

success of New Age bookstores). What is difficult is to present a faith and a way of life that are relatively unsheltered from others in the larger culture and yet possess distinctiveness.

What the distinctiveness should be becomes the theme of both the historical and forward-looking chapters in this book. What follows is discussion about issues that concern, or should concern, all Reform Jews, most other Jews, majorities of religious Americans, and many beyond those three circles. After they have read *Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism*, I hope to overhear some of them, at least, conversing about what they took from these arguments.

Introduction

Conflicting Visions of the Reform Movement in the United States Today

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Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism: Conflicting Visions is a groundbreaking collection of essays that takes a hard look at the Reform movement today in the United States of America. Most demographers believe that the Reform movement is presently the largest American Jewish denomination, and it may be the group that will have the most decisive impact on the future of the Jewish community. Yet relatively little has been published on this fascinating and quickly changing religious entity. From the preface by Martin Marty to the Afterword by Gunther Plaut this volume is an attempt to begin addressing this lacuna.

The Reform movement has generated tremendous energy in recent years. Those who attend the movement's biennial conferences come away in awe of how enthusiastic so many Reform Jews are today. Eric Yoffie, the president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the Reform congregational body, says, "The Reform movement is large, sprawling, fast-growing, and diverse; for all of its problems, there are many pockets of enthusiasm, excitement, creativity, and deep commitment."¹ Yoffie himself deserves a great deal of the credit for being able to channel the excitement that is out there into the building of one of the most vibrant, liberal religious movements in America today. In December 1999 he told five thousand delegates at the UAHC Biennial Convention held in Orlando, Florida, that they were creating "a new Reform revolution." Building on the Jewish literacy initiative he inaugurated at the previous biennial, Yoffie proclaimed a "revolution" in worship to bring Reform Jews back to the synagogue. For those in attendance the spirit of worship was already restored. Thirteen-year-old Julia Bloch of Larchmont, New York, described her impressions: "Five

thousand Jews were reciting prayers aloud. Some stood, some sat, some prayed in Hebrew, some in English, some chanted, some spoke, some belted, some muttered. But it was the sound of five thousand Jews praying. And there, for that moment, the room felt holy."²

There is a new seriousness about God and holiness, and there is a move to integrate spiritual feelings into concrete ritual observances. Reform Jews are reading more about Judaism, and they are studying the Torah, the Talmud, the Midrash, and other traditional religious texts. New types of people are coming into Reform congregations, which has injected a bold excitement into Reform Jewish life. Yet as Yoffie suggests, the movement has difficulties as well. Some of these problems are "teething" issues that are affecting the movement as it grows. Others are related to the relationship between Reform Jews and the rest of the Jewish people. Finally, there are challenges that the Reform movement faces along with all other American liberal religious groupings. Many of the authors in this volume analyze where those problems come from and how they can be addressed.

One of the unique characteristics of this collection is that it combines a historical perspective with contemporary debate. Many collections, as well as single-author volumes, tend to focus exclusively on history, theology, or sociology. This book attempts to look at issues from several of these perspectives and then applies those ideas to the situation today. If an author refers to the various platforms or statements of principle passed in 1855 or 1869 or 1885, we want to understand what those platforms said, and what influence they have on us today. If an author refers to Abraham Geiger of Germany or Kaufmann Kohler of the United States, we want to know not only what those thinkers said on Reform Judaism then, but also what that can teach us about Reform Judaism today.

American Jews: Adaptationists Rather than Rejectionists

One of the basic premises of Reform Judaism is that the Jewish religion can be adjusted to fit the changing needs of people in modern society. This is true despite the fact that there is a great deal of difference in how the elite of the movement understands this concept as opposed to how most of the laity understands it. However, the basic point is that Reform Judaism allows and even encourages Jews to adapt to changing social conditions as it corresponds to the adaptationist approach of the American Jewish community. As political scientist Charles Liebman has noted, American Jews are "adaptationists rather than radical."³ Jews will adapt their Judaism as best they can to fit in with the expectations of pluralistic American society, as they understand those expectations. This is a "consumer orientation" based on individualism combined with a strong resistance to authority. Most American Jews will not be radical, which in this context would mean refusing to go along with what they perceive to be the American way of life.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Between 6 and 10 percent of

American Jews practice Orthodox Judaism. Depending on how one understands adaptation, at least some of the Orthodox groups are radical rather than adaptationist. As a consequence, the American Jewish community is increasingly splitting into two factions: the rejectionist Orthodox, on one hand, and the non-Orthodox, on the other. Those in the modern Orthodox movement are in the peculiar position of trying to maintain some level of affiliation with both sides, a task that will become increasingly difficult in the coming years. The vast majority of American Jews will adopt nonjudgmental attitudes about broad social and cultural norms. If the society as a whole is accepting new standards of behavior, such as the fact that many young couples are now living together before marriage, most American Jews will accept these standards as well.

Similarly, as American society becomes more accepting of gay and lesbian relationships, so too will most Jews accept this new reality. This acceptance includes even the rabbinate. For example, Congregation Beth Israel of West Hartford, Connecticut, published an article in its July 1999 newsletter to introduce their new assistant rabbi, a lesbian. They simply wrote in the very first paragraph, "Over the next few months, we hope that everyone will have the opportunity to meet Rabbi [Elissa] Kohen, Missy Sachs, her partner, and Bailey, their dog, and welcome them into our community."⁴ Imagine such a development in our grandparents' days! The same is true with the increasing acceptability of divorce and, most important for the purposes of our discussion here, increasing intermarriage between different ethnic and religious groups.

As Liebman states, "They do not adopt the radical stance, which would argue that if the cultural environment is inimical to Jewish norms and values, Jews must either change that environment or withdraw from it. They do not even ask the kinds of questions which might lead to a radical posture."⁵ Whereas someone who believes in radical religion will see God as having revealed divine truth to humankind, and will believe that this truth is available to those who seek it out, the adaptationist will view the Jewish religion as a way of life that is changeable according to the nature of the society in which Jews live and their individual place in that society.

The Reform movement is by far the most adaptationist of the three major denominations of American Judaism. Therefore, Reform becomes increasingly attractive to American Jews who have acculturated to the point where their values reflect American values, or perhaps more accurately, the values espoused by certain middle- and upper-middle-class substrata within American society. The fact that American Jews are accepting rather than rejecting of the values of society is one of the main factors that have moved many of them in the direction of Reform congregations in their local communities. Because one of the core beliefs of Reform Judaism is that the autonomy of the individual is the final arbiter of religious decisions, this affiliation thus frees the individual to follow the currents of society rather than the obligatory legal structure of traditional

Judaism that compels specific behaviors. Was this how the Reform movement always saw things, or is this personalistic approach a direct influence from contemporary society? Much of the conflict over where the Reform movement should go originates in disputes over how to view the place from where American Reform Judaism came. But let us start with a description of where the Reform movement is today.

The Competitive "Religious Economy" in the United States

Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism begins with a sociological analysis of Reform Jews and Judaism in the United States based on the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS). Bernard M. Lazerwitz and Ephraim Tabory of Bar Ilan University give a detailed picture of where Reform Jews were and how they compared to other American Jews, particularly their "ideological neighbors," Conservative Jews. Research has shown that religious involvement in the United States is much higher than in Europe. One reason for this may be the pluralistic nature of American society. This creates a "religious economy" in which movements have to compete with one another to attract new adherents, as well as to hold the ones they already have.

Lazerwitz and Tabory argue that the United States is a particularly "competitive market" for Jewish synagogue affiliation. Most American Jews will follow those religious traditions that can be made to fit in with the norms of American society, while they are likely to discontinue practices that seem to overtly emphasize their minority status in the country. The Reform movement's approach to religious tradition is based on the principle of choice, and this approach makes it possible for Reform Jews to link their secular and religious lives together in a consistent structure. However, the desire to accommodate themselves to the American rhythm of life puts tremendous pressure on Reform Jews to be less rather than more ritually observant.

Lazerwitz and Tabory go through different categories describing how Reform Jews feel about issues and, perhaps more important, how they practice; they then attempt to explain the implications of their findings. I decided to put this essay at the very beginning of the collection because it gives an excellent overview of where the Reform movement is today, and it can help the reader place some of the arguments made in other essays into the context of broader trends affecting American Reform Judaism.

Congregation and Community amid a Rapidly Shifting Religious Population

One of the major questions facing the Reform movement is how it will change religiously in the coming years. Many of the essays in this collection deal with the move away from Classical Reform and toward "tradition." Beyond the adoption

of certain previously ignored ceremonies, what does this mean for the type of Judaism that will be practiced? How will American religious trends impact on American Reform Judaism?

Richard Cimino attempts to answer this question. Cimino, the editor of *Religion Watch* and coauthor of a popular book on American religious trends, argues that Reform's liberalizations give it the ability to emphasize those elements of Judaism that will be most relevant to twenty-first-century "seekers."⁶ He further argues that Reform has successfully accommodated itself to the perceived needs of its members, as well as "newcomers." He points out that even policies and statements that might superficially be understood as representing a move away from "the marketplace," such as the 1999 *Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, can be understood as a way of responding to the desire on the part of assimilated American Jews to find existential meaning; thus, these policies and statements are consistent with a market approach.

Cimino believes that American Judaism is successfully responding to the growing awareness that the "civil Jewish religion" is not providing the basis for a strong Jewish identity, seeing evidence of this in the rebirth of interest in spirituality. Reform is enlarging its repertoire, and this is allowing a much larger number of people to find spiritual meaning and religious satisfaction within the Reform movement. Nevertheless, rational-choice theory suggests that the fact that the Reform movement is so liberal may mean that it will have trouble retaining many of those whom it attracts. As personal religious choice continues to become more important, the Reform movement will need to continue to adapt to dramatically changing trends in order to retain the loyalty of those born Jewish and to attract a maximal number of those who are seeking a meaningful religious community.

Lewis Friedland expands on Cimino's comments concerning the fragile nature of the Reform Jewish community in a rapidly changing society, stating that in the United States today community in general is under extraordinary pressure. He suggests that most thriving religious communities are either those that are linked to esoteric forms of spirituality or those that have rejected the challenges of modernity through a willed return to tradition. The Reform movement, Friedland argues, finds itself caught in the middle. The Reform synagogue functions as a service organization in which the members pay a yearly fee and in exchange receive "a cafeteria of choices." This is necessary under the circumstances but is hardly enough, because although members coexist in time and space, they have no binding commitments to each other or to a higher cause. Friedland argues that the Reform synagogue can transcend the mediocrity of being only a service organization by reconstructing itself as a center of modern Jewish renewal. This requires a resacralization of religious life, a process that will require the renewed commitment on the part of a substantial percentage of the congregants. This

resacralization process can be facilitated through a critical reengagement through the larger civic community.

A Low Level of Participation

Perhaps as a result of the impact of individualism, most Reform congregations can attract only an infinitesimally small percentage of their members to attend services. The fact that it now seems widely accepted that most congregants will not attend synagogue may be the concrete expression of the belief that most Jews no longer feel that synagogue attendance is obligatory or even meritorious.

Further, tradition is no longer viewed as a commitment that one must undertake as a sacred responsibility to one's family. Rather, religiosity is to be pursued because of the spirituality that is inherent in it. Many American Jews feel that the synagogue, including the Reform synagogue, has failed to nurture their spiritual side, and it relies instead on an individual's desire to connect with his or her historical faith. For many Americans there is no longer any sense of an obligation to connect with one's historical religious tradition, and this leaves many feeling bored by the Reform worship services and uninterested in becoming more involved in Reform congregational activities. The Jewish Renewal movement has been the most successful Jewish denomination to capture and harness this spiritual urge. The Reform movement, however, has been slow to copy what has worked for Jewish Renewal, and it remains uncertain if the Reform movement is open to serious evaluation and change.

In recent years, many nondenominational, fundamentalist Christian groups have gained momentum and increased their influence and activity. This has not been true of most of the liberal religious movements, however. For example, the 2.6-million-member Presbyterian Church (USA) reports that it has been losing members since 1960.⁷ As a liberal religious denomination, the Reform movement is thus in a highly vulnerable situation as well. Despite the fact that there has been a great deal of religious energy generated in certain sectors of the movement, there is still considerable apathy among the rank-and-file members, and this apathy can easily turn to alienation and eventual disaffiliation.

The Role of the Rabbi in the Selection of a Congregation

One of the most important areas to look at is how people choose a denomination and a congregation. Many of those in the Northeast and Midwest live in stable communities where their parents and grandparents were members of the same synagogues they currently belong to, a pattern that does not hold true for the newer Jewish communities of the Sunbelt.

After World War II large numbers of Jews left the Northeast and Midwest, many moving to California and Florida. More recently, increasing numbers of Jews have been moving to cities such as Denver, Las Vegas, and Phoenix. We

decided to look at one sample case, that of Palm Beach County in Florida. Palm Beach County has a Jewish population of over 220,000, making it the sixth largest Jewish community in the United States. Yet only 18.2 percent of all Jewish households in South Palm Beach County are affiliated with a synagogue. What is going on there? And how typical is it of the United States? Joel L. Levine, who has served as a rabbi in Palm Beach County for over two decades, attempts to answer these questions.

One of his most interesting arguments is that the most important factor in synagogue affiliation in that community is "the quality of the rabbi." This is in marked contrast to my personal observations in the Midwest, where it seemed to me that most often people belong to the synagogue to which their parents belonged. If they switch synagogues, they would switch primarily as a result of moving further out into the suburbs and wanting a synagogue that was closer to their home. This is not the case in regions of the country with higher migration rates.

Levine also discusses other reasons that people join or do not join congregations. Florida typifies many of the trends that are becoming more prevalent in American Jewish life: internal migration, affluence, disaffiliation, intermarriage, and the quest for spirituality. The bottom line is that most Jews will join congregations if and only if they are convinced that the temple has something meaningful to offer them.

Reform Judaism as a Consistent Theological System

It is critical to understand where the movement came from in order to fully comprehend where Reform Judaism is today and where it may go in the coming years. The next several chapters explore this. Jacob Neusner of Bard College argues that in the nineteenth century, the major Reform Jewish theologians believed that their vision of religion represented the Judaism that all Jews—and non-Jews as well—should embrace and practice. Neusner argues that these thinkers had a "remarkable certainty" that what they believed was the religious truth. Therefore, Reform did not represent itself as one brand of Judaism among many, and no Reform theologian suggested that it was up to the individual to choose whatever theology was to his or her taste. Neusner argues that this religious confidence contrasts with the complete failure of nerve that he believes has caused Reform to move toward greater tradition.

Neusner's argument helps us to frame the debate that runs throughout the rest of the collection. Those influenced by Classical Reform, such as Harold Silver and Jay Brickman, argue that as the Reform movement has moved away from and indeed rejected the Classical formulation, it has diminished its own power to attract and hold the congregational member. Others such as Arnold Wolf argue almost the precise opposite. All of the authors are concerned with the

transmission of Jewish tradition from generation to generation. We start this section with a debate over belief because what Reform Judaism represents itself as believing will undoubtedly have a substantial impact on its ability to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The Legacy of Classical Reform Judaism

Classical Reform Judaism was the form of Reform Judaism that developed in the United States in the late nineteenth century. Exemplified by the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform (formally known as the Declaration of Principles), Classical Reform Judaism minimized ritual and emphasized universalism. While much research remains to be done on the nuances of the Classical Reform period, the following statement in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform typifies the general approach: "We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further modern spiritual elevation."

By the 1930s there were signs that at least some of the Reform movement's leaders were feeling the need for a return to tradition. Classical Reform Judaism had been developed during a period of heady optimism, but at virtually the same time pogroms were becoming a serious threat to the Jews of Eastern Europe. By 1881 the flood of East European Jewish immigration to the United States had begun. By the time of the rise to power of the Nazi party in Germany in 1933, it was impossible to see the world as an idyllic place where Jew and Gentile could continue to work side by side to make the world a better place and to bring justice and peace in the spirit of the prophets to all. Rather, there seemed to be a dire need for a Jewish homeland that could absorb the huge number of Jews who faced prejudice, persecution, and even death. While almost no one imagined the enormity of the tragedy that would befall European Jewry, the possible risks facing millions of Jews were very apparent.

In response to the changing political environment, the Reform movement began to embrace political Zionism and more generally to move away from a definition of Judaism that minimized the role of peoplehood in Jewish self-definition. Reform rabbis continued to speak of Ethical Monotheism, which stressed that the Jewish belief in one God would lead to the highest ethical behavior, as well as a devotion to a prophetic Judaism that would motivate Jews to fight for the rights of the downtrodden.

Following World War II large numbers of American Jews left the urban ghettos of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago for the suburbs that were springing up. The movement that benefited the most from the process of suburbanization during the Eisenhower 1950s was the Conservative movement. Conservative

Judaism appealed to the now-Americanized East European immigrants, and even more so to their children, because it appeared to allow for the adaptation to American society that was considered so important. At the same time it was substantially more traditional than the Reform movement. Yet the Reform movement gained membership from the suburbanization trend as well. In 1940 the UAHC had 265 congregations with 59,000 units. By 1955 there were 520 congregations with 255,000 units. By the end of the 1990s the UAHC had more than 875 congregations, with between 1.2 million and 1.5 million individual members.

Several of our essays describe the tension between the old and the new. Rabbi Harold Silver of Beth Israel Congregation in West Hartford, Connecticut, describes his personal career track and his impressions of a large Classical Reform temple in the 1950s. Silver observes that the "Jewishness" of the congregants became "paper-thin" or "virtually nonexistent." Thus a return to tradition became a necessity.

One of the strongest advocates of such a return is Arnold Jacob Wolf, rabbi emeritus of KAM Isaiah Israel of Chicago. Wolf states that the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform was produced by rabbis who were "mostly fine scholars in the noble tradition of Abraham Geiger, but they were very poor theologians." His argument is that not only were they naive, but they were incoherent. Kaufmann Kohler and Emil Hirsch formulated a theological platform filled with misconceptions that has led to the Reform "pick-and-choose" Judaism of today. Wolf is one of the bluntest writers that I have ever read. When he writes, "Our fathers and we have sinned, but repentance is always possible," we understand immediately that he is condemning much of what was done in the name of Reform Judaism in the United States over the last 150 years. However, he does not leave us completely up in the air. In this volume he describes the type of Reform Judaism that can be created and that can provide the basis for both pluralism and a meaningful religious commitment.

Defending Classical Reform—The Religious Version of Classic Coke™

Arnold Wolf refers to the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform as "Reform's original sin." Along these lines, many Reform rabbis have jumped on the bandwagon of the "return to tradition" and are pushing for a sort of Reform that incorporates much more traditional ceremony than had previously been acceptable. Not everyone is pleased with this trend. Jay Brickman, rabbi emeritus at Congregation Sinai in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, argues that the new Pittsburgh Platform passed by the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in Pittsburgh in May 1999 may turn out to be the religious equivalent of the *Classic Coke*™ debacle: As the reader may recall, Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc., thought that increasing numbers of consumers wanted a sweeter, more Pepsi-like cola drink, but *New Coke*™ was greeted with tremendous protest from loyal Coca-Cola drinkers who did not want

the traditional recipe tampered with. Brickman argues that the end result of the new platform may very well be the same as what happened to Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc.

Brickman describes how churches in Wisconsin are filled to overflowing on Sunday mornings and compares this to the sparsely attended services of the local Reform temples. He suggests that the fact that most of the service is in Hebrew is one of the big "turnoffs" for many congregants. The fact that the services are "replete with traditional gestures" may also unsettle many. Brickman argues that in contrast to the traditional Jewish service that he sees as lacking appeal in contemporary America, the Protestant worship format has proved to be extremely popular. Assuming this fact to be true, he asks, "Why have we not avidly pursued a like procedure?" Brickman answers the question by saying that at one time the Reform movement did exactly that. He argues that this vision of Classical Reform Judaism is what motivated the founders of the movement. "The present manifestation of Reform Judaism bears so small a resemblance to the vision of our movement's founders . . . [that] it might be more equitable to leave the title Reform with us [who remain loyal to Classical Reform] and find a new appellation (such as neo-Orthodox) for the present manifestation."

American Orthodox Responses

While some of the authors in this collection have attacked the recent trend in the Reform movement toward greater tradition, one would expect Orthodox rabbis to applaud this move. Orthodox rabbi Aryeh Spero writes about what he describes as the "two hundred years' war," suggesting that many Orthodox Jews have not fully understood that the Reform movement of today is very, very different from the German Reform Judaism of the early nineteenth century or the Classical Reform Judaism in late-nineteenth-century America.

Spero describes a number of battles that the Orthodox have had with the Reform movement over the past two centuries, arguing that some are no longer relevant, while others have become exceedingly serious. Spero argues that many of the sociological objections that Orthodoxy had regarding Reform have "lost their ability to object" as a result of the changes that have occurred in all sectors of the Jewish community. He argues that many *haredim* have refused to acknowledge "the salutary accomplishments of Reform" under any circumstances. Spero suggests that the fear of assimilation may be driving much of the *haredi* attitude rather than the actual halachah. He condemns "strident ideology" and "fanaticism" that "saddles the ideologue with holier-than-thou tribal characteristics."

Like Brickman, Spero uses the analogy of *Coca-Cola*TM. But rather than using Brickman's point that consumers rebelled when Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc., tried to replace "Coke" with *New Coke*TM, Spero argues that if Coca-Cola Enterprises, Inc., were to use Pepsi syrup for making *Coca-Cola*TM, the product would

no longer be "Coke" even though the label would so read. "New Age spiritualism, avant-garde cultural notions, scriptural interpretations befitting Karaites, and radical leftist ideology, even when cloaked in lofty-sounding prophetic garb, remain what they are—not Torah."

Proactive Conversion and an Aggressive Outreach Approach

Alexander Schindler, the former president of the UAHC, argues that the Reform movement should embrace outreach and expand it even more than it has. Schindler explains that when he launched the Reform movement's Outreach campaign in the 1970s, he envisioned it not merely as a response to the increasing intermarriage rate. In fact, he believes that any Outreach program that is limited to the non-Jewish spouses of Jewish partners "is an affront to them." By this he means that such a limited Outreach campaign inevitably casts doubt on their integrity because it implies that such individuals could not have chosen Judaism on its merits but rather did so only to please their partner. Instead Schindler states that he envisioned Outreach as a long-range effort to present Judaism as a religious resource for a world in dire need of spiritual inspiration.

The last few decades have been very tumultuous years for the Reform movement. In particular, the movement has been deeply affected by the tremendous rise in the intermarriage rate, which the NJPS calculated to be 52 percent of all marriages between 1985 and 1990. While others dispute this figure, all agree that the intermarriage rate has risen dramatically since the early 1960s and is much higher than it ever was before. This 52 percent figure became the focal point for what many described as a "crisis" among American Jews.

The Reform movement has been affected by this trend more so than either the Conservative or the Orthodox movements because Reform Jews are more acculturated and less ritually observant. This is also due to the fact that those who intermarry are likely to look to Reform Judaism as a solution for their desire for religious affiliation—if they are interested in Judaism at all. Largely in response to this developing trend, the CCAR passed the patrilineal descent resolution, formally known as *The Status of Children of Mixed Marriages*, which accepts the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers as Jewish if they are raised as Jews and undergo significant public religious acts of identification.

Will Patrilineal Descent Become a "First Class Disaster"?

Many see this as a radical break with the past and a potentially divisive decision that will split the Jewish people into two. Steven Bayme, of the American Jewish Committee, argues that the patrilineal descent resolution places the personal interest of individuals over the collective welfare of the Jewish people as a whole. Bayme states that while it is perfectly understandable that individuals will try to pursue their own interests, "for Jewish leadership to pursue personal rather than

collective agendas and aspirations will result in short-term gains and satisfactions but long-term failures." Many of the leaders of the Reform movement believe he is mistaken.

Current UAHC president Eric Yoffie argues for the importance of Outreach. The author explains how Outreach came about, and what the consequences of the early campaign were. Like Schindler, Yoffie outlines some of the objections to Outreach and explains why in his view these critics are not correct. He also discusses the theological principles underlying Outreach, something that is so important for a policy that is frequently seen as an attempt to place a Band-Aid on the hemorrhaging caused by extremely high intermarriage rates. Using his theological understanding of the religious concepts underlying Outreach, Yoffie proposes that certain limitations be placed on the ritual participation of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue. He believes that Outreach begins with the premise that Jews have a unique destiny, and that you do not draw people in by erasing boundaries; therefore, a Reform movement that advocates Outreach is sending a clear message that being a Reform Jew means deepening one's love of God and taking seriously the practice of Judaism as a way of life.

The dramatic increase in intermarriages has generated opportunities for Outreach. Many rabbis first encounter mixed married couples when such couples call the temple to inquire whether the rabbi would be willing to officiate at an intermarriage ceremony. According to recent studies, at least 40 percent of the American Reform rabbinate is willing to officiate at such ceremonies under certain conditions. Rabbi Hillel Cohn of Congregation Emanu El in San Bernardino, California, explains how he views this issue and why he changed his original position and will now officiate at the marriage of such couples. Since this is perhaps the most controversial issue within the Reform movement, Cohn's radical departure from tradition must be understood and taken seriously. While the tradition obviously would proscribe such a ceremony, the American religious environment is one in which barriers are being broken down and identity distinctions are being blurred.

The Impact of Changing Sex Roles on the Reform Movement

Women have been taking on a far greater role in all facets of American religious life over the past thirty years than they were allowed to in previous generations. This trend, a direct consequence of the feminist movement, has had a dramatic impact on every aspect of American life. Reform Judaism has been able to respond quickly and actively to changing sex role expectations, allowing women to assume responsibility for all aspects of the religious and communal life of individual congregations and the movement as a whole. Karla Goldman, of the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Cincinnati, discusses the role of women in Reform Judaism. She argues that despite the clear male orientation

of Hebrew Union College throughout most of its history, the question of gender equality was always present, "raising challenges that still speak to the present moment's assumption of gender equality and apparent acceptance of female religious leadership."

Rabbi Denise Eger, the founding rabbi of Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood, California, writes that Reform Judaism has already contributed to a number of different revolutions in terms of how Jews look at their tradition, and that one of these revolutions has been the welcoming of gays and lesbians into the Jewish community and Jewish religious life. Eger describes the background and history of this process as it unfolded in the 1970s and 1980s. She discusses how the major institutions of the Reform movement responded to this challenge, and outlines the role of the individual congregations in this dramatic transformation.

Eger gives a fascinating insider perspective on the same-sex marriage officiation resolution that was passed by the CCAR at its Greensboro, North Carolina, Conference in March 2000. A resolution on this subject was originally scheduled to be voted on two years earlier in Anaheim but was delayed due to opposition from those who feared that it would irreparably damage the prospects of the Reform movement in Israel. Even the Greensboro resolution was a compromise text—a reflection of the incredibly controversial nature of the subject. The final resolution acknowledges those rabbis who will not perform such ceremonies along with those who will, and it drops the term "marriage" in favor of "same-gender unions." Nevertheless, many traditionalists condemned the resolution. Rabbi Rafael Grossman, former president of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), states that in his view gay commitment "... goes to the very root of Jewish morality, in the sense of defining what is moral behavior. To give sanction to something like this breaks the moral fiber of Judaism. Why would they do this?"⁸

Hinda Seif, of the University of California at Davis, presents an ethnographic study of bisexual women who have reembraced their Jewish heritage. Her study reveals the fascinating practice of constructing multiple interpretations of religious understanding through the creation of new midrashim, as well as the adaptation of various home rituals to suit the unique needs of this often-neglected Jewish subgroup. Jewish female bisexuals have returned to Judaism by creating a new understanding of the traditional Jewish family and have built strong emotional connections to each other in ways that have implications for all Reform Jews.

I had originally suggested that bisexuality was an area of increasing importance to the Reform movement, but Eric Yoffie wrote me that in his view this is "... simply untrue. Reform Judaism is proud of its outreach to gay and lesbian Jews, and has asserted that loving, permanent homosexual relationships are an indisputable reality in which 'kedushah'—holiness—can be present. However, the distinction between homosexuality and bisexuality is an important one. Bisexuality raises very

different issues, and I am aware of no Reform group or leader who suggests that Reform Judaism sanctions bisexual behavior."⁹

The Importance of Good Leadership for the Future of the Movement

Samuel Joseph of HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, places the discussion of the future of Reform Judaism in the context of the transformation that he believes the Reform synagogue must undergo. He describes the changes in society that have had a tremendous influence on Reform Jews and their congregations, stating that synagogues do not exist in a vacuum. Joseph argues that if the American Reform synagogue continues to do business as usual and function as it has operated over the past several decades, there will be a continual decline in the level of participation and that of affiliation.

Joseph proposes a model of a learning congregation that he believes is essential for building successful synagogues. Congregations must engage people in shared learning, and there must be a willingness and the capacity to challenge the assumptions and the cultural regularities in the congregation. Perhaps most important, people must make a time commitment to reflect and to learn. Joseph shares an example from his hypothetical Temple Shir Chadash.

He also analyzes the dynamics of synagogue boards, discussing the example of Congregation Emanuel in San Francisco. This congregation was recently reported on the front page of *The Forward* as an example of a "synaplex" congregation, meaning that every Friday night there are several different services, just as in a cineplex several different movies are offered at any one time. Joseph argues that in spite of the stereotype of such boards as being very aggressive, the opposite is actually true. This is because people want the operation of the congregation to run smoothly; they want to avoid dissent and certainly conflict. That may be why these boards are composed of people who seem to think in similar ways. A dominant way of thinking develops, and either people fit in with that emerging culture or they do not. If they do not, they very well may not stay on the board.

The Impact of Israeli Religious Policies on American Reform Judaism

Ephraim Tabory gives us a perspective on how the Israeli attitude toward Reform Judaism affects the American Reform movement and American Reform Judaism. Tabory argues that most American Reform Jews are apathetic about what happens in Israel, which may be one of the biggest reasons that the Reform leadership has found it difficult to mobilize their laity to pressure the Israeli government for change. Tabory argues, however, that even if there is a general indifference toward Israel, there may be a considerably greater interest in how Israel relates to the Jewish identity of Reform Jews and the Jewish identity of their children and grandchildren. As more and more Reform Jews are married to people who were not born as Jews, the Orthodox monopoly on the definition of

Jewishness in the state of Israel for the purposes of marriage has the potential to generate a response much stronger than almost any other issue. This is because Orthodox rabbis and their adherents do not recognize Reform converts as Jewish. They do not recognize the children of such converts as Jewish and will continue not to recognize the children of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother as Jewish despite the Reform movement's patrilineal descent resolution of 1983.

Tabory suggests that Israel's seeming rejection of the authenticity of Reform Judaism has the potential to lead American Reform Jews to question whether the state of Israel legitimately represents the Jewish people. As the American Reform Jewish community becomes more and more nonhalachic, not only in its observance but also in its definition of Jewish identity, the gap between American Jews and Israel may grow wider and wider. The issue of patrilineal descent is probably the single most important reason for this.

Visions for the Future

The collection closes with articles that refer to the future of the Reform movement. Alfred Gottschalk, former chancellor of HUC-JIR, gives his vision for a Reform Judaism that needs to be "courageous and not timorous." Gottschalk argues, "We are past the age of the 'hush-hush Jew,' the apologist and the assimilationist." Gottschalk argues that the challenge of helping the many Jews-by-choice understand the concept of Jewish peoplehood is one of the central challenges facing the Reform movement. He also predicts that the Reform movement will grow in Israel.

Gottschalk is very honest about the state of Reform Judaism today. He writes, "This is a time of great gestation," suggesting that Reform "is grappling with issues . . . reaching into the very essence of Judaism's capacity to survive modernity and postmodernity." Gottschalk is openly hostile to New Age influences on Reform Judaism. He writes that many New Age religious movements "make no pretense of seeking past validation for contemporary ideas or beliefs." Yet he argues that the 1999 Pittsburgh "Platform," which he refers to as the recent "debacle," was relatively unaffected by the great enthusiasm for New Age ideas. He does not believe that favoring rabbinic modalities rather than prophetic modalities is necessarily the best way to solidify Reform Judaic authenticity.

There are thus many challenges facing the Reform movement today and in the coming years. How well it can respond will determine to a large degree the quality as well as the quantity of American Judaism. The central question is how liberal Judaism can thrive or even survive in an American society that is based to such a degree on individualism. We hope that the reader may begin to formulate his or her own ideas on how to answer this important question while reading through this collection. The book concludes with words of inspiration by Sheldon Zimmerman, the president of HUC-JIR. Zimmerman argues, "We have

succeeded beyond any legitimate expectations" as Americans but that "the old anchors, that which rooted us, are no longer." Zimmerman explains what it is that makes the Reform Jew unique and what it is that characterizes the Reform approach to *kedushah*, holiness. And that search for holiness is the real goal of religion. May we succeed in our search, and may we help to bring a sense of holiness to the entire world.

Notes

1. Communication from Eric H. Yoffie to the editor, April 27, 2000.
2. No Author, "The Orlando Biennial Album," *Reform Judaism* (Spring 2000): 37.
3. Charles S. Liebman, "Religious Trends among American and Israeli Jews," in *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World Since 1945*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (London: Routledge, 1995), 299-300.
4. "We Warmly Welcome Our New Rabbi Elissa Kohn!" *Congregation Beth Israel Newsletter*, July 1999, 4; author's interview with Elissa Kohn, April 14, 2000.
5. Liebman, "Religious Trends," 299-300.
6. Richard Cimino and Don Lattin, *Shopping for Faith: American Religion in the New Millennium* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).
7. Jim Jones, "Fidelity Clause Retained," *Christianity Today*, August 9, 1999, 16.
8. J. I. Goldberg, "Continental Divide," *The Jewish Journal* (Los Angeles), April 7, 2000, 6.
9. Communication from Eric H. Yoffie to the editor, April 27, 2000.

A Religious and Social Profile of Reform Judaism in the United States

Section 1

Where We Are Today