Reform Judaism Responds to Intermarriage:

How Outreach is Changing the Institutions of Reform Judaism

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To Isaac, Mira and Yael

Our Rabbis have taught:
Always let the left hand thrust away
and the right hand draw near.

Sotah 47a

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

In the United States it has become common for Jews to marry non-Jews—what is often called interfaith marriage, mixed marriage or intermarriage. America's open society and encouragement of diversity—its goal of being a "melting pot"—is at odds with Judaism's long-standing endogamous values, and America seems to be winning the battle. The fact that a marriage between a Jew and non-Jew is socially acceptable is an indication that social barriers between Jews and Gentiles have broken down, and that Jews are truly a part of American society. A reported 52% of Jews marry outside their religion,[1] and many of these interfaith couples that maintain ties to Judaism choose Reform Judaism, a liberal branch of Judaism in America, when they look for acceptance in the Jewish community. The Reform movement succinctly explains why this is a problem: "[intermarriage] weakens the fabric of family relationship and the survival potential of the Jewish community... it makes it more difficult to establish the [Jewish home] that should be the goal of every Jewish marriage."[2] Intermarriage is a threat; it shrinks the Jewish community. With the majority of interfaith marriages resulting in non-Jewish children the Jewish community gets smaller over each generation Smaller Jewish communities have less need for synagogues and other Jewish institutions and services. There is the danger that the Jewish community will shrink to the point of becoming quaint sect rather than a

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[1] Bruce Phillips, *Re-examining Intermarriage: Trends, Textures & Strategies* (Boston: Susan and David Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies, 1997), 1.

[2] Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Gates of Mitzvah: A Guide to the Jewish Life Cycle*, ed. Simeon J. Maslin (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1979), 37.

vibrant religion.

In addition to identifying the problem, the Reform movement has also presented a strategy for addressing it: Outreach reaches out to interfaith families and welcomes them into the Reform community, encouraging them to make Jewish choices. Outreach has played a major role in how the Reform Jewish community responds to the problem of intermarriage; it is, by definition, the only way we as a community respond—any officially sanctioned response to intermarriage *is* Outreach. Outreach begins with the assumption that intermarriage is a fact of modern life, and not a temporary aberration; therefore, the way to deal with this phenomenon is to bring intermarried families into Jewish life. There is a fine line drawn here. Outreach does not condone intermarriage; it accepts the inevitability of such unions, and attempts to incorporate this fact into the Reform movement. In an odd sense it is similar to the Catholic prescription to love the sinner and hate the sin, in that the institution of exogamy is looked down upon, but its adherents are wholeheartedly welcomed in the community. This makes Outreach more tolerant than the Catholic maxim—Outreach certainly does not label those who marry outside of Judaism sinners—but nonetheless, it encourages Jewish marriage instead of interfaith unions. This thesis is going to examine what the Reform leadership is trying to accomplish with Outreach, and how Outreach has changed other institutional responses to interfaith marriage. Specifically, I will deal with five issues: 1) rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, 2) conversion to Judaism, 3) patrilineal descent, 4) synagogue membership, and 5) religious school. It is these areas that exemplify how the leadership and institutions are responding to the overall policy of Outreach. This thesis will not be examining the statistics of intermarriage rates nor attempting to discover the causes of intermarriage; its focus is on how Outreach has shaped the Reform movement's responses to intermarriage and, thereby, the movement at large.

Outreach is reflective of the larger societal tension between moral relativism and absolutes. The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States led to much popular discussion about moral relativism; there were voices heard on some college campuses saying that we Americans brought this upon ourselves with our arrogance, and we should learn to be more tolerant and understanding of others' points of view—especially religious views, and even the point of view of the terrorists. On the opposite end of the spectrum was the expressed feeling that some things are absolutely wrong and are not to be tolerated; there is no understanding such actions, and there certainly should be no sympathy wasted on the proponents of such violence. Moral relativism, which shies away from accepting any absolutes in judging behavior, is also seen in the Reform Judaism's reaction to intermarriage. This is not to say, of course, that the terrorists and interfaith couples share any common ground; it is the external reactions that are similar. Reform Judaism is hesitant to make exclusionary judgments, and it is difficult to find something that definitively says "intermarriage is wrong" without qualifications. Outreach is supposed to enable Reform Judaism to be open to and accepting of interfaith families, without looking down upon those who have married outside of the faith; to encourage those who have intermarried to participate in Jewish life without inadvertently encouraging Jews to intermarry. Reform Judaism has chosen to live within this paradox, to hover between an absolute stand against intermarriage and the relative acceptance of those who intermarry. Simply put, Reform is trying to have it both ways. Outreach attempts to bridge the gap between these extremes and show how we can both discourage intermarriage but welcome intermarried couples.

Outreach's outlook has changed Reform Judaism. Certainly, it has changed attitudes toward intermarriage, and it has also changed policy on how Reform communities deal with intermarried couples. But it has gone beyond that. In creating a

space for interfaith families in Reform Judaism and welcoming those families into the movement, encouraging them to fill that space, Outreach has changed the demographic of Reform Synagogues. The success of Outreach means an increase in the number of interfaith families seeking Jewish involvement, and a growing percentage of synagogue members that are interfaith families. There is a real chance that the number of interfaith families will soon outnumber the number of Jewish families in many congregations, and if the percentage of converts continues its parallel but opposite decline, there is also a chance of having almost as many non-Jews participating in synagogue life as there are Jews. With increased representation has come an increase in influence, and rightfully so; in a country founded in response to the inequality of taxation without representation, can we expect anyone to settle for less? This influence means changes in synagogue practice and rabbinic custom; it means new curricula in educational programs; it means changes in prayer services and even liturgy. The success of Outreach has brought with it many unforeseen complications.

Will these changes turn Reform Judaism into Interfaith Judaism? The Reform leadership has wholeheartedly assured us that such a thing will not happen. They point to sincere efforts designed to ensure that Reform Judaism does not become a syncretistic, interfaith religion, regardless of changes stemming from the success of Outreach. The leadership has written the present history of Reform as a welcoming movement that, where it is altered by Outreach, is altered for the better, and is never taken off course. The American Reform community is told it is on its only possible course, and that Outreach, had it not been invented by the Reform leadership, would have come about in practice nonetheless. Eric Yoffie suggests that Outreach would have happened, in practice if not in name, with or without an institutional policy, because that is what the people wanted. He states that "the grassroots of North American Jewry—Reform and

non-Reform—is firmly in our camp. In fact, I am convinced that on no issue is there a greater gap between leadership and membership than on the Outreach question."[3]

The inevitability of *de facto* Outreach is assumed because Reform Judaism in America is in the midst of a struggle. At times, it may appear to be engaged in many small struggles, but they all stem, to a certain degree, from one tightly-stretched continuum—that between a movement independent of binding traditions and a movement searching for deeper roots in a more observant lifestyle. A desire for autonomous individual rabbis and individual Reform Jews is counterbalanced by a need for standards and authority. On the one hand, the Reform movement has historically been a place for Jews of any level of observance; it has welcomed Jews who observe only the high holidays, and it now welcomes Jews who are *shomer shabbat.* Reform has set no limits on what it means to be a Jew, or has extended its reach so far as to exclude the possibility of exclusion; there are Reform communities indistinguishable in practice from Conservative, and there are Reform congregations that have as their basis a profound belief in humanism.[4] Eric Yoffie has commented on this state of affairs, in which it appears that Reform Judaism is reluctant to set any boundaries or guidelines for acceptable practice, in order to promote inclusion and acceptance—but he stresses that this appearance is misleading, as the movement has begun to draw up boundaries, albeit sometimes unwillingly. "Setting standards means that someone will eventually rub up against those standards," he said, adding that no matter how carefully these standards are drawn, it will be impossible to avoid excluding or offending at least some people. "[This is] important to state because some Reform Jews still find it difficult to acknowledge that any limitation is consistent

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[3] Eric Yoffie, *Remarks from the President*, 20th Anniversary Symposium for the William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach, UAHC, New York, 18 April 1999.

[4] A similar argument is made by: Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided* (New York. Basic Books, 1993), 95-113.

with Reform belief."[5] Reform Judaism has, in the past, made its reputation by accepting all offers and welcoming all those who would be Jewish, with little or no standard against which to judge them; this is no longer the case.

Since the 1930s the Reform movement has been experiencing a backlash against what is now called "classical Reform Judaism." Whether from internal concern or as a reaction to outside criticism, Reform is moving away from its place as what Yoffie called "lowest-common-denominator/no-one-must-ever-be-hurt Judaism"[6] and attempting to reassert itself as based in tradition and ideologically guided movement. There has been an intensified attempt to define what makes a Reform Jew, and what makes Reform Judaism. Guidelines on worship, education and even home life are emerging as an informal rule book on how to be a Reform Jew, and Reform is struggling against its typically perceived role as Judaism for the lazy Jew. A hallmark of this transformation is the Statement of Principles of Reform Judaism, which encourages experimentation with more traditional Jewish practices, such as *kashrut,* which were once considered irrelevant to Reform Jews.

Into this breach comes Outreach, which exists at the very edges of this debate and in its midst. Outreach has been successful in welcoming interfaith families, and in changing attitudes toward interfaith families; now it must contend with Reform Judaism's firmer boundaries as the movement attempts to limit how interfaith families will be incorporated into the Jewish community. Alexander Schindler, the founder of Outreach, has left a wealth of correspondence which makes it clear that reaching out to interfaith families is of an importance beyond that which statistics can reveal. While the numbers are important—the most often cited being the 52% intermarriage rate—behind those statistics are individual families. Outreach, while it contains Schindler's practical goals of increasing

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[5] Yoffie, *Remarks.*

[6] Yoffie, *Remarks.*

the Jewish population, deals with individuals. Its policies acknowledge that interfaith marriage is bad for the Jewish community, but nonetheless attempt to deal with the people who intermarry try to make the best of a bad situation. Outreach has to balance those goals: discouraging interfaith marriage without alienating the interfaith families that it is intended to serve; being accepting of these intermarried couples, but placing limits on acceptable behavior.

Much has already been written about Outreach, and even more about interfaith families in general; nonetheless, there are no studies of Outreach's larger effects on the American Reform community. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the synagogue arm of the Reform movement, and the William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach, the department of the UAHC devoted to Outreach, have published several books for synagogues about what types of Outreach programs work and how to implement them. In addition, the UAHC maintains an Outreach web site that recommends resources for interfaith couples searching for a place in the Jewish community; it comes the closest to publishing books about Outreach itself. All the books the UAHC recommends can be considered Outreach to some extent because they aspire to fulfill the main goal of Outreach—creating Jewish families out of intermarried families. I have chosen not to look at books which have the intention of teaching interfaith couples how to have a dual religion household or that set up dual religion households as the ideal, such as those published by Dovetail, as they do not support the premise of Outreach and the Reform movement.

The subject of intermarriage and its impact on the Jewish community has also been examined, as has the history of Outreach since its inception as a policy of the Reform Movement in 1978. Much of this work consists of case studies or debate on specific intermarriage issues such as rabbinic officiation. The UAHC publications about

Outreach all contain an outline of the history of Outreach. While this is useful in determining the impact of Outreach on intermarriage, not much has been written about the impact of Outreach on the Reform Movement as a whole; I am attempting to begin to fill that void.

Written in 1958, well before Outreach was established, David Kirshenbaum's *Mixed Marriage and the Jewish Future* does address how the Reform Movement's responses to interfaith marriage have impacted Judaism. To be sure, Kirshenbaum is highly critical of the Reform Movement. He deals with two Reform responses to interfaith marriage: encouragement of conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages. He maintains that these Reform responses to interfaith marriage are actually contributing to an increase in intermarriage. His argument is a bit dated, as it deals with Reform responses before an official policy on Outreach; in addition, he only addressed one side of the issue. While he can be credited with an early attempt to understand how responses to interfaith marriage have an impact on the Jewish community, it is time for a new look without the underlying assumption that any response to intermarriage other than outrage is detrimental to the Jewish community.

Jack Wertheimer, in *A People Divided* (chapter five, "Reform: Change in Both Directions"), comes the closest to dealing with Outreach in the manner I do. He does so by setting up a continuum between autonomy and regulated boundaries. Wertheimer deals with the issue of rabbinic officiation as communicated through the resolutions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), and indicates that this issue is indicative of the strain between the two poles of independent rule-making by synagogues and dictated control by the national leadership. He acknowledges that Outreach is changing the demographic of Reform Judaism and points out that patrilineal descent brought with it some serious criticism of Reform by other movements. He places these issues in the

context of other changes in the Reform movement such as increased interest in traditional practice and spirituality. However, he does not deal with these issues in depth nor does he examine the full impact of Outreach on Reform Judaism. He also does not acknowledge that there are other continuums besides autonomy and dependence, such as the disparity between the leadership and the laity. He revisited the topic in the March 2001 issue of *Commentary* magazine and was quite critical of Outreach and the Reform movement, suggesting that Outreach's only impact has been an increase in interfaith marriage. Wertheimer criticizes the Reform movement for not establishing clearer boundaries with regards to non-Jewish spouses and the children in an interfaith marriage. He is critical of patrilineal descent, of rabbis who perform interfaith marriages, and of the CCAR's decision to allow individual rabbis to make their own decisions about officiation. Wertheimer criticizes the Reform principle that allows for individual autonomy as well as the individuals that he feels make bad decisions. He also points out that despite what he considers to be a blurring of boundaries, the Reform movement is often criticized when it does draw boundaries. Wertheimer asserts that Outreach is diluting Judaism and suggests an alternate solution to the problem of intermarriage, not Outreach and universalism, but a focus on what makes Judaism unique. He ignores the fact that the CCAR and the UAHC have repeatedly stated that Judaism is not syncretistic, and he dismisses the struggle within Reform Judaism to draw those boundaries. Ironically, his recognition that Reform is criticized for not going far enough in welcoming non-Jews proves that the Reform movement does in fact have boundaries. While he points out some of the problems of Outreach, he does not deal with the Reform struggle to set those boundaries.

Egon Mayer, the director of the Jewish Outreach Institute and the sociologist who conducted the studies on intermarriage for the American Jewish Committee, takes a more positive approach in his 1995 essay "The Outreach Movement Making Judaism an

Inclusive Religion," included in *The Jewish Condition: Essays on Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler.* In his essay he notes that Outreach has changed the attitude of American Jews toward intermarriage, and deals mainly with the issues of conversion and the controversy of patrilineal descent. He recognizes Outreach as a way to deal with the social reality of increased intermarriage, and notes that since the Reform institution of the Outreach policy others are attempting to imitate that response. However, he focuses most of the essay on conversion and does not note the other areas that Outreach has impacted, such as synagogue and religious school policy or rabbinic officiation. While it is only intended to be a short essay in a collection, Mayer does begin to examine how Outreach has changed the Jewish community; I would like to be even more specific and address how the change in attitude brought about by Outreach has changed the Reform community in a larger context.

Diane Solomon, in her article "Outreach, Inreach and Overreach: How should we interact with the Intermarried?" *(Moment* magazine, February 1995) also addressed how Outreach has changed the Reform Jewish community. She wrote a broad piece about how Outreach has affected the whole Jewish community across denominations, and also about differing perspectives on what Outreach is depending on what community it is in. She raises the question about the impact of Outreach on attitudes toward intermarriage and also brings in the important point that at some point Outreach has the potential to stop trying to discourage intermarriage. Because she also covers the Conservative and Orthodox responses to intermarriage (although does not suggest that the Conservative *keiruv* efforts have significantly changed Conservative Judaism), she does not go into great detail about how Reform Judaism has changed nor does she go into details about the areas in which Reform has changed. This thesis, focusing as it does on the Reform movement, can afford to probe such neglected areas, and produce a true view of

Outreach's larger impact.

Outreach has brought new focus to other related issues, such as officiation at intermarriages and conversion and created the issue of patrilineal descent. The Central Conference of American Rabbis has dealt with issues of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages, in some ways made more complicated by Outreach policies. Some rabbis are against the idea of interfaith weddings, but will try to welcome interfaith couples into their communities. Others reason that since interfaith couples are going to be welcomed into the Jewish community once wed, it is hypocritical to refuse to officiate at these weddings. With one of its goals being conversion of non-Jewish spouses, Outreach has had an effect on conversion policies as well. Just this past summer the CCAR passed new suggestions for requirements for conversion. In addition, an increase in the number of interfaith families in which the husband is the Jewish spouse had led to the recognition of patrilineal descent—the Reform policy of considering the children of a Jewish father to be Jews.

Outreach has also become tied to more tangible issues. In reaching out to interfaith families, synagogues have had to deal with issues of membership: can the non-Jewish spouse become a temple member, serve on the board or participate in services? In a similar way religious schools have been forced to deal with issues brought up by encouraging interfaith families to participate in Jewish life. Questions about the status of the children in the religious school have been addressed, including whether to admit children being raised in dual faith households, how to address the needs and concerns of the children of mixed backgrounds, and how an increased number of mixed-background children affects the classroom. Outreach has in fact created some of these issues and its origin as a response to intermarriage has become somewhat muddied, and therefore a brief history of intermarriage and Outreach deserves some treatment at this point.

CHAPTER 2:

Historical Considerations

Intermarriage has not always been such a problem for the Jewish people. When Abraham sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac, it was understood he would have a Gentile for a daughter-in-law—there was no alternative. Although they were the only Jews at the time, Abraham wished his son would at least marry someone from the family. Rebecca, too, was concerned about whom her sons would marry; after Esau's choice of wife was found wanting in her eyes, she made sure Jacob's wife would be more suitable—that is, from the family. Even Moses did not marry an Israelite woman, and his brother and sister were punished for their complaints about it. When intermarriage did happen, the usual case was an Israelite man taking a foreign wife and the wife assimilating into the people Israel. Joseph and Moses both married foreign wives and nothing negative is said about them because of it. Taking a non-Jewish wife was not a problem as long as the non-Jew was not from one of the forbidden nations. That is the reason God punishes Aaron and Miriam for their complaints against Moses' choice of wife—she wasn't Jewish, but she wasn't forbidden. By the time of Ezra intermarriage had become more common, to the point where it was beginning to be viewed as a problem, as evidenced by Ezra's decree that the Israelites separate from their foreign wives:

> You have transgressed, and have taken foreign wives, to increase the guilt of Israel. And now make confession to the Lord God of your fathers, and do his will; and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the foreign wives *(Ezra* 10:10-11).

During the years between Ezra and modern times, the Jewish people have mostly kept to themselves—by their choice or by the will of others—and intermarriage was a problem of such minor impact that it bore little practical concern for the children of Israel as a community.

Historically, there was not always opportunity or desire for interfaith marriage. Jews were often segregated into their own neighborhoods or even isolated in ghettos. There was little interest on the part of non-Jews in marrying Jews, who had an inferior social status and were therefore considered unsuitable marriage partners. Interfaith marriage was often illegal, not only by Jewish standards, but by civil law as well. For the Jewish people, on the other hand, exogamy meant something else. Intermarriage was as a way out of the Jewish community or a way of achieving higher social status, a symbol of how assimilated one was. Of course, assimilation and social status had their price: intermarried Jews were not welcome in the Jewish community, and not only were the non-Jewish spouses denied membership in the synagogue, but the Jew who intermarried was denied it as well. Intermarriage meant abandoning Judaism, and so the issue of interfaith couples seeking a place in the Jewish community was virtually nonexistent.

With the onset of the Enlightenment and worldwide emancipation of the Jewish people (in one form or another), interaction between Jews and Gentiles has increased and expanded in ways never before imagined. Jews began to be educated in secular universities and to find jobs in areas of employment that were once closed to them. Commerce between Jews and Gentiles grew as well, and increased social contact kept pace. In America as Jews began to move out of A dramatic rise in intermarriage has followed, most notably, for the purpose of this thesis, in the last sixty years, and most visibly in the Reform Jewish community of the United States.

The first instances of social pressure for Jews to accept intermarriage surfaced in

France in 1806, and it was an instance of non-Jews attempting to manipulate the Jews. In an effort to elicit allegiance and and force "acknowledgment of the state's supremacy over the Jewish religion,"[7] Napoleon called for 100 Jewish leaders to come and answer his questions, one of them about the recognition of interfaith marriages. According to Michael Meyer, despite Napoleon's pressure "the majority could not... accede to Napoleon's desire that the Jews of the Empire encourage their own disappearance by advocating mixed marriages."[8] Instead they had the creative solution of stating that rabbis would be just as inclined to accept such marriages as Catholic priests would be. These rabbis were aware, of course, that the Catholic church would not allow such marriages under the auspices of their church, and so they were able to answer Napoleon as required without compromising their similar principles. This issue was again raised in Germany at the Brunswick Assembly of 1844; again there was a desire not to give the impression that Christians were not suitable marriage partners, set against a Jewish desire not to sanction or encourage such unions.

> The resolution adopted by the majority read: "The marriage of a Jew with a Christian, marriage with adherents of monotheistic religions generally, is not prohibited, provided that the laws of the state permit parents to raise the children of such a union in the Jewish faith." In this manner the conference made clear its concern for the continuance of Judaism. Moreover, its qualification effectively eliminated any immediate practical effect of the decision. For there were in fact no states in Germany at the time that allowed for a mixed marriage in which the children could be raised as Jews.[9]

It is clear that even in 1844 there was pressure from outside the Jewish community not to

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[7] Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 27-28.

[8] Meyer, *Response*, 28.

[9] Meyer, *Response*, 135.

seem intolerant by demanding inmarriage and condemning intermarriage; in this respect, the resolution sounds surprisingly familiar amidst prevailing attitudes in America today.

In the United States intermarriage began to be recognized as a problem by the Jewish community in the middle of the twentieth century. Before the 1960s interfaith marriages were not occurring often enough to be considered a community problem; a family crisis perhaps, but not a community one. Greater social acceptance of Jews, increased interaction between Jews and the rest of society and widespread assimilation led to an increase in the number of Jews marrying non-Jews. There was still a great deal of social pressure on these marriages; the Jewish community in general, as well as parents and grandparents in particular, discouraged such unions. In addition, the intermarriage rate was considered low, and there was not much concern about intermarriage as a serious threat to the Jewish future.[10] This lack of concern did not continue much longer. Jonathan Sarna explains that Marshal Sklare's article about intermarriage in *Commentary* in 1964 "shattered the American Jewish community's long silence on the subject of intermarriage and rightly predicted that the subject would emerge as a central issue in American Jewish communal life."[11] Popular opinion at the time was based on a United States Census report that only 7.2% of married Jews were married to a non-Jew. Sklare challenged that statistic and suggested that the actual rate of intermarriage at the time was closer to 18%.[12] Of course, even that rate seems low compared to the 1990 Jewish Population Study, which showed that between 1985 and 1990, 52% of married American Jews had non-Jewish partners.[13] While the results of the 2000 survey have not yet been published,

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[10] Marshal Sklare, *Observing America's Jews* (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1993), 234-237.

[11] Sklare, *Observing*, 234.

[12] Sklare, *Observing*. 237.

[13] Phillips, *Re-examining Intermarriage*, 1.

it is expected that the rate has increased.

Perhaps what is more significant than the rising rate of intermarriage is how attitudes toward intermarriage have changed. Egon Mayer cites a Boston study that found that the Jewish community was becoming more tolerant of interfaith marriage:

> In three successive surveys of the Boston Jewish community, a cross-section of its adult population was asked how they would most probably react if one of their children were to intermarry. In 1965 a little over one quarter, 26 percent, said they would strongly oppose the marriage. Forty-four percent said they would "discourage" it, and another 25 percent said they would remain neutral or accept the marriage. By 1975 the survey of a comparable sample of Boston Jews found that only 14 percent would "strongly oppose" such a marriage, and 59 percent would remain neutral or accept it. And by 1985 the same type of survey found that only 9 percent of Boston's Jewish adults would "strongly oppose" their children's intermarriage, and 66 percent would either remain neutral in the face of it or would accept it.[14]

Mayer shows that there is a clear increase in the acceptability of interfaith marriage.

The American Jewish Committee in the 2000 Annual Survey of American Jewish Opinion found similar acceptance of interfaith marriage. One of the committee's key findings was that "the Jewish taboo on mixed marriage has clearly collapsed."[15] Eighty percent of the respondents agreed that "intermarriage is inevitable in an open society," only 12% said they "strongly disapprove of marriage between a Jew and a Gentile," 40% claimed neutrality and another 16% viewed intermarriage "as a positive good."[16] A recent issue of *Reform Judaism* featured the results of this survey on its cover. Though the cover may have been intended to shock readers with these figures on acceptance of

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[14] Egon Mayer, "Intermarriage Research at the American Jewish Committee: Its Evolution and Impact," in *Facing the Future*, ed. Steven Bayme (New York: KTAV, 1989), 165.

[15] American Jewish Committee, "Responding to Intermarriage, Survey, Analysis, Policy, Key Findings on Intermarriage," www.ajc.org.

[16] American Jewish Committee, "Responding to Intermarriage."

interfaith marriage, the cover story contained an sidebar article that leaned the other way; called "The Forbidden Road Home," it was written by Beth Levine, a Jewish woman who claimed her interfaith marriage is what initiated her interest in Judaism. The author wrote that "the American Jewish community has been concerned for some time now about the amount of interfaith marriage, fearing the Jewish community will eventually self-destruct through assimilation. But in my case, marrying a Christian had made me a more knowledgeable and observant Jew."[17] Even a Jewish magazine, put out by the UAHC, was suggesting that intermarriage could be a positive thing. There was no article showing how an intermarried Jew began celebrating Christmas in order to preserve family harmony and wound up raising dual-religion or Christian children—the negative, opposite outcome to Levine's story.

The 2000 AJC survey found that 41% of Jews believe that interfaith marriage is the greatest threat to the Jewish community, but 50% of those surveyed agreed that "it is racist to oppose Jewish-Gentile marriages."[18] This fact is also found on the cover of *Reform Judaism,* but this idea is not new. In 1993 Dennis Prager wrote that

> many Jews correctly perceive their parents' objections to intermarriage as racist. When Jewish parents who have never been concerned with preserving distinctive Jewish values become obsessed with preserving Jewish blood, it is racism. It is therefore racism to equate Judaism with liberalism, tolerance or some other value, and then to object to a child marrying a non-Jew who holds that value. Only objections to intermarriage based on Judaism as a distinctive religious/moral value system are not racist.[19]

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[17] Beth Levine, "The Forbidden Road Home," *Reform Judaism* (fall 2001), 23.

[18] American Jewish Committee, *Responding to Intermarriage.*

[19] Dennis Prager, "Prager's Thirteen Principles of Intermarriage," *Moment* (February 1993), 18.

Prager does not object to objections to intermarriage, as long as they part of a consistent worldview—that is, just one aspect of being raised in the Jewish tradition. In 1997 Alan Dershowitz expanded on this point, making clear his belief that even a nonobservant, committed Jew can object to intermarriage, writing that "it is not racist for a deeply committed Jew to feel strongly about the continuity of the Jewish people, even if he rejects the strictures of the Halakah."[20] Dershowitz explained how this attitude of choosing only to marry or date other Jews is perceived by many college-age Jews as racism: "many regard it as *wrong* to take into account the religion of a prospective spouse... In the language of the day, it is 'politically incorrect' to insist on marrying a coreligionist."[21] It is these kinds of attitudes, shortsighted and hypocritical, that Prager and Dershowitz say not only make interfaith marriage acceptable, but also can encourage it.

The significant increase in intermarriage has resulted in varied responses from the Jewish public and the leaders of the Reform movement, in small part because there is some disagreement on how to classify the phenomenon: is intermarriage bad for the Jews? Or is it having a positive effect on Judaism, as 16% of the AJC survey's respondents answered? Is there any way to slow the trend, or is it an inevitable part of modern life? Is there even any reason to want to prevent intermarriage? In order to understand how the different voices of American Judaism come to answer these questions, it is important to first appreciate why intermarriage is on the rise, and what its effects are.

The increase of intermarriage between Jews and Gentiles can be attributed to factors both within Judaism and outside of it; that is, Jews can and do marry non-Jews because of things inherent (or lacking) in Judaism, but also because of external factors.

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[20] Alan Dershowitz, *The Vanishing American Jew* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1997), 37.

[21] Dershowitz, *Vanishing*, 26.

The Enlightenment, combined with the Jewish tendency towards intellectualism, has brought the non-Jewish world into the homes of Jews—books and other media, certainly, but interaction with non-Jews on personal and professional levels as well. A desire to assimilate with the world around them can be seen in Jewish communities throughout history, but even this did not always lead to such high rates of intermarriage. The liberal outlook of contemporary Reform Judaism, embracing such cosmopolitan ideas as multiculturalism, has resulted in an appreciation for the richness of other traditions, and has in large part eliminated the repulsion of intermarriage.

In contemporary America, plurality and multiculturalism have become sacred cows; prevailing opinions side with tolerance and acceptance above all other concerns. Many feel that in the spirit of tolerance of others that it would be wrong for a couple in love not to marry because of a difference in religion. Presumably, love conquers all. Many feel that celebrating both religions—picking and choosing a mix of customs from each faith—is a workable solution and a reflection of acceptance and tolerance. Jack Wertheimer wrote that contemporary American attitudes not only sanction intermarriage across religious and ethnic boundaries, but also encourage them.

> They are, after all, symptomatic of increased tolerance and equality, the twinned ideals that in our age seem to trump all other competing values.... Indeed, it is often those who resist the trend who are now on the defensive, called upon to explain what could possibly be wrong when people from different religious or ethnic groups fall in love and marry.... No wonder, then, that communal spokesmen have increasingly come to liken widespread intermarriage to an act of nature. Being for or against it, declares the sociologist Egon Mayer, "is like being for or against the weather. It is a demographic and social reality."[22]

Lastly, there are pressures from the world-at-large that are not faith-based. The Jewish

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[22] Jack Wertheimer, "Surrendering to Intermarriage," *Commentary* (March 2001), 27.

Outreach Institute has found that:

> Intermarriage is not the result of American Jewry's predilection of assimilation. Rather, it is the byproduct of other large scale transformations in American family life affecting Jews and non-Jews alike. These transformations include: removal of virtually all social barriers between Jews and non-Jews in work, education and leisure; later age of marriage; geographic shift away from older areas of dense Jewish concentration; increased participation of women in the labor force; increased incidence of divorce and remarriage. Each of these transformation[s] in the American life has increased the opportunity of social interchange between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors, and have correspondingly increased the opportunity of Jews to meet and marry non-Jews.[23]

It is clear that there is no one cause of the increase of intermarriage.

With a rise in interfaith marriages there is also the side effect that the children of such a marriage, even if raised exclusively as Jews, are more likely to marry non-Jews themselves. The parents of these children no longer feel like they can tell their children only to date or marry a Jew, since they themselves did not do so. Intermarriage is part of the price we pay for living in and being accepted by such an open society.

The American Jewish Committee survey found that 41% of Jews believe that interfaith marriage is the greatest threat to the Jewish community.[24] The threat is twofold. On the one hand, the Jewish community may continue shrinking to the point of nonexistence; on the other, an acceptance of intermarriage may be diluting the Jewish community. Children of interfaith marriage are less likely to be raised Jewish and even less likely to be raised exclusively Jewish. Interfaith couples are less likely to join a synagogue or to send their children to religious schools.[25] The American Jewish

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[23] Jewish Outreach Institute, "The Factors Behind the 52% Intermarriage Rate," www.joi.org/library.

[24] American Jewish Committee, *Responding.*

[25] American Jewish Committee, "American Jewish Committee Statement on Intermarriage 1991," www.ajc.org.

Committee describes the threat: "If this pattern continues, intermarriage, at its current rate or higher, will almost certainly lead to an erosion of the size, strength, and vitality of the Jewish community. Other signs suggest that philanthropic support of Jewish communal institutions may decline as well."[26]

A threat of this magnitude demands a response, and there are a variety of responses to interfaith marriage, from the assumption that shunning the intermarried will discourage further intermarriage to the assumption that interfaith marriage is not only inevitable, but also desirable as a true expression of plurality. There are those who propose that the only solution is to return to *shtetl* life, suggesting that ultra-Orthodox communities have very low intermarriage rates—but Eric Yoffie debunks this by pointing out that "in England and France, where 90 percent of the Jews identify with Orthodox Judaism, the intermarriage rate is higher [than the 52 percent rate in America]."[27]

One type of response to intermarriage has been to attempt to stop it. The methods employed are as varied as the theories as to why people marry non-Jews, but they focus mainly on youth education and playing the numbers game. The former is dedicated to helping Jewish children develop strong Jewish identities so that they will be more likely to seek out a Jewish spouse, or at least be more likely to establish a Jewish home, while the latter is devoted to creating environments for Jewish singles to meet, with the idea that the more Jews they meet the more likely they are to date and marry a Jew.

The second tack taken against intermarriage is not to attempt to halt it, but rather to encourage interfaith families to become Jewish families; this is officially known in the Reform movement as Outreach. Recognizing that interfaith families tend to leave the fold, the Reform Jewish community (on a local as well as national level) has attempted to find

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[26] American Jewish Committee, *Statement*.

[27] Yoffie, *Remarks*.

ways to attract, include and retain them. The reality is that many interfaith families are lost to the Jewish community; a majority of the children in such families are raised in dual religion households and do not consider themselves members of the Jewish community, or they are raised in another religion altogether. Interfaith families are less likely to belong to a synagogue or to celebrate Jewish holidays.[28] The threat is of a diminishing Jewish community; the more Jews that marry non-Jews the smaller the Jewish community gets. To this end—absorbing interfaith couples into the Jewish community—the Reform movement has adopted certain other policies to supplement Outreach. Accepting patrilineal descent alongside matrilineal means that more children of mixed families are considered Jewish, while conversion of the non-Jewish spouse sidesteps the interfaith issue entirely. Attempts to include the non-Jewish members of an interfaith family in synagogue and community life aim to ensure that these mixed families are not lost to Judaism forever. However, these solutions offered by the Reform movement are considered by some to be part of the problem.

Recently Jack Wertheimer criticized Reform Judaism's response to intermarriage as a type of surrender. He reserves most of his criticism for the policies that focus on couples that have already entered into intermarriage, instead of attempting prevention of such unions. "A broad range of institutions have formulated new policies and programs designed to bring these 'interfaith' families into involvement with Jewish communal life... [and] given the sheer numbers of such families, it is hardly surprising that communal institutions would seek to reach out to them."[29] Wertheimer describes what he considers the paradox of the intermarriage debate:

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[28] Phillips, *Re-examining Intermarriage*, 43-56.

[29] Wertheimer, *Surrendering*, 28.

> Most Jewish leaders have become convinced that it is no more possible to prevent widespread intermarriage than it is to alter the seasons. Instead, the community has been trying to persuade people raised in other faiths either to convert to Judaism or to raise their children in a faith that is alien to them. But, no matter how low the bar has been placed, or how deep the self abasement practiced by the bearers of Jewish norms, that effort has been a resounding failure. Worse, rather than strengthening Jewish life, which is the community's ostensible goal, much of what has been done in the name of "outreach" has been diluting it.[30]

This is a fairly harsh criticism of the Reform movement's Outreach policy and, in effect, a criticism of Reform as well.

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[30] Wertheimer, *Surrendering*, 31.

CHAPTER 3:

Outreach

Outreach as an official Reform response to intermarriage, as a policy, and as a department of the UAHC, can trace its roots directly to Alexander Schindler. As President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, he addressed its Board of Trustees in 1978 on the subject of intermarriage, remarking that "the statistics on the subject confirm what our own experience teaches us: intermarriage is on the rise." He cited survey responses, quoted numbers and listed percentages, and included an emotional appeal:

> We may deplore it, we may lament it, we may struggle against it, but these are the facts. The tide is running against us, and we must deal with this threatening reality.... It does not mean that we should prepare to sit *shiva* for the American Jewish community. On the contrary, facing and dealing with reality means confronting it, coming to grips with it, determining to reshape it.[31]

His goal was simply stated: "the creation of an agency within our movement... which will earnestly and urgently confront the problem of intermarriage in specified areas and in an effort to turn the tide which threatens to sweep us away into directions which might enable us to recover our numbers and, more important, to recharge our inner strength."[32] He recognized that Jewish education, though decidedly important, was not preventing exogamy:

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[31] Alexander Schindler, *Outreach: The Case for a Missionary Judaism*, Presidential Address to the Board of Trustees, UAHC, Houston, 2 Dec. 1978.

[32] Schindler, *Missionary Judaism.*

> We know that such programs are our first line of defense in the battle against intermarriage. We know as well, however, that they are an imperfect defense, that even among those who are exposed to our most ambitious efforts, there are hundreds, if not thousands, who will intermarry.... As important as Jewish education is, in the context, I believe that there are other steps we can—and must—take if we are to deal realistically with the threat which intermarriage presents to our survival.[33]

Schindler outlined three of those steps in his speech. The first step was to be more welcoming to Jews-by-choice and more sensitive to their needs, and the second was to bring the non-Jewish spouse into Jewish life, taking advantage of what he calls "Jewish drift"; these have become the basis for the Outreach department, focused on turning the non-Jewish spouse into a Jew. The third step Schindler proposed is still controversial; he suggested reaching out to the "unchurched" Gentiles and encouraging them to convert, admittedly counter to Judaism's historic aversion to proselytizing. Eric Yoffie notes that "[Schindler's] call for an openly proselytizing Judaism was enormously courageous... but, two decades later, it seems to me that this still remains a program for the future."[34]

After Schindler's speech a task force was formed that included among its goals "to develop an effective Outreach program by which the Reform Synagogue can seek out mixed married couples in order to respond to the particular emotional and social stresses in their situations and to make the congregations, the rabbi, and Judaism itself available to them and their families."[35] In 1981 the task force recommended a comprehensive program of Reform Jewish Outreach, and two years later the task force became the joint UAHC/CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach. In 1992, after a generous grant,

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[33]Schindler, *Missionary Judaism.*

[34]Yoffie, *Remarks.*

[35] UAHC Board of Trustees, *Resolution*, December 2, 1978.

it became the William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach.[36] The William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach now includes programming for a laundry-list of interested persons: "those interested in exploring Judaism, Jews-by-choice, those interested in choosing Judaism, intermarried couples and couples contemplating intermarriage, children of intermarried couples, parents of intermarried couples, Jewish youth... Inreach to born Jews on issues relating to Jewish identity, attitudes toward the changing Jewish community, and policy for defining the role of non-Jews in the synagogue, and Interfaith families deciding on how to raise their children."[37]

By its own definition, Outreach is a program which invites Jewish choices, and the goals of the William and Lottie Daniel Department of Outreach certainly run parallel to that invitation:

- Welcome and provide education and support for those who seek to investigate Judaism
- Integrate new Jews-by-choice fully into the Jewish community
- Welcome intermarried couples to take part in synagogue life and encourage them to explore and study Judaism, fostering a comfortable relationship with Judaism
- Encourage and support the efforts of interfaith couples to raise their children as Jews
- Assist young people in strengthening their Jewish identity and in examining the implications of interdating and intermarriage for themselves
- Educate and sensitize the Jewish community to be receptive to new Jews-by-choice and intermarried couples
- Actively encourage people to make Jewish choices in their lives through special discussion groups, community support, adult education and Jewish resources.[38]

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[36] UAHC, "What is Reform Jewish Outreach," www.uahc.org/outreach.

[37] UAHC, "What is Reform Jewish Outreach."

[38] UAHC, "What is Reform Jewish Outreach."

Outreach has become such an integral part of Reform Judaism that it has been incorporated into the Statement of Principles of Reform Judaism:

> We are an inclusive community, opening doors to Jewish life to people of all ages, to varied kinds of families... those who have converted to Judaism, and to all individuals and families, including the intermarried, who strive to create a Jewish home.
>
> We believe that we must not only open doors for those ready to enter our faith, but also to actively encourage those who are seeking a spiritual home to find it in Judaism.
>
> We are committed to strengthening the people Israel by supporting individuals and families in the creation of homes rich in Jewish learning and observance.[39]

The CCAR commentary on these principles mentions Outreach specifically:

> Reform Judaism has always been committed to providing a home for all who seek Jewish experience, and as the variety of those seekers increases, Reform has tried to respond in ways appropriate to each community... This movement has been enriched by those who have converted to Judaism... and the UAHC's Outreach program has gained wide approbation for its encouragement of mixed families who wish to establish Jewish homes and raise their children as Jews... Reform needs to assist [Reform Jewish college students] in finding the Jewish mates they seek, even as we encourage non-Jewish partners to convert or, if they are not ready, to work with their Jewish partners to establish a Jewish home.[40]

Despite this clear statement that Outreach is part of Reform Judaism, as a defining principle and not just a programing priority, Outreach has not been without its critics—even in the Reform movement. In Alexander Schindler's files on Outreach from the American Jewish Archives, there are several letters questioning the value of spending funds on Outreach and suggesting that the funds would be better spent on people already

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[39] Central Conference of American Rabbis, *A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism*, Adopted at the 1999 Pittsburgh Convention, May 1999.

[40] CCAR, *A Statement of Principles*

affiliated with the movement.[41]

The accusation of poorly directed funds is not the sole complaint against Outreach; it is also often criticized for encouraging interfaith marriage. Outreach is a response to intermarriage after the fact, not an attempt to curb it. Its critics suggest that by making a clear statement of welcoming interfaith couples, suggest its critics, Outreach is a contributing factor to increased interfaith marriage. In a letter to then-UAHC President Alexander Schindler a woman wrote of her concerns:

> As our children are growing up in congregations surrounded by the Outreach program, I believe they are now getting a message that says that a mixed marriage is acceptable, because we will help you to fit into our congregation regardless of your selection of spouse. They never hear that marriage to a non-Jew is not what we want for them.[42]

Schindler's reply reiterates the fact that Outreach was not designed to prevent or discourage intermarriage, and suggests that it is the best plan to tackle the shifting population demographics:

> Outreach was never designed to stem the tide of intermarriage. Rather it was intended to reach out to those who are intermarried and invite them to make Jewish choices for themselves and their families. Those Jewish choices include conversion to Judaism, which is an outcome that Outreach encourages... Although it may be that a strong program of Outreach may weaken that prohibition against intermarriage, the alternative would be far worse, driving away many who would otherwise join us.[43]

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[41] Alexander M. Schindler Papers, 1961-1996, Outreach, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of American Jewish Archives, series A, boxes 10, 11 and 12.

[42] Letter to Alexander Schindler from Jean M. Hecht, 2 September 1993, Alexander M. Schindler Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, series A, box 10, folder 2.

[43] Letter to Jean M. Hecht from Alexander Schindler, 14 September 1993, Alexander M Schindler Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus HUC-JIR, series A, box 10, folder 2.

Outreach operates on the premise that intermarriage is inevitable, and that no matter what is done in terms of education and other preventative measures there is no way to stop it completely. Outreach accepts that once the couple is engaged, there is little one can do to stop the marriage, and perhaps there is little one *should* do in that regard. The next best thing is to help this couple become a Jewish family so they are not lost to Judaism. While there are those who say we should stop the couple from getting to the point of betrothal, Outreach acknowledges that in a open society there is no way to prevent Jews from socializing with non-Jews and that, as a result of that, some are going to meet, date and fall in love with non-Jews. That is not to say that Outreach does not want to encourage strong Jewish identity among Jewish youth, so that when it comes time to make decisions regarding who to date and marry they choose only Jews because of their strong Jewish ties; it is merely an admission that there is no foolproof system for doing so.

There are a number of different ways in which Outreach attempts to welcome interfaith families into the Jewish community. There are educational programs, such as the "Introduction to Judaism" course, as well as a shorter three-session course called "Taste of Judaism" designed to get people interested in Judaism; the latter is usually offered at a low cost and is advertised in the secular press to attract more interest. There are also programs like "Stepping Stones," which provide free or low cost religious school for children of interfaith families for a limited time to encourage them to choose Judaism as the religion for their family. Every other year the Department of Outreach puts out an "Idea Book" filled with programing suggestions from other congregations who have had successful Outreach programing beyond introductory programming. Outreach is attempting to take a difficult situation and make it better, to turn the loss of Jewish families into a potential gain, to make the Jewish community a warm and accepting and exciting and fulfilling community in which the non-Jewish spouse will want to take part.

Eric Yoffie speculates on what the Jewish community would be like without a formal Outreach program. He acknowledges that even without Schindler's speech Outreach would have become policy, but writes that his speech brought the issue to the front of the movement's consciousness and declared a plan of action for speeding up the process. Yoffie speculates that without Outreach,

> ...tens of thousands of intermarried couples who are now members of our congregations would be forever lost to the Jewish people... In the absence of Outreach, ours would be a weaker and more divided movement, denied the surge of energy, religious renewal, and adult learning, which is a direct outgrowth of our Outreach efforts.[44]

Yoffie states how important Outreach has been to Reform Judaism; the next section of my thesis will examine how influential Outreach has been on the way Reform Judaism deals with interfaith couples and families.

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[44] Yoffie, *Remarks.*

CHAPTER 4:

Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages

In 1909, the Central Conference of American Rabbis declared intermarriage to be inconsistent with the Jewish tradition. This firm stand, however, was made at a time when marriages between Jews and non-Jews were a much rarer occurrence, and it was followed by no great public discussion. Almost three-quarters of a century later, the CCAR felt the need to reiterate its position, in light of certain observed changes within the American Jewish community. At the 1973 CCAR convention a new resolution on officiation at mixed marriages was drafted, "at which time it was estimated that 40 percent of the rabbis in the CCAR were officiating at mixed marriages because they felt that doing so was an act of important outreach to the intermarrying family."[45]
The resolution read as follows:

> The Central Conference of American Rabbis, 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 Central Conference of American Rabbis 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 Yisrael* for those who have already entered into mixed marriage, the CCAR calls upon its members:
>
> 1. to assist fully in educating children of such mixed marriages as Jews;

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[45] Michael Meyer and Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 182.

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 synagogue.[46]

This firm separation between the acts of officiating at a mixed marriage and encouraging interfaith couples to live Jewish lives was intended to more clearly demarcate the line between the CCAR's Outreach policies and the growing questions surrounding rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages; it seems to have had little success in doing so.

The CCAR defines Outreach as "providing a welcome to the Jewish community and to Jewish life for non-Jewish partners,"[47] and struggles to maintain Outreach policies independent of other policies. Though the text of the 1973 resolution supports the broad goals of Outreach, it was proposed before Outreach became an official policy, and there remains no official Outreach policy regarding rabbinic officiation at such ceremonies. The CCAR does not see a contradiction in this; its Subcommittee on Mixed Marriage to the Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach wrote that "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 involving men and women who are committed to Judaism as a personal way of life."[48]

The CCAR has, in essence, declared a policy that stands against intermarriage but proclaims support of already existing intermarried couples. This policy has raised many questions about consistency and contradiction, the most obvious being: is it possible to

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[46] Central Conference of American Rabbis, Resolution of the Committee on Mixed Marriage, 1973.

[47] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Working with Interfaith Couples: A Jewish Perspective, a Guide for Facilitators* (New York: UAHC, 1992), 187.

[48] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples*, 187.

simultaneously welcome an interfaith couple into the Jewish community and encourage them to have a Jewish home and at the same time refuse them a Jewish wedding? The UAHC Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, in a published guide for facilitators, offers this disclaimer:

> Any discussion on the issue of the rabbinic officiation of intermarriage must be preceded by a reminder that the ultimate policy guidelines are generated by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and individual rabbis then decide what their particular policy will be... The issue of rabbinic officiation is outside the purview of the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach. Outreach—providing a welcome to the Jewish community and to Jewish life for non-Jewish partners—is a mandate of Reform Judaism that is independent of a rabbi's decision about officiation.[49]

This CCAR Commission has drawn a line between its dictates and those of the CCAR as a whole, in efforts to declare its Outreach policies independent of officiation issues.

It is clear, however, that the policy of Outreach does have some relevance to rabbinic officiation. Rabbi Jack Stern recently wrote about the officiation debate, noting that this has been an issue since the 1909 CCAR Convention. There is nothing new under the sun, he wrote in a paraphrase of *Kohelet,* except "what is new under the sun is the expanded Outreach program in our congregations and the consequent need for those who refuse to officiate to reconcile that stance with their embrace of the intermarried."[50] Whether that reconciliation requires a change in policy or just a change of mind remains to be seen; perhaps what the expanded policy of Outreach offers is, in part, substantial reasoning for officiating at mixed marriages.

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[49] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples.* 187.

[50] Jack Stern, "The Question That Will Not Go Away," *Reform Judaism,* fall 1996, 51.

Rabbi Joseph Narot wrote in 1973 about rabbis who officiate at mixed marriages, either unconditionally or with restrictions:

> These men may feel justified by many factors in doing so; but neither can they yet prove their justification satisfactorily in terms of the ultimate, urgent, and historic Jewish considerations.[51]

The Outreach policy may help provide the justification that Narot wrote about. The Subcommittee on Mixed Marriage to the Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach offers arguments both for and against rabbinic officiation, and included among them are reasons directly tied to Outreach: "Outreach begins before a marriage takes place. An outreach program which is intent upon reaching out to couples in and intermarriage, but which disapproves of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages is a contradiction in terms."[52] While not directly mentioning the policy of Outreach, two other lines of argument indicate a concern with its goals:

> Rabbinic officiation at intermarriages 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...
>
> When a rabbi refuses to officiate at an intermarriage, 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.[53]

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[51] Joseph Narot, "Realities versus Expectations," *CCAR Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 81 (spring 1973): 34-36.

[52] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples*, 187.

[53] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples*, 187.

Rabbi Harry Danziger, who does perform interfaith marriages, attempts to shed light on the apparent contradiction of Outreach without officiation:

> First, we [Reform rabbis] accept the validity your marriage; second, we will treat your family as a Jewish family if you live as one; and third, if you rear your children as Jews, they will be regarded as Jews in our community... In this new Reform context, non-officiation conveys a confusing message. The interfaith couple is told essentially that we welcome your marriage, but not your wedding; we accept your potential as a Jewish family, but only after absenting ourselves from the moment that made you a family.[54]

Unable or unwilling to separate the issue of officiation at mixed marriages from that of Outreach, supporters of officiation have their best argument in the criticism of existing policy on grounds of hypocrisy.

The opponents of intermarriage officiation nonetheless stand firm. Alexander Schindler, the founder of Outreach, did not see refusal to officiate as contradictory with the goals of Outreach: "Whether I like it or not, my officiation would be seen as a seal of approval and would, therefore, become encouraging of intermarriage."[55] As for the question of whether these couples would entertain the idea of a Jewish home without such a ceremony, the task force point out that "a growing number of intermarried couples have affiliated with synagogues and are raising their children as Jews despite the fact that they were not married by a rabbi."[56]

Just as officiation and Outreach are linked, so too is it difficult to disentangle them from other related issues. The long-standing public discussion on synagogue dues makes its way into the argument in a question on the UAHC web site; in this instance,

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[54] Harry Danziger, "Why I Officiate at Selected Interfaith Weddings," *Reform Judaism*, fall 1993, 52.

[55] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples*, 187.

[56] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Interfaith Couples*, 187.

a layperson tries to make a case for officiating at a mixed marriages based in large part on dissatisfaction with financial policies:

> What is the official Reform position on officiating at the wedding of a Jew to a non-Jew? My fiancee and I are having difficulty arranging a Rabbi to officiate at our wedding....The responses we have received from rabbis have been most negative and send a message to us and to our families that Judaism does not care to support our marriage, although congregations are willing to accept membership dues from the couple after the fact. This position reinforces some of the more negative perceptions of our people.[57]

The answer to this question is given by a rabbi who does not personally officiate at interfaith weddings. In addition to giving his reasons for refusal, he explains that

> regardless of one's position on officiation, rabbis are called upon to welcome interfaith couples and their children into Jewish life as much as they can... I'm sorry that there is the perception that when Temples welcome interfaith couples, they are doing so simply in order to collect dues. The Reform Movement, through its national Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach and its local congregations, has truly pioneered the art of reaching out to intermarried couples. It has done so, not out of a financial motivation, but out of the conviction that it is consistent with our understanding of Judaism, is the right thing to do and is in the best interest of Judaism and the Jewish people.[58]

Reform Responsa take a much clearer stand against officiation at interfaith weddings than the CCAR policy. In large part, there is support for non-officiation, with the stated hope that this will result in conversion by the non-Jewish betrothed, and more hope that the family will be Jewish (the assumed reason for wanting a rabbi to officiate in the first place). In this way is bypassed the suggested contradiction of welcoming interfaith families into Jewish life but refusing to officiate at their weddings.

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[57] Don Rossoff, *Jewish Answers to Frequently Asked Jewish Questions*, www.uahc.org.

[58] Don Rossoff, *Jewish Answers.*

Rabbi Mark Washofsky explains that:

> the rabbi, in fact, reaches out to the couple by encouraging them to make a sincere and concrete Jewish choice. This is accomplished by the non-Jewish partner's decision to convert to Judaism... Whether it is indeed true that by refusing to officiate at mixed marriages rabbis turn away many couples from Judaism (and we know of no solid non-anecdotal evidence to support this claim), it can as easily be said that when we officiate we discourage the Gentile partner from conversion.[59]

Despite the refusal to officiate at the ceremony itself, continues Washofsky, the intermarried couple should not be turned away.

> The Jewish spouse remains a Jew, the couple's children are potentially Jewish, and it is definitely our Jewish obligation to bring the entire family into the midst of the Jewish community... Our goals are to assist fully in educating the children of mixed marriage as Jews; to provide an opportunity for the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse; and to encourage active involvement in the Jewish community and the synagogue.[60]

It is clear that these are the same goals as Outreach. Washofsky rejects the charge of hypocrisy leveled at rabbis that welcome an interfaith couple after refusing to officiate at their wedding. "We are motivated on this issue, after all, by two important principles: our concern for the integrity of Jewish religious standards and our responsibility for the continuation of Jewish life and identity. Religious Jews must affirm both these values, and there is no contradiction in their doing so."[61]

The policy of Outreach has not solved the officiation debate; in attempting to welcome intermarried couples and simultaneously set up barriers to prevent their initial

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[59] Mark Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 162.

[60] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*,162.

[61] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*,162.

formulation, it has instead fueled the fire, creating questions of hypocrisy and contradiction. And while it can be said that the Outreach policy may have some effect on an individual's decision to officiate at a mixed marriage, it has not produced a change in the CCAR policy on rabbinic officiation.

CHAPTER 5:

Conversion

In 1991 Egon Mayer wrote that American Jews could no longer imagine any way of preventing intermarriage, leading to a "fundamental philosophical change" in the way intermarriage was viewed. He characterized this new approach by reworking an old cliché: "if we can't beat 'em, let 'em join us."[62] Four of the goals of Outreach have to do with this task, that is, getting "them" to join "us." They include welcoming non-Jews interested in Judaism, accepting Jews-by-choice as fully Jewish, enabling non-Jewish partners to study and explore Judaism, and educating the Jewish community to be receptive to new Jews-by-choice and intermarried couples.[63] Exemplifying these goals is Outreach's most well-known component, its introduction to Judaism classes, and along with it a newer focus on conversion.

Recent shifts in the American Jewish population and the evolution of Reform ideology have resulted in an emphasis on more stringent requirements for conversion, while maintaining the open-armed acceptance that is exemplified by Hillel in the Talmud.[64] In fact, the policy of Outreach does not just welcome converts, but encourages the conversion of non-Jewish spouses in interfaith marriages—as long as certain guidelines are met. The rise in in the number of interfaith marriages meant many opportunities for such

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[62] Egon Mayer, "Why Not Judaism," *Moment* (October 1991), 42.

[63] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, *Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community* (New York: UAHC, 1989), Appendix II.

[64] See, for example, Shabbat 31a.

conversion, and Egon Mayer believed that this rise drove parallel growth in conversion to Judaism and the accompanying shift in Jewish attitudes; he stated that almost 90% of all conversions were due to an interfaith marriage, either before the wedding or sometime during the marriage.[65]

Conversion in and of itself is not a controversial issue for Judaism; it has played a role throughout the history of the Jewish people, from the lives of the patriarchs to the present. The Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements all allow conversion, and all have varying methods of preparing the convert for Judaism and welcoming her into the community. Conversion of a non-Jew is not a problem, but the idea of actively encouraging the non-Jewish spouse in an interfaith marriage to convert to Judaism is a new concept. Schindler's revolutionary—and still-unheeded—call to find potential converts even outside of an intermarriage situation is an even more profound shift in thought, but runs along similar lines. The Reform movement asserts that such a conversion transforms the family into a Jewish family, and does not endanger the Jewish community; on the contrary, it swells our numbers. But conversion purely for the sake of marriage, that is, deciding to become Jewish because of one's spouse, has been criticized and traditionally prohibited. The policy of Outreach has extended just over this line, declaring that marriage is an acceptable reason for starting down the path of conversion and encouraging non-Jewish spouses of born Jews to consider conversion is a worthwhile enterprise. Behind this recommendation is a growing recognition that these conversions still need to be conversions of the heart and mind—the desire to convert must be matched by a willingness to immerse one's self in the traditions of the Jewish people. It is only in this way that conversion in exogamous marriages can result in a stronger community, and not a diluted one.

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[65] Mayer, *Why Not Judaism*, 40.

Alexander Schindler considered conversion of the non-Jewish spouse as a positive step in combatting intermarriage. In his 1978 proposal he suggested that one way to help make converts feel welcome is to be aware of issues they might face after the conversion and find ways to support them:

> Immediately after the marriage ceremony, we drop the couple and leave them to fend for themselves. We do not offer them help in establishing a Jewish home, in raising their children Jewishly, in grappling with their particular problems, in dealing with their special conflicts. More important still, we do not really embrace them, enable them to feel a close kinship with our people. On the contrary: If the truth be told, we often alienate them. We question their motivations.... We think them less Jewish (ignoring that they often know more about Judaism than born Jews). Unto the end of their days we refer to them as converts.... It is time for us to stop relating to the new Jews as if they were curiosities, or as if they were superficial people whose conversion to Judaism reflects a lack of principles on their part, a way of accommodating to their partners-to-be.[66]

Schindler wanted to couple the encouragement of conversion with a greater acceptance of Jews-by-choice, hoping that positive reinforcement before and after would benefit the converts and the larger Jewish community; his words are echoed in the policies of Outreach.

As stated above, there has traditionally been opposition to conversion purely for the sake of marriage, but the *halakhic* basis for accepting such converts is not at issue here.[67] The Reform movement does not view marriage to a Jew as an acceptable reason for conversion, but as a good basis for a person to begin study for conversion. The new CCAR Guidelines for working with prospective converts state that "while an impending or existing marriage to a Jew is an understandable reason to begin the exploration of

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[66] Schindler, *Missionary Judaism.*

[67] For a discussion of the *halakhic* issues see: Mark Washofsky, "Conversion to Judaism: The Question of Motivation," in *Introduction to Judaism: Instructor's Guide and Curriculum*, eds. Stephen Einstein and Lydia Kukoff (New York: UAHC Press, 1999), 88-105.

[conversion], it is not a sufficient motivation for finalizing [conversion]."[68] Outreach goes a step beyond merely allowing the conversion and says we should be encouraging the non-Jewish spouses to convert; studies show that families where the non-Jewish spouse converts are more involved in the Jewish community and more likely to raise Jewish children than families where there is no conversion.[69] Seventy percent of conversionary families belong to a synagogue, attend High Holiday services and Passover seders.[70] The 1999 Statement of Principles of the Reform movement states that "We believe that we must not only open doors for those ready to enter our faith, but also to actively encourage those who are seeking a spiritual home to find it in Judaism"[71] and affirms Reform Judaism's commitment to encouraging conversion. The issues at hand, at least for the advocates of Outreach's pro-conversion stance, are how to encourage conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, what the conversion requirements are, how to make Jews-by-choice feel welcome in the Jewish community, and what the needs of Jews-by-choice are beyond conversion.

Rabbi Allen Maller refers to marriages where the non-Jew converts as *mitzvah* marriages.[72] Judaism rejects the idea that non-Jews need to be saved through conversion, and Jewish law traditionally advises Jews to discourage potential converts; these are significant factors in the anti-conversion attitude Judaism has historically held, and

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[68] Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Guidelines for Rabbis Working with Prospective Gerim*, Adopted by the CCAR Membership at the 112th Annual Convention in Monterey, California, June 27, 2001, note 1a.

[69] Egon Mayer, *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 253.

[70] Mayer, *Love and Tradition*, 238.

[71] CCAR, *A Statement of Principles.*

[72] Allen Maller, "Children in Jewish-Christian Marriages," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Vol. 37, No. 73 (winter 1989): 26.

barriers to the conversion of non-Jewish spouses. "It is important for us to stress," writes Maller, "that influencing a Gentile to become Jewish [in the context of a mixed marriage] is a *mitzvah*. We must be careful that in trying to be more accepting of mixed couples, we are not indicating that a mixed marriage is just as good as a *mitzvah* marriage."[73] For Maller, a marriage between two Jews is always preferable to a mixed marriage, and conversion is the only way for an interfaith couple to become a Jewish couple. "Conversion should always be our ideal... conversion to Judaism is the best outcome for an exogamous marriage."[74] By using the word *"mitzvah"* Maller is making conversion a clear Jewish value and linking it with the commandments. This reflects a shift in thinking that it is not only acceptable to convert for the sake of marriage, but that it is a Jewish obligation to do so.

This commitment to accept Jews by choice is also evidenced in the CCAR Resolution of June 2001 on Rabbinic Commitment to Keiruv. The resolution defined *keiruv* as "the process of reaching out to and welcoming non-Jews who have expressed an interest in living a Jewish life" and resolved that rabbis should

> rededicate themselves to the practice of *keiruv* by: Communicating with their membership/constituencies via sermons, bulletin messages, and other appropriate means, about the importance of inviting the non-Jewish spouses of Jewish members of the community to explore the possibility of conversion to Judaism; encouraging non-Jewish spouses to consider increased Jewish learning and living which may lead to conversion to Judaism, and devoting personal time to this endeavor... Educating their membership/constituencies as to the importance of accepting *gerim* as full and authentic Jews.[75]

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[73] Maller, *Children*, 29.

[74] Maller, *Children*, 29.

[75] CCAR, *Resolution on Rabbinic Commitment to Keiruv*, Adopted by the Board of Trustees June 2001.

The Reform Rabbinate is not only endorsing conversion; it is endorsing the encouragement of conversion.

Recent statistics show that the overall number of conversions is up, to about double what it was 20 years ago, about 3,600 per year in the early 1990s.[76] However, only 9% of non-Jewish spouses in interfaith couples choose conversion, down from 18% in the early 1970s.[77] The change in Reform attitudes toward conversion are, in part, due to shifts such as these. Dru Greenwood writes that "conversion has always been a goal of Outreach. Perhaps, in our eagerness to avoid the appearance of proselytizing, we have been too reticent in suggesting the possibility of conversion to the non-Jews among us. We need to find a middle ground between badgering and avoidance, where we can sensitively invite the choice of Judaism."[78]

Encouraging conversion is viewed by some as just as politically incorrect as discouraging interfaith marriages, and acceptance of diversity is preached as preferable. According to this approach there must be no voice against mixed marriage, and no hint that Judaism is better or preferable to any other religion. There is a more moderate approach put forth by Edmund Case, editor of Interfaithfamily.com, who suggests that it is possible to both encourage and welcome conversion and still let those who choose not to convert know that they too are welcome as they are.[79] However, this is in conflict with the very nature of religious belief—adherents of a religion must prefer it to any other, and institutions of that faith must support and encourage such a view. Eric Yoffie noted

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[76] Mayer, *Why Not Judaism*, 29.

[77] Dru Greenwood, "Rising Intermarriage: Calamity or Opportunity," *Reform Judaism* (fall 1991), 9.

[78] Greenwood, *Rising Intermarriage*, 9.

[79] Edward Case, interview with author, 24 January 2002.

that "the synagogue is not a neutral institution," and is defined by its core values, namely, a commitment to Judaism. "[The synagogue] wants families to function as Jewish families, and while intermarried families can do so in some measure, it welcomes the decision of an intermarried family to become a fully Jewish family, with two Jewish adult partners."[80] Yoffie also suggested that a lack of encouragement to convert is a partial failure on the part of Outreach and that "perhaps we have been so successful in making non-Jews feel comfortable in our congregations that we have inadvertently sent the message that we neither want nor expect conversion."[81]

Regardless of this encouragement, the Reform movement maintains that marriage to a Jew is not, in itself, an acceptable reason for a person to convert; it is, however, a good reason to consider conversion. This is perfectly in line with a tradition that prohibited conversion for the sake of marriage, as it is a policy which can expand the Jewish community without dilution. The Reform stance can enable interfaith couples to become Jewish families, and thereby take full part in the Jewish community, rather than drifting towards its periphery and eventually outside *k'lal yisrael.* The CCAR policies state there should not merely be acceptance of such conversions, but encouragement as well—provided appropriate guidelines are met.

The new conversion guidelines put out by the CCAR reflect the seriousness with which the prospective convert is met. Requirements include classes, counseling, and at least a year of living as a Jew. On the subject of rushing a conversion for a wedding the guidelines state that "While some may choose to set a wedding date prior to the completion of [conversion], such timing must in no way compromise the integrity of the

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[80] Yoffie, *Remarks.*

[81] Yoffie, *Remarks.*

[conversion] itself which must be based solely on the readiness of the candidate."[82] The communal element of conversion is addressed, and specifically suggests using lay people trained in the UAHC/HUC/CCAR Outreach Fellows Program for Conversion Certification. These are lay people who attend a week-long seminar and learn how to address the specific needs of converts, including leading sessions for potential converts to deal with the psychological, social and emotional issues with conversion. In addition, it is recommended that prospective converts be paired up with a *haver*, a mentor, from the congregation to help them in the process of conversion. The guidelines suggest that such a program would be under the auspices of the Outreach committee.[83] This demonstrates another way that Outreach has affected conversion in Reform Judaism; in an attempt to nurture prospective converts and new Jews, lay people are being trained to help with what was once only the domain of the rabbi.

What stands in the way of conversion of non-Jewish spouses? Ironically, Outreach's policy of encouraging conversion is hindered by its acceptance and embrace of non-Jews. The acceptance of interfaith couples is taken as evidence that no conversion is necessary to participate in the Jewish community; if Outreach was truly welcoming, say opponents to conversion, than the non-Jewish spouse would be accepted as-is and not encouraged to convert. In addition, Jews-by-choice may find themselves tagged as "converts" for the rest of their lives, and never treated just as Jews. To combat this, Outreach hopes to change born Jews' attitudes about Jews-by-choice, so they are no longer considered second-class Jews. Along with that, there is a push for increased support to new Jews after conversion. For the opposite of second-class treatment is acceptance without acknowledgment of conversion—there is the idea that it is more

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[82] CCAR, *Gerim*, note 1d.

[83] CCAR, *Gerim*, notes 1d, 3a, 4, and 5.

respectful just to consider the convert a Jew and never to bring it up again—but this can neglect the long-term needs of a Jew-by-choice. As each case of conversion is different, each must be handled differently. This strongly echoes Schindler's 1978 comments.

Recent trends in conversion point to a shift in the demographics of converts. In recent years there have been more conversions of already-married non-Jewish spouses; these are people who have already made the ideological choice to worship as Jews, maintain a Jewish home, and raise Jewish children—they lack only the formal conversion process itself. The CCAR Responsa Committee deals with what can happen when Outreach is successful in bringing the interfaith family into the synagogue and the non-Jewish spouse participates actively in the Jewish community, sometimes for several years without conversion. A 1982 responsum dealt with this very issue. In response to a Gentile woman, ready to convert after ten years of marriage to a Jew and an actively Jewish life, the committee wrote that "it would be perfectly possible to accept such a woman as a convert to Judaism with very little further action on her part. This step should be made as easy as possible, and we should do everything in our power to bring [her] completely into the sphere of Judaism."[84] While this is the current acceptable standard, the CCAR committee on Conversion is planning on publishing an appendix to the *Guidelines for Prospective Gerim* that deals specifically with these kinds of cases. The chair of the committee, Rabbi Richard Shapiro, does not think that this standard will hold, and that some degree of official preparation and education will be recommended. This may be different from the existing introduction to Judaism courses and may deal

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[84] Walter Jacob, ed., "Conversion Without Formal Instruction," in *American Reform Responsa: Collected Responsa of the Central Conference of American Rabbis* (New York: CCAR Press, 1983), 209-211.

more with the psycho-social issues of conversion.[85] The task at hand is to welcome even those that may not have such commitment to the community, but wish to start such a relationship. By marrying a Jew and declaring a desire to join the Jewish community, the Gentile is already on the path to Judaism; unlocking the gates is all that remains. The Reform movement is attempting to create a detailed structure for how to welcome these "new Jews," and how to continue making them feel welcome. What the success of Outreach has changed is the demographic of those seeking conversion. If one of the goals is to welcome the interfaith couple into Jewish life with the hopes that the non-Jew will eventually convert, that hope is being realized. Rabbi Shapiro has found—in talking with over 400 rabbis who are involved in Outreach and perform conversions—that more and more of those seeking conversion are people who have been married to a Jew for some time, and not as many engaged couples seeking conversion before the wedding.[86] If this is truly the case it is a shift from 1985, when Egon Mayer found that 40% of conversions were before the marriage.[87] The Outreach policies of encouraging knowledgeable conversions and shifting away from those that are merely for the sake of marriage may not be prescriptive for a changing American Jewish population, but rather descriptive of changes already taking place.

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[85] Richard Shapiro, interview with author, 3 January 2001.

[86] Richard Shapiro, interview.

[87] Mayer, *Love and Tradition*, 233.

CHAPTER 6:

Patrilineal Descent

Outreach has extended its reach beyond its original purpose, and has affected or inspired other areas of contemporary Reform practice and policy, most notably the concept of patrilineal descent. The concept of matrilineal descent is a simple one: the Jewish religion deems any child born to a Jewish mother to be Jewish. This is not a rule designed for mixed-faith marriages; it is part of a *halakhic* tradition intended to determine who is considered Jewish, and who is not. But matrilineal descent has taken on new importance in light of increased numbers of interfaith families in the Jewish community and it is now accompanied in discussions by a reformulated doppelganger, pioneered by the Reform community in America: patrilineal descent.

Patrilineal descent is a heated issue because it separates the Reform community from the Conservative and Orthodox communities, making Jews defined as such exclusively by patrilineal descent unfit for marriage with Jews in these communities. Even before the official CCAR declaration in 1983, there was an unofficial Reform position that children of Jewish fathers and Gentile mothers would be considered Jewish if they were raised as Jewish; their Confirmation ceremony would serve as their conversion. What is significant is that the child was considered converted, not a born Jew.

In 1947 Solomon Freehof wrote that the standard of matrilineal descent applied and that children of a non-Jewish mother needed to be converted to Judaism. He described this type of conversion as a very simple process; in line with the lack of ritual requirements for a Reform conversion at that time, the parents' declaration of intent to

raise the child as a Jew served for conversion, and an older child would be considered converted at his Confirmation ceremony.[88] Freehof's suggestions were adopted by the CCAR as unofficial policy; conversion (of a sort) became the *modus operandum* for bringing children of Jewish patrilineal descent into the Reform movement.

The lack of a formal policy on patrilineal descent enabled changes to occur in the way this issue was handled. By 1961 the popular position that a child of a Gentile mother and Jewish father had to be converted had been reversed. The CCAR rabbi's manual of that year stated that the Reform movement "accepts such a child as Jewish without a formal conversion, if he attends a Jewish school and follows a course of studies leading to Confirmation. Such procedure is regarded as sufficient evidence that the parents and the child himself intend that he shall live as a Jew."[89] This is in fact a statement of patrilineal descent, as children of a Gentile mother and Jewish father are considered Jewish by birth and not by conversion—given the requisite participation in the community through education and ceremonial rites of passage.

In 1978 Alexander Schindler opened the door for a formal declaration in support of patrilineal descent, reaffirming that children of intermarried Jewish men should be treated the same as children of intermarried Jewish women. Schindler did this in a public setting, bringing the issue to the forefront of discussions in support of the goals of Outreach. In an address to the UAHC Board of Trustees he discussed the rise of intermarriage and the children of these marriages:

> ...if the mother is Jewish then the child is regarded as fully Jewish. But if she is not, even Orthodox Judaism, provided the consent of the mother is obtained, permits the circumcision of the boy, his enrollment in religious school and his right

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[88] Solomon Freehof, *Report on Intermarriage* (New York: CCAR Press, 1947), 13-14.

[89] David Polish, ed., *Rabbi's Manual* (New York: CCAR Press, 1988), 225-227.

> to be called to the Torah on the occasion of his bar mitzvah—and everlastingly thereafter, to be considered a full Jew. All this is possible under Orthodoxy. How much the more so within Reform, which has insisted on the creative unfolding of *halakhah*... why should a movement which from its very birth-hour insisted on a full equality of men and women in religious life unquestioningly accept the principle that Jewish lineage is valid through the maternal line alone...? I am not scholar enough to propose an instant revision in our standard practice, but I do think it is important that we seek ways to harmonize our tradition with our needs.[90]

And so originated what would later become the resolution on patrilineal descent. The *halakhic* details are outside the scope of this thesis; what is important is the connection to Outreach, how the recognition of patrilineal descent developed as an outgrowth of Outreach, how the resolution has changed with the success of Outreach, and how this has caused an evolution in the Reform movement.

Schindler's speech was spurred by marriages in which the father is Jewish but the mother is not, for it is in these cases that matrilineal descent does not apply. Though he specifically says he will not propose to drastically change tradition, he does mention harmonizing tradition and need. The need to which he alludes is that of the Jewish community to deal with the children of all these mixed marriages, for he was seeing the beginnings of an increased rate of intermarriage and resultant shrinking of the Jewish community that is even more prevalent today.

Five years later, in 1983, the CCAR passed a resolution that directly addressed the idea of patrilineal descent, and cited intermarriage as its impetus:

> One of the most pressing human issues for the North American Jewish community is mixed marriage, with all its attendant implications. We face today an unprecedented situation due to the changed conditions in which decisions concerning the status of the child of a mixed marriage are to be made. There are

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[90] Schindler, *Missionary Judaism.*

> tens of thousands of mixed marriages. In a vast majority of these cases the non-Jewish extended family is a functioning part of the child's world, and may be decisive in shaping the life of the child. It can no longer be assumed *a priori*, therefore, that the child of a Jewish mother will be Jewish any more than that of a non-Jewish mother will not be. This leads us to the conclusion that the same requirements must be applied to establish the status of a child of mixed marriage, regardless of whether the mother or father is Jewish. Therefore: The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of Jewish status of the offspring of any mixed marriage is to be established through appropriate and timely public and formal acts of identification with the Jewish faith and people. The performance of these mitzvot serves to commit those who participate in them, both parent and child, to Jewish life.[91]

Where this differs from earlier Reform statements on Jewish status being established through the paternal line is the concept of presumption: children of mixed marriages are potentially Jewish, depending on their upbringing and family life and without regard for which parent is Jewish. In essence, the patrilineal descent resolution is not only about patrilineality; it sets a standard for all children of mixed marriages. This paper will not address the question of whether this standard of upbringing and education should also be required for children born to two Jewish parents.

In 1985 Schindler revisited his 1978 comments in a discussion of the CCAR resolution. He again made the direct correlation between intermarriage and patrilineal descent, and patrilineal descent as a branch of Outreach:

> The demographic imperative facing the Jewish people today was the single most important motive for Reform Judaism's 1983 resolution making the patrilineal principle coequal with the matrilineal in determining Jewish status. We wished to respond to the outstanding problem of intermarriage with an active program of outreach.[92]

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[91] Jacob, *American Reform Responsa*, 549-550.

[92] Alexander Schindler, "Facing the Realities of Intermarriage," *Judaism* Vol. 34, No. 133 (winter 1985): 85.

Schindler also links patrilineal descent to other Reform Jewish values, echoing the movement's intention of couching their resolution as a moral stand as well as a necessary action. Schindler suggested that since men and women strive to share equally in family duties (or should so strive), this resolution rightly recognizes the influence of the father upon the children and reflects an increased involvement in child-rearing on his part.[93] He describes the embrace of patrilineal descent as yet another strand in the gender-neutral fabric being woven by the Reform movement, but others take issue with this description.

Jack Wertheimer challenges the notion that Reform is embracing equality in a marriage; he sees instead a devaluing of the role of women. He uses Bruce Phillips' study on intermarriage to support this position:

> ...although the Reform movement redefined Jewish identity so as to insure that children of Jewish fathers would be treated as no less Jewish than children of Jewish mothers, Phillips found that "Jewish women are more likely to raise Jewish children" than are Jewish men: a sociological truth implicitly recognized by the rabbis nearly 2,000 years ago.[94]

Wertheimer puts forward the widely-accepted theory that women are the primary religion-givers in a family and that a non-Jewish woman can not raise Jewish children; examples to the contrary serve to refute his argument. Prominent among these examples is Andrea King, author of the UAHC-published *If I'm Jewish and You're Christian, What are the Kids?* King is an unconverted Christian woman married to a Jewish man; both are committed to raising their children as Jews, and in fact she wrote a book for other interfaith families to help them raise their children as Jews. *Reform Jewish Outreach: The Idea Book* includes various Outreach programs, some written by Gentile women in

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[93] Schindler, *Facing the Realities*, 87.

[94] Wertheimer, *Surrendering*, 29. The study he is referring to is Bruce Phillips, *Reexamining Intermarriage: Trends, Textures, Strategies.*

interfaith marriages and raising Jewish children.[95] The sex of the Jewish parent in a mixed marriage is not, then, the defining factor in whether a child is raised Jewish; the UAHC made this clear when stressing the Jewish potential of any child in a mixed marriage, given the right conditions; the resolution asserts that it is inappropriate for these conditions to include a Jewish mother, disregarding the importance of the father in raising children.

In 1997 the CCAR Responsa Committee clarified this concept of potentiality in a discussion about intermarriage:

> The North American Reform movement has long distinguished itself by its efforts to welcome interfaith families as members of our congregations. The resolution on patrilineal descent, adopted by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1983, is one of the more prominent expressions of this attitude. Yet this stance of openness has never been without its limits. While we "reach out" to the interfaith couple and welcome them into our midst, we do not forget that we are a *Jewish* religious community and that our goal is the encouragement of *Jewish* religious life. Our hope is that the interfaith marriage shall one day cease to be such, that the non-Jewish spouse will choose to become a Jew. In the meantime, we call upon the couple to establish a Jewish home, and we insist that the children be raised exclusively in the Jewish tradition... the conferral of Jewish status in cases of mixed marriage now depends as much if not more on the quality of the child's religious upbringing as it does upon the circumstances of his or her birth.... To summarize: patrilineal descent does not confer Jewish status automatically. Whether the child of a mixed marriage is in fact Jewish is a matter of *judgment*. It depends upon an evaluation of his or her conduct and commitment, a finding that the child's acts of identification with Judaism are sufficiently "meaningful" to remove any doubt as to the genuineness of his or her Jewish identity.[96]

The focus here is less on which parent happens to be Jewish, and more on how the child will be raised; automatic citizenship in the Jewish religion is dismissed as verging on the

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[95] For examples see: Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and the CCAR, *Reform Jewish Outreach: The Idea Book*, (New York: UAHC Press, 1988). Later editions , published as *The 1997 Idea Book, The 2000 Idea Book* and *The 2002 Idea Book*, offer additional examples.

[96] CCAR Responsa Committee, "The Dual Religion Family and Patrilineal Descent," www.ccarnet.org.

absurd (once again, only for children of mixed marriages), and identification of commitment on the part of the family and child is paramount.

More recently the CCAR has taken a second look at patrilineal descent, not to repeal it, but to understand how it was viewed by practicing rabbis. It was found that rabbis were applying the resolution in a variety of ways. The polled rabbis were less concerned about meeting the standards of public and timely rituals when the child met the *halakhic* definition of Jewish, that is when the Jewish parent was the mother, and a key issue was their willingness to trust the standards of other Reform rabbis. Another committee was formed to take a look at the issue of standards and to determine if there was a way to set a standard that all Reform rabbis would accept. They examined the possibility of having the *bar* or *bat mitzvah* ceremony serve as the establishment of Jewish identity (not a conversion), assuming that both rabbis and religious schools have standards and reaching *bar* or *bat mitzvah* is an indicator of both meeting those standards and raising the child as Jewish—however, there was little agreement about what constitutes the standards and requirements for both one parent descent and *b'nai mitzvah*. Reform rabbis both want to maintain their autonomy and want their colleagues to accept their standards; at this point the efforts to standardize have been put on hold in deference to the desire for autonomy.[97] The nature of this discussion indicates two basic aspects of Reform Judaism: one, that the constant struggle between autonomy and authority continues to shape Reform Judaism, and, secondly, that the issues with patrilineal descent are mostly the concern of the rabbis. According to Rabbi Robert Orkand, the rabbinate is more concerned with who is a Jew than the laity is; they are what they think they are. This struggle with autonomy and standards is not unique to patrilineal descent;

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[97] Robert Orkand, interview by author, 31 January 2002.

it reflects a desire for rabbinic autonomy in other areas of Outreach, such as deciding on synagogue policy in regards to non-Jews and in the officiation debate.

In the meantime, the notion of patrilineal descent has effected certain changes in the Reform movement at large. It is no longer the end result of a discussion; it is becoming a key feature of the movement as it is presented to the world. Suggesting where an interfaith family interested in Judaism might find a synagogue, *The Intermarriage Handbook* states:

> If you are a mixed couple where the woman is Gentile, Reform and Reconstructionism have a feature that may be very attractive to you. Both movements depart from Jewish tradition by recognizing what is called patrilineal descent. That means that a child is considered Jewish by both movements if *either* of his parents is Jewish and he is actively raised and educated as a Jew.... The new, and controversial, patrilineal policy is intended specifically to bring mixed families and their children into the community.[98]

Such a statement suggests that the acceptance of patrilineal descent is an element of a successful Outreach program because it can serve to draw otherwise unaffiliated Jews to the synagogue by virtue of seeming welcoming and accepting. No longer viewed as merely a solution to a thorny issue, patrilineal descent is seen by some as a way to increase the attractiveness of Judaism to interfaith couples, and to thereby reinvigorate the community by bringing people back to *shul.* Egon Mayer is not as optimistic.

"Most children raised in a mixed marriage of that type [Jewish father, non-Jewish mother] are minimally exposed to their Jewish heritage," writes Mayer in *Love and Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians.* "They are not likely to seek the benefits of the Reform resolution. It remains an open question as to whether the resolution itself might stimulate more of such families to raise their children as Jews in the

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[98] Judy Personk and Jim Remsen, *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews and Christians* (New York: Arbor House, 1988), 264.

first place."[99] He insists that patrilineal descent is a tool of the elite to try to combat a problem, and not a viable method for attracting intermarried couples to the faith. Paired with the developing definition of an appropriate Jewish upbringing, Mayer suggests that the resolution speaks more about the Reform authorities' desire to maintain standards of Jewish status than it does about the success of Outreach. Lastly, he suggests that recognizing patrilineal descent may, in fact, hurt one of the primary goals of Outreach:

> We have seen... that a great many conversions are sought precisely to enable the family to forge a more homogeneous heritage for their children. The Reform resolution on "patrilineal descent" could possibly undermine that particular motivation for conversion. Therefore, in the present state of our understanding the process of identification among the children of intermarriages, that resolution remains of dubious value. It certainly does not advance the cause of Jewish family unity the same way as the conversion of the mother does.[100]

If Mayer is correct, patrilineal descent detracts from one of Outreach's main goals: creating Jewish families through conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.

There is an acknowledgment that patrilineal descent only benefits a child's Jewish upbringing when the child is in a Jewish home; that is, a child whose is not raised in a Jewish home does not spontaneously feel Jewish just because his or her father is Jewish (the same could be said when the mother is Jewish, or even when both parents are). In answering a question about synagogue membership of a dual religion family, the Responsa Committee makes it clear that even in a family when the non-Jewish spouse does not convert to Judaism, which is the only type of family the one-parent descent resolution applies to, Judaism is to be the only religion practiced in the family, if the child is to be

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[99] Mayer, *Love and Tradition*, 267.

[100] Mayer, *Love and Tradition*, 267-268.

considered Jewish.[101] In the answer to a question about the membership eligibility and Jewish status of a child in a family where the mother is Catholic and the father is Jewish, and in which the parents each wish to pass along their own religion, the Responsa Committee reveals that there are indeed boundaries to patrilineality, and even to welcoming dual religion families into the community. Their answer reads in part:

> Though this man is welcomed as a member, his decision to allow his child to be reared as a Catholic raises doubts concerning his commitment to the most elemental Jewish responsibilities. It is therefore inappropriate for him to serve as a congregational officer, board member, committee chairperson, or religious school teacher, or to hold any other significant communal position, since we look upon our leaders as Jewish role models, as exemplars of the kind of committed Jew that we want all our people to be.... In the case before us, we are convinced that this judgment [on the status of the son] must yield a negative conclusion. We are dealing here, not with an ordinary mixed marriage, but with a dual-religion household. Dividing itself equally and intentionally between Catholics and Jews, the family has determined that theirs shall not be a Jewish home but one that is as Catholic as it is Jewish.... We question, therefore, whether such a family is capable of transmitting an *exclusive* Jewish identity to one of its children. Our position flows from Reform Judaism's categorical rejection of the concept of religious syncretism, the notion that a child can be reared simultaneously in more than one religious tradition.... The dual-religion household is one in which two religions have a legitimate claim to equal status. This distinguished our case from one in which the non-Jewish parent agrees that the *home* shall be Jewish and that the children—all of them—will be reared as Jews.[102]

This recognition that a dual-religion family is *not* a Jewish family is an issue that can be expected to crop up frequently. Bruce Phillips found that "Both the [born Jewish] and the [Christian] spouses in 'dual religion' couples professed the greatest interest in outreach overall, but mostly on their own terms."[103] What Phillips has found is that while

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[101] CCAR Responsa Committee, *The Dual Religion Family.*

[102] CCAR Responsa Committee, *The Dual Religion Family.*

[103] Phillips, *Reexamining intermarriage*, 62.

these families might be responsive to Outreach, they are looking for programs about how to raise children in both religions, programs that run counter to the goals of Outreach and are not usually offered by synagogues. As Phillips explains:

> some of the outreach programs in which mixed married couples have expressed interest may raise serious policy concerns for the organized Jewish community—for example, programs which teach families how to raise children in two religions. Asking about such programs in the research tells us a great deal about the mixed married couples, but it does not mean that the Jewish community should comply with all of their preferences.[104]

The Responsa Committee has made it clear that children of these dual religion families often do not meet the criteria for patrilineal descent and therefore are not benefited by the 1983 resolution.

Phillips' findings do support the restrictions on patrilineal descent. He found that Judaic couples (couples that he classified as mostly Jewish and would likely qualify as Jewish homes under the requirements for patrilineal descent) are natural candidates for Outreach. Since these homes are mostly Jewish and the children may already have a Jewish identity, patrilineal descent affirms what is already going on in their family. In that way, patrilineal descent is not really about patrilineal descent, and in fact the Responsa Committee has suggested that "one-parent descent" might be a more appropriate term.[105] What this is about is establishing a standard of identity for children of mixed marriages. This is no more than what is expected of a household in which matrilineal descent is recognized: when a Jewish parent raises a child in a Jewish home, they are to be recognized as members of the Jewish community.

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[104] Phillips, *Reexamining intermarriage*, 57.

[105] CCAR Responsa Committee, "On Patrilineal Descent, Apostasy and Synagogue Honors 5758.11," www.ccarnet.org.

CHAPTER 7:

Outreach and the Synagogue

Outreach is designed to bring people into synagogue; its very purpose is interaction with and encouragement of intermarried couples, specifically towards increased communal involvement. A direct result of Outreach is an increase in the number of interfaith families that affiliate with a synagogue. While this is generally considered a good thing—these otherwise unaffiliated families are finding a place in Judaism, and the number of mixed families that are lost to Judaism altogether is minimized—the increasing number of non-Jews in the synagogue is increasing and presents its own challenges as well. In answering the question of how a non-Jew can participate in services, the Responsa Committee in 1983 revealed the nature of the threat:

> The Responsa Committee has lately been asked questions about various kinds of non-Jewish appearances at services which suggest a worrisome tendency toward increasing syncretism. Our decisions have held that there must be boundaries in order to assure the identity and continued health of our congregations as well as our movement. If we are everything to everyone, we are in the end nothing at all.... There is a clear and present danger that our movement is dissolving at the edges and is surrendering its singularity to a beckoning culture which champions the syncretistic. Jewish identity is being eroded and is in need of clear guidelines which will define it unmistakably.[106]

In essence, the committee is addressing a simple question: with so many non-Jews participating in Jewish services, at what point does it cease to be a Jewish service?

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[106]W. Gunther Plaut and Mark Washofsky, eds., "Gentile Participation in Synagogue Ritual," *Teshuvot for the Nineties: Reform Judaism's Answers for Today's Dilemmas*, (New York: CCAR Press, 1997) 55; quoted in Meyer and Plaut, *Reader*, 180-181.

At the same time, what is the motivation to convert to Judaism when anyone can fully participate in all aspects of Jewish life? This seems to suggest that although Outreach's goal of including non-Jews in synagogue life has been successful, if it is too successful and the non-Jew feels too welcome there is no longer any incentive to convert formally to Judaism. There are some guidelines aimed at finding a balance; interfaith families should be made to feel welcome, but with the ultimate goal that they feel welcome to convert to Judaism. These guidelines are nothing more than suggestions; individual synagogues are given the freedom to work out their own specific policies. The Reform Responsa Committee divides the guidelines into two divisions, much like the *mitzvot*: one the one hand there are positive suggestions for participation, and on the other are exclusionary limits to that participation. The list of permissible participation includes recitation of prayers at family celebrations or occasions, except the major liturgical ones; making a speech; and any physical presence that does not require a specific statement, such as standing on the *bimah* with a child becoming *bar mitzvah. The* list of unacceptable activities includes leadership of services, the Torah service, and benedictions.[107]

Non-Jewish participation in the various aspects of synagogue life has moved from the theoretical to the practical. Jewish life cycle events such as namings and *b'nai mitzvah* ceremonies bring to the fore difficult questions regarding participation by non-Jewish relatives. The Reform Responsa committee acknowledges that many mixed families turn to Reform synagogues precisely because they are more welcome there, presumably because of Outreach efforts:

> During the last quarter of the twentieth century profound changes have taken place in the demography of North American Judaism. The rate of mixed marriage has increased dramatically, with one marriage partner remaining outside the Jewish

[107] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 24-26.

> faith community. When such couples, often with their children, wish to find a synagogue where they can worship and enroll their offspring for a Jewish education, they will most likely turn to Reform congregations, which are sure to welcome and accommodate them.[108]

The Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach has divided the issues on non-Jews in the synagogue into three areas: ritual, membership and governance/leadership.[109] These issues have largely been dealt with in the Reform Responsa literature.

The issue of non-Jewish participation in synagogue ritual mostly concerns liturgy, worship services and life cycle events; this tends to be the most emotional of the commission's three defined areas. At the heart of the discussion is an apparent conflict between maintaining the integrity of Jewish prayer and including non-Jewish parents in a meaningful way. There must be, it appears, special roles for non-Jews to take; for a Gentile parent to play the role of a Jew in services is demeaning, both to the synagogue and the parent. If we accept the non-Jew in synagogue, it must be as a non-Jew—there should be no subterfuge. This means, then, we must include the non-Jewish parent in synagogue ritual, for if excluded the family might take offense, but there must be an appropriate role to fill.

With the rising numbers of interfaith families who have children being raised as Jews and celebrating Jewish life cycle events, synagogues have been forced to deal with the role of the non-Jew as part of policy and a regular occurrence—not just an occasional request. Lawrence Hoffman suggests that there has been a change in the way Reform responsa have dealt with this issue. Hoffman points to a 1969 responsum which raises the question about the participation of a non-Jewish stepfather as his son becomes

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[108]Plaut and Washofsky, eds., *Teshuvot*, 55; quoted in Meyer and Plaut, *Reader*, 179.

[109] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue: A Resource for Congregations* (New York: UAHC Press, 1991), 6.

bar mitzvah. The questioner was given a generally positive and inclusive response, and suggestions were given for ways in which to participate; the main concern was avoiding a situation that would go against the non-Jew's conscience. Hoffman notes that "what was an anomaly for [Solomon] Freehof in 1969 became commonplace for Reform Jews by 1979,"[110] and in fact a responsum to a similar question raised in 1979—raised by the [UAHC] Education Committee —remains consistent with the older one. This responsum was written when the formal Outreach policy was merely a fledgling, and it, too, stresses what a non-Jew may participate in. The issue was revisited in 1983, and at that time, Hoffman points out, it was treated very differently. Both the question and answer take a negative tone—the questioner asks about limits on non-Jewish participation, and the answer stresses what is forbidden for non-Jews and delineates the limits to non-Jewish participation. Hoffman summarizes:

> Clearly, at least in tone, and even in content, compared to its precedents, this 1983 statement is less generously disposed to non-Jewish participation. Whereas Freehof's initial responsum of 1969 was *inclusive* in intent, trying to find ways in which a non-Jewish stepfather might participate without moral compromise in his son's service of Bar Mitzvah, here, both questioner and respondents take an *exclusive* perspective, seeking the limits to what such parents may do. Moreover, whereas Freehof's early responsum addressed the issue as a conflict for the Christian parent—what might the stepfather say without personally perjuring himself by asserting a doctrine of Jewish faith with which he could not agree—the committee of 1983 looked at the issue more from the perspective of the congregation at prayer, and the integrity of the service of worship which they, as Jews, were attending.[111]

While Hoffman's primary intent is to address the way that responsa questions are answered, he sheds light on how the role of the non-Jew in synagogue ritual has changed.

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[110] Lawrence Hoffman, "Non-Jews and Jewish Life Cycle Liturgy," *Journal of Reform Judaism* Vol. 37, No. 3 (summer 1990): 4.

[111] Hoffman, *Non-Jews*, 5-6.

When Outreach is successful it is exactly these issues of non-Jewish participation that arise; that is to say, in encouraging non-Jews to come to synagogue, we must address what they should or should not do while there.

The fact that there are non-Jewish parents seeing to it that their children receive a Jewish education and become *b'nai mitzvah* is a testament to the success of the Outreach program and its goal of seeing children of interfaith marriages being raised solely as Jews. The fact that a non-Jewish parent could feel so involved in her child's Jewish upbringing and would want to participate in religious ceremonies is a sign that these families do feel welcome in the Jewish community. However, there are some consequences of these increased numbers of intermarried couples—meaning, of course, non-Jews—joining synagogues. As Hoffman points out, in 1969 the question of non-Jewish participation was an anomaly; it was only infrequently that the non-Jewish parent looked for a way to participate in their child's Jewish upbringing. Hoffman demonstrates that by 1979 this has changed; the subject of non-Jewish involvement in ritual has become so prevalent that it is the Education Committee posing the question, and by 1983 it is so frequent that it is viewed as a threat to the integrity of Jewish worship services. As we have seen with conversion, this positive occurrence—a desire to participate fully in a child's Jewish life cycle events—is happening so often that it is now viewed as a threat, leading the Reform community to respond by defining its boundaries and setting new limits.

The participation in services and other rituals, while it may be the most emotional issue as well as the subject of more responsa and policy, is only one of the UAHC's Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach's three areas of concern surrounding the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue; temple membership and leadership issues are the other two. The Commission for Reform Jewish Outreach begins its guide for "Defining the Role

of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue" by stating that:

> Congregations throughout North America have begun examining the impact that the changing demography of the American Jewish community will have on the synagogue. It is a fact of life that increasing numbers of intermarried couples are choosing to join us. As these couples begin to strengthen their ties with the Jewish community, we are challenged to define the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. It is crucial that congregations take a *proactive*, rather than reactive, approach to this definition process. Doing so can prevent some potentially painful and damaging situations.[112]

While not offering any definitive policy statements, the guidebook does provide a framework for synagogues making decisions about what place the non-Jew has in the synagogue. The Reform Responsa Committee has this to say about membership and leadership:

> In the case of a mixed-married couple, membership and voting rights are vested in the Jewish spouse. The non-Jewish spouse may attend religious, educational, and social activities and share in the fellowship of the congregation. He or she may not, however, serve as an officer in the congregation or in its auxiliary organizations such as the Sisterhood, the Brotherhood, or youth groups, or serve as chairperson of a committee. The non-Jewish spouse does not vote at congregational or committee meetings. He or she may serve as a non-voting member of committees devoted to broad communal purposes but should not serve on committees that deal with matters involving Jewish knowledge or synagogue religious policy.[113]

While it is clear that with increasing numbers of non-Jews participating in synagogue life boundaries are required, this is not necessarily in contradiction with the welcoming attitude of Outreach, which has conversion as one of its goals. Maintaining certain synagogue rights and privileges for Jews can be an incentive to convert. In 1983 there was

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[112] Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, *Defining the Role*, 5.

[113] Washofsky, *Jewish Living*, 37.

a question about a non-Jewish mother of a Confirmation student serving as the chairman of the Confirmation Club. The response indicates that this is not appropriate but goes on to say:

> in the case of this individual, it would be appropriate to suggest that this might be a good time to accept Judaism formally. Her activities have taken place entirely within the orbit of Judaism; her youngest child is now to be confirmed. Her own commitment and her efforts through the years would more than suffice to qualify for her conversion without any further instruction. It has been my experience that individuals in this position are very open to such a suggestion and will often formally join the community. That would, of course, remove the problem.[114]

This answer is attempting to meet the ultimate goals of Outreach; welcoming interfaith families into synagogues and the Jewish community so they are comfortable and have a atmosphere for learning about Judaism, and creating a situation where the non-Jewish spouse eventually converts to Judaism, reducing the number of interfaith families and adding to the number of Jewish families.

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[114] Walter Jacob, *Contemporary Reform Responsa* (New York: CCAR Press, 1987), 245-246.

CHAPTER 8:

Religious Education

Another of the primary goals of Outreach is to encourage interfaith families to become exclusively Jewish families. Part of that goal includes educating the children of those family exclusively as Jews, recognizing that a dual religion education is not only harmful and confusing to children, but also hinders the formation of a strong Jewish identity. As we have seen in the synagogue, welcoming interfaith families that remain interfaith families (where the non-Jewish spouse does not convert) can pose problems, not the least of which is what role the non-Jewish parent has at the child's *bar mitzvah* ceremony. But that moment in time is only reached after an extended period of Jewish education, which brings us to the topic at hand, namely, religious school education. Bruce Kadden writes that "if Outreach is to succeed, a key ingredient is the educational program offered by our synagogues."[115] He points out that as the Outreach program grows, the number of intermarried couples associated with Reform congregations rises as well, and with that comes a rise in the number of children of these interfaith families enrolled in synagogue religious schools.

There is a spectrum of families seeking a Jewish education for their children, from the children deemed Jewish by patrilineal descent, by the nature of having one Jewish parent and being raised exclusively as a Jew, to the children being trained in Judaism and another religion with the understanding that someday they will decide which religion to

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[115] Bruce Kadden, "The Educator's Challenge," *Compass*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (fall 1984): 21.

choose. Jack Wertheimer criticizes Outreach and the influx of dual faith students into the Jewish religious school classroom:

> In religious schools run by synagogues, teachers can no longer utter a word in favor of endogamy, or prevent Jewish youngsters from being exposed to the jumbled religious views of their dual-faith classmates.[116]

Is there a point when sensitivity to children from interfaith families interferes with transmitting a strong Jewish identity to the unambiguously Jewish students? When looked at this way, even an increase of children from families where the non-Jewish parent converted can pose sensitivity problems; how can a teacher promote endogamy without sounding critical of the students' parents? Kadden foresees many challenges related to this rise in children of interfaith couples seeking enrollment in synagogue religious schools, and separates the challenges of sensitivity into two groups: responsibilities towards the intermarried couples and responsibilities toward the teachers of these couples' children.[117] Balancing the needs of the intermarried families, welcomed by Outreach, with the needs of the Jewish community-at-large is no small trick.

Kadden writes that the UAHC curriculum shows that "our schools do not just teach about Jewish history, ethics, beliefs and culture. Rather, they strive to 'create' Jews who practice Judaism."[118] This is a valid assessment; synagogue religious schools should not just teach the facts of an ancient faith and its people, but demonstrate the relevance of the faith in contemporary times and the beauty of maintaining it. Religious school is about investing the students with an appreciation for what Judaism can bring to one's life,

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[116] Wertheimer, *Surrendering*, 30-31.

[117] Kadden, *Educator's Challenge*, 5.

[118] Kadden, *Educator's Challenge*, 20.

and how to live a Jewish life. When students are simultaneously learning to be good Christians, the conflict is obvious. Kadden suggests that synagogue religious school is an environment in which we must stress the importance of being Jewish. "Parents who are not prepared to make this commitment," he writes, "should not send their children to the synagogue religious school." He continues:

> While this sounds harsh, it helps prevent situations in which the home and school are working against each other, with the child in the middle. Furthermore, this does not mean the synagogue has no responsibility toward these children. Rabbis and educators need to explore this issue further and develop appropriate educational programs that maintain the integrity of the synagogue and meet the needs of the couples and their children.[119]

What is the responsibility of religious school towards these intermarried couples and their children? If the movement invites intermarried couples to take part in Judaism and in the synagogue community, it must have in place a plan for their children's involvement in religious education programs. Rabbi Arnold Gluck writes:

> The challenge of welcoming and educating the religiously undecided is different and distinct from that of educating our Jewish children to live Jewishly. There are too few places where Jewish identity is secure and unchallenged today. The synagogue religious school must be a place that is unequivocally Jewish—where Jewishness is a given.[120]

However, there is the challenge of how to be an unequivocally Jewish place without offending the children of interfaith couples or the couples themselves. Bruce Kadden suggests introspection on the part of the teachers as the first step. He notes that for teachers to do their jobs and meet their responsibilities to the Reform movement and its

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[119] Kadden, *Educator's Challenge*, 20.

[120] Arnold Gluck, "Arguments in Favor of the UAHC Resolution on Enrollment Policies in Reform Religious Schools," *Reform Judaism* (spring 1996), 61.

Outreach program, they must make certain adjustments:

> One aspect of that task is to prepare them to interact with both the intermarried parents, and with their children. First of all, it is important that teachers (and all other staff members) display a positive attitude toward intermarried couples who have chosen to affiliate with Judaism and seek a Jewish education for their children. This attitude reflects that of the Outreach movement... However, some teachers may have a negative attitude toward intermarried couples, an attitude prevalent until a few years ago, and still quite common today.[121]

Kadden expresses concern that educators may find that "personal attitudes and biases" would affect their abilities to properly respond to mixed-marriage families. He advocates education for the teachers to ensure a place where all the students feel welcome.

The idea of a structured program with definite guidelines for how to absorb and welcome intermarried families into the religious school programs came to fruition in 1984 when the UAHC passed a resolution to deny synagogue religious school enrollment to any student being formally educated in another religion. At the same time, the resolution encouraged synagogues to offer alternative Jewish educational programing for interfaith families and their children. The resolution reads in part:

> The Reform religious school is a primary pathway for Outreach for interfaith families. As Reform Jews, we welcome interfaith families and encourage them to affirm the Jewish identification of their children. However, experience tells us that some interfaith couples who seek to enroll their children in Reform religious schools are not raising and educating their children exclusively as Jews. This is a path that committed Reform Jews cannot support because it is contrary to our understanding of Outreach (which offers a way into Judaism as a distinctive and precious way of life and faith); because it is theologically inconsistent for a person to identify as both Jewish and Christian; and because it is incongruent with the mission of Reform religious schools, i.e., to teach Judaism as a faith that is lived and enable students to develop a strong, positive Jewish identity. Therefore, the UAHC resolves to establish a clearly articulated policy that offers enrollment in

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[121] Kadden, *Educator's Challenge*, 20.

> Reform religious schools and day schools only to children who are not receiving formal religious education in any other religion; to provide and strengthen programs for interfaith couples who are seeking a religious path for their families, encouraging them to explore Judaism; and to call on the Outreach and Education Commissions to develop models for policies and programming to open the way for interfaith couples and their children to choose Judaism.[122]

Harris Gilbert and George Markley, the co-chairs of the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, discussed what some termed a policy of "exclusion":

> The Outreach Commission, responding to the emerging phenomenon of dual religious education, determined that the time had arrived for the establishment of a reasonable boundary, a policy suggesting that enrollment in Reform religious schools be limited to children who are not being formally educated in another religion. Simultaneously and of equal importance, congregations would be encouraged to intensify programs for interfaith families that introduce them to the beauty of our Jewish faith and way of life and enable them to make informed choices.[123]

Gilbert and Markley wrote that the Outreach Commission supported the provision of one religion for a family's children in order to promote healthy spiritual development:

> ...all Outreach programs are based on that premise and go on to invite couples to choose Judaism. Of concern is the increasing number of children in our religious schools who are being educated in both Judaism and another faith, with parents determining that the children will be both religions (partly Jewish, partly something else) or will later choose which of these faiths to adopt. The consequences of such dual education have been surfacing in our schools and sanctuaries.[124]

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[122] From the UAHC resolution on enrollment policy for religious schools.

[123] Harris Gilbert and George Markley, "Choosing Exclusion: Why Outreach Proposed This Resolution," *Reform Judaism*, spring 1996, 58.

[124] Gilbert and Markley, *Choosing Exclusion*, 58.

These consequences are outside the scope of this thesis, but hypothetical questions on the future nature of Outreach are not. If religious school programming is designed to meet the needs of children of intermarried couples, can it meet the needs of the other, single-faith household students? Our terminology reveals how the issues at hand are already embedded quite deeply; we have a way to refer to the children of interfaith couples, but the only words to refer to the other students are considered exclusionary or offensive: if we refer to them as "Jewish" or "normal" what are we saying about the children of interfaith couples? It comes down to assessing the primary goals of synagogue religious school; if the schools are designed to promote a Jewish lifestyle, how can they simultaneously promote acceptance of dual-religion upbringings? How can the schools teach an appreciation of establishing a Jewish home and raising Jewish children when they aim their programs at people who reject these ideas? Teaching Judaism in a Jewish religious school should not be such a strange choice; Dru Greenwood wrote that "those who argue for restrictions teach us that in performing Outreach we can honestly offer the choice of Judaism, not a hybrid."[125] Outreach's stated goals are the absorption of intermarried families into the Jewish community, and not the alteration of the community for these families. The only result of the latter process will be a diluted community that offers little to these families that is distinct from other religions, and loses the beauty and truth of Judaism. Why, then, would they even want to join such a community?

Where Outreach may need to direct more attention to is the second part of the resolution that suggests development of alternative programing for interfaith families, and even alternative religious education for undecided families. Giving these families a way to transition to the normative Reform community, without disrupting the larger population,

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[125] Dru Greenwood, "Toward the Future," *Reform Judaism*, spring 1996, 61.

should go hand-in-hand with the warm welcome delineated by the Commission on Outreach. To that end in 1987 the UAHC passed a resolution on expanding First Steps, programs designed specifically for unaffiliated interfaith families. Stepping Stones is the model religious education program for unaffiliated interfaith families. It began in 1985 with Rabbi Steven Foster in Denver, Colorado. The original program offered a two-year, tuition-free Jewish identity education program for both children of interfaith families and their parents. The program was aimed at those who had not yet made a definitive Jewish choice with the goal that at the end of the two years the family will feel comfortable in Judaism and will make Jewish choices such as joining a synagogue and enrolling their children in the regular synagogue religious school. What is key is that the parents attend classes as well. The UAHC has encouraged the replication of this and similar programs as a way to reach out to interfaith families.[126] These types of programs, while welcoming to undecided interfaith families, do serve to keep their children out of the regular synagogue religious school until a decision has been made about the religious identity of the children. It is interesting to note that the same requirement for synagogue religious school applies, that the children are not being educated formally in another religion. While First Steps programs are welcoming of families who have not yet made the decision to be a Jewish family, the enrollment policy is consistent with the goals of Outreach and again reflects the tension between welcoming interfaith families and maintaining boundaries.

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[126] UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach and UAHC-CCAR-NATE Commission on Reform Jewish Education, *First Steps: A manual for Introductory Education Programs for Interfaith Families* (New York: UAHC Press, 1997), 215-219.

CHAPTER 9:

Recent Findings

In November 2001 the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University put out a study funded by the Alexander M. Schindler Memorial Fund and sponsored by the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach entitled *Outreach Families in the Sacred Common: Congregational Responses to Interfaith Issues*. The study found six broad themes:

1. Outreach efforts are changing as a result of changes in the larger social context.
2. Rabbis play multiple and pivotal roles in welcoming and integrating interfaith families.
3. The successes and struggles of Outreach are intertwined with the successes and struggles of the overall congregation.
4. Jewish education of children, a key point of contact between the interfaith family and the synagogue, brings opportunities for growth and for conflict.
5. Emotions and personal connections have a stronger effect on Jewish engagement and conversion than does Jewish learning.
6. Small congregations face unique challenges.

They also suggest the implications of these findings on programing for interfaith families:

- Personal relationships are the basis of community, and congregations succeed at engaging interfaith families when they pay attention to building these relationships.
- The more points of contact there are between congregants and the synagogue, the more congregants will be engaged over time.

- Drawing young interfaith couples into congregational life provides avenues of Jewish influence in the formative years of their life as a family.
- Synagogue based pre-schools and Hebrew schools are a key point of contact with interfaith families and school staff need specific preparation to deal with the issues and needs presented by these families.
- Making interfaith families comfortable is only the first step in a process of guidance and support toward greater levels of Jewish involvement and observance.
- Even though there are many paths to conversion, becoming a Jew by choice is not the dominant inclination of non-Jewish congregants, so synagogue clergy and staff may need to provide more encouragement and direction.
- According to Jewish law, converts have the same status as Jews by birth. However, they do not always have the same needs. Conversion is the first, rather than the last step in creating a Jewish identity and this process may require more support, education, and guidance than is currently offered to new Jews.
- Outreach may be more effective when it is integrated into all aspects of synagogue life rather than being a separate set of programmatic offerings.
- By identifying and reaffirming their core values, congregations lay the groundwork for integrating interfaith families, and, at the same time, maintain the integrity of Reform ritual and practice.

While all of these conclusions are useful to the study of Outreach, I would like to focus on those areas that have the most impact on Reform Judaism in the five areas that I have been discussing.

The study has found that rabbis are very important in integrating interfaith families. In regards to rabbinic officiation the study found that

> although accepted wisdom would suggest that a rabbi's policy toward officiating at interfaith marriages either opens or shuts the gate for interfaith families, interviews suggested that this is not the case.... What stood out for congregants was not the rabbi's refusal to officiate but, instead, the concern and support he or

she offered to the couple as they prepared for marriage.[127]

One of the rabbis interviewed had just changed his position on officiation; after 20 years of working with interfaith couples he began to officiate at interfaith weddings with clear restrictions. One rabbi does not indicate a trend, but it does raise a number of questions: Will the officiation debate change in light of this study? Will rabbis be more inclined to participate at interfaith weddings because of their relationships with interfaith couples? Will the study's confirmation that it is not whether or not the rabbi officiates but the relationship with the rabbi make it easier for rabbis to resolve the conflict between welcoming interfaith families and yet refusing to officiate at their weddings?

The study also found that while conversion is a goal of Outreach, Outreach is falling short in two ways: firstly, by not providing enough support after a conversion, and secondly, by not directly asking the non-Jewish spouse to convert. The study "found little if any institutional support for Jews by choice during the years after conversion. In their effort to treat Jews by choice as they would any other Jew, rabbis and congregations do not make any efforts to continue mentoring or counseling, yet the convert is still dealing with the ongoing impact of their decision." A plausible solution would be to redirect the Outreach resources that were once needed to make interfaith families feel welcome toward continuing support for new Jews. In addition, the study suggests that "mavens," lay people who are an informal source of answers and seem to new Jews and non-Jews a less intimidating source of answers than the rabbi, are of significant value. The Outreach Fellows program trains such people, and an expansion of the program might be a future step of the department of Outreach.

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[127] Fern Chertok, Mark Rosen, Amy Sales, and Len Saxe, *Outreach Families in the Sacred Common: Congregational Responses to Interfaith Issues* (Photocopied: Brandeis University: Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies, 2001), 12.

While it does not address patrilineal descent directly, the study does address the issue of non-Jewish mothers raising Jewish children, presumably in larger numbers due to increased focus on the issue of patrilineal descent. The study reports that:

> In every synagogue, we heard about families where there are non-Jewish mothers who have not converted but have primary responsibility for raising their children as Jews.... The mother's involvement can take many forms. Most frequently, she is the "*shlepper*" to and from Hebrew school.... Also, mothers set the tone at home since fathers aren't home as much. Because of this pivotal role, mothers can support and encourage Jewish activities and learning at home, but only when they are so inclined and have something to contribute to their children's Jewish upbringing.
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> Several education directors indicated that while many of these parents are to be commended for their commitment to fostering their child's Jewish identity, others make only half-hearted efforts that diminish over time and drop off precipitously after the child's *bar or bat mitzvah* ceremony.... Whether or not the mother is Jewish appears to have a strong effect on the involvement of children in Jewish schooling... Jewish mothers are more likely to be insistent that their children go to Hebrew school regularly and that they do their Hebrew school homework. Non-Jewish mothers may not invoke the same level of participation since they don't have a background that would foster the same positive inclination toward Jewish learning—they get involved primarily because their husband or in-laws want the child to go.[128]

These findings suggest that while patrilineal descent gives more children a claim on Jewish identity, that it does in fact discount the role mothers play in raising their children. The study found that non-Jewish mothers often were not equipped to provide a Jewish home; they just do not have the cultural experience and background to create a Jewish home. The study found that these women did not know about making *latkes* or Purim costumes nor did they have a "Jewish vocabulary." This suggests that with the role mothers play in their children's lives, if the non-Jewish mother is not going to convert she needs to be educated on how to raise Jewish children and create a Jewish home, since these duties

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[128] Chertok, *Outreach Families*, 20-21.

often will fall on her shoulders.

Policy on synagogue participation by non-Jews was found to be set by the rabbis of the synagogues.

> As non-Jewish partners become more integrated into the fabric of the congregational community the need arises to define the parameters of their role in rituals and services. At five of the six synagogues we visited, it was clear that the rabbi not only took the lead, but was also seen as the final arbiter of decisions regarding ritual life.... Even when individual board members and congregants did not agree with particular decisions, the rabbi's interpretation of *halacha* and adherence to an internally consistent framework were respected.[129]

This seems to suggest the trend that these decisions are made on an elite rather then a folk level. However, the study found that in small congregations where there is a high turnover of rabbinic leadership as well as a high proportion of interfaith families, there is a different dynamic at work. A small congregation might face a policy on synagogue participation that changes with each change in leadership. In addition, the study determined that many practical issues arose with a higher percentage of interfaith families in a small synagogue.

> The need for small synagogues to draw from interfaith households for volunteer work serves as a double-edged sword. These synagogues rely on the active involvement of all the adults within member households, regardless of their religious identity, in order to get the work done. However, in the face of the tangible and significant contributions made by these non-Jewish members, it becomes difficult to draw boundaries between the role of Jews and non-Jews in ritual practice and governance of the congregation.[130]

As Outreach continues to be successful, even larger congregations might be faced with the practical issue of having significant numbers of interfaith families as members.

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[129] Chertok, *Outreach Families*, 13.

[130] Chertok, *Outreach Families*, 27.

These issues that are identified as problems for small congregations could become problems for every synagogue.

In regards to religious school the study found that "children's participation in pre-school, Hebrew school, and day school can jump-start Jewish learning by non-Jewish and Jewish parents; Unresolved issues within the interfaith family regarding children's religious orientation are often played out in the Hebrew school; Rabbis and school staff play a critical role in resolving problems that may arise with children of interfaith families."[131] The study found what seems obvious—religious school is an entry point into the Jewish community for many families, both interfaith and Jewish. This makes the religious school a starting place for Outreach, but also acknowledges that even a policy on admission to religious school does not solve the problems of the children of interfaith families that attend. In fact, religious school might bring up more problems for interfaith families, even those who agree to raise their children unambiguously Jewish.

While this study looks at six specific synagogues it does indicate the impact of Outreach on Reform synagogue life. What it is missing is an analysis of the gap between the leadership and the laity of the Reform movement. While concrete facts about how wide the gap is in specific areas, I have found that gaps do exist in each of the five areas that I have discussed, and in those gaps in the potential for even more change. Rabbinic officiation is hotly debated among rabbis while, according to an American Jewish Committee Survey, over 70% of lay people want rabbis to officiate at weddings between a Jew and Gentile.[132] There has been concern among rabbis who do not officiate at interfaith weddings that someday they might be forced to. While the leadership of the CCAR might discourage the practice, synagogue boards and congregants, especially in

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[131] Chertok, *Outreach Families*, 2.

[132] American Jewish Committee, *Responding to Intermarriage.*

congregations where interfaith families make up half of the membership, might require rabbis to officiate at such weddings as a condition of employment.[133] Conversion is controlled by rabbis but, unlike weddings, there is no alternate authority to perform them. It is in this area that Outreach may have narrowed the gap between rabbis and the laity; as interfaith families are welcomed into synagogue life there is less pressure to perform a "quickie conversion" of the non-Jewish spouse. Where there may be potential for divide is balancing the encouragement of conversion with an acceptance of those who do not convert. Similarly, the details of patrilineal descent are of more concern to rabbis than the laity. There is potential for a gap in who is considered Jewish by a rabbi's standards and the standards of the Reform movement and who is considered Jewish by their grandparents' standards. Synagogue involvement and religious school have the greatest potential for gaps between the leadership and the laity. It is these two areas that involve *bar* and *bat mitzvah*, an issue with perhaps as much emotional weight as a wedding. While rabbis are concerned with the integrity of Jewish ritual, parents just want to be involved in their children's life cycle events; whereas a rabbi may be trying to weigh the requirements of Jewish ritual versus involving extended family, the interfaith parents of a child becoming *bar* or *bat mitzvah* are more concerned with having an active role in the ceremony.

These gaps between the laity and the leadership might someday change the leadership response as the demographic of the laity changes to include more interfaith families. Outreach gives interfaith families a place in Reform Judaism, and now those families are demanding a voice as well. Rabbi Alan Yuter is concerned that soon Reform rabbis who are opposed to intermarriage will be marginalized because they will not be

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[133] From Alexander Schindler files, Letter from Sheldon Zimmerman to Alexander Schindler, February 11, 1993, series A, box 10, folder 2, from Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus, HUC-JIR.

hired by congregations who view their opposition as judgmental and not reflective of the congregants.[134] On February 1, 2002 Interfaithfamily.com became its own organization, no longer a subset of Jewish Family and Life. The press release stated:

> Encouraging interfaith families to engage in Jewish life will not be successful if Jewish leaders and institutions are critical or rejecting.... That's why the second focus of our work is to encourage the Jewish community to be genuinely welcoming and inclusive of interfaith families. That is the goal of the new membership association, The InterfaithFamily.com Network.... The Network will expand on our previous advocacy work by developing recommended policies and practices, publicizing them, and working to persuade Jewish leaders and organizations to adopt them.... How the Jewish community responds to intermarriage is as important an issue as any other the community faces, we intend to have a leading role, working together with others, to insure that that response is a positive one.[135]

It is clear that interfaith families are beginning to organize in a more formal way, with the expressed goal of influencing the leadership. In the future we will see how effective the laity is in influencing the leadership and how effective the leadership is in directing the laity. While it is unlikely, it is possible that the gap between the laity and leadership will widen and splinter the Reform movement.

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[134] Alan Yuter, "Reform on Intermarriage, Conservatives on Feminism: The Implications," *Jewish Spectator* (fall 1997), 63.

[135] Press release from www.interfaithfamily.com, e-mail letter

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Outreach is not attempting to stop intermarriage but rather to minimize its effects on the Jewish community; it attempts to solve the larger problems of the community—the negative effects of intermarriage—by helping individual families. As it has done so, however, Outreach also changed Reform Judaism, and to some degree defined the movement. The perception of Reform Judaism as "the movement that accepts interfaith families" becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; interfaith families join Reform synagogues, synagogues in turn address the needs of those families in their congregations, and this attracts more interfaith families. But Outreach is not trying to welcome people into a dull, watered-down, easy Judaism, as some critics have suggested; its goal is to introduce interfaith couples to a vibrant, active, rich Judaism, that benefits both the Jewish community and the families looking for a place in it. This is consistent with the findings that the better a synagogue's programing, the better the interfaith programming.[136] Before Reform synagogues can welcome interfaith families and new Jews, they need to be places to which Jews want to belong. Stressing those qualities that make Judaism, and particularly the Reform movement, fulfilling will give the newcomers something to value. This renewed focus on tradition and ritual is consistent with the general trend in Reform Judaism towards experimentation with more traditional Jewish practices.

Over twenty-five years ago the man who would become my father converted to Judaism before marrying my mother, with the expressed intention that his future children

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[136] Chertok, *Outreach Families, 29.*

would have a clear Jewish identity. On the other hand, while I researched and wrote this thesis my sister got engaged to her long-time boyfriend, who is not Jewish, planned a wedding, and got married. My sister's interfaith marriage and my father's conversion are as much an influence on my opinions about Outreach and intermarriage as anything I have read, and have strongly affected my beliefs about how the Reform community should embrace interfaith couples. No matter how I feel about intermarriage, I love my sister and would not jeopardize my relationship with her by not recognizing her marriage or accepting her husband. It is the family angle that makes dealing with intermarriage so difficult, and makes individuals put aside their convictions (or at least temporarily silence them). The Reform movement is attempting to treat intermarried couples as one would treat family—hence its inability to take a firm stand against exogamy. Reform Judaism recognizes that just as a parent's refusal to attend a wedding causes irreparable damage to the relationship with the newlyweds, so might slighting the interfaith couple turn them away from Judaism forever. I am hesitant to write down my opinions, knowing that my sister will read this; while she already knows how strongly I feel about this issue, I fear that she will nonetheless be hurt by reading it in black and white.

I began this thesis in part to come to my own decision about officiating at intermarriages; that in itself is a testament to the rabbinic autonomy that exists in Reform Judaism. What I have found is that, for me, there is no clear answer to the question of officiation. In my opinion a rabbi may officiate at a wedding where one partner is not Jewish, but, *only* when certain conditions are met. The rabbi should be associated with a synagogue, so that if the rabbi develops a relationship with the couple, they will have a synagogue they already have a connection to. Added incentive in encouraging the creation of a Jewish home would be free synagogue membership for all newlyweds, something that could be arranged unilaterally by the UAHC. But the aforementioned relationship with a

rabbi is not currently a matter of course in weddings; the pre-wedding process should involve more interaction with the rabbi than just a review of the details of the ceremony. I think that in order to have a rabbi officiate at their wedding the interfaith couple should be required to attend an Introduction to Judaism Course and premarital counseling, and they should be committed to establishing a Jewish home. In order for the couple to commit to this, both bride and groom must understand what it means to have a Jewish home. Newlyweds are appropriately self-absorbed and very interested in what it means for them to be establishing a home together, so these sentiments should be encouraged, with hopes of stimulating the couple to set up Jewish homes and begin practicing Jewish rituals and holidays together.

While I believe that a rabbi should be allowed to officiate at the ceremony, I do not think that the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony is appropriate for an interfaith marriage; an alternative liturgy should be used. An interfaith marriage is not considered a legal Jewish marriage, and the traditional Jewish wedding vows have very little meaning to someone who is not Jewish. If one does not subscribe to Judaism, how can he or she be bound by the vows to uphold the laws of Moses and Israel? Hebrew prayers such as the *Sh'hechianiu,* which does not bind the couple by unacceptable standards or make absurd claims, may be recited. But the ceremony is not *kiddushin* and should not be called such. A *ketubah* is not to be used. In my opinion the rabbi's presence, under the above conditions, should indicate enough affinity with Jewish tradition to allow the *chupah* to be used as a symbol of the couple's intention to build a Jewish home together. Rabbis who perform interfaith ceremonies without imposing any qualifications or requirements, and those who will officiate with clergy of other faiths, are not doing service to the community. While they may placate upset family members, these rabbis create the false impression that an interfaith marriage is a Jewish marriage and that the biggest problems

that intermarried couples will face is choosing liturgy for their wedding ceremony (often mixing and matching from different faiths in an attempt to please everyone).

Although this is not a Jewish marriage, the bride and groom have the potential to create a Jewish home and be a part of the Jewish community. I think that Outreach is a good way to deal with such intermarried couples, and that we should encourage intermarried families to live Jewish lives, but the leadership of the Reform movement needs to make it clear—through an official resolution, policy or plain statement—that living a life of Jewish custom and tradition does not grant Jewish identity to Gentiles, and that there is still one more step required to transform a Judaic family into a truly Jewish one—conversion of the non-Jewish spouse.

One of the primary goals of interaction with an interfaith couple should be the eventual conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. As stated earlier, living Jewishly is a wonderful idea, but converting to create a truly Jewish family is preferable. I think that it is acceptable for the non-Jewish partner to convert for the sake of marriage, or for clergy to hasten a conversion so that the couple can have a Jewish wedding. In such cases, however, we need to look at conversion not as the end of Jewish training, but as a beginning; it should be supplemented by post-conversion education and support.

From marriage we come naturally to the question of children, and the status of the children in an interfaith marriage. The recognition of patrilineal descent as an acceptable determinant of Jewish status divides Reform Jews from the rest of the Jewish community. I think we should return to the earlier Reform practice of having the *bris* or the naming ceremony serve as the conversion, and thus reconnect with the other mainstream Jewish movements. The addition of the conversion blessing and a dip in the *mikvah* would help resolve the problem in terms of the child being considered Jewish by the rest of the community. If the parents are committed to raising the child in an

atmosphere in which Judaism is practiced and valued then they should have no objections to taking the child to the *mikvah* for a formal conversion ceremony.

Why should Judaism be practiced and valued by these families? Certainly no argument should be made based on Judaism's similarities to other religions. Here Wertheimer is correct; Judaism can only be important if it distinguishes itself from other faiths, and has something special to offer. Part of this offering is the tradition of Jewish ritual, and synagogue honors and ritual participation are traditionally reserved for Jews. While there is a place for non-Jews in the synagogue, it is not the same place that Jews hold. If a non-Jewish partner wants to fully participate in synagogue life and ritual practice, that person should be encouraged to convert; why should we not encourage them to convert if they are willing to perform all the rituals and feel that they can say blessings with integrity? One of the crucibles for this issue is ceremonies of *b'nai mitzvah;* in these instances, we must create a role for the non-Jewish parent, but it should not be the same as that of the Jewish parent. However, allowing for the variance in custom of Reform synagogues I think that the individual synagogue should decide exactly what those roles should be.

While we look to Outreach to help us make decisions on how to welcome children of interfaith marriages into religious school, the same autonomy for congregations in this matter is not appropriate. The existing religious school policy makes sense—we must exclude children who are being concurrently schooled in another religion. It is very difficult to teach children about Judaism when there are children in the class who claim to be both Christian and Jewish. That is not to say that teachers should not be sensitive to the needs of children of interfaith marriages, but that religious school should be unambiguously Jewish. Conversion should be discussed in class, but the value of endogamy should be stressed from a young age. Waiting until children are teenagers is too

late to begin to tell them about the importance of marrying another Jew; they already want to rebel, and any new guidelines end up as more rules to avoid. High school-age children need to be taught about making Jewish choices for themselves and to consider the Jewish population when making a college decision. With assimilation being a key issue for the future of Judaism, Jewish identity education is even more important. A religious school teacher should not have to teach that "some Jews have Christmas trees." Unfortunately, especially in a religious school setting, to state blatantly that Jews do not have Christmas trees is discouraged, as is the suggestion that endogamy is a preferred state. There is concern that these sorts of statement might be hurtful to interfaith families and that the families might withdraw their children from the school. While this may be the case, I agree with Eric Yoffie; even though having boundaries might isolate someone, they are still necessary. Part of Jewish identity education is teaching what is outside the boundaries of Reform Judaism. Education towards endogamy and a love of Judaism can make a genuine difference in the lives of the students, and makes good sense when viewed from a theoretical perspective.

The current reality, however, is not falling into place as expected. Despite the best education efforts, Jews still intermarry. And while an intermarriage is not a Jewish marriage, telling that to newlyweds is a sure way to upset them. However, we need to make it clear that "membership has its privileges." With conversion comes the ability to perform *aliyot,* to lead services, and to read from the Torah. "Being a good person" does not entirely describe the essence of Judaism and while there are many non-Jews who share Jewish values, they do not share the value that Judaism is unique.

A concept that was brought up in the 1970s related to intermarriage and was spurred on, at least in part, by Outreach, is that of *ger toshav. Ger toshav* is the biblical designation for those who were attached to the Jewish people, but not Jewish.

Perhaps formalizing this category and distinction would be a way to distinguish between the non-Jewish spouse who practices another religion and the non-Jewish spouse who is not an adherent of any other religion. This status might be achieved after a specified amount of Jewish education, and might be what makes a person eligible for marriage by a rabbi.

The November 2001 Outreach study mentions the use of Outreach Fellows, trained mentors from the laity to help potential and new converts adapt to Jewish life. They are successful in part because they are viewed as accessible by those they are intending to serve. Perhaps this model can also serve to provide mentors for interfaith families. In my own experience with interfaith families in my student pulpit work I have found that many interfaith families are looking for direction on how to have a Jewish home but do not feel comfortable asking a rabbi. This is exactly the type of thing that Outreach is trying to combat, to let interfaith families know that no question is too simple and that there is nothing shameful about asking for help in how to establish a Jewish home or even feel comfortable in a synagogue. With the success of Outreach it is important to remember that for many interfaith families the challenge is just to get them in the door.

Intermarriage is detrimental for Jews on a communal level, and makes it difficult for Jews to establish a Jewish home on an individual level. That being said, intermarriage is here to stay and must be appropriately addressed. Once the couple is married the only appropriate response is to help them create a Jewish home with hopes that the non-Jew will convert and that the children will be raised as Jewish and create Jewish homes. It is with that hope that Reform Judaism embraces the tension inherent in Outreach.

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