

**Bridge to the Future:  
Alexander Schindler and His Influence on the  
Development of Reform Judaism's Outreach Program**

by

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## Digest

"Bridge to the Future: Alexander Schindler and His Influence on the Development of American Reform Judaism's Outreach Program" is the history of the first twenty years of Outreach—the Reform Jewish initiative to welcome intermarried couples into congregational life with an emphasis on the key role played by Alexander Schindler.

After an introduction that outlines the purpose of the thesis, the first chapter examines Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage before the advent of Outreach. Possible causes of the increased intermarriage rate in the latter half of the twentieth century and the lay and rabbinic reactions to intermarriage are described in detail. The small amount of statistical evidence concerning intermarriage available from the sixties and early seventies is also presented and analyzed. The chapter concludes with a brief description of Alexander Schindler's rabbinate during this time.

The second chapter is an extended biography of Alexander Schindler to ascertain why he became such a passionate champion of Outreach. It also introduces his vision of Outreach as outlined in a speech he delivered to the UAHC Executive Board in December 1978.

Chapter 3 presents a history of how Schindler's vision of Outreach was transformed by both lay leaders and professional staff into congregational programs. It also reveals responses, both negative and positive, to Schindler's Outreach initiative and some of his reactions to those responses.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine two controversial challenges that arose due to the success of Outreach. Chapter 4 explores the issue of patrilineal descent and the

controversy that ensued due to the CCAR Patrilineal Descent Resolution passed in 1983, which changed for its member congregational rabbis the centuries-old law that Jewish identity is conferred through the mother. Arguments about changing the tradition are presented along with reactions from the other Jewish denominations. Chapter 5 is concerned with the response of Reform congregations to the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. The reaction of the Outreach department staff, rabbis, and individual congregations are all investigated. In both of these chapters, Schindler's views and actions are highlighted.

Finally, the conclusion summarizes the information presented in the thesis, presents crucial questions that need to be researched in the future, and examines the major challenges Outreach faces today absent the leadership of Alexander Schindler.



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## INTRODUCTION

In 1972 the National Jewish Population Survey shocked the Jewish world when it revealed that over 30% of the Jews who had married in the years 1966-1972 had married someone who was not Jewish. This news came on the heels of the *Look* magazine article eight years earlier which had predicted a sharp downturn in the number of Jews in the United States due to assimilation caused in large part by increasing numbers of intermarriages between Jews and non-Jews. Also in 1972 Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler (1925-2000) became president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the congregational union of North American Reform Judaism. Six years into his presidency, in December 1978, Schindler proposed an initiative he called Outreach. This initiative was conceptualized in the hopes of stemming the tide of the losses suffered by the Jewish people due to intermarriage. Schindler argued that instead of rejecting the intermarried couples, the Reform movement should reach out and draw them into the Jewish community. The results of this initiative were phenomenal. Drs. Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut in the chapter about Outreach in their book *The Reform Jewish Reader* state, "Reform was the first movement to wrest positive opportunities from this situation [the increased rate of intermarriage.] By reaching out to the gentile partners in the marital union, it [American Reform Judaism] increased conversion to Judaism, and it also confronted the need for integrating intermarried families and their children into the congregational fabric."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Jewish Reader: North American Documents* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 160.

Schindler's proposal included the idea of increasing sensitivity to new Jews by Choice in order to increase their numbers. He also advocated developing programming to draw the non-Jewish spouse into Jewish life in the hope that the non-Jewish spouse might convert. At the very least, he hoped that the children of intermarried couples might be raised as Jews. The most controversial piece of Schindler's initiative was his proposal that Jews reach out to the "unchurched" to draw in religious seekers to Judaism. The UAHC supported Schindler's initiative, and an Outreach Task Force was formed to make Schindler's vision a reality. Subsequently, the UAHC established an administrative department that would execute the Outreach program throughout its affiliated congregations.

From the time he made his Outreach proposal public, Schindler maintained an active role in its ongoing development. He was able to effectively articulate the reasons why the movement needed an Outreach program when he introduced it to the UAHC Executive Committee meeting in December of 1978, but he followed up his by proposal by working hard to ensure its success.

The purpose of this thesis is to identify and examine the reasons why Outreach was necessary, how it came about, and to critically analyze the role that the man whose name is synonymous with the Outreach initiative played in Outreach's development. To accomplish these goals, I looked first into the causes of intermarriages and outlined the primary reasons for the large increase in intermarriages in the 1970s and 1980s. The loss of Jews to assimilation because of intermarriage was the main reason that Schindler proposed Outreach, but it is useful to consider why Outreach was so personally important to him. The people who worked for Schindler were very dedicated to the Outreach cause.

What qualities did Schindler possess that made him such an inspiration to those who worked with him? This thesis investigates the life of Alexander Schindler to discover what impelled him to make this proposal and then to become Outreach's most enthusiastic champion. In addition to researching the many relevant holdings in the American Jewish Archives, the use of oral histories from people who were involved in Schindler's professional and personal life proved to be invaluable resources.

I have endeavored to reconstruct a history of the first two decades of Outreach programming and to show how Schindler's vision became a reality. This thesis also strives to evaluate Schindler's imprint on the programming. How successful was the Outreach program, and why has it been labeled a phenomenal success? How did Schindler lead his staff and volunteers? Original letters, official documents, and minutes of Outreach and UAHC board meetings provided insight into this area of inquiry.

The research suggests that the Outreach initiative had unintended consequences that created a range of problems that needed to be addressed. One of the first unanticipated effects of Outreach was the realization of the inherent unfairness of the traditional laws of Judaism that rendered children born of a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father Jewish but considered children born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother as non-Jews. The CCAR (Central Conference of American Rabbis) had a longstanding policy that automatically recognized the children born of Jewish mothers as Jews, even if the father was not a Jew. If the situation were reversed, that is, if the child had a Jewish father but a non-Jewish mother, the child would need to be converted in order to be considered a Jew. With the advent of Outreach, both lay and professional leaders became aware of the unfair Reform policies toward children who were born of

non-Jewish mothers and Jewish fathers. I have explored how Schindler initiated a controversial change in the Reform movement to solve this inherent unfairness.

Once Outreach succeeded in bringing the non-Jew into the synagogue, it became necessary for the Reform movement to grapple with the issue of boundaries between the Jew and the non-Jew in the life of the synagogue. This thesis also examines Schindler's role in addressing the controversies that arose as a result of a sharp increase in the number of non-Jews who were actually involved in synagogue life.

Albert Vorspan, former Director of Social Action for the UAHC as well as Vice-President of the UAHC, in the article he wrote for a festschrift honoring Schindler stated, "The best measure of the efficacy of the Outreach program is that other denominations in Judaism, after having first dismissed the program either as an opportunistic device to repopulate our declining ranks or as a left-handed endorsement of intermarriage itself, ended up emulating Outreach in their own programs. If imitation is the highest form of flattery, Reform is invariably the maligned trailblazer, and never more so than under the leadership of Rabbi Schindler."<sup>2</sup>

It is my hope that this thesis provides a solid foundation for a full-scale critical study on how and why Schindler brought the program of Outreach to life and why his personal contributions played a critically important role in the development of the Outreach program over the past twenty-eight years.

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<sup>2</sup> Aron Hirt-Manheimer. *The Jewish Condition. Essays on Contemporary Judaism Honoring Rabbi Alexander Schindler* (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), 5.

## Chapter 1

### What was it like before Outreach?

A teenager in the late '60s and early '70s read the following statements in a textbook used in Reform Jewish confirmation classes:

The mainstream of Jewish tradition has always been against intermarriages....This is because intermarriage poses a threat to the survival of the Jewish people....The Jewish proportion of the total population in the United States is steadily declining, and intermarriage is without a doubt one of the factors that accounts for this decrease.... Whatever statistics we have show that divorce rates are three and four times higher in couples who are intermarried....It is extremely difficult for two families of divergent religious loyalties not to press their respective points of view, however subtly upon their children. The result is a confused, neurotic child....Several studies have been made of the type of personality apt to marry out of the group or faith. They show in this category a disproportionate number of people who are 'unorganized, or demoralized...detached...rebellious...marginal'....Our ancestors were not wrong in their opposition to mixed marriage. They knew the survival of Judaism, as well as the probability of happiness, are both enhanced by marriages in which both partners are Jewish.<sup>3</sup>

It is obvious that the author of the textbook, Rabbi Roland Gittlesohn, and the publisher, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), were doing what they could to discourage their young readers from intermarrying. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who was the Director of the Commission on Jewish Education for the UAHC at the time the book was published, wrote that the book provided "unlimited assistance and advice" and that "the problems of particular concern to the contemporary Jewish community—inter-dating and intermarriage—are given appropriate consideration"<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Roland B. Gittlesohn, *Consecrated Unto Me* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1965), 192-195, 197, 200, 203.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, viii.

Because of the focus of Gittlesohn's book and, as shall be seen, of popular and scholarly literature of the time, it can be deduced that the Jewish community thought intermarriage was a problem which needed some study and, more importantly, a solution.

*Look* magazine in 1964 surprised the Jewish community when it published an article by Thomas Morgan entitled "The Vanishing American Jew." The article posited that the survival of the Jewish community was threatened by what it termed a "crisis of freedom" that had led to a loss of Jewish identity. It was estimated that the Jewish percentage of the total American population would drop precipitously to 1.6% from its 1964 rate of 2.9%. The two primary reasons for this gloomy forecast were, first, the lower birthrate in Jewish families and, second, the soaring intermarriage rate among Jews, with the attendant loss to Judaism of the children of these intermarriages. Morgan explained the Jewish dilemma as a clash between the American value of freedom of individual free choice versus the opposition to intermarriage because of its threat to Jewish survival.<sup>5</sup> However, the causes of intermarriage in the United States were more complex than Mr. Morgan's succinct explanation of the veneration of the American value of individual freedom.

We can begin by looking at the history of the Jew in America. Between 1940 and 1965, the Jewish population both grew and became more mobile. The population growth initiated by the so-called "baby boom" was augmented by immigration. This growing population of Jews moved from the city to the suburbs in large numbers.<sup>6</sup> In fact, "between 1945 and 1965, about a third of all American Jews left the big cities and

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," *Look*, 5 May 1964, 42-43.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), 3.

established themselves in the suburbs.”<sup>7</sup> The move to the suburbs meant that Jews were leaving the security of the Jewish neighborhood in the city to live in areas that were largely populated by gentiles. At the same time anti-Semitism had declined, and the Jews had won acceptance in post-war American society. In fact by the early 1960s, restrictions against Jews had eased in housing, resorts, and in college admissions. The publication of Will Herberg’s book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* placed Judaism as a religion equal to Protestantism and Catholicism, even though Jews only accounted for 3.2% of the American population.<sup>8</sup> With this acceptance came the danger of Jewish assimilation with their friendly new neighbors. As one Jew rather wryly expressed, “Assimilation means assimilation. We can’t have our cake and eat it. If we are, or have become, almost fully integrated into the American milieu, we must accept the hazards of getting lost in the broad landscape of American social life.”<sup>9</sup>

In their former urban life, Jews had lived in neighborhoods together, and the children learned about Judaism almost by osmosis. Judaism was in the air in these neighborhoods—not so in the suburbs where the air was decidedly not Jewish and was dominated by the Jews’ gentile neighbors. Jewish institutions grew to accommodate this lack of Jewish atmosphere in order to meet the communal needs of its Jewish members. There was a rapid growth in the number of synagogues in these new suburban neighborhoods. In many ways, synagogue growth paralleled the growth of churches at this time, but the synagogues were also serving a unique Jewish function. In the cities, the synagogue served mainly the men who went to pray there. The city-bred Jewish

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<sup>7</sup> Albert I. Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia* (Boston: Beacon, 1959), xvii, xix; quoted in Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 282, note 22.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sarna, *American Judaism*, 276.

<sup>9</sup> “We Are Many,” *Moment Magazine*, April 1977, 38.



children were educated largely in the home and in their day-to-day existence in the Jewish neighborhoods. The suburban synagogue developed partially to fill the void in educating the children, but, more than that, the men returning from the service in World War II had grown accustomed to having services officiated by a man who combined English with the traditional Hebrew readings. The number of post-war synagogues grew at an astounding rate. In the Reform Movement alone, the number of affiliated synagogues grew from 334 to 664. Membership in existing synagogues also grew, and it became more common for synagogues to have membership numbers exceeding 1,000. Synagogues not only served *in loco parentis* in the education of the Jewish youth, but also became a place where Jews could interact with other Jews. In many ways, the synagogue became the substitute for the urban neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

Along with the move to the suburbs, Jewish youth were increasingly acquiring higher levels of secular education. The National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) conducted in 1971 found that 54% of the total Jewish population over the age of 25 had some college education. In the group aged 25-29, an astounding 78% had some college education.<sup>11</sup> These young college graduates and those attending college in the early '70s when the NJPS survey was taken were riding the wave of the turbulent '60s. Religious institutions did not fare well under the anti-establishment atmosphere of the college campuses during that time. The skepticism afforded religious institutions by the baby boomers may have resulted in a declining involvement in religious life. By 1971 less than

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<sup>10</sup> Jack Wertheimer. *A People Divided*. 3-7.

<sup>11</sup> Fred Massarik. "Intermarriage-Facts for Planning," *Forty-first General Assembly Assembly Papers; Initial Findings of National Jewish Population Study* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1972), 1.

half of the Jewish population affiliated with a synagogue. Religious observances had also declined among those with a higher education.<sup>12</sup>

Not only were the college students questioning their parents' values, but many people found their future spouses on college campuses. Because higher education in the '60s and '70s helped to foster a tolerance and greater acceptance for diversity,<sup>13</sup> there was also an increase in the acceptance of dating between religious affiliations. Inter-dating rates rose on college campuses generally as the relative importance of religion in the lives of the college student declined. In the *Look* article referenced earlier, at Brandeis University, which in 1964 had a predominantly Jewish enrollment, a majority of students surveyed had no objections to marrying a Christian, and less than one third of those surveyed agreed even partially with Jewish beliefs and traditions.<sup>14</sup>

Apathy towards religion generally may have permeated the campuses and affected students of all religions, but for the Jewish young person particularly, there seemed to be an absence of concrete Jewish belief. In 1969 both the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) commissioned major studies of the Reform Movement. The CCAR wanted to see what the rabbi's role was in 1969, and they also wanted to attempt to project the future role of the rabbi. The UAHC was anticipating its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary and had appointed a Long Range Planning Committee. As part of its charge, the Committee conducted a study in an effort to project the changes expected to come. The Fine Report, which was issued by the UAHC in 1972, stated in its preface, "Many Jews in America today do not know what being Jewish means, what they must believe as Jews, and how their Jewishness should be

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<sup>12</sup> Wertheimer, *A People Divided*. 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 23-27.

<sup>14</sup> Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," 46-47.

expressed. They have Jewish instincts, but do not have any way to support these instincts intellectually."<sup>15</sup> The question the UAHC study raised was, if the older generation lacked these Jewish instincts, how could these instincts be passed onto the younger generation?

Also in 1972, the CCAR issued its own report, known as the Lenn Report, which stated that although synagogue membership would be smaller if it were not for the apparent desire of parents to provide a religious education for their children, this desire did not seem to rise from any religious feeling within the parents. Indeed, it seemed that the more children there were in the family, the less religious was the head of the household.<sup>16</sup>

However, the head of the household and his or her spouse, while not religious, at least had Jewish memories. If, as author Leonard Fine argues in the conclusion to the UAHC study, people who had potent Jewish instincts but had no way of supporting these instincts intellectually at least had their memories to fall back on. Their children did not have this resource. They may have had a Jewish commitment but had no way to express it—no way to express what being Jewish meant. Fine stated,

In short, the people we have dealt with call themselves Jews, and their Judaism does matter to them. But they are vastly uncertain, in the main, regarding what calling oneself a Jew or caring about Judaism means or is supposed to mean; meanings seem to be rarely discussed, at least in ways that help. Consequently, the interest in meanings is repressed, sometimes lost entirely. And when, as in our experience, it is expressed, and the quest for meaning resumed, the paths that most people travel are unfamiliar, the maps they are given of little use.<sup>17</sup>

The college students that Morgan described in his 1964 *Look* article are the children of those adults described in the quote above from the UAHC Fine Report. They

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<sup>15</sup> Leonard Fine, *Reform is a Verb* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1972), x.

<sup>16</sup> Theodore Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), 257-258.

<sup>17</sup> Fine, *Reform is a Verb*, 144.

accepted that they were Jewish, but did not see much value in it. They may have had some vague childhood notions, but nothing that could compel them as adults. If the typical Jewish student was religiously illiterate, it only makes sense that when Sunday School education was challenged by secular college learning, the student could not rely on his or her childhood religious education to meet that challenge.<sup>18</sup>

There seemed to be a contradiction here. If synagogue membership was sought by parents who desired a Jewish education for their children, why did these Jewishly educated children not possess a strong Jewish identity? The reason for this anomaly was a little more complicated. Earlier we discovered that as Jews moved to the suburbs, they relied on the synagogue to educate their children and provide them with their Jewish identity which was slowly dissipating as Jews moved to the suburbs. The UAHC Fine Report found that the Reform temple in 1971 did not appear to be a place where the displaced Jews found community. The temple as a house of worship, or a home, did not exist for many people. Instead, it was seen as a place where services were provided. People had few friends at the temple; they joined mainly to serve their children. This consumer-driven mentality was not conducive to creating community.<sup>19</sup>

The UAHC Fine Report also discovered that the young people sampled who expressed indifference regarding intermarriage had received less Jewish education than those youngsters who expressed negative attitudes toward intermarriage. The majority of the young people who expressed indifference to intermarriage had been enrolled in a once-a-week religious school, as opposed to a more rigorous Jewish education.<sup>20</sup> The weaker once-a-week religious school education—combined with the values in the Jewish

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<sup>18</sup> Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," 47.

<sup>19</sup> Fine, *Reform is a Verb*, 140-141.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

home which reinforced the modern American values of universalism, brotherhood, and equality—made Jewish intermarriage a special dilemma.<sup>21</sup> The young people were taught that Judaism was modern and liberal in its approach. It was no wonder they were surprised when their parents were upset at the idea of their children marrying non-Jews. Nothing or little in their upbringing or education had prepared them for a negative reaction, and nothing they knew could justify it. If a young person expressed the view that religion was not an issue in their choice of a future spouse, they were only reflecting what they had been taught. However, this attitude also reflected an inadequate grasp of what it meant to be a Jew.<sup>22</sup>

Leaving the insular neighborhood and settling down in the suburbs with accommodating gentile neighbors, coupled with a lack of Jewish community and Jewish education, would have made a particularistic Jewish identity difficult enough to attain and maintain. But when higher levels of secular education—with its intense challenges to societal institutions—and the universalistic atmosphere of the '60s and '70s were added to this mix, the Jewish young people were left with only a vague idea of their own Jewish identity and what that meant to their place in the world. A young person who was taught that everyone was created equal found it hard to accept that their parents wanted them to only consider a Jew as a possible marriage partner.<sup>23</sup> Their confusion was understandable, and their willingness to date and marry non-Jews seemed an inevitable byproduct of these interwoven factors.

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<sup>21</sup> Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1979), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Fine, *Reform is a Verb*, 56.

<sup>23</sup> Mayer and Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future*, 2.

The Gittlesohn quote from the religious school text which began this chapter, along with the plethora of articles written in the '60s and '70s reflected the concern of the Jewish community toward intermarriage. Did the frequency of intermarriage warrant all of the anxiety expressed in the journals?

Jonathan Sarna stated that American Jews are very number conscious. They love to count and quantify. The most important numbers to them are their absolute numbers in America and their rate of intermarriage. The fear among them was that they would disappear completely in the American melting pot.<sup>24</sup> In response to this fear, many studies and reports were done, and facts and figures were reported to Jews in many different venues. However, the individual or institution that actually performed the study, the definitions used, the sample chosen, the location of the sample, etc., all need to be taken into consideration when looking at the scope of the problem.

In 1963 Sidney Goldstein and Calvin Goldscheider did a study of 1,603 households in the greater Providence area that contained at least one Jewish member. The study was undertaken because the only data available concerning intermarriage was from the 1957 US Census, which had shown a 7.2% intermarriage rate for Jews. The authors of the study noted that several local studies showed intermarriage rates ranging from 17.4% in San Francisco to 53.6% for Iowa. Their own study showed a 4.5% intermarriage rate in the greater Providence area, with good conversion rates. Further, even if the non-Jewish partner did not convert, this study showed that the majority of the children in the non-conversionary marriages were being raised as Jews. The authors

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<sup>24</sup> Sarna. *American Judaism*, 356-357.

concluded that the "net effects of intermarriage on the overall size of the Jewish population may not be as serious as suggested by several other community studies."<sup>25</sup>

This early study reflected some of the problems of many of the earlier intermarriage figures. First, their survey represented a particular geographic area. Secondly, they did not define intermarriage well. A marriage where a conversion took place prior to the ceremony may not have been considered an intermarriage by many people because the convert may have been a Jew according to Jewish law at the time of the marriage. Finally, their conclusions, which may have been germane to the greater Providence area, may not have applied to other areas of the country. The 53.6% rate in Iowa certainly did not look healthy for Jewish survival.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) was quite concerned with the perceived increase in the percentage of couples intermarrying. The subject of intermarriage occupied both time and debate at the CCAR conventions in the '60s and '70s. Although, as we shall see, the main focus for the Reform rabbis was the issue of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages, they were also concerned with the intermarriage rate and the potential loss to the Jewish community. In 1962 the Committee on Mixed Marriages presented a report and recommendations to the full conference at the CCAR Convention held that year in Minneapolis. In their report, the Committee cited the problem of lack of statistical data for any sizable segment of the Jewish population. However, using the data available from various communities, the report cited not only an increase in intermarriage rates but, more importantly, that 83% of intermarried couples

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin Goldscheider and Sidney Goldstein, "Social and Demographic Aspects of Jewish Intermarriages," *Social Problems* 13, no. 4 (1966), reprint, 387-399, 399.

did not associate with synagogues, and 70% of the children of these intermarriages were not being raised as Jews.<sup>26</sup>

We have already referred to the 1972 CCAR study known as the Lenn Report. Although the study principally focused on rabbis and their attitudes, it also surveyed Reform temple members. The report noted a lack of statistical data concerning society as a whole.<sup>27</sup> In the study, it was reported that 89% of those surveyed were not intermarried, but that one in three respondents aged 20-24 was currently married to a spouse who was not Jewish. One in four of this younger group was married to a spouse who had not converted. Of the children of the intermarried couples, 81% received some Jewish education; but three out of ten of the offspring of these marriages attended church and received non-Jewish religious instruction. Only one in five of those surveyed thought Jewish study or synagogue worship was very important; however, Jewish identity did rank high on the survey.<sup>28</sup> Although admittedly the sample was small, the numbers indicated an increase in the number of intermarriages and some worrisome trends in the education of the children resulting from these marriages.

Rabbi Marc Lee Raphael conducted a study in 1970, about the same time that the information was being gathered for the Lenn Report. He focused on a small sample of couples intermarried in 1970 in the Los Angeles area and followed up with them a year later. None of the non-Jewish spouses had converted, although four of the 114 were considering conversion. Attendance at worship services for these intermarried couples was low, and fourteen couples had attended a church service. Eight out of ten of the couples did nothing to celebrate Shabbat, and there was a general blending of Hanukkah

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<sup>26</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 72 (1963): 86-87.

<sup>27</sup> Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, 125.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 217-244.



and Christmas celebrations as well as Easter celebrations and Passover seders. Only 10% of the couples planned to have a bris for a male child. Raphael concluded that "there is but a dim future for a Judaism left in the hands of intermarried couples."<sup>29</sup>

We have previously referred to the UAHC Fine Report issued in 1972. The Fine Report was the largest single survey research project ever conducted within the three branches of American Judaism.<sup>30</sup> In their sample, they discovered a large discrepancy in attitudes between adults and young people on the subject of intermarriage. While 20-25% of total respondents agreed that they were not ideologically upset with the idea of intermarriage, 57% of the young people surveyed thought that it made no difference if they married another Jew. However, 86% of the young people also said they personally would only intermarry if their future spouse converted or if they themselves could remain Jewish. Fine concluded that the data confirmed young people were not opposed to intermarriage, but that this lack of opposition might not lead to a dramatic increase in the likelihood of intermarriage because of the young adults' personal convictions about intermarriage.<sup>31</sup>

These smaller scale studies, particularly those commissioned by the CCAR and the UAHC, were valuable, but there was still no national wide-ranging study. A nationwide survey was completed and results were disseminated when the US Jewish Community through the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds released its *National Jewish Population Study* (NJPS) in 1972. It "represented the first effort by the

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<sup>29</sup> Marc L. Raphael, "Intermarriage and Jewish Survival." *CCAR Journal* 14, no. 2 (1972): 56-59.

<sup>30</sup> Fine, *Reform is a Verb*, ix.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-59.

American Jewish community to take a look at itself as a whole, and in depth."<sup>32</sup> The sample analyzed consisted of 7,600 households proportionally represented in large and small communities, and for the first time it included Jews who were only marginally identified as being Jewish. Previous surveys had relied largely on subjects culled from lists of Jewish organizations.<sup>33</sup> The report included a summary of its findings concerning intermarriage. Intermarriage was defined as the marriage between a Jew and a partner who was non-Jewish at the time they met. The findings were quite revealing. Of all Jewish marriages, only 9.2% were intermarriages, but of marriages which took place from 1966-1972, 31.7% were intermarriages. The combination of a Jewish husband and a non-Jewish wife was about twice as prevalent as the other way around. This was a worrisome trend because only one in three children of the marriages with a non-Jewish wife was being raised as a Jew. About one half of the non-Jews identified themselves as being Jewish even if a conversion had not taken place. Positive Jewish identification coupled with parental disapproval of their children dating non-Jews were potent factors contributing to in-marriage according to those surveyed.<sup>34</sup>

It looked on the surface as though there had been a dramatic increase in intermarriage rates in the recent year according to this comprehensive study. However, Fred Massarik, who had authored the report on intermarriage in the 1972 NJPS, published an article six years later that asked for a rethinking of the intermarriage crisis. He pointed out that Jews were not necessarily marrying themselves out of existence. In fact, if a Jewish man and a Jewish woman married non-Jews instead of each other, there

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<sup>32</sup> "Introduction," *Forty-first General Assembly Assembly Papers: Initial Findings of National Jewish Population Study* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1972), 1. Underline appeared in the original document.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>34</sup> Massarik, "A Report on Intermarriage," 2-3.

were now two marriages where there might have been one. If only half of the children resulting from these marriages were raised as Jews, there would be still be as many Jewish children as there would have been if the two Jews had married each other. If both couples raised their children as Jews, then there would be a net gain for Judaism. It all depended on what the intermarrying couples chose to do. If the female parent was Jewish, chances were, according to the NJPS study, that the children would be raised as Jews. Hence, it appeared to Massarik that the net loss of one half of the children of intermarriages who were not being raised as Jews was counterbalanced by the doubling of the number of marriages.<sup>35</sup>

Massarik's study suggested that what happened within the family was crucial. Sometimes the non-Jewish spouse converted. However, sometimes the non-Jewish spouse did not convert but "drifted" instead into Jewishness which created a quasi-Jewish home. Many different family situations evolved out of intermarriages, but an official conversion did make an impact on the family life, according to Massarik's analysis. About 40% of the non-Jewish wives converted, but only about 3% of the non-Jewish husbands did. However, about 40-50% of the non-Jewish husbands regarded themselves as Jewish, thereby underscoring the phenomenon of a drift toward Judaism found in many intermarriages.<sup>36</sup>

Intermarriages, like in-marriages, had varying degrees of Jewishness. Massarik contended that knowledge of the rate of intermarriage was only part of the story, and it did not tell us nearly enough. We needed to know the quality of Jewish life after the intermarriage. By analyzing the data available from the NJPS, Massarik was able to show

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<sup>35</sup> Massarik, "Rethinking the Intermarriage Crisis," *Moment*, June 1978, 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

a net increase of 2.1% in the Jewish population due to intermarriages. This was, of course, due to conversion. Yet Massarik also pointed out that "*having children has greater impact on the size of the Jewish population than intermarriage has.*" Massarik's data also indicated that in the United States, the intermarriage rate would not decline in the immediate future. With this thought in mind, Massarik concluded that instead of using resources to combat the intermarriage rate, it might behoove the Jewish community to spend money to maximize the opportunity that intermarriage presented to the Jewish community.<sup>37</sup>

Obviously, the Jewish community would benefit if the non-Jewish spouse converted. The conversion of the non-Jewish spouse would ensure a Jewish household and also ensure that the children would be raised as Jews. Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold carried out a study in the late 1970s to try to ascertain the effects of intermarriage on the Jewish community. They found that conversionary marriages compared much more favorably than intermarriages without conversion, and even more favorably than endogamous marriage in both raising the children as Jews and in maintaining a Jewish home. The study showed that in mixed marriages where the Jewish spouse retained his or her Jewish identity and the non-Jew did not convert, if they did not maintain a Jewish home, it was generally due to lack of interest on the part of the Jewish spouse rather than on opposition by the non-Jewish spouse. In fact, in many of those non-observant homes, the non-Jewish spouse expressed some identity with the Jewish people. Mayer and Sheingold concluded that that the Jewish community might consider

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 32, 31-33. Italics in the original.

developing some mechanism to reach the interested, but not yet converted, non-Jewish spouse.<sup>38</sup>

Another study showed that if a rabbi maintained contact with an intermarried couple, the chances of the non-Jewish spouse converting or the couple maintaining a Jewish home were greatly enhanced. If the rabbi who officiated at an intermarriage was willing to meet with the couple on more than one occasion, or the couple was willing to undertake a course of study similar to that of conversion, there was some chance that the Jewish direction of their house would be affected.<sup>39</sup> The variable here is the rabbi and his attitude toward intermarriage, and his interaction with the couple who was intermarrying.

Rabbis, in general, did not look at intermarriage in a favorable light. In fact, intermarriage had been universally condemned. Deuteronomy 7:1 states it is forbidden for a Jew to marry any of seven Canaanite nations. Ezra and Nehemiah extended this ban to include all the non-Jewish people in the land. This prohibition was further extended by Maimonides who included all nations, not just the non-Jews in the land.<sup>40</sup> In the Middle Ages, not only did the Jews forbid marriages with non-Jews, but the Christians also passed laws throughout that time forbidding marriage between a Christian and a Jew. Since the Christian laws carried severe penalties that impacted the entire Jewish community, the Jewish communities dealt severely with those who disobeyed the law. In the eighteenth century in England as social barriers between non-Jews and Jews decreased, intermarriage increased, but the Jew was generally expelled from the

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<sup>38</sup> Mayer and Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future*, 30-31.

<sup>39</sup> Allen S. Maller, "Jewish-Gentile Marriage: Another Look at the Problem," *CCAR Journal* 23, no. 1 (1976): 73-74.

<sup>40</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 57, (1948): 159.

synagogue. Intermarriage increased in more modern times, although both the Christian churches and synagogues opposed such marriages.<sup>41</sup>

In 1806 the Napoleonic Sanhedrin was asked if a Jew was permitted to marry a non-Jew. The Sanhedrin agreed that although the marriage would be civilly binding, it was not "according to religious forms," but there would be no religious penalty imposed on such a marriage. This bifurcation of civil and religious law accorded to marriage caused confusion and consternation among the Jewish authorities, but this bifurcation exists to this day. A marriage can be valid according to civil law but not valid according to Jewish law (*halacha*). In any event, during the twentieth century, as we have seen, there was an increase in the number of intermarriages.<sup>42</sup>

If intermarriage was forbidden by Jewish law, then it logically follows that rabbis would not officiate at intermarriages. However, Reform rabbis are not bound by *halacha*, and, as we have seen, in the United States where individual freedom was a paramount value, intermarriages did occur in increasing numbers.

Early on, the Reform rabbis decided to take a stand, and in 1909 the CCAR passed a resolution that stated "The CCAR declares that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American rabbinate."<sup>43</sup>

Evidently, this statement was deemed by some to be inadequate because in 1947, the question of mixed marriage was once again being considered by the CCAR. The Committee on Mixed and Intermarriages, following a detailed study, brought a report to the full Conference that recommended the spirit of the 1909 resolution be retained. The

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<sup>41</sup> CCAR Yearbook 90, (1981): 91-94.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 95-97

<sup>43</sup> CCAR Yearbook 57, (1948): 160.

report introducing the resolution stated that by retaining the 1909 resolution, the Committee avoided the implication that mixed marriage was such a common occurrence that there needed to be a resolution against it. Furthermore, the Committee did not want to exert any compulsion over their membership.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, debate over the resolution was long and confrontational. The debate mainly centered on the issue of rabbinic officiation and whether the Conference should have the power to legislate what an individual rabbi could do in his congregation. Rabbi Henry Berkowitz cited intense pressure from his congregation to perform mixed marriages and asked that the 1909 resolution be strengthened so he could go back to his congregation with the backing of the CCAR and continue to refuse to perform mixed marriages. It is somewhat ironic to note that Rabbi Berkowitz mentioned that despite his refusal to perform mixed marriage ceremonies, there was a continuous growth of intermarriages in his community.<sup>45</sup> Rabbi Gunther Plaut agreed with Rabbi Berkowitz and added, "We are taking a step forward when we as Reform rabbis declare that we have certain standards and that liberalism is not identical with lawlessness and that Reform is not identical with expediency."<sup>46</sup> Rabbi Julian Morgenstern countered that the rabbis needed to be looking at what was best for the Jewish people, not a resolution that would strengthen rabbis' hands when dealing with their respective congregations. He further noted that intermarriage posed a danger to the Jewish people, and the ultimate problem was to deal with that danger. "No action, no resolution of ours will change the determination of the couple who have resolved upon a mixed marriage. Our concern, therefore, is what shall be the best thing for Judaism, recognizing that this couple is going to be married anyway. Shall we drive them away

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 173-174.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 180.

completely from the Jewish fold, or shall we seek to salvage what we can from this wreckage?"<sup>47</sup> Rabbi Max Raisin agreed with Morgenstern and added that he performed mixed marriages because of the human side of it. He reminded the Conference that Judaism takes notice of the human side of life.<sup>48</sup> Despite the polarity expressed by those debating the issue, the recommendation of the Committee to reaffirm the 1909 resolution passed unanimously.<sup>49</sup>

The intermarriage issue arose again during the 1962 CCAR Convention. A report issued by the Committee on Mixed Marriages was presented by its chairman, Dr. Eugene Mihaly. The Committee recommended the establishment of a permanent Committee that would concern itself with issues of mixed marriages. The Committee would gather data and make the findings known to the membership of the CCAR. Secondly, the Committee recommended that rabbis do what they could to discourage intermarriage. If asked to officiate at a mixed marriage, the rabbi should encourage the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse-to-be. If the non-Jew refused to convert, then the rabbi should ensure that the couple receive education about Judaism and make a promise to keep a Jewish home. The rabbis' debate following Mihaly's report reiterated many of the arguments from the 1947 convention. Interestingly, Mihaly noted in his report that about one third of Reform rabbis were performing mixed marriage ceremonies. Rabbi Joseph Klein blamed the rising rate of intermarriage on the 35% of the rabbis who did perform intermarriage ceremonies because they were opening the floodgates. Klein theorized that once a rabbi performed an intermarriage, he could never say no again to a couple proposing a mixed marriage. In the end, the rabbis adopted the resolution to establish the permanent

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 178-179.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 184.



Committee, but tabled the second recommendation that called for an attempt for conversion, and failing that, education for the couple along with the promise to keep a Jewish home. Arguments offered by Rabbi Robert Kahn, who served on the Committee and refused to sign the recommendation, seemed to win over the members of the convention. Kahn argued that the second recommendation seemed to condone intermarriages and would weaken the position of the rabbis who refused to do intermarriages. Further, the promise by those who did not desire to convert to keep a Jewish home had no authority behind it.<sup>50</sup>

During the '70s, as we have seen, there was more widespread concern about the whole intermarriage problem. In 1971 the President of the CCAR, Roland Gittlesohn, and the Vice-president, David Polish, issued a joint message. They acknowledged that a significant number of rabbis officiated at mixed marriages. They stated that this created a three-fold problem. First, as a body, they were risking divorcing themselves from K'lal Israel. Secondly, the younger men needed the support of the Conference behind them because they were under increasing pressure to perform mixed marriage ceremonies. Finally, they felt that the rabbis who were upholding Jewish tradition were doing so defensively. They called for a strengthening of the original 1909 resolution, affirmed in 1947, to urge the members of the conference not to officiate at mixed marriages. The two men recommended that the Committee on Mixed Marriages prepare a full exploration of the issues involved and present their results at the 1972 convention.<sup>51</sup>

Rabbis Gittlesohn and Polish had made their positions on intermarriage very clear. In fact, Rabbi Polish wrote a scathing article in the Winter 1973 edition of the

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<sup>50</sup> *CCAR Yearbook*, 72 (1963): 86-105.

<sup>51</sup> *CCAR Yearbook*, 81 (1972): 16.

*CCAR Journal* entitled "Enough!" He inveighed against the practice of what he called "ecumenical marriages" where some rabbis co-officiated with ministers or priests and, sometimes, in churches. He stated,

If our inner diversity has reached the point where an "ecumenical" marriage can be given rabbinical sanction, then we are no longer a merely diverse, but disintegrating body. If, alternately, a rabbi can be driven so far by pressures within his congregation, the time has come for the Conference to make appropriate and unequivocal response to such pressures. Who is to prevail here—Judaism and the Jewish people, or Mommy and Daddy?...So far, the CCAR has avoided saying to any colleague: "You have gone too far." This has been the Conference's strength, but also its weakness. I do not believe we can be silent on this issue which—despite those who will not be moved—is a desecration of Judaism. It is time we said: "Enough!"<sup>52</sup>

Those on the other side also weighed in. Rabbi Henry Cohen wrote in an article in the *CCAR Journal* in 1972: "I would seriously question whether a liberal Judaism, despite its concern with survival, should automatically say to every engaged couple about to enter on a mixed marriage: break up...find someone else. Young Jews who are willing to go against the values of their parents would hardly be dissuaded by any rabbinic policy, of which they may not even be aware....We teach nothing by closing the door."<sup>53</sup>

In the meantime, the 1972 CCAR Lenn Report found that 41% of the Reform rabbis who responded to their survey officiated at mixed marriages. Over half of those who did not officiate at mixed marriages referred the couples to rabbis who would be willing to officiate. It is also interesting to note that 66% of the Reform rabbis surveyed for the Lenn Report thought their congregants approved of intermarriage<sup>54</sup>

The intermarriage debate among the rabbis came to a head during the 1973 CCAR Convention. It was during this conference that the Committee on Mixed Marriage issued

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<sup>52</sup> David Polish, "Enough," *CCAR Journal* 20, no. 1 (1973): 37.

<sup>53</sup> Henry Cohen, "Mixed Marriage and Jewish Continuity," *CCAR Journal* 14, no. 2 (1972): 53-54.

<sup>54</sup> Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, 181, 35.

its report. In his report, the Chair of the Committee on Mixed Marriage, Rabbi Herman Schaalman, cautioned that the question of mixed marriage should be decided on the basis of basic, essential principle, and not on the basis of the fact that the number of people requesting intermarriage was rising. Rabbis, he said, teach Jewish values and do not endorse positions or practices of those who are ignorant of Jewish teachings. He acknowledged that there would be dissent to their recommendations, and asked that the CCAR accept dissent as a right inherent in their liberal tradition. The Committee recommended that instead of "discouraging" rabbis to officiate at mixed marriages, the Conference go on record in "opposition" to participation by its members in any ceremony of mixed marriage. However, the Committee recognized that there would be those members who would dissent, and they suggested several conditions for those who did officiate at intermarriages. The Committee also asked that its members work to ensure that children of mixed marriages be raised as Jews, to provide for opportunities for non-Jewish spouses to be converted, and to encourage involvement in the Jewish community and synagogue of the mixed married families.<sup>55</sup> The report continued with a minority report by Rabbi Irwin H. Fishbein, who served on the Committee on Mixed Marriage but did not agree with the recommendations of the Committee. He asked,

Can we afford to reject one out of three of our people [referring to the intermarriage rate]? From a Jewish point of view, such behavior is irresponsible, from a human point of view, indefensible; from a moral point of view; intolerable....To require rabbis to adhere to certain conditions is to require them to violate their consciences....Every rabbi has the right as well as the obligation to interpret Judaism in accordance with the dictates of his conscience, the needs of his people, the spirit of his times, and the quality of his understanding of Jewish tradition.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 83 (1974): 51-63.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66.

The debate which followed the Committee report was long and certainly very pointed. There was no straddling the fence on this issue. Dr. Eugene Mihaly spoke for those who did not wish to see the recommendation pass. He asserted that no code, *halacha*, or proclamation would cause consensus. Further, he said, "It states in *Avodah Zarah 36a* 'We impose no decree upon the community unless the majority are able to abide it.' How much the more so is this true in our contemporary situation living in a free society where institutional affiliation is voluntary....We run the danger of legislating ourselves into total irrelevance....I did not join the CCAR to be told what to believe. I daily study and pray and struggle to discover that." Mihaly concluded that the CCAR needed to reflect the diversity that characterized the whole Movement.<sup>57</sup> Rabbi Jordan Pearlson took the opposite view.

In fact, the failure to pass a clear, positive position on the part of the Central Conference in effect would have the dynamic impact of encouraging them [intermarriages]....The Rabbi cannot lose his sense of interrelatedness of Jewish community throughout the Jewish world. We do have an obligation each to the other to understand the historic anguish in which others find themselves and to make that a factor in our deliberations....We owe it to the parents...to say, "Let Judaism say something clear and unequivocal which takes this process and somehow inhibits it".<sup>58</sup>

The first paragraph of the resolution, which stated that the CCAR expressed its opposition to rabbis performing intermarriages, passed 321-196. However, the Conference also passed as part of the 1973 resolution that they recognized the right of members to dissent. There were no suggested stipulations in the final resolution. In addition, for mixed marriages that had already taken place, the Conference passed the recommendations that rabbis assist in educating children of mixed marriages as Jews, in

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

providing opportunities for conversion of the non-Jewish spouses, and in creating an environment to encourage the intermarried families to be involved in both the Jewish community and synagogue.<sup>59</sup>

The strength of feelings and convictions that were expressed can be inferred by President Polish's remarks at the end of the debate, when he said, "I hope that time will heal the present divisions of this Conference. I hope that in the main the good spirit that prevailed will serve to alleviate whatever wounds may have been incurred." But Dr. Alfred Gottschalk had the last word and stated that the Conference had dealt with "clerical prerogatives, principles of Jewish tradition and practices of ethics and points of halacha." However, he asked that the conference deal with the factors in Jewish life that were causative factors in intermarriage. He stated that, "I believe we have dealt with the symptoms here tonight, and not with the cause."<sup>60</sup>

It did not take long for the divisions apparent at the Conference to become evident. One of the most vocal dissidents was David Max Eichhorn, who wrote a book entitled Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction following the 1973 convention. He was very angry with Rabbis Gittlesohn and Polish for forcing the issue to begin with, but was also upset when Polish appointed to the Committee on Mixed Marriages what he [Eichhorn] termed "seven middle-aged rabbis, not a single one of whom officiated at intermarriages! Seven vestal virgins charged with the responsibility of planning a textbook of instruction on proper physical relations between the sexes! These were the 'experts' who were to make an objective, scholarly, 'exploration'." After Eichhorn objected "lengthily and loudly," Polish reluctantly added "three so-called intermarrying

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 89, 97.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 96-97.

rabbis to the Committee." The three who were added only rarely performed intermarriages. Eichhorn further objected to the fact that Polish presided over the session at the 1973 convention instead of someone who had some objectivity. Eichhorn supported his argument by quoting the headline of the June 29, 1973, edition of the *Jewish Post and Opinion*, "AT REFORM RABBIS CONVENTION MACHINE WINS FIGHT TO BAN INTERMARRIAGE." In an editorial, the weekly stated, "What was wrong with the action of the Reform rabbis in the convention last week in Atlanta was that it failed to take into consideration present or even future conditions....Nothing much can be achieved by ignoring facts."<sup>61</sup>

For the remainder of the '70s, rabbinic officiation at intermarriages was not discussed at the CCAR conventions. Instead, a Committee on Conversions had been formed, and it made regular reports. There was a sentiment to standardize conversions, and, interestingly, there was overwhelming opposition to the idea of active proselytizing. This issue of proselytizing had been raised by the Chair, Rabbi Harry Bamberger, at an open meeting of the conversion Committee held in Cincinnati before the 1975 CCAR convention, and opposition was voiced at this point. Instead, the rabbis in attendance at that Cincinnati meeting agreed they would remain open to those gentiles who sought them, but they did not propose to actively solicit. They noted that the number who were seeking conversions because of intermarriages was large enough.<sup>62</sup>

This discussion of the history of rabbinic attitudes toward officiation shows the acrimonious split among the rabbis over officiation as well as their concern for what they could clearly see was an increase in the rate of intermarriages. It has already been

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<sup>61</sup> David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriage: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL: Satellite Books, 1974), 161, 165, 168.

<sup>62</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 85, (1976): 33.

pointed out that according to the CCAR Lenn Report, one in four Reform rabbis were performing intermarriages, and over half of those who did not actually do the intermarriages would refer the couple to someone who would.<sup>63</sup>

Intermarriage rates did not diminish in the years following the stormy 1973 CCAR Convention, and the rabbis were undoubtedly aware of the attitudes toward intermarriage on the part of their congregants, as well as the anguish faced by the families of intermarrying couples. According to the CCAR Lenn Report, as has been stated before, a clear majority of the rabbis surveyed believed that their congregants did not have a problem with intermarriage.<sup>64</sup> If the majority of the Reform rabbis did not officiate at intermarriages because they believed that intermarriage was bad for the Jewish people and, conversely, many of their congregants had no problem with intermarriage, there was a potential for conflict. An incident reflecting this conflict occurred in the late '70s in Lexington, Kentucky. Rabbi Alan Bregman, who was the UAHC regional director of the Midwest Region at the time, was visiting Reform Congregation Adath Israel as their scholar in residence. During a session with the congregation, the question of intermarriage was discussed. Someone from the congregation pointed out a young intermarried couple and asked why in a pluralistic society, Judaism could not be more accepting of intermarried families. Rabbi Bregman replied that Jewish tradition considered the young Jewish man a traitor because he had married a non-Jew. The congregation immediately exploded in defense of the young couple. Several intermarried couples told Rabbi Bregman that his opinion was not germane to their congregation. It was clear to those in the room that although Rabbi

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<sup>63</sup> Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, 181.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

Bregman was merely reflecting Jewish tradition and the official stance of the CCAR; that particular approach flew in the face of reality as far as many in this congregation were concerned.<sup>65</sup>

Rabbi Dannel Schwartz wrote an article in *Moment* magazine in 1978 outlining several problems for both the rabbis who were officiating and for the couples who were intermarrying. He admitted there was no way a rabbi could evade the intermarriage question, and any answer to that question could create problems. He cited a situation where a rabbi lost his job because he refused to perform an intermarriage ceremony for the child of one of the officers of his synagogue. On the other side, a rabbi who did perform intermarriages was so busy with weddings of non-temple members that a congregant complained the rabbi was not available for the wedding of her child who was engaged to another Jew. Intermarrying couples complained that rabbis either point-blank refused to talk to them or referred them to another rabbi who would perform the ceremony for an exorbitant fee and barely spoke to them before the ceremony. One woman stated, "If those rabbis are any indication of what Judaism is, it is just not for me ... they made us feel as if we were looking for a doctor to do an illegal abortion, not a rabbi to officiate at a wedding." On the other hand, one rabbi reported, "The proof of the pudding is that 9 out of 10 couples won't even come into your office for an appointment unless you agree in advance to officiate."<sup>66</sup>

Differences among the practices of those rabbis who performed intermarriage also created some problems. There were not many studies done concerning the officiation practices of the rabbis willing to officiate at intermarriages. One study done in 1969 by

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<sup>65</sup> Author's personal recollection.

<sup>66</sup> Dannel Schwartz, "The Intermarriage Rip-off," *Moment*, July/August 1978, 62,64.



the Southern California Association of Liberal Rabbis found that thirty-three rabbis did not perform intermarriages, twenty-four did. Four of the twenty-four only officiated at intermarriages for members of their congregation or people they knew personally, and seventeen stipulated some sort of demand of the couple—which ranged from a commitment to raising Jewish children, to some type of study, either formal or informal prior to the marriage. Three of the twenty-four who did officiate at mixed marriages would perform an intermarriage for anyone who paid the stipulated fee. Of the thirty-three who did not officiate at intermarriages, sixteen would refer the couple to rabbis who did. Their tendency was to refer couples to those rabbis who required the lowest standards because they are the best known.<sup>67</sup>

According to the NJPS, one in three Jewish marriages of those married between 1966 and 1972 involved a partner who was not Jewish at the time of the marriage.<sup>68</sup> One of the concerns expressed was the statistical reluctance of the non-Jewish partner to convert. Only 26.7% of the non-Jewish wives had converted at the time of the study, while a mere 2.5% of the non-Jewish husbands had converted. It should be noted that a far smaller percentage of Jews in intermarriages converted out of Judaism. For both males and females, the percentage was less than 1%. Nearly half, somewhere between 43% and 46% of the initial non-Jews, described themselves as Jewish regardless of whether or not they had undergone a formal conversion.<sup>69</sup> The low rate of affiliation of intermarried couples in a temple or synagogue<sup>70</sup> may explain this low rate of formal conversion, but the relatively high rate of Jewish identification may possibly arise from a

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<sup>67</sup> Allen S. Maller, "Jewish Gentile Marriages: Another Look at the Problem," 65.

<sup>68</sup> Massarik, "Intermarriage Facts for Planning," 10.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

comfort that the intermarried couple felt in the Jewish community. Indeed, especially among the younger people in 1972, there was an acceptance of inter-dating and intermarriage, although all age groups were almost evenly split when asked if intermarriage would cause the Jewish people to disappear.<sup>71</sup>

An unscientific survey was initiated by *Moment* magazine early in 1977. The results of the survey were published in the April edition of that year. The editors were somewhat surprised by the sheer number of responses they received to the survey that had appeared in the magazine in January of that year. A very high proportion of those responding reported that there was someone in their immediate family who had married a non-Jew, and almost everybody knew someone who had converted to Judaism. What is interesting is that even though there seemed to be such a familiarity with those who had converted, there was no clear consensus on the statement, "there should be more vigorous efforts by Jews to proselytize." The sense that emerged was that more energy should not be expended to encourage conversion.<sup>72</sup>

Acceptance in the Jewish community of the intermarried couple began with the Jewish family. David Max Eichhorn advised parents of a child who was engaged to a non-Jew, "What you should not do is go into a tantrum, threaten suicide, threaten to throw your child out of the house, threaten to disown your child or sit *shiva* for him or her, or commit any of the asinine indiscretions that will indicate that you are a product of an era that is no more."<sup>73</sup> Some parents did object to the non-Jewish spouse. One

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<sup>71</sup> Fred Massarik, "Highlights: Jewish Identity," *Forty-first General Assembly Assembly Papers: Initial Findings of National Jewish Population Study* (New York: Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, 1972), 16-17.

<sup>72</sup> "We Are Many," 34-35.

<sup>73</sup> Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction*, 79. (This particular passage in the edition I was using had been defaced with brackets around it, and the word "Mom" written in both margins. It would appear that this anonymous person's mother was from that bygone era.)

woman's guardians, her aunt and uncle, would not let her come home once she married an Episcopalian. Even after they had been married for twenty-two years, the non-Jewish husband admitted that the guardians never really did accept their marriage.<sup>74</sup> The NJPS indicated that 62.3% of those surveyed had parents who were opposed to their inter-dating. This figure was not broken down by age group but does indicate that parents on the whole did want their children to marry Jews.<sup>75</sup>

In the *Moment* survey alluded to earlier, the majority of those surveyed agreed that they would be anywhere from very upset to somewhat upset if their child were to marry a non-Jew. A significant segment reported they would be upset if their child were to marry a convert to Judaism. However, almost all who answered the survey agreed they would be very upset if their child were to convert to a non-Jewish faith.<sup>76</sup> One respondent wrote, "Very upset does not begin to describe the despair I think I would feel if one of my children married a non-Jew. Two of my three are married, both in the synagogue of their childhood that we helped to build. One of these will be a rabbi soon. My youngest is 20, and ... I want him to bring into our family a Jewess who shares our history." Another person whose youngest daughter married a Catholic man who did not convert said, "We did give our children Jewish education and never expected our one daughter to do this to us....What can we do to save our children?"<sup>77</sup>

Just as the rabbis disagreed about the intermarriage issue and whether or not their officiation fostered or hindered mixed marriages, parents also disagreed in their attitudes toward their non-Jewish children in-law. Some were totally accepting. One parent

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<sup>74</sup> Mark Silver, "Intermarried Couples Who Cope," *National Jewish Monthly*, January 1978, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Massarik. "Highlights: Facts for Planning," 16.

<sup>76</sup> "We Are Many," 35-36.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

responded, "Caught in a bind; sincerely fostering interfaith friendship for self and children, much sharing, openness, genuine rapport—but concerned about how to tell our marriage-age children. 'Ok, turn it off, only Jewish mates are acceptable.' What of the Christians, whom they've been taught to love over all these years?" Another said, "I would not turn my back on my children who might become thieves, drug addicts, or gypsies. So why would I if they married non-Jews? The question here is love and a decent example to others."<sup>78</sup> One convert explained, "I had been welcomed to my fiancée's family. I went to my first Passover Seder and was stirred by it and touched by the warmth of the family. That was eight seders ago, and each seder has continued to move me as the first."<sup>79</sup>

How did the community accept the intermarried couple? This question also does not have an obvious answer. And, unfortunately, there does not seem to be much data concerning attitudes toward intermarried families in the '70s. We know that, in general, especially among the young, there was more of an acceptance of intermarriage. But did this acceptance translate into real life situations? Again, the answer is not clear. The NJPS found that 60% of the Jews surveyed agreed with the statement "Being a good Jew is the same as being a good human being, no more, no less." Yet, this universalistic view of Judaism was contradicted by the 85% who agreed that "it is important that there should always be a Jewish people," the 84.5% who agreed "Being Jewish means something very definite to me," and the whopping 94% who disagreed with the statement "If I could easily switch from being Jewish to something else, I would do so."<sup>80</sup> This obvious particularistic identity did cause some discomfort for the intermarried couples.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 36-37.

<sup>79</sup> Sharon Rishe, "Discovering Judaism," *Jewish Spectator*, Fall 1976, 59.

<sup>80</sup> Massarik, "Highlights: Facts for Planning," 12-14.

One Jewish woman married to a non-Jew living in Baltimore said that when she mentions the name of the area where she lives to other Jews, they comment that it is a "gentile" area. The woman retorts that her husband is not Jewish, which puts the other conversant on the defensive.<sup>81</sup>

When the non-Jewish spouse in an intermarriage converts, acceptance by the Jewish community ranges from warm to cold, reflecting longstanding tradition discernable in the rabbinic literature. One Jew reported his conflicting feelings. "I am fully aware that Jewish law mandates full acceptance of converts. However, I have the following reservation: I don't believe you can convert a person to feel the pangs of a Ma'alot or a Munich, or the days of May/June 1967. Of course, even some Jews are insensitive; nevertheless, conversion can't make a Jewish heart." One convert reported, "When people learn that I am a convert, many of them remark, 'Oh, then you're not really Jewish.'" But there is the other side of the coin. "Converts are like naturalized Americans—they've chosen Judaism and are therefore more loyal than those who are Jews by accident of birth. They don't always think like Jews because of the centuries of fine tuning, but we have to give them time and encouragement. They add some new spice to our lifestyles." Another commented, "If it [the conversion came] from an honest desire to be Jewish, and subsequently there was a desire to marry my child, I would be happy, for then my child would be marrying another Jew."<sup>82</sup>

Although it is difficult to find statistics to verify any negative feelings toward the intermarried couple or, more importantly, toward the convert, Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold in their 1979 study of intermarriage made an interesting observation. In their

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<sup>81</sup> Silver, "Intermarried Families Who Cope," 13.

<sup>82</sup> "We Are Many," 37-38.

comments on the relatively low rate of synagogue and Jewish organizational involvement on the part of intermarried couples, they noted "that intermarried couples often find scant welcome in both religious and secular Jewish organizations. Lack of involvement does not always reflect a lack of desire on the part of the intermarrieds to belong."<sup>83</sup> This cool welcome made sense because Jews surveyed in the NJPS did show a high particularistic identity. Therefore, they might be hesitant to accept a non-Jew, or someone who was recently a non-Jew. Rabbi Allen Maller believed education was the key. He noted that although Judaism discouraged proselytizing, in cases involving family unification and preservation of Jewish identity within that family, Maller claimed it was a *mitzvah* to do as much as possible to draw the non-Jew into the community of Israel. This meant not only educating adults, but also children, by introducing them to converts and helping them celebrate the famous converts from the past. It was Maller's hope that this education, coupled with an improvement in the quality as well as the numbers of conversion classes, would increase the number of conversionary marriages.<sup>84</sup>

Surveys proved that there was an increase in intermarriage in the '60s and '70s. The numbers reported in these surveys represented people who had thoughts and sometimes deeply held convictions about intermarriage. Rabbis and laity alike disagreed on the causes, the effects, and, more importantly, what was the solution to the intermarriage problem. We have reviewed the wide-ranging opinions held by Jews and non-Jews alike and can conclude that there was a great deal of concern expressed over all the issues involved with intermarriages. Despite the disagreements over causes, effects,

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<sup>83</sup> Mayer and Scheingold, "Intermarriage and the Jewish Future," 17.

<sup>84</sup> Maller, "Jewish Gentile Marriages: Another Look at the Problem," 69-70.

and solutions, the one opinion that everyone seemed to agree upon was that intermarriage was not going to vanish in the immediate future.

Rabbi Alexander Schindler, who was to play a major role in what was a critically important initiative that sought to ameliorate the intermarriage problem, entered the rabbinate in 1953 as an assistant rabbi at Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts, and through a series of promotions in 1973, he became president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. During these first twenty years of his rabbinate, Schindler was exposed to the problems posed by intermarriages. As a young rabbi directing the youth programs in Worcester, he most certainly met couples who were intermarrying, and he most likely had discussions with his youth groups about interdating. Under his aegis as director of Education at the UAHC, the textbook quoted above, *Consecrated Unto Thee*, dealt extensively with the problems of posed by intermarriage. As Director of Education, then Vice-President and, finally, as President of the UAHC, he had to have been acutely aware of the problems caused by intermarriage, as well as the rabbinic debates regarding this issue that raged during the various CCAR conferences. As we will see, Schindler proposed a bold initiative that was aimed at tackling the intermarriage dilemma directly. First, however, we shall look at his life and the formative influences that shaped his early development and, ultimately, influenced his thinking on intermarriage.

## CHAPTER 2

### What Made Outreach Important To Alexander Schindler?

In his book *Generation Exodus*, Walter Laqueur examined the generation of German Jews born between the years of 1914-1928. Laqueur revealed that there were about 80,000 of them, and about three fourths of that number escaped from Nazi Germany.<sup>85</sup> In many ways they were a remarkable generation. According to Laqueur, this particular cohort "did rather well perhaps because they had to start from scratch, because there was no helping hand, no money, no connections, no safety net. For them, it was a question of sinking or swimming. For some of this generation, it can certainly be said that but for Hitler and the Nazis they would never have gone as far in life as they did."<sup>86</sup>

Alexander Schindler was one of the Germans who escaped the terror of the Nazis and became a noted leader in the Reform Movement. In this chapter, we shall explore what was in his life that caused him to become such a vocal proponent of the Outreach program.

The vast majority of the Jewish families who escaped Nazi Germany and settled in America were very much assimilated. They felt primarily German; their Jewishness was incidental. It is rather surprising, then, that so many of this generation became Reform Rabbis. Some studied initially in Germany and later abroad. Others began their studies in the United States. As Laqueur noted in his book, these German-born rabbis did remarkably well. In fact, at the annual convention of the CCAR in 1983, the CCAR president was Herman Schaalman. At that same meeting, Gunther Plaut succeeded him as

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<sup>85</sup> Walter Laqueur, preface to *Generation Exodus* (Hanover, NH: University Press, 2001), xi.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.



president. The presidents of the three major Reform institutions—the Hebrew Union College, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the World Union of Progressive Judaism—were Alfred Gottschalk, Alexander Schindler, and Gerard Daniel, respectively. And rounding out this list, the president of the Jewish Theological Seminary was Ismar Schorsch. All of these men I just mentioned were German born and members of what Laqueur called the “Generation Exodus.”<sup>87</sup>

Alexander Schindler’s life and career exemplify the characteristics that typify *Generation Exodus* as expounded by Laqueur. Schindler was born in Munich in 1925 to Eliezer and Sali Schindler. His sister, Eva, had been born a year earlier. The family escaped from Germany in 1938, settled in New York, and later moved to New Jersey, where they ran a chicken farm for two years. Alexander served as a ski trooper in the United States Army, and he participated in campaigns in Italy, where he earned both a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. After World War II, he decided to become a rabbi and was ordained at Hebrew Union College in 1953. Following his ordination, Schindler served Congregation Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts, for six years.<sup>88</sup> He then moved on to become the first Director of the UAHC Northeast Region. In 1963 he joined the national staff at the UAHC as Director of the Commission of Jewish Education. He became Vice President of the UAHC in 1967, and in 1973 succeeded Maurice Eisendrath as president of the UAHC, a position he held for twenty-two years until his retirement in 1996. From 1976–1978, he also served as Chair of the Conference

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 278–285.

<sup>88</sup> Albert Vorspan, “Ohev Yisrael, Alexander M. Schindler, a Profile” in *The Jewish Condition*, ed. Aron Hirt-Manheimer (New York: UAHC Press, 1995), 9.

of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations. He died on November 15, 2000, at the age of 75.<sup>89</sup>

Why did Schindler become so passionately interested in and committed to the notion of Outreach? One influence that undoubtedly shaped Schindler's thoughts came from his father's intellectual legacy. Eliezer Schindler was a Yiddish poet who wrote 28 volumes including some children's stories. His poems consisted mainly of religious themes expressing faith in the Jewish people and its future. The poems were read throughout Eastern Europe, and today they are still read in Israel. One of the songs his father composed was sung at Schindler's installation as president of the UAHC in 1973 and again at his daughter Judy's installation as rabbi when her proud father installed her at her first congregation. Schindler repeatedly reminisced that his father loved all Jews, no matter what their religious or intellectual orientation may have been. The term he used to describe this all-encompassing love of all Jews was *Ohev Israel*. He described his upbringing as traditional, although his grandparents were Orthodox.<sup>90</sup> Schindler traced his lineage to Moshe Sofer of Pseversk, the Or Pne Moshe who was a spiritual companion of the Baal Shem Tov.<sup>91</sup> In fact, his fraternal grandfather was a devotee of the Belzer Rebbe. Young Alexander and his sister, Eva, attended the Jewish school in town for their first five years of schooling, as did all the Jews in the town. Their teachers were relatives of Henry Kissinger. Although the school was associated with an Orthodox

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<sup>89</sup> "Biographical Sketch", *An Inventory to the Alexander M. Schindler Papers*.

<http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/aja/findingaids/schindler.htm> (accessed October 1, 2006).

<sup>90</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Interview with Alexander Schindler." Interview by Jaclyn Jeffrey on behalf of the Survivors of Shoah History Foundation, videorecording. Westport, Connecticut, September 2, 1998.

<sup>91</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Jewish Unity and Jewish Education." Remarks before the Rabbinical Assembly, 66<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention held in Toronto on May 18, 1966, The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter referred to as AJA), Manuscript Collection 630 (hereafter this collection is indicated unless otherwise specified), Box 24, Folder 1 (hereafter this will be indicated as 24/1).

synagogue, Eliezer Schindler brought his young son to the Liberal synagogue in the community. Interestingly, his sister, Eva, chose at an early age to remain Orthodox and attended the Orthodox synagogue on her own each Shabbat.<sup>92</sup> Because his mother, Sali Schindler, worked long hours, it was his father who walked the two children to and from school each day. Schindler remembered his father fondly. In his mind, his father's kind and gentle manner stood in contrast to his mother's more forceful personality. Sali was a hard-driving businesswoman. He may have spent more time with his father, at least in those early years.<sup>93</sup> Schindler recounted the following story about his father when he received the Bublik Prize at Hebrew University in July of 1978:

When I was a little boy, my father, *zichrono livracha*, took me to Warsaw where we visited the *shtibel* of the Umaner Chassidim, the devotees of Reb Nachman, the Bratslaver Rebbe. It was a *shtibel* like other such *shtibels* with but one remarkable exception. Carved into the wood of the synagogue's sacred ark was not the usual inscription *da lifne me atta omed* ... "know before whom you stand," but rather a yiddish phrase, *Yidn zait sich nisht misyaesh* ... "Jews do not despair". Remember, if you will, the setting in which I read this affirmation. This was the Warsaw of the middle thirties, the days of the gathering storm. The ax was already lifted, its blade well sharpened. The pyres piled high ready for the burning. Still, this summons to hope. I later learned that this had been the rebbe's favorite saying, his constant, life-long admonition to his followers. "Jews do not despair ... *gevalt* ... never despair." This experience made its lasting impression. The Bratslaver's saying is seared into my soul. Words like despair and gloom, hopelessness and doom simply are not a part of my life's vocabulary. And what if reason dictates otherwise? Well, the reason must be transcended. For when the philosopher postulates, "I think, therefore, I am," The Jew within me emphatically replies, "I believe, therefore I live."<sup>94</sup>

Eliezer taught his son not only to be accepting and appreciative of all Jews, but also he taught his son to be hopeful and optimistic about the future of the Jewish people.

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<sup>92</sup> Eva Oles, telephone interview with the author, January 15, 2007.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander M. Schindler Interview, Videorecording September 2, 1998.

<sup>94</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Address at Mount Scopus." Acceptance of the Bublik Prize at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel. July, 1978. *AJA*, 24/2.

Alexander learned his father's lessons very well. In fact, Schindler's widow, Rhea, recounted fondly that her husband loved all Jews, not just Reform Jews.<sup>95</sup>

Schindler's love of the Jewish people undoubtedly influenced his passion for Outreach, but it was his experiences during the Holocaust years which had the most profound influence on the choices he made later in life. These experiences, which were shared one way or the other by the remarkable *Generation Exodus* mentioned earlier in this chapter, completely changed the direction of his life. Schindler recorded an interview for Steven Spielberg's *Shoah* Project. During the opening of the interview, Schindler pointed out that he was literally not a survivor like those who survived the horror of the concentration camps. On the other hand, he noted that he experienced Nazi oppression. These recollections are worth recounting for they underlie his passion for Jewish survival.

Eliezer Schindler had no illusions about Adolf Hitler. He had read *Mein Kampf* soon after its publication and realized that were Hitler to come to power, it would pose a grave danger for the Jews. He tried to warn the Jews of Munich of this pending danger. The day Hitler was elected in 1933, Eliezer fled Germany because he was a known Hitler opponent. That night the SA [*Sturmabteilung* (storm troopers)] were at the Schindler apartment looking for Eliezer, marking the end of life as the Schindler family had known it.<sup>96</sup>

Ironically, because the German economy had improved so much under Hitler, Sali Schindler's mail order business did very well. Schindler remembered his mother as a no-nonsense businesswoman, and described her as a very strong-willed person who was able

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<sup>95</sup> Rhea Schindler, telephone interview with the author held on September 27, 2006.

<sup>96</sup> Alexander M. Schindler Interview, Videorecording September 2, 1998.

to get what she wanted and convince others to do things her way. Her mail order business grew to be the third largest in all of Germany. Her grit and determination served the family well, especially during the Hitler years and beyond, when the family immigrated to the United States.<sup>97</sup>

Eliezer knew the family could not remain in Germany for very long under Hitler, but he also knew the family would need money. Therefore, Sali remained in Germany with the children for five more years, and from 1933 to 1938, she smuggled money out to her husband a little at a time. This was not an easy feat, since most of her bookkeepers were Nazis, and the Nazis were slowly strangling Jewish businesses with the oppressive Nuremburg Laws. It required some ingenuity on her part to keep her smuggling a secret. Those five years were not easy for the family and particularly for young Alexander. After five years in the Jewish school, he entered a general school where he was the only Jew. He did not experience physical brutality, but there was abundant mental cruelty. The school day began with a prayer that ended in the "name of Jesus Christ who was killed by the Jews," and at that point the class would turn to stare at Alexander. Every subject was designed to build hatred for Jews and trumpet the superiority of the Aryan nation. For example, in arithmetic, the students were asked if you have ten Jews and kill four of them, how many Jews remain? Alexander and Eva were not allowed to go outside in the afternoon, because Sali was afraid they would be kidnapped. In the afternoon, they were tutored by unemployed Jewish university professors who now made a living tutoring other Jews. As a result of these harsh conditions, the brutality of his school day and the solitary existence the Schindlers led, young Alexander became withdrawn and shy. He loved the vacations they took several times a year to visit his father in various places

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

throughout Europe. He said it was like being in the sunlight after the bleak atmosphere of their German existence.<sup>98</sup>

In 1938 the Nazis firebombed the liberal synagogue in Munich. Eliezer told Sali it was time for the family to leave; things would only get worse. She sent the two children to their father in Switzerland in the company of another woman. She then turned her business over to others and fled to Poland. When she got to Poland, she had no visa, but her father-in-law had told her that she should give the Belzer Rebbe some money when she arrived in Poland in order to ensure a safe journey. She went to the Rebbe, and he arranged for her to travel to Budapest disguised as a nun traveling to a conference there. Once she arrived in Budapest, she attempted to check into a hotel but had no money to pay for a room. The hotel clerk would not take her word that her husband would pay for her hotel room and refused to register her. She was attempting to call Eliezer when a man overheard her mention the name Schindler. The man approached Sali and explained that Eliezer had lent him money to attend a wedding in Budapest, and he offered to help get her to Switzerland. The family was united at last, and a few weeks later left for a new life in the United States.<sup>99</sup>

The family settled in New York City's Washington Heights and Alexander went to school where he learned to speak English. A few years later, the family moved to Lakewood, New Jersey, where they bought a chicken farm. Chicken farming was deemed to be an essential occupation, and the family hoped that the work on this farm would be so essential that Alexander would not be drafted. However, Alexander was drafted into the army, and was granted US citizenship before he left for Italy. He was in the 10th

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

Mountain Division as part of the ski patrol. His sister, Eva, recalled that the family was very upset the day he shipped out. His years in the service were extremely hard for the family because they knew that his particular division was decimated.<sup>100</sup> Schindler recalled the difficult campaigns with many deaths among his fellow soldiers, and also miles, not of skiing, but trudging behind laden mules. Towards the end of the war, while stationed on the border of Yugoslavia, he borrowed a jeep to drive to Germany to see if he could find any of his relatives who had not heeded Eliezer's repeated warnings and were not able to escape from Germany. The family had been aware of the existence of Dachau before they left Germany. Indeed, a common prayer was, "Dear God, make me quiet, so they won't take me to Dachau." Schindler arrived in Dachau several weeks after it had been liberated to see if he could find his family members. What he experienced in Dachau changed the direction of his life. He saw not only the horrors wreaked by the Nazis on the people who had survived, but he also realized that his entire family was dead. When talking about this experience, Schindler reflected that he had become inured to death in the army because he had seen so much of it. But this was different. These were his family members: the grandparents he loved; his relatives. And all the dead were Jews.<sup>101</sup>

His personal experience at Dachau, and what was discovered later of the systematic extermination of the Jews, caused the young Schindler to rethink his career options. When Schindler returned to the United States, he decided not to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering. Instead, he majored in Jewish studies at CCNY. His honors thesis entitled *From Discrimination to Extermination* chronicled the evolution of Nazi

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<sup>100</sup> Eva Oles. Telephone interview January 15, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander M. Schindler Interview. Videorecording September 2, 1998.

destruction of the Jews. Schindler read all the documents from the Nuremburg trials, and therefore learned the full truth of what had transpired.<sup>102</sup> In his senior year, he decided to become a rabbi; and his decision was not only fully supported by his father, but his father insisted that his son attend Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, because it had the reputation of being the best liberal seminary.<sup>103</sup> Schindler mused as he was recounting this part of his life that he thought of the *shoah* [the Holocaust] every day. He wondered how anyone could ever forget an experience like that. He had survived and decided, quoting Emil Fackenheim, not to grant Hitler a posthumous victory. He did this by attempting to rebuild what had been destroyed. Obviously, the dead could not be brought back, but he resolved "to do everything humanly possible to secure the safety of the Jewish people wherever they are, and to ensure creative continuity by encouraging the rebirth of the cultural religious force which has sustained this peculiar stiff necked people all these years."<sup>104</sup> Also, because the Jewish people had suffered so grievously, Schindler believed Jews had a responsibility to show compassion and to respond to suffering wherever it occurred, to heal the wounds of all who suffer. In both his professional life and in his volunteer work, which included helping Holocaust survivors, Schindler strove to do just this.<sup>105</sup>

Alexander Schindler freely admitted that the organizational skills he used in his job as president of the UAHC came from his mother, but his love of Judaism and the Jewish people, along with his desire to serve them, were lessons learned from his

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Eva Oles, Telephone interview January 15, 2007.

<sup>104</sup> Alexander M. Schindler, Interview. Videorecording, September 2, 1998.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.



father.<sup>106</sup> Yet Schindler also had a gift that was invaluable in his work for the UAHC and, by extension, for the Jewish people. His close friend and co-worker Albert Vorspan wrote a profile in the festchrift written to honor Schindler upon his retirement after thirty-four years of service to the UAHC, twenty-two of them as its president. Vorspan said, "Schindler somehow managed to address charged issues without appearing to be righteous or polarizing...Alex was respected and also loved. His leadership was characterized by immense personal warmth and self-deprecating humor. While many congregants disagreed with his views, almost to a person, they liked and cherished him."<sup>107</sup>

Schindler's leadership skills became apparent early in his career. As a young rabbi in Worcester, Massachusetts, where among other assignments—which included leading services and teaching adult education—Schindler had the major responsibility of leading the youth. According to his senior rabbi, Joseph Klein, Schindler had won the affection of both young and old. Under his watch, the Temple Emanuel youth group grew to be the "envy of congregations throughout the country." Schindler served as dean at four successive leadership institutes of the National Federation of Temple Youth. While serving at Temple Emanuel, he also served as director of Hillel at both Clark University and Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and was officer or board member of Worcester Zionist District, Worcester Jewish Federation, Jewish Social Service Agencies, B'nai Brith, Jewish War Veterans, Kiwanis, and the Boy Scouts of America. He also lectured before community and regional church groups. Somehow between all of these activities, Schindler met his wife, Rhea. They married in 1956, and a year later their first child was born. Klein noted in his farewell address to him that Schindler had

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Vorspan, "Ohev Yisrael, Alexander M. Schindler, a Profile," 2.

brought their congregation national recognition for the outstanding character of their youth program. Interestingly, only two years following his ordination, Schindler delivered a sermon entitled "Do We Seek Converts?—Judaism: A Missionary Religion."<sup>108</sup> We can deduce from this that Schindler was thinking about proselytizing very early in his rabbinic career.

Schindler was only in the regional office for about three-and-a-half years before he was asked to become the Director of the Commission on Jewish Education in February of 1963. Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, who was president of the UAHC at the time, called Schindler "our popular regional director in the New England area." Eisendrath further said that they were confident that they had picked one of the most qualified people in the rabbinate to do the job.<sup>109</sup>

Education became a top priority under Schindler's leadership. Eisendrath mentioned in his remarks in May 1965 that the UAHC was turning the corner in their educational programming, which boded well for the coming generation of Reform Jews.<sup>110</sup> Under Schindler's leadership, work was begun on a liberal Torah commentary; he created a teacher education department and vastly expanded the textbooks being published by the UAHC. *Consecrated Unto Me*, the textbook quoted in the first chapter of this thesis, was even being used by the Methodist Church. The fact that the textbook dealt frankly with the subject of sex was unusual for its time. In addition, Schindler began a magazine for teachers called *The Jewish Teacher*, and *Keeping Posted* became

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<sup>108</sup> Temple Emanuel Bulletin, Worcester, MA. 5/23/1953-6/10/1959, Microfilm, Periodical Center, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

<sup>109</sup> Union of American Hebrew Congregations (hereafter referred to as UAHC) Executive Committee Minutes, February 4, 1963, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3657.

<sup>110</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, May 23, 1965, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3659.

the largest English language publication issued anywhere in the world for Jewish youth. *The Jewish Teacher* was eventually supplanted by *Dimensions of American Judaism*, a publication begun by Schindler, which by the end of 1967 had the largest subscription list of any Jewish publication outside of *Commentary*.<sup>111</sup> Eisendrath obviously liked and admired his young leader of education, but he was not alone in his admiration. J. Jacques Stone, the first Reform Jew to be chosen as President of the Jewish Education Committee of New York, said that Schindler was recognized as one of the great authorities in Jewish education.<sup>112</sup> In February of 1967, Eisendrath asked Schindler to fill the vice-president slot at the UAHC. From then on, Schindler was an active participant in the UAHC board meetings. He urged the UAHC to join the World Jewish Congress, informed the UAHC about the videocassette revolution that was in its infancy in 1970, and endorsed having women represented on the UAHC board. When Eisendrath was sidelined due to an extended illness, Schindler rose to the occasion and led the union well for almost two years. Many spoke favorably at executive board meetings of his leadership abilities. The chairman of the Board, Earl Morse, said, "All I can tell you it that the ship of state has been in very strong hands, indeed, and everything is moving along extremely well under the very diffident leadership of Alex Schindler."<sup>113</sup>

In February of 1972, Eisendrath nominated Schindler to become the next president of the UAHC commencing with his [Eisendrath's] retirement in 1973. When Schindler accepted the position, he mentioned that he was humbled by the task but

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<sup>111</sup>UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, Nov. 11, 1967, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3660.

<sup>112</sup>UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, May 22, 1966, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3660.

<sup>113</sup>UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, March 9, 1971, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3662.

comforted that he would not stand alone because Eisendrath would stand with him. In the inclusiveness which became a hallmark of his leadership style, Schindler stated that day in February, "In the final analysis, the future of our movement depends upon the quality of that leadership, not on the single man alone, but on the whole, for what the single man cannot do, all of us in concert, might and will."<sup>114</sup>

Tragically, Schindler was not to have Eisendrath as a mentor. Eisendrath was stricken with a fatal heart attack at the UAHC biennial in 1973, just hours before he was to deliver his Presidential message to the Union. Schindler chose to deliver Eisendrath's speech word for word, despite its strong condemnation of then President Richard Nixon. When Schindler spoke to the UAHC Executive Committee only two days later, he said he was asked where he got the strength to continue. He was with Eisendrath just moments before he was stricken and yet was able to deliver his speech. In a reflection of his leadership style, Schindler told the board, "Your strength sustained me, and it will continue to sustain me. The task is great. No doubt the demands exceed my capacity. I do have the will, though. I need, I desperately need your help. I know that it is forthcoming and that it will be forthcoming."<sup>115</sup>

Schindler's leadership abilities did not just reside in the United States. During Schindler's tenure as Chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, Menachem Begin was elected Prime Minister of Israel. Schindler and Yehuda Hellman, then the Director of the Conference, flew to Israel and met with Begin. Schindler personally contacted Jewish leaders to rally the American Jewish community

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<sup>114</sup>UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, February 12, 1972, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3662.

<sup>115</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 7, 1983, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3696.

behind the newly-elected Prime Minister, and they did so despite their initial distrust of Begin.<sup>116</sup> Schindler became a confidant of Begin's, who lauded him for his leadership. Because of his dedication and work, Schindler was awarded the Bublik Prize of Hebrew University in 1978, an honor he shared with David ben Gurion and Harry Truman.<sup>117</sup>

Schindler did not use polls, and even though he frequently consulted people before he acted on his proposals, the buck stopped with him; he took responsibility for his initiatives. His instincts served him well; he seemed to anticipate the right time to introduce new initiatives. The combination of his personal charm, his ambitious visions, and his keen political instincts made Schindler a successful leader.<sup>118</sup>

David Singer wrote an article in *Commentary* magazine in July of 1979 entitled "Living With Intermarriage." Toward the end of his article, he explained,

As the intermarriage rate continues to rise, and it will almost certainly do so, pressures to accede to it will become even stronger within the community. The stronger these pressures become, the more they will encourage mixed unions which in turn will generate still further demands for concessions. The spiral is almost certainly bound to continue upward. This does not mean that American Jewry is in danger of disappearing. No matter what, a sizable Jewish community will be maintained by the simple device of redefining Jewishness in such a way as to include all kinds of people whose *bona fides* would not previously have been acceptable.<sup>119</sup>

Alexander Schindler was well aware of the problems posed by intermarriage. His wife, Rhea, recalled that people came to him for advice concerning intermarriage. There was one couple who really stood out in his mind because they came to him four or five

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<sup>116</sup> Vorspan, "Ohev Yisrael. Alexander M. Schindler, a Profile," 6-7. Begin's election brought 3 decades of Labor party rule to an end. Many American Jews distrusted his terrorist past and feared his more right-wing tendencies. He and Schindler became good friends, and it is hoped that in the future some historian looks into this friendship in depth.

<sup>117</sup> Emily Grotta, E-mail to UAHC Board Members, November 15, 2000. AJA Nearprint files, Alexander Schindler.

<sup>118</sup> Albert Vorspan, Telephone interview with the author held on August 24, 2006.

<sup>119</sup> David Singer, "Living With Intermarriage," *Commentary* 68, no. 1(1979), 52-53.

times and never got married because they could not resolve the issues involved in their situation.<sup>120</sup> In his capacity, first, as a congregational rabbi, then as regional director, and finally in his leadership in the UAHC, he was exposed to the problems created by a spiraling intermarriage rate. In a speech he gave to the Executive Committee of the UAHC in December of 1978, Schindler remarked, "Intermarriage is the sting which comes to us with the hope of our freedom."<sup>121</sup> He himself deplored intermarriage, and in his own family did his best to discourage it. He was quite emphatic that he wanted his own five children to marry Jews, and, as open as he was, he made that clear to them.<sup>122</sup> In a speech to the UAHC Executive Board, Schindler said that if one of his children were to intermarry, "We will not banish our children, we will not sit *shiva* over them, we will draw them closer to our hearts, and we will do our utmost, everything that is humanly possible to make certain that our grandchildren will be Jews and that they will be a part of this community and share the destiny of this people Israel."<sup>123</sup> The knowledge that intermarriage rates were increasing, and souls were being lost to Judaism, coupled with his interaction with those who had experienced the hurt and frustration that so often accompanied intermarriage, impelled him to try to stem this tide of loss and hurt.

Along with intermarriage, Schindler was concerned about another salient issue: the loss of Jewish youth to cults. He stated on more than one occasion that 30% to 40% of the young people joining cults during the late seventies were Jews. Of these youngsters, he said, "There's a spiritual yearning to which we have to respond in the

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<sup>120</sup> Rhea Schindler, Telephone interview, September 27, 2006.

<sup>121</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3693. 13.

<sup>122</sup> Rhea Schindler, Telephone interview, September 27, 2006.

<sup>123</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978. 22.

whole area of worship."<sup>124</sup> With his background in Jewish education and his love for Jews and Judaism, Schindler must have been pained that these young people were so ignorant or indifferent toward their Jewish heritage that they would be drawn into the cults.

Another influence on his thinking about Outreach was Schindler's affinity for Jewish religious life and the ideals it represented. In the famous speech Schindler delivered in Houston in 1978 to the UAHC Executive Committee, he outlined his concept of Outreach:

Judaism offers life, not death. It teaches free will, not the surrender of body and soul to another human being. The Jew prays directly to God, not through an intermediary who stands between him and his God. Judaism is a religion of hope, not despair. Judaism insists that man and society are perfectible. Judaism has an enormous wealth of wisdom and experience to offer in and to this anguished world, and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, to speak frankly and freely with enthusiasm and with dignity.<sup>125</sup>

Schindler spoke often of his love of Judaism and was perplexed that so many Jews were both ignorant and ashamed of their heritage. He complained that at the current time in history Jews were more self-confident than in any time in their recent past. They wore *kippot* and Stars of David without any fear or even thinking about it. Yet, he felt that this behavior was based on superficialities: the American acceptance of the Jews and the recent show of strength by the Jewish nation of Israel against a powerful enemy. There was a lack of internal pride that was made manifest when many Jews hesitated if it was suggested that the Jewish

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<sup>124</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes September 28, 1980, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E. Microfilmed Records, Reel 3694, 21.

<sup>125</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Outreach: the Case for a Missionary Judaism." Address to the UAHC Board of Trustees reprinted in Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and CCAR, *Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community* (New York, NY: UAHC, 1990), 90.

religion was good enough to share. Several times Schindler recounted the story of a Jew by Choice named John who when asked if he had had any difficult moments during his conversion replied yes. He said when people who were born Jewish found out that he was a convert, they would ask him why he would want to do such a thing, and asked if he was *mishugah* [crazy]. John said that attitude made him wonder if he was perhaps seeing things in Judaism that weren't really there. If people who were born Jewish couldn't see the good he was seeing in Judaism, then what was it he was seeing?<sup>126</sup> Schindler summed up his own feelings by saying, "In a word we [Jews] have an enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer this troubled world and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it frankly, freely and with dignity."<sup>127</sup>

With his love of the Jewish people, his Holocaust experiences, his love of Judaism, and his engaging leadership style, Schindler surprised the Executive Board of the UAHC in December of 1978 with his proposal to launch an Outreach initiative. He spoke to very few people about it ahead of time. One person he spoke to was Albert Vorspan, who was Vice-President of the UAHC at the time. Schindler asked him about the idea of proselytizing to the "unchurched." Vorspan revealed that Schindler felt very strongly about it and wanted to go ahead with it despite his awareness that it was a "political hot potato."<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *Choosing Judaism: Some Personal Perspectives*, Lydia Kukoff . producer. 22 min. UAHC Production, 1981, videocassette.

<sup>127</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Report of the President" to the UAHC 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Toronto, December 6-10, 1979, 6.

<sup>128</sup> Albert Vorspan, Telephone interview with the author held on August 24, 2006.



Schindler also spoke to Lydia Kukoff before launching the Outreach initiative. Kukoff had been doing programs with converts in the Western region under the auspices of Regional Director Rabbi Erwin Herman, and her program of support for new Jews by Choice had impressed Schindler. Kukoff told him that the potential for a national Outreach program was enormous, and if he was to introduce it, he should be prepared to really commit himself to it. Schindler assured her that his commitment was strong. Kukoff later became very active on the Outreach Task Force and directed the UAHC's Outreach initiative for many years.<sup>129</sup>

The idea for an Outreach program did not originate with Schindler. He and Lydia Kukoff had had conversations about the programs she had been overseeing for converts on the West Coast.<sup>130</sup> In 1974 he mentioned that there was a Project Outreach, a program to encourage involvement of unaffiliated Jews in urban areas headed by West Coast Regional Director, Rabbi Erwin Herman.<sup>131</sup> In addition, the CCAR had passed a resolution in 1973 that "called upon its members to assist fully in educating children of mixed marriage as Jews; to provide the opportunity for conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and to encourage a creative and consistent cultivation of involvement in the Jewish community and the synagogue."<sup>132</sup> However, Schindler gathered together these various strands of programming and resolutions and sought to write them into a grand vision of Outreach.

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<sup>129</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Telephone interview with the author held on September 29, 2006.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Alexander Schindler, Presidential message to UAHC, October 1974, AJA, 24/1.

<sup>132</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 83 (1974): 97.

Schindler began his presentation about Outreach to the UAHC Board in December 1978 by remarking that the problem of intermarriage had become acute. The rate of intermarriage was rising and becoming so commonplace that Jews had become more accepting of it than they had in the past. He said that facing the problem did not mean sitting *shiva* [mourning] for the Jewish community, that intermarriage itself did not lead to Jewish population decline. A couple involved in an intermarriage could choose to live a Jewish life and raise their children as Jews, thereby adding to, not subtracting, members from the Jewish community.<sup>133</sup>

The Outreach program as outlined by Rabbi Schindler was composed of three parts: (a) Outreach to the convert, (b) Outreach to the non-Jewish spouse in a mixed marriage, and, probably most surprising to those in attendance at the meeting (c) Outreach to those who were religiously unaffiliated—the “unchurched.”

Both through his conversations with Lydia Kukoff and also through his interactions with congregants and those who sought his advice in his work for the UAHC, Schindler was aware of the problems converts faced. He said, “Newcomers to Judaism, in short, must embark on a long-term naturalization process, and they require knowledgeable guides along the way, that they may feel themselves fully equal members of the synagogue family.”<sup>134</sup> He eloquently pled for further help for the new convert who may not have known how to establish a Jewish home or may have needed guidance in how to raise their children

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<sup>133</sup> Alexander Schindler, “Outreach: the Case for a Missionary Judaism,” 83-85.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 86.

Jewishly. Also, converts had special needs relating to problems with their non-Jewish families or facing a Jewish future without a Jewish past upon which to rely. Finally, converts faced discrimination similar to that expressed by John, who was quoted above, by born Jews who just could not understand why anyone would want to become a Jew.<sup>135</sup>

In discussing the non-Jewish spouse in an intermarriage who didn't desire to convert, Rabbi Schindler quoted extensively from Frederick Masserick's article entitled "Rethinking the Intermarriage Crisis" which appeared in the June 1978 edition of *Moment* magazine and was quoted in the last chapter. All of the statistical studies Masserick had researched during the '70s showed that the majority of the non-Jewish partners in an intermarriage did not convert. Masserick noted that the two out of three intermarriages involved a non-Jewish wife and a Jewish husband. About one in four of the women did convert, but the conversion rates when the husband was the non-Jew were much lower. Masserick also noted what he referred to as a "Jewish drift." According to Masserick, non-Jewish spouses, although they did not formally convert, oftentimes identified themselves as Jews. Schindler saw this "Jewish drift" as a ripe opportunity for the Jewish community to draw the non-Jewish spouse into Jewish life. The non-Jew might then decide to convert, but, at the very least, the chances that the children would be brought up as Jews would drastically increase.<sup>136</sup> Schindler said, "We must remove the 'not wanted' signs from our hearts. We are opposed to intermarriage, but we cannot reject the intermarried. And we cannot but be aware

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 85-86.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

that in our current behavior, we communicate rejection.”<sup>137</sup> He advocated fuller participation by the non-Jewish spouse in synagogue life, noting that even the strictest interpretation of *halacha* [Jewish law] allowed for non-Jewish participation in most of ceremonial and life-cycle events.<sup>138</sup> He even mentioned patrilineal descent in this section of his speech. “Why, why should a movement which from its very birth has insisted on the full equality of men and women in the religious life unquestionably accept the principle of Jewish lineage through the maternal line?”<sup>139</sup> He did not propose a solution to this quandary in this particular speech, but he asked for a Task Force to see if there was a possibility of harmonizing the tradition with the modern need.<sup>140</sup>

The last proposal, Schindler claimed, would be the most controversial, and that would be to proselytize to the non-Jewish population. In his speech he said,

It would be easy to tip-toe here, to use obfuscatory language and be satisfied to hint at my purpose. But I will not. Unabashedly and urgently, I propose that we resume our vocation as champions of Judaism; that we move from passive acceptance to affirmative action....I want to reach the unchurched, those reared in non-religious homes or those who have become disillusioned with their taught beliefs. I want to reach those seekers after truth who require a religion which tolerates—more than tolerates, encourages all questions. I want especially to reach the rootless and the alienated who need the warmth and comfort of a people known for its close family ties, a people of ancient and noble heritage.<sup>141</sup>

Where did this idea come from? Jews had not proselytized for about five centuries prior to Schindler’s proposal in 1978. The germination of this idea

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> UAHF Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978, 20.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

<sup>141</sup> Alexander Schindler, “Outreach: the Case for a Missionary Judaism,” 88-89.

came from his father, Eliezer. In a memo written in 1994, Schindler said, "My father was interested in United Israel because it was an outreach organization intended to bring non-Jews to Judaism and welcome them appropriately."<sup>142</sup> Eliezer believed in converting non-Jews to Judaism and discussed this idea with his son. In his biographical profile of Schindler in *The Jewish Condition*, Albert Vorspan pointed out that Eliezer Schindler loved Judaism so much he wanted to share it with non-Jews. Eliezer told his young son that after he escaped from a Siberian prison, on his way home across the Russian steppes, he encountered a village where all the residents had embraced Judaism, although they had never formally converted. These unconverted converts were called *subbotniks* because they refused to work or discuss worldly affairs on the Sabbath, and they would read from Torah. Eliezer remained in the village several months and taught Hebrew to the *subbotniks*. He was clearly affected by these villagers, and Eliezer took up the cause of "missionary" Judaism. He co-edited a journal called *Der Ruf* (*The Summons*), which called upon Jews to be more assertive and to share what they had with the rest of the world. Vorspan quoted a speech Schindler delivered in 1988: "All my life, my father reminded me that people who have no mission are suspect of having no message, of possessing nothing that is sufficiently worthy to share with others. He was also the first to tell me what Albert Einstein

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<sup>142</sup>Alexander Schindler, Memo to Dru Greenwood 2/10/94, AJA 10/1. United Israel was formed in 1944 by David Horowitz. Its sole purpose is to publish historical and biblical research on the Lost Tribes of Israel and to promote their "return" to both the Hebrew Faith and their identification with the Jewish People.

had said: 'I am sorry that I was *born* a Jew, for it kept me from '*choosing*' to be a Jew.'"<sup>143</sup>

Schindler pointed out on more than one occasion that Judaism had not always been opposed to proselytizing. Indeed, he reminded his audience that in Isaiah one can find the exhortation that Jews should be a light to the nations (Isaiah 49:6) and that God's house be a house of prayer for all (Isaiah 56:7). Schindler explained that Jews had proselytized in the past, reaching a zenith in the Maccabean period when they succeeded in converting 10% of the population of the Roman Empire. Even the Talmud explains that while Jews were instructed to push converts away with the left hand, they needed to pull them in with the right hand (Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 10:2 (29b)). In the Middle Ages, Jews were put to death if they were caught seeking converts. As a consequence, around the sixteenth century efforts to proselytize ceased. After that the rabbis began their systematic rejection of converts.<sup>144</sup>

Schindler believed with all his heart that Judaism had much to offer the world. He quoted Hayim Greenberg, a Yiddish essayist, who wrote, "I think that a people which believes that its religion is an expression of eternal truth is duty bound to proselytize; it must not monopolize the truth for itself, but should spread it among others."<sup>145</sup> Even before he announced his Outreach initiative, he said, "This is a task which is really ours. From Abraham's day on we always were charged with a mandate to make Jews out of non-Jews. It is an historic mission

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<sup>143</sup>Vorspan, "Ohev Yisrael, Alexander M. Schindler, a Profile," 10.

<sup>144</sup>UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978, 24.

<sup>145</sup> Hayim Greenberg as quoted by Alexander Schindler in President's Report to UAHC December 6-10, 1979, 6.

which we have shuffled [sic] off under the pressures of an antagonistic world, but which we ought to reassume."<sup>146</sup> In his speech about Outreach, he said,

Judaism has an enormous wealth of wisdom and experience to offer in and to this anguished world, and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it....People want meaning; they want to find a way that makes sense, and matters, and they are determined to succeed....And have we not, we Jews, water to slake the thirst and bread to sate the great hunger? And having it, are we not obliged—for our own sake as well as for those who seek that which we have—to offer it freely and proudly?<sup>147</sup>

Not only did Schindler believe that Judaism had much to offer to those who were seeking religion, but he also wanted to bolster the self-esteem of the twentieth century Reform Jew. As has been mentioned previously, he was disturbed by the comments made by John, the Jew by Choice who had relayed that born Jews were incredulous that he would actually want to voluntarily become a Jew. Schindler made explicit that one of his purposes in proposing Outreach was to change the self-image of the Jew.<sup>148</sup>

I urged this policy not only for the sake of "others" or to increase our numbers, but for our inner well-being too. The process of reaching out requires a prior searching within. Perforce, it will compel us to correct our self perception, and to confront our convictions, to establish once and for all just what we believe and how deeply we believe it....Something happens to the student who is called upon to teach. Something happens to the Jew who is asked to explain the character of his tradition to one outside the in-born circle. Most Jews have taken Judaism as a biological gift, a consequence of birth which is lived in incestuous company. Unchallenged, they take the spiritual and moral insights of Judaism for granted, or more correctly, reduce its imperatives to the ethnicity of food taste, hand gesture, and voice inflection. Called upon to interpret the spiritual conscience of Judaism to others, the

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<sup>146</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978, 15.

<sup>147</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Outreach: the Case for a Missionary Judaism," 90.

<sup>148</sup> UAHC Executive Committee minutes May 20, 1979, AJA Manuscript Collection 72. Series E. Microfilmed Records, Reel 3694, 179.

Jew may gain for himself a new self-awareness, new self-esteem and a new ability to articulate his convictions...."Israel" encompasses religious and moral values, the universal concepts, the mandate of mission, the Jewish People itself.<sup>149</sup>

Life's circumstances and his upbringing played a significant role in shaping Schindler's world-view and certainly helped him face problems that plagued Reform Judaism. His love of all Jewish people was a legacy from his father, while his firm commitment to achieve despite obstacles was a legacy from his mother. The terrible losses of the Holocaust, coupled with his love of the Jewish experience, drove Schindler to ensure that it would live on. All of these things combined brought him to a point where the idea of Outreach with all of its nuances became an imperative for him.

Schindler had the concept and the vision for Outreach. Once the UAHC Board approved it—and they did so unanimously in the December 1978 meeting—it was up to the Task Force on Outreach to translate Schindler's vision into a viable program.

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<sup>149</sup> Alexander Schindler Conference paper entitled "The Greater Israel." Undated, but somewhere in 1976-1978. AJA. 24/2.



### Chapter 3

#### Making the Vision of Outreach a Reality

Alexander Schindler revealed his vision for an ambitious Outreach Program during a speech he delivered to the UAHC Executive Board in December 1978. As powerful as the dream of a Jewish Outreach was for him, he had no plan or budget for the program. The work of turning Schindler's dream into a viable UAHC program fell to the Outreach Task Force.

This chapter will explore the work of the Outreach Task Force, looking specifically at the three areas outlined by Schindler in his 1978 speech: outreach to those who converted to Judaism, outreach to mixed married couples where there was no conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and outreach to what Schindler called the "unchurched" [meaning those who have no religious affiliation whatsoever]. This chapter will also present a summary of the various responses to Schindler's Outreach initiatives.

The Outreach Task Force needed a dynamic chair. David Belin, an attorney well known for his role as counsel to the Warren Commission and as executive director of the Rockefeller Commission, was asked to take the leadership role on the newly created Task Force.<sup>150</sup> Belin had been active in the Reform movement for several years, was a member of the UAHC Board of Trustees and was a personal friend of Schindler's. His litigating skills combined with his rational, analytical nature, and his love of Reform Judaism all combined to make him a qualified chairman.<sup>151</sup> Belin was very concerned about the future of the Jewish community, not just in the US, but throughout the world.

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<sup>150</sup> David Belin, *Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1985), note about the author.

<sup>151</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Telephone interview with the author held on November 7, 2006.

He had assisted with a redevelopment of Jewish education in Des Moines, Iowa, but became convinced that education was not enough to ensure Jewish survival. He said, "I became so enthusiastic with the opportunity for the American Jewish community, indeed for the non-Jewish community because I believe it is important not just for Jews, but for non-Jews that there be a vibrant Jewish community in this country."<sup>152</sup> Belin wrote a letter to Schindler on December 8, 1978, less than a week after Schindler had delivered his speech to the UAHC Executive Board:

I was pleased to read the front page story in the December 3, New York Sunday Times about your speech. Al Vorspan, I am sure, discussed with you last summer my deep convictions on the subject of proselytizing. This is a subject that must be discussed and viewed objectively and dispassionately. In many respects, I think your speech could be one of the most significant in the history of American Reform Judaism. As a matter of fact, it could be one of the most significant talks in the history of Judaism. Because I have been spending so much time and thought in this area over the past few years, I would like to have an opportunity to exchange some views and observations.<sup>153</sup>

The chance to exchange views and observations evolved into Belin's being asked to assume a leading role in the effort to make the changes advocated by Schindler.

One of the resolutions relating to Outreach that was endorsed by the Executive Committee of the UAHC in 1978 was "to implement these principles by calling upon the chairman of the Board to appoint a special Task Force of members of the Board, rabbis, and lay people to examine these recommendations

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<sup>152</sup> "Preliminary Report of the Belin Task Force," Proceedings of UAHC General Assembly held in Toronto, December 1979, microfilm, 162-163. UAHC files, New York, NY.

<sup>153</sup> David Belin, letter to Alexander Schindler, December 8, 1978, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC collection, Box 21/47, Folder, "Outreach Mail Requests."

for implementation in all the program departments of the UAHC.”<sup>154</sup> By December 1979 the Outreach Task Force was comprised of approximately twenty-five rabbis and lay leaders from across the country. The rabbis on the Task Force included several who had conducted conversions. The lay leaders included some who had converted to Judaism as well as parents whose children had married non-Jews, some of whom had not converted.<sup>155</sup> In following the guidelines mandated by the UAHC, the Task Force was comprised of people who represented all aspects of what would ultimately be the Outreach constituency.

One of the most influential lay leaders was Lydia Kukoff.<sup>156</sup> Even before Schindler announced his Outreach initiative, he had already discussed his ideas about Outreach with her. When Schindler’s Outreach initiative became a reality, Kukoff became involved from its inception. She said that it was exciting to “be able to take the ball and run with it.”<sup>157</sup> Kukoff’s enthusiasm for this new initiative may be gauged from the fact that she worked for the Task Force for a year without compensation. Her home was on the West Coast, requiring her to travel often to the East Coast in order for her to do her work for Outreach. In 1980 she became the Director of the Outreach Department at the UAHC. This department was charged with the work of bringing to fruition the recommendations that were made by the Outreach Task Force and, later, by the Outreach Commission, which eventually superseded the Task Force. All of the

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<sup>154</sup> Board of Trustees Outreach resolutions adopted December 1978, [www.urj.org/home/resolutions](http://www.urj.org/home/resolutions) and by-laws/adopted resolutions (accessed August 25, 2006).

<sup>155</sup> “Report of the Belin Task Force,” December 1979, 161-162.

<sup>156</sup> Kukoff was introduced in the previous chapter. She had been doing programs for converts in the western region of the UAHC and was one of the people Schindler consulted before he announced his Outreach initiative.

<sup>157</sup> Lydia Kukoff. Telephone interview with the author on September 29, 2006.

publications, videotapes and programs that emerged from the Outreach initiative had Kukoff's imprint on them.<sup>158</sup>

There were two rabbis involved from the beginning. Rabbi Max Shapiro of Temple Israel in Minneapolis, Minnesota, was appointed co-chair along with David Belin, and the UAHC's own Rabbi Sanford Seltzer served as Director of Special Projects and UAHC Coordinator. Shapiro was serving as Chairman of the CCAR Committee on Conversion at the time, so his participation on the Outreach Task Force certainly appeared logical.<sup>159</sup> Seltzer was director of the Joint Committee on Worship of the CCAR and the UAHC, as well as Regional Director of the UAHC's Northeast region. He was interested in the subject of inter-dating and intermarriage and had published a book entitled *Jews and Non-Jews Falling in Love*. In addition, he had asked Professor Steven Huberman to do a study for the UAHC on intermarriage and conversion in the Boston area.<sup>160</sup>

The agenda set before the Outreach Task Force was enormous. Outreach had to take place within the individual congregations, and there were over 750 congregations at the time the Task Force was formed. How could they all be brought into the process? There was a tremendous need for programs and materials, most of which had to be created from scratch.<sup>161</sup>

There was also a need to have the congregational rabbis involved with Outreach. Initially there was some resistance from the CCAR members who had memories of the bitter arguments that had preceded the 1973 resolution on

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> "Report of the Belin Task Force," December 1979, 161.

<sup>160</sup> Sanford Seltzer. Telephone interview with the author, November 10, 2006. Professor Huberman had done his doctoral dissertation at Brandeis, and the report he issued was a revision of that dissertation.

<sup>161</sup> Lydia Kukoff. Telephone interview September 29, 2006.

Rabbinic Officiation at intermarriages. The CCAR was understandably hesitant to discuss intermarriage in any form. In 1973 the CCAR had gone on record in opposition to rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages. Now their sister organization, the UAHC, was introducing a program to welcome the intermarried couples. Many members of the CCAR probably saw this as a challenge to their authority. However, with the lay leaders of the congregations and the leadership of the UAHC bringing the intermarriage question to the forefront with the Outreach programs, conversations about intermarriage had to occur. Kukoff recalled that at one biennial, there was a heated discussion between representatives of the CCAR and the Outreach Task Force. Kukoff flatly told the CCAR representatives, "We are going to talk about it, and I promise you that no one is going to die!"<sup>162</sup> The Outreach Task Force hypothesized that the Jewish community both wanted and needed to be receptive to the goals of the Outreach platform. They took seriously their task of creating the mechanisms to make that happen.<sup>163</sup>

During December 1979, the Outreach Task Force reported on its progress to a plenary session at the UAHC Biennial meeting held in Toronto. Belin reported that they began their task by looking at the historical perspective to see if, indeed, proselytizing was new to Judaism. Professor Eugene Mihaly of the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College informed them that proselytizing did indeed have a rich history until it became a capital offense in the Middle Ages for Jews to seek converts. The members of the Task Force then read the study

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid. As will be seen, this tension was largely resolved when the Outreach Task Force was superseded by the Joint CCAR-UAHC Outreach Commission.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

authored by Steven Huberman, which reported on the dynamics of conversion. Rabbi Sanford Seltzer, a member of the Task Force Committee, initiated the study and assisted in its implementation. Using the knowledge they had gained from reading this study, the members of the Task Force were able to better prepare themselves to arrange programs both for new Jews and their congregations. The Task Force was assisted by the Joint UAHC-CCAR Commission on Education, which helped in the formulation of materials for the Outreach Task Force.<sup>164</sup>

Once their preliminary research was done, the Task Force identified five groups they wanted to target, all of whom fell within the groups that were introduced in Schindler's speech and consequently were subjects of the resolutions that resulted from his speech. These were: recent converts who needed to be brought more effectively into the existing Jewish community; the non-Jewish partners in mixed marriages, who might under the right circumstances consider conversion; the children of mixed marriages who had no religious preference; the group of people already considering conversion; and, finally, the "unchurched." The Task Force also recognized that there were a vast number of unaffiliated Jews who could also benefit by some type of Outreach.<sup>165</sup>

The Task Force had limited resources, so it looked to congregations and areas of the country that already had successful programs in place that could be duplicated. As part of the 1979 preliminary report, Rabbi Bernard Mehlman made a presentation about what was being done in Boston both in terms of their "Introduction to Judaism" course, as well as follow-up programs for converts. He

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<sup>164</sup>"Report of the Belin Task Force." December 1979, 164-166.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., 166-168.

emphasized the need for dedicated volunteers, including some converts, as well as compassionate rabbis in order to bring about effective programming.<sup>166</sup>

Rabbi Sanford Seltzer then remarked on the lacunae in information about congregational attitudes toward the non-Jews in their midst. To remedy this, a survey had been sent to all UAHC congregations to ascertain what was being done regarding the non-Jewish spouses who were a part of their congregations. The early responses indicated there were a wide variety of practices, and the completed report promised to be a gold mine of information both for the Task Force and also for the individual congregations.<sup>167</sup>

Following Seltzer, Lydia Kukoff gave a stirring testimonial about the need for education and support for new converts, as well as the need to educate Jewish communities to both accept and help these new Jews. She stated, "One can be a Jew by birth or by choice, but either way, he or she cannot live a Jewish life without Jewish learning, a continuing Jewish education. Just as we bring converts under God's wing, so must we bring Jews there. It is a wonderful place to be and we must continue from there."<sup>168</sup>

After the presentations, Belin promised a full report in two years' time and concluded by stating, "You know that there is no issue, no priority that is greater in this world than doing everything we can for our families and for ourselves, for our people, for our country, for the world, than to assure there will be a vibrant Jewish community for the next five thousand years."<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>166</sup>Ibid., 169-175.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid., 176-181.

<sup>168</sup>Ibid., 194.

<sup>169</sup>Ibid., 197.

Following Belin's Report, the UAHC Board of Trustees adopted the following resolutions relating to Outreach:

1. To intensify our formal and informal Jewish educational program with the Reform Jewish movement to stimulate positive and knowledgeable Jewish identification.
2. To develop a sensitive program of welcoming and involving converts to Judaism, recognizing that those who choose Judaism in good faith are as authentic in their Jewish identity as those who are born Jewish.
3. To develop an effective Outreach Program whereby 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 congregation, the rabbi, and Judaism itself available to them and their families; and
4. To plan a special program to bring the message of Judaism to any and all who wish to examine or embrace it. Judaism is not an exclusive club of born Jews: It is a universal faith with an ancient tradition that has deep resonance for people alive today.<sup>170</sup>

The resolutions ended by stating, "We further call upon the congregations of our Union to make the Outreach Program effective by including the first three of its aspects in our own synagogue programming."<sup>171</sup>

The acceptance of these resolutions indicated that the UAHC Board of Trustees had fully accepted the basic concepts of Outreach; however, the Task Force still had a large assignment before it. Due to lack of funding, over the next two years, the Task Force met whenever possible, often piggybacking on other UAHC meetings. During the course of these meetings, the members of the Task Force formulated their recommendations. Early on, they decided to concentrate on known constituencies: the recently converted, the non-Jewish spouse in an

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<sup>170</sup> Outreach Resolutions adopted by the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly held in Toronto, December, 1979, [http://urjhomepage/resolutions.bylaws/adopted resolutions](http://urjhomepage/resolutions.bylaws/adopted%20resolutions) (accessed August 25, 2006).

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.



intermarriage, the children of intermarriage, and the unaffiliated Jew. The area of reaching out to the "unchurched" was a new dimension for the members of the Committee, and they thought since so much work was required in the first four areas, they should put their initial efforts there.<sup>172</sup> In 1980 Kukoff was appointed Director of Outreach and eventually was able to assemble a small staff. Ultimately, it was Kukoff and her staff who brought the recommendations of the Committee to reality. The effectiveness of the Outreach Department's programming was no doubt facilitated by the seamless level of communication that linked the Outreach Department and the original Task Force. According to Kukoff, the partnership between the Task Force making recommendations and the Outreach Department transforming recommendations to programs worked remarkably well and made the work they did that much easier to accomplish.<sup>173</sup>

The first of the major constituencies addressed by Schindler and, consequently, by the Task Force was the convert, or the Jew by Choice as the convert came to be called. We have already noted that converts oftentimes experienced feelings of alienation from their newly found people, and the newly found people had problems relating to the converts as well.

Steven Huberman completed the study of converts initiated by Seltzer in late 1978. Both men acknowledged that there was little research available about converts. They wanted to know who converted and why, what type of identity they had, how relationships changed within their families, as well as within their spouses' families, what problems they had, and what roles rabbis and the Jewish

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<sup>172</sup> Lydia Kukoff. Telephone interview, September 29, 2006.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

community in general played in the assimilation of converts into the Jewish community. Using graduates of the "Introduction to Judaism" courses in the Greater Boston area as the source of their study, and making use of both statistical surveys as well as personal interviews, Huberman and Seltzer uncovered some interesting insights. For example, most of the converts surveyed were introduced to Judaism because they planned on marrying or had married a Jew. However, these same individuals decided to convert because they thought that Judaism was more acceptable than the faith with which they had grown up.<sup>174</sup> For converts, "Judaism is basically a religion like their former faith, Christianity. Since converts adopt this religious self-definition, home observance and synagogue participation become the major vehicles to give expression to their Jewishness."<sup>175</sup> Because converts tended to identify being Jewish only in a religious context, they were lacking in communal/ethnic Jewish identification. This lack of identification with Jewish culture and/or Jewish ethnicity was a subject of debate that appeared in articles published at the time. In an article entitled "Intermarriage and Conversion" which appeared in the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Jonathan Sarna stated succinctly what many were saying about the ethnic aspects of conversion. There was a "tendency of converts to subordinate the ethnic aspects of their Judaism....they are more diffident about *Kelal Yisrael* in general, particularly the idea that Jews should extend special help to fellow Jews in need. And their support of Israel is, statistically speaking, much lower

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<sup>174</sup> Steven Huberman, *New Jews; the Dynamics of Religious Conversion*. (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979), 18.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

than that of born Jews."<sup>176</sup> A convert was once asked at a Torah study session in Danbury, Connecticut, if she had any desire to go to Israel. "No," she replied, "But I would really like to visit Ireland so I could see exactly where my grandparents grew up. I know I am Jewish now, but my ancestors did not come from Israel; they came from Ireland."<sup>177</sup>

The lack of ethnic identification was exacerbated by other factors common to most converts. They came to Judaism with non-Jewish friends and families. They did not, by and large, divorce themselves from their families, and they did not give up their non-Jewish friends. The influences of both were very powerful and could mitigate against a Jewish ethnic identity. Sheldon Zimmerman, rabbi of Central Synagogue, noted, "The convert has parents who still observe Christmas. The convert has a whole familial set of connections. How does the convert deal with those? How does the convert deal with his or her children going back to visit grandparents?"<sup>178</sup> Also, many Jews, including their own spouse's families, might not be accepting of them, which only reinforced the lack of communal identification. Perry Netter, who wrote an article in *Moment* magazine entitled "Will Your God Really be My God?" lamented this when he relayed, "I cannot count the times parents have expressed anxiety over the fact that their child is dating a non-Jew. They say, 'Rabbi, we just pray that our son marries a Jewish girl.' I say, 'But what if his girlfriend converts?' They say, 'Yes, but we

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<sup>176</sup> Jonathan Sarna, "Reform Jewish Leaders, Intermarriage, and Conversion." *Journal of Reform Judaism* 37, no. 1, (1990): 5.

<sup>177</sup> Author's personal recollection.

<sup>178</sup> "Conference on Conversion." *Congress Monthly* 46, No. 7(1979). 17.

mean someone who is *really* Jewish.”<sup>179</sup> Schindler received a letter in 1980 from a woman who said, “Why should we expect an intermarried couple—even though one has been a convenient conversion [sic] to Judaism, but still retains potent memories, relations and ties to the non-Jewish world, just why should this couple be expected to raise its children as caring Jews?”<sup>180</sup>

One of the first programs sponsored by the Outreach Task Force was a series of weekend retreats specifically designed for recent converts. They were brought together to celebrate Shabbat, to share their experiences both before and after their formal conversions, but, more importantly, to talk through where they were headed in the future. For most of the participants, it was a profound experience because it was about owning Judaism.<sup>181</sup> John Bush, now a rabbi, remembers the weekend he attended with his wife, Joanna. They had both converted to Judaism. He found the weekend affirming because he and Joanna discovered that others shared their doubts about their authenticity as Jews. He said that he felt on one level that he would never know enough to be “really” Jewish, but on another level, the weekend reinforced how much he and the other converts really did know. He relayed that he returned home from the weekend, “really pumped” but was not able to verbalize why.<sup>182</sup>

Using what was then cutting edge technology, the Outreach Task Force created a videotape in 1981 of recent converts who discussed the difficulties they encountered with their families, along with the problems they encountered

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<sup>179</sup> Perry Netter, “Will Your God Really Be My God?” *Moment* January/February 1989, 45.

<sup>180</sup> Ethel Fenig, Letter to Alexander Schindler, January 21, 1980, AJA 10/6.

<sup>181</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Telephone interview, September 29, 2006.

<sup>182</sup> John Bush, Telephone interview with the author, October 29, 2006.

because they did not have a Jewish background. They lamented the fact that they did not have people they could rely on to answer their many questions. They spoke of feeling inauthentic and lacking understanding from those who had been born Jewish. But they also confessed their love of Judaism and revealed the reasons they chose to become Jews. Three of the four participants did not choose Judaism because they were marrying someone Jewish. At the end of the videotape, there was a very poignant interview with Melvin Merians, a UAHC Board member whose daughter had married a non-Jew before Outreach had been implemented. He relayed the pain he suffered. Merians endorsed the work of Outreach, both for the Jew and the non-Jew, and ended by saying, "Welcome everyone who wants to be a Jew. Open your arms. Open your hearts. Love them, and teach them. Understand they have a special blessing; understand they have a choice. They want to be a Jew. They are giving us an honor. As a result, we owe them a special responsibility, and a special love."<sup>183</sup> The videotape was made available to all UAHC congregations.

In addition to the videotape, curricula were created and updated. Many synagogues had long been offering so-called "conversion classes," but these classes had no uniform curriculum. The Outreach Task Force suggested renaming the course "Introduction to Judaism" to attract not only those who were considering conversion, but also to include those who had been born Jewish who may not have had extensive Jewish education as children.<sup>184</sup> By 1983 *Introduction to Judaism: A Course Outline* was published. Instead of the cognitive approach

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<sup>183</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Producer, *Choosing Judaism: Some Personal Perspectives* (New York: UAHC, 1981), Videotape.

<sup>184</sup> Lydia Kukoff, ed. *Reform Jewish Outreach: A Program Guide* (New York: UAHC, 1981). 19.

where students learned about theology, philosophy, holidays and history, this new course combined the practical with the theoretical so the students would not only learn about Judaism, they would learn how to live Jewish lives. For example, the section on Passover not only explained the biblical and rabbinic history and the theology of Passover, but also explained how to conduct a Passover seder, complete with recipes.<sup>185</sup>

Along with the weekends, the videotapes and the new "Introduction to Judaism" class, the Outreach Task Force also made available recommendations and programming for the congregations in a booklet entitled *Reform Jewish Outreach: A Program Guide*. This guide included suggestions that would sensitize the temple staff, including the rabbi, to the needs and problems of the Jew by Choice and to those seeking to become Jewish. The guide also included suggested ways to aid congregational members in recognizing their unconscious or conscious prejudice toward the convert. These suggestions ranged from the very simple, like using the Temple bulletin as a way to disseminate information, to creating areas of the library dedicated to Outreach, to programs or mini-courses that benefited both the Jew by Choice and the Jew by Birth.<sup>186</sup>

In 1981 Lydia Kukoff wrote a book entitled *Choosing Judaism*, which chronicled her conversion process. The book provided yet another means for a Jew by Choice to know that what they were feeling and experiencing was not unique. Kukoff's volume aspired to help prospective converts navigate some of the more difficult aspects of conversion, for example, dealing with both Jewish

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<sup>185</sup> Stephen Einstein and Lydia Kukoff, eds. *Introduction to Judaism: A Sourcebook* (New York: UAHC Press, pub 1983, rev 1998). Introduction to the Instructors' Guide, and 138-151.

<sup>186</sup> Lydia Kukoff, *Reform Jewish Outreach: A Program Guide*, 19-21.

and non-Jewish family members. In the final chapter of her book, Kukoff wrote, "In the final analysis we are all Jews by Choice. All those who choose to live a Jewish life are Jews by Choice. It's just that some of us were born to Jewish parents. Together, then, let us make that lifelong commitment to live and learn as Jews, to know the richness of our Jewish birthright."<sup>187</sup> The book was updated in January 2005.

David Belin also wrote a booklet entitled *Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach*, which was distributed in 1985. The booklet presented rational arguments as to why people choose Judaism and concluded by stating, "There is a rebirth of interest in considering whether Judaism should return to its biblical heritage and let the people of the world know that Judaism is a vital, vibrant religion that has much to contribute to society and to the peace and happiness of men and women, and that anyone who chooses to do so can become a Jew."<sup>188</sup>

The question of fostering a Jewish communal identity was addressed in the "Introduction to Judaism" courses, but many acknowledged the difficulty Jews by Choice faced because they did not grow up in a Jewish family or in a Jewish community. However, those involved in Outreach knew from Huberman's survey that in conversionary marriages, the parents wanted to provide their children with a sense of Jewish identity. That identity was fostered not only through the Jewish practices that occurred in the home but also in the

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<sup>187</sup> Lydia Kukoff, *Choosing Judaism* (New York, NY: UAHC Press, 1981), 114.

<sup>188</sup> David Belin, *Why Choose Judaism: New Dimensions of Jewish Outreach* (1985), 18.

parents' actions that ensured that their children had a Jewish education.<sup>189</sup> Even if the parents had problems identifying with their new Jewish ethnicity, their children would not experience the same problems because their upbringing would be Jewish.<sup>190</sup>

Many of the Outreach Task Force members traveled extensively speaking to many, many congregations to discuss Outreach and to break down the historic barriers between the Jew by Birth and the Jew by Choice. These discussions not only enhanced the feeling of community for the Jew by Choice but helped the Jew by Birth better appreciate the Jew by Choice. Largely due to the work of Outreach, negative attitudes toward the convert to Judaism are no longer widely held.<sup>191</sup>

The Task Force was not only concerned with the convert either in an interfaith marriage or outside of such a marriage, it also looked at the interfaith family where the non-Jewish spouse chose not to convert.

In 1979 Rabbi Sanford Seltzer spoke about this issue to the UAHC Board in the Task Force's interim report. He admitted that up to that point in time, no one had given much thought to the non-Jewish spouses in Reform congregations. When questions arose as to their role in congregational life, the issue would be examined by the congregation involved, but there was no overall knowledge about the roles and status of the non-Jewish spouse in the Reform movement in

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<sup>189</sup> Huberman, 31-32.

<sup>190</sup> Sanford Seltzer, Telephone interview with the author on November 10, 2006.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.



general.<sup>192</sup> To partially remedy this, Seltzer sent a survey to all of the UAHC affiliated Reform congregations to ascertain what were the congregational attitudes and practices concerning the non-Jewish spouse. Preliminary findings in 1979 revealed that most congregations agreed that the children of the mixed-married couple would be considered Jewish if they were raised in a Jewish home no matter which parent was Jewish. And most congregations allowed the burial of a non-Jewish spouse of a synagogue member in the congregational cemetery. Beyond that, there was wide range of attitudes and practices related to the non-Jewish spouse.<sup>193</sup>

In addition to discovering that Reform congregations needed to develop policies relating to the non-Jewish spouses, the Task Force recognized that non-Jewish spouses had unique needs. The Outreach program existed not only to address these needs, but also to welcome the mixed-married families into the Reform Jewish community and to provide them with a program of Jewish education so that they might provide a Jewish home and education for their children.

In 1983 the Department of Outreach created the "Times and Seasons" program to meet the needs of the intermarried and to help unaffiliated intermarried couples explore the differences in their backgrounds. This program was meant to be purely educational and was not designed to encourage the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. The reason that differences, rather than commonalities in the couples' backgrounds, were emphasized was that the

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<sup>192</sup> I will be writing a later chapter to explore the issue of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue and how problems associated with their roles were eventually resolved.

<sup>193</sup> "Report of the Belin Task Force," December 1979, 177-179.

program creators believed that before participants could discuss religious options for their children, they had to understand their own religious identities. Among the program's objectives were to help each of the partners explore their own religious background, to explain the major teachings of Judaism and the implications of establishing a Jewish home, and to communicate clearly that the Reform Jewish community would welcome intermarried couples. Although not stated explicitly, it was clear that "Times and Seasons" sought to encourage mixed married couples to establish a Jewish home and to raise their children as Jews.<sup>194</sup>

The program lasted for eight sessions and required a skilled facilitator to lead the sessions. The couples explored many issues, some of which were difficult to confront. For example, is the decision to raise a child in both religions based on what is best for the parents or what is best for the child? The program also presented the Christian and Jewish views on theology and on some shared ideas like attitudes towards prayer or towards Israel.<sup>195</sup> The decision to raise a child as a Jew was recognized as difficult at best. Even if the non-Jew no longer believed in their childhood religion, they often had a difficult time seeing their children raised differently from the way they were raised with different memories and different childhood experiences.<sup>196</sup>

In addition to the "Times and Seasons" program, the Outreach Task Force recommended that individual synagogues include mixed-married couples in an

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<sup>194</sup> Lydia Kukoff and Nina J. Mizrahi, ed. *Times and Seasons: A Guide for Facilitators* (New York: UAHC, 1987), 5-7.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 19, 69-71, 82-83.

<sup>196</sup> Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, et al., ed. *Guidelines for Outreach Education* (New York: UAHC, 1986), 7.

adoptive family program. They also recommended sensitizing the temple staff toward those in mixed marriages, offering free membership to them if possible, and setting up focus or support groups to help the mixed-married couples to raise Jewish children.<sup>197</sup>

The "Times and Seasons" programs, along with the other suggestions from the Outreach Task Force, were geared toward adults, but what about the children of mixed marriages? Denver was one of the fastest growing Jewish centers in the United States, and because of that, it was a compelling site to address the challenge of Outreach as a model Outreach center. In their approach to intermarried couples, the Outreach leadership knew that they had to draw these couples into Jewish life if they were to raise their children as Jews.<sup>198</sup> "After a demographic study in 1981 showed an unprecedented number of interfaith marriages in the Denver area, Congregation Emanuel proposed "Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me," an educational program for the children of interfaith families whose parents had not yet decided on a religious identity for their children. Rabbi Steven Foster and Sandra Heller worked on a proposal with the Allied Jewish Federation of Colorado to create a separate low-cost, time-limited school for unaffiliated interfaith children and their families."<sup>199</sup> The "Stepping Stones" program provided integrated family programming, programming for small children as well as older children, group meetings for interfaith couples, and a program for grandparents of the children of interfaith couples.<sup>200</sup> The "Stepping Stones" program was initiated on a national level in 1989 at the New Orleans Biennial Assembly of the UAHC, where the

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<sup>197</sup> Lydia Kukoff, ed. *Reform Jewish Outreach: A Program Guide*, 27.

<sup>198</sup> "Denver Outreach. AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 4/47, Folder "Outreach - Denver."

<sup>199</sup> *Stepping Stones to a Jewish Me*, <http://www.steppingstonesfamily.com/aboutus.htm> (accessed November 11, 2006).

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

plenary also voted to develop a limited, tuition-free Jewish education for children of unaffiliated mixed-married couples.<sup>201</sup> In 1993 Schindler proposed that the tuition-free program be expanded to include all unaffiliated Jews with school-age children. He pointed out that one in three of the "Stepping Stones" intermarried families joined a congregation.<sup>202</sup>

Once children of mix-married couples began to attend religious school, special circumstances would arise, even if the non-Jewish spouse had converted. These children had relatives who were not Jewish and at least one parent who had not grown up in a Jewish home. The Outreach Department, in concert with the Commission on Jewish Education, produced *Guidelines for Jewish Education* in 1986. The guidelines not only provided some ideas for programming and information about the particular needs of intermarried couples and children, but also included a section to "help teachers to clarify their own feelings on issues such as conversion, intermarriage, and matrilineal/patrilineal descent."<sup>203</sup> The guide emphasized the need for education that was both factual and non-judgmental. An article reprinted in the guide stated, "Jewish children are taught to respect their neighbor's faith. They will do it more wisely if they respect their own."<sup>204</sup> As in all of the guides published by the Outreach Committee, sample programs and extensive bibliographic materials were provided.

The parents of children who had intermarried were another group that the Outreach initiative targeted. However, Kukoff warned in a memo that this population

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<sup>201</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address to the 60<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC*, (Delivered in New Orleans, November 4, 1989), Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>202</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly to the UAHC*, (Delivered in San Francisco, October 23, 1993), Special Collections, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>203</sup> *Guidelines for Outreach Education*, p. 11.

<sup>204</sup> Harold Schulweis, "Why Can't We Be Like Everyone Else?" *Guidelines for Outreach Education*, 62.

was not easy to work with. She recommended that the facilitators of any program for the parents of the intermarried be trained therapists, that rabbis not be present at the sessions, and that parents of those who had married non-Jews and parents of Jews by Choice not be in the same group.<sup>205</sup>

One of the constituencies Schindler referred to in Outreach speeches was the children of intermarriages who grew up without a religious background. There is a web site entitled *HalfJew.com*, which exists to help Half-Jews establish identity. To the question "Are Half-Jews different from whole Jews, or from Christians, for that matter?" the website provides the following answer, "We think so. The non-Jewish world usually considers Halfies [those with one Jewish and one non-Jewish parent] Jews, while the Jewish world, for the most part, is quite certain who is Jewish and who is not. So those with a mixed heritage sometimes feel as if they exists [sic] in a kind of limbo, not really belonging to a religious and cultural minority and not really belonging to the religious and cultural majority, either."<sup>206</sup>

The use of the term *parve* inspired two women, Leslie Goodman-Malamuth and Robin Margolis, to found a group called *Parveh* to support those who grew up in intermarried homes, who wanted to identify as Jews, but either for personal reasons, or sometimes due to opposition by Jewish authorities, could not. They resented being asked to convert because many of them already considered themselves Jewish. In fact, virtually all of them had some sense of Jewish identity, but even if they were drawn to Judaism, they felt that Judaism did not want them. What is interesting is that whether the *parve* child was raised as a Jew or a Christian, he would always have two halves. One woman

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<sup>205</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Memo to Sanford Seltzer dated October 3, 1984. AJA 10/6.

<sup>206</sup> HalfJew.com, <http://www/halfjew.com/html/faq/> (accessed November 11, 2006).

quoted in the article stated that at times she felt like she had the best of both worlds, and at others that she had no world at all.<sup>207</sup>

Alexander Schindler spoke directly to this issue by stating,

Far too many [children of intermarriages] are reared in a manner in which two religions are blurred together so that neither comes into focus. "We will expose them to both religions," explain the parents, "Once they grow up, they will make their own decisions." Such a democratic sentiment usually represents a side-stepping of parental responsibility, a postponement of the parents' own most difficult decision on how to shape their offspring's religious identity. I empathize greatly with these difficulties, especially in cases of devout but separate religious identities within a marriage. We must realize, however, that such indecisiveness or indifference often results not in an open-minded, but a two-headed child, not one who is versed and comfortable in two traditions, but one who will eventually mutter, "A pox on both your houses."<sup>208</sup>

Schindler actually used the word *parve* in his address to the UAHC in December 1986, when he asked the Outreach Commission to develop programs to meet the needs of the *parve* adult children of intermarriage. He acknowledged that they would not be easy to reach, but that they must learn that through Outreach, Reform Judaism was ready to accept them. "It demands that we learn speak our language of Outreach simultaneously to the adult, and to the child within that adult. We must be willing to reckon with the hurts of the past as the hopes for the future....We are ready to bestow our blessing on the children of intermarriage."<sup>209</sup>

In the minutes of an Outreach meeting that took place in Tarrytown, New York, there was recognition that programming for both the college aged and young adults was lacking. Programs on college campuses were suggested, along

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<sup>207</sup> Charlotte Anker. "We Are the Children You Warned Our Parents About." *Moment*. February 1991, 34-39.

<sup>208</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Report the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations to the Board of Trustees*, December 5, 1986. AJA 24/6.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

with a public relations campaign to reach the young adults who were the product of mixed marriages.<sup>210</sup> The final report of the Outreach Task Force to the UAHC Board of Trustees in 1983 stated, "the college campus remains a virtually untouched and critical area of concern....Workshops on interdating and interfaith marriage are essential."<sup>211</sup> Unfortunately, Outreach never did reach the college campus due to both time and financial constraints.<sup>212</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing discussion that the Outreach Task Force accomplished a great deal. The task of bringing Schindler's vision to fruition without a plan or a budget was a challenge, yet people on the Task Force all knew that they were part of something incredibly important, and something that could make a lasting contribution.<sup>213</sup>

Outreach to the new Jew by Choice, to the interfaith couples, and to their children and parents were new ideas to the Reform movement and to Judaism in general. It would only make sense that there would be both positive and negative reactions to the programs.

Alexander Schindler, in his speech to the delegates to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in 1979, just one year after the Outreach initiative was announced, said, "*Amcho* also responded. The mail and phone calls from Jews reveal a deep undercurrent of hurt and pain to which no agency, to the best of my knowledge, has even begun to respond. All the statistics in the world about the skyrocketing

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<sup>210</sup> "Minutes, Outreach Meeting, January 25-26, Tarrytown, NY." AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection 4/47, Folder "Outreach - Denver." Year of meeting was not specified; however, it would have occurred after 1981 and before 1983.

<sup>211</sup> "Closing Report of the Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach," October 1983. From CCAR files, New York, NY.

<sup>212</sup> Sanford Seltzer, Telephone interview, November 10, 2006.

<sup>213</sup> Melvin Merians, Lydia Kukoff, and Sanford Seltzer, Telephone interviews on September 26, 2006, September 29, 2006, and November 10, 2006, respectively.

rate of mixed marriages do not begin to tell us about the degree of heartache felt among Jewish parents and children who have been estranged from one another and have yet to cease from weeping.”<sup>214</sup> Schindler was pleased by the many positive reactions to Outreach. In 1979 Schindler appeared on the daytime talk television program *The Phil Donahue Show* along with fifteen to twenty people who had intermarried. The non-Jewish spouses of some of the couples had converted, and some had chosen not to convert. Schindler remarked that he “shepped *nacohos*” [derived great satisfaction] from some of the responses of the panelists. One of them was a woman who had converted five years previously, and although she admitted that there was some estrangement at first from her in-laws, she stated that her son was currently attending religious school and she would be upset if he brought home a *shiksa* [a non-Jewish woman]. Schindler said that they could not have fashioned a program better than that particular *Phil Donahue Show* episode to serve the purposes of Outreach.<sup>215</sup>

The need for Outreach came through loud and clear in the letters Schindler received following his speech and his subsequent appearance on the *Phil Donahue Show*. One woman wrote, “I am married to a non-practicing Jew and I am Christian. I wonder what are the creeds of the Jewish faith? I only had some exposure to the Jewish faith, and what I know I can truly endorse. What are

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<sup>214</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Report of the President to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, (Delivered in Toronto, December 1979), Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Oh.

<sup>215</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, September 17, 1979, AJA Manuscript Collection 72, Series E, Microfilmed Records, Reel 3694, 65-67.



the mechanics of converting? How can I go about learning more about the Jewish faith so I can make an intelligent decision?"<sup>216</sup>

Not everyone was pleased with the Outreach initiative. Another woman wrote to Schindler asking, "How can I explain to my boys that they should believe in Judaism, and marry Jewish girls when they grow up, when next to them at Hebrew school will be children from mixed marriages—apparently proving that intermarriage does work?"<sup>217</sup>

Edward Shapiro, in his book *Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II*, was not enthusiastic about asking non-Jews to convert. He said that beginning in the 1950s, the number of converts to Judaism increased—from about three thousand to ten thousand a year in the 1980s. These were mainly the result of a non-Jew marrying a Jew. While the rise in conversions proved that Jews had reached a higher status in American society—particularly when celebrities like Sammy Davis, Jr., or Elizabeth Taylor converted—these new Jews accepted what Shapiro called a "watered-down version of Judaism." He thought that because many of these new Jews focused on Judaism as a faith community, they lacked commitment to the history and ethnicity of the Jewish people. He criticized Kukoff's book *Choosing Judaism* because she did not discuss either the Holocaust or Israel. Shapiro asserted that it was the quality of Jews and not the quantity of Jews that mattered. Despite his generally pessimistic analysis, Shapiro

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<sup>216</sup> Sylvia Laskow, Letter to Alexander Schindler, September 1979, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC papers, Box 21/47, Folder "Outreach Mail Requests."

<sup>217</sup> Barbara Friedlander, Letter to Alexander Schindler, September 9, 1992, AJA 10/2.

concluded that Jews survived many crises in the past, and they could survive the crisis engendered by a free and prosperous America.<sup>218</sup>

The rabbis from the other major movements as well as within the Reform movement also weighed in with their opinions about all the aspects of Outreach. Obviously Orthodox Judaism, which does not recognize a conversion that is not done according to *halacha*, would not be in favor of any type of Reform Outreach program. However, as the years passed, there seemed to be some acceptance of the idea of Outreach by some Orthodox authorities, even if they did not agree with the mechanics of a Reform conversion. In a 1986 speech, Schindler said, "Rav Soloveitchik, the most respected voice of mainline Orthodoxy said [in an interview], 'Regarding the plague of intermarriage, from which the Orthodox have not been saved, it is necessary to do what the Reform Jews are doing—with, of course, an orthodox content.'"<sup>219</sup>

Conservative rabbis presented a mixed reaction to Outreach. Steven Bayar wrote in an article in *Conservative Judaism*, "It is unrealistic to expect a *halachic* community to reward those who have broken with *halacha*. It is important to remember, though, that although they have broken *halacha*, they have not broken with the community."<sup>220</sup> Bayar went on to say that the non-Jew in an intermarried couple would not be allowed to participate in ritual practices, but that they could be taught about Judaism. In fact, Bayar asserted the more

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<sup>218</sup> Edward Shapiro, *Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 239-257.

<sup>219</sup> Alexander Schindler, Speech delivered to the regional convention of the Southern Pacific Council of the UAHC, Ocean Beach, CA, 1986, *AJA*, 24/6.

<sup>220</sup> Steven Bayar. "Is Outreach Possible in the Conservative Movement?" *Conservative Judaism* 39, no. 4, (1987), 67.

empathy there was toward the intermarried, the more Outreach could work in the Conservative movement.<sup>221</sup> Jacob Angus echoed Bayar in an article in *Conservative Judaism* and outlined steps where it would be possible for children of intermarrieds to be brought into the Conservative movement. "Much remains to be done for the practice of *keruv* toward intermarried couples, but the first steps should relate to the incorporation of their children within the Jewish community."<sup>222</sup> Daniel Gordis and Joel Roth disagreed in a joint article entitled "Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families."

As much as the principle of *keruv* is one which must be emphasized, it must never supersede the traditional distinction which halacha makes between Jews and non-Jews, nor must it be allowed to make an already blurred distinction [which already existed in the intermarried family] even less noticeable. Jewish society and tradition look askance upon intermarriage and our practices regarding these families should reflect that. We make a laughing stock of serious halacha by seeking leniencies in the law for those who don't care about the law at all.<sup>223</sup>

However, in 1985 Lydia Kukoff recounted in a memo to Schindler, "Outreach has finally arrived to the Conservative movement. The RA [Rabbinical Assembly] is setting up a Task Force on Intermarriage, and JTS [Jewish Theological Seminary, a conservative rabbinical seminary] will offer a mandatory course on intermarriage taught by a special adjunct professor."<sup>224</sup> Schindler mentioned in a presidential address to the UAHC general assembly that Conservative Rabbi Harold Schulweis had instituted a successful "Stepping

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Jacob Angus, "The Mitzvah of Keruv," *Conservative Judaism*, 35, no. 4 (1982), 38.

<sup>223</sup> Daniel Gordis and Joel Roth, "Keruv and the Status of Intermarried Families," *Conservative Judaism*, 35, no. 4, (1982), 54.

<sup>224</sup> Lydia Kukoff. Memorandum to Alexander Schindler, Daniel Syme, Stephen Foster, and David Belin, July 2, 1985. AJA 10/11.

Stones" program in his synagogue.<sup>225</sup> Schulweis also wrote an article entitled "The Stranger in Our Mirror," which appeared in the UAHC publication *Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community*. The article is an exploration of Jewish attitudes toward the *ger* [convert] throughout Jewish history, and he concludes by stating, "The *ger* is our mirror. We have only to look at it to discover that the stranger is us. Not to fear. It is a shock of recognition that holds in promise the renewal of the Jewish spirit."<sup>226</sup>

Reform rabbis also had mixed reactions to Outreach. Rabbi Sanford Seltzer relayed that he thought Reform rabbis were relieved when the Outreach plan was initiated. They knew that the rates of intermarriage were rising and that they needed to be proactive in this area. Outreach gave them permission and support to welcome the intermarried families into their congregations. Seltzer had the impression the Reform rabbis were relieved and thrilled that they could now be more supportive of the intermarried couples than they had been before Outreach was initiated.<sup>227</sup>

The American Jewish Congress sponsored a Conference on Conversion which was compiled in the *Congress Monthly* in November 1979. The conference was designed to include rabbis from all three of the major Jewish movements, but both the Orthodox and Conservative rabbinate, for various reasons, were not well represented. Despite the majority showing by the Reform rabbinate, there was a wide range of opinions expressed. In fact about the only

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<sup>225</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC*, 12.

<sup>226</sup> Harold Schulweis, "The Stranger in Our Mirror," *Outreach and the Changing Reform Jewish Community* (New York: UAHC, 1989), 102.

<sup>227</sup> Sanford Seltzer, Telephone interview November 10, 2006.

issue where there was agreement was that there was a need for more study of the myriad of issues that arose in the course of the discussion. Sheldon Zimmerman, rabbi of Central Synagogue in New York City, mentioned that there were no universally accepted conversion standards in the Reform movement and that the presence of converts presented problems that the rabbis were just beginning to realize. Zimmerman also recounted the difficulty inherent in rejecting mixed marriage, yet not rejecting the mixed married. Jerome Malino, president of the CCAR at the time of the Conference, noted that passivity was also a potent action, and doing nothing at that point would be to act wrongly, especially in the face of all that was known about American Jewish life. He mentioned the problems of the members of the mixed-married families who did not convert, yet were a part of the Jewish community. How were congregations to incorporate them? Maybe most importantly, according to Malino, all Jews needed be witnesses to their faith in order to improve the quality of Jewish life. Daniel Syme, Director of Education at the UAHC, argued that deliberations concerning conversion should not center solely on *halachic* questions. The questions which also needed to be confronted were human questions, and their answers would help to change attitudes both in establishments and in the congregations. Balfour Brickner, Director of Interreligious Activities at the UAHC, worried that because the mood in America at the time was very emotional, and Judaism was rationally based, that there was a possibility that in order to gain converts, a watered-down, more emotional version of Judaism would replace the rational Judaism he knew.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> "Conference on Conversion," *Congress Monthly*, Vol. 46, No. 7, (1979), 14-17.

One of the unforeseen results of reaching out to the intermarried was that the issue of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages came to the forefront again.<sup>229</sup> The CCAR had dealt with the emotionally-charged issue of rabbinic officiation in 1973. The CCAR decided in 1973 to make a stronger statement about rabbinic officiation at intermarriages by passing a resolution that the Conference go on record to oppose participation of its members in any ceremony of mixed marriage. The debate about the issue at the 1973 convention had been extremely acrimonious.<sup>230</sup> It can be inferred that the rabbis did not want to revisit the issue a scant five years later. Rabbi Joe Glaser explained what happened in a letter to Rabbi Joel Zion.

I just don't see how Alex Schindler's Houston message on conversion got tied up with the question of rabbis performing intermarriage, but it has. The confusion occurred immediately, I am told, when during the discussion on Alex's resolution...a member of the UAHC board offered an amendment calling on the rabbis to perform mixed marriages. It was defeated soundly, but the next day, when the NY Times front-paged [sic] Alex's story from Houston, the switchboard at the UAHC was jammed with callers asking for rabbis to perform mixed marriages, preferably, of course, Alex Schindler himself. I have read his speech over twice now, and I still can't see it, but the point is that we are now confronted with the reality of it, and I suppose will have to do something. I do know that Alex has said since Houston that he had no intent whatsoever to reflect in any way on mixed marriage, other than to express disapproval of it, as he did in the speech, and certainly didn't want to get into the matter of rabbinical officiation.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> In 1997 Rabbi Mark Kaiserman wrote his rabbinic thesis entitled *Historical Analysis of Rabbinical Officiation at Interfaith Marriage*. Any additional questions or research in this area can be directed to his thesis.

<sup>230</sup> I summarized the arguments used in the 1973 CCAR Convention in Chapter 1. For a complete account of the proceedings of this Conference, again I refer you to Mark Kaiserman's rabbinic thesis.

<sup>231</sup> Letter from Joseph Glaser to Rabbi Joel Y. Zion, Spring 1979. AJA Unprocessed files. Rabbi Ted Levy collection.

Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman wrote to Schindler expressing his obvious frustration at the direction he perceived that the Reform Movement was heading,

Alex, you are the leader of our movement. Those of us who do not officiate at mixed marriages, but try to reach out effectively and caringly to our mixed-married families are being pushed from every side ... those of us [who do not perform mixed marriages] are coming under attack. We have been loyal to your call for Outreach. Some of us feel that in return you as the major and most respected spokesperson for our movement are pushing us to a further blurring and possible obliteration of all boundaries. If that happens, will there be any more room in our movement for us?<sup>232</sup>

Interestingly enough, amidst all this hue and cry, Schindler remained adamant in his stance against rabbinic officiation at intermarriages. On February 23, 1979, he wrote a letter that was mailed to members of the CCAR. In it he said,

There is only one untoward development, which gives occasion to this letter, and that is the fact that in some quarters my recommendation has been misunderstood to imply that I seek a reversal of the CCAR's Resolution against rabbinic participation at a marriage ceremony between a Jew and a non-Jew. My recommendation does not address itself to this specific issue at all. Indeed my own position opposing such participation has not changed.<sup>233</sup>

The fact that Schindler felt compelled to write that letter underscores how prevalent the belief was that an aspiration of the Outreach program was to advocate for rabbinic officiation at intermarriages.

In the years following Schindler's 1978 speech in Dallas, the Outreach Task Force did its best to put his directives in place. However, the most challenging and controversial proposal Schindler made was the directive to reach

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<sup>232</sup> Sheldon Zimmerman, Letter to Alexander Schindler dated February 11, 1993, AJA 10/2.

<sup>233</sup> Alexander M. Schindler, Letter to members of the CCAR, February 23, 1979. CCAR files, New York, NY.

out to the “unchurched”—to proselytize, which was something most Jews did not see themselves doing. Trying to implement this proposal against the anger, the bewilderment, and, sometimes, even the enthusiastic acceptance of it was a challenge.

On December 3, 1978, *The New York Times* ran a front-page article with the headline “Reform Leader Urges a Program to Convert ‘Seekers’ to Judaism.” It began, “Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the congregational arm of Reform Judaism, has called on Reform Jews to reverse the practice of centuries and begin a drive to convert the ‘unchurched’ to Judaism.” The article continued, “The proposal marks a departure from modern Jewish practice and has been advocated before by Reform spokesmen, though never tied to such an explicit program. Nor has it been put forward during such a period of controversy over proselytizing of Jews by Christians [sic] groups, such as Jews for Jesus.”<sup>234</sup> Schindler knew that this proposal would generate controversy, and he said just that when he introduced this concept to the UAHC board in 1978. Lydia Kukoff mused that Schindler liked to “push the envelope” but added that he wholeheartedly believed in all aspects of his Outreach program. She thought his thinking was that maybe if people could accept the “unchurched,” accepting intermarrieds would be that much easier.<sup>235</sup> Schindler was correct; this proposal did generate controversy, and between *The New York Times* article and the subsequent segment of the *Phil Donahue* talk show devoted to Outreach, millions became aware of it, and many, many people responded, including rabbis who sent copies of sermons they had written supporting Schindler’s stance.

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<sup>234</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, “Reform Leader Urges a Program to Convert ‘Seekers’ to Judaism,” *The New York Times*, December 3, 1978, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>235</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Telephone interview, August 24, 2006.



Schindler received letters from Jews and non-Jews alike. The letters from the non-Jews were particularly poignant. A man wrote in an undated letter, "Even though I lost my faith in religion, I didn't lose my faith in God....I have found out that the only way I could find spiritual fulfillment was by converting to Judaism. I am hoping you can help me."<sup>236</sup> A woman wrote, "I have felt that to possibly inquire or convert to Judaism would only be acceptable if I was involved with a man of the Jewish faith. That is not my case. I'm just a single parent of a previous Christian background who would feel like a 'freak or an outsider' if I were to inquire into learning more about Judaism....Perhaps if your viewpoint is accepted, people like myself, would feel more willing to inquire into Judaism, and possibly convert."<sup>237</sup>

Reform Jewish lay people also wrote to Schindler to let him know what they thought of his proposals. An obviously angry woman exclaimed, "As a Reform Jew, I am appalled at this blatant slap in the face of the tradition which we have followed for so many centuries....Jews pride themselves on the fact that they do not have to coerce people into exploring Judaism, but take pride in the fact that future converts explore Judaism solely from their own interest. I urge you, Rabbi Schindler, to reassess your current opinion on this subject, and return again to the traditions of Reform Judaism."<sup>238</sup> Another letter signed by ten people urged Schindler rather than focusing on the "unchurched," he should direct resources to the non-affiliated Jew, on recent Russian immigrants, and on young single adults. "We abhor the idea of even the thought of

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<sup>236</sup> Robert McNeese, Letter to Alexander Schindler, undated, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC collection, Folder "Outreach Mail Requests," Box 21/47.

<sup>237</sup> Mari Campbell, Letter to Alexander Schindler, October 24, 1993, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC collection, Box 3/47, Folder "Outreach Misc. - Schindler." Underline in original.

<sup>238</sup> Aime Friedman, Letter to Alexander Schindler, December 7, 1978, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection, Box 21/47, Folder "Outreach Mail Requests."

proselytizing among non-Jews....We feel new programs should be planned and executed to reach these three neglected groups."<sup>239</sup>

Schindler also received letters of support from his Jewish constituency. One man wrote, "It is time that millions of 'unchurched' Americans were invited to join the Jewish faith. And they should not have to knock on the door three times to get in."<sup>240</sup> Another wrote, "Judaism has a great deal to offer in terms of philosophical outlook, the relationship between man and God, and most particularly its emphasis on the here and now, rather than the hereafter. It certainly has stood the test of time, and deserves to be a part of the lives of a greater number of our fellow human beings."<sup>241</sup> Schindler replied to this particular writer, "Thank you for the encouraging letter which is all the more welcome because of the many brick bats which are flying my way also."<sup>242</sup>

It is not surprising that reactions to Rabbi Schindler's Outreach to the "unchurched" would also come from rabbis from all three of the major Jewish movements in North America. When the CCAR met in Phoenix in 1979, among other things, Schindler's Outreach to the "unchurched" proposal was the subject of discussion. According *The New York Times* article that reported on the meeting, "The proposal by Rabbi Schindler....was generally well-received here by the rabbis. But some objected [to the suggestion that Jews more actively proselytize], and others criticized the decision by Rabbi Schindler to bring the proposal first to a basic lay organization rather than to the Conference of Rabbis. Rabbi Herbert Bronstein of Chicago said the strategy had caused,

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<sup>239</sup> Doris Doctor, Letter to Alexander Schindler, December 22, 1978, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection, Box 21/47, Folder "Outreach Mail Requests."

<sup>240</sup> Gene I. Maeroff, Letter to Alexander Schindler, December 4, 1978, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection, Box 21/ 47, Folder "Outreach Mail Requests."

<sup>241</sup> Herbert Rubin, Letter to Alexander Schindler, November 25, 1993, AJA, 10/2.

<sup>242</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Herbert Rubin, November 1993, AJA, 10/2.

'a diminution of the rabbinate at a time when the authority of rabbis is being eroded.'"<sup>243</sup> Although Schindler assured the CCAR that all the major organizations of Reform Judaism would cooperate in this Outreach venture, Melvin Merians, a UAHC Board member at the time and member of the Outreach Task Force, said that Schindler did not present his Outreach proposal to the CCAR initially because he was afraid it would get hung up in Committee.<sup>244</sup>

Dannel Schwartz, a Reform rabbi from Birmingham, Michigan, applauded Schindler's call to proselytize and explained in a *Moment* magazine article that his understanding of Schindler's proposal was that he was not asking for the type of "mass crusade" as had been used by the Christian denominations. Instead, Jewish proselytization was to be a gentle introduction by way of information centers and "Introduction to Judaism" courses. He pointed out that converts who had made the conscious choice to be Jewish had added much to synagogue life. Schwartz concluded, "So why be afraid? At worst, we might fail. But at best, we might improve not only our quantity, but our quality as well."<sup>245</sup>

Another Reform rabbi, Robert Jacobs, noted that Schindler's proposal was enthusiastically received by Reform Jews, and not so enthusiastically endorsed by Orthodox and Conservative clergy. In an article he wrote for the *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Jacobs cautioned that before Jews undertook any large-scale program of converting non-Jews, they had some homework to do. They first had to be aware that the culture they were operating in was not largely enamored with religious institutional

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<sup>243</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs, "Rabbis' Meeting Focuses on Proselytizing," *The New York Times*, March 30, 1979, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>244</sup> Melvin Merians, Telephone interview. September 26, 2006.

<sup>245</sup> Dannel Schwartz, "Comment," *Moment* March 1979, 28.

membership and involvement, and they would need to imaginatively market their program. Secondly, they needed to be aware that they were not "Protestant" Jews, that is, they were not selling a faith community but, rather, a way of life. And, more than that, modern Jews needed to be aware of this selling point themselves before they could begin to export it to others. Thirdly, because the explosion of intermarriage was such a recent phenomenon, the emotional issues involved with integrating converts into the Jewish communities were complicated by so many Jews' long-held suspicion of the non-Jew, even in the modern age. These were all problems in the process of being resolved. Finally, the rabbi, who would most likely have the most contact with these new Jews, was him or herself largely unprepared to deal with the problems that arise with the convert or with the convert's family.<sup>246</sup>

Rabbi David Polish noted in another *Journal of Reform Judaism* article that although it is a commandment for Christians to proselytize, a significant part of the Christian world was reassessing its missionary efforts aimed specifically at Jews. Many Christian groups were no longer specifically targeting Jews for their conversion efforts. For Jews to actively seek converts might cause Christians to reciprocate and seek converts from the Jewish "unsynagogued." He also mentioned that there was a "controlled tension" between Reform Jews and their fellow Jews who refused to accept a non-halachic conversion. If Reform Jews began converting large numbers of people, there would be more problems with these more observant Jews. Polish concluded that with the immense needs within the Jewish world, including the lack of synagogue affiliation and the large number of Jews who were not providing a Jewish education for

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<sup>246</sup> Robert P. Jacobs, "Rabbi Schindler's Call to Convert: Are We Ready?" *Journal of Reform Judaism* 27, no. 3, (1980): 30-38.

their children, that scarce resources would be better spent within the Jewish community.<sup>247</sup>

The Conservative rabbis were not generally in favor of proselytizing to the "unchurched." Wolfe Kelman, Executive Vice-President of the Rabbinical Assembly in 1978 when Schindler announced his Outreach initiative, noted that the majority of publicity centered on Outreach to the "unchurched." He reminded his readers in a *Moment* magazine article about the rest of Schindler's message. However, he, like his Reform colleague Polish, worried that if Jews began to proselytize, it might give the green light for Christians to aggressively proselytize Jews. Kelman also argued that Jews really needed to welcome the diversity of faith traditions; a welcome that would not be served if Jews were to begin to actively proselytize. He said, "We must learn to accept the potential for holiness in those who seek to quench their thirst for the words of the Lord from different wells and springs"<sup>248</sup> Another Conservative rabbi, Harold Shulweis, worried that proselytization would damage the Jewish character. He noted in *Moment* magazine that Jews have been insulted by those who claimed they had absolute truth. Might Jews do the same if they began to proselytize? He also worried about the definition of the "unchurched." Some of the "unchurched" were dedicated secularists and needed their convictions to be respected. There were also those who were disillusioned with the church. Christians might consider these people off limits for Jewish proselytization. However, Shulweis agreed with Schindler's belief that if Jews were called upon to teach

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<sup>247</sup> David Polish, "Jewish Proselyting: Another Opinion", *Journal of Reform Judaism* 26, no. 3 (1979): 1-9.

<sup>248</sup> Wolfe Kelman, "Comment," *Moment*, March 1979, 25.

the "unchurched," it would build their self-esteem. He also believed that Jews could formulate a dignified proselytization policy.<sup>249</sup>

Because Orthodox rabbis only accepted *halachic* conversions, it follows that they would not be supporters of an initiative of the Reform Jews to reach out to the non-Jewish population. Rabbi Israel Klaven during a Conference on Conversion explained that for him, Jews were to act as a light to the nations, and if people chose to convert because of the examples they saw in the Jewish world, this is what he would deem proselytization. He was also very concerned about the standards of conversion and wondered why it was so important for Jews to consider proselytization when there are so many Jews who were lost. Klaven advocated bringing Jews back into a real Jewish life, not a pseudo-Jewish life.<sup>250</sup> Schindler had no patience with the Orthodox position. When Orthodox Rabbi Sol Roth made a speech and said that leadership roles should not be made available to anyone who married outside of Judaism, Schindler responded, "One can oppose intermarriage and seek to mitigate its spread without pillorying the intermarried. Jewish life has no need of witch hunts."<sup>251</sup>

If the lay people and the rabbis of the three major Jewish movements had differing opinions about Outreach to the "unchurched," Christians were apparently unphased. The UAHC directed Rabbi Balfour Brickner, head of the UAHC Inter-religious Affairs Department, to poll select Christian groups and ascertain their reactions to the idea of Jews' proselytizing. Although the fundamental evangelical Protestant community declined to respond, the Catholic and Protestant church members who did

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<sup>249</sup> Harold Shulweis, "Comment," *Moment*, March 1979, 27.

<sup>250</sup> "Conference on Conversion," *Congress Monthly*, 14-15.

<sup>251</sup> "Head of Reform Judaism Assails Orthodox Stand on Intermarriage" *New York Times*, July 28, 1980. <http://selectnytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf/> (accessed November 9, 2006).

respond "generally agreed that a strong program by Jews would not seriously hamper recent progress in interfaith talks and that Judaism could help fill a need among millions of Americans who claim no religious identity."<sup>252</sup>

A noted sociologist who was not Jewish, Peter Berger, in a *Commentary* article also had positive words about the renewed efforts of the Jews to proselytize. He, like Schindler and Shulweis, agreed that "the way to 'one's own' [religion] has often led through interaction with the 'other,'" and, further, "interreligious dialogue should be high on the agenda of every religious community in the contemporary world—not just for moral or socio-political reasons, but also for theological reasons."<sup>253</sup>

Amid all the words of support or of dismay, Schindler continued to push for resources to reach out to the "unchurched." In his address to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC in 1979, he mentioned again Outreach to the "unchurched." He said the response had been overwhelmingly favorable both from officials, even those more traditionally inclined, and from just ordinary people. After reading some particularly moving letters, he asked, "How can we not reach out to such people?...In a word, we have an enormous amount of wisdom and experience to offer this troubled world, and we Jews ought to be proud to speak about it, frankly, freely, and with dignity."<sup>254</sup>

In his 1979 report to the UAHC board, David Belin mentioned that reaching out to the "unchurched" had received the most publicity, but that the Task Force was not yet ready to reach out to this group. Belin reported that there would be further study, and they would bring their recommendations to the board in two more years. He did promise,

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<sup>252</sup> Kenneth Briggs, "Jews Say Christians Back Proselytizing," *The New York Times*, May 20, 1979, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archivepdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>253</sup> Peter L. Berger, "Converting the Gentiles?" *Commentary*, May 1979, 39.

<sup>254</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Report of the President" to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC*. Delivered in Toronto, December 1979. Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

however, that any program they recommended would be circumspect. It would not be aggressive but would, instead, be intellectually oriented.<sup>255</sup>

Lydia Kukoff and Mel Merians both agreed that there was so much work to be done with converts and with the intermarried and that the Outreach effort to the "unchurched" was so new and so controversial that, at least at first, the Task Force was unable to make this initiative a priority.<sup>256</sup>

In 1981 the Outreach Task Force issued a summary report to the UAHC and to the Reform rabbinate that explained the benefits they thought would accrue to Judaism if an active program of proselytization was undertaken. The Task Force recommended that programs be created and implemented to bring the message of Judaism to the general public. In order to create effective programming, they recommended that the UAHC consult with experts in mass media about preparing literature, audio visual and other materials, and to assist them in planning, as well as researching and disseminating these new programs.<sup>257</sup> In December 1981, after the summary report had been issued, Schindler addressed the UAHC Biennial in Boston and declared, "Let no one underestimate the scope of this project. What we propose, in effect, is that we launch a massive effort to transform the attitude of an entire community, an entire generation, if you will, from a resigned, embarrassed acquiescence into a determined, emphatic counter-action." Schindler went on to acknowledge that present resources were not enough to adequately fund this kind of programming and called upon the entire Reform

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<sup>255</sup> "Report of the Belin Task Force," December 1979, 167-168.

<sup>256</sup> Lydia Kukoff and Melvin Merians, Telephone interviews, September 29, 2006, and September 26, 2006, respectively.

<sup>257</sup> "A Summary of the Report of the Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach," August 31, 1981. AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection, 3/47.



movement to establish a fund outside their regular budget to provide the resources for this ambitious program.<sup>258</sup>

Commenting on the proposals adopted at the Boston Biennial, *The New York Times* stated, "The plan approved this week in Boston...represents a historic step toward welcoming non-Jews into Judaism, but stops short of encouraging outright proselytizing." *The Times* further explained that the UAHC was looking for \$5 million to fund the project, and that a \$1 million matching grant had already been received.<sup>259</sup> In a meeting held at some point after the 1981 UAHC Biennial, Schindler admitted that Outreach to the religiously non-preferenced had been moved to the back burner, but now it was coming out to the front burner. He asked that programs for the unaffiliated, religiously non-preferenced, and intermarried be combined to maximize scarce funds. He assured those present at the meeting that the money was being separately raised to allay the perception that scarce funds were being allocated to non-Jews, thereby giving them a higher priority than Jews.<sup>260</sup>

Yet, in the minutes to another Outreach meeting with Schindler present, that was held after the 1981 Boston Biennial, it was concluded "This is one area [outreach to the religiously non-preferenced] of the Task Force report that received some strenuous objections from the floor in Boston, and as there is so much to be done in other areas of our Outreach efforts, areas in which there is general agreement and a consensus,

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<sup>258</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, Delivered Boston, December 4, 1981, AJA 24/4.

<sup>259</sup> Kenneth A. Briggs "Reform Jews to Seek Conversion of Non-Jews" *The New York Times*, December 9, 1981, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>260</sup> Minutes. Undated meeting. AJA 11/11.

programming for the religiously non-preferenced should be put on a back burner for now."<sup>261</sup>

In 1983 the Outreach Task Force issued its final report before it dissolved and was superseded by the Joint UAHC/CCAR Commission on Outreach. The report talked of the progress made on four of the five resolutions passed at the 1981 biennial: First, Outreach to the non-Jewish partner in an intermarriage; second, Outreach to the children of intermarriages; third, Outreach programs to strengthen and improve "Introduction to Judaism" courses; and, fourth, follow-through Outreach programs to meet the needs of those who had recently chosen Judaism. The fifth resolution, which had been overwhelmingly approved at the 1981 Biennial, recommended reaching out to the general public by communicating information about Judaism. The resolution clearly stated that this particular Outreach was not to be directed to adherents of other religions. However, the report noted that the limited resources available to Outreach at the time were inadequate for them to achieve all of their goals. The report concluded, "This does not mean that we are completely forgetting about the fifth area; programs of information for the religiously non-preferenced. Rather, we believe that we should initially concentrate our efforts to implement the first four of the resolutions which were adopted at the 1981 Boston Biennial."<sup>262</sup>

Yet, the year before, in an interview with *The New York Times*, Schindler had strongly advocated proselytizing to the "unchurched." He told the interviewer, "I am convinced that it is the mandate of our faith to be a proselyte, that we were driven out of

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<sup>261</sup> Minutes of Outreach Meeting, January 25-26, Tarrytown, NY."AJA, Unprocessed UAHC Collection 4/47, Folder "Outreach - Denver." Year of meeting was not specified but between 1981 and 1983.

<sup>262</sup> "Closing Report of the UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach," October 1983, CCAR Files, New York, NY.

that stance, essentially, by the repression of others. And now that such legal inhibitions no longer restrain us, we ought to be true to our faith.... [The proposal was aimed toward] those who are already bound to us by marriage. But I felt that in principle, we had to go beyond."<sup>263</sup>

Ten years later, Schindler once again brought Outreach to the forefront in his 1993 Presidential address to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC held in San Francisco.

I envisaged the Outreach program not as an emergency to repair the holes in our tent, but as a long-range effort to "enlarge the site" of our tents, to "extend the size of our dwellings." My dream was to see our Judaism unleashed as a resource for a world in need, not as the exclusive inheritance of the few, but as a renewable resource for the many; not as a religious stream too small to be seen on the map of the world, but as a deep flowing river hidden by the overgrown confusion of modern times, which could nourish humanity's highest aspirations. Early on, our Outreach Commission rightly moved to the back burner my call to reach out those of our neighbors who belong to no church or other religious institutions because there were thousands of hungry individuals close at hand....But now is the time to move forward with the wider mission.... Outreach was meant from the beginning...something more than welcoming the strangers who choose to live in our midst. It bids us to seek them out and invite them in, like the prototype of the proselytizing Jew, Abraham whose tent was continually open on all four sides for fear that he would miss a wandering nomad and fail to bid him enter.<sup>264</sup>

Once again, *The New York Times* reported that Schindler had asked for \$5 million to reach out to those who did not belong to any church. The \$5 million dollars, Schindler was quoted as saying, could be used to expand to the general public the programs already in place to introduce Judaism to the non-Jewish spouse.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> "Should American Jews Encourage Converts?" *The New York Times*, May 23, 1982. <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>264</sup> Alexander Schindler *Presidential Address to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC*.

<sup>265</sup> Peter Steinfeld, "Reform Judaism Head Seeks Converts" *The New York Times*, October 24, 1993. <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

The Outreach Department of the UAHC introduced a very successful program aimed at those who wanted to know a little more about Judaism. It was called "Taste of Judaism," and it was a "free, 3-session class for beginners—Jewish or not—that explored the topics of Jewish spirituality, ethics and community designed for unaffiliated Jews, non-Jews, intermarried couples and all searching for an entry into Jewish life."<sup>266</sup> The key to the program was advertising in the local press, and grants were made available to congregations to help defray the costs associated with this advertising.<sup>267</sup> By 1999, according to Dru Greenwood, the Director of the UAHC Outreach Department at that time, 17,000 people had gone through "Taste of Judaism" classes. About half of that number were non-Jews, the other half was comprised of Jews desiring to learn a little more about their faith. According to a UAHC survey, about one in seven of the non-Jews who attended the "Taste of Judaism" sessions went on to study for conversion.<sup>268</sup>

In 1999, only twenty-one years after Schindler revealed his vision of Outreach, about 3%, or 180,000, of the six million American Jews identified themselves as converted.<sup>269</sup> The Outreach Task Force, followed by the Joint UAHC/CCAR Commission on Outreach, had successfully put programs in place, developing curricula where none had existed before, and had produced print publications and various audio visual productions. Programs had been designed for Jews by Choice, intermarried couples, and children of intermarrieds.<sup>270</sup> In only twenty-one years, the vision of a

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<sup>266</sup> *Taste of Judaism*, <http://urj.org/outreach/classes/taste/> (accessed November 18, 2006)

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> Gustav Niebuhr, "Ideas & Trends: A Question of Identity: For Jews, a Little Push for Converts, and a Lot of Angst," *The New York Times*, June 13, 1999, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Presidential Address to the 60<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC*. (Delivered in New Orleans on November 4, 1989). Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

former refugee, a professed *Ohev Israel*, had engineered a change in the attitudes of most Reform Jews and many traditional Jews to be more accepting of the intermarried couples and to actively welcome and encourage conversion to Judaism. The leadership skills of Alexander Schindler, whose innovative approach to the problems posed by a spiraling intermarriage rate, were able to inspire the Outreach Task Force largely staffed by volunteers to work incredibly hard to bring his vision to reality. He was even able to overcome the opposition posed both by lay and rabbinic colleagues who were leery of changing attitudes that had existed for hundreds of years. The combination of Schindler's vision and leadership abilities resulted in Outreach becoming a large program within the American Reform movement.

Yet as the Outreach movement developed, unanticipated, sometimes challenging problems arose with the changes wrought by the influx of Jews by Choice and intermarried couples into synagogue life. Two of these derivative challenges deserve closer inspection: the issue of matrilineal versus patrilineal Jewish descent and the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.

## Chapter 4

### Am I a Jew if My Mother is not?

When Alexander Schindler introduced his Outreach vision to the UAHC Executive Board in 1978, he included an impassioned statement in favor of patrilineal descent. He told the story of Senator William Cohen from Maine. "A good Jew, he came from a mixed marriage, and when it came time for his *Bar Mitzvah*, the Orthodox Rabbi, knowing of the mother's failure to convert, turned the boy down, even though he was circumcised and reared in a Jewish home and educated in a Jewish religious school. Following this refusal the family, in its entirety, converted to Christianity."<sup>271</sup> Schindler admitted that he was not prepared to propose a solution at that time but saw the need to harmonize tradition with modern need. "Why, why should a movement which from its very birth has insisted on the full equality of men and women in the religious life unquestionably accept the principle of Jewish lineage through the maternal line?"<sup>272</sup>

By the time of the UAHC General Assembly held a year later in Toronto, the newly created Outreach Task Force had been had already begun its work. In the course of his presidential speech to the General Assembly, Schindler asked in no uncertain terms that the issue of patrilineal descent be dealt with. He stated that he wanted a child's upbringing and, ultimately, his identity to be considered at least as important as genealogical factors in determining his Jewishness. He spoke to the patent unfairness of strict application of the matrilineal principle saying,

Adherence to the matrilineal principle confronts us with a dreadful anomaly: the offspring of a mixed marriage, whether reared as a Jew or

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<sup>271</sup> Alexander Schindler, Memo to Edith Samuel, November 13, 1978, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files. Box 4 /47. Folder "Outreach Working Papers on Halacha."

<sup>272</sup> UAHC Executive Committee Minutes, December 1-3, 1978, 20.

not, no matter, is automatically a Jew, so long as the mother is Jewish; but if the mother isn't, the offspring must ultimately undergo formal conversion, even if he was raised as a Jew and lived in an intensely Jewish home. This is nonsensical, absurd! Surely the father counts for something when we affix his child's religious identity?<sup>273</sup>

The whole question of patrilineal versus matrilineal descent was not new to Reform Judaism in America. In fact, in 1880 Isaac Meyer Wise wrote a letter concerning a man with a gentile mother and a Jewish father who desired to become a member of B'nai Brith. Wise said that, in his opinion, the offspring of a Jewish father should be considered Jewish.<sup>274</sup>

In 1947 the CCAR dealt with the status of the children of mixed marriages in a report on mixed marriages and intermarriage. Solomon Freehof was the chairman of the Special Committee on Intermarriage, and his name was associated with the Reform understanding of the status of these children. "In mixed marriages, (i.e. marriage between a Jew and an unconverted Gentile), the child follows the status of the mother....If the mother is Gentile, the child is non-Jewish and must be converted before it can be married to a Jew by Jewish law."<sup>275</sup> According to the terms of the report, if the child was an infant, the statement of the parents of their intent to raise their children as Jews was sufficient for conversion. If the child was religious school age, he could receive instruction in the school, and the ceremony of Confirmation at the end of his religious education would be sufficient for conversion. A child above religious school age would need to consent sincerely to the conversion and would receive the same instruction and be converted in a ceremony as an adult. According to Freehof's report, an

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<sup>273</sup> Alexander Schindler. Report of the President to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC.

<sup>274</sup> Isaac Meyer Wise. Letter to Adolph Loeb, February 5, 1880, AJA, Unprocessed Eugene Mihaly Collection, Box 2/3, Folder "Who is a Jew?"

<sup>275</sup> *CCAR Yearbook*, 57, (1948): 70.

adult conversion in 1947 did not require immersion or ritual circumcision of any kind. Rather there would be an ethical examination and formal instruction, followed by a prescribed religious ceremony.<sup>276</sup> This 1947 report was the official stance of the CCAR in 1979 when Schindler put forth his recommendation.

In 1958 David Ben Gurion sent a letter to Dr. Nelson Glueck, President of the Hebrew Union College, asking his opinion as to what the registration procedure should be for a child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother when these parents desired that their child be registered as a Jew. At the request of Dr. Glueck, an answer to this question was proposed by Dr. Alexander Guttman, Talmud Professor at Hebrew Union College. Guttman argued that the child would need a conversion in order to be considered a Jew according to Jewish religious law, which stated that Jewish identity comes from the mother, not the father. However, Guttman noted that this was a religious, not a civil matter. "It would seem quite paradox, [sic] if Israel adopted a policy of administering the admission to the Jewish religion by its civil servants, while leaving marriage and divorce entirely in the hands of (a group of) rabbis....Therefore, the best solution, in my opinion, would be to leave the admission of non-Jews to Judaism to the Rabbis, Orthodox and Liberal alike."<sup>277</sup>

Dr. Eugene Mihaly, Professor of Rabbinic Literature at Hebrew Union College, wrote a seventeen-page, carefully documented letter to Dr. Solomon Freehof, who was the Chairman of the CCAR Committee on Responsa. The letter is undated, but was most likely written in 1960. The purpose of the letter was to comment on a responsum written by Freehof concerning the Jewish status of apostates and Jewish children raised in a

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid. 170-172.

<sup>277</sup> Alexander Guttman, Letter to Dr. Nelson Glueck, December 19, 1958, Rabbi Ken Erhlich, private collection.



Christian environment. During the course of his discussion, Mihaly argued rather forcefully in favor of patrilineal descent. In fact, Schindler made reference to this letter in his 1979 speech to the General Assembly of the UAHC in Toronto. Mihaly stated in his letter, "Not our liberalism, but our Judaism demands that the child of a mixed marriage whether the father or the mother is non-Jewish, be considered a full Jew if the home environment is Jewish and if the child is raised as a Jew."<sup>278</sup> Mihaly's specific arguments will be disclosed in detail later in this chapter, but suffice it to say that in this letter, he raised the issue of genealogy versus how a person is raised and/or self-identifies.

Schindler decided to advocate on behalf of patrilineal descent in Judaism for several reasons. First, he had encountered several painful episodes relating to the matrilineal descent law. In several speeches, he quoted a letter written by a young woman, Adrienne Gordon, whose mother was not Jewish, but whose father was a Jew. She was not raised in a religious environment but explained that at some point, she became aware of her Jewish heritage, and, therefore, she had the responsibility to remember the six million victims of the Holocaust. Because of her awareness of that responsibility, the young woman decided to identify with the Jewish people. She said, "I decided to take on all the deficits of being a member of an oppressed group, with none of the benefits of community. Jews considered me a non-Jew, non-Jews considered me a Jew, and with a despair tinged with as much humor as I could muster, I began to consider myself nothing."<sup>279</sup> Schindler asked,

How could we fail to respond to such a person? Why should we demand that she undergo a formal conversion? Why should we not say to the

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<sup>278</sup> Eugene Mihaly, Letter to Solomon Freehof, 1960 (estimated), Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>279</sup> Adrienne Gorman, Letter to Alexander Schindler, February 26, 1982, AJA, Unprocessed Eugene Mihaly Collection, Box 1/3, File "Who is a Jew?"

Adriennes of this world: By God, you are a Jew. You are the daughter of a Jewish parent. You have resolved to share our fate. You are therefore flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone. You are in truth what you consider yourself to be—a Jew.<sup>280</sup>

Similarly, a woman wrote to Schindler and said, "All my life I've 'felt Jewish' and have never known anyone who accepted me as such, except Gentiles. My father was Jewish. At this late date it's hopeless to think I'm Jewish. I'm 65."<sup>281</sup> Schindler's writings demonstrate that he was moved by the pain of these people. In one of his major addresses he asked, "How do you think these children [of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers] feel though they are circumcised, and reared Jewishly with the consent and cooperation of both parents, when they hear that only the child of a Jewish mother is Jewish? When they grow up, some of them find the strength to speak of their silent pain."<sup>282</sup>

It was not just the personal sufferings that moved Schindler; it was also the irrationality of the standard practice that irked him. He commented during one speech that basing Jewish identity on the genealogy of a child's mother led to some strange anomalies. Ben Gurion's grandson was not considered to be Jewish in Israel because his mother was a Reform Jewish convert, yet Nikita Khrushchev's grandson was considered Jewish because his mother was a Jew.<sup>283</sup>

The logic argument also extended to the current sociological reality. In the modern world of the 1980s, Schindler argued, couples shared the responsibilities of raising children. No longer could it be assumed that ethnic identity was transmitted

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<sup>280</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Reform Innovations and their Impact on Jewish Unity." Speech delivered in Boston, February 29, 1988, AJA, 24/8.

<sup>281</sup> Agnes MacIntyre, Letter to Alexander Schindler, April 1, 1984, AJA, 12/4.

<sup>282</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Will There Be One Jewish People by the Year 2000?" Speech delivered to UAHC/CLAL Conference on Jewish Unity, Princeton, March 16, 1986, AJA, 24/6.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

solely by the mother in a mixed marriage.<sup>284</sup> The sociological reality of intermarriage itself was also a concern of Schindler's and, for him, it served as yet another rationale for adopting a policy of patrilineal descent. In a speech, he estimated that with an intermarriage rate of 30%, there would be 100,000 people threatened with either "exile or annihilation" from the Jewish community if the principle of matrilineal descent was strictly applied to them.

Each number represents a human being, a child of intermarriage who has suffered damage from our past lack of a forthright declaration that they are fully Jewish....Why should we demand they undergo a formal conversion when their Jewish identities are already secured by far more than a symbolic act?...Should we have continued to enforce our opposition to intermarriage itself by punishing and rejecting those who intermarry? Can we afford in numbers, or in spirit, to alienate them and their-our children?<sup>285</sup>

In addition to the problem of the Jewish identity of children of non-Jewish mothers was the attitude of the non-Jewish men who married Jewish women. One of the issues raised in a study of conversion authored by Steven Huberman (mentioned in the previous chapter) was why so many more non-Jewish women in interfaith marriages converted than non-Jewish men. Huberman found that many of the non-Jewish men were aware that Jewish identity was passed through the maternal line. They did not think their conversion would matter as much as the conversion of a non-Jewish woman who was married to a Jewish man. (It should also be noted that ritual circumcision or even the taking of a drop of blood was not looked upon favorably by many of the non-Jewish men either.)<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Alexander Schindler, *Why Patrilineal Descent?* Position paper written between 1981 and 1983. AJA, 24/4.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

<sup>286</sup> Steven Huberman, *New Jews: The Dynamics of Religious Conversion*. Quoted by Alexander Schindler, during meeting of the UAHC Board of Trustees, September 28, 1980, AJA, Collection 72, Microfilm 3694.

Schindler also listed historic reasons that explained why patrilineal descent should be embraced by the Reform movement. He cited the Torah where genealogical lists followed the male, not the female line. He noted that the children of Moses were considered Jewish, despite the fact that Moses' wife, Zipporah, was not a Jew. The paternal principle also applied to Joseph, whose children from Asenath were not only considered Jews, but their names are used in the blessing we confer on our sons each Shabbat. In rabbinic literature, Schindler argued, we are reminded that we live by the merits of our fathers, and the inheritance of priestly status traditionally follows the male line.<sup>287</sup>

Finally, the memory of the Holocaust, which we have seen was never far from Schindler's consciousness, was a strong impetus for him to champion the cause of patrilineal descent:

If nothing else, the memory of *shoah* should impel us to do so [allow for patrilineal descent]. It is a memory that weighs heavily upon us....Let us never forget that those who sought to destroy us made no distinction between us. They killed us all, whatever our "qualifying adjective" yea, even those who were accepted as Jews by non-Orthodox rabbis or whose fathers were Jewish though their mothers were not. Even as we were brothers and sisters in death, so must we ever remain brothers and sisters in life.<sup>288</sup>

One of Reform's early champions of patrilineal descent was Professor Eugene Mihaly who, as we noted above, advocated on behalf of patrilineal descent in his 1960 letter to Solomon Freehof, the chairman of the Responsa Committee of the CCAR. Mihaly reminded Freehof that the CCAR represented a body which had denied the authority of the traditional *halacha* and in actual practice had rejected detailed laws concerning diet, Sabbath observance, laws of divorce, etc. According to Mihaly, the use

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Will There Be One Jewish People by the Year 2000?"

of *halachic* arguments seemed anachronistic at best. "Of what possible relevance is a citation from the writings of a nineteenth century Rabbi of Pressburg who commanded his children in his last will, 'Do not live in the same neighborhood with them (the reformers) nor must you associate with them at all, at all. And do not even touch the books of Moses Dessauer (Mendelssohn)'"<sup>289</sup> Mihaly then took Freehof to task for basing an answer to a question of Jewish identity on a talmudic principle found in *Yevamot 45b* that a girl child born of a gentile father and Jewish mother is "kosher." Freehof had asserted, based on this principle, that even if the child in question married a gentile, the children would be considered Jewish until the end of time. Even if they had maintained Christian homes, all they would need to do would be to promise to maintain a Jewish home to be considered Jewish. No conversion would be required. Mihaly asked, "Are we indeed prepared to grant automatic Jewish status on the basis of 'Jewish blood content' even if infinitesimal so long as it is traced through the mother?"<sup>290</sup> Instead, Mihaly argued that Reform Jews should not emphasize birth as a criterion to establish Jewish identity, but rather they should emphasize the way a child was raised and what his or her choice was once he or she attained adulthood. This would mean that Reform Jews would have criteria more stringent than the Talmud or Codes which allows "Regardless of one's background, no matter how a person was raised, whatever he or his parents or grandparents may have done, even if his ancestors were pious, practicing Christians for generations, as long as there is some obscure Jewish grandmother in the dim past, we will do whatever convenience dictates without the fuss or bother. He is still a Jew."<sup>291</sup> Mihaly

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<sup>289</sup> *Lev Ha-Ivri*, p. 9, cited by Eugene Mihaly, Letter to Solomon Freehof, undated but established as 1960.

<sup>290</sup> Eugene Mihaly, Letter to Solomon Freehof, undated but established as 1960.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

then looked at the somewhat tortured history of Jewish status in rabbinic literature and concluded, "Is it not about time that we state boldly and clearly that in all cases involving Jewish status and the relationship of the Jew and the non-Jew the talmudic law is not operative. Its principles cannot, must not be used."<sup>292</sup>

In a paper written in the early 1980's at the request of Herman Schaalman and Max Shapiro, who were then serving as co-chairs of the CCAR's Committee on Conversion, Rabbi Joseph Edelheit<sup>293</sup> argued for non-lineal descent of a child born of mixed-married parents. When the Talmud made rulings on the lineage of children, they used the matrilineal principle. However, the Talmud only ruled on the lineage of children of mixed marriages. The lineage of children of two Jewish parents was implicitly Jewish. In Talmudic times, Edelheit reasoned that the father determined the Jewish line because the priestly line came through the father, and Jews were named after their fathers (*ben/bat*). However, in contemporary cases involving mixed marriages, Edelheit proposed the use of non-lineal descent. Rather than a passive identification based solely on one or the other parent's background, Edelheit recommended identity be based on active identification with Judaism. This way the current inequality in mixed marriages of automatically accepting a child as a Jew if the mother was Jewish, yet requiring conversion of the child if the father was the Jewish partner would be eliminated.<sup>294</sup>

Not all Reform rabbis agreed that the elimination of matrilineal descent would be a positive step. Rabbi Joseph Hirsch wrote in a letter to Schindler:

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Edelheit served as Assistant Rabbi in the Chicago congregation where Schaalman was the Senior Rabbi. He eventually succeeded Schaalman as Senior Rabbi. In 1992 he moved to Minneapolis and became the Senior Rabbi at Temple Israel, where Max Shapiro had served as Senior Rabbi prior to his retirement in 1985.

<sup>294</sup> Joseph A. Edelheit, Letter to Jerome Malino, January 9, Year not specified but estimated to be early 1980s. AJA, Coll. 729, 31/2.

I don't think it is terrible to ask the child of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother to undergo a conversion ceremony, just as I don't think it is terrible to tell parents who have adopted a non-Jewish child without converting him that he must be converted. The reason for following the mother is the same today as in ancient days. Today, too, as in the days of the Romans, you can only be sure about the mother's identity. Then again, it was always thought that the mother has the deciding influence with the infant with whom she is with all day long and not the father. I see absolutely no reason to change this ancient ruling, and I wish for the sake of your original project that you would abandon this.<sup>295</sup>

There was also a petition sent to Rabbi Herman Schaalman (who eventually became the chair of the CCAR Committee on Patrilineal Descent) signed by twenty-one Reform rabbinical students studying in Israel, who objected strongly to the idea of patrilineal descent. They argued that the adoption of a Patrilineal Descent Resolution would not be good for the unity of the Jewish people and could lead to problems in the future if Reform Jews desired to marry their more observant counterparts. Secondly, they stated that the Progressive Movement in Israel was concerned about the move toward patrilineal descent then taking shape in North America, since it impacted on Jewish identity. If patrilineal descent was accepted in North America, it might jeopardize whether or not an individual could be considered a Jew in Israel. This could create problems, especially if individuals from North America desired to get married in Israel. The students thought it was incumbent on Reform Jews to be aware of the sensibilities of their colleagues in other sectors of liberal Judaism. Thirdly, they alleged that the primary motivation for adopting a policy of patrilineal descent was the growing intermarriage rate in North America. Patrilineal descent was a way for Reform Judaism to legitimize the Jewish identity of the children of mixed marriages. Finally, the students alleged that passage of a Patrilineal Descent Resolution would undermine the stand of those in the

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<sup>295</sup> Joseph Hirsch, Letter to Alexander Schindler, January 9, 1980, AJA, 10/1.

CCAR who refused to officiate at intermarriages.<sup>296</sup> Michael Klein, the dean of the Jerusalem campus of Hebrew Union College at that time, in a cover letter to the students' petition took the students to task because "students are certainly free to express their opinion, even if they have not read the text of the proposed resolution that they are protesting. They are not, however, privileged with the right to misrepresent facts or opinions."<sup>297</sup> Klein countered that the Progressive Movement in Israel had not expressed concern over the proposed resolution; in fact, some members of the movement were in favor of a move to patrilineal descent. Klein disagreed with the students' assertion that the only reason for the resolution was the legitimization of intermarriage. Finally, he did not believe that a vast majority of CCAR members performed intermarriages.<sup>298</sup>

The students' assertion that Reform Judaism's adoption of patrilineal descent would be detrimental to Jewish unity was bolstered if we look at the reaction of those in the other major movements in Judaism to the concept of patrilineal descent. Orthodox Jews were very unhappy with this Reform initiative. Orthodox Rabbi Simcha Abeles Friedman wrote to Schindler, "Our Torah does not advocate patrilineal descent. We cannot change Torah law, as you well know, Sir. Changing God-given Torah laws because it seems expedient leads to more and more compromises and more changes until Torah becomes just another book...choose to follow it, if you will."<sup>299</sup>

The Conservative stance was also quite clear. Conservative Jews followed the traditional *halacha* that a child of a non-Jewish father and a Jewish mother was considered a Jew, but if the father was Jewish and the mother was not, the children were

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<sup>296</sup> Open letter to the members of the CCAR, undated but before May 20, 1982. Attached to letter from Michael Klein to Herman Schaalman dated May 20, 1982. CCAR files, New York.

<sup>297</sup> Michael Klein, Letter to Herman Schaalman, May 20, 1982, CCAR files, New York.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Simcha Abeles Friedman, Letter to Alexander Schindler, May 8, 1991, AJA, 12/4.



considered gentiles. The Conservative understanding of the Reform position on the Jewishness of the children of intermarriages was based on the 1947 Freehof definition. Therefore, if a child of a Reform intermarriage with a non-Jewish mother desired to marry a person who had been raised in a Conservative home, and the couple wanted a Conservative rabbi to perform the wedding ceremony, the Reform Jew would be required to undergo immersion and if the Reform Jew was a male, circumcision, or *hatafat dam brit* (taking of a ritual drop of blood), would also be required.<sup>300</sup>

While the arguments both pro and con were being waged about the concept of patrilineal descent across the Jewish denominations, the leaders of the Reform movement were deciding how to resolve the issue of the Jewish identity of the children of mixed marriages. At least in one aspect, the Reform movement did not have major disagreements. They all concurred that the CCAR was the group that needed to make the final decision regarding patrilineality.

In his 1979 speech, Schindler stated that the CCAR should lead the decision-making process that would culminate in the decision to regard patrilineal descent on equal footing with matrilineal descent.<sup>301</sup> We know that earlier in 1958 Alexander Guttman in his reply to Nelson Glueck concerning Jewish status also stated that Jewish religious status should be left up to the rabbis. Herman Schaalman, chairman of the Patrilineal Descent Committee, stated in a 1981 letter to the members of the CCAR, "It became apparent immediately that the brunt of this consideration [of patrilineal descent] should be borne by the Central Conference of American Rabbis inasmuch as far-reaching

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<sup>300</sup> Kassel Abelson, "The Status of a Non-Jewish Spouse and Children of a Mixed-Marriage in the Synagogue," *Conservative Judaism* 35, (Summer 1982), 46-49.

<sup>301</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Report of the President to the 55<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC," Toronto, 1979. Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

issues of Jewish practice, tradition, and law were centrally involved in this entire matter.”<sup>302</sup> It should be noted that this letter, which detailed the progress that the Patrilineal Descent Committee was making, seemed to be in response to a letter written to Schaalman by Rabbi Joseph Glaser. In that letter, Glaser suggested that Schaalman write a letter to the membership of the CCAR updating them on the progress of the Patrilineal Committee. In addition, Glaser said, “We should not allow a Boston–UAHC Biennial to be an absolute deadline that will rush our own deliberations. It would be good if we could come out of the Grossinger meeting with a definite approach that could then be reported to the Boston Biennial as the decision of the CCAR. If we don’t, it is possible that they could grab the ball away from us again.”<sup>303</sup> The rivalry between the CCAR and UAHC also seemed to play a role in the deliberations surrounding the patrilineal decision.

Jerome Malino, President of the CCAR in 1980, appointed Herman Schaalman chairman of the Patrilineal Descent Committee and also appointed seventeen rabbis to serve with him on the Committee. This distinguished Committee included: Ben Zion Wacholder, Walter Jacob, Peter Knobel, Alexander Schindler, Alfred Gottschalk, Leonard Kravitz, Julius Kravetz, Samuel Karff, Albert Friedlander, Robert Seltzer, Jerome Folkman, Stanley Dreyfus, Max Shapiro, Gunther Plaut, Joshua Haberman, Shy [Isaiah] Zeldin, and Daniel Silver. Malino and Glaser, President and Executive Vice President of the CCAR, respectively, served ex officio.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> Herman Schaalman, Letter to Colleague, November 20, 1981, AJA, Coll. 729, 31/2.

<sup>303</sup> Joseph Glaser, Letter to Herman Schaalman, November 12, 1980. AJA, Coll. 729, 31/2. Underlined in original.

<sup>304</sup> Jerome Malino. List attached to letter to Ben Zion Wacholder, August 29, 1980, AJA, Coll. 729, 31/2.

The Patrilineal Descent Committee met for the first time in December 1980. However, the issues the Committee met to discuss had already been raised at a meeting of the Committee on Conversion held earlier that same year. According to the minutes of that earlier meeting, there were already two resolutions regarding patrilineal descent—one that had been standing for over a year. Obviously, then, patrilineal descent was an issue that was not brand new when Schindler brought it to the attention of the UAHC General Assembly. In fact, Rabbi Max Shapiro stated that the Committee on Conversion worked closely with Schindler to ensure that recognition of patrilineal descent could become a reality.<sup>305</sup>

At the earlier 1980 Conversion Committee meeting, Joseph Glaser stated that there were no less than four CCAR Committees grappling with the issue of patrilineal descent. After explaining current Reform practice, Glaser offered five possible solutions that could settle the debate over the patrilineal descent issue. First was to allow Freehof's 1947 responsum to stand as status quo, which, to Glaser's thinking, would be to sidestep the whole issue. Second, the resolution could be defeated on the basis that it would negatively impact *K'lal Yisrael*. Third, the matter could be referred to a Committee for further study. Fourth was to follow a position articulated by Jerome Malino that the child of a Jewish father or a Jewish mother in an intermarriage would need to be raised as a Jew in order to be considered Jewish. Glaser mentioned Mihaly's 1960 letter to Freehof as support for this position. Finally, a minimalist solution would be to suggest that the child of either a Jewish father or mother in a mixed marriage would be considered Jewish

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<sup>305</sup> Max Shapiro. Personal interview with the author. Held in Minneapolis December 19, 2006.

as long as the child was not raised in another religion.<sup>306</sup> The subject was discussed and debated but, obviously, not resolved at that meeting.

According to the November 1981 memo Schaalman sent to the members of the CCAR detailing the progress of the Patrilineal Descent Committee, the CCAR realized quickly that the issue of patrilineality was complex and divisive. This situation called for the appointment of a committee of "well respected and competent rabbis including the President and members of the Hebrew Union-Jewish Institute of Religion faculty, as well as the president of the UAHC."<sup>307</sup> Schaalman then went on to report that the Committee very quickly agreed on a statement affirming patrilineality, but the preamble to that statement which would explain both the historic and *halachic* background of the issue was not so easily drafted. Schaalman emphasized how carefully this document needed to be worded especially since its import extended beyond the world of Reform Judaism. He appointed a HUC professor [Ben Zion Wacholder] to join him in drafting the preamble.<sup>308</sup> This preamble went through several drafts, and the other members of the CCAR along with the members of the Patrilineal Descent Committee were invited to comment on the draft.

In 1982 Herman Schaalman, who was now President of the CCAR as well as Chairman of the Patrilineal Descent Committee, presented the Committee's report to the CCAR at its annual meeting. Schaalman explained that the actual statement of policy was written, but the Committee needed more time to work on what he called the preamble or the supportive statement. The drafting of the preamble had become a formidable task. Schaalman asked that the rabbis in attendance consider only the

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<sup>306</sup> Minutes from the Committee on Conversion meeting, February 12, 1980, AJA, 729, 31/2.

<sup>307</sup> Herman Schaalman, Letter to Colleague, November 20, 1981.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

operative statements during the course of that meeting and ignore the supportive statements as they were a work in progress. He also mentioned that liberal rabbis outside the United States had been consulted and that the Committee had met with members of the Law Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly (a Conservative body) to gauge their reactions.<sup>309</sup>

Following Schaalman's presentation, Schindler spoke passionately in favor of passing the Committee's proposed operative statement. Referring to the Freehof decision of 1947, he explained that the responsum talked of conversion, but that the inequality remained because it only spoke to the children with a non-Jewish mother; the offspring of Jewish mothers were not required to do anything. "If we stand by the past, if we merely reaffirm our earlier pronouncements, we will make no progress at all. We will again have skirted the issue and thus maintain the untenable. The very same result will pursue if we table this question tonight."<sup>310</sup> The status quo could not be maintained, argued Schindler, in a world with a high rate of intermarriage and divorces. The rights of the father needed to be upheld, along with the rights of the children of Jewish fathers to live as Jews and not have their identity questioned. He also asserted that Reform Jews should not be afraid to stand up for what they believed. Schindler did not think that passage of a patrilineal descent resolution would have a negative effect on the Law of Return or cause a split in the Jewish people. In fact, he said,

Let us not become sycophants truckling for favor becoming what we are not. It will not avail us. We will only demean ourselves and lose our distinctive character. Our fathers and our mothers did not forge Reform Judaism to have us traded in for a tinsel imitation of Orthodoxy. We owe Halacha a vote and not a veto, and we owe ourselves that self-respect and

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<sup>309</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* 92, (1983): 67.

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

integrity which hold fast to our finest values and our most cherished beliefs.<sup>311</sup>

David Polish countered that the new resolution was unnecessary because the current policy articulated by the Freehof responsum in 1947 and recorded in the current *Rabbi's Manual* had worked without issue for several decades. He also feared that the proposed resolution would dilute existing policy because the language "participating in Jewish life" was less stringent than the existing language concerning the child of a non-Jewish mother which required "attending a Jewish school following a course of study leading to Confirmation." He disagreed with Schindler and feared that the passage of patrilineal descent would needlessly provoke the Orthodox Jews in Israel and generally damage religious pluralism.<sup>312</sup>

Joseph Edelheit spoke on behalf of the Committee on Conversion. He agreed with Schindler that the resolution was needed because the 1947 resolution maintained the inequality among the children of mixed marriages. He declared, "There is no basis in fact or in Jewish tradition for the argument that a child of a mixed marriage born by happenstance to a Jewish mother is biologically-genetically Jewish. We are not a race."<sup>313</sup> Edelheit also urged a change in the wording in the resolution to ensure that a required standard of education and life-cycle *mitzvot* be met for a child of any mixed marriage to be considered Jewish.<sup>314</sup>

The Patrilineal Descent Resolution presented in 1982 read, "Where only one of the parents is Jewish, the Jewishness of a child is derivable from the Jewish parent, and is

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>312</sup> Ibid., 72-73.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid., 75.

expressed by participation in Jewish life.”<sup>315</sup> The members of the CCAR then discussed the resolution, offering various changes in wording. Eventually, a motion was made to refer the resolution back to the Patrilineal Descent Committee for more refinement. Charles Kroloff summarized the feelings of many when he said, “I waiver not an iota in my commitment to the validity of patrilineal descent. But I want to say that I entered the room with a more simplistic view of this issue than I hold now....I see the need for refinement and for further understanding of this sensitive issue.”<sup>316</sup>

Following the 1982 meeting, Rabbi Gunther Plaut sent a memo to the Patrilineal Descent Committee. He began his memo by expressing his opinion that “If the question of patrilineal descent had not been raised by Alex Schindler, the practice as enunciated in the *Rabbi's Manual* would have been deemed satisfactory by the Conference.”<sup>317</sup> He was concerned that even the mention of examples of how Jewish identity was to be established in mixed marriages would cause problems because examples cited in the 1982 convention had caused significant disagreement. Plaut concluded, “The more we attempt to say the more we will divide the Conference; the less we attempt to say the less we will divide the conference.”<sup>318</sup> Plaut then listed the positions of the rabbis who had attended the 1982 CCAR annual meeting, which ranged from those who followed the *halachic* stance that a child of a non-Jewish mother was not considered a Jew and needed to be converted, to those who believed a child of a marriage where one of the parents was Jewish should automatically be considered a Jew without qualifications. For simplicity, Plaut argued that the most lenient of the stances be adopted. He asserted that it would be

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>317</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, Memorandum to Committee on Patrilineal Descent, August 16, 1982, AJA, Coll. 729, 31/2.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. Underlined statement is in the original quote.

self-defeating to specify particulars for establishing Jewish identity in the children of mixed marriages, as doing so would result in endless debate. This would leave the details up to the individual rabbis—not an inconsistent position with many matters in Reform Judaism. Plaut advocated presenting a simple statement of the *halachic* background and then laying out the resolution with an explanation as to why it would be left open-ended.<sup>319</sup>

After the convention, several other rabbis also contacted Schaalman to express their opinions. Rabbi Moses Weiler was of the opinion that any child of a mixed marriage could easily undergo a conversion and supported his argument with citations from the Talmud. Rabbi Kenneth D. Roseman, echoing Mihaly and others, argued that the fundamental issue of whether genetics has anything to do with Jewish identity should be addressed. He asserted that the way a child was raised should be the defining aspect in his or her Jewish identity. Rabbi Lewis Littman agreed with Plaut and said debate about the particular manner in which identity was expressed drew attention from the main question—the question of the validity of the identity itself. Rabbi Lawrence A. Englander from Canada argued for the status quo. Englander asserted that a child born of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother who was not raised as a Jew should be able to identify as a Jew through his father's line after undergoing a formal conversion.<sup>320</sup> The rabbis, although seemingly in favor of endorsing patrilineal descent, were obviously not in agreement as to how the statement was to be brought into being.

In 1983 Rabbi Peter Knobel representing the Committee on Patrilineal Descent presented a full report along with the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent to the CCAR

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> These rabbis' opinions cited in this paragraph were included as an attachment to a letter written by Rabbi Herman Schaalman to the Patrilineal Working Committee on August 3, 1982, AJA, Coll. 729.31/2.



convention. The report detailed the history of the problem, the *halacha* pertaining to the issue, as well as past positions that had been taken by the CCAR. It was noted in the report that the problem was not a new one. The report, and, by extension, the resolution that was presented at the same time rejected the current assumption that biology alone could establish the Jewishness of the children of mixed marriage where the mother was Jewish. Rather, no matter which parent was Jewish, a mixed married couple would also need to ensure that their children performed acts of *mitzvot* in order for them to be considered Jewish. Knobel also mentioned that the Committee did not believe that adoption of the resolution would lead to a weakening of the Conference's position on rabbinic officiation at intermarriages.<sup>321</sup>

Even though the resolution applied only to North American Jews, there was recognition that passage of this resolution would affect Jews in other parts of the world. Perhaps for this reason, Rabbi Moses Weiler, honorary life chairman of MARAM (an association of liberal rabbis outside North America), traveled to the United States from Israel in order to speak at the convention. Weiler noted the effect that a changed Reform stance on patrilineal descent would have on *K'lal Yisrael*. He argued that the term "Jewish status" was synonymous with legal status; it was not just a private conviction of one individual. He cautioned that the CCAR needed to think through the ramifications of their decision on the rest of the Jewish people. Weiler asked that the Conference do a more thorough study of the whole question to better understand the history of the matrilineal descent argument. He asserted that a more thorough study of the children of intermarriages was needed to ascertain the influence of the non-Jews who remained very much a part of their world. Finally, Weiler mentioned if Reform Jews in North America

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<sup>321</sup> CCAR Yearbook 93 (1984): 144-145.

were to make such a drastic change in the status of Jewish identity, it could precipitate a change in the status of Reform Jews in North America on the Israeli Law of Return. He recommended the resolution be sent back to Committee.<sup>322</sup>

David Belin, the Chairman of the Outreach Task Force, addressed the convention about the work of Outreach to date and presented the opinion of the Outreach Task Force concerning patrilineal descent. He recognized that Jewish status was an area for the rabbis to determine, but Belin argued for consistency in the treatment of children of mixed marriages. Belin, like Schindler, believed it was discriminatory to have additional requirements for those who had Jewish fathers but non-Jewish mothers. Belin advocated the position put forth by Malino, that is, a child of a marriage where either parent was Jewish would be presumed to be a Jew unless they actively identified with another religion.<sup>323</sup>

The Conference then debated the resolution, including another impassioned plea for passage by Alexander Schindler. The resolution that finally passed stated:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that the child of one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent. This presumption of the Jewish status of the off-spring 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. Depending on circumstances, mitzvot leading toward a positive and exclusive Jewish identity will include entry into the covenant, acquisition of a Hebrew name, Torah study, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, and Kabbalat Torah (Confirmation). For those beyond childhood claiming Jewish identity, other public acts or declarations may be added or substituted after consultation with their rabbi.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 146-148.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid., 68-72.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., 60.

As one might expect, a decision of this magnitude quickly provoked both positive and negative reactions. The decision also sparked new problems and questions. The reactions to the passage of the resolution were swift in coming. The Outreach Task Force in their final report to the UAHC in October of 1983, the same year that the CCAR passed the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent, proclaimed, "One of the most positive recent developments affecting Jewish Outreach was the adoption by the CCAR of its revised Resolution on Matrilineal/Patrilineal Descent....The Task Force commends the CCAR for its courage and leadership in addressing this issue."<sup>325</sup>

Robert Gordis, a Conservative rabbi who was an emeritus professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, wrote an article for *Moment* magazine. Gordis argued that "a law affecting consanguinity and status cannot legitimately be set aside on rational grounds, except, perhaps if two conditions are met: The change must prove acceptable to the entire community, and it must solve a major problem."<sup>326</sup> Gordis did not believe that patrilineal descent met either of these two criteria and, further, he argued that there would be an irreparable split in the Jewish world, making marriages between the movements impossible. Gordis also believed that if a non-Jewish mother did not convert, she would be unable to completely ignore her own upbringing enough to allow her child to be brought up in a Jewish home. He concluded his article with an impassioned plea to Reform leaders to reconsider the resolution in order to move closer to unifying the Jewish people.<sup>327</sup> Rabbi Elias Lieberman, a Reform rabbi, responded to Gordis' concerns in a subsequent edition of *Moment* magazine. "The truth of the matter comes down to how

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<sup>325</sup> Closing Report of the Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, October 3, 1983. CCAR Files, New York, NY.

<sup>326</sup> Robert Gordis, "To Move Forward. Take One Step Back," *Moment*, May 1986, 60.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

we live our lives Jewishly," Lieberman wrote, "not to an emotional attachment to the tradition's insistence that one parent is inherently more capable of transmitting Jewish beliefs and values than the other."<sup>328</sup>

Rabbi Irving Greenberg, an Orthodox rabbi who was president of the National Jewish Resource Center, was quoted in a press release from the *American Jewish Congress*. He thought the Reform movement's decision regarding patrilineal descent was a "triumph for ethics, feminism, sociology and Americanism," but a "defeat for *halacha* and the totality of the Jewish people....a corruption, not a reform." He termed it a "betrayal of ultimate Jewish values" and "enormously costly."<sup>329</sup>

Gunther Plaut, a leading Reform rabbi and scholar, pleaded for unity. In a speech delivered to the Rabbinical Assembly, a body of Conservative rabbis, he explained what the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent meant—that it was not an attempt to break with *halacha* but, rather, an advisory statement to help North American rabbis solve a particular problem they encountered. However, Plaut threw the ball back into the court of the more traditional rabbis by stating,

If you are serious about our reversing any of our previous decisions, and especially this one,—and I am not saying that is likely or even desirable—then *you* must begin by according to both Conservative and Reform a different standing in your theology....I hope that the time will come when all of us will sit down together and be able to discuss the matters that face religious Jewry, regardless of any particular persuasion. *But the beginning must be made between you and us.* Do not let the patrilineal decision stand in the way, because we did not perceive it in that fashion, and the number of children involved in this are vastly fewer than the *Jewish* children who stand in need of Jewish identity.<sup>330</sup>

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<sup>328</sup> Elias Lieberman, Letter to the Editor. *Moment*, July 1986, 3-4.

<sup>329</sup> Israel Levine, "Rabbis from Three Branches Debate Patrilineal Issue at AJ Congress Symposium." Press release from the *American Jewish Congress*, January 16, 1984, AJA, 12/4.

<sup>330</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, "Address to the Rabbinical Assembly." *Journal of Reform Judaism* 32, no. 4, (1985): 68. Italics in the original.

Aside from reacting to the resolution itself, questions about the specific content of the resolution also arose. These questions were referred to the CCAR Responsa Committee, and they testified to the diverse array of concerns the resolution engendered. For example, in October 1983, a question arose as to what the origins of matrilineal descent were, and what were the *halachic* justifications of the Patrilineal Descent Resolution. A rabbi wrote asking about a woman who had come to him because, although her maternal grandmother was Jewish, her mother had converted to Christianity, and she [the daughter] had been confirmed in the Lutheran church. Now she wanted to marry a Jewish man and wanted to know if Reform's newly adopted resolution rendered her a Jew. The CCAR Responsa Committee agreed that *halachically* the woman was a Jew, but considering her background and upbringing, they recommended a full conversion for her. Another question the Responsa Committee tackled concerned a man who grew up in England, the child of a Jewish father and an Anglican mother. He believed he had been ritually circumcised, but could not prove it and had not had a Jewish education. He now wanted to marry a Jewish woman and settle in England. The CCAR Responsa Committee, noting his lack of education or ritual practice which would confirm his Jewish identity in accordance with the resolution, recommended he undergo a formal conversion. Finally, a non-Jewish woman, who married a Jew, had a child by a previous marriage. The second husband had adopted the child, and now at the age of eight, the child wished to become a Jew. Would this child be considered Jewish under the Patrilineal Descent Resolution? The CCAR Responsa Committee, acknowledging the fact that the child had two non-Jewish parents and was adopted later in life, recommended that she be converted by first enrolling her in a religious school. In

addition, there should be a formal ceremony at the synagogue and immersion if that was the custom of her rabbi.<sup>331</sup>

There was also a flurry of letters among the members of the CCAR. Rabbi Arnie Magid wondered, "Is anything being considered to 'formalize' the relationship between Judaism and patrilineal descent Jews? I seem to have a goodly number of Jews with Jewish fathers only. More than a few have expressed a desire to more fully acknowledge—either publicly or in writing—their reaffirmation of faith."<sup>332</sup> Rabbi Joseph Glaser reported to Herman Schaalman, "We then went into a discussion of WHEN, then is the child Jewish? I have to report to you that there is concern about that, and it has to be addressed. Also in the discussion came the feeling that formal affirmation at some point by parents is a sine qua non and can't be left to chance."<sup>333</sup> Rabbi Rav Soloff wrote to Rabbi Gunther Plaut, who at that time was president of the CCAR, asserting that the question was not one of descent, but rather a question of how Jewish identity was established. Soloff advocated that a person could retain Jewish identity even after converting to Christianity, and he wanted to see some guidance as to how such a person could "reclaim" his/her Jewish identity officially should they choose to come back.<sup>334</sup> In his reply to Soloff, Plaut agreed with the concern Soloff expressed in his letter and mentioned that the need for guidance in interpreting the resolution was a subject discussed by the Executive Board of the CCAR. In fact, because so many questions had been raised, Plaut decided he would appoint a special Committee chaired by Herman Schaalman, the former chair of the Patrilineal Descent Committee, along with some other

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<sup>331</sup> CCAR Responsa Numbers 38, 5754.13,39, and 125, respectively. <http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file> (accessed November 30, 2006).

<sup>332</sup> Arnie Magid, Letter to Rabbi Joseph Glaser, December 30, 1985, CCAR files, New York.

<sup>333</sup> Joseph B. Glaser, Letter to Rabbi Herman Schaalman, October 17, 1983, CCAR files, New York.

<sup>334</sup> Rav Soloff, Letter to Rabbi Gunther Plaut, June 7, 1983, CCAR files, New York.

members of the original Patrilineal Descent Committee to address some of the issues and also to assess the consequences of the patrilineal decision.<sup>335</sup>

That reconstituted Committee first convened in September of 1983, and it considered six problems that had arisen in the wake of the passage of the CCAR resolution six months earlier. These were: First, what exactly is the meaning of the Patrilineal Descent Resolution? Second, what should the response be to attacks both within and outside the Reform movement? Third, what should be done about the status of children of mixed marriages by colleagues who disagreed with the resolution? Fourth, what about the Reform movement's relationship with MARAM and liberal European Committees as to this resolution? Fifth, what specific requirements need to be instituted in order to establish Jewish identity with this resolution? Finally, what is to be done about retroactivity? The Committee decided to prepare a set of questions and answers to be mailed to the entire membership to deal with some of the items, but "generally speaking, it was the consensus of the Committee not to enter into controversy when at all avoidable, and to monitor the development of the consequences of our resolution over the next half year or so."<sup>336</sup>

In April 1984 a resolution prepared by Rabbi Philip Bentley for submission at the 1984 CCAR Conference was sent to the members of the Patrilineal Descent Committee. Bentley was disturbed by what he perceived to be the controversy the resolution caused in the Jewish world. He wanted the CCAR to approve the compiling of a report exploring the effect of the adoption of the resolution on relations between the Reform movement and the rest of the Jewish world, as well as a report on the impact on Reform Jewry

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<sup>335</sup> Gunther Plaut, Letter to Rav Soloff, June 16, 1983, CCAR files, New York, NY.

<sup>336</sup> Herman Schaalman, Minutes of the Patrilineal Committee Meeting, September 26, 1983, AJA 12/4.

generally. Bentley also asked for a Committee to be formed to study the impact of the report and also to explore the possibilities of modifications or outright withdrawal of the resolution.<sup>337</sup> Schindler sent a letter to Schaalman recommending opposition to Bentley's resolution because it was premature. Schindler felt that they needed more time to determine the impact of the resolution on the Jewish world. Schindler also thought the Bentley resolution was redundant because the Patrilineal Descent Committee was formed to do exactly what the Bentley resolution was proposing.<sup>338</sup> Schaalman replied to Schindler that he concurred with his [Schindler's] conclusions and promised him he would be in contact with the Chair of the Resolutions Committee to let him know of their respective thoughts on the matter.<sup>339</sup> The resolution was eventually referred to the Committee on Patrilineal Descent.<sup>340</sup>

Despite these controversies, Reform's new position on patrilineal descent remained in place. Within a relatively short period of time, Reform's principles on patrilineality earned widespread acceptance. In 1990 Egon Mayer of the Jewish Outreach Institute in cooperation with the Center for Jewish Studies at the CUNY graduate school, sent out a survey to 9,000 Jewish leaders across the three major movements. It was a large undertaking, involving the compilation of over 2,000 responses, which proportionally represented all segments of the American Jewish leadership. One of the questions on the survey concerned intermarriage. It asked respondents this question: "If you had a son who was married to a non-Jewish woman and he and his wife were raising

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<sup>337</sup> Attachment to letter written by Herman Schaalman to the Members of the Patrilineal Committee, April 13, 1984 AJA, 12/4.

<sup>338</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Herman Schaalman, April 24, 1984, AJA 12/4.

<sup>339</sup> Herman Schaalman, Letter to Alexander Schindler, April 24, 1984, AJA 12/4. An indication of the emotions involved appear at the bottom of this letter. Someone has penned in red "We won this 1<sup>st</sup> round."

<sup>340</sup> *CCAR Yearbook* Vol 94, (1985): 163.



their children as Jews, even though the mother was not Jewish, would you consider their grandchildren to be Jews?" Sixty-seven percent of the respondents answered yes. This included 40% of the Conservative rabbinate and 80% of the Conservative laity. The Reform respondents had close to a 100% affirmative response, while Orthodox rabbis came in at 7% and the Orthodox laity at 10%.<sup>341</sup>

In an article for the *Jerusalem Report*, Schindler stated, "Today about 80 percent of the American Jewish laity, including some Orthodox, accepts the principle [of patrilineal descent]. They recognize that Jewish survival depends on adaptation to changing circumstances, no less today than in times past, and that this broadened definition of who is a Jew does not in fact represent a break from tradition."<sup>342</sup> It would seem that if the rabbis were in disagreement about patrilineal descent, the laity was not.

More than twenty years have passed since the CCAR passed the Resolution on Patrilineal Descent. After the initial storm, the dust settled, and patrilineal descent quickly became an accepted fact of life for American Reform Jewry. The fear expressed by many rabbis that passage of patrilineal descent would cause problems with the relationship between North American Jewry and Israel did not seem to materialize. In fact, on December 3, 2006, Yossi Beilin, Chairman of the Meretz-Yahad party, proposed a bill that would recognize as Jewish those in Israel who have a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother. This was the first time a political party had sought to intervene in the question of who is a Jew, although Beilin fully expected that the Committee would vote it down. Beilin said, "In a world of DNA, it is so old-fashioned to talk about a chain of

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<sup>341</sup> Egon Mayer, Letter to the Editor of *The Jewish Week*, October 13, 1992, AJA 12/4.

<sup>342</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Patrilineal Descent and the Soviet Jewry Problem," Op Ed piece submitted to *The Jerusalem Report*, May 28, 1991, AJA 12/4.

motherhood. If people see themselves as Jewish, and certainly if one of the parents was Jewish, why should the state define them as not Jewish?"<sup>343</sup>

The controversial nature of the Patrilineal Descent Resolution continued to be recognized well after its passage. In a *New York Times* article written in 1995 at the time of Schindler's impending retirement, the author said, "Rabbi Schindler's tenure will probably be best remembered (with considerable anger by some) for the decision of the union—struggling like most Jewish organizations to deal with the rapidly rising rate of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews—to embrace the principle of patrilineal descent."<sup>344</sup>

Schindler quoted Mordecai Kaplan many times when he noted that Reform Judaism owed *halacha* a vote—not a veto. It had been a hallmark of Reform Judaism that it responded to modernity, yet was mindful of the power of tradition. Alexander Schindler knew that patrilineal descent would be controversial because it defied the *halacha* of matrilineal descent dating back to Talmudic times. Matrilineal descent was still strictly observed by all Orthodox Jews, most Conservative Jews, and, maybe more troubling, it was in force by state law in Israel. Ultimately, for Schindler, his convictions of even-handed justice compelled him to take a strong stand on patrilineal descent even though it flew in the face of *halacha*. Although patrilineal descent still has many detractors, particularly among the Orthodox Jews, it is a tribute to Schindler's tenacity that a large majority of Jews in North America agree with patrilineal descent, and that it is even being discussed in Israel today.

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<sup>343</sup> Shahar Ilan, "Bill Would Recognize Judaism through Father." *Haaretz*. [www.haaretz.com](http://www.haaretz.com) (accessed December 3, 2006).

<sup>344</sup> Gustav Niebuhr, "Religion Journal: Departing Shaper of Reform Judaism." *The New York Times*, December 9, 1995, <http://select.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?> (accessed November 9, 2006).

## Chapter 5 The Non-Jew Feels Welcome...Now What Do We Do?

"A couple have [sic] been members for many years. The husband is Jewish; the wife is the product of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother and has no religion. Their children were raised in no religion, and one of them has converted to Judaism. Recently the husband died. His wife wants to maintain some relationship with the temple, either as a member or in some other way. Our charter provides that only Jews can be members of the congregation. What can we do in the case of this woman?"<sup>345</sup>

When Rabbi Max Shapiro submitted this question to the Committee on Responsa in the early 1980s, he raised but one of many questions that arose because the non-Jew had become an integral part of many Reform synagogues. In a 1993 speech to the General Assembly of the UAHC, Alexander Schindler addressed his remarks to the place of the non-Jew in the synagogue. He said,

The joyous success of Outreach has also raised some thorny issues for synagogues. Since so many interfaith couples join our congregations, defining the role of the non-Jew in the temple has become a critically pressing need....Such boundaries do not offend non-Jews who make our houses of worship their own. They do not "raise barriers" for them, as the excellent handbook on the subject prepared by Commission on Jewish Outreach notes. But rather these boundaries "demonstrate a healthy pride in who we are." They will be accepted by non-Jews who join us, provided, of course, that the lines are distinctly drawn, consistently applied, and clearly communicated. But here's the rub: Just where ought those lines be drawn? *This* is where opinions diverge, sometimes very sharply.<sup>346</sup>

The CCAR Responsa Committee dealt with a variety of questions from both rabbis and lay leaders concerning the status of the non-Jew. May an individual observe

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<sup>345</sup> Max Shapiro, Letter to Committee on Responsa, August 1982, AJA, Coll 729 31/2.

<sup>346</sup> Alexander Schindler, President's Report to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC, San Francisco, October 23, 1993. Special Collections, Klau Library, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, OH.

*Yahrzeit* for a non-Jewish leader in the community? To what extent may non-Jews participate in a Jewish public service? Can a non-Jewish widow who promised to raise her children as Jews become a member of a synagogue so her children may receive a Jewish education? May a non-Jew light the *Shabbat* Eve candles? May a non-Jew wear a *tallit*? May a Jew married to a gentile serve as a religious school teacher? May a non-Jewish father lift the Torah before the congregation during the *Bar Mitzvah* of his son? Can Jewish funeral rituals be performed for a non-Jewish spouse? Is it permitted for a non-Jew to be buried in a Jewish cemetery? Can a gentile married to a Jew be considered a member of a temple? What are the Reform and traditional responsa on gentile participation in a worship service? What is the role of a non-Jewish parent during a *Bar Mitzvah* ceremony?<sup>347</sup>

Besides keeping the CCAR Responsa Committee busy answering all of these inquiries, people also wrote letters to Alexander Schindler demanding that there be guidelines for the UAHC congregations that were struggling to determine what the role of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue would be. Rabbi Herman Snyder wrote to Schindler in the early 1990's and said, "I believe it is wrong for Outreach or any Committee to recommend making the non-Jewish spouse a synagogue member, and surely wrong to use the prerogative of the CCAR. The synagogue is a religious organization and is not a social one ... the non-Jew does not expect or desire acceptance into the synagogue. Alex, we can make Outreach to Jews and non-Jews effective but it does not require making members of those with beliefs other than ours just because they are married to Jews. If they were interested they would become Jews."<sup>348</sup> Snyder's

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<sup>347</sup> Various CCAR responsa, <http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?> (accessed December 26, 2006).

<sup>348</sup> Herman Snyder, Letter to Alexander Schindler, May 9, 1990. AJA Coll 630, 10/1.

assertion that the non-Jew does not expect to be accepted in the synagogue was not true for all non-Jews. Debbie Moskowitz was a non-practicing Catholic who was raising her sons as Jews. She wrote to Schindler of her dismay that she could not have an *aliyah*, light the *Shabbat* candles, or pass the Torah down to her son during the *Bar Mitzvah* service. She asserted that she had a significant role in making her children Jews and said if they saw her participating in the service, it would reaffirm her commitment to raising them as Jews.<sup>349</sup> There were non-Jewish spouses who disagreed with the stand taken by Moskowitz. Rabbi Norman M. Cohen of Hopkins, Minnesota, sent a newspaper article to Schindler written about a family in his congregation. The article concerned a *Bar Mitzvah* of the son of mixed married parents. The father, a Baptist, is quoted as saying, "There are a lot of things in services I can't do, but nobody looks at me as if I shouldn't be there."<sup>350</sup>

Rabbis and lay leaders alike also wrote to Schindler asking for rabbinic sources on issues relating to the non-Jewish spouse. Rabbi Sidney Brooks wanted to know why Schindler had asserted in his speech in 1978 to the UAHC Executive Committee that a non-Jew was permitted to light the *Shabbat* candles. Irving Katz, Executive Secretary of Temple Beth El in Birmingham, Alabama, wrote inquiring if a non-Jew could be buried in a Jewish cemetery and asked what sources permitted this. Rabbi Jay Brickman wrote and asked for the sources that allowed a non-Jew to bless the *Shabbat* candles, to handle the Torah, and to be buried in a Jewish cemetery. And Rabbi Jack Spiro also wrote asking about the sources that permitted a non-Jew to light *Shabbat* candles but did not allow a non-Jew to have an *aliyah*. In responses to all of these questions, Schindler not only

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<sup>349</sup> Debbie Moskowitz, Letter to Alexander Schindler, October 1, 1994, AJA, 10/2.

<sup>350</sup> Rabbi Norman M. Cohen, Letter to Alexander Schindler, September 13, 1994 AJA, 10/2.

provided the rabbinic sources, both traditional and modern, but also expressed his wish that regarding the candle lighting, a different blessing be created that would remove the exclusive language from the traditional candle lighting blessing.<sup>351</sup>

Articles in newspapers and periodicals regarding what role the non-Jew could or could not play in the synagogue appeared almost as soon as Schindler announced his initiative in 1978. Only three years after Schindler revealed his Outreach initiative, Rabbi Joseph Edelheit wrote an article laying out some of the problems that welcoming the non-Jew into the synagogue might create. He asked, "Are we ready for the absence of the intergenerational enrichment and linkage of *Bubbies* and *Zedahs*? Are we prepared to integrate Christian family members appropriately into the life cycle *mitzvot* of these Jewish children and their families?...While many of our congregations go out of their way to include the mixed-married family, are we ready to deal with the often distressing questions of a non-Jewish parent's participation in a life cycle *mitsva*?"<sup>352</sup> Edelheit warned against yearning for the past where Judaism was passed down through the generations by osmosis. The present time period included Jews with an entirely different kind of Jewish family. Edelheit concluded by stating, "If we are really committed to a positive Jewish future, we must be more critically aware of which Jews will create that future."<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letters to Sidney Brooks, Irving Katz, Jay Brickman, and Jack Spiro, on February 20, 1979, March 2, 1979, February 8, 1979, and April 9, 1979, respectively, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC collection, Box 4/47, Folder "Outreach Working Papers on Halacha."

<sup>352</sup> Joseph Edelheit, "Are We Ready for the New Jewish Community?" *Journal of Reform Judaism* 24, no. 1, (1982): 18.

<sup>353</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

In an address to the CCAR in 1994, Rabbi Joan Friedman asked point blank, "If a non-Jew marries a Jew, what role does that give him or her in the synagogue?"<sup>354</sup> She informed the CCAR members present of an uncomfortable incident which occurred in her congregation when due to a last minute mix-up, a non-Jew read a very particularistic passage by Abraham Joshua Heschel during the *Ne'ilah* service. The more he read "We Jews, the people of Israel, and the tasks begun by our patriarchs," the more uncomfortable both he and the congregation became. Friedman said, "By the time he completed it, our entire sense of ourselves and what we were doing at that moment had been completely shattered by the cognitive dissonance that was created by having our non-Jewish neighbor, friend, congregant stand before us in the synagogue and say 'We Jews.'"<sup>355</sup> She continued,

We have a large and growing class of people who are not Jews, but on whose behalf some "associate" status is increasingly expected, within a Jewish population for whom Judaism is, increasingly a religious identity to be chosen or affirmed individually to the extent that is personally meaningful within a larger societal context which regards externally imposed distinctions as inherently negative—and all of this then is dropped into synagogues where the default paradigm is that of theater. No wonder we are having a hard time.<sup>356</sup>

Friedman advocated reinforcing the distinction between Jews and non-Jews. She claimed that the best way to do this is not to exclude the non-Jew but, rather, to make the Jew feel needed and responsible for his part in the covenant at Sinai. A synagogue is an assembly for Jews to worship, argued Friedman, but at the same time, there must be

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<sup>354</sup> Joan Friedman, "The Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue: Challenges and Choices," *CCAR Yearbook* 104, (1995): 25.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-26.

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

recognition of non-Jewish family members, particularly at a time when that family is being emphasized.<sup>357</sup>

The idea that boundaries are necessary both for the Jew and the non-Jew was echoed by then Chairman of the UAHC, Melvin Merians. In his summer 1995 message in *Reform Judaism*, Merians said, "This is not a challenge about non-Jews; it is about how we define ourselves. We need to know who we are as Jews. To do this, we need boundaries which distinguish Jews from non-Jews, but boundaries are not equivalent to barriers....When clearly stated, fairly applied, and coupled with an invitation to learn and be involved, boundaries help us maintain our own integrity without offending those we seek to welcome."<sup>358</sup>

When his viewpoint was challenged by a particularly vituperative letter to the editor in a subsequent edition of *Reform Judaism*, Merians responded by reminding the letter writer and the readers of *Reform Judaism* that non-Jews gave their children to be raised as Jews and worked hard for the synagogue whether they had converted or not. "Had we *not* welcomed the non-Jewish spouses of interfaith married couples into the synagogue and carefully delineated the extent of their participation in the synagogue, we would have lost many of these families. And *that* truly would have weakened the Jewish people."<sup>359</sup>

In 1993 Dr. Michael A. Meyer wrote an article entitled "On the Slope Toward Syncretism and Sectarianism" in the *CCAR Journal*. He posited that with the sheer numbers of non-Jews who at that point not only felt very welcome in the synagogue but also in increasing numbers were becoming full members, officers, and religious school

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<sup>357</sup> Ibid., 30-31

<sup>358</sup> Melvin Merians, "Chairman's Message," *Reform Judaism*, Summer 1995, 53.

<sup>359</sup> Melvin Merians, Reply to "Letter to the Editor," *Reform Judaism*, Spring 1996.



teachers, it would only be a matter of time before they would be asking that some aspect of their faith be included in the synagogue. Meyer mused that it was conceivable that a Christian married to a Jew might request that the Lord's Prayer be recited at her child's *Bar Mitzvah* as a nod to the Christian portion of his upbringing. The prayer is clearly pharisaic in content, what would be the harm? The harm, according to Meyer, was the lack of boundaries that some were advocating at the time.

There are voices in our movement today that reject the notion of boundaries, who believe that Reform Judaism must be open to every individual and to every group that seeks to join it. The emerging shape—or lack of shape—of such a religion is of less concern to them than unswerving adherence to full individual autonomy....In such circumstances, Reform Judaism is presently more in danger than at any time in its history of ceasing to be a current or denomination within Judaism and of becoming, instead, a sect.<sup>360</sup>

In 1991 the UAHC/CCAR Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach did a survey to ascertain the state of Outreach in their member congregations. Questionnaires were mailed out to the 840 congregations affiliated with the Reform movement. Fifty-one percent of the congregations responded by the deadline, and the data from them was compiled. The sample proportionally represented both geographical regions and size according to membership numbers. In terms of the role of non-Jews in the synagogue, the UAHC Outreach staff discovered that most Reform synagogues did not have a written policy on the role non-Jews could play in temple life. It should be mentioned that the authors of the study felt that the absence of written policy in the area of ritual was due to the belief that ritual is the purview of the rabbi, not the laity. They also found that 88% of the congregations provided for membership of non-Jews, and 62% of them allowed non-Jews to vote. A majority of the synagogues responding allowed non-Jews to serve on

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<sup>360</sup> Michael A. Meyer, "On the Slope Toward Syncretism and Sectarianism," *CCAR Journal: A Reform Jewish Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (1993): 42-43.

Committees, and a minority (27%) of these allowed non-Jews to be officers. The authors also found that a majority of the synagogues had some restrictions on ritual participation by non-Jews, but they did find ways for the non-Jewish parent to participate in their child's *Bar* or *Bat Mitzvah*. Finally, a majority of the synagogues responding had their own cemetery or cemetery section, and over half of them made some provision for non-Jewish members. Because of these findings, the Outreach staff concluded that the policy issues that were arising due to the large increase of interfaith families in Reform temples needed to be addressed, and that Outreach should help facilitate the creation of these policies. However, they noted that it was amazing even to them that these policy issues arose at all. Prior to the creation of Outreach, no one ever thought that there would be so many non-Jews in the synagogue that a policy about them would become an issue.<sup>361</sup>

Issues of membership, governance, and even ritual participation of non-Jews were the purview of the individual congregations, but most of them were woefully unprepared to tackle these thorny issues. The vast majority of congregations had charters or by-laws that had been written in a time when it was unthinkable that a non-Jew would want to join a synagogue. There was literally no provision for this modern phenomenon. Among many congregations there was also widespread ignorance of resources available to aid them in responding to the issue of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Rabbis knew of the CCAR Responsa Committee and the process it used to offer responses to questions of Jewish practice, but the laity was largely ignorant of the Committee's existence. The idea of a Committee on Responsa that grappled with issues of Reform Jewish practice would come as a surprise to many Reform Jews who honestly thought that "informed

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<sup>361</sup> Dru Greenwood, *UAHC Outreach Census 1991*, Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC and the CCAR (New York: UAHC, 1991), v, 15-17.

consent," the hallmark of Reform Judaism, was an individual, not a movement-wide concept. The laity was also largely unaware of terms like *sh'liach tzibor* and what it entailed, or why the recitation of a blessing including the words *bachar barnu* was inappropriate for a non-Jew. Most important of all, most Reform Jews had never had to articulate a definition of what it means to be a Reform Jew. In order to set boundaries for the non-Jew in the synagogue, the congregants involved needed to know what their own Jewish roles in the synagogue were. This general ignorance, coupled with the many questions that were arising as the non-Jew became more a part of synagogue life, resulted in the Outreach publication entitled *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew*. It was meant as an educational tool as well as a resource for congregations that were struggling with issues related to the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue.<sup>362</sup>

Because one issue of the role of the non-Jew related to ritual, and because the Committee on Responsa had been answering so many questions related to the role of the non-Jew, and finally because the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach was a joint UAHC/CCAR commission, the CCAR was very involved in the process of developing the guide. The rabbis were the lightning rod in many of the non-Jew in the synagogue issues, and they were concerned about the direction the Outreach guide might take. Always lurking beneath the surface was the fear that the issue of rabbinic interfaith officiation at intermarriages would be revisited. Lydia Kukoff wrote a draft of *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue* and then literally reviewed the draft line by line with the Executive Vice-President of the CCAR, Rabbi Joseph Glaser. She asked

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<sup>362</sup> Dru Greenwood. Telephone interviews with the author held November 20, 2006, and January 2, 2007.

him to tell her if anything she had written would make him unhappy, and, if so, they discussed it.<sup>363</sup>

The book was published in 1990 and made available to all of the UAHC congregations. It was divided into four sections. The first section was comprised of exercises to help those who were grappling with the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue come to terms with their own feelings about the complexities surrounding this issue. The second section provided traditional and modern texts that could be used to gain insight into the many issues relating to the presence of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Section three presented some of the experiences and opinions of six Reform rabbis along with study questions that followed each rabbi's presentation. Finally, section four was designed to help the congregation apply what they had learned in the previous three sections. This section included samples of constitutional changes some Reform congregations had made to deal with this issue.<sup>364</sup> Dru Greenwood, who was co-editor of the book, said that so few congregations had actually made changes to their constitutions that the examples in the book were literally the only ones they could find.<sup>365</sup>

The Committee on Responsa gained voice and weight because of the inclusion in *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew* of pertinent responsa as well as a pictorial illustration of how the Responsa Committee operated. Many congregations learned for the first time of the existence of the Responsa Committee through this publication. However, *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew* was controversial for several reasons. First, it actually brought issues out into the open, along with suggested solutions in both ritual practice and

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<sup>363</sup> Lydia Kukoff, Telephone interview, September 29, 2006.

<sup>364</sup> Nina Mizrahi and Dru Greenwood, eds., *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue* (New York: UAHC, 1990), 11.

<sup>365</sup> Dru Greenwood, Telephone interview January 2, 2007.

governance. Not everybody agreed with the suggested solutions, and that became one part of the controversy. But it was the article by Rabbi Lawrence A. Hoffman that created the most discussion.<sup>366</sup>

Hoffman's article "Non-Jews and Jewish Life-Cycle Liturgy," which was included in *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew*, also appeared concurrently in the Summer 1990 edition of the *Journal of Reform Judaism*. A response to his article by Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut also appeared both in the periodical and in the book. Hoffman was a Professor of Liturgy at the New York School of HUC-JIR. In his article, Hoffman reviewed the Reform *halachic* precedents by explaining the answers of the Committee on Responsa as to what a non-Jew could or could not do in a synagogue prayer service. Basically, the Responsa Committee endeavored to preserve the religious integrity of both the Jew and the non-Jew by reserving the most particularistic prayers and practices for Jews alone. It was Hoffman's discussion of the "meaning" of the liturgical text that provoked the interest of the clergy and laity alike. He said that on the surface, a text means whatever its words say, but the reader "hears" different things from the text with the result that the text may mean different things to different readers. This might seem intuitive to most of us, but when we are dealing with sacred texts, this is an important issue. Reform Jews and Orthodox Jews read the same words, but can and do derive different meanings from these words. Hoffman asserted that liturgy texts are ambiguous, and purposefully so, with the result they are able to speak with more than one voice. Secondly, Hoffman said that people recite prayers for many reasons, some which may not relate to its content. Prayer can then be "an act of identity formation, a ritual by which we assert the ultimacy of our lives among others committed to the same ultimacies, in a

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

setting and in a manner, that reinforces our faith in an ultimate being we call God.”<sup>367</sup> In this case, the language of a prayer performs a task, and this becomes what Hoffman calls the “performative” aspect of prayer. The question, then, is “only partly dependent on the ‘truths’ that they [non-Jews] may or may not say with a clear conscience. More important are the performative meanings to the prayers in question, the tasks that liturgical units are intended to perform, and whether those meanings will be undermined if a non-Jew says the prayers that bring them about.”<sup>368</sup> For example, a non-Jew and her particular Reform community may see the candle-lighting on the eve of her child’s *Bar Mitzvah* not as an act affirming her membership in the community of Jews, but rather as an affirmation of the act of a non-Jewish parent who has brought her child to Jewish adulthood in a tradition that she cares enough about to give it to her child. Hoffman concluded, “We will have to explore our meanings together, content with the recognition that there will be considerable diversity from congregation to congregation, and even from case to case, as non-Jewish parents too join the dialogue, some of them opting for one thing and others for another.”<sup>369</sup>

W. Gunther Plaut, who was the chair of the CCAR Committee on Responsa at the time, took exception to Hoffman’s article. Plaut admitted that the liturgy might seem ambiguous, not as a purposeful rendition as Hoffman asserted, but rather because congregants understand the liturgy different from the way the authors intended. As to the performative aspect, Plaut inquired that if there is to be a celebration with a Jewish content, shouldn’t we aim to have a large common ground? Furthermore, “There will still

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<sup>367</sup> Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Non-Jews and Jewish Life-Cycle Liturgy,” *Journal of Reform Judaism* 37 no. 3, (1990): 11.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

be the individual with his/her own reaction patterns, but hopefully there will also be a large common ground. And that common ground, with all the respect we have for the non-Jewish parent's sensitivity, must *first and foremost be the way in which a Jewish congregation expresses its love for God, Torah and Israel.*"<sup>370</sup> Plaut reminded Hoffman, as well as the readers of his article, that the ceremonies and liturgy are taking place in a Reform Jewish congregation, and that the congregation needed to be the focus of concern.

Joseph Glaser's response to Hoffman was also printed in *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*. He began by quoting Samuel Karff, who referred to the question of the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue as a "boundary issue." The ultimate question is where the line is to be drawn. Glaser stated, "The inference to be drawn for the accomodationist is simply this: a non-Jew will make the decision as to what is important and appropriate within a Jewish service....There is a line. Its name is commitment."<sup>371</sup>

It has already been established that the CCAR and the UAHC did not always see eye-to-eye on issues. That would be an understatement when it came to defining roles for the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue. In February 1993 there was a meeting of the Executive Committee of the UAHC that included on its agenda a report from the joint Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach of the UAHC/CCAR. Also on the agenda was a discussion of the role of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue. Walter Jacob, President of the CCAR, opened the meeting with a paper he had written for the occasion. He discussed the history of those who were sincerely interested in Judaism but never

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<sup>370</sup> W. Gunther Plaut, "Response," *Journal of Reform Judaism* 37, no. 3 (1990): 19. Italics in the original.

<sup>371</sup> Joseph Glaser, "Jewish Life-Cycle Liturgy and Non-Jews," in Mizrahi, et al., *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*, 87-88.

officially converted, and he chronicled the constant battle waged by Jews against syncretism and assimilation. Jacob claimed that assimilation and syncretism posed a far greater threat to Jewish survival than the physical destruction by other enemies. To ensure continuity, Judaism had always kept and maintained boundaries. Jacob's answer to the question, "Can a non-Jew be a member of a synagogue?" was an emphatic no. He said, "The synagogue is a Jewish house of worship. We pray as Jews, and teach the fundamental ideas of Judaism. Non-Jews are always welcome to be present, but they cannot be members unless they accept Judaism.....the synagogue is not a golf club or a spa which we may share with others....We cannot have non-Jewish members. It is an oxymoron."<sup>372</sup> Jacob understood the problem with family relationships caused by intermarriage, but he did not want to blur what he thought were the very real distinctions between Jews and Christians. He asserted that synagogue membership was very different from just attending worship services or programs. If non-Jews really desired membership in a synagogue, they should convert to Judaism. Jacobs also advocated clear distinctions between Jews and non-Jews in worship services because it would be wrong to have non-Jews utter words that they did not believe. He drew the analogy of having a Jew assist at a mass or take communion in a Catholic church. Jacob acknowledged that Outreach had been a positive thing for Reform Jews, but he cautioned that Outreach should not become "Overreach." He concluded his talk by invoking both those who died in the Holocaust and those he knew growing up in a small community in Springfield, Missouri. Those

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<sup>372</sup> Walter Jacob, "The Non-Jew in the Synagogue," paper delivered to UAHC Executive Board on February 8, 1993. UAHC files, New York, NY.



people all fought against the danger of syncretism and assimilation against terrible odds; how can we do no less in a free America? asked Jacob.<sup>373</sup>

Jacob's speech was followed by a panel discussion. The panel consisted of five people: Rabbi Stephen Hart, non-Jewish members from several synagogues, a Jew by Choice, and a lay leader. Many questions were raised dealing with membership, participation in governance, and participation in ritual. The consensus that resulted from the discussion was that there was a need for clarity in each congregation. Policies and guidelines needed to be established and communicated so that misunderstandings could be minimized.<sup>374</sup>

Later in the meeting, in his presidential remarks, Schindler talked about the role of the non-Jew. He pointed out that there was agreement on two basic points—that the non-Jew should be welcomed into the synagogue and that boundaries needed to be drawn. Therefore, two questions emerged: what should be done to make the non-Jew feel welcome and where should the boundaries be drawn? Schindler, quoting Gail Donner who had spoken earlier in the day as a member of the panel, spoke of three areas: membership, governance, and life-cycle/ritual. On membership, Schindler publicly disagreed with Jacob and stated he was in favor of doing everything possible to draw in the non-Jewish spouse in order to encourage conversion of the non-Jew and, at the very least, to increase the chances that the children would be brought up as Jews. He would allow a non-Jew to become a member of the synagogue mainly because most synagogues based their memberships on a family unit, and he did not want to advocate splitting families. He also acknowledged that allowing non-Jews to become synagogue members

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Proceedings of the UAHC Executive Committee meeting held on February 8, 1993. UAHC files. New York, NY.

could come with some measure of *tsuris*. In governance, Schindler was insistent that the non-Jew be excluded. He believed that lay leaders of the congregations were teachers and role models. Leaders as well as teachers needed to model the highest ideals of Jewish behavior. As for life-cycle/ritual, the non-Jew should be accorded more rather than less latitude, according to Schindler. He felt that if a child was being raised as a Jew— with the consent of both the Jewish and non-Jewish parent—the child should not have a life-cycle event that would distinguish him or her from the other children. He went on to say that even *halacha* allows for liberal participation of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Schindler advocated structuring life cycle events, especially *B'nei Mitzvah*, in such a way that it would be impossible to distinguish between one with a non-Jewish relatives and one without.<sup>375</sup>

The proceedings of the meeting as well as the debate concerning the non-Jew in the synagogue were obviously upsetting to Glaser. He and Schindler had a contentious relationship that spanned several decades. In a 1972 letter to Herman Schaalman regarding the mixed-marriage debate that was raging in the CCAR at the time, Glaser testified to the fact that his difficulties with Schindler were longstanding. He wrote "As far as my taking the matter up with Alex Schindler is concerned, I really wish you would do this for two reasons: one is that I have a rather complicated set of relationships with the Union staff including Herman and Schindler ... and I just don't seem to get through to Alex on very much at all."<sup>376</sup>

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<sup>375</sup> Alexander Schindler, Remarks from the transcript of UAHC Executive Committee Meeting, February 8, 1993. Attachment to letter from Joe Glaser to Colleagues, May 19, 1993, Klau Library Special Collections. Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

<sup>376</sup> Joseph Glaser, Letter to Herman Schaalman, March 6, 1972, CCAR Files, New York.

On March 31, 1993, following the February 8 Executive Committee meeting, Schindler wrote to inform Glaser that he [Schindler] had heard from other colleagues that Glaser had been insisting that "Schindler wants to make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews in the synagogue." Schindler denied saying any such thing and enclosed a transcript of what he said at the meeting. He added, "My memory is better than your hearing which means that you must be getting older at a faster rate than I am."<sup>377</sup> Schindler admitted that although he and Glaser had "heated differences," they did agree that the non-Jew needed to be welcomed and made a part of the Jewish community and that boundaries must be drawn.<sup>378</sup>

Following a three-day CCAR Executive Committee meeting in March 1993, Glaser sent a letter to Schindler asking him [and it can be inferred, other members of the UAHC staff] to attend a summit to discuss the question of limits, boundaries, prerogatives, and obligations of the UAHC and the CCAR. He added, "There is a great concern that something will come out of the forthcoming biennial, possibly sparked by what you might choose to say in your President's Message, but possibly with some other genesis."<sup>379</sup> Schindler's consternation with this request comes through clearly in his written response to Glaser. He agreed that a summit was a good idea, although he asked that the number of people attending the summit be kept small. Schindler then added, "Joe, please know that I don't interpret your letter as seeking to tell me in advance what I will or will not say at the Biennial. That is, after all, my pulpit and I will keep it free as does any rabbi....I share this thought with you only because I have had three calls either

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<sup>377</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Joseph Glaser, March 31, 1993, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/46, Folder labeled "CCAR/Non-Jews."

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Joseph Glaser, Letter to Alexander Schindler, April 1, 1993, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/46, Folder labeled "CCAR/Non-Jews."

directly or indirectly from members of the Executive Committee seeking to know precisely what I will say in San Francisco. Forgive me for resenting these calls, but you would too!”<sup>380</sup> Schindler’s response underscores the fact that the tension between the CCAR and the UAHC over this subject was not just a personality clash between Glaser and Schindler. As was the case with the patrilineal descent issue, many in the CCAR were concerned that the UAHC might wrest control over a decision that clearly fell within the purview of the rabbinate. These fears spurred the CCAR to demonstrate progress toward a solution in the patrilineal descent issue. Here again, in regard to the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue, the tension between the UAHC and the CCAR reflected concern over which institution had rightful authority to lead the community in this matter, the UAHC or the CCAR.

In May 1993 Glaser sent out a long memorandum to all of the members of the CCAR on the topic “The gathering crisis of intermarriage.” His letter began, “The Conservative rabbinate is beginning to discover that where they have active Outreach Committees, those Committees are becoming lobbies within their congregations for loosening the rules on participation by non Jews in the governance and ritual of the congregations....That, of course has already happened in the Reform movement, and I believe it is time to examine the whole phenomenon closely.”<sup>381</sup> Glaser was concerned that Outreach, although necessary, had taken on a life of its own. With its “sizable” clientele of converts, non-Jews, and non-Jewish family, it may have become a “critical mass” behind crucial changes in congregations that had been made. He asked, “On

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<sup>380</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Joseph Glaser, April 7, 1993, AJA Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/46, Folder labeled “CCAR/Non-Jews.”

<sup>381</sup> Joseph Glaser, Letter to membership of the CCAR, May 13, 1993, Klau Library, Special Collections, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

which constituency do we build our programs, allocate our resources, assert our values, invest our interests? Born and converted Jews, or the clientele resulting from intermarriage?"<sup>382</sup> Glaser claimed that a rabbi needed to be mindful of anything he or she might say which could be construed to be a slight to the Outreach clientele. He intimated that even the act of encouraging in-marriage would be seen as a kind of "rejection or insult." Glaser went on to say that at the February 8 meeting of the UAHC Executive Committee, the discussion concerning the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue consumed an entire day. Glaser asserted it was "striking" that normal business was suspended for a "non-actionable discussion." Glaser then presented a synopsis of the meeting beginning with Jacob's presentation. He summarized comments of the panelists and noted that the panel seemed to agree that the role of the non-Jew could be limited, though the lines drawn needed to be clear so as to avoid painful confrontations. Everyone in attendance, he said, seemed to understand that religion required commitment that "undergirded" the religion's institutions including the synagogue. He added, "I thought it a fine meeting. Then Alex Schindler spoke on the subject, presenting a somewhat differing point of view than Walter's [Jacob]. His verbatim remarks from the raw transcript will follow....I had thought to summarize what Alex said, but he felt that what I wrote (which of course I had him review) did not reflect his views accurately, and requested the use of the transcript instead."<sup>383</sup> Glaser did not agree that anything was gained by ensuring that the children of intermarried couples remain Jewish. He believed that in the first generation of an intermarriage, the identification with Judaism was weakened; by the second generation, it was mostly lost. He lamented that people were

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

hesitant to encourage in-marriage because it was seen as an insult to those that had already intermarried and all their "kith and kin. They are now our constituency or soon will be."<sup>384</sup> Glaser feared the expanding role of the non-Jew in the synagogue because he anticipated that non-Jews would assume leadership positions in synagogues, teach in religious schools, or even serve on the worship Committees. He couldn't fathom why non-Jews could have so much influence in an institution that was responsible for Jewish perpetuation. Glaser made note of the changes in prayer language that some rabbis were making in order to accommodate the non-Jews in a worship service. He said, "It is appropriate to modify our prayers when the consensus warrants in order to address the legitimate evolution of understanding in re [sic] and ritual sacrifices, but to make a Jewish prayer in a Jewish congregation non Jewish is an absurdity."<sup>385</sup> Glaser added, "Authenticity has its price ... without which we will have lost our center and put in jeopardy our very continuity. What is the point of conversion to Judaism? What is the point of marrying in? And **what is the point of refusal to officiate at intermarriage?**"<sup>386</sup> For Glaser and others, this was a pivotal issue. As has been shown earlier in this paper, rabbinic officiation at intermarriage was a bitterly contentious issue and many rabbis felt pressure from all sides either to officiate or not to officiate. The CCAR had endured an extremely painful time in 1972 and 1973 debating the resolution that they passed in opposition to their members officiating at interfaith weddings. They had no desire to revisit it. Now that more non-Jews were participating in the synagogue, rabbis who refused to officiate at intermarriages were again being pressured by their congregants to begin doing so. Glaser said as much in this memo, "There is no doubt that

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<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid. Bold emphasis in the original.

discussions of the role of the non Jew in the synagogue, if permissive results obtain, will lead inevitably to additional pressure on rabbis to officiate at intermarriages. The time has surely come to assert rabbinic leadership and to develop strategies to meet a major crisis and threat to the very continuity of Reform Judaism."<sup>387</sup> Glaser sent out this eight-page memorandum along with copies of the transcript of Schindler's remarks and Jacob's speech to the members of the CCAR.

Dru Greenwood, Director of Outreach at the time, reacted to a draft of the memorandum that Glaser shared with Schindler by stating, "Joe's piece on the role of the non-Jew made my heart sink....He makes Outreach sound like Frankenstein, 'taking on a life of its own.' It is sad that he feels so embattled."<sup>388</sup>

Interestingly, Schindler stated on many occasions that he did not support rabbinic officiation at intermarriages, and in the realm of the role of the non-Jewish spouse, he advocated drawing very clear lines. In his speech to the UAHC General Assembly in October 1993, he presented where he personally thought the lines should be drawn. He said, "Let me quickly emphasize that what I say in this context is not *ex cathedra*, so to speak. It is not a collective decision that was reached by anyone or that I urge for formal adoption. It is merely what I personally believe and what I would commend to my leadership were I [a] congregational rabbi."<sup>389</sup> Following this disclaimer, Schindler explained that he did not favor non-Jews serving in synagogue governance, even on Committees. In the area of ritual, especially in the area of life cycle ceremonies,

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid.

<sup>388</sup> Dru Greenwood, Letter to Alexander Schindler, April 23, 1993, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/46, Folder labeled "CCAR/Non-Jews."

<sup>389</sup> Alexander Schindler, "Presidential Address to the 62<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC."

Schindler said his "personal position" was one of maximum openness. He advocated the creation of ritual, not the deletion of all boundaries:

Truthfulness should never be violated in our desire to be inclusive.... We should strive to present our synagogue as a 'house of prayer for all peoples.' If we choose to fence in that house, to create a hedgerow around our Judaism, that is our right, but let us be certain of our motivation, and not use ritual exclusion to express our emotional grievances, conscious or unconscious, historical or contemporary. Once again, these are my personal views.... I do not urge the universal adoption of my views. What I am urging, however, is the adoption of a clear-cut decision-making process, a process that will enable a congregation to define its goals, express its heart, give tradition a vote, and build its own special community through its ritual life.<sup>390</sup>

The rabbinic community reacted almost immediately to Schindler's 1993 speech, and he received letters responding to what he had said. Schindler's frustration was evident in a letter he wrote to Simeon Maslin barely three weeks after his speech was delivered. He said, "I cannot understand why there was an orchestrated rabbinic opposition to what I had to say." Schindler then quoted the passage in his speech where he said his personal position was one of maximum openness, but not total abandonment of boundaries. He continued, "I made this point over and over again in the entire section on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. So why this orchestrated effort? I am afraid what happened, and unfortunately this affected the perception of the press as well, is that the leadership of the conference accepted what Joe Glaser said I said, not what I really said."<sup>391</sup>

In a letter to Schindler, Rabbi Daniel Komito Gottlieb mentioned that Gunther Plaut, chair of the Responsa Committee, [along with Mark Washofsky, co-chair] had

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Simeon Maslin, November 17, 1993, AJA. Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/47. Folder labeled "CCAR/Non-Jews."



issued a responsum on the participation of the non-Jew in synagogue ritual. In a presentation at a Canadian Council dinner, Plaut responded to Schindler's speech. Plaut praised Outreach but expressed concern about the "erosion of boundaries" issue. He called for a review of the responsum along with trying to head the Reform movement in the direction of increasing emphasis on the particularist elements in Jewish life to ensure continuity. It was also mentioned in this letter that there was to be a rabbinic forum in March to discuss this issue, among others, but it was not intended to be an "anti-UAHC or anti-Schindler" gathering.<sup>392</sup>

Plaut sent a draft of the responsum mentioned in Gottlieb's letter to Schindler. The question to the Responsa Committee came from the CCAR Committee on Reform Jewish practice and asked what were the traditional and Reform positions on the participation of non-Jews in synagogue services, with a specific emphasis on ritual and prayer leadership. The responsum was prepared by Plaut and Rabbi Mark Washofsky, who were chair and co-chair, respectively, of the CCAR Responsa Committee in 1994. Plaut and Washofsky did point out that the situation concerning non-Jews in the traditional literature and the situation with non-Jews in the present day were not necessarily analogous, but in the interest of completeness, they presented an extended explanation of the *halacha*. This *halachic* summary noted that the non-Jew was prohibited from serving as a *sheliach tzibor* or from having a *aliyah*. The Committee then looked at the Reform stances and reviewed the *teshuvot* to date. In doing this, the Committee reminded the reader that "Liberal Judaism has always seen itself as part of the total flow of historic Jewish life, and its Responsa Committees have tried to maintain this

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<sup>392</sup> Daniel Komito Gottlieb, Letter to Alexander Schindler, January 26, 1994, AJA, Unprocessed UAHC files, Box 3/47. Folder labeled "CCAR/Non-Jews."

connection.”<sup>393</sup> Because of this, the Responsa Committee looked at tradition and then decided if there was an overriding Reform position that would cause them to depart from the *halacha*. The Committee dismissed the use of gentile choirs as precedent for a non-Jew leading the service and concluded that the *shelichei tzibor* needed to be Jews. They also said that “participation in the Torah reading is one of the most potent symbols of inclusion in the Jewish community....Access to the Torah symbolizes full inclusion in the Jewish community....For this reason a non-Jew should not be called to the Torah for an *aliyah*.”<sup>394</sup> They concluded by saying, “It is the view of this Committee that it is essential to preserve or recover the central elements of the Jewish service. Our members may not know the traditional categories we have adumbrated, but the rabbis should use every occasion to make them understood.” Further they said:

Even where non-Jewish spouses of Jews are considered full temple members, their religious privileges and obligations derive from sources other than congregational by-laws and partake of the limitations set out above....In the view of this Committee, 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 need of clear guidelines which will define it unmistakably. To provide such markers is the task of the Responsa Committee.<sup>395</sup>

The rabbis on the Responsa Committee were acting in accordance with what they thought was in the best interest of the Jewish people. Yet there were those who disagreed with them. In a letter to HUC Professor Eugene Mihaly, Schindler enclosed a copy of the draft responsum: “Gunther Plaut sent me the enclosed and I would love your reaction to it....I find this Responsum, at least in

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<sup>393</sup> Gunther Plaut and Mark Washofsky. *Teshuvot for the Nineties* (New York: CCR, 1997), 65.

<sup>394</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

its tone, most restrictive and exclusionary and I wonder whether you could let me have a considered response."<sup>396</sup>

In a blunt response, Mihaly asserted that Plaut displayed a "callous insensitivity" to the non-Jewish spouse and parent who was fostering a Jewish home and Jewish life-cycle events for their children:

Even the traditional literalist would not have the temerity, the hutzpah to place such a person in the category of [illegible] or goy and apply the legal disabilities which the Talmud imposes on the idolater and the gentile....To treat Plaut's essay as a serious grappling with the real issues and to use it as a point of departure for discussing a "non-Jew's participation in synagogue ritual" simply an acceptance of his premises and invests them with a legitimacy which they do not merit—either from traditional or reform perspectives. Such a process would be more than self-defeating.<sup>397</sup>

Plaut and Washofsky issued the responsum as written, and though they claimed it was the task of the Responsa Committee to provide guidelines to solve the issue of role of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue, their responsum was not binding Jewish law for Reform Jews. It was advisory only. It was the individual congregation that had to grapple with the issue of the role of the non-Jew. For some, this process was very painful. One rabbi revealed that there were members of his congregation who were still not speaking to one another because of hard feelings that arose over the role the non-Jewish spouse should play in the synagogue. Another said that prior to his becoming their rabbi, his congregants had had a particularly acrimonious time trying to define the role of the non-Jewish spouse in the synagogue. In order to remediate the controversy, the new rabbi

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<sup>396</sup> Alexander Schindler, Letter to Eugene Mihaly, February 10, 1994, AJA. UAHC, Unprocessed files, Box 3/47, Folder, "CCAR/Non-Jews."

<sup>397</sup> Eugene Mihaly, Letter to Alexander Schindler, AJA. UAHC, Unprocessed files, Box 3/47, Folder, "CCAR/Non-Jews." The letter was handwritten and difficult to read in places.

decided to avoid referring to the document that had caused so much heartache in this congregation. Instead, he decided to emphasize what could be done by a non-Jew particularly during a life-cycle event.<sup>398</sup> The rabbi claimed that his approach alleviated most of the residual hard feelings that remained among his congregants.

The Outreach Department did what it could to address these conflicts by publishing *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue* and by offering workshops in different areas of the country and at the UAHC National Biennial. This was uncharted territory for everyone involved. Dru Greenwood, Director of Outreach at the time, said they recommended that congregations first define the role of the Reform Jew in the synagogue. From there, discussion of the role the non-Jew could play in both ritual and governance would be possible. However, despite the Commission's efforts, in many congregations the debate over the proper role of the non-Jew in the synagogue continued to create hard feelings. The Jewish partners in the intermarriages felt as though their non-Jewish spouses were being unfairly treated. The rabbis of many of the congregations were caught in the middle between factions that formed supporting one stance or another. There were congregations where the relationship between the lay leadership and the rabbi was sorely tested.<sup>399</sup>

Monmouth Reform Temple in Tinton Falls, New Jersey, was one congregation that confronted the question early on. The rabbi, Sally Priesand, shared her perspective in *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue* on how this conversation occurred in her congregation. Her synagogue began by

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<sup>398</sup> John Bush and Matthew Cutler, Interviews with the author, December 28, 2006, and January 5, 2007, respectively.

<sup>399</sup> Dru Greenwood, Telephone interviews with the author, November 20, 2006 and January 2, 2007.

reviewing its constitution. In doing so, the issue of the role of the non-Jew became only one of several areas they explored. They studied responsa together in order to make an informed decision, and they spent many hours crafting amendments to the constitution. The board subsequently spent a considerable amount of time looking at the recommended amendments before eventually approving them. The amendments then went to a vote at the synagogue's annual meeting. There it stalled. There were those who thought the synagogue was trying to set up a two-tiered membership. Non-Jews who were raising Jewish families couldn't understand why they would not be allowed to participate in every aspect of the synagogue. Others reminded these non-Jews that a synagogue was not a social club, but a Jewish institution that was trying to ensure a Jewish future. Jews by Choice asserted that those who had not made a complete commitment to Judaism should not have the right to all the privileges of membership. Priesand reported, "Because we were four families short of a quorum, no final decision could be made at the meeting. It was a painful experience (matters of growth and change often are), and most everyone left feeling hurt and unsettled."<sup>400</sup> A subcommittee of the board was subsequently appointed. Its members revised the proposed amendments taking into consideration some of the debate at the annual meeting. The revised amendments were then mailed to the entire membership. Each congregant was contacted by a member of the board, and the rabbi called some of the families who had been most vehemently opposed to the initial proposed amendments. A special congregational meeting was held, and again the

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<sup>400</sup> Sally Priesand, "The Role of the Non-Jew and the Temple Constitution," in Mizrahi, et al., *Defining the Role of the Non-Jew in the Synagogue*, 102.

discussion was heated. The amendments passed by a two-thirds majority, but four families left the congregation and another handful decided to curtail their activities in the temple. In hindsight, Priesand said they could have done several things differently, but in the end, "I suspect, however, that none of the above actions would have made any real difference because the issue is just too sensitive ever to be simple."<sup>401</sup>

So why go through all that heartache? Why not just let sleeping dogs lie?

Priesand answered this question by stating,

Changing our constitution with regard to this issue was a long and painful process. Nonetheless, it gave our members an opportunity to grapple with an important question of philosophy; to discuss with each other who we are and where we are going; to establish a clear-cut policy that could be presented openly and honestly to prospective members; and to resolve this matter before a problem arose with a specific individual. All in all, it was an opportunity for growth, and our congregation is stronger for having participated in the process.<sup>402</sup>

The discussions surrounding the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue sparked vigorous debate and bitter acrimony throughout the Reform movement. The rabbis argued among themselves about it. Their concerns ranged from the perceived threat to their authority because the lay leadership seemed determined to solve this problem on their own, to the threat that many rabbis felt because they thought they saw an erosion of boundaries between the non-Jew and the Jew. Rabbis were sometimes caught in the middle as members of their congregations argued bitterly among themselves about this issue. And even though the CCAR had gone on record disapproving of members who officiated at intermarriage,

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 100.

those rabbis who refused to officiate at an intermarriage were caught in a bind. How could they refuse to perform an intermarriage and then welcome the same intermarried couple into the congregational life with open arms? Didn't that seem hypocritical?

Congregational lay leaders attempted to institute policies on a congregation-by-congregation basis that would welcome the non-Jew but at the same time define boundaries. The community struggled to clarify the roles of both the Jew and the non-Jew in the synagogue. Is a community welcoming if it declares certain things off-limits for certain of those they have accepted as members? As congregations debated the issues, the acrimonious arguments sometimes resulted in hard feelings that were not alleviated for years.

Alexander Schindler could not have foreseen the problems that would arise once his vision of welcoming the non-Jew into the synagogue began to flourish. How ironic it must have been for him to realize that his program of Outreach, which was conceived to strengthen the Jewish people, was criticized as diminishing Jewish strength because of the influx of non-Jews into the synagogue. He did his best to articulate his own personal approach to the problems that arose once large numbers of non-Jews began to participate in the synagogue. He experienced frustration when he felt that his message was misunderstood, misquoted, and sometimes misused, and he conveyed his consternation in letters to his colleagues. However, as congregations went through the painful process of debating their policy, they were, as Priesand so eloquently wrote, often able to

grow and learn from the process. The learning, in the end, may have been more valuable than the policies that were put in place.



## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In 1964 *Look* magazine predicted that by the year 2000, the percentage of Jews in the population of the United States would drop from its 2.9% rate to 1.6%. According to that article, the cause of this decline would be twofold: a low birthrate among Jews, coupled with soaring intermarriage rates, and a concomitant loss of Jewish identity among the intermarried Jews and their children.<sup>403</sup> The year 2000 has come and gone. The percentage of Jews in the population of the United States has declined, but it is at 2.2%,<sup>404</sup> not 1.6%, and although the number of intermarriages between Jews and their non-Jewish neighbors has continued to rise, not all of the children of these intermarriages have been lost to Judaism as the *Look* magazine article would have had us believe. In fact, in the year 2000 the Reform Jewish community looks very different from the Reform Jewish community of 1964. (It has also been noted by more than one Jewish authority that while *Look* magazine predicted the disappearance of the Jewish population, in the year 2000 the Jewish community is still alive while *Look* is no longer in existence.)

Because of Outreach and its emphasis on welcoming the non-Jew into the synagogue, many more non-Jews are members of Reform synagogues today than prior to the onset of the Outreach initiative. Some of these non-Jews play a very active role in the synagogue. Today there is a generation of children of mixed married couples, and many of these children have been raised in an exclusively Jewish home and identify as Jews. In fact, the subject of intermarriage is itself no longer the taboo it was in 1964. The parents of many Jewish children who marry non-Jews may not be thrilled that their child married someone who was not Jewish, but the vast majority accept their non-Jewish son or

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<sup>403</sup> Thomas Morgan, "The Vanishing American Jew," 42-43.

<sup>404</sup> <http://www/jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/USIsrael/usjewpop.html> (accessed January 29, 2007).

daughter-in-law and do not threaten to cut off communication with the offending child, which may have been the practice a generation ago. A contributing factor to this increased acceptance may be that those Jews who intermarried in the 1970s or 1980s may have a difficult time promoting in-marriage to children who are the products of intermarriage. The demographic change in Reform congregations and concurrent changes in some of the dynamics in Reform synagogue life over the past few decades are directly related to the influence of the Outreach program.

On more than one occasion, Alexander Schindler said that Outreach is the program that he would like to have as his most enduring legacy. He was very proud of the changes achieved by Outreach. Speaking during the mid-1980s, he noted that:

Intermarriage was thought to be striking a lethal blow to our collective continuity, but we refused to bow to the inevitable and thereby helped to transform the crisis into an opportunity for renewed growth.....Our open-door policy, our outreach to the intermarried, our decision on patrilineal descent, our efforts to address the actual needs of our community—all these have helped significantly to capitalize upon changing trends and turn the tide of erosion into a current toward a significant renewal.<sup>405</sup>

There can be no doubt that Outreach was an initiative that was very important to Alexander Schindler and one of which he was particularly proud. There are three facts that we may definitively state about the evolution of Outreach and the contribution Schindler made to its conception and maturation as a program.

First, as a result of his life and background, Schindler was uniquely equipped to deal with the "crisis" of the loss of Jews to intermarriage. His love of all people and things Jewish that he inherited from his father and grew to cherish even more as a result of his Holocaust experiences made the losses suffered by the Jewish people due to

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<sup>405</sup> Alexander Schindler, Presidential Address to the 58<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the UAHC, November 1985, Los Angeles, AJA, 24/5.

intermarriage all the more painful for him. It impelled him to do everything he could to stem the attenuation of Jewish life caused by intermarriage, as well as to alleviate the familial distress it caused. Schindler's leadership qualities—honed during the years prior to his becoming the President of the UAHC—served him well when he introduced the Outreach initiative. In 1978 Schindler was poised to both create and guide the Outreach program.

Secondly, the Outreach initiative could not have come to fruition with a visionary leader alone. Outreach succeeded in large part because Schindler was fortunate to have dedicated and talented staff. Lydia Kukoff and Dru Greenwood, who both served as directors of Outreach in the UAHC office, were able to work closely with the Outreach Task Force led by the dynamic lay leader David Belin and, sequentially, Rabbi Max Shapiro and Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman. (The Task Force was later supplanted by the joint UAHC/CCAR Outreach Commission.) This group of professional and lay leaders was able to take Schindler's Outreach initiative and turn it into effective congregation programs. The members of the Task Force and the Commission testify to the fact that they invested a tremendous amount of hard work, especially in the early days. They all also recollected their strong sense of mission in this program. They sensed that the work they were doing mattered and would have an impact on the Jewish people. "In those days," Dru Greenwood commented, "Everybody was on fire!"<sup>406</sup> Indeed, to get the programming written and delivered to over 800 congregations was undoubtedly a daunting task, but they were able to accomplish it.

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<sup>406</sup> Dru Greenwood, Telephone interview, November 20, 2006.

Thanks to the work of his staff, today in 2007, the areas of focus that Schindler introduced in his 1978 speech have to a large degree been integrated into the Reform Jewish community. Converts are no longer abandoned after their formal conversion as frequently was the case before Outreach came into existence. Conversion curricula have been rewritten to include the practical as well as theoretical learning necessary to the conversion process. In addition, most congregations have been sensitized so that converts are no longer viewed with suspicion or as an oddity in the synagogue.

Typically, intermarried couples now find a warm welcome in most Reform synagogues, and in many congregations, the non-Jew becomes an active member of the community. Many rabbis in Reform synagogues now call non-Jewish spouses to the *bimah* for a special blessing because they support the decision to raise their children as Jews and interact in many positive ways in the synagogue community. The non-Jew is urged to take advantage of adult education classes that teach basic Judaism. Today the URJ (formerly the UAHC) is urging loved ones to invite the non-Jew to formally join the Jewish people.

The one area of Outreach that may have been a disappointment to Schindler was Outreach to the "unchurched." As we have seen, Schindler, again having been influenced by his father, expressed interest in proselytizing to the "unchurched" in 1955, just two years after his ordination. There has never been a concerted effort to reach out to those who are not Jewish because most in the Jewish community believe that our first priority should be those Jews who are unaffiliated or unaffiliated intermarried couples. However, the three-session "Taste of Judaism classes" developed by the Outreach staff have

attracted non-Jews who are curious about Judaism, and some of them do eventually decide to attend the Introduction to Judaism classes and formally convert.

The third fact we know about Outreach is that it spawned problems that may never have existed if intermarried couples had not been welcomed into the synagogue. This thesis examines two of the most controversial and prominent challenges: patrilineal descent and the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Prior to the increase in intermarriages and Outreach programs that welcomed the intermarried into the synagogue, very few non-Jews were active in a synagogue. Grappling with the role that these non-Jews could or should play was a contentious, emotion-laden issue, and one that remains controversial to this day. Patrilineal descent is an issue that on the surface does not look like it would generate controversy. In the twenty-first century with the advent of DNA, we have the ability to verify exactly who the father is of any person. And from a standpoint of just plain logic and fairness, it makes no sense to proclaim that a child with a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father is Jewish, but declare another child a gentile if the father is Jewish and the mother is not. However, this is an emotionally-charged issue with literally a thousand years of Jewish tradition behind it. The ultimate effect of this decision on the relationship between Reform Jews and *K'lal Israel* is a matter that is still being debated.

Alexander Schindler's Outreach initiative has had an enormous impact on Jewish life in America. His vision of welcoming the intermarried couples, rather than rejecting them, allowed Reform Jews to do something positive as they faced the reality of a growing rate of intermarriage.

Has Outreach been successful? The success or failure of Outreach largely defies quantification. If we look at the latest National Jewish Population Survey done in 2000, we see that the intermarriage rate is now at 47%. It is still rising, although not at the rate it was in the 1970s and 1980s. The survey also found that only one third of the children in intermarriages are being raised as Jews, but the data also disclosed that children of intermarriages who were raised as Jews were less likely to intermarry. Outreach does not seem to have diminished the tide of intermarriage.

Sociologist Steven M. Cohen recently wrote an article entitled "A Tale of Two Jewries: The Inconvenient Truth for American Jews." He posited that there are two distinct Jewries in America: the in-married Jews who raise their children as Jews are more engaged in Jewish life and are raising three quarters of the current population of Jewish children, and the intermarried who are far less engaged and are responsible for raising only one-quarter of today's Jewish children. Cohen said, "Intermarriage independently depresses Jewish involvement. It both reflects weaker Jewish socialization in the past and lower levels of Jewish engagement today."<sup>407</sup>

Cohen's article stirred a great deal of controversy, especially among proponents of Outreach. Yet, he makes a cogent point. The most problematic Jewish consequence is not the intermarriage itself but what happens to the intermarried families. If the family falls away from the Jewish community and their children are not raised as Jews, they are lost to Judaism. However, Outreach endeavors to bring these couples into the synagogue and into Jewish life. In Boston outreach to the intermarried has been a priority for many years, and it has the "most highly organized and best-funded outreach of any community,

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<sup>407</sup> Cohen, Steven M. "A Tale of Two Jewries: The Inconvenient Truth for American Jews," [www.jewishlife.org/pdf/steven\\_cohen\\_paper.pdf](http://www.jewishlife.org/pdf/steven_cohen_paper.pdf) (accessed February 20, 2007).

with San Francisco a close second."<sup>408</sup> In a community where about one half of the area Jewish households involve an intermarriage, 90% of the Jews in the area participate in some way in the Jewish community, and 60% of the intermarried couples are raising their children as Jews. Paula Brody, who is the Outreach director of the Northeast Council of the URJ, claims that Boston sends a particular message of welcome to the intermarried families because resources are available in Boston for Outreach. Brody maintains if you put the resources in the right places, you do get results, and results for the Jewish community in Boston is measured in affiliation. She estimated that 600-750 interfaith couples each year for ten years in the Boston area have affiliated as a direct result of the Outreach effort.<sup>409</sup>

When sociologist Steven M. Cohen recently visited Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he was asked specifically about Outreach. He stated that once an intermarried couple affiliates, statistically their children become just as Jewishly involved and committed as the children of in-married couples. In that regard, he applauded the Outreach initiative.<sup>410</sup> The results obtained in the Boston area, per Cohen's reckoning, would be positive for Judaism.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, who has served as president of the URJ since Alexander Schindler retired in 1996, praised the Boston community by saying, "This survey offers convincing evidence that Alex Schindler's vision was right all along. It tells us that when we welcome the intermarried with a full heart and offer them meaningful Jewish

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<sup>408</sup> Fishkoff, Sue. "Investment in Outreach is Paying Dividends in Boston, Study Suggests." *JTA Global News Service of the Jewish People*, <http://urj.org/articles/index.cfm?id=12657> (accessed November 18, 2006).

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Steven M. Cohen, Remarks to the student body February 21, 2007, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

involvements, we can draw them into Jewish life and greatly increase the odds that they will raise Jewish children.”<sup>411</sup>

The Boston area survey shows us that Outreach can and does work. Yet, if only one out of three intermarried families are choosing to raise their children as Jews, it seems logical that a continued commitment to Outreach could help increase the odds that the two out of three families who are not raising their children as Jews could be convinced to affiliate and raise a Jewish family.

There are many questions awaiting the attention of future Jewish historians and sociologists. What has been the history of Outreach in the 1990s and into the early 2000s? How has it changed, and do the changes provide a harbinger for the Jewish future? How has the patrilineal descent issue affected the relationship between Reform Jews and Orthodox Jews? Has it had an effect on the relationship between American Jews and Israel? Can changes in Reform Judaism be linked to the increased numbers of Jews by Choice and non-Jews who have been active in synagogues since 1978, when Schindler announced his Outreach vision? In a true Jewish fashion, I began this thesis with questions and conclude with other questions.

In December 1995 Schindler presented his final presidential address to the UAHC as a kind of ethical will. In speaking of Outreach, he said,

The Outreach revolution of Reform Judaism is the programmatic initiative for which I would like to be remembered—cursed, perhaps, by the fractious minority, and blessed by thousands of ingathered Jews and their partners and children. Ingathering is a good word for what we have heretofore called Outreach, for it suggests a gesture of embrace, not of strain. We “outreach” beyond our bounds; we “ingather” to a rightful home....The mission of Reform Jewish Outreach...is to draw the intermarried back into Jewish life in the hope that the non-Jewish partners will ultimately opt for

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<sup>411</sup> Eric Yoffie, Remarks to the Union Board of Trustees in Atlanta, December 10, 2006. <http://urj.org/articles/index.cfm?id=12957> (accessed December 12, 2006).



Judaism, and above all that the child of these marriages will be reared as Jews.<sup>412</sup>

Schindler, who died in November 2000, got his wish. His legacy is Outreach and the thousands of Jewish families who have been positively affected by his Outreach initiative. One such family is the family of Robert Trautman. In December 2006 the entire family—three generations—gathered for the *B'nei Mitzvah* of Bob and his youngest daughter.<sup>413</sup> Bob Trautman is a Jew by Choice who married Debra, Alexander Schindler's daughter. Undoubtedly, Alexander Schindler would be very proud of that particular legacy, which was possible because of the Outreach program that he guided to fruition.

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<sup>412</sup> Alexander Schindler, Presidential Address to the UAHC, December 2, 1995.  
[http://urj.org/\\_kd/go.cfm?destination=viewitem&itemID=3827](http://urj.org/_kd/go.cfm?destination=viewitem&itemID=3827) (accessed December 22, 2006).

<sup>413</sup> Eva Oles, Telephone interview January 15, 2007.

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