

SHE WAS SPEAKING FOR GOD: JANE EVANS AS A PROTO-RABBI

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Summary

This thesis is comprised of four chapters. These chapters are divided such that they pursue the question of Jane Evans' contributions to gender equality and women's ordination by looking at the ways in which she broke barriers, and defied expectations for women in her time. It is divided thus: there is an introductory chapter, a chapter entitled "Jane Evans: Breaking the Stained-Glass Ceiling", a chapter entitled "Jane Evans: The Consummate 'Company Man'", and a final, concluding chapter.

The contribution of this thesis is that it is only the second full-length work to look closely at the work of Dr. Jane Evans, who served as the Executive Director of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods from 1933-1976. The preceding work, also a HUC-JIR rabbinic thesis, was written by Rabbi Adrienne Pollack Scott, and is entitled "*An Analysis of Dr. Jane Evans' Professional Contributions to the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.*" This thesis endeavored to delve deeper into Evans' life and work, and asserts that Evans' has not yet been given her rightful legacy in the American Reform Jewish consciousness. It also contributes to the academic conversation around the history of women's ordination in America.

I traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio in August 2013, in order to spend time researching Jane Evans at the American Jewish Archives. Thus, this thesis relies heavily on archival material, including (but not limited to) Evans'

original writing: speeches, correspondence, original liturgy, as well as those belonging to the NFTS collection

Acknowledgments



I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Jane Evans, of blessed memory. Over the past year, I have come to admire this woman, who I know only through her words and through the memories of others. I only hope that this thesis will begin to enliven the legacy she rightfully deserves.

I want to acknowledge the incredible support and guidance of my advisor, Dr. Carole B. Balin. You have been a source of inspiration as you have challenged me to enliven Jane's legacy. Our relationship embodies the line from Pirke Avot that teaches, "Make for yourself a *Rav*, acquire a friend". Thank you for being both.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The world into which Jane Evans was born in 1907 was strikingly different from the world she left behind when she died at the age of 96 in 2004. Evans lived through two World Wars, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement, the Vietnam War, the rise of feminism and multiculturalism, and finally, the technology and Internet boom.

Not only her colleagues but historians, too, have memorialized Evans and recognized her extensive contributions to Reform Jewry and world politics. There is no doubt that in her inimitable and powerful way, Jane Evans broke barriers for women and advocated tirelessly for their inclusion and ascension into roles of leadership throughout the Reform movement. In the more than forty years of her professional affiliation with the Reform movement, Evans was responsible for remarkable change and progress. As Executive Director of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods (NFTS; now Women of Reform Judaism/WRJ) from 1933 to 1976, Jane Evans drove important innovations in Jewish life at a time when few women advanced to such a professional height. As a trailblazer, she modeled a unique style of leadership: at once capable and business-like, while simultaneously sensitive to the needs of her constituents, and with unwavering commitment to the preservation of Jewish tradition. She was unwavering in her commitment to Jewish learning and sought peace and justice for all by championing causes that reflected her strong moral compass: founding the Jewish Braille Institute, serving as an original member of the committee to write the UN Charter, and working for pacifist initiatives throughout her lifetime.

With all that, however, I submit that her lasting contribution to Reform Jewish history is far more than the sum of the programs, policies and advocacy attributed to her—even with the recently published volume documenting the centennial of Women of Reform Judaism.¹ Although Reform leaders of the past with whom she worked shoulder to shoulder (e.g Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, Rabbi Nelson Glueck, Rabbi Alexander Schindler) and contemporary scholars (e.g. Rebecca Kobrin, Rabbi Adrienne Scott, Pamela Nadell) have lauded her efforts, none has focused on the fact that Evans was herself modeling female leadership for would-be female rabbis. While advocating for gender equality in general and the ordination of women as rabbis in particular (women would become rabbis when she was 65 years old), Evans paved the way for women to hold and maintain power in Reform leadership circles. Her personal qualities and professional acumen put women on the playing field and made it possible for many to imagine that it could be a equal, or gender-less, one.

This fact will come to light through my analysis of Evans’ speeches, homilies and self-composed prayers, along with recent interviews with her professional colleagues. Her public addresses, which are found at the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, testify to the religious leadership she modeled for her constituents and the Reform movement at large, well before women were permitted to become rabbis. She was, in the words of Rabbi Eric Yoffie, “the first lady of the Reform movement” and made it probable that a Jewish woman could be a president

¹ Balin, Carole B., Dana Herman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Gary P. Zola, Ed. *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*.. Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati. 2013.

(of her temple), or even a member of the clergy. Her persona, professionalism, Jewish erudition, and emotional intelligence enabled Reform Jewish men and women to grasp what it means for a woman to serve as a leader, and led eventually to the acceptance of the notion that women could function effectively as rabbis (and cantors).

In this thesis, I will demonstrate how Jane Evans became a prototype for the first generation of women rabbis. In the two chapters that follow I will show how Evans was a barrier-breaker in both public religious life (chapter 1) and in the sphere of institutional power (chapter 2). In effect, she had little regard for the “(stained) glass ceiling” that left women subordinate to men in places of religious power. Evans was not only Jewishly learned but unafraid of employing the language of prayer typically relegated to (male) rabbis, who were on some level professional colleagues. She kept pace with (and in some cases, out-ran) her male counterparts in business know-how as well.

In 2002, Adrienne Scott interviewed Jane Evans for her rabbinical thesis at HUC-JIR in Cincinnati, entitled *An Analysis of Dr. Jane Evans' Professional Contributions to the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods*. Since extant biographical or autobiographical resources on Evans are scarce, this oral history is extremely significant and sheds light on Evans' uniquely sharp mind, even though she was 94 at the time of the interview. In attempting to gain a broader understanding of who she was, it is important to notice the way in which she told her story. Her wit and razor-sharp attention to detail reflect the spirit of this unique woman.

Jane Evans was born in New York City on October 31, 1907, the only child of James Evans and Maybelle Holden Evans. She often alluded to a particular closeness to her father. This is understandable when we consider that her mother died when Evans was an infant, which left her in the primary care of her father. In reflecting upon her childhood, Evans recalled the unique nature of being raised solely by a single parent:

I thank my father, of blessed memory, for the fact that I had an upbringing that every woman was shocked at, because only my father raised me after the age of 9 months. He said no healthy animal ever died from lack of sleep, so therefore he ruled that no one could tell me to go to bed and no one could tell me to get up. So, then I actually have had, from childhood on, thank God and thanks to him, a very short sleep pattern. He (my father) said it was criminal. If I was interested in doing something at night he would never tell me it's 8:00, 9:00, go to bed. I never had to go to bed until I, myself, decided I wanted to go to bed, which was generally at midnight.²

Presumably, the sense of permissiveness inherent in her father's childrearing philosophy shaped Evans into an independent thinker. Here, it is important to highlight two aspects of her personal story: her unusual educational and professional path, and the fact that she remained single and childless throughout her life.

Evans' education was a matter of great importance to her father. She attended a public high school and studied with private tutors to enhance her learning. Much like the rest of her life story, her educational experiences veered from those

² Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA.

traditionally taken by women of the day. Evans highlighted the unusual nature of her course of study from high school to college:

Now I did go to a high school that is no longer in existence, and its name was Girl's High School in Brooklyn, New York. It was a public school exclusively for preparation for college... [i]t happens that I did not attend only one college, and in this way I followed the European pattern. It is true that I took a degree that is no longer in existence, the degree of Bachelor of Philosophy from Xavier University in Cincinnati...[H]owever, prior to Xavier University, I had taken many courses at New York University and then, when I went to Cincinnati at the University of Cincinnati, though I finally took my degree from Xavier".³

Due attention will be paid to the personal context which shaped Jane Evans' professional accomplishments in later chapters. However, as part of understanding the broad strokes of her personal biography, it is nearly impossible to completely divorce her professional and personal life. Many have commented on the unusual nature of her commitment and passion for her work, which deviated from the norm of many of her female contemporaries. Jane Evans' never married, nor did she have any children, seemingly by her own choice. Evans' sexuality and personal life were never a subject for public comment, and even her most intimate friends would not speak definitively on the matter. In a 1996 interview, Evans' acknowledged the fact that she had never married, saying: "yes, I have loved and been loved. The great love of my life has been a non-Jewish man, and I don't know if we had lived in this day and age what the end result would have been, but I did not think for a moment that I could have married a non-Jew and he did not think that he could marry a non-Christian. I have, perhaps because of a lack of family, always been deeply concerned

³ Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA.

with friendship, and I hope I have been a very good friend.”⁴ Those close to her demur from commenting on the subject. Nonetheless, a single, childless woman was certainly not the societal norm in her generation. Her singularity in this regard seemed to allow her to “fit in” to the male-dominated spheres in which she traveled as part of the UAHC and greater Reform movement, and yet, also permitted her greater flexibility for meeting and connecting with thousands of Reform Jewish women across the country.

Jane and the “Women Who Would Be Rabbis”

As historian Pamela Nadell explores in her seminal volume *Women Who Would Be Rabbis* the history of women’s ordination begins long before Sally Priesand is ordained as the first woman rabbi in America by HUC-JIR in 1972. Nadell traces the history of women’s ordination as it developed beginning in the late nineteenth century, providing not only historical and social context but Jewish and *halakhic* background as well. Nadell traces the early roots of the question of female ordination not to Sally Priesand, nor even to Martha Neumark, but rather, to a much lesser known journalist and communal activist, Mary M. Cohen. In a Purim story published in the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent* in 1889, Cohen gives voice to a female protagonist who asks, “Could not—our *women*—be ministers?”⁵

The specter raised by this question is one that inherently acknowledges the influence of Reform Judaism on the American conscience. The issue of women’s

⁴ Aronow, Ina. *Renaissance Woman*. The Jewish Week. May 17, 1996. Print. MSS-720, Box 1, Folder 3. AJA.

⁵ Nadell, Pamela S. *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*. Beacon Press, 1998. p. 1

equal and full participation in religious life had been on the agenda since the beginning of Reform Judaism in America. Many of the earliest innovations of the early Reformers centered around including women (and men) in greater numbers in synagogue participation, including English sermons, mixed-seating, and translation of sacred prayers from Hebrew to English. To be sure, these earliest innovations were toward the end of preparing Jewish women to raise Jewish children, but as Nadell notes, “The emergence of nineteenth-century, middle-class, acculturated Jewish women as synagogue-goers represented but the first shift in women’s presence, place, and roles in nineteenth-century American synagogues.”⁶

I would argue that presence and place of women were the most highly transformed in nineteenth century American Judaism, and that conversations around “role”, specifically women’s roles in leadership only begin at this time, without coming to fruition until later in the twentieth century. Most of the emancipatory efforts of nineteenth century reformers such as Isaac Meyer Wise and Abraham Geiger were stalled efforts; idea proposed, and left on the table, neither discussed and nor acted upon.

By the 1890’s, the question of women’s role in synagogue life, coupled with evolving understandings of what ‘her capability’ might be, takes hold. The landmark 1893 Congress of Jewish Women is of note in this context, as it “unveils a small group of American Jewish women engaged in the essential work of reconceptualizing Judaism in order to expand their place there. As they stood and spoke in the Congress hall, they scaled the first three stages of feminist consciousness

⁶ Ibid. p. 9

posited by Lerner: “authorization to speak, inspired speech, and the right to learn and to teach.”⁷ In this way, we can trace the roots of women’s participation in their own liberation within Jewish life and America to the shift from male leaders talking about women’s role, to women discussing their own roles among other related issues.

One such woman who emerges at this time, to whom we can trace some parallels with the later work of Jane Evans, is Ray Frank, who was known as the “girl rabbi of the golden west.” As Nadell notes, Frank’s career undoubtedly is among the range of influential forces in “advancing the perception, among some, that women’s rabbinic ordination was imminent.”⁸ Although Frank had no formal Jewish education, she gained a reputation as a charismatic lecturer while teaching Sabbath school in Northern California in the 1890’s. After the congregation’s rabbi resigned, Ray Frank took over the leadership of the school, and began to speak and write on the question of women’s ordination. Like Evans, Frank was outspoken and bold; she decried the rampant materialism she perceived in the rabbinate and spoke out against the mixing of religion and politics among other topics. By 1893, she had made the decision to go to Cincinnati to study at Hebrew Union College. Of this decision, Frank wrote

I entered the theological college in Cincinnati, in order to learn more of the philosophy of Judaism, and was the first woman to take that special work at the college...it never having been my intention to take the regular theological course, having long prior concluded that while theologies are many, religion is one; and that ordination is not essential to preachers, or, better yet, to teachers.⁹

In considering the extent to which Jane Evans’ broke barriers as woman in religious life, in comparison with someone like Ray Frank, we are apt to see more

⁷ Ibid. p. 36

⁸ Ibid. p. 39

⁹ Ibid. p. 41

similarities than differences. Much like Frank, Evans was comfortable speaking in theological language, and speaking out against societal ills she saw tearing at the fabric of Jewish life. Further, like Frank, Evans never sought ordination for herself, and though not as explicit as Frank on the topic, one can imagine Evans dismissing the notion that ‘ordination was essential to preachers, or to teachers’. If we are to employ the metaphor of a relay race to the trajectory of Jewish life in America, we might very well see the mantle of Jane Evans’ religious leadership (and the style in which she inhabited it) as the baton handed to her through the generations from Ray Frank.

Another individual, with whom Jane Evans was “connected,” was Paula Ackerman. Much like Ray Frank, Paula Ackerman came to inhabit a de facto rabbinical role in her community, albeit through different circumstances. Born in 1893, Paula Ackerman was educated as a Reform Jew throughout her life, after her family moved away from their Orthodox roots. She was confirmed at a Reform synagogue and was valedictorian of her high school. She had aspirations of becoming a doctor, but her father refused, stipulating instead that he would allow her to go to college only to become a teacher. Ultimately, she did not attend college, and at the age of 26, married Rabbi William Ackerman, an ordainee of the Jewish Theological Seminary. In 1924, the couple moved to Meridian, Mississippi, where William Ackerman became rabbi of Temple Beth Israel, the second largest congregation there.¹⁰

¹⁰ Nadell, Pamela S. *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women’s Ordination, 1889-1985*. Beacon Press, Boston. 1998. p. 120

During her time as *rebbetzin* of Temple Beth Israel, Ackerman was a central figure in the community:

...[s]he embodied for her community the exemplary Jewish wife, mother and communal volunteer. In the synagogue she taught in the Sabbath school. While her husband taught confirmation youth, she taught the pre-confirmation class. “[A]dvisor in every capacity” to the sisterhood, its secretary and program chairman, she refused its presidency, only because she felt a congregant should hold that office...[B]ut the rabbi’s wife did more for Temple Beth Israel. She also frequently substituted in the pulpit for her husband in his absence or when he fell ill.¹¹

To this end, Paula Ackerman inhabited a space similar to that of many of the founding women of NFTS who were also wives of rabbis (or UAHC board members). Pamela Nadell also draws this parallel, comparing Paula Ackerman to “[C]arrie Simon, another *rebbetzin*, who had sought a wider venue for her religious service—a leader among the women of Reform Judaism.”¹² These women laid the groundwork not only for NFTS to grow, but also for the story of Paula Ackerman to unfold as it did following the death of her husband in 1950.

As one of the “women who would have been a rabbi”, Paula Ackerman’s story is one of organic transition into a formalized role that she had always, in some capacity, filled. When her husband died, the president of Temple Beth Israel (with unanimous board support) asked Paula Ackerman to “carry on the ministry until they could get a Rabbi.”¹³ In her analysis, Pamela Nadell suggests that “Ackerman fully understood the implications of the invitation”, within the context of her own work with NFTS and the UAHC. Ackerman saw this moment as an opportunity for the expansion of women’s roles within Reform Judaism, writing: “I also know how

¹¹ Ibid. p. 121

¹² Ibid. p. 121

¹³ Ibid. p. 121

revolutionary the idea is--- therefore it seems to be a challenge that I pray I can meet. If I can just plant a seed for the Jewish woman's larger participation—if perhaps it will open a way for women students to train for congregational leadership—then my life would have some meaning.”¹⁴

Ultimately, Paula Ackerman went on to serve as “interim spiritual leader” of Temple Beth Israel, having no intention of “serving as “Rabbi” except in Meridian”¹⁵. Friends and mentors, including her childhood rabbi, Rabbi Jacob D. Schwartz, offered her divergent counsel on the possibilities as well as challenges of her stepping into this rabbinic role. Despite any reservations or warnings to the contrary, Paula Ackerman went on to serve as the rabbinic presence of the congregation, despite choosing to call herself “interim spiritual leader”. Her election to this role garnered public attention, resulting in press about the “first woman in the U.S. to executive a rabbi's functions”, and plentiful attention from fellow Sisterhood members who sent “dozens of Uniongrams” congratulating her.¹⁶

As students of history, we know that it would be another 22 years before a woman would officially be ordained as a rabbi by the Reform movement in America. In the months following Ackerman's appointment in Meridian, the reaction of Reform leadership was mixed. Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, then president of the UAHC was quoted in Time magazine, saying “Women should not be denied the privilege of ordination...there is nothing in the practice and principles of Liberal

¹⁴Ackerman, Paula. Correspondence File, *Letter from Paula Ackerman to “friend” (likely Jacob D. Schwartz)*. 12 December 1950. AJA. (cited in Nadell's book “Women Who Would Be Rabbis”)

¹⁵ Nadell, Pamela S. *Women Who Would Be Rabbis*, p. 122.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 123

Judaism which precludes the possibility of a woman serving as a rabbi.”¹⁷ But, though Ackerman saw herself as a pioneer in the movement for the ordination of women, this view was not shared by Reform leaders writ large. Nadell asserts that Eisendrath’s statement was largely lip service, “adding his voice to Reform’s long rhetorical tradition of favoring rabbis.”¹⁸

When it got down to the specific case of Paula Ackerman—just as had been true for Martha Neumark, Irma Lindheim, Dora Askowith, and Helen Levinthal—Reform Judaism found questions about the candidate which precluded her from becoming a rabbi. In Ackerman’s case, objections to her temporary rabbinate rested on the fact that she was neither formally trained nor ordained.¹⁹

Why then hold up the story of Jane Evans against the narrative of Paula Ackerman? I believe that the intersection of their individual stories provides greater insight into the nature and character of Jane Evans. In correspondence between Paula Ackerman and Jane Evans, Evans spares no words in reframing Ackerman’s enthusiasm in seeing herself as “the first woman rabbi”. Evans informed Paula Ackerman that she was “[n]ot really the first, that England’s Lily Montagu had preceded her as a preacher and that Evans herself had already officiated at High Holiday services.”²⁰ Whereas Paula Ackerman stepped into a role on the *bima*, I believe that Evans was responsible for creating and maintaining the space and the culture that allowed her to do so.

To take another example, Lily Montagu shared the experience of (female) lay ministry before the “official ordination” of women. Her story, which has been

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 123

comprehensively studied by Ellen Umansky, is linked in many ways with Jane Evans. Evans and Montagu were not only respected colleagues, but also friends. Their mutual admiration and respect for one another is evident in the correspondence between these two visionary women. Where Evans held many male colleagues in high esteem, Montagu stands out as a singular female influence in her life.

Lily Montagu, was born in London in 1873 to a wealthy, prominent Jewish family. As a young girl, Lily was deeply influenced by her parents' Orthodox religious practices, though her mother provided a powerful framework of religious questioning.

Indeed, what Lily Montagu later remembered most about her mother's sense of religiosity was its "elasticity," her willingness, in other words, to answer all of her children's religious questions, no matter how radical; incorporating English prayers into their home worship, impressing upon her children the importance of spontaneous prayer, and perhaps most importantly, believing, unlike her husband, that one could not expect young people to want the pattern of their lives to be identical to that of previous generations.²¹

The somewhat radical nature of Lily's religious upbringing would serve as a strong foundation to her life's work. Her understanding of Judaism as a personal religion, and her spiritual seeking as a Jewish woman define the legacy she created in her work as a lay minister, and one of the founding members of the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

A trailblazer in her own right, Lily Montagu is often called "the first woman rabbi" (much like her sisters in the "would have been" category, like Ray

²¹ Umansky, Ellen M. "Lily Montagu." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 20 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on February 13, 2014) <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/montagu-lily>>.

Frank). In some ways, the veracity of this title is stronger insofar as her role in the Anglo-Jewish community was concerned. As Ellen Umansky points out, she did in fact serve in the *role* of minister or Liberal rabbi for the London Jewish community. She preached and taught, led worship services, conducted life-cycle events, wrote original liturgy for the birth of a baby, worked with potential converts, and effectively functioned as the “socio-spiritual head of the West Central Liberal Jewish Congregation for forty years”.²²

Perhaps it is best to consider Lily Montagu’s self-perception in order to better understand the parallels and differences in her life’s work, as compared with Jane Evans. How did Lily Montagu see herself in her role as spiritual leader? Did she consider herself a rabbi, and if so, was the issue of “official ordination” of concern to her? In an essay entitled “Jewish Women in the Rabbinate” (1956), Montagu addressed these questions, albeit at somewhat of a personal remove. Notably, she refers to herself in the anonymous third person when referencing the decision made by Rabbi Dr. Mattuck to accord women the right to serve as Lay Ministers.²³ She notes:

There was unfortunately no woman qualified by scholarship and ministerial training to enter the Rabbinate, but a woman Lay Minister was inducted and given the leadership of a Congregation. We are hoping that others will be trained for the full Rabbinate when Liberal Theological colleges are established.²⁴

²² Umansky, Ellen M. (ed). Lily Montagu: Sermons, Addresses, Letters and Prayer. The Edwin Mellen Press, New York. 1985. p. 1

²³ Ibid. p. 183

²⁴ Ibid. p. 184

As a visionary thinker, and relentless pursuer of her ideals, Lily Montagu rightfully claims a place in Jewish history as a trailblazing feminist. Luke Devine, a lecturer at the University of Worcester in the UK positions Lily Montagu as a “proto-feminist”, accrediting her with the fact that “women in Liberal Judaism can become rabbis, be called up to read the Torah, they are equal in divorce law, they can study the sacred texts, they can form a minyan, and can assume communal and religious positions of authority over men”²⁵ These are nearly identical attributions to those ascribed to Evans in America. For instance, Rabbi Marla Feldman, Executive Director of Women of Reform Judaism notes that it was NFTS, under Jane Evans’ leadership, that was responsible for “creating the space” first, for women to step on to the bima (through Sisterhood Sabbaths, and leading worship when the rabbi was away or unable, beginning in the 1920’s), and then for women to step into the boardroom, as leaders in all aspects of Jewish life.²⁶

²⁵ Devine, Luke. *Emergent Liberal Judaism and Lily Montagu’s Proto-Feminist Project: Exploring the Precursive and Conceptual Links with Second and Third-Wave Jewish Feminist Theologies*. 2012. Melilah: Journal of Jewish Studies, 9.

²⁶Feldman, Rabbi Marla J. Personal Conversation. February 12, 2014. Call it an interview?

Chapter 2: Jane Evans: Breaking the Stain-Glassed Ceiling

“We desperately need the insights of our religion, our heritage, to face the tumultuous present.”

These words, which are scrawled in Evans’ own hand in the margins of a typewritten speech, typify the deeply held convictions evident throughout her work. Over the course of her long career, Evans’ broke through many (stain-glassed) ceilings.²⁷ In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Evans’ distinguished herself as a maverick in the religious spheres in which she operated. Evans’ Jewish knowledge, personal theology, and commitment to Jewish learning are evident in all of her writing, including original speeches, benedictions and prayers. Though she was not ordained as a rabbi, it is clear from her words and from the influence she cast on others, that Evans acted as a rabbi in the lives of those who knew her. In the lives of her professional constituents, colleagues, and personal intimates, Evans’ was at times a preacher, a prayer leader, and a pastor.

Jane Evans: Preacher

Given her extensive travel as Executive Director of NFTS, it may come as no surprise that Evans spoke publicly, often. In the extant archival materials at the American Jewish Archives, as well as in the collections belonging to NFTS, the bulk of her documents are the texts of her many and varied speeches. However, to characterize them solely as “speeches” would be to miss the significant aspect of her words: Evans wrote like a preacher. Although those who knew her personally balked

²⁷ Fiedler, Maureen. *Breaking through the Stained Glass Ceiling: Women Religious Leaders in Their Own Words*. New York: Seabury, 2010. Print.

at this characterization (citing her “high-pitched voice” and overall affect²⁸), it is difficult to ignore the transcendent, learned, and sermonic qualities of her public speeches.

In her 1952 remarks entitled “For the Blessing of All”, Evans addressed the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation²⁹ on the occasion of their honoring Helen Dalsheimer for her leadership in the congregation, NFTS, and the UAHC. (Notably, four years hence, Dalsheimer would become the first woman to serve as president of a UAHC-affiliated congregation.) In many ways, this particular speech encapsulates Evans’ unique oratory style and shows both the breadth and depth with which she spoke.

The form of her speech is in keeping with that of a sermon. As students of homiletics will readily recognize, she employs a standard tripartite structuring device: she opens with a witticism and transitions smoothly into the heart of the matter at hand. From there, she deftly builds an argument that relies on both sociological understandings of her issue, as well as Jewish tradition, before coming full circle to her original point. Each of the three sections is characterized by elevated language, Jewish textual references and idioms, and a building sense of urgency. In this case: the role of women in Jewish tradition, and the honor and blessings to be found therein.

²⁸ Feldman, Rabbi Marla J. Personal Conversation. February 12, 2014.

²⁹ Baltimore Hebrew Congregation, incorporated in 1830, is the oldest synagogue in Maryland, and among the oldest in the United States. It was, and remains today, the central Reform synagogue in Baltimore, which has always had a large Jewish population.

Her introduction subtly acknowledges various held beliefs about women, offering “a quotation to suit any mood, whether serious, frivolous, provocative or tantalizing.”³⁰

From biblical Proverbs to Confucius, this speech begins by naming the range of extant subjugations and generalizations about women. But the real power and grit of her words begin when she delves into the depths of Jewish ‘legend and law’: she effectively demonstrates her prowess with Jewish texts, and provokes questions around the essential nature of women that would challenge an audience even today.

Curiously, though perhaps befitting the time in which she wrote this piece, Evans does begin by validating the belief that “women, who was created for service to man, which really means to mankind, would always be humble in the performance of her labor for the benefit of others.”³¹ What differentiates her is that she is *of* the social fabric and cultural atmosphere that precedes second-wave feminism: an era that still valued the “cult of domesticity”³² as a life-path for women. Evans’ begins her work at NFTS long before Betty Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique* is published in 1964, and before second-wave feminism popularizes the movement for gender equality. To that end, we see that Evans’ writing preserves the broader communal sentiments of her day, and yet we know that her actions and advocacy went far beyond these gendered conclusions.

³⁰ Jane Evans. *For the Blessing of All*. MSS-745 Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The “cult of domesticity” was a value system that pervaded among upper and middle class women in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Also known as the “cult of true womanhood”, this system valued the “four cardinal virtues: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.” See Welter, Barbara (1966). “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860”. *American Quarterly* 18 (2): 151–174. For publication, needs more historical context.

Evans' speech continues by acknowledging the leadership and invaluable contributions of Dalsheimer, then first Vice President of NFTS, and board member of the UAHC. Evans' lifts up her contributions as emblematic of her "fine counsel, dedicated spirit, and generous thought" before moving on to the topic of NFTS. Again, it is useful to note the skillful homiletic technique which Evans employs in this early speech: she situates NFTS in both its historical and social context, speaking of the vision of its founding members, such as Carrie Simon, and "the late Mrs. Joseph Wiesenfeld of Baltimore" to whom she links the honoree. Effectively, one can imagine that for the listeners at Baltimore Hebrew Congregation on this particular evening in 1952, Evans elicited a sense of great hometown pride, for the leadership and vision bred in their own community. Evans' speech continues to build to this pinnacle statement:

A non-religious American, whether Jew or Gentile by birth, is a less valuable American than one who clearly recognizes the role of religious values in meeting the enormous demands made upon man in this era of tension... [B]ut for modern man, especially mid-twentieth century man, who has seen two World cataclysms and stands precariously on the brink of a third, who hears his scientists and philosophers- as well as his religionists—correctly assay his difficulty as being inherently a spiritual one, religious identification, education, and support are indeed essential. As Jews we are the inheritors of the wisdom distilled for us by our forebears through thousands of years of time. Unless our identification with Jewish life be rooted in the Synagogue, which is our spiritual home, we are only partly Jewish, no matter how many the organizations to which we belong, no matter how many dollars we give to Jewish philanthropy or Jewish defense agencies. The whole Jew is the pious Jew.³³

³³ Evans, Jane. *For the Blessing of All*. MSS-745 Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

Today, a statement like this would be, perhaps, even bolder if spoken from the pulpit of a Reform synagogue: ‘the whole Jew is the pious Jew’. Evans’ sees religion as a salve for the modern American Jew, and her words are clear. Further, she was a true believer in the power and import of institutional religion. She is unequivocal in this regard, and continues by explicating this point for the congregation:

For the modern Reform or Liberal Jew, piety need involve no burdensome discipline, but discipline there is. Unwittingly we often use the word “religiously” in an amusing and strictly non-religious sense. Unfortunately, one sometimes hears more frequently the comment—or did before the advent of television—“religiously I take the children to the movies once a week” than “religiously the family attends Temple services once a week!”³⁴

This call to attention is made not simply to induce guilt or fervor in those who affiliate wholeheartedly or less so; rather, Evans then smoothly translates it into a call to action and commitment. She states, “our identification and education must be more than at the purely local level”, and continues by making a pitch for broad support of the national institutions that comprise the Reform movement. In making the case for supporting the UAHC and NFTS, she links the national obligation with a global one, referencing the work of Dr. Leo Baeck and the Honorable Lily H. Montagu of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Further, Evans elevates the responsibility she sees for American Reform Jews to support humanitarian causes, but she does so in a way that does not dilute her crucial message: all of the good works that one might aim to do as a Reform Jew can be accomplished by supporting and affiliating with NFTS. By supporting NFTS, she reminds this congregation, they are

³⁴ Ibid.

effectively supporting the efforts of the Jewish Braille Institute of America (an organization which she helps found), the UAHC, and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Evans demonstrates the link between local and national affiliation by deftly connecting the newly dedicated Baltimore Hebrew Congregation's building, with the dedication of the Union House of Living Judaism-Berg Memorial in New York. In this regard, her words elevate her status: she is at once a religious leader, and a national one, at that.

Emblematic of her unswerving commitments and belief to Judaism, Evans was unafraid to make bold statements, and couched in what might have otherwise been a *pareve* honorific, Jane Evans uses the opportunity to speak from the pulpit to preach on a matter of profound import to her. Further, it is significant to note that she is invited to speak on this occasion, rather than a male rabbi or colleague. Evans concludes this speech by returning to the person of honor, reminding this congregation of the crucial role that Helen Dalsheimer played in these projects. Finally, she draws on the Book of Proverbs, teaching:

Yes, "Every wise *woman* [emphasis added] buildeth her house" (Proverbs 14:1), a house not only of stone and mortar, but also of the materials of the spirit: of righteousness, of love, of humility, of deeds of loving kindness, of abiding faith in God. These are the attributes of character of all men and women of good will and religious faith, but especially of one whom we would honor tonight, Helen Miller Dalsheimer. We ask God's blessing upon her. To paraphrase the words of a lovely benediction, it can be truly said of her, as we seek to meet with renewed dedication, the inspiration that her life is: "Her deeds are for the joy of all and the heart of none, for the blessing of all and the woe of none, for the life of all and the death of none."³⁵

³⁵ Ibid.

Beyond the simple homiletic expertise with which Jane Evans wrote and spoke, there is a depth of learning, as well as a searching sense of spirituality that elevates her message from what could have otherwise been a simple “thank you” speech upon honoring Dalsheimer. Her facility with Jewish texts is matched only by her intelligent and savvy use of historical and social context to undergird her arguments. In this light alone, we might characterize this speech as unique. However, in considering the ways in which Evans broke religious barriers, I would argue that there is something distinctly rabbinical about the words of this speech. Her use of Jewish text, her comfort with paraphrasing benedictory language, and her willingness to contextualize it all as “for the blessing of all” elevates the speech into a sermon.

Jane Evans: Pastor and Prayer Leader

Evans’ range of original liturgy shows her remarkable deftness as prayer leader. Her archives yield a significant number of benedictions, prayers and mediations. Some are typed, others handwritten in her exacting penmanship on her personalized stationery; some titled, others left without heading. A closer look at these benedictions, invocations and prayers will provide a greater sense of the way in which Jane Evans not only preached “like a rabbi”, but prayed like one as well.

Lord of Creation,
We who have gathered from far and near to gain through our
faith renewed inspiration, now ask thy blessing. Be Thou the
Spirit that enthralls us, be Thou the Guardian of our leaders,
our institutions and all our aspirations. Gird us with the
strength of unyielding courage and enduring hope as seek to
understand and fulfill our duty to Thy universe, to our fellow
beings and thus to Thee.
O, Master, may we be worthy of that for which we pray:

Grant us in these days of our gathering deepened insight,
widened knowledge and heightened zeal that we may know,
however harsh the striving, the rich gift of life turned to a cause
beyond the self, turned to build a world of true justice,
sensitive development and dynamic peace to honor Thee, Thy
people Israel, and all humanity.
Amen.³⁶

These words are handwritten on the personal letterhead of “Miss Jane Evans 104 Wood Hollow Drive, New Rochelle, New York 10804.” Titled “Benediction”, the piece is undated, though presumably written on the occasion of a gathering of the NFTS. It is just one of the many pieces of writing in Evans’ collection at the American Jewish Archives that can be characterized as original liturgy. The richness of her language is elevated by the petitionary phrases characteristic of Reform liturgy in the twentieth century.

When students and scholars of liturgical innovation look to the evolution of liturgy as it relates to the rise of second-wave feminism, they often point first to individuals like Marcia Falk or Rabbi Margaret Moers Wenig. But Jane Evans was not of that era of feminist innovation; one can sense in her words an effort to “sound like a rabbi” which in her time meant, “sound like a man”. Unlike her feminist successors, Evans did not experiment with gendered God-language, or with feminist reinterpretations of text. Rather, she claimed space in what was otherwise solely reserved for the male-rabbi, as she creatively gave words to the prayers of her heart and her prayers for her community. Her words of *tefillot* sound as though they could have come straight out of the Union Prayer Book. To be clear: the significance of Evans’ writing and original liturgy was precisely her ability to “pass” as a rabbi in the

³⁶ Evans, Jane. *Benediction*. n.d. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

male-normative way in which that term was understood throughout most of the twentieth century. In this light, it is ever more remarkable that Evans was so comfortable writing in liturgical language as part of her public persona, and that she was so prolific in that realm.

Evans' offerings of *tefillot* were often, though not only, in the form of benedictions and invocations. In a prayer entitled "A Meditation and a Prayer", Jane offered words of comfort and solace after the death of her friend and colleague, Rabbi Daniel L. Davis.

Lord of Creation, we turn our thoughts to You, whether our souls are filled with joy or torn by sorrow. We know that through the inexorable laws of the universe, which You have created, energy remains although its form may change. Thus do we find solace in the poet's reminder, "no star is lost which ever once was seen." Our tears, whether shed or unshed, are but the tribute of the heart, the mark of loneliness which all of us endure in separation from those we knew, walked beside, worked with, deeply respected, and dearly loved. But let not our loneliness we pray, be intensified by separation from You....³⁷

The rabbinical voice rings clearly in these words; further, I believe that this particular meditation and prayer demonstrate a side of Evans' that we can characterize as "pastoral". As a 'barrier-breaker', so much of Evans' writing and work was dedicated to pushing forward: as a thought leader, she challenged her communities to work harder, learn more, and dedicate themselves with even greater conviction. Here, in these words offered upon the death of a friend and colleague,

³⁷ Evans, Jane. *Benediction*. n.d. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA. First name and then last.

these prayerful words show a side of Evans that is searching, spiritual, and comforting.

Evans' ability to use language to express her personal spiritual strivings, and her vision for Reform Judaism was not limited to the occasional usage, prompted by a special circumstance or event. In an undated piece also titled "Benediction", we see a side of Evans' liturgical impulse that reflects her humanitarian and universalist compulsions. Today one might imagine this benediction appearing as alternative liturgy for *Ma'ariv Aravim* or *Birkat Shalom* in the Reform Movement's most recent prayer book, *Mishkan T'fillah*. *Spelling?*

Thou Lord of Creation who moves stars and planets in their orbits and orders the cycles of nature in Thy universe, grant unto our leaders courage of heart, wisdom of mind and sensitivity to the spirit with which to face the tumult of our time and to fill—with aspiration and with hope--- the farthest voids of men's souls. Teach us, from whichever lands we come or in whatever tongues we speak, that as we strive to make for Israel and mankind a community which truly honors Thy name, we may reach Thee. So may we be worthy of the benediction we ask and of the blessing we seek: Now, Creator, bless Thou us with a portion of Thy strength and peace that we may build a world for Thee. Amen.³⁸

In addition to her original liturgy, Evans acted in explicitly rabbinical roles, both as part of her vision for reaching more constituents for NFTS, and during World War II. During the early days of her tenure with NFTS, Evans' would travel throughout the country, specifically to places where Jewish life was isolated and limited in scope. In her interview with Adrienne Scott, Evans' remembers these experiences.

³⁸ Evans, Jane. *Benediction*. n.d. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA. (2 of 2)

[I] would hold a religious service on a weekend, Friday night or Saturday, very often where they had not had any religious service at all. I'd go into a community, walk around it, and look for Jewish names on stores and then go in and introduce myself- never as a rabbi. I wasn't a rabbi, but would say I'm from some group...And would you come, could we be together as Jewish community Friday night? And I always had enough of the old UPB prayer book. Not that Union Prayer Book is used today.³⁹

For Evans' the work of expanding NFTS and promoting Jewish communal affiliation through particularistic activity was inextricably linked. In addition to her service as prayer leader when visiting isolated and rural Jewish communities, Evans also served in a rabbinical role during the Second World War. In her interview with Adrienne Scott, Evans remembered the dearth of rabbis available to the community due to the fact that so many had been called up for service.

There was a period when we were very short of rabbis because they were in service. I was asked to conduct services, and did, for the high holy days for a very large [i]nstitution for the mentally ill, it's out in the counties...[S]trangely enough, I guess I had conducted more services for institutionalized Jews than almost anyone else and I've learned a great deal and have taught a number of rabbis what they should know and don't know about particularly the Yom Kippur service...[I] adapted the ritual more than you would have to or I, if I were dealing with a normal congregation.⁴⁰

Evans continued by explaining that even after rabbis had returned after the war, she was still called upon from time to time to conduct services, especially in the southern region of North America.

³⁹ Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA. pg. 15

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 14.

Jane Evans: Student and Teacher

“[Jane Evans] learned every day--- she fit the profile of a person who intuitively understood what she needed to do to continue to grow throughout her life”⁴¹

In a speech entitled “The Unfinished Agenda”, Evans concluded with the affirmation: “To find that mixture of idealism, study and action which is truly meaningful to a modern woman is to meet a primary need through which religious identification may become a meaningful religious experience.”⁴² In considering the way in which Evans’ personal narrative as well as her professional activism paved the way toward women’s ordination, we should be mindful of the deep well of learning from which she drew.

In remembering his friend and mentor Jane Evans, Rabbi Jan Katzew recalls that Jane studied Jewish texts daily. Her own personal learning practice, whether done alone, or on occasion in chevruta, was of the utmost importance to her. Whereas many of the women who later come to be characterized as “the women who would have been rabbis” served in the role of rabbi or spiritual leader, Jane embodied a depth of learning and breadth of commitment to Jewish living that were exemplary.

Jane was unequivocal in her assertion that religious life was to be defined by particularistic activity: engagement with ritual, holiday celebration, and most centrally, Jewish learning. It is evident throughout her writing that a call to Jewish literacy is her rallying cry for building the rank and file of the women of NFTS. It is essential that as readers of her life as historical text, we understand that her religious conviction and organizational vision were deeply linked.

⁴¹ Katzew, Rabbi Jan. Personal Conversation. August 15, 2013.

⁴² Evans, Jane. *The Unfinished Agenda*. n.d. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

In a speech that Jane gave at the Golden Jubilee Fiftieth Biennial Assembly in Chicago, Illinois in 1963, she offered a powerful challenge to the women gathered. The speech, entitled “The Challenge of Change For Sisterhood” was a call not only to action, but also to “study, prayer and good deeds.”⁴³

I find it is difficult to believe today—even more than I found it difficult to believe 30 years ago—that Sisterhood attendance or interest in service through Sisterhood can be stimulated by non-educational non—Jewish content in programming, whether the program meetings are three times a year or monthly.

By 1963, Evans had been in her role as Executive Director for nearly 30 years. In this speech, her indictment of “frivolous” activities takes on the issue of gendered activity within Sisterhood, and Reform Judaism at large. As someone who was willing to challenge social boundaries, Evans was unafraid of being blunt: “Pardon me, but I do not believe that the fashion show, the expert on wigs, the course by the latest cosmetician or beauty consultant, are valid, meaningful, or desirable content at Sisterhood meetings.”⁴⁴ ! Again, the sense of Jane Evans as preacher is evident in this moment as well.

If she had only offered critique, this speech would be far less remarkable. However, Evans’ never missed an opportunity to reinforce her beliefs around the centrality of Jewish learning.

If the higher educational level of people today—and it is higher—means anything, if it is true that all of us suffer from a personal, societal, and even cosmic sense of loneliness as we take our first tentative steps into the vast realm of space where once only the music of the spheres was heard and now the roar

⁴³ Evans, Jane. *The Challenge of Change For Sisterhood*. 1963. MSS-745, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁴⁴ Ibid

of man-made rockets goes rapidly into a vast, uncharted area of infinitudes, then surely Sisterhood programs and projects must not be concerned solely with an all-consuming exploitation of techniques, or with the superficialities of our civilization, but rather with what will give rootedness, meaning, depth to our existence.⁴⁵

One can imagine hearing this last line spoken from the *bima* of any Reform synagogue today: rootedness, meaning, and depth being watchwords of 21st century liberal religion and spirituality.

Jane Evans: Exemplar for Jewish Women's Leadership

Given the time in which she lived, Evans' work stands out as unique: she effortlessly donned the mantle of preacher and prayer leader, and did so in a way that came from a deep sense of Jewish obligation. Her work in breaking the stain-glassed ceiling is all the more impressive when considered in tandem with the way she wielded power within NFTS and the larger Reform movement. Whereas these attributes and accomplishments reflect her strong will and determination, when considered in light of the deep wells of Jewish knowledge that Evans possessed, her role as a path-paver and barrier-breaker is all the more distinct. In the following chapter, we will look closely at the attributes and accomplishments that propelled Evans' work, with an eye toward the contributions she made in the realm of gender equality and toward the ordination of women as rabbis.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Chapter 3: Jane Evans: The Consummate “Company Man”

The story of Jane Evans’ ascent into the powerful leadership position she held for more than forty years belies the intention and careful thought that characterized her work. Evans was, in many ways, the right woman, with the right qualities, at the right time to transform NFTS from the fledgling organization that it was in 1933, to the international, business-minded organization with global concerns that it became over the course of her tenure. Prior to Evans’ hiring, NFTS had never had a full-time professional staff member; instead, it was run as part of a broader portfolio held by Rabbi George Zepin. Good The very fact of her being hired, as a woman, is of historic import. It also provides essential insight into the nature of the world in which she lived: for the first twenty years of NFTS’ existence, only men ran this women’s organization on the professional level.

Jane was at once a sociologist and a co-religionist with a brilliant business mind. Evans fundamentally reshaped the purpose and identity of NFTS from a women’s auxiliary to a powerful constituency in its own rite. In its earliest incarnation, it was seen as more of a social group than an activist organization: its activities were local, parochially minded, and lacking in particularistic religious orientation. It was precisely the success of philanthropic efforts that allowed the women of NFTS to accumulate a sense of political capital effectively forcing male leadership to reformulate their view of NFTS. Jane Evans served as the Executive Director of NFTS from 1933-1976, and she continued to work at the UAHC well past her official retirement.

Jane Evans was uniquely positioned as the “right woman” for this job because of her many attributes and experience. First, she was ambitious. Secondly, Evans came from the type of religious background and social action orientation that lent itself well to the task of transforming NFTS. While these characteristics alone may not have set Evans apart, she also possessed two traits that differentiated her from many other women in her time: Evans had the ability to travel in male-dominated spheres, hobnobbing with ‘the boys’ and gaining their respect, and lastly, strong business acumen.

Evans’ visionary leadership positioned her as a powerful player in breaking institutional barriers. She introduced unprecedented business models for leadership. As Rebecca Kobrin notes, while her years working in retail are often glossed over, they were essential to how she understood the importance of mobilizing her constituency.⁴⁶ Her business background is evident in the way she ran meetings, as well as in written materials, such as her annual Report of the Executive Director, which was always clear, concise, and consistent.

Though she began in her official capacity as “Executive Secretary”, before long, Evans was named Executive Director of NFTS. One cannot put too fine a point on the significance of this appointment. At this time, NFTS was gaining momentum, growing toward the zenith of its own influence as an institution in the Reform movement. It was more than just the ‘right hand’ to the UAHF; NFTS was influential in creating both policy and culture throughout the Reform movement. Additionally,

⁴⁶ Kobrin, Rebecca. Lecture at WRJ symposium, June 1, 2013.

Evans served as the *only* woman and non-rabbi head of one of the UAHC's arms in this period.

When she assumed the role of “Executive Secretary” of NFTS, Evans diminutive stature likely amplified assumptions about her leadership qualifications as a woman. But Evans would squelch such assumptions by the reality of her accomplishments. During these early years when the Reform movement was headquartered in Cincinnati, while Evans dedicated herself to expanding the breadth and depth of NFTS. She did this by adopting the work style of the traveling salesmen so prevalent at the time. Evans traversed the United States, addressing congregational audiences; meeting with NFTS affiliated Sisterhoods, and generally serving as an ambassador for the Reform movement in small towns as well as big cities throughout North America. In later years, when asked about the extent of her travel, she would estimate that she spent close to 300 days on the road per year in during her early tenure.

Attributes and Accomplishments: Building Institutional Capacity

Over the course of more than forty years, Jane Evans transformed NFTS into an international organization of more than 650 affiliates, raising millions of dollars, and supporting major initiatives of the Reform movement. In order to understand the depth and breadth of her skill and professional contributions, we can look to the ways in which she broke through power structures: defying gender expectations around power and authority, and utilizing her business savvy to transform Jewish life for women around North America.

A look at Evans' professional trajectory must begin by highlighting the ways in which she defied the normative gender and class expectations of her day. As noted in the introduction, Evans was an avid student and her education veered from the conventional path. Her academic aptitude was matched by her creativity. She had an eye for innovation and indeed is responsible for a design that would become ubiquitous throughout the U.S.. In the 1930's, while working as the Director of Decoration at the large St. Louis department store, W&J Sloan, Joseph Newman of Emerson Electric Manufacturing Company approached her about designing a new tabletop electric fan. In response, she created what became known as the "Silver Swan," which American collectors recognize as the fan that changed fan design forever.⁴⁷

How did Jane Evans transform herself from inventor of the "Silver Swan" to national Reform Jewish leader? On the one hand, Evans was a born-and-bred-Reform Jew, Ambitious and intelligent, she met with success in the corporate world but would eventually "professionalize" her Jewish commitments into the role of Executive Director of NFTS. The transformation of her childhood aspiration to attend medical school into a decades'-long career at the UAHC's mothership on Clifton Avenue in Cincinnati, seemed to catch even her by surprise:

To my utter astonishment, one day Mrs. Steinfeld asked to see me. She described the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and that she would like me to become the Executive of it. I was stunned, and absolutely politely negative. I hadn't the slightest idea in the world of entering Jewish professional life....I was totally negative, totally. I said, "under no circumstances." After all, I was established in my career and had no intention at that time of giving it up, plus I was

⁴⁷ AJA Biographical Sketch: <http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0745/>

convinced that in another year or two I would give up what I was doing and go to medical school.⁴⁸

As Evans notes above, her ascension into her role as Executive Director of National Federation of Temple Sisterhood's (NFTS) came about as a result of a series of coincidences. In addition to her job at W&J Sloan, Evans also taught art classes, presumably to make extra money for attendance at medical school. One of her students was Martha L. Steinfeld, a prominent member of the St. Louis Jewish community and president of NFTS. With no prior warning, she asked Evans to take the executive position.

Evans was a member of Temple Shaarey Emeth in St. Louis, and her rabbi, Julius Gordon, urged her to consider taking on the role of Executive Director.

[Rabbi Gordon] pointed out to me, and I took it pretty seriously, that look, at this time Hitler was coming to power, at this time a young Jewish person of, shall we say, ability...should think seriously about it, and at this time I owed an obligation as a Jew....I was under great pressure over and over again [and] finally I said, "[T]he only thing I can offer, I will temporarily go to Cincinnati with the clear understanding it's only temporary...and I will help you find my successor."⁴⁹

In Evans' recollections, she stood out as, perhaps, the right candidate for the job:

Mrs. Steinfeld had Rabbi Zepin come to St. Louis to an interview and the interview was in Mrs. Steinfeld's home...Rabbi Zepin, I later learned, strongly advised against employing me on the grounds that I was much too--- what is the right word? I suppose "advanced" might be the right word...[H]e felt I was too frank. He used a different word.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

One can only imagine which ‘one word’ Rabbi Zepin might have used to describe his encounter with a woman who later would be described as the ultimate “company man.”⁵¹ For Evans, it was neither a matter of insult nor of misunderstanding: she believed that Zepin’s reservations centered on a fear that she might supplant the lay leadership of NFTS. To some extent, she would admit that he was likely right. Despite initial misgivings, Zepin hired Evans as Executive Secretary of NFTS and made her the first full-time professional staff person for the organization. Upon arrival in Cincinnati, Evans recalled feelings of surprise and dismay at the state of the organization she encountered:

[W]hen I finally got to Cincinnati, with very few exceptions, I found that the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods could have been a non-Jewish organization from their activities at the local levels, even at the national level. You see, I had a very strong Jewish sense and I really felt that if a man from Mars came, he might not have found much difference between going to Sisterhood meeting and going to a meeting of the women of the Council of Churches or whatever.

Thus, in her first report as Executive Secretary⁵², it is not surprising to find Evans’ expressed commitment to running an organization framed by Jewish values, beliefs and action:

[I]t is with pleasure that I present my first report to you as your executive secretary. In so doing it is appropriate that I attempt to crystallize my conception of an organization. It is imperative that we view the pattern as a whole without neglecting to appreciate the texture and quality of the individual threads. The pattern of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods as reflected in the activities of its various committees is a modern projection into practical deed the ideas of our forbearers. We are faced with the challenge and responsibility of creating a

⁵¹ <http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/yoffie/evans/>

⁵² At first, Evans’ title was “Executive Secretary”; perhaps because the title of “secretary” was more commonly applied to, and acceptable for women.

program that will express an intelligent enthusiasm for Judaism. Such an enthusiasm contends itself only when translated into positive action. We must remember that within our heritage is the message of the prophets!/~~profits~~ of Israel, who interpreted religion in terms of service.⁵³

While Evans' fabric imagery gives "texture and quality" to her charge, she is more than a wordsmith. In this early report, one senses her powerful drive. With less than a year in the job, Evans unequivocally put forth, what today we would characterize, an organizational mission statement. She was emphatic about the centrality of congregational life to Jewish continuity and clarified what NFTS was and was not:

We are not a social organization; we are not a philanthropic organization; we are a religious group, dedicated to the philosophy that the congregation is logical unit of organization in Israel, and that through congregational life the modern Jewess can most effectively exercise her influence upon Jewish and non-Jewish life. Religious is the central core of the vast contribution which we, the Jewish people, make to humanity and to ourselves."⁵⁴

Evans envisioned an "intelligent enthusiasm for Judaism" for NFTS. To that end, she sought to professionalize her constituents in a way that would elevate their task and transform their innate skills. For example, in 1966, she led an Advanced Leadership Training workshop and Board Orientation for the NFTS Board of Directors. In terms of attention paid to tangible leadership "skills," Evans understood the importance of ideas only now gaining traction in the business

⁵³ Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA. p. 17

⁵⁴ Statement on Sisterhood Philosophy by Jane Evans, Executive Director. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. First presented at 1949 NFTS District Presidents' Council. MSS #745. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. 1939-1977. 1/1

community, such as physical space (“As leaders must always be aware of physical arrangements which can create a warm and unified atmosphere.”⁵⁵), and turned her attention to strategic planning as well. She focused on group dynamics and had an acute “emotional intelligence.” In notes from the board leadership training of 1966, Evans was cognizant of the “hidden agenda”: that is, the unspoken needs and background stories of the people in the room at any given time and what that could mean for navigating her organization.

Moreover, Evans understood the importance of volunteerism to her constituents’ lives. She comprehended that volunteerism gave meaning to the women who did not earn a wage for their work as well as a means for the Jewish value of pursuing justice. In a 1975 address to the NFTS Biennial Assembly, she explained that volunteers are “powers in action”. In her assessment of the value of volunteerism, she spoke to the vast changes that she had seen in women’s equality in her lifetime.

There is no desire to deny that we are living through a new and revolutionary phase in women’s development. We need not fear it even though, as is the custom of revolutions, pendulums often swing too far in the early days of new movements before steadying into different and more stable rhythms. There really need be no basic contradiction between women’s consciousness raising—women’s liberation, which is wholly desirable—and the continuation of women’s volunteering for service.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Post Board Advanced Leadership Training Workshop and Board Orientation. November 17, 1966. MSS #745. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. 1939-1977. 1/1

⁵⁶ Evans, Jane. “Volunteerism” Biennial Assembly, NFTS. November 7, 1975. MSS #745. National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. 1939-1977. 1/1.

At the same time, Evans led NFTS to become a major financial resource to the Reform movement at large. As she would frequently remark, she saw her work as intrinsically community-based. NFTS put itself at the service of the larger Reform movement time and again. Although Evans would have certainly demurred at the idea of claiming NFTS' accomplishments as her own, the list of the organization's accomplishments is lengthy. In the decades she served at its helm, NFTS was responsible for raising annual scholarships for rabbinical students of HUC-JIR and Leo Baeck College in London (as well an award for cantorial students at the School of Sacred Music), as well as a dormitory on the Cincinnati campus, helping to establish and fund the National Federation of Temple Youth, organizing the Jewish Braille Institute of America, purchasing the land at 838 5th Avenue, and subsequently opening the Union's House of Living Judaism-Berg Memorial in New York, and spearheading special projects in Israel and throughout the world, to list just a few. Furthermore, during her tenure as Executive Director, she was responsible for tremendous growth in her organization. Evans revealed the secret of her success during the Scott interview. A certain Rabbi Cohen, she said, would often meet traveling salesmen on the train. When asked what business he was in, Rabbi Cohen would respond, "I deal in ideals and ideas and I'm selling ideals and ideas."⁵⁷ This gave Evans her idea for expanding Sisterhood, she explained:

[W]e had the concept, we and NFTS, that maybe we could organize Sisterhoods and ultimately, if we could organize Sisterhoods, they might organize a congregation, and literally we did, and this is not a well-known aspect of Reform Judaism that in the early days, we, and I was the one who was sent out,

⁵⁷ Adrienne Scott Oral History, p. 14

at the expense of NFTS. I traveled across the United States to isolated communities...

Indeed, Evans borrowed much from the corporate world. For instance, she applied the concept of “handshakes” and “quotas” used by salesmen to NFTS. As Rebecca Kobrin points out, “Just as marketing in America would not succeed, as historian Walter Friedman points out, without the ‘visible handshake’ of a salesman out on the road,” so too did Evans set out to shake the hands of all NFTS members and help them sell Reform Judaism to their fellow American Jews.”⁵⁸ Her famous handshake was often the measure of confidence left behind after one of her numerous synagogue visits or speaking tours. Within the first decade of her leadership, NFTS had grown exponentially:

From a modest beginning of forty-nine Sisterhoods in the United States with a total membership of 5,000 women, NFTS is today a world-wide fellowship of more than 100,000 members in some 625 affiliates throughout all of the United States and in cities of Canada, Panama, Netherlands Antilles, Guatemala, Argentina, United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Israel, Republic of South Africa, Rhodesia, Australia, New Zealand, and India. It is the women’s agency of Reform Judaism both through the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the World Union for Progressive Judaism.⁵⁹

In addition to the tactics she employed for cultivating new membership in person, Evans was exemplary in her use of innovative technology. For instance, in the early years (1933-1953) at NFTS, she created radio programming to broadcast *Kol Nidre* services, and 35mm promo reels that demonstrated NFTS’ dollars at work.

⁵⁸ Kobrin, Rebecca. "The House (Of Living Judaism) That Jane Evans and NFTS Built, 1951." *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*. Ed. Dana Herman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Carole B. Balin. Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati. 2013. p. 91

⁵⁹ Evans, Jane. *Sixty Years of Service*. 1963. MSS-745, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

Evans ably increased not only the people-power of NFTS but its fundraising dollars. Within her first ten years with NFTS, she effectively doubled the funds raised for scholarships from \$20,358 to \$40,215.10, while also adding more than 50 new Sisterhood affiliates across the country.⁶⁰

Even her language contributed to the organization's growth. First, she drew on the vocabulary of organizational dynamics and strategic planning. In an address to the 22nd Biennial Convention of NFTS in 1959, for example, she presented a compelling and thorough analysis of the question, "Should concepts in program patterns be changed?" The very title of this speech demonstrates her tendency toward higher-level thinking. Even as she traveled extensively, and was involved on the ground, she had an uncanny ability to "zoom out" on the issues: in this case, seeing NFTS in its sociological context and using "external data" to inform her strategy for organizational health. For Evans it was clear that NFTS' success hinged on meeting the needs of its constituents. In addition to presenting statistics about organizational affiliation within comparable women's and religious organizations, Evans raised the issue of women's work: "[T]he average young housewife with several young children and no outside help, either for reasons of economy or because it isn't available, has an incredibly long work week."⁶¹ Evans then listed the tasks of the "average young housewife," ranging from household upkeep to child-rearing, eventually stating that these responsibilities, "comprise a work week of 100 hours or more in seven

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Changing Concepts in Program Patterns by Jane Evans, Executive Director, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. November 16, 1959. MSS #745. Writing by Jane Evans, n.d. 1/4

consecutive days of responsibility, week in and week out.”⁶² Evans met the NFTS women “where they were at”—a skill/tactic that proved crucial to her success. Evans used these facts and statistics to ground her assertion that NFTS “meetings” and “attendance” needed to change. Given both the realities of women’s lives and the growing influence of technology and media, she asked whether monthly meeting attendance is the best use of time, or the best measure of success. She recommended ways in which some Sisterhoods had already evolved new programming models: providing the environment necessary for childcare, for instance, or reducing the number of meetings. To this end, Evans pointed out that change for change’s sake is insufficient, but rather “[w]e need more than ever Sisterhood programs (as well as projects) suited to our search for meaning and “rootedness” in our lives in this tumultuous mid-20th century. And this means that fund-raising must not become the all-consuming “busyness” of our group lives.”⁶³

Four years later, Evans returned to this theme in a speech delivered before the Golden Jubilee Biennial in Chicago (1963). She referenced her earlier remarks on the subject from 1959, stating that she remains as sure as ever of [the] centrality of the congregation in Jewish life, and “[t]hat the increased power which has come to the modern Jewess ought to be exercised in and through Congregational life.”⁶⁴

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Evans, Jane. *Changing Concepts In Program Patterns*. 1959. MSS-745, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁶⁴ Evans, Jane. *The Challenge of Change For Sisterhood*. 1963. MSS-745, Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

Attributes and Accomplishments: Advocacy for Women

Given the broad range of passions and interests that drove Evans' achievements, it is impossible to single out a single accomplishment as "most important." Yet a thread that runs through all her work is her dedication to empowering women to take on leadership roles within the Jewish community. She was a staunch advocate for women's equality in the synagogue and broader movement, including in leadership positions, and an indispensable ally in working towards women's ordination as rabbis.

By the time Evans stepped into the position of Executive Director, there was already a strong desire among the lay leadership and membership of NFTS to work for causes affecting women. Evans acknowledged as much in "The Unfinished Agenda," a speech she delivered in honor of NFTS' jubilee anniversary in 1963:

In the coming decades we should see a greater integration of women into positions of synagogue leadership rather than only in the women's arm of the synagogue, called the Sisterhood. Today, in the 1960's, it is still a matter for comment when a woman becomes the president or an officer of a congregation, and too often her membership on a congregational board of trustees is exclusively in an ex-officio capacity by virtue of her Sisterhood presidency. The individual who has the ability to serve the congregation in a position of leadership should be chosen for responsibility quite apart from financial status or whether the candidate is a man or a woman.⁶⁵

NFTS was no stranger to the question of women's ordination either: in 1921, its founding president, Carrie Simon, brought the issue to the fore. When it re-emerged in 1955, it was (officially) at the urging of CCAR President Rabbi Barnett Brickner. But it was well known that his wife Rebecca, an active NFTS board

⁶⁵ Evans, Jane. *The Unfinished Agenda*. n.d. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

member, was a strong advocate for women's ordination. When addressing Reform rabbis on the issue, he cited the recent decision by the Presbyterian Church to ordain women as ministers. In response, the CCAR formed a committee to study the question in 1956. In its report, which was signed by both President Nelson Glueck of HUC-JIR and President Maurice Eisendrath of UAHC, it states, "In view of woman's parity with man we believe that the unwarranted and outmoded tradition of reducing women to an inferior status with regard to ordination for the rabbinate be abandoned." However, no immediate action was taken by the men. According to the *New York Times* reporter who covered the issue, it was now up to Jane Evans to "sustain debate on the subject."⁶⁶

She informed the 1,000 delegates gathered for the 1957 NFTS Assembly in Toronto that "women are uniquely suited by temperament, intuition, and spiritual sensitivity to be rabbis." She maintained that, "if women can serve as teachers, they can serve as preachers too."⁶⁷ Henceforth, she worked tirelessly, and effectively, for the ordination of women as Reform rabbis through formal, institutional channels in the movement. She knew well that ordaining women posed a threat to religious authority as well as to the structures of power ingrained in patriarchal society. Through her advocacy, Evans broadened NFTS' agenda and, in so doing, that of the larger Reform movement as well.

⁶⁶ Spiegel, Irving. "Women as Rabbis Urged at Parley." *New York Times* [New York] 30 Apr. 1957: n. pag. Print.

⁶⁷ WRJ Centennial Moments

At the same time, she dedicated herself to any number of causes outside the Reform movement's purview. Eventually, many of these would find their way onto the collective agenda of NFTS and the Reform movement. As she put it:

I chose as a model for myself in an age of specialization to live a life of diversification. I've really tried to do that. You see, I try to keep a little balance between whatever it is I do and achieve and hope to achieve professionally, and having at the same time not a concentration in one field only.⁶⁸

Evans' life of 'diversification' is an additional way in which she did not fit into traditional gendered expectations of her day. She was on the ground floor, establishing organizations that served her "causes," including pacifism, the settlement of European refugees, women's rights, ending poverty, and caring for the blind.⁶⁹ It's fair to say that her drive for social justice emerged from her Jewish roots and commitments; to her, the fight for equality was no less applicable to gender as race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality.

Jane Evans: Power in Context at the UAHC

*I can testify from my career that much of the stiffening of spine in the social action leadership of Eisendrath and then Alex Schindler and me came from Jane Evans.*⁷⁰

Al Vorspan's words testify to the power of Jane Evans' influence over the course of more than fifty years. During Maurice Eisendrath's presidency, national

⁶⁸ Evans, Jane, and Adrienne Pollock Scott. *Jane Evans Oral History Interview Transcript*, November 22, 2002. SC-15114. AJA. pg. 17-18

⁶⁹ Kobrin, Rebecca. "The House (Of Living Judaism) That Jane Evans and NFTS Built, 1951." *Sisterhood: A Centennial History of Women of Reform Judaism*. Edited by Carole B. Balin, Dana Herman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Gary P. Zola (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2013), p. 93.

⁷⁰ Vorspan, Al. *Jane Evans Remembered*. Eulogy. March 24, 2004.

interest in social issues and civil rights fomented in the broader Reform movement, due to the joint efforts of NFTS and the UAHC. The movement founded the Religious Action Center in 1962 with financial support provided largely by NFTS. the Equal Pay Act of 1963.⁷¹ The tumultuous decade made waves across the country and NFTS responded. As Eleanor Schwartz, who served as the Assistant Director of NFTS under Jane Evans, recalled: “We [NFTS] were in the forefront in calling for liberalized divorce and abortion laws, for the civil rights of homosexuals, and for strong anti-poverty legislation.”⁷¹

Evans’ relationship with Maurice Eisendrath is legendary (some say she was responsible for his hire). In particular, the pair worked closely to orchestrate the move of the UAHC headquarters from Cincinnati to New York. While Evans admired him and considered him a close friend, she treated him (and in return was treated) as an equal. Indeed, it was not unusual for Evans to call her “friends” to task for overlooking the talents and skills of the “other half” of the Reform movement. In a message sent to the UAHC Board of Trustees in 1970, after enumerating NFTS’ many contributions to the Union, Evans broached the subject of the gap in women’s leadership in the movement:

Year after year I have called upon our [UAHC’s] National Board and the boards of all congregations to take advantage of the brains, experience, energies, and knowledge of their female members by greatly increasing their representation at all policy-making levels. Despite my pleas, only five of our nearly 700 congregations have women presidents: only two—one ex-officio, the president of the NFTS—are on this Board of 180 individuals.⁷²

⁷¹ WRJ Centennial Volume

⁷² Evans, Jane. *To the Board of Trustees of the UAHC*. December 13, 1970. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

Evans' leadership on the issue of gender equality in Reform Jewish leadership, combined with her professional relationship with Rabbi Eisendrath, effected change on an institutional level. By early 1971, Eisendrath established an Ad Hoc committee to study women's participation in Reform Judaism in direct response to Evans' call for inclusion. Minutes read that the UAHC president "called for a study to be made on how to effect greater representation of women on the national, regional, and local congregational boards."⁷³

Later that same year, Evans put forth a resolution at the NFTS Biennial Assembly on the role of women in decision-making. Issues around women's equality in leadership had reached a peak, bolstered as it was by second-wave feminist activism.

We are aware and appreciative of the stands taken by Dr. Maurice N. Eisendrath, President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and champion of human dignity, in calling for greater recognition of women in their own right. However, the Officers and Executive Committee of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, in session assembled in New York April 15-16, 1970 recognize that more vigorous, urgent consideration must be promptly given to this subject. Therefore, we call upon the officers of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the membership of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods actively to educate and enlist national, regional, and congregational leaders, both lay and professional, in overcoming this inequality."⁷⁴

In considering the overall effect of Evans' institutional power and know-how in creating change, one cannot overstate the importance of the esteem in which her male

⁷³ *Ad Hoc Committee on Women in Reform Judaism*. March 9, 1971. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

⁷⁴ Evans, Jane. *Resolution adopted by NFTS Executive Committee on Representation of Women on Boards, Commissions, Committees of the Reform Movement*. April 30, 1970. MSS-745. Box 1, Folder 1. AJA.

colleagues held her. Many have commented on the abiding respect and high regard that Eisendrath, and then Schindler, held for Evans.

Vorspan, who worked side-by-side with Jane Evans, saw her as a “kingmaker”—the one responsible for Eisendrath’s election to the presidency of the UAHC. Rabbi Jan Katzew, who worked closely with Evans’ in her later years, emphasized the power she held not only in the realm of NFTS, but also in the Union at large. Reflecting upon his first encounter with Evans, Vorspan recalled:

When I came to work for the Union in 1953, Jane was there, at the very center of power, largely responsible for the Union moving to its beautiful new home at 838 Fifth Avenue. Within a few months, several of us younger staffers were whispering about Jane Evans. What’s with this Jane Evans? She says she has been a farmer, an inventor, a college teacher, studied medicine, helped found the UN, sails her own boat, knows how to fly an airplane...⁷⁵

Indeed, Evans remained “at the very center of power” even after her official retirement. She continued to come to work each day, taking on important leadership and advisory roles. As Katzew described, Evans was a “tough negotiator” and retained the role of mediator between the UAHC (and then, URJ) and the labor unions until her death:

She was responsible for overseeing the union at URJ- engaged in the negotiations every 2-3 years when the union’s contract came up. Up until basically just before her death, she was the point person representing the leadership for the URJ as they arrived at an agreement with the staff members of the URJ that were members of the union.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Vorspan, Al. *Jane Evans Remembered*. Eulogy. March 24, 2004.

⁷⁶ Katzew, Rabbi Jan. Personal Conversation. August 15, 2013.

From being “right woman, in the right place, at the right time”, until the very end of her life, Jane Evans defied expectations and expanded notions of women’s leadership. Hers was a rare type of power: undergirded by a diverse array of abilities, passions and curiosities, and bolstered by an unflinching drive to create change based on Jewish values.

Conclusion: Jane Evans' Legacy and Its Missing Pieces

In a strange historical irony, Evans' ascent to the position of NFTS' Executive Director in 1933—remarkable for her being the first woman (and only non-rabbi) to serve in an executive leadership capacity at that time—may have paved the way for Rabbi Marla J. Feldman's career path. Feldman was not only of the first generation of women to be ordained by the Reform movement but she became Executive Director of Women of Reform Judaism in 2012. She is the first rabbi to hold this position. This remarkable shift in the leadership of Sisterhood deserves our attention and comment as much for its meaning as for its symbolic importance.

Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk ordained Marla Feldman in 1985. Eight years later, she received a J.D. and was admitted to the Florida Bar in 1993. She is also a certified fundraiser, and before coming to WRJ, served as Director of Development of the Union for Reform Judaism and Director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism.⁷⁷

Without reinforcing the dichotomy of “rabbi” versus “lay leader,” I asked Rabbi Feldman to reflect on the shift that I perceived in the vibrancy of WRJ after women began to be ordained as rabbis. Yet, in an unexpected response, Rabbi Feldman opined that the rabbi-layperson dichotomy was very much in evidence at WRJ when she assumed her position. “I had to carve a space for myself as a Jewish *professional* (emphasis added),” she said.⁷⁸ For Rabbi Feldman, tradition and history come along with the job, which seemed to be amplified by the recent centennial

⁷⁷ Rabbi Marla Feldman biography. <http://www.wrj.org/Pages/RabbiMarlaFeldman.aspx> accessed March 4, 2014.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

celebration of the organization in 2013. With that deep sense of history and tradition comes a fair amount of ingrained ideas about role. As she put it, “I’m not a sisterhood woman, I’m a rabbi.”⁷⁹

When asked about her recollections of Jane Evans, Rabbi Feldman spoke with admiration and a straightforwardness, which one can’t help imagining garnered great respect from Evans herself: “That Jane had a commanding presence was about *her* (emphasis added)--- not because she was acting like a man.”⁸⁰ Rabbi Feldman worked at the URJ with Jane Evans when she served as the Director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism. She recalled a woman of great passion and authenticity, “You couldn’t argue with Jane; she was speaking for God.”⁸¹

When asked to reflect on the significance of having been chosen by the WRJ to serve as their new Executive Director in 2012, Rabbi Feldman remarked, “It’s no small thing. They’re proud of their leadership skills. This is a lay organization.”⁸² The symbolism of a woman rabbi serving in this professional role of a lay organization is important; for Feldman, it is a sign that the “walls are coming down.”⁸³ These ‘walls’ delineate the differences (and barriers) between the various institutional arms of the Reform movement (URJ, WRJ, HUC-JIR, CCAR, etc.). The past decade has seen colossal organizational shifts in the movement: lay-offs, national institutional restructuring, and since 2012, a new leader for the URJ, Rabbi Rick

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Personal conversation with Rabbi Marla Feldman. February 12, 2014.

⁸³ Ibid.

Jacobs and the rising leadership of Rabbi Aaron Panken at HUC-JIR. Given the gains that women have made in the movement toward equality, the essential question facing the WRJ is “what is the role of a women’s organization?”⁸⁴ As Rabbi Feldman remarks, for the first era of its existence, NFTS had been the singular way for women to be leader in Reform Judaism- now what?

With Jane Evans’ accomplishments and personal attributes in full view, I asked those who knew her as professional colleagues and personal friends to comment on my assertion that Jane Evans was a trailblazer, if not model for the notion of women rabbis. As I imagine Evans herself doing, many recoiled at such an idea. But this serious question is one of a larger constellation around the legacy of NFTS and women’s equality in the Reform movement. Rabbi Feldman asks these very questions in a forthcoming article in the CCAR volume celebrating (more than) forty years of women in the rabbinate:

All of this history begs the question: why do most of us (women rabbis) see women who served pulpits like Ray Frank, Martha Neumark, Paula Ackerman, Regina Jonas and Sally Priesand, as our spiritual matriarchs, rather than the lay women who laid the groundwork for us to succeed? The women of NFTS were not trailblazers like these other historical figures; they were the ones who paved the road. They did not seek a revolution but painstakingly led the Movement to evolve, and to do so at a more rapid pace than might have been the case otherwise.⁸⁵

Where does Jane Evans figure in the *shalsholet hakabbalah* of female leadership in the Reform movement? As those who knew and admired her have cautioned me, this

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Feldman, Rabbi Marla J. *The Women Who Set the Stage: Celebrating 100 Years of Women of Reform Judaism*. Draft, unpublished for upcoming CCAR publication on 40 years of Women in the Rabbinate. 2013.

question must be asked subjectively, or risk being answered as a paean to her greatness. But I submit that given the barriers she broke as a religious leader, the breadth and depth of the change she was able to institute as a visionary leader, and her explicit work for the cause of women's ordination, Jane Evans is deserving of a prominent place in our communal consciousness. As Jan Katzew eulogized Evans upon her death:

You know when you are in the presence of greatness. Despite all the rhetorical flourishes to the contrary about all people being created in the divine image, in a very few people, you really believe it. You see God's reflection more clearly. You knew you were in the presence of greatness when you were in the presence of Jane Evans.⁸⁶

Katzew was not alone in reflecting on Evans' commitment to both personal and professional excellence. Expressions of similar awe and adoration were bestowed upon Evans: "renaissance woman", "first lady of Reform Judaism"⁸⁷, and "*gedolah*" [great one].⁸⁸ Despite these laudatory tributes, in the ten years since her death, relatively little attention has been paid to her legacy. In my research on her biography and legacy, it has become abundantly clear that this is a woman deserving of a firmer foothold in the annals of Reform Jewish history, and more specifically, in the history of women's ordination as rabbis.

In his eulogy offered at her 2004 funeral, Rabbi Katzew reflected on the greatness and unwavering commitment to excellence that defined Evans' life. Even in anticipation of her death, Evans was exacting and unyielding; delineating who would

⁸⁶ Katzew, Rabbi Jan. Eulogy for Jane Evans. March 26, 2004.

⁸⁷ Yoffie, Rabbi Eric H. "In Memory of Jane Evans"

Judaism

⁸⁸ Katzew, Rabbi Jan. Eulogy for Jane Evans. March 26, 2004

Speak at her funeral (and for how long!). As a close friend, Katzew was one of two people eulogists appointed by Evans; the other was longtime friend and colleague, Al Vorspan. In his remarks, Vorspan reflected on the more than fifty years of collegiality and friendship that he shared with Evans:

Another great friend of mine, Kivie Kaplan, used to say when you die they recite a little memorial resolution to you, the chair bangs the gavel, and you are forgotten. Usually that is true. It wasn't true of Kivie Kaplan. It will not be true of Jane Evans. She will grow in legend because she was already larger than life, she was the First Lady of Reform Judaism. She will live as long as this Reform Movement lives because so much of her moral and Jewish spirit informs the best of what we do.⁸⁹

Ten years after her death, Vorspan's prediction remains in the offing.

Indeed, those who knew Evans best have voiced confusion over the lack of attention paid to her; though none can offer explanations why. The purpose of this thesis is to lift Evans' accomplishments and personal attributes from the archival sources in order to highlight the way she paved the way for women's ordination. Answering why her legacy remains largely obsolete requires mostly conjecture.

Until nearly the end of her official tenure as Executive Director of NFTS, Evans operated in a world where women's strivings for equality in leadership were just out of reach. For more than sixty years, NFTS served not only as the primary place for Reform Jewish women but as the only institutional space that affirmed their leadership potential. As with any great change, there is loss, and one clearly sees a loss in momentum and centrality for NFTS with the advent of women's ordination in the Reform movement. The trajectory of NFTS in the Reform Jewish consciousness took a turn in the 1970's and beyond: this is likely due to a combination of factors in

⁸⁹ Vorspan, Al. *Jane Evans Remembered*. Eulogy. March 24, 2004.

the cultural ether, including but not limited to the proliferation of women in the workforce (and thus, with less time for volunteer activities).

I would argue that the ordination of women also played an essential role in understanding how NFTS' centrality shifted in the past forty years. With women serving in a professional capacity from the *bima* as rabbis, the role of laywomen in the synagogue generally, and NFTS specifically, was changed. At the height of NFTS' institutional strength, there were more than 600 Sisterhoods, these numbers began to dwindle in the 1990s. Today, there are less than 500 affiliates, with far fewer members.⁹⁰ Perhaps that shift in the centrality of NFTS, is one reason for the dislocation of Jane Evans from the collective consciousness of American Reform Judaism.

In speaking about his friend and colleague, Rabbi Katzew repeatedly used the phrase “*tocha k'varah*” to describe Jane Evans; a feminized usage of a Talmudic phrase that means, “her insides were like her outsides.” For the generations of Reform Jews whose lives Jane Evans touched, her authenticity and integration of self were consistently remarked upon. The phrase “*tocha k'varah*” is a feminization of the words used by Rabban Gamliel to describe the caliber of student he looked for to enter his *beit midrash*. Gamliel was infamous for his strict and demanding standards, saying “*Col talmid sh'ein tocho c'varo lo yicanes l'beit ha'midrash.*” – Any student whose insides are not like his outside will not enter this house of study.⁹¹ Taken out of context, the phrase “*tocho k'varo*” has been lifted up to be a positive descriptor of someone whose words and deeds are aligned in perfect synchronicity. Certainly, we

⁹⁰ Numbers provided by Heather Lorgeree, Service to Sisterhoods & Districts Manager.

⁹¹ Talmud Berachot 28a

can look to the example set by Jane Evans in so many facets of her life and see this alignment: her commitment to Jewish learning on an institutional level was coupled with a dedicated personal practice of Jewish study; her meticulous attention to detail was seen in the way she ran NFTS and in the way she lived in her own home in New Rochelle, New York.⁹² But, the connection between the story of Jane Evans' legacy and the Talmudic tale of Rabban Gamliel runs even deeper than this singular phrase. In context, "*tocha k'vara*" described the standard by which a student might be admitted to the exclusive ranks of this particular *beit midrash*; presumably, there were many who did not meet these standards. However, after Rabban Gamliel stepped down from his leadership position and this stricture was lifted, many, many students came to study at the *beit midrash*. In so many ways, this is true for Jane Evans, who paved the way for the ordination of women: in the years following her leadership of NFTS, women stepped into leadership roles in Reform congregations across the country and the world.

⁹² As reflected by Rabbi Jan Katzew in our personal conversation.

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Appendix 1

Jane Evans Remembered

By Al Vorspan

3-24-04

Jane Evans was one of the most extraordinary persons I've ever met, and I have had more than fifty years of working closely with Jane to validate that judgment. At the 2003 biennial of the Union and WRJ, I took the opportunity to salute Jane on her 96th birthday and to wish that she could reach 120—or at least 100, because George Burns used to remind us that so few people die over 100 years of age.

When I came to work for the Union in 1953, Jane was there, at the very center of power, large responsible for the Union moving to its beautiful new home at 838 Fifth Avenue. Within a few months, several of us younger staffers were whispering about Jane Evans. What's with this Jane Evans? She says she has been a farmer, an inventor, a college teacher, studied medicine, helped found the UN, sails her own boat, knows how to fly an airplane. We laughed and laughed. She was the Zelig of Reform Judaism even before Woody Allen invented Zelig. But like the passionate American Zionist who finally went to Israel for the first time and then reported: "You know, those lies I have been telling you all these years? They're true!" What we thought were Jane's exaggerations were not only true—they were understatements. This Renaissance woman designed an electric table fan when she was 20 years old, and that fan, called the Silver Swan, is now a kind of icon in the industry. And I

learned only recently that she was the behind-the-scenes kingmaker who brought Maurice Eisendrath to the Union to become president. I can testify from my career that much of the stiffening of spine in the social action leadership of Eisendrath and then Alex Schindler and me came from Jane Evans. A religious pacifist, she was one of the three founders and former presidents of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, and she stuck to her principles even during World War II. But she didn't stand idly by. She was at the forefront of the movement to aid and rehabilitate Jewish survivors, serving as chairman of the then American Jewish Conference's Commission on Displaced Persons. She was deeply and Jewishly committed to women's rights, gay rights, civil rights, the United Nations, pluralism and peace in Israel, opposition to the war in Vietnam and now Iraq, and especially for the establishment of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism. Jane believed so profoundly in world peace and international responsibility for it that, as a young executive of then NFTS, she took a leave of absence and joined the U.S. delegation to the UN in its formation in San Francisco. As a consultant, she helped draft the preamble to the United Nations charter. In more recent decades, Jane was President and champion of the Jewish Braille Institute of America—a cause especially close to her heart.

Jane and I, in our retirements, had adjoining emeritus offices at the then UAHC. We laughingly called it the Department of Assisted Living. And Jane and I would schmooze about the good old days and kvetch about current affairs. There was nobody, ever, on the staff of the Union who cared as deeply about ordinary staffers. She was trusted to the labor negotiator every year, up to this very year, and Les tells

me they are taking bets on whether her demise means she will not conduct next year's contract.

Recently I asked Jane what she did for relaxation. "Oh," she said, "I pack a lunch, drive down to the boat basin, start up my boat in Mamaroneck, sail across the Sound to my favorite inlet outside of Westport, anchor, dive in and swim around for half an hour, get back in the boat, and have my lunch." (Adding in that uniquely Jane tone of voice: "Make no mistake, Al, I would not have my lunch first, and then go swimming.") She was 94 years old! The first thing she did when the hospital recently sent her home to die was to renew her passport and driver's license.

At this sad time, I prefer to remember a golden moment in Jane's youth—her 95th birthday celebration, lovingly arranged by Barbara and Elliot in their NY apartment. We saluted Jane with song and satire. How she delighted in life and friends, her memories of yesteryear and faith in tomorrow...she was a phenomenon.

Another great friend of mine, Kivie Kaplan, used to say when you die they recite a little memorial resolution to you, the chair bangs the gavel, and you are forgotten. Usually that is true. It wasn't true of Kivie Kaplan. It will not be true of Jane Evans. She will grow in legend because she was already larger than life, she was the First Lady of Reform Judaism. She will live as long as this Reform Movement lives because so much of her moral and Jewish spirit informs the best of what we do.

There is so much that I want to say, but as Jan explained, Jane left clear directions: each eulogy must be no more than one and a half pages, double-spaced. I do not fear retribution. Jane always forgave us all our trespasses. We love you, Jane. Shalom. Go in peace.

1963 *Speeches*

THE UNFINISHED AGENDA

by

Jane Evans
Executive Director, National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods 1933-

In marking the 50th Anniversary of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, its members and leaders are concerned to only a limited degree with a review of past accomplishments. Rather, they face with eagerness the unfinished agenda of woman's role in religious life.

In the coming decades we should see a greater integration of women into positions of synagogue leadership rather than only in the woman's arm of the synagogue, called the Sisterhood. Today, in the 1960's, it is still a matter for comment when a woman becomes the president or an officer of a congregation, and too often her membership on a congregational board of trustees is exclusively in an ex officio capacity by virtue of her Sisterhood presidency. The individual who has the ability to serve the congregation in a position of leadership should be chosen for responsibility quite apart from financial status or whether the candidate is a man or a woman.

Another major item on the unfinished agenda, however shocking it may seem to traditional Jews, is the question of Reform Judaism recognizing the right of women to ordination on the same terms of ability and preparation as men.

Still a third item of the unfinished agenda, and perhaps this is the most important one of all, is the necessity to adapt the Sisterhood, as well as all other women's organizations, to the changing needs of the latter decades of the 20th century. In this "do-it-yourself age" in which adult education is offered in a greater plethora of courses by radio and TV, or through adult education extension units of colleges, universities and other community agencies, women have a different reason than their forbears for participation in Sisterhood activities. The monthly program is no longer an attendance-compelling incentive as it once was, however interesting the platform presentation that is offered. To find the right mixture of genuine spiritual enrichment to overcome the personal and cosmic



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loneliness of modern women, with projects in which as individuals members may participate in translating religious ideals into practical realities, is the new primary need of religious organizational life. Congregational worship has its most important place, but social action, in deed as well as study, stimulates a valuable response. To find that mixture of idealism, study and action which is truly meaningful to the modern woman is to meet a primary need through which religious identification may become a meaningful religious experience.



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"For the Blessing of All"

*File
Spines
JE*

by Jane Evans

On an evening when richly deserved honor is being paid by the Sisterhood of the Congregation to one of its Past Presidents, whose role in Jewish and communal life in this city, this Temple, as well as on a National scale is exceptional, one cannot help but think of a number of quotations regarding women. Were you to turn to ~~any~~^{any} compendium, it would be simple enough to find a quotation to suit any mood, whether serious, frivolous, provocative or tantalizing. In the Old Testament, in the 31st Chapter of Proverbs is that beautiful tribute, the finest glorification of the wife and the mother, which begins with the famous words: "A woman of valor, who can find?" Or one can recall that Confucious said: "Woman is the masterpiece." Then there are the bits of amusing ~~doggerel~~^{poetry} in which she has been called the ~~mechanism~~^{miracle} of divine contradiction. But it was a woman who, with what I suspect was tongue in cheek, spoke the witticism, "It goes far to reconciling me to being a woman, when I reflect that I am thus in no danger of ever marrying one."

In more serious vein, if we turn to the great storehouse of Jewish legend and law, to the Talmud, there are some intriguing and deeply penetrating comments to be found. There is, for example, the legend in which the question is asked, "Why did God choose to make woman from Adam's rib, rather than from a more important portion of his body?" The answer is given, "God did not choose the head, so that woman would not over-value intellect; nor the ear, so that she would not an eavesdropper be; nor the neck so that she would not be stiff-necked and proud; nor the heart so that she would not be jealous, and so on through other portions of the anatomy, until the statement ~~comes~~^{ends}: God chose the rib, an obscure, unimportant portion of anatomy, so that woman, who was created for service



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to man, which really means to mankind, would always be humble in the performance of her labor for the benefit of others.

Rather against my will and those of her many friends and co-workers in other cities who desired to join in tribute to her, I have promised that I shall not, tonight, embarrass Helen Dalsheimer by recounting the many contributions of heart and mind that she has so unassumingly and always generously made to national communal and religious life. It is just ten years since she became a member of the Board of Directors of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, a Federation in which the Sisterhood of Baltimore Hebrew Congregation is linked with more than 465 other units throughout the United States and in cities of Canada, Cuba, Panama, the United Kingdom, the Union of South Africa and Australia, in service to Jewish and humanitarian causes. In this decade Mrs. Dalsheimer has more than deservedly risen to the very first rank of leadership. As you know, she is today the first Vice-President of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, ^{and Chairman of} a member of several of its most important committees. Likewise she serves on the Board of its parent body, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and gives equally of her fine counsel, dedicated spirit, and generous thought to the National Jewish Welfare Board and the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

It seems appropriate to be speaking of ^{the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods} this Federation, not only tonight, but in the city of Baltimore because Mrs. Dalsheimer has followed a tradition in which some of our outstanding religious leadership has come from this section of the country. It was Mrs. Abram Simon of Washington, D. C. who, in the year 1913, that last year of an uneasy peace before the outbreak of World War I, gave the impetus to the formation in American Jewish life of a new nation-wide Jewish woman's organization, our Federation of Temple Sisterhoods.

It is interesting to recall that in that year of 1913, there was a Jewish community in this country of two million, among our general population of 90 million, in comparison to the present Jewish count of five million of us among 150,000,000 fellow Americans. Our Jewish community^{then} included some 70 national Jewish organizations of which, at the time, only 5 were women's groups in contrast to today's more than 70 among 300 national groups. On January 21st, 1913, with the representatives of the Sisterhood of this Congregation, Har Sinai and Oheb Shalom present, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods was brought into being. Generally one is bored at the thought of hearing phrases from a constitution. But because of the interesting, and I believe wholly valid philosophy, as well as the far-sightedness shown by Mrs. Simon,^{and} the late Mrs. Joseph Wiesenfeld of Baltimore, who later followed Mrs. Simon as the President of the Federation of Sisterhoods, it is interesting to note the words used:

"We, the representatives of the Sisterhoods of the various congregations comprising the Union of American Hebrew Congregations believing:

That the congregation is the logical unit of organization in Israel, and

That the increased power which has come to the modern American Jewess ought to be exercised in congregational life, and

That the religious and moral development of Israel can be furthered by this cooperation,

Do hereby organize a National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods for the more effective carrying out of these aims.

The objects of this Federation are:

Section A. To bring the Sisterhoods of the United States and other countries into closer cooperation and association with one another.

Section B. To quicken the religious consciousness of Israel by

stimulating spiritual and educational activity.

Section C. To advance Judaism in the United States and throughout the world; to serve Jewish and humanitarian causes.

Section D. To cooperate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in the execution of its aims and purposes.

Section E. To espouse such religious causes as are particularly the work of Jewish women."

Tonight is neither the time nor the place to enter into an evaluation of "the congregation as the logical unit of organization in Israel" nor to peruse the many by-paths developed in American Jewish life of other forms of organization of the Jewish community, ~~that have~~ successfully or not, as the case may be. Gathered together in worship service for our Sabbath we can more profitably concern ourselves with religious identification, education, and support, which are logical cornerstones for the advancement of our faith. These cornerstones were well understood by the band of earnest, dedicated women of 1913 who started, on a national scale, the organization of the woman's arm of the Reform Synagogue.

To return for a moment to that world of 1913, there were then, in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, central organization of American Reform Judaism, some 190 congregations in contrast to today's more than 460. Although the Ladies' Aid Society or Hebrew Benevolent Society, which was the forerunner of Sisterhood, had been the charity arm of many congregations, there were still in 1913, large numbers of the congregations of the Union without an organized woman's group. Swiftly, however, following upon the organization set up by the 49 original groups of our National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, the Sisterhood movement *spread,* like that of the Reform movement, ~~spread~~ until today, there are as many Sisterhoods - 466 - as there are Congregations.

A non-religious American, whether Jew or Gentile by birth, is a less valuable American than one who clearly recognizes the role of religious values in meeting the enormous demands made upon man in this era of tension. Perhaps no age either has been, or will be, free of problems; probably every generation has had, or will have, its own peculiar difficulties. And surely religious identification, ^{and support} and education ^{and support} are as necessary in days of relative quiet as in those of crisis. But for modern man, especially mid-twentieth century man, who has seen two World cataclysms and stands precariously on the brink of a third, who hears his scientists and philosophers - as well as his religionists - correctly assay his difficulty as being inherently a spiritual one, religious identification, ^{and support} and education ^{and support} are indeed essential. As Jews we are the inheritors of the wisdom distilled for us by our forebears through thousands of years of time. Unless our identification with Jewish life be rooted in the Synagogue, which is our spiritual home, we are only partly Jewish, no matter how ^{the} many ^{to which} organizations ^{we} belong, ~~no~~ no matter how many dollars we give to Jewish philanthropy or Jewish defense agencies. The whole Jew is the pious Jew. For the modern Reform or Liberal Jew, piety need involve no burdensome discipline, but discipline there is. Unwittingly we often use the word "religiously" in an amusing and strictly non-religious sense. Unfortunately, one sometimes hears more frequently the comment - or did before the advent of television - "religiously I take the children to the movies once a week" than "religiously the family attends Temple services once a week!"

Regular Temple attendance, participation in Temple activities including adult education classes, active not passive enrollment in Sisterhood, Men's Club, Youth group, depending on one's sex and age, to say nothing of adult interest in the Religious School which, if it is good for

our children will be even better when we bring school and home closer together - these are the ways in which we express our religious identification and gain religious education.

But our identification and education must be more than at the purely local level. This was well understood by Isaac Mayer Wise, great and gifted organizer of American Reform Judaism who, as you know, in 1873 brought into being the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and two years later founded through the Union, the Hebrew Union College which today is merged with the Jewish Institute of Religion so that American Reform or Liberal Judaism has one great seminary, with a campus in Cincinnati and another in New York for the training of its Rabbis.

We must support generously not only our local congregation but also the great national institutions of our Reform Jewish movement. We can be rightfully proud of the vision of Isaac M. Wise and of the many inspired leaders who have followed him. From 36 ~~tiny~~ Synagogues in 1873 to 466 Temples today throughout hundreds of communities in the United States and Canada, our religious Union, like our nation itself, daily proves that the strength of one, linked to the strength of many, forms an indissoluble bond. But our movement is not only in America. Both the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and its women's arm - our National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods - are affiliates of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, whose headquarters are in London, England. The sainted Dr. Leo Baeck is President of the World Union and the Honorable Lily H. Montagu is the distinguished Honorary Secretary whose imagination, dedication and spiritual insights have done so much to further a Liberal interpretation of our faith in many lands.

American Jewry has been raising some \$200,000,000 urgently needed *as well as communal causes* dollars annually for overseas and other relief, and some \$5,000,000 annually

for the agencies concerned with the safeguarding of Jewish rights - the agencies which we call our defense group. Valiant indeed is this work, but less worthy is the picture of our American Reform movement allowing its national institutions to go into debt. To serve congregations, to train Rabbis, teachers, cantors, to support in part the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, Brotherhoods and Youth, to distribute informative material to Jew and non-Jew, to conduct Institutes on Judaism for the Christian Clergy, to help organize new congregations - largely among the unaffiliated - to prepare textbooks for all ages, - for these and many other facets of a far reaching program of service, our individual and congregational support is necessary.

If time permitted, there is a fascinating story to be told^{too} of the^{specific} services to Jewish and humanitarian causes made possible through the women of the Sisterhood movement.

Through Institutes on Judaism for the Leaders of Church women we have held, under joint sponsorship of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods and our local affiliates, one day sessions for a total now of more than ten thousand of our Christian neighbors. Through the efforts of hundreds of volunteer Sisterhood braillists we have created the Library of the Jewish Braille Institute of America, Inc. whose volumes circulate free of charge by mail to blind readers wherever they may be. Through annual small ~~cash~~ contributions from our Sisterhoods we have been helping to maintain the Jewish Braille Institute which we brought into being in 1931 and more recently have also aided in a program of special service to some three hundred blind Jewish survivors in Europe who were found when the tide of horror of Nazism's annihilation of our people receded. They need more than minimal relief allocations and through the Committee for European Jewish Blind Survivors of the Palestine Lighthouse, (an American agency, by the way)

we have been offering specialized, personal service.

Through the Sisterhood Division of the Combined Campaign for the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, so ably headed ^{nationally} by Mrs. Dalsheimer, we are adding our woman-power to man-power for the support of our Reform movement.

Annually, through Uniongrams, a special Jewish message blank for all occasions, and through cash contributions to the Scholarship and Religious Education Fund of our National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, we raise some \$50,000 for specified purposes. ~~The~~ ^{Part} ~~largest share of this annual sum goes to the support of rabbinic students~~ ^{toward scholarships for} in need of such assistance on the Cincinnati campus of our College-Institute and to our parent body, the Union, for some of its religious educational work, including its Department of Youth Activities.

The season of 1951-52 has been indeed an era of new beginnings both for Baltimore Hebrew Congregation as well as for our Union of American Hebrew Congregations. You have dedicated this magnificent house of worship and we of the Union and the Sisterhood Federation have likewise dedicated a building for the service of God and the advancement of Judaism, our Union House of Living Judaism-Berg Memorial. Our building stands ^{in New York} on world famous 5th Avenue and 65th Street across from Central Park and opposite another famous Congregation of the Union - Temple Emanu El.

It was Mrs. Dalsheimer who served unselfishly and untiringly as Chairman of our Special Gifts Committee since the building of the national home of American Reform Judaism was first envisioned by the women of our Federation and brought to reality through their efforts and that of the late surgeon and philanthropist, Dr. Albert A. Berg. Under the inscription from Proverbs: "Every Wise Woman Buildeth Her House"

which decorates the Fireplace Wall of the Sisterhood Lounge of our building, are the names of the Sisterhood of this Congregation and of Congregations Har Sinai and Oheb Shalom for the part they played, with more than 200 other units, in making the building possible.

Yes, "Every wise woman buildeth her house" a house not only of stone and mortar, but also of the materials of the spirit of righteousness, of love, of humility, of deeds of loving kindness, of abiding faith in God. These are the attributes of character of all men and women of good will and religious faith, but especially of one whom we would honor tonight, ^{Helene Muller} Mrs. Dalsheimer. We ask God's blessing upon her. To paraphrase the words of a lovely benediction, it can be truly said of her, as we seek to meet with renewed dedication, the inspiration that her life is: "Her deeds are for the joy of all and the ~~heart~~ ^{heart} of none; for the blessing of all and the woe of none; for the life of all and the death of none."