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**A Historical Analysis of  
Rabbinical Officiation at Interfaith Marriages  
in the American Reform Movement**

by

Mark Kaiserman

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion

1997

Referee, Professor Michael A. Meyer



To my brother Saul

*You helped me find my path  
and continue to inspire me along the way*

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## Digest

"A Historical Analysis of Rabbinical Officiation at Interfaith Marriages in the American Reform Movement" reviews the history and role of rabbinical officiation at marriages between Jews and a non-Jews in the Reform movement in the United States.

After an introductory section which defines terms, the first chapter surveys the history of officiation. Beginning with the first modern discussions of interfaith marriage in France in 1806 and the German Reform rabbinical conferences in the nineteenth century, the chapter then moves to the United States. The major debates and resolutions regarding officiation in the American Reform movement, including the Central Conference of American Rabbis' conventions in 1909, 1947, 1962 and 1973, as well as the often heated exchanges between rabbis in both public and private are explored. Chapter one concludes with an analysis of the surveys on how many Reform rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages in the United States.

The second chapter examines the arguments that rabbis have offered on the validity and importance of officiation. Dividing the debates into topics, it explores that the pro and con positions as well as the counter-arguments that rabbis have used in defense of their stance. Among the subjects reviewed are traditional influences, the role of the rabbi, Jewish survival, the Jewish home and family, and the symbolism of officiation.

In the third chapter, the variety of practices of rabbis are examined including the pre-conditions and requirements of different rabbis. The chapter also discusses the various options for an interfaith couple including

the Christian church, civil ceremonies, and co-officiated services. The chapter concludes with sections on the available alternatives within a wedding service and ethical considerations for rabbis.

The final chapter explores the effects that officiation has on rabbinical employment, the cantorate, and other American Jewish denominations. Whether rabbinical officiation has an effect on the later Jewish identity of the interfaith family is the final subject analyzed. The thesis closes with general conclusions wherein the author ultimately concludes that Reform Judaism has spent too much time focusing exclusively on the specific question of officiation and not enough time examining the issues that are raised by officiation and that cause the need for it.

## Acknowledgments

This thesis would have been impossible to write without the support and kindness of numerous people and the amazing resources of the American Reform Movement. Rabbi Lance Sussman of Binghamton, New York helped me originally find this topic as a personal interest in 1991 while I was an undergraduate at SUNY Binghamton. Since then, I have done research in several archives and libraries in Cincinnati, New York City, and Binghamton. Heartfelt appreciation to all the librarians and researchers who directed me to sources and went out of their way to help me find useful materials. Special thanks to Richard Hedrick and Dana Fredrickson at the Klau Library at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Rabbi Elliot Stevens at the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Kevin Proffitt at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, as well as the staffs at the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in New York, the Glenn G. Bartle Library at Binghamton University, and the Klau Library at the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion Library in New York.

Throughout the course of my research, rabbis, cantors, non-Jewish clergy, and other leaders were generous with their time and resources, and honest with their answers and reflections as we spoke for interviews, both in person and on the telephone. My deepest thanks to: Dr. Lewis Barth, Rabbi Murray Blackman, Rabbi Jonathan Eichhorn, Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, Rabbi Irwin Fishbein, Rabbi David Goldstein, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Rabbi Solomon Greenberg, Rabbi Erwin Herman, Dr. Egon Mayer, Dr. Eugene Mihaly,

Reverend Paul Miller, Rabbi Roy Rosenberg, Cantor Judith Rowland, Rabbi Herman Schaalman, Rabbi Arnold Sher, Rabbi Samuel Silver, Cantor Rhoda Silverman, Dr. Ezra Spicehandler, Dr. Ben Zion Wacholder, Rabbi Kenneth Weiss, Father Jack Wessling, and Rabbi Eric Yoffie.

My family and friends have shown me great caring and guidance over the last year. I thank everyone who offered a kind word of support or an understanding word of advice. Thanks to my parents, Carl and Judy, and my brother, Saul, for their constant concern and endless love. Dr. Mark Heintzelman kept me sane this past year. All my friends have been wonderful in the past year of work, offering a shoulder or a hand just when I needed it, and for this I am eternally grateful. I must especially thank Valerie Mittleman for always urging me on and making me smile.

My thesis advisor, Dr. Michael Meyer, has been patient beyond words and supportive to the end with commentary, advice, and wisdom. It has been my deepest pleasure and privilege to work with him. I am eager to continue learning under his watchful and compassionate eye as my teacher and friend.

M.K.

Cincinnati, Ohio  
March 3, 1997



## Preface

Perhaps no issue has so divided the Reform rabbinate as the question of whether to officiate at interfaith marriages.<sup>1</sup>

Rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages has been an ongoing source of debate and discussion in the Reform movement. This "most controversial" aspect of the interfaith marriage issue<sup>2</sup> has been called "the most serious spiritual struggle in the history of the Reform movement."<sup>3</sup> Even in 1909 one rabbi called it "the burning question of today."<sup>4</sup> Officiation has dominated the agenda of at least a half dozen CCAR conventions, led to the formation of a short-lived break-off rabbinical group, received massive public attention, fostered much ill-feeling among colleagues, and resulted in numerous letters, articles, pamphlets, declarations and books. Officiation has generally eclipsed all other aspects of interfaith marriage among the Reform rabbinate, as Robert Barr wrote, "Eventually every discussion about mixed marriage turns its focus to the rabbis."<sup>5</sup>

Every rabbi that is ordained from the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion faces the question of "Do you or don't you?" at their initial placement interviews. Few other topics can raise as heated an argument among Reform laity and clergy as rabbinical officiation. Few other topics hit as close to home, especially for those Jews who have family married to non-Jews or are interfaith married themselves. And few other topics cause

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<sup>1</sup>Steven Bayme quoted in Egon Mayer, *Intermarriage and Rabbinic Officiation* (New York, 1989), iii.

<sup>2</sup>Egon Mayer and Carl Sheingold, *Intermarriage and the Jewish Future* (New York, 1979), 26.

<sup>3</sup>Hershel Shanks, "Rabbis Who Perform Intermarriages: Who They Are & Why They Do It," *Moment* 12, no. 10 (Jan./Feb. 1988): 14.

<sup>4</sup>M. Friedlander, *CCAR Yearbook* 19 (1909): 181.

<sup>5</sup>Robert Barr, "Mixed Marriage and the Rabbi," *Humanistic Judaism* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 19.



rabbis as much internal pain as the struggle to tell a family that they will not officiate at their wedding of a Jew and a non-Jew. "No issue," wrote David Polish, "has placed the encounter of personal freedom and authority in greater tension" than this one.<sup>6</sup>

Although there has been a tremendous amount of literature published on Jewish interfaith marriages in general, the articles or chapters of books that focus on officiation have almost always been partisan, attempting to persuade the reader of one particular viewpoint or another. Even the more recent spate of popular handbooks on interfaith marriage usually have an underlying motive in their short sections on officiation. As the Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach noted, "Much of what passes as fact is in actuality conjecture. Emotion often substitutes for hard data....Significant areas of concern have gone unexamined."<sup>7</sup> A current and thorough objective history of officiation has not been published. In this thesis, I hope to examine the long and tense history of officiation within American Reform Judaism and to explore the many issues that are raised by rabbis' willingness or unwillingness to officiate at interfaith marriages.

This subject of officiation is "a broad one, and overlaps into many other Jewish problems, therefore it causes a great deal of consternation among the rabbis."<sup>8</sup> Hence, this thesis cannot hope to be exhaustive. While numerous rabbis have written articles and sermons outlining their position on the legitimacy of officiation, few historical works on this subject have been published. All available historical documentation has been consulted in the

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<sup>6</sup>David Polish, "The Changing and the Constant in the Reform Rabbinate," *American Jewish Archives* 35, no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 326.

<sup>7</sup>Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, 1983 Closing Report, UAHC Archives, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup>Leo J. Stillpass, "The Attitude of Reform Judaism Toward Inter-marriage: A Study of the Problem of Inter-marriage from Biblical Times to the Present Day Attitude of the Members of the CCAR" (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1943), vi.

research of this thesis. Archival materials from the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, the American Jewish Archives, and many personal archives were explored. Interviews were conducted with many of the participants in the history of the debate on officiation as well as rabbis, cantors, and non-Jewish clergy who are challenged by the issue today.

"It is tedious and usually unnecessary to begin papers with a definition of terms," wrote Robert Chazan in another context. "In this case, however, preliminary delineation of topic is unavoidable."<sup>9</sup> The most common terms used to describe the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew are *intermarriage* and *mixed marriage*. As several authors have noted, "officially and universally accepted usage regarding these terms has not been achieved – a fact which has given rise to a great deal of confused and confusing discussion."<sup>10</sup> From a sociological perspective, Albert Gordon wrote in his 1964 book *Intermarriage*, the "term 'intermarriage' is generally applied to those persons whose religious or ethnic background is or was different from each other's, either prior to or after the marriage....If one of the parties to the marriage has not formally converted to the faith of the other, such a marriage is more properly termed a 'mixed marriage.'"<sup>11</sup> In Judaism, a sociological definition of *mixed marriage* would be the marriage of a Jew to a person who has not converted, while *intermarriage* would include the marriage of a Jew and a non-Jew as well as the marriage of a Jew to a person who has converted to Judaism before the wedding.

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<sup>9</sup>Robert Chazan, "Medieval Anti-Semitism," in *History and Hate*, ed. David Berger (Philadelphia, 1986), 49.

<sup>10</sup>Bernard Martin, "Contra Mixed Marriages: Some Historical and Theological Reflections," *CCAR Journal*, Summer 1977: 75.

<sup>11</sup>Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage* (Boston, 1964), 1.

On a practical level, the two terms have been used interchangeably and synonymously by most rabbis and Jewish writers on the subject. Naturally, this can lead to confusion as one author may be using the sociological definition when referring to *intermarriage*, while another is excluding converts completely while using that term. The CCAR has not been consistent or uniform in their usage. Although Solomon Freehof told the Conference in his 1947 report that the CCAR has "developed a clear distinction" in the terminology by using the accepted sociological definitions,<sup>12</sup> other members of the Conference have used a variety of terminologies and understandings of the terms in their writings. David Max Eichhorn thought that Freehof's statement was merely "created in the fertile brain of the author of the 1947 Report; and it has served ever since to help befuddle the thinking of the Reform rabbinate on the important subject of intermarriage."<sup>13</sup> The 1962 CCAR Report suggested using *mixed marriage* for the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew while consciously having no special term for the marriage of a Jew and a Jew-by-choice.<sup>14</sup> Most official Conference documents used *mixed marriage* as the term of choice during the next two decades, while individual Conference members continued to choose a variety of terms in articles and statements. In 1987, the CCAR Executive Board adopted a motion that *intermarriage* be used to refer to "a marriage between a Jew and an unconverted Christian."<sup>15</sup> This declaration, which had no impact on the Conference membership as a whole, also ignored the existence of interfaith marriages between Jews and non-Christians.

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<sup>12</sup>CCAR Yearbook 57 (1947): 159.

<sup>13</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL, 1974), 32.

<sup>14</sup>CCAR Yearbook 72 (1962): 86.

<sup>15</sup>CCAR Yearbook 97 (1987): 235.

The term *intermarriage* is certainly an accurate one for the marriage of a Jew to a non-Jew, even if not precisely the sociological understanding. However, it is also vague. Milton Barron's book *People Who Intermarry* examined not only marriage between Jews and non-Jews, but many different interfaith marriages as well as marriages between people of different ethnicities and races. Barron wrote that marriage between Jews of different denominations could be seen as intermarriages. "Sociologists and others who have studied the problem of intermarriage have shown no agreement in terminology or definition."<sup>16</sup>

Isaac Mayer Wise used the term *intermarriage* for a variety of prohibited marriages.<sup>17</sup> Kaufmann Kohler defined *intermarriage* in the *Jewish Encyclopedia* as "Marriage between persons of different races or tribes."<sup>18</sup> Louis Mann followed Kohler's terminology using *intermarriage* to designate "marriage between two people of different races, not faiths."<sup>19</sup>

The sociological understanding of the terms is problematic in Judaism as well. We are cautioned in Jewish tradition to make no special note of converts to Judaism, but to treat them like any other Jew. Therefore, according to David Max Eichhorn, a term specifically marking marriages between Jews and non-Jews is not only against *halacha*, "but is also an insult to converts to Judaism and, in its psychological effect, imposes upon them the status of second class citizens."<sup>20</sup> As rabbi and sociologist Mark Winer wrote,

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<sup>16</sup>Milton L. Barron, *People Who Intermarry: Intermarriage in a New England Industrial Community* (Syracuse, NY, 1946), 6.

<sup>17</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise, "Intermarriages," *The American Israelite* 30, no. 25 (Dec. 21, 1883): 4.

<sup>18</sup>Kaufmann Kohler, "Intermarriage," *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: 1901), 610.

<sup>19</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 47 (1937): 310.

<sup>20</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 32-33.

"The sociological definition of intermarriage necessarily differs from that of the Jewish tradition."<sup>21</sup>

*Mixed marriage* is also a problematic term. Like *intermarriage*, it is not clear from the term what is mixed – religion, nationality, ethnicity, or something else. Albert Goldstein thought *all* marriages were mixed. "Like my father, I, too, married – a woman! Are not all marriages at least this mixed?"<sup>22</sup> Eichhorn thought *mixed marriage* had an "unpleasant connotation"<sup>23</sup> and that it emanated from a racial understanding of Judaism. "It was the marriage of a superior race to a person belonging to an inferior race." He compared it to such terms as "half breed," "sambo," and "mongrel" and thought it "racist and scurrilous; and it should be dropped completely from the professional vocabulary of any 20th century religious group that calls itself liberal."<sup>24</sup>

Some writers have introduced or utilized alternate terms. Moshe Davis offered *outmarriage*.<sup>25</sup> Others have suggested *exogamous marriage* or *interreligious marriage*. Reeve Brenner proposed in the 1973 CCAR *Journal* that use of *Jewish intra-marriage* for the marriage of two Jews, *mitzva-marriage* when a conversion takes place prior to marriage, *mixed-marriage* when a Jew and non-Jew marry and "no Jewish continuity is planned or attended," and *inter-marriage* when a Jew and non-Jew marry where "the couple has decided in favor of Jewish continuity."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Mark L. Winer, "Sociological Research on Jewish Intermarriage," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Summer 1985: 39.

<sup>22</sup>Albert S. Goldstein, "The Magnetic Attraction of Mixed Mating," *CCAR Journal*, April 1964:15.

<sup>23</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, "A Sampler on Reform Rabbis' Attitudes Toward Mixed Marriage," 1972, HUC Archives, 19.

<sup>24</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 33.

<sup>25</sup>Moshe Davis, "Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry: Historical Background to the Jewish Response," *CCAR Journal*, April 1972: 2.

<sup>26</sup>Reeve R. Brenner, "Intra-marriage, mitzva-marriage, mixed-marriage, inter-marriage and the family: Towards reworking definitions," *Response* 16, no. 4 (1990): 12-15.



In this thesis, I have used the term *interfaith marriage* to refer to any marriage of a Jew to a person who is not Jewish at the time of the marriage. I believe this term is less ambiguous and carries less baggage than either *intermarriage* or *mixed marriage*. For marriages between a Jew and a convert to Judaism, I have used the term *conversionary marriage* as a neutral reference.

David Max Eichhorn thought *interfaith marriage* was "more precise and suitable" than other possibilities.<sup>27</sup> Sanford Seltzer felt *interfaith marriage* was "the most appropriate designation" and opted to use that term in his works.<sup>28</sup> The Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach also favored *interfaith marriage* as the term of preference.<sup>29</sup> However, *interfaith marriage* is not a term accepted by some writers on this subject. The 1970s CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, which rejected *intermarriage* as "an affront to converts," also decided that *interfaith marriage* introduced "additional complications."<sup>30</sup> The 1987 CCAR Executive Board eliminated it as a possibility as the official Conference term.<sup>31</sup> Mark Winer believed that exclusive use of *interfaith marriage* "missed the complexity of Jewish identity as a combination of religious and ethnic components."<sup>32</sup> The Society for Humanistic Judaism distinguished *interfaith marriage* from an *intercultural marriage*. While in an *interfaith marriage*, at least one party retains their "theistic traditions," in an *intercultural marriage*,

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<sup>27</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 33.

<sup>28</sup>Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Getting Married* (New York, 1984), 6.

<sup>29</sup>Task Force, 1983 Closing Report, 8.

<sup>30</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, Los Angeles, Nov. 10, 1971, American Jewish Archives, 4.

<sup>31</sup>CCAR Yearbook 97 (1987): 235.

<sup>32</sup>Winer, "Sociological Research," 39.

the bride and groom "share a similar world view but...enjoy and participate in the cultural aspects of their differing backgrounds."<sup>33</sup>

Some other terms of note. I have avoided using the term *performing* an interfaith marriage in this thesis. Although the most popular designation of the rabbi's role, it is somewhat inaccurate. A rabbi oversees a wedding, but does not *perform*. The Jewish wedding is a religious ceremony and not a show which *performance* implies. Instead, I have used the term *officiating* at a marriage as a somewhat more accurate phrase. Likewise, when a rabbi and non-Jewish clergyperson officiate together at a wedding, it is often referred to as an *ecumenical wedding*. This is an "erroneous" usage of the term.<sup>34</sup> An *ecumenical* wedding, using the most common definition, would be some sort of Christian wedding, but not a Jewish wedding with participation by clergy of two different faiths. A clearer term that is used in this thesis is a *co-officiated wedding*. Co-officiation refers to any wedding service where a rabbi officiates in conjunction with a non-Jewish clergyperson. However, for all terms, in direct quotations the original choice of terminology is retained.

When Louis Mann spoke at the 1937 CCAR convention, he recalled the 1909 debate. "Each generation," Mann said, "must grapple with, re-think, think anew and think through the same problems in the light of the new day. Judaism is inherently and inevitably an evolutionary religion. The last word has not been spoken. The last word cannot be spoken. The last word, I hope, will never be spoken."<sup>35</sup>

It is my hope that this thesis serves as an accurate reflection of the many words that have been spoken about rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages in Reform Judaism. These words will hopefully serve as a useful

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<sup>33</sup>"Intermarriage," *Humanistic Judaism* 21, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Autumn 1993): 36.

<sup>34</sup>Seltzer, *Married*, 12.

<sup>35</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 47 (1937): 309.

tool for those rabbis and cantors exploring their position on officiation. And I hope it will offer perspective and guidance as the next generations prepare to speak their own words.



## Chapter One

### The Practice of Officiation

#### The Napoleonic Sanhedrin

The issue of officiation at interfaith marriages does not appear in the Reform world until the mid-nineteenth century. However, the preliminary steps towards public discussion of officiation began with Napoleon and the early nineteenth century French Jewish community. Napoleon, responding to complaints against Jewish usury chiefly from the region of Alsace, decreed the establishment of an assembly of Jewish notables on May 30, 1806. One hundred and ten Jewish leaders from France, as well as French-controlled German and Italian provinces, gathered in Paris on July 26, 1806. At the second meeting, on July 29, Napoleon's commissioners submitted twelve questions to the assembly on issues ranging from marriage to patriotism to business practices. Napoleon did not desire simple information, but was actually seeking formal affirmation of the secular State's control over the synagogue which he hoped would ultimately lead to the assimilation of the Jews.<sup>1</sup>

The third question aroused particular debate and discussion. It asked: "May a Jewess marry a Christian, or a Christian woman a Jew? Or does the Jewish law demand alliances between Jews only?"<sup>2</sup> Such a question could not

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<sup>1</sup>David Philipson, *The Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York, 1931), 19; Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York, 1988), 27-28; Leo J. Stillpass, "The Attitude of Reform Judaism Toward Inter-marriage: A Study of the Problem of Inter-marriage from Biblical Times to the Present Day Attitude of the Members of the CCAR" (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1943), 32.

<sup>2</sup>W. Gunther Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of its European Origins* (New York, 1963), 71.

have been asked before the end of the eighteenth century. It was only after the creation of a secular state with its sanction of a civil marriage that individuals could get married outside a religious ceremony. As the assembly well knew, civil marriage was in force in France since the French Revolution and a small number of Jews and Christians had utilized this secular authority to enter into interfaith marriages throughout the realm.<sup>3</sup>

A commission was appointed to work out an answer acceptable to both the assembly and the French emperor. This commission, dominated by liberal-minded lay leaders, concluded that the biblical laws prohibiting marriage with the Canaanite idolatrous nations did not extend to modern Christianity. Therefore, there was no Jewish prohibition against marriages with Christians. A group of traditional rabbis, while agreeing that Christians were not idolaters, could not accept a statement permitting interfaith marriage. The liberal lay leaders are reported to have angrily replied, "You all acknowledge that [the Christians] are no idolaters, that they worship, as you do, the Creator of heaven and earth....What more is necessary to make marriages lawful between Jews and Christians?"<sup>4</sup>

Both sides were willing to compromise. Eventually, a carefully crafted response was issued that would set the stage for a two-hundred year debate over the role of the rabbi in the wedding of a Jew and a non-Jew.<sup>5</sup>

The law does not say that a Jewess cannot marry a Christian nor a Jew a Christian woman; nor does it state that the Jews can intermarry only among themselves. The only marriages expressly forbidden by the law are those with the seven Canaanite nations, with Ammon and Moab and with the Egyptians....The prohibition in general applies only to nations in idolatry. The Talmud declares formally the modern nations are not considered as such as they

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<sup>3</sup>Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, MA, 1942), 177-78; Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage* (Boston, 1964), 178; Lou H. Silberman, "Reprobation, Prohibition, Invalidity," *CCAR Journal*, April 1968: 13-14.

<sup>4</sup>Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness & Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York, 1961), 191-92.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 192; Silberman, "Reprobation," 12, 13; Epstein, *Marriage Laws*, 178-79.

worship, like us, the God of heaven and earth. And, accordingly, there have been at several periods intermarriages between Jews and Christians in France, in Spain, and in Germany; these marriages were sometimes tolerated and sometimes forbidden by the laws of those sovereigns who had received Jews into their dominions.

Unions of this kind are still found in France; but we cannot dissemble that the opinion of the rabbis is against these marriages. According to their doctrine, although the religion of Moses has not forbidden the Jews from intermarrying with nations not of their religion; yet as marriage, according to the Talmud, requires religious ceremonies called *kiddushin* with the benedictions used in such cases, no marriage can be *religiously* valid unless these ceremonies have been performed. This could not be done towards persons who would not both of them consider these ceremonies sacred; and in that case the married couple could separate without the *religious* divorce; they would be considered as married *civilly* but not *religiously*.

Such is the opinion of the rabbis, members of this assembly. In general they would be no more inclined to bless the union of a Jewess with a Christian, or of a Jew with a Christian woman, than Catholic priests themselves would be disposed to sanction unions of this kind. The rabbis acknowledge, however, that a Jew who marries a Christian woman, does not cease on that account to be considered as a Jew by his brethren any more than if he had married a Jewess *civilly* and not *religiously*.<sup>6</sup>

This declaration laid out many of the issues that would be repeated in the subsequent debates that focused specifically on officiation: the extent of the biblical prohibitions, the talmudic and modern understanding of Christians, the laws of *kiddushin*, the reality of existing interfaith marriages, the legality of civil marriage, the unwillingness of rabbis to sanction such unions, and, behind the whole statement, the tension with a secular, but Christian dominated society.

The answers of the assembly of notables were set before the "Great Sanhedrin," also established by Napoleon, which began deliberations on February 9, 1807. Unlike the assembly, which consisted of laymen and rabbis, the Sanhedrin was more traditional, more concerned with *halachah*, and consisted of seventy rabbis.<sup>7</sup> While the other answers of the assembly caused little debate, the Sanhedrin took issue with the assembly's long, vague answer

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<sup>6</sup>Epstein, *Marriage Laws*, 179-80. Italics in original.

<sup>7</sup>Silberman, "Reprobation," 14; Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 21.

to question three. After much deliberation, they unanimously approved a clearer, and certainly more concise response:

The Great Sanhedrin declares that marriage between Israelites and Christians, contracted according to the laws of the "Civil Code," are, from a civil standpoint, binding and valid, and, although such marriages can not be invested with the religious forms, they shall not entail any disciplinary punishment (anathema).<sup>8</sup>

This answer kept within talmudic tradition. It stated that a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew did not have any religious sanction, but it refrained from explicitly stating that interfaith marriages were prohibited. The rabbis simply affirmed their acceptance of civil law. Their concession that the marriage should not suffer from "anathema" or חרם was, according to Moses Mielziner, "rather illusive, since this disciplinary punishment had at the time already fallen into disuse in France."<sup>9</sup>

### **Brunswick**

The Reform movement began examining the issue of interfaith marriage at its first rabbinical assembly in Brunswick (Braunschweig), Germany on June 12-19, 1844. Ludwig Philippson of Magdeburg, the organizer of the conference, proposed that they endorse the answers of the Great Sanhedrin of 1807. On June 18, a committee of Samuel Holdheim, then of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Gotthold Salomon of Hamburg, and Naphtali Frankfurter of Hamburg also recommended endorsing the Sanhedrin's answers with only minor changes.<sup>10</sup> Once again, question three regarding the validity of interfaith marriage was a center of controversy. A fierce debate followed. However, as no one at the Assembly had an actual transcript of the answers of the Great Sanhedrin, they were forced to rely upon their own

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<sup>8</sup>Moses Mielziner, *The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce in Ancient and Modern Times, and Its Relation to the Law of the State* (Cincinnati, 1884), 46.

<sup>9</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 47; Stillpass, "Attitude," 34.

<sup>10</sup>Plaut, *Rise*, 74, 220; Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 149-50; Meyer, *Response*, 132-33.

memories. The Brunswick rabbis remembered the Sanhedrin response, incorrectly, as "Marriage with Christians is not forbidden." The committee of Holdheim, Salomon, and Frankfurter recommended a resolution that read, "Marriage between Jews and Christians, in fact, marriages between monotheists in general, are not forbidden."<sup>11</sup>

The debate posed issues of tradition and the reality of civil marriage, yet most of the speakers expressed regret or dissatisfaction that the question was being discussed at all. A significant exception was Mendel Hess. Hess, the radical reformer and chief rabbi in the Duchy of Weimar, was the first rabbi to publicly support rabbinical officiation of interfaith marriages. He proposed an addition to the resolution that read, "Such marriages are not forbidden and the rabbi is permitted to officiate." His suggestion received no support from the other rabbis.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately the assembly approved an amended statement, offered by Ludwig Philippson, resolving:

...that the intermarriage of Jews and Christians, and, in general, the intermarriage of Jews with adherents of any of the monotheistic religions, is not forbidden, provided that the parents are permitted by the law of the State to bring up the offspring of such marriage in the Jewish faith.<sup>13</sup>

The change of language from "binding and valid" to "not forbidden" provoked sharp criticism from more traditional rabbis and from later Reform scholars. David Philipson, in his history of the Reform movement, called the assembly's decision a symbol of their "unpreparedness and incapacity."<sup>14</sup> Isaac Leeser, the American Orthodox rabbi, wrote a critical attack in *The Occident*.

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<sup>11</sup>Silberman, "Reprobation," 15; Plaut, *Rise*, 220.

<sup>12</sup>Plaut, *Rise*, 220; Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 150.

<sup>13</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 48.

<sup>14</sup>Meyer, *Response*, 135; Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 48; Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 157.



Where, then, is the permission to come from to allow mixed marriages when the records of our religion so emphatically warn us against them? Perhaps they may have discovered a new method of interpreting Scripture more in consonance with the high state of learning prevailing in modern Germany and France, than with the light which falls to our share in this distant part of the world....But if this be an evidence of enlightenment, we would prefer to be dwelling in the darkness which was formerly ours; we would a thousand times sooner be the simple believers in the world who follow the practice of their fathers, and seek not for new light which can only tend to subvert all they once were told to regard as sacred and true.<sup>15</sup>

As there were no states in Germany where an interfaith couple could raise their child as a Jew in 1844, on a practical level, this resolution prohibited interfaith marriages.<sup>16</sup>

### Breslau and Augsburg

After another conference at Frankfurt am Main in 1845, a group of twenty-six reforming rabbis met in Breslau on July 13-24, 1846. Samuel Holdheim, who had already stirred controversy at the Breslau conference with a proposal to move Shabbat to Sunday, recommended, as part of a committee to reform marriage laws, that "a rabbi should officiate at an intermarriage of Jews and non-Jews." No action was taken on his proposal.<sup>17</sup> Holdheim, now the rabbi at the new Berlin temple, is often recorded as the first rabbi to officiate at an interfaith marriage, an 1849 wedding in Leipzig.<sup>18</sup> He later published his views in an 1850 pamphlet, "Gemischte Ehen zwischen Juden und Christen." Holdheim was willing to officiate at the marriage of a Jew and a non-believing Christian addressing the couple "in the name of the religion of purest human love, in the name of Judaism, as it lives in my spirit and in that of so many of my coreligionists."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Isaac Leeser, "The Dangers of Our Position," *The Occident* 2, no. 8 (Nov. 1844): 368.

<sup>16</sup>Meyer, *Response*, 135; *CCAR Yearbook* 18 (1908): 272.

<sup>17</sup>Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 193, 218-19; *CCAR Yearbook* 1 (1890): 98.

<sup>18</sup>Marshall Sklare, "Intermarriage & Jewish Survival," *Commentary* 49 no. 3 (March 1970): 55.

<sup>19</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 52; Meyer, *Response*, 82.

Opposed to Holdheim, the mainstream of Reform in Germany was distancing itself from the resolution at Brunswick. The author of the original declaration, Ludwig Philippson, wrote in his 1865 book *Israelitische Religionslehre*, "From the standpoint of religion and of a sincere religious life, [the rabbi] can not but disapprove of mixed marriages."<sup>20</sup> At the Leipzig Synod of 1869, Abraham Geiger of Breslau, the dominant figure of early Reform Judaism, and Joseph Aub of Berlin both spoke against interfaith marriage as "injurious to the peace of the home and to the preservation of the Jewish faith, the faith of the minority."<sup>21</sup>

No new resolutions on interfaith marriage were considered until the Augsburg Synod on July 11-17, 1871 where a proposal of Dr. Emil Lehmann of Leipzig, who was too sick to attend, was read: "The declaration of the rabbinical conference at Brunswick in 1844 that there is no objection in Judaism to marriage between Jews and Christians, provided that the state does not demand that the children be reared in the Christian religion, still meets the views of the members of the synod to-day in accordance with the experiences of the intervening years."<sup>22</sup> The synod had already, as part of their reforms of the marriage laws, accepted the validity of civil marriage. However, they were unwilling to approve Lehmann's proposal and endorse the controversial Brunswick declaration. The commission on the reform of marriage suggested tabling the recommendation. Abraham Geiger recommended that rather than ignore the issue by shelving it, they should defer it to a later time. Clearly they were "not prepared to deliberate upon it at

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<sup>20</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 49. Mielziner has called this a great modification of Philippson's earlier views (Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 48), but this statement doesn't appear to be contrary to the original proposal.

<sup>21</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 36.

<sup>22</sup>Philippson, *Reform Movement*, 317. CCAR Yearbook 1 (1890): 108 stated that this was at the Leipzig Synod.

present, but would in the future." Geiger's proposal was accepted.<sup>23</sup> But the German Reform movement did not address the issue of officiation again as Geiger had proposed. In the United States, however, the issue of officiation was just beginning to be debated.

### Nineteenth Century American Reform

Interfaith marriage had been an issue in the United States since its earliest days. Convinced, according to Jacob Rader Marcus, that interfaith marriage "threatened the very existence of the community,"<sup>24</sup> as early as 1790 congregations began to deny membership to Jews who had married outside the faith. Among the earliest congregations who changed their by-laws or constitution were the traditional congregations Shearith Israel of New York in 1790, Mickve Israel of Savannah in 1791, and Mikveh Israel of Philadelphia in 1798.<sup>25</sup>

However, debates over interfaith marriage did not occur until the latter part of the nineteenth century. By then, significant numbers of rabbis had arrived on American soil and the Reform movement had begun to establish itself. While the earliest conference called by Isaac Mayer Wise in Cleveland in 1855 did not address the issue, the first truly Reform convention did.

In 1869, hearing of the impending Leipzig synod in Germany, Wise called for a meeting of American rabbis in Cincinnati that June. However, the Eastern block of rabbis, led by Samuel Adler and David Einhorn, both of New York City, called for their own conference which took precedence over Wise's.<sup>26</sup> On November 3, thirteen radical reformers, along with Isaac Mayer

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<sup>23</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 94; Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 317-18.

<sup>24</sup>Jacob Rader Marcus, *American Jewry: Documents* (Cincinnati, 1959), 187; Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Vol. 1, (Detroit, 1989), 603-04.

<sup>25</sup>Marcus, *Documents*, 129, 160, 176.

<sup>26</sup>Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Vol. 3, (Detroit, 1993), 86.



Wise, met in the home of Samuel Hirsch in Philadelphia. The Eastern rabbis were mostly traditional on the subject of conversion and hostile to the subject of interfaith marriage. Yet, during debates on changing the marriage formula, Solomon Deutsch of Baltimore wanted to make sure that any new formula proposed did not rule out interfaith marriages. Max Schlesinger of Albany thought the conference should take a public stance on interfaith marriage, but the subject was sent to committee.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time as the conference, the pages of the *Jewish Times* of New York published an ongoing exchange in German between Samuel Hirsch and David Einhorn on interfaith marriage and officiation. Hirsch argued that the prohibitions of the Torah did not apply to Christians who were monotheists. Einhorn, in the January 28, 1870 edition of the *Jewish Times*, responded with, perhaps, the most frequently quoted statement in opposition of officiation: "To lend a hand to the sanctification of mixed marriage, is, according to my firm conviction, to FURNISH A NAIL TO THE COFFIN OF THE SMALL JEWISH RACE, WITH ITS SUBLIME MISSION."<sup>28</sup>

Three years later, Isaac Mayer Wise published a long article titled "Intermarriages" in his own *American Israelite*. Wise concluded his article with an outspoken critique of those rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages:

If a rabbi believes, as he ought to, that matrimony is a sacred institution, sanctified by the law of the covenant, by the expressed will of the Maker of man, in whose name and by the authority of the revealed law he unites the couple before him the holy covenant of matrimony, and invokes upon them God's blessing; he will not make a comedian of himself to do and say all that for persons who do not believe a word of it.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 87; Meyer, *Response*, 257; David Einhorn, "The Philadelphia Conference," *Jewish Times* 1, no. 37 (Nov. 12, 1869): 6.

<sup>28</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 19 (1909): 265; CCAR *Yearbook* 47 (1937): 317; Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 52. Emphasis in original.

<sup>29</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise, "Intermarriages," *The American Israelite* 30, no. 25 (Dec. 21, 1883): 4.

Wise believed that the questions of interfaith marriage and conversion should be decided at a synod. Although these hopes were never realized, in 1889 he helped found the Central Conference of American Rabbis which quickly became the organization for Reform rabbis. In 1890, the Conference held its first convention which included an address by Moses Mielziner on "The Marriage Agenda." Just as the German rabbinical assemblies and synods, as well as the 1869 Philadelphia meeting, had dealt with marriage reform as one of its earliest topics, the CCAR asked Mielziner to draft "a plan of a ritual for the solemnization of Jewish marriages."<sup>30</sup>

Mielziner was the logical choice to present such a plan. In 1884 he had published *The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce in Ancient and Modern Times, and Its Relation to the Law of the State*. The book reviewed the traditional laws of marriage and made suggestions for their modern implementation. It immediately became the standard in the field. Mielziner devoted a considerable portion of the chapter on prohibited marriages to the subject of interfaith marriages reviewing the biblical and historical prohibitions. To conclude the section, he cited the published oppositions to officiation of Geiger, Aub, Einhorn, and Wise. Mielziner's CCAR paper of 1890 made no mention of interfaith marriage, however, and primarily summarized many of the proposals from his book.<sup>31</sup>

In the first yearbook of the Conference a collection of "Resolutions of Past Conferences" was published including the French Sanhedrin, the German assemblies and synods, the 1869 conference, and the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. The piece contained several errors including a repetition of the mistake of the Brunswick conference reporting the Sanhedrin's response

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<sup>30</sup>CCAR Yearbook 1 (1890): 34.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 34; Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 49-54.

on the question of interfaith marriage as, "Marriage with Christians is not prohibited."<sup>32</sup>

Response to officiation in the nineteenth century was often harsh. Isaac Moses, while working in Milwaukee in the 1880s, was censured by his synagogue board, and challenged by Isaac Mayer Wise and the national press, for officiating at an interfaith marriage. Only his congregation gave him a limited vote of confidence.<sup>33</sup> At the 1909 CCAR debates, Moses, perhaps recalling this incident, stated, "The most influential laymen have spoken emphatically and are speaking against any such marriages."<sup>34</sup> Isaac Mayer Wise's congregation barred the Jewish partner of an interfaith marriage from membership as late as 1892. Kaufmann Kohler unsuccessfully urged his colleagues to take a similar stance.<sup>35</sup>

#### 1907-1909

The Central Conference did not directly discuss the issue of interfaith marriage until its seventeenth annual meeting in 1907 held in Frankfort, Michigan. At that convention, the Committee on Resolutions recommended "that the question of intermarriage be made the subject of a paper for presentation at the next Conference."<sup>36</sup> While interfaith marriage had been discussed by rabbis in articles, this was the first official resolution that addressed the subject. It marked the beginning of a ninety year intense official debate that has not reached a decisive conclusion today.

On Sunday, July 5, 1908, Mendel Silber of St. Louis read his paper, "Intermarriage" to the CCAR assembly which was meeting again in

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<sup>32</sup>CCAR Yearbook 1 (1890): 80.

<sup>33</sup>Marcus, *US Jewry*, Vol. 3, 398.

<sup>34</sup>CCAR Yearbook 19 (1909): 329.

<sup>35</sup>Meyer, *Response*, 290; CCAR Yearbook 99 (1989), Vol. 2: 45.

<sup>36</sup>CCAR Yearbook 17 (1907): 139-40.

Frankfort. Silber reviewed the biblical history as well as more recent discussions of interfaith marriage. He did not refer specifically to officiation as he was engaged in an outright rejection of interfaith marriage itself. "Let intermarriage but become general and it will not take many centuries before Judaism will disappear....I feel, therefore, justified in stating, nay, compelled to say, that *intermarriage is inadvisable, undesirable and unpermissible.*"<sup>37</sup>

An unpublished discussion, with fourteen rabbis participating, followed the presentation of the paper. Max Heller of New Orleans, then Vice-President of the CCAR, called for the presentation of five papers on varying aspects of the topic of interfaith marriage at the next convention. While Samuel Schulman of New York expressed misgivings at having to listen to five papers on one topic, the resolution was carried.<sup>38</sup>

The 1909 convention, held November 9-16, in New York City, featured the most extensive discussion and debate on the issue of officiation so far. Perhaps in recognition of Schulman's concern over the abundance of papers in Heller's proposal of 1908, just two were presented. HUC Professor Ephraim Feldman analyzed the subject from a historical perspective, while Samuel Schulman discussed the religious aspects. Feldman rejected any racial overtones in the biblical and talmudic prohibitions against intermarriage. He noted that most statements on interfaith marriage have been "mild, and hesitating, and apologetic, in their disapproval....Your modern rabbi has too much of sweetness and light to make a very sturdy opponent."<sup>39</sup>

Schulman saw the impediments to interfaith marriage as purely religious. If the non-Jewish partner would convert, that impediment would be removed. Despite any statements from proponents such as Holdheim,

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<sup>37</sup>CCAR Yearbook 18 (1908): 270, 276.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 76-77.

<sup>39</sup>CCAR Yearbook 19 (1909): 298.

Schulman believed that Judaism has been uniformly, in both law and spirit, in opposition to interfaith marriage. Addressing the subject of officiation directly, he noted that while a civil marriage is certainly acceptable legally, it has no religious sanction. He stated that "in the matter of a mixed marriage that is suggested to him to be consecrated by him in the name of Judaism, [a rabbi] certainly ought not to consent."<sup>40</sup> He concluded his presentation with a summary of his arguments: "The Synagogue is opposed to a mixed marriage because it does not realize the ideal of marriage; because it is prejudicial to Judaism; because a Rabbi, as a religious functionary, can not officiate at it."<sup>41</sup>

Responding to Schulman's paper was Isaac Moses, also of New York. Moses hesitated to call for conversion of the non-Jewish partner too quickly as it might be seen as hypocrisy -- converting for the sake of marriage. However, if the non-Jew was willing to support the Jewish spouse's religion and to raise their children as Jews, then even "without formal conversion such a person should be accepted as a member of the household of Israel, and the marriage consecrated by the rabbi."<sup>42</sup> Moses cautioned against any declaration of the Conference "totally opposed to marriage between Jew and Gentile. Every case should be judged on its own merits and the rabbi's hand should not be tied by a law to that effect."<sup>43</sup>

Immediate discussion of the topic was closed off by a 34-33 vote.<sup>44</sup> However, the issue was far from being concluded at the 1909 convention. The next day, Schulman, along with William Rosenau of Baltimore, proposed the following resolution:

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 312-14, 319.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 327.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 332.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 333-34.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 89.



Resolved, That it is the sense of this Conference that a rabbi ought not to officiate at a marriage between a Jew or Jewess and a person professing a religion other than Judaism, inasmuch as such mixed marriage is prohibited by the Jewish religion, and would tend to disintegrate the religion of Israel. (Signed) Samuel Schulman, William Rosenau.<sup>45</sup>

Joseph Silverman of New York immediately called for the tabling of the resolution, but his suggestion failed. Joseph Stolz of Chicago moved that it be referred to the Committee on Resolutions. The passage of Stolz's proposal ended any discussion until that committee's report four days later.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps sensing the impending debate, the Committee on Resolutions addressed the Schulman/Rosenau resolution as their final topic. They decided to recommend an alternate proposal after their own deliberations:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American Rabbinate.<sup>47</sup>

After brief discussion of the committee's other recommendations, the Conference turned to the question of interfaith marriage. Again, a proposal to table the resolution, this time by Abram Hirschberg of Chicago, failed. Fourteen rabbis were recorded in the *CCAR Yearbook* as speaking on the issue, beginning with Schulman, the co-author of the original resolution, who defended his wording.<sup>48</sup>

The subsequent debate included Isaac Moses calling both the original and the revised resolutions "religious tyranny," and Jacob Kaplan of Selma, Alabama, imploring the Conference "to vote one way or the other, so I may go home and say the sense of the Conference is for or against."<sup>49</sup> Harry Mayer of Kansas City spoke against the resolution stating that it will not change any of the rabbis' opinions.

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 119.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 175, 176.

There is not the least doubt as to what the majority believe about the matter. The majority are against intermarriage, or rather all are against mixed marriages, and the majority are against officiating. No action will bind the minority in any way, but it might be construed by laity as binding, and for that reason it is pernicious.<sup>50</sup>

Mayer was followed by Maurice Harris of New York who supported Schulman's version and begged his colleagues:

Realize the gravity of this situation. You dare not vote against it, because if you do, you make the situation ever so much worse than before. The word will go forth that the Central Conference as such indorsed mixed marriage – that will be the conclusion. Gentlemen, the moment the word has gone forth that rabbis indorse mixed marriage, Judaism will not live four generations.<sup>51</sup>

Moses Gries of Cleveland then added a third choice of resolutions. Since he was aware of no rabbi who actively *encouraged* interfaith marriage, he found the conclusion of the committee's resolution to imply that there *are* such rabbis. His proposal was "The Central Conference of American Rabbis resolves that mixed marriages are contrary to the historic tradition of the Jewish religion." Schulman dismissed this proposal as a "truism."<sup>52</sup>

After a final statement from H.G. Enelow of Louisville, the chair of the Committee on Resolutions, the Conference voted down Gries' amendment. Schulman's original motion failed 18-28, while the committee's resolution passed 42-2.<sup>53</sup> Thus, the Central Conference of American Rabbis first official statement on interfaith marriage was established:

"The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American Rabbinate."<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 178.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 180, 182.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 184.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 170.

It would be sixty-four years before the Conference took a different, official stance and one that addressed the issue of officiation directly, rather than implicitly.

Jacob Rader Marcus noted that only forty-four rabbis voted on the final resolution while ninety-seven rabbis were in attendance at the convention. He wondered, "Did many keep silent or did the men go home early for reasons of their own?"<sup>55</sup> This resolution was not debated until the late afternoon of the final day of the convention. While the number of rabbis in attendance at the time of the final vote is unknown, it is probable many rabbis needed to begin their travels before the debate even began.

The names of the dissenters in the final vote are also unrecorded. Given Isaac Moses' outspoken opposition to the resolution, calling it "tyranny" during the debate, as well as his own practice of officiation, it is likely that he was one of the dissenters.<sup>56</sup> At the 1947 convention, Ephraim Frisch, previously of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, stated that he had "voted even against the mild resolution" of 1909.<sup>57</sup>

Reaction to the CCAR's declaration was decidedly positive. Because of the vague wording, rabbis could interpret the resolution to fit their own position. Therefore, the radical Reformer Emil G. Hirsch of Chicago, who is believed to have officiated at interfaith marriages, could graciously call the resolution "mighty and wonderful" and "a fine stroke of consummate diplomacy." Hirsch defended his own position in this editorial in the pages of his own newspaper, *The Reform Advocate*, and criticized the Conference for not going far enough. He felt they should have also resolved the

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<sup>55</sup>Marcus, *US Jewry*, Vol. 3, 669.

<sup>56</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 19 (1909): 175.

<sup>57</sup>Unpublished manuscript of the 1947 CCAR Convention, 223, American Jewish Archives



dilemma of rabbis supporting a Reform conversion that would not be accepted by non-Reform rabbis, while denying interfaith marriage.<sup>58</sup>

### **Between the Debates**

The decades after the 1909 declaration were relatively silent on the issue of interfaith marriage. At the CCAR, the issue was not mentioned in a resolution until 1935 and not discussed in a plenary session until 1947. However, several important documents and discussions within the Reform movement did appear.

In 1912, the CCAR Committee on Social and Religious Union surveyed the Reform rabbinate on a variety of issues focusing primarily on congregational services and holiday observances. The committee also asked rabbis about interfaith marriage, their stance on officiation, and the rate of interfaith marriage in their community. Despite the breadth of the committee's report, the short discussion afterwards inevitably focused on the specific issue of interfaith marriage. Moses Gries, Max Heller, and Max Raisin of Meridian, Mississippi each disputed the wording and specifics of the committee's findings on interfaith marriage. The report was ultimately referred back to committee.<sup>59</sup>

Kaufmann Kohler, President of the Hebrew Union College and chairman of the CCAR Committee on Responsa, published several responsa on issues relating to interfaith marriage in 1916 and 1919. Kohler's first responsum on the subject was on the burial of non-Jewish spouses in Jewish cemeteries. This responsum, co-signed by Jacob Lauterbach, briefly referred to officiation:

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<sup>58</sup>Philipson, *Reform Movement*, 370; Stillpass, "Attitude," 31; Emil G. Hirsch, "An Historic Resolution," *The Reform Advocate* 38 (Nov. 7, 1909): 577.

<sup>59</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 22 (1912): 94-101.

I have always in my practice taken the stand that, while mixed marriages should not be sanctioned by the rabbi, the civil law which declares them as valid must be recognized by us to the extent that the non-Jewish wife or husband should be entitled to the right of being buried alongside the Jewish husband or wife on the plot owned by the one or the other in the Jewish cemetery.<sup>60</sup>

In a responsum titled "Shall A Rabbi Officiate at a Mixed Marriage?" in 1919, Kohler directly responded to the issue:

Unless the person whom a Jew or Jewess is to marry adopts in some form the Jewish religion...no rabbi who wants to be true to the tradition of Judaism can perform the marriage ceremony....Certainly the Jewish home, which is the object of marriage, must be conducted according to the Jewish principles. A Christian minister cannot consecrate a Jewish home, nor can a Jewish minister consecrate a Christian home and if man and wife belong to two different religions, it will be a house divided against itself. Without harmony of views in a matter so vital to the future there is no real unity. For those who think that the Jewish home needs no religious consecration the State law provides that they may apply to the civil magistrate to perform the marriage and have the sanction of the State for their union.<sup>61</sup>

The Reform movement would not issue another responsum specifically on the subject of officiation until 1980.

Although a *Minister's Handbook* had been published by the CCAR, it was with the publication of the *Rabbi's Manual* in 1928 that interfaith marriage was first mentioned. This edition included "Historical and Explanatory Notes" in the back. Among the subjects, and the one given the largest number of pages, was "Mixed Marriage in Modern Times." This five page section was a reprint of pages 47-49 and part of page 52 from Mielziner's *The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce* with the 1909 CCAR resolution and the 1919 responsum by Kohler also quoted.<sup>62</sup>

In 1935, the CCAR Committee on Resolutions considered not one, but two resolutions on interfaith marriage, twenty-six years after the last,

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<sup>60</sup>CCAR Yearbook 26 (1916): 133.

<sup>61</sup>CCAR Yearbook 29 (1919): 75-76.

<sup>62</sup>Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Rabbi's Manual* (Cincinnati, 1928), 172-76.

contentious resolution of 1909. The first, signed by eight rabbis who did not officiate, began:

The action of Central Conference of American Rabbis taken in 1909 to the effect that intermarriages should not be performed without conversion, is disregarded to such a degree as to lessen the authority of the Conference and of Judaism as a whole, as well as to prove embarrassing to those rabbis who abide by the Conference decisions.<sup>63</sup>

The second resolution, which omitted the above, pointed interpretation of the 1909 decision, was signed by three more liberal rabbis: Joseph Baron of Milwaukee, Louis Mann of Chicago, and James Heller of Cincinnati.

Resolved, That the Executive Board be instructed to arrange a discussion, as part of the program on the next Convention, upon the problem of Reform Rabbis officiating at intermarriages, looking toward a reconsideration of our past attitude.<sup>64</sup>

Both resolutions were referred to the Executive Board. In a meeting that October the Board resolved to look into assigning a paper on interfaith marriage "for the purpose of ascertaining whether the Conference desires to change its attitude which recommends that members do not officiate at intermarriages."<sup>65</sup> Clearly, the Executive Board did not review the resolution of 1909 which made no specific mention of officiation.

The paper proposed at the 1935 Executive Board meeting appeared at the 1937 convention in Columbus, Ohio. Louis Mann, one of the authors of the second 1935 resolution, read his paper, "Intermarriage as a Practical Problem in the Ministry." Mann recalled the history of officiation in the CCAR and the 1909 debate. To determine the current mood of the Conference, Mann surveyed its membership on several points including

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<sup>63</sup>CCAR Yearbook 45 (1935): 105. The resolution was signed by Eugene E. Hibshman (Altoona, PA), Morris W. Graff (Paducah, KY), Jacob I. Meyer (Hazelton, PA), Abram Vossen Goodman, (Austin, TX) Daniel L. Davis (Lancaster, PA), H.D. Snyder (actually H. Eliot Snyder of Springfield, IL), Alvin S. Luchs, (New Rochelle, NY), and Samuel Wolf (Cincinnati, OH).

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>65</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Chicago, Oct. 22, 1935, CCAR Archives, 2.

whether they officiate and whether the CCAR should change its position. Just as the Executive Board had not checked the 1909 resolution, Mann also reported the declaration incorrectly in his survey by asking, "Do you think that the Central Conference of American Rabbis' attitude of non-participation in cases of intermarriage should be changed?" Only one rabbi corrected his mistake in the survey responses, but Mann dismissed this rabbi's correction outright. On the day he left for the convention, Mann finally looked at the 1909 resolution again and discovered that he had been thinking of Schulman's original resolution, rather than the alternate resolution that was ultimately passed.<sup>66</sup>

Following the presentation of his survey, Mann admitted in his report that he took this paper to call for a new resolution simply discouraging interfaith marriage. Since that is precisely the Conference's stated position, "*we ought to reaffirm that. Rabbis should discourage intermarriage, yet the Conference should not go on record for non-participation.*"<sup>67</sup>

After Mann's paper was read, a motion by an unnamed rabbi to postpone discussion failed. The issue was resolved to be referred to a special commission to be appointed by the President to report next year.<sup>68</sup> That October, in an Executive Board meeting in Cincinnati, President Max Currick of Erie, Pennsylvania appointed Louis Mann and Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland to study the problem.<sup>69</sup> The committee was expanded by the 1939 convention in Washington, DC to five members: Solomon Freehof of Pittsburgh, James Heller, Abba Hillel Silver, Sidney Goldstein of New York, and Jacob Lauterbach of the Hebrew Union College. During the pre-

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<sup>66</sup>CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 313.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 322.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 125.

<sup>69</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Cincinnati, Oct. 5, 1937, CCAR Archives, 3.

convention Executive Board meeting of the 1939 convention, Freehof reported that the Committee on Inter-marriage was making progress.<sup>70</sup>

At the 1941 CCAR Convention in Atlantic City, Solomon Freehof presented a paper on creating "A Code of Ceremonial and Ritual Practice." Although Freehof was not proposing changes related to interfaith marriage, he did refer to the 1909 declaration as a "clear-cut resolution on the questions of inter-marriage and mixed marriage."<sup>71</sup> In the discussion after the paper, David Philipson challenged the pro-officiation forces:

The decisions of the Conference on various subjects have been accepted by the majority. Particularly has this been true in the matter of performing mixed marriages. The action of the Conference in advising against the performance of inter-marriages has been a tremendous help to our members when placed in the difficult position by those who were willing to officiate.<sup>72</sup>

#### 1947 Convention

Although Freehof reported progress in 1939, it was not until 1946 that another mention of the Committee on Inter-marriage appeared. At the Executive Board meeting in Cincinnati that October, President Abba Hillel Silver appointed a new committee, with some familiar participants, to study interfaith marriage and report to the Executive Board. This committee consisted of Solomon Freehof, again as chair, Bernard Harrison of Los Angeles, Louis Mann, James Heller, Max Currick, and Sidney Goldstein.<sup>73</sup>

At the 1947 Convention in Montreal, Freehof read a committee paper, also signed by Harrison and Mann, that presented a wide-ranging "Report on Mixed Marriage and Inter-marriage." As Freehof noted in the subsequent discussion, the report covered a number of issues because he felt "that there

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<sup>70</sup>CCAR Yearbook 49 (1939): 27; Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Washington, DC, June 13, 1939, CCAR Archives, 3.

<sup>71</sup>CCAR Yearbook 51 (1941): 296.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 297.

<sup>73</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Cincinnati, Oct. 22-23, 1946, CCAR Archives, 4.



were many closely related questions which the Conference had never yet come to deal with, and I decided to put them all into the report for the sake of completeness."<sup>74</sup> After reviewing early decisions regarding interfaith marriage in the Reform movement in Germany and the United States, Freehof praised the 1909 resolution and urged that "we still must maintain the spirit of 1909." If a new resolution prohibited rabbis from officiation, it would imply that "rabbis actually do officiate at a considerable number of mixed marriages and that we are trying to put an end to an evil situation. But that is not so. It rarely happens that one of our colleagues officiates at such a marriage. When it does happen it is under certain unusual circumstances." Furthermore, if prohibited, what would the CCAR do when a rabbi chose to officiate?<sup>75</sup>

Freehof expounded on a long list of proposals on subjects including conversion, civil marriage, common law marriage, and the status of children of interfaith couples. His first recommendation was the only one specifically on interfaith marriage. The committee's proposed resolution was:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, in Convention assembled in Montreal in the year 1947, strongly reaffirmed its stand on the subject of mixed marriages adopted in 1909, as follows: "The Central Conference of American Rabbis declares that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should therefore be discouraged by the American Rabbinate."<sup>76</sup>

The ensuing discussion was long and bitter, extending over two sessions. Over twenty-five different rabbis spoke during the course of the acrimonious debate which covered similar ground as the 1909 exchange. Henry Berkowitz of Portland called for a stronger resolution than the one proposed. He was looking for support in his struggle with his own synagogue

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<sup>74</sup>CCAR Yearbook 57 (1947): 172-73.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 160-61.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 161.



which had urged him to officiate. He advocated replacing the word "discouraged" with "forbid."<sup>77</sup> CCAR Vice-President Abraham Feldman informed the Conference that the limited autonomy of the CCAR did not allow such prohibitions and suggested "be not sanctioned" by the rabbinate as alternate wording. Berkowitz apparently accepted this replacement in the wording of his substitute resolution. In defense of the original proposal of the committee, Freehof reminded the Conference that a resolution similar to Berkowitz's failed in 1909.<sup>78</sup>

Likewise, sharp critique by those who did officiate was offered. William Rosenblum of New York commented that he did not represent the popular view, but he believed the Conference was legislating in a reactionary spirit.

Nothing is as sublime as is the love of a man for a woman and no legislation and no resolution that you will pass here is going to stop it....To use the word "forbid," or the word "sanction" is a step backward....I for one, will be put in the position of having to say, "I cannot subscribe to a resolution of this character."<sup>79</sup>

A call was made to close the debate which failed. President Silver chastised that call as "a mistake" while discussing such an important issue.<sup>80</sup> When the debate continued at the evening session, one of the first speakers was Julian Morgenstern, President of the Hebrew Union College. His long speech implored the Conference to search for what is best, not for the individual rabbi, but for the Jewish people.

In the 45 years of my rabbinate, I have never officiated at a mixed marriage, and I think that I never shall. But were I starting in the rabbinate today as a young rabbi facing the problem of intermarriage realistically and seeking to do that which I think is best for the Jewish people, not to drive these people away hopelessly from Judaism but to strive to hold them close to Judaism, and to try to recover for Judaism and for the Jewish people the offspring of as many

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<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 174. Grammatically, he should have proposed "forbidden."

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 174.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 176.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 177.

of these mixed marriages as possible, I think I would officiate at intermarriages under certain conditions; not freely, not unrestrictedly, not in all such marriages, but if I could fix certain conditions that would govern this intermarriage, I would officiate at it, because I think I could achieve more for Judaism and the Jewish people in that way than by driving these people away hopelessly from Judaism and away from Israel.<sup>81</sup>

Another alternate resolution was proposed by Ferdinand Isserman of St. Louis. After noting that the traditional ban on interfaith marriage was for the preservation of the Jewish faith, he suggested:

Inasmuch as historic Jewish opposition to mixed marriage was motivated not by desire to maintain racial purity but to preserve the faith, a desire we share, we hereby recommend that the members of this conference officiate only at such mixed marriages where both partners give their oath that the children born of their union will be reared in accordance with the traditions and teachings of Judaism.<sup>82</sup>

At the end of the debate, a motion to table the resolution failed as did Isserman's substitute resolution. The more stringent resolution "that the Conference does not sanction mixed marriages and called upon its members to refrain from officiating at them" was barely defeated by a vote of 74 to 76. Unanimously, the Conference then adopted the committee's resolution:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis strongly reaffirms the position taken by the Conference of 1909 which declared that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion and should, therefore, be discouraged by the American rabbinate.<sup>83</sup>

The reported votes raise some questions. After some of the violent comments of the earlier debate, it seems unlikely that the resolution would pass unanimously. Furthermore, there were 227 rabbis attending the 1947 convention. Only 150 (or 66%) voted on the more stringent resolution. Unlike 1909, this debate took place on Thursday, June 26, the day *before* the convention ended. While it is not entirely clear why so many rabbis did not

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 179.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 182.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 183-84.

record a vote on this important resolution, it should be noted that the debate did not conclude until well after midnight.

### Responsa

The 1947 reaffirmation seemed to satisfy the Conference as the issue would not be raised again in the CCAR until 1960. While the Conference remained quiet on the issue, the Jewish press slowly began to publish more articles on interfaith marriage as various rabbis offered their opinions on officiation and associated topics.

Solomon Freehof, the chair of the CCAR Committee on Inter marriage, published several responsa on issues related to interfaith marriage beginning in the 1940s. In 1944, with the publication of *Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background*, Freehof had touched on the issue of officiation. He wrote that, "It is impossible for Judaism to consider [an interfaith marriage] as a Jewish marriage. Such a couple is incapable of contracting Kiddushin."<sup>84</sup> In volume two, published in 1952, he raised the issue of co-officiation as an aside while discussing whether two Jews could be married by a Christian minister. He concluded, "On the basis of the unanimous attitude of traditional law, it would be improper for a rabbi to participate with a Christian minister at such a marriage."<sup>85</sup> Just over a quarter century later, this issue would return when the CCAR argued about "ecumenical" or co-officiated at interfaith weddings.

Freehof never directly discussed the subject of officiation in any of his responsa. Perhaps he was content to let Kohler's answer stand. Perhaps he was never asked the question during his tenure as chairperson of the Committee on Responsa. In 1960, he told Rabbi Joseph Fink of Buffalo that

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<sup>84</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background*, Vol. 1, (Cincinnati, 1944), 67.

<sup>85</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Reform Jewish Practice and Its Rabbinic Background*, Vol. 2, (Cincinnati, 1952), 83.

he approved of officiating at the marriage of two Christians in unusual circumstances. He warned, however, that interfaith couples "will come to you and will not understand why you will marry two Christians, and yet refuse to marry a couple where one of them is a Jew. If, however, it is only on rare occasions that you marry two Christians, such a danger is not likely to arise."<sup>86</sup>

Other responsa related to officiation during Freehof's tenure include his 1963 declaration that the non-Jewish partner of an interfaith marriage should not become a synagogue member without conversion.<sup>87</sup> In 1971, Freehof came closest to discussing officiation directly in responding to the question of Rabbi Philip Bernstein of Rochester, New York. Bernstein asked if the interfaith marriage of a temple member could take place on synagogue grounds. Freehof reviewed a short history of officiation in traditional and historical sources. He noted that if the rabbi already officiates at such marriages, then this problem does not exist for him. "But to the majority of us who do not officiate at mixed marriages, our stand on the matter necessarily runs counter to the rather pathetic requests of our people....Also, we cannot allow such procedures as will lead other young people to believe such marriages are somehow countenanced by the rabbi and by Judaism."<sup>88</sup> Although Freehof never specifically addressed the issue of officiation, consistently in his writings he stated that an interfaith marriage "is not a Jewish marriage and as long as one partner is not Jewish, it cannot be a Jewish marriage."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati, 1960), 189.

<sup>87</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Recent Reform Responsa* (Cincinnati, 1963), 63-66.

<sup>88</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Modern Reform Responsa* ([Cincinnati], 1971), 114-15.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 114.

The revised *Rabbi's Manual* of 1961 reflected this stance. The article primarily reprinted sections of the 1928 version including quotations from Mielziner and David Einhorn, the resolution of 1909, and the responsum of Kohler from 1919. Additionally, the two page section offered several "religious grounds" why "Reform Judaism is opposed to mixed marriages," and concluded with a note that a convert to Judaism "is a Jew in every respect."<sup>90</sup>

### 1962 Convention

Issues of interfaith marriage returned at the 1960 CCAR convention in Detroit. Bernard Kligfeld of Long Beach, New York and Jerome Folkman of Columbus, Ohio each presented brief papers as part of a Friday morning seminar on "Intermarriage and Mixed Marriage." Kligfeld, reviewing current surveys of the rate of interfaith marriage, called for a more definitive study to determine "who intermarries, why and with what effects."<sup>91</sup> Folkman spoke of the many problems created by the integration of converts into synagogue life.<sup>92</sup> Neither discussed officiation.

Despite the very specific nature of the presentations, Jack Stern's summary of the discussion afterwards noted that it "dealt largely with the evaluation of the current position of the CCAR toward mixed marriages."<sup>93</sup> After listing some of the reasons that were offered in the session, Stern reported unanimous consent on a motion that the Conference study the topic further at a future convention.<sup>94</sup> At the CCAR Executive Board meeting in New York that October, the board agreed with the seminar's motion.

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<sup>90</sup>Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Rabbi's Manual* (Cincinnati, 1961), 132-33.

<sup>91</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 70 (1960): 136.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 137-38.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 140.



President Bernard Bamberger of New York recommended that because of other major issues already on the agenda for 1961, "it would not be feasible to carry on so important a discussion" at the next convention. He also suggested that the existing Committee on Marriage, Family and the Home and the Responsa Committee begin to look into the issues for a future convention.<sup>95</sup>

The following summer, Bamberger, in his presidential address, suggested that it was probably time for the Conference "to take another long hard look at the vexed problem of mixed marriage."<sup>96</sup> In light of the presidential suggestion, at that October's Executive Board meeting, a committee was appointed to prepare a statement for the 1962 Convention in Minneapolis-St. Paul. The Special Committee on Mixed Marriage, appointed by incoming CCAR President Albert Minda of Minneapolis, consisted of Eugene Mihaly of HUC-JIR in Cincinnati as chairman, Philip Bernstein of Rochester, New York, Morris Lieberman of Baltimore, Nathan Perilman of New York City, and Robert Kahn of Houston.<sup>97</sup>

The sudden interest of the CCAR in the issue, less than fifteen years after the previous debate, was probably a result of growing numbers of interfaith marriages, as well as deepening divisions between the various positions. Albert Gordon believed that rabbis who did not officiate were raising complaints against their colleagues that did. Gunther Plaut has contended that the pro-officiation forces were finding support from sociologists and psychologists who questioned the effectiveness of the refusal to officiate.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, New York, NY, Oct. 25-26, 1960, CCAR Archives, 5.

<sup>96</sup>CCAR Yearbook 71 (1961): 11.

<sup>97</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, New York, NY, Oct. 4-5, 1961, CCAR Archives, 2; CCAR Yearbook 72 (1962): 94.

<sup>98</sup>Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 185; W. Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources Until 1948* (New York, 1965), 359.



The committee report in 1962 began by examining the same issues that Bernard Kligfeld had raised two years earlier. The information the Committee on Mixed Marriage found available on the rates, causes, and results of interfaith marriage was scant. The committee saw the goals of the Conference as recognizing the growing trend of interfaith marriage, trying to determine what Reform rabbis can do to possibly reverse it, and ascertaining how "to keep a significant majority of mixed couples within the Jewish community."<sup>99</sup>

The answer, they declared, was not in the issue of officiation. "We are most likely unanimous in our ardent desire to reduce the rate [of interfaith marriage] to a minimum....But mixed marriage will not disappear merely because we reaffirm our belief that it should be discouraged....We have been bogged down long enough on the issue [of officiation]. It is time that we move on."<sup>100</sup>

The committee proposed two recommendations:

A. The Conference shall establish a permanent committee which would concern itself exclusively with mixed marriage and the range of problems related to it. The committee shall in conjunction with the other arms of the Reform Movement gather and evaluate available data, initiate new statistical and depth studies on the various aspects of mixed marriage, conversion, etc. (as outlined in the body of this report), and make its findings and recommendations available to the membership of the CCAR through periodic reports.

B. The CCAR shall adopt the following as its official statement on mixed marriage:

Our deep and abiding concern for the sanctity and unity of the Jewish home, our profound commitment to the preservation of Judaism and the Jewish people, make it imperative that the Reform rabbinate do everything within its power consistent with the principles of liberal Judaism to discourage mixed marriage. When called upon to officiate at a mixed marriage, the rabbi shall make every effort to bring the non-Jewish member into Judaism by way of a sincere conversion.

The Central Conference further declares that it is the sacred duty of the rabbi to insist that mixed couples receive thorough instruction in Judaism prior to

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<sup>99</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 72 (1962): 88.

<sup>100</sup>*Ibid.*, 88-89.

their marriage and that they reach a firm pre-marital agreement on the religious climate of the home and the rearing of the children.<sup>101</sup>

The report was signed by Mihaly, Bernstein, Lieberman, and Perilman. Robert Kahn dissented from the committees' findings and was the first of many rabbis to speak in the ensuing, acrimonious discussion. While Kahn had no criticism of the first resolution which would create a standing committee, he could not accept the second proposal. He found the change in CCAR policy "unwise and unnecessary." The existing policy of "discourage" could be interpreted liberally: "not to officiate at an intermarriage; [or] some have interpreted it to discourage up to a point." The proposed policy suggested that if one cannot persuade the non-Jew to convert, then a rabbi would be permitted to officiate at their marriage. Rather than submit a new amendment, he proposed that the Conference pass only the first two paragraphs of the second resolution.<sup>102</sup>

As chairperson of the Committee on the Unaffiliated, Joshua Haberman of Trenton, New Jersey twice during the debate tried to convince the Conference that many of the proposals suggested were identical to the goals of his committee. He unsuccessfully proposed that the Committee on the Unaffiliated play a major role in the study of interfaith marriage recommended in the first resolution.<sup>103</sup>

While the first resolution was adopted quite easily, the second resolution was subject to several attempts to reword, rework, or reject it. After Bernard Bamberger critiqued Kahn's proposal to simply pass the first two paragraphs as leaving "something hanging in the air," Kahn offered a long alternate resolution that essentially restated the 1909 resolution:

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 95-95, 103-04.

In 1909 and again in 1947 the CCAR declared that mixed marriage is contrary to Jewish tradition and ought to be discouraged by the American rabbinate. This resolution, repeated by two generations of rabbis after extensive consideration and debate, as motivated by deep concern for the unity of the home and an equally deep concern for the perpetuation of Judaism. The CCAR reiterates these resolutions. In an age when mixed marriage more and more undermines the stability of the home and the numerical strength of the Jewish faith, it is all the more urgent that our members seek by friendly and intensive counseling to help couples of differing faiths to resolve their differences and to establish united Jewish homes for themselves and their children.<sup>104</sup>

As in the debates of 1909 and 1947, several rabbis called for a more stringent resolution. Joseph Klein of Worcester, Massachusetts blamed rabbis who officiate for opening "the floodgates for mixed marriage on so large a scale." He proposal was "that it is not only the responsibility of members of this Conference to discourage mixed marriage, [but] to refrain altogether from officiating at such marriages."<sup>105</sup>

Victor Reichert of Cincinnati took the opposite viewpoint. He noted that Dr. Mihaly, "who probably knows more of Halacha than anybody in this room, has taken a creative and forward looking position on this matter, and that certain notable leaders of liberal Judaism in our midst retreat at this point." While anti-officiation speakers, such as Robert Kahn, had said that this resolution will pull the rug out from under them, Reichert believed that these same rabbis "stand on the carpet of Orthodox Judaism."<sup>106</sup>

In response to a query, President Minda informed the Conference that if both the Committee's and Kahn's resolutions were tabled, the previous declaration would stand. Unlike the attempts at nearly every previous convention or assembly that has discussed interfaith marriage, in 1962 the proposal to table all the resolutions was passed. The vote was not recorded.<sup>107</sup> The first attempt for tacit approval of officiation by the Conference failed, but

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 96-97

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 97.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 98.

the proponents of a more stringent resolution found no great support either as the Conference settled on maintaining the status quo.

### **The 1960s Committee on Mixed Marriage**

As opposed to 1909 and 1947, when a period of quiet and inactivity followed a major CCAR debate on interfaith marriage, the lack of a resolution, the sharply polarized views, critical articles in the press, as well as the formation of the standing CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, kept the issue very active and very present.

The Mixed Marriage Committee underwent a significant membership change after the 1962 debates. Hillel Fine of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a supporter of officiation, was appointed the new chair. The only holdover from the previous committee was Eugene Mihaly, as Jerome Folkman of Columbus, Ohio and Abraham Shusterman of Baltimore were added. In 1963, Abraham Feldman joined the committee, which remained unchanged until 1967 when Murray Rothman of Newton, Massachusetts replaced Feldman.<sup>108</sup>

During the 1960s, the committee focused on two areas. First, to address the paucity of scientific information, the committee began to research and survey the causes and effects of interfaith marriage. Secondly, the committee attempted to publish a manual on interfaith marriage. Both efforts met frustration.

The committee initiated surveys on several levels. First, they attempted to analyze all the marriages occurring in June 1964 in St. Louis. Secondly, they asked Reform rabbis to keep records of all marriages at which they officiated, as well as those they might have refused, from September 1,

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<sup>108</sup>*Ibid.*, xvi; *CCAR Yearbook* 73 (1963): xv; *CCAR Yearbook* 77 (1967): x.

1964 to September 1, 1967, and to follow up after each interfaith couple for the three years after marriage. Finally, they surveyed the entire membership of the Conference regarding their practices and the effect of interfaith marriage on their synagogue.<sup>109</sup> The results of this third survey were distributed in October 1966 after the 450 responses were processed by the IBM computers at Ohio State University. Despite the stated hopes of Fine, the other surveys, as well as the full, multifaceted report that was once proposed, never reached fruition.<sup>110</sup>

Efforts to produce a guidebook found even more impediments. The committee wanted to publish a manual "which may be given by rabbis to couples contemplating mixed marriage."<sup>111</sup> The leadership of the CCAR had other ideas for the use of such a pamphlet. In his 1964 Presidential Address, Leon Feuer of Toledo, Ohio proposed an increased effort in the study of interfaith marriage. He especially felt the Conference should focus its energies on college age youth.<sup>112</sup> When the Committee on Mixed Marriage requested permission to publish a manual for couples from the Executive Board before the 1965 convention, they were given approval from the President only to "prepare such a manual for the use of high school students."<sup>113</sup>

In 1966, the committee's pamphlet, *Marrying Within Your Faith*, for high school and college students, was circulated for consideration by the

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<sup>109</sup>CCAR Yearbook 74 (1964): 89-90; Hillel A. Fine to CCAR Members, June 1, 1964, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>110</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, Survey Results, 1964, American Jewish Archives; CCAR Yearbook 75 (1965): 76; CCAR Yearbook 77 (1967): 56; CCAR Yearbook 78 (1968): 93; CCAR Yearbook 79 (1969): 103; Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," CCAR Journal, Oct. 1966: 34; Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Ramifications of Realism," CCAR Journal, June 1967: 81-88.

<sup>111</sup>CCAR Yearbook 75 (1965): 76.

<sup>112</sup>CCAR Yearbook 74 (1964): 10.

<sup>113</sup>CCAR Yearbook 75 (1965): 24.



Conference. It was not met with great enthusiasm as some members "find the pamphlet too conservative and others find it too liberal in its basic approach, while many approve of it either in principle or in its present form."<sup>114</sup> The pamphlet had a section of "The Wedding" which cautioned a young interfaith couple that "it may be difficult or impossible to find a suitable religious ceremony."<sup>115</sup> After numerous revisions, including adding the suggestion of a civil ceremony as an alternative to rabbinical officiation, the committee experimentally distributed copies to selected rabbis and Hillel directors for evaluation of its usefulness. Although the "overwhelming majority of those who used it found it beneficial, and recommended publication," in 1969, the Executive Board requested the committee to "strengthen the pamphlet." Ultimately, it was never published.<sup>116</sup>

### Entering the 1970s

As the decade shifted from the sixties to the seventies, the issue of officiation returned to the center of debate in the Reform movement. The frequency of interfaith marriage among Jews had risen in conjunction with the more liberal and open times. Likewise, the number of rabbis who officiated at interfaith marriages also began to increase. Debates on approaches to interfaith marriage and officiation raged in the Jewish press, within synagogues, and at UAHC conventions.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Sidney L. Regner to CCAR Members, April 6, 1966, American Jewish Archives, 1; CCAR *Yearbook* 76 (1966): 66.

<sup>115</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, "Marrying Within Your Faith," [1969?], American Jewish Archives, 11.

<sup>116</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, "Marrying Within Your Faith," draft, April 1966, American Jewish Archives, 7; Committee on Mixed Marriage, "Marrying Within Your Faith," [1969?], American Jewish Archives, 11; CCAR *Yearbook* 77 (1967): 55; CCAR *Yearbook* 78 (1968): 92; CCAR *Yearbook* 79 (1969): 24, 103.

<sup>117</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 99 (1989), Vol. 2: 46.



At the 1969 UAHC biennial in Miami Beach, Joseph Klein and Abraham Klausner of Yonkers, New York debated the issue of officiation. After Klausner called on the movement to revoke the current CCAR position, a "resolution to that effect was promptly introduced from the floor and a lively discussion ensued, from which it became evident that the motion enjoyed wide support among those who were in attendance." Not expecting this sudden event, the UAHC leadership "announced that this session had been intended for educational purposes only and ruled the motion out of order."<sup>118</sup>

The UAHC Pacific Southwest Region was perhaps the only UAHC region to try to take direct action on officiation. David Caplan, a lay leader and the Regional Director of Synagogue Administration, organized a resolution for the February 1969 Pacific Southwest regional biennial. The resolution, first proposed at a regional quarterly meeting, stated that rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages "can be an important factor in influencing the young couple to follow the path of Judaism for themselves and for their children." It called on the CCAR to request that "rabbis re-evaluate their stand on the issue and modify their position so that they will be encouraged to perform such marriages" if the interfaith couple will raise a Jewish family.<sup>119</sup> Opposed by the regional director, Rabbi Erwin Herman, the resolution never made it to the floor of the biennial.<sup>120</sup>

In Executive Board sessions, the CCAR continued to struggle with officiation. At a 1969 pre-convention Executive Board Meeting, Roland Gittelsohn of Boston, Vice President of the CCAR, "informed the Board of a

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<sup>118</sup>Sklare, "Jewish Survival," 57-58.

<sup>119</sup>"7th Regional Biennial Convention Pacific Southwest Council, UAHC," Feb. 22-23, 1969, CCAR Archives.

<sup>120</sup>Erwin Herman, telephone interview, Nov. 25, 1996.

CCAR colleague who comes into his community without invitation to officiate at inter-marriage ceremonies which Gittelsohn has refused."<sup>121</sup> The matter was referred to the Ethics Committee. At the same meeting, the Executive Board passed a motion to instruct the Committee on Mixed Marriage to begin working towards a new Conference position. "Such a plan is to be reported to the Executive Board before its implementation."<sup>122</sup>

As it commenced the search for a new Conference resolution, the Committee on Mixed Marriage was expanded by two. Murray Rothman moved into the committee chair while Paul Gorin of Canton, Ohio and Joel Zion of Lawrence, New York were added. The following year, Jerome Folkman and Eugene Mihaly left the committee and were replaced by Benjamin Rudavsky of Brookline, Massachusetts and Robert Shapiro of Marblehead, Massachusetts.<sup>123</sup>

### 1971 Convention

Gittelsohn, now President of the CCAR, spoke about officiation in a unique joint message with Vice President David Polish at the 1971 convention. In the sixth section of the speech, Gittelsohn reflected on the past debates and resolutions on officiation. "We do not propose a resumption of the substantive debate now. We do recommend most urgently, however, that we amend the only official statement we have ever adopted on this issue."<sup>124</sup> As opposed to 1947, when Solomon Freehof stated that few rabbis officiate, Gittelsohn said that "the plain, inescapable fact today is that our

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<sup>121</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Houston, TX, June 15-16, 1969, CCAR Archives, 3.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., 4.

<sup>123</sup>CCAR Yearbook 79 (1969): x; CCAR Yearbook 80 (1970): x.

<sup>124</sup>CCAR Yearbook 81 (1971): 15. Freehof later modified his statement on the numbers of officiants. In an undated work, "The New Marriage Problems," Freehof wrote, "officiating has become widespread and is being publicly advocated by an increasing number of colleagues. This new situation requires us to restudy our attitude and reconsider our stand towards the practice of officiating at mixed marriages." (2)

members do officiate at a considerable number of mixed-marriage ceremonies....This Conference can no longer turn the other way, pretend that all is well, or escape its responsibility to the matter."<sup>125</sup>

Although the strengthening of the CCAR's statement would not reduce the rate of interfaith marriage, "it will protect those of our men who most need such protection now, and it will contribute substantially to our current struggle for acceptance in Israel as a legitimately Jewish religious alternative."<sup>126</sup> Gittelsohn and Polish proposed a new resolution:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, having officially declared in 1909 and again in 1947 that mixed marriages are contrary to the tradition of the Jewish religion, calls upon its members not officiate at such mixed-marriage ceremonies.<sup>127</sup>

The Committee on the President's Message's narrowly rejected this proposal 70-67. As a compromise, it recommended that the Committee on Mixed Marriage prepare "a full exploration of the issue" for the 1972 convention. The President's Message Committee also reaffirmed the 1909 resolution.<sup>128</sup>

### 1971-1972

With an increased mandate, the Committee on Mixed Marriage was expanded again, this time to ten members. Herman E. Schaalman of Chicago became chair of the committee while Murray Rothman stayed on as a member. The holdovers from the early sixties, Fine and Shusterman, departed, while over the coming months the new additions were Irwin Fishbein of Westfield, New Jersey, Neil Kominsky of Los Angeles, Joseph

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<sup>125</sup>CCAR Yearbook 81 (1971): 16.

<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>128</sup>Ibid., 51; Harvey J. Fields, "Mixed Marriage and the CCAR: Issue and Institution," CCAR Journal, April 1972: 65.

Narot of Miami, and Martin Ryback of Downey, California.<sup>129</sup> Schaalman, who would be the most influential force on the issue of officiation over the next two years, did not himself officiate at interfaith marriages, but also had not given the topic extensive consideration. He quickly came to the conclusion that the rabbinate had to be "an instrument for the preservation of Judaism rather than for anything that seemed to encourage a lessening of the attachment." He saw officiation as such an encouragement.<sup>130</sup>

The committee worked intently during eight meetings over the next two years consulting rabbis, UAHC lay leaders, sociologists, psychologists, politicians, Orthodox and Conservative leaders, and Reform communities abroad. Despite deep ideological differences between members, the "mood in the committee was...remarkably open to the hearing of each other's points of view. Very rarely was there sharp controversy."<sup>131</sup> Fishbein and Kominsky were proponents of officiation. Paul Gorin officiated, but under limited circumstances. When Kominsky went to Israel for a year beginning in the summer of 1972, he was replaced by Alan Fuchs of Elkins Park, Pennsylvania who also officiated under limited circumstances. Martin Ryback and Robert Shapiro also left the committee in 1972 and were replaced by Leonard Kravitz of HUC-JIR in New York and Jordan Pearlson of Toronto.

As the members of the committee met, they were cautioned by the CCAR leadership to make sure that "there is a thorough-going commitment to avoid a split in the Conference over this issue."<sup>132</sup> Before the 1972 convention, a thirty-four page packet of materials was sent out to the entire Conference covering a wide range of opinions and areas related to interfaith

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<sup>129</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 81 (1971): viii.

<sup>130</sup>Herman E. Schaalman, personal interview, Chicago, IL, June 3, 1996.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, New York, NY, Jan. 23-25, 1972, CCAR Archives, 2.

marriage and officiation. The introduction of the packet concluded, "While it does not pretend to be exhaustive in any fashion or even totally balanced, it represents a fair overview of some of the materials covered, and of a number of the areas which were surveyed."<sup>133</sup>

At the 1972 convention in Grossinger, New York, the committee returned with their mandated "full exploration." The entire morning of the second day of the convention was devoted to the presentation of the committee. There were also small *chugim* to discuss the issues. Instead of a single report, seven separate aspects of the topic were presented by members of the committee. This was done, as chairman Herman Schaalman told the Conference, in order reflect the complexity of the issue "and also give an opportunity to a variety of views to be heard on the subject."<sup>134</sup> Among the diverse topics discussed were statistics on the rate of interfaith marriage and *halachic* aspects affecting the decision to officiate. Many of the presentations only touched on the issue of officiation focusing instead on tangential issues such as *K'lal Yisrael* or the status of children born to an interfaith couple. Joseph Narot concluded the presentations of the committee and suggested what they and the Conference should do next as well as what they should not do:

We must not go toward acrimonious and divisive debate. We must not go to reading each other out of the Conference and out of the larger Jewish community because we differ from each other seriously, even radically....We must not go toward the assertion or inference that one or another of us has the only and final truth on the subject. We must not go toward a reversal or a betrayal of the historic character which our Conference has always had – the character of the liberal, internally differing, and bold innovator both in beliefs and practices. In sum, we must not, in the judgment of the members of the committee, certainly not now, alter either the wording or the intention, either toward more permissiveness or less, of our resolution of 1909.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, "A Sampler on Reform Rabbis' Attitudes Toward Mixed Marriage," 1972, HUC Archives, 1.

<sup>134</sup>CCAR Yearbook 82 (1972): 65.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 88.



The Committee on Resolutions, after praising the Committee on Mixed Marriage's work, resolved that recommendations be drawn up "on the various issues of mixed marriage based upon all the input received at the Convention."<sup>136</sup>

### 1972-1973

When the Committee of Mixed Marriages reconvened that November, they planned the form of their presentation at the next convention. They determined that one report would be issued by the chair, with a possible minority report. Schaalman, however, was determined to bring in a unanimous committee report.<sup>137</sup> The committee also was resolved "that it would be detrimental to the Movement and to the Conference to polarize the Convention and that the committee should do anything possible to avoid that danger."<sup>138</sup> The ten rabbis discussed a wide range of issues - not all of them directly related to officiation or even to interfaith marriage. Among the topics considered were officiation (at any wedding) on Shabbat or Yom Tov, personal status in *K'lal Yisrael*, ethical behavior between colleagues, co-officiation with clergy of another faith, officiation by cantors, and job placement.<sup>139</sup> At the end of the November meeting, Murray Rothman was assigned the task of writing a proposed resolution for committee discussion.

That January, Rothman's resolution was distributed. It made no declarations regarding the permissibility of officiation, but offered guidelines

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>137</sup>Schaalman, interview; Irwin H. Fishbein, personal interview, Westfield, NJ, July 9, 1996.

<sup>138</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, New York, NY, Nov. 26-28, 1972, CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., 1-7.



for interfaith couples and for rabbis.<sup>140</sup> By February, the resolution had been thoroughly rewritten and was presented by Schaalman to the Executive Committee for feedback. The draft that Schaalman sent was very similar to the final resolution presented that June.<sup>141</sup> The Executive Committee offered substantive changes to what became the second section of the resolution. These proposed modifications were primarily suggested by Robert Kahn of Houston. The Executive Committee enumerated five condemnations of rabbis who officiate in place of the "minimal standards" proposed in the Committee on Mixed Marriage's resolution.<sup>142</sup> The suggestions were not accepted by the Committee on Mixed Marriage. In the month before the CCAR convention, Paul Gorin submitted a number of suggested changes to this second section altering it to read more as a guideline for those who do not officiate rather than as a list of requirements.<sup>143</sup> Most of his suggestions were incorporated in the final draft.

Two weeks before the Atlanta convention, the final resolution was distributed to the membership of the CCAR. Schaalman, in a cover letter, referred to the resolution as a "center position" and noted that eight of the committee members accepted the full resolution, while Joel Zion dissented from the second section and Irwin Fishbein "dissents and will submit a separate report."<sup>144</sup> Fishbein distributed his dissent to the Conference membership four days later. He wrote that this report was supposed to be

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<sup>140</sup>Murray I. Rothman, "Suggested Resolution on the Matter of Mixed Marriage," Jan. 1973, CCAR Archives.

<sup>141</sup>Herman E. Schaalman, "Report of the Chairman of Committee on Mixed Marriage to the Executive Board of the CCAR," Feb. 12, 1973, CCAR Archives.

<sup>142</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, Grossinger, NY, March 20-21, 1973, CCAR Archives, 5-6.

<sup>143</sup>Paul Gorin to Herman E. Schaalman, May 10, 1973, CCAR Archives, 4-5.

<sup>144</sup>Herman E. Schaalman to CCAR Members, June 1, 1973, CCAR Archives.

included with Schaalman's letter, but that Joseph Glaser had "refused to include the minority report unless I reduced it to a single page."<sup>145</sup>

Fishbein's dissent caused a bit of a controversy in the weeks before the 1973 convention. Schaalman had believed that the compromise resolution would receive unanimous endorsement from the committee, but Fishbein felt unable to accept it. The leadership of the CCAR would not guarantee Fishbein that he would be allowed to present his minority report at the convention. In his letter to the Conference, Fishbein wrote, "I was informed that I was just another member of the Conference with no more right to speak than other members."<sup>146</sup> After publication of Fishbein's letter, the Executive Board met and decided to insure Fishbein's right to speak. At that point, Schaalman felt that he had no ground to deny Joel Zion the right to speak against the section that he opposed.<sup>147</sup>

#### **David Max Eichhorn and Irwin Fishbein**

Fishbein had already been challenging the CCAR leadership. In 1970, he left pulpit life to begin the Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling in Westfield, New Jersey which primarily served interfaith couples. In May 1971, Fishbein decided to update a list of rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages that was originally compiled by David Max Eichhorn of Satellite Beach, Florida and Rego Park, New York.

During the sixties, Eichhorn had been marking off in a CCAR yearbook whenever he heard that a rabbi had officiated at an interfaith marriage. In June of 1969, Eichhorn sent a letter to the membership of the CCAR asking each member, "Do you routinely officiate at a marriage between a Jew and a

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<sup>145</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein to CCAR Members, June 5, 1973, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>147</sup>Fishbein, interview; Schaalman, interview.

non-Jew without requiring the non-Jew to convert to Judaism prior to the marriage?"<sup>148</sup> Eichhorn requested that all rabbis who did officiate to contact him for inclusion on a list of officiating Reform rabbis. Eighty-nine rabbis were willing to be put on a restricted list of officiants, while another seven stated they officiated but did not want their names to be publicized.<sup>149</sup> Eichhorn then created an unrestricted list of "Rabbis to Whom Inter-marriage Situations May Be Referred" which contained the names of 61 Reform rabbis.<sup>150</sup>

In 1970, when Fishbein approached Max Eichhorn about updating the list, Eichhorn showed him the yearbook with the names of all the rabbis who he believed had officiated checked off and remarked that it was more than half of the Conference. Fishbein noted that Eichhorn included rabbis who officiated in very unusual circumstances such as one time only or for a pregnant bride.<sup>151</sup> Eichhorn later stated that he believed a third of Reform rabbis would officiate at interfaith marriages in general, a third would do it in an emergency situation, and the remaining third would not officiate.<sup>152</sup> Eichhorn gave Fishbein permission to take over the maintenance of the list. In 1973, he wrote to Eugene Mihaly that his major goal in creating the list was satisfied.

My original purpose, which was to show that the assertion that only a handful of Reform rabbis was officiating at intermarriages is a crock of shavings, had been fulfilled. None of the 'Reform Halacha' nuts (Gittelsohn, Polish, Plaut, Joe Klein, Braude, Schaalman, Schwarzschild -- a motley assembly of Yeckes and guilt-ridden Orthodox Jews) can any longer say that such rabbis are few and far between.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>148</sup>David Max Eichhorn to CCAR Members, June 3, 1969, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>149</sup>David Max Eichhorn to CCAR Members, Aug. 1, 1969, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>150</sup>David Max Eichhorn to CCAR Members, Sept. 19, 1969, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>151</sup>Fishbein, interview.

<sup>152</sup>"Despite Traditions a Growing Number of Rabbis Officiate at Mixed Marriages," *New York Times*, Sept. 5, 1971: 42.

<sup>153</sup>David Max Eichhorn to Eugene Mihaly, Nov. 1, 1972, American Jewish Archives, 1.

The composition of the Committee on Mixed Marriage bothered Eichhorn from the beginning. He exchanged a series of letters with CCAR President David Polish insisting the committee fairly represent age, geography, and especially practice of officiation. He noted that the initial committee consisted of "Seven middle-aged men, not a single one of whom officiated at intermarriages! Seven middle-aged vestal virgins charged with the responsibility of planning a textbook of instruction on proper physical relationships between the sexes!"<sup>154</sup> Apparently, Eichhorn was unaware that Paul Gorin had been officiating under limited circumstance since the 1960s.<sup>155</sup> Polish defended the composition of the committee by noting that it was essentially the same committee that was in place before he became CCAR President. Polish wrote that he expected the proposal from the 1971 President's Message would be resolved "one way or the other" at the 1971 convention and was surprised by the call for a re-assessment for 1972.<sup>156</sup>

Perhaps in response to Eichhorn's complaints, Irwin Fishbein and Neil Kominsky were initially added to the Committee on Mixed Marriage. Before Fishbein accepted, he informed Polish of his plans to update Eichhorn's list and that he "didn't want that to be a secret from him." According to Fishbein, Polish replied that if he had known that initially then he would not have asked him.<sup>157</sup> These additions did not impress Eichhorn. He felt that Fishbein was not one of the true experts in the field and that Kominsky, having been ordained in 1970, was a complete novice. By September, Joseph

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<sup>154</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL, 1974), 161.

<sup>155</sup>Paul Gorin to Joseph Glaser, Dec. 20, 1979, CCAR Archives.

<sup>156</sup>David Polish to David Max Eichhorn, Sept. 3, 1971, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>157</sup>Fishbein, interview.

Narot, who officiated in limited circumstances, was also added to the committee.<sup>158</sup>

Fishbein was now maintaining the ever-growing list of Reform rabbis who officiated. His 1971 update contained 78 rabbis on the publicized list and 101 on the restricted list.<sup>159</sup> As Eichhorn's list had, Fishbein's list caused dissension among the CCAR leadership. When Eichhorn first published his list, Norman Mirsky called for sanctions of all the rabbis whose names appeared on the list for fear that it "will encourage new rabbis to perform" interfaith marriages.<sup>160</sup> Joshua Haberman of Washington, DC proposed bringing Eichhorn up on charges to the CCAR Ethics Committee because Eichhorn would distribute the list to lay people who might use it to only hire rabbis who officiated. This resulted in a nine-month flood of angry correspondence between Eichhorn, Haberman, and Ethics Committee chair Jacob Shankman of New Rochelle, New York, but nothing more.<sup>161</sup>

Similarly, shortly after the 1972 CCAR convention, it was reported to the Executive Board "that a member of the Conference is distributing a list of rabbis who perform mixed marriages. It was recommended that this matter be referred to the Committee on Ethics." As this violated no part of the CCAR's ethics code, no further action was taken.<sup>162</sup> By the 1973 convention, Fishbein's list contained the names of 119 rabbis as well as "more than 100 other rabbis who officiate at [interfaith] marriages but who for one reason or another do not wish their names to be included in the public list."<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup>David Max Eichhorn to David Polish, Sept. 14, 1971, American Jewish Archives, 1; Polish to Eichhorn, Sept. 1971, 2.

<sup>159</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein to CCAR Members, Aug. 6, 1971, CCAR Archives.

<sup>160</sup>Norman Mirsky, "Mixed Marriage and the Reform Rabbinate," *Midstream*, Jan. 1970: 42.

<sup>161</sup>Haberman Case File, 1972-1973, Eichhorn Archives.

<sup>162</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, Grossinger, NY, June 15, 1972, CCAR Archives, 6.

<sup>163</sup>Irving Spiegel, "More Rabbis Help Jews Marry Non-Jews," *New York Times*, Dec. 26, 1973, 42.



Fishbein's dissent from the committee's resolution was therefore not surprising. According to Fishbein, Joseph Glaser, Executive Vice President of the CCAR, allegedly told him after the 1973 convention that "'as long as I have anything to say on it, you will never be a member of any other Conference committee.' ...And he kept his word."<sup>164</sup>

### 1973 Convention

As the Conference approached, the tensions multiplied. Anticipating the debate, Roland Gittelsohn drafted a resolution passed by the CCAR Executive Board in March 1973. It stated that despite the differences of opinion among Conference (and Executive Board) Members, the CCAR needed to "conduct our discussion as colleagues and with *derech eretz*. Let us respect each other's right to differ and refrain from impugning the motive of those with whom we disagree. Above all, let us so behave, during and after this convention, that -- whatever the outcome -- the unity and viability of the Central Conference will be assured."<sup>165</sup>

Schaalman was being urged to change the resolution to include penalties and sanctions against rabbis who officiated. He refused. "I made it very clear at the time that as a liberal movement I did not think, other than persuasion and calls to conscience...no penalties ought to be used, and no penalties ought to be imposed."<sup>166</sup>

Members of the Conference began to publicize their opinions to each other even before the convention. Roy Rosenberg, a rabbi in Brooklyn, sent an eight page article to the entire Conference explaining why he officiated at interfaith marriages including an ardent defense of co-officiation with

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<sup>164</sup>Fishbein, interview.

<sup>165</sup>Minutes, Committee on Mixed Marriage, March 1973, 6.

<sup>166</sup>Schaalman, interview.



Christian clergy. Rosenberg thought that this was the only way he would be able to get his position heard.<sup>167</sup> On April 25, 1973, David Max Eichhorn and fifteen other rabbis who officiated at interfaith marriages, sent a letter to the CCAR membership calling for status quo by leaving the 1909 resolution in place. "Any more specific resolution on this subject will serve no meaningful purpose and may well cause a serious breach both within the Conference and the American Reform Movement."<sup>168</sup> The petition gathered support and a week before the convention, 187 rabbis had signed the declaration that "the 1909 statement on intermarriage should be retained and that the right of every member of the CCAR to interpret and implement that resolution in whatever manner his conscience dictates should in no way be curtailed."<sup>169</sup> By the end of the 1973 convention, a total of 222 would have signed the petition.<sup>170</sup>

Rabbis weren't alone in expressing their trepidation about the upcoming convention. Mrs. Martin Sondheimer of Lima, Ohio, along with eleven other singles and couples from the congregation in Lima, sent a letter

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<sup>167</sup>Roy Rosenberg, telephone interview, Feb. 21, 1997; Roy A. Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," June 1, 1973, HUC Archives. Rosenberg published an almost identical text, "On Mixed Marriage," in *Issues of the American Council for Judaism*, Winter 1986: 6-8.

<sup>168</sup>David Max Eichhorn et al., to CCAR Members, April 25, 1973, CCAR Archives. The sixteen men were: Murray Blackman of New Orleans; David Max Eichhorn of Satellite Beach, Florida; Jerome D. Folkman of Columbus, Ohio; Leon Fram of Detroit; Abraham N. Franzblau of HUC-JIR in New York; Arthur N. Gilbert of New York City; Samuel Glasner of Santa Monica, California; Albert S. Goldstein of Chelmsford, Massachusetts; Harold D. Hahn of Cincinnati; Joseph H. Levine of the University of Rochester; Leo Lichtenberg of Adelphi University; Nathan A. Perilman of New York City; Alvan D. Rubin of St. Louis; Eugene J. Sack of Brooklyn; Abraham Shusterman of Baltimore; and Manfred Swarsensky of Madison, Wisconsin.

<sup>169</sup>David Max Eichhorn et al., petition, June 1973, American Jewish Archives; "Conscience Only Guide 187 Reform Rabbis Ask," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 15, 1973: 1. Original in all capital letters. The ultimate sponsors of the petition were almost identical to the authors of the initial letter. Stanley Brav of Cincinnati was the only addition. Abraham Franzblau was a signatory on the petition, but was not listed as one of its sponsors. Manfred Swarsensky was not listed as a signatory of the later petition, but is listed on an earlier version (David Max Eichhorn et al., earlier draft of petition, [June 1973], American Jewish Archives).

<sup>170</sup>"Action Said Injurious to Judaism's Survival," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 29, 1973: 1.

to Joseph Glaser urging the CCAR to be as liberal as the Catholic Church regarding interfaith marriage. If the CCAR passes a resolution forbidding officiation, the letter warned, it will "influence many young people to join Christian Churches, who wisely perform such ceremonies."<sup>171</sup> The intensity grew in articles and exchanges between rabbis. "Many thought the sky was falling," recalled Dr. Alfred Gottschalk.<sup>172</sup>

On Tuesday, June 19, 1973, on the second day of the CCAR convention in Atlanta, Georgia, at 7:45 pm, the discussion finally began. Herman Schaalman, as chair of the Committee on Mixed Marriage, reviewed the committee's mandate to find a new resolution for the Conference. The 1909 resolution was "a quotable public statement," but was so vague as to allow "option and *hechsher* for diametrically opposite views and practices concerning mixed marriage."<sup>173</sup> The committee had looked for "a stand on which we could rest the issue of mixed marriage with integrity, Jewish authenticity, and the secure trust that we could deal with the problem of mixed marriage henceforth with unquestioned responsibility toward all."<sup>174</sup>

This statement, while repeating the position of 1909, now urged Reform rabbis not to participate in officiation at interfaith weddings. However, the resolution recognized the right to disagree. "Dissent is a right, not a privilege granted by a majority. It is a right inherent in our Conference without which it would break radically with its past. It is a right belonging to those who conscientiously differ from what we trust will become the declared standard of the CCAR on mixed marriage."<sup>175</sup> The proposed resolution read:

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<sup>171</sup>Elizabeth Sondheimer et al. to Joe Glazer [sic], May 1, 1973, CCAR Archives.

<sup>172</sup>Alfred Gottschalk, personal interview, Cincinnati, OH, Jan. 27, 1997.

<sup>173</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 59.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., 62.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, recalling its stand adopted in 1909, "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged," now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage.

Recognizing that historically the CCAR encompasses members holding divergent interpretations of Jewish tradition, the Conference calls upon these members who dissent from this declaration:

1. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage unless the couple agrees to undertake, prior to marriage, a course of study of Judaism equivalent to that required for conversion;
2. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage for a member of a congregation served by a Conference member unless there had been prior consultation with that Rabbi;
3. to refrain from co-officiating or sharing with non-Jewish clergy in the solemnization of a mixed marriage;
4. to refrain from officiating at a mixed marriage on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*.

In order to keep open every channel to Judaism and *K'lal Yisrael* for those who have already entered into mixed marriage, the CCAR calls upon its members:

1. to assist fully in educating children of such mixed marriage as Jews;
2. to provide the opportunity for conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and
3. to encourage a creative and consistent cultivation of involvement in Jewish community and the synagogue.<sup>176</sup>

Schaalman's report was followed by the minority reports of Irwin Fishbein and Joel Zion. Fishbein stated that he saw a rabbi's refusal to officiate as a rejection of the couple -- "From a Jewish point of view, such behavior is irresponsible; from a human point of view intolerable."<sup>177</sup>

By refusing to officiate we slam a door that may be only slightly ajar. Let us keep this door open. Let us trust enough in the value of our Jewish heritage to believe that when couples are given support and encouragement they will choose to identify with our people and become an active part of the Jewish people.<sup>178</sup>

Fishbein accepted the "positive approach" of the third paragraph of the resolution. However, the first paragraph would "transform this Conference from a deliberative into a legislative body." He rejected the second paragraph as an infringement on the right to dissent which had always been "unconditional....There is a grave danger, if the second paragraph of this

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., 63-64.

<sup>177</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>178</sup>Ibid., 65.

resolution is adopted, that the liberal stance of the CCAR will be seriously eroded."<sup>179</sup> Rejecting the "spirit and the content of the first two paragraphs," Fishbein urged that resolution be defeated and the committee be directed to further study all the aspects of the issue.<sup>180</sup>

Zion rejected the second paragraph of the resolution for entirely different reasons than Fishbein. He saw the document as inconsistent; "while the resolution is offered as an organic unity, it is in reality signaling a red and a green light, a stop and a go at the same time. It is, therefore, confusing and permissive."<sup>181</sup> Calling for a clearer statement, Zion proposed that the current resolution be passed with the second section eliminated.

[This] would be a step forward in clarifying what the historical role of the Rabbi has always been: that of defender of the faith, protector of its cultural and ethical resources, and officiant at life-cycle ceremonies that will insure the furtherance of Jewish religious life. A statement which is weak, open to contrasting interpretations, ambivalently flashing red and green lights, is not a standard but a roadblock.<sup>182</sup>

After the minority reports, a motion, made by Hayim Goren Perelmuter of Chicago, was passed to divide the resolution into three separate sections, each paragraph to be considered separately.<sup>183</sup> This was unexpected by the Committee on Mixed Marriage. They had been assured by the CCAR leadership that the resolution would be considered as a whole. Several of the committee members who themselves officiated, had agreed to support the resolution only as a unified measure.<sup>184</sup>

Nevertheless, the hostile debate on section one, chaired by CCAR President David Polish, began as numerous rabbis implored, cajoled, and

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>180</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>181</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>182</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., 70; "Machine Wins Fight to Ban Intermarriage," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 29, 1973: 1.

<sup>184</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein to author, July 15, 1996, Author's Archives.

argued back and forth. Former committee member Neil Kominsky, now of Windsor, Connecticut, saw the resolution as a direct affront to those who officiated. By passing this resolution "it is saying something to a very significant portion of its membership that disagrees with it. You are saying that we do not really belong here - but we do belong here."<sup>185</sup>

Moses Weiler, Vice Chairman of MARAM, urged the American Reform Rabbinate not to drive a wedge between themselves and the rest of the Reform Jewish world.<sup>186</sup> Ronald Millstein of Laurelton, New York called the first part of the resolution

the greatest unfinished business that this Conference has before it....And now finally, more than sixty years later, we are called upon to complete the sentence which should have been completed in 1909 and should have been completed in 1947 and should have been completed in 1962 and should have been completed last year at Grossinger's.<sup>187</sup>

Millstein found a precedent for the resolution in both magnitude and principle. "Our movement is at a crossroads. This is the most important issue since Zionism."<sup>188</sup> In 1943, he recollected, the CCAR called upon its members to disband the American Council for Judaism and did not impose sanctions on members who might remain members.<sup>189</sup> "Once again we are at a crossroad. Which way will we turn: outward toward permissiveness and encroaching assimilation, or inward toward the discipline of the tradition?"<sup>190</sup>

Charles Lippman of Pearl River, New York lamented "that there are those who feel they have the right to dictate to others....Let each of us decide for ourselves which marriages we shall perform or not perform."<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 73.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>187</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>188</sup>Ibid., 78.

<sup>189</sup>CCAR Yearbook 53 (1943): 98. That resolution passed by a vote of 137-45.

<sup>190</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 79.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., 79.



A letter was read by Roland Gittelsohn which had been signed by eight of the eleven living CCAR past Presidents urging that "the time has come...when our Conference must speak out. For the sake of self-respect, within our Movement and of integrity between Reform Judaism and *k'lal Yisrael*, we vigorously recommend that Central Conference...[urge] its members not to officiate at mixed-marriage ceremonies."<sup>192</sup>

After the allotted, hour long debate had long passed, summary arguments on the first section were offered. Dr. Eugene Mihaly spoke against it. Mihaly stated that the debate over officiation, whatever position one took, is לשם שמים. However:

The resolution proposed by the committee is regressive; contrary to the demands of God here and now; contrary to the demands of Judaism; yes, contrary to the demands of true *Halachah* as I understand it.<sup>193</sup>

I did not join the Central Conference of American Rabbis to be told what the *Halachah* is. I attended *Yeshivot* and the Hebrew Union College for that;...I did not join the CCAR to be told what to believe. I daily study and pray and struggle to discover that. I certainly did not join the CCAR to be told what I as an ordained Rabbi may or may not do. I embraced Reform Judaism to reject that.<sup>194</sup>

Mihaly concluded: "I plead with you...for the sake of Reform Judaism and this Conference....Vote down this resolution of the committee and uphold the historic position of the Conference."<sup>195</sup>

Speaking in favor of part one was Jordan Pearlson, a member of the Committee on Mixed Marriage. Pearlson argued that rabbis are used as a

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<sup>192</sup>Ibid., 80. The statement was signed by Abraham Feldman of Hartford, Connecticut; Leon Feuer of Toledo, Ohio; Solomon Freehof of Pittsburgh; Jacob Rader Marcus of Cincinnati; Roland Gittelsohn of Boston; Albert Minda of Minneapolis; Jacob Rudin of Great Neck, New York; and Jacob Weinstein of San Francisco. The 1973 CCAR *Yearbook* listed Bernard Bamberger of New York City; Philip Bernstein of Rochester, New York; and Levi Olan of Dallas, Texas as also having also signed it. An errata sheet corrected the signatories. According to Irwin Fishbein, David Max Eichhorn believed the misprint in the CCAR *Yearbook* was intentional (Fishbein to author, July 1996).

<sup>193</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>194</sup>Ibid., 86.

<sup>195</sup>Ibid., 87.



wedge between child and parents. If the rabbi officiates, the child can return home and say to his or her parents, "If the Rabbi will do the ceremony, then what on earth can you do to me by way of objection to say that it shouldn't be done?"<sup>196</sup> Failure to pass the resolution would tacitly imply approval of mixed marriage.

Therefore, instead of discouraging mixed marriages, the failure to pass a clear, positive position on the part of the Central Conference in effect would have the dynamic impact of encouraging them.<sup>197</sup>

He concluded: "I think the further discussion of this material depends primarily upon the passage of this first paragraph. I think this first paragraph performs functions which are absolutely essential, both to our self-respect and to the directions which we may influence persuasively in the evolution of Judaism here in the United States."<sup>198</sup>

Before calling for a vote, CCAR President Polish read a statement signed by four of the members of the Committee on Mixed Marriage:

Because we of the majority group of the committee believe the balanced resolution was destroyed by the procedures, we of the majority now will vote against Part I because it is alone.<sup>199</sup>

This statement was signed by Narot, Gorin, Fuchs, and Rothman. According to Irwin Fishbein, some of the committee members felt betrayed by the division of the resolution. Anticipating the failure of section two, they hoped to defeat the whole resolution rather than pass only section one. Early in the debate they had tried to speak to the Conference to announce the removal of their endorsement of the resolution, but were denied.<sup>200</sup> The first section of

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<sup>196</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>197</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>200</sup>Fishbein, Interview; Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 165-66.

the resolution passed by a vote of 321 in favor and 196 against or 62% of the votes in favor of the resolution.<sup>201</sup>

The Conference now turned to the second section of the resolution which both Fishbein and Zion has opposed. Again, many rabbis spoke in the subsequent acrimonious debate. The first was Simeon J. Maslin of Chicago who made a proposal that, like the division of the resolution into parts, changed the course of the evening's debate.

Like Zion, Maslin saw the resolution as "a case of green light-red light. When we entangle this entire resolution as it stands with the second section, we make the CCAR look ridiculous. I therefore move that we refer back to the Executive Board for referral" to appropriate committees each of the sections of the second section.<sup>202</sup>

In response, the subsequent speakers addressed less the nature of the resolution and more the motion to commit. Rabbis on all sides of the issue spoke in favor and in opposition to the motion. For example, Maurice Davis, of White Plains, New York spoke in favor of committing the section in order to make the Conference's stand against officiation clear.

Section One stands beautifully by itself. Section Two deals with certain grievances that can be best handled in the proper committees, and let history then record that when this Conference was forced to take a stand on that night it, did.<sup>203</sup>

Robert Bergman of Irvine, California also wanted a clear Conference stand against officiation. However, he thought that was best handled by directly voting on the section at this time. Otherwise people might misinterpret the decision to send this section to committees "that the Reform

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<sup>201</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 83 (1973): 89. According to the list of those "Registered at the 1973 Convention" found in the 1973 CCAR *Yearbook*, xxv-xxvii, only 497 rabbis were registered at the conference. The vote count for section one totals 517 votes. The source of the discrepancy of the twenty additional votes is unclear.

<sup>202</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>203</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

Movement really wanted to mitigate its stand....Therefore I personally would like to see it put to a vote tonight, and I personally would like to see it put away tonight."<sup>204</sup>

To a lesser extent, a similar split occurred within pro-officiation forces. Most rabbis who officiated insisted the Conference not commit the resolution, but pass it that evening. Randall Falk of Nashville argued that the second section "recognizes the freedom of dissent within the Conference. It recognizes that even though the principles of the majority have been stated, we recognize in this Conference the freedom of dissent."<sup>205</sup> Similarly, Bruce Warshal of Ann Arbor, Michigan worried that without the second section, "the whole thing becomes much stronger than was intended by the original committee."<sup>206</sup> Roy Rosenberg also favored voting on this section that night, but he wanted it defeated. Rosenberg thought the guidelines were coercive and that the Conference had no business defining his rabbinical practice.<sup>207</sup>

Bernard Bamberger, on the other hand, favored sending the motion to committee. He found the individual sections to be unclear and a modification in the Code of Ethics. For example, he criticized the insistence that rabbis not officiate at an interfaith marriage on Shabbat, "quite oblivious to the fact that Rabbis officiate at unmixed marriages on *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*. Instead of considering these manifest deficiencies, I think the simplest thing to do is to refer the section back to committee."<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>Ibid., 91.

<sup>205</sup>Ibid., 90.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>207</sup>Rosenberg, interview.

<sup>208</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 92.

Herman Schaalman, summarizing the arguments against committing section two to committees, urged his anti-officiation colleagues to let the resolution "reflect the actual condition of our Conference today."<sup>209</sup>

Those of us who wanted a strong stand have already achieved that by the vote that was taken a while ago. It is now equally important that we do that of which we are also capable...and not to strike wounds as will perhaps be beyond healing.<sup>210</sup>

Joshua Haberman spoke in favor of referral to committees.

We should not spoil this historic moment of decision on the basic principles by inflaming both sides anew with a whole series of specific and subsidiary details....We have waited since 1909 to reach the point stated in Part I. We can wait until 1974 to move another step in clarification of the matters dealt with in Part II.<sup>211</sup>

The vote was 211 in favor of referral and 189 opposed. However, after a recount, the revised total was 221 for referral and 198 opposed or 53% in favor of referral.<sup>212</sup>

By referring section two to committees, the statement on the right of rabbis to dissent was lost from the resolution. Bruce Warshal had warned against such a situation saying that for those who had voted against section one, "our faces should not be ground into the mud."<sup>213</sup> The second section, according to committee member Alan Fuchs, was designed "to preserve the freedom and the integrity of the members of this Conference....This section cannot be committed without endangering the nature of Central Conference of American Rabbis."<sup>214</sup> Likewise Herman Schaalman believed the second section was "the bridge between the extremes." Eliminating that, "in a way, took the heart out of the whole thing."<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>210</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., 95. Note that 98 fewer people voted on this section than on the first section.

<sup>213</sup>Ibid., 92.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., 91-92.

<sup>215</sup>Schaalman, interview.

In order to avoid a split in the Conference, an amendment was proposed at the beginning of the discussion on section three.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis recognizes that historically its members have held and continue to hold divergent interpretations of Jewish tradition.<sup>216</sup>

The amendment passed by a vote of 209-168 or 55% in favor and received a "resounding ovation."<sup>217</sup> Section three, now amended, was passed without dissent by a voice vote.<sup>218</sup> Summarizing the five hour debate, David Polish recalled the similar dispute over Zionism "held thirty years ago under equally impassioned circumstances in which some of the rhetoric was much more violent and which lasted until about two or three o'clock in the morning." At the time, the Conference feared a significant split. "The fear of the Conference did not materialize; the alienation was healed, members came back into the Conference from the American Council for Judaism." Similarly, "I hope time will heal the present divisions of this Conference."<sup>219</sup>

The 1973 Resolution, the first change in CCAR policy regarding interfaith marriage in 64 years, and the first official statement directly dealing with officiation, read:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis, recalling its stand adopted in 1909, "that mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged," now declares its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis recognizes that historically its members have held and continue to hold divergent interpretations of Jewish tradition.

In order to keep open every channel to Judaism and *K'lal Yisrael* for those who have already entered into mixed marriage, the CCAR calls upon its members:

1. to assist fully in educating children of such mixed marriage as Jews;
2. to provide the opportunity for conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, and

<sup>216</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 96.

<sup>217</sup>Robert I. Kahn to CCAR Members, July 3, 1973, CCAR Archives, 1; Irving Spiegel, "American Reform Rabbinate Votes Its Opposition to Having Its Members Officiate at Mixed Marriages," *New York Times*, June 21, 1973. 42 fewer people voted on this amendment than on section two.

<sup>218</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 96; Kahn to CCAR, July 1973, 1.

<sup>219</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 96.



3. to encourage a creative and consistent cultivation of involvement in Jewish community and the synagogue."<sup>220</sup>

### Breakaways and Bans

Throughout the preparation for the 1973 debate in Atlanta, the CCAR leadership and the Committee on Mixed Marriage worked diligently to avoid a split in the Conference over the issue. However, in the aftermath of the debate, many felt that the whole Conference had been engineered to pass the resolution opposing interfaith marriages. David Max Eichhorn bitterly criticized the entire process, especially the actions of CCAR President and Vice-President David Polish and Robert Kahn, in his book *Jewish Inter marriages: Fact and Fiction*. Eichhorn wrote the book "in protest" because he felt the committee had been loaded, the Conference misled, and the convention set up to guarantee passage of the resolution.<sup>221</sup> The *Jewish Post and Opinion* offered a somewhat similar analysis in an article published immediately after the convention, "Machine Wins Fight to Ban Inter marriage." The article stated that "it began to be clear that preparation had been carefully laid to subvert the report of the committee in favor of a stand which was clearly a hard line."<sup>222</sup> Likewise, Sylvin Wolf wrote in his doctoral dissertation on the CCAR, "It appears that the activity in the CCAR between 1971 and 1973 was something of a charade. The vote might have been taken in 1971 and have been the same."<sup>223</sup>

"We are now becoming the (de)centralized Conference of American Rabbis," warned Philip Schechter of Englishtown, New Jersey during the

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<sup>220</sup>Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>221</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages: Fact and Fiction*, revised and unpublished (1984), Eichhorn Archives, 8; Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 160-68.

<sup>222</sup>"Machine Wins Fight," June 1973, 1.

<sup>223</sup>Sylvin Lawrence Wolf, "Reform Judaism as Process: A Study of the Central Conference of American Rabbis 1960-1975" (Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 1978), 274.



debates.<sup>224</sup> With the passage of the first section of the resolution, he wondered, how will the Conference "find a way for forty-one per cent to continue to be members in good standing of the Conference."

If you fail, this Conference will definitely be divided and there will be members of this Conference who will no longer be here. If this is the choice, that we go, that you no longer want us, and this is exactly how many of those you have turned away feel - I ask you, will Judaism be better off, will our movement be stronger, and will we have served the living God?<sup>225</sup>

As feared, a breakaway group was founded the day after the Atlanta vote. David Max Eichhorn, along with Michael A. Barenbaum of Worcester, Massachusetts, Murray Blackman of New Orleans, Albert S. Goldstein of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, and Charles D. Lippman, met the in the afternoon of June 20 and formed the Concerned Members of the Conference. They issued the following statement:

We believe this action of the Conference will be injurious to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people and that it is not responsive to the realities of contemporary Jewish life and the needs of our youth.<sup>226</sup>

The Concerned Members of the Conference, chaired by Eichhorn, felt that the CCAR resolution was "not an accurate reflection of the real sentiment of the entire Conference membership."<sup>227</sup> An initial meeting was held November 8, 1973 in New York, the day before the UAHC biennial. Thirty-five CCAR members attended and heard presentations by Goldstein and Mihaly on "The Relevance of Halachah to Reform Judaism."<sup>228</sup> Calling upon other CCAR members to join them, Concerned Members had 78 adherents by December and 85 by the following April.<sup>229</sup> That winter, the break-off group published "Our Statement of Concern," expressing deep

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<sup>224</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 93.

<sup>225</sup>Ibid., 94.

<sup>226</sup>"Action Said Injurious," 1; Spiegel, "American Reform Rabbinate."

<sup>227</sup>David Max Eichhorn to CCAR, Aug. 1, 1973, Eichhorn Archives, 1.

<sup>228</sup>David Max Eichhorn to CCAR, Dec. 1973, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>229</sup>"List of Concerned Members of the Conference," Dec. 1, 1973, Eichhorn Archives.

reservations regarding what is currently happening in Reform Judaism that is illiberal, regressive, coercive."<sup>230</sup>

At the behest of Eugene Mihaly, sympathetic lay leaders were invited to join. With potential membership of both rabbis and lay people, the group changed its name to the Association for a Progressive Reform Judaism (APRJ) in September 1974 and held a national convention in St. Louis on November 10-11. According to Mihaly, the APRJ initially attracted some 250 rabbis who favored officiation.<sup>231</sup> Mihaly became its first president with Murray Blackman as Vice-Chairman, Jack Bemporad of Dallas as Treasurer, and Alvin Reines of HUC-Cincinnati as Secretary.<sup>232</sup> In 1975, the APRJ published a statement on the issues they felt were dividing the Reform movement: "Reform Judaism and Halacha," "Reform Judaism and Israel," and "The question of the relationship between an ethnic-national as opposed to a religious Jewish identity." Neither interfaith marriage or officiation were mentioned directly, but issues of rabbinical freedom and autonomy pervaded the document.<sup>233</sup>

Initially, the APRJ had considered forming a separate organization from the CCAR. Nearly forty members of the UAHC Board were ready to join the APRJ. Concerned with the possibility of splintering the Movement, leaders of the Union, including Rabbi Alexander Schindler, President of the UAHC, met with Dr. Mihaly. Mihaly decided that he had no interest in

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<sup>230</sup>Concerned Members of the Conference, "Our Statement of Concern" [Dec. 1973?], Eichhorn Archives, 1.

<sup>231</sup>Eugene Mihaly to David Max Eichhorn, Sept. 21, 1973, Eichhorn Archives, 1-2; Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York, 1993), 102; Judah Cahn, "The Struggle within Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal*, Summer 1975: 65; "New Liberal Caucus in CCAR," *Reform Judaism*, Nov. 1974: 7; Eugene Mihaly, telephone interview, Nov. 26, 1996.

<sup>232</sup>Jack Bemporad, "Issues Confronting the Association for a Progressive Reform Judaism," *American Jewish Archives*, 3.

<sup>233</sup>*Ibid.*, 1; Wolf, "Reform Judaism as Process," 269.

beginning another bureaucratic organization and limited the APRJ to a caucus within the CCAR. "Which means I doomed it death," Mihaly recalled later. With Alvan Rubin of St. Louis as its second chairman, the APRJ eventually had over three hundred rabbis affiliated with it. The caucus, which held several additional meetings, soon faded away.<sup>234</sup>

Addressing some of the deep concerns of the Conference, new CCAR president Robert Kahn wrote to the membership on July 3, two weeks after the Atlanta convention. He recounted the votes on the different sections of the resolution and reflected that "the entire debate despite the deep emotions it engendered, was conducted on a high level."<sup>235</sup> As he interpreted the resolution, it clarified the word "discourage" from the 1909 resolution as "non-participation." The resolution, he suggested, would be used to strengthen the hand of those rabbis that did not officiate. He dismissed as groundless any notions that the resolution would result in sanctions or future "authoritarian demands" on the Conference. "Any attempt to read more into the resolution than was there is a disservice to the Conference."<sup>236</sup>

Sanctions were not forthcoming from the CCAR, however the New York Board of Rabbis (NYBR), an organization for rabbis from all three major movements, was not similarly minded. Earlier in 1973, an attempt was made to bar membership to the NYBR to any rabbi who officiated at interfaith marriages because these rabbis were "guilty of helping to destroy the cornerstone upon which the house of Israel rests."<sup>237</sup> Although some NYBR members feared such an attempt would be divisive within the organization

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<sup>234</sup>Mihaly, interview. Moneys that remained from the APRJ when it finally disbanded were used by Mihaly to start the Israel Bettan Memorial Prize for sermons at HUC Cincinnati.

<sup>235</sup>Kahn to CCAR, July 1973, 1.

<sup>236</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>237</sup>William Berkowitz, "A Statement on Mixed Marriage by NYBR President," *The NYBR Bulletin* 29, no. 4 (Feb./March 1973): 1.

and others felt that they should wait until after the June 1973 CCAR convention in Atlanta, a resolution was passed to deny such membership by the officers and Board of Governors in a nine to one vote. However, as this was a change in NYBR membership, it was pointed out that this decision was a constitutional issue and required a two-thirds vote for passage. After NYBR President William Berkowitz informed the membership of the process, a poll was conducted to gauge the opinions of New York rabbis. 339 rabbis favored the membership change including 30 Reform rabbis. Of the 46 who opposed the change, 40 were Reform and 6 were Conservative.<sup>238</sup>

On February 7, 1973, the plenary met and voted on the amendment. Sixty-seven rabbis favored the constitutional amendment and 37 opposed it. This was three votes short of the two-thirds needed for passage. Instead, the NYBR overwhelmingly passed a "strong resolution condemning rabbis who perform mixed marriages."<sup>239</sup> The Rabbinical Alliance of America, an Orthodox group, was outraged that the amendment did not carry and called upon its membership to resign from the NYBR.<sup>240</sup> Harry Essrig brought charges to the CCAR Ethics Committee against the three Reform sponsors of the resolution: Judah Cahn, Ronald Millstein and Herbert Rose. He said their conduct rendered "a disservice to the CCAR" and was "unbecoming colleagues."<sup>241</sup> Apparently, no subsequent action was taken by the CCAR Ethics Committee.

The NYBR resolution was not the first attempt of a community rabbinical organization to challenge members on their stance on officiation.

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<sup>238</sup>Ibid., 1; William Berkowitz to NYBR Members, Feb. 16, 1973, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>239</sup>Berkowitz, "A Statement on Mixed Marriage," 1.

<sup>240</sup>"RAA Urges Orthodox Rabbis to Resign from New York Board of Rabbis," *JTA Daily News Bulletin*, Feb. 15, 1973: 4.

<sup>241</sup>Harry Essrig to Jacob Shankman, Feb. 28, 1973, American Jewish Archives, 1, 4.

For example, in 1964, the Essex, New Jersey Board of Rabbis unsuccessfully attempted to restrict its members from officiation in a 7-5 vote. In 1968, they were able to pass a resolution stating their opposition to officiation and their concern that couples "may be delude into the false assumption that they have been married according to the Jewish rite."<sup>242</sup>

On June 29, only days after the Atlanta convention, the NYBR revisited the issue and this time passed the amendment to make membership open only to "rabbis who neither officiate at mixed marriages nor make referrals to rabbis who officiate at mixed marriages." Rabbis who were currently members, however, would not be expelled. Joseph Glaser criticized William Berkowitz for setting up a collision between Orthodox and Reform rabbis. He "hoped to find internal means within the Board to rescind the action. He said, if necessary, he would take the issue before a Jewish court." The final resolution was signed by five rabbis: two Orthodox rabbis, Gilbert Klaperman and Norman Frimer, President Berkowitz, and two Reform rabbis, Judah Cahn and Herbert Rose.<sup>243</sup> Although the NYBR resolution is still on the books, it has not been enforced.<sup>244</sup>

Having fulfilled its mandate of revising the CCAR policy on interfaith marriage, the Committee on Mixed Marriage was disbanded. Schaalman, who had struggled for two years to bring in a unifying resolution, had seen "overnight, the whole work of the committee" collapse. "It was a profound disappointment to me."<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup>"Rabbinic Board Nixes Ban on Intermarrying Rabbis," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, Dec. 11, 1964; "With Rabbinic Groups," *Bulletin of the New York Board of Rabbis* 35, no. 1 (Sept. 1986): 8.

<sup>243</sup>"Intermarriage Scene Moves From Atlanta to New York," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, July 6, 1973: 1.

<sup>244</sup>Rosenberg, interview.

<sup>245</sup>Schaalman, interview.



## Entering the 1980s

After the intensity of 1973, the Reform movement generally stepped away from the issue of officiation at interfaith marriages in the official arena. At conventions for the rest of the decade, the issue was hardly mentioned. In 1980, Joel Zion led a practicum, one of the eight choices offered, on how to follow CCAR guidelines on interfaith marriage in light of the 1973 resolution.<sup>246</sup> In 1985, a workshop was offered among thirteen others on "Responding to Requests for Mixed Marriage." It was lead by Gary Glickstein of Miami Beach, Daniel Polish of Los Angeles, and Samuel Stahl of San Antonio.<sup>247</sup>

Throughout the early 1980s, a series of responsa were published on officiation beginning with a major presentation in 1980. Walter Jacob, chair of the responsa committee, along with Eugene Lipman of Washington, DC, W. Gunther Plaut of Toronto, Harry Roth of Andover, Massachusetts, Rav Soloff of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, and Bernard Zlotowitz of Fair Lawn, New Jersey submitted a comprehensive *t'shuvah* to the question "May a Reform rabbi officiate at a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew?"<sup>248</sup> Unlike many responsa, which reveal their ultimate decision only at the end, this one immediately began, "Reform Judaism has been firmly opposed to mixed marriages. This was true in the last century and in this century."<sup>249</sup> After quoting from the 1909 and 1973 CCAR resolutions, the responsum reviewed the history of interfaith marriage in Judaism from biblical through modern times. Despite the initial question, the primary focus of the document was not officiation, but interfaith marriage. The responsum attempted to show

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<sup>246</sup>CCAR Yearbook 90 (1980): 305.

<sup>247</sup>CCAR Yearbook 95 (1985): 376.

<sup>248</sup>CCAR Yearbook 90 (1980): 86. The signatories are listed in Walter Jacob, ed., *American Reform Responsa* (New York, 1983), 465.

<sup>249</sup>CCAR Yearbook 90 (1980): 86.



that Judaism, including Reform Judaism, had consistently opposed interfaith marriage. The closest the responsum came to directly answering the *she'elah* came early in the text when it was stated that the CCAR "resolutions clearly state the position of the Reform rabbinate in this matter."<sup>250</sup>

In 1981, a very similar responsum was issued regarding the marriage of "messianic Jew" and Jew. Using the same introduction as the 1980 responsum, the authors explained that a "messianic Jew" is not Jewish and therefore a rabbi "cannot officiate at his marriage with a Jewish girl."<sup>251</sup> The following year the committee responded to the question of "halachic justification for a rabbi officiating at an intermarriage." In this responsum, the authors listed fifteen reasons from *halachic* to sociological on why a rabbi should not officiate. "For all the foregoing reasons, we reaffirm the position taken by the Central Conference of American Rabbis" in the opening section of the 1973 resolution.<sup>252</sup>

At the end of the 1970s, the New England Region of the CCAR called upon the CCAR to expel those members who were co-officiating at interfaith marriages with clergy of other faiths.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, Paul Gorin responded to a request of Joseph Glaser by privately proposing a resolution on co-officiation and Shabbat for consideration by the CCAR:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis - having previously declared its disapproval of Rabbis performing mixed marriages, and having recognized - at the same time - that its members may differ in their interpretations of Jewish tradition - now goes further and declares that it views with special aversion - as deserving of censure - the actions of those Rabbis who co-officiate with Christian clergy in solemnizing marriages; or who solemnize marriages in a Church designated as such; or who perform any marriage during the Sabbath or Holy Day.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>250</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>251</sup>CCAR Yearbook 91 (1981): 69.

<sup>252</sup>CCAR Yearbook 92 (1982): 215.

<sup>253</sup>CCAR Yearbook 99 (1989), Vol. 2: 29.

<sup>254</sup>Gorin to Glaser, Dec. 1979, 5.

Co-officiation had been raised as an issue in the early 1970s. The Committee on Mixed Marriage had examined it, including the presentation of paper by Neil Kominsky in favor of the practice. The committee declined to focus on co-officiation to avoid complicating its central mandate on officiation itself.<sup>255</sup> Shortly before the 1973 convention, CCAR President Daniel Polish published an article in the *CCAR Journal*, "Enough!" where he decried the practice of co-officiation as one that "would universalize Israel and the Jewish people out of existence." He did not call for sanctions, but that "the moral repugnance of the Conference be registered in the face of a kind on anarchy which Judaism has never before known."<sup>256</sup>

While the CCAR avoided the issue in the 1970s, it was ready to tackle it the 1980s and a special committee on Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies was established in 1980 consisting of Arthur Starr of Manchester, New Hampshire as chairman, Walter Jacob of Pittsburgh, Neil Kominsky, Murray Rothman, and Ronald Sobel of New York City. The following year Rothman became the chair while Starr remained on as a member. In 1982, the committee changed its name to the Committee on Ecumenical Wedding Ceremonies.

A resolution was ready as early as 1980, but Joseph Glaser requested that it be postponed for revisions because he did "not want the resolution framed in such a way as to be insulting to our cherished Christian colleague." Glaser decided that the resolution would not be considered until 1982 because the 1981 CCAR convention was in Jerusalem "and that's all we need."<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup>Neil Kominsky, "Co-Officiating at Mixed Marriages with Christian Clergymen," position paper for CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, Jan. 1972, CCAR Archives; Minutes, Committee on Mixed Marriage, Nov. 1972, 4; Joseph Glaser to Elliot J. Holin, Feb. 25, 1981, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>256</sup>David Polish, "Enough!" *CCAR Journal*, Winter 1973: 36, 37.

<sup>257</sup>Glaser to Holin, Feb. 1981, 2.

By 1982, the committee reported to the CCAR that it had thoroughly discussed the issue having received suggestions from colleagues ranging from "say nothing lest you focus undue attention on the matter" to "colleagues who officiate together with non-Jewish clergy should be expelled from the Conference."<sup>258</sup> By a four to one vote, the committee took the following position:

In 1909, and again in 1947 and in 1973, the Central Conference of American Rabbis declared its opposition to the performance of mixed marriages by its members. Mindful of these prior resolutions, we now call special attention to the most flagrant form of mixed marriage – co-officiation with non-Jewish clergy – and publicly repudiate that practice.<sup>259</sup>

The resolution was adopted by the CCAR and the committee disbanded. However it did not satisfy some of the rabbis who had most wanted an official condemnation of co-officiation. David Polish found that "nothing substantive has resulted from the resolution. The offending rabbis continue to flaunt Jewish tradition and the sensibilities of their colleagues." He now believed that this "new situation demands that rabbis limit some of their autonomy and be limited by their colleagues."<sup>260</sup>

Reflecting these arguments, the Ethics Committee began to discuss possible sanctions against rabbis who co-officiated. It had previously dealt with ethics violations related to officiation such as rabbis who advertised their willingness to officiate and rabbis who officiated at the wedding of other rabbi's congregants without first informing them. These actions had resulted in changes in the CCAR ethics statement. With Herman Schaalman as chair,

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<sup>258</sup>CCAR Yearbook 92 (1982): 132.

<sup>259</sup>Ibid., It can be easily deduced that Kominsky, the only rabbi on the committee who officiated as well as co-officiated, was the dissenting vote.

<sup>260</sup>David Polish, "Participation of Reform rabbis in 'ecumenical marriages' is disturbing," *Sentinel*, n.d.

the Ethics Committee continued to struggle with co-officiation and violations of "encroachment or trespass."<sup>261</sup>

Unable to define the term "co-officiation," an Ad Hoc Rabbinical Standards Committee was formed in 1985 with Schaalman as chair along with Harry Danziger of Memphis, Randall Falk of Nashville, Lynne Landsberg of Staunton, Virginia, Murray Rothman, and Robert M. Seltzer of the Hunter College History Department in New York.<sup>262</sup> However, the committee met with a "stalemate. It proved impossible to define sufficiently what we mean by 'ecumenical marriages' or by the officiating or co-officiation of rabbis at such events."<sup>263</sup> The Ad Hoc Committee was dissolved and the Ethics Committee was returned the task of resolving the impasse.

There were two primary obstacles that the committees could not overcome. First, the rabbis could not agree what was meant by "co-officiation." Did it include a ceremony where a rabbi only offered a blessing? Did it include a ceremony where a non-Jewish clergyperson only offered a blessing? Secondly, they feared that invoking sanctions against those who co-officiate "might imply endorsement of rabbinic officiation at mixed marriage ceremonies without co-officiation."<sup>264</sup> As the Ethics Committee could not resolve these questions, it let the matter drop.<sup>265</sup>

While the Ethics Committee was considering co-officiation, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been exploring the issue of interfaith marriage and officiation itself. In 1979, the UAHC and CCAR had formed a Joint Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach chaired by David Belin, a

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<sup>261</sup>CCAR Yearbook 86 (1976): 247; CCAR Yearbook 91 (1981): 33; CCAR Yearbook 94 (1984): 101; CCAR Yearbook 95 (1985): 197.

<sup>262</sup>CCAR Yearbook 95 (1985): 406.

<sup>263</sup>CCAR Yearbook 96 (1986): 202.

<sup>264</sup>CCAR Yearbook 99 (1989), Vol. 2: 29.

<sup>265</sup>Ibid., 29.

prominent lay leader from Des Moines. The issue of officiation was immediately raised at the first meeting in 1979. Perhaps this was most on the minds of the Task Force as the UAHC Board of Trustees had recently passed an amendment urging the CCAR to reconsider its position on officiation. After UAHC President Alexander Schindler "vigorously opposed" the amendment, the Board of Trustees did not pass it.<sup>266</sup> Belin, fearing the issue would distract them from all other issues, convinced the Task Force to delay discussion on officiation until after the 1981 UAHC biennial in Boston.<sup>267</sup> At the biennial, the Task Force proposed a sub-committee to study officiation which was headed by Melvin Merians, a lay leader from Larchmont, New York.<sup>268</sup> This decision resulted in heated correspondence between Joseph Glaser and several rabbis after Glaser informed the CCAR that "at no time would there ever be any resolution emanating from the Task Force with respect to the matter of whether rabbis should or should not perform mixed marriages."<sup>269</sup>

After two years of research, the sub-committee's recommendations were adopted unanimously by the Task Force and included in their 1983 UAHC biennial Report. The section of officiation stated:

The Task Force unqualifiedly affirms the right of every Rabbi to act in accordance with her/her religious conscience in the matter of officiation at interfaith marriages free from any external pressure.<sup>270</sup>

It offered five specific suggestions for action: First, that a tripartite commission of the CCAR, UAHC, and HUC-JIR be set up to "undertake an

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<sup>266</sup>Edith J. Miller to Joel Y. Zion, "Re: Mixed Marriage," Spring 1979, CCAR Archives, 19.

<sup>267</sup>David W. Belin, "Background Memorandum on Resolution Concerning Rabbinic Officiation at Interfaith Marriages, where Children Will Be Raised as Jews," Nov. 25, 1996, UAHC Archives, 1; David W. Belin additional comments on 1983 Closing Report of Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, 1996, UAHC Archives.

<sup>268</sup>Belin, "Background," 2; Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Outreach, 1983 Closing Report, UAHC Archives, 8.

<sup>269</sup>Joseph Glaser to CCAR Members, Dec. 31, 1981, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>270</sup>Task Force, 1983 Closing Report, 8.



extensive evaluation of the ramifications of interfaith marriage" and present a report within two years. Secondly, that officiation be openly discussed in "Forums for Listening and Learning." Third, that the CCAR continue to study the issue. Fourth, that educational programs be created for both rabbis and laity. And finally, that HUC-JIR address this issue in its formal rabbinical curriculum.<sup>271</sup> Although the tripartite commission was established, it did not make a report at the 1985 UAHC biennial and subsequently disbanded.<sup>272</sup>

### **The Committee of 100 and Eugene Mihaly**

In April 1984, Simeon Maslin organized a group of rabbinical colleagues to protest "the distressing information that deserving colleagues were not being considered or even interviewed for certain pulpits because of their refusal to officiate at mixed marriages." These rabbis, all of whom did not officiate at interfaith weddings, decided to publish a statement to "counter the common perception that, while Orthodox and Conservative rabbis do not officiate at mixed marriages, Reform rabbis do."<sup>273</sup>

The document, "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," was published in November 1984 and was sent with a cover letter from Maslin to the entire membership of the CCAR. The twelve-page pamphlet contained the signatures of 110 Reform rabbis including, at Maslin's request, Alfred Gottschalk, President of HUC-JIR, W. Gunther Plaut, President of the CCAR, and Alexander Schindler, President of the UAHC. These rabbis were referred to by the organizational name, "The Committee of 100."

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<sup>271</sup>Task Force, 1983 Closing Report, 9-10.

<sup>272</sup>Belin, "Background," 2.

<sup>273</sup>Simeon J. Maslin to CCAR Members, Nov. 20, 1984, American Jewish Archives. According to Eugene Mihaly, Maslin was under great pressure from his congregation to officiate (Mihaly, interview). Irwin Fishbein informed me that Maslin was the first rabbi, at least in recent memory, at Knesseth Israel not to officiate at interfaith marriages (Fishbein, interview).

The pamphlet contained general statements about interfaith marriage, the process of *kiddushin*, and eight questions and answers in the back. It began with a summary explanation of why the 110 signatories would not officiate at interfaith marriage.

When officiating at a marriage ceremony, the rabbi acts as representative of the Jewish people and the Jewish heritage. What the rabbi does or does not do has an effect on the totality of Jewry and on our people's potential for survival in the midst of an overwhelmingly non-Jewish society  
Our understanding of the essence of Jewish marriage makes it impossible for us to officiate at mixed marriages....The fact remains that a marriage ceremony involving a person who is not a member of the Jewish people is not a Jewish ceremony.<sup>274</sup>

In his cover letter, Maslin was emphatic that the Committee of 100's document was simply "to make it clear to the American Jewish community - and especially rabbinic selection committees - that it may not certainly be taken for granted that a Reform rabbi will officiate at a mixed marriage." He cautioned that "the last thing we want to emerge from the publication of this pamphlet is divisiveness."<sup>275</sup>

Maslin's desire was not to be fulfilled. Rabbis who officiated at interfaith marriages were incensed by the wide-spread publication of "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage." Murray Blackman, a long-time proponent of rabbinical officiation, along with several other rabbis, looked for an appropriate response to the Committee of 100. They decided to directly challenge some of the statements made in the pamphlet and approached Dr. Eugene Mihaly to write a learned position paper defending the right to officiate. Mihaly agreed to respond only to specific questions which he was

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<sup>274</sup>Simeon J. Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," Nov. 25, 1984, CCAR Archives, 1-2.

<sup>275</sup>Maslin to CCAR, Nov. 1984. First quote was underlined in original.

then supplied. He chose four of them for his *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* which was published in May of 1985 with funds raised by Blackman.<sup>276</sup>

*Responsa* was sent with a cover letter by Blackman to the CCAR membership. Blackman called the Mihaly book "a serious, objective response from the perspective of Reform Jewish principles and tradition."<sup>277</sup> Mihaly addressed each question in an individual responsum where he analyzed statements made by the Committee of 100. Mihaly's four *responsa* examined the necessity of the phrase *k'dat Moshe v'Yisrael*, the meaning of the term *kiddushin*, whether officiation at interfaith weddings was "contrary to the guidelines" of the CCAR, and whether officiation was not acceptable for a Reform rabbi "by any Jewish criterion."<sup>278</sup>

In challenging the claim of the Committee of 100 that officiation was contrary to the CCAR guidelines, Mihaly noted that "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage" did not quote the second paragraph of the 1973 resolution which affirmed the right of dissent. "This paragraph was included precisely to prevent the resolution's being used the way the Statement uses it."<sup>279</sup> "The resolutions of the rabbinic organizations certainly merit each rabbi's serious consideration. They become 'guidelines,' however, only if the rabbi choose to make them so."<sup>280</sup>

In declaring that a rabbi who officiates at interfaith marriages is acting 'contrary to the clear guidelines of their rabbinic organization,' the Statement obviously implies, with the subtlety of a sledgehammer, that the first paragraph of the resolution is absolute, binding and no Reform rabbi dare deviate from it.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>276</sup>Mihaly, interview; Murray Blackman to CCAR Members, June 10, 1985, CCAR Archives; Murray Blackman, telephone interview, Feb. 21, 1997.

<sup>277</sup>Blackman to CCAR, June 1985.

<sup>278</sup>Eugene Mihaly, *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* (Cincinnati, 1985). Quotations are from the Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage" and are cited in Mihaly's *Responsa*.

<sup>279</sup>Mihaly, *Responsa*, 46.

<sup>280</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>281</sup>*Ibid.*, 46-47.

Mihaly's has said that theme of his *Responsa*, and his entire philosophy on officiation, is that each rabbi has "the right, the duty to follow his conscience." However, when making that decision, "you cannot use tradition as the basis." The Committee of 100 made dogmatic and absolute statements that, in his opinion, did not allow "freedom of conscience."<sup>282</sup>

The publication of Mihaly's *Responsa* provoked a new round of counter-attacks. Simeon Maslin prepared a response. In August, he circulated to selected rabbis the draft of a critical response to Mihaly which he planned on publishing under the signatures of most of the CCAR past presidents, a dozen well-known rabbis, and some of the faculty of HUC. At the suggestion of Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Maslin also approached Dr. Ben Zion Wacholder of HUC-JIR in Cincinnati about writing a brief statement from the faculty.<sup>283</sup>

"A Statement of Concern" was distributed to the membership of the CCAR in December 1985. The document contained the signatures of twenty-four rabbis including eight CCAR Past Presidents.<sup>284</sup> The "Statement" briefly critiqued each of Mihaly's *responsa* generally dismissing them as irrelevant to "Jewish marriage ceremonies today."<sup>285</sup> The statement was considerably toned down from the earlier draft which referred to Mihaly's *Responsa* as an "embarrassing document" which was "dishonest" and "an absurd and destructive effort."<sup>286</sup>

In responding to Mihaly's notion that CCAR resolutions are not a true "guideline," the authors of the "Statement" wondered:

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<sup>282</sup>Mihaly, interview.

<sup>283</sup>Gottschalk, interview; Simeon J. Maslin to Ben Zion Wacholder, Aug. 6, 1985, American Jewish Archives; Ben Zion Wacholder, telephone interview, Nov. 12, 1996.

<sup>284</sup>Simeon J. Maslin et al., "A Statement of Concern," Dec. 26, 1985, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>285</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>286</sup>Simeon J. Maslin to CCAR Members, draft, Aug. 6, 1984, CCAR Archives, 1, 5.

What is the resolution passed by the CCAR in 1973 and declaring 'its opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage,' if not a *guideline*? What would Dr. Mihaly prefer that we call it? A *gezerah*? a suggestion? a hint? Our statement never said that colleagues who officiate at mixed marriages were in violation of any 'rule' or 'halacha' of the CCAR. That is not the way the CCAR operates. One can only ask: if the 1973 resolution in opposition to officiation at mixed marriages is not a *guideline*, what is it?<sup>287</sup>

The four-page "Statement of Concern" concluded: "We are saddened by this need to criticize the work a respected colleague. We do so to protect the integrity of the Reform rabbinate and the reputation of our College-Institute."<sup>288</sup>

Included with the "Statement of Concern," was a two-page "Response to Eugene Mihaly," signed by four HUC-JIR faculty members: its author Ben Zion Wacholder of Cincinnati, and one faculty member from each stateside campus, Lewis M. Barth of Los Angeles, Leonard S. Kravitz of New York, and Ezra Spicehandler of Cincinnati. The document explained the faculty's reasoning for publishing this critique: "We do so lest our silence be construed either as agreement or as indifference."<sup>289</sup> The "Response" contained specific textual challenges to the first two of Mihaly's *responsa* citing misuse of textual sources. An original draft ended with the statement, "Certainly, an egregious representation of the classical tradition does not serve to enhance the author's reputation."<sup>290</sup> The published version omitted this sentence and instead ended:

In conclusion, it seems to us that Dr. Mihaly's *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* is misnamed. Generally, the term 'Responsa' refers to legal opinions which view the rabbinic tradition sympathetically. *Responsa on Jewish Marriage*, on the other hand, can only be characterized as antinomian polemics.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>287</sup>Maslin et al., "Statement of Concern," 3.

<sup>288</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>289</sup>Ben Zion Wacholder et al., "Response to Eugene Mihaly," [Dec. 1985], CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>290</sup>Ben Zion Wacholder, "Draft of Response to Eugene Mihaly," Dec. 3, 1985, Meyer Archives, 3.

<sup>291</sup>Wacholder et al., "Response," 2.



Lewis Barth and Ezra Spicehandler, who signed the document at the request of Simeon Maslin, both regretted the last line and found it "a bit insulting."<sup>292</sup>

Mihaly responded in person to a draft of the faculty document that had been sent to him by Wacholder. Mihaly and Wacholder met in Wacholder's office on December 12, 1985 and Mihaly recorded the events of the meeting later that day. At the meeting, Mihaly spoke harshly and critically to Wacholder often using personal attacks. He warned Wacholder that he was being used "for less than scholarly reasons"<sup>293</sup> and told him that this statement reflected poor scholarship:

...you misquote me. You mis-interpret my intent. You address yourself to points which I never made and which are irrelevant to my discussion. You attribute notions to me which I do not hold and then proceed to argue against them. Knowing much better, you intentionally misrepresent traditional sources.<sup>294</sup>

Calling the entire document hostile, Mihaly concluded, "I certainly have no objection at all to -- in fact I would welcome -- a scholarly discussion on the merits of what I have actually said. I am deeply grieved to say that your so-called response to me does not actually do this."<sup>295</sup> Mihaly later said that he felt "terrible" about the faculty document and personally insulted.<sup>296</sup> In the final draft of "Response to Eugene Mihaly," Wacholder incorporated none of the criticisms from his meeting with him.

A similar exchange, in a more public forum, occurred over two years later. Moshe Zemer of Tel Aviv published a critique of Mihaly's *Responsa* in the Spring 1988 CCAR *Journal*. He criticized Mihaly for using his sources selectively, for not quoting a single responsum anywhere in his *Responsa*,

<sup>292</sup>Lewis Barth, telephone interview, Nov. 12, 1996; Ezra Spicehandler, telephone interview, Nov. 12, 1996. Quotation from Spicehandler.

<sup>293</sup>Eugene Mihaly to Ben Zion Wacholder, Dec. 12, 1985, Meyer Archives, 1.

<sup>294</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>295</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>296</sup>Mihaly, interview.

and for calling interfaith marriage "Jewishly authentic."<sup>297</sup> In the same issue, Mihaly responded to Zemer in similar manner as he did to Wacholder, but without the personal attacks. He declared that Zemer "misquotes me,...distorts my position,...attributes views to me that I do not hold" and that "his treatment of classical sources...is often in error."<sup>298</sup> Again Mihaly stated that he hoped his *Responsa* would produce "serious thought on basic issues we face as Reform Jews....I deeply regret that neither Rabbi Zemer's essay nor any of the other published responses...have addressed [these] questions."<sup>299</sup>

The "Statement of Concern" and "Response to Eugene Mihaly" "offended" Murray Blackman and other rabbis who favored officiation at interfaith marriages. Blackman, who personally thought the claims of rabbis being denied jobs were "a lot of hogwash," again organized a response.<sup>300</sup> He wrote to select colleagues, "There are those who might feel that no response is a better strategy than the issuing of a rebuttal. I believe differently and hope that you agree."<sup>301</sup> Early drafts of Blackman's response were full of "emotion laden words and phrases."<sup>302</sup> One version called the anti-officiation documents "diatribe" and "derogatory."<sup>303</sup> At the suggestions of colleagues, Blackman toned down some of the language.

The final document was sent to the membership of the CCAR in April 1986. It was titled "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation." "A Call" referred to the responses to Mihaly as "absolutist" for once again not including the second paragraph of the 1973 resolution which referred to dissent. "We view

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<sup>297</sup>Moshe Zemer, "A Halachic Critique of *Responsa on Jewish Marriage*," *CCAR Journal*, Spring 1988: 36, 31.

<sup>298</sup>Eugene Mihaly, "Response," *CCAR Journal*, Spring 1988: 48.

<sup>299</sup>*Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>300</sup>Blackman, interview.

<sup>301</sup>Murray Blackman to CCAR Members, Feb. 21, 1986, CCAR Archives.

<sup>302</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>303</sup>Murray Blackman, "A Call To Reason," Feb. 21, 1986, Meyer Archives.

with distress the continuing impression given by this 'Statement of Concern' that there is a monolithic position in the C.C.A.R. on the issue of rabbis and mixed marriages."<sup>304</sup>

The Committee of 100's original document stated that publication of "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage" was out of concern for colleagues having difficulty being placed because they did not officiate at interfaith marriages. Blackman's text purported that if the 104 signers of "A Call" had been invited, "many of us would have joined in a statement of concern, if that was all that is at issue. Instead, our ranks are now racked by bitterness and divisiveness occasioned by privately sponsored memoranda."<sup>305</sup>

"A Call to Reason and Reconciliation" concluded, "Lest time close the gates between us, come then let us reason together in a spirit of civility and collegiality." Because some rabbis, especially CCAR Vice President Jack Stern, had begun trying to "calm the waters," the published version continued:

A heartening sign is that discussion has begun. Let us strive towards reconciliation within that institution best suited for discussion, debate and resolution, the committee structure, the commissions, the regional and national conventions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.<sup>306</sup>

Reflecting that call, CCAR President Jack Stern, one of the signatories of the Committee of 100, devoted the final section of his 1986 CCAR convention address to these recent events. Stern defended "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriages" as a specific response to the pressure from lay leaders not to hire rabbis who do not officiate at interfaith marriages.

The purpose of the document, therefore, was to offer support to those rabbis who were following the official Conference position and who were being pressured by the congregations not to. It was never intended to attack those who hold to

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<sup>304</sup>Murray Blackman et al., "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation," April 1986, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>305</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>306</sup>Ibid., 1; Blackman, interview.

'the divergent view' – even though, upon rereading the question and answer section of the document, I could see how it was perceived otherwise.<sup>307</sup>

Commenting on the "volleys back and forth" among rabbis and scholars, he wondered, "Why are we fighting with each other? Why are we firing our upset at each other when it should be directed at those who are the cause of the problem?" referring to lay leadership.<sup>308</sup> Calling for an end to the "battle," he urged the CCAR to ask the UAHC to "urge its member congregations not to pressure rabbis and not to discriminate against rabbinical candidates because of their refusal to officiate at mixed marriages or their insistence upon following the dictates of their own conscience."<sup>309</sup>

The following year, Stern revisited the controversy. He noted that the leadership of the Reform movement had met on this issue and that they came to "a unanimous response of support." A letter, signed by the UAHC President and the UAHC Board Chairman, would be sent to all congregations that requested placement. "It will urge them in the strongest terms possible not to allow the matter of officiation to become the determining factor in the choice of their rabbinic candidate."<sup>310</sup> Such a letter was apparently never sent out.<sup>311</sup> Although the "battle" ended for the present, the issues raised did not disappear.

### **Towards the Present**

In 1988, the CCAR *Rabbi's Manual* was revised for the first time in 27 years. The entirely new section, "Officiating at Mixed Marriage" primarily focused on whether rabbis should officiate. It began with a quotation from *Gates of Mitzvah* on Judaism's resistance to interfaith marriage. After several

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<sup>307</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 96 (1986): 9.

<sup>308</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>309</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>310</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 97 (1987): 2.

<sup>311</sup>Arnold Sher, telephone interview, Feb. 11, 1997.

biblical and talmudic citations, the 1909 and 1973 resolutions were reprinted. For the first time, statements about outreach, the education of children of interfaith marriages, and the 1982 resolution opposing co-officiation were also included.<sup>312</sup>

After the furor of exchange in the mid 1980s, little of consequence occurred in the late 1980s and early 1990s regarding officiation at interfaith marriage. While articles continually appeared in the Jewish and popular press on the subject, and sociological and population studies immediately caused a flurry of sermons and posturing, few official actions were taken within the Reform movement.

Reflecting that inactivity, ~~the~~ Executive Board, in 1986, defeated a motion "that the CCAR endorse forums for listening to views on rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages."<sup>313</sup> In 1989, CCAR President Eugene Lippman discussed the history and debate over officiation within the Conference. He noted that officiation was still a factor in rabbinical placement and that colleagues "invoked or ignored" the various CCAR resolutions as they saw fit.<sup>314</sup> He concluded:

Quiet as we may seem at the moment, the issue is heavily present among us. I wish I had some wise and persuasive proposal to present to you for consideration, but I do not. *Shev velo ta-aseh* comes hard for me, but I now require myself to invoke it not only on myself but to suggest its appropriateness for all of us.<sup>315</sup>

The 1990 National Jewish Population survey, which reported that the interfaith marriage rate in Judaism had risen to over 50%, began to push officiation once again into the center of the Reform Jewish consciousness. Commenting on the statistics at the 1992 CCAR convention, Steven Bayme

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<sup>312</sup>David Polish and W. Gunther Plaut, eds., *Rabbi's Manual* (New York, 1988), 242-43.

<sup>313</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 96 (1986): 300.

<sup>314</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 99 (1989): 8.

<sup>315</sup>*Ibid.*, 8.



said about officiation: "At a time when the Jewish community is looking to its leaders for guidance in addressing these very difficult questions, it is my hope that members of this Conference, who have debated this issue on grounds of principle, may revisit it in light of new data and concerns."<sup>316</sup> In 1993, Joseph Glaser wrote a letter to the CCAR Executive Board reflecting on presentations made by Walter Jacob and Alexander Schindler on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue. Glaser noted:

There is no doubt that discussions of the role of the non Jew in the synagogue, if permissive results obtain, will lead inevitably to additional pressure on rabbis to officiate at intermarriages. The time has surely come to assert rabbinic leadership and to develop strategies to meet a major crisis and threat to the very continuity of Reform Judaism. Rabbis have the obligation to set standards for Jewish practice.<sup>317</sup>

At the 1993 CCAR convention, the Executive Board considered "mixed marriage officiation" one of the major topics in need of address by the CCAR.<sup>318</sup>

David Belin, the former chair of the Joint UAHC/CCAR Task Force on Reform Jewish Planning as well as the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach, began writing to each CCAR President urging them to re-examine the issue of officiation and to rescind the first paragraph of the 1973 CCAR resolution. Belin saw this a logical step in light of recent surveys on interfaith marriage as well as the decision of the CCAR to recommend the ordination of homosexual rabbis. His most recent request, to Simeon Maslin in 1995, was declined.<sup>319</sup>

By 1996, UAHC regional biennials and regional rabbinical conventions were exploring the issue of officiation. Based on the Pacific region's rabbinical

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<sup>316</sup>CCAR Yearbook 102 (1992): 147.

<sup>317</sup>Joseph Glaser to CCAR Members, "The gathering crisis of intermarriage," May 19, 1993, CCAR Archives, 7.

<sup>318</sup>CCAR Yearbook 103 (1993): 98.

<sup>319</sup>Belin, "Background," 3.

convention in 1995, the CCAR leadership decided to hold a discussion on officiation at interfaith marriages at the 1996 CCAR convention in Philadelphia. As part of the convention theme, "Outreach and Inter-marriage: Come, Let Us Reason Together," a morning session was devoted to "Mixed Marriage: Why I Believe Officiating Will or Will Not Lead to Continuity of the Jewish People."<sup>320</sup> Perhaps unintentionally, the title of the 1996 convention echoed the conclusion of "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation," "Come then let us reason together in a spirit of civility and collegiality."<sup>321</sup>

Several firsts occurred at the session, moderated by Jack Stern who had called for an end to the "battle" between rabbis in his 1986 Presidential address. Of the four speakers, two were decidedly pro-officiation. The Conference had never publicly allowed proponents of officiation to speak on that topic at any time other than as part of a committee report or in the course of a debate on a resolution. As Harry Danziger noted, that Simeon Maslin, who was so central to the mid-1980s upheaval, was President of the CCAR when this discussion occurred was "amazing." Secondly, two of the four speakers were lay leaders. Never before had non-rabbinical leadership been part of the CCAR's formal discussion on officiation. The four speakers were George Markley, a lay leader from Bridgeport, Connecticut, Rabbi Harry Danziger of Memphis, Jacqueline Guttman, a lay leader from Teaneck, New Jersey, and Rabbi Debra Hachen of Westborough, Massachusetts.<sup>322</sup>

Markley began by recalling his own story. When he was engaged to a non-Jewish woman in 1969, he was treated harshly by a rabbi that he had approached to officiate. Eventually Markley and his wife married in a

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<sup>320</sup>1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 1996, Author's Archives; "Mixed Marriage: Why I Believe Officiating Will or Will Not Lead to Continuity of the Jewish People," 1996 CCAR Convention session, March 1996, audiocassette, CCAR Archives.

<sup>321</sup>Blackman et al., "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation," 1.

<sup>322</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

Unitarian Church. However, Markley's displeasure "was not with the rabbi's refusal to perform our ceremony, but rather with the manner in which he communicated that decision to us." Markley believed that rabbis needed to send messages that interfaith marriage is contrary to Judaism by their actions. "One of the few ways in which the message can still be sent is through the rabbi's decision not to officiate."

Just as many say that one pronouncement of 'no' by a rabbi speaks more loudly than a thousand 'yeses,' I would suggest that ultimately, for those who do officiate, only the 'yes' will be heard and interpreted. The fact that the rabbi may impose conditions or criteria will be lost. The fact that she may modify the ceremony will be lost. The fact that she may counsel interfaith couples extensively will be lost. The only message which will be heard is that the rabbi officiates at all weddings - period. That will eventually be translated into meaning that the rabbi does not really care whether you marry a Jew or not.<sup>323</sup>

A refusal by a rabbi to officiate will not turn Jews away from Judaism. Rather the Jewish values already instilled in them are the determining factor. Markley urged that rabbis be allowed to make their own choices about officiation free from pressure.<sup>324</sup>

Harry Danziger saw officiation as a direct result of his desire "to influence the outcome of the wedding" so that the couple will create a Jewish family. "I only officiate as a rabbi at a wedding when it is to be the beginning of a Jewish household based on their commitment and their decision. For me that is the essential reason for a Jewish wedding ceremony."

In the context of Reform Judaism, Danziger thought that non-officiation was out of place. Rabbis who do not officiate will welcome the family, "but only after absenting ourselves from the high moment that made you a family." He concluded:

I've observed with thirty-two years contact in the same community, that when a rabbi officiates at the wedding in association with shaping the Jewish

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<sup>323</sup>Ibid.

<sup>324</sup>Ibid.

character of the marriage, it does make a difference....The gain for Jewish survival far outweighs the loss.<sup>325</sup>

Guttman recalled her son and his non-Jewish fiancée's struggle to find a rabbi to officiate at their wedding. "I was mortified at the treatment they received." She noted that if she was a rabbi, she would likely not officiate. However, she could not understand how rabbis could refuse to refer couples to rabbis who do officiate.

She insisted that rabbis should be allowed to make their own decision based on "their individual conscience."

But I believe that the perception of officiation as a semi-dastardly deed must be changed. That the tacit disapproval evident as our clergy are trained must move to an open exploration of options on a spectrum from non-officiation perhaps all the way to co-officiation with counseling and referring in there somewhere. And with the CCAR's and HUC's approval of these varying positions. In short, I don't want Reform Judaism to be pro-officiation, but rather...pro-choice.<sup>326</sup>

Guttman proposed that the UAHC compile and distribute a list of rabbis who officiate and develop guidelines for couples planning interfaith marriage with education as a requirement.<sup>327</sup>

Hachen stated that both officiation and non-officiation are paths to the continuity of the Jewish people. "I believe that allowing these two seemingly opposing views side by side, with all the tension that brings, is the strength of our movement." Because of the nature of the rabbi as *misaderet kiddushin* and the importance of the legal phrase, "*Harei At M'kudeshet Li*," Hachen believed she was unable to officiate at an interfaith marriage as a Jewish act.

However, Hachen felt that rabbis who do not officiate could do much more for couples including pre-marital counseling, personal meetings, and offering a blessing on the *bimah* of the synagogue. "Providing a warm and

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<sup>325</sup>Ibid.

<sup>326</sup>Ibid.

<sup>327</sup>Ibid.

welcoming climate for them to explore their religion" can be done with or without officiation. "At least let us agree that it is not the act of standing with a couple at the *chuppah* that creates Jewish households. It is everything we do as rabbis before and after the ritual that really makes for Jewish continuity."<sup>328</sup>

Following the presentations, twelve rabbis offered comments in an abbreviated discussion. Jonathan Eichhorn of Kingston, New York echoed Guttman's calls for "pro-choice." "Reform Judaism has its uniqueness primarily in the fact that it is open to a variety of different choices....Reform rabbis should reach out to one another with respect....We may disagree, but let us disagree with respect." Irwin Fishbein stated that he found the presentations "wonderful" and that the tenor and nature of the discussion was what he was looking for in 1973. "I'm glad I have waited. Thank you for it today."<sup>329</sup>

Richard Levy of Los Angeles urged Markley and all the UAHC leadership to allow rabbis to make the "religious decisions" regarding officiation free from pressure. The theme of freedom of choice for the rabbi was mentioned by all the speakers and consistently received the most applause. The formal session was followed with breakout discussion groups reacting to the presentations. A number of practical workshops on officiation were held during the convention as well.<sup>330</sup>

Eighty-seven years after the first CCAR resolution on interfaith marriage and 23 years after the resolution opposing officiation, the CCAR held a civil, frank discussion on officiation of interfaith marriage. That no CCAR resolutions were proposed or were impending probably eased the

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<sup>328</sup>Ibid.

<sup>329</sup>Ibid.

<sup>330</sup>Ibid.



openness of the exchange. The entire event was unprecedented in the history of Reform Judaism and rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages.

Following the June CCAR convention, David Belin ignited new controversy with a resolution he had submitted to the Executive Committee of the UAHC. Originally proposed in February 1996, it was postponed because of the installation of new UAHC President Eric Yoffie.<sup>331</sup> That June, the CCAR Executive Board discussed the implications of Belin's resolution and then unanimously reaffirmed the 1973 CCAR resolution.<sup>332</sup> The Belin resolution, "Resolution on Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages, Where There is a Commitment to Identity as a Jewish Household and Raise Any Children as Jews," was purported to be neutral, advocating the rescinding of the 1973 CCAR resolution and instead letting rabbis make their decision "free from any outside pressures, whether or not to officiate."<sup>333</sup> However, in early drafts, the resolution suggested that the UAHC Board of Trustees should urge rabbis who are undecided about officiation to "be sensitive to the desire of the great majority of lay people and should resolve ambivalent feelings in favor of Rabbinic Officiation."<sup>334</sup> UAHC President Eric Yoffie also noted that the resolution did not remove the pressure from congregational search committees who made decisions on hiring based on the officiation practice of the rabbi. Although adamantly opposed to the resolution, Yoffie convinced Belin to add language that rabbis should be able to make their decision "free

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<sup>331</sup>Belin, "Background," 4.

<sup>332</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Executive Board, New York, NY, June 10-11, 1996, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>333</sup>Belin, "Background," 3.

<sup>334</sup>David W. Belin, "Resolution on Rabbinic Officiation at Intermarriages, Where There is a Commitment to Identity as a Jewish Household and Raise Any Children as Jews," Oct. 21, 1996, UAHC Archives, 2.

from any outside pressures, whether from congregations, congregational Rabbinic search committees, peers, or peer professional groups."<sup>335</sup>

At the December 1996 UAHC trustees meeting in Los Angeles, Belin presented a significantly modified and shortened resolution, but one that still called upon the CCAR to rescind its 1973 resolution.<sup>336</sup> A substitute resolution from Melvin Merians was allowed to replace the Belin text. Merians' version was somewhat softer than Belin's, but had at its core the revoking of the first paragraph of the 1973 resolution.<sup>337</sup> After outspoken criticism from several rabbis including new HUC-JIR President Sheldon Zimmerman, the resolution was defeated in a show of hands by an eight to one margin.<sup>338</sup> Once again, the UAHC was unable to pass a resolution of officiation and this time it was defeated by a decisive margin.

### Surveys on Officiation

Having examined the history of officiation in the American Reform movement, we now turn to the numbers of rabbis who officiate. There have been several surveys and studies to determine how many American Reform rabbis willing to officiate at interfaith marriages. They show a rise in the overall number of rabbis over the course of this century. However, these surveys have sometimes been flawed in questioning, short on details, and widely varied in format to hamper any cross-comparisons.

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<sup>335</sup>David W. Belin, "Resolution on Rabbinic Officiation at Interfaith Marriages, Where There is a Commitment to Identity as a Jewish Household and Raise Any Children as Jews," Nov. 7, 1996, UAHC Archives, 2; Eric Yoffie, personal interview, Cincinnati, OH, Nov. 18, 1996.

<sup>336</sup>David W. Belin, "Resolution on Rabbinic Officiation at Interfaith Marriages, Where There is a Commitment to Identity as a Jewish Household and Raise Any Children as Jews," [Dec.], 1996, UAHC Archives, 1.

<sup>337</sup>Merians, Melvin. Amendment to David W. Belin's "Resolution," [Dec. 1996], 1.

<sup>338</sup>Tom Tugend, "Reform leaders avoid showdown with rabbis," *The American Israelite* 143, no. 23 (Dec. 19, 1996): 1.

We have little objective information on the number of nineteenth century Reform rabbis who officiated either in Germany or the United States. According to Moses Mielziner, "A few radical rabbis in Germany advocated mixed marriages and did not hesitate to solemnize them in the name of religion."<sup>339</sup> Among them were Mendel Hess, Samuel Holdheim, and Ignaz Einhorn, a rabbi in Hungary.<sup>340</sup>

Of the nineteenth century American Reform rabbis, only a handful have been recorded by history as officiating at interfaith marriages: Samuel Hirsch, Emil G. Hirsch, Isaac Moses, Max Landsberg of Rochester, New York, Jacob Voorsanger of San Francisco, Leo Franklin of Detroit, and Charles Fleischer of Boston. From their comments during the debates of 1869, 1909 and 1947 respectively, it could be construed, perhaps, that Solomon Deutsch, Harry Mayer and Ephraim Frisch also officiated.<sup>341</sup>

In 1912, the CCAR Committee on Social and Religious Union surveyed the membership of the CCAR to determine the level and interest in synagogue programs. They received over one hundred responses which represented about four-fifths of Reform congregations and over half of Reform rabbis. Urged to include questions on interfaith marriage by unnamed rabbis searching for "the moral support of numbers to aid them in refusing to officiate," the committee learned of only seven Reform rabbis who officiated at interfaith marriages. Another two or three unnamed rabbis stated they do so would in unspecified exceptional circumstances.<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>339</sup>Mielziner, *Marriage and Divorce*, 52 n.1.

<sup>340</sup>Meyer, *Response*, 163, 205.

<sup>341</sup>Meyer, *Response*, 257, 458 n.91; Kerry M. Olitzky, Lance J. Sussman and Malcolm H. Stern, eds., *Reform Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (Westport, CT, 1993), 60-61; Marcus, *US Jewry*, Vol. 3, 118; CCAR *Yearbook* 19 (1909): 178; Unpublished manuscript of the 1947 CCAR Convention, 223, American Jewish Archives.

<sup>342</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 22 (1912): 95, 98.

## Mann (1937)

Louis Mann's 1937 survey was the first to focus exclusively on interfaith marriage. Mann asked the CCAR three questions:

- I. Do you officiate at weddings in which one party *is* and *remains* Christian?
- II. If so, what promise, if any, do you exact? For example, that the children should be brought up as Jews.
- III. Do you think that the Central Conference of American Rabbis' attitude of non-participation in cases of intermarriage should be changed?<sup>343</sup>

Mann sent out 325 surveys and received 240 valid responses (74% of the CCAR). 131 rabbis (55.5%) reported that they do not officiate at interfaith marriages and also do not want the CCAR policy changed. As noted above, Mann had incorrectly recalled the CCAR policy as one of "non-participation." He also got confused in his own statistics, reporting that 109 (45.5%) rabbis want a change in the policy as stated in question three. Of these rabbis who want a change:

- 51 (21%) officiate at interfaith marriages with certain conditions: a promise to raise the children as Jews or to join a congregation.
- 30 (12.5%) do not officiate.
- 17 (7%) officiate without conditions.
- 11 (4.5%) officiate with conditions, but do not want a change in the stated CCAR policy.

Mann clearly mixed up his numbers as he included the eleven rabbis who do not want a change in CCAR policy as part of the group of 109. An accurate breakdown of Mann's statistics would be:

- 161 rabbis (67%) do not officiate at interfaith marriages.
- 79 rabbis (33%) will officiate. 62 of them (26%) with some conditions. 17 (7%) without conditions.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup>CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 313. Italics in original.

<sup>344</sup>Ibid., 314-15.

### Stillpass (1943)

In 1943, as part of his HUC rabbinical thesis, Leo Stillpass also surveyed the Conference on issues related to officiation. Stillpass asked twelve questions of the 437 rabbis who received questionnaires, but was primarily interested in whether or not they officiated. He received back 277 valid replies (64% of the Conference). His results were similar to Mann's:

- 181 rabbis (65%) do not officiate at interfaith marriages.
- 95 rabbis (34%) will officiate. 47 (17%) with condition that the children would be raised as Jews. 48 (17%) with other conditions or no conditions at all.<sup>345</sup>

Stillpass examined several other factors in his survey results. Age was not significant in whether or not one was willing to officiate as rabbis officiated in about equal numbers regardless of when they had been ordained. However, which rabbinical seminary one attended did have significance. Although Stillpass surveyed only CCAR members, a significant number of CCAR rabbis had been ordained from European rabbinical seminaries or through private *smicha*. He found the HUC graduates were more likely to officiate.

- HUC graduates: 63.5% do not officiate. 36.5% do officiate.
- Non-HUC graduates: 77% do not officiate. 23% do officiate.<sup>346</sup>

Geographically, Stillpass found consistency throughout the country with relatively equal numbers of rabbis officiating and not officiating at interfaith marriage in all regions except for the East. In the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic States, 81 rabbis did not officiate (76%) while 25 did (24%). This included a 38-14 gap in New York State and a 7-0 gap in New Jersey. All other

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<sup>345</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 63-64, 77. At the 1947 CCAR convention, Stillpass inexplicably announced different results during the debate. He said then that he had received 265 survey of which 220 rabbi would not officiate and 45 would (CCAR Yearbook 57 (1947): 183).

<sup>346</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 79, 81, 83-84.



regions were essentially equal with those who did not officiate outnumbering those who did by a few in each section of the country.

Within certain states, however, there was significant variance. In Ohio, there was a 17-7 gap between those who did not officiate and those who did. Nearly all the rabbis who responded from Cincinnati and Cleveland did not officiate, while throughout the rest of the state, nearly all others would. In California, almost all the rabbis from Southern California did not officiate, while all of the respondents from Northern California stated they would officiate. Indiana was the only state with a large inclination in favor of officiation. Six rabbis would officiate in the state, while only one would not.<sup>347</sup>

The number of interfaith marriages at which rabbis had officiated demonstrated that they were few and far between. Of those who officiated, 72 rabbis (83%) did so at less than 1.1 interfaith marriages a year according to Stillpass. Only one rabbi officiated at an average of more the six interfaith marriages a year.<sup>348</sup> Based on these statistics, the author concluded that the attitude of Reform Judaism, as reflected in its rabbis, was in opposition to officiation. He found that most rabbis wanted a greater role for the CCAR in deciding an official attitude on the subject. Stillpass therefore concluded that his results "support those who refuse to perform intermarriages in the main."<sup>349</sup>

#### **CCAR Survey (1964)**

By the 1960s, speculation on the numbers of rabbis who officiated was rampant. Max Eichhorn wrote Albert Gordon in 1961 that he believed as

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<sup>347</sup>Ibid., 67-70.

<sup>348</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>349</sup>Ibid., 128-29.

many as 20% of Reform rabbis would officiate in certain circumstances. Earlier in his book, Gordon had stated, "It is generally agreed that 35 per cent of [Reform rabbis] perform such marriages."<sup>350</sup>

In 1964, the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage began to survey its members on interfaith marriages. By 1966 the first results were published. In response to the question, "What is your attitude toward officiating at a mixed marriage?" the survey offered five choices:

- (a) Will officiate only if the non-Jewish party is converted to Judaism before the ceremony.
- (b) Will officiate without the conversion ceremony if the couple agree to raise their children as Jews, and if there appear to be no further impediments to the marriage.
- (c) Will officiate in certain conditions without prior conversion.
- (d) Will officiate with no conditions.
- (e) Further remarks or requirements.<sup>351</sup>

- 450 surveys were returned. 306 rabbis (68%) would not officiate.
- 68 rabbis (15%) would officiate if the children would be raised as Jews. 44 (10%) would officiate under certain conditions. 13 rabbis (3%) had no conditions. Several rabbis did not reply.

Furthermore, of the ~~rabbis who indicated~~ that they did not officiate, approximately half of them also stated that they might officiate under unusual circumstances such as pregnancy or impending departure from the area for military reasons.<sup>352</sup>

When the survey examined the responses of the rabbis based on geography, it found generally "monolithic patterns" with Southern states being the most liberal and the Northeast being the most "severe." The survey also explored the connection between city size and position on officiation finding very minor differences between the communities.<sup>353</sup> More recent surveys have not analyzed geographical breakdowns, however Irwin Fishbein

<sup>350</sup>Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 208, 187.

<sup>351</sup>Survey Results, 1964, 2.

<sup>352</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-3.

<sup>353</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-8.

has spoken about the personalities of a congregation and a community. Fishbein pointed to St. Louis and Philadelphia as cities with old roots in officiation, while the Northeast, especially when "dominated by Roland Gittelsohn," and Texas, which he considered "an anomaly," were communities with far fewer rabbis who officiate. In 1995, Jeffrey Salkin said that congregations in Detroit, Montreal, St. Louis, and the South generally have rabbis that do officiate, while rabbis in Toronto, Chicago, the Northeast, New Jersey, Florida, and Texas are less likely to officiate.<sup>354</sup>

Thus, the cumulative results from the 1964 survey show little change from the previous surveys.

- 68% of rabbis do not officiate at interfaith marriages.
- 28% of rabbis will officiate. 25% with some conditions. 3% without conditions.<sup>355</sup>

#### **The Lenn Report (1972)**

In 1969, speculation continued on the number of rabbis who officiate perhaps elevated by David Max Eichhorn publishing his list of rabbis who officiate. In the spring of 1969, the Southern California Association of Liberal Rabbis surveyed their own members. Of the 57 respondents, 58% would not officiate, while 42% would. The results found that about half of those rabbis who would not officiate would refer. Of the 24 rabbis who would officiate, 4 would officiate only for congregants, 17 had various requirements, and 3 had no requirements.<sup>356</sup>

The CCAR also joined in trying to determine the number of Reform officiants. As a result of the report of the Committee on Rabbinic Training,

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<sup>354</sup>Fishbein, interview; "Depolarizing Situation - Not Into Yes and No," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 25, 1996, Author's Archives.

<sup>355</sup>Survey Results, 1964, 3.

<sup>356</sup>Allen S. Maller and Marc Lee Raphael, "The 'Cost' of Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, April 1971: 83.

chaired by David Polish, at the 1969 CCAR convention, a major sociological study of the Reform movement was authorized. Theodore I. Lenn of Connecticut was engaged to conduct this thorough investigation of the nature, background, and feelings of the varied constituent bodies of Reform Judaism. The survey was conducted in 1971 and the results published in a book, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, in 1972.<sup>357</sup>

As part of the survey of Reform rabbis, Lenn asked if they officiated at interfaith marriages. He received 478 valid replies to the question from congregational rabbis or 50% of the CCAR. However, if we exclude rabbis who could not be considered as part of the question or reply, the results would be for about 60% of the CCAR.

- 282 rabbis (59%) do not officiate at interfaith marriages.
- 196 rabbis (41%) would officiate. 96 (20%) with some conditions. 100 (21%) without conditions.<sup>358</sup>

Lenn also asked HUC-JIR students if they would officiate at interfaith marriages. On the 58 surveys returned, many students did not answer the question. However, 28% indicated they would not officiate, 16% would officiate "only in the most unusual of circumstances" and 7% stated they would officiate in general.<sup>359</sup>

Two other surveys of HUC students have been compiled since Lenn. In 1980, HUC Professor Robert Katz analyzed responses from 71 HUC Cincinnati students and faculty members. He found that 47% of the students would not officiate, 28% of the students would, and 26% were undecided. Interestingly, of the students in their fourth and fifth years of rabbinical

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<sup>357</sup>Theodore I. Lenn et al., *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (West Hartford, CT, 1972), 1-2.

<sup>358</sup>*Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>359</sup>*Ibid.*, 133.

school, 38% would officiate. Among HUC faculty who were also rabbis, 62% would not officiate, 31% would, and 8% were undecided.<sup>360</sup>

In 1995, rabbinical student Steven Lowenstein surveyed a larger percentage of the HUC student body and compared his results to Lenn's findings. He received results from 116 students. Lowenstein found that 66% of HUC students would not officiate, 25% of the students "would perform them only under specific conditions" and 6% would under certain conditions.<sup>361</sup>

Surveys on Officiation	Mann (1937)	Stillpass (1943)	CCAR (1964)	Lenn (1971)
Number of Respondents (out of CCAR membership)	74% (240)	64% (277)	45% (450)	60% (478)
Will Not Officiate	67% (161)	65% (181)	68% (306)	59% (282)
Will Officiate (All)	33% (79)	34% (95)	28% (126)	41% (196)
Will (with conditions) (out of those who officiate)	78% (62)	49% (47)	90% (113)	49% (96)
Will (without conditions) (out of those who officiate)	22% (17)	51% (48)	10% (13)	51% (100)

Comparing the results of the four studies, we find minimal changes in the number of rabbis who will or will not officiate through the early 1960s. A shift towards officiation can be noted by the early 70s. The dramatic differences that occur relating to conditions at which a rabbi might or might not officiate were based as much on the form of the question in the survey as they were on changing times.

### **The Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling**

<sup>360</sup>Robert L. Katz et al., "Data from Questionnaire 5/8/80 on Mixed Marriage, Conversion," May 19, 1980, American Jewish Archives.

<sup>361</sup>Steven Stark Lowenstein, "The Analysis and Comparison of the American Reform Rabbinic Student of the Early 1970's with Reform Rabbinic Students of the Early 1990's: An Assessment of Changing Perspectives in the Seminary," (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1995), 61.



Since the Lenn Report, there have been no official or comprehensive studies on the number of Reform rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages. In 1971, Irwin Fishbein, at the Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling, began to compile his list of rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages based on the list created by David Max Eichhorn in 1969. This list contained the names, and beginning in 1973, the conditions of Reform rabbis who officiated at interfaith marriages. In 1982 Fishbein began to collect more generalizable survey data in order to try and "determine the present position of the Reform rabbinate on officiating at intermarriages and to compare data...to a portion of the Lenn Report."<sup>362</sup>

Fishbein conducted such surveys in 1982, 1986, 1990, and 1995.<sup>363</sup> While the information in the surveys was used to compile the lists of rabbis who officiate and their varying requirements, Fishbein also analyzed the data of all the forms including those of rabbis who do not officiate at interfaith marriages and those who officiate, but were not willing to be put on the list.

Fishbein also allowed rabbis to choose from a wide selection of possible requirements (19 in 1995) to further clarify their positions. The statistics of rabbis who require the specific commitment for a commitment to Jewish home or that the children be raised as Jews are reflected below. In 1990, Fishbein began including Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly rabbis in both the list and the surveys.

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<sup>362</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1982 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies," 1982, Fishbein Archives.

<sup>363</sup>Fishbein, "Summary 1982"; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1986 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies," 1986, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1990 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies," Dec. 31, 1990, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies: Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1995 Survey," Dec. 29, 1995, Fishbein Archives.

The total number of rabbis on the Rabbinic Center's list of rabbis who officiate, regardless of organizational affiliation, is:

Year	Total Number of Rabbis Listed
1969	61
1971	78
1973	119
1978	159
1982	178
1986	202
1990	220
1995	231

The data below is only of CCAR members:

Fishbein Surveys	1982	1986	1990	1995
Number of Respondents (out of CCAR membership)	43% (582)	39% (553)	47% (729)	40% (659)
Will Not Officiate	50% (289)	50% (274)	54% (394)	52% (341)
Will Officiate (All)	50% (293)	50% (278)	46% (335)	48% (318)
Will (home or children) (out of those who officiate)	68% (198)	67% (185)	64% (216)	42% (133)
Willing to be Put on List (out of those who officiate)	61% (178)	73% (202)	62% (207)	69% (221)

The overall numbers of rabbis who do officiate and do not officiate have not significantly changed over the thirteen years of surveys. The only notable trend is the drop in the number of rabbis who require commitments regarding a Jewish home and the raising of children in the 1995 survey.

While Fishbein found the increase from the Lenn survey on the number of rabbis who officiate significant, others do not. By the time Fishbein began collecting general results in 1982, he was well-known as one of the major proponents of officiation and the force behind "the list." It is likely that many rabbis who do not officiate had refused to return their survey to Fishbein. Elliot Stevens wrote *Moment* in 1988 that Fishbein's results were "far-fetched, given the likelihood that rabbis opposed to rabbinic officiation

would probably be inclined to discard the survey on the receipt."<sup>364</sup> Likewise, Hershel Shanks said, "Rabbis who refuse to perform intermarriages may not want to participate in, or be associated with, Rabbi Fishbein's survey."<sup>365</sup> The smaller overall percentage of respondents to the survey could reflect this contention.

Others completely disagree. Egon Mayer thought that the "suggestion that Reform rabbis who are opposed to officiating at mixed marriages are less likely to 'cast their vote' in a survey dealing with the subject sounds highly improbable, to say the least."<sup>366</sup> Rabbis who do officiate may also be hesitant to respond to the survey. Some, like Abraham Klausner, refused to be on the list because "he is already performing more intermarriages than he can handle; publicity would only make matters worse."<sup>367</sup> Others might be hesitant because their practice of officiation is quite limited or private. They might fear that the information would become public, especially when sending it to the organization most responsible for publishing such data. Fishbein has said that he sometimes receives survey forms without any identifying features on them and has even learned that some surveys have been mailed out of state to avoid revealing postmarks.<sup>368</sup>

The number of rabbis who will officiate at interfaith marriage has slowly risen since Mann's 1937 survey. Over the last two decades, those numbers have remained somewhat constant with those that officiate under varying circumstances holding steady at somewhere under 50%.

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<sup>364</sup>Elliot L. Stevens, Letter, *Moment* 13, no. 2 (April 1988): 6.

<sup>365</sup>Hershel Shanks, "Rabbis Who Perform Intermarriages: Who They Are & Why They Do It," *Moment* 12, no. 10 (Jan./Feb. 1988): 16.

<sup>366</sup>Egon Mayer, Letter, *Moment* 13, no. 2 (April 1988): 6.

<sup>367</sup>Sklare, "Jewish Survival," 57.

<sup>368</sup>Fishbein, interview.

## Chapter Two

### To Officiate or Not to Officiate

The more things change, the more they remain the same.<sup>1</sup>

Despite intense debate and endless rhetoric, the arguments in favor and against officiation at interfaith marriages have not changed dramatically within the Reform movement. What was debated in 1909 is still debated today. While some challenges are no longer relevant or even appropriate in the 1990s, and occasionally an new argument is put forth, the early Reformers and today's rabbis spoke a similar language regarding officiation. What makes the discussion different today is the publicity and greater acceptance of interfaith marriage. Rabbis and lay leaders of all denominations, as well as sociologists, psychiatrists, historians, and marriage counselors, have flooded the publishing world with books and articles on every aspect of interfaith marriage. Thus, we have far more public debate to consider than we did at the beginning of the twentieth century.

#### Bible and Talmud

Arguments regarding officiation often begin with interfaith marriage itself. Quite often, rabbis feel that if they can prove that interfaith marriage is wrong then the idea that officiation is wrong must logically follow. For example, the detailed 1980 CCAR responsum, written by Walter Jacob, responded to the question, "May a Reform rabbi officiate at marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew?" This responsum covered the history of Jewish

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<sup>1</sup>Alphonse Karr, *Les Guêpes*, quoted in Emily Morison Beck, ed., *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* (Boston, 1980), 514.

opposition to interfaith marriage without ever directly answering the query.<sup>2</sup> It was to be inferred that officiation is inappropriate.

The historical stance of Judaism towards interfaith marriage is used by both rabbis who officiate and rabbis who do not as support for their position. Paul Gorin, in his 1972 CCAR presentation, stated as a fact that, "Virtually all of us accept as axiomatic that mixed marriage is contrary to Jewish tradition and that it constitutes a major threat to Jewish survival."<sup>3</sup> Various biblical and talmudic verses as well as statements from the codes and rabbinic commentaries have been cited to show that Jewish tradition has consistently opposed interfaith marriage.<sup>4</sup> Thus, Martin Ryback concluded in 1972, "the *Halachah* unequivocally bans mixed marriages."<sup>5</sup> Gorin, despite his own practice of officiating under limited circumstances, took it a step further by stating that officiation is "patently contrary to *Halachah*."<sup>6</sup>

Such statements are not left unchallenged by rabbis who officiate. The absoluteness of Jewish opposition to marriages between Jews and non-Jews is usually questioned. David Max Eichhorn wondered, "Is there, really and truly, in *all* Jewish history violent objection to any sort of marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew?" In response, he wrote, "There is not."<sup>7</sup> Eichhorn and others have noted that Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, and Solomon all

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<sup>2</sup>CCAR Yearbook 90 (1980): 86-101.

<sup>3</sup>CCAR Yearbook 82 (1972): 77.

<sup>4</sup>For a full exploration of the traditional views of interfaith marriage, see the above mentioned CCAR responsum from CCAR Yearbook 90 (1980): 86-101 as well as Louis M. Epstein, *Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud* (Cambridge, MA, 1942).

Some of the more relevant Biblical verses include: Genesis 11:29, 20:12, 24:15, 26:34, 28:9, 29:12, 38:2, 41:45, 46:10; Exodus 2:21, 34:16; Numbers 21:1; Deuteronomy 7:3-4; 7:14, 21:10; Joshua 23:12; Judges 3:5-6; 14:3, 21:16-17; 2 Samuel 4:13, 6:3; 1 Kings 3:1, 7:14, 11:1-2, 16:31; Malachi 2:11-12; Book of Ruth; Ezra 9:1-2; 10:5, 10:10-11, 10:19; Nehemiah 10:30-31; 13:23, 25.

Among the Mishnaic and Talmudic sources are: Mishnah Yevamot 2:8; Avodah Zara 31b, 36b; Chullin 13b; Sanhedrin 81b; Kiddushin 68b; Yevamot 45a, 77a.

<sup>5</sup>CCAR Yearbook 82 (1972): 73.

<sup>6</sup>CCAR Yearbook 82 (1972): 78.

<sup>7</sup>David Max Eichhorn, "A New Look at Conversion and Marriage," *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1957: 12.



married foreigners. Rachel Cowan has commented that "Rabbinic legend asserts that the wives of all the biblical Israelites converted."<sup>8</sup> Eichhorn challenged any interpretation of the Book of Ezra as an indication that Jews were forbidden to intermarry. He resolved that "what aroused Ezra's anxiety and wrath were those [marriages] in which Jews were being persuaded by their spouses to follow the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites."<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, the blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh, born of an Egyptian mother, and the stories of Ruth and Esther were examples in the Bible to contrast the hard line of Ezra. Eichhorn concluded,

The Biblical attitude toward intermarriage is clear and consistent: Intermarriages which benefit the Jewish people are approved. Intermarriages which harm the Jewish people are condemned. The only intermarriages which are forbidden are those in which there is a possibility that the non-Jewish spouse may attempt to persuade the Jew to abandon his religion and to worship false gods.<sup>10</sup>

Samuel Holdheim was the first to publicly challenge the rabbinic understanding of Deuteronomy 7:4, "You shall not intermarry with them: do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for you sons." "Them" refers to the seven nations of the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, listed in Deuteronomy 7:1. The rabbis of the Talmud expanded these prohibitions against marrying these seven nations to all pagan peoples.<sup>11</sup> Holdheim challenged the relevance of such a dictum in the face of interfaith marriage with Christians. In an 1869 sermon, contained in his *Predigten über die jüdische Religion*, he stated that Christians were not equivalent with the pagans of the biblical or talmudic periods. "Marriage with non-Jews," he said to the congregation, "was

<sup>8</sup>Rachel B. Cowan, "Jewish-Christian Marriages: Shall I Officiate?" *Cross Currents*, Spring 1990: 36.

<sup>9</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL, 1974), 16.

<sup>10</sup>David Max Eichhorn, "Did Ezra Ban All Intermarriages?" *CCAR Journal*, Spring 1973: 43.

<sup>11</sup>*CCAR Yearbook* 90 (1980): 91.

prohibited in order to maintain the racial purity of the Jews" and to keep them "a separate and distinctive holy nation....But that time is long gone!"<sup>12</sup> While Isaac Mayer Wise also accepted that Christians and Muslims were not comparable with the talmudic pagans, he disputed the notion that Deuteronomy 7:4 was for racial reasons. "It is purely spiritual," he wrote in 1883. "The law simply commands to keep aloof of Paganism and to educate and govern the chosen people in the law of God."<sup>13</sup>

### *Kiddushin*

Some writers, such as Eugene Mihaly, have stated that the laws of the Talmud which declare interfaith marriage as invalid are an "innovation" based on "impossible, unacceptable assumptions concerning the status of the gentile." However, many rabbis have based their objections to officiation on these traditional laws. In the 1909 CCAR debate, Samuel Schulman stated that interfaith marriage was absolutely prohibited as noted in the talmudic passage, "ein kiddushin tofsin."<sup>14</sup>

One of the traditionally based reasons cited for reluctance to officiate is the nature of Jewish marriage, specifically an understanding of *kiddushin*. Martin Ryback explained that *kiddushin* means "that something significantly Jewish happens at a marriage ceremony, which transforms a civil act into the religious experience, and which results in a commitment to Judaism, and Jewish family life by the couple being married."<sup>15</sup> The Committee of 100 called *kiddushin* "sacred Jewish marriage" which "reaffirms not only the bond between God and humanity but also the covenant between God and

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<sup>12</sup>Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, Oct. 1966: 36; Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Abraham Geiger and Samuel Holdheim: Their Differences in Germany and Repercussions in America," *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* 22 (1977): 145.

<sup>13</sup>Isaac Mayer Wise, "Intermarriages," *The American Israelite* 30, no. 25 (Dec. 21, 1883): 4.

<sup>14</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 19 (1909): 176.

<sup>15</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 82 (1972): 73.

Israel."<sup>16</sup> Thus, marriage under Jewish auspices, these writers believe, must be between a Jew and a Jew. Only a Jew marrying a Jew is *kiddushin*. An interfaith ceremony, even if performed by a rabbi, could never be *kiddushin*, because *kiddushin* "between a Jew and non-Jew would be a contradiction in terms."<sup>17</sup> The marriage covenant, according to Rachel Cowan, is a contract. "A non-Jew is not qualified to enter into a marriage contract with a Jew by virtue of the fact of not being Jewish."<sup>18</sup> Cantor Amy Brenner Mitz concluded, based on such arguments, "A wedding between a Jew and a gentile is simply not a Jewish wedding."<sup>19</sup>

Eugene Mihaly challenged statements such as these. In his *Responsa on Jewish Marriage*, he detailed at length how *kiddushin* is not specifically Jewish marriage, but a rabbinic metaphor.<sup>20</sup> Ben Zion Wacholder, in his Response to Eugene Mihaly, disagreed stating that *kiddushin* is not a metaphor, but "the standard rabbinic term for marriage."<sup>21</sup> Burt Siegel's objection was quite different. He noted that the concept of *kiddushin* is the "spirit" of the law in Reform Judaism. Since "we don't regard the totality of the corpus of Rabbinic jurisprudence on marriage," what sets interfaith marriage apart from all other marriage issues? "How does it keep alive the spirit of *kiddushin* in any significant fashion?...The irrelevance of this is so obvious."<sup>22</sup> Similar arguments, used in opposition to citations of traditional or *halachic* sources, will be analyzed below.

<sup>16</sup>Simeon J. Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," Nov. 25, 1984, CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>17</sup>CCAR Yearbook 92 (1982): 213.

<sup>18</sup>Cowan, "Jewish-Christian Marriage," 36.

<sup>19</sup>Amy Brenner Mitz, Letter, *Reform Judaism*, Winter 1996: 8.

<sup>20</sup>Eugene Mihaly, *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* (Cincinnati, 1985), 40.

<sup>21</sup>Ben Zion Wacholder et al., "Response to Eugene Mihaly," [Dec. 1985], CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>22</sup>Burt A. Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, April 1971: 81.

## The Role of the Rabbi

While the above explanations speak to the validity of the wedding itself, the rabbi's role in the Jewish wedding service is at the heart of many rabbis' refusal to officiate. As early as 1909, Samuel Schulman noted that a rabbi's role in a Jewish wedding is not to impart a sacrament. The rabbi is the *m'sader kiddushin*, which could be filled by any learned Jew.<sup>23</sup> Jakob Petuchowski wrote that two witnesses are all that are needed for a Jewish wedding, but that a rabbi is advisable, not to make the marriage Jewish, but to avoid breaking any confusing laws and to avoid doubts "about the validity of the *kiddushin*."<sup>24</sup> When rabbis officiate at interfaith weddings, Petuchowski continued, the rabbi "creates the impression that it is his presence which alone establishes the validity of a marriage" and that the rabbi is arrogating "to himself a priestly status with which Jewish law does not invest him."<sup>25</sup> Several years later, Petuchowski wondered how to view rabbis who were lending their presence "to a situation which can have no Jewish legal validity at all? Who does he think he is? Some kind of Jewish Pope, empowered to grant dispensations?"<sup>26</sup> Haskell Bernat expounded further on the nature of the rabbi as witness: "Symbolically, the rabbi *is* the Jewish people at the ceremony, and through the rabbi we enter into the covenant with the bride and groom."<sup>27</sup>

Scottie Schwarz Younce, a lay person from Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, criticized such arguments as hypocritical. She felt that rabbis who refrain from bestowing "the blessings of Judaism upon a non-Jew" at an

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<sup>23</sup>CCAR Yearbook 19 (1909): 319.

<sup>24</sup>Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," 35.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>26</sup>Jakob J. Petuchowski, Letter, *Midstream*, April 1970: 65.

<sup>27</sup>Mark L. Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" *Reform Judaism*, Summer 1985: 2.

interfaith wedding, do not hesitate to lead community interfaith services "and wouldn't miss the opportunity to give their priestly blessings during an invocation before a football game."<sup>28</sup> It is not the rabbi who imbues the wedding with holiness respond some rabbis. "The element of holiness in marriage comes from the act of the bride being set apart for the groom as his wife. From now on they are sanctified to each other, consecrated as the conveyors of the Covenant between God and the Jewish people through the lives they will lead together and the children they will raise."<sup>29</sup> John Friedman, in a 1996 presentation to the UAHC Mid-Atlantic Regional Biennial, stated that an interfaith wedding service lacks integrity "when it is performed by a rabbi, the representative of a tradition which either bride or groom cannot accept in the first place. It is the Jewish ceremony which, in this case, lacks integrity...not the couple at all."<sup>30</sup> Other rabbis still feel their place is to officiate despite the traditional understanding of the rabbi's role. Henry Cohen wrote that the rabbi should officiate in order to "act in a way that will promote the transmission of Judaism, to offer a Jewish perspective on the meaning of marriage and to help the couple and their families express their hopes and prayers for a life of mutual fulfillment and love."<sup>31</sup>

If a rabbi cannot officiate at a Jewish marriage because neither the nature of *kiddushin* nor the role of the rabbi is appropriate or acceptable, some rabbis wonder if the rabbi can officiate in a civil capacity. Martin Ryback challenged such notions on *halachic* grounds including *marit ayin*.<sup>32</sup> Other rabbis saw this as appropriating to oneself "an authority which is not really

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<sup>28</sup>Scottie Schwarz Younce, Letter, *Reform Judaism*, Winter 1985-86: 32.

<sup>29</sup>Cowan, "Jewish-Christian Marriage," 36.

<sup>30</sup>John S. Friedman, "Why I Don't Officiate at Intermarriages," paper delivered at UAHC Mid-Atlantic regional biennial. Oct., 27, 1996, American Jewish Archives, 2.

<sup>31</sup>Henry Cohen, Letter, *Moment* 13, no. 2 (April 1988): 8.

<sup>32</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 82 (1972): 75.



his, ethically or legally, to exercise."<sup>33</sup> While rabbis are legally able to officiate at any marriage, Judah Cahn believed that "in granting me this privilege there was an implicit, if not explicit, understanding on the State's part that I would not utilize my authority to officiate at the marriage ceremonies of non-Jews."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Maurice Davis stated, "I am not a Justice of the Peace, but a rabbi. If I have the legal right to act as a Justice of the Peace in the instance, it is only because I am a rabbi."<sup>35</sup>

As early as 1919, Kaufmann Kohler wrote that on the question of a rabbi officiating in a civil role, "neither Judaism nor the State law acknowledges such a marriage as legal."<sup>36</sup> Kohler was perhaps overstating the case in reference to state law. In his 1909 CCAR presentation, Samuel Schulman thought that officiating in a civil capacity "would be unworthy of the Rabbinical office....The Rabbi has no right to make his office that of a civil magistrate. He can only marry as a Rabbi, as a teacher of the Jewish religion."<sup>37</sup> Louis Mann questioned such statements in his 1937 CCAR presentation. He remarked: "If this were the only occasion on which a rabbi steps beyond his rabbinic function, the argument would carry more conviction." Among the other 'non-rabbinic' roles that Mann listed were sociologist, economist, politician, literary critic, and social worker.<sup>38</sup>

Officiation at interfaith marriage is often seen as a "mockery of the rabbinate" by those who do not officiate.<sup>39</sup> Isaac Mayer Wise believed that a

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<sup>33</sup>Jack D. Spiro, "Considerations," CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>34</sup>Judah Cahn, "The Rabbi, Mixed Marriages, and Jewish Education," *The Reconstructionist* 31 no. 4 (Feb. 19, 1965): 12.

<sup>35</sup>Maurice Davis, "The Rabbi and Intermarriages," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, Jan. 2, 1991: 10.

<sup>36</sup>CCAR Yearbook 29 (1919): 76.

<sup>37</sup>CCAR Yearbook 19 (1909): 323-24.

<sup>38</sup>CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 320-21.

<sup>39</sup>Louis A. Berman, Letter, *Midstream*, April 1970: 68.

rabbi who officiated would "make a comedian of himself."<sup>40</sup> The wedding is made to appear "kosher" by the participation of a rabbi, according to Joseph Klein. "He is putting his *hechsher* on what everyone knows is *tref*."<sup>41</sup> Such ceremonies have been called an "empty" ritual, "a farce," "hypocritical and dishonest," "immoral," and "make-believe."<sup>42</sup> John Friedman found that couples who are married at ceremonies where a rabbi officiates sense this dishonesty. Interfaith couples, he wrote in a 1981 letter, often come to him when the non-Jew wishes to convert. They avoid returning to the rabbi who officiated at their wedding because, "somewhere in their hearts they know that it is not honest to have a non-Jew be married by a rabbi."<sup>43</sup>

Jonathan Gerard based his opposition on the sacredness of bearing witness. "There is no more important act a Jew can do. For a witness establishes truth." If a rabbi officiates at an interfaith wedding, that rabbi is bearing false witness that the couple is being married according to the "tradition and faith of Israel" and then "lives with the burden of violating one of the Ten Commandments as well as one of the inviolable principles of Judaism -- to be truthful."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Sandy Rosen would publicly acknowledge and thank interfaith couples married in a civil ceremony. He openly told the couples how much he appreciated "their not attempting to manipulate me or my notions about the integrity of our religion" by trying to force him to officiate.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Wise, "Intermarriages," 4.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," *Congress Bi-Weekly* 31, no. 6 (March 23, 1964): 9.

<sup>42</sup>Jakob J. Petuchowski, "The Ramifications of Realism," *CCAR Journal*, June 1967: 82; Solomon B. Freehof, Max C. Currick and Isaac Landman, "Reform and Intermarriage," *Liberal Judaism*, March 1947: 16, 17; Maurice Davis, "Why I Won't Perform an Intermarriage: A Reform Rabbi Responds," *Moment* 12, no. 10 (Jan./Feb. 1988): 20.

<sup>43</sup>John S. Friedman to Joseph Glazer [sic], Oct. 29, 1981, CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>44</sup>Jonathan Gerard, "Why I Do Not Perform Mixed Marriages and Why I'm Announcing the Reasons Publicly," *Bulletin of Temple Berith Sholom, Troy, New York*. Nov. 1980. 3.

<sup>45</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 343 (12/26/95).

### *K'dat Moshe V'Yisrael*

הרי את (אתה) מקדשת (מקדש) לי במערת זו כדת משה וישראל.  
Be consecrated to me with this ring as my wife/husband in keeping with the  
heritage of Moses and Israel.<sup>46</sup>

While the nature of the Jewish wedding ceremony itself may be a major obstacle for some rabbis, the specifics of the wedding vows are also a barrier. Jonathan Gerard said that this one-line blessing commits the couple "to view each other in a special and unique way. Always. And in the context of the Jewish tradition."<sup>47</sup> The vow is seen by many rabbis as absolutely essential to the ceremony. Jack Spiro, who did officiate, called *k'dat Moshe* is "the indispensable basis of a Jewish wedding [which] the rabbi must ask the couple to make; without this oath it cannot be considered a Jewish wedding."<sup>48</sup> Other rabbis concur that the vow is required for a Jewish wedding to be a Jewish wedding. Steven Foster thought it analogous to the use of Jesus at a Christian wedding, while Debra Hachen said, in her 1996 presentation to the CCAR, that without these words, the wedding "is no longer religiously binding as a Jewish act" and, although spiritual and uplifting, it is not "legal."<sup>49</sup>

Not only are the words vital, but so is the identity of the speaker. *K'dat Moshe* is a "formal contract....If one of the parties is not bound 'by the law of Moses and Israel,' the contract is not binding; it is void."<sup>50</sup> "If one of the couples is not Jewish, it is impossible for him or her to utter an oath regarding marital consecration according to Jewish law," wrote Jack Spiro. "How can a non-Jew be involved in a Jewish wedding which represents

<sup>46</sup>David Polish and W. Gunther Plaut, eds., *Rabbi's Manual* (New York, 1988), 54.

<sup>47</sup>Gerard, "Why I Do Not," 2.

<sup>48</sup>Spiro, "Considerations," 1.

<sup>49</sup>Steven Foster, "Officiation at Interweddings," author's notes, March 8, 1995; "Mixed Marriage: Why I Believe Officiating Will or Will Not Lead to Continuity of the Jewish People," 1996 CCAR Convention session, March 1996, audiocassette, CCAR Archives.

<sup>50</sup>Anita Diamant, *The New Jewish Wedding* (New York, 1985), 36.

commitment to Jewish tradition? But there is no Jewish wedding without the oath."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, concluded the Committee of 100, the marriage is not Jewish if the rabbi omits "the traditional words" from the ceremony, and for a non-Jew to speak these words is "inappropriate....Either a marriage is a Jewish one or it is not."<sup>52</sup>

Eugene Mihaly responded sharply to notions such as these. In his response to the Committee of 100, he criticized the idea that by omitting these words it is not a Jewish marriage. This concept, he wrote, is an "extravagant use of the Jewish tradition and a grievous distortion of the core teaching of Reform Judaism....Whether or not a rabbi does or does not include a particular phrase in the marriage service is an insignificant detail."<sup>53</sup> Mihaly reviewed the history of the Jewish marital vows and concluded that they weren't used regularly until the 12th or 13th century.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, he criticized the Committee's translation of the Hebrew as "the heritage of Moses and Israel." Mihaly stated that *dat* has never been translated as "heritage" as the Committee stated (and as the CCA's *Rabbi's Manual* would translate it in the 1988 edition). Mihaly noted that the 1928 *Rabbi's Manual* translated this phrase as "according to the faith of Israel;" while the 1961 *Rabbi's Manual* used "according to the law of God and the faith of Israel."<sup>55</sup> Mihaly concluded that any assertion that *k'dat Moshe* is essential to the Jewish services has to be "dismissed, even from literalist traditional perspective, as fanciful invention."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Spiro, "Considerations," 1.

<sup>52</sup>Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage."

<sup>53</sup>Mihaly, *Responsa*, 19-20, 23.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 16 n. 1. The Conservative and Orthodox rabbi's manuals, as well as most other Jewish services, consistently translate the words *dat* as "Law."

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

Responding to Mihaly's claims, Simeon Maslin wrote that the usage of *k'dat Moshe* is universal in Jewish ceremonies today. When it became mainstream is irrelevant. "Since when does Reform Judaism validate only ancient practices?"<sup>57</sup> Ben Zion Wacholder noted that a standardized marriage ceremony only came into existence in the late Middle Ages. However, the central concepts of *k'dat Moshe* existed much earlier. "Although different formulas were employed, they inevitably expressed or implied" the same concepts. *K'dat Moshe v'Yisrael*, according to Wacholder, "lies at the very heart of Jewish marriage."<sup>58</sup>

If the ceremony is inappropriate for non-Jews, why not alter the ceremony? David Max Eichhorn noted that traditionally Jewish marriage was achieved by an exchange of an object of value, through a contract, or by sexual intercourse. Therefore a rabbi, vows, and all other details of the wedding are not essential to make a wedding Jewish or valid. "Except for their aesthetic appeal or emotional appeal, they are completely unimportant."<sup>59</sup> Mary Hoffmann, a lay leader, wondered if there wasn't a "middle ground" where "a meaningful service [would] be designed" that allowed the rabbi "to officiate in a less Jewish sanctifying way, while giving the intermarrying couple the feeling of inclusion they need?"<sup>60</sup> Samuel Sandmel thought that the service represented a particular religious viewpoint for both a denomination and a clergyperson. "To deviate or omit any part of the wedding service may present a clergyman with difficult questions beyond simply words, phrases, or sentences; the inherited prescribed ceremony represents a theological position he subscribes to. Hence, from the clergyman's viewpoint, it is reasonable to

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<sup>57</sup>Simeon J. Maslin et al., "A Statement of Concern," Dec. 26, 1985, CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>58</sup>Wacholder et al., "Response," 1.

<sup>59</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 22.

<sup>60</sup>Mary Hoffman, "Rabbis Conducting an Intermarriage," *The Jewish Post and Opinion*, Nov. 14, 1990, 14.



expect the couple which asks him to officiate to share in the theological beliefs of that denomination."<sup>61</sup>

Many rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages, while they might question the essential quality of the vows, agree with the non-officiants that *k'dat Moshe* is inappropriate for a non-Jew to recite. Kenneth Weiss of El Paso, Texas said that "certain words in the wedding ceremony [need to] be changed to reflect the reality that a non-Jew cannot [be consecrated] in accordance with the Law of Moses and the people of Israel." Changing the vows is out the question for some rabbis who do not officiate. Maurice Davis thought that many things in the ceremony could be altered, but when we get to the vows, "this is where we run out of compromise."<sup>62</sup> Stephen Fuchs agreed that one cannot alter the traditional Jewish wedding vows.<sup>63</sup>

However, many rabbis make exactly that change. David Max Eichhorn, stating that "both good taste and common sense indicate [the traditional vows] should be employed only at a marriage ceremony involving two Jews," substituted the phrase "*b'eyney Elohim v'adam* - in the sight of God and man."<sup>64</sup> Robert Lennick altered the phrase to "*k'dat libi v'ahavat olam* - according to the faith of my heart and my everlasting love."<sup>65</sup> Paul Gorin, who made his change to recognize that an interfaith marriage is not according to *halachah*, used "*bifnei Elohim v'adam* - in the presence of God and man."<sup>66</sup> Other variations and alternatives in the wedding ceremony and vows will be examined in chapter three.

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<sup>61</sup>Samuel Sandmel, *When a Jew and Christian Marry* (Philadelphia, 1977), 28.

<sup>62</sup>Davis, "The Rabbi and Intermarriages," 10.

<sup>63</sup>"How to Think About Officiation (For Newly Ordained Rabbis)," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 26, 1996, Author's Archives.

<sup>64</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 23.

<sup>65</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 350 (1/4/96).

<sup>66</sup>Paul Gorin, "Mixed Marriage: Is a 'Middle of the Road' Position Possible?" Report to CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, April 1972, CCAR Archives, 10.

Samuel Silver took a completely different approach to *k'dat Moshe*. He determined that a non-Jew *could* recite these words with sincerity. "Christianity has not repudiated the outlook of Moses and Judaism with respect to family life," he wrote.

Both Judaism and Christianity subscribe to wholesomeness, holiness, and devotion within the home....We reasoned that everything that is in Judaism is also in Christianity. Christianity is Judaism plus the trinitarian idea. Not everything that is in Christianity is to be found in Judaism, for the latter...does not subscribe to the apotheosis of Jesus or to many other dogmas under the Cross. This explains why Christians are usually not offended by what happens in a synagogue or during a Jewish ceremony, and why Jews feel out of place in a church or feel uncomfortable during a trinitarian ceremony.<sup>67</sup>

When asked about the numerous differences between the Jewish and Christian faiths, Silver said, "there is some divergence, but there are more things that unite them than separate them."<sup>68</sup> Outlooks related to Silver's will be discussed in chapter three in the section on co-officiation.

### ***Halachic Relevance***

The claims of Reform rabbis who do not officiate that *halachah* prevents them from officiating is regularly challenged by rabbis who do officiate. Burt Siegel, in a 1971 article for the *CCAR Journal*, stated the case clearly.

Naturally, marriage between a Jew and an unconverted non-Jew is completely against Jewish law. It is easy to understand why Orthodox and Conservative rabbis categorically refuse to officiate at such marriages. Any rabbi who accepts the Halacha as his life-design is perfectly justified in not officiating. But when Reform rabbis refuse to officiate on these grounds, I am absolutely confused.

Reform Judaism is not traditional Halachic Judaism. Reform rabbis deviate from the traditional laws of marriage time after time....Why then capriciously invoke the "sanctity" of Jewish law in regard to officiating at mixed marriages?<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Samuel M. Silver, *Mixed Marriage: Between Jew and Christian* (New York, 1977), 57-58.

<sup>68</sup>Samuel M. Silver, telephone interview, Jan. 1992.

<sup>69</sup>Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," 80.

Paul Gorin called such a stance "contradictory."<sup>70</sup> When non-officiants refer to Jewish "tradition," rather than *halachah*, as their basis, they are equally criticized. G. George Fox referred to this as a "discouragingly weak reason for not officiating" citing the numerous areas where Reform Judaism is anything but traditional.<sup>71</sup> Bernard Bamberger noted that the 1909 CCAR resolution used "Jewish tradition" as the reason for opposing interfaith marriage. He agreed that such a statement was true, but like Fox, declared that "Reform Judaism has sanctioned and even sanctified many procedures that are contrary to Jewish tradition. On so important a question as this, we cannot rest on authority alone, but must give good reasons for whatever position we uphold."<sup>72</sup>

The use of tradition was further challenged on the specifics of marriage and conversion. Eugene Mihaly wondered if rabbis who believed *k'dat Moshe* was essential to the service were also insisting on two *halachically* qualified witnesses at the wedding and were strictly following the traditional laws regarding divorce, conversion, the levirate marriage, and the marriage of a Kohen to a divorcee. "In all the above cases, the American Reform rabbinate has, practically unanimously, rejected the traditional halakhic prescriptions. Reform rabbis not only officiate at such marriages, they have declared the traditional halakha in these instances null and void – not *dat Moshe weYisrael*."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Hillel Fine noted that most rabbis will marry a Jew who had divorced without a *get* to another Jew. Their children would be considered *mamzerim* and would have severe restrictions in a traditional marriage. "Since we are ready to do this, we would be committing a minor

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<sup>70</sup>Gorin, "Middle of the Road," 3.

<sup>71</sup>G. George Fox, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, Oct. 1960: 67.

<sup>72</sup>Bernard J. Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage: Some Reflections on a Debate," *CCAR Journal*, April 1963: 19.

<sup>73</sup>Mihaly, *Responsa*, 21-23.

infraction if we were to officiate at mixed marriages, where offspring suffer no such stigma."<sup>74</sup>

Response to such criticism generally falls into two categories. The first states that Reform Judaism is actually *halachic* – in its own way. Martin Ryback thought that *halachah* did operate within Reform Judaism. "While we charted a progressive interpretation of Jewish law, we have, at the same time maintained the basic intent and general principles of *Halachah*, especially with regard to marriage."<sup>75</sup> Joseph Klein, writing in 1964, also believed *halachah* existed in Reform Judaism, however in a completely Reform configuration. He saw the *Union Prayerbook* as *halachah* for Reform Worship and the *Rabbi's Manual* as a *halachic* guide for lifecycle events "in much the same way that the more voluminous *Codes* guide our Orthodox colleagues."<sup>76</sup>

A second response is that arguments opposing *halachah* are dangerous as they could lead to the abandonment of many Jewish practices. Jakob Petuchowski, one of the most outspoken proponents of tradition as the basis for non-officiation, called the claims against *halachah* "in a way, pathetic....Why restrict the argument to the matter of *kiddushin*? It can be applied likewise to anything else we have retained of the Tradition! On that basis, we can also do away with the Sabbath, with Passover, and with the Day of Atonement, *intermarriage ken, en ladabhar soph!*"<sup>77</sup> Somewhat less dramatic was Herman Schaalman who, in his 1973 presentation to the CCAR, agreed that Reform Judaism has not "been meticulous" in *halachic* matters "nor, at times, even respectful of *halachah* in the past." However, Schaalman

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<sup>74</sup>Hillel A. Fine, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, June 1967: 103.

<sup>75</sup>*CCAR Yearbook* 82 (1972): 73-74.

<sup>76</sup>Joseph Klein, "Editor's Comments," *CCAR Journal*, April 1964: 80.

<sup>77</sup>Petuchowski, "The Ramifications of Realism," 85.

noted that such actions have led Reform "to near fatal flirtation with the peril of Jewish authenticity." What has saved Reform Judaism is the maintenance of the "essential areas." Unlike *Shabbat* or *Kashrut*, "the once-and-for-a-lifetime nature of the act of *kiddushin*...raises marriage to a unique level, embracing all of the Jewish past and future as a covenant community."<sup>78</sup> That same year, Judah Cahn agreed that the difference was between what is fundamental and what is not. Cahn thought that rabbis should inherently know the distinction and if that if a rabbi was confused, he believed the CCAR was the source for Reform rabbis to seek an answer.<sup>79</sup>

G. George Fox also accepted these "eternal verities," quoting David Philipson. However, he believed that "these are not eliminated by those of us who, under certain conditions, perform mixed marriages."<sup>80</sup> "I, personally, have a great loyalty to *halachah*," wrote Joseph Levine, "but I ask – where does our primary loyalty lie? Do we minister to *halachah*, or do we minister to the happiness of the young people?"<sup>81</sup>

Samuel Silver, once again, had a singular viewpoint on the issue. He wrote, in a 1988 letter to the *CCAR Journal*, that rabbis who officiate are working within the "spirit of Halacha." Specifics have been modified by the *halachists* in response to changing times. "And the new situation with respect to the intermingling of Jews and gentiles in our time is such that *there is little doubt that the Hillelites and other decisors of the Halacha would certainly put the kosher stamp on such officiation.* As for us in the Reform camp, providing a Jewish marriage ceremony for a mixed couple does not

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<sup>78</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 60-61.

<sup>79</sup>Judah Cahn, "The Struggle within Reform Judaism," *CCAR Journal*, Summer 1975: 68.

<sup>80</sup>Fox, Letter, 1960, 67-68.

<sup>81</sup>Joseph H. Levine, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1965: 60.



constitute as great a departure from precedent as the ordination of women, the proclamation of patrilineality, etc."<sup>82</sup>

### Encouragement and Deterrence

A standard explanation by many rabbis who do not officiate is that they are trying to prevent an increase in rate of interfaith marriage. They believe that officiating at interfaith marriage leads to an increase in interfaith marriages, while not officiating at interfaith marriage, at the very least, stagnates the numbers of Jews who marry out of their faith. Perhaps the most definitive statements on this matter were written by Joseph Klein. He claimed in 1964 that he "was able to dissuade a goodly number from entering into a marriage with a non-Jew."<sup>83</sup> Four years earlier, he wrote: "Our own feeling is that this attitude [of officiation] tends to encourage and increase mixed marriages, whereas refusal on the part of the rabbi to officiate serves as a powerful deterrent."<sup>84</sup> Although few other rabbis state such a concrete position, David Polish also believed that couples who come to a rabbi "can be dissuaded....We assume too facilely that couples bent on marriage are equally determined to go through with intermarriage."<sup>85</sup> Newton J. Friedman declared that "a united stand by all [of the] CCAR would deter many couples who 'shop' around looking for a rabbi who will officiate at such a ceremony."<sup>86</sup>

Just as couples can be deterred by not officiating, these rabbis believe that the act of officiation increases interfaith marriage. Joseph Klein wrote

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<sup>82</sup>Samuel M. Silver, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, Fall 1988: 76. Italics added.

<sup>83</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 7.

<sup>84</sup>Joseph Klein, "Editor's Comments," *CCAR Journal*, June 1960: 2.

<sup>85</sup>David Polish, "The Problem of Intermarriage - Will Moderation Help?" *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1964: 34.

<sup>86</sup>Leo J. Stillpass, "The Attitude of Reform Judaism Toward Intermarriage: A Study of the Problem of Intermarriage from Biblical Times to the Present Day Attitude of the Members of the CCAR" (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1943), 109.

that if all Reform rabbis officiated, it "would only open the floodgates for mixed marriage on an unprecedented scale."<sup>87</sup> Abraham Mayer Heller thought, "If rabbis cannot halt the trend toward general amalgamation, the least they can do is to refrain from augmenting it by officiating at mixed marriages."<sup>88</sup> Although these types of arguments are somewhat similar, they can generally be broken down into "what does it mean?", "how will it look?" and "what will they say?"

"What message will people take from rabbinical officiation?" rabbis wonder. Moshe Davis believed that officiation at an interfaith marriage "implies that it is a Jewish marriage."<sup>89</sup> Solomon Freehof wanted to make sure that young people did not believe "such marriages are somehow countenanced by the rabbi and by Judaism."<sup>90</sup> Likewise, in a 1982 CCAR responsum, Walter Jacob wrote that "the agreement to officiate at intermarriages would be a clear signal to others in the community, especially children, that this a matter of indifference or less than paramount concern to the rabbi."<sup>91</sup> Of course, Joseph Klein was the most emphatic:

*But what is especially dangerous in all this is the fact that the rabbi who does officiate at a mixed marriage is giving rabbinical sanction to such marriage: he is telling the entire community that there is nothing wrong in the marriage of Jews to non-Jews, and he proves the point by virtue of being himself a party to the act.*<sup>92</sup>

A second argument is, "How will it look?" This line of debate focuses more on the rabbi as a symbol for the Jewish community. John Friedman wrote in 1981 that "whether we like it or not a rabbi is a Jewish symbol....Even

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<sup>87</sup>Klein, "Editor's Comments," June 1960: 2.

<sup>88</sup>Abraham Mayer Heller, "Mixed Marriages and the Rabbi," *Congress Bi-Weekly*, 32, no. 6 (March 15, 1965): 9.

<sup>89</sup>Davis, "Why I Won't Perform an Intermarriage," 21.

<sup>90</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, *Modern Reform Responsa* ([Cincinnati], 1971), 114-15.

<sup>91</sup>CCAR Yearbook 92 (1982): 214.

<sup>92</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 9. Italics in original.

if I as a rabbi were to conduct a secular service, it must be recognized that I am being seen by all those present (including the non-Jews) as a symbol of Judaism. I am a religious symbol of one person who is to be part of this marriage and not of the other."<sup>93</sup> Fifteen years later, Friedman elaborated on this same thought. He had attended the interfaith wedding of a relative which was conducted by a priest. Although the priest composed a sensitive, non-Christian liturgy for the occasion,

With all of his sensitivity and responsiveness to the religious difference that was involved, there was one religious symbol that he could not remove or obscure. It was the most noticed, most one-sided, most Christian icon in the ceremony. It was he...the priest himself. To the assembled congregation, his officiating as a Catholic priest, regardless of the words he spoke or the liturgy he prayed, defined the service as Catholic.<sup>94</sup>

In his 1996 CCAR presentation, lay leader George Markley said, "One of the few ways in which the message can still be sent is through the rabbi's decision not to officiate. A decision to conduct the ceremony suggests that a marriage between a Jew and a non-Jew, although not a Jewish marriage, is nevertheless no different in the eyes of the community."<sup>95</sup> Joseph Klein, not surprisingly, took an extreme view on this subject as he had with others: If a rabbi officiates at an interfaith marriage, it "gives the false impression to the community that his position is the 'official' position of Reform Judaism. Far from discouraging mixed marriage, he encourages it."<sup>96</sup>

A third related argument is "What will they say?" Here, rabbis who do not officiate speculate on what others in the community would say if they began officiating. Alexander Schindler's best known quotation on officiation fits into this category. Interfaith marriage "represents a potential drain on the numeric strength of the Jewish people and on its inner commitment.

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<sup>93</sup>Friedman to Glazer [sic], Oct. 1981, 2.

<sup>94</sup>Friedman, "Why I Don't Officiate at Interfaith Marriages," 2.

<sup>95</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

<sup>96</sup>Klein, "Editor's Comments," April 1964, 79.

Whether I like it or not, my officiation would be seen as a seal of approval and would therefore become encouraging of intermarriage. If I participate, I give license to those who say, 'Well, the rabbis are officiating, why in heaven's name is there anything wrong with intermarrying?'"<sup>97</sup> Joel Zion wrote that the most important reason for his refusal to officiate was the students in his confirmation class. "What authenticity and respect can I have in their eyes if, following long class discussions on the need to marry within their own faith, they see my name associated in the press, or in public knowledge, with a mixed marriage? Nothing can so diminish the Rabbi's stature and authenticity as a teacher and perpetuator of Jewish family life as such a contradiction of my spiritual offering."<sup>98</sup> Joseph Glaser concluded that if he officiated, "the young people will say it must be all right if the rabbi literally sanctions it."<sup>99</sup> Joseph Klein had an argument in this category as well. He cited a family in Washington, DC where the family's rabbi had agreed to officiate at the wedding of the son and his non-Jewish fiancée. "The son's argument was that if the rabbi was willing to officiate at an intermarriage, then there could be nothing wrong with it from the point of view of Judaism and he could not understand why his parents, who were far from being the most pious Jews, should raise such a storm of objection."<sup>100</sup>

These claims are challenged directly by rabbis who officiate. Most of these rabbis are in agreement that a policy of non-officiation does not impede the rate of interfaith marriage. "They aren't deterred by our reluctance, refusal or denunciation," Albert Goldstein wrote in 1965. "In spite of our

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<sup>97</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 2.

<sup>98</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 69.

<sup>99</sup>Joel Y. Zion, "Re: Mixed Marriage," Spring 1979, CCAR Archives, 10.

<sup>100</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 8.

well-known, quite universal opposition to it, exogamy is on the increase."<sup>101</sup> David Max Eichhorn stated it even more directly: "The intermarriage trend will not be stopped or even slowed down by the refusal of any rabbi or group of rabbis to officiate at these marriages. Such a rabbinic attitude is unrealistic, ostrich like and negative. To put it more bluntly, it is just plain stupid."<sup>102</sup> Allen Freehling was a rabbi who changed his position from non-officiation to officiation. He wrote in 1995, "I was convinced that my refusing to officiate at mixed marriage ceremonies would help to deter couples from entering into such unions, because I thought that they were making a tragic mistake. In the process, I believed that I was helping to preserve the integrity of Judaism." He decided this policy was wrong and subsequently changed his position on officiation.<sup>103</sup> In the 1966 CCAR survey, no rabbi indicated that couples who had been refused officiation "often do not get married for that reason."<sup>104</sup>

Although Klein and Polish had stated with pride that they had been able to deter couples directly from entering into an interfaith marriage, Bernard Bamberger was vehemently opposed to such an action. "When a couple have already decided to marry, an effort on [the rabbi's] part to separate them would not only be ineffective, but in most cases morally wrong. In fact, the rabbi must frequently try to persuade the parents of the Jewish partner to accept the situation with good grace, whether or not they like the match, and whether or not the rabbi officiates at the wedding."<sup>105</sup>

Although some rabbis have stated that officiation leads to an increase in interfaith marriage, a survey by Albert Gordon casts doubt that rabbis feel

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<sup>101</sup>Albert S. Goldstein, "The Magnetic Attraction of Mixed Mating," *CCAR Journal*, April 1964: 20.

<sup>102</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 103.

<sup>103</sup>Allen I. Freehling, "Why I Changed My Mind About Performing Intermarriages," *Jewish Spectator* 60, no. 1 (Summer 95): 41.

<sup>104</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, Survey Results, 1964, American Jewish Archives, 2.

<sup>105</sup>Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage," 20.



this really a significant factor. In his landmark work, *Intermarriage*, Gordon surveyed Reform and Conservative rabbis as to what factors will cause interfaith marriage to rise. Forty-five rabbis listed "propinquity," while thirty-four proposed decreasing parental control. Numerous other suggestions were recorded including "the weakness of the religion in the home," and "military service draws young men away from parental religious patterns." Not a single rabbi proposed that the existence of officiating rabbis would lead to an increase in interfaith marriage.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, claims that rabbi's officiating symbolically condones interfaith marriage is rejected by rabbis such as Abraham Cronbach. He wrote, "Functioning as a prison chaplain condones no crime and ministering to soldiers condones no war. Likewise, officiating at an intermarriage can fulfill other aims than that of conferring approval."<sup>107</sup>

In 1964, Joseph Klein wrote that, although he had no statistical evidence to prove his point, "I am convinced that in those communities where there are rabbis who will officiate at an intermarriage, the rate of intermarriage is considerably higher than in those communities where no rabbi will officiate."<sup>108</sup> Yet, Bernard Bamberger, only a year earlier, had written, "We ought [to] discard the assumption...that rabbis who officiate at mixed marriage encourage such unions, and that those who refuse to officiate discourage them."<sup>109</sup>

## Survival

One of the oldest arguments opposing officiation at interfaith marriages is that it will lead to destruction of the Jewish people. Isaac Mayer

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<sup>106</sup>Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage* (Boston, 1964), 193-94.

<sup>107</sup>Abraham Cronbach, "Intermarriage," Nov. 1, 1937, American Jewish Archives, 6.

<sup>108</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 8.

<sup>109</sup>Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage," 20.

Wise cited it as the reason for opposition at the time of the Napoleonic Sanhedrin and the German rabbinical conferences. However, he was not impressed with such arguments. He wrote that some oppose interfaith marriage "as mere matter of discipline and utility that we few Israelites be not lost among the vast multitudes of Christians and Mohammedans. Evidently those gentlemen have taken very low ground, none justifiable in law."<sup>110</sup> David Einhorn thought that Judaism's mission to all mankind "necessitated the survival of the Jews as a distinct group; and therefore saw in mixed marriage a danger to universalism itself."<sup>111</sup> While Abraham Geiger did not believe in Jewish survival simply for its own sake, he did endorse the objection of Jews, "as representatives of a minority religion," to interfaith marriage.<sup>112</sup>

Such arguments have not lost their utility in twentieth century debates on interfaith marriage. Solomon Freehof in 1947 wrote that "With Judaism maintained, as it is, by a tiny percentage of the population, Judaism would die if Jews disappeared. We must struggle to maintain our existence as a separate family among the various groupings in modern life....We have a duty to maintain Jewry in order that Judaism may live."<sup>113</sup> "As a Rabbi, I believe...that I must abide by those principles which will foster Jewish survival," Kerry Olitzky wrote in 1981. "At this point, I am not convinced that mixed marriages will enhance the survival of the Jewish people. Therefore, as an independent authority by virtue of ordination, I feel free to deter from such ceremonies." <sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup>Wise, "Intermarriages," 4.

<sup>111</sup>Petuchowski, "Geiger and Holdheim," 155.

<sup>112</sup>Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity* (New York, 1988), 97.

<sup>113</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, "Reform and Intermarriage," 15.

<sup>114</sup>Kerry M. Olitzky to Joseph Glaser, Oct. 22, 1981, CCAR Archives, 1.

Other rabbis who use an argument of survival focus on the rabbi's role in the marriage. While interfaith marriage will occur without rabbis, that doesn't mean a rabbi has to play an active role in it. The Committee of 100 held such a position in their booklet. Responding to the concept that a rabbi's refusal to officiate is unrealistic, they wrote, "But that does not mean that institutions that represent Judaism – in particular, the synagogue and the rabbi – must cooperate with a process which threatens the survival of Judaism."<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Roland Gittelsohn stated that his "obligation as a rabbi is to maximize not minimize, the probability, that there will be a viable Jewish community in the United States five hundred years from now."<sup>116</sup>

While Gittelsohn wondered about Judaism's future in 500 years, other rabbis were not so optimistic. A number of anti-officiating rabbis have taken a defeatist attitude towards interfaith marriage that it is the beginning of the destruction of the Jewish community. Not surprisingly, Joseph Klein is one of these rabbis. He wrote in 1969 that "mixed marriage poses the greatest single threat Jews now face in the struggle for Jewish survival....It may well be that we are witnessing the beginning of the end of Jewish life in America. It takes only a single generation of indifferent Jews to obliterate what a hundred generations over a period of more than 3,000 years have fought to preserve."<sup>117</sup> Some, such as Albert Goldstein and Roland Gittelsohn, relate the current interfaith marriage crisis to biblical days of Ezra.<sup>118</sup> Others believe that interfaith marriage will finish off the work of the Holocaust. Roy Rosenberg was told in an anonymous letter that his practices made him

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<sup>115</sup>Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 10.

<sup>116</sup>Roland B. Gittelsohn, *The Extra Dimension* (New York, 1983), 224.

<sup>117</sup>Joseph Klein, "Reform Judaism and Inter-marriage," Paper delivered at UAHC Biennial, Oct. 26, 1969, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>118</sup>Goldstein, "Magnetic Attraction," 14; Gittelsohn, *Extra Dimension*, 210.

"worse than Hitler."<sup>119</sup> Joel Zion argued that interfaith marriage is "a serious threat to the survival of the Jewish people..."

To take less than a forthright stand against mixed marriage is to lead the already assimilating Jewish community down the same garden path by which many European Jewish communities disappeared in what was tantamount to a spiritual holocaust.<sup>120</sup>

Most recently, Harry Levin wrote that "Rabbinic officiation at an intermarriage is assisting suicide. Yes. Rabbis who officiate at intermarriages are assisting suicide."<sup>121</sup>

Rabbis who officiate offer a number of response to these arguments. All of them state, in different forms, that they are actually serving the future of Judaism better than those who do not officiate. "I would earnestly submit that the present policy of the majority of Reform rabbis in not officiating, is a potent factor threatening Jewish survival and that those of us who do officiate offer continuity a better chance."<sup>122</sup> Burt Siegel called the survivalist approach "play[ing] God" and the "ultimate arrogance."<sup>123</sup> Michael Robinson responded directly to the notions that officiation will destroy Judaism. "People who keep slamming the door on these people, on these potential Jews, are the ones who are creating the so-called bloodless holocaust....I have to ask, 'Would Judaism be better served if they were married by a Protestant minister or a justice of the peace? Would there be any Jewish families there?' Judaism is best when it is open and welcoming."<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>Judy Petsonk and Jim Remsen, *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews & Christians* (New York, 1988), 64.

<sup>120</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 83 (1973): 68; see also Robert Barr, "Mixed Marriage and the Rabbi," *Humanistic Judaism* 10, no. 3 (Autumn 1982): 18.

<sup>121</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 593 (9/8/96).

<sup>122</sup>Allan Tarshish, "A Sampler on Reform Rabbis' Attitudes Toward Mixed Marriage," 1972, HUC Archives, 16.

<sup>123</sup>Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," 81.

<sup>124</sup>Michael D'Antonio, "Jewish Husbands, Christian Wives (and Vice Versa)," *Present Tense* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 9.

A unique response by a Reform rabbi to the survivalist argument came from Charles Familant, a Reform rabbi and marriage and family therapist in the California Bay Area. In a 1993 issue of *Dovetail*, a newsletter for interfaith families, he spoke of the possible benefits of increasing interfaith marriage:

Intermarriage, as an aspect of this larger phenomenon, should therefore not be construed as an unavoidable evil but as a potential good, even if it does not contribute to the survival of Judaism as we know it today. The integration of different religious traditions may result in the emergence of new forms of religious expression. Whatever becomes of Judaism in the future, those aspects that have enduring value may well leave their indelible stamp on any newly emerging forms.<sup>125</sup>

### **Alienation and Inclusion**

Rabbis who officiate have their own generalizations on the subject. Repeatedly, those rabbis who preside at interfaith weddings state that officiation brings interfaith couples into Judaism, while not officiating rejects and alienates them at their most sensitive moments. Bernard Bamberger summed up this concept when he wrote that rabbis who officiate "express the view that their procedure saves for Judaism many individuals who would be alienated by a more rigid policy."<sup>126</sup> Such a position is also used in response to the survivalist arguments explored above. Albert Axelrad decided to officiate when "it finally dawned on me that sometimes a given mixed-marriage may actually serve the interests of Jewish continuity."

...There are clearly situations in which mixed-marriage *will* result in Jewish continuity and *will* strengthen the fabric of Jewish life. In such situations, I would argue that rabbis should be present for these couples playing the role of *mekarev*, drawing them near to Judaism and the Jewish people, not estranging or rejecting them.<sup>127</sup>

Keeping the individual Jew within the Jewish community and welcoming the non-Jew is at the heart of this approach. "Ours is the

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<sup>125</sup>Charles Familant, "Interfaith Weddings: Rabbis Respond," *Dovetail* 1, no. 4 (Feb./March 1993): 12.

<sup>126</sup>Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage," 20.

<sup>127</sup>Albert S. Axelrad, *Meditations of a Maverick Rabbi* (Chappaqua, NY, 1985), 68.



obligation to hold onto every Jewish individual in our midst and to warmly welcome those whom they marry, including every non-Jewish person, who may not have been born into our faith but who has the ability and the willingness to play an active role in its growth and development."<sup>128</sup> Samuel Shulman believed the essential question for rabbis should be, "Is it possible to keep a significant percentage and perhaps even the majority of mixed couples within the Jewish community?"<sup>129</sup> Louis Witt wrote in 1943 that interfaith marriage will continue despite the protestations of rabbis. "If, like Hillel, we draw the non-Jew toward us instead of, like Shammai, push him away, we Rabbis will be more realistic and, what is far more to the point, even make numerical gains for Judaism. At least, that has been my experience."<sup>130</sup> Nearly forty years later, Leslie Simon, a lay person, argued similarly, "There is also much that can be done to ensure that these families are allowed to develop strong, close ties to the community. In the end, as the community blesses them, so they will bless the community."<sup>131</sup>

The second half of this line of argumentation by rabbis who officiate is that while they are being welcoming and inclusive, rabbis who do not officiate are rejecting and offending interfaith couples. Maurice Eisendrath, President of the UAHC, took such a position in his 1964 book, *Can Faith Survive?* "I cannot see how the illiberal rejection by the rabbi at such a crucial moment can do anything but repel the non-Jew – and the Jew as well – from any potential attraction which Judaism might hold."<sup>132</sup> "If I behave as some rabbis behave in such situations," wrote David Max Eichhorn, "there is

<sup>128</sup>Freehling, "Why I Changed My Mind," 42.

<sup>129</sup>Charles E. Shulman, "Mixed Marriage, Conversion and Reality," *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1964: 29.

<sup>130</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 88.

<sup>131</sup>Leslie Simon, "Preparation for Marriage to a Jew," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Summer 1981: 75.

<sup>132</sup>Maurice N. Eisendrath, *Can Faith Survive?* (New York 1964), 16.

a good chance that this couple will depart from my presence bewildered, frustrated, and resentful."<sup>133</sup> Michael Robinson stated his position in the form of a rhetorical question to rabbis who do not officiate: "Are you really convinced that you serve young people who, for the first time in their lives, come to you seeking your counsel, understanding and help?"<sup>134</sup>

This type of thinking is the most frequently cited criticism by lay people against rabbis who will not officiate at interfaith marriages. Alfred Miller of Montreal said, "It is impossible to stress too strongly how bitter the Jew feels when the rabbi refuses to marry him. He feels he is being rejected by the Jewish people, leaving a scar from which he rarely recovers. If a religious marriage is refused, it does not stop the couple from getting married—it only turns them away from the synagogue."<sup>135</sup> Scottie Schwarz Younce, in a highly pointed letter to *Reform Judaism*, stated that "there is no way this couple can feel anything but rejection. The Jewish party, committed to his or her religion, has no choice but to feel betrayed by the very institution which had always been an integral part of his or her life."<sup>136</sup>

Rabbis who do not officiate offer a variety of responses to such critiques. Judah Cahn addressed this subject directly in a 1973 article for *CCAR Journal*.

This argument appears so valid that when one claims that it is mistaken, he is subject to intense criticism. Nevertheless, I believe it is completely erroneous. If we create an atmosphere where mixed marriage become acceptable, we must understand that, for every couple we retain within the Jewish fold, there will be many others who will not remain within in the community. Hence for the sake of the one couple we are trying to save, we create an atmosphere which fosters and condones assimilation through mixed marriage.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Eichhorn, "A New Look," 15.

<sup>134</sup>Daniel Schwartz, "The Inter-marriage Rip-Off," *Moment* 3, no. 8 (July/Aug. 1978): 63.

<sup>135</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 2.

<sup>136</sup>Younce, Letter, 32.

<sup>137</sup>Cahn, "The Struggle within Reform Judaism," 66-67.

The Committee of 100 believed that any alienation came from the attitudes of the couple and their parents, and not from the rabbi. "Rabbis who refuse to officiate at mixed marriages, do not reject couples."<sup>138</sup> Steven Foster believed that it is all a matter of approach, and that his refusal could even bring an interfaith couple closer to Judaism. "It is because of my willingness to spend time with them, explain my position, and establish a relationship. The most important thing that I can give them is my presence, not my answer."<sup>139</sup> However, several rabbis, who previously did not officiate, reported that once their position became known, couples stopped coming to visit them denying them the chance to establish such a relationship. Kenneth Weiss reflected several years after deciding to officiate, "I was always willing to do pre-marital counseling for *any* couple, but they never presented me with the opportunity."<sup>140</sup>

Even rabbis who officiate sometimes need to respond to the argument of alienation and rejection. When Jack Spiro officiated under limited circumstances and with specific conditions for the couple, some of the couples who approached him were unwilling to meet these criteria. "My earnest prayer is that the Jews involved know enough about their Jewish tradition, about a Jewish wedding, and have enough faith in a rabbi as a man who tries to be understanding and compassionate, to be assured that they are not being 'rejected' and that he is not an ogre for not being able to perform an intermarriage when the above conditions cannot be met."<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 10.

<sup>139</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 3.

<sup>140</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss, telephone interview, Jan. 28, 1997; Paul Gorin to Joseph Glaser, Dec. 20, 1979, CCAR Archives.

<sup>141</sup>Spiro, "Considerations," 2-3.

## Jewish Home

As a rabbi, I have a dual obligation: to move in a direction that will not weaken but will, if possible, strengthen the Jewish religious fellowship and also to move in a direction which will increase the chances for happiness of this couple as individuals and as the establishers of a home and family.<sup>142</sup>

An argument related to that of alienation and inclusion is encapsulated in the above quotation by David Max Eichhorn. Rabbis who support officiation at interfaith marriages state that officiating allowed them to influence the couple in creating a Jewish home and family. Those who do not officiate, these rabbis claim, set up a feeling of rejection that not only alienates the couple from the rabbi, but from Judaism as well.

Harry Danziger utilized this argument in his 1996 presentation to the CCAR. "My mission is to influence the outcome of the wedding, to influence the marriage. And so in good conscience, if I can be there at the inception of the marriage, at the wedding, I will be there."<sup>143</sup> While many Jews marry non-Jews, only a portion ask a rabbi to officiate. It is these couples, rabbis who officiate argue, that are most likely to create a Jewish household, but only if they are welcomed and embraced. "The mixed couple apparently gravitates toward Jewishness – else why do they give the rabbi 'the first refusal'?"<sup>144</sup> Similarly, Cary Yales believed that "the fact that a couple seeks a rabbi to perform their marriage should indicate that...Judaism will be the religion of the home and the children."<sup>145</sup> Such a liberal attitude, according to Abraham Mayer Heller, "will not only meet the needs of the couple but may result in the eventual voluntary conversion of the non-Jew to Judaism and the integration of the children in the life of the Jewish community."<sup>146</sup> The

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<sup>142</sup>Eichhorn, "A New Look," 15.

<sup>143</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

<sup>144</sup>Goldstein, "Magnetic Attraction," 20.

<sup>145</sup>Cary David Yales, "A Survey and An Analysis of the Literature on Jewish Mixed Marriage and Intermarriage," (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1967), 81.

<sup>146</sup>Heller, "Mixed Marriages and the Rabbi," 8.

inverse is also true, Paul Gorin wrote. By refusing to officiate, one would be sending the Jew "in the direction of the Christian faith of their mate"<sup>147</sup>

A Jewish home is probable, or perhaps even possible, only with two Jewish parents. This is typical of the response to the above claim by rabbis who do not officiate. Kaufmann Kohler took the strongest stance in a 1919 responsum: "Certainly the Jewish home, which is the object of marriage, must be conducted according to the Jewish principles....If a man and wife belong to two different religions, it will be a house divided against itself."<sup>148</sup> Over sixty years later, a CCAR responsum by Walter Jacob made a similar argument. A Jewish home where both parents are Jewish is more effective at raising Jews than an interfaith home, Jacob wrote. "Judaism is a religion of the home and the family,...therefore it is important there be a minimum of confusion between the couple and their in-laws about the Jewishness of the home."<sup>149</sup> While rabbis who officiate cite numerous cases where they have "saved" the couple for Judaism, those who do not officiate challenge those claims. Joseph Klein wrote in 1964, "There is no evidence to prove that most mixed couples who are married by rabbis eventually cast in their lot with Judaism and the Jewish people."<sup>150</sup> While Klein could only offer firsthand experience, Dr. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee told *Moment* magazine in 1988, "Rabbis who consent to officiate at interfaith marriages on the assumption that they are encouraging ongoing ties of the couple with the Jewish community might well question the validity of that

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<sup>147</sup>Gorin, "Middle of the Road," 7.

<sup>148</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 29 (1919): 76.

<sup>149</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 92 (1982): 214.

<sup>150</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 8-9.



premise."<sup>151</sup> The effects of officiation on the later Jewish identity and involvement of the interfaith family will be examined in chapter four.

Rabbis who do not officiate are hesitant to sanction the home of a Jew and a non-Jew because, they believe, it will probably not lead to the creation of a Jewish home. Yet, it is often said that these same rabbis will preside at the wedding of two completely uninvolved Jews. Ellen Jaffe McClain, in her 1995 book *Embracing the Stranger*, reflected on this paradox.

For many intermarrying couples planning to form Jewish families, it's frustrating to be denied rabbinic officiation when they know that any rabbi will marry a completely nonobservant endogamous Jewish couple. The rather lame reason rabbis give for marrying apathetic Jews when they won't marry a mixed couple committed to Jewish life is that the endogamous couple may develop a feeling for Judaism at some point, at which time they'd be better prepared to maintain a Jewish home than an intermarried couple.<sup>152</sup>

When Jews are "religiously indifferent, or even antagonistic," noted Louis Mann, "we cannot at times help but feel that we *are* performing an intermarriage, even when both parties are Jews."<sup>153</sup> While not every interfaith couple "offers promise for Judaism," neither does every Jewish-Jewish couple, wrote Irwin Fishbein. "We do not know what vicissitudes will befall any couple that comes to us. We never know how they will respond to us or how meaningful our response to them can be."<sup>154</sup>

## Outreach

An offshoot of the above arguments in favor of officiating is outreach. Many rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages believe that it is not only hypocritical, but nearly impossible for a rabbi who does not officiate to

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<sup>151</sup>Hershel Shanks, "Rabbis Who Perform Intermarriages: Who They Are & Why They Do It," *Moment* 12, no. 10 (Jan./Feb. 1988): 19.

<sup>152</sup>Ellen Jaffe McClain, *Embracing the Stranger: Intermarriage and the Future of the American Jewish Community* (New York, 1995), 198.

<sup>153</sup>CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 316-317.

<sup>154</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Intermarriage and Outreach: Facing Contemporary Challenges," Paper delivered at 24th Annual Convention of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot, June 14, 1984, Fishbein Archives, 1.

successfully reach out to interfaith couples. "Some couples and their parents insist that a rabbi's refusal to officiate at an interfaith marriage contradicts any subsequent effort to encourage couples to affiliate with a synagogue and raise children as Jews."<sup>155</sup> Emily Korzenik wrote that "rabbis must be receptive from the beginning. We cannot turn people away, then 'grudgingly' accept the couple after the fact, and expect that there will be no scars, no residue or resentment."<sup>156</sup> Charles McMillan, in a 1996 letter to *Reform Judaism*, summarized this argument.

Wouldn't the partners in interfaith marriage feel more affinity to Judaism if a rabbi officiated? Wouldn't interfaith children be heartened to learn that their parents were married by a rabbi? Reform Judaism does everything possible to reach out to interfaith couples, except the one thing that would make outreach genuine.<sup>157</sup>

Rabbis who do not officiate explain that there is no contradiction. Alexander Schindler, then President of the UAHC and the initiator of many outreach programs in the Reform movement said that the seeming contradiction "is widely misunderstood as a rejection of couples who intend to intermarry and an acceptance of those who have." Schindler saw outreach as "predicated on the assumption that we can maintain our opposition to intermarriage without at the same time rejecting the intermarried."<sup>158</sup> Lydia Kukoff, then director of the Outreach Commission, called this contrast the "opposite sides of the same coin."<sup>159</sup> Others emphasize that a wedding is only a small moment in the life of a couple. "The wedding ceremony itself...is a matter of some ten minutes," wrote Samuel Sandmel. "The marriage in theory is to last a lifetime."<sup>160</sup> Steven Foster saw a significant distinction

<sup>155</sup>Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Getting Married* (New York, 1984), 11.

<sup>156</sup>Emily Korzenik, "Interfaith Weddings: Rabbis Respond," *Dovetail* 1, no. 4 (Feb./March 1993): 3.

<sup>157</sup>Charles B. McMillan, Letter, *Reform Judaism*, Spring 1996: 10.

<sup>158</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 3.

<sup>159</sup>*Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>160</sup>Samuel Sandmel, *When a Jew and Christian Marry*, 27.

between the marriage and the wedding. "Outreach is doing the intermarriage. Officiation is doing the interwedding."<sup>161</sup>

### Family Life

The principal reasons against such intermarriages are, that peace and harmony can not be expected to reign supreme in a marriage in which the parties belong to religions so widely diverging from each other in regard to certain dogmas. Experience, besides, demonstrates that it is only in the rarest cases of such mixed marriages that domestic life can be conducted and children brought up in the spirit of religion.<sup>162</sup>

Interfaith marriage leads to disaster for the couple and for any children they will have. This argument, encapsulated by Moses Mielziner in the above 1884 quotation, has been used by rabbis who do not officiate from the earliest arguments. Geiger and Aub called interfaith marriage "injurious to the peace of the home."<sup>163</sup> Isaac Mayer Wise thought that because of the negative views that Christians have of Judaism, "peace and good will, mutual respect, confidence, and genuine affection can hardly be expected to sway a durable scepter in the family, the members of which look upon one another with such degrading and damaging prejudices. The offspring of such families are usually the worst sufferers."<sup>164</sup> Kaufmann Kohler believed that "Without harmony of views in a matter so vital to the future there is no real unity."<sup>165</sup>

Such views were expanded upon by later rabbis. Two main areas generally focused on are the increased potential for divorce and the well-being of the child. Albert Gordon, after studying interfaith marriages among many religions, declared "I believe that there is evidence to support the thesis that interfaith marriages are far less likely to succeed than are those in which

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<sup>161</sup>Foster, "Officiation at Interweddings."

<sup>162</sup>Moses Mielziner, *The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce in Ancient and Modern Times, and Its Relation to the Law of the State* (Cincinnati, 1884), 49.

<sup>163</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 36.

<sup>164</sup>Wise, "Intermarriages," 4.

<sup>165</sup>CCAR Yearbook 47 (1937): 76.

both parties have a religion in common. The evidence on this score seems clear and unequivocal....Marriage out of one's faith is...almost three times less likely to succeed than ordinary marriages....The fact is that interfaith marriages fail in far greater numbers than intrafaith marriages."<sup>166</sup> Similar arguments have been put forth by Allen Maller and Roland Gittelsohn.<sup>167</sup>

The other argument is to lament the plight of the children of interfaith couples. In this approach, rabbis are not discussing whether the children are raised as Jews, but their general happiness or the struggle of being a child in any interfaith family. Abraham Franzblau incorporated this line of thought into a 1954 article. "One of the strongest arguments for attempting to prevent mixed marriages is that whether or not the marriage itself is a success, invariably the children resulting from it have their problems. They are victims in almost every case."<sup>168</sup> Isaac Landman explained such reasoning further: "The children of mixed marriages lack the security of integration with father and mother and, a little later, suffer the failure of parents to integrate themselves with the community in which we know, and as history shows, the church plays a significant part."<sup>169</sup>

Bernard Bamberger challenged these statements. "We do not, in fact, have reliable statistics; nor do we have a satisfactory way of measuring success in marriage....Everyone knows of successful intermarriages, and they are not so rare as to be labeled startling exceptions."<sup>170</sup> Although David Max Eichhorn agreed that marriages between people of the same faith are more

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<sup>166</sup>Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 348.

<sup>167</sup>Allen S. Maller, "Jewish-Gentile Marriage: Another Look at the Problem," *CCAR Journal*, Winter 1976: 67; Gittelsohn, *Extra Dimension*, 215-216.

<sup>168</sup>Abraham N. Franzblau, "The Dynamics of Mixed Marriage," *CCAR Journal*, Oct. 1954: 22.

<sup>169</sup>Isaac Landman, "Reform and Intermarriage," 17.

<sup>170</sup>Bernard J. Bamberger, "Plain Talk About Intermarriage," *The Reconstructionist* 15, no. 16 (Dec. 16, 1949): 11.

"desired," he had not seen any studies which proved that divorce and unhappiness were more likely in interfaith marriages. He also concurred that the children of such marriages were the most likely to suffer "psychic damage," and therefore our energies and attention should be directed towards them.<sup>171</sup>

Arguments against interfaith marriage because they lack success have diminished greatly in recent years. As Abraham Mayer Heller noted, as early as 1965, the couple is not going to be dissuaded by the time they approach a rabbi. "Any attempt to dissuade such a couple from consummating their love will be of no avail, it is asserted."<sup>172</sup> Furthermore, couples may be incensed at statements predicting the impending failure of their relationship just as they are beginning their life together.

### Conditions

Rabbis who officiate often have particular conditions and requirements for the interfaith couples. While the nature of these conditions will be examined in chapter three, many rabbis justify their officiation based on them. Conditions, such as a commitment to an exclusively Jewish home, raising children as Jews, or joining a synagogue, are seen as vehicles to insuring the interfaith couple's association with Judaism. Kenneth Weiss clarified the need for his conditions in a 1994 synagogue bulletin article explaining why he had begun officiating:

I must be certain that the home I am creating will be a Jewish home to the exclusion of any other faith; in other words – a marriage performed by a rabbi is supposed to create a Jewish family....Colleagues in nearby cities who perform intermarriages for couples who do agree to meet specific standards...note that some 2/3 of these couples retain a connection with the Jewish community, keep a

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<sup>171</sup>Eichhorn, "A New Look," 11-12.

<sup>172</sup>Heller, "Mixed Marriages and the Rabbi," 8.



Jewish home, see to – and participate in – the Jewish upbringing of their children.<sup>173</sup>

Albert Axelrad wanted to know two things about each couple that approached him:

That the partners are uniting in a compatible, warm, loving, and sharing relationship in which the individuality of each is fully and mutually respected, and that in their home, Jewish life, peoplehood, continuity will be strengthened, not weakened or ended. My aim as a rabbi is to foster and facilitate the links necessary for Jewish continuity... When a couple shares this commitment to Jewish continuity through the home, I am prepared to participate in their marriage ceremony.<sup>174</sup>

Rabbis who do not officiate are often aghast at these requirements. Jakob Petuchowski saw no "intermediary position" between officiating under no circumstances and officiating under all circumstances. "*Kiddushin* either applies to a non-Jewish partner, or they do not apply; and if they apply, they apply to all non-Jewish partners."<sup>175</sup> More recently, Steven Foster stated that if he was ever to officiate, it would have to be for all couples without any conditions.<sup>176</sup> Petuchowski further wondered if such promises could be kept. "How can someone who is not sufficiently convinced by Judaism to contemplate conversion 'raise' his or her children 'as Jews?'"<sup>177</sup>

Some supporters of officiation also criticize the notion of requirements and conditions. Abraham Klausner thought this was "sheer arrogance."

In an ecumenical age...how dare a religion make such demands; what a tragic error it would be for Judaism to assert its superiority at a time when even Catholicism was in the process of moderating its own claims to religious preeminence and of seeking to accommodate itself to the modern world.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss, "Toward the Survival and Enhancement of Jewish Life: A New Look at Intermarriage," Sept. 1, 1994, CCAR Archives, 1. Second quoted sentence preceded first in original.

<sup>174</sup>Axelrad, *Meditations*, 70.

<sup>175</sup>Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," 36.

<sup>176</sup>Foster, "Officiation at Interweddings."

<sup>177</sup>Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," 34.

<sup>178</sup>Marshall Sklare, "Intermarriage & Jewish Survival," *Commentary* 49 no. 3 (March 1970): 57-58.

Bernard Bamberger called such promises "a particularly offensive invasion of conscience."<sup>179</sup> David Katz, a lay person, was also critical of rabbis who asked for conditions instead of accepting all interfaith couples.

What a bunch of hypocrites—asking for conditions before they would condescend to do what they were trained to do, given the power by the state to do and what they should do without question....Where do these rabbis get the idea that they have the right to say no because one is not Jewish. How can they deny these people that which is rightfully theirs?...They are forcing their beliefs on us rather than helping us to understand ourselves.<sup>180</sup>

The effectiveness of such requirements have also been challenged. David Polish called them "hazardous." Wondering to what extent they have been kept, he had the impression that "this is more of a self-justifying device for the rabbi than an effective influence on the couple. However earnest the promise, it can be more readily deferred, ignored, forgotten than the act of conversion which is very often an impressive act of faith. One is a promise. The other is a covenant."<sup>181</sup> Jerome Davidson thought "that such promises "are not moral and I'm convinced they're ineffective."<sup>182</sup> Marc Lee Raphael thought they were "meaningless."<sup>183</sup>

Rabbis who use these requirements disagree. David Goldstein thought one had to trust the couple. He found that "these pre-nuptial agreements had a power...as a touchstone the couple can refer back to throughout their lives."<sup>184</sup> Myron Silverman reflected on the forty-five years of officiating of Morris Newfield. In all those years, "only once was the agreement not kept."<sup>185</sup> Other rabbis have also claimed positive results. These results will be analyzed in chapter four.

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<sup>179</sup>Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage," 22.

<sup>180</sup>David Katz, Letter, *Moment* 13, no. 4 (June 1988): 8.

<sup>181</sup>Polish, "Will Moderation Help?" 35.

<sup>182</sup>Zion, "Re: Mixed Marriage," 13.

<sup>183</sup>Marc Lee Raphael, "Intermarriage and Jewish Survival: A Hard Disjunction," *CCAR Journal*, April 1972: 60.

<sup>184</sup>David Goldstein, personal interview, New Orleans, LA, June 6, 1996.

<sup>185</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 87.

## Conversion

The response to interfaith marriage for many rabbis is to urge the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Once the non-Jew has become a Jew-by-choice, the couple is told, the rabbi can officiate without difficulty. David Polish wrote that such an attitude "may involve reconsidering our traditional position that we do not seek converts."<sup>186</sup> Bernard Martin thought that the numbers of converts could be doubled or tripled in the United States with "a more positive and encouraging attitude on the part of the rabbis whom they seek out for help toward both the Jewish and non-Jewish parties to an impending marriage."<sup>187</sup>

In 1965 Roland Gittelsohn listed three reasons why we should specifically urge the non-Jewish partner to convert:

First of all, because we are Jews, anxious and concerned for the survival of Judaism. Second, because most intermarried couples find, whether they plan it so or not, that they are accepted more warmly by their Jewish than their Gentile friends. A majority of these couples seem to end up as Jews socially, even if not religiously. As far as anti-Semites are concerned, the couple and their children are considered Jews even if they prefer not to be. How much better then, especially for the children to be Jews because they want to be, because they feel gratification and pride in following the Jewish way of life.<sup>188</sup>

Gittelsohn's second and third reasons might not be considered appropriate today.

Conversionary marriages are seen as more likely to succeed and more likely to be Jewish marriages than interfaith marriages. Abraham Mayer Heller believed that, despite talmudic law to the contrary, a conversion to Judaism motivated solely by an impending marriage "is preferable to a mixed marriage with the non-Jew retaining his faith."

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<sup>186</sup>Polish, "Will Moderation Help?" 37.

<sup>187</sup>Bernard Martin, "Contra Mixed Marriages: Some Historical and Theological Reflections," *CCAR Journal*, Summer 1977: 84.

<sup>188</sup>Roland B. Gittelsohn, *Consecrated Unto Me: A Jewish View of Love and Marriage* (New York, 1965), 203.

The reasons seem obvious. First, it is possible that the convert, through learning the basic principles of Judaism as a condition for marriage, may become a sincere believer of the Jewish faith and practice. Secondly, the children of such a union are by right of descent recognized as Jews and share in Judaism's heritage. For a rabbi to officiate at a mixed marriage in the hope that at some future time the non-Jewish spouse will accept the Jewish faith, or that the children will be raised Jewishly without the parental formal adherence to the Jewish faith, is not a reasonable expectation.<sup>189</sup>

Allen Maller has often advocated an increase in conversion in response to the growing rate of interfaith marriage. Calling conversionary marriages "*mitzvah*-marriages," Maller noted that 95% of children raised in such homes were raised as Jews. "Obviously, the best solution to the problem of mixed marriage is to raise the proportion of *mitzvah*-marriages."<sup>190</sup>

Rabbis who officiate often seize the concept of conversion as an example of duplicity by the rabbis who do not officiate. David Max Eichhorn, himself the editor of an important book on conversion, has written extensively on this subject. Aside from the direct violation of *halachah*, he claimed, the insistence of conversion before marriage "amounts to forcing a person to convert to Judaism under duress and it results, in many instances, in the production of a hypocritical convert."<sup>191</sup> Conversion to Judaism for marriage, according to Mishnah *Kiddushin* 3:5, is forbidden. Any conversion under these conditions "is an invalid conversion and, therefore, any Jewish marriage ceremony that follow such an invalid conversion, is, Jewishly, an invalid marriage ceremony."<sup>192</sup> While rabbis who officiate are also violating the *halachah*, they do so willfully and openly, Eichhorn wrote. Rabbis who insist on conversion are "either telling an audacious lie" or are themselves "ignoramuses."<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>189</sup>Heller, "Mixed Marriages and the Rabbi," 9.

<sup>190</sup>Maller, "Jewish-Gentile Marriage," 67-69.

<sup>191</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 11.

<sup>192</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>193</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

Abraham Klausner agreed with Eichhorn. He believed there was "such a thing as 'true' conversion, which is the result of only the most rigorous intellectual and emotional re-education; but this in his view has nothing to do with the conversions-for-marriage which Reform rabbis perform by the thousands each year."<sup>194</sup> Marshall Sklare concluded that if Klausner's arguments were correct "then the rabbi who requires conversion is no better, morally speaking (indeed he is worse), than his colleague who just goes ahead and marries the couple."<sup>195</sup> Similarly, Jack Spiro wondered if we base our opposition to officiation on *halachah*, how can we justify conversion without it?<sup>196</sup>

Louis Mann thought that conversions before marriage could not possibly be genuine. "However sincere the person may be, for the moment, his perspective, his vision and his judgment are colored by the solution of difficulties and as a result, the conversion is apt to be superficial, if even that."<sup>197</sup> Israel Gerber, who opposed officiation, thought that any "promises to convert after marriage are hardly ever kept....And where there is conversion, there is bitterness."<sup>198</sup>

Rabbis who support conversion before marriage respond sharply to these claims. The Committee on 100 rather optimistically held that "The rabbi will never urge conversion on the non-Jewish partner but will discuss the possibility if the subject is raised by the couple."<sup>199</sup> Moshe Davis found any claims that conversions were insincere, at least in his rabbinate, a bit offensive.

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<sup>194</sup>Sklare, "Jewish Survival," 57.

<sup>195</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>196</sup>Jack D. Spiro, Letter *CCAR Journal*, June 1967: 104.

<sup>197</sup>*CCAR Yearbook* 47 (1937): 318.

<sup>198</sup>Israel J. Gerber, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, April 1969: 93.

<sup>199</sup>Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 10.



I have officiated at a great many conversions during my tenure, a great many deeply moving and meaningful conversions, many of which would never have taken place had I been willing to officiate at intermarriages. And I deeply resent those who demean the honesty or the sanctity of those conversions.<sup>200</sup>

Officiation is also seen as an impediment to conversion. The 1982 CCAR responsum on interfaith marriage stated that widespread rabbinical officiation would cause the number of converts to Judaism to drop. They believed that "through officiating at mixed marriages we will lose that large number of converts. At present, the number of converts to Judaism roughly balances those who are lost to us through mixed marriage and indifference."<sup>201</sup> However, no statistics are cited to back up these promising claims. Ellen Jaffe McClain thought that one possible reason for a decline in the number of converts in the early 1980s could have been due to the overall increase rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages.<sup>202</sup>

A non-Jew who is urged to convert, but knows there is "another recourse...will at the very least ponder mightily upon the easier choice," wrote David Polish.<sup>203</sup> Israel Gerber thought similarly. "If Rabbis will indiscriminately provide rituals sacred to Judaism without regard to the religious faiths of the people involved, then why convert?"<sup>204</sup> Haskell Bernat believed that all Jews whose conversions he had overseen were an impetus not to officiate. He reasoned, "Were I to officiate, could they not confront me with, 'How can you give to those unwilling to make our commitment the same benefits and sacred privileges?'"<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>200</sup>Davis, "Why I Won't Perform an Intermarriage," 21.

<sup>201</sup>CCAR Yearbook 92 (1982): 215.

<sup>202</sup>McClain, *Embracing the Stranger*, 207.

<sup>203</sup>Polish, "Will Moderation Help?" 35.

<sup>204</sup>Gerber, Letter, 94.

<sup>205</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 3.

## Universal and Particular

There is...the anomalous situation wherein Reform rabbis have a positive orientation toward an open and unprejudiced milieu, but expect ethnocentric attitudes to prevail in marital choices.<sup>206</sup>

Cary Yales reflected a heartfelt tension in Reform Judaism in the above statement. The universal nature of Reform Judaism conflicts with the particularistic nature of Judaism. The decision to officiate or not to officiate often directly emanates from this polarity.

Some rabbis see the need to officiate "as consonant with a higher law; the will of the Jewish people to live, or the universal teachings of Prophetic Judaism."<sup>207</sup> Samuel Hirsch's belief in officiation came from such notions. He emphasized "the need for ceremonies to serve as symbols to reflect the humanitarian principles which would tie Jewry to all mankind. Judaism, he taught, was a God centered humanism."<sup>208</sup> Abraham Klausner believed that Reform rabbis could not call for liberalism and egalitarianism, and also to discourage officiation. Reform "must return to its original universalist inspiration." Either we must return to the ghettos, he challenged, or to legitimate rabbis' officiation.<sup>209</sup>

Particularism is not without its defenders. In his 1918 book *Jewish Theology*, Kaufmann Kohler concluded the chapter on "Christianity and Mohammedanism" by writing:

Yet just because of this universalistic Messianic hope of Judaism it is still imperative, as it has been throughout the past, that the Jewish people must continue its separateness as "Kingdom of priests and a holy nation," and for the sake of its world-mission avoid intermarrying with members of other sects, unless they espouse the Jewish faith.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>Yales, "Survey and Analysis," 71.

<sup>207</sup>Norman Mirsky, "Mixed Marriage and the Reform Rabbinate," *Midstream*, Jan. 1970: 45.

<sup>208</sup>Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Vol. 3, (Detroit, 1993), 78.

<sup>209</sup>Sklare, "Jewish Survival," 57.

<sup>210</sup>Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology: Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York, 1968), 445-46.

Gunther Plaut told the CCAR in 1947 that he was "not ashamed to stand on [a] particularist platform....We are taking a step forward when we as reform rabbis declare that we have certain standards and that liberalism is not identical; with lawlessness and that reform is not identical with expediency."<sup>211</sup> Solomon Freehof saw the stance of the CCAR on officiation as "the outcome of our classic Reform intention to balance the requirements of Jewish law with the needs of the present age."<sup>212</sup>

Some critics of non-officiation have called such rabbis "parochial, narrow-minded and intolerant" as well as "rigid, inflexible and formula-bound."<sup>213</sup> Such notions have been taken further by David Max Eichhorn and Roy Rosenberg. Referring to the talmudic prohibitions on interfaith marriage, Eichhorn wrote in his 1974 book on interfaith marriage: "the rigid principle...has been quoted ever since, by Jewish racists and bigots, as their justification for seeking to prevent any and all marriages of a Jew to a non-Jew."<sup>214</sup> In a 1973 ~~article~~ for the *CCAR Journal* he reflected negatively on the expulsion of non-Jewish spouses in the time of Ezra stating, "Judaism and racism are incompatible."<sup>215</sup> Rosenberg has been more explicit. In a 1973 document, "On Mixed Marriage," which Rosenberg sent to the entire CCAR membership before the 1973 conference, he defended the inherent humanity of non-Jews which he felt was stripped by traditional attitudes.<sup>216</sup> "I reject the legal formula that says the non-Jew is not *adam*, and I reject the tradition that says his soul is not as exalted, as holy, as pure, as yours or mine."<sup>217</sup> In the 1973 debate, Rosenberg added, "There are Rabbis and laymen who want a

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<sup>211</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 57 (1947): 180-81.

<sup>212</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, "Reform and Inter-marriage," 14-15.

<sup>213</sup>Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," 82; Gorin, "Middle of the Road," 2-3.

<sup>214</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter-marriages*, 18.

<sup>215</sup>Eichhorn, "Ezra," 44.

<sup>216</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, telephone interview, Feb. 21, 1997.

<sup>217</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," June 1, 1973, HUC Archives 5.

Judaism that is devoid even of the hint of racism. There are Rabbis who want an authentic Rabbinic voice representing a liberal tradition, and this is the tradition that we have represented."<sup>218</sup>

Jordan Pearlson reacted to Rosenberg's comments in 1973:

May I say that as one who supports strongly the acceptance of this first paragraph, and as one who has married converts of mixed blood of a significant number of variations, I take great exception to the accusation that Judaism is in any way racist. I consider that as a low blow unworthy of the argument, unworthy on the level in which the discussion should have and might have gone tonight.<sup>219</sup>

Others have noted that Judaism, which is typically considered a religion, and not a race in the United States, accepts converts of any race and therefore cannot be considered racist.

### Changing Your Mind

In addition to be certain of the effects that officiation would have on the future of Judaism, Joseph Klein regularly proposed another reason not to officiate. In several different articles, Klein stated that once a rabbi officiates at an interfaith wedding, that rabbi is stuck officiating at them for the rest of their career, or at least as long as that rabbi works in the same community. Therefore, he believed, a rabbi should never officiate. For example, in the 1960 *CCAR Journal*, Klein wrote:

The rabbi who participates in a ceremony involving a mixed couple finds himself 'trapped' into officiating at every such marriage that comes his way. How can he refuse to unite one such couple when he has already united another? Or how can he resist the pressures brought to bear upon him by a member of his congregation when it is public knowledge that he participated in a mixed marriage on another occasion? In such a situation he becomes utterly incapable even of carrying out the directive of the Conference which is to discourage mixed marriage. His previous action has already given to this kind of marriage a 'rabbinic' stamp of approval.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 74.

<sup>219</sup>Ibid., 87.

<sup>220</sup>Klein, "Editor's Comments," June 1960: 2.

Examples from both early and recent Jewish history demonstrate the inaccuracy of Klein's assessment. David Philipson officiated at several interfaith marriages at his first congregation in Baltimore. Almost sixty years later, he reflected on those events. "It so happened that the three intermarrying couples at whose marriage I officiated had unfortunate experiences owing to the differences in their faiths. From then on I have refused to officiate at such functions."<sup>221</sup> Philipson was an outspoken critic of officiation during the rest of his career. More recently, Bruce Block wrote that in the beginning of his career he did not officiate, but after some agonized thinking, he decided to officiate under certain circumstances. "Then, after a few such weddings over a period of years, with more thought, and further discussions with colleagues, I reverted back to my original position, which I still hold....Thank God I am part of a movement which did not close any doors, and which allowed me to have the flexibility to change my position as I changed my view, and grew in the process. I would still want to have the option to change my position if I changed my mind after thoughtful reflection."<sup>222</sup>

### **Alternatives for the Couple**

Jewish ceremonies are not the only available option. Civil ceremonies and other religious ceremonies are viable alternatives for the interfaith couple. The existence of these alternatives for marriage is sometimes used as another argument, both for and against officiation.

Rabbis who officiate cite these options as the unfortunate consequences when a rabbi refuses to officiate. Emil Hirsch believed that denying the request of a couple for a Jewish ceremony, was to send them to the liberal

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<sup>221</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 123.

<sup>222</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 357 (1/16/96).



church.<sup>223</sup> David Max Eichhorn knew that "the couple before me is fully determined to get married and nothing that I say or do will prevent the marriage from occurring. I am faced with the simple fact that, if I reuse to marry them, they will get married by someone else – a minister, a judge, or a license bureau clerk."<sup>224</sup> Albert Goldstein wondered if officiation was really worse than refusing to do so and letting "the priest or minister perform the service, and thus allows the impression to prevail that almost *any* kind of Christianity is more 'liberal' than *every* form of Judaism – even Reform?"<sup>225</sup> Allen Freehling accepted that couples could not only go to non-Jewish officiants, but also to other rabbis. He changed his position because he was "inadvertently putting these couples in the hands of secular officials, non-Jewish clergy or rabbinic colleagues whose own financial situations and particular philosophies cause them to be nothing more than mercenaries who often invalidate any semblance of Jewish propriety and tradition."<sup>226</sup>

Yet, some rabbis who do not officiate see the availability of other officiant options as a help. Jakob Petuchowski, Rachel Cowan, and John Friedman, among others, regularly urged couples to utilize a civil officiant.<sup>227</sup> The Committee of 100 believed that all interfaith weddings should take place before non-religious officiants such as a judge, justice of the peace, or a clerk of the courts. "It is precisely because not all couples who marry are religious or of the same religion that the state provides for civil marriage."<sup>228</sup> However, many couples are not interested in a civil wedding. Kathleen Krauss, a lay leader from Manhattan, Kansas, reflected that a marriage, even

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<sup>223</sup>Emil G. Hirsch, "An Historic Resolution," *The Reform Advocate* 38 (Nov. 7, 1909): 578.

<sup>224</sup>Eichhorn, "A New Look," 15.

<sup>225</sup>Goldstein, "Magnetic Attraction," 18.

<sup>226</sup>Freehling, "Why I Changed My Mind," 41.

<sup>227</sup>Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," 36; Cowan, "Jewish-Christian Marriage," 39; Friedman to Glazer [sic], Oct. 1981, 2.

<sup>228</sup>Maslin et al., "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 11.

an interfaith one such as hers, "is a covenant between God and the couple and not merely a legal act. If my husband had been denied the benefit of a religious ceremony, it would have shaken his faith in his religion."<sup>229</sup> Israel Gerber agreed that many couples are distressed to hear his suggestion of a civil ceremony. "They are in love and they want to sanctify their love with beauty and holiness. Fine, I tell them; that is the goal of a Jewish marriage. Resolve your conflict first so it will not spoil your happiness later."<sup>230</sup>

### Pressure and Guilt

Rabbis who do not officiate often battle with congregational pressures and guilt. A 1987 survey of Reform lay leaders found that 45% felt rabbis should officiate at interfaith weddings.<sup>231</sup> Floyd Herman, referring to the days when he did not officiate, told the UAHC Mid-Atlantic regional biennial in 1996 that as a small town rabbi, "I got a lot of pressure as the only Reform rabbi in town, to officiate at intermarriages. I must tell you, however, that the pressure applied by members of the congregation only strengthened my own position against officiation."<sup>232</sup> Joseph Herzog believed rabbis who did not officiate needed to hold firm. "Are we simply to accommodate our rabbinic functions to the desires of our Baale Batim, or are we to represent the mainstream of tradition?"<sup>233</sup> Joseph Klein thought that some rabbis agreed to officiate because of these pressures.<sup>234</sup> Others have claimed that rabbis have started to officiate only to find or keep a job. One rabbi said anonymously in a 1977 *Moment* article, "The pressure to do 'them' is immense. No one I know

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<sup>229</sup>Kathleen Krauss, Letter, *Reform Judaism*, Winter 1985-86: 32.

<sup>230</sup>Gerber, Letter, 93.

<sup>231</sup>Mark L. Winer, Sanford Seltzer and Steven J. Schwager, *Leaders of Reform Judaism* (New York, 1987), 113.

<sup>232</sup>Floyd L. Herman, "Why I Officiate at Mixed Marriages," Paper delivered at UAHC Mid-Atlantic Regional Biennial, Oct. 27, 1996, American Jewish Archives, 12.

<sup>233</sup>Joseph D. Herzog, Letter *CCAR Journal*, June 1967: 104.

<sup>234</sup>Klein, "The Rabbi's Responsibility," 8.

can resist – either they're going to bend you or you'll be broke....Do you think I'm going to lose my job and disappoint all those people who are counting on me over that kid? Either I'll marry her or I will get somebody to do it."<sup>235</sup>

Many couples approach a rabbi to officiate at their interfaith marriage out of their own desire for a Jewish religious presence in their wedding. However, according to some rabbis that do not officiate, there are other couples who come because of pressure and guilt from the Jewish partner's parents. John Friedman found that many couples were relieved when he told them that he was unable to officiate. "Nine times out of ten (it seems to me) the parents of the Jewish member of the couple are coercing the couple into having this kind of wedding. The marital partners often express to me that they agree with me, but simply cannot tell their Jewish parents."<sup>236</sup> Kenneth Weiss found that many couples want a rabbi to officiate in order "to satisfy or appease parents."<sup>237</sup> Burt Siegel, who officiated under certain conditions, would always talk with prospective couples at length. "If, as far as I can determine, the rabbi is asked to officiate only to placate the anger of the Jewish parents, I will refuse."<sup>238</sup>

Having a rabbi officiate to appease family has been seen as exploitive of the clergyperson. Roland Gittelsohn thought rabbis were being used "to give the appearance that theirs is a Jewishly valid marriage...or to appease their guilt...or to mollify unhappy parents or grandparents."<sup>239</sup> Sanford Seltzer believed such couples merely wanted a "religious functionary at the wedding, a role few, if any, will accept even in cases where the couples are Jewish."<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup>Schwartz, "Intermarriage Rip-Off," 63.

<sup>236</sup>Friedman to Glazer [sic], Oct. 1981, 2.

<sup>237</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss to Joseph Glaser, "Dealing with Request for Officiating at Mixed-Marriages," [1982?], CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>238</sup>Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," 80.

<sup>239</sup>Gittelsohn, *Extra Dimension*, 224.

<sup>240</sup>Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Falling In Love* (New York, 1976), 5.

When these couples do not get their way, wrote Judah Cahn, they often attempt to "blackmail" the rabbi into agreeing. "Young people who make these threats either to the rabbi or to their parents remind me of children who threaten to run away from home unless they are granted their way."<sup>241</sup> Connie Kreshtool, then President of the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, told *Reform Judaism* in 1985 that rabbis are sometimes the scapegoat for the interfaith couple. "They often place most of their anger, frustration, and disappointment onto the rabbi rather than looking for the reasons why."<sup>242</sup>

David Max Eichhorn saw an entirely different scapegoat. He believed that the anger expressed by rabbis who do not officiate towards those who do is based on their own failures as a rabbi.

Psychologically speaking, the opposition of many a non-intermarrying rabbi to the intermarrying rabbis is probably rooted in his unconscious feeling that he himself has not been a success as a religious teacher and that he himself bears some measure of the responsibility for the increase in intermarriages. Rather than place the feeling in the forefront of his consciousness, he finds in the intermarrying rabbi a convenient scapegoat upon whom to place his own guilt feelings.<sup>243</sup>

### *K'lal Yisrael*

The place of Reform Judaism within world Jewry is of paramount importance in some rabbis' decision not to officiate. Herman Schaalman and Jakob Petuchowski have written most extensively on this subject. Schaalman believed that all efforts must be made to avoid driving the liberal and traditional segments of Judaism apart. "To engage in any marriage practices that would cast doubt upon the ability of the offspring of such marriages to marry traditionally oriented Jews is to divide the Jewish people further and

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<sup>241</sup>Judah Cahn, "The Rabbi, Mixed Marriages, and Jewish Education," *The Reconstructionist* 31 no. 4 (Feb. 19, 1965).

<sup>242</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?"

<sup>243</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 71.

thus becomes objectionable." Such a position did not prevent Schaalman from chairing the CCAR Committee on Patrilineal Descent and pushing for the eventual passage of the 1983 resolution of patrilineality. In 1971, he wrote, "Whatever endangers the survival of the Jewish people, whatever fragments it further is intolerable today. Our officiating at marriages between Jews and non-Jews is such a divisive element widening the gap irretrievably between the torn fragments of our people."<sup>244</sup>

Petuchowski wanted rabbis to officiate at Jewish marriages, not merely Reform Jewish marriages. "But we cannot represent *kelal yisrael*, if what we do is not sanctioned by *kelal yisrael*, and cannot be sanctioned by *kelal yisrael*." He feared that with so many Reform rabbis officiating at interfaith marriages, traditional rabbis would prohibit their congregants from marrying Reform Jews out of doubt of their status. "Can I take the responsibility of 'solemnizing' a marriage the offspring of which will be so barred?"<sup>245</sup> He noted that despite serious disagreements between the schools of Shammai and Hillel on the issue of marriage, the men and women of each school did not refrain from marrying men and women from the other school. "Can we afford to aim for less?"<sup>246</sup>

The appeal to *k'lal Yisrael* has been dismissed by officiating rabbis. Hillel Fine thought Petuchowski's approach was "not laying the groundwork for an organic unity of the Orthodox and liberal branches of Judaism. Rather, he is asking us to become a branch of Orthodoxy, acknowledging that where we deviate from their law we do so as sinners: pleading with us therefore, to take care that our sinfulness cause the minimum of embarrassment."<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>244</sup>Herman E. Schaalman, Paper, Feb. 10, 1971, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>245</sup>Petuchowski, "The Ramifications of Realism," 83.

<sup>246</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>247</sup>Fine, Letter, 103.



Jerome Gurland agreed with Petuchowski's concerns, but believed that attempts to follow traditional law will "not breach the halachic gap that exists between Reform and *Kelal Yisrael*."<sup>248</sup> Likewise, Solomon Freehof, an outspoken critic of officiation, wrote that short of complete acceptance of Orthodox observance and law, nothing Reform rabbis do will appease the Orthodox. "There can be no such thing as making concessions when dealing with the law that is deemed to be God-given and therefore unchangeable."<sup>249</sup> Petuchowski offered a response to these types of critiques. If we were to follow all the *halachic* rules, he wrote, and the Orthodox would still not accept our marriages, "then the problem will be for the Orthodox to settle with their own conscience. Our conscience would be clear."<sup>250</sup>

The focus on the specific issue of marriage bothered other critics of this approach. Roy Rosenberg thought the issue of divorced Jews remarrying without a *get* was a more significant problem. Children from those marriages would be *mamzerim*. "If we are really serious about furthering 'the unity of the Jewish people,' then this is the area which our halachic scholars should be putting forth their most energetic efforts."<sup>251</sup> One Orthodox rabbi who met with the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage in the early 1970s agreed that "remarriage without a *get* is far more serious....But the mixed marriage phenomenon is even worse psychologically. It is a public demonstration that there exists a class of rabbis for whom the continuity of Judaism is not a major concern."<sup>252</sup> Solomon Freehof believed that the marriages of future Reform Jews were not in particular jeopardy. He noted that in the United States, the

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<sup>248</sup>Jerome S. Gurland, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, June 1967: 102.

<sup>249</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, "The New Marriage Problems," CCAR Archives, 7-8.

<sup>250</sup>Petuchowski, "The Ramifications of Realism," 84.

<sup>251</sup>Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," 6.

<sup>252</sup>"A Sampler on Reform Rabbis' Attitudes," 1.

Orthodox had been declaring Reformers under suspicion of being *mamzerim*, yet had continued to officiate at their marriages.<sup>253</sup>

### Money

Money is often named as a reason why some rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages. Naturally, no rabbis have used this as their justification in print. Neil Kominsky disputed the claim. "I will...officiate at a mixed marriage, not because I make lots of money doing it and not because I'm caving in to ignorant baalei batim, but because, after the most careful and soul-searching consideration, I believe it to be the right thing to do, Jewishly and rabbinically."<sup>254</sup> It is generally acknowledged that "Rent-a-rabbis," as Ellen Jaffe McClain called them,<sup>255</sup> are available, but they are looked upon with scorn by most Reform rabbis on all sides of the issue. Anita Diamant noted that these "mercenary" rabbis "make comfortable livings selling their services to families who insist on a Jewish wedding for couples who don't much care one way or the other. These rabbis don't usually require meetings with the bride and groom prior to the wedding but ask for a hefty fee – often payable in advance."<sup>256</sup> David Max Eichhorn agreed that there was this small group of rabbis "whose procedures are very questionable and, in a few instances, unethical." But he cautioned against judging all rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages by the actions of this handful.<sup>257</sup>

Some of these mercenary rabbis are not actually rabbis. In 1973, the City Clerk of New York investigated a number of Hebrew school teachers, cantors, and several individuals with no religious training who had been posing as

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<sup>253</sup>Freehof, "New Marriage Problems," 9.

<sup>254</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 349 (1/4/96).

<sup>255</sup>McClain, *Embracing the Stranger*, 200.

<sup>256</sup>Diamant, *New Jewish Wedding*, 40.

<sup>257</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Interfaith Marriages*, 106.

rabbis for interfaith weddings and charging fees as high as \$600. "We're powerless to do anything about rabbis who call themselves 'Reform,'" lamented Joseph Glaser. "After all, 'reform' is only an adjective."<sup>258</sup> More recently, Rabbi Martin Rozenberg of Port Washington, New York stated that there were cantors who "pose" as rabbis and officiate, however he did not specify whether these were cantors from the Reform movement.<sup>259</sup>

"The harsh fact of the intermarriage problem is that it is a lucrative business." Such is the assessment of a 1978 *Moment* article by Daniel Schwartz called "The Intermarriage Rip-Off." In the article, Schwartz, a Reform rabbi in Michigan, surveyed 47 New York state rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages. He found that their fees ranged from \$75 to \$350. When a second caller contacted these rabbis about a marriage of a Jew to a Jew, their fees had dropped to \$50 to \$125. "If there is a principle involved here, it appears to be the principles of the fast buck."<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, rabbis who officiate contend that behind their decision lies "principle and integrity."<sup>261</sup>

Rabbis make the decision to officiate for many reasons. For some rabbis, the traditions and history of Judaism play the central role in their thinking. Other rabbis focus on the symbolism of the rabbi and officiation. The individual couple and their future are contrasted with the community at large and the future of Judaism by many rabbis. For most rabbis it is a combination of influences, along with a measure of pure gut feeling, that leads to the decision whether or not to officiate. Nearly all Reform rabbis

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<sup>258</sup>Gary Rosenblatt, "Sharp practices are uncovered in inter-faith wedding rites," *American Examiner-Jewish Week*, Dec. 8, 1973.

<sup>259</sup>"Depolarizing Situation - Not Into Yes and No," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 25, 1996, Author's Archives.

<sup>260</sup>Schwartz, "Intermarriage Rip-Off," 63.

<sup>261</sup>Shanks, "Rabbis Who Perform Intermarriages," 17.

appear to make the decision whether or not to officiate at interfaith marriages based on their understanding of what is best for the Jews, the Jewish community, and Judaism. As Bernard Bamberger wrote in 1963, we need to discard the notion that "rabbis who perform mixed marriages lack principles, and the counter-assumption that rabbis who refuse to do so are medieval bigots." Rather, we should respectfully assume their decision has been made with merit and integrity.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>262</sup>Bamberger, "Mixed Marriage," 21.

### Chapter Three Standards and Practices

#### Variety

It is an oversimplification of serious dimensions to characterize American rabbis on their position relative to officiating at mixed-marriages as "you do or you don't."<sup>1</sup>

In discussions of officiation, rabbis are usually divided into two categories – those that "do" and those that "don't." Either a rabbi officiates at the wedding of a Jew and a non-Jew or a rabbi does not do so. However, these basic categories do not reflect the numerous difference in the standards and practices of rabbis regarding officiation at interfaith marriages.

There are "wide variations in the requirements and practices of rabbis who officiate" at interfaith marriages.<sup>2</sup> Some require extensive promises and commitments from a couple regarding their future Jewish life and the raising of the children. Some rabbis will only officiate if a couple engages in certain Jewish activities such as joining a synagogue, pre-marital counseling, or a course of study. Other rabbis have no such requirements. There are those rabbis who will co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy or officiate in a church or on Shabbat. And there are rabbis who will do none of those things. Some rabbis use a standard Reform liturgy in their wedding services, while others retain almost none of the traditional elements in the ceremony.

Likewise, there is diversity among rabbis who do not officiate. There are those rabbis who offer a blessing for an interfaith couple after their

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<sup>1</sup>Reeve R. Brenner, "Rabbinic Referrals: Will the Couple Be Left On Their Own?" *CCAR Journal*, Spring 1973: 47.

<sup>2</sup>David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL, 1974), 116.



wedding or will attend the service as a guest. Some rabbis will try to assist a couple in every aspect of the wedding and refrain only from officiation. Many rabbis who do not officiate will refer couples to other colleagues who do. Many others will refrain from any referrals.

In this chapter, we will examine some of these varied standards and practices of rabbis that officiate at interfaith marriages as well as those who do not.

### **Requirements**

Until 1973, surveys on the attitude of rabbis towards officiation at interfaith marriages offered three options: the rabbi does not officiate, the rabbi officiates under certain conditions, and the rabbi officiates under any conditions. Thus Louis Mann's 1937 survey found that of 79 rabbis who were willing to officiate, 78% had a pre-condition. This condition was either a promise by the couple to raise their children as Jews or for the couple to join the synagogue. Mann did not elaborate or delve into the nature of these conditions.<sup>3</sup>

In Leo Stillpass' 1943 survey, he determined that of 95 rabbis who stated that they officiate, 49% required a signed statement that the children would be raised as Jews. There were an unspecified number of other rabbis who insist on synagogue membership, but they were not included Mann's total.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 47 (1937): 314-15.

<sup>4</sup>Leo J. Stillpass, "The Attitude of Reform Judaism Toward Intermarriage: A Study of the Problem of Intermarriage from Biblical Times to the Present Day Attitude of the Members of the CCAR" (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1943), 63-64, 77.

The 1964 CCAR survey found that of 125 rabbis that officiate, 90% had certain conditions – 54% requiring a promise that the children would be raised as Jews, 35% officiating under other, unspecified conditions.<sup>5</sup>

The 1971 Lenn survey found that 196 rabbis were willing to officiate, 49% of them “when special circumstances exist.” The circumstances were never defined.<sup>6</sup>

Although one could conclude from these numbers that somewhere between 49% and 90% of rabbis who officiate have certain requirements of the couple, the vague wording of the different surveys, as well as the absence of detailed findings on the nature of these conditions, makes a cross comparison suspect.

In the earliest published lists of Reform rabbis who officiate by David Max Eichhorn and Irwin Fishbein, no details were included about the rabbis’ conditions. However, in 1973 Fishbein added a new feature to the list of the Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling by including the requirements and conditions of each of the Reform rabbis. The initial list of choices was:

1. Requires commitment to establish a Jewish home and/or raise children as Jews.
2. Requires course of study in Judaism prior to marriage.
3. Requires commitment to pursue a course of study in Judaism after marriage.
4. Requires synagogue membership.
5. Requires rabbi to be the only officiant.
6. Requires Jewish ceremony to be the only ceremony.
7. Officiates on Shabbat.
8. Officiates with non-Jewish clergy if service contains no references to religions other than Judaism.
9. Officiates with non-Jewish clergy if service contains references to religions other than Judaism.
10. Officiates in a church or chapel where no Christian symbols are visible.
11. Officiates in a church or chapel where Christian symbols are visible.
12. Requires that children not be promised to another faith.

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<sup>5</sup>Cary David Yales, “A Survey and An Analysis of the Literature on Jewish Mixed Marriage and Intermarriage,” (rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion, 1967), 76.

<sup>6</sup>Theodore I. Lenn et al., *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism* (West Hartford, CT, 1972), 128.

13. Requires ceremony in immediate vicinity.
14. Officiates only for members of congregation and their children.
15. Will not officiate in catering establishment.
16. Requires referral from colleague.
17. Requires two or more hours of premarital counseling.
18. Sets requirements with each couple during the premarital conference.
19. Did not return questionnaire. Name was carried over from previous list.<sup>7</sup>

Over the coming decades, this list of requirements has remained essentially the same. Since 1973, requirements 10 (in a church without visible symbols), 14 (officiate for members only), 15 (catering hall) and 19 (carried from previous list) have been removed. Added, as of 1995, were "Requires rabbi to be the only officiant but permits non-Jewish clergy to offer prayers that contain no references to religions other than Judaism" (added in 1978), "Requires non-Jewish partner to begin conversion process before marriage with intent to complete it after marriage" (added in 1990), "Requires that non-Jewish partner not be committed to another faith" (added in 1990), and "Offers prayer or blessing when wedding service is performed by non-Jewish clergy" (added in 1995).<sup>8</sup> As rabbis often select many of these conditions, Fishbein revised the system so that certain conditions implicitly included other conditions. For example, a rabbi who requires a commitment to a Jewish home or that the children be raised as Jews includes the condition that the children not be promised to another faith.<sup>9</sup>

When the 1973 list was published with rabbis' conditions, David Max Eichhorn praised the addition. "This is helpful in terms of giving advance

<sup>7</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," [List #3], 1973, Fishbein Archives, 1.

<sup>8</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "C.C.A.R. Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," List #4, Dec. 1978, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," List #5, Nov. 1982, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," List #6, June 1986, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," List #7, Oct. 1990, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbis Who Officiate at Inter marriages Without Requiring Conversion," List #8, July 1996, Fishbein Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Fishbein, List #8, July 1996, 1.

information to those who are seeking such a rabbi" and that it was a valuable means of disproving the notions that rabbis who officiate have no standards.<sup>10</sup>

### Home and Family

The most common requirement of rabbis who officiate is that the couple will have a Jewish home and their children will be raised as Jews. Early surveys of rabbis sometimes understood this as the definitive precondition. In Fishbein's 1973 list, 59 of 119 rabbis required this. Since 28 of the rabbis on the list were carried over from the previous survey and therefore had no specified requirements, 65% of the rabbis responding required a commitment for home and/or family. This number remained relatively constant through the next 17 years: 68% in 1982, 67% in 1986 and 64% in 1990.<sup>11</sup> In the most recent survey results, Fishbein found it had dropped to 42% within the CCAR. Fishbein explained this change as "the struggle of a more traditionally minded rabbinate to respond empathically to a more acculturated, less committed Jewish laity."<sup>12</sup>

The nature of this commitment towards home and family varies between rabbis. Some used a pledge or signed statement for a couple. These were likely modeled on the Catholic pledges which will be discussed later in this chapter. Leo Franklin of Detroit was an early advocate of such a Jewish

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<sup>10</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 125-26.

<sup>11</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1982 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Inter marriage Ceremonies," 1982, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1986 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Inter marriage Ceremonies," 1986, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1990 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Inter marriage Ceremonies," Dec. 31, 1990, Fishbein Archives.

<sup>12</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbinic Participation in Inter marriage Ceremonies: Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1995 Survey," Dec. 29, 1995, Fishbein Archives.

pledge which he focused on the children. As early as 1914, he had both bride and groom sign a written statement:

We, the undersigned, hereby pledge ourselves that in case children should be born of our marriage, we will, to the best of our knowledge and ability rear them in the Jewish faith.<sup>13</sup>

Such statements were still in use in recent decades such as this one from the 1970s:

I, the undersigned, do hereby pledge to live in accordance with the principles of the Jewish faith and, if blessed with children, to rear them in the Jewish faith for greater harmony, unity and understanding in our home. May God strengthen me in this, my resolution.<sup>14</sup>

However, for most rabbis, the pledge has become a verbal agreement resulting from discussions with the officiating rabbi. One rabbi reflected, "I accept people's word for their good faith if I feel they have grasped the concept that a child of a mixed marriage needs the strength and security that derive from an appreciation of and love for the Judaism and Jewishness in its background."<sup>15</sup>

Some rabbis who officiate, lay people, and non-Jewish clergy have criticized this requirement as coercive or ineffective. One lay leader wondered "of what permanent value is a conditional pledge made by moral coercion?"<sup>16</sup> Irwin Fishbein used to require this as one of his conditions. However, when he was once counseling an interfaith couple in Philadelphia, the couple told Fishbein that they were not going to have a single religion home. When Fishbein informed them that he would be unable to officiate at their wedding, they asked him, "You mean, if we had come in here and told you we were going to raise our children as Jews and lied to you, you would have been willing to officiate?" This had a significant impact on him and

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<sup>13</sup>Leo M. Franklin, Wedding Pledge, Nov. 5, 1914, American Jewish Archives.

<sup>14</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 122.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>16</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, Max C. Currick and Isaac Landman, "Reform and Inter marriage," *Liberal Judaism*, March 1947: 14.



Fishbein subsequently dropped this requirement.<sup>17</sup> Ronald Luka noted that "many couples complain that their religious leaders are more interested in the faith of their children than they are in the faith of the couple."<sup>18</sup>

Although such a condition cannot be enforced, for many rabbis it is still essential that there be "a sincere desire on the part of both persons to establish a Jewish home....Nothing further can realistically be expected since nothing more is required of two Jews about to marry."<sup>19</sup>

### Other Conditions

Little has been written about the varied specifics in the conditions of rabbis. A course of study, for example, might take place before or after the marriage, might be with others or private, and might differ in length and content between different rabbis. Most commonly, such a course would be the synagogue's introduction to Judaism or conversion course (with no expectation for conversion at the course's end). However, some rabbis prefer private sessions tailor-designed for each couple. Paul Gorin provided a private tutor for a minimum of twelve sessions with each couple.<sup>20</sup>

A course of study is a common requirement by rabbis who officiate. In 1973, 44 (48%) rabbis required a course of study for the couple before or after marriage. In 1978, this number dropped to 31%, but rose back to 40% of rabbis who officiate in 1982. From the most recent list, the number of rabbis who require a course of study is about 30%.<sup>21</sup>

David Max Eichhorn opposed this requirement saying that it "sounds good in theory, in practice it has some decidedly unfavorable aspects." He

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<sup>17</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, personal interview, Westfield, NJ, July 9, 1996.

<sup>18</sup>Ronald Luka, *When a Christian and a Jew Marry* (New York, 1973), 42.

<sup>19</sup>Burt A. Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, April 1971: 80.

<sup>20</sup>Paul Gorin to Joseph Glaser, Dec. 20, 1979, CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>21</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973; Fishbein, "Summary 1982"; Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

thought these "aspects" included putting an unexpected burden upon a couple which might possibly delay their wedding plans, calling into doubt the Jewish partner's knowledge which may be "quite sufficient to handle the Jewish religious aspects of the couple's married life," and presenting the non-Jew "lifeless facts" rather than allowing him or her to "undergo an actual experience in Jewish living."<sup>22</sup>

For some rabbis, a particular condition stands out as the most essential. Thus, one rabbi, who was also a certified marriage counselor, wrote that counseling was essential in his officiation. "I do not officiate at any weddings for people I do not know and with whom I have not counselled. I require no promises of anyone in advance of wedding ceremonies except that they must agree to use me as teacher and counsellor."<sup>23</sup> Many rabbis recognize the value of counseling for all couples, Jewish and interfaith, but are unable to add additional meetings with every couple. David Goldstein of New Orleans lamented, "As a solo rabbi in a big congregation, I don't have the time for it."<sup>24</sup>

Only four rabbis listed counseling as a pre-condition on the 1973 Fishbein list. In 1986, 102 (50%) did so, and most recently 109 (47%).<sup>25</sup> While fully half the rabbis today require two or more hours of pre-marital counseling, there are some rabbis who do not even meet the couple until just before the wedding. A 1970 study by Allen Maller and Marc Lee Raphael found that 47% of couples did not have a personal meeting with rabbi before the wedding day. Sometimes all the arrangements were made by a secretary. Maller and Raphael were shocked by this discovery. "The cost to Judaism of

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<sup>22</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 49-50.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>24</sup>David Goldstein, personal interview, New Orleans, LA, June 6, 1996.

<sup>25</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973; Fishbein, List #6, June 1986; Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

performing for a couple that you have not met is perhaps difficult to measure but assuredly frightening to imagine."<sup>26</sup>

Some rabbis will officiate only under particularly unusual circumstances. Leo Stillpass wrote in his 1943 thesis that these conditions included pregnancy, older couples, soldiers heading off to war, and, most unexpectedly, "Doctors and nurses, who are intelligent but have little religious affiliation."<sup>27</sup> Rabbis will sometimes officiate in extenuating circumstances in private and without any publicity. Daniel Schwartz calls such rabbis "conditional intermarriagists."<sup>28</sup>

The age of the couple is one of the more commonly cited reasons for rabbis to alter their regular practices regarding officiation. If the couple is past childbearing years, a primary obstacle to officiation is removed for some rabbis. David Max Eichhorn varied his approach for older couples. In those cases he did not require them to commit to a Jewish home, but married them unconditionally, reasoning, "A mixed marriage between elderly mature persons does not seem to me to constitute much of a hazard either to Judaism or to the individuals concerned."<sup>29</sup> Bernard Zlotowitz responded to this line of thinking in a 1989 responsum where he concluded, "It is misleading to consider a ceremony Jewish if between a Jew and a non-Jew....Age makes no difference."<sup>30</sup>

There are a number of rabbis who have few or no pre-conditions. In 1971, Maller and Raphael wrote that most interfaith marriages in Los Angeles

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<sup>26</sup>Allen S. Maller and Marc Lee Raphael, "The 'Cost' of Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, April 1971: 84.

<sup>27</sup>Stillpass, "Attitude," 91.

<sup>28</sup>Daniel Schwartz, "The Intermarriage Rip-Off," *Moment* 3, no. 8 (July/Aug. 1978): 63.

<sup>29</sup>David Max Eichhorn, "A New Look at Conversion and Marriage," *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1957: 16.

<sup>30</sup>Bernard M. Zlotowitz, "Should Intermarriage Be Performed for the Elderly? Should One Perform a Marriage for an Elderly Couple Who Do Not Have a State License?" *The Journal of Aging and Judaism* 1, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1989): 68.

were "performed by a few rabbis who have no standards. Their revenue from marriages is sizeable."<sup>31</sup> In 1996, Fishbein's most recent list had 47 rabbis (20%) who had no significant requirements regarding Judaism (family, children, course of study, membership, not promised to another faith) or counseling.<sup>32</sup> While some rabbis, such as Jakob Petuchowski, who did not officiate, believed conditions were illogical,<sup>33</sup> most rabbis found them to be essential to their reasons for officiating. Reflecting on this subject, Eichhorn, who required a commitment to a Jewish home and the raising of Jewish children, wrote in 1957:

If I go to the other extreme and consent to marry the couple unconditionally, what shall I have done? In my opinion, I shall have helped to bring into being a family which will have no spiritual roots, a family whose children will either be torn asunder emotionally by the conflicting religious ideologies of their parents or who will be cast adrift spiritually because of the parents' indifference to religion.<sup>34</sup>

### Referrals

There is an issue related to the mixed-marriage controversy which has not received the attention it deserves: rabbinic referrals.<sup>35</sup>

When a rabbi is unable to officiate at the wedding of an interfaith couple, should the rabbi refer that couple to a colleague who can? What are the ramifications of referring a couples? "What are the ethics of withholding the information?"<sup>36</sup>

Many rabbis speak against referrals. Sanford Seltzer thought it was unreasonable for rabbis who do not officiate to be expected to refer. "To do so is to violate the rabbis' integrity and seriously compromise their own religious beliefs. Yet couples and families will often insist upon this, and

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<sup>31</sup>Maller and Raphael, "Cost' of Mixed Marriages," 84.

<sup>32</sup>Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

<sup>33</sup>Jakob J. Petuchowski, "Realism About Mixed Marriages," *CCAR Journal*, Oct. 1966: 36-37.

<sup>34</sup>Eichhorn, "A New Look," 15-16.

<sup>35</sup>Brenner, "Rabbinic Referrals" 46.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

rabbis, torn by their affection for the family and their desire to please, may sometimes agree."<sup>37</sup> Other rabbis concede that they are not able to prevent interfaith marriage, "but at least I will not encourage it or tacitly approve it by recommending another rabbi who would give the appearance of legitimizing their union."<sup>38</sup>

An unwillingness to refer, however, is often met with even greater outrage by some rabbis and lay people than a refusal to officiate. Lay leader Jacqueline Guttman, in her 1996 CCAR presentation, declared that if she were a rabbi, she probably would not officiate. But she is "dumbfounded" by the unwillingness to refer by Reform rabbis who also preach the welcome of the stranger. "How dare we as a movement respond...with a metaphoric slap in the face."<sup>39</sup>

Rabbis who do not officiate, but refer couples to rabbis who do, battle an inherent tension. Some feel referrals are completely justified. "It's just a referral like to a psychologist or to a social agency. I don't see it as a Jewish matter only. It's a human problem. I'm simply helping a fellow human being to solve his own problem in his own way....I perform a public service."<sup>40</sup> One rabbi explained his position with a metaphor:

Physicians who are unable, for one reason or another, to be helpful to a patient refer him to other physicians. I do the same thing with mixed marriages and all other persons who need rabbinic counselling and service of kinds which I feel some other rabbi is in a better position than I to handle.<sup>41</sup>

However, a willingness to refer is also criticized. One rabbi who does not officiate, but refers said, "I feel guilt about it....I feel guilty because in

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<sup>37</sup>Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Falling In Love* (New York, 1976), 6.

<sup>38</sup>Brenner, "Rabbinic Referrals" 49.

<sup>39</sup>"Mixed Marriage: Why I Believe Officiating Will or Will Not Lead to Continuity of the Jewish People," 1996 CCAR Convention session, March 1996, audiocassette, CCAR Archives.

<sup>40</sup>Lenn et al., *Rabbi and Synagogue*, 132.

<sup>41</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Inter marriages*, 122.



essence I'm sanctioning it."<sup>42</sup> Rabbis who officiate sometimes consider rabbis who refer to be insincere. "They stand there in the pulpit and take a 'holier than thou' approach, condemning all the rabbis who take part in what they call a *treif* ceremony...well, one half of the intermarriages I perform were referred to me by rabbis like that – to me that's *narishkeit* and more than a little hypocritical." Another rabbi stated, "It's like the man who doesn't sell the heroin on the street corner but directs anyone who asks to where they can get it."<sup>43</sup>

Rabbis who officiate with the strictest criteria often keep their practice quiet, while those with the least restrictions are known through newspaper wedding announcements, word of mouth, and even advertisements. Allen Maller and Marc Lee Raphael found that rabbis who do not officiate, but refer, often do not inquire into the requirements of their colleagues. These rabbis invariably refer couples to rabbis without knowing their standards and usually to those rabbis with the least stringent policies.<sup>44</sup> Had the rabbi "investigated his rabbinic resources" for a colleague with integrity, with standards and with *menschlichkeit* to whom to refer," wrote Reeve Brenner, "he would have helped the couple, he would have helped eliminate or reduce the limits of the commercial rabbis and have helped to raise the standards of rabbinical representation accordingly."<sup>45</sup>

Some rabbis who refer do examine the practices of their colleagues and make appropriate suggestions based on the particular couple. Elyse Frishman developed a layered process when she meets with an interfaith couple. First she tried to discern some of the motivations of the couple in wanting a rabbi

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<sup>42</sup>Lenn et al., *Rabbi and Synagogue*, 133.

<sup>43</sup>Schwartz, "Intermarriage Rip-Off," 64.

<sup>44</sup>Maller and Raphael, "'Cost' of Mixed Marriages," 84.

<sup>45</sup>Brenner, "Rabbinic Referrals" 49.

to officiate. If the couple was responding to parental pressure or wanted a rabbi to co-officiate, she would not refer them to anyone. If the couple was unclear about their home and children's religious future, "I will urge them to use [a] justice of the peace." If the couple was planning on having a non-Jewish home, she urged them to use a minister of that faith. However, "I will refer in situations wherein I think there's justification, even though it doesn't match my theology -- and I know they'll find a rabbi anyway; I'd rather they have a good rather than sour experience....I hate when charlatans get ahold of these couples." If the couple was planning on a Jewish home with Jewish children and wanted a rabbi to officiate in a neutral setting, Frishman would "refer to a rabbi I trust."<sup>46</sup>

The issue of referrals exists for rabbis who do officiate at interfaith marriages as well. If a couple cannot or will not meet the conditions and criteria of a particular rabbi, should the rabbi refer to a colleague who doesn't have that requirement? One rabbi who struggled with that issue from both positions is Kenneth Weiss of El Paso, Texas. When Weiss did not officiate at interfaith marriages, he would refer couples, in similar situations as Elyse Frishman, to rabbis with "a true sense of authenticity" who also did premarital counseling. In 1992, Weiss changed his position on officiation to one with very specific conditions. When he met with a couple that desired a two-religion service or home, Weiss would not refer the couple. For other couples that couldn't meet his requirements, he would consider referring them to a colleague, but only one with "a true sense of authenticity."<sup>47</sup>

Allan Maller and Marc Lee Raphael proposed a hierarchy of referrals in their 1971 *CCAR Journal* article. They suggested that rabbis who do not

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<sup>46</sup>Elyse D. Frishman, "Intermarriage Philosophy," [1982?], UAHC Archives.

<sup>47</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss, telephone interview, Jan. 28, 1997.

officiate refer couples to rabbis with strict requirements. If the couple is unable to meet those requirements, that rabbi should refer them to a rabbi with less stringent conditions. If that too is unacceptable to the couple, "they might finally be referred to a rabbi who will marry them without conditions but who does not participate in a joint ceremony or officiate within a church." For Maller and Raphael, no rabbi should refer a couple to rabbis who co-officiate or officiate in a church.<sup>48</sup>

One area of referrals not often mentioned is between the different movements of Judaism. Rabbis who officiate note that many of the couples who approach them have been referred from other rabbis, including Conservative and Orthodox rabbis. Albert Axelrad wrote that "one such Conservative rabbi has told me that 'It's good for the Jewish people that there are rabbis like you,' who conduct mixed-marriage ceremonies discriminately, selectively, and in a principled way."<sup>49</sup> When deciding between a Reform and a civil ceremony, Conservative rabbis are often split. A 1976 survey of Los Angeles Conservative rabbis by Allen Maller found that 29% preferred an interfaith couple to have a Reform ceremony, 35% favored a civil ceremony, and 29% thought they were "equally undesirable." 35% of the rabbis would refer to a Reform rabbi, yet Maller found that, like their Reform colleagues, they generally recommended rabbis "with the lowest standards whose volume of officiating had made them notorious."<sup>50</sup>

Referrals from more traditional colleagues are not always looked upon with favor by Reform rabbis. Lawrence Forman required all couples to join the synagogue for him to officiate at their wedding. "The ones who don't stay

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<sup>48</sup>Maller and Raphael, "'Cost' of Mixed Marriages," 84.

<sup>49</sup>Albert S. Axelrad, *Meditations of a Maverick Rabbi* (Chappaqua, NY, 1985), 68.

<sup>50</sup>Allen S. Maller, "Jewish-Gentile Marriage: Another Look at the Problem," *CCAR Journal*, Winter 1976: 65-66.

are the ones who come from the Conservative shul....They join for a year and stay for a quarter, and then they go back, because of the hypocrisy of the Conservative movement is, 'Well, we'll let Forman do our dirty work and then we'll take you back.'"<sup>51</sup>

When couples search for a rabbi to officiate at their interfaith wedding, they often begin with the national and regional offices of the Reform movement. They are usually disappointed as most Reform organizations will not refer. In 1960, Aaron Zanger wrote a sharp critique on this practice:

Telephone, if you wish, to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and ask them if you can get a rabbi to officiate at a mixed marriage. You will be told that there is none such in existence. Obviously, this is not the case, yet is the 'official' answer from headquarters itself. Does it matter that it happens to be an untruthful answer?<sup>52</sup>

The Central Conference of American Rabbis' main office in New York City would make referrals on request in the 1960s. Joseph Glaser found that the secretaries were spending an "inordinate" amount of time referring interfaith couples to local New York rabbis. "We are a national office," Glaser wrote. "We should not be put upon to perform a local service just because we happen to be located in New York."<sup>53</sup> In 1971, Glaser instructed the secretaries to refer all calls requesting marriage or any other rabbinical service to the New York Federation of Temples, which Glaser later learned did not refer interfaith couples to rabbis for officiation.<sup>54</sup> A letter was sent out to the CCAR membership stating that as the result of a policy change, "the CCAR Office will NOT refer calls for mixed marriages."<sup>55</sup> The early 1970s CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage re-examined this issue. Those that favored

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<sup>51</sup>Ellen Jaffe McClain, *Embracing the Stranger: Intermarriage and the Future of the American Jewish Community* (New York, 1995), 199-200.

<sup>52</sup>Aaron Zanger, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, June 1960: 70-71. 70.

<sup>53</sup>Joseph Glaser to Murray Blackman, Dec. 8, 1971, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>55</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein to CCAR Members, Sept. 9, 1971, CCAR Archives. Emphasis in original.

the new policy felt "it was not the function of a national office to serve as a clearing house for such requests" and undercut the decisions of rabbis who do refer. Those in favor of referral felt it was an appropriate service of the CCAR "and that human considerations militate against withholding readily available information for those who may have several unsuccessful inquiries prior to contacting the national office." The committee ultimately favored the new policy.<sup>56</sup>

The UAHC Pacific Southwest region had a policy of referrals in the 1960s and 1970s under the direction of Rabbi Erwin Herman. Herman knew of three rabbis in his region who officiated, but would refer to only one of them. The other two, he felt, would "marry a monkey to a palm tree." The UAHC Pacific Southwest office would receive twenty to twenty-five calls a month with requests. Three influential rabbis in the community, who did not officiate, insisted that Herman "categorically" instruct the UAHC staff to respond to questions of officiation by saying that "we do not approve of this...and that we know of no rabbis who will officiate at such an affair." Herman "turned them down cold" feeling that simply telling couples that no one would officiate was "a lie." If a couple was prepared to create a Jewish household and raise children as well as take an introduction to Judaism course, Herman felt it was appropriate to refer.<sup>57</sup>

In the last decade, several UAHC regional offices have begun referring interfaith couples who call looking for a rabbi. The first was the UAHC Pennsylvania Council under the direction of Rabbi Richard Address.<sup>58</sup> In 1988, Address said the Pennsylvania Council "is the only regional referral

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<sup>56</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, New York, NY, Jan. 23-25, 1972, CCAR Archives, 3-5.

<sup>57</sup>Erwin Herman, telephone interview, Nov. 25, 1996.

<sup>58</sup>Sue Levi Elwell, telephone interview, Feb. 21, 1997.



service under the auspices of one of the major Jewish denominations."<sup>59</sup> Since then several other regions have likewise begun referring couples, however there are still some UAHC regional offices that will not, telling callers "We can't help you." According to Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell, the Outreach Director at the Pennsylvania Council, the Pennsylvania office will refer couples to local Reform and occasionally Reconstructionist rabbis of integrity, but for couples seeking co-officiation, the office will recommend a civil ceremony. Elwell's main goal was to enter into open dialogue with the caller and try to get the couple into an introduction to Judaism course. "They thought they were calling for a telephone number, and I put them on a whole package."<sup>60</sup> The UAHC has no official policy on either referrals or officiation and the decision to refer is at the discretion of the regional director.<sup>61</sup>

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical College in Philadelphia also has an informal referral service run under the direction of Rabbi Linda Holtzman.<sup>62</sup> Since 1970, Rabbi Irwin Fishbein's Rabbinic Center for Research Counseling in Westfield, New Jersey "provides a referral service for those who seek help in matter relating to intermarriage by maintaining a national list of over two hundred and thirty rabbis who officiate at intermarriages." The list contains rabbis affiliated with either the Central Conference of American Rabbis or the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association.<sup>63</sup>

Of rabbis who do not officiate, growing numbers will refer under certain circumstances. The 1971 Lenn report stated that 51% of rabbis who do not themselves officiate, had referred at least one couple in the past twelve

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<sup>59</sup>Judy Petsonk and Jim Remsen, *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews & Christians* (New York, 1988), 333.

<sup>60</sup>Elwell, interview.

<sup>61</sup>Eric Yoffie, personal interview, Cincinnati, OH, Nov. 18, 1996; Elwell, interview.

<sup>62</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 334.

<sup>63</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling," Information Pamphlet, Fishbein Archives.

months.<sup>64</sup> Irwin Fishbein found the numbers to be much higher. In his 1982 survey, 62% of non-officiating rabbis would refer a couple to a rabbi that did. That number has grown with each subsequent survey: 64% in 1986, 67% of CCAR rabbis that did not officiate in 1990, and 72% in the 1995 study.<sup>65</sup>

Referrals	Lenn 1971	Fishbein 1982	Fishbein 1986	Fishbein 1990	Fishbein 1995
Not Officiate	59% (282)	50% (289)	50% (274)	54% (394)	52% (341)
Will Refer	51% (144)	62% (180)	64% (174)	67% (265)	72% (245)
Will Not Refer	49% (138)	38% (109)	36% (100)	33% (129)	28% (96)

### Options

It is not only rabbis who have a wide range of possibilities in their practice and approach to interfaith weddings. When choosing an officiant, interfaith couples have many options as well. Among the possibilities are:

- Choosing to be married in a Jewish service by a rabbi.
- Getting married in the religious faith of the non-Jewish partner generally by approaching a priest or a minister.
- Finding a "neutral" religious tradition such as the Unitarian Universalist Church or the Ethical Culture Society.
- Being married in a civil ceremony by a judge or justice of the peace.
- Having two separate ceremonies, one in each faith.
- "Balancing" the two religious faiths by having a joint ceremony co-officiated by a rabbi and a non-Jewish clergyperson.

The choice of the officiant is "one of the first hurdles...and potentially one of the hardest to surmount" for an interfaith couple, according to Joan Hawxhurst in her 1996 book *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies: Samples and Sources*. The most common solution, she wrote, is for a couple to select only one tradition. "By choosing to have either a Jewish or a Christian ceremony,

<sup>64</sup>Lenn et al., *Rabbi and Synagogue*, 132.

<sup>65</sup>Fishbein, "Summary 1982"; Fishbein, "Summary 1986"; Fishbein, "Summary 1990," 1; Fishbein, "Summary 1995," 1.

you will bypass many of the objections raised by clergy about interfaith weddings, so it should be easier to find an officiant."<sup>66</sup>

### Catholic Weddings

A Jewish-Catholic couple wishing to be married in the Catholic church faces a much easier time today than they did forty or fifty years ago. In Catholicism, marriage is a sacrament which signifies "the unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church."<sup>67</sup> James Pike, an Episcopal Bishop, in his 1954 book, *If You Marry Outside Your Faith: Counsel on Mixed Marriages*, summarized the Roman Catholic Church's position: "The mixed marriage is not a good thing. This point is missed by many people because the Roman Catholic Church has such well-organized machinery for arranging mixed marriages....This is not the Church's idea of a good marriage."<sup>68</sup>

In II Corinthians 6:14-15, Paul warned, "Do not be mismated with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?...Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?" Subsequent Christian doctrine affirmed this statement. Early church fathers including St. Cyprian and Tertullian, as well as the Council of Elvira in the early 300s, forbade Christian girls for marrying "infidels, Jews, heretics or priests of the pagan rites."<sup>69</sup> The Roman Emperor

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<sup>66</sup>Joan C. Hawxhurst, ed., *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies: Samples and Sources* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1996), 7-8.

<sup>67</sup>Wolli Kaelter, "Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," *The Jewish Spectator* 38 no. 6 (June 1973): 12.

<sup>68</sup>James A. Pike, *If You Marry Outside Your Faith: Counsel on Mixed Marriages* (New York, 1954), 74, 77.

<sup>69</sup>James H. S. Bossard and Eleanor Stoker Boll, *One Marriage Two Faiths: Guidance on Interfaith Marriage* (New York, 1957), 73.

Constantine prohibited marriages to Jews in 339 CE declaring them adulterous. Later emperors added to these injunctions.<sup>70</sup>

Catholic opposition to marriage with Jews remained firm until the twentieth century. Most of the Church doctrine on this subject was directed at marriage between Catholics and Protestants, but, in the absence of other law, was extended to include Jews as well. Thus, the 1918 Code of Canon Law of the Roman Catholic Church allowed a dispensation from the normal church sacrament of marriage only for a "good and weighty reason." The dispensation was arranged through the local parish priest and was granted by the bishop "as a matter of course" if an antenuptial agreement was signed.<sup>71</sup> The nature of this agreement varied by diocese, but generally it was a written pledge signed by both partners of the interfaith couple. Four elements were generally standard. First, the non-Catholic agreed not to hinder in any way the Catholic party's observance of Catholicism. Second, both the Catholic and non-Catholic pledged that their children "shall be baptized and educated solely in the faith of the Roman Catholic Church, even in the event of the death of the Catholic consort." Third, the Catholic "promised to seek by every means at his disposal to convert the non-Roman party to his religion." Fourth, "that no marriage ceremony other than that to be performed by the Catholic priest will take place."<sup>72</sup>

The Catholic interfaith ceremony was "a drab affair conducted in the rectory parlor with the priest vested only in his black cassock and with the service conducted in a way slightly less perfunctory than a justice of the peace

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>71</sup>Paul H. Besanceney, *Interfaith Marriages: Who and Why* (New Haven, CT, 1970), 117; Pike, *Outside Your Faith*, 77.

<sup>72</sup>Bossard and Boll, *One Marriage Two Faith*, 77; Pike, *Outside Your Faith*, 77-78; Milton L. Barron, *People Who Intermarry: Intermarriage in a New England Industrial Community* (Syracuse, NY, 1946), 41.

ceremony."<sup>73</sup> The antenuptial agreement was often ignored by the couple after marriage, however the Church had "certain ecclesiastical sanctions." If the couple did not live up to their promises, it could result in the excommunication of the Catholic party. Furthermore, if it could be demonstrated that the Catholic party never intended to follow the agreement, the marriage could be annulled.<sup>74</sup>

The Second Vatican Council in the 1960s loosened many of the Catholic rules regarding interfaith marriages. The Church's attitude was particularly transformed, according to Father Jack Wessling, after the Council declared that "the Spirit of God is alive in working in the people's of other faiths."<sup>75</sup> On May 28, 1966, Pope Paul VI eliminated the sanction of excommunication, even retroactively, for Catholics who were married by a non-Catholic officiant. That same decree allowed an interfaith marriage to take place as part of a regular Catholic Mass including the standard blessing for a Catholic wedding.<sup>76</sup> Pope Paul's "Apostolic Letter Determining Norms for Mixed Marriages" left many other decisions to the religious hierarchy of each country. In the United States, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops declared:

The priest will welcome a request for a mixed marriage and extend himself and his office in giving assistance to the prospective bride and groom in preparing for their marriage. In the assistance he gives in preparation for marriage between a Catholic and a non-Catholic, and in his continued efforts to help all married couples and families, the priest will endeavor to be in contact and to co-operate with the minister or religious counsellor of the non-Catholic.<sup>77</sup>

The interfaith couple would take a premarital program of preparation, as do all Catholic couples, usually called pre-Cana, based on a wedding Jesus

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<sup>73</sup>Pike, *Outside Your Faith*, 77.

<sup>74</sup>*Ibid.*, 76, 82-84.

<sup>75</sup>Jack Wessling, personal interview, Cincinnati, OH, Feb. 12, 1997.

<sup>76</sup>Besanceney, *Interfaith Marriages*, 119.

<sup>77</sup>Abraham J. Klausner, *Weddings: A Complete Guide to All Religious and Interfaith Marriage Services* (Columbus, OH:, 1986), 110-11.



attended at Cana in John 2. There are no longer formal written pledges for the non-Catholic. To receive a dispensation to marry a non-Catholic, called "Disparity of Cult," the Catholic party must declare:

I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ, and with God's help intend to continue living that faith in the Catholic Church.  
I promise to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with my children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics.<sup>78</sup>

The declaration can be made orally or in written form at the discretion of the individual priest. The non-Catholic party should be informed of this declaration. There are rarely sanctions for non-observance.<sup>79</sup>

The Church's position is that if after the wedding occurs, the couple disagrees strongly and needs to come to a different decision about child-rearing for the sake of their marriage, then the matter is no longer in the Catholic partner's power, so she isn't violating her pledge.<sup>80</sup>

A Jewish-Catholic wedding service at which a priest officiates is not held at the regular mass. The essential Catholic affirmations, including communion and the celebration of the mysterious union of Christ and Church, are generally omitted. Because one member of the wedding couple is not baptized, the marriage is not an official Church sacrament. Essentially, the priest is offering a blessing to a civil union, albeit one that has been church approved.<sup>81</sup>

For Orthodox Christians, canon law 72 of the Sixth Ecumenical Council continues to prohibit interfaith marriage. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, marrying a non-baptized person is considered self-excommunication. Priests are completely prohibited from officiating. "Should a Greek Orthodox priest

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<sup>78</sup>Wessling, interview; Archdiocese of Cincinnati, "Application for Matrimonial Dispensations/Permissions," Personal Archives.

<sup>79</sup>Wessling, interview; Roy A. Rosenberg, Peter Meehan and John Wade Payne, *Happily Intermarried: Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage* (New York, 1988), 94-96; Klausner, *Weddings*, 111.

<sup>80</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 69.

<sup>81</sup>Wessling, interview; Archdiocese of Cincinnati, "Document for Granting Mixed Religion Permission," Personal Archives; Kaelter, "Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 12; Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 338.

officiate at an intermarriage, he would face suspension for violating canon law and for insubordination." However, there are occasional exceptions. Some traditions allow a Orthodox style wedding without the sacrament of marriage. The Orthodox priest can be present, but may only offer a benediction.<sup>82</sup>

### Protestant Weddings

"The Protestant position is based upon Protestantism's emphasis upon grace and salvation as individually obtained."<sup>83</sup> Opposition to interfaith marriage in the Protestant Church has primarily been a reaction to Roman Catholicism's strict rules and pre-Vatican II antenuptial agreement.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the 1953 Lutheran Missouri Synod passed a resolution stating, "Marriage between Protestants and Roman Catholics is diametrically opposed to the eternal truths of God." The 1958 General Convention of the Episcopal Church declared, "This convention earnestly warns members against contracting marriages with Roman Catholics." The Presbyterian "Confession of Faith," Chapter 24, section 3, addressed the issue of non-Christians when it stated "that it is the duty of Christians to marry in the Lord. Therefore, such as profess the true reformed religion should not marry with infidels, papists, or other idolaters." However, neither the "Confession of Faith" nor any of the larger Protestant denominations specified any consequences for violating such declarations.<sup>85</sup>

In general, the question of interfaith marriage has "provoked no controversy, it has not even been the subject of official dialogue in most of

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<sup>82</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 338; Klausner, *Weddings* 112.

<sup>83</sup>Sanford Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Getting Married* (New York, 1984), 14.

<sup>84</sup>Besanceney, *Interfaith Marriages* 118.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 119-20; Seltzer, *Jews and Non-Jews Getting Married*, 13; Algernon D. Black, *If I Marry Outside My Religion* (New York, 1954), 14.

the mainstream Protestant denominations."<sup>86</sup> Generally, Protestant churches "have no regulations or rules binding their members or their clergy in regard to mixed marriages."<sup>87</sup> It is believed by most Protestants clergy, according to Reverend Paul Miller, that if the couple approaches their marriage "in the context of personal freedom, choice and responsibility...[then] the couple will work out the religious differences for themselves and their children in a spirit of respect, tolerance and mutual affirmation."<sup>88</sup> The percentage of interfaith marriages outside of Christianity is small, seen as natural, and is not considered a threat to Christian faith. Protestant ministers officiate at a wedding as a civil authority as well as an ecclesiastical one. As a civil officiant, a minister can use any form of liturgy and officiate for any couple – even if both parties are not Protestant. In the Presbyterian Church, for example, marriage is not seen as a sacrament. Therefore clergy have the latitude to officiate at an interfaith wedding at their own level of comfort and integrity. "Most mainstream Protestant clergy will take part in mixed-marriage ceremonies."<sup>89</sup> Many Protestant ministers will require pre-marital counseling for the interfaith couple. During their sessions, couples discuss the meaning of marriage and will often be asked in which tradition they will raise their children, but there will be no expectation of the conversion of the Jewish partner, nor that the children will be nurtured as Christians.<sup>90</sup>

Given the diversity of denominations within Protestantism, there are exceptions. "An increasingly vocal evangelical element, certainly in the fundamentalist churches but also at one extreme of the mainstream

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<sup>86</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 336.

<sup>87</sup>Black, *If I Marry*, 15.

<sup>88</sup>Paul Miller, personal interview, Cincinnati, OH, Feb. 12, 1997.

<sup>89</sup>Miller, interview; Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 336; Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 10; Barron, *People Who Intermarry*, 44; Kaelter, "Rabbis and Mixed Marriage," 12.

<sup>90</sup>Miller, interview; Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 101-02.

denominations, wants all Jews to be converted and thus would oppose participation in a mixed ceremony." The Episcopal church has required that couples "sign a declaration that they will live a Christian life."<sup>91</sup> Other denominations, such as the Southern Baptist, Pentecostal, fundamentalist, and evangelical traditions, would have additional restrictions or prohibitions.<sup>92</sup>

### Other Alternatives

Unable to reconcile with the religious needs or symbolism of one particular religious faith, some couples choose a "neutral" religious alternative. The most common options are the Unitarian Universalist Church and the Ethical Culture Society because, as Joan Hawxhurst wrote, "these traditions are inclusive and embracing of both Jewish and Christian beliefs."<sup>93</sup>

The Unitarian Church or fellowship, "has been a haven for Jewish-Christian couples for generations." A Unitarian minister has great flexibility in the service. It may contain no specific references to a particular religion or may include elements and traditions from one or both of the couple's religious faiths.<sup>94</sup> There is no standard service, but the composition is left to the "creative talent of the officiating minister."<sup>95</sup> The Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City offers an interfaith service that does not have specific references to Judaism or Christianity, but rather more universal passages from the book of Ruth, Kahlil Gibran, and William Shakespeare. For a Jewish-Christian interfaith service, the breaking of the glass, a wine

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<sup>91</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 336-37.

<sup>92</sup>Miller, interview; Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 102.

<sup>93</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 9.

<sup>94</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 74.

<sup>95</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 63.

ceremony and I Corinthians 13 are usually added, however the wine ceremony contains no specific religious references.<sup>96</sup> Other Unitarian services similarly contain non-religious poetry and general theological references that can equally apply to Judaism or Christianity. When a service has a religious reference, the minister will usually offer a choice. One service lets the couple choose between I Corinthians 13 or Kahlil Gibran.<sup>97</sup>

The Ethical Culture Society is a humanist organization that accommodates the desires of interfaith weddings. Since no specific legal language is required in an Ethical Culture wedding, "any mutually satisfying language is appropriate." The couple is free to write the ceremony or include meaningful readings or poetry. "Because the Ethical Culture is a non-theistic religious community, our Leaders do not generally use theological language. This does not however, prohibit the use of symbolic ceremonies that might include the huppah, breaking of the glass, candle lighting, or the use of a wine ceremony."<sup>98</sup> Typical services from the Ethical Culture Society have no religious references at all.<sup>99</sup>

The Quaker ceremony allows a couple to have no officiant. A couple must obtain needs a Quaker wedding license which grants them authority to unite themselves in marriage. "To be legal, you need only have two witnesses whom you designate sign the license, although the custom is to have everyone who attends the wedding sign as well, or to sign a separate document that bears words to the effect that they bless the marriage by their

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<sup>96</sup>Dick Leonard to author, Jan. 22, 1997, Personal Archives; Unitarian Church of All Souls, "The Marriage Service," Personal Archives; Unitarian Church of All Souls, "The Wine Ceremony," Personal Archives.

<sup>97</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 64.

<sup>98</sup>Ethical Culture Society, "Ethical Perspectives: An Ethical Culture Wedding Perspective," Personal Archives, 2.

<sup>99</sup>Ethical Culture Society, Various Services, Personal Archives.



presence." The nature of the entire service is left to the couple.<sup>100</sup> Rabbi Joshua Haberman has suggested this as an alternative for interfaith couples who are "cool toward the idea of a strictly civil ceremony." He composed a model service for use in this context which contains no faith specific references.<sup>101</sup>

For couples that wish to avoid making a religious decision or declaration, a civil ceremony is a common option. Judges or justices of the peace are generally used as officiants. Some rabbis urge a couple that wants a rabbi to lead their wedding to have a Jewish judge officiate instead at a ceremony that the rabbi helps the couple write.<sup>102</sup> Most civil officiants are open to creative liturgy, the addition of traditional symbols such as a wine ceremony or the breaking of a glass, the use of God-language in readings, and even to having clergy speak or offer a blessing.<sup>103</sup> One such Jewish judge, Benjamin Mehlman, wrote that he will happily include a *chuppah*, a broken glass, the traditional wedding vows, or other Jewish elements if a couple requests them, but he won't include Hebrew because it is a civil and not a religious ceremony.<sup>104</sup>

### Co-Officiation

If you are both committed to your individual religious traditions, you can choose to have a representative from each of your faith traditions at your wedding ceremony. This is one of the most difficult, and yet most popular choices made by interfaith couples.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>100</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 74-75.

<sup>101</sup>Joshua O. Haberman, "A New Approach to Mixed Marriage Wedding Services," American Jewish Archives.

<sup>102</sup>Rachel B. Cowan, "Jewish-Christian Marriages: Shall I Officiate?" *Cross Currents*, Spring 1990: 39.

<sup>103</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 74; Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 9.

<sup>104</sup>Benjamin Wm. Mehlman, "Rabbinic and Lay Officiation at Mixed Marriage Ceremonies," *Reconstructionist* 49, no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 22.

<sup>105</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 8.

The religious statement made by having one particular religion's clergy officiate is a message that some couples are uncomfortable making. "The partner who chooses not to include his or her own religious tradition in the wedding ceremony may later regret or resent this decision."<sup>106</sup> The so-called "neutral" and non-religious options, such as Unitarian Universalist and civil ceremonies, are unappealing to many couples who wish to be married by clergy from their own faith. The solution that many couples seek is to have both clergy officiate at the same ceremony. These joint or co-officiated religious services are "an even better solution," according to Rabbi Roy Rosenberg, Father Peter Meehan, and Reverend John Wade Payne in their book *Happily Intermarried: Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage*. "Christianity and Judaism, both affirm marriage with joy, and each tradition can contribute to the celebration that will enrich it."<sup>107</sup> Such wedding ceremonies are "in most instances very inspiring, both for the bridal couple and for the assembled wedding guests. They enable the couple to be blessed in both the Jewish and Christian traditions, and demonstrate the mutual respect that both families have for each other and for the backgrounds from which they come."<sup>108</sup>

Co-officiation has been the subject of some virulent criticism from Reform rabbis. David Polish, perhaps the most outspoken opponent of co-officiation, wrote that a joint wedding service "is anything but Jewish. It is a mockery of everything for which the wedding service and Judaism stand."<sup>109</sup> Several years earlier, he wondered if these rabbis "consider it a *mitzvah* to

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>107</sup>Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 100.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 105.

<sup>109</sup>David Polish, "Participation of Reform rabbis in 'ecumenical marriages' is disturbing," *Sentinel*, n.d.

facilitate the passage out of Judaism for mixed-marrying couples."<sup>110</sup> Roland Gittelsohn wrote, "I have no respect for those who officiate with a minister or priest, making of the Judaism I love only an ingredient in a recipe or stew which is calculated to produce indigestion."<sup>111</sup> More recently, Stephen Forstein reacted to a proposal that CCAR open discussion on this issue.

I don't want open dialogue. I want an end to co-officiation. Co-officiation is wrong. It is against the explicit policy of the CCAR. CCAR members who engage in such co-officiation should be sanctioned, irregardless [sic] of the integrity of their beliefs or their thoughtfulness in expressing their position. Yesh G'vul!!<sup>112</sup>

Solomon Freehof thought that rabbis who officiate at any interfaith marriage could not also reject co-officiating. "Those willing to officiate at mixed marriages know that these are not Jewish marriages. But they consider them religious marriages and as such cannot logically hesitate to co-officiate with a Christian minister whose service is also a religious one."<sup>113</sup> However, many rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages refuse to co-officiate and even outright criticize the practice. The original 1973 CCAR resolution, endorsed by several rabbis who officiated, had a statement opposing co-officiation that was part of the section that was referred to committees. Committee member Paul Gorin later proposed a CCAR resolution calling for censure of rabbis who co-officiate.<sup>114</sup> Rabbis who officiate, but oppose co-officiation, feel that joint ceremonies work against their reasons for officiating in the first place. Gorin wrote in 1972, "My efforts, in this field, are intended - in keeping with my Rabbinical calling - to preserve Jewish youth for Judaism and to gain - not lose - a family for the Jewish community. I therefore cannot participate jointly with a Christian clergyman in a 'dual'

<sup>110</sup>David Polish, "Enough!" *CCAR Journal*, Winter 1973: 36.

<sup>111</sup>Roland B. Gittelsohn, *The Extra Dimension* (New York, 1983), 225.

<sup>112</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 594 (9/9/96).

<sup>113</sup>Solomon B. Freehof, "The New Marriage Problems," *CCAR Archives*, 6.

<sup>114</sup>*CCAR Yearbook* 83 (1973): 63-64; Gorin to Glaser, Dec. 1979, 5.

religious ceremony."<sup>115</sup> Jonathan Eichhorn wanted any ceremony he was part of to be "a Jewish ceremony from start to finish....Co-officiation waters down the Jewish content of the ceremony. It is a Jewish ceremony. I don't want anyone to be confused."<sup>116</sup> Harry Danziger stated that his opposition to co-officiation flowed "from why I do officiate at intermarriages, namely, the clear creation of a Jewish household."<sup>117</sup>

For rabbis who co-officiate, it is the appropriate and even Jewish thing to do. Neil Kominsky, in a 1972 paper to the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, argued in favor of co-officiation.

When a Jew and a Christian, having seriously faced up to the problems involved, come together in marriage, it is entirely appropriate that clergymen of both religions participate in the ceremony. If there is enough common ground available to make such a ceremony work, then it is no chillul hashem for the rabbi to participate, it is not foreign to the spirit of Reform Judaism for him to do so, and he and the Christian clergyman may, with clear conscience, join together in the praise of one God for love which unites bridegroom and bride.<sup>118</sup>

Others argue that co-officiation is appropriate if we understand the non-Jew as entirely equal. Roy Rosenberg wrote in 1973 that the non-Jewish partner "has as much right as the Jew to invite his minister or priest to participate in their holy covenant of marriage. It is not only the Jew who has the right to feel emotional about his religion, and his ties, at such a time."<sup>119</sup> Mayer Selekman furthered this thought when he explained:

God is the father of us all, and He has given us autonomy. I can't see that He objects that two of His children want to marry. I co-officiate out of my concern for the couple. To have two clergy side by side, and to have blessings from both, is a powerful statement of rootedness and of the different approaches to revelation. Here are two people who are coming through their respective traditions and not in opposition to them. I will even go into a church for a

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<sup>115</sup>Paul Gorin, "Mixed Marriage: Is a 'Middle of the Road' Position Possible?" Report to CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, April 1972, CCAR Archives, 11.

<sup>116</sup>Jonathan Eichhorn, telephone interview, Feb. 10, 1997.

<sup>117</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 595 (9/10/96).

<sup>118</sup>Neil Kominsky, "Co-Officiating at Mixed Marriages with Christian Clergymen," position paper for CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, Jan. 1972, CCAR Archives 4.

<sup>119</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," June 1, 1973, HUC Archives 7.

ceremony. That is as much God's house as a synagogue, though we are not used to it.<sup>120</sup>

Reverend Paul Miller, a Presbyterian minister, thought that the symbolism of officiation was that "by the presence of both of the rabbi and the minister, both traditions give their blessing to this marriage and this couple."<sup>121</sup>

Responding to the criticisms against them, Lawrence Forman clarified how co-officiation was not in conflict with a rabbi's desire for the couple to create a Jewish home.

When a Minister or Priest stands with me at the ceremony, it simply allows the non-Jewish side of the family to see that we Jews absolutely respect the integrity and value system of the non-Jewish partner. It signifies that the couple has decided on a Jewish home but "tips the hat of respect" to the religion of the other. The message I send to the community is not mixed. I truly believe that what I do brings formerly unaffiliated Jews and non-Jews into the Jewish community.<sup>122</sup>

Neil Kominsky argued that the charge that rabbis who co-officiate have no standards is baseless. He explained that for all marriages, he must be convinced "that a relationship exists over which I can say a berachah, in which the problems have been realistically faced....I do not hesitate to decline to perform any wedding which does not meet these standards."<sup>123</sup> However, he recognized that co-officiation "is dramatically offensive to many of our fellow-Jews." Any rabbi who would co-officiate must determine, as he did, "that overriding considerations lead him to participate."<sup>124</sup>

An additional complication for rabbis that do not co-officiate is that most non-Jewish clergy do not understand why a rabbi would not co-officiate, let alone why a rabbi would not officiate.<sup>125</sup> This issue, many rabbis fear, can

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<sup>120</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 70.

<sup>121</sup>Miller, interview.

<sup>122</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 592 (9/8/96).

<sup>123</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>125</sup>"How to Think About Officiation (For Newly Ordained Rabbis)," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 26, 1996, Author's Archives.



cause tension in relations between Jewish and non-Jewish clergy. Furthermore, "Judaism can come off, in the eyes of both the Christian and the Jewish partner to the intermarriage, looking narrow and mean-spirited in contrast to 'open-minded' and 'accepting' Christianity."<sup>126</sup> At the 1973 CCAR convention, Simeon Maslin voiced concern on this issue. "I believe the Christian world does not understand the basis on which we refuse to officiate. It does not understand that we do not officiate in such marriages and that we do not consider them to be illegitimate."<sup>127</sup>

Such an attitude was illustrated by Reverend Walter Wagoner's response to a 1972 article on interfaith marriage by Burt Siegel. Wagoner was "dumbfounded" by Siegel's requirement that a couple agree to have a Jewish home before Siegel would officiate. "Why isn't it fairer simply to say to the married couple 'Respect and study each other's religious background and decide as your convictions and conscience dictates.'" Siegel's approach, Wagoner concluded, showed a lack "mutual respect."<sup>128</sup>

Charles Arian, a Conservative rabbi who was ordained from HUC, felt that rabbis needed to sensitize their Christian colleagues to these issues. By doing so, non-Jewish clergy would be selective and not co-officiate with "marrying rabbis" or mercenaries. Further, the non-Jewish clergy could explain to couples why they are having difficulty in finding a rabbi "and help them to realize that this position is not a personal rejection."<sup>129</sup> Similarly, Father Robert Bullock thought that co-officiated services were "counterproductive....They intensify the difficulties, make things worse...and pretend to be religious while being the opposite." He found most rabbis who

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<sup>126</sup>Charles L. Arian, "Rabbis, Intermarriage, and the Christian Clergy," *Conservative Judaism* 47, no. 1 (Fall 1994): 84.

<sup>127</sup>CCAR Yearbook 83 (1973): 90.

<sup>128</sup>Walter D. Wagoner, Letter, *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1972: 96.

<sup>129</sup>Arian, "Rabbis and the Christian Clergy," 85-86.

co-officiate to be "a source of shame, even scandal," and urged his fellow clergy to not work with them.<sup>130</sup> Bullock felt that the Catholic church needed a policy on co-officiation that would state that "Catholic priests and deacons should not participate in inter-religious wedding ceremonies with rabbis who regularly perform them." Ultimately, he concluded, "We must not be part of these ceremonies."<sup>131</sup>

For rabbis and Christian clergy who co-officiate, there is no incongruity in a wedding service blending two faiths. For many Christians, there is nothing in the Jewish ceremony or even in Jewish faith that violates Christian beliefs.<sup>132</sup> Reverend Ernst Pipes thought religion was "one of the unnecessary barriers to the successful marriage."<sup>133</sup> Roy Rosenberg believed there was a good basis for co-officiation in Reform Judaism. He thought it was similar to Jewish and Christian clergy speaking in each other's houses of worship. "It is not sinful or wrong, or harmful to Judaism. It is a sign that we have grown up, that the world in which we live is, with all its faults, a little better place than it used to be. It is a sign that, perhaps, men can, after all, live together as brothers."<sup>134</sup>

The total number of rabbis who co-officiate is unknown. In the Reform movement, the only statistical information is from Irwin Fishbein's surveys. His results show that since 1973 somewhere around a third of rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages are also willing to share that service with non-Jewish clergy. In 1995, that totaled 86 Reform rabbis or 27% of those who responded to the survey. Based on the most recent lists from Fishbein, about

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<sup>130</sup>Robert W. Bullock, "Jewish-Christian Marriages: Let Them be Faithful to Jewish Tradition," *Cross Currents*, Spring 1990: 43, 44-45.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>132</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 65; Luka, *Christian and a Jew Marry*, 17.

<sup>133</sup>Ernest D. Pipes, Jr., "Reflections on the 'Mixed Marriage,'" Sermon, June 7, 1964, HUC Archives, 3.

<sup>134</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, telephone interview, Feb. 21, 1997; Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," 8.

50% of rabbis that co-officiate will allow "references to religions other than Judaism." This is a significant increase from 1973 when only 28% of rabbis who co-officiated would allow such references. With 1995 being a noteworthy exception, between 53% and 65% of rabbis who officiate insist on being the only officiant. Since rabbis are not required to select either one category or the other, the percentages do not necessarily total 100%. Also, for 1978, Fishbein did not offer information beyond percentages.<sup>135</sup>

Fishbein's Lists	1973	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995
Co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy	32% (29)	47%	38% (111)	31% (86)	31% (103)	27% (86)
Rabbi only officiant	65% (59)	53%	62% (182)	59% (164)	62% (207)	43% (137)

According to a late 1970s study by Egon Mayer, 6% of marriages involving a Jew and a Christian were co-officiated. However, Mayer's study did not distinguish between interfaith marriages and conversionary marriages likely reducing the percentage.<sup>136</sup> Roy Rosenberg estimated in 1988 that about one hundred rabbis and cantors in the United States will co-officiate. He thought that most of these rabbis were "renegade Orthodox who got their ordination outside of the major recognized rabbinical channels, and have no official rabbinic standing."<sup>137</sup> As Fishbein's 1995 study found 90 rabbis in the CCAR and RRA alone who co-officiate, Rosenberg's number is probably low.<sup>138</sup>

In certain parts of the country, it is especially difficult to find a rabbi who co-officiates with Christian clergy. However, in some large metropolitan areas, such as New York City, Washington DC, Chicago, and San Francisco,

<sup>135</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973; Fishbein, List #4, Dec. 1978; Fishbein, "Summary 1982"; Fishbein, "Summary 1986"; Fishbein, "Summary 1990," 2; Fishbein, "Summary 1995," 2; Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

<sup>136</sup>Egon Mayer, *Love & Tradition: Marriage Between Jews and Christians* (New York, 1985), 192-93.

<sup>137</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 71.

<sup>138</sup>Fishbein, "Summary 1995," 2.

Christian and Jewish clergy have "teamed up" to officiate at numerous weddings. These clergy teams will also co-officiate at interfaith services for baby namings, coming-of-age ceremonies, funerals and others.<sup>139</sup> One such organization is Interfaith Clergy, based in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Founded in the mid-1980s, Interfaith Clergy has a pool of 35 rabbis, cantors, priests and ministers. Most of the Jewish clergy are retired from congregational duties. Interfaith Clergy receives over a thousand inquiries each year. Shimon Berris, director of Interfaith Clergy, thought that the organization was "helping people become closer to their religion."<sup>140</sup>

### Services

Services for interfaith couples vary significantly depending on the officiant. Priests and ministers normally use their standard Church liturgy as the basis for their service. Services from the Unitarian Church and Ethical Culture Society have been discussed earlier in this chapter. Civil officiants may adapt a generic marriage service. Joint officiants find ways to merge their different faiths in a service.

Rabbis who officiate at interfaith weddings, where there is no co-officiation, generally approach the service in one of two ways. Most Reform rabbis use a standard Reform Jewish service with few or no modifications. For example, Burt Siegel modified the service slightly "so that a non-Jewish person makes no false statement of himself as a Jew." For Siegel, these modifications were primarily in areas of particularistic language.<sup>141</sup> Kenneth Weiss used the first service in the CCAR *Rabbi's Manual* with one significant change. Instead of the standard vows recited during the exchange of rings,

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<sup>139</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 8.

<sup>140</sup>"Interfaith Clergy: Providing Services for Jewish-Christian Families," *Dovetail* 2, no. 5 (April/May 1994): 8.

<sup>141</sup>Siegel, "Officiating at Mixed Marriages," 82.

"Be consecrated to me with this ring as my wife/husband in keeping with the heritage of Moses and Israel," (or "according to the law of Moses and Israel"), Weiss used the variation from Hosea 2:21-22 in that service, "I betroth you to me forever; I betroth you to me with steadfast love and compassion; I betroth you to me in faithfulness."<sup>142</sup>

The other way rabbis often approach the interfaith marriage service is by removing or changing almost all of the traditional elements of the service. Rather than use the standard Reform marriage service, they use a creative, alternate liturgy, often of their own composition. One such rabbi is Brandeis Hillel director Albert Axelrad. He described the wedding service he used this way:

The ceremony I conduct is a religious one. It is prayerful, reflective and poetic. It is also eclectic and welcomes contributions from the couple. It borrows considerable Jewish elements and sources, including Biblical and post-Biblical selections, the sharing of wine, the shattering of a glass. However, it is not itself THE normative Jewish ceremony and it does not include the major elements which would imply that it is.<sup>143</sup>

For example, Axelrad's service does not include a *chuppah*. In his introduction to the service, Axelrad reiterates the above statement to the congregation by saying that this ceremony "borrows some elements and sources, but at the same time is not itself the recognized Jewish ceremony."<sup>144</sup> This introduction is followed by a selection of biblical and post-biblical readings. In the questions section, which are Axelrad's original wedding vows, he asks the groom, "Is it your intention to honor and respect her, to care for her in tenderness, and to seek together with her a warm and loving

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<sup>142</sup>Weiss, interview; David Polish and W. Gunther Plaut, eds., *Rabbi's Manual* (New York, 1988), 54.

<sup>143</sup>Albert S. Axelrad, "In Response to Inquiries about Mixed-Marriage Ceremonies," *American Jewish Archives*, 2.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.



family life, hallowed by the traditions of Judaism?"<sup>145</sup> After the bride is asked the same question, Axelrad read the alternative marriage contract which stresses the "common goal" of a "unified Jewish household."<sup>146</sup> The exchange of rings does not use the traditional formula, but rather the English phrase, "With this ring, be thou consecrated unto me. Wear it as a symbol of our love."<sup>147</sup> This is followed by several poems, a sharing of wine, and a concluding prayer. The shattering of glass concludes the service at the couple's request.

Another creative service is "The Children of Noah" written by Rebecca Alpert, Linda Holtzman and Arthur Waskow, all Reconstructionist rabbis. They published the service with explanations in the November 1983 *Reconstructionist Judaism* and November/December 1983 *Menorah: Sparks of Jewish Renewal*. It has been republished, without the commentary, in *The New Jewish Wedding*. The service "is intended for use in a Jewish context to affirm and make holy the marriage of two people who are 'children of Noah' – one of whom is a Jew and one of whom is not." Since such a marriage is not a "Jewish marriage," but rather a "Jewishly affirmed universalist marriage," they felt it was necessary to create a new form of liturgy in which such a marriage could be hallowed.<sup>148</sup> Alpert, Holtzman and Waskow were clear that traditional Jewish symbols including the *ketubah*, *chuppah*, standard ring ceremony, sharing of wine, and shattering of a glass should not be used. They also did not recommend using Hebrew.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>Albert S. Axelrad, "A Ceremony for the Mixed Couple," *Reconstructionist* 51, no. 8 (July/Aug. 1986): 25.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>147</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>148</sup>Rebecca Alpert, Linda Holtzman and Arthur Waskow, "'The Children of Noah': Proposal for a Wedding Ceremony," *Reconstructionist* 49 no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 24.

<sup>149</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

The service draws on the theme of the Noah story as well as passages from Hosea and Song of Songs. To set the mood for the service, a natural motif is suggested by holding the service outdoors or bringing plants into the location of the service. The ceremony begins with the pouring of a circle of water followed by a circle of sand poured in the center of the pool to represent the flood and the dry land rising at its end. The bridal couple stands together in the center of the circle. After passages from Songs of Songs are recited by the couple, seven colored scarves in a chain are draped over the bride and groom representing the rainbow.<sup>150</sup> Hosea 2:20-22 is read during the ring ceremony which is followed by the facilitator, who may be a rabbi, reading a statement of marriage. After additional pledges by the couple, the sharing of a candle, food, and water, the facilitator says,

By the authority vested in us  
Through the covenant of God with all of Noah's children,  
Through the teachings of Torah,  
And through the laws of the State of \_\_\_\_\_  
We proclaim you husband and wife.<sup>151</sup>

The service concludes with the release of multi-colored balloons or the throwing of flowers. Another version of this service, attributed to Rabbi Moshe Halfon, is printed in *The Intermarriage Handbook*. It uses much of the same poetry and imagery, but has less ritual sharing and more elements from Jewish tradition including a *chuppah* and passages in Hebrew.<sup>152</sup>

When a couple is married by a single officiant, whether a rabbi, minister, or priest, elements from the other partner's faith are sometimes included in the ceremony. Many Christian clergy allow the use of a *chuppah* or the breaking of a glass in a church service. Neil Kominsky suggested the use of the Lord's Prayer, read interlinearly in Hebrew and English, which he

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<sup>150</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>151</sup>*Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>152</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 339-41.

believed "is in no way theologically offensive."<sup>153</sup> Martin Ryback responded to this suggestion with shock in a letter to Kominsky: "How could a Rabbi use the most sacred prayer of Christianity in the same context with *Sheva B'rachot & Kiddushin*? It's simply beyond my comprehension."<sup>154</sup>

Interfaith marriage services are rarely published. Evelyn Kaye in her book, *Crosscurrents: Children, Families & Religion*, noted that "few such ceremonies are put down on paper. Often they are carefully created for a specific event or occasion, and then spoken but not recorded."<sup>155</sup> However, in the past couple of decades, several books on interfaith marriage have included sample wedding services as appendixes and more recently two books have been published specifically on the subject of interfaith wedding services. While services from non-religious and Christian points of view are often included in these books, nearly all the services specifically designed for a Jew and a non-Jew are services to be co-officiated by a rabbi and a Christian clergyperson.

The goal of a co-officiated service, according to many of their authors, is to blend two religious traditions much as the marriage of the interfaith couple will blend two traditions. Reverend Ronald Luka thought the objective of publishing an interfaith wedding service was to show "how it is possible to integrally combine both rites."<sup>156</sup> Joan Hawxhurst, who included seven complete services in her book, believed the couple should write their own interfaith marriage service. "Together you'll be able to design a

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<sup>153</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>154</sup>Martin Ryback to Neil Kominsky, March 27, 1972, American Jewish Archives, 2. Transliteration in all capital letters in original.

<sup>155</sup>Evelyn Kaye, *Crosscurrents: Children, Families & Religion* (New York, 1980), 214.

<sup>156</sup>Luka, *Christian and a Jew Marry*, 54.

ceremony that fits your personal style and conveys the important messages you want to send at the beginning of your married life."<sup>157</sup>

Abraham Klausner, in his book, *Weddings: A Complete Guide to All Religious and Interfaith Marriage Services*, offered interfaith couples advice on preparing their co-officiated service. He believed that the two officiants needed to work closely together, but neither should set pre-conditions. He suggested that one of the officiants be put in charge of the service, not to make them unequal, but rather that clergyperson "assumes the responsibility for the planning of the wedding." When the wedding takes place in a particular religion's sanctuary, that religion's officiant assumes the role of "clergyperson in charge."<sup>158</sup> Reverend Paul Miller thought it was practical and appropriate for an interfaith ceremony to take place on neutral ground, to use only ethically driven passages from the New Testament, and for no Christological references to be used during the service. "Ideally, something of importance to each out of their respective traditions and communities of faith should be used in the service."<sup>159</sup>

The liturgy of the co-officiated service varies greatly, but generally the rabbi and Christian officiant share different sections of the service, sometimes alternating back and forth, sometimes leading a particular section together. Klausner thought that "the drama of the service and its ecumenical spirit are heightened when the various parts are intertwined, one voice and then the other weaving in and out of the service."<sup>160</sup> One example of such a service is suggested by the authors of the book *Happily Intermarried*. They wrote that

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<sup>157</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 25.

<sup>158</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 113.

<sup>159</sup>Miller, interview.

<sup>160</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 113.

the following outline of a co-officiated service "has been very favorably received on numerous occasions and in many different settings":

Introductory remarks by rabbi and priest (or minister), Scripture reading by priest or minister, reception of vows by priest or minister, exchange of rings under the direction of rabbi, blessing of wine ("seven benedictions") by rabbi after which bride and groom drink of the wine, concluding blessings by rabbi and priest (or minister), breaking of the glass.<sup>161</sup>

Some co-officiated services include only Jewish and non-specific religious elements. Others contain Christian symbols and readings. The Jewish-Christian service found in Evelyn Kaye's book contains only scriptural readings from the Hebrew Bible and no Christian symbolism.<sup>162</sup> In the three co-officiated Jewish-Christian services in Joan Hawxhurst's book, two of them have readings from both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, while the third only has readings from the New Testament.<sup>163</sup>

What is notably absent from many co-officiated services are Christological references. Many rabbis insist on such "inclusive language. That there not be any references to Jesus or the 'son of god' or anything that was not really acceptable as part of the Jewish service."<sup>164</sup> Neil Kominsky noted that the Christian clergyperson who co-officiates needs to be "particularly flexible...to do a totally non-Christological service (in their shoes, I'm not sure I would do it!)." <sup>165</sup> Father Jack Wessling thought that not using Christological language was "a good a idea....Anything you're doing that includes them both or refers to both of them, you should not be using 'Jesus' or 'Christ' because that would be a Christian prayer and would not be appropriate for the Jewish person."<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>161</sup>Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 107.

<sup>162</sup>Kaye, *Crosscurrents*, 219-24.

<sup>163</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*.

<sup>164</sup>Fishbein, interview.

<sup>165</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 2.

<sup>166</sup>Wessling, interview.



Abraham Klausner, however, warned couples that they should not insist on such a change. "The bride and groom must understand that inviting a clergy person to conduct or share in their wedding service does not give them the right to command changes in the clergy's religious visions and commitments."<sup>167</sup> An example of an interfaith service that does use Jesus' name was written by Rabbi Samuel Halevi Barron, Reverend Ronald Luka, Reverend Gregory Kenny, and Professor Robert McAfee Brown.<sup>168</sup> Christological language appears in only two places in the ceremony. The first is in some of the optional scriptural readings, such as Matthew 22:1 and John 2:1, which contain Jesus' name. The second is the priest's concluding benediction which begins "Almighty God our Father, for all of us the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and for some of us the God and Father of Jesus Christ."<sup>169</sup> Otherwise, the service has no trinitarian references.

The unity candle, a traditional element in many Christian marriage services, is often found in co-officiated services. Based on an interpretation of Matthew 19:6, "They are no longer two but one," the bride and groom "often carry lighted candles that they bring to a single, unlighted candle that stands before the altar." Together, they light the single candle symbolizing "that their two lives are now one."<sup>170</sup> One suggested reconstruction of this symbol in a Jewish-Christian wedding is for the bride and groom to use *havdalah* candles which "symbolize that even in unity, we can remain individuals."<sup>171</sup>

Similarly, the breaking of a glass by the groom can be found in nearly all co-officiated services. However, it is often given new meaning by the

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<sup>167</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 114.

<sup>168</sup>Luka, *Christian and a Jew Marry*, 54-86.

<sup>169</sup>*Ibid.*, 78-79.

<sup>170</sup>John C. McCollister, *The Christian Book of Why* (Middle Village, NY, 1983), 190.

<sup>171</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 74.

officiants. In one service, it was paralleled to ringing of the church bells at the end of a Christian wedding, both of which have the intention of scaring away "evil spirits wishing to harm the newly married couple,"<sup>172</sup> Another suggested, "Since this is an interfaith ceremony, let us, with this symbol, be particularly mindful of the needless barriers that people erect between one another, and try to think, with the breaking of the glass, of breaking down those barriers and helping to build a world of respect, unity and peace."<sup>173</sup>

The concluding blessing of the co-officiated service is often the Priestly Benediction. This is regularly led by the rabbi and Christian clergyperson together, alternating between the rabbi reading a line in Hebrew and the Christian minister reading English. Abraham Klausner particularly suggested this as an effective close to the service.<sup>174</sup>

For an interfaith wedding, the standard marriage *ketubah* is often not considered appropriate or desirable. Several companies have developed interfaith *ketubot*. Caspi Cards and Art of Newtonville, Massachusetts prints "several ketubah designs with language for partners of different heritages." Good Company of Chicago produces a "six-color interfaith ketubah with language that expresses a couple's commitment to respect each other's heritage." The Good Company's *ketubah*, which was created by Allan Secher, a Reform rabbi, is especially designed for a co-officiated ceremony as it has two signature lines labeled simply for "officiant."<sup>175</sup>

For a Roman Catholic priest to be involved in a co-officiated service, a special "Dispensation from Form" is required. This form is sent to the

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<sup>172</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>174</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 118. For examples, see Solomon Greenberg, "Marriage Ceremony," Personal Archives, 12; Solomon Greenberg, "Interfaith Ceremony Catholic-Jewish Wedding," Personal Archives, 9; Kaye, *Crosscurrents*, 118; Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 37.

<sup>175</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 82, 88.

archdiocese where it is automatically approved. The priest is no longer considered the primary officiant and the non-Catholic officiant would receive the vows and sign the marriage license as the official witness. As the second participant, the priest is officially limited to reading scriptural passages, offering prayers and a benediction, however some priests, such as Father Jack Wessling, disregard this ruling.<sup>176</sup>

### Vows and Rings

The vows said over the ring ceremony are subject to many variations in all kinds of interfaith services. Some rabbis make changes to the final phrase of traditional formula in Hebrew or English. Examples include: "*bifnay Elohim v'adam* – in the presence of God and man,"<sup>177</sup> "*b'eyney Elohim v'adam* – in the sight of God and man,"<sup>178</sup> "*k'dat Elohim uv'nei adam* – according to God and man,"<sup>179</sup> "*k'dat libi v'ahavat olam* – according to the faith of my heart and my everlasting love,"<sup>180</sup> and "*k'dat Elohim u'bnei adam* – This ring is a symbol of your sacredness (or your specialness) unto me according to the ways of God and humanity."<sup>181</sup> Others will use different love vows from Hebrew tradition including Hosea 2:21-22, Song of Songs 6:3 "*ani l'dodi v'dodi li* – I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine," and Song of Songs 5:16 "*zeh dodi, v'zeh rey-i* – This is my beloved and this is my friend."<sup>182</sup>

In co-officiated ceremonies, the tendency is to split the vows from the ring service. Often a priest will lead the vows and then the rabbi the ring

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<sup>176</sup>Wessling, interview; Archdiocese of Cincinnati, "Matrimonial Dispensations"; Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 96, 107; Klausner, *Weddings* 111.

<sup>177</sup>Gorin, "Middle of the Road," 10.

<sup>178</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 23.

<sup>179</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>180</sup>HUCALum Newsgroup 350 (1/4/96).

<sup>181</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 70.

<sup>182</sup>*Ibid.*, 71.

service. Some officiants prefer "submitting a vow and offering the ring to the one of his faith." However, Klausner believed that this "has the effect of stressing difference, whereas the wedding service should stress the unity of promise and purpose."<sup>183</sup> Some rabbis insist they lead the exchange of vows. David Max Eichhorn wrote, "If there is to be only one ceremony and a non-Jewish clergyman is to participate, I must be the clergyman who pronounces the couple husband and wife."<sup>184</sup>

The words at the ring service are sometimes adaptations of the traditional phrase, generally only in English, and sometimes much further removed. Examples from co-officiated services include: "Behold, be thou consecrated unto me by this ring as my wife, in accordance with the faith of Judaism and the law of God and man,"<sup>185</sup> "Be thou consecrated unto me with this ring as my wife, according to the faith of God and humanity,"<sup>186</sup> "With this ring, be thou consecrated unto me as my wife, in everlasting love,"<sup>187</sup> "With this ring, I pledge my devotion to you, as my wife, in everlasting love,"<sup>188</sup> "This ring is a symbol that you have become my wife in the love of God,"<sup>189</sup> "I give you this ring as a sign of my love and my loyalty,"<sup>190</sup> "I give you this ring as a sign of our love and welcome you as my wife,"<sup>191</sup> "By this ring, as a token and pledge of my constant love, you are consecrated to me as my wedded wife,"<sup>192</sup> and "With this ring I thee wed and by it be thou consecrated unto me, as my wedded wife according to the Laws of God and

<sup>183</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 118.

<sup>184</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Interfaith Marriages*, 111.

<sup>185</sup>Luka, *Christian and a Jew Marry*, 72.

<sup>186</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 117.

<sup>187</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 56.

<sup>188</sup>Greenberg, "Interfaith Ceremony Catholic-Jewish Wedding," 9.

<sup>189</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 41.

<sup>190</sup>Sherwin Wine quoted Miriam Jerris, "What's Different about Humanistic Jewish Weddings?" *Humanistic Judaism* 15, no. 3 (Summer 1987): 25.

<sup>191</sup>Daniel Friedman quoted in *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>192</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 48.

Man."<sup>193</sup> The ring exchange is often preceded by the Christian tradition of blessing the rings.<sup>194</sup>

### Blessings

One option that stops short of co-officiation is for the rabbi to offer a blessing after the wedding of a Jew to a non-Jew, but not to officiate at that ceremony. David Max Eichhorn called this a "blessing ceremony." Immediately after a couple was married by a Christian or a civil officiant, Eichhorn would rise and "offer a prayer on behalf of the couple and a benediction."<sup>195</sup> Neil Kominsky, however, refused to follow this same practice. "I will not by this action, condone the lack of respect for the religious integrity of the Jewish partner. Just as the words of the ceremony must be mutually acceptable, so must the setting."<sup>196</sup> Solomon Freehof called such actions "contrary to the Jewish spirit."<sup>197</sup>

Blessings also are an option for rabbis that do not officiate. Many rabbis will offer a prayer for the couple before or after their wedding. John Friedman would attend the civil weddings of Jewishly committed interfaith couples and at the couple's request would offer a prayer before the reception. He believed that doing this "further strengthens my link to the couple and helps me to bring them under the umbrella of the synagogue."<sup>198</sup> Joseph Edelheit would offer a blessing for an interfaith couple but only if they were married by a secular officiant and were committed to a Jewish home. Edelheit offered a variety of options for the couple. The blessing could be at any time other than Shabbat, could be before or after the marriage, in the sanctuary,

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<sup>193</sup>Kaye, *Crosscurrents*, 222.

<sup>194</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 122.

<sup>195</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 121.

<sup>196</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>197</sup>Freehof, "New Marriage Problems," 6.

<sup>198</sup>John S. Friedman to Joseph Glazer [sic], Oct. 29, 1981, CCAR Archives, 2.



chapel, rabbi's study, or a private home. If the couple wished more public recognition, Edelheit would offer a blessing at the wedding reception as a "toast." However, he wanted to be clear that this action was not officiation. No ritual objects could be used with the blessing. This decision was also not to be construed as the beginning of a change of synagogue policy opposing officiation. "We do not want anyone to misunderstand that our willingness to provide public recognition of interfaith marriage will ultimately become officiation at interfaith weddings."<sup>199</sup>

Steven Foster would offer a blessing in public, while his Reform colleague in Denver, Raymond Zwerin would only do so in private.<sup>200</sup> Debra Hachen invited every interfaith couple for a pre-wedding blessing at Shabbat services. She told the CCAR in 1996 that "Jewish families that wanted the rabbi at the wedding in order to affirm that their child was not giving up Judaism can sometimes find that pre-nuptial blessings give them a space to announce their pride and their joy. And in our synagogue we shout *mazel tov* and throw candy." The Jewish partner is called up for *aliyah* by Hachen. The non-Jewish partner then joins them on the *bimah* for a *Mi Shebeirach*.<sup>201</sup> Irwin Fishbein added a category to his 1995 list for the rabbi who "Offers prayer or blessing when wedding service is performed by non-Jewish clergy." He noted that these rabbis "do not technically officiate at intermarriages but, because they are willing to be with the couple at the time of their ceremony, are included." In the 1995, only one rabbi was listed with this condition.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>199</sup>Joseph A. Edelheit, "New Custom of Recognizing Interfaith Couples," UAHC Archives, 1.

<sup>200</sup>Steven Foster, "Officiation at Interweddings," author's notes, March 8, 1995.

<sup>201</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

<sup>202</sup>Fishbein, List #8, July 1996; Irwin H. Fishbein to author, Feb. 3, 1997, Personal Archives.

A 1979 CCAR responsum addressed the question of a rabbi offering a prayer for an interfaith couple. It concluded that it would be improper to do so before the couple was married as it would "lend approval" to such a marriage. After the couple is married, the congregation should "do everything possible to make the non-Jewish partner feel at ease and at home in our midst." However, the responsum never directly stated that a prayer or blessing for an interfaith after marriage was acceptable.<sup>203</sup>

Another option that avoids co-officiation would be to allow the non-Jewish clergyperson to offer a prayer or blessing at or after the Jewish service. While this issue has not been the focus of much discussion, a related scenario has been addressed by leaders of the Reform movement. Solomon Freehof thought that in a conversionary marriage, "there is no real harm in inviting a non-Jewish minister to give a blessing."<sup>204</sup> A 1979 CCAR responsum tackled this issue of a Christian clergyperson's participation in the wedding of two Jews. That responsum concluded that there was nothing preventing this non-Jewish clergyperson "from participating in the less essential parts of the services as a social, non-religious gesture. He might add a prayer (without trinitarian references), give a homily, or be included in the wedding party; this would be considered appropriate and within the bounds of Jewish tradition."<sup>205</sup> Such an argument could easily be adapted by rabbis who officiate to allow Christian clergy to offer a blessing during or after interfaith services.

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<sup>203</sup>Walter Jacob, ed., *American Reform Responsa* (New York, 1983), 465.

<sup>204</sup>Freehof, "New Marriage Problems," 6.

<sup>205</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 87 (1977): 101.

### Number, Location and Time

Three issues that arise regularly in discussing interfaith marriage services are the number of services, the location of the service and the time of the service. When both bride and groom are committed to having ceremonies in their own faith, and co-officiation is not a viable option, some couples "choose to have two wedding services, one in each of their religious disciplines. There is no reason why two services cannot be conducted, if there is good reason for each and if the drama can be retained," wrote Abraham Klausner.<sup>206</sup> Only the first ceremony is legally binding, "so the second ceremony is technically a 'blessing' of the marriage,"<sup>207</sup>

Neil Kominsky refused to be part of two ceremony interfaith marriages "as only one of the ceremonies, the first, actually marries the couple. The second, for me, is an uncomfortable charade."<sup>208</sup> David Max Eichhorn would officiate in such a scenario. "If there are to be two ceremonies, they must be completely separate in time and in place and the Jewish ceremony must be the second ceremony." This is done so that first ceremony is regarded as the civil ceremony and the second ceremony as the religious one. Eichhorn admitted that "this is stretching things a bit," but believed the non-Jew also had the right to be married by his or her clergyperson.<sup>209</sup> A 1983 CCAR responsum directly addressed the issue of separate ceremonies. The responsum declared strong opposition to such practices and stated that "We vigorously reject this attempt at religious syncretism suggested by the question and can in no way condone Jewish participation in such dual

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<sup>206</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 114.

<sup>207</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 9.

<sup>208</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>209</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 111-12.

ceremonies.”<sup>210</sup> 52% of the rabbis on Irwin Fishbein’s most recent list require that the Jewish ceremony be the only ceremony.<sup>211</sup>

The location of a wedding is often the focus of much tension for an interfaith couple. Many Christian families want a Church wedding. Jewish families will often compromise on a non-religious location such as a reception hall. When these tensions arise, the authors of *Happily Intermarried* suggest that Christian families without an ongoing connection to a particular church, agree on a neutral spot. However, if the family has strong ties to a church, “there is no reason they should be deprived of the opportunity of celebrating the wedding there as well.”<sup>212</sup>

Few rabbis are willing to officiate in a church if Christian religious symbols are present. Since 1973, between 6% and 12% of all Reform rabbis would officiate in a church or chapel where such symbols were present. David Max Eichhorn thought that if those symbols were removed, “there should be no objection” to having a Jewish wedding there.<sup>213</sup> It is unknown what percentage of Reform rabbis today will officiate in a church or chapel when no symbols are present. In 1973, 22% of the rabbis on Fishbein’s list (26 rabbis) indicated their willingness. While in 1978, it was 33% (59 rabbis).<sup>214</sup>

Fishbein’s Lists	1973	1978	1982	1986	1990	1995
In a church with Christian symbols	12% (11)	9% (14)	6% (18)	9% (25)	9% (31)	8% (26)

When planning an interfaith wedding, couples must contend with the various days that clergy might refrain from officiating. Some Christians might object to a Sunday service or a wedding during Advent or Lent.<sup>215</sup>

<sup>210</sup>CCAR Yearbook 93 (1983): 194-95.

<sup>211</sup>Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

<sup>212</sup>Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 106.

<sup>213</sup>Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages*, 109.

<sup>214</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973.

<sup>215</sup>Hawxhurst, *Interfaith Wedding Ceremonies*, 22.

Rabbis might refuse to officiate during the ten days of repentance or the Omer. The most common request is for a rabbi to officiate on Shabbat. "Rabbis who are willing to perform Sabbath weddings do so because they feel that, first, [many Jews] no longer regard a wedding as a business transaction and, second, the joy of the wedding enhances the joy of the Sabbath."<sup>216</sup>

Most rabbis who officiate at interfaith marriages will not officiate on Shabbat. Abraham Klausner stated that a Jewish wedding "is not planned for a Sabbath, a holy day, a festival, or other special times during the year."<sup>217</sup> Neil Kominsky thought that a "shabbat wedding is...out of the question because of the unnecessary affront to traditional sensibilities."<sup>218</sup> In 1973, only five rabbis in Fishbein's list (5%) were willing to officiate on Shabbat. By 1995, twenty-two rabbis (10%) were listed, almost all of them also willing to co-officiate with non-Jewish clergy in a service that mentioned other religions.<sup>219</sup>

The CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage debated the issue of Shabbat officiation and the 1973 resolution expressed opposition to that practice in the section that was referred to committees.<sup>220</sup> In 1979, Joseph Herzog of Buffalo wrote a letter to Joseph Glaser complaining of the practices of local colleague, Martin Goldberg, who would officiate on Shabbat. Herzog called for a "public censure" of such rabbis.<sup>221</sup> Glaser explored the issue and ultimately informed Herzog that there was no current CCAR process for addressing the situation. He proposed that Herzog write a resolution for the next CCAR convention.<sup>222</sup> Herzog looked into that suggestion, but ultimately the CCAR never addressed

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<sup>216</sup>Rosenberg et al., *Happily Intermarried*, 90.

<sup>217</sup>Klausner, *Weddings* 82.

<sup>218</sup>Kominsky, "Co-Officiating," 3.

<sup>219</sup>Fishbein, List #3, 1973; Fishbein, List #8, July 1996.

<sup>220</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 83 (1973): 63-64.

<sup>221</sup>Joseph D. Herzog to Joseph Glaser, Nov. 6, 1979, CCAR Archives.

<sup>222</sup>Joseph Glaser to Joseph D. Herzog, Feb. 12, 1980, CCAR Archives.



the issue.<sup>223</sup> In 1989, CCAR President Eugene Lippman lamented that "even our more strongly-worded exhortation to our colleagues not to officiate in the sanctuaries of other religions, not to officiate on Shabbat or on Yom Tov - even that statement is ignored with impunity by colleagues as part of our total pluralism."<sup>224</sup> The CCAR, however, has not passed any resolution on officiation on Shabbat.

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<sup>223</sup>Herman E. Schaalman to Joseph D. Herzog, Sept. 1, 1981, CCAR Archives.

<sup>224</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 99 (1989): 8.

## Chapter Four

### Effects and Prospects

#### Employment

The question of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages remains unresolved for North American Reform Jews....Some Reform congregations decline to interview for their pulpits rabbinic candidates who do not officiate at intermarriages. Other congregations refuse to consider rabbis who do officiate.<sup>1</sup>

Whether or not a rabbi's position on officiation affects employment has been a much debated issue in the Reform movement. As early as 1972, rabbis expressed public concern that their practice was preventing them from obtaining certain jobs. The CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage of the early 1970s examined this issue in their initial deliberations. At the November 1972 meeting, the Committee initially thought to propose that congregations should not make any hiring decisions based on this single issue since "rabbinic-congregational relations are multi-faceted, and marriage is only one of the many functions which the rabbi performs."<sup>2</sup> But at that same meeting, this statement was revised to completely reject a rabbi's position on officiation as grounds to consider for a search committee. They sent the following statement to the Placement Director:

The CCAR strongly supports the rabbi in all matters of conscience. It is the position of the CCAR that the matter of officiating or not officiating at a mixed marriage is such an issue, and should not in any way be a consideration in the process of negotiating for a pulpit, or in the matter of retention or tenure. The Placement Committee is directed to support this resolution and to act on the basis of it.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mark L. Winer, Sanford Seltzer and Steven J. Schwager, *Leaders of Reform Judaism* (New York, 1987), 4.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, New York, NY, Nov. 26-28, 1972, CCAR Archives, 4.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

That December, Rabbi Joseph Glaser forwarded to the Committee on Mixed Marriage a letter that Placement Director Malcolm Stern had recently received. The letter had all identifying features removed to protect the anonymity of both the author and the congregation. The rabbi who wrote the letter to Stern was concerned about a recent interview he had just completed for a new pulpit. "The problem is that I detect that some (or many) of the Committee members are interested in hiring a rabbi who will freely officiate at interfaith marriages," he wrote. "In my opinion, an inordinate amount of time was taken up during the interview on this particular subject." If he was not to be offered this particular pulpit, the rabbi felt that it was solely because of his practice of not officiating at interfaith marriages. This situation, he felt, was "deplorable." Although he believed the Placement office could do little about such events, he found it entirely unfair that "people like myself are less marketable commodities than our more permissive colleagues, from the point of view of many pulpit committees, precisely because we uphold the validity of the weakly-worded 1909 CCAR Resolution on Interfaith Marriages."<sup>4</sup>

The issue of placement, like so many other peripheral issues, was pushed aside by the Committee on Mixed Marriage as they examined their central concern of rabbinical officiation. Concern for rabbis being denied pulpits because of their opposition to officiation at interfaith marriages was, according to Simeon Maslin, the impetus for the creation of Committee of 100. Maslin wrote in the cover letter accompanying "Reform Rabbis and Mixed Marriage" that the pamphlet had been privately published "at our own expense so as to make it clear to the American Jewish community - and

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<sup>4</sup>Unknown to Malcolm Stern, Dec. 26, 1972, CCAR Archives.

especially to rabbinic selection committees - that it may certainly not be taken for granted that a Reform rabbi will officiate at a mixed marriage."<sup>5</sup>

In the ensuing controversy, Murray Blackman wrote in "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation" that if placement was the central issue, then rabbis who do officiate would have joined the members of the Committee of 100 "in a statement of concern, if that was all that was at issue. Instead, our ranks are now racked by bitterness and divisiveness occasioned by privately sponsored memoranda."<sup>6</sup> As an alternative to a particular rabbi officiating, Eugene Mihaly proposed the creation of a lay committee "whose duty it will be to determine whether a marriage meets what the congregation considers to be the legitimate standards set by the congregation...[and] one of the dedicated members of the committee, after a course of study and licensing by the congregation to satisfy the legal requirements, would solemnize the marriage." Mihaly did not suggest what should happen if the couple did not meet these "legitimate standards."<sup>7</sup>

In 1986 and 1987, Jack Stern spoke about the difficulties of placement in his CCAR Presidential addresses. Stern wanted the UAHC to "urge its member congregations not to pressure rabbis and not to discriminate against rabbinical candidates because of their refusal to officiate at mixed marriages or their insistence upon following the dictates of their own conscience."<sup>8</sup> By 1987, he had the unanimous consent of the leadership of the Reform movement to send a letter, signed by the UAHC President and the UAHC Board Chairman, to all congregations that requested placement. "It will urge

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<sup>5</sup>Simeon J. Maslin to CCAR Members, Nov. 20, 1984, American Jewish Archives. Original was underlined.

<sup>6</sup>Murray Blackman et al., "A Call to Reason and Reconciliation," April 1986, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>7</sup>Eugene Mihaly, *Responsa on Jewish Marriage* (Cincinnati, 1985), 82.

<sup>8</sup>CCAR Yearbook 96 (1986): 9.

them in the strongest terms possible not to allow the matter of officiation to become the determining factor in the choice of their rabbinic candidate."<sup>9</sup>

Despite Stern's urges, the issue remained active for many rabbis. In the 1989 CCAR Presidential address, Eugene Lipman noted, "Our Placement Commission and its directors have tried valiantly to fulfill our mandate that this issue not be a factor in rabbinical placement. We know that not only are they not very successful, but they can't be so long as congregations elect rabbis and do not have them selected by some outside authority, *chas vechalila*." At the 1996 CCAR Conference, Stern likewise lamented that, "What is new under the sun, despite all pleas by our Conference and Placement Commission, is the number of search committees for whom an essential question to candidates is: 'Do you or don't you?'"<sup>10</sup>

Whether officiation should be a central concern of hiring committees is debated by rabbis and lay leaders from all positions on officiation. Then UAHF board chairman Charles Rothschild, Jr. rejected any sort "litmus test." "Whether or not a rabbi officiates at mixed marriages should not be an important criterion in determining a rabbi's suitability for a particular congregation."<sup>11</sup> Even some of the most outspoken proponents of officiation have criticized such practices. Sam Silver called it "dreadful" and Eugene Mihaly wrote that "for a congregation to use a rabbi's officiating or not at interfaith marriages as the sole, or even as a major criterion in selecting a rabbi is unwise, self-defeating, and contrary to the spirit of Reform Judaism."<sup>12</sup> Others have taken an opposite view. Lay leader Paul Uhlmann,

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<sup>9</sup>CCAR Yearbook 97 (1987): 2.

<sup>10</sup>"Mixed Marriage: Why I Believe Officiating Will or Will Not Lead to Continuity of the Jewish People," 1996 CCAR Convention session, March 1996, audiocassette, CCAR Archives.

<sup>11</sup>Mark L. Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" *Reform Judaism*, Summer 1985: 3.

<sup>12</sup>Samuel M. Silver, telephone interview, Jan. 1992; Mihaly, *Responsa*, 74-75.



Jr. of Kansas City supported a "litmus test" and felt that a rabbi's position on officiation should be listed as "part of his curriculum vitae." Rabbi Kenneth Segel, then of Montreal, compared a "congregation's rabbinic choice to the selection of a husband or a wife. 'If the congregation feels that rabbi's officiating at mixed marriages is important, it's right.'" <sup>13</sup>

Congregations that are searching for a new rabbi can ask rabbinical candidates about their views on officiation. They cannot, however, restrict a prospective panel to only those who officiate or those who do not. To do so would be self-defeating, stated Joseph Glaser in 1985. Congregations that limit their choices to only those rabbis who officiate "eliminate over half the members of the Conference, reducing the odds of finding the kind of rabbi they ought to have as leader, teacher, and pastor. It's unfair, not only to the rabbis, but also to the congregations." <sup>14</sup> Arnold Sher, the current director the Placement Commission, believes that is still true today. There is the issue of "supply and demand....More rabbis are being ordained who don't officiate than those who do." <sup>15</sup>

Rabbis have been reported to lose jobs, not have contracts renewed, and not be hired because of their position on officiation. This includes those that do officiate as well as those that do not, Sher noted. He believed that more attention should be focused on the tradition of that particular congregation, their past history on officiation, and the community they are in. If a congregation is considering several applicants, they will take a stronger candidate whose position on officiation does not match the committees, than the weaker applicant whose position does. Sher cited the example of Nashville, Tennessee where the congregation searched for a rabbi who did

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<sup>13</sup>Winer, "Should Rabbis Perform Mixed Marriages?" 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>15</sup>Arnold Sher, telephone interview, Feb. 11, 1997.

officiate, but the strongest candidate was a rabbi who absolutely did not, Stephen Fuchs. Fuchs, who had a "long and difficult process" in finding a job, was hired by the Nashville congregation. Although a break-away congregation was formed in response to Fuchs' position on officiation, incited by a sermon on endogamous marriage, he still occupies the Nashville pulpit.<sup>16</sup>

John Friedman, in a 1996 presentation to a UAHC regional biennial, said, "To decide not to officiate at intermarriages is an altruistic decision. You make that decision against the interest of your career, in general. Such a decision puts you at odds with your congregants, sixty percent of whom, we are told, would like you to officiate."<sup>17</sup> A 1985 survey by Mark Winer, Sanford Seitzer and Steven Schwager of the delegates of the UAHC and Sisterhood biennials found that 45% of the lay leadership favored rabbinical officiation in general, while 46% opposed it.<sup>18</sup> A survey by the Jewish Outreach Institute in 1990 narrowed the question by asking lay members of the Reform and Conservative movements if "they would like to see their rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages if the couple was committed to raising their children as Jewish." Under these conditions, 90% of the Reform laity and 70% of the Conservative laity favored officiation. 40% of the Reform lay leaders supported officiation without such preconditions.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the overwhelming sentiment in favor of officiation among lay leaders, Sher does not see it as a "burning issues with search committees today. No one gets or loses a job over this issue." More important than one's

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<sup>16</sup>Sher, interview; "How to Think About Officiation (For Newly Ordained Rabbis)," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 26, 1996, Author's Archives.

<sup>17</sup>John S. Friedman, "Why I Don't Officiate at Intermarriages," paper delivered at UAHC Mid-Atlantic regional biennial. Oct., 27, 1996, American Jewish Archives, 1.

<sup>18</sup>Winer et al., *Leaders of Reform Judaism*, 113.

<sup>19</sup>Peter Steinfelds, "Jews Found Split on Mixed Marriage," *New York Times*, Sept. 18, 1990: A25; Egon Mayer, "The Impact of Intermarriage," *Reform Judaism*, Spring 1991: 32.

position, according to Sher, is "how the rabbi defends his or her position and the consistency of the rabbi's actions....It's not what they answer, but how they answer....It isn't the 'yes' or 'no', but 'because.' It is the 'because' that becomes operative here." The Placement Commission urges all search committee not to make their decisions based only on officiation and become "one issue" committees. All UAHC congregations that enter the process of hiring meet with Sher, a UAHC regional director, or another UAHC representative. Issues relating to placement are reviewed with the search committee including rabbinical officiation at interfaith marriages. Calls for specific rules on placement and officiation seem worthless to Sher. "You can make all the rules you want, but congregations can do whatever they want."<sup>20</sup>

### **Cantors**

In recent years, the role of the cantor as an officiant has become more prevalent. Even though Reform cantors have been officiating at marriage ceremonies for many years, the interfaith marriage debate has not included them. According to American Conference of Cantors President Judith Rowland, this is because cantors "are not in the limelight. The expectation of a cantor to do weddings...is less visible than the rabbinic officiation."<sup>21</sup>

The CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage discussed the issue of cantorial officiation at a meeting in November 1972. The Committee agreed on the following resolution:

- 1) that it would request of the American Conference of Cantors that they insist that in a congregation where the rabbi of the congregation does not conduct mixed marriages, the cantor shall follow the policy of the rabbi; 2) it is of course to be expected that whenever Cantors officiate at marriages they subscribe to the same standards as is the policy among rabbis.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Sher, interview.

<sup>21</sup>Judith Rowland, telephone interview, Jan. 27, 1997.

<sup>22</sup>Minutes, Committee on Mixed Marriage, Nov. 1972, 3.

When the Committee decided to focus exclusively on rabbinical officiation, the resolution on cantors along with all other peripheral issues, was pushed aside. It has not subsequently been addressed by the CCAR.

Cantors have generally faced the same questions and issues as rabbis regarding interfaith marriage, but cantors have rarely been included in the discussion process on officiation within the Reform movement. As a group, Reform cantors have "sort of been dismayed that they haven't been involved in the discussion...Cantors have been totally left out of the picture."<sup>23</sup> Cantor Rhoda Silverman of Baltimore agrees. When discussing issues of officiation, many lay people assume that "the cantor does what the rabbi does." However, in her congregation and in many others, this is not true. If the cantor does not officiate at interfaith marriages and the rabbi does, the cantor is not expected to participate, in any fashion, at an interfaith marriage.<sup>24</sup> Rabbi David Goldstein of New Orleans and Cantor Rowland reported similar experiences.<sup>25</sup>

While synagogues have varied policies regarding a cantor's role, Rowland was not aware of any cantors having difficulty in job placement because of their views on officiation. Like rabbis, at most job interviews cantors are asked about their position.<sup>26</sup> Currently, the American Conference of Cantors has no policy on officiation, although there is a possibility of the issue being discussed in greater detail at a future convention. The present position is that each cantor is left to his or her "individual conscience."<sup>27</sup>

It is unknown how many Reform cantors are willing to officiate at interfaith marriages and under what conditions. Egon Mayer thought that

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<sup>23</sup>Rowland, interview.

<sup>24</sup>Rhoda Silverman, telephone interview, Feb. 10, 1997.

<sup>25</sup>David Goldstein, personal interview, New Orleans, LA, June 6, 1996; Rowland, interview.

<sup>26</sup>Rowland, interview; Silverman, interview.

<sup>27</sup>Rowland, interview.

cantors represent a tiny percentage of officiants.<sup>28</sup> Rowland pointed out that a few cantors do a "brisk business" in officiation and get all the press, but like their rabbinical counterparts, these cantors represent a minority of those who officiate.<sup>29</sup> Irwin Fishbein has had requests from Reform cantors to be included in his list of officiants. A survey went out to all Reform cantors at the beginning of 1997 and the results will be included in a future update of Rabbi Fishbein's list.<sup>30</sup>

### Orthodox Judaism

There is no difference of opinion between orthodox Jews and reform Jews in their attitude toward mixed marriage....No Rabbi, even the most liberal, will officiate at a mixed marriage unless the non-Jewish bride or bridegroom has previously accepted Judaism.<sup>31</sup>

When Orthodox rabbi David de Sola Pool wrote the above statement in 1918, he reflected the hopeful view that all rabbis, regardless of denomination, shared a similar view about officiation at interfaith marriages. However, history has shown us that the different denominations of American Jewry differ as dramatically on this issue as they do on almost any other.

The Orthodox position on interfaith marriage is quite clear. J. David Bleich, an Orthodox rabbi in New York City, explained this at a 1976 conference on interfaith marriage:

There is a well-known folk saying to the effect that wherever there are two Jews, there are three opinions. It seems to me that in the area of Halacha the number of opinions often increases geometrically according to the number of authorities writing about or discussing any given topic. In the area of intermarriage, this is simply not the case. There is little, if any, disagreement; and there are very, very few hairs to split.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Egon Mayer, personal interview, New York, NY, July 11, 1996.

<sup>29</sup>Rowland, interview.

<sup>30</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, personal interview, Westfield, NJ, July 9, 1996; Silverman interview.

<sup>31</sup>David De Sola Pool, *Intermarriage* (New York, [1918]), 12.

<sup>32</sup>J. David Bleich, "An Halachic Perspective to Mixed Marriage," *The Threat of Mixed Marriage: A Response*, Sheldon Zimmerman and Barbara S. Tranin, eds. (New York, 1978), 16-17.



"Interfaith marriage is no marriage," wrote Maurice Lamm. "It is prohibited and it is also void."<sup>33</sup>

As early as 1844, Orthodox rabbis in America were publicly condemning interfaith marriage. Isaac Leeser wrote in the *Occident* that "no Jew can conscientiously or legally take to wife any Christian, Mahommedan or heathen woman, nor can any Jewess take for husband a man who is not of the house of Israel."<sup>34</sup> A year later, Leeser again addressed the issue writing, "If we wish to preserve our race in our religion, and not wish to see them incorporated with all or any one of the many denominations of Christians, we must endeavour to prevent, if possible, any of our members from intermarrying with Christians or persons indifferent to any faith."<sup>35</sup>

Given such a view of interfaith marriage, it is not surprising that Orthodox rabbis are vocal and consistent in their denunciation of officiation at interfaith marriages. Maurice Lamm wrote, "The rabbi has no part in effecting the marriage itself. He ascertains only that the partners are legitimately permitted to marry one another and that the marriage process is executed according to the laws of Moses and Israel."<sup>36</sup> Kalman Packouz thought, "Any rabbi who performs such a ceremony perpetrates a farce; the wedding has no Jewish validity....Even if an intermarriage had 100 rabbis to perform and bless it, it has absolutely no legal status or validity under Jewish law."<sup>37</sup> Officiation sends signals that "what is inherently *treif* can be *kashered* – that intermarriage is only a sin if the organized Jewish community insists

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<sup>33</sup>Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way in Love & Marriage* (Middle Village, NY, 1980), 53.

<sup>34</sup>Isaac Leeser, "The Dangers of Our Position," *The Occident* 2, no. 8 (Nov. 1844): 367.

<sup>35</sup>Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage* (Boston, 1964), 183.

<sup>36</sup>Lamm, *Jewish Way*, 179.

<sup>37</sup>Kalman Packouz, *How to Stop an Intermarriage: A Practical Guide for Parents* (Jerusalem, 1976), 90.

on considering it a sin."<sup>38</sup> Herschel Schacter of Yeshiva University called officiation a "bloodless holocaust....These people are gratifying their own personal needs and not considering the effect on the community and their progeny."<sup>39</sup>

Despite such forceful statements against interfaith marriage, Orthodox Jews still marry non-Jews. Therefore Orthodox rabbis have been forced to find appropriate reactions. The conversion of the non-Jew has often been proposed as a reluctant solution. David Ellenson, in a 1985 article for *Jewish Social Studies*, outlined the divergent positions of rabbinical authorities regarding this approach. He noted that late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Orthodox rabbis varied between a more stringent camp that forbade such conversions as a violation of *halachah* and a more lenient group that permitted it. This lenient group included Zvi Kalischer, David Hoffmann and Marcus Horovitz. Since World War II, however, no Orthodox rabbi has publicly taken such a lenient approach.<sup>40</sup>

Ellenson cited several responsa where Orthodox rabbis were particularly critical of Reform practices regarding interfaith marriage. In a 1949 responsum, Simcha Levy, the former president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America, offered his opinion on whether an Orthodox rabbi could approve of the conversion of a non-Jew solely for marriage. Levy "reluctantly" permitted the conversion "lest the family turn to a Reform rabbi and be lost in its entirety."<sup>41</sup> Reform conversions were invalid in all cases, wrote Moshe Feinstein, then "the leading Orthodox rabbinic authority in the

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<sup>38</sup>Chani Friedman, "Mangled Roots, Bitter Fruits," *The Jewish Observer* 26, no. 2 (March 1993): 17.

<sup>39</sup>Michael D'Antonio, "Jewish Husbands, Christian Wives (and Vice Versa)," *Present Tense* 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 6.

<sup>40</sup>David Ellenson, "Representative Orthodox Responsa on Conversion and Inter-marriage in the Contemporary Era," *Jewish Social Studies* 47 (1985): 209.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 210.

United States, if not the world." "Even if no one witnesses [Reform rabbis'] transgressions of Torah, the name 'Reform' testifies to the fact that they are heretics, and therefore are not fit to conduct conversion."<sup>42</sup> Ellenson found no post-World War II ruling by an Orthodox rabbinical authority that accepted "the validity of conversions conducted by the Liberal rabbinate," nor would they generally allow the Orthodox rabbi to convert a non-Jewish partner of a prospective interfaith couple.<sup>43</sup>

If Orthodox rabbis are unable to convert the non-Jewish partner before marriage or refer them to a Reform rabbi to do the conversion, then what reaction to interfaith marriage do their leaders propose? One common approach seems to be shame and condemnation. In the book *How to Stop an Inter-marriage*, one Orthodox rabbi described the method used whenever a young man in his congregation would approach him and tell him that he was thinking of marrying a non-Jew.

I usually meet the young man late in the evening at the synagogue and ask him to come into the main sanctuary. The atmosphere is quiet, with over 500 empty seats; the only lights are in the back and a few near the holy ark. Then I say to the young man, "Open the holy Ark." He asks, "Rabbi, now?" and I answer, "Yes, now." Then I tell him emphatically, "Throw the Torah on the floor! Stamp on it and spit on it!!" Invariably the young man says, "Rabbi, you must be kidding! Then I take the Torah from him and return it to the Ark. Immediately I lace into him, "By marrying out of our religion you are throwing down, stamping, and spitting on the holy Torah," and continue from there. Very often this proves to be a most helpful means in changing the minds of serious young people who are considering intermarriage. By taking them into the sanctuary, opening the Ark (which even the most unlearned reveres), and asking them to throw down and spit on the holy Torah scroll, they feel for the first time how disgusting and wrong intermarriage is.<sup>44</sup>

Other writers and authorities reflect the same thoughts in their choice of language. Maurice Lamm called interfaith marriage a "disease." Any Jew who marries a non-Jew, Lamm stated, is participating in a "pogrom."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 215-16.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 216.

<sup>44</sup>Packouz, *How to Stop an Inter-marriage*, 72-73.

<sup>45</sup>Lamm, *Jewish Way*, 49.

"Interfaith-marriage is treason against the Jewish people, its Bible, its history, and its laws," he continued. "It means victory for those forces, ancient or modern, which have sought to destroy us. It is a terminal malignancy for your family's Judaism."<sup>46</sup> Aish Hatorah, the Ultra-Orthodox school in Jerusalem, used a fictitious interfaith marriage invitation as part of a fundraising drive. In requesting funds to defeat this "crisis," they stated that Aish HaTorah and its rabbis "are combatants in the war to save our Jewish youth."<sup>47</sup> Morris Joseph believed that "every Jew who contemplates marriage outside the pale must regard himself as paving the way to a disruption which would be the final, as it would be the culminating, disaster in the history of his people."<sup>48</sup>

In 1974, Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis published a pamphlet, *Intermarriage - Can It Work?*, counseling against interfaith marriage. Later republished in abridged form as *Intermarriage...Jewish Suicide: Why Should I Marry a Jew?*, Jungreis responded to an assimilated Jewish college student who asked why she should care about marrying a Jew. In her lengthy reply, Jungreis called interfaith marriage "a death below" against Judaism. "Your actions bring your family's Jewish existence to a close after thousands of years."<sup>49</sup> After retelling a story about one family's fight for survival during the Holocaust, Jungreis asked:

Who do you think you are?...Don't you understand that you are a link with a glorious past, that you are part of a prophetic history? Did you survive 4,000 years of torture and oppression only to be disappear in the midst of freedom? **ARE YOU TO BE THE LAST JEW IN YOUR FAMILY AFTER 4,000 YEARS?** ...Perhaps you recoil at my fanaticism. You feel that I am carrying things a bit too far...that there is no basis for comparison between gas chambers and the intermarriage that you are contemplating. But think for a moment...Isn't there?

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>47</sup>Aish Hatorah, Fundraising Brochure, HUC Archives.

<sup>48</sup>Quoted in Joseph H. Hertz, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London, 1981), 774.

<sup>49</sup>Esther Jungreis, *Intermarriage - Can It Work?* (North Woodmere, NY, 1974), 3.

Those who died in the gas chambers disappeared in smoke. But at least they left behind a legacy, a kaddish. And those who go the route of intermarriage also die – but with one difference. They leave no trace. Their souls are forever extinguished in this world as well as in the world to come. They leave no memory, not even a kaddish. They simply disappear.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the traditional statement of the 1909 CCAR resolution on interfaith marriage, “militant orthodoxy lost no time to place the Conference under ‘Herem.’”<sup>51</sup> With the issue under consideration in the early 1970s, the CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage sought out the Orthodox leadership to help reduce any such tensions. In January 1972, “5 distinguished Orthodox rabbis, who feel themselves to be part of the liberal wing of American Orthodoxy” secretly met with members of the CCAR Committee.<sup>52</sup> These Orthodox rabbis explained to the Reform committee their opposition and horror at certain Reform practices regarding marriage and conversion. Officiation at interfaith marriage, they stated, was in direct opposition to the survival of the Jewish people. “One cannot make concessions in the area of the performance of mixed marriages without destroying the faith community of Judaism.”<sup>53</sup> One rabbi summarized, “if it is agreed that mixed marriage is undesirable, then the rabbi should act accordingly and in no way, religious or civil, attempt to legitimate such a union.”<sup>54</sup>

The five Orthodox rabbis who met with the CCAR in secret took a “substantial risk to their present standing within the Orthodox movement.”<sup>55</sup> Meeting with the Reform movement to discuss interfaith marriage would have been seen with considerable disgust by many of their colleagues. Such a reaction can be inferred from other smaller events. In 1992, the Rabbinical

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<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 11, 12. Emphasis in original.

<sup>51</sup>Emil G. Hirsch, “An Historic Resolution,” *The Reform Advocate* 38 (Nov. 7, 1909): 578.

<sup>52</sup>Committee on Mixed Marriage, “Confidential Memo for Circulation Among Members of the Mixed Marriage Committee Only,” Jan. 23-25, 1972, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 1.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 4.



Council of America Roundtable proposed counting an interfaith married Jewish man in a *minyan*. Agudath Israel of America published a full-page ad in the *Jewish Observer* condemning this breach in the "universally and consistently harsh" attitude of Orthodoxy to the "absolute taboo" of interfaith marriage.<sup>56</sup> If some segments of the Orthodox world react critically to such a proposal, one could only imagine the reaction if the details of the secret meeting with CCAR were released.

### Conservative Judaism

The Conservative movement remains unalterably opposed to intermarriage....The greatest concern is Jewish survival, and, given history, that's a valid concern.<sup>57</sup>

Conservative Judaism has consistently opposed interfaith marriage, let alone the participation of rabbis in a marriage service of a Jew to a non-Jew. Early published statements and rulings that dealt with interfaith marriage never mentioned officiation, but usually focused on whether a Jew who had married a non-Jew could join a Conservative synagogue. For example, in the early 1940s, the Committee on Jewish Life and Standards (CJLS) stated, "Marrying outside of the faith is considered tantamount to a rupture with the Jewish community since the offspring of mixed marriages are usually weaned away from the Jewish religion."<sup>58</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary Chancellor Dr. Louis Finkelstein said in 1962, "Jews are hostile to intermarriage with people of another faith....Judaism does not consider it an unreasonable sacrifice for a Jewish man or woman to shun marriage or even the thought of marriage to a non-Jew."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>"An Urgent Plea to the Members of the Rabbinical Council of America," *The Jewish Observer* 25, no. 3 (April 1992): 31.

<sup>57</sup>Conservative Rabbi Joel Roth quoted in D'Antonio, "Jewish Husbands, Christian Wives," 6.

<sup>58</sup>Elliot Salo Schoenberg, "Intermarriage and Conservative Judaism: An Approach for the 1990's," *Conservative Judaism* 43, no. 1 (Fall 1990): 13.

<sup>59</sup>Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 187.

However, as the rate of interfaith marriage rose and the issue of officiation became a greater part of the public discussion, Conservative Judaism began to address the issue. On February 24, 1972, the CJLS adopted a Standard of Rabbinic Practice that stated:

It is the unanimous judgment of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards that a member of the Rabbinical Assembly or of the Cantors' Assembly may not officiate at the marriage of a Jew to an unconverted non-Jew, that he may not co-officiate with any other clergyman, nor may he officiate at or be present at a purely civil ceremony, nor may the Conservative Synagogue be used for such a marriage. Neither a Rabbi nor a Cantor can divest himself of his role as a representative of the Jewish faith and claim to perform such a marriage in a civil capacity. There is no other way to interpret the presence of a Rabbi or a Cantor at a marriage other than as a form of approval.<sup>60</sup>

Despite this policy, some Conservative rabbis were officiating at interfaith marriages. In 1974, the Rabbinic Assembly expelled Rabbi George Gershon Rosenstok of Chicago from its membership, albeit officially not for his practice at officiation, but for ignoring a call to present himself at a hearing on the matter.<sup>61</sup> Since then, a small number of Conservative rabbis have continued to officiate at interfaith marriages. "Any member accused of violating the standard can be brought before a committee and warned, censured, or expelled from the Assembly. This has occurred in a handful of instances, with the accused being expelled for refusing to testify."<sup>62</sup>

Elliot Salo Schoenberg recalled, in a 1990 article for *Conservative Judaism*, that as a rabbinical student at JTS only one issue was seen as bringing certain sanctions upon the rabbi. "It was not the injunction against committing adultery, or the prohibition barring the public desecration of Shabbat, but the mandate forbidding a Conservative rabbi to officiate at an

<sup>60</sup>Schoenberg, "Intermarriage and Conservative Judaism," 13.

<sup>61</sup>Jean Herschaft, "Rabbi is Expelled Over Intermarriage," *Jewish Post*, May 5, 1974; David Max Eichhorn, *Jewish Intermarriages: Fact and Fiction* (Satellite Beach, FL, 1974), 106; Samuel M. Silver, *Mixed Marriage: Between Jew and Christian* (New York, 1977), 65.

<sup>62</sup>Judy Petsonk and Jim Remsen, *The Intermarriage Handbook: A Guide for Jews & Christians* (New York, 1988), 334-35; Hershel Shanks, "Rabbis Who Perform Intermarriages: Who They Are & Why They Do It," *Moment* 12, no. 10 (Jan./Feb. 1988): 14.

intermarriage."<sup>63</sup> He summarized the Conservative position on officiation as "Intermarriage is injurious to the Jewish people and the Jewish community. We are opposed to intermarriage. We encourage conversion. The rabbi and the cantor may not officiate nor may they be seen in any way to encourage intermarriage. The synagogue may not be the site for an intermarriage or for the reception that follows."<sup>64</sup> The most recent official position of Conservative Judaism was the 1995 joint "Statement on Intermarriage" by all the major Conservative bodies. It has no mention of officiation, but inferentially states, "Intermarriages should not be publicly acknowledged in any official synagogue forum."<sup>65</sup>

### **Reconstructionist Judaism**

While the large majority of Reconstructionist rabbis do not officiate at mixed-marriage ceremonies, all Reconstructionist rabbis are committed to making themselves available for counseling and guidance.<sup>66</sup>

The above quotation, from Rebecca Alpert's and Jacob Staub's 1985 book, *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach*, encapsulates the position of Reconstructionist Judaism on officiation. This approach is somewhat different than the position of Mordecai Kaplan, the founder of Reconstructionist Judaism, on interfaith marriage. In 1956, Kaplan said that "Since Jews are a minority and Judaism is exposed to tremendous disintegrating forces from the non-Jewish environment...it cannot approve of uncontrolled intermarriage with non-Jews."<sup>67</sup> However, he continued, if the non-Jew converted to Judaism, they should be openly welcomed. Kaplan rejected officiation at an interfaith ceremony.

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<sup>63</sup>Schoenberg, "Intermarriage and Conservative Judaism," 16.

<sup>64</sup>Schoenberg, "Intermarriage and Conservative Judaism," 13-14.

<sup>65</sup>Leadership Council of Conservative Judaism, "Statement on Intermarriage," March 7, 1995, American Jewish Archives, 5.

<sup>66</sup>Rebecca T. Alpert and Jacob J. Staub., *Exploring Judaism: A Reconstructionist Approach* (New York, 1985), 61.

<sup>67</sup>Gordon, *Intermarriage*, 188.

We cannot regard as a proper marriage any union between a Jew and a non-Jew who has not been converted. Though that interdicts the officiation at such a marriage by a rabbi, or any other functionary of the Jewish community, it does not mean that we should regard the couple as living in an immoral relationship. It merely means that the Jewish party to the marriage is guilty of a dereliction in his or her obligation to Judaism.<sup>68</sup>

As Reconstructionism made "far-reaching revisions" in the thought of Kaplan, according to Jack Wertheimer, a greater openness to forms of officiation appeared in Reconstructionist Judaism.<sup>69</sup> At the March 1993 meeting of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Assembly (RRA), a set of guidelines on interfaith marriage were adopted. Recognizing the right of individual rabbis to "make their own determinations in dealing with the issues of intermarriage," the Guidelines urged all rabbis to engage in pre-marital counseling with a prospective interfaith couple and help them address the issues they will face in raising a family and in the Jewish world.<sup>70</sup> Specifically addressing officiation, the RRA Guidelines encouraged rabbis to work for the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse and to communicate a rabbinical objection to officiation "sensitively" and without the sense that the couple has been "rejected by the Jewish community."<sup>71</sup> Officiation was to be avoided.

A rabbi represents the standards of the Jewish people and integrity of Judaism's traditions and sancta. One carries the title rabbi and the duties and privileges that go with that title by virtue of a commitment to teach and transmit Jewish values and to work for the creative development of the Jewish people. The achievement of these goals necessitates the preservation of the essential integrity of Jewish sancta through their authentic application. We therefore believe that the traditional rites of the Jewish wedding ceremony (*kiddushin*) should be reserved for the marriage of a Jew to a Jew.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>69</sup>Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (New York, 1993), 163.

<sup>70</sup>"RRA Guidelines in Intermarriage," *Reconstructionist* 49, no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 18, 19.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 20.

In those cases where the couple is committed to establishing a Jewish home, but the non-Jewish spouse is unwilling to convert, "the rabbi may feel that it is important to support the couple through the process of civil marriage. The rabbi may decide to attend the civil marriage ceremony. The rabbi may further choose to offer appropriate remarks welcoming the couple into the Jewish community and encouraging their continued involvement in the life of the Jewish people. His/her presence should in no way be construed as that of officiant."<sup>73</sup>

The RRA Guidelines, which were as a "consensus" agreement,<sup>74</sup> were criticized for the role it suggested for the rabbi. Conservative rabbi Stephen Lerner thought the rabbi's attendance at a civil ceremony was "a form of co-officiation....One can deny and deny all one wants, but a rabbi's presence confers immediate legitimacy." In his opinion, this position is "beyond the bounds" and "ingenuous in the extreme."<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Reconstructionist rabbi Jack Cohen thought that when "a rabbi makes remarks as part of a civil ceremony, welcoming the couple into the Jewish community and encouraging their continued involvement in the life of the Jewish people, it seems to me that he is, in effect, an officiant. The Guidelines, at this point, seem to me to violate the discipline of non-participation in an intermarriage service."<sup>76</sup>

Others thought that the Guidelines did not go far enough. Judge Benjamin Mehlman, a Reconstructionist Jew who civilly officiated at many interfaith weddings, thought that attendance at a civil ceremony would still

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>74</sup>Petsonk and Remsen, *Intermarriage Handbook*, 335.

<sup>75</sup>Stephen C. Lerner, "Guidelines on Intermarriage: A Conservative View," *Reconstructionist* 49, no. 3 (Dec. 1983): 15-16.

<sup>76</sup>Jack J. Cohen, "The Rabbinic Role: A Response to the RRA Guidelines," *Reconstructionist* 49, no. 3 (Dec. 1983): 8.



be felt by the couple as an outright refusal and rejection by the rabbi. To truly welcome an interfaith couple, "he or she should have the courage to officiate, adapting the ceremony in a manner consistent with the couple's circumstances. That would be true welcome and encouragement. Anything less will appear of doubtful sincerity."<sup>77</sup>

Shortly after the publication of the RRA Guidelines, Reconstructionist affiliates began a year of study and discussion on interfaith marriage.<sup>78</sup> In June of 1984, the lay wing of the Reconstructionist Movement, the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot (FRCH), passed a "Resolution on Intermarriage" at their annual convention. Although it echoed the RRA Guidelines in most areas, it allowed for greater flexibility for the rabbi in officiation.

(a) The traditional rites of the Jewish wedding ceremony (*kiddushin*) should be reserved for the marriage of a Jew to a Jew.

(b) Where an intermarrying couple is committed to establishing a Jewish home and raising and educating their children as Jews, we encourage rabbis of FRCH affiliates to support the couple in every way, including the possibility of attending their civil marriage ceremony, and after the conclusion of that ceremony, offering appropriate remarks welcoming the couple into the Jewish community and encouraging their continued involvement in the life of the Jewish people.

(c) FRCH shall invite the RRA to form a joint commission to develop guidelines for alternative non-kiddushin marriage ceremonies for intermarrying couples. If forming a joint commission is not feasible, rabbinic members shall be appointed to a FRCH committee.

(d) Jewish officiation should never take place as part of a joint interreligious wedding ceremony.

(e) Recognizing both the rights of conscience and the pluralism of viewpoints within the Reconstructionist movement, we recommend that when a rabbi or congregation/havurah is unable on principle to serve the needs of an intermarrying couple in any of the above ways, the couple should be referred to other rabbis or congregations/havurot who might be able to do so.<sup>79</sup>

The FRCH resolution encouraged the development of non-*kiddushin* marriage ceremonies, such as the "Children of Noah" ceremony created by

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<sup>77</sup>Benjamin Wm. Mehlman, "Rabbinic and Lay Officiation at Mixed Marriage Ceremonies," *Reconstructionist* 49, no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 23.

<sup>78</sup>Lillian Kaplan, "Mutual Respect," *Reconstructionist* 51, no. 1 (Sept. 1985): 16.

<sup>79</sup>"Resolution on Intermarriage," *Reconstructionist* 50, no. 1 (Sept. 1984): E.

Rebecca Alpert, Linda Holtzman, and Arthur Waskow.<sup>80</sup> The proposed joint commission, according to Lillian Kaplan, the president of the FRCH, would resolve the differences between the ~~FRCH resolution~~ and RRA guidelines.<sup>81</sup>

In current practice, about one-third of Reconstructionist rabbis officiate at interfaith marriages according to Irwin Fishbein's data. In 1990, Fishbein found that 34% of RRA rabbis who responded to his survey would officiate. In 1995, that number had risen to 38%. Perhaps in reflection of the more stringent RRA Guidelines and FRCH Resolution, the number of Reconstructionist rabbis who officiate is somewhat smaller than the number of Reform rabbis who do so. RRA rabbis are also more likely to refer couples to another officiant than Reform rabbis if they are unable to officiate.<sup>82</sup>

Fishbein Surveys	1990	1995
Number of RRA Respondents	44% (67)	38% (63)
Will Not Officiate	66% (44)	62% (39)
Of those who do not officiate, how many will refer?	80% (35)	82% (32)
Will Officiate	34% (23)	38% (24)

Examining the specific practices of RRA rabbis who officiate, we find they are somewhat more traditional than their Reform counterparts. For example, they are more likely to require a couple to commit to establishing a Jewish home or raising their children as Jews. Although the percentage of RRA rabbis willing to co-officiate is similar to Fishbein's total for Reform rabbis in 1995, only one RRA rabbi is willing to officiate when Christian

<sup>80</sup>Rebecca Alpert, Linda Holtzman and Arthur Waskow, "The Children of Noah: Proposal for a Wedding Ceremony," *Reconstructionist* 49 no. 2 (Nov. 1983): 24-27.

<sup>81</sup>Kaplan, "Mutual Respect," 16.

<sup>82</sup>Irwin H. Fishbein, "Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1990 Survey on Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies," Dec. 31, 1990, Fishbein Archives; Irwin H. Fishbein, "Rabbinic Participation in Intermarriage Ceremonies: Summary of Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling 1995 Survey," Dec. 29, 1995, Fishbein Archives.

symbols are visible. RRA rabbis are as likely as CCAR rabbis to be willing to have their name listed on Rabbi Fishbein's lists.<sup>83</sup>

RRA Rabbis Who Officiate	1990	1995
Require commitment on Jewish family or raising children	70% (16)	63% (15)
Will Co-officiate	22% (5)	29% (7)
Will Officiate when Christian Symbols are visible	0% (0)	4% (1)
Willing to be Put on Fishbein's List	70% (16)	71% (17)

Robert Gluck, executive director of the RRA, told *Moment* magazine in 1993 that "the vast majority of our members do not officiate at interfaith marriages."<sup>84</sup> Unlike the Conservative movement, the Reconstructionist movement does not impose sanctions on any RRA rabbis who officiate at interfaith weddings.<sup>85</sup>

### Humanistic Judaism

The Society for Humanistic Judaism, founded by HUC-JIR graduate Sherwin Wine, is "the only branch of Judaism to publicly acknowledge the legitimacy of intermarriage and the first to embrace the intermarried," according to one Humanistic Jewish author. "Humanistic Jews support the right and freedom of all Jews to marry whomever they love, regardless of religious or ethnic identity."<sup>86</sup> In 1974, six Humanistic rabbis authored a statement on interfaith marriage which they circulated among the American rabbinate and received forty-eight signatures of endorsement. It read in part:

We believe that intermarriage is neither good nor bad, just as we believe that the marriage of two Jews, in itself, is neither good nor bad. The moral worth of a marriage always depends on the quality of the human relationship – on the degree of mutual love and respect that prevails.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Ibid.

<sup>84</sup>Robert J. Gluck, Letter, *Moment* 18, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 79.

<sup>85</sup>Wertheimer, *People Divided*, 163.

<sup>86</sup>Terry Toll, "Breaking the Silence About Intermarriage," *Humanistic Judaism* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 12.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 13.

In May 1982, the Association of Humanistic Rabbis issued a statement on officiation at its annual meeting:

We affirm the right of every Jew to marry whomever he/she chooses. We affirm the right of every rabbi to officiate at any marriage ceremony in which this free choice is exercised. We also affirm the right of every rabbi to co-officiate with any civil magistrate or minister of religion in such a ceremony as an act of respect for the dignity and culture of both the Jewish and non-Jewish partners.<sup>88</sup>

The goal in officiating at an interfaith marriage is to let Judaism "remain accessible to all Jews who wish to identify as Jews, regardless of their choice of marriage partners."<sup>89</sup> Due to the small number of Humanistic Jewish officiants, who may be trained lay leaders as well as rabbis, the Society for Humanistic Judaism offers assistance in helping a couple find an officiant for their interfaith wedding. This includes referrals to Reform rabbis as well as to humanist counselors from the American Humanist Association.<sup>90</sup> Although it is unclear how many Humanistic Jewish officiants are available, Miriam Jerris listed nine Humanistic leaders who co-officiate in a 1990 article in *Humanistic Judaism*. They were from California, Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and Toronto and included three HUC ordained rabbis serving Humanist congregations: Daniel Friedman, Steven Mason, and Sherwin Wine.<sup>91</sup>

### Effects of Officiation

An ongoing source of disagreement in the Jewish community is the impact of rabbinic officiation on the Jewish attitudes of mixed marriage couples.<sup>92</sup>

Many rabbis who officiate argue that "rabbinic officiation will open the door to further outreach efforts, sensitizing the couple to the Jewish presence

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>89</sup>"Intermarriage," *Humanistic Judaism* 21, nos. 3-4 (Summer/Autumn 1993): 36.

<sup>90</sup>Miriam Jerris, "The Intermarriage Ceremony," *Humanistic Judaism* 18, no. 1 (Winter 1990), 20.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>92</sup>Sanford Seltzer, "Jewish Identity Among the Converted and the Intermarried: An Assessment," 1988, HUC Archives, 4.

within their marriage and paving the road to ultimate conversion."<sup>93</sup> Often utilized in this argument is the statement that officiation "saves" the interfaith couple for Judaism. For example, Emil Hirsch wrote in 1909 that his goal in officiating is "simply actuated by a desire to save for Judaism the Jew and the children of these unions."<sup>94</sup> Richard Hertz said at the 1973 CCAR debate that he had changed his position on officiation after twenty-five years in the rabbinate "and since changing this position of mine, I feel that I have literally saved scores and scores of couple to Judaism and for Judaism."<sup>95</sup> Floyd Herman told a UAHC regional biennial in 1996 that he began officiating when he realized that "being involved before the marriage, [he could] help save these children and this family for Judaism."<sup>96</sup>

Rabbis who claim to "save" couples often cite personal and anecdotal evidence to support their claims. For example, Herman said that of the couples with whom he is still in contact, about 60% "remain committed to the Jewish community."<sup>97</sup> Benjamin Rudavsky of Hingham, Massachusetts, officiated at nearly 100 interfaith marriages a year, almost all of them co-officiated with a Christian clergyperson. "In his experience, almost every Jewish woman and at least two-thirds of the Jewish men he marries decide to bring up their children as Jews. In most cases, the couple returns to Judaism, studying, reading, joining a synagogue, expanding and fulfilling the Jewish way of life."<sup>98</sup> Kenneth Weiss changed his position on officiation partially because colleagues who officiate told him that two-thirds of interfaith

<sup>93</sup>Steven Bayme quoted in Egon Mayer, *Intermarriage and Rabbinic Officiation* (New York, 1989), iii.

<sup>94</sup>Hirsch, "An Historic Resolution," 578.

<sup>95</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 83 (1973): 82.

<sup>96</sup>Floyd L. Herman, "Why I Officiate at Mixed Marriages," Paper delivered at UAHC Mid-Atlantic Regional Biennial, Oct. 27, 1996, American Jewish Archives, 2.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>98</sup>Andrea Jolles, "Intermarriage: For Better or Worse," *B'nai Brith Jewish Monthly* 102, no. 5 (Jan. 1988): 9, 11.



couples married by a rabbi with pre-conditions "retain a connection with the Jewish community, keep a Jewish home, see to – and participate in – the Jewish upbringing of their children."<sup>99</sup> Paul Gorin believed that 95% of interfaith couples at whose weddings he officiated "have entered into Jewish affiliation, Jewish community involvement, and Jewish practices in the home."<sup>100</sup> Rabbi David Fass of New City, New York, after more than twenty years of officiation, claimed that 75-80% of the non-Jewish partners "he has married to Jews have converted to Judaism, either before the wedding or, in most cases, later on, 'usually precipitated by the birth of children.'"<sup>101</sup>

The most extensive personal record keeping on officiation has probably been done by Henry Cohen of Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. Cohen kept information on almost all the couples at whose interfaith weddings he officiated since 1965. Periodically, he contacted these couples to update his statistics on the effect of rabbinical officiation on the couple's Jewish identity and practice. In 1972, he published his first set of results in the *CCAR Journal* finding that almost 88% of the couples were keeping their promises to raise their children as Jews. Cohen concluded that "the rabbi's willingness to officiate at the marriage together with his desire to keep in contact with the couple were significant factors in their decisions regarding the religious upbringing of the children."<sup>102</sup> Since many of the couples had not yet had children, their ultimate commitment was still unclear. However, in 1996 Cohen published an update of his findings reporting that 70% of the interfaith couples had indeed given their children a Jewish education. He

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<sup>99</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss, "Toward the Survival and Enhancement of Jewish Life: A New Look at Intermarriage," Sept. 1, 1994, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>100</sup>Paul Gorin to Joseph Glaser, Dec. 20, 1979, CCAR Archives 2.

<sup>101</sup>Ellen Jaffe McClain, *Embracing the Stranger: Intermarriage and the Future of the American Jewish Community* (New York, 1995), 199.

<sup>102</sup>Henry Cohen, "Mixed Marriage and Jewish Continuity," *CCAR Journal*, April 1972: 50, 51. Quotation originally in italics.

also found that these families engaged in Jewish ritual and observance at a much higher rate than those reported in the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey.<sup>103</sup> Cohen concluded that "officiating has given me, as the rabbi, a much greater opportunity than my nonofficiating colleagues have, to develop a positive relation with the couple and through that relation to encourage their connection with the Jewish faith and people."<sup>104</sup>

Such results have been challenged both by rabbis who do not officiate and by sociologists. Allan Maller pointed out that "because of the couple's awareness of the rabbi's questions" in Cohen's survey, the respondent might have given the answers that they thought the rabbi wanted to hear. "Less positive results may have resulted through an anonymously-administered questionnaire."<sup>105</sup> Egon Mayer thought that Cohen's statistics were extremely interesting as a "snapshot" of a particular community, but that his results "have no generalizable value."<sup>106</sup> These rabbis and sociologists offer their own take on the effects of officiation. Judah Cahn doubted that "there would be any significant difference between those losses suffered in the instances of those mixed marriages at which a rabbi officiated and those mixed marriages at which secular authorities officiated."<sup>107</sup> Mark Winer wrote that "rabbinic officiation or non-officiation probably has little impact on that basic trend of Jewish self-identification."<sup>108</sup> Herman Schaalman believed that the idea "that a couple is lost because of 'rejection' is a specious argument....Whether

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<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 54. Italics in original.

<sup>105</sup>Gerald B. Bubis, "Intermarriage, the Rabbi, and the Jewish Communal Worker," *Journal of Jewish Communal Service* 50, no. 1 (Fall 1973): 93.

<sup>106</sup>Mayer, interview.

<sup>107</sup>Judah Cahn, "The Rabbi, Mixed Marriages, and Jewish Education," *The Reconstructionist* 31 no. 4 (Feb. 19, 1965): 13.

<sup>108</sup>Mark L. Winer, "Jewish Demography and the Challenges to Reform Judaism," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Winter 1984: 24.

they stay within Judaism or not is not primarily traceable to whether the rabbi did or did not officiate."<sup>109</sup>

For many decades rabbis have lamented the lack of research in this area. David Polish noted in 1964 that studies on interfaith marriage "have dealt chiefly with its extent, and scantily with its effect. Thus far, research in this area tends to be inconsistent, and the same statistics have been subject to differing interpretations."<sup>110</sup> Likewise, Steven Bayme in 1989 reflected that "No one knows what difference rabbinic officiation -- or, conversely, refusal to officiate -- actually makes in the subsequent Jewish experiences of the intermarried couple."<sup>111</sup>

Several studies have been done that offer some general statistical evidence on the effect of rabbinical officiation on the Jewish identity and involvement of a couple. Most of these surveys focus on the participation of interfaith couples who have been married by a rabbi in Jewish life, including synagogue affiliation, religious identity of the children, later conversion of the non-Jewish partner and participation in Jewish rituals and observances.

A 1972 article by Marc Lee Raphael is typical. Examining the thesis that couples who agree to raise their children as Jews are "saved" for Judaism, he analyzed two recent surveys to show that "those who continue to argue that the sanctification of an intermarriage by a rabbi is likely to lead to measurable Jewish experiences" are wrong.<sup>112</sup> He found that of 114 recently married interfaith couples in Los Angeles, all of whom had been married by a rabbi, less than a third went to High Holiday services and less than 20% went to any

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<sup>109</sup>Herman E. Schaalman, personal interview, Chicago, IL, June 3, 1996.

<sup>110</sup>David Polish, "The Problem of Intermarriage - Will Moderation Help?" *CCAR Journal*, Jan. 1964: 33.

<sup>111</sup>Mayer, *Rabbinic Officiation*, iii.

<sup>112</sup>Marc Lee Raphael, "Intermarriage and Jewish Survival: A Hard Disjunction," *CCAR Journal*, April 1972: 57.

other synagogue event. "Rabbinical kindness towards the intermarrying," he noted, "will rarely provide the same rabbi – or any rabbi for that matter – with the pleasure of extending a *Shabbat Shalom* to the couple at any time during the following year."<sup>113</sup> Since these recently married couples did not yet have children, Raphael examined a Columbus, Ohio survey on the education of children of interfaith marriage and found that only one of the eleven public school aged children was attending a synagogue religious school. However, three children were in church schools. "In all cases, Jewish survival seems rather tenuous."<sup>114</sup>

In 1973, Roy Rosenberg hypothesized that "a greater percentage of children born to couples who were married by rabbi are raised as Jews, when compared to children of couples who were married by civil authorities."<sup>115</sup> Allen Maller confirmed those results in a pair of studies published in 1975. He examined how 45 interfaith and conversionary couples were raising their children. Not surprisingly, none of the 12 children from parents who were married in a Christian ceremony were being raised as Jews. Two of the 21 children from couples married in a civil ceremony were being brought up as Jews, while four of the seven children of interfaith couples married by a rabbi were raising their children as Jews. All of the children from conversionary homes were being raised as Jews.<sup>116</sup> Maller concluded that "it would seem that those couples who come to a rabbi to be married are more likely to raise their children as Jews than are those who are married in civil or church

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<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 58.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>115</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, "On Mixed Marriage," June 1, 1973, HUC Archives 1.

<sup>116</sup>Allen S. Maller, "Mixed Marriage and Reform Rabbis," *Judaism* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 46-47.

ceremonies. It would also seem that being married by a rabbi is rarely a determining factor in this decision."<sup>117</sup>

Similar results were found in a 1995 survey by the Jewish Outreach Institute. Of the interfaith couples married exclusively by Jewish clergy, 62% were raising their children as Jews. Among couples that were married civilly, 28% were bringing their children up in the Jewish faith. 22% of couples married in a co-officiated service and 9% of those married in a Christian or other non-Jewish religious service were likewise raising Jewish children. The authors of the JOI survey concluded that there was "a high degree of statistical association between the likelihood of raising Jewish children and whether or not an intermarried couple's marriage was solemnized by a rabbi or cantor."<sup>118</sup>

The results found in the Maller and JOI surveys are "hardly surprising. After all, who but couples who are interested in leading some kind of a Jewish life would seek to be married by a rabbi or cantor? Those who have no interest in Jewish affiliation or in raising Jewish children would also be the least likely to want to have their marriages solemnized by Jewish clergy."<sup>119</sup> Reflecting this, several studies examined aspects of the positive effect that a rabbi might bring to a couple's life by officiating and what negative impact a rabbi's refusal to officiate has.

A 1987 American Jewish Committee study asked interfaith couples, "Has the fact that you were married by a rabbi had an influence upon your life?" 61% of the couples felt "it had made no difference at all" while only 8%

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<sup>117</sup>Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>118</sup>Jewish Outreach Institute, "Facts About Jewish Clergy Participation in Interfaith Marriages," March 21, 1996, Personal Archives, 2, 7.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., 8.



felt "it has made our family life more Jewish."<sup>120</sup> The Jewish Outreach Institute's survey likewise asked couples what influence the rabbi's or cantor's participation had on their feelings about Jewish life. 48% of the Jewish partners and 41% of the non-Jews said it was either "very positive" or "somewhat positive." 48% of the Jews and 53% of the non-Jews felt it had a "neutral" or had "no effect." Only 4% of the Jews and 6% of the non-Jews thought officiation had a "negative" or "very negative" effect.<sup>121</sup> Henry Cohen asked couples at whose ceremonies he had officiated, "If you could *not* have found a rabbi to officiate at your wedding," would you have given your children a different religious education? "About half stated that even, if they had not found a rabbi to officiate, they would *still* have given their children a Jewish education." Another equally large group said they would have been less likely to give their children a Jewish education. Very few hypothesized that they would have given their children no Jewish education.<sup>122</sup> He further asked the couples about the effect rabbinical officiation has on Jewish continuity. Just under 82% of the respondents "believed that rabbinic officiation would encourage the continuity of the Jewish faith and people."<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps the most extensive and relevant survey on the direct effect of officiation as opposed to non-officiation was a 1989 survey by Egon Mayer sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. Unlike any other survey, Mayer compared four groups: conversionary couples, interfaith couples who were married by a rabbi, "those who were not married by a rabbi because they *never asked* a rabbi to officiate and those who had asked but *had been*

<sup>120</sup>Egon Mayer and Amy Avgar, *Conversion Among the Intermarried: Choosing to Become Jewish* (New York, 1987), 21.

<sup>121</sup>Jewish Outreach Institute, "Fact About Jewish Clergy," 5.

<sup>122</sup>Henry Cohen, "Rabbinic Officiation and Mixed Marriage Revisited," *CCAR Journal*, Winter 1996: 50.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 51, 53.

refused."<sup>124</sup> Of the 39 couples who had been refused by a rabbi (20% of the 200 interfaith couples in the survey), 31% of them eventually found a rabbi to officiate; 28% were married by non-Jewish clergy, and 41% had a civil ceremony. It is important to note that Mayer did not distinguish between couples seeking a rabbi for exclusive officiation and those looking for a rabbi to join a non-Jewish clergyperson in co-officiation. Most of those couples who were refused by a rabbi and were eventually married by non-Jewish clergy had been seeking a co-officiant.<sup>125</sup> While 87% of those couples who were refused by a rabbi were upset at the results, only 28% of the couples felt that the rabbi's position was a reason to distance themselves from the Jewish community.<sup>126</sup>

Whether or not a rabbi officiated, Mayer found, seemed to have had "little impact on the quality of Jewish life of the mixed-married couples in the sample." 60% of the couples felt it had made "no difference at all" in their lives, while 8% felt it "made their family life definitely more Jewish." 32% said it "somewhat" had an effect.<sup>127</sup> Comparing real life behaviors of the couples, Mayer found "no positive connection...between rabbinic officiation or nonofficiation and subsequent communal involvement."<sup>128</sup> In nearly every category that Mayer analyzed, the differences in behavior between the 58 couples who were married by a rabbi and the 27 couples who were unable to find a rabbi to officiate were "statistically insignificant. The statistically significant differences are between the scores of the converts and those of the nonconverts. In other words, whether or not rabbis officiated at the mixed

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<sup>124</sup>Mayer, *Rabbinic Officiation*, 3.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>127</sup>*Ibid.*, 5, 9.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, iv.

marriages made no difference in the future religious activity of the couples."<sup>129</sup>

For example, 22% of the couples who were married by a rabbi were now members of a synagogue, while 23% of those refused by a rabbi were synagogue members. In contrast, 84% of conversionary couples belonged to a synagogue, while only 11% of those who never sought rabbinical officiation were members.<sup>130</sup> Couples whose request for rabbinical officiation was refused were only slightly less likely to attend a seder, Rosh Hashanah services, or go to synagogue regularly than those who had a rabbi preside at their wedding.<sup>131</sup> There were practically no differences in the "Christian influences" of the two groups of couples. For example, 18% of the couples who were married by a rabbi attended Church regularly while 20% of those who were refused did the same. None of the conversionary families attended church regularly.<sup>132</sup> "Those who were rebuffed by a rabbi were *not* at all more likely to belong to a church, *nor* at all more likely to attend one with regularity, than those whose marriages had not the benefit of clergy."<sup>133</sup>

Although Mayer claimed that there was no significant gain to those couples who had a rabbi at their service, any more than there was a negative influence on those who had been refused, the attitudes towards Judaism of couples who had been refused were less positive than those who had a rabbi officiate. While equal percentages of the two groups felt comfortable in a Jewish setting, 22% of those who had a rabbi officiate felt a "need to be part of the Jewish community," while only 8% of those who had been turned down by a rabbi felt the same. When it came to raising children, 91% of the

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<sup>129</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>131</sup>*Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>132</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>133</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

conversionary couples wanted their children to be Jewish, 34% of those who had a rabbi officiate, but only 21% of those who had been unable to find a rabbi to officiate. "Thus, the willingness of rabbis to officiate at mixed-religion marriages seems to be related to the prospects of such parents raising their children as Jews. The long-term demographic consequences of even such a small relationship may be quite important for the Jewish community as a whole."<sup>134</sup>

The varying results of the above surveys, as well as the different statistical analyses applied to them, have left rabbis and sociologists to draw dramatically different conclusions. Egon Mayer in 1989 wrote that "rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages has relatively little, if any, connection to the expressed Jewishness in the family lives of non-Jews married to Jews. Similarly, rabbinic refusal to officiate at mixed marriages seems to have relatively little, if any, connection with large-scale alienation from Jewish attachments."<sup>135</sup> However, the 1996 JOI survey, which was directed by Mayer, concluded that "intermarried couples whose marriages were solemnized exclusively by Jewish clergy are far more likely than others to be raising their children as Jews."<sup>136</sup> Likewise, Henry Cohen believed that rabbis who officiate, together with pre-marital counseling, "encourage at least some of the couples to rear their children as Jews."<sup>137</sup> Reflecting in the summer of 1996 on these results, Mayer still held that despite some statistical evidence to contrary, he believed that officiation played "a very small role," that "on the

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 7, 16.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 7-8.

<sup>136</sup>Jewish Outreach Institute, "Fact About Jewish Clergy," 7.

<sup>137</sup>Cohen, "Rabbinic Officiation," 54.

whole, it doesn't seem to make that much of a difference," and that the results should not be simply seen as a "cause and effect."<sup>138</sup>

Mark Winer, a rabbi and sociologist, noted the conflict in these arguments, as well as the desire, on the part of some Jews, for sociological research to provide a concrete answer to the question of officiation. He believed no such answer was forthcoming.

Many Reform rabbis and committed lay leaders hope for the discovery by sociologists of the proverbial 'smoking gun,' which will resolve the painful dilemma of rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages. The coming of such an 'Elijah the sociologist' is unlikely in the near future. Sociologically speaking, the methodological requirements for such a decisive piece of research could not easily be satisfied. Rabbinically speaking, halachic decisions may be influenced by sociological research, but sociology should not dictate Halacha.<sup>139</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

The arguments for and against officiation are each compelling and powerful. These arguments overlap one onto the next. Many times rabbis of opposite positions use similar arguments, differently phrased, to make a similar point. For example, both rabbis who officiate and those who do not have used *halachic* arguments. The rabbi who officiates might claim that the laws of marriage can be violated for the sake of the interfaith couple, but we dare not tamper with the laws of conversion and have any false converts. The rabbi who does not officiate might urge conversion despite a clear violation of the traditional law regarding conversion motivated by marriage, but will not officiate at an interfaith wedding lest we make a mockery of the wedding service. Both groups are therefore holding on to the traditional view for one element, but are willing to compromise on the other.

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<sup>138</sup>Mayer, interview; David W. Belin, "Background Memorandum on Resolution Concerning Rabbinic Officiation at Interfaith Marriages, where Children Will Be Raised as Jews," Nov. 25, 1996, UAHF Archives, 3.

<sup>139</sup>Winer, "Jewish Demography," 24.



From the many arguments put forth from all positions, one common theme that emanates is the different focus on the community versus the individual. Rabbis who officiate often argue on the basis of the individual couple that is before them. What right do we have to refuse to marry such a couple, to withhold them access to Judaism, to a rabbi, to the marital vows? "How can we deny our rituals, symbols and ceremonies to members?" asked Lawrence Forman.<sup>140</sup> "Why deny that privilege to a non-Jew who is asking for a rabbi's blessing?" wondered Samuel Silver.<sup>141</sup> Rabbis who officiate are not ignoring the needs of the community, but are serving those needs one couple at a time. Jack Spiro thought that officiating was a compromise based on his rabbinical commitment "to propagate Judaism and perpetuate the Jewish people. I am in 'business' for no other reason!"<sup>142</sup> In this line of thinking, any possible opposition to officiation would be called irrelevant. These rabbis are serving "the needs of human beings, not just an abstract body of doctrine."<sup>143</sup> "All other considerations, while within the realm of human concern, are not truly relevant to the crucial problem at hand."<sup>144</sup>

Rabbis who do not officiate often look beyond the individual couple to how their actions might affect the community. These rabbis argue on the basis of relationships with other movements in Judaism or the symbolic approval of interfaith marriage that might be inferred by a rabbi officiating. While it is painful to turn a couple down, the greater good in the integrity of Judaism and the survival of the Jewish people is met by refusing to officiate. These rabbis care about the individuals they face, but are more specifically

<sup>140</sup>HUCAlum Newsgroup 592 (9/8/96).

<sup>141</sup>Silver, *Mixed Marriage*, 57.

<sup>142</sup>Jack D. Spiro, "Considerations," CCAR Archives, 2.

<sup>143</sup>Roy A. Rosenberg, Peter Meehan and John Wade Payne, *Happily Intermarried: Authoritative Advice for a Joyous Jewish-Christian Marriage* (New York, 1988), 88.

<sup>144</sup>Abraham Mayer Heller, "Mixed Marriages and the Rabbi," *Congress Bi-Weekly*, 32, no. 6 (March 15, 1965): 8.

focused on the Jewish community as a whole and the damage one might inflict on it by officiating at interfaith marriages.<sup>145</sup> While it is true that the couple *might* be alienated from Judaism and even abandon it, "it is far more important to have a strong commitment from a small group," a 1982 CCAR responsum proposed, "than a vague commitment from a larger number who are at the very periphery."<sup>146</sup> Joseph Klein thought the rabbinic principle of "יחיד ורבים, הלכה כרבים" applied here. He reasoned, "if a rabbi has to choose between serving an individual who plans to marry a non-Jew, and being loyal in his responsibilities to the community and the Jewish tradition, he has no alternative but to make his decision in terms of what he owes the community as a whole."<sup>147</sup>

Ultimately, I believe both positions can be justified within the spectrum of Reform Judaism as legitimate and equally concerned with the future of Judaism. I think officiation is not out-of-step with other Reform positions such as patrilineal descent. For an individual rabbi or cantor, the decision to officiate or not officiate may be completely contrary to their own understanding of Jewish survival, *halachah*, *kiddushin*, conversion, outreach, tradition, Jewish text, or a myriad of other possibilities. But after reading and discussing the well-thought out and heartfelt positions of rabbis who officiate and rabbis who do not, I believe that both can reasonably be considered as in the best interests of Judaism, the individual couple, and the Jewish future.

Some writers have argued similarly. In April 1972, Paul Gorin wondered if the Reform movement could not agree to disagree:

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<sup>145</sup>Joseph Klein, "Editor's Comments," *CCAR Journal*, April 1964: 79.

<sup>146</sup>CCAR *Yearbook* 92 (1982): 215.

<sup>147</sup>Klein, "Editor's Comments," April 1964, 80.

On this grievous issue, it is possible that – out of diverse approaches – some creative responses might develop; and – if we cannot achieve the generosity of spirit which enabled our ancient sages to differ sharply – and to debate fiercely – on some important questions yet declare “AYLEH V’AYLEH DIVRAY ELOHIM HAYYIM, Both of these are the words of the living God,” we should be able – at the very least – to differ with each other, without condemnation, recrimination, or impugning of motives.<sup>148</sup>

That June, Neil Kominsky concluded similarly:

We have become rabbis to promote Judaism among Jews. We may honestly differ as to what rabbinic actions best serve this end, as well as how much latitude we have to superimpose our own judgment on traditional beliefs and practices....To each of us, the stewardship implied by our rabbinate is sacred; we may differ as to the actions we feel are required of us. If so, then let us differ, and know that differ *l'shem shamaim*.<sup>149</sup>

Such reasoning is not only offered by rabbis who officiate. Debra Hachen in her 1996 presentation to the CCAR began her speech on why she does not officiate by declaring:

I believe that officiating at mixed marriage will lead to the continuity of the Jewish people. I also believe that not officiating at mixed marriage will lead to the continuity of the Jewish people. I believe that allowing these two seemingly opposing views side by side, with all the tension that brings is the strength of our movement.<sup>150</sup>

However, such reasoning should not be used to justify or ignore some of the extremely troubling issues raised by officiation. The syncretization of Judaism as seen in co-officiation, officiation on Shabbat and in non-Jewish holy places, and the exploitive practices of a few mercenary rabbis cannot simply be grouped together with all officiating rabbis. The distinctions are relevant and important and must be addressed.

The issue of officiation has occupied the CCAR for nearly the entire twentieth century with little progress. The 1962 CCAR Mixed Marriage report declared, “We have been bogged down long enough on this issue. It is time

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<sup>148</sup>Paul Gorin, “Mixed Marriage: Is a ‘Middle of the Road’ Position Possible?” Report to CCAR Committee on Mixed Marriage, April 1972, CCAR Archives, 1.

<sup>149</sup>CCAR Yearbook 82 (1972): 84-85.

<sup>150</sup>“Mixed Marriage,” audiocassette.

we move on."<sup>151</sup> Similarly, Henry Cohen concluded in 1996, "Rabbinic officiation at mixed marriage is part of the problem; not part of the solution."<sup>152</sup>

Because the debate has generally focused on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of officiation, there are many aspects of officiation that are often overlooked. One of these affects rabbis of all positions: the attitude of the rabbi in dealing with the interfaith couple. Whether a rabbi does not officiate or refer, officiates in limited circumstances, co-officiates in Christian churches, or any other position, the way the rabbi treats the couple and interacts with them has more influence and power, in my opinion, than any other factor relating to rabbinical officiation.

Harry Danziger said in 1996 that "just as there is no one kind of intermarriage, there is no one kind of rabbinic officiation." The couples vary, the officiants vary, and the non-officiants vary as well.<sup>153</sup> How the rabbi works with a couple and prepares them for marriage is different from rabbi to rabbi. To generalize rabbis into two broad categories of those who officiate and those who do not neglects the individual distinctions.

This discrimination is omitted in surveys on the effects of officiation. For example, Egon Mayer's 1989 survey and the 1995 Jewish Outreach Institute make no distinction between the variety of those rabbis who officiate and those who do not. While sensitivity and the quality of counseling are factors that are practically impossible to classify, most surveys that try and determine the influence of rabbinical officiation do not even distinguish between rabbis who require preconditions, such as a commitment for a Jewish household, and those who do not. Jonathan Sarna wrote in 1990 that the

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<sup>151</sup>CCAR Yearbook 72 (1962): 89.

<sup>152</sup>Cohen, "Rabbinic Officiation," 47.

<sup>153</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

"key question is not just mechanically quantitative, as these surveys would have as believe, but also elusively qualitative. In other words, before we can measure impact effectively we need to know not just whether a rabbi agreed to officiate, but also how the rabbi explained his or her decision and then related to the couple beforehand and afterwards."<sup>154</sup> The simple fact that a rabbi officiates should not be the only focus, but the way the rabbi officiates needs to be considered as well.

How rabbis interact with a couple at whose wedding they will officiate is just as important, I believe, as whether or not they officiate. An example of this can be seen in the work of Henry Cohen. Cohen concluded his 1996 survey that a rabbi's influence "depends on the quality of the relationship that is established between the rabbi and the couple."<sup>155</sup> Henry Cohen's officiating at interfaith marriages was not the singular key getting a substantial number of couples involved in Judaism. Rather, his personal involvement with the couples and his consistent follow-up on their well-being had the larger impact. Egon Mayer, who has disputed notions that officiation has a direct effect on later Jewish identity, said that if Cohen had not officiated, but had remained as concerned for the well-being of the couple, "he'd probably have the same results."<sup>156</sup> Marc Lee Raphael found that couples who had extensive contact with the rabbi before marriage "had considerably more Jewish experiences after their marriage than those couples that met with the rabbi only one time."<sup>157</sup>

For rabbis that do not officiate, the method that they employ in responding to a couple's request for officiation is vital. It has been argued by

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<sup>154</sup>Jonathan D. Sarna, "Reform Jewish Leaders, Inter-marriage, and Conversion," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Winter 1990: 4.

<sup>155</sup>Cohen, "Rabbinic Officiation," 54. Italics in original.

<sup>156</sup>Mayer, interview.

<sup>157</sup>Raphael, "Inter-marriage and Jewish Survival," 60.



many rabbis that one should never reject a couple on the phone, that a rabbi should try to bring them into his or her office and meet with them face-to-face. Above all, a rabbi should turn the couple down with as much care and concern as possible. However, almost half of the couples in Egon Mayer's 1989 survey felt the rabbi had refused them insensitively. 74% of all the couples who unsuccessfully asked a rabbi to officiate felt "unencouraged by the rabbi to remain in contact with the synagogue." While only a quarter of the couples felt that this refusal was a reason to distance themselves from the synagogue, many couples feel rejected and hurt by the rabbi's response.<sup>158</sup>

It is natural, and perhaps even expected, that a couple not receiving the answer they desired would walk away from a rabbi's study in pain and even anger. Surely, many of the couples are more upset at the answer than the way the answer was presented to them. However, many lay people tell stories of "disparagement, of inhospitality, of insensitivity, of verbal abuse" from Reform rabbis.<sup>159</sup> George Markley commented that his displeasure in 1969 at being turned down by a rabbi to officiate was "not with the rabbi's refusal to perform our ceremony, but rather with the manner in which he communicated that decision to us."<sup>160</sup> Jacqueline Guttman reported in 1996 that her son and his fiancée found the same problem in his search. "I was mortified at the treatment they received. While, of course, some rabbis were supportive and helpful, more were inaccessible or worse downright nasty." This included rabbis who did not officiate as well as rabbis who did.<sup>161</sup> At the very least, if rabbis are expressing their message in a sensitive manner, some lay people are not perceiving it that way.

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<sup>158</sup>Mayer, *Rabbinic Officiation*, 5.

<sup>159</sup>Mayer, interview.

<sup>160</sup>"Mixed Marriage," audiocassette.

<sup>161</sup>*Ibid.*

I believe there are things we can do to help the situation. First and foremost, rabbis and other leaders need to stop condemning and castigating each other, whether in articles, at CCAR conventions or in general. Not only is it unbecoming the dignity of the rabbinate, but it merely adds more fuel to the already blazing fire. At this point in Jewish history, we must accept that interfaith marriage is a reality and is almost certain to continue to be a major issue in the lives of Reform Jews. About half of the Reform rabbinate feels it is appropriate, in some way, to officiate at the wedding ceremonies of these interfaith couples. The other half feels it is contrary to their understanding of Judaism. Neither side is going to "win" and convince the other, and attempts to forbid officiation have repeatedly failed in Reform in earlier times when officiation was much less accepted.

If officiation is a reality within Reform, then each rabbi must carefully determine their own position and how they will deal with each couple and family whom they will encounter. If rabbis desire to support the future of Judaism and to reach Jews sensitively, all rabbis must examine their approach towards officiation and determine if it reflects these values. This does not mean simply acquiescing to a couple's desires, but rather sharing one's understanding of Judaism, whatever that may be, with a couple in an open and honest way. A rabbi can draw a couple into Judaism with and without officiating. A rabbi can drive them off with and without officiating. A rabbi can understand officiation as totally legitimate or completely outside the nature of Reform Judaism and still accept the other position as valid.

Until we begin discussing the issues that emanate from officiation at interfaith marriage, rather than only the appropriateness of officiation, it would be premature to offer any "answers." However, by way of conclusion I'd like to explore one aspect of officiation. Rabbis who do not officiate are

given the simple option of saying "no" and ending the conversation. Some rabbi still have their secretaries handle it. This would seem to preclude any hope of establishing a couple's Jewish future. So, what can a rabbi who does not officiate actually do?

For starters, I think we need to change our terminology. Consistently in discussions on interfaith marriage, rabbis who do not officiate are said to *refuse* to officiate. By saying *refuse* we are immediately setting up a barrier and implying the rejection of the couple. I propose we search for alternative phrases. For example, we might say that a rabbi is *unable* to officiate. This would equally apply to a rabbi who has preconditions that a couple cannot meet. That rabbi is also *unable* to officiate at the wedding.

Rabbis may be trying to be welcoming and sensitive with couples, yet they are not being heard that way. Perhaps rabbis who do not officiate need to work on new methods to express their message. Who speaks to the couple when they first call? What is said? How do they phrase their message in the speaking to the couple? Has the rabbi tried their approach out on other rabbis and lay leaders, on psychologists and marriage counselors, to receive feedback and suggestions?

Furthermore, rabbis who do not officiate should avoid simply focusing on what they can't do - the wedding. Instead, they should "positively practice"<sup>162</sup> by stressing what they can do. Each rabbi who does not officiate will find different things that they can offer a couple. Some will refer a couple to another rabbi, hopefully one that they know and whose integrity and behavior they respect. Some will be a Jewish resource for the couple, helping them write their own ceremony and find an appropriate civil

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<sup>162</sup>Jeffrey Salkin, "Depolarizing Situation - Not Into Yes and No," 1996 CCAR Convention, author's notes, March 25, 1996, Author's Archives.

officiant. Some rabbis will attend a civil ceremony or offer a blessing whether before or after, in public or in private. Hopefully, most rabbis will spend time with the couple and help them plan their lives together.

Rabbis who officiate are probably accurate in stating that a couple is less likely to meet with or approach a rabbi who does not officiate than one who does. This alone is not a reason for a rabbi to start officiating. A rabbi who does not condemn and leaves open the channels of communication will start to make a difference.<sup>163</sup> If rabbis who do officiate would insist that all Jewish partners at least meet with their own rabbi, rabbis who do not officiate would have the chance to reach out and bring that couple into the temple that they or their parents call home.

Many rabbis will not have the experience of Mark Winer who found that after telling interfaith couples, "Look, you're not going to convert, that's not important. Let me be your friend, let me be your rabbi. Let's study Judaism together," that most couples would study with him and that the non-Jew usually converted to Judaism.<sup>164</sup> However, all rabbis, regardless of their position on officiation at interfaith marriages, can approach each couple with a sense of love and compassion, of concern for Judaism and for the couple's future, and can try to make a positive difference in their lives.

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<sup>163</sup>Kenneth J. Weiss to Joseph Glaser, "Dealing with Request for Officiating at Mixed-Marriages," [1982?], CCAR Archives, 1.

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