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**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.**

**by**

**Steven Stark Lowenstein**

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination**

**Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion**

**1995**

**Referee: Professor Jacob Rader Marcus**

## Dedications

, I lovingly dedicate my thesis to:

Julie, my wife and best friend, whose loving touch watched this project develop and assisted with every word. Nothing would have been possible without her inspiration, love and support.

Benjamin, whose wonderful smile, special laugh, and big bright eyes provided encouragement and nourishment during each and every study break.

To Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, who made American Jewish History come alive for me, and who provided me with insight and guidance into the American Reform rabbinate. In his 99th year, no one is as knowledgeable about this profession or group of "Boys" than our "Chief." I truly feel blessed and honored to have my thesis added to the shelves of the countless students and rabbis who have learned to love American Jewish History through the brilliance and devotion of "Dr. Jake". May you have no evil eye.

Finally, in addition to Julie, Benjamin and Dr. Marcus, I dedicate my thesis to my father Benjamin Levoy Lowenstein Zichrono Livracha, who instilled in me a love of Judaism and Israel both by word and by deed. Unfortunately, he never lived to see me grow up and enter rabbinical school. He surely would have loved to have shared in the process. May his memory always be for a blessing.

## Digest

This rabbinical thesis is a sociological and historical exploration of the changing perspectives of the seminary student at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. It compares students from the early 1970's to those enrolled in the College-Institute as of the fall of 1994. Throughout this research project, I have analyzed the seminary population, first, as it was perceived by Dr. Theodore Lenn in his study entitled: "The Lenn Report, The Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism;" and then, as viewed through my own primary research, conducted with HUC students during the fall of 1994. In addition to sampling the student population, I also explored, by way of survey research, some of the attitudes, beliefs and issues facing current rabbis who were ordained within the past 25 years. This was in attempt to interpret how the practical rabbinate relates to the profile of the seminarian, and to assess what this implies for the future rabbinic professional.

In my research, I explored the seminary students' perspectives using the following categories of interest: General Information, Religious Beliefs, Role of the Rabbi, and the Student Attitudes towards the Hebrew Union College. Where applicable, direct comparisons were made between the students of the 70's and those enrolled in the College-Institute today.



### Acknowledgments

The thesis begins with the development and historical background of the Lenn Report and systematically assesses Dr. Lenn's findings regarding the seminary student of that time period. The middle chapters describe the methods and results of my own survey research conducted in the fall of 1994. The final sections include a discussion of the results, conclusions on the research, and observations about the future of the rabbinate.

regarding seminary students of the past several decades. They provided more material than I could have ever wanted. In addition to the published material, the results of a comprehensive database of information taken from Rabbinic School applications over the past 40 years has slowly become available. The library materials will be referred to when applicable and will be used for the purpose of comparison.

Special thanks are in order for Lisa Frankel and Amelia Smith in the National Office of Admissions. They would field my questions, do the needed research and would always obtain the information I had requested. Ror Chaiken and Deb Xander in the Registrar's Office provided lists of students and supplies for the surveys. The Alumni Office provided the address labels for the rabbi, and Bernadette Fay helped with word processing. The staff of the American Jewish Archiver was of great assistance in the primary research phase of the project.

Dr. Linda Goldenhar, Behavioral Scientist extraordinaire and

### Acknowledgements

There are many people who have assisted in this project. I am grateful to Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, President of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, and to Dr. Gary Zola the National Dean of Admissions for the College-Institute who have made available files which contained a vast amount of information regarding seminary students of the past several decades. They provided more material than I could have ever wanted. In addition to the published material, the results of a comprehensive databank of information taken from Rabbinic School applications over the past 40 years has slowly become available. The Lilly materials will be referred to when applicable and will be used for the purpose of comparison.

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Dr. Linda Goldenhar, Behavioral Scientist extrordinnaire and

Survey Researcher was very helpful in the development and implementation of the survey instruments used in the project. She also provided guidance on the results and analysis. Her assistance was invaluable.

And finally, I am also grateful to the 116 students of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the 73 Rabbis in the field who took the 20 minutes to fill out the surveys and return them. Without their participation and honesty, I would not have been able to write this thesis.

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The rabbinate and the seminary student is a topic about which there is not a great deal written. While there are several books about rabbis, the survey of literature regarding the rabbinate, or

I. Abraham Chasidych, "The College and Its Outlook," Hebrew Union College Monthly, Vol. IX (Dec. 1922), p.7.

## **Introduction**

In the December 1922 edition of the Hebrew Union College monthly, newly elected faculty member Rabbi Abraham Chronbach z"l wrote an article entitled "Our College and its Outlook". In the article he began: "A parallel may be drawn between a college such as ours and a large public conveyance such as a railroad car. A hundred passengers may be on board travelling on the same train, going in the same direction; yet each passenger may have a different destination and purpose." <sup>1</sup>

That statement was true of the Hebrew Union College in 1922 and it seems to be true of the College-Institute today. In my rabbinic thesis I plan to look at students of the Hebrew Union College, both those who attended in the 1970's as well as those enrolled at the College-Institute today. In examining these different groups I hope to discover the commonalities and differences between the two generations of students, in terms of their professional decisions and beliefs, as well as in what they value in their chosen profession.

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1. Abraham Chronbach, "The College and its Outlook," Hebrew Union College Monthly, Vol. IX (Dec., 1922), p.7.



works on the complex nature of the profession are minimal. Several studies of the rabbinate were attempted in the late 1950's and 1960's but are considered unreliable and outdated.<sup>2</sup> Within the time period I am exploring there were several studies worth noting. In 1968, Charles Leibman conducted a comprehensive study on seminary education which was published in the 1968 American Jewish Year Book. The last Hebrew Union College Rabbinical Thesis that explored the seminary student was written in 1969 by Charles Sherman, titled Factors Influencing the Selection of the Rabbinate.<sup>3</sup> Several years later in 1972, the Central Conference of American Rabbis received the results of a detailed and complex study of the seminary student as part of a report entitled The Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism, conducted by Theodore I. Lenn and instituted by the Central Conference. It is this study, commissioned by the CCAR with support from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, that I will use as my historical guide throughout my rabbinic thesis.

The Lenn Report proved to be interesting, provocative, and controversial in its assessment of the rabbinate in general and in particular, the Reform rabbinical student of the late 1960's and early 1970's. It is against that historical backdrop that I plan to explore

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<sup>2</sup> Carlin and Mendelovitz, "The American Rabbi," The Jews, ed. by Marshall Sklare 1958. Arthur Hertzberg, "The Conservative Rabbinate," Essays on Jewish Life and Thought by Joseph Blau, 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Sherman, Factors Influencing the Selection of the Rabbinate, HUC Thesis, June, 1969.

the changing rabbinical student of the Hebrew Union College; comparing the student from that time period with the student population of today.

The Lenn report was unveiled during a time of great transition in the Reform movement. At the 1972 convention when Dr. Lenn formally presented his results to the Conference, Rabbi David Polish in his Presidential Address stated:

We gather at a time of transition for our entire movement—the elevation of Alfred Gottschalk to the Presidency of our College-Institute, the assumption of the Executive Vice President of our conference by Joe Glaser.... and the designation of Alexander Schindler as President Elect of our Union...These events coming within a single year, are profoundly symbolic and meaningful. <sup>4</sup>

Now, two full decades later, in a year that brought about the announced retirement of these two central figures of the Reform movement, and the subsequent and untimely passing of Rabbi Joe Glaser, I hope to explore the changes in attitudes and perceptions of today's rabbinic student population by using some of the same tools that were used by Dr. Lenn.

My interest in the rabbinate and the seminary stems from the fact that I have been a student at the Hebrew Union College for almost five years. The College-Institute and the rabbinate have undergone many changes over the past decades and changes will continue to take place into the future. A systematic study of the

<sup>4</sup> David Polish, Presidential Address, published in CCAR Yearbook, 1972, p. 3.

type of person who chooses to study at the Hebrew Union College, and how that person changes as he/she goes through the seminary could yield valuable information to both students who apply to the College-Institute and to those who dedicate themselves to the ultimate success of the College-Institute as a whole. Such information could assist faculty members and staff who give all they have to make Hebrew Union College "the finest and largest Liberal Seminary in the World".<sup>5</sup>

In order to fully understand the seminary populations, and to discover the sort of information I wanted to explore, I had to ground myself in the historical perspective of the Lenn Report. Then, to fully assess the population of today I created my own survey to assess the current student population. As with any undertaking like this one, it is my sincere hope that my fellow colleagues, and the rabbis in the field who have answered the questionnaires, did so openly and honestly. Without their honesty, the results of this thesis would most certainly be skewed.

Though the research methodology is outlined in detail in Chapter III, a preview of my approach follows. I sent out a survey to all the students at the Hebrew Union College's three stateside campuses. I consciously decided not to include the students at the Jerusalem campus due to their recent entry into the school and the relatively novel understanding of the rabbinate. Using some of the same questions that Dr. Lenn asked, and other pertinent additions, I

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, History Class Notes, Spring Semester, 1992.

attempted to explore the attitudes, and beliefs of today's student at Hebrew Union College.

In addition to the student population I surveyed, I probed the attitudes and beliefs of rabbis currently in the field. By exploring a sampling of the rabbis who have been ordained since the early 1970's I attempted to gain a better understanding of the complexities and struggles that rabbis face each and every day. Since over 700 rabbis have been ordained since 1970, I needed to have a select sample for the study. Therefore, five or six members from each ordination class over the past 25 years were selected to participate in the study.

Each rabbi received a cover letter signed by myself and my advisor Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, and a simple 2-page questionnaire. Each question was open-ended and rabbis were encouraged to reflect on their chosen careers. We attempted to gather a cross section of respondents who had varying experiences within the rabbinate. Some were chosen anonymously and others were chosen because it was felt that they had exemplified a certain type of rabbinate. Some had been successful while others had faced difficult challenges.

The final sections of the thesis include a discussion of the results and conclusions on the research, and observations about the future.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Altmann, *A Religious History of the American People*, p. 400.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Jick, "The Reform Synagogue," in Weinberger, p. 105.



## Chapter I

### Historical Background

To begin this composite study of the rabbinate a reflection of the past 25 years, it is necessary to first speculate on the social and political context of the late 1960's and early 1970's. The historian Sidney Ahlstrom described this time period as a time when "the foundation of national confidence, patriotic idealism, moral traditionalism, and even of historical Judeo-Christian theism were awash. Presuppositions that had held firm for centuries-even millennia-were being widely questioned.<sup>6</sup> This decade of the 1960's pushed religious leaders to begin to rethink the role of religion in American society.

Jewish organizational life during this period no longer found meaning, and a distance began to emerge. Rabbi Eugene Borowitz stated:

The crisis in American society, the peril to the state of Israel, the new appreciation of ethnicity all seemed to call for a re-examination of Reform Jewish principles....The style of synagogue life which seemed so fresh a few years previous, seemed somewhat stale and in need of reinvigoration.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, p. 600.

<sup>7</sup> Leon Jick, "The Reform Synagogue," in Werthheimer, p. 105.

The state of the rabbinate was no different. On October 20, 1968 at 2:00 in the afternoon, a joint meeting was held at the House of Living Judaism in New York City between two very important committees from the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Members of the Committee on Rabbinical Status, chaired by Rabbi Abram Vossen Goodman, and members of the Committee on Rabbinic Training, chaired by Rabbi David Polish, gathered together for this most important meeting.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to this meeting, these groups were both separate committees of the Central Conference of American Rabbis with different agendas and goals. With the recent changes in American society, the committees had decided to hold a joint meeting to establish what the committees had in common with one another, and how they could mutually identify where their paths diverged regarding the future of the Reform rabbinate. It was at this meeting that a working draft was completed and the report of the committee was presented to the Executive Committee of the CCAR.

In the report the newly formed committee stressed that the academic standards of the Hebrew Union College should be enhanced, not diminished. They felt that proficiency in Jewish Studies was completely indispensable in the rabbinate.<sup>9</sup> It was at this

<sup>8</sup> Personal Letter from Rabbi David Polish and Rabbi Abraham Goodman, to Committee Members, August 19, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> David Polish and Committee, Preliminary Working Draft from The Committee of Rabbinic Training.

committee meeting that a proposal was made for a far-reaching study to explore several key factors relating to the rabbinate: Such areas of exploration would include but would not be limited to:

- A. The realities of synagogue life as the rabbi confronts them.
- B. The realities of Jewish life outside the synagogue for which the rabbi had responsibility.
- C. The function of the Seminary in preparing (the rabbi) intellectually and practically to cope with those realities so that Jewish existence might be renewed ethnically, religiously, intellectually and communally.<sup>10</sup>

The rabbis who attended this committee meeting felt that the society at the time had been undergoing radical transformation and that it had become urgently necessary to assess the qualifications and roles of the Reform rabbi. They felt that this was imperative if rabbis were to continue to influence the Jewish people into the next decade. It was therefore proposed by Rabbi David Polish to the CCAR Executive Board on October 22, 1968 that:

- A. We should learn authoritatively how congregations, Jewish communities, seminaries and rabbis view the rabbinic calling in order to better understand and cope with what confronts us.
- B. We should learn what non-Jewish clerical and seminary bodies are doing by way of self study and self renewal.
- C. We should learn how our existing rabbinical training program, which has faced the challenge of pre and post-war world, can best equip itself for the uncertainties of the remainder of this century and the next.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.1.



academic circles it was agreed upon by members of the Central Conference that the "renewal of Jewish life" within the seminary would be the primary motivation for the work of this committee. It was therefore presented to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference in American Rabbis that:

A common theme that constantly arose for discussion during the early stages of the project was the issue of "renewal of Jewish life". Members of this newly formed committee were convinced that Jewish life required renewal if the Jewish people were to survive, and that nowhere did the possibility for renewal hold forth greater hope than in the seminary, especially the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Unfortunately, in the general society at this time, synagogue attendance had fallen off and the significance of the rabbi was in a very rapid decline. Recent publications and interest in the exploration of the rabbinate had become more prevalent. A Masters thesis by HUC Student Charles Sherman regarding the selection of the rabbinate as a career first appeared in 1968. This was subsequently followed by the Sklare Studies, and Charles Liebman's seminal article for the American Jewish Year Book on seminary education of the major rabbinic seminary schools around the country. Recent publications and books such as Theological Education and Ministry Studies by Fielding continued to add to this growing area of interest.

Because of this social context and the growing interest in

academic circles it was agreed upon by members of the Central Conference that this "renewal of Jewish life" within the seminary would be the primary motivation for the work of this committee. <sup>12</sup>

It was therefore presented to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis that:

The committee decided, subject to the approval of the Executive Board, to endorse a comprehensive study of the rabbinate within the context of a radically changing world, as well as a radically changing synagogue, Jewish community, and Judaism itself.<sup>13</sup>

It was agreed upon that the study would assess the rabbinic experience and rabbinic training as it related to those fast moving changes of the time period. The committee strongly felt that this would call for something more substantial than an examination of seminary curricula, since the curriculum was well within the competence and guidance of the faculties and the administration of the College-Institute. What needed to be done was a scientific and far-reaching study of the entire context in which the rabbi functioned.

The committee members felt that it was incumbent upon them to ask the proper questions: They needed to explore what "equipment" a rabbi needed from his pre-student recruitment days,

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Notes from the Executive Committee Meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, October 22nd 1968.

through his seminary years, and then into his rabbinic experience. They also needed to delve into the role of the rabbi to see if it was the same as it had been a generation ago. Were congregations the same or did they also have different expectations for the rabbi? It was assessed that such questions needed be asked within every stratum which shaped or was shaped by the rabbinate. They needed to be asked of students, rabbis, youth group members, board members, and uncommitted/unaffiliated Jews. What seemed essential was that this extensive undertaking needed to be a comprehensive self-assessment of the entire Reform movement.

From its first inception, the original Committee on Rabbinic Training felt that such an endeavor needed to be a "joint and simultaneous undertaking" between the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: The notes of the Executive Committee of the CCAR explicitly stated:

As the college approaches its second century, it would be highly auspicious if together we could see our institution add new dimensions to the intellectual and moral leadership which we have always provided.<sup>14</sup>

A letter from the Conference President Rabbi Levi Olan to Rabbi Lou Silberman of Vanderbilt University on November 12th, 1968 specifically stated:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.,

"Dr. Glueck (President of the Hebrew Union College) enthusiastically supported the idea of the study and I believe is now prepared to work cooperatively with our committee."<sup>15</sup>

While the letter specifically stated that the Hebrew Union College supported the idea of the study, the very last sentence of the letter indicated that a meeting would be set up shortly between the College and the CCAR. Olan concluded his letter to Silberman by stating: "I hope you will be able to share in this confrontation."<sup>16</sup> It would seem that from the outset, a tension existed between the CCAR and the Hebrew Union College, a tension that manifested itself throughout the duration of the study.

With the approval of the Executive Committee, and the support (albeit questionable) of the College-Institute, additional meetings and programs were established in order to begin to create a comprehensive study. The initial meeting for this task was held in Chicago on Wednesday December 18th, 1968. After this meeting a letter was sent from the CCAR to HUC-JIR, informing the administration of the College and the Board of Governors on the progress of the committee:

We assume that during the limited duration of the study, such experimental and physical maintenance programs of the HUC-JIR as well as the establishment of Academic chairs and similar activities will, of course, proceed. We likewise

<sup>15</sup> Personal Letter from Rabbi Levi Olan, to Rabbi Lou Silberman, November 12, 1968. Letters submitted by Rabbi Silberman to The American Jewish Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., Collection #34



assume that during that period, major physical expansion which could relate to aspects of the study would be deferred.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to this limitation placed on buildings and development including, but not limited to, the Jerusalem Campus and the relocation of the New York Campus, which were the major projects of the College at that time, the Central Conference actively urged the College to continue to support this important undertaking due to the great "crisis of Jewish existence" which was occurring at the time.

The committee felt that it was essential to study and then forecast the probable trends and changes in the rabbinate that would occur within the next few decades. Once this was accomplished, the committee would then be well equipped to draw conclusions as to the qualities and qualifications rabbis from the Reform movement should possess.

Much debate took place as to the need for a professional sociologist to develop this study. In February of 1969, Dr. Louis Berman, a sociologist from the Chicago area, in consultation with other sociologists around the country, assessed the field and proposed a study that would cost \$356,000 to implement.<sup>18</sup>

After several discussions and committee meetings, a joint retreat was proposed that would be held in Houston, Texas in

<sup>17</sup> Personal Letter from Rabbi Polish, to the Committee, November, 1968.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Louis Berman, Proposal of February 2nd 1968 to David Polish in Manuscript Collection #34

conjunction with the 1969 CCAR Convention. This retreat, co-sponsored by the CCAR, HUC-JIR, and the UAHC, was entitled "Conversations on the Rabbinate".<sup>19</sup> A letter on file in the American Jewish Archives, from Rabbi Lou Silberman to Rabbi David Polish outlined the agenda for this retreat. Areas that would be addressed would include the general upheaval of society and the overall role of the rabbi. Questions which would be answered included: What are the values of our congregants? Who are we? In the present emerging situation, what should a rabbi be? <sup>20</sup>

It was also announced during this time period that the name of the Committee on Rabbinic Training under the guidance of Rabbi David Polish was to be formally changed for the 1969-70 year to the Future of the Rabbinate and the Synagogue.<sup>21</sup> In the final report of the Committee in June of 1973, Rabbi David Polish's addressed the committee name change in his summary statement.

The committee wisely chose to expand the scope of its work in order to obviate the erroneous impression that the College-Institute alone was responsible for the Rabbinic crisis.<sup>22</sup>

At the 1969 CCAR Convention in Houston, Texas the following statement was unanimously agreed upon by both the Central

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid..

<sup>20</sup> Personal Letter from Rabbi Lou Silberman, to Rabbi David Polish, April, 1969.

<sup>21</sup> CCAR Communication to Conference Members in the Spring of 1969.

<sup>22</sup> Report of the Future of the Rabbinate, as submitted to the CCAR Executive Board in June of 1973, p. 8.

Conference and the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College.

"We envision a program in which we would ask for the college's help in a study of the Rabbinat and we in turn would offer our resources to the College in an analysis of the training of rabbis." <sup>23</sup>

While the plan was fully conceived and initiated within the Conference, it finally seemed to have the full support of the College-Institute and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations.

Dr. Berman traveled to Cincinnati, Ohio on May 26-27, 1969 to acquaint himself with the curriculum of the College-Institute and the programs being offered on the Cincinnati campus. It was during this meeting that issues began to emerge indicating that the College had some major reservations about this undertaking. In a memorandum from Dean Herbert Brichto to Dr. Nelson Glueck and Rabbi David Polish, the following issues and concerns around the study were relayed directly to Dr. Berman. The College-Institute's concerns on this project dealt with:

1. Ongoing pressure from certain CCAR officers for ex-officio representation on the College Board.
2. The irresponsible and malicious criticism of the College, its curriculum and faculty in articles in the CCAR Journal.
3. The college faculty view that the conference initiatives held for them something less than trust or confidence.
4. The malaise and discontent within the rabbinat which is a secret to no one, will surely be reflected in such a general survey.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Executive Board minutes of the CCAR, June, 1969.

<sup>24</sup> Dean Herbert Brichto, HUC-JIR memorandum to President Glueck and Rabbi Polish on June 2nd 1969.



The College-Institute was greatly concerned about the "ambiance" which would be prevalent in conducting the survey. The College proposed that 3 separate sociologists be selected; one chosen by the College, one by the UAHF, and one by the CCAR to review and critique a design proposal of the general survey.<sup>25</sup> While the minutes of the CCAR meetings reflected a situation of full cooperation from the College-Institute, there seemed to be some serious reservations and strong voices of concern. These issues heightened the tension around the participation of the College-Institute. Yet, nonetheless, the Conference continued on its course to bring to fruition the proposed study.

After a meeting in Chicago in April of 1969, Rabbi Lou Silberman wrote that neither the Union nor the College placed very much reliance upon the proposed study. Silberman further stated that he felt:

"He [Nelson Glueck] is maneuvering the situation to make it appear that he is protecting the College... and the faculty from the Conference that is bent on taking it over" <sup>26</sup>

On September 29th, 1969, Chairman David Polish wrote to the Committee on the Future of the Rabbinate prior to the upcoming CCAR Executive Board meeting, bringing the committee up to date on recent developments:

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>26</sup> Personal letter from Rabbi Lou Silberman, to Rabbi David Polish on April 24th 1969.

"Early in the summer it was necessary for me to terminate our relationship with Dr. Louis Berman because of demands which were totally unacceptable, and because of advice of legal counsel. As a consequence I have spent a major part of the summer seeking the most effective replacement I could find.....consequently, I am now prepared to recommend to the Executive Board the designation of Dr. Theodore Lenn, a Connecticut sociologist, academician and counselor. <sup>27</sup>

In a phone interview conducted with Rabbi Polish, he revealed to me that Dr. Berman was the Committees' primary choice to execute the project, since he was highly respected and published in the field of Jewish Identity and Inter-marriage. The Conference however, was emphatic that the information gathered from the study was to be kept "in-house" and could not be used by Dr. Berman for publication. According to Rabbi Polish, this was not acceptable to Dr. Berman and as a result he had to be removed from the project. <sup>28</sup>

In conjunction with the UAHC Biennial in October of 1969, newly hired sociologist Dr. Theodore Lenn and the Central Conference held a "Think Tank" in Miami, Florida. Working papers were presented and several meetings were held between the three different constituent groups: HUC, CCAR, and the UAHC, as well as congregational board members and general members from selected congregations. It was in Miami that some of the proposed areas of study were discussed, researched and proposed. These included the

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<sup>27</sup> Personal letter from Rabbi David Polish, to Committee members on September 29, 1969.

<sup>28</sup> Phone Interview with Rabbi David Polish, Sunday February 3rd, 1995.

"Exploration of the Role of the Rabbi both Present and Future", and "What Kind of Training was Needed for the American Rabbinate."<sup>29</sup>

Dr. Theodore Lenn was a Reform Jew affiliated with Temple Beth Israel in West Hartford, Connecticut. He was a close friend of Rabbi Abraham J. Feldman, the Senior Rabbi at the congregation in Hartford. A series of letters between Dr. Lenn and Rabbi Feldman have since been deposited by Rabbi Feldman in the American Jewish Archives. The letters speak of a mutual respect and a genuine friendship between Lenn and Feldman that predates Dr. Lenn's involvement with the CCAR project.<sup>30</sup> Rabbi Feldman was also a close childhood friend of Rabbi David Polish, and when Rabbi Polish was visiting with Rabbi Feldman, the latter suggested Dr. Lenn undertake the study.

Dr. Lenn at the time was teaching and providing family and marriage counseling in the West Hartford area of Connecticut. According to a phone interview with Dr. Lenn, he stated that during the research phase of the project he was able to take a sabbatical from teaching at the University of Hartford. Since he had to formally agree not to publish his findings for his own purpose, Dr. Lenn had to use his own personal time to complete the project, and could not use the project for his own professional development, or for the purpose of his own recognition and publication.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Material found in CCAR Manuscript Collection #34.

<sup>30</sup> Letters include acknowledgements to Rabbis Discretionary Fund, Open House invitations, Family simcha celebrations in MS Col 38 Box 21 Folder 15.

<sup>31</sup> Phone Interview with Dr. Lenn, February, 1995.

By the fall of 1969, serious investigation was underway and a full scale proposal by Dr. Lenn was submitted to the Executive Committee of the Central Conference. The proposal specifically delineated what was to be done and a precise time frame for completing the study. A November 1st, 1971 target date was projected with a grace period extended until February 1st, 1972. While a proposed financial amount of the study was not indicated by Dr. Lenn, the CCAR Executive Committee allocated \$80,000 for the proposed project as was recorded in the CCAR minutes by the recording secretary:

Our study has already commenced. We are committed to spending between \$60,000 and 80,000 towards its completion.<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Lenn then compiled a team of highly skilled research associates for assistance with the study. 3 professors of Sociology handled the research design, procedures and the refinement of the questionnaires. 2 professors of Psychology became technical consultants and handled data analysis. 2 Psychiatrists were consulted regarding trend and data analysis, and a conservative rabbi was brought on board as a rabbinical consultant.<sup>33</sup>

The general rabbinic population of the Central Conference was then made aware that the Conference had begun working on a comprehensive study of the rabbinate. In the lead article on the

<sup>32</sup> CCAR Yearbook, 1969, page 26. Report of the Recording Secretary.

<sup>33</sup> Lenn Report, p.iii.

cover of the CCAR Newsletter of July 1970, major areas of inquiry to be studied by Dr. Lenn were presented and three major questions were posed: Has the rabbinate a future? Is religion disappearing? Should the synagogue survive? The article continued:

What problems lie ahead for the Rabbinate as a profession? Many of us are aware that a number of our colleagues are presently disenchanted with the pulpit ministry. Some have left, others are disturbed and worried about their future.<sup>34</sup>

The headline article concluded with the statement that Dr. Lenn would be receiving \$63,000 to complete the study.<sup>35</sup>

Likewise, in the same newsletter, the CCAR, which at the time of the study was facing a large financial deficit, asked rabbis to help secure funds from active layman to support the study on the Future of the Rabbi and Synagogue. In subsequent newsletters, rabbis were thanked for finding donors to contribute to the project.

While Dr. Lenn had begun the complex project, numerous other rabbis and leaders took it upon themselves to address the concerns that had been surmised by the Central Conference. Some were solicited by Dr. Lenn and the Committee, and others were spontaneous reflections, reactions, and opinions.

One of the seminal articles of this time period was written by Hebrew Union College professor Dr. Robert Katz. His article *The*

<sup>34</sup> CCAR Newsletter July 1970. Material preserved on Microfilm at the Jewish Periodical Center of the Hebrew Union College Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.1.



Future of the Rabbinate-Ascribed vs. Achieved Leadership was written for the Miami think tank of rabbis and lay leaders in October of 1969, and later published in the CCAR Journal. In the article, Dr. Katz posed questions that he felt the Conference should begin thinking about as they attempt to craft such a complex research project. He proposed that those involved with the project must start to assess the relevancy, authority, power and status of the rabbi.

In the language of Sociology, we want an ascribed status, to be less dependent on the contingencies of constantly having to achieve our status. We are frustrated because we sense an erosion of the status inherited in the title "rabbi" <sup>36</sup>

At a special meeting held in Warwick, New York over May 25-27, 1970 entitled "The Crisis in the Rabbinate", Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver offered some of his personal reflections on the "problematic" and diverse nature of the rabbinate:

Each generation must do more, which is often to accomplish less, especially if the synagogue is largely caught up in itself. Anyone who enters congregational work with a prophet's passion or a scholar's patience lives on the edge of ultimate, ego shattering despair. Smiling endlessly at people who don't care the least about you, circulating at ceremonies which are both garish and vulgar is galling to anyone.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Dr. Robert Katz, Ascribed vs Achieved Status First written for the Miami "Think Tank" Later published in CCAR Journal and in Compendium used for Senior Practicum 1973-1974.

<sup>37</sup> Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver, "The Worth of the Work We Do" CCAR Journal January 1970.

Rabbi Sanford Shapiro of Miami Beach offered the following suggestion to the question of whether the rabbinate has a future. In the January, 1971 CCAR Journal, Shapiro used his business mentality to state that, without question, the rabbinate does have a future.

Every Rabbi should have a year in business after beginning his Rabbinate. One learns to understand the industrial mentality, the psyche of the men who rule the business community, and to truly understand the needs of these people whose looks are often deceiving.<sup>38</sup>

Some of the most insightful material presented during this time period came in the form of a letter. "Restructuring the Rabbinate,-an open letter to Dr. Theodore Lenn", came from Dr. Eugene Borowitz, a member of the faculty of the New York campus of HUC-JIR. Dr. Borowitz held a post-graduate seminar on the contemporary rabbinate at the New York campus during the Fall 1969-1970 semester.

The non-credit seminar class was made up of 15 rabbinic alumni from in and around the New York area, who served as assistant rabbis, senior rabbis and Hillel directors. Their rabbinic service ranged from 2 to over 25 years.<sup>39</sup>

Discussions began with what had originally brought the rabbis to their chosen profession, and where the greatest areas of satisfaction and frustrations were derived. The seminar participants

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<sup>38</sup> Rabbi Sanford Shapiro, "Has the Rabbinate a Future"? CCAR Journal, January 1971.

<sup>39</sup> Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, "Restructuring the Rabbinate" CCAR Journal, June 1970.



then looked at what changes they would like to see in the rabbinate and concluded with what the College-Institute might do to make more of the ideal possible. It seemed that for the first time, from 9:15-10:30 on Tuesday mornings, concerned and committed rabbis gathered together for frank discussions to attempt to gain understanding and perspective on the changing dynamics of the rabbinate. Dr Borowitz concluded the letter by saying:

(Rabbis) are an incredibly lonely group of men. Our devotion to Judaism makes us the most alienated people in this society, in our congregations, in our families, and, worst of all in the midst of our colleagues. What came home with unparalleled pathos was the way in which our major institutions do not help us.... Instead of binding the rabbis together as a community of brothers... The College-Institute, the UAHC and most particularly the CCAR perpetuate all the worst of American values of competitiveness and success...They pit one man against the other in a struggle for prizes of power. <sup>40</sup>

Dr. Borowitz relayed this letter to Dr. Lenn and his team of researchers. The records of the class sessions and the materials, including the participants' original biographical statements written when they applied to the College-Institute, were submitted in hopes they would be helpful in Lenn's study of the rabbinate. All in all, 79 pages were sent from Dr. Borowitz's seminar class to Dr. Theodore Lenn in Hartford, Connecticut. <sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p.64.

<sup>41</sup> This material is also on file with The American Jewish Archives under the heading of Rabbi Eugene Borowitz.

With the project underway, I would now like to assess what Dr. Lenn explored and discovered in his research.

The total population of the Reform Jewish community in the New York area at the time of the survey was 14,000. The total number of women rabbis at the time was 14. The total number of usable questionnaires returned to Dr. Lenn, on or before the cut-off date, was 920. This yielded a response rate of 66%.<sup>42</sup> The survey took between one and two hours to complete and consisted of 60 pages with 143 basic questions.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Theodore Lenn, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, Published by the CCNY, 1972, p.4.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

## Chapter II

### Findings from the Lenn Report

The expressed objectives of the Lenn Report can be summarized in one of the key questions Dr. Lenn himself posed at the beginning of his analysis:

To what extent that any malaise exists in American Reform Judaism, how might it be identified and assessed by a study of the attitudes and behaviors of today's American reform rabbinate? <sup>42</sup>

With this question in mind, Dr. Lenn and his team of highly skilled researchers and sociologists began a systematic study of Reform Judaism, encompassing the analysis of rabbis, seminary students, and congregants. Dr. Lenn began his research by sending out a comprehensive questionnaire to ordained Reform rabbis living in the United States as of November 1970. This total population was 942 men (since there were no ordained women rabbis at the time.) The total number of usable questionnaires returned to Dr. Lenn, on or before the cut-off date, was 620. This yielded a response rate of 66%.<sup>43</sup> The survey took between one and two hours to complete and consisted of 60 pages with 143 basic questions. <sup>44</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Dr. Theodore Lenn Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism, Published by the CCAR, 1972, p.4.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

In addition to the ordained rabbis who received the questionnaire, 2,498 surveys were sent to randomly selected members of 11 different congregations around the country. Along with the congregational sample, 500 additional surveys were sent specifically to reform Jewish youths who were identified as being Jewishly active. It should be noted that the response rate from congregants was 39% and from Temple youth was 53%. Additionally, 471 surveys were mailed to rabbis' wives and 238 were returned, making the response rate from this population 51%.<sup>45</sup>

The area that I am most interested in for my rabbinic thesis is Section IV The Seminarian Sample, which was intended to reach rabbinic students who, at the time, were currently enrolled at the 3 stateside campuses of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Only the California and Cincinnati schools were able to respond to Dr. Lenn's questionnaire, as it was too late in the academic semester for the New York students to participate in the study. Of the 192 questionnaires mailed to seminarians, 58 usable returns were received, making for a return rate of only 30%.<sup>46</sup> This was by far the lowest return rate of any sample population surveyed by Dr. Lenn. At the time of the study, in the Spring of 1970, the Deans of the three campuses of Hebrew Union College indicated the following number of full time students in residence. New York had 45

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 11. Complete chart on page 11 of the Lenn Report.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.10.



students, Cincinnati had 132, and the California school had 15.<sup>47</sup> Without the New York school factored into the final pool, the response rate was still only 40% returned by the seminarians who received the questionnaire in time to be included in Dr. Lenn's analysis.

In the cover letter to students who received the questionnaire, Dr. Lenn stated that while he was aware that questionnaires may either annoy or amuse those filling it out: "Very simply...there is no other economically feasible way to gather even part of the large amount of information aimed at in this questionnaire."<sup>48</sup>

Much like the survey sent to ordained rabbis, the seminary students surveyed by Dr. Lenn were asked to comment on religious beliefs, attitudes toward the College-Institute, the Union, and the CCAR. Additionally, there were questions about Israel, ritual observance, The Union Prayer Book, and expectations of the role of the rabbi.

Complementary data for the Lenn report was also collected in other numerous ways. In addition to the lengthy questionnaires that were sent out, primary and secondary sources were used to gather information and research regarding these populations. Interviews and participant observations were also employed. The following chart indicates the categories and numbers of people who were

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., page 11.

<sup>48</sup> Cover letter sent by Dr. Lenn to students at the Hebrew Union College.

interviewed, with 85% of the interviews being conducted by Dr. Lenn himself.

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Samples**

Population Studied	Mailed	Useable Returns	% Return Rate
Rabbis	942	620	66%
Congregants	2498	984	39%
Seminarians	192	58	30%
Youth	500	264	53%
Rabbis Wives	471	238	51%

**Interviews Conducted**

Population Studied	# of Interviews
Rabbis	101
Congregants	260
Seminarians	18
Youth	62
Rabbis Wives	37 <sup>49</sup>

The data was then processed and the questionnaires edited. All participants were encouraged to write additional comments within the margins of the survey or on separate sheets of paper. Comments were then excerpted from the original surveys and answers were tabulated and computer processed. Tapes and notes were edited and the final report was ready to be prepared.

The final report was then written in 7 distinct sections consisting of an introduction, a conclusion, and a section on each of the sampled populations: Rabbis, Congregants, Seminarians, Rabbis'

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 14 and p.11.

Wives, and Temple Youth. With this brief outline of how Dr. Lenn executed his study, we can now look at what he found with regard to the fourth section of the project, the seminary student.

In the analysis of the 4th part of the survey dealing with the seminary student, Dr. Lenn began with the major and somewhat startling assertion that life was not all rosey in the ivory tower of the seminary at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion.

There is an undeniable discontent on the part of many of our seminarians. They seem to share little of the strong, positive, and hopeful views that so many of the rabbis feel and gratuitously express in their comments. <sup>50</sup>

Indeed, Dr. Lenn was hard pressed to find any positive, hopeful praise from this student population. The dissatisfaction was not isolated to certain areas. It ran the entire gamut of the students' lives; from religious belief, to life at the College; from frustration with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the Central Conference, to Reform Judaism in general. A complete disdain for the survey itself was also indicated. So great was this resentment that it led to the bold statement, uttered on page 319 of the study by Dr. Lenn. At this moment he departed from his role of objective observer when he stated:

In 25 years of survey research, this writer had not been exposed from any population sample, to the castigating and destructive comments that even begin to be

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.319.

commensurate with the outpouring of criticism that come forth from close to 50% of our seminarian sample.<sup>51</sup>

Lenn concluded the introduction with the note that since there were no responses received from students at the New York campus and since there were only fifteen students from the Los Angeles campus included in the research, most of what we were being told about the seminary student was based on the data gained solely from the students at the Cincinnati Campus.<sup>52</sup>

The following are some statistics from the demographic study of the seminary students who answered the Lenn survey: It would appear that the typical student at the College-Institute at that time came from a highly educated, upper middle class home. The average age of the student was just under 25. 77% of the students entered the seminary directly from College and 13% came from rabbinical homes. 57% claim that their home was pro-Zionist.

With regard to Jewish backgrounds, 6% said they had Orthodox parents, 24% said they had Conservative parents, and almost 60% of the students stated that they were products of the Reform movement. 57% of the students were married, although very few had children.<sup>53</sup>

The religious commitment of the seminarian enrolled at the Hebrew Union College during this time period was much lower than

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 319-320.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.320.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Section 1-4 of Chapter 17 of The Lenn Report 321-322.



that of the working rabbis who were interviewed. Figure 55 of the Lenn Study (Table 2 of this study) fully illustrates the high percentage of students who viewed themselves as agnostic.

**Table 2**  
**Religious Beliefs of Seminarians and Rabbis**

n=116	Seminarians	Rabbis since 1967	All rabbis
Traditional	4%	3%	10%
Qualified Traditional	38%	55%	62%
Non-Traditional	13%	21%	14%
Agnostic	43%	19%	14%
Atheist	2%	1%	1%

To what extent this was due to the "counterculture" that was prevalent in this time period is still unclear. It is also unclear whether this was unique to the Jewish seminary or whether this was a reflection of the larger general problems in religious America at the time. The latter was probably the reality. Regarding this issue, Rabbi Leon Jick in an article about the development of the American Synagogue during this time period stated that "by the late 1960's the "death of God" was being proclaimed in some theological circles." <sup>54</sup>

In assessing why the students and the rabbis of that time period chose the rabbinate as their career choice, the responses were almost the same for both populations. Both students and rabbis were most likely to mention "self fulfillment" and "serving people" as the

<sup>54</sup> Leon Jick quoted in Werthheimer p.104.

prime reasons for entering the rabbinate. They were least likely to mention power as a reason for entering the rabbinate.<sup>55</sup>

**Table 3:**  
**Why Seminary Students Chose the Rabbinate as a Career?**

"As a occupation it offered me the most opportunity to 'do my own thing'"	74%
"I like people and the rabbinate provided maximum opportunities to serve my fellow-man."	58%
"My intense belief in God and in Judaism has led me to be a teacher unto my People."	44%
"It was the image of the rabbi as scholar, teacher and community leader that attracted me most."	38%
"When I saw rabbis in the pulpit, they seemed to me to represent significant, powerful figures."	8%

Lenn further illustrated that seminarians, more so than their predecessors already working in the field, were not as inclined to scholarship and power. The generation of students in the late 1960's and early 1970's were no longer following a rabbinic model of a scholarly father figure deeply learned and inaccessible, but rather, a more informal, permissive pastor type.<sup>56</sup>

In terms of how seminary students viewed their rabbinical roles,

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 325.

there seemed to be a great level of agreement between students and rabbis. This is illustrated in Table 48 of the Lenn Report (Table 4 in this study.

**TABLE 4**  
**RABBINICAL ROLE EXPECTATIONS:**  
**A COMPARATIVE RANK ORDER ASSESSMENT**  
**BY SEMINARIANS AND RABBIS**

"What Rabbis ought to do"	Seminarians ( N=54)	Rabbis N=620
Religious Teacher	92%	82%
Adult Ed. Teacher	69%	74%
Priestly Roles	61%	51%
Counselor	59%	44%
Pastoral Visits	54%	30%
Jewish Community Representative	50%	38%
Preacher	41%	49%
Scholar	39%	51%
Leader of Youth Group	28%	14%
Writer	11%	14%
NonJewish Community Representative	9%	12%
Temple Auxiliaries	9%	17%
Administrator	9%	6%
Radio and TV speaker	4%	5%
Fundraiser	0%	1%

It would appear by this chart that both seminary students and rabbis were almost in complete agreement as to what it meant to be a rabbi, both in terms of the positions' priorities, as well as the less

important roles of the job. Dr. Lenn also pointed out that the students consistently demonstrated a greater preference for priestly roles, counseling, and pastoral visits than did their predecessors, while rabbis in the field placed a great deal more importance on scholarly activities.<sup>57</sup> Again this is supported by the trend of the specific time period.

As for future plans for seminary students, it was not the case during this time period that most students wanted to become pulpit rabbis. In fact only 46% definitely were interested in the pulpit rabbinate. 19% intended to pursue graduate studies, and 15% intended to teach. The remainder of the students indicated that they would become Hillel rabbis, writers, or perform other types of rabbinic work.<sup>58</sup>

In the analysis of the students' and rabbis' views of HUC-JIR, there seemed to be a very critical overtone. Over 50% of both rabbis and students surveyed indicated that HUC-JIR did little or nothing to help them better understand their own values and attitudes. (54% of the students and 53% of the alumni indicated this). Likewise, 54% of the rabbis and 71% of the students indicated that HUC-JIR professors provided almost no intimate friendships with students. 32% of the students and 37% of the rabbis indicated that HUC-JIR professional courses were poor while 40% of the rabbis and 42% of the students thought that HUC-JIR professional courses were fair.<sup>59</sup> The final

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.328.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p.330.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p.160.



area of HUC-JIR that I found compelling was the students and alumni rank order assessment of the curriculum of the College. Table 5 in my study corresponds to Table 25 in the Lenn Report.

**Table 5**  
**HUC-JIR Curriculum- A Rank Order Assessment**

<b>Rated Top Five</b>	(n=597)	Seminarians	Alumni
1. Bible		94%	85%
2. Jewish Religious Thought		83%	65%
3. History		83%	87%
4. Hebrew Language		82%	78%
5. Theology		70%	72%
<b>Rated Middle Five</b>			
6. Human Relations		64%	57%
7. Homiletics		62%	46%
8. Midrash		59%	68%
9. Liturgy		57%	54%
10. Philosophy		56%	60%
<b>Rated Bottom Seven</b>			
11. Education		54%	48%
12. Commentaries		50%	56%
13. Speech		44%	39%
14. Comparative Religions		43%	57%
15. Talmud		39%	46%
16. Codes		34%	35%
17. Jewish Music		15%	18%

As noted in Table 5, there were a few small, but somewhat significant differences between alumni and students regarding three different courses offered at the College-Institute. It would appear that students at this time placed less importance on Jewish religious thought (65% of students to 83% of rabbis) Likewise students placed greater importance on Comparative Religions. (57% of students to 43% of the rabbis) And finally, students placed far less importance on Homiletics (46% for students compared to 62% for alumni) Hence we have a shift to less formal preaching and a deviation in interest from specifically Jewish religious thought to religious thought in general.<sup>60</sup> It would seem that students held a more global and universal approach to Judaism than had previously been prevalent at the College-Institute.

At long last, the presentation of the completed Lenn Report to the full constituency of the Central Conference of American Rabbis occurred at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, June 13th, 1972 at Grossinger's Resort in Upstate New York. The theme of the overall convention that year was "Toward Jewish Continuity." <sup>61</sup>

The report of the Committee on the Future of the Rabbinate and the Synagogue opened the second day of the conference. The session was chaired by Rabbi Robert Kahn and the introduction was given by Rabbi David Polish, President of the Conference and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.169.

<sup>61</sup> Program from the 1972 Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

presiding Chairman of the committee. Dr. Lenn was asked to speak for about an hour to report his research findings. Conference delegates were then divided into 10 different "Chugim" or breakout groups for small group discussions on the material. Each "Chug" had a chairperson, a discussant, and a reporter to record the small group discussions. Dr. Lenn also presented workshops dealing with Rabbis' wives on the other days of the convention.

Rabbi Polish began his remarks by praising Dr. Lenn for his diligence and hard work. He also acknowledged that this project had begun in 1968 and the study was formalized in 1969. Dr. Lenn completed the work one month ahead of the twenty-four months allotted for the task.<sup>62</sup>

The outcome of the study was not to be proposals or plans but rather, raw data, from which the Committee and Conference would then be able to make the appropriate proposals and plans. Rabbi Polish stated:

"We believe that this study therefore offers significant new chances for all of us to advance. Fresh starts are now available to us. Every segment of our movement can now respond from strength to strength of new chances and new beginnings."<sup>63</sup>

Likewise, the newly appointed Executive Vice-President of the

<sup>62</sup> Rabbi David Polish Report of Committee of the Future of the Rabbinate and the Synagogue CCAR Yearbook 1972 page 113

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 115.

Conference, Rabbi Joseph Glaser z"l stated at the opening of his report;

The Lenn Study has been one of the big things of the year and it has impressed me very much. There are some people who find in it alarming things: Some people who wish that certain things were not going to be known-here, there, and everywhere. I am delighted that we have had the courage and the honesty to be analyzed, and to analyze ourselves on the basis of that splendid analysis, and to move ahead to carry out the obvious mandates that seem to come out of the Lenn Study. <sup>64</sup>

Dr. Lenn presented his findings to a CCAR Conference that had a record attendance. Over 500 rabbis and 300 wives attended the conference. <sup>65</sup> Dr. Lenn systematically explored the role of the Reform rabbis, their attitudes and behaviors. He also explored the relationship between the Reform rabbi and his congregation and the inner religiosity of the rabbi. While many of the findings of the Lenn Report presented at the Conference were beyond the scope of my thesis, his overall comments were quite compelling.

Lenn again highlighted certain findings from the section on the seminary student including the fact that 44% of the seminarians stated they were agnostic, and that only 4 % believed in God in more or less of a traditional Jewish sense. Less than half of the seminary

<sup>64</sup> Rabbi Joe Glaser, Report of the Executive Vice-President, CCAR Convention 1972. CCAR Yearbook page 16.

<sup>65</sup> CCAR Newsletter. July, 1972.



students planned to enter the pulpit rabbinate, and many seminarians were disenchanted with many aspects of Reform Judaism, especially the CCAR and the Hebrew Union College.<sup>66</sup>

Dr. Lenn spoke of the potential crisis that was present within Reform Judaism. Regardless of whether that crisis was real or artificial, Reform Judaism, as Dr. Lenn had discovered it, was in some state of "malaise". Since Dr. Lenn's explicit mandate from the Conference was not to present any solutions to the problems, just the data, Lenn concluded his remarks with a quote from Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, the newly elected President of the Hebrew Union College. Dr. Gottschalk stated that "Judaism thrives on dialectic, on confrontation, and on rebuttal."<sup>67</sup> Dr. Theodore Lenn's presentation at the 83rd annual CCAR Conference indeed served to bring forth just that.

The most vocal and concise dialectic and rebuttal occurred in the winter edition of the 1973 CCAR Journal. "Eight Afterthoughts on Lenn" was the lead section of the Journal in which a broad spectrum of involved individuals stated their comments and reactions to the Lenn Report. Many of the comments referred to the broader scope of the project, but several responses specifically explored and addressed the role and position of the seminarian.

The section began with Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, immediate Past-President of the CCAR, who had been involved with the project

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<sup>66</sup> Dr. Lenn, Research study on Reform Judaism presented at CCAR Conference reprinted in the CCAR Yearbook 1972.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 144 .

from the early stages. Rabbi Gittelsohn stated that Dr. Lenn showed seminarians to be more impatient and resentful than pulpit rabbis. With reference to the statement that Dr Lenn made regarding the "castigating and destructive comments that come forth from close to 50% of our seminarian sample,"<sup>68</sup> Rabbi Gittelsohn stated that he understood how the College-Institute had to serve as the scapegoat for students' opinions, but wondered where seminarians acquired their negative impressions of the Central Conference and the Union?

Rabbi Gittelsohn spoke openly and honestly about the struggle for power between the different organizations CCAR, UAHC and HUC-JIR and stated that the CCAR may have served as the "lightening rod" for much of the negative feelings and antagonism among students and rabbis. He concluded his explanation on the seminary student with the statement:

A new day of truly familial feeling has dawned among our three sponsoring bodies. In this respect, Lenn's conclusions may be thoroughly accurate for the generation he studied, but not at all predictive of the future.<sup>69</sup>

One of the most surprising respondents published in the CCAR Journal was that of David Eli Vorspan, the President of the HUC-JIR Student Body on the Cincinnati campus. He presented a view of the seminary student at the time who was caught between two phrases "not-interested and uninteresting". While in school, students seemed

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 319-320.

<sup>69</sup> Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, "The Voice of Every Member," CCAR Journal, Winter, 1973 p.6

to be "not interested" in participating in anything, and when the students would leave the school they would always say that the school was "uninteresting". He emphatically stated that there was a great morale problem on the Cincinnati Campus.

Most students find greater happiness berating HUC than in doing something about the situation! <sup>70</sup>

The situation at the College-Institute as Vorspan saw it was indeed filled with many deficiencies.

Little religious atmosphere, poorly developed curriculum, minimally required academic level, disastrous pedagogic technique ....One need only to look at the Lenn report to realize that HUC may be doing more harm than good. <sup>71</sup>

Vorspan stated that the main reason for this problem was the "Menial Student on Campus/Authoritarian Figure Off Campus Syndrome."<sup>72</sup> The seminary student was looked up to when teaching and leading a student congregation and then looked down upon by the HUC-JIR faculty. A student was called rabbi on the weekends and "kinderlach" during the week. As a result, each student had to make an abrupt psychological turn around each Monday from rabbi to student.<sup>73</sup>

Vorspan suggested more student involvement and student

<sup>70</sup>David Eli Vorspan, "Should Seminarians Share in the Blame?," CCAR Journal, Winter, 1973. p. 19

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p.20.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p.20.

initiated creativity on campus. He sensed a need for student-led programs that circumvented the "ills of the school." Yet, when the student body had initiated such ideas, they too had failed. It seemed that students at this time were focused on minimal involvement and passivity instead of action and participation.

Several members of the faculty of the College-Institute also published reactions to the Lenn Report. Dr. Sylvan Schwartzman, Professor of Education at the Cincinnati School ascertained that the vehemence expressed in the report did not correspond to the facts found within the Lenn Report:

HUC-JIR professors, it is claimed have no respect for their students, nor do they develop intimate friendships with them- and yet from my knowledge of many other schools, it is safe to say that no faculty concerns itself more with the personal welfare of the students than does the College-Institute. There is no limit to the help our students request and receive, or the counsel, hospitality, tutoring, or just plain *shmoos*-sessions our faculty provides.... Discounting an occasional unfortunate act by a very few faculty members (who are, after all, human) the facts just don't justify the vehemence expressed. <sup>74</sup>

While Dr. Schwartzman did not say that all was rosey in the ivory tower of the College-Institute, he saw a much greater problem at hand. He identified the overall failure of the movement to come up with a form of Judaism to which everyone could be fully committed. Schwartzman called it "the sense of a religious vacuum

<sup>74</sup> Sylvan Schwartzman's private response to Dr. Gottschalk. Later reprinted in CCAR Journal. Winter, 1973. p. 15.

to which (rabbis and seminary students) cannot possibly devote their lives".<sup>75</sup>

For Dr. Schwartzman, the problems that Dr. Lenn found within the College-Institute could not simply be solved by rearrangement of the curriculum. What was needed was a re-evaluation of the entire Reform movement itself.

Likewise, Cincinnati Human Relations professor Rabbi Robert Katz entitled his response published in the CCAR Journal "Seminary Malaise". Throughout his report, Katz raised questions on Lenn's research methods and the larger picture of the seminary student at the time. He acknowledged that it was extremely difficult to assess whether the "malaise" in the seminary was a result of the general religious situation in America or endemic to the College-Institute in particular.

Dr. Katz pointed out that much of Dr. Lenn's research was compiled at a time of great transition within the HUC-JIR community. Many new programs were being planned and implemented including, but not limited to, the Jerusalem program, the transition from grades to pass-fail markings, the elimination of the B.H.L. degree, student internships, and student participation on faculty and board committees.<sup>76</sup> Against this changing atmosphere of the College, Dr. Katz concluded:

Now that the College-Institute is moving rapidly to meet new conditions, some of the criticisms published in the

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p.16.

<sup>76</sup> Rabbi Robert Katz "Seminary Malaise" in CCAR Journal p. 12.



Lenn Report will be defused. Hopefully some of the so called malaise will be relieved through increasingly open and honest dialogue among alumni, faculty and students. <sup>77</sup>

In addition to the rebuttals found within the CCAR Journal, discussions took place on all levels and in all areas regarding the report. Dr. Lenn himself became a popular speaker at congregations around the country on the "Future of Reform Judaism". A note in the CCAR Newsletter of May 1973 stated that Dr. Ted Lenn "about the most knowledgeable man on the CCAR has been appearing on congregational platforms speaking about his study. Contact him to arrange a visit at his home address in Connecticut." <sup>78</sup>

In a personal interview I conducted with Dr. Lenn, he stated that he spoke at over a dozen synagogues around the country, mostly in the New England region. When the study was complete he had to resume his teaching duties and could not spare any more time for travel.<sup>79</sup> Other congregations arranged discussion groups about the study that included lay leaders, rabbis and professionals. A flyer for Wise Temple's Brotherhood discussion on the Lenn Report held on a Sunday afternoon at Plum Street Temple was deposited in the American Jewish Archives. That discussion was chaired by Dr. Robert Katz from the College-Institute

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> CCAR Newsletter, May, 1973.

<sup>79</sup> Personal phone call with Dr. Lenn on February 1st, 1995.

Indeed, even discussions were held at the College-Institute regarding Dr. Lenn's findings. The main meeting held on the Cincinnati Campus coincided with the CCAR Executive Board meeting and was held on October 19th, 1972.

It was stated right from the outset of the day-long discussion that much had changed in the Jewish World since the Lenn Study had been conducted during the 1969-70 school year. The purpose of the study was to provide input for the CCAR Committee on the Future of the Rabbinate. The study provided a mirror of self-examination and since its internal publication, the committee was hard at work deliberating the issues and publishing their findings.<sup>80</sup>

While much of the day-long discussion was centered on Lenn's findings, the over-arching theme was "whether the synagogue and Reform rabbinate would endure or perish?" It was at this discussion that Dr. Lenn suggested "that the section on seminary students was included to provide perspective on the rabbi, not as a comprehensive survey of students." <sup>81</sup>

While the newly elected president of the College-Institute, Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, did not publish a specific response to the Lenn Report, he did craft a sermon entitled "The Role of the Rabbi" that he delivered around the country when he was asked to speak of the current situation of the American rabbinate during this time period. Originally written for the UAHC Biennial on October 16, 1973, Dr. Gottschalk preached this sermon often, including the 1976 Ordination

<sup>80</sup> Summary of extended discussion at HUC. October 19th, 1972. Files from Office of the President. Used with permission.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.1 of the critique section.

Service in Cincinnati. In the sermon he referred to the Lenn Report indirectly. He stated:

A great deal of discussion and soul searching has taken place concerning the role of the rabbi and the role of the synagogue. Symposia, long range studies, learned papers, and scientific surveys are evidence of the earnestness with which the problems concerning the role of the synagogue and the role of the Rabbi (are addressed)--They are intertwined.

He continued:

This is not the place to comment in detail on the rich outpouring of questions and on the answers which have been proffered. To me it appears that the investigation, whether scientific or couched in terms of personal conviction and confession, so far has produced preponderantly a conformation rather than a solution of what has been called the malaise of rabbi and congregation. <sup>82</sup>

With this background firmly established, I now leave the Lenn Report and offer a look into what the rabbinate looks like today through the lens of my own research.

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<sup>82</sup> Dr. Alfred Gottschalk "The Role of the Rabbi" sermon written and delivered in 1973-4. From his personal files. Used with permission.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Method**

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study has been to explore the changing perspectives of the seminary student at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The first two chapters dealt with what the student of the Hebrew Union College was like in the late 1960's and early 1970's using the historical perspective of the Lenn Report.

In the coming chapter, I plan to detail the methods and results of my own research conducted in the Fall of 1994 regarding seminary students and rabbis. In the following chapters I will use this information to discuss the results of my findings and draw comparisons and conclusions around these two population samples.

My own desire for this project has been to conduct a primary research study on rabbinical students and current rabbis in the field. It has been my hope to look at these populations in terms of their personal characteristics, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. In using a survey I have been able to generalize about the many people in these populations, by studying only a few of them.

The survey allows us to "see" conditions beyond our direct experience. It enables us to repeatedly test and affirm or refine these statements of how people are similar to or

different from others in aspects of their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.<sup>83</sup>

After reading the Lenn Report and exploring the original questionnaire sent to rabbinic students during the 1969-1970 school year, I began to formulate some of my own questions for the seminary student of today. Some questions I selected were exact duplicates of Dr. Lenn's survey, and others were newly created to address key changes within our society.

The research approach I selected was a survey as opposed to interviews, small group studies, or field research. While there are advantages and disadvantages for all types of research, It seemed that for the specific information I wanted to gain, the survey appeared the best instrument. I knew the population I was trying to explore (rabbis and rabbinical students) and a short survey was the most cost-effective and efficient way to gain information which would be free of perceptual bias. When budgets are limited, mail surveys are regarded as the most inexpensive way to obtain the greatest amount of information.<sup>84</sup> Given this fact, this was the avenue I chose.

Once I selected a research method, I then developed the final questions and drafted them into the current shape and layout of the survey. Invaluable assistance was added by Dr. Linda Goldenhar, who served as a survey research consultant for the project. When

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<sup>83</sup>Survey Research 1963 p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p.23.



the survey was completed, I then pre-tested it on several participants to make sure that it was valid and cohesive. Ambiguous questions were then reworded and erroneous questions, eliminated.

The student population I targeted consisted of the three stateside campuses of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. During the 1994-1995 academic year, the total student enrollment of full-time students was 182.<sup>85</sup> Six additional students were on leaves of absence and were not included in the population sample. Because the student population size was manageable, a complete census or "total enumeration" was taken and this has yielded the most comprehensive results.

The survey designed for current rabbis in the field was developed in the following manner. Since I was looking at the differences between rabbinic students from the 1969-70 school year and those of today, I decided to explore the rabbis who had been ordained within that period of time to get an overall assessment of their actual experiences in the rabbinate.

A "purposive sample" of 132 rabbis was selected from over 700 men and women who had been ordained within the past 25 years from the Cincinnati and New York campuses. Four to six members of each ordination class were selected by my advisor, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus, and myself.

In a "purposive" sample, respondents are chosen deliberately

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<sup>85</sup> HUC Office of Admissions Student Rosters obtained and used by permission from the National Dean of Admissions of the College-Institute.

by knowing the type of people they are and where they are located.<sup>86</sup> This method was selected in hopes that the survey would get a high response rate from a varied sample that illustrated a variety of different rabbinic experiences.

The five-page, self-administered survey to students in New York and Los Angeles, and the two-page survey to rabbis in the field were mailed out with a cover letter signed by myself and Dr. Marcus on October 25, 1994. As an incentive for respondents to return the survey, a self-addressed, stamped envelope was also provided. A cut-off date of December 1st was selected for all responses to be returned via the United States Postal Service to the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.

Although the survey was exactly the same, a slightly different procedure was established for the students on the Cincinnati campus. In efforts to cut down on the cost of postage, surveys were hand delivered to each individual student via their campus mailbox on October 26th. A separate mailbox was created in the mailroom of the College for surveys to be returned. No additional encouragement for participation or specific survey explanations were made to Cincinnati students, since similar announcements were not able to be made to the students on campus in New York and Los Angeles.

Most surveys were returned by the December 1st cut off date. That deadline was extended until December 10th, to accommodate a few stragglers, but after that date, surveys received were not

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<sup>86</sup> Survey Research, p. 65.

included in the overall response rate. While responses were anonymous, there were questions that asked for the proposed year of ordination, campus currently attending, and gender. Responses were then categorized and stored into male and female sections, between the New York, Cincinnati and Los Angeles campuses, and further by ordination classes. Tabulations were then begun by hand during the month of December, and final tabulations were completed by the 1st of January, 1995.

The greatest unknown in conducting survey research is response rate and the ability to control who actually responds to a survey. Research shows that short questionnaires have a much higher return rate than long or moderately long surveys.<sup>87</sup> As a result, I kept both surveys short and deliberate, each one taking no more than 15-20 minutes at the most to complete.

From the outset I knew that my results would hinge on the rate of response. One of the books I consulted for the project Survey Research indicated:

Depending on the type of survey, mail returns will be as low as 10 percent for a general population sample and as high as 80 percent for a well motivated subsampling of the population. A 70 percent completion is extraordinary.<sup>88</sup>

With these numbers in mind, I set for my overall goal a 50% return rate for the project. I knew that if I could get 50% of the

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

students to respond, I would be able to have a large enough sample to generalize about the entire student population at the Hebrew Union College. I was less worried about my rabbinic return rate since it wasn't a random sample. I knew that I would not be able to use the findings to generalize about the entire rabbinic population. My suspicion was that a letter signed by Dr. Marcus would indeed be a very subtle incentive for rabbis to participate in the project.

### Results

Of the total of 182 surveys which were sent to students of the Hebrew Union College, 116 were returned on or before the due date for an overall return rate of 64%. Of the total student population, 102 or (56%) were male and 80 or (44%) were female. 61 or (60%) of the male students returned the surveys and 55 or (69%) of the female students returned completed surveys. Table 6 shows the breakdown by class and gender between each of the three stateside campuses:

**Table 6**  
**Survey Sample**

Campus: New York	Total Student Population 94-95				77		
Year of Ordination	Male		Female		Class Total	Response	%
1995	6	6	12	13	19	18	95%
1996	6	12	8	13	25	14	56%
1997	6	7	5	9	16	11	69%
1998	9	11	6	6	17	15	88%
Total	27	36	31	41	77	58	74%

**75% male response**

**76% female response**

<b>Campus: Cincinnati</b>		<b>Total Student population 94-95</b>				<b>79</b>	
Year of Ordination	Male		Female		Class Total--	Responses	%
1995	8	11	6	8	19	14	74%
1996	8	11	2	5	16	10	63%
1997	8	14	4	7	21	12	57%
1998	5	14	2	9	23	7	30%
Total	29	50	14	29	79	43	54.4%

**58 % male response      48% Female response**

<b>Campus: Los Angeles</b>		<b>Total Student Population 94-95</b>				<b>26</b>	
Year of Ordination	Male		Female		Class Total--	Responses	%
1997	9	1	3	3	12	4	33%
1998	7	4	7	7	14	11	79%
Total	16	5	10	10	26	15	58%

**31% male response      100% female response**

<b>Total student population</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>102 Male</b>	<b>80 Female</b>
<b>Surveys returned</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Total Response Rate</b>	<b>64% Total</b>	<b>60% male</b>	<b>69% female</b>

There were a total of 40 questions asked on the student survey. An entire copy of a blank survey can be found in Appendix A. The questions found on the survey can be broken down into several different sections, corresponding to the overarching themes of the project: general information, religious beliefs, professional goals and aspirations, and the students' perceptions of the Hebrew Union College.



### **General Information**

The majority of students at the Hebrew Union College are products of the Reform movement. Almost 8 out of 10 (77%) students were raised in Reform households. Conservative homes were the next most common with 14%, and almost 1 out of 10 students were raised in the category of "other" mostly converts to Judaism. Less than 1% of the students were raised in homes that were orthodox.

**Table 7**  
**Childhood Upbringing:**

Reform	Conservative	Orthodox	Other	
77%	14%	>1%	9%	N=116

Slightly more than 1 out of 10 rabbinic students today come from rabbinic families with a father as a rabbi. (We still have not had the first instance of a child who has a mother as a rabbi. Mother-in-law yes, but not mother.) Likewise, just 2 out of 10 students have someone else in their families who are rabbis, i.e. grandfathers, aunts, uncles or siblings.

**Table 8**  
**Rabbinic Families**

Was/is mother or father a Rabbi?	The first member in extended family to become a rabbi?
Yes 13%	Yes 78%
No 87%	No 22%
n = 116	

Slightly over half (5 out of 10) of the student population is single with the majority of those married doing so while attending rabbinical school. 4 out of 10 students are currently married and a small percentage are either engaged, divorced, or widowed. Only about 14% of the students currently have children.

**Table 9**  
**Marital Status and Family:**

Single	Married	Engaged	Divorced	Widowed	
55%	38%	4%	2%	1%	n=114

**Engaged or Married while at HUC.**

**Children**

Yes	No	Yes	No	
34%	64%	14%	86%	n=116

The majority of student currently enrolled at HUC-JIR did not proceed directly from College to Graduate School. 3/4 of the students (73%) took some time off and 1/4 (27%) came directly from undergraduate school to the College-Institute.

**Table 10**  
**Entering the College**

Entered HUC directly from College	27%
Took some time off	73%

More than half of the students enrolled at HUC-JIR asserted that the house in which they grew up was Pro-Zionist. Almost 1 in 10

students claimed that the house was not Pro-Zionist and more than 1/3 (34%) of the students stated that their home was indifferent regarding Israel. Almost 9 out of 10 (88%) students had been to Israel prior to the Jerusalem program.

When asked if they had considered living in Israel prior to the Jerusalem program, almost 6 out of 10 students answered in the affirmative with slight variations between the different schools. A larger percentage of male students would consider living in Israel after ordination than women students, and more than 1/3 of all the female students would not be interested in living in Israel at all.

**Table 11**  
**Attitudes about Israel**

Pro-Zionist home?				Visited Israel prior to HUC	
Yes	55%	No	9%	Yes	88%
Indifferent	34%	Not Certain	2%	No	12%

**Considered Living in Israel Prior to HUC**

HUC	Cincinnati	New York	Los Angeles	
Yes 57%	Yes 55%	Yes 69%	Yes 66%	
No 43%	No 45%	No 31%	No 34%	n=116

**Would Live in Israel in the Future**

	Most Definitely	Possibly	Not a chance
HUC	18%	56%	26%
Female	15%	49%	36%
Male	22%	62%	17%

A final question in the general information section dealt with birth order of rabbinical students. It would seem that a very small percentage, less than 1 in 20 students were only children. A higher number of female students, not quite half (46%) are the oldest in their families and slightly less, (44%) of the male students are youngest children. Overall, 4 students out of 10 are oldest in their families, 4 are youngest in their families and almost 2 are middle children.

**Table 12**  
**Birth Order**

HUC General		N=116	
41% oldest child	18% a middle child		
39% youngest child	3% only child		
Male Students		Female students	
34% oldest child	20% a middle child	46% oldest child	16% middle child
44% youngest child	2% only child	32% youngest child	5% only child

### **Religious Observance**

The next set of questions dealt with the current students' religious observance and belief in God. For the general College population, 1/3 of the students keep kosher all of the time. Less than 1/3 only keep kosher in their homes, and almost 2/5th of the students do not keep kosher at all. There were considerable differences between the Cincinnati and New York campuses. In New York, slightly more than 2/5th (44%) keep kosher all of the time, and (27%) keep kosher in their homes and (28%) do not keep kosher at

all. In Cincinnati, 1/4 (24%) keep kosher all of the time, 1/4 (25%) keep kosher in their homes and over 1/2 (51%) do not keep kosher at all.

**Table 13**  
**Level of Kashrut**

<b>HUC-JIR</b>		<b>n=116</b>
36%		keep kosher all the time
27%		keep kosher in home
37%		do not keep kosher
<b>New York Students</b>		<b>n = 77</b>
44%		keep kosher all the time
28%		keep kosher in home
28%		do not keep kosher
<b>Cincinnati Students</b>		<b>n = 79</b>
24%		keep kosher all the time
24%		keep kosher in my home
51%		do not keep kosher

Prayer was the next area of exploration. Almost 7 out of 10 (69%) students feel that prayer is extremely important due to the fact that it furnishes a close bond with other Jews and/or with God. 2 out of 10 students (22%) said that prayers satisfy a personal need but does not happen often. Almost one in 10 (9%) said that prayers are important but they have become too familiar to help them. A small percentage admit that prayers mean little or nothing to them. (See Table 14). Similarly, when asked how often students pray privately, almost 1 in 10 stated that they never pray privately, 2 in



10 do so only on special occasions, over 3 in 10 do so several times a week. 1/4 or (26%) pray privately each and every day. (See Table 15)

**Table 14**  
**Importance of Prayer**

69%	Prayers are extremely important, close bond with other Jews and/or with God.
22%	Sometimes they satisfy a personal need, but not often.
8%	Prayers are important, but they are too familiar to help as much.
2%	Prayers mean little or nothing
N=116	

**Table 15**  
**Frequency of Private Prayer** N=112

9%	18%	15%	31%	26%
Seldom or never	On special occasions	Once a week	Several times a week	Everyday

Belief in God is a difficult question to assess in a survey. When I asked it of the HUC population, an overwhelming 3/4 (77%) stated that they believe in God in a "more or less traditional Judaic sense, modified by their own views of what God is and what God stands for." 1 in 10 or (10%) believe in God in strictly a "traditional" Judaic/Jewish sense, and the remainder of the student population ranged from still searching for God, to being agnostic.

**Table 16**  
**Belief in God**

77%	I believe in God in a more or less traditional Judaic sense modified by my own views of what God is, what God stands for, etc.	
10%	I believe in God in a more or less traditional Judaic sense.	
5%	My belief in God has very little in common with traditional Judaic belief.	
3%	I am probably agnostic, but find it difficult to admit it.	
3%	I am still searching.	1% I simply do not believe in God.
1%	I am an agnostic..	0% I am an atheist
N=115		

Within the realm of personal observance, I asked a question regarding the use of gender sensitive language, and if the student changes the language of the prayerbook. Almost 2/3 (62%) of the college community always changes the language of the prayers and an additional 1/4 (23%) does so only when leading services. One in 10 students (9%) never changes the language of prayers. Again there are discrepancies between the different campuses and between males and females on this issue. Almost 7 of 10 (69%) women always change the language while only 1/2 (54%) of the men do so. A much larger percentage of Los Angeles students always change language, and nearly 1/5th (17%) of all Cincinnati students never change the language. See Table 17 for a complete analysis:

**Table 17**  
**Changing Language to Make it Gender Neutral**

	Always	Only when leading services	Only in private prayer	Never	Not sure
HUC	62%	23%	4%	9%	2%
Cin	43%	27%	5%	17%	7%
NY	68%	25%	3.5%	3.5%	
LA	87%	13%			n=116
Male	54%	30%	2%	12%	2%
Female	69%	18%	5%	4%	4%

The final question within this section deals with intermarriage and the breakdown of students currently enrolled in the College who would and would not consider performing intermarriage without prior conversion. For the overall school population, 2/3 (66%) of the students would not perform them. 1/4 (25%) would perform them only under specific conditions, 1/20th (5%) would perform them without any questions. 3% are still unsure and 1% would perform them only for synagogue members.

Again there is a difference between the Cincinnati and New York campuses. In New York, 3/4 (75%) of the students would not perform intermarriages and 1/4 (24%) would perform them only under specific circumstances. In Cincinnati, almost 1/10th (9%) of the student population would perform them without any question, 2/3rds (66%) would not perform them at all, and 1/5th (21%) would perform them only under special conditions.

**Table 18**  
**Performance of Intermarriage**

<b>All of HUC</b>	<b>New York Students</b>	<b>Cincinnati</b>	<b>n=116</b>
5% will perform them.	0% will perform them.	9% will perform them.	
1% will for Temple member.	1% will for Temple member.	0% will for Temple member.	
25% will only under specific conditions.	24% will only under specific conditions.	21% will only under specific conditions.	
66% will not perform them.	75% will not perform them.	65% will not perform them.	
3% Unsure		5% Unsure	

### **Role of the Rabbi**

The third overarching theme throughout the survey dealt with the students' perceptions of their rabbinate and their individual understanding of the role of the Rabbi. Almost 1/3 (29%) of the students' first thoughts of being a rabbi occurred during childhood. Almost 1/4 (23%) of the students thought of the rabbinate during high school. Another 1/4 (23%) first thought of the rabbinate during college. Over 1/3 (35%) of the students made their final decision either in college or after working in some other field (30%). 1/5 (20%) made their decision after college.

**Table 19**  
**Decisions on becoming a Rabbi**

	First thought	Final decision
As a child	29%	1 %
During high school	23%	7 %
During college	23%	35 %
After college	6%	20 %
After working in another field	14%	30 %
After visiting Israel	3%	3 %
Other	2%	4% <span style="float: right;">n=116</span>

After 5 years of schooling at the College-Institute, students have many choices to pursue with regard to employment. Students see themselves spending the majority of their careers in the following types of positions. 2/3 (65%) of those enrolled at the College today who answered my survey envision themselves in the congregational rabbinate. In New York that number is slightly over 1/2 (55%) and in Cincinnati that number swells to almost 3/4th (74%). Organizational work is where 13% of the general HUC-JIR population pictures itself, slightly higher in New York, and 1 out of 10 (9%) students see themselves in teaching careers. Other small percentages are in chaplaincy positions, educational work and "other" types of rabbinic work.



**Table 20**  
**Expectations for Rabbinical Career**

Position	General HUC	New York	Cincinnati
Congregation	65%	55%	74%
Organization	13%	18%	7%
Teaching career	9%	12%	7%
Chaplaincy	3%	3%	2%
Educational work	8%	9%	7%
Other	1%	3%	3%

N=115

In a more specific question, students after ordination see themselves working in the following positions: 1/2 (50%) of the students are interested in assistantships and almost 1/4 of the students are interested in solo congregations. The remaining 1/4 of the population plans to work in various settings including, but not limited to Hillels, camp positions, graduate school, teaching positions, Jewish agency work, education, interfaith work and World Union work. With the exception of Assistantships (New York, 45%; Los Angeles, 40%; and Cincinnati, 63%) all three schools scored much the same in all the variety of other types of positions.

**Table 21**  
**Positions After Ordination**

50%	Assistantships HUC	n=116	(LA 40%) ( New York 45%) (Cincinnati 63%)
23%			Solo Congregation
2%			HUC Administration
4 %			Camp Director
2%			UAHC Position
3 %			Graduate school
8%			Hillel work
2 %			Chaplaincy
3%			Full time teaching
2%			Jewish Agency work
Other 3%			Education and Interfaith Work

On the following page, Table 22 illustrates the rank order assessment between what the students feel a rabbi should do and what the students themselves look forward to doing when they become a rabbi. Students feel a rabbi's major priorities include pastoral functions, religious school teaching, priestly functions, and being a representative to the non-Jewish community. Students look forward to priestly functions the most, followed by adult education, pastoral visitation and then religious school education.

**Table 22**  
**Rank Order Assessment on What the Rabbi**  
**Should Do and What Students Look Forward to Doing**

A Rabbi should do this	What students look forward to most
Pastoral visitation	Priestly functions
Religious school teacher	Adult Education teacher
Priestly functions	Pastoral visitation
Representative to the Jewish Community	Religious School teacher
Adult Education teacher	Counseling
Counseling	Representative to the Jewish Community
Social Action	Social Action
Preacher	Scholar
Scholar	Preacher
Work with Synagogue auxiliaries	Representative to Non Jewish Community
Representative to Non Jewish Community	Writer
Administrator	Work with Synagogue auxiliaries
Youth group leader	Youth group leader
Fundraiser	Administrator
Writer	Radio and TV
Radio and TV	Fundraiser

n=114

The final question within this section deals with the reasons behind the students' choice of the rabbinate. When asked if students chose the rabbinate because the rabbi represented a significantly powerful figure, almost 1/3 (31%) of the students identified closely or somewhat closely with that answer, while 2/3 (69%) did not identify at all with that reason. When asked if the reason for entering the rabbinate stemmed from an intense belief in God and

the desire to be a teacher, 4/5th (80%) of the students identified at least somewhat closely to that reason, while 1/5 (20%) did not. As an occupation to "do my own thing", 4/5th (80%) of the students identified at least somewhat closely to that reason while 1/5 (20%) did not.

The greatest number of students (90%) answered that the reason most closely akin to their decision to enter the rabbinate was that "...they like people and the rabbinate provides the maximum opportunities to serve humankind".

**Table 23**  
**Why Seminary Students Chose the Rabbinate as a Career?**

	<b>Identify</b>	<b>Not at All</b>
"As a occupation it offered me the most opportunity to 'do my own thing'"	80%	20%
"I like people and the rabbinate provided maximum opportunities to serve my fellow-man."	90%	10%
"My intense belief in God and in Judaism has led me to be a teacher unto my People."	81%	19%
"It was the image of the rabbi as scholar, teacher and community leader that attracted me most."	82%	18%
"When I saw rabbis in the pulpit, they seemed to me to represent significant, powerful figures."	31%	69%

## Attitudes Toward Hebrew Union College

The final theme in the survey was the exploration of the students' attitudes towards The Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. For the overall College community, 1 out of 10 (9%) students felt that the professional courses offered at the College were excellent. 4 out of 10 (40%) students thought that they were good and the same amount thought that they were fair. Slightly more than 1 of 10 (12%) felt that the professional courses were poor and 3% had not decided. When investigated among the different campuses, more than 1/3 (36%) of the Los Angeles students feel that courses at that campus are excellent. More than 1/2 of the students in Cincinnati view their professional courses as fair and almost 1/2 (47%) state that in New York, the professional courses are good. Professional courses include, Practical Rabbinics, Education, and Homiletics.

**Table 24**  
**Professional Courses at HUC-JIR**

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Undecided	
HUC	9%	38%	38%	12%	3%	
LA	36%	36%	22%	0%	7%	
NY	10%	47%	31%	10%	1%	
Cin	0%	28%	52%	19%	1%	n=116

When compared with the professional courses, rabbinical courses like Bible and Midrash are considered better by well over



1/2 (57%) of the student population. Around 1/4 (27%) of the students stated that they are about the same. In Cincinnati, almost 2/3 of the students (63%) consider the rabbinical courses better.

**Table 25**  
**Rabbinical courses**

	Better	About the same	Worse	Undecided	Can't compare
HUC	57%	27%	5%	2%	9%
LA	40%	33%	7%	7%	13%
NY	59%	26%	4%	0%	11%
Cin	63%	26%	4%	4%	4%

In exploring student/faculty relationships, only 4% of the school population stated that they have "close and intimate" relationships with the faculty. However 1/4 (26%) of the students in Los Angeles do feel as if they have close and intimate relationships with the faculty. 1/3 (34.5%) of the students stated that some relationships are intimate and another 1/3 (34.5%) stated that they only have a few relationships that are intimate. 20% stated that they have no intimate relationships with the faculty. That number rises to 30% on the Cincinnati Campus, with 0% of the students reporting that they have intimate and personal relationships with the faculty there.

**Table 26**  
**Student-Faculty Relationships**

	HUC n=116	LA n=15	CIN n=43	NY n=58
Intimate	4%	26%	0%	2%
Some Intimate	34.5%	60%	26%	34%
only a few	34.5%	7%	37%	40%
No intimate	20%	7%	30%	17%
Undecided	7%	0%	7%	9%

When it comes to the selection of which Campus of the College-Institute to attend, 4/5th of the students (80%) were able to attend the campus of their choice. The major reasons for choosing the different campuses varied. 86% of those who chose Cincinnati cited "cost of living" as a major reason for selecting the campus. 42% cited geographic location, 30% cited proximity to family, and 21% cited spousal employment. In New York, 90% stated that the campus was their first preference and over half of the students cited proximity to family (53%) and geographic location (52%) as the main reasons for attending that campus. Almost 1/3 (30%) state that they chose New York for the varied work experience it offers.

100% of the students who responded from Los Angeles stated that the LA campus was their first preference and nearly 1/2 (47%) cited the faculty and the geographic location (47%) as the primary reasons for attending school there. It should also be noted that several students indicated that they selected the LA campus, not for family proximity, but rather to be further away from family.

Table 27

Reasons for Choosing Campus			
New York	Los Angeles	Cincinnati	First Preference
0% Cost of living	7% Cost of living	86% Cost of living	<b>Cincinnati</b>
53% Proximity to family	33% Proximity to family	30% Proximity to family	80% Yes 20% No
24% Spouse	0% Spouse	21% Spouse	<b>New York</b>
Employment	Employment	Employment	90% Yes 10% No
52% Geographic location	47% Geographic location	42% Geographic location	<b>Los Angeles</b>
29% Work experience	40% Work experience	12% Work experience	100% yes 0% No
29% Faculty	47% Faculty	16% Faculty	

The final issue I would like to explore is the curriculum at the College-Institute. In an alphabetical listing from the course catalogues, I had the students assess which courses were considered "very important". The top six courses selected in order were: Bible, Hebrew, Liturgy, Talmud, History, and Theology. The middle six courses were, Jewish Religious Thought, Midrash, Homiletics, Commentaries, Education, and Human Relations. The bottom six courses were, Philosophy, History of Reform, Codes, Comparative Religions, Speech, and Jewish Music.

**Table 28**  
**HUC-JIR Curriculum**  
**Rank Order Assessment by Seminarians**

Bible 94%	Jewish Thought 66%	Philosophy 55%
Hebrew 87%	Midrash 64%	Reform History 50%
Liturgy 83%	Homiletics 58%	Codes 43%
Talmud 70%	Commentaries 58%	Comparative Rel 37%
History 70%	Education 55%	Speech 32%
Theology 67%	Human Relations 55%	Jewish Music 12%

While there were other questions asked on the survey, their responses were not useful for this project. Having now presented my detailed methods and results, I would now like to explore the issues that rabbis in the field put forth as a reflection of the present state of the rabbinate. I will then discuss the results of this research in connection with the historical perspective of the Lenn Report and in relation to the present state of the rabbinate.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Rabbinic Responses**

The intrinsic goal of the surveys that were sent out to rabbis in the field was to obtain a sense of the issues and beliefs that rabbis were currently grappling with each and every day. The sample was drawn from members of the ordination classes from the past 25 years; most being ordained from the Cincinnati School. A total of 132 surveys were sent out. 73 of them were returned with the information filled out properly. 3 surveys were returned incomplete, with notes from the rabbis stating that they were not qualified, or were too busy to complete the study. 4 surveys were returned after the material was compiled and processed

The returns from this survey cannot be used for statistical analysis, since it was a selected and purposive sample, but they can be used to indicate the issues most on the minds of rabbis in the field. As a result, I will present some of the findings that correspond to the questions asked of the rabbinical school population. Unfortunately, due to space limitations, I can not include all of the responses that were received, but I was greatly impressed with the quality of results received from almost 60% of the rabbinic population sampled. Several rabbis wrote special remarks on their



surveys to Dr. Marcus and thanked me for providing them the opportunity to think about their own rabbinate. While I would like to think that the high return rate was the result of a wonderfully crafted survey instrument and the desire for rabbis to reflect on their chosen profession, the exceptionally high return rate could have been a result of the reputation, power and respect Dr. Marcus yields as the honorary president of the CCAR and the teacher par excellence for nearly 75 years at the Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College. With his signature on the cover letter, rabbis felt a stronger connection to the project, and thus, were compelled to reply.

According to the rabbis who answered the survey, the most dramatic changes that have occurred during their professional careers in the rabbinate over the past 25 years were the ordination of women, the return to tradition, the rise of intermarriage, and the diminished respect for the rabbi: Table 29 has the complete listing of the major changes within the rabbinate as indicated by rabbis in the field.

**Table 29**  
**Rank Order Assessment of Changes in the Rabbinate**  
**Over the Past 25 years**

1. The ordination and acceptance of women rabbis and their contribution to the rabbinate.
2. The decreasing membership of congregations and the lack of advancements within rabbinic positions.
3. The return to tradition for rabbis and congregations.
4. The rise of intermarriages and the repercussions that it has had in the Synagogue.
5. The lack of automatic respect and the diminished status of the Rabbi.
6. The renewed spiritual search of the Rabbi.
7. The decline of personal and professional morality of the Rabbi.
8. The acceptance of openly gay and lesbian rabbis.
9. The variety of rabbinical experiences available beyond the congregation.
10. The changing nature and stress on rabbinic families.

It was not at all surprising to find that the greatest number of rabbis stated that the ordination of women rabbis was the most significant change occurring in the rabbinate. When Dr. Lenn conducted his survey, not one women had ever been ordained and only 1 was enrolled in the rabbinic program at the time.<sup>89</sup> The second salient change highlighted by rabbis was the decrease of rabbinic positions and the lack of advancement for rabbis

A 1981 Ordinee wrote:

One of the main changes in the rabbinate is the increasing percentage of women rabbis. While this change has not affected all congregations, the effects are noticeable at regional and national conventions as well as in the liturgy created by the CCAR. It is obvious that the new gender sensitive prayerbooks are a function of the increased presence of women in "on the pulpit" leadership.

<sup>89</sup> Admissions office files. Used with permission.

The rabbi continued:

A second change in the rabbinate is the decreased number of opportunities for movement within the rabbinate. The Placement Director has constantly been saying that there are fewer jobs available for those rabbis who would like to move up to higher positions.

The past 25 years have certainly brought a return to tradition for rabbis and their congregations. Even with the high influx of intermarried couples and non-Jews associated with the synagogue, there still has been a desire for increased tradition.

The role and status of the rabbi has changed dramatically over the past 25 years as well. This was best expressed in the response of a 1980 Cincinnati ordinee who stated:

When I grew up the rabbi ruled the congregation with a strength of vision and powerful management that made him the kingpin of the congregation. The rabbi was next to God!!! I remember Rabbi Bob Kahn of Houston telling the story of his using the urinal in the temple bathroom and a little boy was also going to the bathroom. After finishing, as they left the little boy ran out to his parents and said: Mommy, Daddy, you'll never believe this, I just pee peed next to God!" That role of the Rabbi as the figure of ultimate respect has changed dramatically in these past years, where the rabbi is now "one of the gang" rather than an unapproachable icon.

Equally powerful as the role of the rabbi, the rabbis' decline of personal and professional morality has frequently been highlighted as a current issue in the field. Reflections on this topic were best expressed by this 1984 ordinee:

Unfortunately, there is much more (and more public) violation of ethical standards which demeans the integrity of every rabbi!

And finally this 1974 ordinee seemed to touch upon many of the changes that have occurred within the rabbinate when he stated:

The emphasis has changed from ethnicity (Jewish power) to spirituality. Also the growth of outreach as intermarriage comes out of the closet. Speaking of closets, AIDS, gay congregations and the ordination of gay rabbis have all made changes for the better.

When asked whether the rabbis' belief in God had appreciably changed since their days at HUC-JIR, the answers were as varied as the rabbis themselves. Generally it would seem that those rabbis out of rabbinical school less than 10 years have not had as much of a change in theology and God concept than those rabbis who have been out more than 10 years. Milestone events like having children, the death of a family member, or "peak" experiences with congregants in pastoral settings were highlighted as having had profound effects on numerous individual rabbis' theologies. A 1981 Ordinee stressed:

I viewed God mainly as creator and listener, but now I see God as a healer and a source of strength. I do not believe that God can heal where there is no chance of healing, but I have come to emphasize the teachings of Judaism that illustrate how a positive attitude can help in the healing process.

Several rabbis indicated that they address the concept of God today, but never did so as a student at the College. Two ordinees, one from 1971, the other from 1981, stated respectively:

I address God today, something I rarely did at HUC. For me God used to be the subject of theological discussions, purely philosophical. Today, God is the outcome of my confrontation with Jewish activities: Study, worship, and involvement with people.

When I was a student at HUC we never talked about God or did anything to enhance our personal belief in God. Our focus was not even on the "how to" aspects of Jewish living since they were not emphasized in school.

Other rabbis also indicated that while their views of God have not changed a great deal, life and new experiences have greatly enhanced their beliefs as they have grown and matured. This 1981 ordinee expressed the process best:

I had particular beliefs (in school) but not the whole picture. Slowly I find myself fitting individual beliefs into a theology.

A great number of rabbis also stated that they are more comfortable talking about God from the pulpit and have become more aware of God's presence in their lives and in the lives of their congregants than ever before. In fact, they state that people want to hear more and more about God. This 1993 ordinee aptly stated:

People are more interested in God than I realized. They are equally as confused and angry.



In terms of the preparation provided by the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, rabbis in the field have both positive and negative comments to say about the institution that ordained them. While there was no overwhelming consensus in either direction, ordinees of the past ten years are much more positive about the education they received at the College than those ordained in an earlier generation. Those who answered that the College did prepare them for the rabbinate often cited the fine academic education they received while being a student there. Many spoke of the "building blocks" that the school provided them and the necessary "tools" that were obtained while in residence in either New York or Cincinnati. This 1982 Ordinee stated:

Yes, the college curriculum provided me with a proficiency in Hebrew, with a broad exposure to Judaism's classical texts as well as skills for handling the pastoral aspects of the rabbinate.

A 1987 ordinee stated:

...HUC couldn't hope to teach all the necessary skills if they had students for 50 years. But they gave me the significant tools and the significant connections, and then it was up to me.

The majority of those who did not think that the college adequately prepared them for the rabbinate cited the lack of practical skills as the major area where the college was lacking. This sentiment spanned the spectrum of the generations.

A 1974 Ordinee stated:

Academically the college was fine-given the mind I gave them to work with. There was nowhere near enough emphasis on what really matters most not the Kamatz Katan, but human hurt, doubt, love etc. Much more could have been done to prepare us to interface as preachers, teachers and pastors to the human predicament.

The same sentiment was also expressed by a 1994 ordinee recently hired in a large suburban congregation:

There should be even more emphasis on practical rabbinics by someone who has been doing it. I have not heard one congregant ask me about Talmud or Mishnah since I got here, but there have been massive amounts of counseling, sermons, funerals, weddings.... Real World stuff.

The complexity of this issue was best summed up by a 1981 Ordinee who stated:

I cannot answer that question. Even if the curriculum were perfect the world changes too fast to expect the college to keep up. In addition, each rabbinate is different. I got the tools that I needed to complete my education. That is important. I also have relationships with my teachers that could never happen anywhere else. They remain my teachers.

In exploring what the 3 or 4 most critical skills a rabbinical student needs to develop while in school, the rabbis that were surveyed offered a host of suggestions on what they might be. Table 30 is a summary of the top ten skills that were most commonly mentioned by rabbis as necessary in the rabbinate.

**Table 30**  
**Rank Order Assessment of Critical Skills Needed by**  
**Seminary Students**

1. Familiarity with study of texts and Jewish sources
2. Communication skills: Effective speaking and writing
3. Listening skills: How to listen and hear what people are saying
4. Counseling and human caring skills such as empathy
5. Love of teaching and learning
6. Knowledge of Hebrew ....Rabbinic. Modern and Classical
7. Organizational and management skills
8. Creativity
9. Flexibility
10. Positive self esteem

While most rabbis offered lists with specific skills, several rabbis wrote more elaborate statements like this 1980 ordinee:

The ability to listen rather than talk. Open mindedness, and the ability to grow and change. An ability to perceive change. J,E,P,D don't really matter, preaching is not as important as teaching. A knowledge of Judaism but with the ability to inspire others, to seek Jewish learning, not to be impressed with the rabbi's personal knowledge.

Other rabbis used this question to offer somewhat true and funny practical suggestions of skills that are of utmost importance in the rabbinate. They are:

Learn to smile even though you are churning inside!!!

Learn to survive the darkside of synagogue politics.

Learn how to get out of your own way

Remember, many things from school will never be used again.

Be a mensch, but if you don't know that by the time you start HUC it is too late.

When asked about second thoughts on choosing the rabbinate, the overall feeling among the survey respondents was one of comfort. Just counting numbers, well over half of the rabbis answered the question with a no, indicating that there seemed to be a sense of job satisfaction among rabbis. While some rabbis admit to never having a second thought of leaving, others indicate "fleeting" or occasional feelings of regret regarding their decision. A small percentage indicated that they often have thoughts of leaving the rabbinate due to the high stress and pressures of the position.

A common theme that was mentioned by several rabbis was the fact that while they had thought about leaving congregational work, they never thought of leaving the rabbinate overall. The following are selected comments regarding second thoughts on the rabbinate:

From 1970:

Often it is difficult to live life as a rabbi with a balance between home and family and the incessant demands of work.

From 1973:

No, the rabbinate has been very fulfilling to me. I love the variety of skills it requires, the challenges it presents, the people contact, and the opportunity for continuous growth.

From 1981:

I think about leaving the rabbinate everyday. That is what keeps it so fresh.

From 1985:

No one can prepare you for "life in the fishbowl". Every member feels they have a right to judge and comment on anything you do or say.

And finally from 1988:

Everyone has pressing second thoughts on bad days after bad board meetings. Still I'm glad I became a rabbi. My biggest complaint is that I don't get enough time out doors. It's tough sitting at a desk on a beautiful day when the mountains and rivers beckon.

These findings are likewise supported by the book *Rabbi* by Murray Polner. In the conclusion of the book he writes:

They (rabbis and seminarians) tend to complain too much in their publications and at their conventions, but I suspect that they are no more or less dissatisfied with their profession than their peers in other fields. Indeed their spirit seems uncommonly high; amazingly, an incredibly large number of them have elected to remain in the rabbinate.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed there are a great number of fulfilling aspects of the rabbinate, and each survey respondent offered up their suggestions

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<sup>90</sup> Polner in *Rabbi* p. 208-209.



on what they might be. While responses were quite diverse, several themes ran through their comments about what aspects are special and fulfilling in the rabbinate today. These are ranked in order from greatest to least occurrences.

**Table 31**  
**Rank Order Assessment of Most Fulfilling Aspects**

1. Helping people and counseling them.
2. Teaching and transmitting Judaism to all types of people.
3. Participation in life cycle events both "simchas and sorrows".
4. Creating and implementing programs to advance the Jewish cause.
5. Participation in community activities.
6. The encouragement of religious growth.
7. Being able personally grow as a Jew.
8. Working with and watching children grow.
9. Writing and preaching sermons, conveying a meaningful message.
10. Ability to study and learn from classical sources.

A great many of the responses were centered around the concept of helping people, being with people and having an influence on their lives at "peak" experiences. The most fulfilling aspects of the rabbinate were eloquently stated by a 1980 Ordinee:

There are few professions where everything one does impacts the lives of others in a meaningful way; be it life cycle events, personal kindness, or even off hand remarks. What the rabbi says and what the rabbi does is extremely precious in the eyes and in the lives of our congregants.

Likewise, when exploring the obstacles that currently face rabbis out in the field, the major issue they seem to be grappling with is the concept of time, and the fact that there is simply not enough of it. This is true especially when it comes to time for the family needs of the rabbis. It seems difficult to balance between the personal needs of the rabbi and the needs of the congregation. The almost obsession with time was mentioned by well over 1/2 of the rabbis surveyed. The following are a list of obstacles that were mentioned most often by our sample population.

**Table 32**  
**Obstacles within the Rabbinate**

1. Time limitations with regard to family.
2. Finding time and making sure that there is enough of it.
3. Financial/salary obstacles that make financial situation pressurized.
4. Congregational/Board politics.
5. The inability to say no.
6. Insecurity and competition of Senior Rabbis and other rabbinic colleagues.
7. Isolation, both geographic and spiritual.
8. Not being able to meet the needs of each individual congregant.

While other obstacles were also highlighted, these were the most common themes mentioned. Several comments further explicate some of the points that were mentioned:

A 1980 Ordinee stated:

For me the greatest obstacles are being a workaholic and putting one's professional or congregational duties above one's personal time, one's family time, one's spouse, or one's children. The demands of a congregation or community are never-ending and I have not been very successful in this effort although I strive to do better.

This 1984 ordinee stated:

The frustration for me comes from the reality that no matter how many good things are done, it is only the complaints that come to the board so those are what they evaluate.

The final question I would like to explore in this section is the attempt to solicit from rabbis in the field what they see as the definition of what creates a successful rabbinate. The major areas that were stressed most often include scholarship, the love of learning and teaching, the ability to listen, and not just talk and a sense of balance, in personal and family life. People spoke of flexibility; the ability to respond quickly to the needs of the congregation and the community, and creativity in what rabbis say and do. Other elements mentioned include personal fulfillment, sharing of vision, concern for others, and empowering others to learn and to grow personally and Jewishly. The following are samples of what the rabbis articulated regarding success:

A 1992 ordinee stated:

Scholarship of any type. Judaic or non-judaic learning is the key to good teaching and preaching. A rabbi must walk the walk and talk the talk. Deeds of honesty, goodness, and

integrity are important factors Leadership and communication skills are a must.

A 1988 Ordinee stated:

A sense of humor is most important. If I couldn't laugh at things, then I'd be weeping half the time.

A 1980 Ordinee stated:

Convictions as to what you believe but an open mind in understanding that many will choose to believe differently from yourself.

A 1977 Ordinee stated:

Contentment: Contentment with ones own family. Contentment with oneself and contentment with improving the job that one has and throwing away the last page of the CCAR Bulletin with Placement News.

And finally from 1974:

The proof of a successful rabbinate is in family. Raising Jewish children who are enthusiastically Jewish and who, having seen dad in his underwear in good times and bad, still say, "My dad is a great rabbi and I'm proud of both him and mom."

Having explored two seminary population, as well as some of issues facing rabbis today we can now interpret the data of the surveys to assess how the profile of the seminarian has changed over the last two decades and what this implies for the future rabbinic population.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion of Results**

To this point I have systematically presented the findings of Dr. Lenn in the early 1970's and the findings of the research I conducted in the fall of 1994. I would now like to discuss my findings as they relate to the rabbinate and the student at HUC-JIR, and hopefully compare them, when possible, to the findings of Dr. Lenn.

Unlike Dr. Lenn, who received a very poor response rate (30%) from a population vehemently opposed to the project, the response rate and comments received in my research were, for the most part, positive. A total response rate of 64% from the three stateside campuses was beyond my expectations. However, it should be noted that it was the Cincinnati campus that yielded the lowest response rate (54.5%). The low return rate from Cincinnati could be a result of a different survey return procedure, which did not include postage, and had students receiving and returning their surveys via the student mail. This might have caused the survey to have a weaker impact than for students who received it in the mail at home. It is noted that at least 4 Cincinnati surveys were immediately discarded in the mailroom recycling bin as the students emptied their mail boxes on the day the surveys were delivered.

Many surveys did include very positive feedback and



encouragement for the project. Numerous students thanked me for undertaking the project and several included their names, asking for copies of my results when the project is completed. Likewise, several critical notes were also received that raised objection to the wording of some questions and the research methodology used in the survey. Other comments challenged the information I had requested. One New York student returned a blank survey and wrote:

To me the idea of a survey of the students of a school such as this one, where the student body is very small makes little sense. There is no way to ask the questions you have asked and keep the responses anonymous. I can't imagine responding to some of the questions asked when, there is no anonymity.

Another New York student from the same class answered the survey but then responded:

The design of this questionnaire does not begin to plumb where I am, where I came from (Roman Catholic) and what I hope my future holds. It seems to be written for young kids fresh out of school with nary a thought in their heads. I suggest you try again.

In this discussion section I plan to follow the same topic areas as the research method section and compare and contrast the results regarding the two targeted seminary populations looking at general information, religious beliefs, the role of the rabbi, and students' attitudes toward the Hebrew Union College.

### **General Information**

Students in the early 1970's came from highly educated upper middle class homes with the average age of the students just under 25 years of age. According to the National Office of Admissions, the average age of students upon admission to the College-Institute today has risen. The average age is currently 27.3 of those students currently accepted into the College program at the time of admission.<sup>91</sup>

Another topic of interest surrounds the issue of gender in the rabbinate. In 1972 the first female, Sally Priesand, was ordained at the Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Priesand was first accepted to the College-Institute in 1963 as a "student of special status." Her admissions file indicated that the "special status" was due to the fact that she could not live in an all male dormitory and had to receive special dispensation.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, Rabbi Priesand was a student at the time Dr. Lenn conducted his research. Yet women in the seminary were such a novel idea that of the 140 questions that Dr. Lenn asked of the seminary student, there were no questions that even probed the gender of the respondent. Thus, it

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<sup>91</sup> Rabbinical School Admission Statistics 1981-1992; prepared by The National Office of Admissions, January 1972.

<sup>92</sup> Admissions file of Sally Priesand researched by Lisa Frankel of the National Office of Admissions.

seems as if gender did not even play a role in Dr. Lenn's questionnaire.

Today, on the other hand, of the total population of 182 students at the College-Institute, 80 (44%) is female. As was indicated by the rabbis in the field, the phenomenon of women in the rabbinate has indeed been the most dramatic change within the profession over the past 2 decades.

Regarding time of entry into rabbinical school, the different responses were also significant. In 1970 when Dr. Lenn performed his research, 77% of the students entered HUC directly from College. My results show that only 27% of students entered HUC directly from school and 73% of the students took off some time before HUC. While the majority of students said they had taken off between 1 and 2 years, there are numerous students who waited upwards of 10 years before admission.

This may indicate that a more mature student is entering the seminary; one who may in fact be better prepared to deal with the pressures of working life upon graduation.

These three findings: 1.) increased women in seminary, 2.) increased age of the seminary student, and 3.) the fact that more students are waiting to enter the seminary directly corresponds to the national trends of all seminary students according to a recent study published by Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey.

An article "Changing Age and Gender Profiles Among Entering

Seminary Students 1975-1989" indicates that more women are entering the clergy than ever before. More students, male and female, are entering seminary after the age of 30 and are bringing with them a host of new and different experiences.<sup>93</sup>

13% of students from the 1970's and also from 1994 came from Rabbinic homes, indicating that the same percentage of rabbis' children from both population samples continue to choose the rabbinate as a career choice. Likewise a higher percentage of students currently have other family members like grandparents, and siblings in the rabbinate. Such a statistic is not available from Dr. Lenn.

The Reform movement has become an even bigger supplier of rabbinic students over the last 20 years. In the 1970's, 60% of the students were products of the Reform movement and today that number currently stands at 77%. This might suggest that with the strengthening of UAHC summer camps, religious schools, and college activities, more Reform Jews find the rabbinate attractive. There has also been a decrease in the number of Conservative and Orthodox students finding their way to the Reform rabbinate. In Dr. Lenn's report of 1972, 24% of the students viewed themselves as Conservative and 6% considered themselves Orthodox. My study

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<sup>93</sup> Ministry Research Notes "Changing age and Gender Profiles Among Entering Seminary Students" 1975-1989. ETS Spring 1991. This material was made possible by the Lilly Endowment and was tabulated from a database of some 80,000 records for a comprehensive study of Seminary education. As of publication of this thesis, HUC is still waiting on the results of the materials it has submitted to Educational Testing Service in the fall of 1991.

indicates that the Conservative movement contributed 4% to the HUC population of today and less than 1% came from Orthodox homes.

There has also been a change in the marital status of HUC students. In the 1970's, 57% of the students were married while today 38% are married. Yet today, more married students currently have children than did so 20 years ago. Again it would seem that the increased age of the average student enhances their already established maturity level as we saw earlier. And again, this corresponds to the ETS material which states that students are more likely to bring children with them (or have children) as they begin their study of theology.<sup>94</sup>

In exploring the students' attitudes toward Israel, more than 50% of both student populations regarded themselves as Pro-Zionist. What is interesting is that the College-Institute's Year-in-Israel Program was not implemented at the time Dr. Lenn began his research. And yet, both populations had equivalent commitments to the Jewish state with slightly over 50% of both student populations regarding their homes growing up as Pro-Zionist. Though this statistic does not reflect the full range of the students' attitudes on Israel, it could cause us to reassess the required Israel program and its real impact on the rabbinic student.

In my study, it was most encouraging that 88% of the current HUC students had visited Israel prior to the Jerusalem program, with 57% of the students considering living in Israel prior to their rabbinic

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 2.



school education. Such a statistic is not available from the Lenn report. Based on these findings the growing impact of programs such as a junior year abroad or an Israel summer experience seems to have strengthened today's students' individual opportunities to travel and visit the land of Israel. That exposure has also interested a small percentage of students to live in Israel in the future.

### **Religious Observance**

One of the most striking findings surrounds the changing perspective of the seminary students around his/her belief in God. In the early 1970's, 38% of the students had a traditional view of God modified by their own belief of what God is, 13% had a non-traditional view of God with little in common with their Jewish belief, 4% had a view of God in a traditional Judaic sense, 43% of the students stated that they were agnostic, and 2% considered themselves atheists.

Compared to these findings, today's students have a much different view of God. When asked the very same question, with the same choices and the same wording, the results were quite different. In my study, 77% of the students surveyed stated that they had a traditional view of God modified by their own belief of what God is. 5% had a non-traditional view of God with little in common with their Jewish belief. 10% had a view of God in a traditional Judaic

sense. Only 3% considered themselves agnostics and less than 1% did not believe in God. Some 3% of the students today stated that they are still searching.

These statistics bring to the fore two major conclusions. First, the seminary student of today seems to be much clearer about his/her belief in the existence of God. Second, of those who indicated their certain belief in God, the majority embraced the traditional view of God as modified by their own view of what God is. In thinking about the first conclusion, an important question arises: Why would the student of today be so much more sure about God's existence? Possible explanations might include that the students of the '70's lived in a time of radical departure from all that was traditional -- socially, morally and spiritually. This time period surely could have had an impact on their religious values, and even for those who had chosen the rabbinate as a career path, the theological ambivalence remained. Conversely, the student of today is the product of a world which, over the last 20 years has come to claim, and oftentimes demand, a secular approach to everything. Perhaps this divergence from the spiritual world brought about an emptiness for people in our society, and so today, we see a rabbinic student, and perhaps a community at large which has sought out and returned to a renewed and strengthened spirituality.

An article in the New Republic in 1988 likewise made this point. In "Oh My God- America's Divinity Schools Get Religion,"

Andrew Sullivan explored seminary life in America. While HUC-JIR was not one of the schools Sullivan visited, his conclusions can be applied to the College-Institute as well. The article quotes Rabbi Neil Gillman of the Jewish Theological Seminary who said "There's a new romanticism among students...I don't know what the word spirituality means in the Jewish tradition, but it is a word the students use all the time". The article continues, "...In the middle of secular society and intellectual life, religion is declaring its independence. And the students, not the teachers are primarily responsible." <sup>95</sup>

Along with the renewed spirituality an enhanced belief in tradition and prayer has also developed. According to my study almost 70% of the students surveyed stated that prayers were extremely important to them and that they furnished a close bond with other Jews and/or with God. Over half of the students surveyed stated that they pray privately each and every day, and well over 1/3 of the entire student population (36%) said that they keep kosher all of the time. This is perhaps in keeping with the previously stated conclusion that the Reform rabbinical student of today is more deeply accepting of the traditional foundations of Judaism.

An interesting note around the students' traditional values is that the New York student overall seems to embrace the most traditional lifestyle of the 3 stateside campuses. As presented in the

<sup>95</sup> New Republic May 2, 1988. p.23.

research section, only 28% of the students who responded from New York did not keep kosher, and over half (51%) of the students in Cincinnati stated that they did not keep kosher. Numerous instances occurred when students in New York answered questions from a more traditional viewpoint than their counterparts in Cincinnati.

Though no results were available from the Lenn Report regarding the seminary students view on intermarriage, this was an issue I felt needed to be explored in order to understand the student of today. My results showed that overall only 25% of students would perform intermarriage. In a society where mixed marriage is much more prevalent than in the early 1970's, this statistic seems remarkable. Once again this trend reflects a more traditional perspective on the part of today's seminary student and could indicate a future hesitation on their part to perform this service as leaders in their communities. This causes me to wonder how these future leaders will react when, in the field they are confronted with the more than 50% rate of intermarriage happening in America today. Rabbis surveyed from the field stated that the increased rate of intermarriage is indeed one of the greatest challenges facing the rabbinate today.

A final area of exploration with regard to personal beliefs is the use of gender sensitive language in liturgy. Dr. Lenn conducted his research at a time when the old Union Prayerbook was still in use and gender sensitive language was simply unaddressed. Today, the

students are using Gates of Prayer which, though it now contains gender sensitive editions, it is on the whole, not a gender sensitive prayerbook. Therefore the statistic that 66% of the students today always change the language during prayer is significant. This indicates that today's students, though quite traditional, carry the social awareness of male-female equality and are, of their own volition, changing the language themselves. This may also be due to the fact that there is a large (over 45%) population of women at the College-Institute today.

### **Role of the Rabbi**

The primary reasons for students entering the rabbinate seem to have changed since the 1970's. When Dr. Lenn conducted his research, the rank order responses to the question "Why choose the rabbinate?" were identical between both seminary students and rabbis out in the field. Both were likely to mention self-fulfillment (i.e. "Doing their own thing") as the primary reason for entering the rabbinate. This was followed by "liking people and the desire to serve humankind." Both seminarians and rabbis were least likely to mention power as their reason for entering the rabbinate.

My research indicated that the number one reason for entering the rabbinate for the student of today was "liking people and the ability to serve humankind". This was indeed cited by over 90% of



the students as the primary focus for their professional life.. Being a leader and community servant is currently more important to today's students than the fact that the rabbinate can provide an opportunity to "do my own thing". Being a power figure was still regarded as the least motivating factor in choosing the rabbinate today. However, a much larger percentage (31%) stated power as a reason than the 8% of students who responded twenty years ago. This difference in the rabbinic students' sense of purpose is reflected in other responses throughout both studies.

Twenty years ago, Dr. Lenn assessed a student population in which 46% of the students were interested in a pulpit experience. The students of the early 1970's were also interested in graduate school (19%), teaching positions, (15%) as well as Hillel and organizational work.

According to my research, the student population today is very focused on the pulpit experience . Almost 75% of the students currently enrolled in the College plan to enter positions in either a large congregation as an assistant or in a small congregation as a solo rabbi. Very few students today (6%) are interested in either graduate school or teaching positions.

These results reflect a difference in the two populations' overall purpose for entering the rabbinate. Those in the 1970's were a group of students focused on self-fulfillment and self-exploration. Therefore, they tended to opt out of congregational life which places a great deal of external demands on the professional. Conversely, the

student of today is one who indicates that the main purpose for entering the rabbinate is to serve humanity, and this can be achieved, in greatest measure, through congregational service.

Once again there was a noticeable difference between the Cincinnati and the New York campuses. It seems as if New York students were less interested in congregational work and more interested in organizational and educational activities. Perhaps this is due to the variety of rabbinic experiences the New York student is offered in a Jewish community as diverse as New York.

In assessing role expectations between the two student populations, the same 6 roles were selected by both populations but in different orders of priority. A combination of the charts that were illustrated in the research sections clarifies this point. (See Table 33)

**Table 33**

**What rabbis ought to do 1970's**

**What rabbis ought to do 1994**

Religious School Teacher	Pastoral Visits
Adult Education	Religious School
Priestly Roles	Priestly roles
Counseling	Jewish Community Representative
Pastoral Visits	Adult Education
Jewish Community Representative	Counseling

Whereas the student in the 1970's expected the rabbi to be first and foremost a teacher, students of today cite pastoral responsibilities as the number one priority of the rabbi. This again reflects the current society's need for spiritual guidance and leadership. Students of today also indicated a greater connection to the external Jewish community, a function that the students of the 70's held as less important.

### **Attitudes Towards Hebrew Union College**

It should not be surprising to note that students' attitudes towards HUC-JIR have indeed changed over the last 2 decades. When Dr. Lenn conducted his research, there was an air of dissatisfaction and malaise running rampant through the halls of the College-Institute. As a result, Dr. Lenn found 71% of the students feeling that they had "no intimate relationships" with the faculty.

My study indicated that only 20% of the students stated that they had no intimate friendships with the faculty with the majority of students stating that they had "some or a few" intimate relationships with faculty members. Perhaps this distinction is a result of the fact that students in the 70's were less apt to develop relationships with those in positions of authority. This would have

*Interview with Student January 28, 1986*

been in conflict with the anti-establishment mood prevalent during the time period.

An interesting caveat on this question appeared from the students at the Los Angeles campus, who overwhelmingly (86%) stated that they did have at least some intimate relationships with the faculty on their campus. Perhaps because Los Angeles is a smaller school with a smaller student population there is more contact between students, staff, and the administration of the campus. In a follow-up interview conducted with a student who had attended both Los Angeles and Cincinnati, the student offered a suggestion as to the reason behind the close friendship of the LA students with the faculty:

The attitude and spirit of the faculty towards the students in LA is quite different from that of Cincinnati. The LA faculty takes it upon themselves to serve as friend, counsel, and guide to the student in both academic and non-academic areas. <sup>96</sup>

Dr. Lenn also found that 32% of the students he surveyed regarded the professional courses at the College as poor. For today's HUC student only 12% regarded their professional courses as poor with the majority of students stating that their courses were either fair (38%) or good (38%). Over half of the student population (57%) stated that their rabbinical courses like Bible and Midrash were

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Student January 29, 1995.

better than their professional courses. Both student populations found that the scholarly courses like Bible and Midrash were more important to their professional development. However, current students scored the quality of today's professional courses as higher than those in the 1970's.

Interestingly enough, what came out of the field rabbis' responses was that the professional rabbinic skills were what they most used on a day to day basis. This could point to a need for a more enhanced professional skills curriculum at the college.

With regard to the curriculum, there has certainly been a substantial change with regard to the importance of courses offered at HUC-JIR. Table 34 explains the difference in the two populations' assessments of the curriculum and course offerings at the College-Institute



**Table 34**  
**Rank Order Assessment of Curriculum**  
**Importance to the Seminary Student**  
Lenn Students      Today's Students

1. History	Bible
2. Bible	Hebrew
3. Hebrew	Liturgy
4. Theology	Talmud
5. Midrash	History
6. Jewish Thought	Theology
7. Philosophy	Jewish Thought
8. Human Relations	Midrash
9. Comparative Religion	Homiletics
10. Biblical Commentaries	Biblical Commentaries
11. Liturgy	Education
12. Education	Human Relations
13. Homiletics	Philosophy
14. Talmud	Codes
15. Speech	Comparative Religion
16. Codes	Speech
17 Jewish Music	Jewish Music

What is fascinating to note is the incredible rise in importance of courses such as Liturgy and Talmud from the bottom of the list of the Lenn students to the very top of the list in my research. This again points to the increasing trend towards tradition on the part of students today.

There has been an equally noticeable change in the importance rating of such courses as Philosophy and Comparative Religion. The students of today do not find these types of courses as important as their counterparts of the 1970's did. Perhaps, this points again to the greater focus of today's students on the courses which will enhance their pulpit and congregational skills.

In conclusion, it is clear from this discussion that the students of today, on most spiritual, educational and professional levels have quite a different raison d'etre than did their counterparts of the early 1970's.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusions

Many of us have heard it again and again from family, friends, congregants and colleagues. And so the old joke goes. What kind of job is a rabbi for a nice Jewish boy or girl like you?

Gary Tobin one of the leading Jewish scholars and sociologists on America Jewry recently once wrote a piece for the Jewish World page of the Jerusalem Post. In it he stated:

Did you ever wonder why anyone would choose to become a rabbi? Even if deep religious commitment attracted someone to the pulpit, it might not be enough to help someone survive in contemporary congregational life. More and more congregations are eating up their rabbis.<sup>97</sup>

Yet, enrollment continues to rise at the Hebrew Union College. Each year that I have been in attendance the class size has grown from 38 in 1990 when I was accepted to nearly 67 rabbinical students currently enrolled in the Jerusalem program. More people want to become rabbis. Through it all the rabbinate as a profession seems to be endure and abide in difficult times. Rabbis' names are being smeared nationwide across the front pages of newspapers, for both personal and professional reasons. Rabbis are losing their jobs in big and small congregations because they don't get along with

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<sup>97</sup> Gary Tobin, "Eating up the Rabbi" World Jewry Page of the Jerusalem Post from HUC Board of Governors material, October, 1987.

their lay leadership.

Dr. Leslie Freedman, a psychiatrist, published an article in Rabbinics Today several years ago based on his Ph.D dissertation from Columbia University entitled Role Related Stress in the Rabbinate. In the article and more fully in the dissertation Dr. Freedman stated that the stress level of the rabbi was higher than those people who live in and around Three Mile Island in the aftermath of a nuclear accident.<sup>98</sup> In fact 27% of the rabbis responding to Dr. Freedman considered their work to be very stressful.<sup>99</sup>

Rabbi Jack Bloom writes that being a rabbi means being set apart, lonely, and subject to unreasonable demands from all sides. Being a rabbi means not being able to leave a colleague on call. Being a rabbi means being a symbolic exemplar who stands for something other than one's self.<sup>100</sup> So, given all that, how does one succeed in the rabbinate?

There is no question that the rabbinate is perceived as a difficult profession. How does someone dedicated to the Jewish people and to the core of a calling survive in the 1990's? In going back to the original question that was attempted to be tackled by Dr. Lenn. Does the rabbinate today have a future?

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<sup>98</sup> Dr. Leslie Freedman, "Role Related Stress in the Rabbinate," published in Rabbinics Today. A monthly newsletter dedicated to an effective, fulfilled rabbinate. March 1993, p. 10

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>100</sup> Rabbi Jack Bloom, "Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar," in Shema January 19, 1990. p.1.

Throughout this thesis I have explored the attitudes and beliefs of the students from the 1970's, as well as those of the students today. I have also addressed what rabbis in the field are saying about their chosen profession. For the most part I have found an older, more serious student entering the ranks of the clergy, with a stronger belief in God and a more solid commitment to the tenets of traditional Judaism. Today's rabbis are grappling with issues of Jewish continuity, survival, and the bridging of an increasingly diverse community. At the same time they see strong family pressures and demands that make for a tension between the rabbi's personal and professional life.

What has been most compelling in my findings though, has been the realization that regardless of the changing profile of the seminary student, the realities in the field remain largely the same. Perhaps there is truth in the words of the Biblical writer Kohelet who stated that "There is nothing new under the sun."

The last question of my survey to rabbis asked them to share their advice to rabbinic students about to enter the field. Though their responses were as unique as the rabbis themselves, there was a similar thread of philosophy in all of them. I have selected one member from each of the past 25 ordination classes from the Cincinnati Campus to share their advice in this conclusion. Some of it is practical and some theoretical. Some of it should be followed and some ignored. Some is individual while some is communal. But in



all, these responses speak to the remarkable experience that one encounters within the rabbinate and to the sheer intensity of its moments.

From the class of 1969:

Find a good mentor and a good life partner. Keep a sense of humor about yourself: Never stop learning. Throw away your HUC class notes 2 years after you graduate and never preach the same sermon twice.

From the class of 1970:

Make certain that you love Judaism and people. Make certain that you define for yourself goals based on your strengths and weaknesses. Use your time at HUC-JIR to gather as much Jewish knowledge as possible, because your Jewish knowledge gives you self respect.

From the class of 1971:

Take your five years at HUC seriously. Prepare yourself spiritually, psychologically, and intellectually for your rabbinate. Be accepting, encouraging and not rigid. Be non-judgmental.

From the class of 1972:

Know who you are and what you believe. Create a vision of the kind of synagogue you would like to create. Be true to yourself and your principles. Learn the value of patience. Maintain a sense of humor. Remember that teaching goes on all the time. Every moment provides an opportunity for holiness.

From the class of 1973:

Forget your own religious "needs." Check them at the door. A rabbi has no needs, he/she is just needed period. Wait to retire, and then you can relax. In the meantime serve, serve serve. We are in essence servants as Moses is called a m'sharet. That's it. Sometimes, I think of myself as a caterer. I cater to everything and everyone.

From the class of 1974:

Don't say no too often. It leads to enemies... Find a rabbi for yourself. Learn from lots of colleagues. The rabbi with the biggest Temple is not necessarily the best person.

From the class of 1975:

Realistically-have another skill to fall back on or a rich father-in-law.

From the class of 1976:

Realize that you are never master of your own time or needs: you are there for others. Clearly understand that your family will suffer because of your job.

From the class of 1977:

If you want to serve the Jewish people enter the rabbinate. If you want to lead the Jewish people, earn millions of dollars and then lead the thankful masses.

From the class of 1978:

Get as much practical experience as possible and as much involvement in synagogue life as possible. Study Hard!

From the class of 1979:

Know what you are getting into. Take a year off and work as an intern. Develop human relations skills. Understand that graduating from HUC is no guarantee for a congregational job.

From the class of 1980:

Look to sincere and secure colleagues for fellowship. The rabbinate is a lonely profession. Good friends who are rabbis can help you understand yourself, your needs and skills, and encourage you to make a contribution worthy of praise. Never mind the competition of other colleagues. We need each other. It is a small "chevre" and outside of it, few others understand or care about our lives as rabbis.

From the class of 1981:

You can make a difference in this world.

1. Bigger is not better.
2. Don't ever do anything for the money.
3. Put your family first.
4. Pay serious attention to your own spiritual needs.
5. Learn learn learn!!!

From the class of 1982:

Look for a small congregation where it is possible to have time for a personal life outside the congregation.

From the class of 1983:

Though the rabbinate can be rewarding, there is much potential for disappointment and frustration. Talk to as many rabbis as you can so you know what you are getting into.

From the class of 1984:

To be a rabbi who has a sense of integrity requires hard work. People evaluate the rabbi's entire message i.e. how she/he lives and whether he/she practices what what he/she preaches. Those unwilling to put in this effort demean both Judaism and the rabbinate.

From the class of 1985:

Be prepared for everyone judging you. From the language you use, what you wear, and where you go. Your plans will always come after the needs of members. Always make your own plans with the eye on cancelling at the last minute. As Dr. Marcus told us: "...Boys it's cold out there..." I always believed him and now I know he is so right.

From the class of 1986:

Know that you must be rabbi to Jewish beliefs that might not fit your own. Don't believe that you must be a rabbi whose congregation reflects his/her personal beliefs. Be flexible. We are reform rabbis and must respect classical Reform ideas. These are the Jews who have built these congregations and have sustained them- We should respect this!

From the class of 1987:

In the congregational rabbinate, big is not beautiful. Make sure that you have a life outside the rabbinate. You need time for family and friends. You need a distracting hobby. The rabbinate has an insidious way of becoming all consuming....we should practice what we preach. Be well prepared and thoughtful in your public presentation. Be concerned about good English/Hebrew. We are addressing a very intelligent laity that-appropriately-will not tolerate slap dash drivel.

From the class of 1988:

1. Go slow with introducing change anywhere.
2. Listen to people before offering advice.
3. Know that you are always a rabbi no matter where you are.
4. Don't give up the passion that you brought to the rabbinate.
5. Ask for help when you need it.

From the class of 1989:

Look on every encounter as an opportunity to help shape someone's impression about Judaism. Every slight, every instance of impatience will come back to haunt. Every moment of love, enthusiasm, faith and caring will build strength. That does not mean giving in to every demand. On the contrary, A rabbi that explains (convincingly) why he/she will not do something contrary to principle will only gain in respect.

From the class of 1990:

A. Have a strong spiritual commitment and practice in place. Keep to it. B. Find community with other morally and spiritually sane people. C. Don't tolerate evil for long. Change it or leave it.

From the class of 1991:

Expand your horizons and think beyond the pulpit. Open yourself to the possibilities and joys of working in a Jewish Community Center, Hillel, etc. Learn to love learning and studying. Unlearn the skills learned at student pulpits of putting things together last minute because you are doing a million things. Set the highest standards for yourself- especially with regard to scholarship and learning



From the class of 1992:

Learn as much as possible and never give up your routine of study. Make family and friends a priority and find time for your own growth.

From the class of 1993:

Take time to think why you are choosing the rabbinate. Be open to growth and change. Work on not becoming ego involved. Be secure in your own self-esteem and decisions.

And finally from the class of 1994:

Get lots of practical education and start writing your 1st High Holiday sermons right now.

The advice that rabbis gave is as unique and individualized as their own personal reasons for entering the profession. It is a composite of what the people in the field are telling us to do.

After all this research I was hoping to have the perfect recipe for a successful rabbinate. After surveying, reading, interviewing and writing I now realize that there is no perfect pattern to follow. In a sermon entitled Rabbis and Their Critics, preached on April 17, 1932 at The Temple in Cleveland, Ohio, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver offered the following assessment of the Reform rabbi, which still holds true today.

To sum up, the Jewish people has never looked upon its rabbis as saints or supermen. They looked upon them as men, some of them more gifted than others, but men of the people, chosen by the people to perform certain religious duties and provide religious guidance and leadership in Jewish life. And I think

that by and large, working under these difficulties, the American Jewish ministry is possessed of earnest, sincere, hard-working, faithful men who by following their best judgments are serving the cause of Judaism and the Jewish people.

Perhaps in the years to come, when our life is better organized, when our institutions have been longer established, when Jewish responsibilities have been properly divided and assigned, much of the criticism which is today being made of the rabbi will of itself disappear. Meanwhile, may I advise all Jewish laymen to bear with their rabbis even as their rabbis have to bear with them <sup>101</sup>

Given that each and every rabbi may exercise his or her own judgement in the profession, clearly there may not be uniformity within the rabbinate, but there will certainly be personal truth and integrity. It is these characteristics that will allow them to "bear the burdens" that were true 63 years ago, and are still true today.

Those who accept the title rabbi in June of this year, and every subsequent year thereafter, will surely confront many problems and challenges in leading the Jewish people forward. Some problems will be new and others, repeat performances of old issues. Regardless of what the issues may be, the awesome responsibility that comes when we assume the mantle of leadership is ours to cultivate.

The work of the rabbinate is difficult. It is "Avodat Hakodesh". In the Torah portion we read of the sons of Kohot, ordered to carry the ark on their shoulders. Others had much simpler tasks carrying clothes, and decorations. Those who choose the rabbinate may not find the task easy. Those who guard the essential core of our faith,

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<sup>101</sup>Abba Hillel Silver Therefore Choose Life p. 396.

will often feel the heavy weight upon their shoulders. Yet, they will know that there is no higher service. The sons of Kohot are mentioned above all the other descendants because they carried the Ark which encased the Law of Moses. Others may take less burdensome assignments, but we, as future rabbis, are inextricably bound by the Talmudic sage Rabbi Tarphon who stated in Avot II 15-16:

**Lo alecha ha-melachah ligmor.**

We may not finish the task, but we are not free to walk away from it. The day is short, and the task is great, the wages high, the workers lazy, and everybody is impatient.....<sup>102</sup>

But that is all part of the awesome responsibility and formidable task that comes with the title "Rabbi."

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<sup>102</sup>Jacob Neusner, Torah From Our Sages p. 83.

## Postscript

After turning in my final chapter, the next day Dr. Marcus handed me back the corrections along with a hand written note that contained his philosophy and conclusions regarding success in the rabbinate. He said that from his perspective, as we stand on the eve of the 21st century, the following suggestions are necessary for the survival and success of the rabbi:

1. Help everybody and anybody wherever and whenever you can.
2. Always listen sympathetically.
3. Never engage in a fight.
4. Encourage congregants to make adjustments in their own personal lives that might make them better human beings.
5. When asked by congregants why they should remain Jewish, tell them that Jewry is security for the individual who lives in this weird and threatening world.

Jacob Rader Marcus  
February, 1995

I thank Dr. Marcus for his support, his direction, and above all his wisdom.

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### **Video Productions**

**Rabbi:** Recruitment Video. A joint project of HUC-JIR and the CCAR. 1992.

## Appendix A



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

3101 CLIFTON AVENUE • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2488  
(513) 321-1875

October 24th, 1994

Dear Fellow Cincinnati HUC-JIR Students:


I need your help on a very important project. Did you know that the last major study on the "Reform Rabbinate and the Seminary Student" was attempted in the early 1970's by a sociologist named Dr. Theodore Lenn? The Lenn Report, as it was titled, assessed the state of the Reform movement, Rabbis, Rabbinical Students, Congregants, and Jewish youth from that time period. When released, it painted a very gloomy picture of the future of Reform Judaism.


For my Rabbinic Thesis, I have been researching the Lenn Report and am attempting to bring certain areas of it up to date. Here is where I need your help. Enclosed you will find a questionnaire which examines some of the same areas Dr. Lenn explored in his research. In fact, some of the very questions in this survey are the same ones Dr. Lenn used in his study.

Please take the time to fill out the enclosed survey, which shouldn't take more than 20 minutes. Your participation in this project will help us assess any changes that may have taken place in the HUC-JIR student over the past twenty years. We will be more than willing to share our results with those who participate, when the project is completed.

As the College-Institute prepares for the next century, such a project could be very important. Please take the time to help us, help HUC, and possibly, help yourself. Please return the surveys in the envelope provided to the special box located in the mail room by December 1st, 1994. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

  
Steven Stark Lowenstein  
Thesis Writer

  
Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus  
Advisor

### THESIS SURVEY FOR HUC-JIR STUDENTS

**Thank You for taking a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire. Please answer the questions honestly. Feel free to write any additional comments directly on the questionnaire. Your participation in this project is greatly appreciate**

1. When did you first think about the rabbinate as a career and when did you make your final decision?

(Check one in each column)

	First thought	Final decision
As a child	_____	_____
During High School	_____	_____
During College	_____	_____
After College	_____	_____
After working in some other field	_____	_____
After visiting Israel	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____

2. After Ordination, I hope to work in the following position: (rank your first three choices with 1 being your first choice)
- |                          |                          |                                       |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| _____ Solo Congregation  | _____ Assistantship      | _____ with 1 being your first choice) |
| _____ HUC Administration | _____ Camp Director      | _____ UAHC Position                   |
| _____ Graduate school    | _____ Hillel work        | _____ Chaplaincy                      |
| _____ Full time teaching | _____ Jewish Agency work | Other _____                           |

3. At present, I anticipate spending most of my rabbinical career in a: (Circle One)

A. Congregation    B. Organization    C. Teaching career    D. Chaplaincy  
E. Educational work    F. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

4. How would you describe your relationships with faculty members at HUC-JIR? (Check One)

\_\_\_\_\_ Intimate and personal  
\_\_\_\_\_ Some intimate relationships  
\_\_\_\_\_ Only a few intimate relationships  
\_\_\_\_\_ No intimate relationships  
\_\_\_\_\_ Undecided

5. On the whole, the professional courses at HUC-JIR such as Practical Rabbinics, Education, Homiletics are:

1	2	3	4	5
Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Undecided

6. Compared with my professional courses, my rabbinical courses like Midrash and Bible are:

1	2	3	4	5
Better	About the same	Worse	Undecided	Can't compare

7. Was the HUC campus you are now attending your first preference?    Yes    No

7. Why did you choose this campus? (Check all that apply)

☐ Cost of living      ☐ Proximity to family      ☐ Spouse Employment  
☐ Geographic location      ☐ Work experience      ☐ Faculty  
 Other reasons \_\_\_\_\_

8. Assume that you are from a Reform Jewish home, and have just received your BA in English, and are now beginning your studies for the rabbinate. Using the scale provided, circle the number which corresponds to your beliefs on which courses you would consider necessary and which unnecessary. (Assume that all courses are equally well taught) 1= Very Necessary 2= Somewhat necessary 3=Undecided 4=Not necessary 5=Very Unnecessary

Bible	1	2	3	4	5	Human Relations	1	2	3	4	5
Codes	1	2	3	4	5	Jewish Music	1	2	3	4	5
Commentaries	1	2	3	4	5	Jewish Religious Thought	1	2	3	4	5
Comparative religions	1	2	3	4	5	Liturgy	1	2	3	4	5
Education	1	2	3	4	5	Midrash	1	2	3	4	5
Hebrew Language	1	2	3	4	5	Philosophy	1	2	3	4	5
History	1	2	3	4	5	Speech	1	2	3	4	5
History of Reform	1	2	3	4	5	Talmud	1	2	3	4	5
Homiletics	1	2	3	4	5	Theology	1	2	3	4	5

9. As a child, did you live in a Pro-Zionist home? Yes No Indifferent Not certain

10. Had you been to Israel before the Jerusalem program? Yes No

If yes, how many times? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Have you ever considered, or did you ever live in Israel Prior to HUC? Yes No

12. Would you ever want to live in Israel in the future? Most definitely Possibly Not a chance

13. I currently..... (Check One)

☐ keep kosher all the time  
☐ keep kosher in my home  
☐ do not keep kosher

14. When I am a rabbi I... (Check One)

☐ will keep kosher all the time:  
☐ will keep kosher in my home  
☐ will not keep kosher

15. What is your current stance regarding officiation at intermarriages? (without prior conversion) (Check One)

☐ I will perform them.  
☐ I will perform them only for synagogue members.  
☐ I will perform them only under specific conditions.  
☐ I will not perform them.

16. Which statement comes closest to expressing the meaning that prayers have for you personally? (Check One)

- ☐ Prayers mean little or nothing to me.  
☐ Sometimes they satisfy a personal need, but not often.  
☐ Prayers are important to me, but they are too familiar to help me as much as I wish.  
☐ Prayers are extremely important to me: they furnish a close bond with other Jews and/or with God.

17. How often do you pray privately? (Circle one)

- |                 |                      |             |                      |          |
|-----------------|----------------------|-------------|----------------------|----------|
| 1               | 2                    | 3           | 4                    | 5        |
| Seldom or never | On special occasions | Once a week | Several times a week | Everyday |

18. How often do you attend Chapel Services at HUC? (Circle One)

- |          |                      |  |             |       |
|----------|----------------------|--|-------------|-------|
| 1        | 2                    | 3  | 4           | 5     |
| Everyday | Several times a week | Only when I'm friends<br>with the Service leader | Once a week | Never |

19. Do you change the language of the prayerbook to make it gender neutral? (Circle One)

- |        |                            |                        |       |
|--------|----------------------------|------------------------|-------|
| 1      | 2                          | 3                      | 4     |
| Always | Only when leading services | Only in private prayer | Never |

20. Which of the following comes closest to expressing your current beliefs about the existence of God?

- (Check one) ☐ I believe in God in a more or less traditional Judaic sense.  
☐ I believe in God in a more or less traditional Judaic sense  
modified by my own views of what God is, what God stands for, etc.  
☐ My belief in God has very little in common with traditional Judaic belief.  
☐ I am probably agnostic, but find it difficult to admit it.  
☐ I simply do not believe in God.  
☐ I am still searching.  
☐ I am an agnostic.  
☐ I am an atheist.

21. As a child, were you raised: Reform Conservative Orthodox Other\_\_\_\_\_

22. Was/is your mother or father a Rabbi? Yes No

23. Are you the first member in your extended family to become a rabbi? Yes No

24. In your family, are you the oldest child a middle child  
youngest child only child

25. What was your undergraduate major in college?\_\_\_\_\_

26. Did you enter HUC-JIR directly from College? Yes No

If No, how many years passed between graduation from College and entering HUC?\_\_\_\_\_



27. What was the highest degree you earned before entering HUC? \_\_\_\_\_

28. Where do you get your news: (Check all that apply)

☐ Time/Newsweek      ☐ New York Times      ☐ Evening News  
☐ National Public Radio      ☐ Local radio      ☐ National News  
☐ Local Paper      ☐ Jewish News

Other \_\_\_\_\_

29. The rabbi serves in many capacities. This question has two parts. Please rate in terms of:

a. The extent to which **you think a rabbi should perform** each activity

b. The extent to which **you look forward to performing** each activity

1=A great deal    2=some    3= little    4= Not at all    5=Can't decide

	A rabbi should do this.....					I look forward to doing this				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Scholarly achievement										
Administrator										
Preacher										
Counseling on personal problems										
Religious teacher										
Adult Ed teacher										
Radio and TV Speaker										
Youth Group leader										
Writer of Jewish Books and articles										
Representative to Non-Jewish Community										
Representative to Jewish Community										
Fundraiser										
Social Action leader										
Work with Synagogue auxiliaries										
Pastoral visitations										
Priestly "Officiating" Roles										

30. Age \_\_\_\_\_

31. Male or Female (Circle One)

32. Please circle ~~expected~~ year of Ordination:    1995    1996    1997    1998    1999

33. Circle the current campus of HUC-JIR you are attending: Cincinnati    Los Angeles    New York

34. Marital Status: (Circle One)    Single    Married    Engaged    Divorced    Widowed  
 Did you get (or plan to get) engaged or married while attending HUC.    Yes    No

35. Children      Yes      No      If yes, how many? \_\_\_\_\_

36. Please read the following statements made by rabbis and indicate the extent to which they match **your own reasons** for entering the rabbinate: (Circle One for each statement)

1=very closely      2=somewhat closely      3=very little      4= not at all

- |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. "When I saw Rabbis on the pulpit they seemed to me to represent significant powerful figures."   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| B. "My intense belief in God and in Judaism enhanced my desire to continue one of its major traditions...to be a teacher unto my people." | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| C. "As an occupation it offered me the most opportunity to "do my own thing" in terms of my interests, needs, and general fulfillment."   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| D. "I like people, and the rabbinate provides maximum opportunities to serve humankind."  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| E. "It was the image of the rabbi as scholar, teacher, and community leader that attracted me most."                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Please answer the following questions using the lines provided plus additional sheets if necessary.

37. What are the things that you enjoy the most about your chosen profession?: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

38. What are your biggest fears about becoming a rabbi? \_\_\_\_\_

-----

39. What could be done to make you feel better prepared to enter the rabbinate?: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

40. Has the HUC-JIR experience been what you expected?: \_\_\_\_\_

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Other Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Feel free to use more paper if necessary.

Thank you for your participation.

## Appendix B



HEBREW UNION COLLEGE—JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
Cincinnati • New York • Los Angeles • Jerusalem

3101 CLIFTON AVENUE • CINCINNATI, OHIO 45220-2486  
(513) 221-1875

October 20th, 1994

Dear Rabbi;

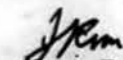
You have been selected to participate in a very important and interesting project. For my Rabbinic Thesis, (remember that fun project?) I, under the skillful guidance of Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus have begun to explore the changing Seminary Student and Rabbi from the 1970's to the present day. Using the Lenn Report of 1972 as my historical guide, I am trying to assess the changes that have occurred in the rabbinate over the past 20 years.

If you would be so kind, please answer the enclosed questions as openly and as honestly as possible and return them in the attached envelope by December 1st, 1994. Several members of each ordination class from the past 25 years have been selected to participate in the project. We will be more than willing to share our findings with you when the project is completed.

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedule to answer these questions. It shouldn't take more than 15 minutes to complete the form. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely Yours,

  
Steven Stark Lowenstein  
Thesis Writer

  
Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus  
Thesis Advisor

**Your Thoughts on the Rabbinate**

Year of Ordination \_\_\_\_\_

Campus Attended \_\_\_\_\_

Please cite the three most dramatic changes in the rabbinate during the course of your professional career. \_\_\_\_\_

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Has your belief in God evolved appreciably since your days at HUC-JIR? If so, please describe precisely how your beliefs about God have changed.

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Please name the three most important elements, which, in your view, define a successful rabbinate?

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Do you believe that HUC-JIR prepared you adequately for your rabbinate? Please explain why or why not.

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In your opinion, what are the three or four most critical skills a rabbinical student needs to develop while in school?

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Have you ever had second thoughts about choosing the rabbinate as a career? Please explain why or why not.

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---

---

What are the three or four most fulfilling aspects of your rabbinate?

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What are the three or four most formidable obstacles you have faced during the course of your rabbinate?

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What advice would you give future rabbis about to enter the rabbinate?

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If you would like to offer any additional remarks about this questionnaire, the rabbinate, or rabbinical study, please feel free to do so below.

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**Thank you for your participation!!!!!!**