

FORUM III

Changing Perceptions of Intermarriage

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Addressing a 1989 conference of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), Rabbi Alexander Schindler again urged the Reform movement to proselytize among the “unchurched.” Schindler’s speech was the keynote address to a conference convened to assess the first 10 years of the UAHC’s Commission on Reformed Jewish Outreach. The conference itself symbolized the centrality of outreach, particularly among intermarried couples, to the future of the Reform movement and the many changes that have taken place in Jewish communal attitudes about outreach over the past decade.

One can hardly argue with the ideological bases of outreach activity designed to secure conversion to Judaism. As Peter Berger (1979) noted over 10 years ago, a Judaism that is self-assured about its own treasures and truths ought be willing to share them with others. Indeed, the very pluralism of American society that Jews have so valued and advocated legitimates a variety of choices of religious identity or of none. Finally, such outreach compels Jews to re-examine their own faith and beliefs and ask which aspects of their tradition speak with salience for contemporary Jews.

Moreover, Rabbi Schindler was correct in identifying Judaism historically as a missionary faith. There was considerable Jewish proselytization in ancient times; some historians have estimated that Jews comprised a full 10% of the population of the Roman Empire. To be sure, Jews suffered heavily from proselytizing, for conversion to Judaism constituted a radical action necessitating the breaking of ties to the Gentile family. Rome itself expelled her Jewish citizens in 19 CE for excessive

missionary activity (Leon, 1960). Limitations upon Jewish missionary activity were imposed both before and after Rome accepted Christianity as its state religion. These restrictions upon proselytization became so great that conversions to Judaism virtually ceased by the 13th century. As a result, modern Jewish thinkers often defend their Judaism precisely in the terms that Jews do not seek others to join their faith. Responding to Johann Caspar Lavater’s challenge that he convert to Christianity, Moses Mendelson replied that proselytizing was “completely alien to Judaism.” Since “the righteous of all faiths can surely be saved,” no motive existed for Jewish proselytizing. Schindler, however, stood on firm historical and rabbinic grounds in advocating a return to missionary outreach.

More tellingly, strong pragmatic grounds existed for an outreach movement. By the 1970s large numbers of Jews had opted for intermarriage with Gentiles. Outreach to the “unchurched” spouses could well result in conversion to Judaism and the formation of a Jewish home. Conversion thus seemed the answer to intermarriage, and perhaps Jews themselves had to adjust their reluctance to seek converts—a reluctance that, in any case, was unique to the modern Jewish experience and had little basis in Jewish tradition.

Against this background, the Reform movement in 1979 identified outreach to intermarried couples as a core component of its future. To be sure, the movement remained ideologically opposed to intermarriage. There was special condemnation for the apparently growing practice of raising children in two faiths, resulting in the blurring of two distinct religious traditions and the transmission of neither. During the past decade, vigorous efforts, however,

have been made to translate Jewish teachings and experiences for intermarried couples, to draw them closer to the Jewish community, and work for the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Even when no conversion results, great energies have been expended so as not to lose the Jewish dimension within the home.

Clearly, Rabbi Schindler and the Commission on Outreach have greatly affected Jewish communal perceptions of intermarriage and conversion. Not only has the Reform movement maintained an effective outreach program for the past 10 years but considerable outreach has also taken place under the auspices of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reconstructionist Judaism. In many cases, this has resulted in the conversion to Judaism of the non-Jewish spouse. Jewish communal leaders today generally recognize the importance of outreach in attempting to grapple with the increase in the incidence of intermarriage.

MAP OF INTERMARRIAGE

What then constitutes the map of intermarriage in America? Until the 1960s American Jews intermarried at rates that were surprisingly low by historical standards. Virtually every society in which Jews had valued integration into the surrounding culture had witnessed a high degree of intermarriage. Thus, in Berlin in the 1920s one of every five Jews was marrying someone not born of the Jewish faith. By 1933 that rate had increased to 44% for all of German Jewry.¹

In contrast, for reasons that still remain unexplained, intermarriage rates remained lower than 10% until the 1960s in the United States. Thus, Nathan Glazer and

Daniel Patrick Moynihan described the Jews as "the most endogamous of peoples" in their 1963 landmark study, *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Yet a sea change in these percentages occurred virtually overnight. In the mid-1960s Marshall Sklare (1964) noted an increase in individual intermarriage rates to 17%, and by the time of the National Jewish Population Study (Massarik & Chenkin, 1973) in the early 1970s, that rate had nearly doubled.

Since 1973 great variations in rates of intermarriage have occurred regionally. New York City, with its large numbers of Jews, which increases the pool of potential marriage mates, and its high percentage of Orthodox Jews, who rarely intermarry, enjoys a low intermarriage rate of 11% (number of mixed marriages subtracting for conversion). Conversely, Denver has one of the highest current intermarriage rates in the country at over 60%. Generally, the western Jewish communities report a higher degree of acculturation, a lower rate of affiliation, and therefore large numbers of intermarrying couples. Los Angeles, for instance, with its half-million

same ten Jews, the seven who married endogamously would form 3.5 marriages, whereas the three who intermarried will form 3 marriages. Thus, the couples rate, in this case, is 45%. Generally, the couples rates will be half again as large as the intermarriage rate. Because these rates are frequently confused, statements about rates of intermarriage often sound artificially high.

Similarly, cumulative rates of intermarriage refer to all marriages. Current rates refer to marriages currently taking place. The current rate, for obvious reasons, tends to be much higher than the cumulative rate. In general, unless noted otherwise, this article uses individual and current rates of intermarriage, rather than couple and cumulative rates.

Further confusion results from statistics and percentages that do not distinguish between intermarriages in which no conversion to Judaism occurs and intermarriage in which the non-Jewish spouse has chosen to join the Jewish people. Technically, intermarriages in which conversion occurs are no longer intermarriages. Moreover, conversion often occurs after marriage, particularly when children are involved. Therefore, the term "intermarriage" should properly be restricted to marriage absent conversions to Judaism.

1. Discussion about intermarriage rates is often blurred by confusion between individual rates and couples rates and between cumulative rates and current rates. Individual rates refer to the percentage of Jews who marry out. Thus, if three of every ten Jews marry out, you have an intermarriage rate of 30%. Couples rates refer to the percentage of marriages involving Jews that are intermarriages. Thus, of the

Jews, possesses an astonishingly low affiliation rate of 20% and a high rate of intermarriage of 39%.

Nationally, it is fair to say that intermarriage for individuals stands at 30% (again subtracted for those who convert and are therefore no longer intermarried). The most considerable differentials are between cities of large and small Jewish populations and between eastern and western Jewish communities. Until recently, it had been thought that Jewish men were twice as likely to intermarry as were Jewish women. Current data indicate that women may be as likely to marry out of the faith as are men. Finally, intermarriers tend to be "high achievers," individuals of considerable talent, education, and accomplishment, who are the most likely to travel beyond the immediate social circles of the Jewish community. For them, intermarriage is a barometer of their own social mobility. In essence, the high rate of intermarriage, as problematic as it is for Jewish continuity, represents the American Jewish success ethos of education, career, and social advancement. High rates of intermarriage today owe more to American philo-Semitism in which the Jew has become a desirable marriage partner than to the historical context of anti-Semitism, for which intermarriage held out the hope of escaping a despised community. Intermarriage can also be correlated with levels of religious observance. Orthodox Jews are least likely to intermarry (Cohen, 1989). Reform Jews are more likely to do so, and unaffiliated Jews are the most likely intermarriers.

As noted earlier, the primary vehicle for containing the effects of intermarriage in terms of Jewish identity and continuity has been the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Once conversion has occurred, the marriage may no longer be termed an "intermarriage," for the home becomes Jewish (with all of the ambivalence concerning Jewishness that plagues endogamous Jewish marriages). Thus, of 600,000 marriages in America today in which one partner was

not born a Jew, approximately one-fifth have resulted in conversion to Judaism; 85% of these marriages are of Gentile women married to Jewish men (Mayer, 1985). There have been surprisingly few conversions to Christianity, a testimony to the improved status of Jews in American society generally. The current norm, however, is for no conversion to occur, leaving the children in a vague no-man's land occupying the interstices between watered-down versions of Judaism and Christianity. The long-term consequences for Jewish continuity may well be devastating. A recent Philadelphia study of three-generational families found that no grandchildren of intermarriage absent conversion continued to identify as Jews (Schmelz & Della Pergola, 1989).

Each year approximately 11,000 to 12,000 Jews-by-Choice enter the Jewish community. The Reform movement converts about 8,000 per year, the Conservative movement about 3,000 to 4,000, and the Orthodox several hundred. The absence of any uniform conversion procedure acceptable to all of the religious movements heralds an impending crisis in the definition of "Who Is a Jew" inasmuch as thousands of individuals are converting to Judaism annually in good faith only to discover that their conversions are by no means universally recognized. The recent controversy in Israel over the "Who Is A Jew" amendment in many ways symbolizes the continuing disagreements in the United States over definitions of Jewish identity.

In point of fact, the Jewish community as a whole has been enriched by new converts. These individuals often strengthen the Jewish identity of the home and stimulate the Jewish members of the family to intensify their ties to Jewish community and tradition. Moreover, the would-be Jew-by-Choice is most likely to convert to Judaism when the Jewish spouse and family members value their Jewishness. In other words, the key factors stimulating conversion to Judaism are the desire to gain acceptance by the Jewish family and build

a united family. Once accepting conversion, the new Jews are as likely, if not more likely, than the born Jews to practice specific forms of Jewish rituals and traditions.

Most intermarriages, however, do not result in the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Evidence indicates that, as intermarriages become more acceptable socially, conversion to Judaism may be declining. Those who identify conversion as the primary response to intermarriage may have to acknowledge in the very near future that they are fighting an uphill struggle.

POPULAR ATTITUDES: INCREASING ACCEPTANCE

As the overall map of intermarriage in America has been changing, so have popular attitudes shifted to greater acceptance of intermarriage. Today, 87% of Americans approve of interfaith relationships marriages between Jews and Gentiles; in contrast, 20 years ago only 60% of Americans approved of such marriages. In one sense, Jews should draw comfort from polling data that point to the high level of respect accorded Judaism. Marriage to a Jew connotes a positive statement in the mind of most Americans, Woody Allen's "Annie Hall" to the contrary. The danger, however, that intermarriage may mean dissolution of Jewish communal ties haunts those concerned with future Jewish survival.

Moreover, popular literature and the media have helped legitimize intermarriage as a viable option. A virtual cottage industry of guidebooks for intermarried couples has arisen, each complete with helpful hints for making interfaith marriage work and with stories of successful couples building happy and healthy homes. Such books as *The Intermarriage Handbook* (Petsonk and Remsen, William Morrow Co.), *Raising Your Jewish/Christian Child* (Lee Gruzen, Dodd, Mead and Co.), *But How Will You Raise the Children* (Steven Carr Reuben, Pocket Books), *Happily Intermarried* (a unique interreligious com-

position of Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, Father Peter Meehan, and Rev. John Wade Payne, MacMillan), *Mixed Blessings* (Paul and Rachel Cowan, Doubleday), and *Intermarriage* (Susan Weidman Schneider, The Free Press) all point to the growing market for such marriage guidebooks and to the increased viability and acceptance of intermarriage as a phenomenon. To be sure, these guidebooks vary considerably in approach and content. Yet, the availability of these handbooks on a mass market basis indicates how intermarriage has evolved from a marginal to a mainstream phenomenon in American society.

Television too has changed greatly in its portrayal of interfaith marriage. In the early 1970s a popular situation comedy, *Bridget Loves Bernie*, drew considerable protest for its portrayal of a successful intermarriage. Today, in contrast, the networks present several attractive role models of a successful intermarriage. In *L.A. Law*, Markowitz and Kelsey are two upwardly mobile, intelligent, and liberal-minded exemplars of intermarriage. Markowitz' Jewishness comes to the fore when he is confronted by his mother-in-law's social anti-Semitism and the couple's inability to agree about how to raise their child.

The program receiving the most attention for its portrait of intermarriage has been the critically acclaimed series, *thirtysomething*. To date, the Steadman couple—Gentile wife and Jewish husband—has reached no decision on how to raise their child, a theme that symbolizes the struggles and even the failures of the "Yuppie" generation. Two years ago the Steadman family first confronted the December dilemma—Chanukah or Christmas, menorah or tree, or perhaps both? In the end, the spirit of reconciliation pervading the holiday season enables the couple to resolve their problem by spontaneously celebrating both holidays.

One year later *thirtysomething* returned to the theme of intermarriage in a far more sophisticated fashion. Approaching the anniversary of his father's death,

Michael Steadman begins to question the meaning of his Jewishness and the viability of his intermarriage. Learning that his wife is pregnant with a second child, he wonders about the future religious upbringing of his children. Steadman returns to the synagogue of his youth and discovers that his people are “doing fine” a remarkable statement on television to the effect of the vitality of Jewish life in America. The program concludes with Steadman reciting the Kaddish for his father, suggesting that he continues to struggle in two worlds—a strong and healthy marriage to a Gentile and an internal quest to link himself with Judaism. Significantly, this episode was showcased at a recent national conference of Jewish educators as a model pedagogic tool, indicating the degree to which even Jewish educators have become accepting of intermarriage as a phenomenon.

For these programs, intermarriage has been at most an occasional theme. Generally, it has been peripheral to the primary interests of the characters, surfacing only for particular programs, such as the December dilemma of Christmas or Chanukah. This television season, however, featured one program that highlighted an interfaith relationship as its primary theme—*Chicken Soup*, starring Jackie Mason and Lynn Redgrave. The show was canceled in midseason.

The importance of tradition was central to the program's theme. Its main characters, Jackie and Maddy, were quite proud of their respective Jewish and Catholic heritages. That reverence for tradition may explain the couple's reluctance to pronounce marital vows.

However, both articulated the overriding importance of love and trust in a relationship over allegiances to ethnicity and faith. Religious differences in their view become obsolete when a couple shares common social values. In fact, their common commitment to helping the underprivileged seemed to bind the couple. Conversely, the opposition to intermarriage expressed by Mason's mother sounded

like an anachronism roughly equivalent to the boorish anti-Semitism of Maddy's brother, Mike.

Intermarriages, in short, can be happy marriages even if they do present special problems. More tellingly, the taboo against portraying successful intermarriages on prime-time television has fallen, reflecting the growing legitimization of intermarriage by the viewing public.

Parallel to the growing acceptability of intermarriage within the general society has been its growing legitimization within the Jewish community. A Boston survey in the mid-1960s indicated that a quarter of the city's Jewish community would strongly oppose their children's intermarriage, and 44% indicated they would discourage it. By 1985 only 9% of Boston's Jews remained strongly opposed to intermarriage, whereas two-thirds indicated acceptance of intermarriage or neutrality toward it (Israel, 1987; Silberman, 1985).

In the past, Jews who opposed intermarriage usually did so for one of two reasons: religious conviction and a popular stereotype that interfaith marriages would inevitably fail. The 1950s Lakeville studies, for example, indicated strong opposition to intermarriage out of fear of marital discord (Sklare & Greenblum, 1967). Currently, the stronger the degree of ideological religious conviction, the lower the likelihood of intermarriage occurring. Orthodox Jews and graduates of Jewish day schools score especially highly in terms of ideological opposition to intermarriage and a strong desire for endogamous Jewish marriage. These, however, represent at most a tenth of American Jewry.

The strength of the second factor, a lingering stereotype that intermarriages are unlikely to be successful marriages, has been eroded in recent years. To be sure, a recent demographic study finds that intermarriages are still twice as likely to end in divorce as are endogamous marriages (Kosmin et al., 1989). Yet, the reality of successful intermarriages belies this generalization. Role models of happily intermarried couples communicate that tales of

“it can’t work” are mere vestiges of less tolerant eras. Added to this is the overall American perception that today’s marriages are as likely to fail as to succeed. In such a context, success in marriage becomes the luck of the draw, and intermarriages are as likely to succeed or fail as are any other type of marriage.

COMMUNAL ATTITUDES: OUTRAGE AND OUTREACH

Attitudes of Jewish leadership have also changed as intermarriages have become both more widespread and acceptable. Jewish leaders initially responded with shock and dismay to the National Jewish Population Study findings suggesting that one of every three marriages involving Jews was an intermarriage (Massarik & Chenkin, 1973). Articles in Jewish and general periodicals pointed to intermarriage as the glaring weakness of Jewish communal life. Jewish organizations began holding conferences to assess the “intermarriage crisis” and determine whether communal policy might reduce the ever upward rates. There was general agreement that intermarriage threatened Jewish continuity, and each of the religious movements adopted resolutions firmly stating their opposition to the phenomenon. Gradually, this reaction of shock and dismay evolved into a more pragmatic, many would say more constructive, attitude of resistance and containment. In this view, intermarriage remained a threat to the Jewish future, but intermarrying couples remained potential members of the Jewish community, and all efforts should be directed to enlisting their affiliation. In effect, this attitude, best articulated in Rabbi Schindler’s 1979 address announcing the formation of the Commission on Outreach, distinguished between respecting the personal choices of individuals to intermarry and opposing the phenomenon of intermarriage generally as a threat to Jewish continuity.

This policy of “outrage and outreach” theoretically remains the official stance of

Jewish leadership: reach out to intermarrieds, encourage the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse, but articulate clearly the support for Jewish in-marriage and opposition to interdating and out-marriage. To be sure, these policies are not always consistent with one another. Does the existence, for instance, of workshops for intermarried couples under the auspices of Jewish communal organizations in and of itself signal communal acceptance and even endorsement of intermarriage? By and large, however, communal leadership has successfully defined outreach to intermarrieds as a necessary response to the difficult problem of Jews living in an open and secular society in which marriage to non-Jewish mates has become unsurprising. Moreover, Jews marrying out are no longer communicating their rejection of Jewish heritage by doing so. They are signaling their acceptance of the open society and the secular courtship process, not their rejection of Judaism. Religion may well become a critical factor in the subsequent development of these marriages, and outreach to these intermarried couples is unquestionably the key to stimulating conversion and formation of Jewish homes, thereby stemming losses and attrition resulting from intermarriage.

Yet, several signs point to the possibility of a communal redefinition of intermarriage—as beneficial for Jews, rather than a danger to be contained. Some sociologists have argued that intermarriage may well produce a numerical gain for the Jewish community via conversion and that Jewish identity, in any case, has been so diluted that intermarriage is by no means aggravating the situation (Bayme, 1987; Hertzberg, 1989; Silberman, 1985). These sociologists intend to counteract the alarmism and hysteria over the vanishing American Jew. Yet in underscoring that Jewish biological survival for the present seems assured, the message has been blurred into one that states that intermarriage may no longer threaten Jewish vitality.

Ideological issues related to intermarriage have also helped change communal

perceptions of the phenomenon. Few communal questions in recent years have attracted as much attention as the controversial 1983 decision by the Central Conference of American Rabbis on patrilineal descent. The decision in effect affirmed long-standing Reform practice to accept as a Jew the child of either a Jewish father or a Jewish mother, provided that the parents expressed a commitment to Jewish continuity through engaging in specific acts of Jewish affirmation in the child's upbringing. Many have sought to explain the decision as one of principle that is irrelevant to the intermarriage phenomenon generally. Traditional rabbinic law had defined identity via the mother. In an age of gender equality, should not equal weight be given to a Jewish father? Moreover, Reform leaders pointed to the anomaly of children of Jewish fathers raised as Jews, yet not being recognized as such, whereas children of Jewish mothers who had never identified in any substantive or even symbolic way as Jews were automatically recognized as Jews under Jewish law. Traditionalist Reform rabbis, in fact, pointed to their refusal to officiate at marriages in which one partner was born of a Jewish mother but had never affirmed membership in the Jewish community.

Yet, in addition to questions of principle, the patrilineal descent decision must also be considered in the sociological and demographic context of American Reform Judaism. For one thing, the overwhelming majority of Reform rabbis had been practicing patrilineal descent since World War II by their de facto acceptance of children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers as Jewish. Moreover, Reform rabbis who oppose patrilineality in the name of communal unity had to face the harsh reality that the Orthodox rabbinate was unlikely to accept Reform conversions in any case. Finally, and most importantly, as the numbers of interfaith marriages increased, the numbers of children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers within Reform temples naturally increased as well.

However, objections to the patrilineal descent decision are considerable. First, its effects upon Jewish unity weigh heavily. For the last 2000 years the Jewish community has acted upon a single principle of matrilineal identity. Any child of a Jewish mother, no matter how involved or uninvolved in Jewish activity, claimed equal status as a Jew under Jewish law. Orthodox and Conservative Jews agree on the continuing validity of this principle. Thus, individuals who are told that they are Jews by Reform rabbis would find their Jewishness rejected, in the absence of formal conversion, by Orthodox and Conservative Judaism alike. To be sure, Orthodox rabbis generally rejected Reform conversions in any case. Yet, the decision for patrilineality, rather than for insistence upon the conversion of children of Jewish fathers, drove a wedge between Conservative and Reform Judaism, the two largest religious movements within contemporary American Judaism. Finally, as Reform Rabbi David Polish (1989) has recently noted, the insistence that the Jewishness of children of either Jewish mothers or Jewish fathers depends upon certain Jewish "affirmations" threatens to divide the Reform movement itself over differing criteria of what such affirmations might be.

Equally serious are the implications for Israel-Diaspora relations. Reform leaders, like their Conservative and even many Orthodox colleagues, oppose proposed changes in the Law of Return that would have the effect of denying Jewish status to those who convert to Judaism under non-Orthodox auspices. They argue that the State of Israel, through legislative action, ought not drive wedges between Israeli and Diaspora Jews by declaring that converts to Judaism in the Diaspora are less than full Jews. This argument, however, collapses in the face of the patrilineal descent decision. The Reform movement itself has driven such a wedge by declaring offspring of Jewish fathers as Jewish. Should Israel now be compelled to amend the Law of Return in a more liberal direction, extending the definition of who is a Jew to

children of Jewish fathers, recognized as Jews by the Reform and Reconstructionist movements in America, yet whose Jewishness is denied by more traditionalist sectors of Jewry? Significantly, the Reform movement in Israel itself recognized the implications of the decision for their claims to recognition within Israel and vociferously, yet vainly, opposed the patrilineal descent resolution.

Finally, we must weigh the consequences of the patrilineal descent decision on conversion to Judaism in America. In theory, patrilineality may obstruct rather than encourage conversion. Intermarried couples are now offered the consolation that even without the conversion of the Gentile mother the offspring of such marriages are still Jews. They may well be entitled to ask why convert at all and submit to a rigorous program of Jewish study if the children are already Jews. Although little statistical evidence exists to date to corroborate this claim, historically one motivation to conversion has been to enable children to be raised within the Jewish faith—a motivation possibly undermined by the patrilineal descent decision.

In the final analysis, the patrilineal descent decision, motivated by legitimate concerns for expanding Jewish numbers and the principle of gender equality, may not be taken out of the context of the outreach movement and the intermarriage phenomenon. It affirms the growing reality of intermarriage and says to intermarried couples that their identifying children are still presumed to be Jewish, even without conversion. As laudable as such a statement may appear, not only does it undermine Jewish unity but it also goes beyond a pragmatic accommodation to intermarriage toward ideological legitimization.

What are the alternatives? Recently, several “centrist” Orthodox leaders have been urging the universal conversion of the children of non-Jewish mothers. Legal requirements for the conversion of minors are said to be less austere than those imposed upon adults and might be accepted by all sectors of Jewry without undue

hardship. Working toward such a unified conversion procedure would also carry with it the two side benefits of enhancing intermovement relations and encouraging those who truly wish to raise their children as Jews to signal their desires through a meaningful conversion procedure. In the case of adult children of Jewish fathers committed to leading a Jewish life, facilitating reconversion may well be desirable in any case to ensure marriageability with Conservative and Orthodox Jews.

Even more divisive than patrilineality has been the issue of rabbinic officiation at interfaith marriages. Orthodox and Conservative rabbis are universally opposed to officiation and will suffer sanctions should they even attend such weddings. Reconstructionist rabbis have worked out guidelines permitting rabbinic participation in civil ceremonies. No issue has so divided Reform rabbinic leadership than the question of officiation, whether singly or in cooperation with Gentile clergy. About half of Reform rabbis do officiate at mixed marriages under certain conditions, most usually the promise to raise children as Jews. The official stance of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), however, opposes officiation, but leaves the final decision to the individual discretion of the particular rabbi. The Joint Placement Committee of UAHC, CCAR, and the Hebrew Union College has sought to support the CCAR position by opposing publicly the decisions of Reform congregations to refuse to employ rabbis who will not officiate at mixed marriages.

Proponents of rabbinic officiation claim it is the natural extension of outreach, opening doors of entry to intermarried couples. Opponents claim that rabbinic officiation accomplishes little except to send normative signals of rabbinical acceptance and even blessing of interfaith marriages.

What little research that exists tends to argue against rabbinic officiation. Studies sponsored by the American Jewish Committee and executed by Egon Mayer (1989) indicate that the rabbinic refusal to officiate causes some bad feeling and

resentment, but does not discourage communal involvement. Conversely, little evidence indicates that rabbinic officiation does in fact lead to greater communal involvement, much less conversion. Seen in this light, ideological and theological reasons underlying this issue would appear as more weighty and substantive than the pragmatic questions of outreach effectiveness.

To be sure, some rabbis justify officiation as the morally desirable alternative. Thus, Rabbi Roy Rosenberg cites the universalist concern with humanity as grounds for officiation. Common brotherhood with Gentiles should naturally result in marital unions between Jews and Gentiles, and rabbis ought to bless such unions and even co-officiate with Christian clergy. This position ironically echoes Napoleon's erstwhile request—denied by the Paris Sanhedrin—that the French rabbinate encourage one in every three unions to be an interfaith marriage!

Rosenberg's position reflects those who no longer fear interfaith marriages. It is doubtful whether he and like-minded colleagues could subscribe to the official position of the Reform movement, which continues to oppose intermarriage. Yet, rabbis who refuse to officiate generally respect the right of colleagues to do so and will often refer couples to them out of consideration for the couples themselves and their parents. Thus, not only has the number of Reform rabbis willing to officiate increased significantly but also a position supportive of officiation, which once was considered virtually heretical, has become a mainstream, albeit minority, position within the Reform movement. The net effect, of course, becomes further communal legitimization of intermarriage.

Further evidence indicates that Jewish leadership attitudes have become more accepting of intermarriage. A recent study of Reform Jewish leadership indicated that 80% of converts or those married to converts expressed approval of their children marrying out without conversion. More

startlingly, 50% of this group indicated they would not mind their children converting to Christianity (Winer et al., 1987)! In other words, as intermarriage becomes more acceptable within Jewish leadership circles, increasingly Jewish leaders no longer perceive it as a stigma. Whether the removal of the stigma attached to intermarriage in fact increases intermarriage is an unprovable supposition, but, over the long term, it certainly helps legitimate intermarriage as an option for American Jews.

Similarly, among the current spate of handbooks to intermarriage are those that extol the virtues of raising children in two faiths. Embracing both faiths may, of course, be understood as an extension of American pluralism and a way to deepen experience and understanding. Thus, oblivious to the theological contradictions between Judaism and Christianity, Lee Gruzen in *Raising Your Jewish/Christian Child* argues that the dual-faith option is the most compelling route for today's intermarried parents. Yet, if Gruzen's book is the work of a solitary journalist, more weighty are the statements of rabbinic leaders who similarly support a two-faith scenario. Thus, Rabbi Steven Reuben in *But How Will You Raise The Children* admits that his earlier opposition to dual-faith child rearing had been misplaced. Far worse, for him, is raising children in no faith at all. Although Rabbi Roy Rosenberg joins with Protestant and Catholic colleagues in *Happily Intermarried* in opposing two faiths for children as theologically inconsistent and confusing to children, he nevertheless concludes that two faiths can happily co-exist within one home. He praises intermarriage as a model human relations phenomenon that will enable Jew and Christian to lovingly accept one another.

In fairness, not all of the recent guides to intermarriage extol the phenomenon generally or endorse the two-faith solution specifically. Paul and Rachel Cowan, for

example, clearly prefer conversion to Judaism and criticize the two-faith solution as all but impossible. Similarly, Judy Petsonk and Jim Remson support a single faith within the home with occasional introduction of cultural and ethnic traditions of the other heritage in the child's upbringing. Susan Weidman Schneider also urges that children receive a unified religious identity, arguing that two faiths can work only if both parents are equally committed to their respective religion.

AN APPROPRIATE COMMUNAL RESPONSE TO INTERMARRIAGE

Some sociologists recently have claimed that the increase in intermarriage is by no means a watershed event in American Jewish history. Calvin Goldscheider (1986), for example, dismisses intermarriage as an insignificant threat for "the data indicate strong Jewish communal and identificational ties for the intermarried." Goldscheider bases his argument on structural factors—friendship ties, neighborhoods, and religious affiliation—rather than on ideological perspectives on intermarriage and Jewish continuity. Recent intermarrieds, in any event, look like most other Jews. He therefore concludes that the fuss over intermarriage, in effect, is unwarranted. Steven M. Cohen (1989), in contrast, acknowledges that, the greater the number of intermarriages, the greater the number of offspring who are less committed to Jewish life. For Cohen, intermarriage poses the danger of decreased involvement in the Jewish community even if windows of opportunity exist for outreach to intermarrieds. In other words, intermarriage poses the specter of serious losses for Jewish life, although the phenomenon is by no means an unmitigated disaster. In pronounced contrast, Israeli demographers Uziel O. Schmelz and Sergio Della Pergola (1989) emphasize the declining rate of conversion and the dilution of Jewish identity over the long term. Thus, whether in-

termarriage matters sociologically in terms of Jewish survival is currently arguable, although majority opinion tends to see more losses in intermarriage than gains.

Yet, over and above the sociological and demographic effects of intermarriage, the phenomenon matters in how Jews interpret it—the very ideological issues that some of the sociologists dismiss as irrelevant to the Jewish future. For what has occurred has been a shift in the perceptions and attitudes of American Jews toward the increased acceptability of intermarriage. The challenges to Jewish leadership are considerable. First, Jewish leaders must acknowledge intermarriage for what it is—a threat to future Jewish unity, identity, and continuity. Efforts to reinterpret intermarriage as a positive step in terms of human relations and accommodation to American modernity understate the degree of assimilation that intermarriage signifies and lay the groundwork for conflict in terms of future Jewish identity. It must be recognized that opposition to intermarriage in some ways runs counter to Jewish perceptions of American values and civilization as fully consonant with and nurturing of Jewish values. American culture extols the ideals of romantic love and equality for all of humanity. Yet, Jews cannot articulate continued opposition to intermarriage—something Jewish leaders would still prefer to at least pay lip service to—without at the same time acknowledging that Jewish values and American ideals are at times in conflict. Intermarriage proves that America has worked in terms of the acceptance of Jews. The question for leadership now becomes whether Jews can maintain their unique identity in a friendly America.

Second, Jewish leaders must now confront conversion as the antidote and perhaps the sole bright spot on the map of intermarriage in America. This means that Jews must abandon their long-held opposition to proselytization and their ambivalence about the presence of converts in their midst. Programs of outreach to

would-be Jews-by-Choice, such as those pioneered by the Reform movement, should receive full communal encouragement. New outreach initiatives are necessary, particularly those that harness the barely tapped potential of the electronic media. Yet, in the absence of a uniform conversion procedure acceptable to each of the religious movements within contemporary Judaism, Jews face the specter of thousands of individuals entering the Jewish people in good faith each year only to find their conversion delegitimized by other sectors of the community.

In the absence of conversion, accurate information must be disseminated about the implications of patrilineal descent and raising children in two faiths. Communal leaders must clearly inform individuals that the identity of patrilineal Jews as Jewish is rejected by Orthodox and Conservative Judaism. Whether the patrilineal descent decision itself discourages conversion and legitimates intermarriage is a painful issue that must be studied honestly. Communal leaders must also inform intermarried couples that no denomination of Judaism has a category of being both Jewish and Christian. Individuals who choose to raise their children in two faiths must recognize the theological absurdity they are communicating, to say nothing of the psychological identity problems they are creating for their children.

Finally, the challenge of preserving Jewish unity warrants careful attention to the divisive issues of conversion, patrilineality, and rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings. Differing standards and procedures operative within the respective movements threaten to drive wedges between Israel and Diaspora Judaism and sow divisions among Jews of different movements and persuasions. At a time of considerable opposition and dangers from without the Jewish community, the Jewish community can ill afford the disunity that the climate surrounding intermarriage breeds from within.

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