



**A
STATEMENT
on the JEWISH
FUTURE**

Text and Responses



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Introduction

On December 5, 1996, the American Jewish Committee convened a conference of Jewish leaders to debate “A Statement on the Jewish Future” signed by a coalition of academics, rabbis, and communal professionals affiliated with all the major religious movements and critical of certain communal policies designed to secure Jewish continuity. The Statement originated in an earlier meeting convened at the Jewish Theological Seminary anchored in an article published in *Commentary* magazine by Professors Jack Wertheimer, Charles Liebman, and Steven M. Cohen entitled “What to Do About Jewish Continuity.” The JTS meeting concluded with a recommendation that a statement be formulated inviting Jewish leaders and intellectuals to express a “countervoice” to prevailing opinion on what constitutes Jewish continuity and how the community should go about securing it.

The Statement was formulated and released in August 1996. Shortly after, acting in his capacity as an AJC program officer, Steven Bayme convened a debate on the Statement at AJC headquarters. Our hope was to engage the issue seriously, solicit views both for and against the Statement, and promote dialogue between them.

Rather than publish conference proceedings, generally of interest only to those actually in attendance, we felt that the best way to disseminate the work of the conference was to publish a collection of essays responding to the Statement on which the conference was based. Of the more than twenty individuals we invited to respond, thirteen did so—seven who signed the statement, and six who remain critical of it. We believe this collection represents the broad range of opinion the Statement evoked. We present it to the community in the hope that it will stimulate future deliberations over securing the Jewish future.

Mimi Alperin, *Chair*
Jewish Communal Affairs Commission
American Jewish Committee

A STATEMENT ON THE JEWISH FUTURE

Responding to the high rates of intermarriage and concerns about eroding Jewish life, the organized Jewish community has initiated a drive to ensure the Jewish future in North America. As Jewish academics, rabbis, and communal professionals, we welcome this initiative, particularly insofar as it promotes greater attention to the importance of Jewish learning and involvement, and seeks to transform Jewish institutions to make them even more compelling. Certain initiatives, however, seem to us more likely to undermine North American Judaism than to strengthen it. In a well-intentioned effort at inclusivity, some in the Jewish community seem all too willing to sacrifice distinctive Judaic values and teachings.

In response, we call upon American Jews to declare the following five values fundamental to any program of Jewish continuity in North America:

(1) *Torab*. Judaism rests upon a shared commitment to Jewish learning and the commanding obligations that being Jewish entails. These are what give substance and meaning to Jewish life. Jewish continuity depends upon our ability to maintain and strengthen these shared commitments and obligations, and to pass them on to our children.

(2) *Am Yisrael* (Jewish peoplehood). The bonds of Jewish peoplehood have stood at the heart of Jewish group definition since the days of Abraham and Sarah. Judaism is more than a religion; it demands identification with the Jewish people as a whole, with its historical homeland, and a familial closeness with Jews of all kinds everywhere. Jews, whether by birth or by choice, must consider themselves links in a great chain of Jewish tradition, a *shalshelet* (chain) that stretches across the generations binding Jews across time and into the future.

(3) *Klal Yisrael* (the community of Israel). Plural expressions of Judaism have long been a feature of Jewish communal life. Today, Jewish continuity is particularly heavily intertwined with the future of the Reform and Conservative religious movements, with which the overwhelming majority of North American Jews identify. To the extent that these movements succeed in retaining their members, we will have Jewish continuity. Recognizing this, all Jews regardless of ideological conviction ought as an expression of *Klal Yisrael* to affirm the importance of plurality of religious expression within American Judaism.

(4) *Brit* (covenant). From the time of Abraham, Jews have seen themselves as bound to one another and to God through a covenant that distinguishes Jews from members of other peoples or faiths. This covenant serves to differentiate Jews from non-Jews and to ensure that Jews remain a people apart. American Jews, integrated into American society and full participants in its activities, are increasingly not a people apart. As boundaries blur, inclusivity runs the risk of degenerating into a vague universalism that is Jewishly incoherent; for example, non-Jews receiving *aliyot*. No matter how close the personal relationships between Jews and members of other faiths, Jewish continuity demands that strong, visible religious boundaries between Jews and non-Jews be maintained. Leadership roles within the Jewish community and in Jewish religious life must be reserved for those who accept the covenant—Jews alone.

(5) *Keruv* (outreach). In recent years, Jewish leaders have initiated programs of outreach-to-Jews in an effort to draw Jews closer to their people and faith and to win back those whose Judaism has eroded. The moderately affiliated are the most promising candidates for outreach, and—given scarce resources—outreach programs are most productively directed toward them. Outreach directed toward those who have moved furthest from Judaism and toward the non-Jewish marriage partners of Jews may also be valuable and should remain on the Jewish communal agenda. No Jew should ever be written off. However, our priority ought to target those in the broad middle of the Jewish population to strengthen their adhesion to the core of Jewish life, in all its manifestations. Outreach to mixed-marrieds should never encourage religious syncretism or ideological neutrality to mixed marriage itself.

In calling upon American Jews to place these five values at the heart of Jewish continuity efforts, we part company both with those who believe that any kind of Jewish involvement, no matter how superficial, promotes Jewish continuity, and with those who look upon outreach as a panacea and seek to dilute Judaism to make it more attractive to potential converts. Both of these efforts, while well-meaning, are doomed to fail; they promote not continuity but radical discontinuity and are at variance with our tradition. Instead, the best way to ensure the continuity of a meaningful, durable Judaism in North America is to emphasize the fundamentals: Torah, Jewish peoplehood (*Am Yisrael*), pluralistic community (*Klal Yisrael*), the sacred covenant (*Brith*), and a strong program of outreach to moderately affiliated Jews.

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To its credit, the Reform movement continues to oppose mixed marriage. Rabbi Jeffrey Salkin, who co-chairs the UAHC-CCAR Commission on Outreach, recently distinguished between synagogue-based outreach and the “value-free” or nonjudgmental approach that takes place outside of religious institutions. The former, according to Rabbi Salkin, preserves the norms of Jewish endogamy. The latter, unfortunately, approaches mixed marriage in neutral terms. Salkin’s distinction is well taken, yet concerns about outreach remain. First, much of the public demand to increase funding for outreach involves extension of outreach to an array of institutions both secular and religious. That broadening will surely make it difficult if not impossible to discourage interfaith marriage. Second, one cannot underestimate the pressure growing within the Reform movement for nonjudgmental and value-free outreach, symbolized by the increased demand for rabbinic officiation at mixed marriages. Within the past year the Reform movement has acted to deny Jewish education to children being raised even partially as Christians, and to uphold standards discouraging Reform rabbis from officiating at mixed marriages. Both these steps are important and merit communal support. Whether continued pressures to reverse these decisions can be withstood is a question for the future.

Similarly, federation leaders claim the community should “watch what we do, not what we say.” Indeed, some federations, most notably Boston and New York, have moved rapidly to launch serious continuity initiatives. Outreach to mixed-marrieds appears to constitute at most a marginal dimension of these initiatives. In that sense, some federation leaders have criticized the statement by arguing that the community cannot articulate norms, much less boundaries. Yet surely Jewish leaders do retain responsibility for helping to shape communal climate and self-perception. What the Jewish community says and does publicly surely matters in determining norms. Ideological neutrality can never substitute for value clarification.

Real disagreement exists over how to preserve Jewish life. Some have sought to paper over differences and create an artificial consensus. As one who signed the Statement, I believe the community can only profit from candid debate and exchange. At the very least, we will keep each other honest, reminding in-reach advocates of the necessity to avoid writing off fellow Jews.

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Intermarriage and the Jewish Future

For nearly a decade, the high and apparently growing rate of intermarriage has fueled concerns over “Jewish continuity” among communal leaders and involved North American Jews of all sorts. On a personal level, intermarriage can be enormously painful, especially for the most committed Jewish parents and family members. On the demographic level, intermarriage means fewer potentially Jewish offspring will identify as such. On the communal level, it means—among other consequences—that, in time, fewer Jews will use and support the synagogues, centers, federations, schools, and other Jewish institutions that have been the hallmark of North American Jewry since its inception.

With this said, this situation is not as gloomy as some would have us believe. In a manner of speaking, intermarriage does not threaten North American Jewish continuity per se. Notwithstanding the many Jews who intermarry, there is little doubt that a distinctive Jewish group, some healthy Jewish institutions, and some vital forms of Judaism will continue. Intermarriage may, in time, reduce the North American Jewish population, but it certainly will not deplete that population entirely. In fact, those who will persist as Jews will, in all likelihood, display higher average rates of ritual practice, educational background, piety, and communal affiliation than the current Jewish population.

The chief reason for this counterintuitive prediction is that intermarriage occurs disproportionately among those with the weakest levels of Jewish education and involvement, as well as those most geographically removed from many other Jews. We know that good Jewish homes, intensive Jewish education, and dwelling among Jews (i.e., in areas with high proportions of Jewish residents) all bear inverse statistical relationship with intermarriage. If so (and not ignoring the many young adults from very fine Jewish homes and communities who do intermarry), then the converse is also true. That is, more intermarriers spring from those parts of the Jewish population with weaker Jewish ties, poorer Jewish education, and less ritually observant parents. Although some have rightly said that intermarriage can strike anywhere, it does tend to thrive among the least Jewishly involved, connected, and educated.

Paradoxically, then, by inducing the departure from the population of less committed and less connected Jews and their offspring, intermarriage may be producing some “positive,” or at least ambiguous, effects on the remaining Jewish group as a whole. Moreover, by causing alarm among even the more involved Jewish families (if not *especially* among the more involved), intermarriage has provoked a healthy counterresponse in the form of heightened interest in more intensive forms of Jewish education for adults and children alike. As a result of all these trends, intermarriage may eventually shrink the number of North American Jews; but, in time, those who remain Jewish will exhibit higher levels of ritual observance, with more widespread intensive Jewish educational experiences (day schools, camps, youth movements, Israel, university courses, Hillels, adult study, etc.).

Jewish continuity, then, pure and simple, is not the issue here. But the nature of the Jewishness that will continue *is* very much the issue; and it is out of concern with the type of Judaism that will continue in North America that I was moved to help draft and to sign the “Statement on the Jewish Future.” The Statement’s five main points (emphasizing Torah,

Jewish peoplehood, community of Israel [i.e., pluralism], covenant [i.e., boundaries], and outreach [to the moderately affiliated]) grow out of our understanding of the Jewish future, the topic to which I now turn.

Religious Strength versus Ethnic Decline

An examination of some recent trends provides some hints as to the impact of intermarriage on Judaism in North America. Jewish-Gentile intermarriage surged from 1960 to 1980, and has climbed only slowly since then. In the last two decades, indicators of Jewish religious vitality have, perhaps surprisingly given the prior surge in intermarriage, remained stable or even moved upward. Prime among them have been steady or slightly increasing ritual observance among all major denominations; climbing yeshiva and day school enrollments capped by an unprecedented growth in non-Orthodox Jewish high schools, several of which have just opened or soon will; and growing adult Jewish education under all sorts of auspices, including synagogues, federations, and Jewish community centers. Other positive signs of religious vitality abound. Included here are the Jewish emphasis of the JCC movement; the creativity and widening impact of Jewish feminism (extending even to the Orthodox); the spiritual renewal movement; federation-sponsored Jewish continuity efforts, as well as Jewish healing, the arts, and other arenas of Jewish cultural creativity. Religiously, Jewry seems to be doing fairly well.

In sharp contrast, while North American Jews may be religiously creative and productive, numerous aspects of Jewish ethnicity—the other major dimension of Jewishness and Judaism—are in decline. The disturbing signs are plentiful: the growth in intermarriage itself and, perhaps as important, an accompanying rise in its acceptability by parents, family members, friends, rabbis, educators, and Jewish institutions; the decline in in-group friendship (i.e., fewer Jews have mostly Jewish friends); the geographic dispersal of the Jewish population, along with the demise of Jewish neighborhoods; the grow-

ing emotional, philanthropic, spiritual, and political distance from Israel; the fall-off in membership and participation in *all* major Jewish fraternal organizations; the decline, in inflation-adjusted terms, of giving to federation annual campaigns; and the alienation from collective Jewish political activity, occasioned in part by the very success of such activity since 1967.

These trends point to a likely narrowing of North American Judaism—from a religion plus ethnicity to a religion alone. As they move from a sacred tribe to an individualist faith, North American Jews will find themselves increasingly alienated and detached from the rest of world Jewry, particularly that found in Israel. In contrast with American Jews (Canadians may be a different story here), Israelis of almost all persuasions see themselves in national terms, as do Jews of the former Soviet Union (FSU). For decades, the latter defined themselves, and were defined by others, as one of many quasi-national ethnic minorities in the FSU. In time, an increasingly religious American Jewry may look out to a nationally defined world Jewry, with gaps so great as to produce at least “Two Worlds of Judaism.”

Accordingly, the rise in intermarriage in North America is not merely a demographic issue but a cultural and religious one as well. It inevitably affects the very fabric of Jewish life and the very definition of being Jewish. Oddly enough, the effects of intermarriage upon the meaning of Judaism and Jewish identity increase insofar as mixed-married Jews and their Gentile husbands and wives choose to more actively participate in synagogues and Jewish community centers, and enroll their youngsters in Jewish schools. The intermarried, their children, and even their parents constitute emerging and growing constituencies within Jewish institutions. Their conceptions, concerns, and interests understandably point in the direction of lowering barriers between Jews and Gentiles and of blurring boundaries so as to make Jewish institutions more inviting for mixed-faith families. These stances increasingly shape and influence Jewish institutions, how they operate, and

how they conceive of and present Judaism.

As these processes unfold, in line with prevailing American notions of religious affiliation, we begin to see the emergence of a more religiously oriented Judaism, one which emphasizes such matters as faith, liturgy, theology, spiritual search, and religious community—all undeniably good things.

At the same time, a form of Judaism that is characterized by, and accepts, high rates of intermarriage must perforce place less emphasis on Jews as a distinct, historic people, with collective interests, mutual responsibilities, and common destiny. Jonathan Woocher’s classic work on federation Judaism, *Sacred Survival*, published just over a decade ago, describes a bygone era. The echoes of “Am Yisrael Chai,” once sung with gusto at UJA and federation gatherings, have now been replaced by the more individual and delicate melodies of “personal journeys” and “spiritual search.” On a related plane, for welcome reasons—the decline of anti-Semitism among them—Jews in America no longer see themselves as marginal, but something is indeed lost in the transition. That something may be the ethnic aspect to Jewish identity. Something is wrong when a young collegian can say (in the pages of *Moment* magazine), “I don’t need to be around other Jews to practice my religion,” or when, in the same issue of the magazine, a traditionally oriented Jewish columnist defends removing his *kippah* when leaving his home with the argument that the *kippah* in the home is a religious statement, but on the street it is a mere ethnic symbol, as if Jewish ethnicity is somehow inferior to and distinctive from Jewish religion. American Jews more and more see themselves as counterparts to Protestants and Catholics, while less and less seeing themselves as counterparts to Hispanics, African-Americans, Italians, Irish, and Asian-Americans.

Concerns over the threats to the ethnic dimension of North American Judaism underlay the decision of the drafters of the Statement to specifically single out “Jewish peoplehood” as a matter worthy of the organized community’s urgent attention. In

effect, this key portion of the Statement calls for a specific emphasis on ethnicity as a vital and distinctive aspect of being Jewish that sets Judaism apart from other religious options in North America. If taken seriously, the call for a greater emphasis on Jewish peoplehood would mean more attention by educators, rabbis, and others to: the teaching of Jewish history, cultivating relations with other Jewish communities around the world, immersion in Jewish cultures, and pursuing Jewish politics, directed both internally and externally.

Three Contrasting Responses to Inter-marriage

The changes affecting North American Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness lend critical urgency to the questions of how the organized community is to respond to intermarriage and, more generally, to the increasingly permeable boundaries (if “boundaries” is even the appropriate word anymore) between Jews and non-Jews and between Judaism and “non-Judaism.” Indeed, responses have ranged across a spectrum ranging from inclusiveness (bring the intermarried in) at one end to exclusiveness (keep them out) at the other.

Whatever their position on this spectrum, the vast majority of Jewish leaders, rabbis, and educators harbor the same twin, competing urges, albeit to varying degrees. On the one hand, they—including even the most vigorous advocates of inclusiveness—really do wish that fewer Jews would intermarry. On the other hand, they—even those who are most committed to exclusivity—also wish that those who have married non-Jews would choose to lead fuller Jewish lives, and raise their children as committed and educated Jews. In short, in the ideal world, no matter what their current position on the inclusive-exclusive spectrum, almost all communal leaders and professionals would like to effectively oppose intermarriage and to successfully reach the intermarried to lead richer Jewish lives. This means seeking to achieve two aims simultaneously: preserving the “endogamy norm” (the prescription that Jews ought to

marry Jews) while at the same time Jewishly engaging the mixed-married, the very individuals who most obviously have violated that norm.

It ought to be obvious (but it isn't to everyone) that these two desirable aims stand in tension; in practice, they contradict and undermine one another. The most vigorous defense of the endogamy norm entails denouncing intermarriage and criticizing those who commit it or those who contemplate it. Denunciation inevitably makes the mixed-married feel uncomfortable, as well it should, and leads them to avoid people and communities who are most committed to the endogamy norm. Indeed, that is the main reason why the most vigorous advocates of inclusiveness caution rabbis and other leaders to soften their condemnation of intermarriage. Rabbis, in turn, report that they are under increasing pressure from their congregants (who are often mixed-married or the parents of mixed-married children) to downplay their opposition to intermarriage.

Concurrently, the most enthusiastic forms of reaching the mixed-married include extending welcome, recognition, and honors not only to mixed-married Jews but, in theory and sometimes in practice, to their non-Jewish partners and children. Such activities, by their very nature, inevitably make it impossible to forcefully condemn intermarriage and to vigorously insist that Jews marry only born-Jews or converts to Judaism. Social norms are enforced through social sanctions—that is, by rewarding those who follow the norms and punishing those who violate them. Communities that heartily welcome the intermarried have to be regarded as simply less serious about the endogamy norm than those that discourage—or that at least choose not to explicitly encourage—the participation of the intermarried in synagogue and organized Jewish life.

The Jewish community's various positions and policies on the intermarried balance the twin competing objectives (endogamy and welcoming) in different ways. At one extreme are those who argue that, as a community, Jews ought to make absolutely no allowance for the mixed-married, and in fact

ought to make sure that they hold no positions of honor or leadership in Jewish life. While few would turn away intermarried Jews seeking legitimate services or participation, most would clearly indicate their lack of comfort with the inclusion of the mixed-married in their communities.

At the other extreme are the advocates of total inclusiveness, or what may be called “far-outreach.” They believe that the intermarried, as a large and fast-growing segment of the Jewish population, ought to constitute the *primary* target for education, recruitment, and inclusion. In their view, the intermarried—as those most at risk of leaving the Jewish population—are those most worthy of attention by educators and those who fund them. Some voices in this camp urge widespread inclusion of intermarried Jews’ families (which means non-Jewish spouses and children) in liturgy and leadership, while opposing any attempt to make explicit where the participation of non-Jews is inappropriate or unwelcome. They urge rabbinic officiation at the weddings of interfaith couples, arguing that such officiation establishes a potentially fruitful link between such couples and the Jewish community. Some far-outreach advocates claim that the organized community often drives away potentially interested interfaith couples. They admonish rabbis and communal workers for being insensitive and unwelcoming to mixed-married families who, predictably and understandably, are especially sensitive to even minor slights and seeming insults.

Targeting the intermarried, inclusion in liturgy and leadership, rabbinic officiation, and heightened sensitivity constitute the major policies of the most vigorous advocates of far-outreach. While they may pay lip service to the endogamy norm, there can be no doubt that the inevitable by-product of the policies they advocate is to sabotage the historic Jewish prohibition against intermarriage and a lot that goes with it.

Between the two camps of the most militant defenders of the endogamy norm and the most committed advocates of far-outreach lies a vast middle

ground. At the heart of this middle-ground position is an emphasis on outreach to the “moderately affiliated,” some of whom are, in fact, intermarried. The moderately affiliated group embraces the very large numbers of Jews already affiliated with Jewish institutions, yet not so involved that they would be regarded as members of the activist elite. In operational terms, this definition boils down largely to those members of Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist congregations or JCCs who show few, if any, signs of high Jewish involvement and commitment. Such signs include the following illustrative behaviors: frequent attendance at synagogue services, regular study of Judaica, extensive ritual practice at home, serious observance of all major Jewish holidays, intensive Jewish education of their children, serving in leadership capacities in organized Jewish life, or maintaining a deep connection with Israel, marked by frequent visits, pro-Israel activity, reading, friendships, etc. Certainly, those who evince even a few of these signs cannot be regarded as only moderately affiliated. The cornerstone of this policy is the emphasis on targeting the moderately affiliated rather than the least affiliated or the intermarried, as such. Educators, rabbis, and communities would certainly welcome interfaith couples who evince interest in becoming active, but they would not sponsor programs that explicitly make a special invitation to the intermarried.

Targeting the Moderately Affiliated: Outreach at Its Best

So which policy is best: emphasizing the endogamy norm above all else, or welcoming the mixed-married even at the expense of the endogamy norm, or something in between? As a rhetorical technique, policy analysts generally work to frame their preferred alternative as a compromise between two extremes, and they tend to raise their own preference last. Accordingly, it should by now be readily apparent that I advocate outreach to the moderately affiliated as the preferred policy direction for the Jewish community. I come to this position by way of both strategic

argument and consideration of principle.

The strategic argument is rather straightforward. First, the moderately affiliated (even if they're intermarried) are much easier to reach than the unaffiliated (especially if they're intermarried). In other words, the same effort, the same dollars, the same rabbis and educators can have a more profound impact on families and individuals who are visible and are already somewhat committed to conventional Jewish life than they can on a population that is remote, uninterested, and invisible. Why make *special* efforts to reach the intermarried as an explicitly designated population, especially when doing so would seem to condone intermarriage and further erode the endogamy norm? Why not simply welcome them into programs that are aimed at transforming Jewish lives and institutions without special reference to the one population group that is least likely to be touched by such programs?

Second, as a general rule (and policy ought to be made with general rules and not the exceptions in mind), the moderately affiliated can go further in their Jewish development. Far more readily than the least affiliated (and the intermarried are probably the majority in this group), the moderately affiliated stand a better chance of adopting one or another version of intensive Jewish living. In so doing, they stand the better chance of augmenting and enriching the core of Jews who are crucial for an active, vibrant, and historically significant North American Jewry. As one outreach worker who refuses to target the intermarried told me, "Even if I reach them [the mixed-married], I can't close the deal." Their non-Jewish spouses, with their own sincere views, commitments, and loyalties to things other than Judaism (otherwise, why haven't they converted?), inevitably pose obstacles to serious Jewish growth on the part of the Jewish partners. (To be sure, Jewish spouses can also present similar obstacles; yet, certainly, those posed by Gentile spouses are more serious and more intractable.) Yes, the obstacles can be overcome, but it doesn't happen very often. Certainly, mixed-married Jews who seem ready to surmount such obstacles

should be helped to do so; but the community ought not to be spending precious resources that could be better spent elsewhere in the expectation that a significant number of intermarried Jews will be persuaded by far-outreach programs to adopt an intensive style of Jewish life.

A third strategic consideration is the matter of continuity. According to the 1990 National Jewish Population Study, only a quarter to a third of mixed-married Jews say they are raising their children as Jews. (This figure needs to be seen as a realistic maximum for the proportion of identifying Jewish offspring of these marriages. While children of mixed-faith couples not now being raised as Jewish may, in time, come to identify as Jews, we must also consider the possibility of movement in the other direction where those being raised as Jews eventually cease to identify as such.) The current rates of intermarriage, as well as the research on interethnic and interreligious marriages among the groups in North America, suggest an astoundingly high rate of intermarriage in the next generation among the raised-Jewish children from this generation's cohort of mixed marriages. That rate probably will exceed 65 percent. In other words, of the one-third (maximum) of the children who are being raised as Jews by mixed-married parents today, no more than a quarter will marry Jews. If so, then less than one in ten of the grandchildren of the mixed-married will identify as Jews and have Jewish spouses.

From the point of view of a voluntary community concerned with its vitality and continuity, and operating with scarce personal and financial resources, the mixed-married simply do not represent a particularly enticing primary target for investment of those scarce resources. In-married couples (i.e., the vast majority of whom are at least moderately affiliated) raise Jewish children with reasonably high chances of marrying Jews. Presumably, positive influences on such couples will produce benefits to the community in the next or future generations as well. In contrast, investment in Jewishly educating the mixed-married produces positive results in this gen-

eration alone, if at all.

The immediately foregoing analysis underlies the fifth plank in the “Statement on the Jewish Future,” which discusses the most appropriate targets of outreach. We are concerned that growing efforts to target those who are the most alienated from Jewish life will, in time, distract attention and resources from reaching and nurturing the moderately affiliated, as defined above. Perhaps our concern is premature; perhaps not. But we do not view efforts aimed as specifically recruiting the most distant from Jewish life as a wise use of communal resources; nor, for that matter, would I spend limited and sorely needed outreach funds on their opposite number, those most committed to Jewish living, in one or another fashion. Rather, finite resources and sober judgment demand that we focus on those who are neither already heavily involved in Jewish living nor so distant from it that we stand little chance of dramatically turning them around. To be clear, this policy does not mean turning away interfaith couples or ignoring them entirely. But it does oppose committing significant fungible resources to efforts that specifically focus on the intermarried.

In practice, the policy of focusing on the moderately affiliated means focusing on members of Conservative and Reform congregations—hence our plank on “Klal Yisrael (the community of Israel)” or pluralism. Some Orthodox leaders balked at signing the Statement out of reluctance to being seen as lending legitimacy to non-Orthodox forms of Judaism. Indeed, this plank does explicitly call for respect for Conservatism and Reform. But this plank, in emphasizing the importance of the middle of Jewish life, also must be seen as urging a de-emphasis on those situated very far from the mainstream of American Jewish life, which we implicitly define as Conservative synagogues and Reform temples. This position contains no ideological slight to the Orthodox on the one hand nor to the least affiliated and the intermarried on the other. It merely recognizes that in the current North American Jewish reality, the success of Conservative and Reform Judaism—

barring a major alteration—is key to the success, and continuity, of North American Judaism. To paraphrase Willy Sutton, why go to Conservative and Reform congregations to engage in outreach? Because that’s where the Jews are.

Preserving Boundaries to Strengthen Community

Beyond these strategic questions of resource allocation lie other objections to the far-outreach position, that is, that which demands explicitly targeting the intermarried as well as others who are currently least interested in Judaism. Among its unquestioned achievements, the outreach movement (be it outreach to the intermarried or outreach to the moderately affiliated) has indeed stimulated several positive developments in Jewish life. The emergence of programs in basic Jewish literacy (Florence Melton Mini-School, Derekh Torah, CLAL, Wexner, and others, to say nothing of the scores of individual initiatives by synagogues, centers, and federations) derives in part from an attempt to come to grips with the intermarriage phenomenon and, more broadly, with the lack of engagement on the part of the moderately affiliated. Indeed, mixed-married Jews who turn to such programs are welcomed, as well they should be; but none of these programs specifically advertise that they are seeking Jews married to non-Jews.

In contrast to these broad-gauge endeavors aimed at all Jews, intermarried or not, attempts to publicly and specifically *target* the mixed-married run several dangers. One is that they seem to lend legitimacy to intermarriage as acceptable from a Jewish point of view. Just as we don’t sponsor classes for Sabbath violators, we ought not single out the intermarried as worthy of special attention. Another problem peculiar to programs geared especially to the intermarried is that rabbis and educators may be drawn into presenting Judaism in such a way as to make it more palatable for marketing to the intermarried and their non-Jewish spouses. This can come not so much in adopting specifically Christian

elements, but in casting Judaism in terms that will be most familiar to North American Gentiles and the Jews who marry them—emphasizing ethical teachings, spiritual quest, and personal faith, while downplaying ethnic ties, historic persecution, particularist responsibility, and Zionism—in short, Jewish peoplehood. In other words, as a matter of comfort or strategy, rabbis and educators in such programs may unwittingly (or intentionally) promote an increasingly religious and decreasingly ethnic construction of Judaism.

But the danger in reaching out specifically to the intermarried (as opposed to targeting any and all Jews who want to go out and learn) doesn't stop with the impact on how Judaism is conveyed. The subsequent danger lies in an actual transformation in the very nature of Judaism in ways which ought to frighten anyone committed to a distinctive definition of Judaism. Here we may turn to the observations of historian Michael Meyer of HUC-JIR Cincinnati (and another signer of the Statement), published a few years ago:

When will we begin to hear demands that not only should Christians be given full equality in the Reform temple but also—at least up to a point—so should Christianity? For the present, the idea still seems absurd. But then who, even twenty years ago, would have imagined that increasingly Gentile mothers of *B'nai Mitzvah* would light Sabbath candles, that Torah scrolls would be handed to Christian parents, and that men and women not committed to Judaism would recite portions of the liturgy?

Meyer fears that the Reform movement is in danger of yielding to pressures to incorporate Christian elements in liturgy, education, and temples. (Conservative Judaism and Reconstructionism may already face the same challenge, although perhaps not to the same extent.) As members of Reform congregations, Christian spouses (perhaps with the support of their Jewish spouses) will urge their houses of worship to recognize their religious traditions—perhaps in the liturgy, perhaps “a larger role for Jesus in

our religious school textbooks,” or perhaps even a Christmas tree in the temple lobby (At least one Jewish community center has already endured such a controversy, rejecting the request of the center's Christian members to erect a Christmas tree in the center's lobby. If one center, then why not more; and if centers, then why not Reform temples?)

Some may regard Meyer's concerns as fanciful or overly alarmist; perhaps Jews are sufficiently steeled against introducing explicitly Christian elements in their synagogues and centers. But there can be no denying that the peoplehood dimension is an aspect of Judaism that North American Jews easily abandon, and many have already moved in that direction. Efforts to “embrace the stranger,” when not tempered by a commitment to norms, to boundaries, and to Jewish peoplehood, will inevitably produce a detribalized, individualistic, privatized, purely religious form of Judaism in America. Now, it is true that some may view such prospects with equanimity, and some prominent Jewish historians may declare that outcome the inevitable verdict of history. But my personal Jewish commitments (which may be summarized by saying, “Judaism is the way in which I practice my ethnicity”) lead me to view such a prospect with alarm, to say the least. Just because social forces and history may lead us in a certain direction, as Jews we are certainly not absolved of the responsibility to try to influence that history.

For this reason, the Statement we signed includes a delicately worded plank on “Covenant.” Our purpose here, drawing upon traditional Jewish language, is to advocate the exclusion of non-Jews from roles that ought to be (and, until now, have been) reserved for Jews. The aim is not, as some have (mis-)interpreted our Statement, to exclude those such as some Reconstructionists who have a theological objection to “Covenant.” Rather, we sought language that would draw a firm line for certain purposes between Jews and non-Jews and between Judaism and non-Judaism. Our quarrel is not with those who find “Covenant” problematic, but with those who find defining exclusive roles for Jews in liturgy and lead-

ership impossible.

The Dangers of Successful Far-Outreach— and Some Qualifications

Thus, any way one looks at it, significant communal investment in outreach *specifically targeted* at the mixed-married (as opposed to merely welcoming them to programs aimed primarily at moderately affiliated Jews) is of dubious value. As I have argued, such programs are unlikely to meet with great long-term success. The far-outreach projects undertaken heretofore, in numerous cities, centers, and congregations, have entailed considerable expense and required excessive hours of professional time to reach not very many Jews. Whether they succeed or not, the impulse to change the presentation of Judaism, if not its nature, to suit the recruitment of Jews married to Gentiles, may well prove irresistible. One such change, clearly already at an advanced stage, is the evisceration of the endogamy norm, once a key cultural element that distinguished Jews from other religious and ethnic groups, few of whom were as committed to inmarriage as were the Jews.

If, contrary to my expectations, outreach efforts *do* succeed in attracting large numbers of intermarried Jews (and their non-Jewish spouses and children), the consequences for Judaism will be highly troublesome. The outcome of unbridled far-outreach will be a Judaism nearly bereft of its ethnic dimension, recognizable neither to its forebears nor to its contemporaries. Such an eventuality should concern Jews of all denominational persuasions and should especially concern federations, Jewish community centers, and Zionists, all of whom depend upon the endurance of an ethnically committed, collectively oriented, tribally defined Judaism that holds the concept of Jewish peoplehood in the highest regard. Recruiting the intermarried at all costs may be too expensive a proposition for the Jewish people.

To be clear, my opposition to overly enthusiastic far-outreach concerns only organized action by the Jewish community and its leaders, not the behavior of individuals. Parents and siblings of intermarried

Jews should do all in their power to maintain warm and meaningful relationships with their intermarried relatives. In doing so, they may well provide the decisive factor that will preserve their relatives' Jewish identities. Private actions have far fewer normative consequences for a community than do the official policies of leaders and institutions. Families should do what they have to do; but so should rabbis, educators, lay leaders, synagogues, schools, federations, and centers. The latter have clear responsibility for representing Judaism. Their public behavior shapes the meaning of Judaism, the content of its symbols, and the nature of its norms. Judaism is, among other things, a complex legal system whose legislators, in effect, consist of both the governed and the governors—laity, clergy, educators, volunteer leaders, and communal institutions.

Institutional behavior toward the intermarried, and policies of outreach, are not merely private matters of individual conscience or denominational preference. How Jewish leaders and institutions relate to the challenge of the intermarried and their families affects not only their own construction of Judaism but that of all those around them, indeed the entire nature of the Jewish definition throughout the world. After all, Judaism does not equal "Protestantism minus Jesus." It is not only a matter of individual faith, but a collective enterprise in which all Jews are implicated and all Jews can implicate, so to speak. Those who argue that it is appropriate to debate such issues as territorial compromise in Israel, the inclusion of women in Jewish religious ceremonies, or the interpretation of passages in our texts certainly ought to find it appropriate for committed Jews to debate alternative approaches to outreach and the intermarried. Efforts by some federation leaders to deflect scrutiny of their policies in this area by confining the discussion to the religious sphere may be an effective debating ploy; but such efforts must be seen as a disingenuous tactic designed to avoid controversy and to marginalize the critics of the damaging communal policies they pursue or, in the name of consensus, permit.

In truth, the Jewish community's stances toward outreach, the moderately affiliated, and the unaffiliated intermarried may, in the end, have little impact either on the intermarriage rate or the rate at which they and their families forge attachments to the conventional Jewish community. But whatever ambiguous impact these stances may exert on Jewish demographics, there can be no question of their direct relevance for the Jewish symbolic system. Insofar as such is the case, the decision of which stance is best ought to be made on grounds of principle rather than in terms of putative social consequences. The decision as to whether to defend the endogamy norm ought not be driven by a calculation as to whether the norm will succeed in influencing most Jews to intermarry. After all, the rejection in practice of Shabbat and intensive text study has not dissuaded all religious denominations of Judaism from holding up these as ideals to which we should all aspire. Rather, we need to decide whether insistence on endogamy is crucial for upholding the ethnic peoplehood dimension of Jewishness (as I think it is) or, more broadly, whether marrying a Gentile is right or wrong from a Jewish point of view. If intermarriage is wrong, then it should be treated as wrong, albeit with sensitivity and astuteness. Failure to do so will hand intermarriage not only a partial demographic victory but a widespread cultural one as well.

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Soon I shall leave my position as senior rabbi of Congregation Ohabai Sholom in Nashville, Tennessee, for a similar position at Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford, Connecticut. I wish to respond to the "Statement on the Jewish Future" through the prism of my experience in Nashville and my hopes for my move to Hartford.

Torah

It is hard for me to see how anybody can disagree

with the statement that our future "rests upon a shared commitment to Jewish learning." I place at the top of the list of my accomplishments in Nashville the creation, ten years ago, of a weekly Chevrah Torah, a Shabbat morning study of *parashat hashavua*. I take pride in the fact that, often, more than thirty-five Reform Jews in Nashville, Tennessee, gather at 9:15 on Shabbat morning with no other agenda than to grapple with the text of the weekly *sidra*.

It should be a beacon of hope to those of us concerned with Jewish continuity that indeed, in the Reform movement, more and more Jews take Talmud Torah seriously. In addition, our Shabbat morning services, when we do not celebrate a bar or bat mitzvah, include an interactive discussion of the weekly Haftarah portion. One member said to me, "I am seventy years old and I have been a Reform Jew all my life, and a fairly regular attender at that, but I have never begun to understand the meaning of the Haftarah portions." This is progress. While there is much that concerns us as we face the future, the saving of individual Jewish lives or small groups of Jewish lives through serious encounter with sacred texts is an important accomplishment.

The phrase "commanding obligations," however, is more problematic. Certainly, I believe that discipline is an absolute necessity for all Jews. Too many Reform Jews believe our movement stands for "Do what you want, when you want, how you want." It cannot be. Many of us who are lawyers, doctors, rabbis, teachers, businessmen, whatever, love our work. Yet, if we are honest, there are many days when we go to our office and perform our tasks not out of a great love but out of a sense that people expect us there. We have an obligation. This is a *vital* idea for Reform Jews to understand and accept. One cannot succeed in any area of life without discipline and sense of obligation. So it must be in our religious tradition.

What those obligations are, though, will differ from individual to individual. My hope and expectation for Reform Jews is that we will at least find a