

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) *Torah*. 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) *Brith* (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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Prof. Eugene Borowitz <i>Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York</i>	Rabbi Daniel Gordis <i>University of Judaism, Los Angeles</i>	Prof. Alan Middleman <i>Muhlenberg College</i>
Rabbi Nina Cardin <i>Sh'ma magazine</i>	Rabbi Irving Greenberg <i>National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership</i>	Prof. Jerry Z. Muller <i>Catholic University</i>
Prof. Steven M. Cohen <i>The Hebrew University</i>	Prof. Samuel Heilman <i>Graduate Center, CUNY</i>	Rabbi Yehiel Poupko <i>Pritzker Center for Jewish Education of the Jewish Community Centers of Chicago</i>
Rabbi Maurice Corson <i>The Wexner Foundation</i>	Prof. Paula Hyman <i>Yale University</i>	Prof. Jonathan Sarna <i>Brandeis University</i>
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Institutional affiliation for identification only.

Responses

Steven Bayme

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The Statement by the thirty Jewish intellectuals, rabbis, and communal leaders was meant to counter mainstream communal thinking on how to secure Jewish continuity. All too often, Jewish leaders seem intent on a quick fix, a magic bullet, or a noncontroversial prescription, such as a trip to Israel for every Jewish adolescent. By contrast, the signers of the Statement believe that there is no effective route to Jewish continuity that will not prove offensive, in some measure, to the Jewish communal consensus. There is no mystery to securing Jewish continuity. Those most willing to pay the cultural price of commitment to leading a serious Jewish life will, in all likelihood, be most successful in realizing Jewish continuity. In a prior generation, the federation slogan was "Survival Demands Sacrifice." That rings true no less today in the struggle to attain continuity. However, some losses are inevitable, and many of these will be personally painful to the leadership of the American Jewish community.

Reactions to the "Statement on the Jewish Future," to be sure, have been decidedly mixed. Many Conservative, Modern Orthodox, and Reform leaders have welcomed its appearance. Others claim that the Statement is irrelevant to the continuity debate or have derided it as excessively elitist or exclusionary. Still others quarrel with its effort to articulate communal priorities.

Reaction has been strongest within the Reform movement. The Reform program of outreach to mixed-marrieds, a central priority of the movement, reflects the pervasiveness of mixed marriage within its ranks. Reform deserves credit for restoring the conversion issue to the Jewish communal agenda as a primary response to the reality of mixed marriage. However, Reform advocates of outreach in the absence of conversion have perceived this Statement as dismissive of their well-intentioned efforts to preserve the Jewishness of children of mixed-marrieds.

The Statement, however, does not condemn outreach per se. On the contrary, it declares that no Jew ought be written off entirely. Rather, the Statement argues that priority of resources should be targeted to the moderately affiliated, those in the "middle" of Jewish life, who want Jewish continuity but lack the knowledge and wherewithal to lead a creative Jewish life. Surely, those who are interested in and open to Jewish commitments constitute a far riper target for continuity initiatives than do the completely unaffiliated who have chosen not to lead a Jewish life.

Regrettably, only a minority of mixed-married couples are included among the "middles" of Jewish life. Two-thirds of mixed-marrieds claim no interest at all in communal outreach initiatives, and nearly three-fourths of mixed-marrieds are already raising their children outside the Jewish faith. Outreach to these large numbers of mixed-marrieds is little more than chasing after people who have no desire to be chased. Even more troublesome is the recent finding of Dr. Bruce Phillips that the largest numbers of mixed-marrieds desire that the Jewish community assist them in raising children in both faiths. Already, unfortunately, some outreach advocates urge acceptance of such demands. For example, Jewish Family and Children's Service in Boston, Massachusetts, recommends to interfaith couples: "Become active in the synagogue and the church. Making connections to the people that your partner is connected to and sharing these experiences are what life and religion are about. . . . The benefit for children from an interfaith marriage is that they have two diverse and enriching backgrounds to learn from."

Moreover, the Statement expresses concern that much of what passes for outreach today is ideologically neutral on intermarriage itself. A well-intentioned language of inclusivity designed to raise the comfort level of mixed-marrieds within the community is easily perceived as nonjudgmental acceptance of mixed marriage itself—as one alternative family model among others, and by no means the most complicated. In such a culture, it is hard to commu-

nicate to young people the importance of choosing a Jewish mate.

Consider, for example, the following: *The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour* concluded its January 2, 1992, program with an extended segment on mixed marriage and the Jewish community. The broadcast featured four contrasting perspectives on Jewish communal outreach to mixed-marrieds. Rabbi Charles Familant, a Reform rabbi who performs interfaith marriages, often in cooperation with Catholic and Protestant clergy (“according to the laws of Moses and Jesus”), refuses “to write these people off” and therefore ministers to their spiritual needs. His Reform colleague, Rabbi Steven Foster, rejects rabbinic officiation at interfaith weddings but maintains that, absent specific programs of outreach to mixed-marrieds, we will face considerable demographic losses within the next generation. In contrast, Rabbi Alan Silverstein, a Conservative rabbi, notes that, having worked extensively with interfaith couples, he has a twofold response: targeted outreach and programs aimed at preventing intermarriage. An Orthodox colleague, Rabbi Stanley Wagner, goes further, claiming the entire outreach movement has accomplished little save to communicate to the Jewish community at large that interfaith marriage absent conversion is perfectly acceptable.

This debate on PBS symbolizes a larger division within the Jewish community struggling to cope with mixed marriage. The release of the Council of Jewish Federations’ National Jewish Population Survey highlighted a significant increase in mixed marriage and a pronounced drop in the rate of conversion to Judaism. On a human level, these individuals all have Jewish relatives and do not wish to be rejected by the Jewish community. On a demographic level, as Rabbi Foster notes, they form a critical mass of nearly one-half million adults and 770,000 children.

Given these realities, it is understandable that the Jewish community fears serious numerical erosion, which will, in turn, undermine the institutional base of the community. Ironically, many of today’s advocates of outreach to mixed-marrieds were un-

concerned, just a few short years ago, about population loss due to a declining Jewish birthrate. “Quality not quantity” was what mattered, in their view. Despairing of any demographic policy that might impact upon birthrate, they urged the Jewish community to abandon rhetorical statements about numbers. In pronounced contrast, many of these same advocates today see outreach to mixed-marrieds as a panacea for Jewish demographic dilemmas.

Certainly one ought not quarrel either with the human imperatives of outreach or with the demographic realities. But all too often communal policy is guided by the personal desires of Jewish leaders that their grandchildren remain Jews, paying little attention to the content and effectiveness of outreach, its overall message to the Jewish community, and the real financial cost involved in funding outreach activities. In such a heated emotional climate—at times individuals insist that their grandchildren are Jewish even if outwardly practicing Christianity—we have, at best, a poor basis for rational policy formulation and analysis.

The late Rabbi David Polish, a distinguished Reform rabbi, pinpointed this dilemma. Rabbi Polish argued that outreach to mixed-marrieds, where successful, will have a transforming effect upon Jewish institutions, possibly diluting Jewish content. The danger of such successful outreach is the merging of Jewish and Christian identities into a meaningless hybrid, as well as the overall legitimization of intermarriage as a phenomenon. Thus a well-intentioned effort to broaden the institutional bases of Jewish life can result in undermining Jewish distinctiveness in favor of ideological blandness.

Outreach, then, should not simply validate what Jews do. It must challenge people to live Jewishly. The language utilized by the Conservative movement is instructive. The outreach arm of the movement labeled its program *keruv*, implying that the ideological imperative is to bring Jews closer to Judaism rather than transform the self-definition of Judaism and Jewish values so as to be palatable to mixed-marrieds.

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 Intermarriage

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 soft-pedal 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 inmarry. 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

core group of practices—even though that core group for one may differ from the core group for another. It is essential that all of us have a basis of Jewish practice that we consider indispensable to our Jewish identities. Any further attempt to define that core group or to set standards obligatory on all, though, will lead to division and disagreement.

Am Yisrael

As Jonathan Sarna has pointed out, one of the most difficult tasks for a congregational rabbi is the inculcation of a sense of Jewish peoplehood in our Jews-by-choice. It is axiomatic that, when it comes to religious practice, Jews-by-choice often know more, care more, and do more than the average born-Jew. It is not so easy, though, to infuse our Jews-by-choice with a sense of *am yisrael*, the importance of Jewish peoplehood and the centrality of Israel as a spiritual and physical refuge. As Rabbi Tarfon said, though, “The day is short and the work is great. . . . It is not incumbent upon us to complete the task, but we are not free to desist from it.”

Even in our Jews-by-birth, the links of the *shal-shelet* (chain) are growing weaker. Parents for whom their parents and grandparents created strong Jewish memories may feel an obligation to “expose” (almost as if it were a disease) their children to a Jewish education. So they drop their kids off at the Sunday school door or, when it is expected of them, at the sanctuary door, but rarely do they venture in themselves.

As Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman has written, “When parents do Judaism only for the children, the children get a message. That message is that this Jewish stuff is only for kids. When we grow up, we don’t need it anymore.” Such an attitude is tragic for the future of the Jewish people. We must move away from a pediatric orientation to Judaism. We must do more than send our kids off to religious school. We must pray with them, study with them, and live Jewish lives with them. We must create warm, loving Jewish memories for them if we are to hope that they will want to do the same for their children. The

stakes in getting this message across to a vast body of Jewish adults are nothing less than the future survival of our people.

Klal Yisrael

As a Reform Jew, it is very easy for me to feel defensive. The Orthodox do not accept my converts, do not accept my practice, do not accept me as a rabbi. Yet I know that, to the Orthodox, issues like patrilineality, a lack of uniform halakhic standards for conversion, and other issues suggest that we have cut off our very roots. It is a difficult question. We must struggle together. The operative word, though, is *together*. One group cannot pull back from the other. We must meet. We must dialogue. We must challenge. We must probe. We may not find the answer, but we cannot give up our search.

In Israel, though, things are deteriorating rapidly. If the *haredi* community acts to delegitimize 90 percent (the approximate number of Reform and Conservative Jews who are affiliated in the Diaspora) of world Jewry from having a voice and place in the Jewish homeland, we are in real danger. The Orthodox in Israel have thrown down the gauntlet and said, “You are either religious like we are, or you are not religious at all.”

Faced with such a choice, 85 percent of Israel’s population chooses nonreligious. Yet we know that many of those 85 percent light Shabbat candles, care for the values of Torah, and believe in a God who demands that they use their talents to create a just, caring, compassionate society. How long will the *haredim* call these people nonreligious and deprive future generations of a rich source of Jewish spiritual values?

Brith

One of the realities of my eleven years in Nashville is that, during my tenure, a group from The Temple split off to form another congregation. One of their main reasons: my refusal to officiate at interfaith marriages and my insistence that we must continue to encourage endogamy as a people. The underlying

premise of my position, which was so offensive to many, was that, from a religious perspective, there is and must remain a difference between a Jew and a non-Jew.

All choices in life have consequences. The choice to convert to Judaism has consequences, as does the choice not to convert. I truly believe that we must be honest with the non-Jews to whom we Reform synagogues attempt to reach out. If we are not, our outreach efforts will be nothing more than an ephemeral solution leading to our dissolution as a people or, at the very best, our severe diminution within two generations.

I do not believe we are asking too much when we say to a non-Jew, "We care about you, we are here for you, we want to study with you, we want to teach you, we want you to participate in our services, we welcome you. Yet we ask you to understand that there is a religious difference between a Jew and non-Jew, and that I, as a rabbi, cannot perform a Jewish marriage ceremony for a non-Jew." If we offer all of the above to a non-Jew who approaches us, and we offer them with caring and empathy, but still the non-Jew says, "If you don't marry me, you have rejected me, and you bear the responsibility for turning not only me but my Jewish spouse-to-be off of Judaism forever," I think our response in such a case is to cut our losses and ask respectfully, "Who is rejecting whom?"

Keruv

I believe in outreach. As a Reform rabbi, I believe we should do everything that we legitimately can to make a non-Jew feel welcome in our midst. I believe that a non-Jew should sit on the *bima* at his child's bar or bat mitzvah. I believe that a non-Jew should play a meaningful role in the service. I believe a non-Jew should have the opportunity, if he wishes, to address his child as part of the service.

On the other hand, I do not believe that a non-Jew should participate in such a way as to falsely declare that he or she is bound by the covenant of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob,

Leah, and Rachel. Specifically, I do not believe it is appropriate for a non-Jew to bless the Torah. *Asher bahar banu mikol ha'amim venatan lanu et torato* (who chose us from among all the nations and gave us his Torah) is a sacred commitment, and one who does not feel part of the "us" to whom Torah was given, one who does not see his or her fate bound inextricably with the Jewish people, should not utter those words before the congregation.

My approach, I believe, offers the best of both worlds. The non-Jew should have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the precious life-cycle event of the child to whom he or she has contributed mightily. Often it is the non-Jewish parent who drives the child to bar or bat mitzvah lessons, who supports, who attends worship with the family. It is a family event.

On the other hand, there remains a distinction between a Jew and a non-Jew. I think it is important for all congregations to develop clear policies. We must be honest with those whom we are trying to attract. At the same time, we should make our religious faith as attractive as possible.

We have a precious heritage. We have civilized the world. We brought the world from a pagan outlook, where gods were malevolent forces that had to be appeased, to an outlook where an invisible, good, caring God yearns for us to create a better world. There is much to attract a thinking person to our religion, and we should not be hesitant to share its riches.

It is no longer true that those who marry out of the faith do so because they reject our faith. Most people who marry out of the faith do so because they have grown to love, and wish to spend their lives with, a non-Jew. Yes, it is sad that the practice of our tradition means so little to them that they do not feel compelled to share their faith and practice with the one with whom they share their life. Yet we must realize that the Jewish awakening comes sometimes in strange and mysterious ways.

As Rabbi Eric Yoffie has pointed out, Herzl was an assimilated Jew until struck by the injustice of the

Dreyfus trial. Then he devoted his life to the preservation of the Jewish people. Moses was happy living as chief shepherd to his father-in-law in Midian until a vision compelled him to return to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and demand that he let our people go.

For me, then, the question of outreach or inreach is not a question of either/or. It is a question of both/and. I recognize that resources are limited. I recognize that there are people out there who simply do not want to be reached. We are foolish to pursue them so aggressively. Yet I think some tend to draw our circle a bit too narrowly. It is in our best interest to cast a wide net, though with the greatest emphasis on the core. Let us cast a wide net and I believe we will be surprised by those who find their way into it.

On one point I wish to be very clear. When I say we should seek to attract converts, I do not say we do this by “transforming Judaism.” Judaism, as it is, is a vibrant, wonderful faith, with many opportunities for meaningful religious expression within its parameters. I do not want to change Judaism. I want to amplify its message.

I believe that there are many people out there who are searching and who could find within our tents a very happy spiritual home. I believe that among those are some who, difficult as it may be, will develop an important sense of *am yisrael*, the peoplehood of Israel, as well as a preference for the religion of Israel.

At the same time, I continue to believe that we cannot afford to become the first generation in Jewish history to cast no negative judgment on interfaith marriage. I wish we could return to the original 1978 mandate of Rabbi Alexander Schindler when it comes to outreach. We should continue to reject intermarriage, but we should definitely endeavor to welcome the intermarried. Too often, in our pursuit of the intermarried, we have sanctioned intermarriage. I do not believe that it is in our best interest to continue to do so.

One final point: In the Torah, God instructs Moses to construct the altar of the ancient Taberna-

cle from unhewn stones. Moses could not change the shape of the stones that went into the altar. There is a lesson in that instruction. Today Jews of many different personalities, intellectual bents, desires and needs come to our synagogues. We must endeavor to incorporate them all into the framework of our contemporary altar. At the same time, we must never forget that the altar we build has a special purpose. It is an altar to the Almighty and to the covenant of which we are heirs.

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To the best of my knowledge, I was the first Reform Jew to sign this Statement. As the Statement can easily, but mistakenly, be construed as a lever for gaining greater support for Conservative and Orthodox Judaism at the expense of Reform, it may be of interest to know why I added my signature to those of individuals I respect but with whom I differ in basic religious orientation.

Let me begin by noting that some portions of the Statement do not meet my approval. I believe that every effort to promote Jewish continuity is worthwhile and therefore not only should no Jew be “written off entirely,” no Jew should be written off at all. Any involvement, no matter how superficial, is not to be taken lightly. I reject the notion that outreach even to those furthest removed from Jewish activity produces “radical discontinuity.” Indeed, I support the efforts of Reform Judaism to reach out to the periphery as well as to reach into the core. But this is not my own personal statement; it is an attempt to reach a broad consensus. More important, I am fully and strongly in sympathy with what I believe constitutes the heart of the Statement. Indeed, its essential points are ones I have made repeatedly myself—and usually in gatherings of Reform Jews. Let me simply list four of them.

First, in my list of priorities, too, those Jews who

are on a trajectory toward the center are most deserving of every encouragement we can give them, especially in the way of enhanced educational opportunities. I would make it clear, however, that within this category I include without any prejudice not only Jews-by-choice but also mixed-religion couples and their children who are being raised as Jews, whether their Jewishness be matrilineal or patrilineal. Along with the leadership of the Reform movement, I would, however, exclude those families that are raising their children in two faiths. I would reach out only to those who are genuinely seeking to be drawn in.

Second, I fully support the need for setting boundaries. A non-Jew in the synagogue, however often she or he may attend and regardless of whether the children are receiving a Jewish education and identify themselves as Jews, is still not a Jew. It remains religiously wrong for those of other faiths to play any role in the synagogue in which they lead Jews in a Jewish ceremonial act or recite words that are meaningless or absurd for the congregation when spoken by a non-Jew. I do believe it may be acceptable for a nonconverted Christian woman, trying to help create a Jewish home for her family, to light Shabbat candles in her own house despite the literal meaning of the words she recites. Indeed, that experience may one day lead to her own conversion, or at least help to create an atmosphere that will increase the chances of her children remaining Jewish. But that is not the same as performing a public ceremonial act on behalf of the congregation, such as lighting the same candles in the synagogue.

Third, of even more concern than Christians doing Jewish acts on behalf of Jews is the as yet weak but growing trend to introduce the Christian faith into the synagogue. As more and more mixed couples join synagogues, pressures have appeared to introduce Christian (or "neutral") elements into the services, especially when they involve a rite of passage. In a very few synagogues resistance to such foreign elements has virtually broken down and they have begun to descend what I have called "the slip-

pery slope toward syncretism and sectarianism." In such cases outreach is no longer a matter of reaching out but of "meeting halfway." The necessity to arrest this tendency before it is too late seems to me paramount. It is of special importance to me just because I am a Reform Jew and hence live more on the edge than do my fellow Jews of more traditional religious orientations.

And fourth, I can easily and wholeheartedly identify with the five values that the Statement puts forth. Surely no serious Jew can object to Torah, especially when it is broadly defined as learning. Nor can I conceive of a committed Jew who does not connect "commanding obligations" with Torah, however one defines the theological, historical, or moral underpinnings of those obligations. Jewish peoplehood is a value that I, as a Reform Jew, find requires more emphasis today than a decade or two ago when we were more focused on our people and its heartland in the Land of Israel. Now we are too easily swept away by the fashionable current of "spirituality" that we have adopted from the society around us, and we focus on our own inner lives in disproportion to our sense of collective responsibility.

I am grateful for the Statement's emphasis on *klal yisrael* because I can well imagine that this portion of the Statement was difficult for the Orthodox signatories. Yet without a firm avowal of pluralism within Judaism, I could not have signed. As for *brith*, I recognize that covenant represents a theological category that excludes secular Jews, and that perhaps here my own sense of *klal yisrael* falls short, since it fails to fully embrace them. Yet I am firmly convinced that the future of Judaism, at least in the Diaspora, lies in religious commitment. Secular versions of Judaism that put Jewish culture or support of Israel at the center instead of around a religious core do not have the staying power of commitment to a religious way of life. For me, *brith* is a symbolic expression of the basic religious relationship in Judaism between the people and its God. As a Reform Jew I may understand that relationship very differently from those of more traditional theologies, but I fully

share the conviction that if we do not succeed in transmitting a sense of covenant, we will not succeed in gaining Jewish continuity. Thus the thrust of this admittedly imperfect Statement in the direction of shoring up our religious distinctiveness as Jews makes it perhaps even more important for members of the Reform movement like myself than for those less exposed to the dangers that today confront Jewish continuity.

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Let me be candid. The proposal to reserve leadership roles within the Jewish community and in Jewish religious life to “those who accept the covenant” as articulated in “A Statement on the Jewish Future” excludes me, my parents and grandmother, my sons and husband. As Reconstructionists, we do not accept the idea of covenantal Jews (nor, I might add, the unmentioned corollary of Jews as a chosen people). I find it quite hurtful that my good friends who signed this Statement are ready to relegate me and my family to the margins of American Jewish life.

And what warrants such desperate notions of triage and exclusivity? According to the Statement, American Jews must avoid an inclusivity that “runs the risk of degenerating into a vague universalism that is Jewishly incoherent.” Perhaps they have in mind that universalism declaring men and women equal: the “Jewishly incoherent” vision that produced radical changes in American Jewish life and brought women onto the *bima* and into communal leadership roles. Nowhere, of course, does the Statement suggest going back to the well-established tradition of women’s subordination in Jewish communal life, but given the logic of its argument, why should we not expect this in some future document?

Or perhaps the signers of the Statement have in mind the universalism that proclaims all men are cre-

ated equal and endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, the core universalist vision at the heart of the American democratic experiment. Is this now condemned as “Jewishly incoherent” and a post-modern vision of tribalism resurrected as the proper alternative to such Enlightenment notions? Tribalism, with its emphasis upon common birth, assumes a sameness as critical to solidarity. It stands in opposition to peoplehood, which assumes pluralism and diversity, a commonality based upon difference rather than sameness. What ultimately makes one form of “vague universalism” acceptable and another form dangerous?

Why should we trust these self-appointed gatekeepers with their penchant for drawing boundaries and setting up barriers? The Statement begins by decrying a “well-intentioned effort at inclusivity” and those who “seem all too willing to sacrifice distinctive Judaic values and teachings.” Clearly these academics and community professionals have appointed themselves the arbiters of what constitute “distinctive Judaic values and teachings.” Those who would like to be followed implicitly claim the authority of expertise and position. They would plan to leverage the future by laying guilt over the survival of the people at the feet of every American Jew and Jewish organization. The new prophets call for errant Jews to come back to the ways of Torah.

Apparently some Jewish baby boomers have suffered a loss of nerve vis-à-vis American social and cultural life. Certainly they seem to have lost patience with ordinary American Jews. No doubt they could quote from Robert Frost, without irony, that good fences make good neighbors. Reading this document, I can well understand—and empathize with—many of our forebears who eagerly fled the constraints of the collapsing, corrupt kehillahs of eastern Europe to embrace the freedom and anarchy of American Jewish communal life as a wonderful tonic. Women certainly breathed more freely in the United States. Before long they were ready to challenge past practices, sacrificing those “distinctive Judaic values and teachings” upheld by traditionally

constituted male authorities.

Lest you think I worry unnecessarily, look at the Statement's position on Torah. Torah is presented not just as a shared commitment to Jewish learning but to "commanding obligations." Who is commanding? Must all American Jews, now, believe in God and God's commandments? Are we moving toward requiring a belief in revelation? Will the next step be another thirteen articles of faith as Maimonides constructed them? Here, in late-twentieth-century America, Torah is placed in a theological straitjacket that the American Jewish community is urged to adopt to guide its funding priorities.

I think we need some historical perspective. "There are immense areas in Jewish life that are unoccupied by organized activity and influence," noted a distinguished rabbi. "The issues we discuss so heatedly at our conferences and conventions . . . are not of concern to unattached Jews, whose number is legion. *Jewish life in this country seems weightier at its periphery than at its center.* . . . There is one comforting element in the picture as I see it. . . . These Jewish illiterates . . . are not lost souls. . . . They are Jews to whom Judaism has not been presented. . . . It is not that they have turned their backs upon Judaism but that they have never faced it." That is Morris Adler in 1945. Without difficulty I could find similar statements from 1905 or 1885.

American Judaism has always been rather shallow. The periphery has always been weightier than the center. Immigrant Jews did not carry across the ocean deep knowledge of Jewish rituals and texts. So why didn't American Jews focus upon Jewish continuity in 1945? Because rescuing Holocaust survivors and securing the State of Israel seemed more pressing. Did the American Jewish community misplace its communal priorities? I don't think so. Did that mean that most American Jews remained on the periphery where they had always been? Yes. Did leaders agonize over intermarriage and "The Vanishing American Jew" as *Look* magazine put it provocatively back in 1964? Sure they did. (For younger readers, *Look* was a popular picture magazine. It has since

vanished. American Jews, as is obvious, are still around worrying about their future fate.) The issue, as I see it, is not how to erect boundaries and barriers, but how to present Judaism to those who have never experienced it.

Step back for a moment and look at the American Jewish communal landscape. American Jews come together and create identities without referring to position papers on Jewish continuity. Jewish life in the United States is built on voluntarism. Yes, generational transitions are often difficult to navigate and a number of key Jewish organizations are having a very rough time right now. Aging memberships want to perpetuate their institutions by recruiting a new generation, but they find it hard to give up control. Other organizations reinvent themselves.

No, American Jews haven't produced a vibrant, powerful, ever-expanding core of committed folk who accept an exclusive covenant and believe God commanded them to fulfill obligations laid down in Torah, but I suspect that most of them don't want to create such Jews. Or such a core. Most Jews didn't come to America for such a task, and now that they're here, they don't want to take up such a burden of continuity. I agree with them. I might add that restricting Jewish communal funds to "the moderately affiliated"—that is, largely Orthodox and Conservative Jews—won't produce such a core either, although it will guarantee that Jewish communal resources are increasingly directed into the hands and pockets of these Jews.

I have no quarrel with the second and third complementary statements of Jewish peoplehood and pluralism. Unfortunately, these aren't directed to American Jews because they are contradicted by the fourth and fifth points on covenant and outreach. No, the statements on pluralism and peoplehood are really directed to Israelis, and it suggests that this entire enterprises is being performed for an audience.

Perry Miller, the famous scholar of American Puritanism, presents a wonderful image in his brilliant essay *Errand into the Wilderness*. There he compares the Puritan experiment in New England to a

circus show. The Puritans came to America, but they kept their gaze firmly fixed on their fellow Puritans who stayed back in England. The American experiment was designed to show the stay-at-homes the path God wanted them to take. It was of momentous historical import. And then, after the English Revolution of 1644, suddenly the New Englanders discover that their audience's gaze has wandered. Like the circus clown with a large bustle, who walks firmly down to the center of the ring and then turns decisively right, while the bustle keeps walking straight ahead, the Puritans suddenly recognized that history had taken a right-hand turn. They were left alone, facing the wilderness.

We, too, should face our wilderness here in America and not worry about how our performance is being received in Israel because, in truth, the Israelis aren't watching. They are understandably preoccupied with their own tasks of survival. Indeed, the entire issue of pluralism needs to be recast as a message to ourselves. If we do that, we will realize that it firmly contradicts the normative rules set forth in the fourth statement on covenant.

Jews do, in fact, differ from non-Jews in America though they are not a people apart. There is more of interest to Jews in the 1990 population survey than intermarriage figures. In Barry Kosmin's words: "The Jews are too old, too well-educated, too liberal, too secular, too metropolitan, too wealthy, to egalitarian, too civic-minded to be normal Americans when compared to the overall U.S. population." As I have noted elsewhere, Kosmin's list suggests that Jewish distinctiveness now derives less from facts of birth than from a series of choices Jews have made: where to live, how many children to have, what education to obtain, what occupations to enter, what politics to pursue and what values to espouse. Do we really want to return to Jewishness by birth, by ascription? Is that how we understand our covenant: as a barrier? And do we want these self-chosen academics and community professionals to be the gatekeepers?

American Jews are integrated into American so-

ciety and a distinctive people at the same time. That is a remarkable accomplishment. The issue is not who we should restrict our *aliyot* to—a matter that cannot be decided by Jewish communal organizations anyhow because it is within the province of individual congregations—but what values we want to embrace. We American Jews are different. We may look like other white Americans but we don't act like them.

The authors of the Statement don't want American Jews to continue their tradition of difference. No, the Statement suggests that we should actually become more like other Americans. It is trendy in worrisome ways. We are told to become insular, exclusive, and unconcerned with universal values, to withdraw from the public sphere and to commitments to making American society as open and egalitarian and democratic as possible. Implicitly it is suggested that we act more like white Baptists and Methodists and Presbyterians and Episcopalians, not to mention Catholics—all those who have turned their backs on liberal values to cultivate their own narrow garden plots.

American Jews have demonstrated a genius for navigating boundaries. That ability to see beyond one's own nose led American Jews to help create a Jewish state, to rescue Soviet Jews (without asking whether they were kosher), to reach out to Ethiopian Jews. Why are the Statement signers obsessed with boundaries? Why should we be engaging in the American sport of identity politics? It is one of the less attractive features of academic life and certainly not one worth emulating. There are far more important issues than "who is a Jew." Maybe for the Orthodox this is critical (as the August 1996 *Commentary* symposium suggests) but I vigorously object to placing the Orthodox agenda at the center of American Jewish communal concerns. So many American Jews remain untouched by Judaism, by the beauty and meaning it can bring into their lives, that it seems criminal to be obsessed with excluding Jews, with building ever higher barriers to participation. It also runs against the grain of much that is most in-

spiring in the American Jewish past.

If American Jews really want to focus their energies upon the future and Jewish continuity, let changes come from many sources as they have in the past. Let the openness of American society and the voluntary character of its religious life stimulate Jewish imaginations and energized Jewish wills. Solutions will emerge through competition and debate, through syncretism and innovation. It seems to me that things haven't turned out so badly in America. It's been great for us as Jews, great for us as professional women. Only in America could Jewish women come so far, so fast. Many of us have a liberating sense of opportunity and security.

Judaism is more than a religion, it includes an entire, pluralist religious civilization. Therefore, Jews are more than a faith community and certainly more than a tribe. Jews identify not just with faith statements but with a diverse people. This means that there will be more than one way to join the Jewish people, to throw in one's lot with the Jewish community, to accept its past history and future destiny. One of the most important ways to commit oneself to Judaism and identify as Jews is to raise Jewish children. This deserves far more attention than it receives in the Statement.

I think that Statement signers have gotten it terribly wrong. They propose radical changes in how American Jews should understand themselves and their goals, changes that would make Jews more like conservative white Americans. They urge this upon us in the name of continuity, and they do so with one eye cocked overseas to see how well their performance is being received by Jews in the sovereign state of Israel. I have more confidence than the authors of the Statement in American Jews: in Jewish creativity, imagination, resilience, and responsiveness. Let's keep the Jewish marketplace of ideas and people an open one. Setting boundaries, erecting barriers, excluding people, and choosing gatekeepers is not a promising way to begin to face common problems.

Bernard Reisman

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The American Jewish community is highly organized, with a full network of organizations and services, staffed by a cadre of well-trained Jewish communal professionals. There is also a wide array of Jewish intellectuals who teach, lecture, and write books and articles on Jewish subjects. While the two groups—the professionals and the scholars—share many common interests and concerns, they seldom have the opportunity to meet and share ideas.

On December 5, 1996, a group of leading Jewish professionals and scholars came together for a very productive interchange. The meeting was convened because of two key initiatives.

The first was a manifesto written by a small group of Jewish intellectuals, "A Statement on the Jewish Future," expressing concern about strategies planned by the emerging Jewish continuity programs being launched by Jewish federations across North America. The original drafters of the Statement sought out colleagues to endorse their work. Some thirty individuals, academics and rabbis, signed the document. Brief stories in the *New York Times* and the *Forward* described the Statement and its supporters, but the impact was, at this stage, minimal.

What put the Statement on the public communal agenda, however, was the second initiative, taken by Dr. Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee. Himself a signer of the Statement, Bayme assembled some thirty-five leading scholars and professionals, along with the drafters of the Statement, for an all-day institute. What emerged was a productive exchange that generated fresh insights about the challenges that confront the American Jewish community. I am honored to offer my views on this ongoing dialogue.

The decline of Jewish distinctiveness in America has accelerated over the past two decades. The most obvious signs, emerging from the 1990 National

Jewish Population Survey, are the 52 percent intermarriage rate and the drop in rates of observance of Jewish rituals and of membership in synagogues and Jewish organizations. Leaders of the American Jewish community are naturally concerned.

Among scholars as well, the predominant tone is one of pessimism. At the Association for Jewish Studies in December 1996, Professor Samuel Z. Klausner of the University of Pennsylvania argued that “the cultural and structural assimilation of Jews to the American mainstream” will ultimately lead to “the religious conversion of American Jews to Christianity.” Most of those who study and write about American Jewry share his doubts about the vitality of the community.

I agree that the mass of American Jews have taken on the lifestyle and values of America, and it is certainly true that the vast majority of Americans are Christians. But it is not Christianity that attracts American Jews, but rather Western values: individualism, materialism, secularism, diversity, pluralism. And it is precisely these last two elements—diversity and pluralism—that make Jews feel very comfortable in American society. They recognize that they can be very American while at the same time maintaining their Jewish identity. This synthesis makes it more accurate to describe American Jews as acculturated rather than assimilated.

Members of the baby-boom generation of American Jews are not really trying to assimilate, if by that we mean the rejection of Jewish identity. Rather, they are seeking a different fit between their religious and psychological interests than the one that satisfied their parents and grandparents. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that many of these Jews are coming to view their Jewish identity as a resource for enriching their lives. Steven M. Cohen, reviewing data from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, discovered that Jews aged 35–44, the baby boomers, are not less ritually active than their elders.

Similar findings emerge from my study of Alaskan Jews. One would expect this Jewish community to be the very epitome of assimilation. The

decision to live in Alaska suggests a lack of connection to mainstream American Jewry: it is geographically distant from large concentrations of Jews, it is predominantly rural, it has few organized Jewish programs and only two rabbis, one Reform and the other Lubavitch, both of whom live in Anchorage.

To my surprise, however, I found Alaskan Jews to be neither assimilated nor marginal. They had, in fact, higher levels of Jewish identity and behaviors than the Jews of the Lower 48 on all measures except one: slightly more Alaskan Jews have Christmas trees.

How do we account for the unexpected attraction of Jewish identity for highly acculturated Jews? I would suggest that third- and fourth-generation Jews, who now represent the majority of American Jews, are so comfortably integrated in American society that they recognize the limitations of the contemporary secular lifestyle, and they understand that retaining and enhancing their Jewishness can fill the void. Jewish identity fulfills four functions for them:

Spirituality: The Jewish quest for meaning and purpose can help American Jews move beyond individualism and materialism.

Community: People on the “fast track,” whose relationships tend to be transient and fleeting, thirst for more personalized and permanent ties, a community where people know and care about one another.

Authority: American culture distrusts authority figures, whether parents, teachers, bosses, or government officials. But the baby boomers are starting to recognize that such distrust needs to be tempered, for the good of individuals and the larger society.

A Principled Community: Young American Jews are idealistic. Though skeptical of the organized Jewish community, they will be attracted to it if they find moral and spiritual meaning in the concepts and policies of the community.

I concur with the intentions of the people who produced the “Statement on the Jewish Future”: basic Jewish beliefs and values should not be compromised in the process of reaching out to minimally

involved Jews and the intermarried.

But I am concerned that the signers of the Statement, all active and committed Jews, are setting up criteria that would allow outreach only to other Jews who think and behave as they do. I would be more inclusive. As I have argued, Jewish identity can be made meaningful even for the most acculturated Jews. I am confident that many intermarried Jews and their non-Jewish partners will respond to our welcoming initiatives.

Being Jewish in America today is not viewed as a burden but as a viable identity. American Jewish leaders must provide the encouragement and the supportive programs that enable acculturated young Jews to express their Jewish interests and responsibilities.

John Ruskay

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I have known and worked with Jack Wertheimer, Charles Liebman, and Steven M. Cohen for decades and value them as colleagues in a collective effort to enrich Jewish life throughout the world. I therefore welcome this opportunity to present my views on the effort they have launched, first with their article in *Commentary* ("How to Save American Jews," January 1996) and now with the draft "Statement on the Jewish Future."

The *Commentary* article is of particular import since it served as the basis for a December 1995 consultation that concluded with the decision to prepare this Statement on Jewish continuity. It was in that article that the authors presented their broad perspectives on the nature of present "continuity initiatives" that served as the point of reference for the preparation of the Statement.

1. In their *Commentary* article, the authors call for the "organized Jewish community to re-direct its attention, its funding and its program from the periphery to the core." The implication is clear that this is not being done at present. This view reflects either

a benign misunderstanding or a conscious mischaracterization of how the organized Jewish community has responded to the challenge and opportunity represented by the communal focus on the "continuity agenda."

Although the authors do not clearly identify which programs are the targets of their critique, one might conclude that they are referring to federations, since they selectively cite two reports prepared by the Council of Jewish Federations and refer to the "organized Jewish community," which usually implies federations. Assuming this is the case—and if it is not, it's time for the authors to clarify the major initiatives, not isolated programs, to which they are reacting—one need only analyze the federations undertaking significant continuity initiatives to realize that this implicit accusation is baseless.

Most observers agree that among the most significant initiatives are those being undertaken by federations in Boston, Washington, Cleveland, and New York. In each community, staff has been hired to provide professional leadership, and significant funds have been made available. In each, major programs have been devoted to strengthening synagogues, to support the start of day schools, to strengthen denominations, and to bolster campus-based programs. Relying on Steven Cohen's prior conceptualization, each federation made a strategic choice to focus on the "marginally or intermittently affiliated"—those within our institutions—not the unaffiliated. In New York, during the past three years, beyond New York's long-standing support for our Board of Jewish Education, the Fund for Jewish Education (to which federation contributes over \$3 million annually for day schools), and for New York Hillel—which comes to over \$8 million annually—an additional \$9 million has been made available. These funds have been used overwhelmingly to strengthen synagogues, teen programs, campus-based programs, Jewish summer camps, and Israel Experience programs operated primarily by the religious movements—the very institutions proposed by the authors. In sum, it is simply not true, as the authors wrote, "that the attention of

communal leaders has been riveted on the unaffiliated.”

2. The critique contained in both the *Commentary* article and now this Statement emerges from a misunderstanding of our new setting. In the prior period of Jewish life, national and international instrumentalities—UJA, CJF, JDC—were required to respond to the national and international imperatives to rescue our people from around the world, resettle them in Israel or elsewhere, and participate in the building of the Jewish state. As the community turns to the “continuity agenda,” the primary arena is decidedly local. Jews not raised in committed families or committed communities will encounter and experience Jewish life in synagogues, Hillels, community centers, or Jewish summer camps. It is in these institutions that they will or will not be engaged and inspired. It is not likely that such agencies can be strengthened by national efforts far removed from local communities. CJF, for example, does not operate local programs nor does it fund local programs. While organizations such as JESNA undertake essential research, disseminate valuable reports, and provide consultations for lay and professional leaders, it is local federations and other regional or local bodies that are positioned to bring significant resources—financial, planning, and consulting—to these key “gateway” institutions that must be strengthened, if not transformed. The authors’ reliance on the CJF reports reflects the perspective of the prior era when national and international challenges defined our agenda. A serious analysis of the *content* of present continuity initiatives in communities, or a financial analysis of federation expenditures, would overwhelmingly confirm the marginal import of such national reports in assessing the community’s record.

3. The present Statement seeks to counter efforts that allegedly blur or weaken boundaries and communal norms in reaching out to the non-Jewish partners of mixed marriages. I share the view of the authors of this Statement that the maintenance of distinctions and boundaries is at the very core of Jew-

ish life. It is the way we sanctify time, space, and our collective experience as a people.

Therefore, those who undertake outreach to intermarrieds must be challenged to address how they will simultaneously maintain boundaries and norms that preserve the foundation of our people. Unless they do so, such efforts are inadequate and flawed.

Similarly, in the new sociocultural context of American Jewry, those who are unswerving in upholding communal norms and boundaries must also be challenged to address how they will simultaneously develop ways to engage those non-Jewish spouses prepared to deepen their learning about and participation in Jewish life. Failing to do so, I believe such efforts—including this Statement on Jewish continuity—are inadequate and do not provide the basis for sound communal policy moving forward. The present context requires us to maintain communal norms while simultaneously welcoming those who seek to deepen their connection with our community. This requires a dialectical approach, conceptually and programmatically.

For example, for many reasons I believe that rabbinic participation ought to be reserved for marriages between Jews. I must emphasize that this is a personal view, not that of UJA-Federation, which respects the autonomy of each denominational and rabbinic group to determine its own policies in such areas. Holding this perspective, I believe we must also develop multidimensional, nuanced approaches—publicly affirming core communal norms and boundaries while developing ways to publicly encourage and engage those prepared to learn our ways and live within our communities.

It might even be in our communal interest to have a range of positions on this matter.

Instead of seeking to promulgate one credo for all, we would be far better advised to grapple with the complex realities of our new situation conceptually and programmatically.

4. More disturbing to this reader, the Statement suggests that “the outreach directed toward those who have strayed furthest from Judaism and toward

the non-Jewish marriage partners of Jews must not be allowed to siphon away funds needed to strengthen Jewish life at its core.”¹ What are we to make of this?

As I have pointed out, with modest exceptions the continuity initiatives that federations have developed have been designed to strengthen synagogues, youth groups, day schools, denominational groups, Hillel programs, and summer camps.

In New York, as opposed to “appealing to the lowest common denominator” as the *Commentary* article asserts, federation honors the diversity of our community and provides support to exceptional initiatives proposed from synagogues affiliated with each of the denominations. New York and most other federations support day schools from the far right to the Reform movement.

I have been told informally that the authors are particularly agitated with Reform Jewish outreach (why don’t they name names?). If this is correct, I deduce that with this Statement this group of academics, mostly drawn from the ranks of Conservative Judaism and the Modern Orthodox, seeks to make certain that the one entity that allocates communal funds in the American Jewish community—federations—is inhibited from providing support for programs this group considers to be not communally desirable, if not “beyond the pale.”

Said differently, since this group assumes they are in possession of truth about what will maintain the Jewish future, they now seek to ensure that such efforts are denied communal support.

Is this not the equivalent of what most of these individuals object to so vigorously when they regularly add their names to statements advocating religious pluralism in Israel and, in so doing, protest one group’s self-appointment as the arbiter of communal

norms? Couldn’t *haredi* leaders use the very words of this Statement when they insist, to the collective horror of most who signed this Statement, that the Israeli government not “siphon away funds urgently needed to strengthen Jewish life at its core”? I strongly caution the signers of this Statement from seeking to impose on the entire community what they consider to be “the fundamentals.” Such processes can be insidious.

Reform Judaism has traditionally given primacy to individual conscience, not communal norms. The signatories to this Statement may or may not believe that this is desirable for Jewish life. I personally share their concerns. This ought to be debated vigorously. But to participate in an effort that seeks to label the core principles and approaches of one of the largest denominations as “not communally desirable” and then to seek to have communal funds denied to such programs is something we ought to oppose not only in Israel but here as well. It violates our fundamental commitment to pluralism and empties of meaning its inclusion in this Statement on Jewish continuity. How the authors could affirm pluralism as a central value while seeking to deny communal funds to the programs of a major religious movement eludes this observer. I want to emphasize:

I am dismayed *not* by the effort to engage in spirited discussion about desired strategies but by this effort to deny communal funds to those with whom this self-appointed group disagrees.

5. I believe the communal focus on the “continuity agenda” represents an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen and renew the fabric of the American Jewish community. There is no one solution. I believe the community ought to give priority to the following three interrelated strategies:

- We ought to maximize the numbers of our young who attend and participate in what appear to be the most powerful and impactful experiences of Jewish life—day schools, Jewish summer camps, youth groups, and Israel Experience programs.

- We must strengthen efforts to recruit, prepare, and retain the best and the brightest as Jewish pro-

¹ The above statement was part of the draft statement that served as the basis of the December 1996 consultation. It was deleted in drafts developed subsequent to the consultation. I have retained the section that follows both to accurately reflect the December 1996 debate and to serve as a caution for future efforts of this kind.

professionals—rabbis, Jewish educators, Jewish communal professionals. Their effectiveness will be a critical factor in determining the success of our efforts.

• We must strengthen, if not transform, the primary institutions where most Jews encounter Jewish life—synagogues, community centers, Hillel, and Jewish summer camps—to maximize the likelihood that these encounters will be compelling and rich so individuals will deepen their exploration of Jewish living and Jewish learning and remain involved in these institutions as venues to find meaning and community for their lives.

The challenge we face is less about marketing, less about outreach or inreach, less even about formal Jewish education. It is about all of these things, to be sure, but it is foremost about creating compelling communities, inspired and inspiring communities, that can “sear the soul,” communities that can beckon Jews—core Jews and marginal Jews, intermarried Jews and inmarrieds—on the basis of what these Jewish communities offer as vehicles for fulfillment, for a life of meaning, of purpose, of conviction and commitment. Experiencing such vibrant communities, “marginal Jews,” mixed-marrieds, and so-called “core Jews,” categories far more fluid than these terms imply, in fact all Jews, will be more likely to want to learn so they can become active community members.

Such an undertaking will require substantial change—individually, communally, institutionally, and philanthropically. Federations and many other national and local organizations are now testing how resources can be most effective in responding to these prodigious challenges. Let us debate alternative strategies, but let such debates be grounded in empirical analysis, not mischaracterizations based on the selective readings of reports from national task forces that have little relationship to what is in fact being undertaken in local communities. Finally, while we ought to debate alternative strategies and visions, let us respect and honor the rich diversity of North American Jewish life.

Jeffrey K. Salkin

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In the sanctuary of Central Synagogue in Rockville Centre, New York, my former congregation, there is an unusual verse inscribed over the *bima*. The words are from Psalm 118. *Lo amut, ki echyeh, v'asaper maaseh Yab*: “I shall not die, but live, and recount the acts of God.” It is a verse from Hallel, the psalms of praise that our ancestors chanted in the ancient Temple on the pilgrimage festivals, on Sukkot, on Pesach, and on Shavuot, and it is still part of our festival liturgy.

I have always interpreted these words in the following way. “I shall not die, but live”: this is an unfettered declaration of faith in the Jewish future. But the fulfillment of those words depends on the second part of the verse: “. . . and recount the acts of God.” It is not only that Jewish continuity is an act of God, though it is—and with every passing year I believe even more strongly that our endurance as a people bears the mark of the Divine Hand. It is also that our survival as a people depends on our ability to recount the acts of God, to engage in the spiritual dimension of Jewish living.

To put it somewhat differently: The Jews are not only an *ethnos*. As a mere ethnic group, our continuity is not a divinely ordained fact. In an end-of-millennium multicultural setting, a *mélange* of ethnic groups compete to be heard in the public choir. The continuity of the Jewish people *depends* upon our being a religious people. God does not need a people with a predilection for cholesterol-filled foods. God needs the Jews to teach Torah to the world, and to bring the world closer to God’s vision at the opening moments of creation.

It is for that reason that I am in general agreement with “A Statement on the Jewish Future.” My quibbles are few, though they are significant.

1. I am in full agreement with the notion of

Torah as a path to Jewish learning. I believe that learning is central to the Jewish future, because it engages us in conversation with the Jewish past and present. More than this, it is an evocation of the moment of Sinai, in which we reconnect with Torah and remember why the Torah blessing—*Baruch attah . . . noteyn ha-Torah*—is in the present. For God gives us Torah every day, if we know how to listen for it.

But the authors go one step further. Torah is not merely intellectual learning. It is learning that becomes translated into personal obligation.

I understand this sense of personal obligation to utterly transcend movement boundaries. True, more traditional Jews will understand “obligation” in a different way, with a different set of contours and rhythms. Only a Judaism of strong faith and covenantal commitments is worthy of being called Judaism.

I realize that “pluralism” has become a dirty word in some Jewish circles. As sad as I am about that, I realize that everyone has limits. Might I suggest “diversity” in its place? For, in fact, different movements will respond to different refractions of the Jewish story. This Jewish diversity is implicit in the aggadic way of understanding Sinai—that everyone heard the divine word according to his or her abilities. But make no mistake: The Torah is no mere story. The oral tradition and that which flows out of it is no mere resource. On some level, story must translate into obligation—and at that moment, as Rosenzweig said, the word that was heard millennia ago becomes a personal *mitzvah*. Or, to put it another way—*meiseh* (story) must bring *masseh* (deed) in its path.

2. I am in full agreement with the notion that Jewish peoplehood is central. Here I believe that our sense of Jewish peoplehood must stand in dialogue with “Judaism as religion.” While we are not only a people, we are also not merely a religion—over and against the claims of earlier generations of classical Reform Jews, who saw the Jewish people as a “faith community.”

3. I am in full agreement with the authors’ sense of the covenant. Implicit in their remarks is that the

Jewish people needs to be an *am kadosh*.

But I do not think that the issue of who comes up for *aliyot* is the biggest problem that we face right now, as theologically vexing as it is. The blurring of religious boundaries is important, but it is not the only issue. American Jews have still not fulfilled their mission to be an *am kadosh* in one very important way—we have not engaged American culture in any meaningful sense. We have capitulated wholeheartedly to the assumptions of elite (and, tragically, even middle-brow) end-of-millennium American culture. We no longer ask hard questions about the media or about public virtue, and seem to have handed those moral portfolios over to Christians whose worldview and sociological assumptions are radically at odds with our own.

Are we now ready to stand apart from the culture, especially popular culture? Nothing is more important for us at this juncture in American society: to walk in the footsteps of the prophets and to prompt America into an engagement with itself.

4. Finally, *keruv* and outreach. The authors believe that outreach efforts should be aimed primarily at moderately affiliated Jews, and they are afraid that efforts to win back Jews who have strayed the furthest from Judaism will siphon off much-needed funds. Finally, they are concerned that outreach efforts to mixed-marrieds will convey a neutral posture on the issue of intermarriage.

I find this section of the Statement to be particularly mischievous.

I do not believe that outreach efforts to interfaith families constitute a posture of neutrality on this issue. Far from it. It must be said, clearly and loudly, that if we want the Jewish people to continue as a distinct people with a clear religious message, then we want Jews to marry Jews.

But what do we do when that does not happen? It is far too late in American Jewish history to turn back the clock. The authors know that only a time-machine-induced trip back to the thirteenth century has any hope of completely ameliorating the threat of mixed marriage. Time and circumstances being what

they are, what should the Jewish community do?

This is where outreach to interfaith families comes in: programs designed to bring them into the synagogue, to familiarize them with Judaism, to help them work out the struggles in their lives. We are not neutral in this regard. We want to encourage Jewish choices. We want to educate their children as Jews. We want to encourage conversion of the non-Jewish spouse—and sometimes it happens more than a decade after the wedding itself. Even when rabbis cannot officiate at interfaith wedding ceremonies, outreach becomes essential.

Perhaps the authors are mistaking synagogue-based outreach programs for secular Jewish outreach program. As I said in a letter to *Commentary*, some programs for the intermarried are equivocal about Judaism and Jewish values. Such problems illustrate the two competing paradigms of Jewish communal life. Secular Jewish agencies—like Hillel and the Jewish Family Service, which cosponsored a course on bicultural exploration in interfaith marriage—are based on a social work/therapy model that is often value-free.

The competing paradigm is that of the synagogue world—whether Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, or Orthodox. The synagogue as an institution is unequivocally and unapologetically value-laden. We want the creative survival of the Jewish people as a religious people. The more Jewish families that practice Judaism, the greater the chances of that elusive target called Jewish continuity. If the synagogue can teach intermarried families how to function as Jewish families, then we will have achieved a partial victory. That is the goal of the Reform movement's Outreach Commission, which I cochair.

Finally, there are those who suggest that we have devoted too much of our programmatic and financial resources to those who are ostensibly on the outskirts of Jewish life, as opposed to those who are already within our gates. Some suggest that we should devote our energies to those who are already the most committed, rather than those perceived to be the

least committed. Some suggest that we have been too busy looking for those who stand outside our gates, thus not seeing those who are already there before us. Some have borrowed the term “triage” from the field of medical ethics, suggesting that we should sort out the so-called “patients” and allocate the resources to heal those whose Jewish immune systems are already highly functional.

The question is not *either* outreach to intermarried families *or* outreach to the moderately affiliated, which has been a great strength of many Orthodox efforts. It is time to reject the paradigm of *either/or* and go for *both*. There is an embarrassment of riches in the Jewish world for Jewish education and outreach. Many of those efforts are very useful and creative. This is a clear example of a situation where throwing money at a problem actually *works*. To *not* invest money in interfaith families and their unique needs is tantamount to abandonment.

We should continue to support and strengthen programs for those families, without any thought of cutting back on those who are already within our gates. Moreover, we should wholeheartedly reject any attempts to relativize Jewish identity. We should fight the culture of watered-down Judaism and minimalism. We should strive to dissuade those who are tempted to religious syncretism. We should work at educating the children of interfaith marriages solely in Judaism. In the words of the Midrash (*Seder Eliahu Rabbah*): Our “no” should be “no” and our “yes” should be “yes.”

With our support, many interfaith families will live Jewish lives. Many (not all, and not nearly enough) non-Jewish spouses may convert. And if not, they will at least be sympathetic Gentiles, “velcroed” onto our people.

Isaiah got it right when he named one of his sons *Shear yashuv*. *Shear yashuv*: a remnant will return. A remnant always has. It is the goal of the American Jewish community to create a place to which they might, in fact, want to return.

Jonathan D. Sarna

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Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of “A Statement on the Jewish Future” is its list of signatories. This list of thirty names includes many of the foremost scholars of contemporary Jewish life, men and women who, on a whole range of political and religious issues, frequently disagree. It includes Jews prominent in Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox circles, political liberals and political conservatives, supporters of Israel’s left wing and supporters of Israel’s right wing. Fully fifteen of the signatories are professional academicians, including some who have rarely if ever spoken out before on a question concerning American Jewish public life. Others signed the Statement even though it differed significantly from policies that they themselves had elsewhere championed. They did so because they, like all the other signatories of this Statement, considered it imperative to carve out a middle ground of fundamental values that a wide spectrum of Jews could agree upon.

No parallel statement on a matter of domestic Jewish policy has in recent years targeted such a broad, distinguished, and diverse constituency. Issues of communal significance typically divide American Jews into opposing factions, rather than doing what this Statement does in bringing them all together. Polarization, indeed, has dominated organized Jewish life for a generation. As a result, the “Statement on the Jewish Future,” which aimed at achieving broad communal consensus, prompted immediate suspicion—surely, many instinctively felt, it could not possibly mean what it says!

This hermeneutic of suspicion explains why, in response to the Statement, some wholly responsible communal figures assumed that it must properly mean something else. One scholar, for example, interpreted the Statement as reflecting the views of “traditionally constituted male authorities,” making

it, by implication, antifeminist. In fact, it mentions neither men nor women, uses scrupulously inclusive language, and bears the proud signatures of some of the American Jewish community’s leading feminist scholars. Another distinguished critic charged the Statement with being anti-Reform. This charge, like the previous one, reflects an experience that remains all too common in some circles, but in our case a second look would have disclosed that the Statement explicitly embraces the Reform movement and even carries the signature of its foremost historian. Yet a third critic actually responded not to our Statement but to a quite different and more provocative article in *Commentary* magazine authored by several of its signatories. Did our Statement endorse that article? No! Rather than appreciate how the signers of the Statement compromised in order to capture a broad middle ground, this critic, like so many others, looked for esoteric meanings and ulterior motives. Years of experience in American Jewish life left him unprepared to deal with a statement that actually sought to bring Jews together instead of driving them apart.

The real significance of “A Statement on the Jewish Future” escaped both its communal critics and its journalistic interpreters. At least as I read it—and I may as well confess that I also wrote much of it—its language augurs a return to the center in American Jewish life. It represents a renewed if not-yet-altogether-successful effort to find a “golden mean,” a broad middle of the road that can both carry forward and contain a majority of affiliated Jews. Precisely for this reason, none of the Statement’s central ideas are in any sense revolutionary. Torah, Jewish peoplehood (*am yisrael*), pluralistic community (*klal yisrael*), sacred covenant (*brith*), and outreach to moderately affiliated Jews (*keruv*) are values that most American Jews have long considered to be normative. What is revolutionary, at least in terms of recent decades, is the Statement’s effort to forge a broad transdenominational coalition in support of these values. This will clearly be a more difficult task than many of us had imagined, for deeply ingrained suspicions must

still be overcome. The thirty signatures appended to the Statement, however, represent a beacon of hope. If we can bring these academics and communal professionals together, can a broader coalition of centrists be far behind?

I believe that the time is now ripe for a more comprehensive effort aimed at reconstituting the “vital center” of American Jewish life. The 1996 election demonstrated that America as a whole is turning back to the center, and centrist elements within Israeli society have likewise in recent months garnered new strength. American Jews have frequently marched in step with these kinds of political and cultural transformations. Just as they once polarized in response to changes in the world around them and became (in Jack Wertheimer’s phrase) “a people divided,” so now the opportunity presents itself to re-center our community and to look afresh at “the ties that bind.” The “Statement on the Jewish Future” takes advantage of this opportunity. It returns us to the vital center of American Jewish life and provides a firm basis upon which the necessary work of continuity and renewal can proceed.

Alan Silverstein

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In the fall of 1996, Morton Klein, president of the Zionist Organization of America, created a stir when he publicly opposed the ADL’s invitation to columnist Thomas Friedman as a speaker at a fund-raising event. Friedman’s defenders lambasted the notion that the Jewish community should be denied the opportunity to listen civilly to unpopular views, even from critics of Israeli peace policies.

Soon thereafter, the American Jewish Committee hosted an open forum to discuss a statement advocating inreach rather than outreach as the best response to interfaith marriage. The opponents of the statement labeled its signatories with every canard

imaginable: bigoted, antipluralist, sexist, and so forth. Rather than discuss the issues upon their merits, the statement’s opponents used highly charged emotional outbursts to cow inreach advocates into silence. Verbalizing unpopular opinions, critics insisted, would cause irreparable damage within the larger Jewish community. A reasoned discussion became impossible.

As a signatory of “A Statement on the Jewish Future,” I welcome the opportunity to address the substance of the debate. What *is* the best Jewish way to respond to interfaith marriage and promote Jewish continuity?

Pragmatics: How do we best recruit intermarried couples into our program? Are we better served by publicizing and conducting sessions *solely* for the intermarried (e.g., outreach)? Or are we most likely to find the intermarrieds crossing our portals to join with a growing core of inmarried Jews who attend enticing entry-level programs such as holiday workshops, family services, Hebrew or Jewish literacy classes, learners/beginners *minyanim*, tot Shabbats, and so forth? Successful “open synagogue” modules of this nature are open to outmarried as well as to endogamous couples, to marrieds as well as singles, to members as well as nonmembers. This is “inreach.”

From my experience as a pulpit rabbi seeking to draw intermarried Jews into synagogue life, I heartily endorse inreach. In the late 1980s, I supervised Project Link, an experimental outreach effort of seventy Conservative synagogues throughout the state of New Jersey. Tens of thousands of dollars were spent on aggressive advertising in both Jewish and general newspapers, inviting mixed-married couples to partake of tuition-free workshops at convenient locations intended to “link” them with Jewish religious life. Year after year, for five years, remarkably few intermarrieds (one or two dozen annually, statewide) enrolled.

In follow-up conversations, many of the clientele indicated their disapproval of Jewish programs singling out the intermarried. They protested that

“you make it seem as though we have ‘a problem,’ and that you have ‘the solution.’” In contrast, synagogues with reputations for high quality entry-level programs (preschools, parenting and Jewish family education, and/or the other programs listed above) draw dozens of the intermarried, along with other Jews seeking to connect to their roots. My own congregation has many intermarried Jews participating side by side with inmarried peers in our rich array of “user-friendly” Shabbat and holiday services, in life-long learning, in *hesed* programs serving the needy, as well as in formal childhood education (whether nursery school, religious school, or day school).

Locale: The outreach/inreach debate also must address the setting for Jewish continuity programming. Inreach advocates are accused of opposing pluralism, of attacking the approach of Reform Judaism. Nonsense! To the extent that there is an “attack,” it is upon secular, nonjudgmental, communal venues. In my own MetroWest Federation, for example, Jewish Continuity dollars primarily are allocated to efforts by federated agencies. These well-intentioned ventures are not administered either by rabbis or by formally trained and certified Jewish educators, nor do they take place under the auspices of Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist Judaism.

As a counterpoint, the inreach point of view is that the synagogue is *the* gateway into American Jewish life. Not ethnic pride, identification with Israel, memories of the Holocaust, or combating anti-Semitism will induce intermarrieds to come aboard. Just as Catholic and Protestant programs for the intermarried take place in church settings and under church direction, so too should mixed-married Jews and their family members be first and foremost connected to a synagogue address and pursue religious/spiritual fulfillment. Association with synagogue, and with a specific branch of Judaism, will set the exogamous couple upon a pathway of Jewish connections.

Fifth Column: Those of us who favor inreach over outreach fear that programs solely for the intermarried create and strengthen an “intermarried iden-

tity.” Rather than being brought into the mainstream of Judaism, a permanent and “idealized” intermarried status is achieved. Such clusters of intermarrieds can become Jewish communal advocates on behalf of future intermarriages, claiming, “It is preferable to intermarry. You can combine the best of both religions and cultures.”

By contrast, attracting intermarried Jews and their families into mainstream synagogue programs enables rabbis and Jewish educators to win many of them over, on a case-by-case basis, to Jewish commitments. This individualized process includes, of course, the possibility of the most desirable outcome, the conversion to Judaism of non-Jewish members of the household. Plus, where conversion does not occur, we speak clearly of our opposition to raising the children “in both religions.” In a synagogue setting, the ideal remains Jewish parenting, creating a Jewish home environment, and not Jewish-Christian syncretism.

Promoting Endogamy: Finally, inreach defenders are concerned about the impact of outreach programs upon subsequent generations. If the culture of the congregation avoids advocating marriage within the faith, then the spiraling rates of intermarriage will accelerate beyond our worst nightmares. Despite our best efforts, an estimated 90 percent of the grandchildren of today’s intermarrieds will not be Jews. Highly visible programs energizing constituencies of intermarrieds create pressures to teach our young that the religious background of a future spouse is inconsequential. This is either self-deception or conscious complicity in our demise.

In contrast, synagogue-based inreach programming balances compassion and principle. It enables the synagogue to teach that Jews care so much about their religious life that they will seek to marry someone who shares this passion. Nevertheless, once someone intermarries, we never write them off. They are welcome to come and bring their family members to a rich array of Judaic programs. These programs do not represent “outreach.” Instead, they are *keruv*, bringing Jews on the margins “closer” to the attrac-

tive power of their Jewish heritage, their sacred tradition.

In sum, the issues raised by the inreach statement seriously challenge the assumptions of non-judgmental outreach. After so many years of such outreach programming, and so many communal dollars spent, is it not time for vigorous debate rather than name-calling? Should we not test the effectiveness of this broadly accepted mode of connecting with the intermarried?

At the AJC conference, the participants were asked: "Don't all of you have someone in your extended family who is intermarried?" The implication was clear: do not write them off! No one disagrees with this truism. However, not all reaching out is the same. Most of us would like to bring these relatives into the mainstream of Jewish life, not simply into a subculture of intermarrieds. Most of us would like to maximize the odds that the offspring of these mixed-marrieds and their grandchildren might be raised, and remain, as Jews. Most of us would not like to see a Jewish communal endorsement of intermarriage encourage young adults (*who are also members of our extended families*) to marry people who are not Jews.

"A Statement on the Jewish Future" calls upon us to discuss outreach vs. inreach with civility!

Jack Wertheimer

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Ever since the release of findings in the early 1990s that demonstrate the extent of intermarriage within American Jewish society, the organized community has paid some attention to the crisis of "Jewish continuity," a crisis resulting from the inability of many Jewish families to nurture a younger generation dedicated to Jewish living. The most commonly proffered solutions to this crisis have been to supplement funding for Jewish educational institutions and to develop more inclusive program-

ming to make every Jew count.

Lost in these discussions are questions of norms, boundaries, and content. Specifically, what should be taught in Jewish educational institutions and which values should they convey? Are there any limits to inclusiveness? Are all approaches equally valid? Are there any lines in the sand that we are not prepared to cross in our efforts to be inclusive?

These are exceedingly difficult questions to address in a diverse and religiously fragmented Jewish community situated in a largely nonideological and pluralistic American society. And so it appears that the only religious expression the Jewish community is prepared to reject out of hand is "Jews for Jesus." The "Statement on the Jewish Future" represents a bold attempt to confront the tough questions that are so easily swept aside. It challenges the American Jewish community to go beyond platitudes about "inclusiveness" and define the limits and content of our Jewishness.

But why should anyone oppose inclusiveness? Is it not self-evident that every Jew should be included and made to feel welcome? The problem with an unfettered inclusivity is that it absolves us of any value judgments. Anyone who claims to be a Jew is accorded that status; any religious expression that claims to be Judaism is embraced. Our tolerance is forever tested by ever more radical expressions of Judaism and ever new conceptions of who is a Jew. As a result, ours is an age of blurred group boundaries and syncretistic religious practices.

A recent study conducted under my direction suggests that our young people understand us all too well and have internalized our laissez-faire attitudes. As part of a wide-ranging study of Conservative synagogues and their members, nearly 1500 recent bar and bat mitzvah celebrants and one parent of each child were interviewed. Much of a positive nature emerged from this survey about the attitudes of young people regarding the bar and bat mitzvah experience, as well as the identification of these youngsters with aspects of Judaism, their Jewishness, Israel, the Hebrew language, etc. But there were also

two decidedly disappointing findings. Here I quote from an as yet unpublished report by the director of the bar and bat mitzvah survey, Barry Kosmin:

Only 19 percent of children thought that “living in a kosher home” was “very important” to their Jewishness while 30 percent of the parents maintained strict *Kkashrut*. Conversely, only 17 percent of the parental homes abrogated all the laws of *kashrut* but 33 percent of the children thought it was “not at all important.”

Kosmin then continues:

The issue of intermarriage is an area where concern for Jewish continuity contradicts aspirations to universalism. At first sight there is a considerable generation gap on this issue between parochial parents and universalistic teenagers. Among parents, 86 percent agree with the statement that “a Jew should marry someone who is also Jewish” (46 percent strongly agree). The teenagers were given a somewhat similar statement to consider but in reverse. “Do you think it is OK for Jews to marry people of other religions?” To which 65 percent said yes and 32 percent replied no. At one level the liberalism of the teenagers can be explained in terms of societal norms. Intermarriage is a common reality today, moreover 8 percent of their parents were not Jewish by birth. [Hence]. . . 16 percent of the sample had a parent who was not always Jewish and therefore have close gentile kin.

These attitudes were not shaped in a vacuum. Young people who actually received a Jewish education and had positive Jewish experiences have internalized our society’s “live and let live” philosophy to the point where they reject their own movement’s accepted boundaries. They are wonderfully pluralistic and inclusive. But how many will remain committed to living as Jews?

The Jewish community today faces an urgent crisis. Although some sectors of the community have been intensifying their commitments and investing in the Jewish education of their children, we cannot take this population for granted. Far more intensive programs are needed even for the more engaged pop-

ulation in order to ground men, women, and children within a Jewish community that socializes them to live as Jews—and to think seriously about boundaries and Jewish content. The bar and bat mitzvah data alarm me: they are a warning that the core is a lot softer than we would like to believe.

They also confirm what I have encountered on an anecdotal level: outside the Orthodox community, few adult Jews harbor the reasonable certainty that their children will all marry Jews. Over the years, I have spoken to many highly engaged parents of college-age and older children—including Conservative and Reform rabbis—who have confided that they have no idea whether their children will marry Jews; that it is a matter of luck; and that they feel quite helpless as the barriers to intermarriage crumble.

This represents a psychological shift of massive proportions within one generation—that we have barely acknowledged: the vast majority of Jewish parents today have no reasonable expectation that all their children will marry Jews and raise Jewish families. They shrug and hope for the best, trying to find the right argument to persuade their kids not to interdate. I am not suggesting that most Jews are marrying non-Jews, but that parents can no longer rely upon what was expected in the past, that there would be a fairly natural process of transmission from one generation to the next. And this fear haunts quite committed Jews. This psychological shift in perspective, I believe, is as critical as the reality of intermarriage.

As a historian, I have puzzled over whether there are any historical precedents for this state of affairs. Yes, rates of intermarriage were quite high in some pre-Holocaust Jewish communities. But relatively little was self-consciously expressed then that would lead us to believe that parents or even most communal leaders openly worried, as many American Jews do today, about whether their grandchildren would be Jewish in any meaningful way. In some settings, such as Spain after 1391, rates of *shmad*, conversion to Christianity, reached serious proportions and par-

ents may have worried, although few articulated such concerns in writings that remain. I suggest that the nature of the angst today is quite remarkable—and perhaps unprecedented.

One of the main responses to this angst on the part of Jewish spokespersons has been to embrace the new reality. In the face of the crisis of transmission, more and more Jewish leaders declare “We are all Jews-by-choice.” And they formulate policies accordingly, the underlying assumption being that the Jews of the next generation will be won through conversionary efforts—that is, by winning actual converts from other religions and by “turning on” a certain percentage of born-Jews. It’s all a crapshoot, so let’s target as many populations as possible; let’s be as hospitable as possible; let us be inclusive; and then maybe some born-Jews and some converts will constitute the next generation of American Jews. This is what passes for realism in the American Jewish community today.

Now, regardless of whether this is realistic, it certainly is unprecedented. The largest Jewish community in the world is betting its future not on generational transmission—not on recruiting the children of this generation’s committed Jews to be the next generation’s Jews—but on turning on the uncommitted or non-Jews. I doubt that any Jewish community in history has attempted such a feat. Moreover, this approach is based on defeatism: since we cannot rely upon our strongly and moderately engaged Jews to replicate themselves, let us recruit the next generation of Jews from the periphery or even outside the Jewish community.

Some leaders actually prefer converts and *baalei teshuva* as a validation of Judaism—if these outsiders are signing on, there must be something to Judaic civilization, they seem to suggest. This defeatist and demeaning approach does a terrible disservice to the Jews who are engaged already and are seeking support, while their rabbis and communal leaders are in hot pursuit of converts and marginal Jews. A more sane and dignified policy would build outward from our strength.

We have today tens of thousands of families that send their children to Jewish schools. These people have demonstrated through their investment in the schooling of their children, their membership in synagogues, and their physical presence within the four walls of Jewish institutions that they have some levels of engagement. And yet, we cannot afford to hire the personnel to work with these somewhat engaged families and move them along Jewishly. There are more children in Jewish educational institutions than we have had for a long while. The demographic trajectory is bringing young families into contact with Jewish institutions, and those institutions are starved for adequate funds needed to provide Jewish enrichment to families. I have spoken to parents who have told me with tears in their eyes that they had to remove their children from a day school because they could not afford the tuition. This in a Jewish community that invests millions of dollars in Jewish studies programs at some institutions of higher learning that have no Jewish students or faculty. This in a Jewish community that is now being urged to spend millions to woo unchurched Christians. This in a Jewish community that makes deliberate decisions every day about its allocation priorities, but will not establish priorities when it comes to its investment in Jewish continuity efforts.

The issue before us has everything to do with setting priorities. Which Jewish institutions hold the best promise of nurturing the next generations of American Jews? How do we invest our financial and human resources to strengthen those most interested in Jewish life before we address the needs of Jews who have marginalized themselves? And how do we reach out to the marginalized without harming those who are already somewhat engaged?

Our present course seems hell-bent on harming that more engaged population. The more we try to make intermarried families feel comfortable in Jewish settings, the further we demolish barriers to intermarriage. Why should young people oppose intermarriage if they see interfaith families treated as equals in synagogues? How can our youth develop a

resistance to interdating and intermarriage when the Jewish community is becoming ever more reluctant to stigmatize intermarriage—and on the contrary, is creating a vast population of lobbyists who favor the elimination of barriers to intermarriage because they themselves are intermarried? Inclusiveness, a term that is as heartwarming as motherhood and apple pie, comes at a high price.

What then is the proper response to the intermarried—and especially their heartbroken families, who suffer great anguish over the generational discontinuity that most interfaith marriages foster? Just as the decision to intermarry is a personal family decision, so too must be the response to intermarriage. Institutions, “the community,” the synagogue, cannot adequately cope with intermarriage. It must be dealt with within the extended family. Through their model of Jewish participation and their commitment to the Jewish way, grandparents, uncles and aunts, and cousins can play a role in moving interfaith families toward engagement with Judaism. Large institutions cannot effectively deal with so personal and emotionally laden a set of problems.

Our study of bar and bat mitzvah celebrants also suggests that we must go beyond inclusiveness to confront questions of Jewish content and worldview. It is not an accident that young people who are indifferent to kashrut observance also take a *laissez-faire* approach to intermarriage. The rabbis of past generations would not have been surprised. In fact, Jewish texts—both halakhic and aggadic—link the acts of eating and drinking with non-Jews to sexual union with non-Jews. Judaism consists of a complex structure of rules and beliefs. Tamper with one aspect and another will be affected. There is a connection between kashrut observance and sexual liaisons. There is an integrity to the structure of Judaism. As we dismantle one section of the structure, we weaken the rest.

We know better today. We have tampered in the last decade with many bricks and quite a few pillars supporting the structure of Judaism, but we assure ourselves that the edifice will endure. In truth, it is

weakening in ways unimaginable even a generation ago. And, not surprisingly, those who argue for yet more tampering invoke recent changes: if we did *x* last year, how can we now shy away from taking the next logical step to *y*? Recently, some rabbis who officiate at intermarriages announced their intention to officiate as well at gay commitment ceremonies: after all, if we can sanctify the union of a Jew and a Gentile, why not of two Jews of the same sex? My point is that even those who advocate a radical course of action recognize that much in Judaism is intertwined. I have come across remarkably little reflection on the implications of radical new policies for the totality and integrity of the Jewish way of life.

Most important, the linkage between kashrut and intermarriage underscores that traditional Judaism established a series of boundaries designed to keep Jews Jewish. If we are to engage seriously in a struggle for Jewish community, we will have to enter as a community into an intensive discussion about all the intermediate boundaries between Jews and their neighbors that we have worked so hard to efface. And we will have to struggle as a community to define the content of our Jewishness. The “Statement on the Jewish Future,” signed by individuals who identify with various religious movements and ideological perspectives, offers a starting point for such a serious conversation.

Jonathan Woocher

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When it was first circulated, I did not sign the “Statement on Jewish Continuity,” now called “A Statement on the Jewish Future,” despite my great respect for the eminent academic and rabbinic leaders who were its original signatories. I felt that portions of the Statement were inaccurate in what they implicitly identified as the intent, nature, and likely impact of current communal policies in the area of Jewish continuity, and that the tone of the Statement as a whole was needlessly

strident and confrontational.

The new version being published here is improved in several small, but significant, ways. There are still phrases in it that strike me as overly vague and, therefore, subject to misinterpretation, and the Statement continues to be directed in part against unnamed antagonists whose importance in determining actual policies appears to me exaggerated by implication. Nevertheless, I note happily that in several places the critiques and suggestions made by myself and others have been incorporated and the rhetorical heat turned down. In this version, the Statement can, I believe, serve usefully as a consensus articulation of positive values on which to ground our efforts to revitalize Jewish life and to enhance the likelihood of its continuation as far into the future as any of us can hope to see.

Hence, I offer my comments here not as a rebuttal but as a constructive critique and (hopefully) extension of the Statement at hand. The signers of the Statement have endorsed a set of five fundamental principles—Torah, Am Yisrael (peoplehood), Klal Yisrael (pluralistic community), Brith (covenant), and Keruv (outreach)—as the bases for Jewish continuity endeavors. Speaking personally, I would add three more as equally important: the Values of Kehilla (living as part of a genuine community); Tikkun Olam (the Jewish mission to help repair the world); and Yirat Shamayim (an attitude of humility, responsibility, and awe in the face of our own limitations). But it is not the values themselves that are at issue here. It is how to bring them alive in our community, our institutions, and the lives of individual Jews. From a practical standpoint, the Statement stops too soon and fails to address adequately the real challenge facing those engaged in the work of Jewish continuity: how our policies and programs can render these Jewish values meaningful and significant in the lives of Jews for whom they are neither self-evident nor irremediably irrelevant.

This is primarily a challenge of what *to* do, not of what *not* to do. Strongly in its initial version, and more mildly but still evident in this one, the State-

ment evinces a concern that “Jewish continuity” efforts are giving rise to a host of new outreach initiatives aimed at the most marginal of Jews—and their Gentile spouses—thereby diverting precious resources away from programs and institutions that serve the needs and reinforce the Jewish identity of a more committed core. Alongside this, the Statement expresses a fear that Judaism itself is being distorted to fit the needs of outreach. Boundaries are being blurred and particularistic content changed in the direction of a “vague universalism.”

These are legitimate concerns, though they should not, in my view, be major ones. A thorough survey conducted by JESNA and CJF of the programs actually being generated in local continuity initiatives shows that “outreach to the intermarried” constitutes only a small fraction of all the new endeavors being mounted. When one looks at the total dollars being expended by federations on Jewish continuity and education, the proportion expended on outreach is minuscule compared, e.g., to that going to day schools. Even less are outreach programs aimed at (or reaching) “those who have moved furthest from Judaism.” Overwhelmingly, those who participate in outreach programs are precisely those who *are* interested in developing or rediscovering a connection to Jewish life, else—in what is, after all, a voluntaristic world—they would not be there. It is precisely “the broad middle” who are being targeted by the new programs being developed under the banner of “Jewish continuity,” just as the signers of this Statement urge.

Nor is advocacy or toleration of religious syncretism—at least between Judaism and Christianity—a significant component even of programming labeled as “outreach.” Does this mean that participants in outreach programs for the intermarried never discuss the possibility of maintaining dual-faith households or look for what Judaism and Christianity might have in common? Obviously not. But an examination of the curricula of outreach programs sponsored by synagogues and Jewish community centers will, I think, quickly reassure those wor-

ried about syncretism and nonjudgmentalism that the vast majority of these are unambiguously *Jewish* programs, presenting and advocating for Jewish life choices, albeit with sensitivity and tact.

I do not believe that non-Jews should be given *aliyot* (though there are certainly other roles they can play in Jewish worship). But, as I survey the Jewish scene today, my major worry is not whether non-Jews are in fact receiving *aliyot* in a handful of synagogues. It is why Shabbat services attract so few Jews into our synagogues in the first place. Jewish continuity is not primarily about *boundaries*; it is about *content*. The question of the hour is whether we can fill the lives of more Jews with the substance of Judaism—including those values that the Statement’s signers and I agree are central to the Jewish worldview and ethos.

This is hard, practical work. As much as we might like to, we cannot simply proclaim: “This is what Judaism stands for; come and affirm it.” In my view, the essential core of both inreach and outreach—indeed, of all effective Jewish education—is the same: building bridges between the lives of those who are open to growing in their Jewishness, and the rich treasure house of stories, values, personalities, and ways of perceiving, thinking, and behaving that we call “Judaism.” This can be done, I believe, by providing access to a wide range of Jewish experiences; by teaching Judaism’s unique language, which allows us to explicate these experiences and weave them into an overarching pattern for our lives; and by helping Jews to encounter what John Ruskay calls “inspired and inspiring Jewish communities,” groups and settings where these experiences and this language are visibly shared.

“Jewish continuity” initiatives that involve these cardinal elements—whether they be family education programs, social justice projects, efforts to “reclaim Shabbat,” trips to Israel, adult literacy crash courses, synagogue transformation endeavors, outreach programs to the “unaffiliated,” or the myriad of other initiatives being tried around North America (and abroad) today—are worth investing in. So too,

of course, are tried and true institutions like day schools and summer camps that share the same strategy for enhancing Jewish learning and involvement. In one sense, *all* of these programs compete for resources—outreach vs. inreach vastly oversimplifies the very real dilemmas being faced not only by federations but by every school, synagogue, JCC, Hillel, religious movement, national agency and foundation that must decide where to invest its limited resources. In another sense, however, all these endeavors are allied components of an audacious “action research” experiment being conducted on a grand scale today. My wager is that we will need all these initiatives, and more, if we are to impact in a significant way on the incredibly diverse, self-directed, multiply focused group that we call “North American Jewry.”

To my mind, calling for triage in allocating resources when we need massive new investment in a host of areas about whose long-term impact and potential we are just beginning to learn is premature and potentially self-defeating. As a practical matter, triage will take care of itself: many Jews and most non-Jews simply won’t respond to our invitations. But there is value, as one of the Statement’s signers, Professor Jonathan Sarna, has suggested elsewhere, in providing a multiplicity of options, of points of connection to Jewish life, not just because we can’t know for certain which ones will “work,” but because we *can* know for certain that different Jews *will* connect in different ways, at different levels of intensity, to different aspects of our tradition, and in different kinds of communities.

This does not mean that I reject the need for individuals and institutions to make choices regarding the kind of Judaism they wish to espouse and the steps that they believe will best ensure Judaism’s flourishing in the future. I want a vigorous but respectful argument about both our ideologies and our strategies to be part of the Jewish continuity endeavor. I favor a “muscular” pluralism (which surely goes beyond simply expressing hope for the success of the Reform and Conservative movements), in which respect for the right of others to choose their

Jewish path does not render them immune from critique, only from efforts to push them off the “narrow bridge” we all walk upon.

I believe that there *are* boundaries—and that *amcha* eventually does a pretty good job of finding them (e.g., we can and do distinguish between “Messianic Jews,” who for the vast majority of Jews are clearly “beyond the pale,” and meditating “Jew-Bu’s,” who many feel are not). But spending inordinate amounts of time and energy trying to identify precisely where these boundaries lie is neither necessary nor fruitful when there is so much to do to fill the space within our Jewish territory with substantive, engaging, commitment-inducing Jewish content. I want to see Jews embrace Judaism not as a smorgasbord of tasty tidbits but as a life commitment, as a source of norms to and for which we feel responsible. We will not get there, however, by confronting Jews with demands, but rather by teaching them and exposing them to settings where the fruits of commitment are palpable. “Trust the process,” my social work friends say. I do, and I trust the products as well. Thus, I am prepared to start where people are and allow them to grow into a Judaism that—not for all, but for many—will be more than simply another “option” in their lives.

My disagreement with the “Statement on the Jewish Future” is, then, less with its content than its emphases. In its first paragraph, the Statement argues that “certain initiatives . . . seem more likely to undermine North American Judaism than to strengthen it.” The authors worry that “in a well-intentioned effort at inclusivity, some in the Jewish community seem all too willing to sacrifice distinctive Judaic values and teachings.” Perhaps. But here the vagueness of the Statement, carried over from its original version, renders it more pernicious than helpful. We don’t know exactly which initiatives these are, or who is counted among the “some”—though we can guess. And if my guess is correct, then I believe the note of alarm in these sentences is excessive, or at least misplaced. The real threat to the values the signers and I cherish, including the five

listed in the Statement, comes not from even misguided “outreach,” but from the ethos of individualism and secularism, mixed at times with a disturbing tendency toward triumphalism and intolerance in the camps of the already committed (of varying ideologies), that pervades Jewish life today.

Ever since the original article that gave birth to this Statement appeared in *Commentary* magazine, I have been trying to figure out whether I am missing something that I should be seeing. My answer still is: I don’t think so. This latest version of the Statement is better than any that has preceded it. But as an attempt to describe and prescribe policy for the practical work of Jewish continuity, it is hardly sufficient. So let’s put the Statement behind us and dismount the barricades. Since we agree on far more than we disagree, let’s get to work shaping the Jewish future we all want to see.

Eric H. Yoffie

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Efforts at outreach and inclusivity entail a willingness to “sacrifice distinctive Judaic values and teachings.”

“As boundaries blur, inclusivity runs the risk of degenerating into a vague universalism that is Jewishly incoherent. . . .”

“Outreach to mixed-marrieds should never encourage religious syncretism”

“[W]e part company . . . with those who look upon outreach as a panacea and seek to dilute Judaism to make it more attractive to potential converts.”

The above excerpts from “A Statement on the Jewish Future” suggest that the Statement’s primary concern is to attack the outreach work initiated in the late 1970s by the Reform movement and subsequently emulated by many others in the Jewish community. The passing reference to the fact that “no Jew should ever be written off” is a late addition to the text, and one that runs contrary to its general thrust

and tone. The approach of the Statement's authors is one that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of Great Britain has aptly referred to as "Jewish Darwinism"—the belief that only the fittest Jews will survive, and that therefore only they are deserving of our support and attention.

As Rabbi Sacks says, it is an argument that is neat, plausible, and wrong. The complexities of Jewish life today do not lend themselves to simplistic either/or solutions.

The authors of the Statement do say some perfectly reasonable things.

Yes, religion and Torah are the keys to Jewish survival. It is correct to stress that Jews are a unique people, different from others in their acceptance of God's covenant and embrace of God's mitzvot. It is right that no outreach program can succeed if synagogues do not offer Jewish substance and religious depth. If a synagogue is not a place to study Torah, celebrate sacred moments, and observe ancient rituals rooted in rabbinic tradition, why would anyone wish to be a part of it?

But how in heaven's name does this lead to the conclusion that Jews on the periphery of the community can be left unattended? Such a claim is theologically offensive, sociologically blind, and practically disastrous.

Our theological mandate is clear: the nature of the covenant forbids the exclusion of any Jew, however wayward, from our people's collective destiny.

Since the revelation at Sinai, and even before, all Jews have carried within themselves a fragment of the *shechina*, the divine presence, and are linked in a bond of shared responsibility to the people of Israel. The Shoah has shaped our thinking in this regard: Devastated by the Holocaust, we can find no theologically acceptable rationale for turning our backs on any group of Jews.

The sociological reality of return from the margins is a documentable phenomenon. Jews on the fringes often maintain an emotional identification with their roots and an amorphous but very real sense of belonging. It is true for Eastern European

Jews cut off from Jewish life for two generations, for alienated Jews, for intermarried Jews, and for Jews who have not belonged to a synagogue since childhood. Virtually every rabbi has a story to tell about a synagogue activist who has found his or her way back from the margins of the community.

On practical grounds, we know from our history that numbers matter. If we were to draw only 20 percent of those on the periphery into synagogue life, we will have added upward of half a million Jews to the ranks of the Jewishly committed. Can we afford not to make that effort?

The Statement attempts to discredit outreach by suggesting that those who champion it are prepared to strip Judaism of its particularistic commitments in order to attract the unaffiliated and intermarried. But this is absurd. Intermarried couples can be welcomed without denuding Judaism of its essential character; the resolution passed at the last UAHC Biennial General Assembly opposing dual education in Jewish and Christian schools demonstrates the willingness of the Reform movement to draw lines where they need to be drawn.

Yes, there are instances of outreach advocates stretching the bounds of what is acceptable, just as observant Jews occasionally embrace fanaticism and intolerance. But such extremism should not be used to discredit outreach any more than it should be used to discredit the study and observance of Torah.

There will always be tension between the need to support programs specifically directed toward outreach and programs directed at those already engaged in Jewish communal and religious life. But my own view is that we are capable of doing both. What we lack are not the resources but confidence in what Jewish mystics have always asserted: the power of the eternal spark that dwells in the heart of every Jew, that spark of *yiddishkeit* that rekindles the spirit of *teshuvah*, return.

In a recent article, Rabbi Norman Lamm, the president of Yeshiva University, argued that observance of *mitzvot*, study of Torah, and a sense of belonging to the Jewish people are the guarantors of

Jewish survival. Jewish institutions, he wrote, must assert these values “through outreach to the unaffiliated and the indifferent who are at the margins and have not (yet) made a complete break with their Jewishness.” At the same time, Dr. Lamm demanded that the community offer its full support to those “who already model this behavior.”

Rabbi Lamm is right. It is not either/or. It is both/and.

Committed to collective rather than selective survival, we must bring our message to affiliated and unaffiliated Jews, to core and marginal Jews, and to everyone who remains tied, however tenuously, to our shared destiny as a holy people.