

The name “Jew” is in crisis. A word of intense power, it is often a source of confusion and conflict for a modern liberal religionist who bears the name. Accordingly, there are clear indications that if the term Jew cannot be given a definition appropriate and constructive for liberal religionists, increasing numbers of persons who presently bear the name will let it fall into disuse for themselves and their children. This process is already underway; and although it occurs gradually, somewhat unconsciously, and largely through passivity, it nonetheless endangers the survival of the term Jew as a name for the members of a modern liberal religious community. The point must be stressed that the dissatisfaction of the liberal religionist with the name Jew is not produced by such negative economic or social causes as anti-semitism. It is not a case of the liberal religionist who bears the name Jew being frightened or ashamed of the name. Rather it is profound philosophic and moral disagreement with the meanings currently given the name Jew by establishment “Jewish” institutions and communities that have arrogated to themselves the right to define the name for all who bear it. In other words, it is not what “non-Jews” are doing regarding the name Jew that disturbs the “Jewish” liberal religionists, but what “Jews” are doing to it. “Jewish” liberal religionists are not forsaking the name Jew; on the contrary, the establishment “Jewish” institutions are taking the name from them.

There are two primary areas of liberal discontent with established “Jewish” institutional use of the term Jew. The first arises from the fact that “Jew” has historically been a term that refers to persons who respond to the ultimate existential and moral concerns of humankind by subscribing to some system of beliefs and values that give their lives meaning. Yet when liberal religionists subscribe to these ultimate concerns with the liberal and universalistic beliefs and values they consider valid, they find that general institutional usage provides no meaning that accords with their ideology. This produces the confusing, situation (particularly for youngsters) of having a name, “Jew” that has an institutional implication of commitment to one kind of ideology, while the person who has the name in fact subscribes to another. Given the emotional and social force of the name Jew in our culture, the disparity between the institutional meaning of the name and the actual ideology of the liberal religionist produces a conflict that all too often is resolved by burying the name Jew in oblivion.

The second area of liberal dissatisfaction with the general “Jewish” institutional meaning concerns the answer to the question “Who is a Jew?”; that is to say, “Which persons rightfully bear the name so that they have a just claim to be called ‘Jew’ by others, and to receive whatever rights and privileges come with recognized possession of the name?” From the liberal viewpoint, every person who can present a reasonable and moral case for it should be recognized as authentically possessing the name Jew. This is not, however, general “Jewish” institutional practice, which recognizes authentic possession of the name Jew only on the basis of rules that for the liberal religionist are neither reasonable nor moral. The question of who has a right to authentic possession of the name Jew is not a theoretical word-game without practical consequences. On the contrary, many a youngster, and even adults, have suffered profound anguish from identity crises brought on by uncertainty over whether they are “Jews” or not.

Yet the conflict and confusion that besets liberal religionists over the name Jew need not be. The name Jew, with its rich symbolic and communal potential, can be a positive force in liberal religious life. For this to be, however, it is first necessary to

provide an answer to the question “Who is a Jew?” that is based upon liberal or polydox principles. The present general “Jewish” institutional meaning ascribed to the name Jew simply will not do for a liberal Judaism. Moreover, for a polydox definition of the name Jew to be efficacious, the meaning must be put into practice by a **sovereign** polydox Jewish community, one that possesses the independence and integrity to follow its own principles regardless of whether other institutions, also called “Jewish,” agree. Indeed, a liberal (liberal means free) Jewish community that does not have the freedom to carry out its own principles is a contradiction in terms. In the discussion that follows, an analysis will be given of the principles upon which a meaning of the term Jew appropriate for a liberal Judaism may be based. An answer will then be proposed, from the polydox viewpoint, to the question, “Who is a Jew?”

II

To begin with, a brief history of the term Jew is in order. Perhaps most striking is the fact that the term Jew does not appear in the Torah, that is the Pentateuch (Five Books of Moses). Such pentateuchal figures as Abraham (whose legends reflect a period c. 2000-1700 B.C.E.) and Moses (c. 1300 B.C.E.) are called “Hebrews.” The general name for the members of the community that, according to the Pentateuch, was established by Moses is “Israelites.” The United Monarchy of ancient Israel was established under David (c. 998 B.C.E.), and lasted until the death of Solomon when the kingdom was divided (c. 926 B.C.E.). It is only with the division of the United Monarchy into two nations, Israel and Judah, that the forerunner of the name Jew appears. The people of Judah are known as Judeans, and it is from the word Judean that the word Jew eventually evolves. At first, “Judean” referred exclusively to citizens of Judah, as in the book of Jeremiah (c. 639-587 B.C.E.). In time, “Judean” referred not only to citizens of Judah, but to everyone who was a member of a religious community that may be described as the “pentateuchal religious community,” whether living in Judah or not. The fundamental principle of the pentateuchal religious community, briefly stated, was that the Pentateuch is the literal word of the deity, and the commandments it contains regarding beliefs and practices were therefore to be obeyed. This meaning of the term Jew as referring to members of the pentateuchal religious community appears only in such very late books of the Bible as Daniel (c. 198-168 B.C.E.) and Esther (c. 134-104 B.C.E.). Thus the name Jew is non-existent in the history of such biblical figures as Abraham, Moses, David, and the Prophets, now anachronistically termed Jews by historians and theologians. From the beginning of the patriarchal age, somewhere around the year 2000 B.C.E., to the early part of the second century B.C.E., when the Book of Daniel was most likely written, the name Jew does not appear in the annals of history.

Interestingly, the term Jew was never defined by the pentateuchal religious community in which it had originated. Needless to say, since “Jew” does not occur in the Torah or the books of the Prophets, it is not defined there. Yet neither is it defined in the very late books of the Bible in which it first appears. “Jew” is used apparently only as a general and informal name for members of the pentateuchal community. No specific rules are given to determine precisely who is a “Jew,” that is, who properly bears the name, and who has a right, therefore, to be recognized as a “Jew” by a “Jewish” community.

Sometime in the second century B.C.E., a new religious party called the Pharisees arose in southern Palestine. The Pharisees were bitterly opposed to the beliefs and practices of the long-established pentateuchal religious community, whose members at that time were known as Sadducees. The radical difference between the Pharisees and Sadducees is seen by comparing the basic beliefs and practices of the two groups. The Pharisees subordinated the Pentateuch to the Talmud (the pharisaic system of biblical interpretation and law); they believed in a physical afterlife; and their worship centered around the synagogue and prayer. On the other hand, the Sadducees believed only in the Pentateuch and rejected the Talmud; they did not believe in an afterlife; and their worship centered around the Temple in Jerusalem and animal sacrifices. It is an irony of history that the Pharisees established the principles upon which the first formal definition of the name Jew is based, inasmuch as they were passionate opponents of the pentateuchal community that had originated the name Jew, and to whose members it originally referred.

A word of clarification is necessary to explain why the first formal definition of the term Jew is described as having been based on pharisaic principles rather than as having been formulated by the Pharisees themselves. The reason is that in their official writings the Pharisees did not employ the term Jew to refer to the adherents of their Talmudic religious system, and rarely mention the term even in general use. They regularly employed the name “Israelite” for members of their own community. The term Israelite is used particularly in the halacha or religious law of the Pharisees contained in the Talmud. Hence it is not the word Jew, but the term Israelite that was actually defined by the Pharisees. Parenthetically, it may be remarked that until relatively recent times, the term Jew was used chiefly by non-Jews. As an illustration, Moses Maimonides’ great philosophic work of the Middle Ages, the **Guide of the Perplexed** (12th century C.E.); contains neither the term Jew nor Judaism. When the term Jew finally came into common use by those themselves called “Jews”, the pharisaic definition of an “Israelite” was applied to the name Jew. This was done in the halachic or rabbinic legal writings of Orthodox Judaism, which is the contemporary heir of Pharisaism and remains essentially similar to it. Accordingly, following the pharisaic rules for defining an “Israelite” which appear in the Talmud, Orthodox Judaism lays down the following definition of a “Jew”:

“A Jew is a person who is born of a Jewish mother, or a person who has converted to Orthodox Judaism.”

There are significant implications of the Orthodox definition of a Jew that are not apparent at first sight, but which must be understood as part of the definition to understand its full significance.

- 1) The conversion a person must undergo to become a Jew is an Orthodox Jewish conversion. Consequently, a Reform Jewish or otherwise non-Orthodox conversion does not, according to Orthodoxy, make a person a Jew. One of the essential features of the Orthodox conversion of a male is that he undergo circumcision.
- 2) A person born of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is not a Jew, and must be converted to become a Jew.

- 3) All persons who, according to Orthodox Judaism, are Jews are subject to a binding, compulsory, and irrevocable obligation. This obligation is that they must obey the rules and regulations laid down in the Talmud and post-Talmudic halachic works, which are recognized by Orthodox Judaism as ultimately commandments (mitsvot) of the deity. Thus Jews are not born free. They are born obligated to obey the laws and dictates of Orthodox Judaism. A convert is also obligated, although a distinction must be drawn between the convert and the native Jew. The convert chooses Orthodox Judaism of his own free will; whereas the native Jew is obligated to obey the commandments of Orthodoxy by the mere fact that he was born of a Jewish mother. There is no way for native Jews to rid themselves of their Orthodox obligation according to Orthodox Judaism, even if they become Reform or otherwise leave Orthodoxy. The obligation to obey Orthodox halachic law remains, and the persons who do not are judged sinners for not fulfilling it. Although it should not be overlooked that the Orthodox definition does grant to a "Jew" certain rights and privileges, perhaps the greatest significance of the definition for the modern Jew is the inescapable duty it imposes upon "Jews" to obey the Orthodox halachic law, and by extension, the Orthodox rabbinate, which executes those laws.
- 4) One aspect of Orthodox Jewish halacha that relates particularly to the definition of a "Jew" are those laws and rules that govern marriage and divorce, and which determine whether the offspring of "Jews" are "Jewish" or not. These laws and rules, as explained in the preceding paragraph, apply to all "Jews," whether they accept Orthodoxy or not. A right that a "Jew" has is to enter into a valid marriage with another "Jew." Non-Jews cannot enter into a valid marriage with a "Jew." A valid Jewish marriage once entered into by Jews can be dissolved only by an Orthodox Jewish divorce, or Get. Consequently, a civil divorce will not dissolve a "Jewish" marriage. If, therefore, two persons have been married in combined civil and "Jewish" marriage ceremonies, as is usual in America, and subsequently a civil divorce is obtained, only the civil marriage, according to Orthodoxy, will have been dissolved. The "Jewish" marriage remains in force until there is a Get. If a woman should remarry after a civil divorce without obtaining a Get, the remarriage is invalid according to Orthodoxy, because she is still married to the first man. Inasmuch as the woman is still married to the first man, her relationship with the second man (to whom her remarriage is invalid) is adulterous. The Orthodox rule is that a child born of an adulterous union is a mamzer. The mamzer occupies a status legally inferior to someone who is merely illegitimate. The mamzer has no status as a Jew at all, and is forbidden to marry a Jew. In sum, the children of a "Jewish" woman who has remarried after a previous "Jewish" marriage that has not been dissolved by a Get are mamzerim for Orthodoxy, even though the mother has obtained a civil divorce and subsequently contracted valid civil and non-Orthodox "Jewish" marriages.

III

The Orthodox halachic definition of who is a "Jew" is entirely unacceptable on philosophic and moral grounds to any polydox or truly liberal Judaism. Thus for those Reform Jews who understand Reform Judaism to be a polydoxy, the Orthodox definition

is clearly unsatisfactory. Yet even for those who maintain Reform is something other than a polydoxy, (although what that “something other” might be has never been demonstrated,) the Orthodox definition cannot be morally defended. Among the reasons that the Orthodox definition of a “Jew” is unacceptable to a polydox Judaism, and, in particular, to the Reform community, are the following:

1) The primary principle of a polydoxy, superseding all others, is that human persons are born free, with the inherent right to determine for themselves what their religious beliefs, values, and practices shall be. This principle is in direct contradiction to the Orthodox definition of a Jew as a person who is born unfree, subject to the authority of the Halachic system of Talmudic and rabbinic law, and its authoritative interpreters, the Orthodox rabbinate. The only definition of a “Jew” that would be suitable for a polydoxy is one in which the name Jew does not abridge the individual’s right to freedom and self-determination.

2) The Orthodox definition of a “Jew” is discriminatory, and therefore, immoral. Whereas Orthodox halachic law generally discriminates against women, as is well-known, in this case it discriminates against men. There is no moral justification why a “Jewish” mother should be able to hand down the name Jew to her children, even though the father is a non-Jew, whereas a Jewish father, whose children are born of a non-Jew, cannot transmit the name Jew to them.

3) The Orthodox definition of a Jew is irrational and arbitrary. There are no valid philosophic or theologic grounds, -- in fact, no reasons of any kind have ever been presented, -- why the name Jew should be transmitted by a mother and not by a father. In a polydox Judaism, whose factual and moral foundations are rooted in reasonableness, no right, -- in this case, the right of the father to transmit his name Jew to his offspring, -- can be taken from a person without demonstrating why this should be the case.

4) The Reform community has followed the view, contrary to Orthodox halachic law, that a Jewish marriage is dissolved by a civil divorce, and that no Get, therefore, is required. Reform rabbis routinely officiate at remarriages of women whose previous marriages were terminated by civil divorces, without a Get. It is evident that it would be profoundly immoral for the Reform community to declare the children born of such remarriages not only non-Jewish, but mamzerim as well.

5) Many Reform rabbis officiate at intermarriages in which Jewish men are married to non-Jewish women. It makes little sense, moral or otherwise, to declare non-Jewish the children of a marriage that a rabbi has performed and thereby sanctioned. Yet this would occur if the Orthodox definition of a “Jew” were applied.

6) The Orthodox definition of a Jew carries the essential requirement that a non-Jewish male who desires to convert to Judaism and become a Jew must undergo circumcision. The Reform community, however, has dispensed with circumcision as a requirement for conversion. Consequently, if the Orthodox definition of who is a Jew were applied in Reform, the great numbers of conversions to Reform Judaism of non-Jewish males who have not been circumcised would have to be declared void. It is patently absurd for Reform Judaism to apply, without justification, a definition of “Jew” that would nullify its own conversion practices.

IV

We come then to the crucial question: How should a polydox Jewish community define the name Jew? That is to say, who, according to a polydox Jewish community, has a right to the name Jew, and should be recognized as such? Prior to answering this question, some preliminary observations will be helpful.

For one, it should be noted that the Reform Jewish community has never given an answer to the question of who is a “Jew.” Odd as it may seem, Reform has never defined the name Jew. As can be seen from the discussion earlier, Reform has certainly made changes that imply a rejection of the Orthodox definition of a “Jew,” but Reform has never itself presented a direct, reasoned alternative to the Orthodox definition. This vacuum in Reform philosophy has been dealt with by the national Reform institutions, as they have with so many other theoretical deficiencies, either by failing to understand that it exists, or by pretending that it does not exist. Whichever may be the case, it appears that many in the Reform community have attempted to conceal, if not from others then from themselves, Reform’s implicit rejection of the Orthodox definition of a “Jew,” and the fact that Reform itself does not have one. This is done by using the Orthodox definition as a model for a “rule of thumb standard” in determining who in Reform is a Jew. This “rule of thumb standard” is: “A person is a Jew who has been born of a Jewish mother, or who has been converted to Judaism.” The critical question is by what right or reasoning is this standard applied in the Reform Jewish community? It is no answer to say that the standard resembles the Orthodox definition of a Jew and, therefore, should be applied in Reform. Any standard used in Reform to determine who is a “Jew” must certainly be based upon Reform principles rather than upon some resemblance to Orthodox law. Moreover, as is evident from the discussion earlier, the resemblance is verbal rather than substantial, specious and without merit. Reform’s acceptance of civil divorce in place of the Get, Reform’s changes in conversion procedures, and generally the many changes Reform has instituted in its marriage and ritual practices, have so gutted the heart of the Orthodox definition that Orthodoxy will not recognize anyone to be a “Jew” who does not meet exactly the Orthodox definition, even if the person does meet the Reform “Rule of thumb standard.”

Neither can Reform Jews defend their “rule of thumb standard” for determining who is a “Jew” on the grounds that it appears in the Torah. For, as mentioned earlier, the word Jew does not appear in the Torah, let alone criteria that define its use. Finally, there is no validity to the argument that the “rule of thumb standard” should be applied in Reform because it has its roots in the Talmud and rabbinic halachic law, for the Talmud and halacha have no authoritative status in Reform Judaism. Not only is the rejection of the Talmud and halachic law evident from general Reform practice, but their authority was explicitly rejected by a committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in the dynamic late nineteenth century period of classical Reform.

“From the standpoint of Reform Judaism, the whole post-Biblical and patristic literature, including the Talmud casuists, responses, and commentaries is, and can be considered as, nothing more nor less than ‘religious literature.’ . . . the more the conditions and environments of our modern life force it upon us, the more persistently we have to assert that our relations in all religious matters are in no way authoritatively and finally determined by any portion of our post-Biblical and

patristic (Talmudic and rabbinic) literature.” (**Jewish Encyclopedia**, Vol. IV, p. 216)

Inasmuch as the Reform “rule of thumb standard” for determining a Jew as someone “born of a Jewish mother, or who has been converted to Judaism,” is ultimately based only on the Talmud (even in Orthodoxy), and the Talmud is not authoritative in Reform, there is no justification for employing this standard in the Reform community. Until it is shown that the “rule of thumb standard” is based upon Reform principles, no one in Reform has a moral right to apply it. Certainly this “standard” has brought unnecessary anguish to many lives. It is no small matter for a Reform rabbi, congregation, or schoolmate to declare a child non-Jewish, whose father is Jewish but mother is not, on the basis of an arbitrary “rule of thumb standard” that in Reform has no basis in fact, and no justification in principle.

A second observation preliminary to offering a definition of “Jew” suitable for a polydoxy relates to the question: How did Orthodox Judaism receive the right to lay down a definition of the name Jew? The answer to this question will prove helpful in laying a foundation for a polydox definition of “Jew.” As will be recalled from the discussion earlier, Orthodox Judaism did not give rise to the name Jew. “Jew” originated in the pentateuchal religious community, with whose principles Orthodox Judaism, as heir and successor of Pharisaism, is in fundamental disagreement. Accordingly, Orthodoxy not only cannot claim to have originated the term Jew, it cannot even claim to be the spiritual descendant of those who originated it. Consequently, we cannot find an intrinsic religious or theological connection between Orthodox Judaism and its right to the name Jew. Yet Orthodoxy did take possession of the name Jew, defined it, and refers to its members by the name. Moreover, there is universal agreement that Orthodoxy has a right to use the name for itself. The reason for this right, it may be proposed, has to do not with religious or theological characteristics of the name Jew, but with semantic and cultural ones. The name Jew, viewed historically, can be discerned as possessing three characteristics, which may be terms: Inheritability, possessability; and redefinability.

- a) Inheritability is the characteristic of the name Jew that makes it capable of being transmitted from parent to child. (Family names and certain titles, for example, have the characteristic of inheritability.)
- b) Possessability is the characteristic of the name Jew that enables it to become the possession of or “belong to” those who inherit it. Once they possess the name, those who inherit it own it, and are free to do with the name as they wish. (Any number of examples can be given of the phenomenon of possessability. One is the use of the name Jew by Reform Jews, who inherited it from Orthodox Judaism, and proceeded to give it meanings entirely incompatible with the definition of Orthodoxy.)
- c) Redefinability is the characteristic of the name Jew whereby it can be given new definition by a sovereign community whose members have inherited the name. (Basically, the Orthodox Jewish definition of the name Jew is an instance of redefinability. Inherited by Orthodox Judaism and the Pharisees from the pentateuchal religious community, where the name Jew had a fundamentally

different meaning, Orthodoxy, as an independent community, exercised its sovereign right to redefine the name for itself.)

In the light of the foregoing, the right of a polydox Jewish community to define the name Jew for itself can be said to be based upon three historic characteristics of the name: inheritability; possessability, and redefinability. The definition itself, however, must meet the polydox values of freedom, reasonableness, and morality. For those of us who understand Reform Judaism to be a polydoxy, a definition of “Jew” that satisfies generally the requirements of a polydox Judaism will serve as an appropriate Reform definition as well. The following definition of the name Jew, then, is proposed for polydox Jewish communities in general, and for the Reform Jewish community in particular.

“A Jew is a person who wishes to take the name Jew, and who is descended from a Jewish parent, grandparent, or ancestor; also, a Jew is a person who wishes to take the name Jew, and is a member of a Jewish community.”

These further comments on the definition will help elucidate some of its details and implications:

- 1) This definition resolves the vexed problem (frequent in the Reform community) that arises where the father is Jewish and the mother is not. In such cases, the Orthodox definition of a “Jew” and definitions modeled after the Orthodox definition, discriminate against the father and deny the name Jew to the offspring. In the proposed polydox Jewish definition, the nature right of inheritance from a father is affirmed, and the offspring are recognized as “Jews.”
- 2) The definition accepts as a principle that the name Jew is not only inheritable, but infinitely inheritable, an infinite heritage. Once the name Jew has been determined to be inheritable, what rational grounds are there for a requirement that the inheritance be from parents alone? Why should a person not be able to inherit the name Jew from a grandparent or ancestral progenitor? The proposed polydox Jewish definition, therefore, standing on the principle that the name Jew is an infinite heritage, affirms the right of the descendants of a Jewish grandparent or ancestor to be recognized as Jews if they so desire.
- 3) In the proposed polydox definition, the individual is free to accept or reject the heritage of the name Jew. Whereas in the Orthodox definition, acceptance of the name and belief in Orthodox Judaism are compulsory for those born of a Jewish mother, in the polydox definition, the freedom to reject the name Jew is affirmed. Implicit in the freedom to reject the name Jew entirely is the freedom of the individual who inherits the name to give it whatever meaning he or she wishes.
- 4) Different Jewish communities vary in their requirements for membership. Once a non-Jew, however, who wishes to take the name Jew meets whatever the requirements may be for membership in a given Jewish community, and becomes a member of that community, he or she has the right to be recognized as a “Jew.”
- 5) The proposed polydox definition of a “Jew” differs from the definition of a “Jew” that is laid down in the laws of the State of Israel. The Israeli law defining a “Jew” is based on the Orthodox model, and consequently, accepts as Jews only

those persons born of Jewish mothers, or persons who have converted to Judaism, (the form of the conversion is at present unspecified.) A significant consequence of the Israeli definition of a “Jew” is that Israel’s “Law of Return,” which declares that “every Jew has a right to settle in the State of Israel,” limits this right only to those who meet the Israeli definition, that is, to persons born of Jewish mothers or persons who have undergone a conversion of Judaism. Accordingly, there will be persons recognized as “Jews” by the proposed polydox definition who are not recognized by the State of Israel, and who would not be eligible to emigrate to Israel under the provisions of its “Law of Return.” It is no objection to the proposed polydox definition of a “Jew” that it differs from the definition laid down in the laws of the State of Israel. A polydox Jewish community’s primary obligation, as it should be in every religious community, is to its own principles. For reasons given earlier, it is clear that Israel’s definition of a “Jew” is contrary to the principles and spirit of a Jewish polydoxy, and must therefore be rejected. Likewise, the threat implicit in Israel’s “Law of Return,” that Israel will accept under its provisions only those recognized as “Jews” by Israeli law, can have no effect upon a polydox Judaism’s commitment to its own principles and values. A polydox Judaism affirms not only the freedom of its individual members, but its collective freedom as well, from interference by any state, “Jewish” or otherwise.

A final argument for acceptance of the proposed polydox definition of a “Jew” comes from consideration of the Holocaust experience suffered by millions of European Jews under the tyranny of the Nazis. The definition of a “Jew” laid down by Hitler and the Nazi German government in the “First Regulation” of the Reich Citizenship Law is this:

“A Jew is any person descended from at least three Jewish grandparents, or an individual with two Jewish grandparents who also belongs to the Jewish community, or who is married to a Jew.”

Given this definition, persons were judged to be “Jews” by the Nazis, and thereby made subject to persecution, who would not be accepted as “Jews” by the definition of Orthodox Judaism, or by those who model their definitions, standards, and laws after the Orthodox definition, as do the State of Israel, and many Reform Jews. The reason for this is easily seen. A person may have three Jewish grandparents, for example, and still have a mother who is not Jewish, if the mother’s father is Jewish and her mother is not. Such a person would be judged a “Jew” by the Nazis, but a “non-Jew” by Orthodoxy and the State of Israel, and ineligible, therefore, for communal help under the “Law of Return”. Under the polydox definition of a Jew, which stands upon the principle that the name Jew is an infinite heritage, a person with three Jewish grandparents would, of course, be recognized as a Jew and receive all the communal concern and care that sharing a name brings.

The Holocaust is dramatic evidence of the moral imperative that urges acceptance of the polydox definition of a Jew that has been proposed. For polydox or Reform Jews to put the proposed definition into effect, it is only necessary to do so in their personal lives. Every polydox and Reform Jew has the freedom to understand the

meaning of the term Jew as he or she chooses. Yet the future of the American Reform Jewish community's sovereignty and freedom are clouded. Owing to a radical retreat into the past, as well as to political and ethnic considerations, the national institutions of Reform are threatening to surrender the sovereignty and autonomy fought for so valiantly by the founders of American Reform Judaism. Hence the national institutions have given up the progressive creativity of classical Reform Judaism, and have become increasingly submissive to the influences of Jewish institutions and forces outside the reform community. Yet one can look upon the Reform situation with regret, but not despair. If the Reform national institutions will not support the values and aspirations of the liberal Jewish religionist, then liberal Jews will find the strength and commitment to create whatever new institutional representation their dedication to principle requires.

Alvin J. Reines