

Failure of Principles

Tracing the Work and Failure of the Joint Platform Committee to Produce a “Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism”

By David Reinhart

In 1873, through the efforts of Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) was founded in Cincinnati, OH. This organization was intended to serve as a unifying body for the entirety of American Jewry. Likewise, the Hebrew Union College (HUC), founded in 1875 also by Isaac Mayer Wise, was meant to train an American Rabbinate ready to serve this entire community. However, due to the events of the late 1870s and early 1880s, this unity of all American Jewry was not meant to be. In 1885, Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler called together a conference of American reform Rabbis in Pittsburgh, PA, and, with the leadership of Isaac Mayer Wise, this conference ratified a document formally expressing the beliefs of their ideology, the Declaration of Principles better known as “The Pittsburgh Platform.” With this document, the official Reform Movement was born. Thus, the UAHC (which would be renamed the Union for Reform Judaism in 2003) and HUC became, respectively, the synagogal and educational organizations of the Reform Movement with the Rabbinic body of the movement, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), being founded in 1889.

From 1885 on, the CCAR, which formed out of the earlier Rabbinic conferences, such as the one in Pittsburgh, was responsible for defining the formal perspectives and principles of the Reform Movement. As such, they adopted a new platform in 1937, “The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism,” known as “The Columbus Platform.” In recognition of differences within the movement, the conference was specific to explain that this platform was presented “not as a

fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry.”¹ After 1937, the formation of another platform would not be attempted for thirty-four years. During this intervening time, significant events changed the composition of and necessitated ideological shifts in the entirety of world Jewry: World War II and The Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel and the Six-Day War, as well as changes within American Society, such as the Civil Rights and Feminist movements of the 1960s. While the Columbus Platform remained valid through this period, the upcoming 100th anniversary in 1973 of the founding of the UAHC began a call for the formation of a new document to express the needs and beliefs of contemporary Reform Jews.

This call was indeed recognized and accepted, but, as we will see, the source of this call is somewhat unclear. Nevertheless, at the CCAR Convention of 1971 in St. Louis, MO, the creation of a Platform Committee was formally announced, with the intent being “for the Reform Movement to take a new look at itself, its ideology, and its practices.”² Ultimately, the goal of this committee was “the preparation of a working paper toward a new platform for Reform Judaism.”³ Unlike the previous two platforms, however, which were solely initiated and created by the Rabbinic conference, this platform was to be a joint project of all three major bodies of the Reform Movement, the CCAR, the UAHC, and HUC, with the CCAR taking the lead.⁴

In order to clarify their origins, the Platform Committee, in the very first meeting on November 21st-23rd, 1971, stated that “the original impetus of the Platform Committee came from the Union [of American Hebrew Congregations] Centennial Committee.”⁵ Slightly

¹ “Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective,” Adopted by the CCAR in San Francisco 1976, (27 October 2004), <https://ccarnet.org/rabbis-speak/platforms/guiding-principles-reform-judaism/>, (Accessed 20 December 2016).

² Leonard I. Beerman, “Report of the Recording Secretary,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. LXXXI, 1971: 23-24.

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ Platform Committee Meeting Minutes, 21-23 November 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

differently, Jack Bemporad, the first secretary of the Platform Committee, explains that the impetus for this endeavor was the desire of the laity “to know, specifically and in detail, what fundamental beliefs Reform Judaism still embraces and what practices it advocates.”⁶ This need was brought to the CCAR by the presidents of the three major organizations, resulting in the creation of the aforementioned committee.⁷ Nevertheless, regardless of its origins, the Platform Committee was clearly formed as a joint effort of the CCAR, the UAHC, and HUC in order to prepare a document to be ratified at their respective conferences and conventions of 1973, in honor of the UAHC Centennial. Unfortunately, this goal was not accomplished, with no such document being presented. Based on an analysis of the documentary evidence, the endeavor was doomed to fail because of the broad scope of organizations/people, topics, and depth of process which the committee hoped to include. Once this committee failed in late 1973, early 1974, Eugene Borowitz was tapped by the CCAR President of the time to produce a unifying statement, which eventually became “Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective” adopted in 1976.

The nature of the initial joint effort led to an inherent power struggle between the CCAR and the UAHC. The previously mentioned first meeting’s minutes, of November 21st-23rd, 1971, record the first sign of this interaction. While the original minutes read as was quoted previously, “That the original impetus of the Platform Committee came from the Union [of American Hebrew Congregations] Centennial Committee,” Rabbi David Polish, President of the CCAR at the time, had the minutes revised to include the phrase “At the initiative of the Central

⁶ URJ Records MS72 D-12/Committee on the Centennial Leader’s Manual “A New Platform for Reform” Jack Bemporad.

⁷ *ibid*

Conference of American Rabbis, the project is a collaborative affair ...”⁸ This very clearly solidifies the place of the CCAR as the leaders of this body, as was stated in the initial orders for the committee.⁹

This inter-organizational power jockeying actually led to some conflict within the CCAR specifically regarding the issue of appointing non-clergy, i.e. lay people, to the Platform Committee. As the UAHC was cooperating in this endeavor, not only were congregational Rabbis obviously going to participate and serve on the committee, but, from the beginning, there was encouragement to include non-clergy as well. The first meeting of the Steering Committee of the Project on the ‘Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism’ discussed “adding two ‘pure’ laymen” to the Platform Committee, but “it was agreed to delay the matter until it could be discussed by the CCAR Board at its March meeting.”¹⁰ Nevertheless, before this meeting could even take place, letters from prominent members of the Committee, such as Rabbis W. Gunther Plaut and Levi Olan, were exchanged with Rabbi Dudley Weinberg, the Chairman of the Platform Committee, objecting to this notion.¹¹ Levi Olan’s letter explains, in retrospect rather astutely, that “it will be difficult to arrive at [even a Rabbinic view] without the added complication of the layman’s view.”¹² Nevertheless, at the meeting of the CCAR Board on March 14-15th, 1972, the decision was made to include “some laymen” specifically at the

⁸ Letter from David Polish to Jack Bemporad, 25 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁹ Leonard I. Beerman, “Report of the Recording Secretary,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. LXXXI, 1971: 23-24.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Project on the ‘Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism’, 23 December 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹¹ Message from W. Gunther Plaut to Dudley Weinberg, 11 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹² Message from Levi Olan to Dudley Weinberg, 15 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

request of the Centennial Commission of the UAHC.¹³ Even so, it would appear that some members of the committee were less than pleased at this decision, as the Chairman and Secretary specifically requested that those who made the decision, i.e. the president of the CCAR, be the ones to invite the lay people, who were indeed introduced to the Committee at their meeting on May 2nd.¹⁴

A related disagreement and conflict between and within the UAHC and the CCAR was regarding the involvement and impact the UAHC Regions and the larger Jewish world would have on the Committee and, thus, the proposed ‘Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism.’ This included the extent of the responsibility of the Committee to involve and aid these groups in this process. The disagreement began at the first meeting of the Steering Committee, where “it was decided to perk the work of the working committee (i.e. the Platform Committee) through regional CCAR and UAHC conventions and through adult education programs in congregations, all leading up to the UAHC Centennial in 1973.”¹⁵ As a result, many of the UAHC Regions began to plan their conventions that would take place in late 1972 or early 1973 around the statement or at least cursory papers which Platform Committee would produce. The earliest to do so and publicize as such was the Midwest Council of the UAHC.¹⁶ They had entitled their Biennial Convention on April 28-30, 1972 “To Know – To Do: Preparing a New Platform for Reform Judaism” and advertised the meeting as follows:

¹³ Minutes: Meeting of the Board of the CCAR, 14-15 March 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁴ Memorandum from Jack Bemporad to Alex Schindler, 18 April 1972 and Minutes, 22-24 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁵ Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee of the Project on the ‘Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism’, 23 December 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁶ To Know – To Do: Preparing a New Platform for Reform Judaism, 15 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

“Never before in our Reform movement have laymen been invited to participate in preparing a new platform, a set of guiding principles for the future of Reform Judaism. Our Midwest Council Biennial moves in a new direction this year, when laymen and rabbis will jointly consider theological and intellectual foundations of Reform Judaism.

Instead of workshops, committees will be charged with preparing planks on God and Man, Israel, Social Action, and Religious Practices. The General Assembly meeting on Sunday will attempt to forge a new set of guiding principles. Our suggestions will be forwarded to the national Biennial of the UAHC set for 1973.

Delegates will receive background material in advance of our Biennial”¹⁷

This publication, and the local advertisements in temple bulletins which it spurred, such as that of Congregation B’nai Jehudah, were not welcome news to the CCAR and the Platform Committee.¹⁸ In his letter regarding this publication, David Polish, President of the CCAR, expressed his concerns and those of the committee about “the prospects of premature discussion of our work on a regional and/or national level.”¹⁹ This began a series of correspondences between the leaders of these different bodies. The discussion became heated to the point that one UAHC Rabbi, Erwin Herman, pointedly stated, “It is now very clear that we will move on our own.... It is our intention to move ahead with the platform as the program of our convention. We will not be hamstrung by the CCAR.”²⁰ Despite the objections of the Platform Committee, the Executive Board of the CCAR sided with the Regional Councils of the UAHC. The CCAR Board “decided that, regardless of the stage of completion of the work of [the] committee, [the Platform] could and should be the subject matter of those conventions, with the clear

¹⁷ To Know – To Do: Preparing a New Platform for Reform Judaism, 15 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁸ Letter from David Polish to Jack Bemporad, 25 February 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

¹⁹ *ibid*

²⁰ Memorandum from Erwin Herman to Alexander Schindler, 8 March 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

understanding that no decisions would be made, but that this would simply be an opportunity for some input and perhaps, more important, feedback to [the] committee.”²¹ Even so, the committee continued expressing their displeasure at this decision.²²

Nevertheless, several bodies followed through with the essence of this mandate, to provide “some input and perhaps, more important, feedback to [the] committee.” This included multiple Regional Councils of the UAHC, such as the Pacific Southwest, New Jersey, Chicago Federation/Great Lakes Region, Northeast Lakes, Ohio Valley, Southeast, and Midwest Councils.²³ While the latter three of these Biennial Conferences produced documents which made their way to the Platform Committee, there is absolutely no evidence that this input from the UAHC Regions were made available to or reviewed by any members of the committee. Unfortunately, the second half of the mandate, to provide “feedback to the committee,” never took place. This is solely the fault of the Platform Committee itself. The committee objected to and prevented any and all dissemination of the papers on which they were working. Beginning in May 1972, they said “the working papers should be kept within the purview of the committee,” a position which continued throughout the process in order to “avoid the inevitable pressures which come from every direction to make the “Platform” conform to an infinite variety of views.”²⁴ From these statements, the committee obviously, while committed to expressing the

²¹ Message from Joseph Glaser to Dudley Weinberg, 21 March 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²² Message from Dudley Weinberg to Joseph Glaser, 4 April 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²³ CCAR Records MS34 25/16 and 26/1-2,8 Various records, 1972-1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16 and 26/folders 1-2,8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁴ Platform Committee Meeting, 22-24 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH and Message from Dudley Weinberg to Max A. Shapiro, 23 March 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

views of the entirety of the movement, did not actually want, nor particularly cared about, input and feedback from the larger Reform Jewish world.

Still, more organizations and groups put together their own “platforms,” with minimal to no guidance of the Platform Committee, in the hope that their voice might be heard. In the summer of 1972, the education staff at the Goldman Union Camp Institute in Zionsville, IN decided this was a wonderful opportunity to teach about the movement and explore Reform Jewish identity through a different lens, the exact hope of the initial meeting of the Steering Committee. Thus, the oldest age group, Anaf, spent three weeks studying the previous two platforms, before attempting to write their own document.²⁵ In the introduction to their document, these teens described the purpose their project:

“While this is indeed presented as a youth platform, the delegates to the Zionsville Convention ’72 hope that their suggestions will be considered by the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in their deliberations. Together we may attain new levels of understanding in our striving for a stronger Reform Judaism.”

Once again, there is no evidence that the hope of these campers came to fruition, as there is no record of this document ever even being received by the committee. Another group, organized in March of 1973, actually by the current Vice-President and President-elect of the CCAR, Rabbi Robert I Kahn, undertook a similar activity and produced a report for the consideration of the committee, but, even though it was received by the Chairman directly from Rabbi Kahn himself, there is still no evidence that this document was ever considered.²⁶ In fact, the only similar document which the committee showed any interest in receiving was from an alumni seminar led

²⁵ “Zionsville” Platform, 1972, Myron S. Goldman Union Camp Institute Records, MS 670/box 5/folders 3-7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁶ Message from Robert Kahn to Dudley Weinberg, 16 March 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

by Rabbi Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz. He and a group of graduated Rabbis put together over the course of a semester of study their own platform.²⁷ Upon hearing of this seminar Dudley Weinberg reached out to Rabbi Borowitz, “I hope that you will share with me anything of value that emerges from your seminar. I should also be grateful for any thoughts you care to share with me about this matter independently of the seminar.”²⁸ Thus, it appears that the committee was as much if not more interested in the opinions of Rabbi Borowitz himself, as he was in the document which the seminar would produce. Whatever the case, this “Proto-Platform” was seen as important enough to deserve printing in the CCAR Journal in 1973.²⁹ All of these different bodies putting together various documents expressing a multitude of opinions gives a distinct impression that there were simply “too many cooks in the kitchen,” the CCAR, HUC, the UACH, all their regional councils, camps, individual synagogues, youth groups, etc., to produce anything of substance.

All these different voices certainly created conflict, without even mentioning the differing perspectives of the Platform Committee members themselves, but equally problematic was the end goal and the developmental process which the committee chose to adopt in the first place. In order to achieve their purpose as described by the CCAR, “for the Reform Movement to take a new look at itself, its ideology, and its practices,” the committee created a list of twenty-seven different topics to address.³⁰ As Eugene Borowitz explains, “It soon became clear to the

²⁷ A New York Proto-Platform, Eugene Borowitz, undated, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁸ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Eugene Borowitz, 20 November 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

²⁹ Eugene B. Borowitz, “On Becoming a Reform Jew Today,” *CCAR Journal*, vol. XX, Summer 1973: 55-62.

³⁰ Leonard I. Beerman, “Report of the Recording Secretary,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. LXXXI, 1971: 23-24. and Platform Committee Meeting, 21-23 November 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

commission that it could fulfill its mandate only if it carried out a massive intellectual effort.”³¹ As such, the committee decided to assign individuals to write extensive papers on each of these subjects before attempting to distill these down into some statement regarding the principles and beliefs of the Reform Movement. Specifically, the Platform Committee resolved to “not be vague and general, such as the Columbus Platform, but to deal with specifics where necessary” and, thus, to “produce a new document for a new age and ... not be afraid to express boldly the tenets of Reform Judaism.”³² Ultimately, this plan was too much for the committee, especially if the goal was to create a single document for the Centennial of the UAHC in 1973.³³

Thus, immediately, we begin to see strife and doubt within the committee. At that same first meeting of the Platform Committee, the members themselves, recognizing their differences and the barriers they might cause, resolved “that if there would be no agreement, then a majority and minority report could be given.”³⁴ Interestingly, while the Platform Committee itself never reached a point to even discuss the creation of minority opinions, this structure served the Goldman Union Camp Institute campers well, for the “Zionsville Platform” provided majority and minority opinions in the statements on Social Action and Theology.³⁵ The statement on Theology actually produced a Majority Opinion and two Minority Opinions, differing primarily on if and how a Reform Jew should believe in God.³⁶ Despite the success of these campers in producing a document, the Platform Committee struggled to make progress from the start and

³¹ Eugene B. Borowitz, “Preface,” *CCAR Journal*, vol. XXIV, Spring 1977: 13-17.

³² Platform Committee Meeting, 21-23 November 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³³ Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee, 23 December 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁴ Platform Committee Meeting, 21-23 November 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁵ “Zionsville” Platform, 1972, Myron S. Goldman Union Camp Institute Records, MS 670/box 5/folders 3-7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁶ *ibid*

doubt of their own success appeared early on. As the Chairman of the committee expressed as early as April 4th, 1972, “Our first task is to reach a consensus within the Committee itself. We may or may not succeed in gaining that objective.”³⁷ However, he continued “Whether or not we do manage to produce a single “platform,” we will be able, I believe, to present the various working papers to the 1973 conventions of the CCAR and the UAHC.”³⁸ Thus, we see the first expression that the committee might not meet their ultimate mandate.

In this statement, Rabbi Weinberg also made mention of the working papers which the committee was attempting to write. This turned out to be a painstakingly slow and involved process. Seven such papers were assigned to various members of the committee at the first meeting, ranging in topic from Halakha to Who is a Jew? to Crises in Jewish History, all of which led to some controversy.³⁹ As per the Steering Committee, these documents and materials were meant to be provided to the Regional and Local bodies of the UAHC, but, since the committee had such issues finalizing and approving these papers, this never happened (which is what led to the previously mentioned conflict with the UAHC).⁴⁰ By the April meeting, the committee had indeed received five of these papers, but none of them were approved, all required revisions, and a nine additional such papers were assigned.⁴¹ The following meeting showed more of the same. Many of these papers were discussed at greater length, the notes of which indicate some critical divides between the members, for example on such issues as the

³⁷ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Joseph Glaser 4 April 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Platform Committee Meeting, 21-23 November 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴⁰ Minutes of the Meeting of the Steering Committee, 23 December 1971, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 13, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴¹ Notes of Platform Committee Meeting, 14-16 April 1972 and Message from Dudley Weinberg to Louis Lister 4/25 April 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

extent of our commandedness, the nature of God, the relevance of Israel, morality, and divine judgement.⁴² As such, none of these papers were approved. Since the Committee was not able to agree and finalize these papers and due to the desire for the larger Reform community to engage with the new platform, an effort was made to create a completely new set of documents on the topics which the Platform Committee was discussing to be used as educational tools, but these were “not” the Platform Papers.⁴³ While the topics of these papers eventually were discussed during sessions led by each of their authors at the 1973 CCAR Conference in Atlanta, GA, the papers themselves seemed to remain within the bounds of the committee.⁴⁴ Only when the Committee eventually disbanded were these papers then turned over to the CCAR and subsequently to the American Jewish Archives.⁴⁵

Moreover, from the very beginning, these papers were supposed to “be accompanied by a brief statement which might be suitable for ultimate inclusion in a platform.”⁴⁶ This instruction appears to have never led to results and no such “brief statement[s]” appear anywhere in the records. Rabbi Weinberg seems to explain the reasoning behind this lack of production: “The process of preparing and discussing the working papers is necessarily a slow and difficult one, to say nothing of the even more complex process of extracting from the working papers the kinds of statements that can be offered as guiding principles for our movement.”⁴⁷ This lack of progress

⁴² Platform Committee Meeting, 22-24 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴³ Regional Centennial Program Bulletin II, 20 June 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴⁴ “Convention Program,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. LXXXIII, 1973: xxi-xxii.

⁴⁵ Eugene B. Borowitz, “On Becoming a Reform Jew Today,” *CCAR Journal*, vol. XX, Summer 1973: 55-62.

⁴⁶ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Jack Bemporad, 23 March 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴⁷ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Louis Lister, 25 April 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

caused the formal statement at the Platform Committee meeting on May 22nd-24th, 1972 that there were three possible outcomes regarding “a new Platform for Reform Judaism”:

- “1-To succeed in producing a statement and supporting papers;
- 2-To emerge with a majority and minority report which will be presented to the national institutions;
- 3-To fail to reach consensus.”⁴⁸

For the first time the possibility of complete failure was mentioned within the context of the Platform Committee. However, this possibility of failure was all the more worrisome to the Chairman of the committee, Rabbi Weinberg, who, in speaking to Rabbi Borowitz, expressed his doubt thus:

“Please wish us well in our work. I am not at all sure that it will be possible to obtain a consensus about the principles and practices which our movement ought to follow even within the committee itself, let alone within the body of the Reform constituency. We will do our best and if we find that we cannot issue a genuinely significant and challenging statement, we will not issue any, at least so far as I am concerned.”

Thus, in Rabbi Weinberg’s mind, option 2 was no option at all, it was success or failure, and they did indeed try their best.

Even though the previously indicated “brief statements” accompanying the working papers were never completed, at the same May 1972 meeting of the committee, Rabbi Weinberg assigned a subcommittee consisting of Rabbis Bernard Martin, Martin Rozenberg, and Richard Levy to attempt to rectify this issue.⁴⁹ Their ultimate goal was “to draft a preliminary statement for the consideration of the Committee at its next meeting.”⁵⁰ This constituted a first attempt at a

⁴⁸ Platform Committee Meeting, 22-24 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁴⁹ Platform Committee Meeting, 22-24 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵⁰ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Dr. Bernard Martin et. al., 31 May 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

single document that might become the “Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism.” This effort did indeed result in a synthesis of the committee’s material, but not in a single concise statement, instead each of the three subcommittee members wrote a paper on different sections of the statement, all of which led to significant debate and none of which were approved.⁵¹ For the time being, the statements of the subcommittee seem to have been abandoned after this meeting, as they do not appear again in the Platform Committee’s records for nearly two years, and, more dramatically, a completely new statement was commissioned by executive decision of the Chairman. In January 1973, Rabbis Levi Olan and Jack Bemporad now undertook “the arduous task of welding the various papers which [had] been presented to the “Platform” Committee and other available materials into a single document.”⁵² While this too failed, it was the only single document that the Platform Committee put together and the closest they came to providing a ‘Statement on Principles and Practices of Reform Judaism.’

During this time, the second half of 1972 and 1973, as the UAHC Centennial rapidly approached, the committee began to face significant external and internal criticism and differences. Externally, individuals and groups criticized the committee for not representing the full extent of the Reform Jewish community, pointing out that half the population was barely represented, there was only a single woman on the committee, and that there was no youth representation.⁵³ This criticism seems to be valid as the committee itself had asked this question at their April 1972 meeting.⁵⁴ Issues further arose from other committees of the CCAR. In early

⁵¹ Platform Committee Meeting Minutes, 10-12 October 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵² Message from Dudley Weinberg to Levi Olan, 16 January 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵³ Letter from Miss Audrey Jacobson to Rabbi Weinberg, 7 July 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵⁴ Notes of Platform Committee Meeting, 14-16 April 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 25/folder 16, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

1973, two committees expressed their concerns over different parts of the possible statement's contents. Maram, the Council of Israel Reform Rabbis, reached out to the Platform Committee through Ezra Spicehandler because they had heard the committee was working on a statement regarding "Who is a Jew?", possibly recognizing patrilineal descent.⁵⁵ They feared that "a public announcement to this effect under present circumstances would further widen the breach between Reform and Orthodox Jews. It would serve as ammunition to those who favor legislation in Israel which would not recognize conversions and marriages performed by Reform Rabbis in the diaspora."⁵⁶ As such, they "urge[d] the committee not to include any definition as to "Who is a Jew?" in the guiding principles."⁵⁷ Similarly, the Justice and Peace Committee of the CCAR was concerned that a decisive enough statement regarding these values would not be present in the document, so they encouraged the committee to "include a strong statement on Jewish ethics, Jewish universalism, on private and social ethics and individual conscience," explaining "We believe that the thrust of Reform Judaism in earlier times should not be lost in the new ethnicism and particularism."⁵⁸

These pressures and differences from outside of the committee do not come close to the extent of disagreement from within the Platform Committee itself. As Dudley Weinberg summarizes in November of 1973 in light of the approaching UAHC Biennial, "I shall tell them as honestly as I can what our committee has done so far and indicate that significant and even intense differences of opinion exist within the committee."⁵⁹ This was in a response to Jakob

⁵⁵ Message from Ezra Spicehandler to Dudley Weinberg, 10 January 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵⁶ *ibid*

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ Message from Michael A. Robinson to David Polish, 9 March 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁵⁹ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Jakob J. Petuchowski 8 November 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

Petuchowski, who was one of the primary dissenters of the committee. As early as November 1972, Rabbi Petuchowski expressed extreme disagreement with the committee and more.

“Far be it from me to impugn Ben’s scholarship. But I do disagree violently with his conclusion that we are to accept as Jews the offspring of either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father and a Gentile spouse. ...

God knows, there are enough divisions today in the Household of Israel. We do not need any additional ones. I will not have my name associated with any document that includes Wacholder’s proposal; and I would regard the Committee’s adoption of Wacholder’s proposal as a hetter for me to withdraw from a Committee of the necessity of which I am, in any case, still not convinced.”⁶⁰

This formal statement of “violent” disagreement confirmed the concerns of Rabbi Weinberg, in responding to Rabbi Petuchowski he reflects, “what that memo tells me is what I have known right along, namely that the task of our committee is at best a terribly difficult one and may, at worst, prove to be an impossible one.”⁶¹ Jakob Petuchowski is but one dissenter, and he was not even the earliest to express the possibility that, due to differences, they would remove themselves from the committee. A month earlier, Rabbi Lou H. Silberman explained “Try as I may to contribute to the work of the Platform Committee, I know very well that I cannot possibly support any document it produces” and wonders “given this gap, do you not think that it will be wiser, better certainly for my colleagues, if I withdraw?”⁶² These among other noted differences appear throughout the existence of the Platform Committee and certainly contribute to the inability of the committee to produce any platform, statement, or documents at all for the Centennial.

⁶⁰ Message from Jakob Petuchowski to Haskell Bernat, 20 November 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶¹ Message from Dudley Weinberg to Jakob Petuchowski, 27 November 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶² Message from Lou Silberman to David Polish, 25 October 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

In response to another such expression of disagreement, Dudley Weinberg again mentions, “As a matter of fact, I am not at all positive that we will succeed in producing a definitive ‘platform.’ We can only try to achieve concensus [sic.] within the committee itself in which a broad spectrum of opinion is represented. The task is an exceedingly difficult one and there is no guarantee that we will succeed.”⁶³ At this same time, Rabbi Haskell Bernat, the current secretary of the committee, specifically states with even more conviction, “The very form in which we have determined to receive and work with the documents precludes the mere ‘enunciation of lofty principles,’” i.e. a single statement or platform.⁶⁴ Ultimately, the failure to produce such a ‘Statement on Principles and Practices on Reform Judaism’ for the 1973 Centennial is solidified by Rabbi Alexander Spicehandler, the President-Elect of the UAHC,

“There is still some residual concern on the part of some members of the Conference regarding the matter of our delegates voting on a Platform per se at our forthcoming Centennial-Biennial. I want to make it crystal clear that it is not our intention to do so. Even if we wanted to have a vote we couldn’t because there’s nothing we could vote on.”⁶⁵

In other words, there was to be no Platform for 1973. Nevertheless, the Platform Committee continued working on the possibility of a statement beyond the intended period of time and certainly moved forward with the process of the working papers. However, by the end of the year, the committee officially recognized, “The crucial realization however was that a laconic platform statement after the style of Pittsburgh or Columbus (the Olan-Bemporad paper was a somewhat fuller model) is not possible given the diversity of our Movement today.”⁶⁶ Thus, the

⁶³ Message from Dudley Weinberg to William G. Braude, 7 December 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶⁴ Memorandum from Haskell Bernat to Dudley Weinberg, 8 December 1972, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶⁵ Message from Alexander Spicehandler to David Polish, 22 March 1973, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 26/folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶⁶ Memorandum – December meeting of the Platform Committee, 19 February 1974, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 27/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

Platform Committee gave up any attempt to synthesize such a document; instead, they retrenched themselves in the evaluation of their working papers and an ongoing process to create several “statements on each of the critical issues that face Judaism.”⁶⁷

In light of the seemingly unbridgeable differences within the Reform movement itself over issues such as intermarriage, the role of halakha, and patrilineal descent, the failure of the Platform Committee to produce a platform is not surprising. However, their defeat did not help this matter, and, in 1975, the CCAR was close to splitting over these disagreements.⁶⁸ At this moment, the President of the CCAR, Rabbi Robert I. Kahn, recognized these divisions and confronted them head on. In his masterfully articulated President’s Address (which I highly recommend reading in its entirety) to the 1975 CCAR Convention in Cincinnati, OH, he pled for unity and essentially laid the foundation for a unifying statement in a way the Platform Committee could not:

“We need, it seems to me, to find a definition of our movement which can pull together its disparate factions. When white light is viewed through a prism, it is broken down into a spectrum of colors. Would it not be possible to bring the prismatic divisions into which the light of Reform has been broken into unity again? This was attempted in Pittsburgh; it was revised in Columbus; perhaps the process should begin again in Cincinnati as we celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of our movement.

I should like to offer, for your thought, the beginnings of such as affirmations of the principles of Reform Judaism.”⁶⁹

As a result of his speech, an *ad hoc* Committee on President’s Message was “formed and charged with the discussion and refinement of Rabbi Kahn’s statement to be presented to the

⁶⁷ Memorandum – December meeting of the Platform Committee, 19 February 1974, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 27/folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁶⁸ Eugene B. Borowitz, “Preface,” *CCAR Journal*, vol. XXIV, Spring 1977: 13-17.

⁶⁹ Robert I. Kahn, “Report of the President,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook*, vol. LXXXV, 1975: 3-12.

1976 convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.”⁷⁰ Therefore, this new committee, headed by Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, took up the failure of the previous Platform Committee and, building off of Rabbi Kahn’s address, worked toward the creation of a unifying document, even if it was not unanimous. Rabbi Borowitz explains, “We realized that if we tried to speak for everyone in the Reform movement we could write nothing of significant,” yet, “if we did not represent even the 10% at the far ‘left’ and far ‘right’ of the Conference, we would still be speaking for 80% of our colleagues.”⁷¹ This realization, the CCAR as the sole participant, and the reduced scope of their deliberations allowed this committee to succeed, unlike the previous one, in producing such a document. In their mandated time frame, Rabbi Borowitz and the Committee on President’s Message agreed upon and presented “Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective” to the 1976 CCAR Convention. As Michael A. Meyer explains in the final section of his book *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*, this “was, in fact, a new platform,” which was “readily” adopted by the CCAR and “remarkably well reflected the state of the movement.”⁷² Thus, the CCAR was actually able to provide a “Centenary Perspective,” despite the failure of the Joint Platform Committee of the early 1970s.

⁷⁰ On President’s Message, undated, Central Conference of American Rabbis Records, MS 34/box 27/folder 6, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

⁷¹ Eugene B. Borowitz, “Preface,” *CCAR Journal*, vol. XXIV, Spring 1977: 13-17.

⁷² Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1995), 383.