

Review Essay

New Light on the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885

The Changing World of Reform Judaism: The Pittsburgh Platform in Retrospect. Edited by Walter Jacob. Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1985. xi + 124 pp. No price indicated.

Few documents in all of American Jewish history have been as cited, interpreted, analyzed, defended, and criticized as the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. This eight-point resolution, described by Walter Jacob in his introduction to this volume as "the clearest and most influential nineteenth century statement on American Reform Judaism (p.1)," and by Robert Ross, also in this volume, as a "statement which . . . exemplifies the broader categories and meanings of liberal religion generally (p.56)," resulted from a three day conference called by Kaufmann Kohler and held just outside of Pittsburgh in Concordia Hall, Allegheny City. The Platform never won formal acceptance either by the Central Conference of American Rabbis or by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and from the beginning, leading Reform rabbis dissented from one or more of its major planks. Yet, however much some individuals sought to distance themselves from the sentiments expressed at Pittsburgh, none ever doubted the platform's overall importance. "Rarely," Gunther Plaut points out here, "have eighteen* men meeting together for but a few days, made such an impact on the history of our religion (p.17)."

For all that has been written about the ideas expressed in the Pittsburgh Platform, especially the well-known anti-nationhood statement in its fifth plank ("We consider ourselves no longer a nation but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the administration of the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state"), surprisingly little research has been done into the document's background, history, and impact. Even the published *Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference*, reprinted from the columns of *The Jewish Reformer*, and issued by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1923 ("in honor of the eightieth anniversary of the birth of Rabbi Kaufmann Kohler who issued the call for the Convention") have remained little known and practically unread.

* Actually, as Walter Jacob explains, there were nineteen participants. "Fifteen rabbis were present on the first day; three others arrived on the second day. The Rev. L. Naumberg, retired spiritual leader of the Rodef Shalom Congregation of Pittsburgh, was also recognized as a member of the conference on the second day (p.27)."

Recognizing this, and to commemorate the Pittsburgh Platform's centennial, Rodef Shalom Congregation in Pittsburgh, host congregation of the 1885 conference, sponsored a two-day symposium on the Pittsburgh Platform for the Mid-Atlantic Region of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in March 1985. Five speakers delivered major addresses: W. Gunther Plaut, "The Pittsburgh Platform in the Light of Previous Rabbinic Conferences"; Corinne Krause, "A Historical Perspective of the Pittsburgh Platform"; Walter Jacob, "The Influence of the Pittsburgh Platform on Reform *Halakhah* and Biblical Study"; Robert W. Ross, "The Pittsburgh Platform and American Religious Thought"; and Phillip Sigal, "The Conservative Movement and the Pittsburgh Platform." In addition, Samuel Karff spoke briefly on the theology of the Pittsburgh Platform, and Mark Staitman, in a later sermon, commented on the relationship between the Pittsburgh Platform and its successors: the Columbus Platform of 1937 and the Centenary Perspective of 1976.

Inevitably, these papers proved uneven in quality. Some speakers ranged far from their preassigned topics; others permitted private agendas to peek out from under the skirts of their scholarship. One speaker, the late Rabbi Sigal, admitted at the outset of his remarks that he was not going to discuss the Platform from the point of view of the Conservative Movement, but rather from his own idiosyncratic perspective "on creative halakhah." Still, the symposium as a whole brought out a great deal of new information and research, and one can only welcome the decision to gather these papers together between the covers of a book. Strange as it may seem, this book, which also reprints the now virtually unobtainable Proceedings of the Pittsburgh Conference, can lay claim to being the only volume on the history of the Pittsburgh Platform published to date.

Taking into account the data found in this volume, as well as other new sources, we can begin to reevaluate three central historical questions that anyone interested in the Pittsburgh Platform's place in the history of American Judaism needs to consider: (1) Why was the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference called? (2) What transpired at the Conference itself? (3) What was the impact of the Pittsburgh Platform on Reform Judaism? Given the state of current research into late nineteenth-century American Judaism none of these questions can be answered definitively. From what we do know, however, it is quite clear that standard accounts of this episode must now be substantially revised.

(1) *Why was the Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference called?* The usual answer, supplied by David Philipson, a conference participant, and by many others, including several in this volume (e.g., Ross, p.

56), is that the “Kohut-Kohler controversy was the real cause.”¹ In 1885, Alexander Kohut immigrated to America from Hungary to assume the pulpit of Congregation Ahawath Chesed, and soon after his arrival he delivered a series of lectures on *The Ethics of the Fathers* which amounted to a strong attack on ‘Radical Reform Judaism.’ “A Reform which seeks to progress without the Mosaic-rabbinical tradition,” he thundered in German, “is a deformity – a skeleton without flesh and sinew, without spirit and heart. It is suicide; and suicide is not reform.” Kaufmann Kohler, rabbi of nearby Temple Beth El took this as a personal challenge (“the gauntlet thrown in our faces must be taken up at once”), and though it was late in the season, after Shavuot, he delivered five discourses (“Backward or Forward”) that defended Radical Reform, attacked Orthodoxy, and asked American Jews to choose: “Which are we to espouse? The one that turns the dials of the time backward, or the one that proudly points to the forward move of history?” The dispute received wide publicity, even in the secular press, and according to Moshe Davis’s well-known account, “The Pittsburgh Conference was called to give the Historical School and its spokesman, Alexander Kohut, an ‘official’ answer.”²

This theory as to the origins of the Pittsburgh Conference is attractively straightforward, and finds support in comments made by contemporary observers. But as anyone who carefully reads Davis’s chapter or the newspapers of the time knows, it is much too simple. Kohut, in fact, was far from being alone in his attacks on Reform. Other criticisms were sounded by like-minded traditionalist rabbis, especially Sabato Morais, as well as by a group which Max Cohen, one of its members, characterized as consisting “of young American Jews who, while not inordinately addicted to Orthodoxy as a rigid standardisation of thought and conduct, were yet opposed to the wholesale and reckless discarding of everything that was Jewish simply because it was inconvenient, oriental, or was not in conformity with Episcopalian customs.” Many of these “young American Jews” associated themselves with New York’s traditionalist Jewish newspaper, the *American Hebrew*, and participated in what was referred to at the time as a “Jewish revival.” They supported efforts aimed at strengthening the Sabbath, Jewish holiday observance, and other

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- 1 David Philipson, “The Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference,” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 45 (1935), 195; for similar accounts see *inter alia* Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism* (Philadelphia: 1965), pp.222–225; Naomi W. Cohen, *Encounter With Emancipation* (Philadelphia: 1984), pp.181–85; H.G. Enelow, “Kaufmann Kohler,” *American Jewish Year Book*, 28 (1926–27), p.249.
 - 2 Alexander Kohut, *The Ethics of the Fathers* (New York: 1920), p.7; Kaufmann Kohler, *Studies, Addresses and Personal Papers* (New York: 1931), p.203; Davis, *Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, p.225.

rituals, and sought to deepen Jews' understanding of their religion, history and culture. When Kohler spoke of "an increasing shallowness of thought visible everywhere, whilst the emotional is pressing forward to take the lead," one suspects that he was referring to this group which had taken the offensive against Reform, and rallied around Kohut when he began his lectures. Since this was a whole traditionalist movement, rather than just the fulminations of one man, it understandably worried Kohler, and would seem more adequately to explain why at Pittsburgh he responded as he did.³

Still, there remains a problem. If, as is claimed, the Pittsburgh Conference was no more than a response to Kohut and like-minded traditionalists, it is difficult to understand why Kohler's letter inviting Reform rabbis to come to Pittsburgh failed to say so, and why his lecture delivered at the Conference's opening session dwelt only briefly on "Conservative Judaism" and its "backward" stance, and concentrated instead on "appalling indifference," "religious decline," and the fear that "our younger generation grow daily more estranged from our sacred heritage (pp.92-93)." Admittedly, Kohut and the traditionalists may have been on Kohler's mind when he told the assembled rabbis that "We cannot afford to stand condemned as *law-breakers*, to be branded as frivolous and as *rebels and traitors* because we transgress these laws on principle [p.94]". But his specific proposals for Jewish mission work, women's equality "in the entire religious and moral sphere of life," Jewish literature and newspapers, a uniform system of Jewish religious instruction, thoroughgoing ritual reform, modifications to the weekly cycle of Pentateuchal readings, a new Bible translation, adult Jewish education, a revised attitude toward the Gentile world, admission of Gentiles without circumcision, and a revitalization of Jewish home life actually had far less to do with the validity of the "Mosaic-Rabbinic tradition," the focus of the dispute with Kohut, than with the problem that Kohler repeatedly underscored: "the condition of affairs of Judaism in general and in our country in particular (p.92)." Isaac Mayer Wise, in an important and hitherto overlooked retrospective on the Pittsburgh Conference, likely went too far in denying completely "that Dr. Kohler proposed that conference in order to receive its sanction in his controversy with Dr. Kohut," a charge he dismissed as a "post-festum" claim of some of Kohler's "opponents."⁴ Yet the evidence does strongly indicate that the traditional

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- 3 Davis, *Emergence of Conservative Judaism*, pp.200-228; Max Cohen, "Some Memories of Alexander Kohut," in Kohut, *Ethics of the Fathers*, p.xcviii; Kohler, *Studies*, p. 202. On the late nineteenth century American Jewish revival, see chapter two of the author's forthcoming history of the Jewish Publication Society; and "The Great American Jewish Awakening," *Midstream*, 28 (October, 1982), 30-34.
- 4 Isaac M. Wise, "A Record of American Judaism for A.M. 5646," *American Jews*

challenge, if a concern, was by no means the only or even the main one. Kohler was far more concerned about the need "to inspire and to win the despondent and the skeptic (p.94)."

Sefton Temkin, in a recent "centenary assessment" of the Pittsburgh Platform, concedes the weakness of the standard explanation of the Platform's origins, and argues that Kohler, in formulating his program, was actually "looking over his left shoulder rather than over his right." "The bogey man," according to this revisionist view, "was not Alexander Kohut, but Felix Adler." Adler, who in 1876 founded the Ethical Culture movement, did pose a serious threat to Radical Reform (a more serious one, indeed, than Kohut did) for, as Temkin explains, he drew his followers from "the very element to whom an advanced reformer such as Kohler looked for support."⁵ Furthermore, Kohler in his Conference Paper actually pointed to one of the programs of the Ethical Culture Society as a model for Jews to emulate:

It must be stated to the credit of the Ethical Culture Society of New York, that it has rendered it a matter of the highest ambition of the wealthiest young ladies and gentlemen to have so many poor families placed under the special care and guardianship of each, and a great deal of good is accomplished by the combined efforts of its members. Why should not each Jewish congregation have the material and moral welfare of the poor within its reach entrusted to its care also, so that religion becomes with each member an active training for the practice of love (p.95)?

Still, if it cannot be denied that Kohler was concerned about Ethical Culture, it is difficult to maintain, as Temkin seems to, that this was Kohler's sole concern and alone explains Pittsburgh. For this not only ignores the traditionalist challenge entirely, it also overlooks Kohler's unquestionable concern with Social Gospel and Freethought inroads into Judaism – his fear that Jews, not finding what they were seeking in Judaism, would turn to other faiths and convert. "Shall the intelligent and thinking class of Jews henceforth go to a free Christian church?" he asked, in his first reply to Kohut. In a subsequent open letter to Sabato Morais, published in the *American Hebrew*, he

Annual for 5647 (Cincinnati: 1887), 62. Wise conceded, however, that one of the Conference's main objects was "to declare that American Judaism will not surrender nor submit in anywise to the reactionary movements of any sort of European orthodoxy."

- 5 Sefton D. Temkin, "The Pittsburgh Platform: A Centenary Assessment," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, 32:4 (Fall, 1985), 7. For Adler's comments on the Pittsburgh Platform, see Gunther Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism* (New York: 1965) pp.38–40; and Benny Kraut, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler* (Cincinnati: 1979), pp.181, 219–220. We know from Hyman Enelow that Kohler, like most Reform rabbis of his day, was concerned about Ethical Culture, which he considered "no substitute for religion, though just then it was being thus played up", see H.G.Enelow, "Kaufmann Kohler," *American Jewish Year Book* 28 (1926–7), 249.

attacked the Philadelphia Sephardic minister for taking “too little cognizance of the fact that Jews are the foremost in applauding Ingersollian mockery” – a reference to the antireligious teachings of Robert Ingersoll. Eight years later, he was still convinced that the greatest danger to the American Jew lay in “Agnosticism and an indifferent, if not hostile, attitude to the synagogue.”⁶ These concerns explain the many evident parallels, some of them outlined in this volume by Robert Ross and Corinne Krause, linking the ideas discussed in Pittsburgh with those voiced in Liberal Protestant, Free Religious, and Masonic circles. In addition, they demonstrate quite conclusively that besides traditionalist Judaism and Ethical Culture, there was yet a third challenge that Kohler hoped the rabbis assembled at Pittsburgh would meet: the challenge posed by the combined forces of assimilation, apostasy, “religious indifference” and “lethargy among the masses (p.104).”⁷

(2) *What transpired at the Conference itself?* The published proceedings of the Pittsburgh Platform are obviously incomplete. They begin with Kohler’s call for “practical measures as seen demanded by the hour,” coupled with his ambitious list of proposed reforms, yet move on at the next session, and with little explanation, to an ideological platform, refined from one originally drafted by Kohler and called for only in his first proposal: “We ought to unite on a platform . . . broad, comprehensive, enlightened and liberal enough to impress and win all hearts, and also firm and positive enough to dispel suspicion and reproach of agnostic tendencies, or of discontinuing the historical thread of the past (p.93).” The *practical* reforms that Kohler championed, and that he specifically asked David Philipson to further⁸, were mostly deferred – why is not clear. Nor do the proceedings reveal what motivated the changes introduced into Kohler’s original draft of the Pittsburgh Platform. He submitted a proposed ten point platform on Monday afternoon November 16th, and the next morning a committee of five (Kohler included) returned with a related but by no means identical eight point platform that speedily won Conference approval. The proceedings transcribe frustratingly little of the accompanying debate, and though we know that the final text was not adopted unanimously, what the final vote was remains a mystery.

6 Kohler, *Studies*, p.204; originally published in *American Hebrew*, 23 (June 12, 1885), p.66; “Kohler to Morais,” *American Hebrew*, 23 (July 3, 1885), p.120; Kaufmann Kohler, “Is Reform Judaism Destructive or Constructive?” *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* [= *CCARYB*] 3 (1892–93), p.111.

7 Leon Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue 1820–1870* (Hanover, N.H.: 1976), pp.191–92; Alice M. Greenwald, “The Masonic Mizrah and Lamp: Jewish Ritual Art As a Reflection of Cultural Assimilation,” *Journal of Jewish Art*, 10 (1984), 97.

8 Philipson, “Pittsburgh Rabbinical Conference,” p.197.

If anything, the published report of the proceedings raises more questions than it answers.

But worse than being incomplete, it can now be shown that *the so-called "Authentic Report of the Proceedings of the Rabbinical Conference Held at Pittsburg" is, in fact, nothing of the sort, and cannot be considered an authoritative account of what transpired there.* Important comments were excluded or changed, often on tendentious grounds. Where other reliable sources are available, they contain new or significantly different information. Compare, for example, the text that David Philipson published of the letter Kohler sent "to reform rabbis throughout the country" inviting them to Pittsburgh, and the same letter published supposedly verbatim in the "Authentic Report." The latter not only retroactively alters the venue – the original letter invited the rabbis to "Temple Rodef Sholom (Rev. Dr. Mayer's)," and the site was later changed – but also, and more importantly, the character of those invited. The Philipson letter speaks of "all friends and supporters of the cause of Reform and Union in American Judaism," while the "Authentic Report" omits everything after the word "reform" (without the capital letter) – a substantive difference considering that Isaac Mayer Wise came to Pittsburgh precisely in order to further Jewish unity.⁹ Even more revealing is a comparison between the "Authentic Report" and the proceedings of the Conference as described in the *Pittsburgh Commercial Gazette* (uncovered by Mr. Stanley Rosenbaum). The *Gazette* (November 17, 1885) quotes Kohler as contrasting the "Orthodox Jew" to those in the Reform camp "who no longer wait for a Jewish kingdom in Palestine, and the rebuilding of the old slaughter-house as the center of Divine worship." The "Authentic Report" employs the label "Conservative Judaism," perhaps in Kohler's usage merely a synonym for Orthodoxy (see his reference to "all along the line from conservatism to ultraradicalism"), and tones down the term "slaughter house" to "the old temple" – a far less inflammatory rendering (pp.92–3). The *Gazette* then goes on to quote a revealing comment by Rabbi Solomon Sonneschein that the "Authentic Report" leaves out completely:

Dr. Sonneschein argued that it was high time for the Hebrews to take a stand against the prevailing sentiment that the Hebrews as a class were merely migratory in disposition and were mere money makers, possessing neither moral nor social influence in the community. "It was time to correct that impression and to define our position upon this social problem now agitating the public mind . . ."

9 *Ibid.* pp.196–197. "Union of American Judaism" was consciously *not* mentioned in the call to the 1869 Philadelphia Conference of Reform rabbis; see Sefton D. Temkin, *The New World of Reform* (London: 1971), p.80. For Wise's attitude to the Pittsburgh Conference, see James G. Heller, *Isaac M. Wise* (New York: 1965), pp.461–468.

Perhaps most damning of all, the "Authentic Report" edited out voiced criticisms. Rabbi Michael Machol of Cleveland, one of those present in Pittsburgh, told the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1890 that when the "Declaration of Principles" at Pittsburgh was adopted, "I was opposed to some of them, and am still opposed to them."¹⁰ No record of this opposition, however, appears in the published proceedings; indeed Machol is one of those cited as "having given in eloquent words expression to their great satisfaction with what was accomplished by the Conference (p.122)"! The inescapable conclusion, then, is that the "Authentic Report" is a self-serving and somewhat unreliable account of what transpired at Pittsburgh - the best we have, to be sure, but not nearly good enough. Isaac Mayer Wise, back in 1887, was rightly upset that the "official proceedings" were never published:

The committee appointed to publish the proceedings neglected its duty; instead of bringing before the public the official proceedings in an independent form, Dr. Kohler took it upon himself, without any authority, to publish them in his paper, which few people read, and many suspected of one-sidedness.¹¹

If, owing to unreliable reporting, we cannot be certain of what transpired at the Pittsburgh Conference, we can now explain what had hitherto been a mystery: why the meeting planned for Cincinnati in May 1886 to continue the work left undone in Pittsburgh failed to take place. Temkin, in his "Centenary Assessment," pointed the way towards a solution when he noticed a hint in David Philipson's account suggesting "there there was something not quite seemly" that led to the cancellation of the planned gathering at the last minute (so much so that Philipson only heard about it after he arrived in Cincinnati). Now, thanks to Wise's contemporary report, the mystery can be cleared up. There was indeed a scandal, and it involved conference-member Solomon Sonneschein. He, according to well-founded allegations published at the time, made overtures to the Unitarian Church in Boston pledging to join it on specified terms.¹²

10 CCARYB,1 (1891), 31; David Polish, "The Changing and the Constant in the Reform Rabbinate," *American Jewish Archives* 35 (November, 1983), 270-272, 275-276; cf. on Machol, Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Cleveland* (Cleveland: 1978), esp. pp.151-152.

11 Wise, "A Record of American Judaism for 5646," p.64; contrast Plaut, *Growth of Reform Judaism*, p.31: "No official transcript of the conference is extant. We owe the faithful recording of the proceedings to the editorial foresight of *The Jewish Reformer* which published such material *in extenso*."

12 See Benny Kraut's forthcoming study of this fascinating and revealing affair, "A Unitarian Rabbi? The Case of Solomon Sonneschein," in Todd Endelmann, ed., *Apostasy in Modern Jewish History* (New York: 1987).

The affair and unpleasant allegations surrounding it – some Reform rabbis defended their St. Louis colleague, others, like Kohler, fiercely attacked him – created a storm and seemed likely to dominate the agenda of any new conference. Many feared that it would also lead to fresh divisiveness, and cast Reform Judaism in a bad light, for Sonneschein's alleged flirtation with apostasy seemed to confirm the worst charges of Reform's opponents.

This, then, was sufficient reason in and of itself to warrant the conference's postponement. Wise, however, cited three additional and less compelling reasons as well. First, the fierce controversy stirred up by the Pittsburgh Platform gave some of those scheduled to meet in Cincinnati cold feet. Second, an ideological dispute within Kaufmann Kohler's home congregation, coupled with financial problems that closed his newspaper, made it difficult for Kohler to devote necessary attention to a new conference. Third, the sudden death of Rabbi James K. Gutheim, a leading Southern Reform rabbi, sent his Reform colleagues into mourning, and provided the excuse that made an honorable postponement possible. Wise's awkwardly-written explanation being the most important contemporary source bearing on all of this, it deserves to be quoted in full:

The Pittsburgh Conference resolved to continue its meeting in Cincinnati, May 31st. It was advanced, however, that the time between the two sessions was too short for the committees to finish their work, and it was not convenient for the members of the Southern Conference to attend at that time, and so the meeting was deferred to June 28th, for which time also the meeting of the Sabbath-school Union, to be established by order of the Council of 1885, and the meeting of the Jewish Literary Union, were called, and a large assemblage was expected in Cincinnati. Meanwhile, however, a number of unpleasant affairs occurred. The deafening noise and cry of heresy on the part of the opponents intimidated some of the members, who are not as firm and determined as they might be. Dr. Sonneschein, in hot controversy with a part of his congregation, being accused by his opponents that he went to Boston, and there offered his services to the Unitarians in case of inability to come to an amicable understanding with his congregation. It was expected that this case, if the conference met in Cincinnati, would prematurely be brought up before it, and might occupy the whole time without any benefit to either side, threatening a split in the very ranks of the leading men in the conference. Dr. Kohler being discouraged and apparently intimidated by a controversy with his congregation, the sudden collapse of his newspaper enterprise, and being compromised in the Sonneschein case as an opponent, asked for the postponement of the conference, as others had done who partly maintained they could not come. The request was not unwelcome to the committee, but for other reasons, the chief of which was the death of the Rev. James K. Gutheim . . . When he was no more, the Chairman of the committee uncertain as to what rabbis would come or stay away, gladly embraced the opportunity offered by Dr. Kohler's and other members' request, to postpone, and with the consent of his colleagues (Dr. Hirsch

of Chicago and Dr. Moses of Louisville,) did postpone indefinitely the meeting of the conference.¹³

(3) *What was the impact of the Pittsburgh Platform on Reform Judaism?* Most scholars would probably agree with Walter Jacob's assessment in this volume that the Pittsburgh Platform, in part because of its controversial nature, became "the defining document of Reform Judaism by the first decade of the 20th century (p.3)," and "played a decisive role" in Reform's subsequent development (p.26). Indeed, Gunther Plaut has written that it "remained the foundation of the [Reform] movement for fifty years." Yet, questions remain as to how broad support for the Platform actually was within the larger ranks of the Reform rabbinate and laity: Did they sanctify it as Reform's creed, or did they honor it in the breach, modifying it in deed if not in word? Since no full-scale study of this question has been undertaken, we are left with two conflicting interpretations. One group, exemplified by Samuel Goldenson, rabbi of Rodef Shalom Congregation in Pittsburgh and later of Temple Emanu-El in New York, argued vigorously, in this case on the occasion of the Platform's fiftieth anniversary in 1935, that the eight planks epitomized what the vast majority of Reform Jews truly believed:

Though this declaration has never been made the official expression of our Conference, yet it has commonly been regarded as representative of the views held by our membership. The reason is that the Reform rabbis, for the last four decades, have quite generally accepted the conception of Judaism then enunciated.

Many contemporary scholars, including some contributors to this volume, would agree. During Reform's great debate over Zionism, the centrality of the Pittsburgh Platform was an important argument in opponents' favor, and one of the main reasons why the new Columbus Platform was introduced in 1937.¹⁴

Others, however, have dissented from this view, arguing that the Pittsburgh Platform's real influence has been somewhat exaggerated. Walter Jacob reminds us that the Pittsburgh Platform never won formal adoption either by the Southern Conference of Rabbis or by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and actually faced significant opposition in both bodies (p.25). Bernard Bamberger pointed

13 Wise, "A Record of American Judaism for 5646," p.65.

14 Plaut, *Growth of Reform Judaism*, p. 31; Samuel Goldenson in *CCARYB*, 45 (1935), 133; Marc Lee Raphael, "Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of San Francisco on Jews and Judaism: The Implications of the Pittsburgh Platform," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 63 (1973), 185-203; Marc Lee Raphael, *Jews and Judaism in a Mid-western Community* (Columbus: 1979), p. 189; David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (Jerusalem: 1976).

out twenty years ago that Kaufmann Kohler ignored the Platform completely in his authoritative *Jewish Theology*, and rarely referred to it in his other writings, suggesting that he himself hardly considered it central. Maximilian Heller, one of the earliest Reform proponents of Zionism and later president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, called it *einen ueberwundenen Standpunkt* [an outdated view] as early as 1903. Furthermore, in areas such as halacha and Bible, that Dr. Jacob examines here, and Zionism, that others have looked at in detail, the Platform "represented a statement of radical reform which was almost immediately modified (p.37)." Actions failed to comport with what a strict reading of the Platform's text might have required.¹⁵

Until we know more about Classical Reform Judaism in America – its meaning, scope, rise, and fall – we shall probably not be able to decide between these two interpretations. One suspects, however, that both views are in their own way correct. For some, the Pittsburgh Platform *was* Reform Judaism. For others, it was but a manifestation of Reform, no more binding than any other Reform pronouncement on the movement's adherents. In between, lay a whole series of intermediate positions: people pulled in both directions. Reactions to the Pittsburgh Platform may thus be considered an historical litmus test – a measure of Classical Reform Judaism's strength in the face of its many nineteenth and twentieth century challengers.

The last word, then, has not yet been written on the Pittsburgh Platform. The essays in this volume open up new avenues for exploration, and reexamination of available data suggests that even long accepted truths need to be revised. Yet, there remains room for a full-scale history of the Pittsburgh Platform and its impact, a history that would reveal much not only about Reform Judaism, and American Judaism generally, but also about late nineteenth century American religion as a whole, and American Judaism's relationship to it.

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15 Bernard J. Bamberger, "Theological Developments," in Bertram W. Korn, ed., *Retrospect and Prospect* (New York: 1965), pp. 28-29; *CCARYB*, 15 (1905), 105; Gary E. Zola, "Reform Judaism's Premier Zionist: Maximilian Heller," *American Jewish History*, 73 (1984), 375-397; Michael A. Meyer, "American Reform Judaism and Zionism: Early Efforts at Ideological Rapprochement," *Studies in Zionism*, 7 (Spring, 1983), 49-64.