

Hankus Netsky, recognized by *The Forward* in 2013 as one of the world's most important Jews, gives his readers a fascinating and vibrant welcome into the world of klezmer, a world which, had it not been for him, might today be only scratchy 78 recordings or distant memories.

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The Rise of Reform Judaism: A Sourcebook of its European Origins. By W. Gunther Plaut. New introduction by Howard A. Berman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/ Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015. xv + 288 pp.

The Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources. By W. Gunther Plaut. New introduction by Howard A. Berman. New Epilogue by David Ellenson, with select documents, 1975–2008. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press/ Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2015. xv + 443 pp.

Fifty years have passed since the prolific Reform rabbi and scholar W. Gunther Plaut (1912–2012), then rabbi of Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto, completed his magisterial two-volume documentary history of Reform Judaism, published by the World Union for Progressive Judaism. “Every student of modern Judaism will be grateful to Rabbi Plaut’s selection from the written legacy of the first men to grapple courageously with the challenge to transmitted Judaism of modern life and thought,” Lloyd Gartner wrote in his review in this journal of Volume One, covering the rise of Reform Judaism in Germany.¹ Volume Two, which brought the story of Reform Judaism to 1948, was of even greater interest to American Jewish historians, for it included new primary source material on Reform Judaism in the United States, including documents translated from the original German.

To mark the jubilee of these long out-of-print volumes, the Jewish Publication Society has now republished them as part of a new series entitled “JPS Anthologies of Jewish Thought.” Both books are sponsored by the Society for Classical Reform Judaism and introduced by its executive director, Rabbi Howard A. Berman. The Society for Classical Reform Judaism has sponsored the republication (with revisions) of a number of classical Reform Jewish texts, including the *Union Prayer*

1. Lloyd P. Gartner, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 53 (March 1964): 301–303.

Book and the *New Union Haggadah*. The Plaut anthologies form part of this same effort. They aim to educate Reform Jews concerning their classical heritage.

In this case, though, Berman devotes the bulk of his introduction (identical in both volumes) to a critique of what he views as Plaut's anti-classical ideological bias. Plaut, who immigrated from Germany, where Reform Judaism was much more religiously traditional, labeled Classical Reform Judaism "extreme," and displayed evident relief that its heyday, which he dated from the Pittsburgh Platform (1885) to the great depression and the rise of Nazism, had given way "toward more traditional patterns of thought and form." By contrast, Berman, who presides over a congregation that "welcome[s] all who are seeking to experience Judaism's universal spiritual ideals and traditions, regardless of religious background, with a special outreach to interfaith families and the LGBT community," argues for "the preservation and the creative renewal of this distinctive heritage within the broader Reform Movement." Classical Reform, he contends, "is not merely a 'phase' or 'period' but rather a continuing vital and dynamic understanding within the wide spectrum of the contemporary [Reform] movement." Now that contemporary Reform Judaism embraces "radical inclusion" and legitimates a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices, he seeks to ensure that it will embrace the ideals and forms of Classical Reform Judaism as well.

Historians will lament that Rabbi Berman and JPS did not update *The Rise of Reform Judaism* to incorporate a broader range of primary sources. There are no women's voices here, few lay voices, and only a smattering of East European voices. Fifty years ago, that was the norm. Today, even the most "classical" of readers will notice that critical voices are missing. *The Growth of Reform Judaism* suffers from many of these same defects and also effectively ends in 1948. Plaut provided an epilogue covering developments from 1948 to 1965 but no primary sources.

This jubilee edition includes a valuable new chapter by David El-leson, chancellor emeritus of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, summarizing developments in Reform Judaism since 1965. The chapter crisply analyzes central developments affecting the movement: the growth and implications of intermarriage, the rise of outreach; the impact of feminism; changes in Reform theology, spirituality, and approaches toward social justice; new platforms and prayer books; and the Reform movement's evolving attitude toward Israel. The volume also appends nine new documents (1975–2008) not found in the original edition, including four platforms, two introductions to prayer books, two key documents on patrilineal descent, and the 2000 resolution affirming the right of Reform rabbis to officiate at same-sex marriages.

Unlike Plaut's original, however, the new section does not present a range of voices on these controversial issues. Nor does it substitute for a much-needed full-scale documentary covering the past 65 years in the Reform movement's history. Sadly, it does not even bother to update Plaut's 1965 bibliography.

Specialists should nevertheless welcome the republication in paperback of these two volumes (alas, badly produced; my copy began to fall apart at first reading), for they make available primary sources available nowhere else. Most readers, including those seeking a volume for classroom use, will probably still prefer the volume that W. Gunther Plaut coedited with Michael A. Meyer entitled *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* (2001). Though less ambitious and perhaps less "classical," its coverage of the twentieth century and its suggestions for further reading are far more comprehensive.

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