

THE REFORM BETH DIN:
THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE
RABBINICAL COURT OF THE REFORM SYNAGOGUES
OF GREAT BRITAIN 1935 - 1965

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Leicester

by

Jonathan A. Romain B.A. (London)

Department of History
University of Leicester

January 1990

ProQuest Number: U632521

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest U632521

Published by ProQuest LLC(2015). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.

This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346



7500678412

ABSTRACT

The Reform Beth Din: The Formation and Development of the
Rabbinical Court of the Reform
Synagogues of Great Britain 1935-1965
by Jonathan A. Romain

A Beth Din - a Rabbinical Court - has been the traditional vehicle for dealing with matters of Jewish status such as conversion, divorce and adoption according to Jewish Law. In Britain, where the Jewish community had belonged mainly to Orthodox synagogues, all Rabbinical Courts were under the Orthodox authorities. In 1948 the Reform Beth Din was founded. It was the first time that a non-Orthodox Rabbinical Court had been established in Britain.

The Reform Beth Din represented a turning point in the religious life of Anglo-Jewry, for although it was intended purely to serve members of Reform synagogues it came to be used by many in the wider community as an alternative to the Orthodox courts. It reflected a changing pattern of religious allegiance due to a variety of factors: the increasingly reactionary nature of the previously tolerant Orthodox rabbinate; the estrangement between them and the laity within Orthodox synagogues; the disruption to communal life caused by the Second World War; and growing assimilation amongst Anglo-Jewry. The Reform Beth Din fulfilled a need for a Rabbinical Court whose liberal approach corresponded to the attitude of many British Jews. Initially the Orthodox authorities ignored the Reform Beth Din but their fierce condemnation of it subsequently indicated their awareness of the important role it had attained for the whole of Anglo-Jewry.

The Reform Beth Din also had a great impact on the Reform movement in Britain. The movement had come into existence only six years earlier and although it linked together the Reform synagogues they were jealous of their individual autonomy. The creation of the Reform Beth Din necessitated them agreeing on a common policy and subordinating their local authority to a central institution. The Reform Beth Din acted as an important catalyst in the development of the character and structure of the Reform movement, and was partly responsible for its emergence as a significant force within Anglo-Jewry.

CONTENTS

Foreword	p. 11
Acknowledgements	p. v
References	p. vi
Chapter I: Anglo-Jewry Until 1935	p. 1
Chapter II: A New Era	p. 32
Chapter III: The Reform Beth Din	p. 92
Chapter IV: Case Studies and Communal Reactions	p. 170
Chapter V: The Effect and Impact of the Reform Beth Din	p. 223
Appendices	p. 268
Notes on the Sources	p. 298
Bibliography	p. 301

FOREWORD

A Jewish community cannot function fully without a Beth Din - a Rabbinical Court that is the ultimate arbitrator of a considerable range of internal issues. One of its most important duties is supervising and authorising status changes, such as in the case of conversion, divorce and adoption. It is remarkable, therefore, that the Reform Jewish community in Britain existed for over one hundred years before a formal Beth Din of its own was established.

The eventual formation of a Reform Beth Din in 1948 begs many questions : Why was it lacking in the period 1840 - 1948? What factors led to its creation? Why was it so unique compared to those set up by Reform communities in other countries and the only one to exert national jurisdiction? For what new circumstances was it intended to cater? Did it satisfy the goals allocated to it? How did such a centralised institution with far-reaching powers fit into a movement based on the autonomy of its member synagogues? What was its effect on the structure, growth and image of Reform Judaism?

In addition, the Reform Beth Din raises questions that apply to Anglo-Jewry at large: How did its formation reflect developments within the general Jewish community, especially those of synagogue affiliation, demographic changes and marriage patterns? Was its establishment shortly after the Second World War connected with the consequences of the war on British Jews or with the influx of continental refugees preceding it, along with the many Rabbis that this involved? How did the emergence of a specifically Reform Beth Din

influence a Jewry accustomed previously to only Orthodox Rabbinical Courts? Why did it come to have an importance far beyond its own Reform constituency and much greater than that envisaged by its founders? How did it manage amongst certain sections of the Jewish community to overcome the gulf that had grown up between clergy and laity? What was the reaction of the Orthodox Rabbinate to the loss of its monopoly? What changes in Anglo-Jewry were prompted by the existence of the Reform Beth Din?

The study of the Reform Beth Din thus involves examination both of the Reform movement and its developments, and of Anglo-Jewry and the changes within it. It is an institution that invites discussion of specific details and general trends, bridging the denominational divide within Jewry. It was not only a significant step for the Reform community but also had major implications for Anglo-Jewry as a whole. By investigating the forces that led to its establishment and the reasons for its widespread appeal one will be able to trace many of the underlying currents within the Jewish community, which were later to surface with great impact.

The main thrust of the study begins in 1935, which witnessed various key developments both within and outside the Reform movement. It saw the appointment of Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky to the Chief Rabbi's Court, the main Orthodox Beth Din, resulting in a break from the previous tradition of 'liberal orthodoxy', the imposition of a prohibitive interpretation of the laws of Jewish status and a growing

dissatisfaction amongst the laity. 1935 also marked the first arrivals of the continental refugees who were to have a dramatic effect on the direction of both Reform and Orthodoxy in Britain. At the same time there were the initial stirrings of a new energy and growth within the Reform synagogues under the leadership of Rabbi Harold Reinhart. They were to lead to the creation of the Reform movement as a cohesive force and to provide the basis of its rapid expansion after the War.

The study concludes in 1965, by which time the Reform Beth Din had become a well-established institution within Anglo-Jewry. It had overcome theological and administrative difficulties within the Reform movement, weathered the violent opposition of the Orthodox Rabbinate and been accepted by many within the general Jewish community as an alternative source of help and guidance to that of the Orthodox courts. 1965 also marked the retirement of Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie, closing a period of great fluctuation, during which many changes had occurred in all aspects of the community. Many of them were reflected in the role played by the Reform Beth Din in the Jewish community at large.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following most sincerely for their help in the course of my research:

The Assembly of Rabbis, Association of Jewish Refugees, Board of Deputies Community Research Unit, Reform Synagogues of Great Britain, and Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues for permission to consult their archives.

Bournemouth, Bradford, Cardiff, Edgware, Glasgow, Hendon, Leeds, Manchester, North Western, St. George's Settlement, West London and Wimbledon Reform synagogues for access to their records.

Mr. Ezra Kahn of Jews College Library, Mrs Trude Levi of the Mocatta Library, and Mr. Joseph Munk of the Anglo-Jewish Archives for their kind assistance. Also to the staff of the British Museum Newspaper Library, the Leo Baeck College Library, and the Weiner Library.

Professor Aubrey Newman for his enthusiasm when the subject of the thesis was first mooted, his encouragement ever since, along with his invaluable mixture of scholarly guidance and good humour.

REFERENCES

The following abbreviations are used in the Notes:

A. B. S.	Associated British Synagogues
A. S. G. B.	Association of Synagogues in Great Britain
Ass of Min	Assembly of Ministers
B. T.	Babylonian Talmud
C. C. A. R.	Central Conference of American Rabbis
Conf	Conference (Annual) of the A. S. G. B.
Exec.	Executive
J. C.	Jewish Chronicle
R. P.	Reinhart Papers
R. B. D.	Reform Beth Din
R. S. G. B.	Reform Synagogues of Great Britain
U. L. P. S.	Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues
U. O. H. C.	Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations
W. L. S.	West London Synagogue

References to the Reinhart Papers and Hertz Papers give first the title of the box, and then that of the file in which the material is to be found.

Unless otherwise stated, references to Bradford, Edgware, Glasgow, Leeds, Manchester, North Western, St. George's Settlement, West London and Wimbledon all refer to the Reform synagogues of that name.

In view of different systems of transliteration, various spellings of Hebrew terms will sometimes occur in quotations.

CHAPTER I

ANGLO-JEWRY UNTIL 1935

Modern Anglo-Jewry derives from the "Readmission" in 1656¹ by Cromwell. The readmitted community was composed of Sephardi Jews originating from Spain and Portugal who were known as Marranos or New Christians. These were Jews who had officially converted to Christianity to avoid persecution, but who had secretly maintained their Jewish identity. It contained assimilated and prosperous merchants and their households, and by 1663 was established sufficiently to draw up its first body of Ascarnot or regulations and to appoint its first Rabbi. The community numbered some 90 heads of families, and was almost entirely limited to London.

As Jewish immigration increased other Jews also began to enter the country. These were Ashkenazi Jews, Jews from Central Europe, who were distinguished from the Sephardi Jews by certain differences of liturgy and of Hebrew pronunciation. They tended to be much more observant in their Jewish practices and more immersed in Rabbinic scholarship. They were largely disinterested in the secular studies and social etiquettes that the religiously laxer Sephardi Jews pursued. Many of the Ashkenazi Jews were also of a much lower social and commercial class, often engaged in petty handicraft, retail trade, and peddling. It was largely due to their itinerant trading in

1. See Cecil Roth A History of the Jews in England p. 149ff.

country areas that Jewish communities grew up in the provinces in the eighteenth century.

Whilst the two communities were one in faith, the social and religious differences between them meant that there was little contact with each other. By 1690, the Ashkenazi Jews had formed their own community in London. The few hundred Jews then in England were increased by further immigration to 6,000 in 1734 and to 35,000 in 1850. This rapid growth had consisted largely of Ashkenazi Jews, who now outnumbered their Sephardi brethren. Although the Sephardi Jews may still have regarded themselves as the 'aristocracy' of Anglo-Jewry, the institutions of Anglo-Jewry reflected a different reality: the Board of Deputies - a representative organisation consisting of deputies from all congregations in the country and dealing with matters of common interest - was established in 1760 by the Sephardi community; yet when it drew up its first constitution in 1836, fifteen out of the twenty-two deputies were from Ashkenazi synagogues.

This simple pattern of an Anglo-Jewry divided into two groups strongly differentiated by social factors but subscribing to an Orthodox interpretation

was broken by the emergence of the first Reform synagogue in 1840. The Reform movement had begun in Germany some 30 years earlier, where it had been founded upon the principles of theological reform, responding to the need for an assimilated form of Judaism for those who had rejected Orthodoxy but wished

to retain their Jewish identity. There had also been calls for certain reforms in England at that time, but these were limited to a few matters of liturgy or concerning the level of decorum during public worship. They had originated with members of the (Sephardi) Bevis Marks Synagogue, but had been brushed aside by the Rabbinic leadership. Yet it was not these complaints that led to the establishment of a Reform community, in Britain but demographic factors: the Jewish population of London had been concentrated initially to the east of the City of London, and that is where the Bevis Marks Synagogue was situated. Over the years, many of the richer families had moved to the fashionable and affluent West End of London. As it was not permissible to travel on the Sabbath, save on foot, they found the journey to Bevis Marks every Sabbath tiring and inconvenient. Their requests for the establishment of a local branch synagogue were refused several times by the communal elders, who feared a loss of their authority and who were concerned about the financial difficulties that would arise from the departure of the richer members. Frustrated in their attempts to act within the existing communal framework, eighteen lay members of the Sephardi community along with six Ashkenazi Jews resolved to form a new congregation of their own. Reflecting both elements of Anglo-Jewry, it became known as "The West London Synagogue of British Jews", thus obviating any distinction between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews. The breakaway had been led by

laymen and it left a legacy of strong lay involvement in the religious direction of both the West London Synagogue and the future Reform movement. It resulted, too, in a dislike of Rabbinic authoritarianism which remained a strong feature of the new synagogue.

Now that the worshippers at West London were free from ecclesiastical control, minor liturgical reforms were instituted. These changes were justified in the introduction to the first prayer book of the congregation Forms of Prayer,² which declared:

History bears us out in the assumption, that it becomes a congregation of Israelites to adapt the ritual to the wants of its members; and it must be universally admitted that the present mode of worship fails to call forth the devotion, so essential to the religious improvement of the people.

A further reform was the abolition of sacred days which were not ordained directly in the Bible, namely the second days of festivals. The decision was based on a return to the Bible³ as the sole authority and a rejection of Rabbinic accretions:

Our unerring guide has been, and will continue to be, the sacred volume of the scriptures, by that alone have we endeavoured to regulate our principles... Revelation in the full sense of that hallowed word, began at Sinai, and with the grave injunction to keep the Sinaitic precepts it terminates.

Although this repudiation of Rabbinic Law was often advanced, particularly in the sermons and articles of the congregation's

2. Forms of Prayer p. iv.

3. Rev. Professor D. W. Marks Sermons Preached on Various occasions at the West London Synagogue of British Jews p. 18.

first minister, Rev. D. W. Marks, only in a few minor instances was it ever carried out. The structure of the service largely remained the same as the traditional format, men and women still sat apart, and the vernacular was not used in the service.

The founders of West London were aware of developments on the Continent. In 1839, just before the secession, Anna Marie Goldsmid (the daughter of Sir Isaac Lyon Goldsmid who was to be one of its leading members) published an English translation of the sermons of Rabbi Gottwold Salomon, the minister of the Hamburg Reform Temple. Apart from this, however, there appears to have been no formal contact between the two groups, and there is no evidence that the development of English Reform was⁴ markedly influenced by the German Reform movement. The first exchange of personnel did not take place until 1860 when Rev. Dr. Gustav Gottheil became minister of the Reform congregation, which had been established by then in Manchester, having previously served the Reform community in Berlin. The moderate changes initiated by the West London Synagogue were very far from the radicalism of the Continental reformers. However they were sufficient to arouse the wrath of both the Sephardi and Ashkenazi religious leadership who regarded the views of the new community as an unacceptable challenge to Rabbinic authority, particularly their repudiation of the Oral Law and the Talmud. Uniting together they issued a caution ~~denouncing~~ - a form of herem (social excommunication) that was used as a sanction to impose discipline within the Jewish community. The caution denounced the Reform congregation and banned its members from communion with

4. See also Walter M. Schwab 'Some Aspects of the Relationship between the German and the Anglo-Jewish Community' p. 171.

other Jews.

The reaction of the rest of British Jewry to the caution was not uniform. Although most congregations acknowledged the ban, which was formally circulated in writing, those at Liverpool, Manchester, and the Western Synagogue in London disapproved and returned it, while the Plymouth Congregation burned their copy of the official document. Members of Bevis Marks itself were unhappy with it, and after several attempts by the 'moderates' the ban was lifted in 1849. It was largely because it was felt that the caution had been misused in the case of West London that part of the agreement by which Nathan Adler was appointed Chief Rabbi in 1845 was that he relinquished use of the caution.

Two further obstacles faced by the new congregation were connected with the Board of Deputies. The first problem concerned marriages. Under the terms of the 1836 Marriage Act a synagogue secretary could be empowered to register Jewish marriages only if he had a certification from the President of the Board of Deputies. This gave the President considerable power over all British congregations in Britain. The then President, Sir Moses Montefiore, was opposed vehemently to the breakaway congregation and refused to grant it a certificate on the grounds that it did not enjoy the approval of either of the Board's ecclesiastical authorities, the Chief Rabbi and the Haham (the religious leader of the Sephardim). It meant

that unlike all other Jewish congregations West London was unable to register civilly its own marriages. The matter was resolved eventually by a separate Act of Parliament in 1856 which granted specific authorization to the West London Synagogue. The second problem was the Board's refusal to accept delegates from West London Synagogue, which again was due to Montefiore's personal antagonism to the breakaway community and his deference to the opinion of the Chief Rabbi.⁵ When the Board revised its constitution in 1874, the year in which Montefiore retired as President, there was a new climate of reconciliation and Reform delegates were declared eligible. Once these issues had been dealt with, the new synagogue settled down to concentrate on its own internal affairs. Its membership grew apace, but it did not cause any great split amongst British Jewry. Despite doctrinal differences, individual congregants continued to socialise with members of the Orthodox communities and work together with them in a variety of communal charities and other bodies.

Outside of its own membership, the West London Synagogue had little impact on the religious life of the rest of the community. When the Synagogue celebrated its centenary, The Jewish Chronicle was to lament the lack of success of its original aspirations.⁶

Beyond its own walls, its influence on British Judaism, which was anticipated so ardently by its brave founders, has been restricted and almost

5. Israel Finestein 'The Uneasy Victorian : Montefiore as Communal Leader' p. 46; Israel Finestein 'Sir Moses Montefiore : a modern appreciation' p. 197.
6. J. C. 30th January, 1942.

negligible, and no great regenerative impulse has flowed from it.

There was no attempt to create a national grouping. Other Reform congregations had been established in Manchester in 1856 and in Bradford in 1873, but neither were the result of deliberate efforts by West London Synagogue to gain adherents elsewhere. The Manchester Congregation of British Jews owed its roots to a long-standing local dissatisfaction within the Orthodox congregation at the control exerted by the London-based Chief Rabbinate, as well as a minor row over the use of an organ during the services. Indeed, although the minister of West London attended the consecration of the Manchester Synagogue, the new community was not considered a branch synagogue of the West London Congregation owing to its decision to retain observance of the second days of festivals, which had been abolished by West London as part of its reforms. In Bradford the establishment of a Reform synagogue was the result of an influx of German Jews in the wool industry who were attracted to the city because of the flourishing wool trade there. No synagogue then existed in Bradford so they established one themselves, and as they came largely from a Reform background they founded one that followed the Reform tradition.

Two other Reform communities were established but existed only for a few years before being disbanded, in Hull in the 1850's and in Clapham in the 1870's. The West London Synagogue

did not initiate or support them, and their demise reflects the absence of any attempt to set up an administrative framework or to link activities. When the Jewish Religious Union, forerunner of the Liberal movement, approached West London in 1903 for the use of its premises for Sabbath afternoon services it was met with so many restrictive conditions that it decided to look for another venue instead. The West London membership itself remained relatively static and by the end of the nineteenth century it was still dominated by a few closely knit families. The heavy preponderance of Sephardi Jews amongst its founders may have been partly responsible for this tendency, for they were long accustomed to being members of a minority community whose ranks were largely closed to outsiders. The Reform congregation in Manchester also had the same desire to remain exclusive, and its fees were set high to exclude those who could not afford them.⁷ The membership of the Reform congregations represented a cultural elite for many years, and was not a cross-section of Anglo-Jewry. Their parochialism and lack of missionary drive meant that a Reform movement, in any spiritual or organisational sense, did not exist. Thus whilst there was a widespread Reform movement in Germany by the end of the nineteenth century, there was no such equivalent in Britain. Independence and autonomy took precedence over unity, and they continued to be important features in the next century too.

Another division within Anglo-Jewry was caused by the growing importance of the provincial Jewish communities,

7. Michael Leigh 'Reform Judaism in Britain' p. 39.

particularly industrial centres such as Manchester which had grown rapidly in the mid-nineteenth century. Their expansion led to increasing friction with the previously dominant south and to a desire to be independent of the central authorities in London. In this the Manchester congregations had almost invariably taken the lead. When the Damascus Blood Libel occurred in 1840 and the London synagogues sent a delegation to wait upon Lord Palmerston, Manchester preferred to send⁸ a parallel delegation of its own. There were also several clashes with the Chief Rabbi. One concerned a woman accepted into Judaism in Holland and who was recognised as Jewish by the Manchester Old Hebrew Congregation despite the long-established custom that such matters rested in the hands⁹ of the Chief Rabbi. Another clash was over the congregation's appointment of Dr. Schiller-Szinessy as its minister without first referring him to the Chief Rabbi for examination of his suitability. The justification for this unprecedented move was given by the warden David Hesse as "the jealous feeling for our rights because the right to do what we have done cannot be¹⁰ impugned, and can never be surrendered". The Manchester congregation also took an opposing line at the Board of Deputies to the London synagogues who had banned the admission of representatives of the West London Synagogue. When this ban was upheld, Manchester responded by declaring the caution against the Reformers to be null and void as far as they were

8. Bill Williams The Making of Manchester Jewry 1740-1875
p. 99.

9. Ibid p. 209.

10. David Hesse to the Chief Rabbi. 11th January 1852;
quoted Williams op.cit. p. 211.

concerned.¹¹ The friction extended to other areas of Jewish communal life. The Manchester delegates were particularly loud in criticising the Board for failing to pay sufficient attention to the provinces and claimed it was "too affected with Londonism".¹² In the early decades of the twentieth century they campaigned vigorously for greater provincial representation, Sunday meetings, and more accountability by the Foreign Committee. Indeed, it was largely thanks to the vote of the provincial communities that the Zionists at the Board were able to achieve their historic vote of censure against the Conjoint Foreign Committee on 17th June 1917. It was due not only to their pro-Zionist sympathies but also to "their strong sense of regionalism combined with their fierce antagonism to the exaggerated influence of a privileged coterie"¹³ and thus an extension of their resentment against "Londonism". A similar independent attitude was taken within other communal institutions. Ministers from Manchester complained that the communal ministry laboured under the burden of a London-tied bureaucracy which ignored provincial needs.¹⁴

Perhaps most prominent of all was the Manchester group within the English Zionist Federation. Although their attempt in 1909 to transfer the Federation's headquarters from London to Manchester failed, they were to assume leadership of the

11. Ibid p. 229.

12. Minutes of the Board of Deputies 17th June 1908; quoted in Stuart A. Cohen English Zionists and British Jews p. 142.

13. Cohen op.cit. p. 276.

14. Ibid p. 141.

movement in the following decade. They rose to power both thanks to their own talents and "on the crest of a wave of provincial dissatisfaction toward anything that smacked of metropolitan predominance".¹⁵ These examples demonstrate a

general pattern indicating a tense relationship between

Manchester and London Jewish communities:¹⁶

The pressure for a greater degree of local independence which had produced the sporadic conflicts with the Board of Deputies and the Chief Rabbi... was an assertion by Manchester middle-class Jewry, prosperous and excessively self-confident, that it was no longer prepared to accept without question either the tutelage of the London plutocracy or the authority of a Metropolitan Rabbi.

This state of affairs within the Jewish community also paralleled the new attitude of the city of Manchester as a whole to the south. It reflected the enhanced status of Manchester within England and the prominence it was attaining

in the affairs of the nation:¹⁷

Manchester's role as an entrepot of the cotton trade, as a major focus of the retail trades, as a centre of radical political ideas, and as the leader of a national 'school' of thought, all played their part in shaping the particular destinies of the Jewish community. The community grew with Manchester, and was to some extent a variation on urban themes, reflecting the social moods and prejudices, reacting to the changing economic fortunes, sharing the political eclat of the shock city of the age.

Whilst organisations such as the Board of Deputies tried to link together all sections of Anglo-Jewry, the main life of

15. Ibid p. 322.

16. Williams op. cit. p. 221.

17. Ibid p. 340.

the community was centred on its various religious institutions. Predominant amongst those in London, where lived two-thirds of the Jewish community, was the United Synagogue. Established by Act of Parliament in 1870, its purpose was to co-ordinate the religious, welfare, and charitable activities of the then five leading Ashkenazi synagogues in London. With the westward and northward flow of the Jewish population within London, along with increased immigration, the number of congregations grew rapidly : fourteen by 1900, twenty-five by 1920, and forty-four by 1935. It derived its religious guidance from the Chief Rabbi, an office that developed from the prominence given to the minister of the Great Synagogue and which had become a formal appointment as the spiritual head of the Ashkenazi communities in 1845. Whilst the United Synagogue was an organisation solely for synagogues in the London area, the religious authority of the Chief Rabbi was recognised by most independent Orthodox congregations in the provinces. This was in part because they required his approval in order to be licensed by the Board of Deputies to conduct marriages. In return the Chief Rabbi demanded complete supervision of all aspects of services and religious administration, including the sanctioning of those who were to conduct services or preach during them.

The work of the Chief Rabbi was assisted by a Beth Din, a religious court of law. It was an institution that was responsible for decisions regarding all aspects of Jewish law.

It was a development of the judicial process begun in Biblical times with the delegation of authority by Moses to judges who would hear cases brought by the people.¹⁸ By Rabbinic times this had become a system of courts of varying size and authority: a court of three judges for smaller towns, a court of twenty-three judges for larger towns, and a court of 71 judges - the Great Sanhedrin - which sat in Jerusalem and had supreme¹⁹ authority in all matters. The Sanhedrin survived the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 A.D. by being reconvened in Jabneh, later moving to Galilee. The abolition of the Patriarchate in the fifth century brought the demise of the Sanhedrin and the end of a central legal authority.²⁰ Thereafter authority resided in the local courts, with a court of three judges dealing with civil and criminal law, as well as ritual matters and other issues particular to the Jewish faith. This included cases of personal status such as conversion,²¹ divorce²² and chalitzah.²³ In this way a Beth Din was a vehicle for the jurisdiction of all matters that might face Jews. It did not need to be a permanent court, and a Beth Din could come into existence simply by the gathering of three learned men to hear a particular case. It was therefore of vital importance as a

18. Exodus. 18: 20-23

19. ~~Babylonian Talmud~~ Sanhedrin. 1:1-6

20. Other centres arose and held great authority for a time (e.g. the academies in Babylonia) but they depended on the reputation of individual scholars, and never again was there a permanent recognised central authority.

21. B. T. Yebamot 47b

22. B. T. Gittin 5b, Ketubot 21b

23. ~~Babylonian Talmud~~ Yebamot 12.1

method of internal government that survived the loss of political power and that overcame the problems of dispersion into exile. A network of local courts accompanied the expansion of the Jewish Diaspora. They managed both to continue the transmission of Rabbinic authority and to maintain a sense of cohesion among the scattered communities.

Those eligible to sit on a Beth Din were originally those who had received semichah (ordination) through the rite of laying on of hands. This, too, had an ancient lineage, being a practice that dated to Moses and his appointment of Joshua as his successor by the laying of hands²⁴. It was imitated for the appointment of other leaders and resulted in a chain of tradition from the Biblical judges to the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin. Semichah was limited to those living in the Land of Israel and therefore they alone were allowed to carry the title of "Rabbi". However, scholars abroad were accorded similar status by dint of their learning, and deemed eligible to sit upon a Beth Din²⁵. The practice of the laying of hands ceased around the fourth century, and thereafter the authority to judge was transmitted by document issued by an already ordained Rabbi. Although the traditional semichah ceased to exist it became customary for those empowered to give judgements to adopt the title of "Rabbi", notwithstanding where they lived. It was possible for a Beth Din not to ~~comprise~~^{consist} only of Rabbis, but for one recognised scholar to ask two laymen to sit with

24. Numbers 27:23

25. B. T. Gittin 88b, Baba Kamma 84b

him to form a court.²⁶ However there was a strong tradition that any member of a Beth Din should be suitably qualified and learned in Jewish law.²⁷ Divorce cases were singled out in particular because of their complexities and it was stipulated that unless a judge was well versed in Jewish matrimonial law²⁸ "he should have no business with them."

The basis for the decisions made by the members of a Beth Din was Jewish Law as recorded in the Talmud and the subsequent Rabbinic Codes. It was developed further in Responsa by individual Rabbis of great note who applied Jewish Law to new situations and modern conditions. It was not regarded as merely a legal system but seen as the expression of the will of God and carrying a Divine imprimatur. It was accepted, therefore, that all decisions had to be within this framework and that any novel judgements could arise only if they could be justified by traditional rules of interpretation. It was axiomatic that the authority of the Talmud and Rabbinic Literature could not be challenged, only adapted. It was this principle that was one of the distinguishing marks between the Orthodox and the Reform, with the latter not accepting the Talmud's authority as binding, nor limiting itself to the previously accepted methods of interpretation.

The power of a Beth Din had been considerable even when in exile, for although they were subjected to the law of the land

26. Maimonides Mishneh Torah Sanhedrin 4: 11

27. Ibid. 2: 14, 4: 15; B. T. Sanhedrin 5b, 7b

28. B. T. Kiddushin 6a

Jewish communities had usually been allocated their own internal autonomy, and the courts had continued to deal with a wide range of cases. The courts were often delegated full powers to impose their decisions by the civil authorities, sometimes extending to capital punishment. They could also rely on the use of the herem to force obedience to their rulings, for in the close-knit and inter-dependent Jewish community few would risk the social isolation that the herem entailed.

In the modern era in Britain, however, the emancipation of the Jews had brought an end to their separate corporate structure and Jewish citizens were made subject to the civil courts directly. Thenceforth all cases concerned with civil and criminal law were generally taken to the secular courts. Disputes concerning business matters or claims for damages might still be heard by a Beth Din but, as it no longer had any powers of enforcement and the herem had lost its effectiveness, it could only act in the role of arbitration and depended on the willingness of the petitioners to accept its decisions. The main function of a Beth Din thus became limited to questions of Jewish ritual observances, such as the licensing of ritual slaughterers or the supervision of kosher food products, and to matters of personal status, such as conversion and religious divorce. In any matters which impinged on civil law, the requirements of civil law had to be satisfied first : thus no religious divorce could be affected

until the couple concerned had already obtained a civil divorce. Even in cases exclusively related to Jewish matters a Beth Din had no means of coercion, but depended on its own prestige and authority within the community. A Beth Din - including the Chief Rabbi's Court - often found itself in the invidious position of giving judgements that it knew it could not enforce. Lamenting on the situation Dayan Asher Feldman, a member of the Chief Rabbi's Court, stated in 1929 "The only means that can be employed is moral suasion, either direct or ²⁹ through the medium of friends" and asked the civil judiciary to lend its support for the decisions of the Chief Rabbi's ³⁰ Court.

The Chief Rabbi's Court was recognised in the Deed of Foundation and Trust of the United Synagogue as its "Ecclesiastical Board". It was a standing institution, with a permanent member of the Court being known as a dayan (judge), and constitutionally the Chief Rabbi was ex officio its President. However it was the Chief Rabbi himself, not his Court, who was the religious authority for the United Synagogue, with the other members of the Court serving as "assessors". The prime task of the Court was to deal with cases presented by Ashkenazi Jews in London. In major centres such as Manchester, Glasgow, Leeds, and Cardiff the needs of provincial Ashkenazi congregations were served by local Batei Din. Whilst one Beth Din was as competent as another in Jewish

29. Dayan A. Feldman 'The London Beth Din' p. 3. A similar lament was to be voiced by Dayan Golditch in The Jewish Gazette 14th March, 1958.

30. Ibid p. 14.

Law, the London Beth Din became regarded as the most senior and authoritative in the country as a result of its connection with the Chief Rabbi and the large constituency that it served. Many of the local Batei Din preferred to deal with matters of ritual only and were content to leave matters of personal status, particularly conversion, to the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi's Court. Although there were occasional calls to decentralise its authority and power,³¹ the Court continued to act as the sole arbiter of such cases:³²

Applications on behalf of proselytes from provincial communities were in the first place sent to the local Beth Din and were then referred to the London Beth Din, which was the only body with authority to make decisions on such applications.

The London Beth Din acted on the basis of personal interview and on the information and data provided by the local Beth Din, who were not called upon to make any recommendations for acceptance or otherwise, but were merely to assist in any investigation which may be called for by the London Beth Din.

Whilst much of the work of the Chief Rabbi's Court was highly specialised and went unnoticed by most of the community, issues of personal status often gained public attention.³³ Conversion to Judaism was permitted by Jewish Law, but centuries of living in the Diaspora among a hostile non-Jewish population had led to a negative attitude on the part of Jewish authorities. In England this was compounded by a vague belief

31. e.g. Rev. A. S. Super, minister of Moortown Synagogue Leeds in J. C. 18th April, 1947.

32. J. C. 29th January 1960; see also Dayan Golditch in Jewish Echo 9th February, 1963.

33. Babylonian Talmud Yebamot 47a.

that a condition of the "Re-admission" by Cromwell was that³⁴ there should be no conversions to Judaism. As a result it had become customary to discourage applicants seeking conversion, and those individuals who were accepted had had to go to the³⁵ Continent for the conversion ceremony to be performed. The attitude of the Chief Rabbinate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was equivocal. On the one hand it was admitted that the condition of 'no proselytes' lacked historicity and from 1875 conversions were permitted to take³⁶ place in England. On the other hand it was pointed out that the Chief Rabbi's Court had a "discretionary authority" by which it may "notwithstanding that the candidate satisfies every legal test, decline to accept the would-be covert"³⁷. Clearly this was put into practice, for a passage in the Annual³⁸ Report of the United Synagogue for 1925 comments:

The question of proselytisation continues to bristle with difficulties. Every effort is being made to check and control what must be regarded as a growing evil... Although the number of London applicants during the past year was 136 (as against 125 in 1924 and 74 in 1923) the number actually admitted has been

34. Dr. Benjamin Artom Sermons p. 275.
35. Nathan Adler to the President, Mikva Yisrael Congregation, Melbourne 10th April 1873, Board of Deputies of British Jews, Community Research Unit, Intermarriage File.
36. Hermann Adler's inaugural address to the Jewish Historical Society delivered 20th December 1896; quoted J. C. 25th December, 1896.
37. Rev. E. M. Levy 'Proselytes' J. C. 25th September, 1926.
38. S. Shuter (Clerk to the Chief Rabbi's Court) to Hertz 22nd April 1926, Hertz Papers C3 United Synagogue and the Office of the Chief Rabbi; United Synagogue Assorted.

reduced to 33, compared with 46 in 1924, and 85 in 1923.

The uninhibited language reveals hostility towards conversion, while the figures show that not only were admissions being drastically reduced but it was at a time of rising applications. In fact this passage was deleted from the official report two days before it was printed in view of its controversial nature.³⁹

Another status issue that aroused contention was matrimonial law. Divorce was permitted in Judaism and was marked by the handing over of a get, a document of religious divorce.⁴⁰ Whilst it was necessary to obtain a civil divorce in order to conform with English law, obtaining a get remained important as it was impossible to have a religious remarriage without it. In theory a get could be obtained unilaterally by a husband, although since the rulings of Rabbenu Gershom in the eleventh century it effectively depended on the mutual agreement of the husband and wife. The Beth Din had no executive role; its function was only to supervise the arrangements, or to offer an opinion in cases of dispute. Whilst this left the couple free to make their own decisions, it also meant that no effective action could be taken by a Beth Din when a couple disagreed about having a get. If one partner wished to obtain a get and the other refused to co-operate, progress was often impossible and the result was an acrimonious stalemate.⁴¹ Moreover women were placed at a disadvantage because originally a woman could be divorced against her

39. Philip Goldberg (Secretary, United Synagogue Council) to S. Shuter 23rd March, 1926 Hertz Papers *ibid*.

40. Deuteronomy 24. 1-2.

41. I. Klein A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice p. 451.

wishes, whereas a man could not be divorced unwillingly.

Whilst Jewish Law was changed later and prohibited divorces without both parties' consent, certain situations were allowed in which a husband could divorce his wife without her consent⁴² providing he was so authorised by a Beth Din. A woman whose husband refused to agree to a get had no means of forcing his consent and the Beth Din was powerless to intervene. She was known as an agunah ("a chained woman") and unable to remarry in synagogue. The difficulties inherent in the Jewish divorce procedure were much commented upon by laity and clergy alike.⁴³ A leading article in the Jewish Chronicle in 1876 declared:

It is undoubtedly a fact that the existing divorce laws subject women to great hardships and should be revised. We are well aware that an individual Rabbi has no power in the matter. His functions are purely administrative and not legislative. But there is no reason why, in these days of railways and electric telegraphs, a number of orthodox Rabbis might not meet in conclave for the purpose of examining this and similar questions with the view of applying a remedy to crying wrongs.

No such conclave ever met, and the lack of any solution led even Chief Rabbi Hertz to admit that concerning the "tragical problem of the Agunah... Jewish religious law suffers from⁴⁴ arrested development".

42. Cases included : if a Beth Din considered that it was in the wife's best interest to receive a divorce (get zikkui); if the wife was insane (heter meah rabbanim); if the wife was missing and presumed dead (heter nissu'in). None of them applied in the case of a woman seeking to divorce her husband.

43. J. C. 28th April, 1876.

44. Opening Address to the Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers 14th July 1925; quoted J. H. Hertz Sermons, Addresses and Studies Vol II p. 131.

There were other Jewish groups in Britain which had their own religious organisations. The Federation of Synagogues catered primarily for the East European immigrants who had arrived at the end of the nineteenth century. Originally only speaking Yiddish, suffering from great poverty and being either intensely religious or ardently socialist, these immigrants had felt little in common with the established community which was assimilating comfortably and which regarded religious and political extremism with distaste. They founded their own small prayer groups and friendly societies, the shtieblach and chevrot, which were later welded together as the Federation. It was based exclusively in London, with over half its membership living in the E.1 district. By 1935 many of its members were now English-born and much of its initial ultra-Orthodox zeal had waned. The Federation established its own Rabbinical Council in 1928 to deal with the supervision of kosher food and ritual baths, as well as tombstone levies and support of Orthodox educational establishments. However, it did not have a separate Beth Din, but referred all matters of status to the Court of the Chief Rabbi, whose authority was accepted for such purposes.

45

A section of Anglo-Jewry which did not accept the Chief Rabbi's authority, was a small group of communities largely of Central European origins. Dedicated to strict observance and to Rabbinic scholarship, they were appalled at

45. It was stipulated in the title deeds of the Federation that it was under the ecclesiastical authority of the Chief Rabbi. As a result of subsequent differences between the two organisations the Federation established its own Beth Din in 1966.

what they considered were the lax standards of British Jews, particularly with regard to the provision of kashrut, religiously acceptable food. They banded together^{in 1926} to form the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. The U.O.H.C. Rabbinate maintained an ad hoc Beth Din that catered for its own limited and London-based membership.

The Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation maintained their own ad hoc Beth Din to serve their community. Despite having been the original settlers in England in the seventeenth century, they had long surrendered their pre-eminence to the more numerous Ashkenazi Jews. Apart from synagogues in Manchester and Ramsgate, the Sephardi community was based almost entirely in London. The Sephardi Rabbinate was not under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi, but would often work in conjunction with the Chief Rabbi in matters of common interest, as they had done in the joint denunciation of the West London Synagogue many years earlier.

A non-orthodox synagogue organisation that had emerged separately from the Reform synagogues was the Liberal movement. It had been established in 1910 with the founding of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue in London, representing a more radical and progressive interpretation of Judaism than the Reform synagogues. Even more than they, the Liberals were influenced and guided by lay leaders, such as Lily Montagu, Claude Montefiore and Israel Abrahams, who had come from the ranks of

old Orthodox Anglo-Jewish families. Traditional Rabbinic structures were not regarded as sacrosanct, and it was felt that there was no need for them to have a Beth Din. Instead, issues affecting their small and largely London-based membership were dealt with by a Rites and Practices Committee, consisting of ministers and lay members.

When the West London Synagogue had been faced with proselyte cases it had followed the Orthodox pattern of sending⁴⁶ the applicants abroad for the conversion ceremony. Shortly after the Chief Rabbi permitted conversions to take place in England, West London did likewise through its own ad hoc courts. No attempt was made to utilise the services of the Chief Rabbi's Court for in the intervening 35 years since Marks had been minister of the congregation the initial reforms to synagogue ritual had grown into a major divergence of approach to halachah. Orthodoxy considered the Bible and the Talmud, the Rabbinic interpretation of the Bible, as divine in essence. Its precepts were therefore immutable, and there could be no deviation from traditional regulations except through strictly prescribed channels of interpretation. Reform theology, as developed in the writings and sermons of Marks, did not regard the past as necessarily binding. It allowed itself the right to apply Biblical and Rabbinic teachings in the light of modern conditions and values. Reform leaders in the 19th century⁴⁷ concluded that:

46. Minutes, Council of West London Synagogue 25th October, 1852.

47. C. Berg 'Revelation, Halachah and Mitsvah' p. 105.

Many traditional practices had outlived their usefulness or, at least, required modification. They denied that Judaism consisted of nothing but the revelation of six hundred and thirteen positive and negative commandments which are not liable to change. Divine Revelation had not ended with the codification of Jewish law, but was a continuous process; the pronouncements of serious scholars of all generations also constituted Divine Revelation. Reform leaders were influenced by the so-called higher criticism of the Bible, and especially by the new 'Science of Judaism' which included the scientific study of the origins and development of Jewish traditions throughout the ages. Influenced by their new knowledge they tried to separate the relative from the absolute and the temporary from the eternal. They were deeply impressed by the moral enthusiasm and idealism of the great prophets, whose ethical teachings they took as guide to their own attitudes. The prophets had, at times, disregarded the letter and pointed out that compliance with ceremonial and ritual, without moral enthusiasm, did not bring man nearer to God. They took up this idea and drew a distinction between moral and ethical laws on the one hand and ceremonial and ritual traditions on the other. Moral commandments were of an absolute character but ritual fulfilled a relative purpose and was changeable ... and thus a revolutionary attitude to the traditional Halachah was adopted.

This independent stance meant that in conversion cases substantial differences emerged. Whereas the Chief Rabbi's Court insisted that applicants conform strictly to traditional procedures, the West London Courts had no hesitation in amending such requirements when it was felt that they were burdensome or unfair to the applicants.

Those applying to West London for conversion were interviewed by the Wardens, who would then, if they considered the candidate suitable, give permission for tuition to proceed. At the end of the course an ad hoc court was established for

the person's examination. It consisted of three members :
three ministers when available, or two ministers and the Senior
Warden. This practice had been started by Marks in 1880 and
was continued by his successor ~~in~~⁴⁸ in 1904, Rev Morris Joseph.
The course entailed study of Jewish beliefs, customs and
history, along with an elementary knowledge of Hebrew. The
attitude to conversion was sympathetic and the general policy
was to "welcome proselytes and make their reception easier than
it is"⁴⁹. Although the process of conversion and the course
requirements were taken seriously, one of the few personal
records of a case appearing before a West London court
indicates that lapses in standards took place. Writing to her
fiancee in 1915 shortly before her successful appearance in
such a court,⁵⁰ Venetia Stanley declared:

Were I to be washed 1,000 times in the waters of the
Jordan and to go through every rite and ceremony the
strictest Jewish creed involved, I should not feel I
had changed my race or nationality. I go through the
formula required because you want it for your
mother's sake ... Religion you know I care nothing
about and shan't attempt to bring up my children in
any ... I shall never think of myself as a Jew.

The courts at West London were held primarily for the
needs of its own membership. Neither they nor any other body
held national jurisdiction for the other Reform synagogues.

48. The earliest surviving record book of conversions is from 1919. Of the 112 sittings between then and 1935, 28 were with three ministers, 55 with two ministers and a warden, and 29 with one minister and two wardens.
49. Morris Joseph Judaism As Creed And Life p. 166.
50. Venetia Stanley to Edwin Montagu 6th June 1915; quoted Michael and Eleanor Brock (ed) H. H. Asquith - Letters to Venetia Stanley p. 604.

The Manchester and Bradford congregations referred their religious queries to their own ministers, who would also convene occasional courts as and when the need arose. None of these ad hoc courts dealt with matrimonial affairs, for religious divorce at that time was not required by Reform synagogues. Civil divorce was considered sufficient and a get⁵¹ was not needed in order to remarry. Despite their ad hoc and limited nature, the West London Courts attracted attention from outside the Reform synagogues. Applicants came occasionally from other sections of Jewry because they found such an approach more conducive to their needs, whilst they were sometimes referred to them by Orthodox ministers who felt it more appropriate to their situation.⁵² Some cases were even sent to West London directly from the Chief Rabbi's Court. Writing in 1930 to Rev. Simmons about a female applicant who was engaged to a nominally observant Jew, Dayan Gollop stated:⁵³

The fact that the gentleman concerned is not a strictly Orthodox Jew, would seem to point that he would be more at home with you than with us. It would be almost absurd to train an applicant for strictly Orthodox Judaism, when the man she proposes to marry does not observe the religion she is presumed to undertake.

I see no reason why you should not deal with the case if he wishes to place it in your hands.

In turn the West London ministers occasionally referred cases

51. Minutes, West London Synagogue Wardens 25th January and 5th March, 1872.

52. M. Brown to Reinhart 3rd January 1932 R. P. Proselytes B - H; Rev. M. Brown.

53. Gollop to V. G. Simmons 30th October 1930 R. P. Proselytes S - Z; Simon Weill.

to the Chief Rabbi's Court that were felt to belong under
54
Orthodox auspices.

The willingness of the two authorities to recommend proselytes to each other indicates a degree of mutual respect and goodwill. It reflected the esteemed position that West London had acquired in the general community. Despite its schismatic origins and fears that it would be a source of heresy and anarchy, the Synagogue had earned a high reputation for its decorous form of worship and its many philanthropic activities. The close family ties between many of its leading members and those occupying leading roles in the Orthodox community contributed to the amicable regard in which it was held. This reconciliation also reflected the tolerant, liberal tradition of Orthodoxy at the end of the nineteenth century and in the first three decades of the twentieth century. It consisted of extending the boundaries of the permissible to the maximum in order to promote harmony within Anglo-Jewry and to encourage those on the fringes to stay within the communal framework. Reform ministers were allowed to participate in Orthodox institutions and ceremonies. Rev. Isidore Harris, a minister at West London, was chosen to edit the Jews' College Jubilee Volume in 1906, while at the consecration of the New Synagogue in its new premises in 1915, Rev. Morris Joseph was one of the scroll-bearers behind Chief Rabbi Hertz. Indeed it was Joseph who had been the person elected to deliver the only funeral oration given at the time of the burial of Chief Rabbi

54. Reinhart to Gollop 26th June 1932 R. P. Proselytes B - H:
Mrs Philip Graham.

Adler in 1911. Conversely Hertz had been prepared to deliver the memorial address for Julia Waley Cohen in 1917 despite her membership of West London. His words of praise for her mirrored his own attitude to religious pluralism in Anglo-Jewry at that time:

55
Everywhere she looked for the unity underlying the diversity in our religious life, and refused to admit that the various movements at present agitating Jewry were irreconcilable.

Hertz's visit to West London to deliver a lecture there in 1925 was hailed as "a sign that the old bitterness which existed in the past was now buried for ever". This was somewhat over-optimistic as there were still major divisions between them and Hertz did not accept many of the tenets of the Reformers, such as their rejection of the Oral Law. Moreover, he was opposed vehemently to Higher Biblical Criticism which they accepted but which he lambasted as suffering from "hallucinations of hatred whenever dealing with Jews and Judaism". Nevertheless, his visit was a significant step. When Hertz returned in 1934 to be guest of honour at the opening of West London's extension he affirmed the rapprochement, although without blurring the distinctions between Orthodoxy and Reform :

55. R. Henriques Sir Robert Waley-Cohen. The funeral service had taken place at Willesden Cemetery ~~London~~; the memorial service was held at the Central Synagogue (United Synagogue).
56. Words of greeting to Hertz by H. S. Q. Henriques, Chairman of the Council of West London Synagogue; quoted The West London Magazine Vol. 1 No. 7 (March 1925).
57. Sermon delivered at Jews' College 19th December 1915, J. H. Hertz Sermons, Addresses and Studies Vol 1, p.86
58. Speech delivered 27th May 1934; quoted The West London Synagogue Magazine Vol. 8 No. 11 (July 1934).

I feel that my presence here requires some words in explanation. It is certainly not due to the fact that I dismiss the religious issues which led to the formation of this Synagogue ninety-four years ago as of trifling importance. I am the last person in the world to minimise the significance of religious differences in Jewry. If I have nevertheless decided to be with you this morning, it is because of my conviction that far more calamitous than religious difference in Jewry is religious indifference in Jewry.

He went on to praise its contribution to Jewish life and presented the Reform community as his ally rather than enemy :

Your co-operation is especially welcome at the present day, when there is need for emphasising the religious nature of Anglo-Jewry, in the face of the exaggerated racialism proclaimed by some Jews. For you are among those who maintain that Anglo-Jewry is far more than a racial group with certain social and civic interests; and that Israel is first of all a spiritual community, to whom the God of our Fathers in the days of old entrusted a Law of Truth, and thereby planted everlasting life within us.

It was a remarkable speech that epitomised a mood of religious harmony that would never have been imagined at the time of West London's inception, and which would not be repeated again.

CHAPTER II

A NEW ERA

The tolerant, liberal tendency within Anglo-Jewish Orthodoxy may have been the dominant one, but it was not the only one. The equivocal attitude of the Chief Rabbi's Court has already been noted. In addition there were criticisms from more traditional elements that the United Synagogue was failing to uphold the high standards of the faith. These came particularly from the East European immigrants and reflected the changing social and demographic pattern of the community. Upon the death of Chief Rabbi Hermann Adler in 1911 the Association for furthering Traditional Judaism in Great Britain, consisting largely of foreign-born ministers, demanded that the new appointee be a man of "strict orthodoxy, a rigid observant of the Shulchan Aruch, and a great Talmudist" if he was to be recognised by them.¹

In 1917 the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations² castigated the Chief Rabbi's Court:

In consequence of its constitution, and more so as an outcome of its - no doubt well meant - endeavours to satisfy also the non-observant sections of the community, the Beth Din appears frequently not quite free from worldly influences. The result is often a compromise which not only thousands of strictly observant Jews find unsatisfactory, but we are convinced must also be repugnant to members of the Beth Din itself.

1. Quoted in A. Newman The United Synagogue p. 98.
2. Victor Schonfeld to Philip Ornstein 15th March 1917 Hertz Papers C5 Rabbi's Conferences 1917/18.

Criticism was renewed when the U.O.H.C. called a protest meeting in the wake of Hertz's visit to West London Synagogue in 1934. His visit was condemned and it was announced that "efforts are being made to establish an independent Orthodox Beth Din in London which shall satisfy and minister to the requirements of all Orthodox Jews in the Metropolis".³ Although the decision had little consequence in itself, affecting only a small number of Jews, it was indicative of the pressures from the right-wing being exerted upon the Chief Rabbinate, and which would increasingly change its "middle-of-the-road" stance to a more uncompromisingly Orthodox one.

The crucial point at which there was a change from the domination of the liberal tendency within the Orthodox Rabbinate to that of a stricter one can be dated to 1935. That year witnessed the appointment of the renowned Lithuanian scholar, Rabbi Yehezkel Abramsky, as the senior Dayan of the Chief Rabbi's Court. It brought such right-wing pressures into the very leadership of the United Synagogue itself. His enormous personal influence served both to give the Court much greater stature within the United Synagogue, and to promote a much stricter interpretation of Jewish Law. He saw it as his task to impose "a strong Orthodoxy" and to reinforce many observances that had been neglected, especially the dietary laws.⁴ He insisted on strengthening regulations concerning kashrut as a condition for accepting the position, and the changes he demanded were implemented within a few weeks of his

3. J. C. 4th January 1935.

4. J. C. 28th June 1935.

appointment. He was also opposed to conversions to Judaism, particularly if there was any question of marriage involved, which he regarded as an automatic sign of insincerity. The claim that "it was practically impossible to get a conversion while he was at the Beth Din"⁵ is not totally accurate, but did reflect the general feeling that conversion became considerably harder to achieve once he joined the Court. Although he did not initiate the antipathetic attitude to conversion, his arrival can be seen as the final seal on a policy that had been developing for some time. With Abramsky that policy became the hallmark of the Court. Commenting on his over-all effect, the present Chief Rabbi, Dr. Immanuel Jakobovits wrote:

[The Beth Din] slowly progressed in stature ... reaching its peak under the dynamic leadership of Dayan Abramski's towering personality. His commanding influence extended primarily to improving the standards of Shechitah and Kashrut ... to more severe controls on the admission of proselytes, and generally moving the Beth Din's "middle-of-the-road" course strongly and irrevocably to the right.

Another factor in the changes within the Orthodox leadership at that time was the influx of Continental Jews fleeing from the growing oppression in Europe. Although there were many who gravitated towards the Reform community there were also a considerable number from strictly traditional backgrounds who bolstered the new Orthodoxy in Great Britain.

5. Private conversation 19th October 1982 Professor Chimen Abramsky (son of Dayan Abramsky). A similar analysis is provided by Louis Jacobs : "It was Dayan Abramsky, not Cromwell, who was responsible for the (anti-conversion) attitude of the Beth Din". Louis Jacobs Helping With Enquiries p. 218.
6. I. Jakobovits The Timely and The Timeless p. 271.

Their number included Rabbis, and in July 1941 thirty-five Orthodox refugee Rabbis met in London to form an association dealing with matters of mutual concern. Many of them were to serve as congregational ministers throughout the country, such as Alexander Altmann (Manchester), Joseph Braunold (Sunderland), Felix Carlebach (Hendon), Paul Holzer (Epsom), Jacob Kaufmann (Welwyn Garden City), Wolf Lewi (Birmingham), Isidor Lichtigfeld (Cricklewood), and Wolf Gottlieb (Glasgow). They brought a very different approach to communal life,⁷ provoking comment on the 'new Jewish clergy':

The Reverend X, whose Jewish studies terminated when he was eighteen, who dressed like an Anglican clergyman, carried his umbrella on the Sabbath and was very broadminded about the dietary laws, was the real religious guide of his congregation. Owing, however, to changes in the community, the Reverend X has frequently been replaced by Rabbi Y, who eats with very few of his congregants and generally comports himself in an orthodox fashion. This is not a development which has found universal favour. Discontent has been deliberately fostered by interested parties, and the old easy-going compromises over theology and practice have been ruthlessly probed.

Another observer points out other changes resulting from the⁸ influx of foreign-trained Rabbis:

From about 1930 there was an increasing tendency for the United Synagogue ministers to model their roles on those of the traditional rabbinate rather than those of the Christian clergy ... religious knowledge was judged as the most desirable qualification rather than pastoral methods of preaching, reading the service, congratulating and consoling. The number of ministers in the United constituent synagogues who had rabbinical diplomas increased from four (out of seventeen) in 1930 to twelve (out of twenty-one) in 1960 ... A photograph of the Anglo-Jewish Preachers

7. N. Cohen 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Religious Life' p. 46.
8. S. Sharot Judaism - A Sociology p. 158.

(Ministers) Conference in 1935 shows that forty-three out of fifty-six ministers present wore canonicals, and the majority wore no headgear or beards. No ministers can be seen wearing canonicals in a photograph of the ministers at their conference in 1956, but their heads were covered and many had short or trimmed beards.

As well as serving United Synagogue congregations and provincial synagogues under the jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbi, some of immigrant Rabbis came to sit on the London Beth Din, such as Isidore Grunfeld and Julius Jakobovits. After the war Leopold Grossnass, Abraham Rapoport, Myer Lew and Myer Steinberg also joined the Beth Din. Their arrival led to a total transformation in the composition of the court. Until 1935 all members had been English-born or trained, but by 1945 all but one came from the Continent, and it was a predominance⁹ that was to remain through the period under study. Their presence brought added support to the court's already stringent¹⁰ policies. They were not, however, welcomed by all:

... there developed a feeling amongst many that the Chief Rabbi had fallen too far under what had become known as "the extreme right wing", feelings that were accentuated during the war.

By the time Chief Rabbi Hertz died in 1946, the situation had changed so drastically that, according to one Orthodox minister "The Germanic influence took control and occupied the key power¹¹ posts in the community". It was also noted that a consequence

9. See Appendix I.

10. A. Newman 'Chief Rabbi Dr. Joseph H. Hertz' p. 20; see also A. Newman The United Synagogue p. 107.

11. Private conversation 3rd November 1983 Rabbi Maurice Gaguine (Minister, Withington Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews 1946-84).

of the influx of immigrant Rabbis "had been the emergence of the Chief Rabbi's Beth Din to a position of power within the Orthodox community that it had not previously enjoyed".¹²

Moreover the relationship of the immigrant dayanim to the United Synagogue was different from that of previous incumbents. In the past many of the dayanim had also been part-time ministers of the United Synagogue and had been in regular contact with ordinary members of the community, such as Lazarus and Gollop at Bayswater and Hampstead. Now, however, most of them not only came from very different types of communities abroad but they no longer served as ministers in the United Synagogue, such as Abramsky, Grunfeld and Grossnass. Thus they never became part of, or familiar with, its general membership and were out of touch with its character and needs.

In addition, certain personal factors within the religious hierarchy also led to a 'right-wing' influence : in January 1940, Judith Hertz, the Chief Rabbi's daughter, married Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, who was the presiding Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations. The family ties between the two men, and their work together on such projects as the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council for German and Austrian Jews, which Dr. Schonfeld spear-headed, meant that a close relationship grew up between them. Hertz was still grieving over the loss ten years earlier of his wife to whom he had looked for "wise counsel and religious enthusiasm".¹³ He was

12. L. Kochan Association of Jewish Refugees Information May 1962.

13. Preface to The Pentateuch and Haftorahs Ed. J. H. Hertz.

also feeling despondent about his illness and deafness, and he came to rely increasingly upon his son-in-law. Commenting on this dependency, Dayan Lazarus pointed out that Hertz felt "he had no one to fall back on at all, and he had therefore made Dr. Schonfeld his right-hand man in everything".¹⁴ It was not surprising that this should extend to influence in religious matters too, and in the eyes of many it "undoubtedly helped to alter his personal [previously hostile] attitude to right-wing orthodoxy".¹⁵

The change in both the personnel and the policies of the Orthodox rabbinate soon began to take effect and be noticed publicly. The Annual Report of the United Synagogue for the combined period 1936-8 noted a rise in the number of applications for conversion, but also increased opposition by the Chief Rabbi's Court. Moreover, for the first time, it revealed that the official grounds for rejecting enquirers was that "the overwhelming number of applicants are not actuated by motives which would justify the Beth Din in accepting them". This was not just a hardening of attitude but a major change of policy, as was commented upon by one of the 'old-style' English ministers, Rev. Dr. Abraham Cohen:¹⁶

It is an undeniable fact that about 1935 or 1936 the Beth Din began to reject applicants on grounds which did not disqualify before that date. If the Beth Din claims that its new decision is based solely on Jewish Law, the deduction is that Chief Rabbis Nathan Adler, Hermann Adler, and Joseph Hertz (before 1935)

14. Dayan Lazarus to United Synagogue Honorary Officers 1944; quoted A. Newman 'Chief Rabbi Dr. Joseph H. Hertz' p. 21.
15. N. Cohen op. cit. p. 44.
16. J. C. 8th June 1945

acted contrary to the din in accepting the types of candidates which are now refused.

What we are now concerned with is not the Jewish Law on proselytisation, but the policy of the Beth Din towards it. I cite a case from my own experience to substantiate this reading of the situation. A young man whose father was a Jew and mother a Christian, became engaged to a Jewish girl. He was employed by her mother as a traveller (the father was dead) and finished his work on Friday. The Beth Din rejected him because the girl's mother did not close her business on the Sabbath. I considered the decision so outrageously unfair that I placed the facts before the Chief Rabbi. He supported my view and, on his intervention, the Beth Din reversed its verdict. ... A specific instance of this kind proves that the Beth Din is, in this matter, not just administering Jewish Law, but formulating a law of its own devising.

As many of the applicants were engaged or married to members of the United Synagogue, or their children, there arose an increasing gulf between the views of clergy and laity. It also extended to the lay leadership of the United Synagogue who felt that the stance of the Court was unnecessarily rigid. Commenting on this double divide, between the rabbinate and both the lay constituency and lay leadership, a former President of the United Synagogue, Ewen Montagu declared:

17

The opinion of most of the United Synagogue Honorary Officers about the dayanim was that they were awfully little men and small-minded ... The Honorary Officers were aware of the popular dissatisfaction with the Beth Din on proselytisation, and often raised the matter informally to ameliorate the situation and to show the human face of Judaism, but to no avail whatsoever.

The consequences of the change in attitude by the Chief Rabbi's Court were referred to by Rabbi Dr. Israel Mattuck, senior minister of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue when he commented "The

Orthodox Jewish ecclesiastical authorities have adopted a policy whereby they practically refuse to entertain any non-Jew¹⁸ who wants to become a Jew". The remark was more a statement of fact than a criticism. It was shown to be correct soon afterwards by a rare public statement on the policy of the Chief Rabbi's Court in which Dayan Swift stated that although applicants were interviewed sympathetically, usually only one¹⁹ percent were accepted.

Another area of Jewish life that evoked increasing public anger was the problem of civilly divorced women who were prevented from remarrying in synagogue because their former husbands refused to agree to a get. As was seen earlier this was not a new problem, but there was now a growing impatience with the lack of response by the Orthodox authorities and a feeling that they were indifferent to the needs of the community they were supposed to be leading. In 1935 the Jewish²⁰ Chronicle declared:

Seven years ago our own Board of Deputies took it up with the London Beth Din. Six months later it passed a resolution suggesting that the Beth Din "should seriously consider the taking of steps to secure the convening of an authoritative Conference of Orthodox Rabbis". That "serious consideration" is still going on. If the upholders of rigid orthodoxy, as they see it, believe that the perpetuation of an inhuman system is the best way of keeping Judaism in these days alive and respected, they are perpetuating an act of crass folly for which Judaism will have to pay.

18. J. C. 7th June 1946.

19. J. C. 8th October 1946.

20. J. C. 21st June 1935.

Eight months later, another blast of condemnation appeared:

It is nothing less than a crying scandal and a grave reproach to our Faith. We have in these columns, again and again pleaded for a merciful and rational approach to the Agunah problem ... But nothing has been done. How long is this state of affairs to continue? ... Our Rabbis are imperilling adherence to Jewish law in general, quite apart from the menace to Jewish morality by their attitude of laissez-faire. They are doing more. They are bringing Judaism itself into contempt.

Perhaps even more revealing than the articles themselves - which, on their own might be regarded as possibly being biased or unrepresentative - is the fact that letters of agreement, citing a host of anguished case histories, occupied the correspondence pages for the following eleven weeks.

The onset of the Second World War and the deaths of hundreds of Jews serving in the British forces, many of which were never witnessed and were merely reported "missing in action", made the problem even more critical. In January 1940 Abramsky revived a procedure that had existed in the First World War and devised a document permitting the Court to issue a get to a soldier's wife if there was no definite news of his being alive or dead five years after he had signed it. However the move only affected a small percentage of those burdened by the status of agunah, for many did not sign the document, either because they were not approached or because they found

22

it demoralising. Moreover the document offered no assistance after the war to the many immigrants from Europe whose spouses had died in concentration camps, but who lacked witnesses or documentary evidence to prove it. It was not a problem that affected just Jews, and the newly-formed United Nations won widespread praise for its attempt to establish a central source of information as to the death of missing persons, utilising the expertise of the Red Cross. However the Chief Rabbi's Court refused to accept certificates of death issued by the Red Cross unless accompanied by corroborating evidence. Once again²³ the Court was lambasted by the Jewish press:²⁴

This attitude seems not entirely worthy of the occasion. While it is doubtless strictly correct as far as it goes, its studiously non-committal approach is far from promising. If the United Nations is encouraged to move in this matter, then surely some complementary action, of a more positive and constructive nature, might be expected from our ecclesiastical authorities. It will indeed be a reproach to our religious tradition if a rigid interpretation of the Rabbinic Code prevents the rendering of legal aid to the suffering and afflicted.

Despite their awareness of the problems, the members of the Chief Rabbi's Court felt unable to institute any major changes in Jewish Law concerning widows. The larger issue of

22. Notification of the availability of the document was repeated by the Chief Rabbi's Court in the Jewish Chronicle on 3rd April 1942 because "so few" had applied for it, a fact also lamented by the leading article in the edition of 19th June 1943; see also the criticisms of Rabbi Leslie Edgar, then a Jewish chaplain to the forces, in J. C. 18th October 1946.

23. J. C. 24th December 1948.

24. J. C. 31st December 1948; see also J. C. 15th August 1947, and Mattuck's criticisms in J. C. 24th January 1947.

women whose husbands were alive but withheld consent for a get was also not tackled. Few women were prepared to allow their former husbands - or, as they often saw it, the rabbis - to prevent them from remarrying. Many approached Reform synagogues, which did not require a get, or they dispensed with religious formalities and obtained civil marriages. In 1946 Abramsky himself commented on the "major problem" of those remarrying without a get, although he offered no solution.²⁵ One minister resorted to releasing scores of pigeons and declared that freeing the birds from their captivity symbolised that all cases of agunah were henceforth freed from the bonds of their marriage. Whilst he acted without any authority and his gesture had no legal consequences, he did at least respond to²⁶ the public dissatisfaction.

A related matrimonial problem was that of chalitzah: the Biblical injunction that if a woman's husband died and left her childless, her brother had to marry her. Alternatively he could release himself from this duty, and free the widow to marry someone else by a ceremony in which the widow publicly removes the shoe from off his foot, spits in his face and recites a formula denouncing him.²⁷ Many considered it an archaic and distasteful rite, although very few cases arose in peace-time. However, the war resulted in an increase of such instances. In 1946 Basil Henriques, Warden of the Bernhard

25. J. C. 9th August 1946.

26. The action was by Rev. J. Shaposnick; quoted in J. C. 19th August 1949.

27. Deuteronomy 25.5-10.

Baron St. George's Jewish Settlement, wrote to the Jewish Chronicle about cases in which the brothers-in-law either could²⁸ not be located or refused to participate in the ceremony. The result was that the women concerned were unable to remarry in synagogue. Henriques' letter produced a flurry of correspondence for the next six weeks, citing similar examples, indicating that it was of concern to many. It culminated with a leading article that again pitted the needs of the community against the unwillingness of the religious authorities to amend²⁹ Jewish Law:

Chalitza constitutes by no means the only issue demanding authoritative exposition with regard to contemporary times. It is unfortunate that some of our religious leaders, despite the wide opportunities afforded them, continue to speak out in vague generalised terms about Orthodox Jewish values, and studiously refrain from bringing these values into concrete relationship with everyday problems ... If the guardians of our religious traditions adopt a merely negative attitude, or else avoid dealing with the practical implications of their doctrine, their influence for good is disastrously weakened.

There was no response, either by way of explanation or change of policy, and the matter remained as one more source of discontent.

Important as conversion and matrimonial difficulties were for the individuals concerned and their families, a subject that had much wider implications for Anglo-Jewry and that became highly contentious after 1935 was kashrut. Whilst many Jews bought kosher meat, the supervision of such meat by the religious authorities was lax. Indeed it was the horror at

28. J. C. 1st November 1946.

29. J. C. 13th December 1946.

various irregularities that had led strictly observant Jews to form the Machzike Hadath Society in 1891 and establish their own slaughterhouses and butchers' shops. It was the Chief Rabbi's Court which was responsible for the supervision over kosher food. Despite tightening up on certain procedures, such as the use of seals on their poultry, no major changes were introduced. Abramsky, however, was committed to raising the standard of kashrut and began to impose new regulations immediately after joining the Chief Rabbi's Court. It was no coincidence that until his appointment he had been the presiding Rabbi of the Machzike Hadath. In July 1935 the Court ordered that henceforth all hind-quarter meat needed to be purged before being sold so as to comply with Jewish Law. This entailed removing the sinew, a complex procedure requiring great expertise. As the number of skilled purgers was very limited, the availability of hindquarters was reduced considerably while its prices rose sharply. It resulted in a storm of protest in the correspondence columns of The Jewish Chronicle, typical of which was the following:

Do the authorities realise that hitherto many Jews who do not really believe in or strictly observe Kashrut have invariably bought their meat at Kosher butchers and that they and others like myself who do believe in real Kashrut but who have always repudiated what is ridiculous and out of date in so-called Rabbinic Law - by far the majority of Jews recognising the authority of the Chief Rabbi - will certainly not tolerate such a grave infraction of the freedom of action of their wives, sisters, and daughters in providing for their household wants.

30. B. Homa A Fortress in Anglo-Jewry pp. 9-10, 30-31.

31. J. C. 19th July 1935.

Whether the change in policy by the Chief Rabbi's Court was justified or not is irrelevant for the purposes of this study. What is important is how the matter was perceived by the community at large, and clearly it was viewed as an unwarranted imposition and as ecclesiastical interference. Moreover, the decision resulted in more serious consequences than letters of protest. In a report on the effect of the pronouncement on kosher meat trade a year later, it was revealed that since the new regulations had come into force there had been a considerable loss of custom, and that many Jews were now patronising non-kosher butchers.

The influence of Abramsky and the continental rabbis can also be seen in the changing role of the dayanim within the United Synagogue. They had been regarded as subordinates to the Chief Rabbi, his assessors, delegated to concern themselves with the minutiae of religious matters, and irrelevant to the leadership of the United Synagogue. After 1935 they became cherished councillors and guides to the Chief Rabbi, and took an active interest in the affairs of the United Synagogue. Previously it had been assumed that the Chief Rabbi was responsible for spiritual matters, and that the President of the United Synagogue was responsible for secular matters, with the President deciding where the dividing line fell. The dayanim no longer felt constricted to this definition, as Philip Goldberg, secretary of the United Synagogue, noted at a meeting of the Honorary Officers:

32. J. C. 13th and 20th November 1936.

33. Notes to meeting of United Synagogue Honorary Officers 6th May 1946; Philip Goldberg Papers Box 3.

Since Dayan Abramsky's appointment there has been abundant evidence of the endeavours of the Beth Din to take over administrative functions, which were by long tradition done by so-called laymen. To my mind any conception of the Council of the United Synagogue and Boards of Management of Synagogues as limited to dealing with financial and other secular matters is a totally false one.

A year earlier the dayanim had sought to bring the lay leadership to heel when they backed the Chief Rabbi's attempt to summon the officers of Finchley Synagogue to appear before the Court over a dispute between the Reader and Warden of the synagogue. The Finchley officers refused to attend and were supported in their stance by the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue. Thereupon the dayanim entered the debate by insisting that it was the duty of all Jews to obey the summons of a Beth Din and thus that, in effect, it was the supreme arbiter in Jewish matters and was not subject to the Honorary Officers. The four dayanim - Abramsky, Grunfeld, Jakobovits and Swift - informed the latter that:

Your unheard-of suggestion that the Beth Din "withdraw its decision to intervene" would be the first step in religious chaos and communal ruin in Anglo-Jewry. It would be tantamount to the assertion that "there is neither Religious Law nor Judge in Israel" and would be a virtual secession from Orthodox Judaism.

The correspondence over the Finchley Synagogue dispute reveals a deep, and long-standing, antagonism between the religious and the lay leadership. Much of it was personalised between Chief Rabbi Hertz and Sir Robert Waley Cohen, the

34. Dayanim of the Chief Rabbi's Court to Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue 11th April 1945; Hertz Papers Disregard of Beth Din Summons - Correspondence Papers.

President of the United Synagogue. Yet it also reflected the breakdown of cordial relations between the rabbinate and laity at the top of the United Synagogue, and mirrored that within the country at large. Thus Hertz was accused of capricious interpretation and warned that "such abusive irrelevancies will not be allowed to obscure the issues or further your efforts to assume dictatorship and to rule the Community by coercion".³⁵

For his part Hertz cited a list of examples over several years in which Waley Cohen had flouted his authority : appointing as temporary Senior Chaplain someone who did not meet with Hertz's approval; ordering the destruction of all copies of a printed edition of a sermon by Hertz; refusing to supply Hertz with a list of United Synagogue Groups that sprang up as a result of the evacuation during the war; disagreeing over the admission of a convert. After a lengthy description³⁶ of these and other incidents the letter concluded:

Your personal hostility to me leads you to defame me even to Government departments ... But enough. There is little more that I could say to induce you to give up your Quixotic fight against the windmills of "priestly dictatorship". It is pure hallucination.

It is clear, therefore, that not only did the Chief Rabbi's Court veer sharply to the right and become much more Orthodox, but that it also became much more powerful and sought to exert its influence in the community. This was a double

35. Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue to Chief Rabbi Hertz 14th March 1945; Hertz Papers *ibid*.

36. Chief Rabbi Hertz to Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue 9th April 1945; Hertz Papers *ibid*. For the full text of this highly illuminating letter see Appendix II.

recipe for disharmony within Anglo-Jewry. Twenty years later a devastating picture of the decay that had begun in 1935 was presented by Dr. Redcliffe Salaman in his Lucien Wolf Memorial
37
Lecture to the Jewish Historical Society of England:

In the last two decades, it has been obvious that a new type of relationship had arisen between the community as a whole and the ecclesiastical authorities. The latter had been 'captured' by the ultra-Orthodox who, through the influence of the Rabbinate had attempted to dragoon the community into accepting rulings and decisions on matters of social and so-called religious behaviour, which are unacceptable to the majority and which are felt to be out of harmony with the spiritual aspirations of a cultured people ... The policy has led to the loss of that rapport between the Jewish public and its religious leaders which was a feature of Jewish life thirty years ago. The gulf is growing ... It is this influence which has slammed the door against the admission of converts, refused the privilege of registration of marriages to the ministers of the Liberal synagogues, and has denied to Jews the right of cremating their dead ... Within the Anglo-Jewry today, there lurks a self-destructive force, due to the antithesis existing between its exalted social and ethical outlook and an over-developed legalism which has lost its appeal.

In the eyes of the general community the "progressive
38
conservatism" espoused originally by Hertz had turned into a reactionary Orthodoxy that had little in common with the Judaism of Anglo-Jewry. It is not surprising, therefore, that in 1948 his successor, Brodie, lamented publicly that "the community at large did not appreciate the important work done
39
by the Beth Din".

37. Lecture delivered 18th May 1953; quoted J. C. 22nd May 1953.
38. Sermon delivered at the Great Synagogue 23rd March 1931; quoted in J. H. Hertz Sermons, Addresses and Studies Vol. I p. 258.
39. J. C. 1st October 1948.

At the same time as there were changes within the Orthodox world there were also important developments affecting the Reform synagogues. They were to change the character of Reform Judaism in Britain and to lead directly to the establishment of the Reform Beth Din. The first development was the arrival of Rabbi Harold Reinhart at West London Synagogue in 1929. Reinhart was born in 1891 in Portland, Oregon, had attended the Reform Temple there, and had been influenced greatly by the then minister, Rabbi Stephen Wise. Later to become one of America's leading Rabbis, Wise was responsible for Reinhart's decision to enter the ministry. It is no accident that many of Wise's characteristics were reflected in the features of Reinhart's own career : skilled oratory, insistence on freedom of the pulpit, practical concern for social welfare, and a passionate belief in the abiding value of Jewish ideals and their application to daily life.⁴⁰

Reinhart obtained his degree as Bachelor of Arts at the University of Cincinnati, and Master of Arts at Chicago University. He studied for the ministry at the Reform seminary in Cincinnati, the Hebrew Union College, and was ordained as a Rabbi in 1915. Both Reinhart's religious upbringing and Rabbinic training were within Reform Judaism. It was dominated

40. On Stephen Wise see W. G. Plaut The Growth of Reform Judaism p. 86ff; on the early life of Reinhart see L. & J. Golden Harold Reinhart p. 3.

41

by the principles of the Pittsburgh Platform which concentrated on the prophetic tradition within Judaism and placed much greater emphasis on personal conduct and morals than on outer forms and rituals. It stressed the spiritual and ethical in the Jewish message, and gave priority to the moral demands of Judaism rather than its ceremonial observances. Judaism was viewed as a "progressive religion ever striving to be in accord

42

with the postulates of reason". It had no hesitation in discarding the legalism of the past, and instead insisted on the right to maintain "only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization". This radical approach towards Jewish Law had resulted in extensive reforms, particularly in matters of status : the get was discarded and civil divorce considered fully valid; civil death certificates were deemed to be sufficient for a person whose spouse was presumed dead to be able to remarry in synagogue; conversion to Judaism was made considerably easier and circumcision was no longer insisted upon for males. In addition chalitza - the ceremony releasing a man from having to marry his deceased

41. The Pittsburgh Platform had emerged from the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885, which had been called together by Kaufmann Kohler, and upon whose draft the Platform had been based. Kohler was President of the Hebrew Union College whilst Reinhart was a student there and exerted much influence upon him. Shortly before his own death in 1969, when asked to speak on books that had had a lasting impression upon him, Reinhart gave pride of place to the collected addresses of Kohler, for whom he had always maintained a profound respect.
42. Pittsburgh Platform 1885; quoted Eugene B. Borowitz Reform Judaism Today p. 190.
43. Idem.

brother's childless widow - was abandoned. Also abolished was mamzerut, the stigma of illegitimacy that fell upon children of adulterous or incestuous unions, and which prevented them and their descendants from marrying anyone other than another

44

mamzer for ten generations. There was no doubt that Reinhart was deeply attached to the standpoint of American Reform

45

Judaism, and he often vaunted its merits:

Reform is an attitude towards our Jewishness ... emphasises devotion, as against conformity, and appreciation of the ideal, as against acceptance by rote. Reform presents Judaism as a universal religion ... it proclaims the need for making Judaism relevant, for developing consciously and deliberately the next phase of Jewish thought and practice such as will answer to the need of the hour.

Following his ordination Reinhart occupied the pulpit of the Reform Temple in Gary, Indiana for two years, then spent seven years as minister in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and a further four years in Sacramento, California. His first contact with England was in 1921 when Mattuck had written to him suggesting that he become Assistant Minister at the Liberal Jewish Synagogue. Reinhart declined the position when the Synagogue declared that it would be unwilling to assist financially with annual visits home to his parents. When West London were seeking a Senior Minister to succeed Joseph, Reinhart was recommended and Philip Waley, the President of the Synagogue, travelled to the United States to interview him.

46

44. David Phillipson The Reform Movement in Judaism p. 311ff.

45. The Scribe 1927; quoted in Golden op.cit. p. 5.

46. Minutes, Liberal Jewish Synagogue Council 21st March, 19th June and 26th September 1921.

After a visit to West London in 1928 Reinhart accepted the post and took up office in March 1929. He never recorded why he was attracted by the ideas of settling in England, although others have suggested that he found Anglo-Jewry more congenial to him: whereas American Jewry was too materialistic and possession-oriented for Reinhart's liking, the still-evident Victorian values and faith of English Jews were temperamentally more
47
suited to him. In addition West London was the epitome of the Classical Reform Judaism in which he was so immersed. Moreover it was not just Anglo-Jewry but the country as a whole that attracted him. Like T. S. Eliot and many other American
48
compatriots:

Reinhart was in love with Britain and the British. He adored the Royal family, and the English countryside and the London theatre, and the elusive values that the United Kingdom enshrines ... an American in love with England.

The style of Reinhart's ministry often seemed to owe more to the "Bible punching" Protestantism of Western America than to the Judaism developed by the Rabbis through centuries of teaching and study. His deep faith was founded on the Hebrew Bible, which he quoted continuously in his sermon and articles. The Book of Psalms, in particular, was his constant

47. Private conversation 1st July 1987 Leo Bernard (former Council member of West London Synagogue, founder member of Westminster Synagogue).

48. Andre Ungar 'My Ten Synagogues' p. 20. Suggestions have been made that Reinhart also had reasons for leaving the United States, either because his outspoken pacifism during the First World War made him unpopular, or because his wife's Russian birth led to prejudice amongst American Jews. Both can be dismissed: many other American Rabbis were pacifist and did not suffer for it, whilst there is no evidence for the latter suggestion: the Reinharts maintained their American citizenship and made regular trips back to the United States.

reference point, and one of his contributions to the new Prayer Book published in 1930 was to include a much larger selection of psalms than was in previous editions. He did not value highly Rabbinic texts and, save for the Ethics of the Fathers, rarely mentioned them. For Reinhart the essence of Jewish life was communion with the Deity and the act of prayer. All things were subservient to it and he regarded it as having "the most important effect of any kind of human effort in the world".⁴⁹ It was often noted that "He never reads prayers to his congregation, but prays aloud in their presence."⁵⁰

Reinhart's passionate belief in prayer was matched by his certainty in the truth of other convictions that he held and which he maintained staunchly whether or not they were popular. He was a committed pacifist, he was an early opponent of capital punishment, he was highly critical of Zionism, he was opposed to the establishment of Ladies Guilds on the grounds that they were divisive and (long before the term became fashionable) sexist. In these and other issues Reinhart never saw the need to trim his sails according to popular opinion. He regarded his ministry as a "holy office" and later declared⁵¹ of it:

I have tried to fight for principle and to teach the service of truth within the Jewish community, even though it might not always be comfortable for the Jewish community.

49. Lecture to A. S. G. B. Annual Conference 12th May 1956.

50. J. C. 26th March 1954; see also Golden op.cit. p. 232.

51. Sermon delivered at West London Synagogue 28th March 1954; quoted in Golden op.cit. p. 171.

When officiating at the induction service of Rabbi Werner Vander Zyl at the North Western Reform Synagogue in 1943, Reinhart had made a personal declaration of the principles that had⁵² guided him and which illustrated his uncompromising stance:

God's word will I speak, God's word that is clean and sure, that knows no hesitancy and no compromise, that burns like fire, that breathes life and hope. The true rabbi is he who has a heritage from the prophets, with a lively passion for justice and a quick courage to drive the message home. That passion and that courage must be unmistakable. Every rabbi must be a marked man, because it must be known that he is uncorruptible not to be persuaded by interest or advantage, but motivated solely to advance the holy cause. His word must be an application in the living present of the ancient and eternal truth.

This characteristic of "inflexible rectitude" also made him a difficult person to work with, and some found his dogmatic⁵³ assertiveness unacceptable. Several decades later it was to lead to his departure from West London under a cloud of mutual acrimony.

Although the West London Synagogue had been used to the "Mosaic-centredness" of D. W. Marks and the "conservative Reform" of Morris Joseph, Reinhart's approach to Judaism was⁵⁴ not considered to be too far removed for every day purposes. Moreover, the Synagogue was felt to be ripe for new input and ready for a fresh spirit. According to the then second

52. Sermon delivered at North Western Reform Synagogue 11th July 1943; quoted in Golden op.cit. p.116.

53. Private conversation 10th January 1989 Rabbi Stanley Dreyfus (former minister West London Synagogue).

54. Michael J. Goulston 'The Theology of Reform Judaism in Great Britain' p. 56 - 62.

55

minister, Vivian G. Simmons, the synagogue was:

Isolated and aloof from the rest of Jewry ...
Enthusiasm was frowned upon and decades passed away
without any change, except very minor ones, in
organisation or ritual. Jewish reform was not a
flowing stream, but a silent pool - choked and
impenetrable.

Reinhart's arrival had exactly the desired effect and soon

56

galvanised the congregation out of its torpor:

Following Reinhart's appointment a new spirit began
to permeate the ancient stillness, and a new
enthusiasm and a fresh discontent to replace the old
complacency and policy of laissez-faire ... a growing
consciousness of the unity of Israel ... a large
influx of Orthodox newcomers, and a new missionary
spirit.

A year after taking office, Reinhart published his
definition of Reform Judaism, which was both a personal
declaration of faith and also a manifesto for his ministry at

57

West London Synagogue:

THIS IS REFORM

To be Jewish enough to have faith in the inner
resources of the Jewish people, and its capacity for
universal ideals and human service; and so to
identify Jewish destiny with broad and progressive
paths;

To be Jewish enough to believe that truth is the seal
of God, and so to allow the light of reason to play
upon our past, our present and our future, and to
pursue that light with confidence and courage;

To be Jewish enough to feel that man is the partner
of God in the work of creation, and that it is our
task to build the kingdom of heaven here on earth

55. V. G. Simmons Reform in Judaism p. 11.

56. Ibid. p. 12.

57. The West London Synagogue Magazine February 1930.

through the perception and fulfilment of God's living will progressively revealed through human history;

To be Jewish enough to seek to love the Lord our God, not with formula and ritual, but with heart and soul and might, and to strive after that true and simple spiritual exercise which releases and nourishes the divine within us.

THIS IS REFORM

His words were intended not merely as a description of Reform but as a recipe for action. He often proclaimed that "We assert the right and the duty to change and to adapt, to meet⁵⁸ the needs and opportunities of both time and place". It included changes in Jewish law and custom, sacrificing the letter of the law in order to maintain its spirit, and to suit contemporary situations. For Reinhardt Judaism was in a state of constant flux - it could not be conserved, only developed. He saw it as a dynamic process and one that was answerable "to⁵⁹ now" rather than to the past. As well as his criticising Orthodoxy for failing to inspire today's Jews, Reinhardt condemned Reform Jews who had "grown faint in its reforming"⁶⁰ and who "make what is gone synonymous with what is good".

Whilst Orthodox Rabbis recognised the need for change in Jewish Law, they felt constrained by their own lack of authority or of any universally accepted mechanism for such⁶¹ changes. Reinhardt, however, had no such reservations :

The authority for our ultimate decision is the voice

58. Ibid. April 1930.

59. Ibid. November 1934.

60. Idem.

61. Ibid. April 1930.

of God in our own hearts. 'To thine own self be true', say we, and not only, 'thou canst not then be false to any man', but also, thou canst not be false to God himself ... Orthodoxy with its completed code and its lack of living authority sufficient to deal with any matter of radical significance, must exalt conformity into the place of prime importance. We may respect this attitude. But it is not ours ... Ours the task to revive the creative side of Jewish faith and practice. Ours to hew the channels through which may flow the waters of a new and freshening faith.

It was Reinhart's aim to establish a Reform Beth Din in place of the scattered ad hoc courts maintained by individual Reform congregations.⁶² Two motives can be discerned. First was his desire to have a central system that would bring uniformity to the procedures and practices of conversation. He was concerned about the reputation of the courts and was keen to ensure that insincere and ill-prepared candidates, such as Venetia Stanley, were not accepted. He made it clear that "It is a matter of considerable importance⁶³ that these courts should be most seriously regarded" and that the courts "cannot afford to be lax - or even to appear lax - in matters such as this".⁶⁴ Here he was influenced greatly by his American background and his experiences of conversion in the Reform congregations of the United States. In the absence of any overall control by a central Rabbinic body the religious autonomy of the local congregations was paramount. Each community was responsible for its own procedures and standards.

62. Private conversation 17th December 1980 Mrs Harold Reinhart.

63. Reinhart to Cassell 13th January 1943 R. P. Provincial Reform Synagogues; Cassell.

64. Reinhart to P. Waley 22nd September 1935 R. P. West London Synagogue.

The result was "anarchy" and he was determined not to let the pattern be repeated in England.⁶⁵ It led him to believe firmly in a centralised system. He considered that anything else would be "undignified and unsatisfactory".⁶⁶ Indeed he was to warn his colleagues of the American experience "where everybody interpreted the law in his own way, which had resulted in a chaos of divergent practices".⁶⁷

A survey conducted amongst American Reform Rabbis questioning their conversion procedures indicates enormous differences in policies and confirms Reinhart's analysis.⁶⁸ Thus some Rabbis insisted that a proselyte take a course of study and appear before a court of three individuals, whereas others saw no need for study and no necessity for any formal process of conversion. Amongst those requiring a period of tuition, the length ranged from two weeks to fifteen months. There was also divergence over the question of circumcision for male converts, with some Rabbis regarding it as essential and others

65. This factor was emphasised by both Cassell (Private conversation 16th December 1980) and Mrs Reinhart (Private conversation 17th December 1980). Both quoted Reinhart's use of the word "anarchy" to describe the situation of proselyte courts in the United States.

66. Private conversation 26th November 1980 Rabbi Gerhard Graf. His remarks were confirmed and re-inforced by Rabbi Van der Zyl (Private conversation 20th June 1981).

67. Minutes, Assembly of Ministers 15th March 1950.

68. David Max Eichorn 'Conversions to Judaism by Reform and Conservative Rabbis' p. 306-9. Also typical of the fierce independence was the fate of a proposal to the C.C.A.R. in 1909 (shortly before Reinhart began studying for the ministry) declaring that Rabbis should not officiate at mixed marriages. Although the vast majority of Rabbis supported the sentiment the motion was rejected on the principle that collective authority should not impinge on individual conscience.

not considering it necessary as an entry rite to the faith. By contrast according to Reinhart the Reform synagogues in England⁶⁹ were "consistently conservative and organic" - a description that he made approvingly and the character of which he was determined to uphold. It was impossible, however, in the 1930's to establish the Reform Beth Din that he envisaged. There was no organisation or formal ties of any sort linking the various Reform congregations. There was also an insufficient number of Rabbinic colleagues to make it a standing institution. In effect Reinhart was contemplating an initiative which would involve revolutionary changes to the Reform community. In the meantime, however, he set to work on a series of structural changes to the ad hoc courts at West London. He sought to make conversion subject solely to the jurisdiction of ministers and to exclude lay membership of the courts. It is noticeable that this was only achieved once West London had acquired a third minister, thus supplying Reinhart⁷⁰ with sufficient manpower for a three-minister court. He extended this policy further by suggesting that it was preferable for ministers sitting on courts to be qualified Rabbis. He encouraged colleagues who were not ordained to

69. Reinhart in his Introduction to Morris Joseph Judaism As Creed and Life p. xiv.

70. Minutes, West London Synagogue Wardens 25th May 1937.

71

obtain semichah. Reinhart revised the syllabus for converts

72

and lengthened the period of study required. There was a stricter application of such standards, and a candidate who might previously have appeared before a court upon her first application found "We could not possibly entertain the idea of admitting Miss T. in so short a time ... we have a trust to fulfill, and in such a matter as this, a solemn

73

responsibility". Moreover Reinhart was aware that comparisons would be made between the West London ad hoc courts and the Chief Rabbi's Court, and he felt it vital that its calibre should stand up to external scrutiny. It was with obvious

74

pride concerning this point that he himself was later to write:

It is a fact that the standard of proselytes in 'Berkeley Street' [the location of West London] is higher than that of 'Mulberry Street' [the seat of the Chief Rabbi's Court]; and further that we want it to be known by the Community that it is so!

The second motive of Reinhart in his desire for a Reform

71. Reinhart to Goldberg 5th December 1937 R. P. Provincial Reform Synagogues; The Manchester Congregation of British Jews; similarly see Reinhart to Graf 5th December 1941 R.P. Provincial Congregations; Bradford 1945 - 1953. Reinhart's concern for correct credentials later extended to advising a colleague with a private semichah from an individual Rabbi to upgrade his status by applying for semichah from an established Rabbinic institution: Reinhart to Rosenblum 23rd May 1956 R.P. West London Synagogue 1956/7; West London Synagogue 1956.

72. R. P. Proselytes S-W; Proselytes Certificate and Syllabus.

73. Note 15th April 1937 R. P. Proselytes S-W; Joan Esther Turner.

74. Reinhart to Goldberg 22nd September 1940 R. P. Provincial Reform Synagogues; The Manchester Congregation of British Jews.

Beth Din was ideological rather than practical. He regarded Reform Judaism as authoritative Judaism and the true heir to Jewish tradition. He constantly emphasised that "it is not a sect" and that it preserved rather than destroyed the original⁷⁵ tenets of Judaism. Indeed Reinhart often felt it was misleading to give a label to 'Reform Judaism' and therefore⁷⁶ imply that it was different from Judaism itself:

The progressive quality of Judaism was traditional and had always been inherent in its very nature; to adopt any label such as "Progressive" was to invite the suggestion that our Judaism is not traditional.

If we are different from some other Synagogues it is not that we have a "new" or "qualified" Judaism. It is the other Synagogues (so-called "orthodox") who so often distort and misrepresent our ancient faith. Let us not be manoeuvred into being the less authentic Jews.

An example of the seriousness with which Reinhart took this claim to authenticity was the re-introduction of the use of a get. Whereas in Orthodox synagogues it was usual to apply for a get after a civil divorce and essential to possess it if a remarriage was intended, it had not been required at West London. When the more traditionally-minded German Reform Rabbis arrived in England and commented on the importance of a religious divorce, Reinhart felt compelled to re-examine the issue. In the absence of any Rabbinic body to which to turn for advice, the decision rested entirely with him. In 1945 he authorised Rabbi Dr. Arthur Katz to write out gittin for

75. The Scribe 1927; quoted in Golden op.cit. p. 5.

76. Minutes, Conference of Associated British Synagogues 23rd July 1946.

members of the congregation who had just undergone a divorce. That such a major step was undertaken on the say-so of an individual Rabbi was typical of the ad hoc and haphazard approach to decision-making then prevalent in Reform synagogues. The decision was not retroactive and did not apply to those who had already divorced and remarried, but henceforth a get was advised and was deemed necessary for anyone marrying at West London who was divorced. It thereafter became the norm for other Reform synagogues, owing both to the influence of West London and the backing it had among the German Rabbis who were to serve many of the congregations.

In the past the institution of a Beth Din capable of dealing with the needs of the community, particularly in the area of status changes, had been crucial to Jewish social and religious organisation. For Reinhart a Reform Beth Din was likewise essential if the Reform movement was to service those same needs and if it was to be considered normative and comprehensive. It was a view that he was to hold consistently, as he was to tell an A.S.G.B. Executive meeting on 9th May 1952 :

I believe the Judaism of our Association should and can be the way for Anglo-Jewry of the future. This can only be on condition that we are successful in avoiding sectarianism. Our course must continue to be, as our leaders in the past have kept it, in the central stream of Jewish life and thought.

Thus a curious contrast emerges : despite Reinhart's radicalism and his cavalier attitude to halachic authority, he was also

keen to restore many traditional procedures and emphasise Rabbinic influences. Unable to create a Reform Beth Din during the early part of his ministry he instituted a variety of measures designed to pave the way towards it.

It may be wondered that one person's commitment to the idea of a Reform Beth Din should be so important as to influence all others. Yet Reinhart was the Senior Minister of the West London Synagogue, and hence the leading religious spokesman of the Reform movement as a whole. In addition to this, he also had enormous personal influence as a result of his involvement in the formation and guidance of other Reform synagogues. It was thanks to his help and encouragement that many new congregations came into existence and existing ones developed. A brief review of some of his activities will illustrate his key role : in 1932 Reinhart went to Manchester to preach at a Sabbath service and to address a literary meeting. In 1933 he welcomed the approach of a small group of individuals who wished to establish a new synagogue in north west London. Initially they had intended to associate themselves with the Liberal Jewish Synagogue, but their overtures had met with little response. Reinhart, however, gave enthusiastic support to their plans, attended several committee meetings and presided at their inaugural service in September of that year. He was also responsible for West London Synagogue's decision to offer the congregation - the North Western Reform Synagogue - land which it owned in Golders

Green as a site for its building. Fifty years later his influence was remembered at the Synagogue's jubilee celebration:⁷⁸

One person - beyond anyone else - was responsible for the launching of this Congregation - and he was Harold F. Reinhart, of blessed memory, then Rabbi of the West London Synagogue. Without him it could not have happened in the year 1933. It was his vision, his faith, his determination, his encouragement, his untiring helpfulness in every conceivable way, that made it possible. The idea was his; he convinced me of it; and we saw it through together.

Also in 1933 Reinhart travelled to Glasgow to preach during the consecration service of the new building of the Reform Synagogue there. In 1934 Reinhart became involved similarly in the establishment of a new congregation in Edgware, and he addressed an inaugural public meeting on the principles of modern Judaism. It too had not intended to be a Reform congregation - merely an independent community - but as a result of the contact with Reinhart it affiliated with the West London Synagogue. In 1937 he preached at the High Holy Day services of St. George's Settlement Synagogue. The following year he was again in Manchester, this time to preside over a reception in honour of the seventieth birthday of its minister, Rev. Jacob Phillips. He also conducted occasional services for the North Western Reform Synagogue which was without a minister at that time. In 1940 Reinhart answered Bradford's request for help in finding a minister by sending Rabbi Graf to them. Two years later he persuaded the West London Council to send £100 to Bradford to assist them in their financial difficulties.

78. Rabbi Solomon Starrels Centre (Magazine of North Western Reform Synagogue) Jubilee Issue 1983.

Not surprisingly Reinhart was among the founders of the Associated British Synagogues in Great Britain in 1942 and was elected Vice-Chairman, a position he retained until his resignation from the movement fifteen years later. He also travelled to Glasgow, taking two other Rabbis with him, to organise a court for proselytes. In 1943 he responded to a call from families in Leeds to help establish a Reform community there. He addressed an inaugural meeting in Leeds and provided them with names of Jewish families who had moved to Leeds after they had been bombed out of London. He encouraged Graf at nearby Bradford to assist the new community. That same year he arranged another court session in Glasgow by sending Rabbi Cassell and Rabbi Schreiber to form one with Goldberg there. He also sent the synagogue £400, and persuaded Manchester Reform Synagogue and North Western Reform Synagogue to contribute another £100 each. In 1944 Reinhart sent Schreiber to take High Holy Day services in Glasgow and sent Rabbi Italiener to Leeds as a guest preacher, as well as conducting a service himself there, and also delivering a public lecture on the theme of "Our Judaism Today". In 1945, he arranged another court in Glasgow, addressed another public meeting in Leeds, and called a committee meeting in Edgware to resume the congregation's activities after they had ceased to function owing to the circumstances of the war. He also went to Glasgow to officiate at the induction of Cassell as minister of the synagogue. At the celebrations afterwards Reinhart was
79
thanked by the President, Captain A. E. Barnett, who

spoke of the esteem and affection in which he was held by the members of the Glasgow Progressive Synagogue who were deeply appreciative of the help and guidance they had received from him personally and from the West London Synagogue in general.

Further tribute to Reinhart's energy came the following year, after his attempts to resuscitate the Edgware congregation
80
proved successful:

If credit for the revival of the Edgware and District Congregation has to be given to one man, that man is the Senior Minister of the West London Synagogue, Rabbi H. F. Reinhart. At the end of December 1945 he had no more than half a dozen of the old members who agreed with him that the revival of the Congregation was both desirable and practicable. Thereupon things moved very rapidly ... a new committee, accommodation, burial rights, services ... All this, of course, would not have been possible without the fullest assistance of Mr. Reinhart personally and of the Council of the West London Synagogue.

During the course of the year, Reinhart also returned to Glasgow to address a public meeting.

In 1947, Reinhart arranged for Rabbi Bienheim to take the High Holy Day services in Leeds, and also to help out at Bradford for occasional Sabbath services when Graf was at Leeds. In addition, Reinhart persuaded the West London Synagogue to make an interest free loan of £1,000 to Leeds towards the acquisition of a permanent building of their own. At the same time, Reinhart was engaged in correspondence with Myer Cohen who was intent on establishing a Reform congregation in Cardiff. His important role at that point of the community's history followed the pattern already seen

80. Newsletter of the Edgware Reform Synagogue May 1946. In recognition of his services to the congregation, Reinhart was made its Life President.

81

elsewhere:

Rabbi Reinhart appears to have appreciated the problems of the provincial communities who were trying to establish Reform congregations ... his insight was gained through his experience in directing so many fledgling communities in post-war Britain. His advice was both of theological and administrative nature, and at times was quite specific, even suggesting the manner in which meetings of interested parties should be held. ... But Rabbi Reinhart's advice encompassed not only administrative details. His letters to Mr. Myer Cohen were a concise statement of Reform theology as it stood in 1947.

He was also responsible for suggesting that Rabbi Maybaum be the first minister of Edgware, and collected £670 as an interest-free loan for the purchase of his house. When Graf resigned unexpectedly from Bradford in 1948, leaving them leaderless and in turmoil, the Council decided that the only sensible step forward would be "to communicate with Rabbi Reinhart in order to get his advice on the matter".⁸² Reinhart had also been involved in inaugural committee meetings to establish a Reform synagogue in both Hendon and Southport in 1948, particularly with encouraging membership growth and organising regular services. In 1949 he arranged the loan of 150 High Holy Day prayer books and two scrolls to Hendon, while he arranged for Rev. Alexander Jaffe to conduct regular services at Southport. A loan of £2,000 was also made in favour of Edgware Reform Synagogue to assist in the purchase of a synagogue building. A similar amount was granted to North

81. A. S. Liss A Short History of Reform Judaism in South Wales 1947-1970 p. 19.

82. Minutes, Council of Bradford Reform Synagogue 7th July 1948.

Western Reform Synagogue for its new building in 1950.

Reinhart also visited Leeds to participate in a general meeting that year, as well as becoming involved in the formation of yet another Reform congregation, Wimbledon. In that same year Reinhart was appointed to the executive of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the international co-ordinating body which linked all Reform communities throughout the world. Reinhart was present too at the inaugural meetings of the Maidenhead (1953) and Brighton (1955) congregations. In addition he visited regularly these and other Reform synagogues as a guest preacher or spoke at their Annual General Meetings, keeping in touch especially with those in the provinces.

On the occasion of Reinhart's silver jubilee as minister of West London, letters of appreciation of his energy and assistance were received not only from the many congregations that he had helped establish, but also from older communities such as Bradford who still had cause to be grateful to him :⁸³

During these twenty-five years we have had the pleasure of welcoming him on many occasions, in times of difficulty, when he gave us much assistance and strength; and when times were perhaps better, his encouragement helped us still further. Our gratitude to him can never be over-stressed.

Throughout this period Reinhart had been the editor of the synagogue's monthly newsletter, the West London Synagogue Magazine. When he began in 1929 it consisted of four pages and dealt with matters appertaining to West London only. Reinhart expanded it to include a wide range of articles on all aspects

of Jewish life and containing news of other Reform congregations. In 1934 its change of character, particularly its relevance to other communities, was recognised when its title was changed to The Synagogue Review. When Reinhart resigned as editor upon his departure from West London, The Synagogue Review had grown into a national journal, of 34 pages, and was an important unifying factor within the Reform movement.

Further to all these achievements, the mere fact that Reinhart had remained in England during the war was also held in great esteem. The other American Reform ministers serving British pulpits - Baron, Cashdan and Perlzweig - had all returned to America in 1940. Reinhart by contrast had elected to stay at West London even though he remained an American citizen and could have returned honourably to the United States. He and his wife experienced twice the shock and upheaval of bomb damage to their home, while the Synagogue was very often in danger too. However "his devotion to his congregation had become part of a larger commitment to English⁸⁴ life" and there was no question of him leaving for safer shores. The remark that "Rabbi Reinhart's diocese extends from Lands End to John O'Groats"⁸⁵ was no exaggeration and reflected his influence and formative involvement with virtually all the other Reform congregations. Although his official position was solely that of minister to West London, unofficially his activities paralleled those of the Chief Rabbi who was called

84. Golden op.cit. p. 9.

85. Owen E. Mocatta in The Synagogue Review March 1954.

upon to make pastoral visits to communities throughout the country and to be a central source of advice and information. Whilst he lacked any title or administrative structure to support him, Reinhart occupied a similar role within the Reform movement. His desire to establish a Reform Beth Din therefore carried considerable weight and, in the event, brought about its achievement.

If the first of the developments affecting the world of British Reform Judaism in the 1930's was the personality of Reinhart, the second was the growth of Reform membership and communities. As was seen earlier once the initial drama of the Reform secession had taken place in 1840 there was little evidence of any missionary spirit or any desire to establish

branch congregations. Except in Manchester (and probably Liverpool) provincial Jewry at the time was not yet middle-class bourgeois in English terms. However new patterns of Jewish settlement from city centres into the suburbs led to profound changes. In London the emigration from the East End at the turn of the century exploded during the inter-war years, going in all directions, but with a particularly strong move north-

86

west, virtually following the route of the Northern Line.

This large shift in the Jewish population led to the establishment of many new communities. The United Synagogue, which consisted of thirty-three synagogues in 1930, was swollen by another forty-two by 1949. Thus it more than doubled the number of its constituent synagogues within a space of twenty years. However, not all suburban Jews continued their former religious affiliation. As Marshall Sklare has shown in his

86. See V. D. Lipman 'The Development of London Jewry' p. 48ff.

study of American Jewry in the same period, "suburbanisation brought with it the problems of the maintenance of Jewish identity".⁸⁷ Many in America whose attachment to Orthodoxy was superficial took the opportunity afforded by their physical move into new surroundings to effect a religious transition as well. This occurred in Britain too, albeit on a more modest level. New Reform communities in Golders Green (the North Western Reform Synagogue), Edgware and Hendon reflected the great migration to North West London, while the one in Wimbledon indicated the move south. A similar process took place in other urban centres, such as Manchester and Leeds, where new Reform Synagogues also arose. The four Reform Synagogues established by 1930 grew to thirteen within twenty years. Whereas the new suburban Orthodox synagogues largely consisted of members who had previously belonged to inner⁸⁸ London Orthodox synagogues a high proportion of those joining the new Reform synagogues had not previously been affiliated to another Reform synagogue.⁸⁹ Thus the growth of the Reform arose initially from calls outside of the established Reform congregations and as a result of Jewish settlement in new areas.

87. Marshall Sklare Conservative Judaism p. 256.

88. Within Orthodoxy, however, there was a transference of members from Federation Synagogues to the United Synagogue, which was quicker to respond to the need for new communities in the suburbs; see Aubrey Newman The United Synagogue p. 118-9; Stephen Sharot op.cit. 155-7.

89. A typical example is provided by Edgware Reform Synagogue, established in 1934 and in 1987 the largest Reform congregation in Great Britain: the thirteen founder members all previously belonged to the United Synagogue.

In addition to these demographic changes, the 1930's also saw the influx of some 60,000 German Jews fleeing from Nazi oppression. It was Germany that had been the birthplace of the Reform movement in Judaism at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since that time it had attracted wide support, had become well established, and its Rabbis enjoyed a high degree of respect amongst the general Jewish community for their combination of Jewish and secular scholarship. Unlike Reform Judaism in England which took place outside of Orthodox congregations and was seen as a peripheral group, in Germany Reform Judaism manifested itself within old-established communities. It was much stronger and more generally accepted. Many of the German refugees, therefore, were sympathetic to Reform Judaism, and their arrival swelled existing⁹⁰ congregations and helped to lead to the foundation of new ones. There were also those who were nominally Orthodox and might have remained within the Orthodox fold had the Chief Rabbis and Honorary Officers been able to put into practice a scheme of special services designed specifically to attract them. However their attempts were thwarted by the Council of the United Synagogue, and those who preferred services that started late on a Friday evening and included a sermon could⁹¹ find them only in Reform synagogues. Indeed it was a development whose importance was realised at the time by Reinhart, who wrote to other Reform synagogues urging them to

90. For a general survey see Walter M. Schwab 'Some Aspects of the Relationship between the German and the Anglo-Jewish Community' p. 171ff.

91. Aubrey Newman The United Synagogue p. 107, 133-4.

make every effort to respond positively to the newcomers:

It is a well known fact that a much larger proportion of Germans are sympathetic to a progressive interpretation. If by catering a little to the particular needs of the refugees at the moment, I think that the congregation should not only be rendering a service to the individual refugee but at the same time will be discovering a source of new strength for the congregation in time to come.

The membership growth of individual Reform congregations illustrates the new pattern of synagogue affiliation : the North Western boasted 303 members in 1936, 500 by 1945, and 1162 by 1956. The 20 families belonging to Edgware in 1939 grew to 54 in 1946, and leapt to 450 in 1959. Orthodox synagogues in the area also grew apace then - but they were no longer the only synagogues and now had to compete with an active Reform presence. Moreover, the Reform membership grew in greater proportion than did its Orthodox counterpart. The growth of the former was due to those joining Reform synagogues for the first time, whereas that of the latter was often a shift from an Orthodox synagogue in one part of London to that in another part. Similar growth was recorded by Reform communities outside of North West London : thus Wimbledon increased from 63 members in 1950 to 225 by 1960. The same pattern occurred in the provinces too : Bournemouth saw its 77 families in 1948 increase by a third by 1953, while the 100 members belonging to Sinai in Leeds in 1947 had quintupled by

⁹³
1961.

The sum total of these individual growths resulted in a fast-rate of increase for the Reform movement as a whole. The total Reform membership in London rose from approximately 4,000 in 1940 to 15,000 in 1960. Even more striking was the success in the provinces; between 1949 and 1970 seventeen new synagogues were opened in all, and of these nine were Reform. Although the total annual average of synagogue marriages declined after World War II, the annual average of marriages performed by Reform synagogues rose from 130 in 1941-50 to 192 in 1961-5. By contrast the number of marriages under the auspices of those recognising the Chief Rabbi's authority fell ⁹⁴ by half in the corresponding period. By 1961-5 the ratio of marriages to deaths within the Orthodox group was 73%, whereas ⁹⁵ it was 154% within Reform synagogues.

Amongst the continental refugees who came to England were some thirty-five Reform Rabbis. Their arrival was crucial for both the expansion of the Reform movement and the establishment of the Reform Beth Din, and constitutes a third development affecting British Reform Jewry. There was at that time no facility for training Reform Rabbis in England. Home-grown lay preachers might appear, such as Basil Henriques, while some

93. For full details of the growth of Reform synagogues see Appendix III.

94. S. J. Prais and Marlana Schmool 'Statistics of Jewish Marriages in Great Britain' p. 154.

95. S. J. Prais and Marlana Schmool 'The Size and Structure of the Anglo-Jewish Population 1960-65' p. 17.

Jews' College graduates switched allegiance and joined Reform synagogues, such as Goldberg and Philip Cohen. The more usual source for obtaining ministers, and the only method of ensuring Rabbinic leadership, was importing Americans who had graduated from the Hebrew Union College. Thus it was that the West London Synagogue had brought Reinhart over from the United States to succeed Morris Joseph. The few other ordained Rabbis in England also came from across the Atlantic, Cashdan (also at West London), Baron (serving Glasgow), and Starrels (serving North Western Reform).

The sudden immigration of the German Reform Rabbis provided the movement with the personal quality of leadership to which it could not otherwise have aspired. They were graduates of the highly esteemed Berlin Rabbinical College, the Hochschule fuer die Wissenschaft des Judentums, which combined traditional Jewish learning with modern studies. Most of them had doctorates in addition to their Rabbinical ordination. Some were congregational ministers, others were scholars and academics. Their commitment to Reform Judaism gave British Reform a new strength and distinction. Commenting two decades later on this unequalled chance, Owen E. Mocatta, President of the West London Synagogue, wrote:

Up to 1933, it had been impossible to provide embryonic Reform congregations with ministers. Now, thanks to Hitler, an opportunity was presented; and so, due to this unforeseen source of trained and qualified ministers, the Association of Synagogues came into being and Reform congregations began to multiply.

In itself, the arrival of the Rabbis and their families did not change anything. It was the warm reception that they received from Reinhart personally and the manner in which he⁹⁷ used their talents that led to such major effects:

From 1933 onwards, the growing plight of German Jewry and the welfare of those who were able to escape from oppression became a constant concern of the Anglo-Jewish community, and many organisations and individuals were deeply involved in the work of alleviation; but it can be said without reservation that no synagogue responded more effectively to the needs of the moment than Upper Berkeley Street, and that no one man acquitted himself more nobly than Harold Reinhart.

It is a testimony echoed by many others, particularly those who⁹⁸ benefitted from his assistance and later became his colleagues:

He saw the potential, and the rabbinic newcomers found in him guidance and counsel. He channelled this 'manpower' with much understanding and care ... He recognised that in these German Rabbis there existed a trained and experienced group of communal and religious leaders. Thus he actively co-ordinated the activities of these ministers and the fledgling groups of Reformers in the provinces.

⁹⁹
According to another Rabbi, Reinhart stood out as the person who gave the warmest welcome to the German Reform Rabbis in England, although of course much work was done by many others on behalf of the refugees in general.

97. Golden op. cit. p. 8.

98. G. Graf 'The Influence of the German Reform Rabbis on British Reform Judaism' p. 156. Graf's comments are echoed by A. S. Liss op.cit. p. 4.

99. Private conversation Rabbi Curtis Cassell 16th December 1980.

Reinhart's efforts were prodigious. He put into practice a sermon he had preached after the Nazis came to power: "Whatever is in our power to do to help our afflicted brothers we should not hesitate to do".¹⁰⁰ He established "The 1933 Club" at West London, which served both as a social club and a welfare organisation for Jewish refugees throughout London, and he also initiated the Monday Circle - weekly meetings and seminars for the refugee Rabbis - which began in 1939. He was also active on behalf of individual Rabbis and their specific problems : when he heard that Rabbi Rosenthal had been refused help by the Advisory Committee for the Admission of Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers because he was a Reform Rabbi and that he was currently wandering in the streets of Berlin to escape arrest, Reinhart took up his case personally with the Home Office and succeeded in gaining permission for him to find¹⁰¹ haven in England. He later found work for Rosenthal in the United States, where he went in 1946, and maintained contact with his family long after his death. When another refugee Rabbi, Pfingst, was interned, it was Reinhart who worked to

100. Sermon preached at West London Synagogue May 1933; quoted Golden op.cit. p. 69.

101. R. P. Refugee Rabbis P-R; Rosenthal. It is instructive to note the number of letters that Reinhart wrote on Rosenthal's behalf when the case first came to his attention in December 1938 : to the Jewish Refugee Committee, the Home Office, the Refugee Children's Movement, Chief Rabbi Dr. Hertz, the Chief Rabbi's Religious Emergency Council, Jews' Temporary Shelter, the Advisory Committee for the Admission of Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers, and also to the private address of Mr. Otto Schiff, the Chairman of the latter committee (see Appendix IV). Similar time and effort were devoted to the cases of others in distress too.

102

secure his release. When the aged German cantor, Rev.

Feibelman, arrived in England in April 1939 and in ill-health,

Reinhart made sure he was provided for financially and saw to

103

his medical expenses. It was also Reinhart who created, and

often funded through West London Synagogue, many jobs for the

refugee Rabbis. Italiener, Katz and Cassell were all employed

as Assistant Ministers at West London, while Schreiber, Katten,

Curtis, Kokotek, Lehmann and Pfingst were employed as teachers.

Others such as Ledermann, Lemle, Salzberger and Warschauer were

asked to contribute articles to The Synagogue Review and

thereby have an opportunity both to exercise their talents and

supplement their income. The letter of thanks from Rabbi Dr.

Samuel Atlas was typical of the sentiments expressed by so

104

many refugee ministers:

Before leaving for the United States I should like to express my deepest gratitude to the Executive of the West London Synagogue for their kindness and generous hospitality which they have extended to me for over seven years, since my arrival in England. ... I have always felt at home within the walls of the West London Synagogue, the doors of which were open to me at all times ... Moreover the seminars in philosophy and in Talmud which Mr. Reinhart's creative initiative arranged for me has helped me to continue my academic work, without which I would have been lacking much-needed stimulus. I should like here, too, especially to thank Mr. Reinhart, whose cordial friendship I have been privileged to enjoy in such abundant measure, for all that he has done for me. That I am now going to the Hebrew Union College is also due to his friendship and initiative.

Reinhart also acted as an unofficial employment agency for

102. R. P. Refugee Rabbis P-R: Pfingst.

103. R. P. Provincial Reform Synagogues; Feibelman.

104. The Synagogue Review February 1942.

the other Reform Synagogues and was responsible for sending
many refugee Rabbis all over the country.¹⁰⁵ In addition,
funding for these posts was supported in part by the West
London Synagogue. Some refugee Rabbis did not have
congregational positions but were supported by other means;
thus Baeck and Loewenstamm, who were appointed President and
Director respectively of the Society for Jewish Study which was
founded in 1946 due to Reinhart's personal initiative.
Bienheim, Salzberger and Dorfler were also in regular contact
with Reinhart, whilst his files on "Refugee Rabbis" reveal that
in addition he corresponded with and assisted Rabbis Krim,
Lasker, Margules, Oppenheim, Popper, Eschelbacher, Sisenstendt,
Rappoport, Seligmann, Schwarzschild, Schoenberger, Weil,
Witebski, Wise, and Rev. Seligsohn. Some were content to
retire in peace in England, others later went to the United
States to seek positions there, but all of them received much
care and attention from Reinhart. It is not surprising,
therefore, that Dr. Leo Baeck. declared "The German Rabbis
¹⁰⁶
should set up a monument to him". Reinhart's efforts,
moreover, were conducted despite some initial opposition from
the home-born Jewish community : for instance the Council
Minutes of the North Western Reform Synagogue in January 1940

105. Reinhart sent Italiener to St. George's in 1939, Graf to
Bradford in 1940, Van der Zyl to North Western in 1943,
Sawady to St. George's in 1944, Cassell to Glasgow in
1945, Maybaum to Edgware and Berg to Bournemouth in 1947,
and Bienheim to Bradford in 1949.

106. Private conversation 14th January 1986 Curtis Cassell.

107

record:

A suggestion made by Dr. Cohn and seconded by Mr. Stern that during Rev. Perlzweig's absence and on some occasion when no other preacher was available, a German Rabbi be invited to deliver a sermon in German - the service in all other respects remaining unaltered. The suggestion was rejected, only two people voting in its favour.

Reinhart persisted in his efforts on behalf of the refugee Rabbis, and was single-handedly responsible for their integration into the Reform movement. It is noticeable that, despite having initially rejected the services of an occasional German Rabbi, the North Western's next appointment of a permanent Rabbi was one of those same refugees, Van der Zyl. It was Van der Zyl, moreover, who was later to succeed Reinhart at West London and who eventually became Life President of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. Others also came to occupy leading positions : Curtis became Clerk to the Beth Din in 1948 and held office for the next 23 years, Maybaum became one of the leading Anglo-Jewish theologians, while Katten and Dorfler were principal lecturers at the newly-established Leo Baeck College, which was responsible for training a new generation of Rabbis and enabled the Reform movement in Britain to provide its own religious leadership for the first time. Commenting on the changes within the Reform movement that resulted, Mocatta

107. Minutes, Council of West London Synagogue 28th January 1940. It should be noted that even German Rabbis able to speak English were regarded with suspicion because of their accent and origins: see Aubrey Newman The United Synagogue p. 150. In a similar case the Birmingham Liberal Synagogue would only grant the Birmingham Jewish Refugees Club use of its hall if no lectures were delivered in German: see Zoe Joseph Survivors p. 51.

108

concluded:

It may well be that this development will be regarded as the most significant event in Rabbi Reinhart's reign at Berkeley Street. The founders, a hundred years ago, did not conceive of a movement branching out in many directions and enrolling supporters wherever they might be found. They desired nothing more than to cultivate their own garden, and to be left in peace. Today, the Reform Synagogue has given birth to a Reform movement, growing, expanding, strengthening. Thus while the influence of his predecessors was principally confined to the precincts of one Synagogue, Rabbi Reinhart's diocese extends from Lands End to John O'Groats. He may well look back with some satisfaction on the first twenty-five years of his ministry.

If the influx of German Rabbis proved so important for the Reform movement in general, they were equally significant for Reinhart's desire to establish a Reform Beth Din in particular. Having for years been one of only a few Reform Rabbis in England, Reinhart suddenly found himself supplied with many Rabbis of experience and learning who would be able to sit on a Beth Din. Moreover Reinhart's leaning towards the conservative nature of English Reform Judaism was shared by the refugee Rabbis, whose brand of Judaism was much more traditional than that which Reinhart had experienced in North America. They were schooled on the idea that Judaism is based on historical development, and that it should progress only in a careful and orderly structure. Reinhart's stress that "our revisions and adaptions^(sic) must be organic" matched their philosophy entirely.¹⁰⁹ The availability of such Rabbinic manpower was to make the establishment of a Reform Beth Din feasible in practice. It

108. The Synagogue Review March 1954.

109. The West London Synagogue Magazine December 1929.

was to be one of the refugee Rabbis, Michael Curtis, who was eventually appointed as the first Clerk to the Reform Beth Din. Apart from Reinhart himself and Goldberg in Manchester, the Reform Beth Din was to be manned exclusively by the refugee Rabbis for the first six years of its existence, and they were to dominate it for the whole of the period under study. Those that sat on its courts were Baeck, Berg, Bienheim, Cassell, Curtis, Dorfler, Graf, Italiener, Katten, Katz, Lowenstamm, Maybaum, Sawady, Shreiber and Van der Zyl. Without them the formation of the Reform Beth Din would have been impossible.

Alongside the developments within Orthodox and Reform circles, an even more dramatic change was to burst upon the scene. The Second World War had a profound impact on British life in general and effected the Jewish community equally. It resulted in widespread disruption of communal life, which was then predominantly under the auspices of Orthodox authorities. Some 60,000 Jews - approximately 15% of British Jewry - joined the armed forces. Many of the Jewish civilian population in London and other sensitive areas were evacuated into the country to escape the bombing raids. There had been little preparation by Jewish organisations for such an eventuality even though evacuation had been discussed by civil defence committees fifteen years earlier and were made public six years before the war.¹¹⁰ It meant that when war broke out on 1st September 1939 and mass evacuation swung into action, the United Synagogue was faced virtually overnight with the need to provide services, organise religious education, and ensure

110. Ben Wicks No Time To Wave Goodbye p. 9-14.

kosher food supplies to a community that was now dispersed and scattered throughout the country. Very often it was not even known where Jews had been relocated. In addition many who occupied such roles in peace-time were themselves called away for war duties. Ministers, too, were in short supply owing to the call for them to become full-time chaplains. Even in areas where there already were established congregations, innumerable problems occurred. Services were limited because of the constraints of black-outs and air raid warnings:

111

Unthinkable as it might have been to advise against the holding of services, undesirable it undoubtedly was to advise the concentration of large numbers of people in buildings especially vulnerable to bombings at a time when bombings were particularly expected.

Classes for children were difficult to maintain, and those that did survive often operated on a considerably less regular level. The typical pre-war pattern of Jewish education was to have classes on Sunday mornings and four times midweek after school. During the war this was reduced frequently to Sunday mornings only, and remained as such in many areas afterwards.

112

In some places the evacuated children were not even known about by the local community, and consequently no provision was made for their educational needs. Thus in Maidenhead it was only thanks to the voluntary efforts of an evacuated teacher that 80 Jewish children, whom he had discovered accidentally, received any Jewish tuition.

113

111. Aubrey Newman The United Synagogue p. 152.

112. Arnold Levy Sunderland Jewish Community p. 243.

113. Simon Joseph Autobiography p. 171.

There were enormous upheavals in family life. Those children who remained at home often found their fathers serving abroad and their mothers engaged in war work. The exigencies of war resulted often in the abandonment of Jewish observances :

114

The deterioration in religious knowledge is immense. If before the war there was apathy, today there is to be found in young people real antagonism. The fine parental example in religion that has always characterised the Jewish home is fast disappearing.

Some of the parents make no attempt to revive the lovely Sabbath spirit which life in public shelters or in over-crowded billets had made impossible. Few of the adolescents have an elementary knowledge of the Bible or of Israel's history. Fewer still attend public worship, and even fewer know how to pray by themselves.

It was even more disruptive for those children who were evacuated with their mothers only, their fathers being on active service or having to remain in the cities to carry on their jobs. Even worse consequences accompanied those children who were evacuated by themselves. Not only were they without their families but they were often cut off from all Jewish life completely. On the evacuation application forms there was no reference to religious persuasion because the government authorities believed that the emergency did not leave them any time to cater for individual needs and desires. Whilst many host families tried to take account of their charges' Jewishness, others made no such effort and made them attend

Church every day, if not three times on Sunday. Lack of
Jewish education coupled with Christian indoctrination led to
baptism in some cases and religious confusion in many others:

You have to understand that I was also being exposed
to chapel attendance at school and the sentimental
attractions of conventional Anglicanism - stained
glass, familiar hymns, surplices, and plenty of
architecture - which created a spiritual
schizophrenia.

Others who were evacuees have recorded less exalted memories
but often refer to lifestyles that altered irrevocably their
religious behaviour and outlook, whether it be having
visitations from Father Christmas or breaking the dietary laws:

In the foster home I learned to eat pork and bacon,
which I had never had before, and I developed a real
taste for it. What I got out of that experience was
that I learned to say "I can!" rather than "cannot".

As the only religious organisation seen as having de facto
responsibility for British Jewry, the Office of the Chief Rabbi
came under considerable criticism for the breakdown in communal
services. Public ire was roused in particular in March 1941
when the Chief Rabbi's Court refused to sanction the sale of
hind-quarters owing to war-time conditions and the difficulties
of supervision. A leading article in the Jewish Chronicle the
following week complained that it was an unnecessary
administrative failure, and it would leave kosher butchers

115. Ben Wicks op.cit. p.93; Vera Gissing Pearls of Childhood
p. 56.

116. David Benedictus 'Why They Flock Twice a Year'.

117. Ben Wicks op.cit. p. 213; see also pp. 95, 101.

with insufficient meat supplies, and that it would force many Jews to register with non-kosher butchers if they did not wish their meat rations reduced. It concluded:

118

And so the flight from Kashrut and Orthodoxy will speed up. This is just what happened a few years ago when the Beth Din disturbed the former system of dealing with hind-quarters meat, and the incentive is far stronger today. In fact, and paradoxical as it may seem, the Beth Din has perhaps in this way caused more Jews to forsake the Din and eat trefa forbidden meat than any other influence in our midst ... the question may easily arise whether the Beth Din should not be asked to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, and contrive a more workable interpretation of the Law in the face of the extraordinary circumstances that prevail today.

The reactions of individual correspondents followed the same tone, accusing the Chief Rabbi's Court of showing "a lamentable sense of proportion" or declared that "With all this talk of 'Back to Judaism', it is ironical that the leaders of the community should help us to drift away". A more general criticism was that no guidance was given on urgent practical issues that were suddenly facing Jews every day. It was epitomised by the plea

119

120

121

I do not ask for another Beth Din. Nor do I ask that the existing body should abrogate Jewish Law. I ask that it tell me and thousands like me, what I and my family are to do in the positions in which we find ourselves.

1. Is a soldier permitted to work on the Sabbath?
2. Is he to abstain from meat of all kinds and margarine?

118. J. C. 28th March 1941.

119. J. C. 4th April 1941.

120. J. C. 13th June 1941.

121. J. C. 14th March 1941.

3. Is a man who, having kept the Sabbath at great personal sacrifice, when presented with an order backed by the Ministry of Supply, requiring him in the National Emergency to work a seven day week, to throw up his job and risk possible prosecution?
4. Since I can neither afford to send my children Kasher food, nor find a Jewish billetor for them, am I (a) to bring them back to London or (b) to advise them only to eat bread and milk?
5. Is my wife, an A.R.P. telephone operator, to carry on on the Sabbath?

No such detailed guidance was ever made available, leaving most Jews to work out their own answers. It contributed both to the decline in religious standards, and to the growing disharmony between the general community and the Orthodox leadership.

Another significant effect of the war-years was the sharp rise in inter-marriage - Jews marrying non-Jews - a phenomenon that had been condemned throughout the ages by communal leaders because of the threat it posed to Jewish survival. Whilst inter-marriage had always occurred within Anglo-Jewry it had been contained to a limited degree. It was realised, however, that the dislocation of the communal structure and the decrease in religious identification that the war would bring would also lead to a much higher rate of inter-marriage. Some Reform Synagogues even made preparations for it soon after war was

122

declared:

In anticipation of a number of rushed mixed marriages due to war conditions it was agreed that such marriages and/or conversions could be carried out by the Minister subject to consultation with the Presiding Warden and Secretary.

An article in the Jewish press during the war drew attention to the problem "of social mixing of Jewish and non-Jewish young people notably at dances ... in the Forces, or in their work".¹²³ War-time conditions not only meant the lowering of social barriers between Jews and non-Jews but also a relaxation of sexual morals, resulting in many accidental pregnancies and marriages that might otherwise not have been arranged. By 1945 the Chief Rabbi's Court felt it necessary to issue a 'Special Pronouncement' on inter-marriage:¹²⁴

Inter-marriage is unfortunately increasing. Formerly a Jew who married an unconverted non-Jewess was looked upon by his fellow Jews as a renegade, and he too considered himself as such. No one classed the children of such a union as Jews, and the parents had no part or function in Jewish life. But today few seem to realise the confusion in family life, the chaos in regard to burial, and other lamentable complications that such a union brings in its train. Even more disturbing is the fact, recently brought to our notice, that men who have married out of the faith, have in some places a hand in the control of congregational affairs. This is clearly intolerable.

In an attempt to halt the trend it was decreed that Jewish males who married out were banned from synagogue membership and could not utilise the services of a mohel for their sons. The extent of the courtship between Jews and non-Jews is evident from the number of proselyte enquiries at West London synagogue : whereas before the war they numbered 20 - 30 per annum, by 1942 they had increased to 54, and in 1945 leapt to 105¹²⁵ enquiries. The majority of enquirers did not pursue their

123. J. C. 21st January 1944.

124. J. C. 6th April 1945.

125. Proselyte Enquiry Book, West London Synagogue.

interest in conversion after their initial approach to the Synagogue. Although some of the engaged couples may have separated, it must be assumed that many marriages went ahead and constituted mixed marriages. Moreover, in 40% of the cases the couples already were married. While there are no specific figures available for inter-marriage its dramatic increase can be discerned in the marriage statistics generally: ¹²⁶ whereas the synagogue marriage rate per thousand for the decade beginning 1931 was 8.4, in the decade beginning 1941 it dropped to 7.3, while for the decade beginning in 1951 it plummeted to 4.6. Thus synagogue marriages virtually halved within two decades. As there was no major change in the marriage rate for the general population in the corresponding period, nor any fluctuation in the size of the Jewish community, it indicates a ¹²⁷ steep rise in inter-marriage.

The war brought enormous changes to British Jewry - some evacuated families never returned to their homes but settled in new areas, others never fully returned to Judaism. Religious loyalty declined greatly, whilst the children suffered ¹²⁸ educational havoc. For the children

above all it was their attitude to authority - along with that of their parents - that would never be the same again. As the First World War had destroyed the sense of loyalty of millions who had felt cheated on their return from France, so, in the Second World War, the evacuation shattered many people's belief that authority was there to be blindly obeyed.

126. S. J. Prais and Marlana Schmool 'Statistics of Jewish Marriage in Great Britain' p. 151-3.

127. S. J. Prais 'Statistical Research Needs and Prospects' p. 121; Marlana Schmool 'Can We Measure Outmarriage?'

128. Ben Wicks op.cit. p. 197.

The year 1945 brought an end to the war, but its repercussions remained. Some areas of the country, particularly the East End of London, had experienced large-scale destruction of homes and synagogues, leading to the dispersal of the communities that had existed there. In Stepney, for instance, the Jewish population declined from about 60,000 in 1940 to 30,000 in 1945, and the war resulted in a massive exodus of Jews from the East End.¹²⁹ Even for those Jewish servicemen and women who, along with civilian evacuees, returned to their homes, the pattern of Jewish life had been radically altered. The consequences were felt for decades afterwards:¹³⁰

It is only now that we experience in England what damage has been done to the religious life of our community by the evacuation when thousands of boys and girls who are now, or ought to be, the mainstay of the Anglo-Jewish community were weaned away from practical religious observance. I am also convinced that the very high rate of inter-marriage now prevailing in the Anglo-Jewish community can be traced back to the evacuation period.

Thus in the decade beginning 1935 major changes had taken place within the Orthodox and Reform communities, and which had considerable ramifications for the future direction of both. They were independent of each other, although related to similar sources : the arrival of new personalities such as Abramsky and Reinhart, and the influence and effect of continental refugees. In addition the war provoked critical developments in the life of Anglo-Jewry in general. A new era had begun.

129. G. Alderman The Federation of Synagogues 1887-1987 p. 69.

130. Dayan Isidore Grunfeld to Fabian Schonfeld 21st October 1974; correspondence belonging to Dr. Judith Grunfeld.

CHAPTER III

THE REFORM BETH DIN

By 1942 three of the factors behind both the need for and the means of achieving a Reform Beth Din were in place: the drive of Reinhart, the growth of Reform synagogues, and the arrival of the German Reform Rabbis. However, one further crucial step was required before concrete plans could be put into operation. There were still no formal links between the Reform synagogues. It was a measure of the fierce independence of the congregations that this state of affairs should have lasted even after a hundred years of Reform Judaism in Britain. By then their number had grown to six, with West London, Manchester and Bradford being joined by St. George's¹ Settlement, North Western and Glasgow. However, this was to change decisively on 4th January 1942 when delegates from the six congregations gathered together in Manchester under the name of "The Associated British Synagogues". It was the first official meeting of Reform representatives and, from what was initially a very limited agenda, was to lead to momentous changes.

The purpose of the meeting was to consider a unified response to the policies of the Joint Emergency Committee for Jewish Religious Education, which had been sponsored by the Board of Deputies in order to deal with the war-time education

1. Edgware, although founded in 1935, was disbanded temporarily between 1939 and 1945 because of the disruption to activities caused by the war.

of Jewish children. Chief Rabbi Hertz had concluded an agreement with the Committee whereby members of the Reform community were to be excluded from the Committee, they were to be debarred as teachers, and no part of the funds raised by the Board would be used for religious education along Reform lines.² It reflected the more uncompromising stance of the Chief Rabbinate and the disappearance of inter-communal harmony. Reinhart had been one of the prime movers of the meeting and took a leading role in the discussions. He strongly advocated co-operation between the six congregations to provide religious education for their children, as well as for those without any synagogue affiliation and also for refugee children from progressive homes. His suggestion was favourably received, although further discussion quickly indicated that such a policy would involve establishing and financing a complex range of activities : training teachers, formulating curricula, studying educational problems, providing text-books and organising classes. This need, along with the sentiment expressed by many delegates that it was necessary "to speak³ with a united Reform voice", inevitably led to the realisation that an organisational structure was necessary.

It was agreed that the six synagogues should formalise links with each other, although each would maintain its independence and have total autonomy in religious, financial and other matters. Delegates would meet regularly to discuss

2. J. C. 5th September 1941; The Synagogue Review December 1941 p. 17.
3. Minutes, Associated British Synagogues 4th January 1942.

common concerns and implement agreed policies. It signalled the birth of Reform as an active movement. What had started off as a protest meeting against the Chief Rabbi's ruling ended as the foundation of a formal Reform movement. There was an ironic parallel with the foundation of the first Reform synagogue, for just as West London had been pushed into existence by the intransigence of the Bevis Marks authorities rather than being a deliberate breakaway, so the Reform movement came into existence accidentally in reaction to moves by the Chief Rabbinate.

By the close of the meeting a fourteen-point plan had emerged covering a wide spectrum of topics far beyond the original concern of childrens' religious education. It included writing pamphlets on Jewish subjects from a Reform perspective, establishing a central library as a resource centre for the congregations, training Rabbis for Reform pulpits, and publishing a joint journal. It also contained the intention "To sponsor Rabbinical Court and Rabbinical Conference".⁴ The plan testified to the new confidence amongst the Reform synagogues and a realisation that expansion could only come through co-operation. There was now an official structure through which other developments, such as a Rabbinical Court, could take place. The inclusion of the Court as one of the fourteen points was at Reinhart's instigation and reflected his keenness to establish a Reform Beth Din as soon as possible now that the opportunity presented itself.

4. R. P. A.S.G.B. and Society of Jewish Study; A.S.G.B. 1946, 1947.

In the ensuing months the main attention of the new body was devoted to the issue that had brought it together, making arrangements for the religious education of children. It was not till the next meeting of the delegates on 22nd November that there was time for discussion of a Rabbinical Court :

Mr. Goldberg [Minister of Manchester] expressed the opinion that we needed a "Beth Din" to pronounce upon Jewish matters in accordance with our views. The subject was debated at length. Mr. Reinhart pointed out that in fact there had always been a "Beth Din" at "Berkeley Street", but that its function had been mostly confined to the reception of proselytes.

It is intriguing that in this first debate on a Beth Din, the two men who were going to be the main protagonists in the lengthy issue should adopt positions so untypical of their later stances, Goldberg being enthusiastic and Reinhart appearing reluctant. However, in this instance the discussion was more on a policy-making body - which later came into effect as the Assembly of Ministers - rather than a court regulating matters of status, which was the prime function of the future Reform Beth Din. It was resolved that the issue be included in the brief of the Committee for Co-operation, Extension and Central Authority that was established at the end of the Conference. It consisted of Reinhart, Goldberg, S. Rainsbury (North Western), Basil Henriques (St. George's Settlement), H. Marks and Edward Henriques (both from West London). One of the tasks allocated to the committee was to consider the expansion of the Reform Movement in areas where no such

synagogue existed. Another was to report on ways of harmonising the form of services used in the constituent⁵ synagogues. There was a third objective:

To consider and report on the desirability and possibility of establishing

- 1) a body common to all constituent Synagogues to serve as a "Beth Din",

and

- 2) a body to discharge duties similar to those discharged by the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis (C.C.A.R.) had been founded in 1889 and had become the national association for American Reform Rabbis. Its main function was to provide a link between the Rabbis through regular meetings, and to be a central body for expressing their views on religious and other matters. Reinhart had been a member of the C.C.A.R. when a minister in the United States and maintained contact with it even when in England.

The proposed committee did not meet for seven months, "circumstances having rendered it impossible to arrange an⁶ earlier meeting". Its task was made even more difficult by having extra responsibilities allocated to it : the establishment of a central fund to provide financial assistance for constituent bodies requiring it, and means of spreading the Reform movement in Glasgow. These were both major issues that were to demand much time and energy. The

5. Minutes, A. S. G. B. 22nd November 1942.

6. Minutes, Associated British Synagogues 20th June 1943.

central fund involved debate over how the money was to be collected, whose responsibility it was, and how it was to be administered. It also raised questions about the role of the A.B.S. One synagogue - Manchester - had already pointed out "the unwisdom of financial control from the centre", a concern that was to become a recurrent theme in Manchester's attitude to the Reform Beth Din.⁷ The matter of Glasgow related to the problems it was experiencing and its falling membership role due to lack of leadership. In addition to these tasks the committee became pre-occupied with other pressing issues that arose : requests to establish a Reform synagogue in Leeds and in Bournemouth; the need to print and re-edit the prayer book; the question of relations with the Liberal synagogues. War-time conditions added to the difficulties of arranging meetings and putting policies into action. Considerable attention was devoted to drawing up a constitution for the movement, with much discussion on synagogue representation, the powers and duties of an executive, rates of per capita funding. As a result of all these additional concerns and the intense debates they inspired, the matter of the Rabbinic Court received no attention and was postponed for several years in order to devote more time to the more immediate issues at hand. The very nature of the movement was still unresolved, and the Chairman opened the 1946 Conference by asking a basic question:⁸

In the implementation of its aims was the A.B.S. to be an executive body with independent funds, capable of taking action on behalf of all constituent synagogues; or was it to remain no more than an

7. *ibid.* 4th January 1942.

8. *ibid.* 23rd July 1946.

advisory or consultative association from which advice would go forth to the various synagogues for their individual and independent action?

Whilst there was no definitive answer to that question, the Conference did decide to change the name of the movement, which henceforth was to be known as the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain. Its constitution was finally agreed upon in November of that year, and adopted formally at the Conference the following April. The objects of the Association still included the sponsoring of a Rabbinical Court even though nothing had been done about it yet. It would be intriguing to know whether the fact that it was placed last of these objects was a chance position or indicative of its low priority. Five years had passed without any serious consideration being given to it. It was clear that the laity were too pre-occupied to deal with it, and that the initiative must come from elsewhere. Following an informal discussion between Reinhart and the other ministers on 14th January 1947, a document was prepared which proposed the establishment of both a Rabbinical Conference and a Rabbinic Court :

In the Congregations of the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain, decisions involving matters of Jewish law are made by their Rabbinical Conference and Rabbinical Courts.

The Rabbinical Conference of the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain consists of such ministers of the Congregations of the Association as possess the Rabbinical degree, and such other Rabbis as are co-opted by them. The Conference shall meet at least once annually, and at other times at the

request of three members. The first meeting of the Conference is to be called by the Senior Minister of the West London Synagogue.

A Court may be convened at any time by any member of the Conference who is a minister of one of the Congregations; and he shall invite two other members of the Conference to sit with him.

The Conference shall keep a central Register of cases of the Rabbinical Courts. Not less than a week before any session of a Court, the Convenor shall notify the Registrar of the impending cases; and following the Court, he shall render a report of the decisions.

The recommendation was presented to the A.S.G.B. Executive on 25th March 1947 who decided to place it on the agenda for the Association's forthcoming Conference. Delegates from the member synagogues, which now included Edgware, Leeds and Bournemouth, met on 20th April. In the debate on the Rabbinical Court the subject was transformed from a mere matter of procedure to a contentious issue of principle :

The proposal was discussed at great length and with some heat. The considerable opposition was based, in the main, on the feeling that this was a retrogressive step, and that it was the undesirable state of "Rabbinical authoritarianism" of the Orthodox Community that had led to the Reform Movement over a century ago. Ultimately, the Conference declined to sanction the establishment of a Rabbinical Court until it had the opportunity of examining and discussing the terms of reference and Rules of Procedure of any such Court.

Accordingly, it was agreed that the Rabbis should hold a Conference at which they should draw up the proposed Rules of Procedure and Jurisdiction of the Rabbinical court, that these should be submitted to the Executive, and that they should come before a later Conference. It was generally felt that the matter was of sufficient importance to warrant the calling of a special Conference for this purpose.

The discussion marked the emergence of a concern that was to be one of the main objections to the establishment of a Reform Beth Din - the fear of Rabbis being invested with too much power. Its context, however, was not so much personal as historical; it should be seen not as a slight on the particular Rabbis involved in the debate, who were held in high esteem, but with roots going back to the origins of Reform. The early Reformers of the 1840's had felt aggrieved that the entrenched religious leadership had refused to consider simple improvements in services; they had also been greatly upset that the reaction to the reforms they instituted was for the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Rabbinate to combine together in condemnation of them and issue a caution against them. It should be remembered, too, that Reform was initially a lay movement, and although subsequent ministers such as Marks and Joseph had exerted great influence, the laity had always been involved in decisions of religious matters. Moreover, the lack of any Reform movement until 1942 meant that individual congregations were used to both administrative and religious independence; even when the Associated British Synagogues was formed, it was on the understanding that complete autonomy would be retained by the constituent members. In the case of weddings, for instance, once a Reform synagogue had gained a registrar of its own and had satisfied the civil requirements, it alone was responsible for the authorisation of local Jewish marriages. However, a constituent of the United Synagogue with its own registrar

still needed the Chief Rabbi's approval for each marriage before it could proceed with arrangements. The thought that a central Rabbinic authority with wide-ranging powers might now be established was therefore anathema to some and a worry to others.

One of those opposed to the recommendation was Basil Henriques, then warden of St. George's Settlement and prominent within the Association. He wrote to Reinhart the day after the
9
Conference:

I think it extremely unfair of you to press the Beth Din without having given the representatives an opportunity of understanding what may be its consequences. I quite agree that Reform ministers should meet together to give their opinions on religious matters which may be referred to them by any individual congregation. I think it will be fatal for progress if these decisions are binding on all the congregations without their having a right of appeal.

10

This question of get is one which horrifies me. I refuse absolutely to be bound to the inhuman practice which has been established at Berkeley Street. It is all very well whilst you are there. I know that you would not do anything beastly. But do you realise that you may be putting the members of my

11

congregation under the Sergeant Major, and further generations under people who may be as unpleasant (they cannot be more unpleasant than he!).

9. Basil Henriques to Reinhart 21st April 1947 R. P. A.S.G.B. and Society of Jewish Study; A.S.G.B. 1946, 1947.
10. West London encouraged the use of the get from 1945 but it was not obligatory for the movement as a whole.
11. It has been suggested that this was a cryptic reference to Italiener, then minister of St. George's Settlement, whose Teutonic character and concern for orderly detail often met with Henriques' disapproval.

I still want to know very particularly, for it is of extreme importance, what are the powers and the functions of this proposed Beth Din.

It seems that no immediate steps were taken by Reinhart or the other ministers, for at the Executive meeting of the Association on 14th October 1947, the Chairman proposed that the Rabbis hold an early meeting to draw up further concrete proposals for the setting up of a Rabbinical Court "as was requested at the last A. S. G. B. Conference". Reinhart agreed to call a Rabbinical Conference in the near future. Reinhart wrote to his colleagues and suggested holding it immediately prior to an Executive meeting on 2nd December, which some of¹² them would be attending anyway. His suggestion hints at one of the difficulties facing the Rabbis - the physical distance between them, and the time and expense that travelling to Rabbinic Conferences entailed. His letter also proposed a separate meeting for those colleagues who were Rabbis. It reflects Reinhart's distinction, already mentioned above, between Ministers within the Association and those who were qualified Rabbis. Whilst he regarded the former as having an important role as far as pastoral and congregational work was concerned, it was only the latter whom he considered to have the ability to decide upon matters of Jewish Law.

The result of the meeting was a document entitled "Recommendations of the 8 Ministers of the Congregations of the¹³ A. S. G. B. ". The eight ministers were Berg (Leeds), Cassell

12. The ministers who attended the A. S. G. B. Executive meetings were Goldberg, Reinhart and Van der Zyl.

13. See Appendix V.

(Glasgow), Goldberg (Manchester), Graf (Bradford), Italiener (West London), Sawady (St. Georges Settlement) and Van der Zyl (North Western), with Reinhart in the chair. Apart from Goldberg and Reinhart himself, all were German refugees and all owed their communal position partly to the influence of Reinhart. Their recommendations were virtually the same as those proposed on 14th January, save that membership of the Rabbinic Conference was open to all ministers, whether or not they had a Rabbinic degree. Without this change, Goldberg could not have participated, and the Manchester Congregation would certainly have objected strongly.

At the same time a further document, entitled "Notes on the recommendations of Ministers", was issued for the benefit of the A. S. G. B.

Decisions of the Conference regarding matters of Jewish Law should be submitted to a general meeting of the Association. In the event of such a meeting's disapproval of the decision, the matter shall be discussed by the meeting and referred back to the Conference.

In a case where a decision has been rendered by a Beth Din, a dissatisfied litigant may appeal to the Conference of Ministers, who may, in their discretion, appoint an Appeal Court.

The two types of cases which, judging from recent experience, are likely to occupy the attention of the Beth Din are

- (1) Marriage and Divorce cases.
- (2) Proselyte cases.

The effect of the Notes was to give greater detail as to how specific decisions would be arrived at. It also allowed for a lay veto of any general decisions that were found unacceptable, and it permitted the right of appeal by any individual adversely affected by such a decision. The modifications were a direct result of the dissatisfaction expressed at the A. S. G. B. Conference, and were designed to calm lay fears that the Reform Beth Din would be as authoritative and autonomous as an Orthodox Beth Din. In addition to the historic resistance against such Rabbinic powers, the unpopularity and apparent intransigence of the Chief Rabbi's Court were powerful influences on the lay leadership.

The recommendations were presented to the Executive meeting held on 2nd December. Reinhart justified them by stating that they would answer a very real need of the congregations in that they would strengthen their position vis-a-vis the Jewish Community at large, and would be a practical step in answering demands for guidance in religious practice. Whilst he was met with general approval, some opposition was expressed by the chairman of Manchester :

Mr. Wansker stated that the Council of the Manchester Congregation of British Jews might object if all cases of proselytes had to be referred to the Beth Din. He asked whether the Beth Din could not formulate Rules of Procedure to enable the A. S. G. B. Congregations to deal with straightforward cases by themselves. Mr. Reinhart said that in dealing with matters involving Jewish Law, the standards of the A. S. G. B. Congregations should be as high and as

defensible as those of Orthodox congregations. In this connection only those ministers who had acquired a Rabbinical Diploma (Semichah) would be eligible to deal with proselyte, marriage and divorce cases. The Assembly wished all cases to be referred to a Beth Din, but there was no suggestion that such a Beth Din should always sit in London. It might well sit, when required, in any part of the Provinces where A. S. G. B. Congregations had been established.

Mr. Wansker said that this recommendation would have to be referred to his Council.

This short exchange summarised all the major issues that both led to the desire for a Reform Beth Din and aroused opposition to it. Those favouring it considered that it would be a source of much needed Rabbinic guidance; that it would act as a cohesive force within the movement; and that it would enhance the position of the movement within Anglo-Jewry in general. Ranged against the idea was the worry that a form of neo-Orthodoxy was being introduced and that "Rabbinical authoritarianism" would seep into Reform Judaism; the fear of provincial congregations, particularly Manchester, that their local autonomy would be threatened by a centralised Reform Beth Din in London; and the concern of the second largest congregation in the movement that its minister would be placed at a disadvantage as he did not, at that stage, have the Rabbinical diploma that was being insisted upon. It was agreed that the individual synagogue councils should have time to consider the recommendations and then the matter be brought back to the Executive. One change that was proposed was that as the Annual General Meeting of the A. S. G. B. was known as

Conference it would be confusing for the ministers to use the same term. It was suggested that instead they be referred to as the Assembly of Ministers.

In the ensuing weeks the synagogue councils discussed the issue. Manchester saw little merit in a Beth Din beyond its control, and endorsed the position of Wansker that cases should be dealt with by Manchester except "in special circumstances where it might be helpful to consult with London. If for any reason a case was turned down, London should be advised in case such an application was made there at a later date".¹⁴

Something that is immediately apparent from this discussion is that whereas the original "Recommendation of the 8 Ministers of the A.S.G.B." - which was doubtless before the Executive members - nowhere mentions the word 'London' and only refers to the 'Beth Din', the Manchester Council nowhere mention 'Beth Din' and refer to 'London' twice in as many sentences. It seems fair to conclude, therefore, that the discussion focussed little on the issue of a Beth Din and the concept of a unified and uniform Rabbinic authority; instead, it was more concerned with the relationship between the capital and the provinces, and the issues of central control and individual autonomy within the movement. The terms 'London' and 'Manchester' appear to refer more to protagonists than to associates.

The Bradford Synagogue Council was less concerned about potential challenges to its independence and declared itself in

favour of the recommendations, although urging that there should be "strong provincial representation on all courts".¹⁵

At the A. S. G. B. Executive meeting on 9th February 1948

Manchester proposed that

1. Where a proselyte case presented a difficulty, reference should be made to a Rabbinical Court, but in a straightforward case, the existing machinery, used in Manchester, was adequate.
2. In all cases of admission of proselytes, there should be a frank interchange of information.

Thus, in effect, Manchester rejected any change in the current arrangements and set itself against the ministers' recommendations. The North Western, by contrast, declared itself in favour of all decisions being made by the court and was opposed to cases being decided autonomously. West London also backed the recommendations but suggested various measures to guarantee the fairness of the court's proceedings. It proposed that courts should be open to interested parties in the case, and that West London be informed of cases of an appeal against the court's decisions.

A discussion on the viewpoint of Manchester then ensued, during which Wansker stated that if Manchester lost its right to deal with straightforward proselyte cases, then it would be a threat to the Synagogue's autonomy. Reinhart therefore suggested that the Recommendations be redrafted in three parts :

1. GENERAL INTERPRETATION OF JEWISH LAW.

The Assembly shall be accepted as the authoritative body to render decisions regarding matters involving general interpretation of Jewish Law.

2. MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE.

The Rabbinical Court shall be accepted as the authoritative body to give opinions involving the application of Jewish Law to cases of marriage and divorce.

3. PROSELYTES.

The Rabbinical Court, sitting in any convenient locality, shall offer its services in cases of proselyte admissions for such congregations as signify their desire to avail themselves of such services.

In response to West London's proposals it was suggested that admission of the parties should be limited to that stage of the proceedings when evidence was being taken. It was decided to request Edward Henriques to assist the ministers to re-draft their recommendations.

The debate had shown that whilst some synagogues wished to make certain amendments to the draft, Manchester was the only synagogue to oppose the very principle of a central Reform Beth Din. Despite being in a minority, however, Manchester's objections could not be ignored owing to a strong desire to avoid any major split in the Association, which was still relatively small and barely six years old. Moreover, Manchester's size and prestige commanded much attention. Manchester was the second oldest congregation in the A.S.G.B.

after West London and, as has been shown, had been founded independently of the London Community. In 1948 it was also the second largest within the A. S. G. B. and made a considerable contribution to its finances.¹⁶ Its fierce defence of its independence had been manifest from the very beginning of the Association. Following only the second meeting of the new body¹⁷ the issue had been raised in Council:

A report on the London Conference was considered, and it was resolved that the Delegates be authorised to state "That this congregation approved the policy of close co-operation with all Progressive congregations in the country, whilst retaining complete autonomy".

As a result of its separate development Manchester had a great belief in the validity of its own tradition and was determined to maintain it ~~then~~. It also felt that its age gave it a dignity and standing that were not shared by the newer congregations in the South, and it was unimpressed by the recent arrival of communities such as the North Western and Edgware. Perhaps they in turn were so conscious of their own sudden growth that they under-valued the older lineage of Manchester and its sense of importance. The expansion of the Reform movement had resulted in a relative lessening of Manchester's position. Initially Manchester had enjoyed an equal relationship with West London and Bradford, one amongst three associates, and with the North having more congregations than the South. Now, however, Manchester was just one among nine congregations, the majority of them being in the South, and West London being

16. In 1944, for instance. Manchester had provided a sixth of the total income of the movement.

17. Minutes, Manchester Synagogue Council 15th February 1943.

regarded as the leading synagogue of the movement. There were thus real fears among many in the Manchester Synagogue that the position, respect and independence of the Congregation were under threat. As was seen earlier, there was a similar divide between Manchester and the South in other aspects of Jewish communal life, which in turn was a reflection of the economic and political rivalry between North and South generally. The resistance of the Manchester Reform Synagogue to the proposals to a centralised Reform Beth Din in London was based on many more factors than the immediate issue itself.

The compromise formula suggested by Reinhart accommodated two of Manchester's basic objections, though no doubt to his own chagrin. Making the Assembly responsible for general interpretation of Jewish Law (and relegating the Rabbinical Court to its application in specific circumstances), meant that ministers who were not Rabbis - most notably Goldberg - were now able to participate in the law-making procedure. Splitting cases of marriage and divorce from cases of proselytes ensured that there was at least a central authority for all matrimonial matters even though conversion cases might still be decided by local courts. Making the services of the Rabbinical Court available rather than obligatory meant that Manchester could continue its independent tradition and stay within the A.S.G.B., whilst other congregations could be encouraged to make those available services a permanent feature.

That evening Reinhart himself drafted a new version of the Recommendations which took account of the points raised earlier in the day. Thus the Beth Din was referred to as the A.S.G.B. Rabbinical Court. When an Appeal Court was appointed, the Executive of the Synagogue whose member was concerned was to be taken into consultation. The issues of marriage, divorce, and conversion were treated separately, the first two being the concern of the Rabbinical Court, and the third being heard by the Rabbinical Court only "for such Congregations of the Association who signify their desire for such service". He also made a change of wording in the text, simple in itself but with deep implications, referring to the "opinions" of the Assembly rather than its "decisions". It recognised the reality that, in view of the voluntary nature of the Association, its powerful lay leadership and the still infant stage of the Assembly, few of the decisions of the Assembly could be enforced against lay opposition. By substituting "opinions" Reinhart altered nothing in real terms, but did pre-empt any criticisms of the Assembly based on lay fears of a Rabbinic take-over. His re-draft was then sent to Edward Henriques for his legal comments. In a letter of 16th February to Reinhart, Henriques corrected certain minor points, but advised in detail on one aspect :

Clause 1d of the accompanying draft states that the Assembly shall render of its own collective act opinions upon certain matters. It is for the Rabbis preparing this scheme to decide whether they intend

the Assembly, which will consist of many individuals, to deliver one opinion as the collective act of the Assembly or to deliver numerous individual opinions which may conflict with one another. There is a difference between the method followed by the English House of Lords sitting as a Supreme Court of Appeal and the English Privy Council sitting in the same capacity. In the House of Lords each judge delivers if he desires his own separate Judgement which must be so framed that it amounts to a yes or a no in a matter of an Appeal. The ayes and the noes are counted and the majority prevails. The system pursued in the Privy Council is entirely different. One opinion only can be delivered which is the advice tendered by the Judges to his Majesty. There can never be more than one opinion on the same case. The system works quite satisfactorily. I should have thought it was the obvious choice for you and your friends but the decision is for you.

In view of Reinhart's concern for clear guidance in troubled times, it is doubtful whether he needed persuasion as to the latter course, and certainly this was the procedure adopted for all decisions of the Assembly.

On 9th March 1948 a further revision to the re-draft was made, inserting measures to ensure full protection of the rights of the individuals coming before the court.¹⁸ Thus clause 2a ensured that the parties concerned should have full access to the Court when evidence was being presented and when a decision was being given. They should also have the right to representation to assist them in their case. Clause 2b not only laid down the right of an appeal court, but insisted that every applicant was fully aware of that right. Paragraph 4 stipulated that the Register should be open to public inspection, so that the laity could be fully informed of the trends and decisions within the Rabbinate, but at the same time

18. See Appendix VI.

the names of the individuals were to be kept secret. The other new recommendation was clause 1d, which provided for the Assembly to draw up its own rules of procedure, the details of which had not been specified. The document as a whole was concerned with general principles and overall guidelines which needed the approval of the lay leadership of the A.S.G.B. It was not the place for the finer points of the running of the Court, which would have clouded the issue and which could safely be left to the Rabbis to work out for themselves.

Even this draft, however, was not to be the final version. At a meeting of the ministers at the A.S.G.B. Conference in Manchester over the weekend of 17th-18th April minor alterations were made, re-arranging the text, before being presented to Conference. Introducing the document, Reinhart re-iterated his long-held view that such a Court was essential if the Reform movement was to have a healthy structure - both in the eyes of Anglo-Jewry and for its own purposes and he emphasised that "the reason for the recommendation was the need to formalise and support the traditional character of Jewish life".

A number of amendments were proposed by Professor Ernst Cohn, a delegate from the North Western Reform Synagogue. While most were concerned with improving the grammar and general flow, one concerned a more fundamental issue. At the end of clause 2a, where it was stated that those before the

Court may be present at, or should receive notification of, the decision of the Court, Cohn suggested that the grounds of the decision should be stated. Discussion on the matter was deferred, however, as Reinhart said that he needed notice of such an amendment in view of implications it would have. The larger problem of Manchester's opposition still remained and prevented even the principle of such a Court being able to gain unanimous acceptance :

Although the revised draft was very widely supported, all the Manchester delegates stated categorically that they could not bind their congregation to an innovation that was directly opposed to their custom, of many years standing, of dealing themselves with straightforward cases of conversion. They felt that their congregation would not object to difficult cases being referred to the Rabbinical Court.

Thus the position of the Manchester delegates had not changed in the slightest since their original objections to the first recommendation concerning the Rabbinical Court. The hours of debates and the various redrafts of the proposals had been unable to win them over or to allay their fears. Their continued dissension resulted in two separate problems. Firstly it impeded the progress of an institution desired by all the other synagogues; secondly Manchester's position created a serious rift within the Association. It is indicated in the first version of the minutes for that session, in which it is recorded :

When the Manchester representatives were pressed by the North Western delegates to accept the Rabbinical

Court in order to achieve uniformity, the discussion became very heated.

Passions clearly became high, with some delegates becoming angry at what they considered to be Manchester's obstinacy, and Manchester in turn defending itself vigorously. It was a rancour that could be ill afforded by an Association that was so small and still relatively young.

It is noticeable that in the minutes that were eventually published, this last paragraph was omitted. No doubt it was felt that the rift between the congregations were great enough already without adding the failure of this attempt to bridge it and the acrimony that subsequently arose. Instead, the minutes close the matter :

It was finally decided to adjourn further discussion on the Rabbinical Court. The proposal to accept Clause I, in its amended form, which was the section of the recommendation relating to the Assembly of Ministers, was carried with one dissident.

By limiting the voting to the first clause only, further "heated" debate was curtailed. The result was that the Ministers were given the blessing of the A.S.G.B. Conference to establish their own Assembly as a forum not just for their own benefit, but also for evolving decisions applicable to the whole movement. However the Rabbinical Court - the main purpose of the recommendations - was denied the approval that Reinhart and the majority of his colleagues had so keenly desired.

It is remarkable to note that despite this set-back and despite the lack of approval the Rabbinical Court did

effectively exist - for it had already been established
19
formally on 1st February 1948. It was not known as the Court
of the A.S.G.B., for as was shown above, such recognition was
being withheld. It was therefore conducted as if the Court of
the Assembly of Ministers, even though that also had not been
agreed officially. The certificates of conversion were given
under the name of the congregations which the sponsoring
ministers served. Thus theoretically the court was for the
ministers' own purposes, although inevitably - and no doubt
deliberately - it functioned de facto as the Court of the
A.S.G.B. In this way, the Rabbinic service and jurisdiction
which Reinhart and others felt so important to provide was able
to proceed, even while the A.S.G.B. was debating its existence
and status. Through this device Reinhart achieved the
substance of what he wanted even though he lacked the official
endorsement. A remark he made years later to a correspondent
seeking to introduce a change in his synagogue sums up
Reinhart's attitude and his single-minded pursuit of goals of
whose rightness he was convinced : "Do not take any notice of
what they say they want - what matters is what they ought to
20
want".

A similar de facto process took place in the appointment

19. This date is given in the first Annual Report of the Beth Din 1948 (A.S.G.B. London 1949), and also Curtis 'The Beth Din of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain' p. 137.
20. Private conversation Rabbi Dr. E. S. Rosenblum 26th November 1986. Reinhart's remarks referred to the refusal of the A.S.G.B. Executive to assist the establishment of a Reform Synagogue in Brighton in 1955.

of the first Clerk to the Beth Din, Rabbi Michael Curtis.

Arriving in England in 1939 as a refugee from Germany, he was provided with work at West London by Reinhart. He assisted with teaching duties, particularly the tuition of proselytes and of children at Religion School. In January 1948 he was asked by Reinhart to assist with the Rabbinical Court, arrange sittings and supervise paperwork. According to Curtis himself, he was "never actually appointed Clerk, but just became it".²¹

Once again it shows how Reinhart forced the pace and turned his intentions into reality. Although the court effectively served the A. S. G. B., it was not officially recognised, and so Curtis' salary continued to be paid by West London. Despite its casual nature, the appointment of Curtis was very important for the progress of the Reform Beth Din. Having a person responsible for general running and making it a professional appointment enabled the as yet unofficial court to evolve a structure and to deal with that thorniest of problems - how to harmonise the authority of the Rabbis, the autonomy of the congregations, and the rights of individuals who came before it. It was perhaps the best way of determining how successful the court would be, and its smooth running ultimately helped persuade the A. S. G. B. to give its official sanction.

Curtis' appointment also provided the court with an advocate for its cause. On 31st January 1949 the ministers held the first meeting of their Assembly, part of whose agenda was to receive a report from Curtis on the first eleven months of the court. After giving an analysis of the sixty-four cases

22

that the court had had to consider, Curtis concluded :

Considering that it is in the minds of many that the Court is a necessity, it is regrettable that this Court is not fully authorised. It should be recognised not only by the Assembly of Ministers, but also by the constituent congregations. It should adopt the name "Court of the A. S. G. B." or some similar name and should be governed by an agreed constitution.

I, therefore, move that the Assembly of Ministers of the A. S. G. B. should agree on a name and a constitution of the Court and should approach the Council of the constituent synagogues to ratify the institution of a Rabbinical Court whose jurisdiction is in accordance with their conceptions and their ideals.

The minutes of the meeting indicate that the ministers' reaction to the proposal was favourable. but the stumbling block of Manchester's objections still remained. Goldberg took exactly the same stance as his lay leadership, thus preventing unanimity of opinion in both of the A. S. G. B.'s main decision-making bodies. the Assembly and the Conference. The terminology used by some of the ministers reveals how strongly felt the issue had become :

Dr. Italiener thanked all those who had contributed to achieve these remarkable results. As to the motion, he thought it was rather dangerous to go before the Councils now, knowing that there was opposition and prejudice to be expected.

He was seconded in that respect by the Chairman (Reinhart), who said that it was not diplomatic to incur hostility from certain quarters.

The same opinion was expressed by Mr. Sawady. He welcomed the institution of the Beth Din. Its

initial efforts should not be "smashed" by going to the public too early.

Dr. Van der Zyl, however, pointed out that all congregations had agreed in principle to the Beth Din, and that the majority of their members were behind the institution. If this Assembly could establish the Beth Din, its findings needed no longer to be promulgated under the headings of the West London Synagogue or North Western Reform Synagogue. It was up to the Ministers to decide on the question.

Mr. Goldberg declared that his Congregation would be reluctant to give its consent.

The Chairman asked for and received permission to interrupt the debate for the discussion of item 9 of the Agenda.

Whether the temporary halt in the debate was because item 9 (on the membership rights of couples not married in synagogue) needed an urgent decision or was a tactical move to avoid an unpleasant impasse, is not clear. Certainly, when the debate on the Beth Din did resume later in the meeting, both sides showed a more positive and conciliatory tone. Nevertheless the final verdict was to keep the present arrangement of a Beth Din in deed but not in title, and not to cause further dissension by seeking the formal approval of the A. S. G. B. :

Dr. Van der Zyl declared that it had become clear to him that the responsibility to decide on the question lay with the ministers and not with the congregations. The Beth Din must be the Court of the Assembly of the A. S. G. B. To Mr. Goldberg's objection that the last authority in a congregation was not the Rabbi as a member of the Assembly but the congregation, he replied that the minister remained autonomous in his congregation. He examined the religious position. The Beth Din could not enforce its decisions.

Rabbi Cassell pointed out that any decisions of any

Beth Din was taken in the name of Judaism and not of a particular congregation.

As Dr. Maybaum pressed for a decision, Mr. Goldberg declared that he would refrain from voting as many points needed clarification, for instance the composition of the Beth Din, but he would not object to a majority decision.

Dr. Van der Zyl insisted that in view of its importance the Beth Din should be established by a unanimous decision of the Assembly.

The Chairman, closing the debate, said the Assembly's report to the Conference of the A.S.G.B. must be that - in the opinion of the Assembly - no decision with regard to the Beth Din should be made for another year.

Although the contentious issue of official recognition of the court had been deferred, the debate had achieved two steps forward in the long process : first the realisation that the solution to the problem would have to come from within the Assembly rather than from the A.S.G.B. Not only was the ministers' agreement on a common policy necessary for it to prove workable, but the attitude of the various synagogues would be influenced by their own minister's view. A unanimous decision by the ministers would also have an important effect. Given the fact that the Assembly now provided the ministers with an organised structure and an official voice, the debates on the court would now take place in the Assembly meetings rather than at Conference. A second result of that meeting was a slight thaw in Goldberg's position - still opposed to the idea of a central Reform Beth Din, but now at least willing to accept a majority verdict. That this was not put to the test

may well be because Van der Zyl and Reinhart hoped that with the passage of time Goldberg would be persuaded to endorse a Reform Beth Din. Moreover, such a policy was very much in their own interest, for not only would it avoid much unseemly and divisive wrangling within the Assembly, but it would mean that the Reform Beth Din would have a much stronger foundation and be capable of the authoritative role which they hoped it would play.

At the following Conference of the A. S. G. B. during weekend of 6-8 April 1949, Reinhart gave a brief report on the Assembly's discussion. Whilst he declared that the cases dealt by the Court provided incontrovertible proof of its value, he advised that no decision as to its official adoption be made for another year. The report was accepted without dissent.

The next meeting of the Assembly was on 7th December - eleven months after their first gathering - an extraordinarily long time considering the host of important issues and pressing tasks before it. Apart from the Court these included revision of the Prayer Book, the question of calendar reform, and a statement on the guiding principles of the Reform movement. The minutes show that the ministers themselves were well aware
23
of this hiatus in their deliberations :

The Chairman, Mr. Reinhart, in his opening words warmly welcomed the members of the Assembly. He expressed his disappointment that the high hopes raised in the first meeting, in which the Assembly of Ministers had constituted itself, had not been fulfilled. The first enthusiasm was not followed up. One of the reasons, in his opinion, was that the Assembly did not meet frequently enough. He

suggested a greater frequency of the sessions (four times a year). The place of the meeting should

24

change and some should be held in the North. The very barren soil in this country during 1949, as far as Jewish religious matters were concerned, was no excuse for the inertia, unfortunately shown by the Assembly. On the contrary, it should urge the ministers to make the Assembly an influential and flourishing body.

Reinhart's concern was shared by his colleagues, for it was agreed that the next meeting should be within three months time.

After taking matters arising from the minutes of the previous meeting and dealing with correspondence received, the first item on the agenda was that of the Beth Din. The familiar pattern of discussion repeated itself. Reinhart urged full recognition of the Beth Din and was strongly supported by Van der Zyl :

The Chairman, opening the discussion on the Rabbinical Court, said that the dissension on the Court was not an irreconcilable controversy. The Court did not ask for unlimited authority. Some congregations might not agree to accept decisions regarding certain types of cases. The essential point was the recognition of the Beth Din as an institution to make decisions in individual cases of ritual, proselytes and matrimonial cases in accordance with the guidance of the Assembly. He was seconded by Dr. Van der Zyl, who regretted that the Assembly had so far failed to recognize the Court. It was against its dignity that the certificate should be given out under the name of a single congregation.

At this point Dr. Maybaum intervened, expressing his reservations that the Beth Din might lead to Rabbinic

autocracy. It was noticeable, however, that he acknowledged the merits of the unofficial Beth Din that had been functioning. Reinhart's decision to proceed with the court on a de facto basis was clearly having the desired effect of proving its benefits :

Dr. Maybaum, although recognising that it was an advantage to have a Beth Din and that the activities of the Court in the last two years had proved a blessing for the congregations, raised the point of the authority exercised by the Beth Din. The danger of a Beth Din was that it might create a bureaucracy, whereas the last word ought to be with each individual congregation. There could not be a final authority, as no decision was infallible.

His fears were answered by Dr. Italiener and Dr. Van der Zyl, who pointed out that the Court was not intended to diminish the authority of the congregations or of their ministers, but to extend advice, help and guidance. It was necessary that some halachic problems of general importance should be solved by an authorised body, which was responsible to the Assembly, whose task it was to interpret Jewish laws. The Beth Din was to apply this interpretation to its individual cases.

The other main objection came predictably from Goldberg, who espoused the cause of local autonomy. As before, others sought to reassure him that the Beth Din would not threaten current Reform practices but strengthen them. The discussion also brought to the fore Reinhart's aversion to the situation in America :

Mr. Goldberg declared his opposition to a centralization of authority, whereupon Dr. Van der Zyl answered that Judaism could not be localized. Mr. Reinhart pointed out that the Assembly could obviously not make laws, its task was to interpret

the recognised law by practice. The Assembly could profit from the experience in the U.S.A. where everybody had interpreted the law in his own way, which had resulted in a chaos of divergent practices. Now strong efforts were made there to unify the astounding multitude of interpretations. In recognizing the decision of the Beth Din the minister of a congregation would not surrender to bureaucracy, he would surrender his personal interpretation of Jewish law to the approved opinion of the Assembly.

Apart from the actual recognition of the Beth Din, another vexed question was who should actually sit on it, or, more precisely, whether it should involve only those who had the Rabbinical diploma. Once again, the discussion followed already well-trammelled lines. Reinhart was concerned to give the Court as much authority as possible, in both internal and external eyes, and therefore led those urging Rabbinic qualifications. Goldberg, who did not possess the Rabbinical Diploma, and for whom exclusion from the Court would have been humiliating both within his congregation and within the movement at large, led those negating the value of such a diploma. Each side had a strong vested interest in the outcome of the debate, although both considered that they were arguing from a position of principle as to the future direction of the movement as a whole. Reinhart was keen to associate with tradition as far as possible unless reason dictated otherwise, while Goldberg saw the practical wants and needs of one's own congregation as being paramount :

As to the composition of the Court, there was a division of opinion. Some ministers, led by Mr.

Goldberg, argued that every accredited minister of a congregation, whether a Rabbi or not, should enjoy full recognition to sit as a member of the Court.

Other ministers, among them the Chairman, strongly defended the view that the Jewish conscience as it was formed by Jewish history and Jewish tradition was accustomed to rely on the authority of three Rabbis, especially where the dissolution of marriages was concerned. The great responsibility that the Assembly had for the future of the Jewish people demanded that they should retain this tradition and not lightly outrage the Jewish conscience.

As in his introductory remarks, when he had opened the meeting and spoken of the barren religious soil in the country, Reinhart was concerned not just with the affairs of the A. S. G. B. but with the whole of Anglo-Jewry. It was in keeping with his belief that Reform was not an off-shoot of traditional Judaism, but a direct heir of it and carried the responsibility for its future success or failure. Goldberg's position had the weakness that it could appear as if he was merely protecting petty local privilege and safe-guarding his own position as a Rabbinically-unqualified minister. Moreover, he had the difficulty that in the same discussion he spoke against recognition of the Court, but also argued for his own eligibility to sit upon it should it be recognised. When it came to taking a decision Goldberg abstained from voting as a mark of protest against the issue and as a declaration of his independence of any decision reached:

Finally the present practice (in proselyte cases three ministers of whom one is a Rabbi; in matrimonial cases, three Rabbis) was put to the vote

and accepted. Mr. Goldberg abstained from voting and reserved the right to speak on this practice of the Court at its discussion at the A.S.G.B. conference.

The next item on the agenda was the recommended procedure for intending proselytes. The discussion that followed was without controversy, although the issue was to be clouded with dissension soon afterward and brought into the already fraught debate on the Court. For the moment, however, a simple recommendation was agreed :

A prospective proselyte should apply in the first instance to the local minister, or in the case of a congregation in which there is no minister, to the officer of his local congregation. The minister or officer may arrange for the instruction of the candidate. When desired, and especially when no minister is locally available, advice regarding the instruction may be had from the Clerk of the Court of

25

the Assembly of Ministers. After an extended period of preparation, at such time as the local minister or officer considers the candidate qualified to appear before the Court, he shall advise the Clerk of the Court. The Clerk will arrange a sitting of the Court, which, in the case of proselytes, consists of three persons of recognized qualifications usually ministers, and at least one of them a Rabbi. The Court will be held in the home town of the candidate, if possible, or, failing that, in the nearest place possible. The Clerk will take into consideration the free time of the candidate and in cases of hardship will arrange assistance for any necessary travelling expenses.

The recommendation on proselyte procedure was reported to the A.S.G.B. Executive meeting of 12th January 1950, and it was decided to circulate it to all congregations for their consideration. When it met again on 20th February it received

25. The title is misleading, for the Court was still not officially recognised as the Court of the Assembly, merely the Court used by the Assembly, and whose documents were issued under the auspices of the West London Synagogue.

favourable reports from all synagogues save Manchester. The Manchester representative, Frank Lister, presented an alternative formula which had been drawn up five days earlier. It had followed Goldberg's recommendation that in matrimonial and difficult conversion cases matters should be referred to a court of three ministers of the A.S.G.B. With regard to ordinary conversion cases, however, it proposed that a lay member of the local congregation be one of the three judges of the Court. Bearing in mind that West London Synagogue had excluded laity being present at courts thirteen years earlier, and that Reinhart was not even happy with non-Rabbinic ministers sitting on the court, the suggestion was bound to be opposed. The document was entitled "Proselytes. Proposed Alternative Formula".²⁶ Its effect was to concede authority to the Reform Beth Din in matrimonial cases, but to retain local control in conversion cases. It also maintained strong lay involvement in considering the proselyte's initial application and in examining them at the end of their course. The only concession was that there should be two ministers and one lay member on the court rather than the other way round. In all other respects the formula was largely a restatement of the Manchester position.

The Assembly meeting - the third to have taken place - met on 15th March with a full agenda. The subject of the Beth Din dominated the meeting, with not only the Manchester alternative proposals before it, but also the second Annual Report of the Clerk of the Court. Like its predecessor it ended with a

strong plea for the Assembly's recognition, this time with even greater force :

With regard to the fine work done by the Court, it is all the more regrettable that the Court is still not officially recognized by the Assembly of Ministers ... I do believe that it would be a great misfortune, if the Ministers of the Assembly would underestimate their responsibility to interpret the Law in accordance with their ideals. I can understand that the orthodox find it difficult to agree on the urgently needed re-interpretation of the Halachah and especially on the long-due re-interpretation of the marriage laws. There are so many 'Schools', there are so many Chief Rabbis, in London, in Ireland, in Israel, etc. The Assembly is composed only of a small number of ministers with a definite similarity of outlook. Should it not be possible for them to agree in the question of the Court?

There are no real obstacles to an understanding. No financial contributions are involved, no undertaking to use the Court is demanded, and it can have no power except moral persuasion. Far from diminishing the authority of the minister in his congregation, the institution of a Beth Din upholds the like-minded development within the Association and adds dignity to the ministerial servants of the Law. And what is the sense of discussing the procedure for intending proselytes, if not every minister, in principle, is of the opinion that there should be the institution of a Beth Din at the disposal of a minister?

I, therefore, conclude this report with the motion that this Assembly constitute the Beth Din as the Court of the Assembly of the Ministers of the A.S.G.B., agree on a name and appoint a sub-committee to prepare a draft statute.

After Curtis had submitted his report, there was a general discussion on the motion he had proposed, in which most speakers remained entrenched in the positions that they had adopted long ago. Maybaum expressed his theological doubts and Reinhart urged that the practical needs for a Reform Beth Din

made its recognition essential :

Dr. Maybaum declared that he would be reluctant to agree to a final recognition of the Court. He had great doubts about the Beth Din. The principal question had never been discussed. The meaning of the Law within the progressive movement had never been clarified and he was under the impression that uncritically insisting on the Court was 'Playing Orthodoxy'.

Mr. Reinhart pointed out that it was certainly true that the Beth Din proceeded without a precise ideological basis. The Assembly had not dealt with the theory of the Jewish Law. If the Beth Din were to wait until the problem was solved theoretically it would have to adjourn many decisions indefinitely and would only add to the hardship and frustration caused by the stalemate of the interpretation of the Law. The only way was to proceed practically with the motive to satisfy our own need.

The counter-proposals of Manchester regarding intending proselytes also came under discussion. Manchester's persistent resistance to a centralised authority for proselyte cases led to a heated debate. The personal motives of Goldberg were openly brought into question, while his reply indicated the resentment that had built up between him and some of his colleagues over his stand :

Dr. Schreiber, referring to Manchester, said that, because our principles were vague at this moment, he would not recommend the institution of a separate Beth Din in Manchester, nor would he consider it advisable to co-opt laymen as members of the Court. Mr. Reinhart, taking this point up, expressed the opinion that the choice of the members of the Court was a question of confidence. In this context a group of colleagues could be trusted to arrive at a conclusion better than laymen.

Mr. Goldberg, referring to the procedure of the

Court, explained that Manchester's counter-proposals were arrived at after long discussions. It was thought that it was advisable to co-ordinate local laymen as judges of the Court. One advantage was that they would protect the minister against criticism.

Mr. Cassell wanted to know, what the function and the power of the members of the Executive were, who would be sitting on the Court. He was told by Mr. Goldberg that it was intended that all members of the Court should have equal rights and the decisions would be taken by a majority vote. Mr. Bienheim said that Manchester's counter-proposals were not acceptable to Bradford. Mr. Graf thought that Mr. Goldberg might be prompted in his attitude by the fact that he had not the Semichah. Mr. Goldberg replied that he might not be in possession of the Semichah, but, nevertheless, he would submit that his understanding of the background, content and structure of Anglo-Jewry was perhaps greater than that of those, who do possess the Semichah, and therefore he might be better fitted to understand a case than they were. Mr. Reinhart pointed out that it was obvious that the whole spirit of the counter-proposals was different from that prevailing in the procedure in use. Any matter of Jewish Law was to be resolved by persons of Jewish learning. Members of the Executive were not primarily concerned with Jewish Law. Mr. Goldberg was confident that the decisions taken in Manchester would not very much differ from the decisions of any other Court.

Mr. Reinhart maintained that the original proposals, which were much broader, could be used by Manchester, but the Manchester formula could never serve the other congregations. The counter-proposals endangered a unified solution of the problems and took the matter out of the province of Jewish Law and surrendered it to the administrative authority of the congregation.

Following the discussion, Goldberg moved, and Maybaum seconded, that the Manchester counter-proposals should be accepted as the general recommendations for the procedure of the court. The motion was put to the vote and defeated by six votes to two. Goldberg then raised the question of whether the

Assembly would be ready to co-operate if a local court was arranged in Manchester on the basis of their own proposals. Opinion varied : Graf expressed the view that co-operation would be disloyal to the principles generally accepted by the Assembly. Schreiber said that the decision would depend on the nature of each case. Van der Zyl thought that the Assembly should co-operate in principle but leave it to the discretion of each minister to sit at any court arranged by Manchester. The result was that the following motion was accepted without opposition :

'The Assembly of Ministers, whilst not agreeing to the alternative formula for procedure regarding proselytes, proposed by the Manchester Congregation, is willing to co-operate in the procedure as laid down in 7B with reference to cases of the Manchester Congregation, whenever the request for a Minister is addressed to the Assembly of Ministers.'

As in so many cases of committee politics and rivalry, the symbolism of that motion was much more important than its actual substance. In practical terms the motion allowed Manchester to run its own proselyte affairs (although this had already been conceded in Reinhart's draft recommendations of February 1948) and for other ministers to participate in its courts without being disloyal to the principles of the Assembly. What was much more significant, however, was the fact that Goldberg could claim to have won a victory in the Assembly and could take back to Manchester a statement, if not approving then at least permitting the continuance of the local

independence for which they had so keenly fought. The other ministers, too, would have felt relief that Manchester had not been forced into open confrontation with the Assembly and that its demands had been accommodated as much as possible. It was against this background that the crucial decision as to the status and recognition of the court proceeded. The minutes record surprisingly little comment on the matter, and it was dealt with quickly and speedily. This was because Goldberg was now more ready to give way to the majority, while they in turn no longer felt it necessary to shelve the issue in order to avoid conflicting with the views of Manchester :

The Assembly proceeded next to the vote of Mr. Curtis's motion that the Beth Din be constituted as the Court of the Assembly of the Ministers of the A. S. G. B. After Dr. Van der Zyl's amendment to postpone the vote had found no seconder the motion was passed nem. con. Mr. Goldberg, Dr. Maybaum and Dr. Van der Zyl abstained from voting. Dr. Schreiber and Mr. Curtis were appointed to prepare a draft statute.

The abstention of Goldberg and Maybaum was to be expected in view of their stated opinions, while Van der Zyl had wished to wait until a unanimous vote could be obtained. However, the other seven ministers now believed that it was now time for
27
formal recognition of the court by the Assembly.

At the next meeting of the A. S. G. B. Executive on 26th April 1950, a letter from the Honorary Secretary of the Assembly of Ministers informed it of the Assembly vote on the Manchester proposals. The decision was accepted without

27. The seven ministers who voted for recognition of the court were Bienheim, Cassell, Curtis, Graf, Reinhart, Sawady and Schreiber.

comment. It is strange that the letter did not mention the recognition of the Beth Din at long last. Perhaps it was deliberately kept for the A.S.G.B. Conference, which took place over the weekend of 28-30th April, as more befitting a matter of such significance. As Chairman of the Assembly, Reinhart had what must have been the very pleasant task for him of announcing to the assembled delegates :

The Assembly had formally adopted the Beth Din, in the work of which its members throughout the country participated, as the Rabbinical Court of the Assembly of Ministers.

Conference endorsed the Court's new status and title without further debate.

Despite the recognition given to the Court and the assumption that it now served the whole movement there were still many problems yet to be resolved. Foremost amongst these was the position of the Council of Manchester which had insisted on maintaining their own parallel courts for proselytes. As well as there being a danger of different standards, the Manchester courts also included the active participation of laymen. Both of these were unacceptable to Reinhart who was convinced that only a unified procedure and the exclusive role of ministers could guarantee the desired integrity and respect. Another problem still to be addressed was the relationship between a centralised Reform Beth Din and the tradition of congregational autonomy. Although the

ministers themselves had come to terms with this, it was still an issue for many amongst the laity.

It is highly significant that the next move in the development of proselyte procedure came from Goldberg. At a meeting of the Manchester Executive on 6th November 1950 he suggested two amendments to the Proselytes Proposed Alternative Formula drawn up by them in February : first the lay person attending the court should not be a permanent appointee but should rotate amongst the members of the Executive. Secondly,

In the event of a disagreement between the ministers the candidate shall be invited to be re-examined by a similar court at a later date.

The effect of these suggestions was to limit substantially the extent and influence of the laity. The first ensured that no one layman could become unofficially elevated to the status of third minister by dint of constantly sitting on the courts. The second meant that the lay representative could never have a decisive vote, and a decision could only be made with the agreement of both ministers.

The two amendments were accepted by the Executive without any dissension. Goldberg had introduced the matter by stating that in his view proselytisation should be dealt with exclusively by ministers, although he was prepared to work within the Manchester formula which permitted lay involvement both at the initial interview and the final examination. This

episode raises the question of who had been the dominant force in Manchester's vigorous opposition to the Reform Beth Din. Clearly there was a strong lay leadership, determined to guard its local independence within the A.S.G.B. and its lay involvement in spiritual matters. But had Goldberg been equally in favour of maintaining such principles or had he agreed unwillingly to a Synagogue policy that he himself did not share?

In public meetings, such as the Assembly of Ministers, Goldberg had always advocated the view of the Manchester Executive and Council without ever hinting at any personal reservations of his own. Within the confines of internal synagogue debates, however, there had been several occasions in which differences arose between the Manchester Executive and him. In May 1942 he was reprimanded by the Manchester Executive for dealing with applicants for conversion himself instead of instructing them to contact the Honorary Secretary,²⁸ and at a meeting the following month the ruling was re-²⁹ iterated. Goldberg was adamant that it was his role as a minister not just to teach candidates but also to be involved in the selection process. Having forcefully put forward his views, it was then agreed that he should be present at all interviews relating to conversion and joint Executive meetings³⁰ for this purpose. He achieved a further advance of his full ministerial authority when it was agreed that instead of the

28. Minutes Manchester Exec. 12th May 1942.

29. *ibid* 18th June 1942.

30. *ibid* 30th July 1942.

full Executive being present at such hearings. the matter would be entrusted to a sub-committee of three people, one of which³¹ was himself. Thus, within a short space of time, a radical change had been made, taking the question of proselytes out of the hands of a five-member lay executive and giving it to a committee consisting of himself and two lay members in which his own influence would be keenly felt.

In fact there was considerable concern over his encroachment on what had previously been lay responsibilities. At its very next meeting the Executive added a cautionary³² rider:

It was agreed that the question of conversions to be dealt with by the sub-committee should only apply to those cases at present before the Executive.

The resolution made clear that the sub-committee should be seen as an experiment only and liable to reconsideration. Further question-marks over the sub-committee's authority were raised at a meeting of the full Council of the Synagogue in February 1944 at which there was mentioned adverse criticism which reflected upon the method with which the conversions were³³ dealt. Criticisms mounted and at an Executive meeting later³⁴ that year:

Mr. Kwit expressed his dissatisfaction at the manner in which conversions were dealt with. He did not agree with the sub-committee that had been set up

31. ibid 8th October 1942.

32. ibid 5th November 1942.

33. Minutes Manchester Council 10th February 1944.

34. Minutes Manchester Exec. 3rd November 1944.

making a decision without consulting the Executive. He said that the sub-committee should make a report to the Executive and then the Executive should make the final decision.

The motion was unanimously agreed and the Executive took back the authority it had temporarily invested in the sub-committee, and also thereby lessened the extra influence that Goldberg had obtained. It further weakened his position when it decided that a candidate appearing before the sub-committee should first meet the minister, and then have a separate
35
meeting with the two lay members.

When it came to formulating a policy vis-a-vis the proposed Reform Beth Din, differences again emerged between the Manchester Executive and Goldberg. Initially Goldberg gave his support to the Executive's independent stance. Indeed there may have been personal reasons for doing so : any loss of local independence to a centralised London court would have been a loss of his authority to control local cases too. In addition, Goldberg was acutely aware that Reinhart and others felt that his lack of Rabbinic ordination disqualified him from hearing certain cases and lessened his authority even further. By 1950, however, the Reform Beth Din had been in operation for two years, had proved its worth to the subscribing congregations, and had also earned a good reputation within the wider community. As someone in intimate contact with the ministers who did participate in it, and as an active member of the Assembly, Goldberg began to feel the need to regularise Manchester's position. He told an Executive meeting that their

proposals regarding status cases "did not go far enough and did not stand four-square with Jewish Law"³⁶. It was largely on his urging that Manchester had agreed that matrimonial and divorce cases should only be dealt with by a court of three ministers, exactly as Reinhart had suggested in his amended draft proposals, of March 1948.³⁷ In addition, although laity would still sit on conversion cases in Manchester, the previous arrangement of two lay members and one minister was changed to one lay member and two ministers. All these debates, and that of 6th November 1950 quoted earlier, indicate that Goldberg's views were not always in harmony with the anti-ministerial and isolationist attitude of the Manchester Executive. He was thus in the difficult position of fighting two separate battles at the same time : resisting demands of his ministerial colleagues that Manchester accept the Reform Beth Din's jurisdiction for all conversion cases, and resisting the desire of the Manchester Council to maintain lay control over spiritual matters. In different situations he thus sometimes opposed ministerial authority and sometimes defended ministerial authority. Whilst this may appear inconsistent, a common thread that ran through each situation was that Goldberg's own authority was thereby enhanced : he maintained his own local court and was independent of his ministerial colleagues, and he ensured that his own lay congregants recognised his special role as minister.

This interpretation is given weight by comments as to

36. *ibid.* 10th February 1950.

37. *ibid.* 15th February 1950.

Goldberg's personality. According to his son, he had good relations with other ministers, but so long as they recognised that Manchester was his fiefdom. He saw himself as "Lochinvar³⁸ in his northern stronghold - approach ye who dare". Within Manchester itself Goldberg also felt the need to assert his authority for a variety of reasons relating to his family, the Synagogue and the wider Jewish community. His wife, Frimette Yadit, came from a staunchly Orthodox family with several Rabbis in it. His parents-in-law had never regarded him as a real minister for he had graduated from Jews College without semichah. They were even more critical when he resigned from the Orthodox Kingston Hebrew Congregation to join the Reform in Manchester and they regarded the Manchester Synagogue as a Church. Within the Synagogue itself he faced an uphill task in asserting himself. One problem was his age. Born in 1917 he went to Manchester when only 23 years old, an unusually young age for the minister of so established and prestigious a community. It is clear that he himself felt this to be a disadvantage for he gave a false date of birth when interviewed for the position, making himself look older for fear of being³⁹ disqualified because of his comparative youthfulness. Another problem was that the previous incumbent, Rev. Jacob Phillips, had been unwell for the last few years of his long ministry and this had led to considerable lay domination of synagogue affairs. Their control even extended to the direction that "It

38. Private conversation, Rabbi David Goldberg 2nd November 1983.

39. Goldberg to Reinhart 22nd September 1940 R. P. Provincial Reform Congregations: Manchester.

was agreed that Rev. Phillips be asked to refrain from delivering sermons more often than once a month, unless specifically requested to the contrary".⁴⁰ Thus lay leaders had become used to spiritual responsibilities that they would not otherwise have enjoyed. Their total authority over the minister was indicated in the terms of the contract drawn up with Goldberg in June 1941 when, after a trial year in office, his appointment was extended for a further five years. Among the conditions was the statement:⁴¹

A list of all his outside activities be supplied and that such activities be controlled by the Executive ... The minister should not attend meetings except at the invitation of the Executive.

Goldberg's efforts to establish his own authority culminated in open conflict in the Executive election of 1953 when the incumbent President and leading lay personality for many years, Fred Lister, was ousted from his position by a candidate backed by Goldberg.

Within the wider Jewish community Goldberg had to face considerable antagonism from the Orthodox leadership, who were extremely hostile towards the Reform movement. Thus Dayan Golditch declared:⁴²

Misguided Jews who, in their ignorance and presumption, set up splinter sectarian Synagogues, are, in reality, proposing to reform Judaism and not themselves. Instead of bettering themselves and seeking to rise to the level of historic Judaism, they announce their competence to alter Judaism and

40. Minutes Manchester Executive 8th June 1935.

41. Minutes of Manchester Executive 18th June 1941.

42. Jewish Gazette 23rd September 1949.

to bring it down to their own level - to give the sanction of religion to the vain imaginings of their own hearts. G'd grant that they may realise the error of their ways and return to Him and His people.

Similarly Rabbi Casper, who lived only three houses away from Goldberg, criticised Reform as a "sham and superficial ideology".⁴³ With his personal standing being under so many pressures, it is not surprising that a constant concern of his was to maintain his own authority in a variety of different ways.

Goldberg's differences with the Manchester Executive became further pronounced when he wrote to the Presiding Warden, Mr. Oppen in February 1952 concerning⁴⁴

the divergence of opinion between myself and the Executive on certain matters which seem to me to be fundamental to the affairs of our Congregation ... the Executive is aware that I do regard with dissatisfaction and alarm the present practise whereby members of the Executive attend the proceedings and question would-be Converts.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which Goldberg suggested that proselytes be interviewed by a panel of ministers only. For their part the Executive put forward counter-proposals widening lay involvement by extending it to include Council members. Eventually a motion that the present arrangements be continued was carried, and the matter was not debated again for another two years.

While Manchester was deliberating its own internal procedures, the Reform Beth Din was successfully serving the

43. Jewish Gazette 8th September 1950.

44. Minutes Manchester Exec. 11th February 1952.

other congregations in the A.S.G.B. At the 1951 Annual Conference, one year after the Reform Beth Din had been officially announced, Reinhart declared that through its existence a service had been rendered by the Assembly of Ministers to Jewish Law. He also stated that "whatever success the Beth Din may have had was due to Rabbi Michael Curtis, whose labours deserved the highest praise".⁴⁵ As the years progressed Curtis himself was much more confident about the purpose and viability of the court. Whereas his first two Annual Reports had ended with pleas for recognition, that of 1953 concluded on a note of optimism:

Our Beth Din has, as this report shows, continued its progress towards its consolidation, and its institution can now be regarded as safely founded within the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain. I do not hesitate to say that it renders valuable service to the members of our Congregations. Its authority is acknowledged and its services sought also by many outside the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain. The potentiality of a service to a wide circle is evident and it is our prayer that our Beth Din may be of increasing usefulness to Anglo-Jewry.

Moreover, both of the ministers who had expressed gravest doubts about the Court's desirability now gave it their full support.⁴⁶ Maybaum publicly praised the work of the court while⁴⁷ at the ASGB Conference in 1953 Goldberg declared:

he had always given his services to the Court when requested, and that he hoped that Manchester would come into the scheme in the near future as he personally believed in the Beth Din.

45. Minutes A.S.G.B. Conf. 15th April 1951.
46. *ibid* 9th May 1954.
47. *ibid* 3rd May 1953.

It was the first time outside Manchester that Goldberg had hinted at any difference in view between the Manchester Executive and himself, or committed himself to changing their stance. An additional factor in his new attitude may be found in the fact that he was now no longer a mere reverend but a Rabbi. His degree had been awarded in the United States by the Hebrew Union College in 1952 following studies at Manchester University and a short stay in America. His elevated status meant that he need no longer feel less qualified than the other ministers, while there would be no further queries as to whether he was able to judge matrimonial and divorce cases.

Goldberg's declaration of intent at the A.S.G.B. Conference brought the issue of Manchester's isolated stance over proselytes to the fore and heralded a series of debates the following year that led to her participation in the Reform Beth Din for such cases too. The matter was first raised at an Executive meeting of Manchester Synagogue on 18th January 1954, but received a very negative reaction. Dr. Portnoy, a close friend of Goldberg, proposed that in future all conversions be carried out in London. No seconder was found for this proposal. He then proposed that all conversions be carried out in Manchester but by a court of Rabbis. No seconder was found for this either. Portnoy was undeterred by the lack of support, for at the very next meeting he re-introduced the matter, proposing "that in future there be no lay participation in conversions and that these be placed solely in the hands of a Rabbinical Court". He also suggested that a detailed

analysis be compiled of all conversions carried out in the past five years. As two members were absent discussion was deferred, although the pressure of other agenda items meant that the issue was not raised again until July.

In the meantime there was considerable correspondence between Goldberg and Reinhart on the matter. On 11th March Reinhart had suggested to Goldberg that a court be held in Manchester to hear local conversion cases. It would consist of Goldberg and two other ministers, with a lay person in attendance so as to satisfy the congregation's policy.⁴⁹ It was a clear attempt by Reinhart to introduce the principle of a three-minister court albeit with the concession of the additional presence of a lay person. Goldberg replied that the issue had been a matter of "heated arguments" recently and asked Reinhart for guidance in tackling the problem.⁵⁰ Reinhart wrote back that he did not have time to give a full opinion,⁵¹ but in the meantime urged:

I do beseech you to lay all your emphasis upon the authority of the Beth Din, of which you are as much a member as anyone else, and the seat of which is in every synagogue of the Association.

It was a characteristic reply, demanding full support for the authority of the court that was so important to him, yet emphasising that it belonged to all constituent synagogues. Goldberg responded that he was "on the threshold" of having it

49. Reinhart to Goldberg 11th March 1954 R. P. Provincial Reform Synagogues; Manchester.

50. Goldberg to Reinhart 15th March 1954 R. P. *ibid.*

51. Reinhart to Goldberg 19th March 1954 R. P. *ibid.*

agreed that the Reform Beth Din be used by Manchester for their converts, and asked for a formal statement which he could

52

present to the Council. The correspondence is invaluable for it indicates all the behind-the-scenes manoeuvrings that took place, none of which are recorded in any official minutes.

Reinhart obliged by return of post, proclaiming the merits of the Reform Beth Din and once again taking care to reassure

53

those worried about the traditions of individual congregations:

May I state definitely that after long and difficult experience, I am convinced that the best method of dealing with the problem of proselytes in this country is that adopted by the Beth Din of our Association. The responsibility rests squarely on the shoulders of the competent authorities; and the constitution of the Court avoids any geographical or other discrimination. These features combine to afford us a system which, if used properly, should command the respect of the entire Jewish world and at the same time should meet all local requirements.

Having discussed the matter within Manchester and in private correspondence with Reinhart, Goldberg next aired it at the A. S. G. B. Annual Conference in May. Delivering a paper entitled The Practical Problems of the A. S. G. B. he examined

several issues, including the Reform Beth Din, vis-a-vis the

54

question of local autonomy and central organisation:

The major practical problem which faces our Association I believe is inherent in a simple challenging question. It is this : what material sacrifices of substance and of effort are we willing to make individually and collectively to ensure that our Association will become a dynamic organisational force ... The question of local autonomy in relationship to the Association as a whole urgently

52. Goldberg to Reinhart 24th March 1954 R. P. ibid.

53. Reinhart to Goldberg 25th March 1954 R. P. ibid.

54. The paper was delivered on 9th May 1954.

requires clarification ... a blue-print [should be] drawn up which would clearly define the relationship of the individual congregations to the Association on such burning issues as "Have all congregations to recognise the Beth Din of the Association".

The tone of the speech strongly implied that the answer to such a question was "yes" and that a unified procedure was highly desirable. However he also sought to pacify provincial objections by criticising the London domination of the affairs of the A. S. G. B. He suggested that meetings of the Association should also be held in provincial centres and that future Vice-Presidents be elected on a geographical basis - one for the North and one for the South - so that it would be a truly national movement. The Reform Beth Din was also commented upon at another session of the Conference, when Rabbi Maybaum stated that co-operation between lay members and the Reform Beth Din⁵⁵ was desirable, but participation was impossible.

Behind Goldberg's general remarks regarding local autonomy lay the particular issue of Manchester being the only congregation in the A. S. G. B. to hold its own court for proselytes. The matter returned to Manchester for discussion by the Synagogue Executive in July. Although much time was devoted to the issue, the only decisions made were concerning the length of a conversion course and not the more important⁵⁶ question of under whose auspices the candidature should be. That question had not been brushed aside, but before it was considered another issue was raised that, indirectly, was

55. Minutes A. S. G. B. Conf. 7-9th May 1954.

56. Minutes Manchester Exec. 19th July 1954.

highly significant. A questionnaire regarding finances and membership statistics was sent by the A. S. G. B. to Manchester and all other constituent congregations. It elicited a frosty reception from the Manchester Executive:

57

It was decided to put before the Council the view of the Executive and the A. S. G. B. representatives that in this sphere the Association is exceeding the original intentions of those that formed it, and that it should confine itself to spiritual and not financial matters in so far as each individual congregation is concerned.

The statement echoes the warning given in 1943 to the nascent Association that Manchester regarded its purpose solely as being a facilitator of co-operation between like-minded synagogues, but not having any central control. It also marks the beginning of the rift that was to result in Manchester's temporary resignation from the A. S. G. B.

In addition to Manchester's long-standing concern over the A. S. G. B.'s changing role, another factor in their attitude was Manchester's own financial difficulties. At this time they had only just completed their new building and were experiencing considerable financial embarrassment. Their lack of funds had forced them to cancel their usual annual contribution to communal causes such as the Association for Jewish Youth, the Jewish Book Council and the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

58

However, whilst their rebuttal jealously guards the

57. *ibid* 6th September 1954.

58. Minutes A. S. G. B. Executive 22nd July 1954.

administrative and financial independence of Manchester, it does infer that the A. S. G. B. has considerable influence in the spiritual sphere. It signified that a change of attitude had taken place and the mood was now set for acceptance of the Reform Beth Din for Manchester's proselytes.

At the Manchester Council meeting of 6th September 1954 which received its Executive's hostile view on the A. S. G. B.'s assumed role, a statement on proselytes drawn up by Goldberg⁵⁹ was circulated. The preamble confirmed a willingness to accept proselytes, although only if their sincerity was beyond question. Of crucial importance were the five main points. The first four made it clear that all aspects of the conversion was to be exclusively in the hands of ministers - the initial interview, the tuition and the recommendation for candidates to present themselves before a court. The fifth point declared that "The decision for acceptance into Judaism rests with a⁶⁰ Beth Din of the A. S. G. B."

The motion was carried unanimously. It meant that Manchester at last subscribed to the authority of the Reform Beth Din not only in matters of marriage and divorce, but now also with regard to conversion. After so many years of resistance, this change of heart must be credited to two factors: first to the diplomacy of Reinhart in allowing Manchester to arrange its own courts parallel to the Reform Beth Din for conversion cases yet take advantage of it for

59. See Appendix VIII.

60. Minutes Manchester Council 18th September 1954.

matrimonial ones, and thus pursuing a long campaign to wean them slowly over to a unified system. Second, credit must also go to Goldberg who, despite his initial friction with fellow-ministers over Manchester's stance, worked within the congregation to persuade them that conversion was a matter for ministerial expertise only.

It is important to note that what Manchester accepted was ministerial responsibility for conversions. It was not acquiescing in centralised control by the South, for that was an issue that was to become increasingly bitter. Indeed it is noticeable, and probably not accidental, that the Presiding Warden had described Goldberg's paper at the meeting as "a statement giving details of machinery suggested by the Executive for the carrying out of all future conversions by the London Beth Din of the A.S.G.B."⁶¹. Thus despite being known as the Rabbinical Court of the A.S.G.B., it was still labelled "the London Beth Din", even though Reinhart had often emphasised that it was not a Southern court but served the whole movement - and indeed had sat in Manchester on several occasions.⁶² It was a psychological factor that had had a significant practical effect and would continue to do so.

Whilst the issue of Manchester's recognition of the Reform Beth Din for conversions had now been resolved, the basic point of contention between Manchester and other members of the A.S.G.B. still remained. The Beth Din debate was merely a

61. Idem.

62. It had already sat twice in Manchester that year and on several occasions beforehand.

symptom of the poor relationship and a microcosm of a much larger problem. Thus a month after Manchester's acceptance of the Reform Beth Din a meeting was held in Manchester between its representatives and members of the A.S.G.B. Executive to discuss the general situation. The Manchester delegates expressed their objections to the way in which the A.S.G.B. was developing:⁶³

There was a very strong feeling in Manchester that they were not adequately represented when decisions were taken by the Association ... [in addition] they wanted their limited funds available used to the best possible purpose and if they were going to be asked to pool their resources in a central fund in London there was a great danger of these funds being dissipated.

Thus the complaint already seen before - resentment against centralised control in the South - was joined by concern over their financial commitments. Although they were assured that congregational autonomy was fundamental to the Association, their grievance continued to fester. At a meeting of the A.S.G.B. Executive in January 1955, the Manchester representative criticised the Association's procedures and complained that it was "mainly a London body".⁶⁴ Attempts by Manchester to change the constitution of the A.S.G.B. and decrease affiliation fees were debated over the course of several meetings, although it was eventually agreed to maintain the existing scale.⁶⁵

63. Minutes A.S.G.B. Exec. 31st October 1954.

64. *ibid* 19th January 1955. The speaker was Basil Levy.

65. The discussion spanned ten months and agreement was reached at a meeting on 30th October 1955.

Despite the problems with Manchester and the delays they had caused, the Reform Beth Din had accomplished two major achievements by 1954. It had gained official endorsement by the A.S.G.B. and it had persuaded all the congregations within the Association to subscribe to it. A third and final hurdle was to erupt two years later over the standards set for conversion by the court and the need to unify the procedure for tuition amongst the different congregations. It was a concern that was not voiced in other areas of status change, such as adoption and divorce. These were seen as purely administrative matters and dealt with at the Reform Beth Din using Rabbinic expertise. Conversion, however, was a more controversial area and effected congregations in a number of ways. First, while examination was held at the Reform Beth Din, most of the procedure - the tuition - was held under the congregations' auspices and subject to their control. Second, any lack of knowledge amongst converts would be very obvious to other members of the community of which they had become a part and cause embarrassment to all concerned. Third, a common criticism by Orthodox leaders about the Reform movement was that it accepted converts who were unqualified or insincere. Fourth, there were often misgivings by some who considered that conversions should not be encouraged in principle and that they should only occur in exceptional circumstances. At an Annual General Meeting of the Leeds Synagogue, the chairman devoted part of his speech to appeal to members not to show so much animosity to converts, some of whom had resigned as a result.

66

Goldberg also had cause to refer to "acrimonious discussions" on the subject amongst his Council members. He even suggested to Curtis a change in the style of the Annual Reports so as to alleviate the problem :
67

You state for the year ended 31st December 1956 there were 113 Proselyte cases inclusive of 26 Minors. Now I don't know how you feel about this, but personally I would prefer this to read that there were 87 Proselyte cases who had between them 26 children below the age of 16. It is just another way of saying the same thing but to certain of the types with which I have to deal it sounds much better when I mention that throughout the whole of the Movement for a twelve month period, the number of Proselytes admitted was 87 and not 113 as stated in the report.

The question of relationships with proselytes was also an agenda item at a Council meeting of the St. Georges Settlement Synagogue :
68

The Chairman stressed how important it was that having been accepted as Jews, there was nothing distinguishable between converts and those that had been born Jews. Various members of the committee spoke in agreement and the feeling generally expressed was that every effort would be made to make all converts as comfortable as possible.

While the attitude there was more positive, the need to make a special effort indicates the same underlying problem.

The issue was formally raised at the Annual Conference of the A. S. G. B. in May 1956. Representatives from the Bournemouth and Edgware Synagogues questioned the standard set by the Reform Beth Din for conversion in comparison with that of Orthodox courts. They also referred to charges of easy

67. Goldberg to Curtis 3rd June 1957 Collins file 1957,

68. Minutes St. Georges Settlement Council 24th October 1955.

conversion which were made against the Association. In reply,
69
Rabbis Van der Zyl and Reinhart gave a vigorous defence :

the Beth Din of the Association imposed on the prospective proselyte the highest level of knowledge and education which could reasonably be demanded, and from that aspect it might be easier to pass the Beth Din of the Chief Rabbi's Court. The impediment placed on proselytes by the orthodox was one of ceremonial practices, mainly in connection with the Sabbath and Kashrut.

A. L. Hamwee of Manchester declared that the real issue was not so much differences between Orthodox and Reform procedure as differences between the various Reform synagogues. He urged the A.S.G.B. that although it should be mindful of individual autonomy, it should seek to unify the procedure in the matter of proselytes. After further points were made by other
70
delegates, Reinhart again spoke:

In view of the serious nature of the acceptance of proselytes, it was absolutely right that the procedure in this matter should be thoroughly and constantly examined. There were three stages in the process of anyone wishing to be recognised as a Jew. First he had to have someone to recommend his application; secondly, he had to study, and thirdly, he had to be recognised by a competent authority. It was surely agreed by all that it was desirable that a central Beth Din should be the competent authority in the final stages. As to the training of proselytes this was very thorough. The question that needed the attention of the Assembly was the question of unification in the acceptance of a proselyte for training in the first instance.

The discussion ended with a promise that the question of unification would be considered at the next A.S.G.B. Executive meeting and a recommendation that the Assembly of Ministers

69. Minutes A.S.G.B. Conf. 10th May 1956.

70. idem.

produce some proposals on the matter.

After further discussion the A. S. G. B. Executive decided that the question was of such significance and complexity that it would be necessary to devote considerable time to it. A special conference was called for 10th-11th November at which it and other matters could be discussed at length.⁷¹ In the meantime it was hoped that "pending the receipt of their recommendations, no steps would be taken by individual congregations in this matter".⁷² In fact this had already happened, for almost two weeks earlier a meeting of the Manchester Council had defeated by 8 votes to 4 a motion⁷³ proposed by Mr. Hamwee:

The procedure for conversion to the Jewish faith shall be regulated through the A. S. G. B. in accordance with rules laid down by them.

Although this position was to be modified, it was typical of Manchester's reluctance to cede any authority to the A. S. G. B. By contrast, the Council of the West London Synagogue welcomed the moves towards unified procedure and recommended "speedy action".⁷⁴

As requested the Assembly of Ministers met to discuss procedures. Following two separate sessions and considerable

71. The other main topics were Manchester's new budget proposals, and the question of links with the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues.

72. Minutes A. S. G. B. Exec. 23rd July 1956.

73. Minutes Manchester Council 12th July 1956.

74. Minutes W. L. S. Council 25th July 1956.

debate, they drew up proposals for the whole movement. As was to become clear later, their ability to reach agreement was facilitated by Goldberg's absence on both occasions. The proposals declared:

In accordance with Jewish tradition we recognise the right of Gentiles who are able to prove their fitness, to be accepted into the Jewish Community and we desire, in charity, to give such assistance as we can.

1. A person who desires to be accepted into Judaism should, subsequent to a preliminary interview with the Minister, be recommended by him for such instruction and observances as will give that person the opportunity to qualify as a Jew.
2. The period of preparation must depend in each case on individual circumstances but it is understood that as a general rule the length of tuition cannot be less than nine months to a year.
3. The recommendation for such a person to present him - (her-) self before the Beth Din must come from a Minister of the A.S.G.B.
4. The decision for acceptance into Judaism rests with the Beth Din.

The rules largely correspond to those drawn up by Goldberg two years earlier. The only major difference was that whereas he had proposed a minimum time limit of eighteen months, the Assembly document suggested a minimum of nine months to a year. Even in this respect there was still not a great discrepancy, for the Assembly was referring to tuition only, while Goldberg was taking into account the probation period during which a candidate would meet with the minister and attend services

75. Minutes Ass. of Min. 1st August 1956, quoted in D. Marmur ed. Halachic Decisions of the Assembly of Ministers 1949-1963 p. 28.

76

before commencing tuition. The new proposals received the unanimous support of all the ministers present. It should be noted that Reinhart himself favoured as full a period of tuition as possible. When asked by the Chairman of Southport New Synagogue what length he suggested he replied that it should not be less than a year.⁷⁷ The proposals were welcomed by the A.S.G.B. Executive, who congratulated the Assembly on its ability to achieve unanimity.⁷⁸ The proposals were then sent to the constituent congregations so that comments could be made before they were formally presented at the conference. The reaction was largely positive. Wimbledon welcomed the proposals and instructed delegates to the special conference to vote for them.⁷⁹ Glasgow also supported them, although pointing out that it would be unable to comply with point three of the rules as it lacked a minister. The Assembly replied that ministers visiting Glasgow to take services would also interview any proselytes and make the necessary recommendations on their behalf.⁸⁰ As a result of other comments, the Assembly

76. It should be noted that Goldberg's stipulation of 18 months was in itself a compromise between the two different time-scales Manchester had hitherto maintained: proselytes attached to members of the congregation took a minimum of 15 months (3 months probation and 12 months tuition) while partners of non-members had a minimum of 21 months (6 months probation and 15 months tuition); Minutes. Manchester Executive 19th July 1954.
77. Reinhart to Sampson Goldstone 17th March 1955 R. P. Mixture I; Southport New Synagogue.
78. Minutes A.S.G.B. Exec. 3rd September 1956.
79. Minutes Wimbledon Council 3rd September 1956.
80. Minutes Ass. of Min. 1st October 1956, quoted Marmur op. cit. p.28.

81

added some further points to their proposals:

- 5a. A central register is being kept of all cases which come before the court.
- b. A central register of all applicants for proselytisation shall be kept.
- c. The ministers undertake to forward particulars of all applicants immediately after the first interview with them.
- d. In the event of one applicant having once been interviewed by one minister and subsequently making application to a minister of another synagogue, the latter will at once communicate with the minister to whom the original application was made.
- e. If no agreement can be reached between the two ministers the matter shall be referred to the Beth Din for its decision.

The effect of these additions was to provide a smooth administrative procedure and ensure that all cases were properly documented. There would also be the fullest possible exchange of information amongst ministers especially when a candidate who had already been refused by one minister approached another minister.

There was also a comment that the phrase "with or without lay co-operation" should be added when talking about preliminary interviews with the minister. The suggestion was made in order to facilitate agreement by Conference, but was rejected by the Assembly. As Reinhart declared, such an addition would only impinge on the authority of the ministers, whose ultimate responsibility the conversions were, while there was nothing in the proposals that excluded lay co-operation if

82

individual ministers felt it was required.

At the Manchester Synagogue - the most likely source of any objections - a series of discussions took place. At a Council meeting of 3rd October 1956 it was proposed by Mr. Lister that the matter of the unification procedure be re-examined. In itself this was a controversial proposal and was only passed by ten votes to eight. A lengthy debate followed, at the end of which Mr. Hamwee again put forward the motion - previously defeated in Executive - that Manchester accept a unified procedure, and in particular the recommendations of the Assembly of Ministers, providing they were adopted by the A. S. G. B. This time the motion was carried by twelve votes to six. It was short-lived victory, however, for at an Executive meeting five days later it was decided to refer the matter back to the Council for re-consideration "as it was understood that all the details, implications and importance of this matter had not been fully grasped by certain Council members". Subsequent Executive meetings debated amendments to the Assembly recommendations, particularly over the length of time which was felt to be too short, and it was suggested that the minimum period should be set at eighteen months. It was also decided that if these amendments were rejected, the Manchester delegates to the special conference should vote against the original Assembly proposals. Once again there was an

83

84

82. Minutes A. S. G. B. Exec. 1st October 1956.

83. Minutes Manchester Exec. 8th October 1956.

84. Meetings took place on 15th and 22nd October 1956.

insistence on Manchester's right to separatism and there was no
hesitation in making this possible confrontation clear:

85

If the original resolution of the Ministers' Assembly is carried, it was resolved that the Manchester Congregation will reserve the right to take whatever steps thought fit for the Congregation.

The Manchester Council duly ratified the Executive's stance at its meeting of 7th November, thus reversing their earlier endorsement of the Assembly proposals.

The Special Conference took place and saw lengthy discussions on all aspects of conversion far beyond the immediate recommendations of the Assembly. Thus S. J. Levy of Bournemouth questioned whether there should be a general policy to encourage conversion, or whether it should be officially discouraged save in special circumstances. Mr. S. Watson of North Western voiced the issue of those converting for the sake of marriage and whether it was a disqualifying motive or should be welcomed for the sake of any future children.

Whilst many general questions were raised, the only definite objections to the Assembly's recommendations came from the Manchester delegation. Goldberg pointed out that the apparent unanimity of the ministers had only been possible because of his unavoidable absence when the matter had been discussed. He and other Manchester delegates urged that the proposals be altered to discourage proselytes in principle, while those accepted should have a minimum of eighteen months tuition. They also expressed the desire that the Reform should

not be seen as a "dumping ground"⁸⁶ for converts refused by the Orthodox.

Once again, Manchester's attitude was largely different from most other congregations. The Southport delegate described its amendment as "a cry of panic and that they were surrendering to pressure from orthodox sources"⁸⁷. Wimbledon and North Western delegates quoted the words of Leo Baeck, only recently deceased and still exerting enormous influence over the movement, whose opinion on proselytes was "to open the doors" and who had stated that he would be "proud to be a leader of a congregation of Proselytes"⁸⁸. Three amendments were tabled and voted upon. The first was put forward by Manchester⁸⁹ and suggested adding to the preamble:

In the same spirit, as a safeguard for the community as well as to protect those concerned against unpleasant circumstances which can ensue, we consider it to be no less our religious duty to discourage from becoming Jews those who do not evince a genuine inclination to do so.

The amendment was defeated and further attempts by Manchester to include cautionary additions to the preamble were protested at on the grounds that the majority opinion had already expressed itself.

The second amendment was a compromise formula over the

86. Minutes A. S. G. B. Special Conf. 10th November 1956.

87. idem.

88. idem.

89. idem.

length of tuition and proposed that it be not less "than
fifteen months, except that in special circumstances this
period may be reconsidered by the Beth Din".⁹⁰ Although Reinhart
objected that it would be wrong to determine the length of a
study course out of the need for political compromise, it was
felt that some gesture to Manchester should be made to achieve
a unified procedure and the motion was passed. Despite this
attempt at compromise and a subsequent plea by the Chairman
that all should accept the resolutions in a loyal spirit, the
Manchester delegation declared that no such undertaking could
be given. The third amendment concerned the register and
merely merged clauses (b) and (c) of paragraph 5, and was
accepted. The Chairman wound up the long debate by proposing
that the Ministers' recommendations be accepted and that the
three amendments be referred back to the Ministers "for their
final decision". This was to prove an important phrase and
vested ultimate authority in the Minister's Assembly.

It should be noted that Manchester's isolated stance also
manifested itself elsewhere during the Special Conferences,
particularly over their proposals to alter the financial
workings of the A. S. G. B. In putting forward Manchester's case
Mr. V. Steinart expressed the congregation's familiar
⁹¹
objection :

The Association was first formed as a consultative
association for the benefit of its members. During
the period of its existence however it had, in their
view, attained some rather extravagant ambitions

90. idem.

91. idem.

which were not visualised when the Constitution was originally drawn up.

A compromise motion was eventually agreed which met some of Manchester's complaints but did not substantially alter the workings of the Association.

The ministers met the following month and devoted much of their discussion to the issue of length of tuition. After a protracted debate in which Goldberg sought to gain a longer minimum period, Reinhart proposed a compromise formula :⁹²

The Assembly still feels, in the light of all its experience, that the wisest minimum is only a minimum. In many cases the period is longer and may well be fifteen months or two years or more.

The motion was intended to maintain a flexible period so as to cater for individual circumstances, yet also reassure those who feared a decline in standards. The passing of the resolution by seven votes to four indicated divisions amongst the ministers and that further discussion was advisable. This took place a few days later on 15th December, at the end of which it was agreed by a similar majority vote that there would be no change to the Assembly's original recommendation, setting a minimum period of nine to twelve months but allowing individual congregations to encourage a longer period if they so desired.

The decision of the Assembly was relayed to the A.S.G.B. Executive at their meeting on 17th December. Explaining why the ministers had effectively rejected the Conference

92. Minutes Ass. of Min. 12th December 1956, quoted Marmur op. cit. p. 29.

93

amendment, Reinhart stated :

The ministers had sympathetically and at great length considered the recommendation from the Conference. They had felt, however, that although they recognised Conference as the supreme authority, in certain spheres, especially in regard to the interpretation of Jewish Law, the ministers should be regarded as the final authority, and he doubted if there could be any reason for altering their original decision as regards the length of tuition.

The Executive voted by eight to three to accept the ministers' position and a statement was sent out by the Assembly to the congregations giving the reasons for their attitude. It asserted that while the Assembly had appreciated the spirit of the conference discussion, that spirit could be best served without any formal alteration in the tuition length

94

originally mentioned :

It should be explained that the important phrase regarding the period of approach to conversion is "The period of preparation must depend in each case on individual circumstances". The period of "nine months to a year" is mentioned only because the experience of the majority of ministers has shown that that is in fact the usual minimum. As stated also, however, many cases take fifteen months or even longer. However, a minority of the members feel that in no case is a period of less than fifteen months adequate. There is of course no bar to their insistence on that minimum in the case of their own proselytes. The majority of the Assembly felt that it would be not quite honest for them to agree to a certain minimum period of time which seemed to them arbitrary, as confessedly it had been suggested not with reference to any experience or intrinsic merit but solely with the object of "putting people off".

Whilst justifying their refusal to change their stand, the

93. Minutes A.S.G.B. Exec. 17th December 1956.

94. Statement by the Assembly of Ministers on the Unification of Procedure with regard to Proselytes, 30th January 1957.

ministers also sought to reassure the laity that their concerns were understood and would receive attention. The statement nevertheless ends with a strong assertion of the Reform Beth Din as the final arbiter :

The members of the Assembly wish to express their full appreciation of the anxieties of members of the Conference and of the Congregations represented, and they desire to co-operate in what Mr. Solomons called

"tightening up". They desire to place on record that in the spirit of the Conference of the 11th November, they will redouble their efforts to discourage applicants for conversion so as to prevent, as far as possible, insincere undertakings; and to guarantee in all cases adequate periods of preparation and probation, and a final judgement based solely upon the candidate's full realisation of Jewishness.

In the end, the responsibility for proselytization must rest with the Beth Din; and the ministers respectfully ask the support of the Conference and all their members in their effort to maintain Jewish tradition in this important field.

While most congregations now accepted the Assembly's decision, Manchester felt that "the democratic conference decisions had been negatived by the Ministers Assembly in spite of the Chairman's appeal for unity". The matter was given an added complexity due to the fact that the Chairman of the A. S. G. B. was Mr. Alexander Levy, who was also one of the representatives of the Manchester Congregation. In view of the clash of interests between his two positions he declared his intention to resign as Chairman. The Manchester Executive then proceeded to discuss counter-recommendations which asserted that the A. S. G. B. Conference had ultimate authority in all matters and that the Assembly of Ministers was subordinate to

96

its decisions. It was intended to reduce the power of the Assembly, which Manchester found unacceptable as it was a central body independent of any control by the constituent synagogues. Manchester's "Alternative Resolution" urged that
97
the A. S. G. B. constitution be amended:

- (a) that decisions of the Conference are paramount in all matters
- (b) that subject to (a) above, the Ministers' Assembly shall be set up as a sub-committee of the Association. Its function inter alia shall be to make suggestions of importance to the work of the Association at all levels, and to advise the Executive and Conference on matters placed before it.

Whilst the motion was in direct response to the differences between the ministers and Conference over tuition-length, it also raised many other issues such as whether conversion was an ecclesiastical or administrative matter, as well as the whole question of authority within the Association. Commenting on the impending debate, Maybaum told his own synagogue council that "the highest authority for the Ministers
98
at the current time was of course the Beth Din". He also added his impression that if the ministers refused to accept Conference as the higher authority Manchester would probably leave the A. S. G. B.

Both sides realised that the matter was in danger of

96. These were discussed and variously amended at meetings of the Executive on 4th February, 4th March, 1st April, 3rd April and 8th April 1957.

97. Minutes Manchester Exec. 8th April 1957.

98. Minutes Edgware Council 7th May 1957.

escalating far beyond the issue of unification procedure for prosleytes and took steps to defuse any confrontation. The A. S. G. B. Executive confirmed that the Special Conference amendments had merely been recommendations to the Assembly, not directives and that the final decision had been committed to the ministers.⁹⁹ There had therefore been no breach of the constitutional procedure. For their part, the Ministers' Assembly¹⁰⁰ issued a statement that was equally conciliatory:

The Ministers' Assembly are anxious to do everything in their power to restore a spirit of harmony and goodwill in the workings of the Association. They have deliberated on the resolution submitted by Manchester, which was passed on to them by the Executive of the A. S. G. B.

Clause a, as has already been pointed out by the A. S. G. B. Executive, seems to cut across the autonomy of individual congregations, which is the foundation on which the A. S. G. B. at present stands. In so far, however, as this clause purposes to underline the function of the Conference as stated in Article 9 of the Constitution of the A. S. G. B., the ministers do of course endorse it.

With regard to clause b, the Assembly feel that the term "sub-committee" is not quite accurate because of the nature of their composition. The Assembly are not appointed by the A. S. G. B., but every minister of an A. S. G. B. congregation and such other qualified men as they invite, are members of the Assembly. Their functions, however, as formulated in the Manchester resolution are entirely agreed by the Ministers' Assembly.

The statement skilfully managed to disagree with both parts of the Manchester resolution yet at the same time display a desire to work in complete harmony within the procedures of the Association. It also had the ironic achievement of basing

99. Minutes A. S. G. B. Exec. 6th March 1957.

100. *ibid* 15th May 1957.

part of the objection on the fact that Manchester's proposal would limit congregational autonomy - the very issue that Manchester valued so highly! On 15th May 1957 Manchester declared itself satisfied by the clarification and withdrew the motion. Mr. Levy resumed his position as Chairman and the issue of conversion was deemed to have been settled. Manchester's retraction meant that the unification procedure for proselytes was now accepted throughout the Association. It also meant that the last hurdle to the acceptance of the workings of the Reform Beth Din itself was now over. Its authority and procedures were accepted by the movement as a whole and by all the individual congregations within it. There were to be no further questions as to its status or challenges to its writ.

As a postscript to the long saga that had taken so many years to complete - fifteen years since the idea of a Reform Beth Din was first mooted officially - it should be noted that the two major forces that had been involved in its development left the stage shortly afterwards. On 12th June 1957 Reinhart resigned his position at West London over a matter of internal synagogue politics. As a result he felt constrained to resign from the A.S.G.B. Executive and he no longer participated in the work of its committees including the Assembly of Ministers and the Reform Beth Din. It was a cruel irony that the founder of the Reform Beth Din and prime mover in all its battles for recognition should leave the A.S.G.B. only four weeks later and not enjoy the fruits of his achievements. The

final paragraph of the Annual Report of the Reform Beth Din for 1957 noted :

We have to register the resignation from the Assembly of Ministers of our founder member, Rabbi H. F. Reinhart. Nothing need be said of his valuable work for two reasons. Firstly because it is well known to all, and secondly because we do not consider his work for the Beth Din is terminated. We have the strong hope that his absence is only temporary and that he will soon return to his vacant place in the Beth Din.

It was to prove a vain hope, for Reinhart never returned, although the outstanding influence he had on its birth and development are evident to this day.

The other departure, albeit a little later, was that of Manchester Synagogue. Shortly after resuming the chair, Mr. Levy gave a warning that he might again have to tender his resignation, this time over Manchester's concern with the budget and what it considered to be the unacceptably high level¹⁰² of contributions expected. It was also opposed to the acceptance of proselytes from Liberal synagogues. When all the other Reform synagogues voted to recognise Liberal converts it¹⁰³ highlighted Manchester's isolation within the movement. Once again there were raised the issues of congregational autonomy, of London domination, and of centralised activities that went beyond the original intentions of the Association. No solution was found for the problem and it culminated in Manchester's resignation from the Association in August 1959 after two years of rancorous discussion. The secession meant that Goldberg

102. *ibid* 25th July 1957.

103. *ibid.* 16th November 1957.

ceased to be a member of the Assembly of Ministers under the terms of its constitution, which limited membership to those within the A.S.G.B. Thus the synagogue that had objected most to the authority of the Reform Beth Din and had caused considerable delay in its general acceptance within the A.S.G.B. was itself no longer part of the movement. Manchester's resignation reinforces the view already expressed that its opposition to the Reform Beth Din was part of its larger opposition to the expansion and changing role of the A.S.G.B. However, unlike Reinhart, Manchester did rejoin, in January 1961. Whilst there were various conditions which they insisted upon as part of the reconciliation formula, no mention was made of the Reform Beth Din and there were no further objections to it.¹⁰⁴ By then the Association had changed its name to the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain.¹⁰⁵ The Court had therefore changed its title too and became known as "The Court of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain". It also adopted the Hebrew name of "Beth Din Zedek" (literally, "court of justice"), the traditional title for a Rabbinic Court. It was a move that reflected its firm position within the movement and its confidence in its role.

104. Minutes Manchester Council 23rd May 1960.

105. Minutes A.S.G.B. Conference 17th May 1958.

CHAPTER IV

CASE STUDIES AND COMMUNAL REACTIONS

In the years 1948-1965 the Reform Beth Din dealt with just over two and a half thousand cases.¹ They not only reveal many moving stories in the lives of the individuals concerned, but also reflect important aspects of Anglo-Jewry during that period. Examined one by one the cases are of personal interest only, but taken together they chart distinctive trends within the community.

The number of adult proselytes coming before the Reform Beth Din shows a pattern of steady increase.² Thus the 40 cases appearing in its first year rose to 109 cases in 1965. There were a variety of reasons behind this consistent growth. One was the rapid expansion of the Reform movement. Upon the establishment of the Reform Beth Din there were ten synagogues in the A. S. G. B.;³ by 1965 they had grown to twenty-five. Whilst many were in London, others were spread throughout the provinces, ranging from Brighton to Newcastle. Many of them increased their membership at an enormous rate.⁴ As a result the Reform Beth Din served a constituency that was becoming larger every year, and which was reflected in a corresponding increase in cases.

1. These were divided into Proselytes (1349), Adoption (93) Divorce (327), Minors (467), Status. (124), Conversion Enquiries (193).
2. See Appendix IX.
3. See Appendix X.
4. See Appendix III.

A more detailed analysis of the cases indicates that another factor was the rise in inter-marriage. Out of a total of 1349 proselytes, 127 were not engaged or married to a Jew.⁵ Thus only 9% were converting purely for love of Judaism itself and with no other motive to influence their decision. In all other instances a Jewish partner was involved, pointing to a growing number of Jew forming liaisons with non-Jews. Moreover, more than half the Jews concerned had married their spouses before they had converted : 628 were married prior to approaching the Reform Beth Din, compared to 574 who were engaged. The fact that conversion was an afterthought to marriage for many is shown also by the large number of young children who converted at the same time as their mothers did - 467 in all.⁶ Not surprisingly the figures for the age of proselytes at the time of conversion show that over half were ~~between~~ ^{within the} 21-30 age-bracket, whilst a total of 77% were under 40 years of age.⁷ This conforms to the age-groups most associated with marriage and children.

It is noticeable that the overwhelming number of proselytes were women, with a total of 1,120 applicants compared to 229 men.⁸ This overall ratio of approximately five females for every male compares exactly to Reform conversions in the United States where the same ratio is found.⁹ The

5. See Appendix XI.

6. See Appendix IX.

7. See Appendix XII.

8. See Appendix XI.

9. D. M. Eichorn (ed) Conversion to Judaism - A History and Analysis p. 172.

predominance of women is to be expected for two reasons.

First, the conversion course was a much more daunting prospect for men than for women; for although the study requirements were the same for both sexes, the ritual of circumcision was incumbent on the men. Normally a born-Jew is circumcised at eight days old, and the ritual is done in a matter of seconds and with little after-effects. For an adult, however, it involves a full-scale operation in hospital, under anaesthetic and with a recuperation period of several days. Fears of the pain and discomfort involved, along with deeper fears as to the affect on one's virility or sexual ability, are discouraging factors that female proselytes do not face. Although

exemptions from circumcision were granted by the Reform Beth Din in cases of likely danger to health, such instances were rare and only applied to ten out of the 229 males concerned. A

second, and perhaps even more important reason, is the fact that Jewish status is traditionally passed down through the female line. Thus if a Jewish woman marries a non-Jew, the children of that union will be born with Jewish status.

However, if a Jewish man marries a non-Jewish woman, the children will not be considered Jewish. In many cases an important factor behind conversion is the desire to pass on the Jewish heritage to the next generation and bring one's children up in the same religious background that the Jewish partner

10. A striking parallel is that it was realised by the early Christians that circumcision was a distinct discouragement to conversion and that insisting upon it would "put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples" (Acts of the Apostles 15.10). A declaration was therefore made dropping it as a requirement for entry into Christianity.

11. Minutes, Ass. of Min. 24th May 1961.

experienced. The effect of this matrilineal descent is to provide considerable incentive for the female partners of Jewish men to convert for the sake of the childrens' religious identity. Conversely, there is much less pressure on the male partners of Jewish women to convert as any children would have¹² full Jewish status anyway.

The desire of many applicants to convert in order to harmonise the family faith based on an existing or impending marriage was considered by the Orthodox authorities as merely a loophole for sanctioning inter-marriage. They sought to stem the tide by discouraging conversion. The Reform Beth Din was aware that much of its work was due to the rise in inter-marriage rather than the pure love of Judaism, but felt that the best policy was to rectify an undesirable situation by¹³ bringing the non-Jew into the faith:

In principle we are against proselyte marriages. We share the fears of Jewish parents, we agree with the marriage counsellors and warn applicants against the inherent difficulties in religious and social relationships, but when the applicants come to us they have already made up their minds. It would be short-sighted to suppose that by refusing to accept the non-Jewish partner for conversion, the marriage could be prevented. There are no religious impediments to a mixed marriage in the Register Offices. We must meet the applicants on their merits, with an open and unbiased mind.

The geographical origins of the applicants shed some light on the pattern of inter-marriage. In one of the few studies on the subject Neustatter concluded that its increase was to be

12. For a similar analysis see E. Krausz Leeds Jewry p. 100.

13. Curtis 'The Beth Din of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain' p. 130.

measured particularly amongst Jews living in smaller towns and rural areas.¹⁴ Such Jews were more liable to marry non-Jews because of the lack of a strong Jewish community around them and the limited opportunity to socialise with fellow Jews. The cases at the Reform Beth Din suggest a qualification of this finding, for the vast majority of Jews bringing their spouses for conversion came from the large cities. Applicants from London, Manchester, Leeds, Glasgow and Cardiff accounted for¹⁵ 80% of the total number. It would seem, therefore, that urban Jews were also prone to meeting and forming unions with non-Jews. However, owing to a combination of factors including communal pressure and the availability of conversion facilities, they sought to bring their non-Jewish spouses into the Jewish fold.

The religious backgrounds that the applicants were jettisoning in favour of Judaism mirror the diverse religious strands within the country at large and highlight the extent to¹⁶ which Jews were integrating with all aspects of society. Although records are incomplete, it is clear that the majority came from the Church of England, followed by significant numbers who were Catholics or Methodists, the next two largest groupings in the Church. A smaller percentage came from the Church of Scotland, Baptist, Presbyterian and Lutheran Churches. Others came from Non-conformist, Welsh Chapel,

14. H. Newstatter 'Demographic and Other Statistical Aspects of Anglo-Jewry' p. 94.

15. See Appendix XIII.

16. See Appendix XIV.

Evangelist, Christian Scientist, Church of Wales, Greek Orthodox, Congregationalist, Episcopalian, Salvation Army, Serbian Orthodox, Unitarian and Plymouth Brethren backgrounds.

The religious affiliation of the Jewish partners of the converts is even more revealing and indicates another factor in the growth of cases at the Reform Beth Din. The details are not recorded in all of the cases, but of the 698 instances where the Jewish partner's affiliation is known, only 108 were from a Reform synagogue.¹⁷ Thus those within the Reform movement were involved in merely 15% of proselyte cases. It was a consistently low level throughout the period under study. Indeed, when in 1964 the proportion of partners from a Reform background rose to 27% the Annual Report of the Reform Beth Din pointed out that it was "an unusually high number of cases". With the exception of one case from the Liberal synagogue, all the other Jewish partners hailed from Orthodox communities. Thus 85% of cases heard at the Reform Beth Din came from outside the Reform movement. The figure testifies to the dissatisfaction with the attitude and policies of the Chief Rabbi's Court by those for whom it should have been their natural home. Others had applied to the Chief Rabbi's Court but had received no satisfaction. They formed a minimum 13% of the total number that applied to the Reform Beth Din. The percentage may well be higher as it was only after 1957 that the form for prospective converts to the Reform Beth Din included the question whether one had applied to another court beforehand. Moreover it is known that some applicants were

17. See Appendix XV.

nervous of admitting prior application elsewhere in the
(mistaken) belief that it might prejudice their reception by
18
the Reform Beth Din.

The reports of those who had approached the Chief Rabbi's
Court throw a rare light on a court that was extremely
reluctant to discuss its inner workings. Its negative attitude
to conversion per se manifested itself in a number of ways :
some applicants were simply refused because they were seeking
19
conversion:

We applied to the Chief Rabbi's Court in 1938, but
the war intervened; we applied again in 1946 and were
told that they wanted no more converts.

Others reported that they were discouraged through continuous
20
delays:

I approached the Chief Rabbi's Beth Din four years
ago. I was told to leave home and leave my job and
work for Jewish people, all of which I did. I was
then told to come back in a year, and then I was told
to come back in another six months, and then in a
further six months. I do not think they were the
slightest bit interested in me.

In some cases the Chief Rabbi's Court never responded to
21
applicants, whether they were initial enquiries or those who

18. See Dean file 1961 and Stratton file 1963 in which both candidates denied having applied elsewhere previously on their application form, yet admitted having done so when interviewed by the Clerk to the Court R.B.D.
19. Isbitsky file 1963 : see also Brent file 1956, Kleineman file 1961, R.B.D.
20. Bright file 1963; see also Frost file 1955, Cline file 1959 R.B.D.
21. Schotter file 1958 R.B.D.

22

had already been interviewed:

My wife was very anxious to embrace the Jewish Faith. I duly came in front of Dayan Abramsky and Lazarus, I was cross-questioned for 1½ hours, and the findings of the Court was as follows:

I was to close my premises every Sabbath, for the following six months, and after the expiry of that period I would be recalled and if satisfactory, they would consider our case. To this I replied, I would willingly agree, but would they appoint two witnesses to see that this was carried out. To this, Dayan Abramsky said, shaking me by the hand, from your earnestness, I am convinced you will do your duty and that the next time I will meet you, you will be a different man. I came home with a light heart and I fulfilled my duty.

At last the time came to inform the Beth Din. Registered letters, telegrams were sent to the Beth Din, and from that day to this (2 years later) NO WORD EVER CAME.

The opposition of the Chief Rabbi's Court to inter-marriage meant that in their eyes many applicants in a relationship with a Jew were excluded automatically. Thus a female applicant married to a Jew was turned away "because her Jewish husband had committed a sin in marrying out". This attitude extended even to the children of a mixed-marriage : a woman whose father was Jewish and whose mother was non-Jewish was informed that "Nothing could be done as long as my mother is alive or married to my father".

Another commonly reported reason for rejection by the Chief Rabbi's Court was not that the applicant was unworthy but

22. Harris file 1950 R.B.D.

23. Pritchard file 1960 R.B.D.

24. Huddon file 1965 R.B.D.

that their Jewish partner failed to meet the standards of the Court. In many cases it related to proper observance of the Sabbath : "He was informed that since he was working on the Sabbath, the conversion of his wife could not be accepted".²⁵
The Court suggested that a newsagent sell his shop and that a businessman close his office on Sabbaths and Holidays despite his non-Jewish partner's objections.²⁶ No exceptions were made for those in emergency services : "I was refused because my husband is a doctor. He could not promise not to look after his patients on the Sabbath".²⁷ In other instances the applicants were turned down because the Jewish partner did not lay tephillin (phylacteries) every day or could not read Hebrew fluently enough.²⁸
²⁹
³⁰

Whether such criteria were justified or whether they went beyond the demands of Jewish Law is not the issue. What is important is that they were perceived by many ordinary members of Orthodox synagogues as being unfair and unhelpful. In addition there are several accounts of deliberately discourteous treatment, and of being "dealt with very

25. Minski file 1951; see also Jacobs file 1948, Miller file 1956 R. B. D.
26. Blackman file 1961; see also Williams file 1951, Sinclair-Morris file 1951 R. B. D.
27. Korobruk file 1961; see also Bush file 1961 R. B. D.
28. Lewis file 1964 R. B. D.
29. Ravel file 1959 R. B. D.
30. Mitzman file 1956 R. B. D.

31 abruptly", "frightened away", 32 and that "they were very rude". 33
Whilst some reports might be dismissed as prejudiced because
the applicant had been rejected, the combined evidence of so
many testimonies cannot be discarded. Moreover the
inevitability of a rebuff by the Chief Rabbi's Court is
confirmed by several proselytes who had approached the minister
of their local Orthodox synagogue and were told that it was in
their best interest to apply to the Reform Beth Din. Curtis
34 noted of one candidate:

Dr. Minton is very friendly with the Rev. Ephraim
Levine who warned him NOT to go to the Chief Rabbi's
Beth Din, and advised him to come to us.

Similar recommendations were made by other Orthodox
ministers who felt that the standards of the Chief Rabbi's
Court were unnecessarily off-putting. Thus Rabbi E. Susman of
Northampton Hebrew Congregation wrote to Reinhart concerning
35 the wife of one of his congregants :

She once went to see the Chief Rabbinate and she was
not at all received satisfactorily. The only fault
that the London Beth Din could find on her was that
her husband works on Saturday ... There are 80% of

31. Lee file 1962; see also Phillips file 1963 R.B.D.
32. Sampson file 1961; see also Levy file 1959 R.B.D.
33. Sugarman file 1965; see also Horrocks file 1952, Collins
file 1957 R.B.D.
34. Minton file 1950 R.B.D.
35. Susman to Reinhart 2nd July 1953; Singer file 1953 R.B.D.
Other Orthodox ministers who advised members of their
synagogue to approach the Reform Beth Din were Rev. A.
Barnett (Western Synagogue), Rev. R. Brookes (Birmingham
Hebrew Congregation), Rabbi B. Levy (Bristol Hebrew
Congregation), Rev. P. Snowden (Newport Synagogue, Rabbi
M. Unterman (Cardiff United Synagogue).

Anglo-Jewry who work on Saturday and are accepted as Orthodox members. My own opinion is that Mrs Singer is worthy to become a Jewess ... She attends our synagogue whenever she can and is more interested in the way of Jewish life than many of our own faith ... Can you possibly help her to become a Jewess?

The shift of loyalty by those within the Orthodox fold to the Reform synagogues is also evident from the geographical
36
origins of the applicants. The majority of them came from the Greater London areas, reflecting the largest Jewish settlement in the country. The others were spread over 127 provincial towns, with the greatest number from places with a high Jewish population, such as Manchester. In 68 towns, however, there was no synagogue, which meant travelling to another town to attend services, but which was precluded by the Orthodox authorities because of the Sabbath restrictions concerning travel. Most applicants - and their Jewish partners - were unwilling to either move home or stay elsewhere at weekends to accomodate this requirement. Instead they attended the nearest Reform synagogue, which saw no objection to travelling on the Sabbath. The transfer of allegiance is even more noticeable from the 48 towns in which there was a local Orthodox synagogue, but where the candidates still chose to journey elsewhere to attend a Reform synagogue. In 9 towns there were both Orthodox and Reform synagogues, from which they chose the latter. In only two towns - Maidenhead and Harlow - was there only a Reform synagogue and no immediate Orthodox alternative.

All of the cases that were rejected or left in abeyance by the Chief Rabbi's Court were accepted by the Reform authorities

and passed the Reform Beth Din following tuition. Their failure at the Chief Rabbi's Court was not seen as a blot on their character but merely a sign of a different approach to Judaism:³⁷

They came to us not as "rejects" on moral grounds, but because their Jewish partners could not comply with the ritual demands made on them by the orthodox authorities.

The cases highlight the different criteria of the two courts : whereas the former demanded strict observance of Jewish Law by the applicant and their partner, the latter regarded Jewish identity as the main concern. For Reinhart the essence of conversion was more to do with a person's feelings than their practice of rituals:³⁸

I think you will agree that the important thing to emphasise at the very beginning is that learning is not an objective in itself, but is the means of enabling the individual to know whether or not he is a Jew; and that before a person can appear before a Court, he must be able to say that he feels Jewish in all respects. It is of the utmost importance to emphasise that wanting to be Jewish is one thing, and being Jewish another. The Court has authority only to acknowledge a person who is himself sure of his Jewish knowledge, conviction and loyalty.

Reinhart's shorthand formula of "sincere conviction based on adequate knowledge"³⁹ was an accurate summary of the requirements of the Reform Beth Din : placing conviction as

37. Annual Report of the Reform Beth Din 1962 p.2; see similarly the 1963 Annual Report p.2.

38. Reinhart to Katz 11th October 1948 R. P. Mixture I; Rabbi Katz.

39. Reinhart to H. Smith 9th October 1948 R. P. Proselytes S - W; Harry Smith.

the priority, and with no mention of ritual observances.

Whilst the merits of such a policy are open to debate, there is little doubt that they corresponded more closely to the attitudes of a largely nominally-Orthodox Anglo-Jewry than did the strictures of the Chief Rabbi's Court. In this context it should be noted that in only two cases were applicants to the Reform Beth Din rejected. One concerned a divorcee with a child who wished to convert and marry a Jewish man, but who did not wish her child to become Jewish; the other person started tuition but her lack of commitment was found unacceptable because she still attended Church and did not go to synagogue services. Others dropped out of their tuition course for reasons of their own - such as pregnancy, a death in the family, the break-up of their engagement, lack of time and going abroad. In two cases applicants were referred to the Chief Rabbi's Court as it was felt to be more suitable for their lifestyle. In only three instances are there any complaints by those who did not pursue conversion with the Reform Beth Din : two individuals stated that a year's course was too long a period for them, while a third person referred

40. R.B.D. Courtbook 11th April 1951 (Marshall).

41. R.B.D. Courtbook 4th December 1953 (Waller).

42. Dredger file 1952. Springer file 1960 R.B.D.

43. Ball file 1954. Harris file 1959 R.B.D.

44. Mansi file 1950. Studer file 1961 R.B.D.

45. Dear file 1951, Pearson file 1954 R.B.D.

46. Auerhaan file 1952, Greenberg file 1955 R.B.D.

47. Bigg file 1955, Bursar file 1959 R.B.D.

48. Kingston file 1953, Pinheira file 1964 R.B.D.

49

to "too many obstacles put in our way".

Another aspect of the Reform Beth Din's work concerned Jewish parents adopting non-Jewish children and wishing to register them as Jewish. A total of 93 cases were heard during the years under study, although the first one did not occur until 1954; thereafter they increased to an average of nine per
50 year. As with proselyte cases, the rise in number reflected both the growth of the Reform movement and the dissatisfaction with the Orthodox authorities. Although full information before 1959 is lacking, at least 11% had approached the Chief Rabbi's Court - almost exactly the same proportion of proselyte cases. Once again the couples either reported that they were
51 kept waiting without any response, or that they were not religious enough and that they "must be strictly Orthodox in every respect before consideration of the adoption can be
52 made". Lest it be thought that these are merely the disgruntled reactions of rejected couples, it should be noticed that another application that went to the Chief Rabbi's Court first and then transferred to the Reform Beth Din was made by the National Childrens' Adoption Society. They too reported that their attempts to gain a hearing at the Chief Rabbi's
53 Court were without success.

49. Jukes file 1960 R.B.D.

50. See Appendix XVI.

51. Rogers file 1963, Wein file 1963 R.B.D.

52. Quitak file 1959; see also Gribert file 1965 R.B.D.

53. Stern file 1965 R.B.D.

The increase in adoption cases also highlighted the growing difficulty in finding Jewish children available for adoption. This was a result of the increased use of contraception, the growth in the number of abortions, the greater social acceptability of one-parent families, and the growing trend for unmarried mothers to keep their babies. It therefore became increasingly rare for there to be unwanted Jewish children who could be adopted. According to Harold Altman, Chief Officer for the Norwood Joint Committee for the Welfare of Jewish Children, there were between 200 - 300 Jewish couples applying for children to adopt each year and only 21⁵⁴ Jewish children available per annum. As a result many such couples were driven to adopt non-Jewish children and then sought to convert them.

As well as conversion and adoption cases, the Reform Beth Din dealt with a total of 327 applications for a get during the⁵⁵ time under study. Despite slight variations in certain years, the annual figures remained static at an average of 18 cases per annum and showed little fluctuation. Within that number, however, the role of the Reform Beth Din in serving the wider community is shown again - for in only 46 cases were the couples married in a Reform synagogue, 14% of the overall sum. The percentage is almost the same as the number of Reform partners to proselytes. Those outside of the Reform movement who had no local Reform synagogue applied directly to the Clerk

54. J. C. 19th March 1965.

55. See Appendix XVII.

56

of the Reform Beth Din. A further 65 couples had married in a Registry Office ceremony, while six had come from Liberal synagogues. The remaining 210 had come from Orthodox synagogues, of which 64 had approached the Chief Rabbi's Court first, but had been unable to obtain a get there. Accounting for 20% of the total applications to the Reform Beth Din, they constitute an even higher percentage than in proselyte cases and indicate even greater problems with the Orthodox authorities. This was due to the inability of the Court to grant a get should the husband object to it even though the couple might have been divorced civilly for many years.⁵⁷ As the Clerk to the Court, Marcus Carr, wrote to several female applicants : "I am to inform you that it is not the Beth Din who issues the Get. The proceedings can only go ahead with the consent and co-operation of the husband".⁵⁸ Another woman was told that as nothing could persuade her former husband to consent "she must be a martyr of the Jewish race".⁵⁹ Indicative of the impotency of the Court to effect a get was a case in which pressure was put on a recalcitrant husband by telling him that as a woman can only be released from her marriage through a get or through her husband's death, the members of the Court

56. Minutes, Assembly of Rabbis 7th December 1960.

57. See Chapter I p. 20.

58. Mr. Carr to Mrs McAlley 9th July 1959 McAlley/Brill file 1960; see also Deitch file 1958, Silvester file 1963 R. B. D.

59. Jewish Telegraph 14th November 1958.

would have no option but to pray for the latter method. In
many instances the husbands offered to withdraw their
objections to the get in return for financial remuneration or
revoking maintenance payments. In spite of the questionable
morality of such a solution, it was often recommended by the
Orthodox authorities. As Dayan Golditch wrote to one woman:

I strongly urged him to accept a get from you. To my
regret he refused to do so. In the absence of his
consent there is little that we can do. I would
suggest that you make it worth his while, and
manifest a substantial degree of appreciation.

Whilst the Orthodox authorities may have felt they had no
other means of helping such applicants, those concerned were
aggrieved at what they considered to be a mixture of
indifference and blackmail. Others were unable to obtain a get
because their husbands were mentally ill and not in a position
to consent to a divorce. According to the Chief Rabbi's Court
there was no remedy for such a situation and wives in this
situation were told that "it will not be possible to proceed".
A further problem concerned wives whose husbands were missing
and presumed dead. Even though they had certificates from
civil authorities stating that their husbands were registered
as dead - and in one case had been granted a widow's pension by

60. Private conversation 30th August 1984 Rabbi Louis Jacobs
(former member of the Manchester Beth Din).
61. Dayan Golditch to Mr. Chaytow 19th June 1959; Chaytow file
1960. See also Bloom file 1949, Cope file 1964 R.B.D.
62. Wise file 1951, McAlley/Brill file 1960 R.B.D.
63. Mr. Carr to Mrs Silverman 2nd July 1957 Silverman file
1957 R.B.D.

64

the Air Ministry - the Chief Rabbi's Court refused to accept the evidence as sufficient. In the absence of any further proof of death they were unable to obtain permission to re-
65
marry.

The Reform Beth Din took an entirely different approach to divorce. Whilst it endeavoured to gain the consent of both parties it took upon itself the power to award an equivalent document despite the objections of either party on the
66
principle that they were acting unjustly:

When the husband refuses to give the Get, or his whereabouts are unknown, or he is presumed to be dead, or he resorts to bribery and makes the payment of money a condition of his consent, the Chief Rabbi's Court cannot help. The harassed wife waits in vain and is not allowed to enter a religious marriage again. Is not the hardship of the frustrated wife undeserved and unjust? Under such circumstances our Beth Din dissolves the marriage and issues a document which allows the wife to remarry in any of our Synagogues ... We depart in these cases from the practice of the Orthodox Court, which condemns these unfortunate people to life-long celibacy in the name of Jewish Law.

It is noticeable that in 32 of the 64 unsolved cases that had been heard originally at the Chief Rabbi's Court, the husbands were persuaded to grant their consent. The knowledge that their powers of veto could be over-ruled by the Reform Beth Din led to a more reasonable stance. In cases where consent was still withheld and on grounds that the Reform Beth Din considered spurious - such as the man who had remarried civilly

64. Rowell file 1952 R.B.D.

65. Nedbolsky file 1959, Sassienie file 1963 R.B.D.

66. Curtis op. cit. p. 130.

but refused his former wife a ⁶⁷get - the marriage was declared dissolved religiously and the parties entitled to remarry in a Jewish ceremony. As Curtis explained to the husbands in such ⁶⁸ instances:

As to your former marriage, the position is that it is legally and factually ended, and to uphold the religious validity would be utterly unrealistic. We therefore think that the religious dissolution should be declared without further delay.

Another aspect of the divorce cases that reflects trends within Anglo-Jewry is the question of who petitioned for the divorce. Of the cases known, 149 (48%) were initiated by ⁶⁹ husbands, and 163 (52%) were initiated by wives. This corresponds to the national pattern generally : during the ⁷⁰ period under study 56% of all divorces were filed by wives. It is noticeable, too, that in 1948-1950, a large majority of cases were initiated by husbands, and against the general ratio for subsequent years - which also followed the national pattern and which can be explained by the unusually high divorce rate that followed in the aftermath of the Second World War, and the large number of men that returned home from the battlefield and ⁷¹ divorced their wives:

Abnormal strains were imposed on marriages by the

67. Cope file 1964 R.B.D.

68. Rabbi Curtis to Mr. Luck-Hille 13th April 1964 Luck Hille file 1964 R.B.D.

69. See Appendix XVII.

70. G. Rowntree and N. H. Carrier The Resort to Divorce in England and Wales 1858-1957 p. 201.

71. Ibid p. 202.

circumstances of war. The First World War was the occasion for a large increase due to long absences, sexual recklessness and hasty marriages. These factors again operated in the Second World War, when separations were also frequent, and in some cases prolonged, and when many of the younger adult population of both sexes were transferred from home districts to areas or duties where traditional codes of behaviour were sometimes no longer observed. A whole generation of married couples were subjected to these stresses, and exceptional numbers eventually emerged with new prospective spouses, requiring a legal termination of previous marriages. Furthermore, the unusually high earnings of civilian workers, both men and women, during the war, enabled many to meet the cost of divorce, which had previously been far beyond their means. The impact of war is therefore reflected in an upsurge of petitions during the latter stages of the war and immediately after its end. The war also had the effect of increasing the proportion of petitions filed by the husbands, and of correspondingly reducing that of wives.

During the period under study the rate of divorce rose⁷² both nationally and amongst Jews. Yet there was little corresponding increase in the number of applications for a get at the Reform Beth Din. Nor was there any measurable increase⁷³ via the Orthodox authorities. This confirms the complaints that many Jews did not bother to obtain a get upon their⁷⁴ divorce in the civil courts. A local study of Leeds asserts⁷⁵ that 25% of divorcing Jewish couples did not seek a get, while⁷⁶ the same figure is posited nationally for the years 1960-1965.

72. Ibid p. 201.

73. File entitled 'Statistics on Divorce', Community Research Unit, Board of Deputies, London.

74. e.g. at the Conference of Orthodox Rabbis, reported in J. C. 20th January 1950; see also Dayan Grunfeld in J. C. 1st January 1954.

75. E. Krausz op. cit. p. 85.

76. B. Kosmin Divorce in Anglo-Jewry p. 18.

It implies a high degree of religious indifference. Moreover it means that those Jews who remarried afterwards either married fellow Jews in a Registry Office or married out of the faith. The paucity of cases at the Reform Beth Din, and their lack of increase over two decades mirrors the tendency within the community towards secularisation and assimilation.

Another revealing aspect of the cases is the light they shed on the internal workings of the Reform Beth Din. This is particularly important as there were no founding principles upon which the Court was based. As was seen in the previous chapter the Reform Beth Din came into existence before the questions of its jurisdiction and structure had been agreed formally. Moreover, the main theme of the debates within the A.S.G.B. and Assembly of Ministers concerned the principle of the acceptance of the authority of the Reform Beth Din, and comparatively little time was spent discussing the theological basis of its existence or the Rabbinic guidelines which would determine its policy. Both these key areas were left undefined, and only gradually does a picture emerge from the way in which the Court was conducted. Superficially, the structure of the Reform Beth Din followed traditional lines, with the courts consisting of three members, generally those enjoying semichah. However it was the Reform version of semichah, which was similar in name but very different in character from that awarded by Orthodox authorities. For the former it meant one was trained to minister to the needs of a

congregation, as much a statement of pastoral abilities as of Jewish learning, whereas for the latter it signified one was qualified to render judgement in Jewish Law and was akin to a legal degree. Reform Rabbis were expected to be familiar with Rabbinic Literature, but not necessarily an expert in it. It was seen as a monument to Jewish cultural achievement, rather than a channel of the Divine will. It was viewed as important to the development of Judaism and worth consulting, but not as the sole guide to modern life and the ultimate arbiter. Moreover the traditional methods of interpreting Rabbinic Law were also not accepted as binding. The strict hermeneutical rules that governed Orthodox judgements were only one of many considerations in Reform eyes. Instead, other criteria played an equal role in determining a modern Jewish response : conscience, common sense, ethical values and the demands of changing circumstances. Thus travelling on the Sabbath, strictly forbidden according to traditional Jewish Law, was permitted by Reform on the grounds that the previous objections no longer applied, while it could also facilitate attendance at service by those living too far away to walk to synagogue. There was a major shift of emphasis from means to ends, whereby Reform felt able to endorse policies it believed were right however impossible it would be to arrive at such a position through the halachah. It felt no hesitation in dismissing what it felt to be out-dated and adapting what it regarded as appropriate to modern conditions. Thus there was an entirely

different relationship to Rabbinic Law. To the traditional mind the Reform attitude was utterly cavalier and unprincipled; their policies lacked any validity and their decisions were worthless. The Reform semichah was not recognised and there could be no question of a Reform Rabbi being allowed to sit upon an Orthodox Beth Din. Moreover, quite apart from the unacceptable approach displayed by Reform Rabbis to halachah, their level of knowledge would have been considered insufficient to qualify them as a dayan.

It might have been thought that the beginning of such an important new institution as the Reform Beth Din would have been the occasion for a statement of Reform values and criteria, whether for public consumption or for internal reference. Yet their rejection of the halachah was not accompanied by substituting a system of their own making. Reform did not look to different authorities in Jewish Law, preferring one school of thought to that followed by the Orthodox. Neither did they establish alternative hermeneutical rules by which to interpret the received text of Jewish Law, nor seek to erect a totally new legal framework based on a new series of principles according to their own ideology. Instead there was merely a general understanding of the service which the Reform Beth Din should render. The main aim was a desire to help people achieve what they wanted, with the only proviso that it should fit in with the Reform understanding of modern Jewish life. The concern was therefore

very much with the fate of the individual rather than with the laws of Judaism. Indeed the former took precedence over the latter. This contrasted with the Orthodox who believed those laws to be divinely sanctioned and much more important than the particular circumstances of any one person. Whilst they would try to accommodate both, it was always the individual who had to take second place if no compromise was possible. Reinhart's dictum was that "it is a court to help people", whereas the Chief Rabbi might have said in response that his court was there to implement Jewish Law.

The fact that the Reform Beth Din could operate on such a loosely defined basis was precisely because it arrived so long after Reform had been established in Britain. By then there had already developed a Reform approach to Jewish life, which was haphazard rather than systematic and which was a peculiar mixture of traditional practices and modern adaptations^{at}. Thus circumcision was required for male converts whereas attending a mikveh was not demanded, even though both had equal weight in Jewish Law. A ketubah was considered an essential part of the Jewish marriage ceremony, but it was a totally different text from the traditional version. There were no set rules for establishing such policies and they evolved as and when issues had to be confronted. Moreover until the Assembly of Ministers was established the decisions depended very often upon the personal inclinations of individual ministers. Naturally the Reform Beth Din needed some basic regulations by which to

function and these were provided by the decisions of the Assembly of Ministers. The debates followed no particular format and consisted of the verbal contributions of the ministers concerned. Thus whereas the Chief Rabbi's Court turned to the "Shulchan Aruch" and other Rabbinic works for guidance, the Reform Beth Din did not base itself on traditional texts but referred instead to the minute-books of recent meetings. Moreover, as in the case of length of proselyte tuition, some issues had to be ratified by the A.S.G.B. Thus there was also occasional lay involvement in decisions. The position of the halachah was referred to, and sometimes a particular minister was deputed in advance to consult the traditional sources, but without them being considered binding, and they were weighed up equally with the pastoral experience of ministers or their opinion of ethical imperatives. A simple majority vote determined the final outcome. The discussions themselves were not recorded,⁷⁷ although the final decisions were noted. The result was that overall guidelines were those established by the Assembly although any sitting of the court had full authority to accept⁷⁸ or reject the cases before it. Thus the Assembly ruled that, although circumcision for male proselytes was obligatory, in cases where medical evidence advised against it exemptions could be made. It was then up to a court to apply the ruling to particular cases and to exercise discretion when

77 For a complete list see Decisions of the Ministers' Assembly 1949 - 1975 (unpublished collection) Archives of the Reform Beth Din

78 Curtis op. cit. p. 133

appropriate. Procedural rules were also agreed, such as prohibiting a minister from sitting on a Court which was interviewing a candidate for conversion from his own congregation. When individual cases arose that were of great complexity or were highly unusual, a small sub-committee was appointed to give guidance. The decision they arrived at would then serve as a precedent for future instances and, in this way, a body of Reform guidelines emerged. There was a feeling that such an ad hoc approach to court matters might be bettered by establishing more formal principles. An attempt was made to establish a "Halachah Committee" which would produce a series of general Reform halachic principles upon which to operate. However, it is significant to note that the committee was allowed to lapse after less than a year when it was found impossible to reach unanimous decisions which could be made binding. It was therefore decided to maintain the existing method of having jurisdiction based on case-law. In general, therefore, Reform thinking reacted to situations rather than pre-empted them. In view of the constantly evolving nature of Reform policy there was no attempt to publish official guidelines for the Court and it was deemed sufficient that the ministers themselves were aware of general procedures through receiving the Assembly minutes. Even the compilation of past decisions in a booklet in 1963 as a convenient reference was issued only to ministers and was accompanied by a rider on the

79 In 1968 this ad hoc arrangement was made permanent and a "Standing Committee" was formed to study cases not covered by existing policy.

80 Minutes of the Assembly of Ministers 7th September 1960. The "Halachah Committee" had been founded on 21st October 1959.

front cover warning that it was not for publication. One of the effects of this case-law system was to give Curtis an important role as Clerk to the Court ensuring that decisions of different sittings of the Reform Beth Din were consistent with each other. This was particularly crucial as there was no permanent dayanim, and instead members of each court were chosen from a rota of the Ministers' Assembly and usually courts differed in composition. Moreover there was no Rosh Beth Din or Av Beth Din (the Head or President of the Court), but each sitting was chaired by the most senior minister present, which often varied.

In many ways the adaptable nature of the Reform Beth Din was merely a reflection of the malleable position of Reform in other areas of Jewish life. Thus the flexible lifestyle that Reform permitted born Jews to lead meant that there was no definitive standard against which converts could be measured. Acceptance in some form of the main practices was sufficient without being committed to total observance. The Sabbath had to be celebrated, but this could take place in a variety of ways and without many of the restrictions demanded by Orthodoxy. Kashrut had to be taken account of, but this could range from a minimalist abstention from pork to a complete insistence on certified kosher foods and separate crockery for milk and meat diets. When confronted with people who wished to convert the Reform Beth Din judged their sincerity according to its own values, such as taking note of their character,

synagogue attendance and study. If a person excelled in these areas, then it mattered not that the person travelled to synagogue on the Sabbath or did not observe all the ritual commands. Moreover their acceptance did not hinge on whether the person was in a relationship with a Jew or the level of religiosity of the Jewish partner. These were regarded as incidental details, which might hinder or facilitate the conversion process, but were irrelevant to the intrinsic worth of the actual candidate.

The different yardstick by which the Reform Beth Din operated meant that it was able to make decisions that were impossible for the Orthodox courts to take, even if they wanted to do so. This applied to candidates for conversion whom Orthodox ministers recognised as being genuine but who could not be accepted because they were unable to satisfy all the requirements owing to their job, family situation or place of residence. It was even more evident with regard to divorce cases and the many instances of women who were trapped in a civilly-terminated marriage but unable to obtain a get through the recalcitrance, malice or disappearance of their former husbands. Orthodox dayanim themselves admitted that their situation was tragic and undeserved, but were bound by the halachah and could offer no remedy. The freedom of manoeuvre that the Reform Beth Din claimed for itself allowed it to change the rules of Jewish divorce, award the get without the husband's consent and alleviate the plight of such women. It

typified the difference between the two types of courts, with the Orthodox ones being guided strictly by the channels of Jewish Law and accepting the limitations this sometimes imposed, while the Reform court adopted solutions in which it believed, and then justified them on moral grounds which it saw as an equally important Jewish principle. On other occasions it adapted traditional methods although radically altering their application. Thus it took upon itself the right to give a get to women whose husbands were insane by utilising the halachic mechanism to free husbands in the reverse situation - heter meah rabbanim - although extending it to apply to trapped wives, and requiring not the signatures of a hundred Rabbis but merely those of all the ministers in the Assembly.

The range of cases that came before the Reform Beth Din indicates that virtually all of its work was concerned with matters of personal status : conversion, adoption, status definition, marriage and divorce. This was in marked comparison with the Chief Rabbi's Court which was responsible also for shechitah, certification of hotels and restaurants for kashrut, and hearing cases of civil disputes that the defendants and plaintiffs preferred to bring before a Jewish court rather than take to the secular ones. The latter category might include disagreements between business partners, or between landlord and tenant, or breaches of promise, or accusations of slander, as well as communal problems between Jewish institutions and individuals. In view of Reform's

equivocal attitude to kashrut, it was inevitable that it did not have any role in licensing or supervising such arrangements, and did not seek to do so. Theoretically civil disputes could have come before it, although the combination of the assimilated nature of most members of Reform congregations and the Rabbis' own lack of expertise in such aspects of Jewish Law meant that there was little question of such cases arising nor any attempt to solicit them. It was questions of personal status, and particularly cases in which the Orthodox authorities seemed unable to help, that characterised the Reform Beth Din in the eyes of the Jewish public.

Despite the large number of Jews outside the Reform movement who turned to the Reform Beth Din and its growing role in British Jewry, this development had never been intended. The court had been envisaged as a service for the Reform synagogues. There was therefore no attempt to publicise it within the wider community as it was seen as purely an internal
82
matter. The birth of the Reform Beth Din was not announced in the Jewish press, and its existence received only a brief
83
incidental mention by a columnist. The only exception to its low profile was a letter by Curtis to the Jewish Chronicle in 1950 in response to a controversy between the representatives
84
of Orthodox and Liberal Judaism:

In general, the principles outlined in your leading article are descriptive of those to which we of the

82. Private conversation 5th November 1980 Rabbi Michael Curtis.

83. J. C. 20th March 1948.

84. J. C. 3rd February 1950.

Association of Synagogues belong; and the procedure advised by you is in the main that which we try to follow. Our Beth Din ... tries conscientiously and courageously to apply the Jewish Law, that Law which is a tree of life, that Law which is relevant to all times, that Law which proclaims the ways of humanity and love.

Apart from this one letter there was no advertisement of the Reform Beth Din for several years, save for a passing⁸⁵ reference in an article by Cassell. It did not even appear in the Jewish Year Book until 1956.

Whilst the Orthodox authorities were aware of the establishment and workings of the Reform Beth Din, no reference was made to it. The only Orthodox criticisms were periodic attacks on Reform Judaism in general and occasioned by local factors - when there were proposals in 1948 to form a Reform⁸⁶ synagogue in Cardiff, or when Chief Rabbi Brodie inducted⁸⁷ Rabbi Weisz as Dayan in Manchester the following year. This apparent silence concerning the Reform Beth Din is even more remarkable when contrasted with the active intervention by the Chief Rabbi's Court in 1948 over a recommendation by the Board of Deputies' Law, Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee. The committee had suggested amending the Board's constitution to allow the President of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue to authorise the issuing of certificates to marriage secretaries of Liberal synagogues. A strongly-worded statement was issued by the Court of the Chief Rabbi urging all members of the Board

85. J. C. 27th January 1956.

86 See J. C. 23rd July 1948 (and also 9th, 16th and 30th July).

87. J. C. 13th April 1949.

to vote against the recommendation, and warning that all those who voted for it or abstained would have "a terrible guilt"

88

upon their conscience.

Despite the absence of any comments on the Reform Beth Din, its Clerk, Rabbi Curtis, claimed in the Annual Report of 1949: "The Orthodox camp does no longer consider the activities of this Court as negligible, but watches it carefully". His remark is borne out by a discussion that occurred at the Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers earlier that year.

Following a paper on 'The Halachic Problems of Today', Rabbi A.

89

E. Silverstone warned his colleagues :

The Reform Movement is making great strides. Its exponents say that Judaism imposes many unnecessary hardships upon Jews and these handicaps must be removed; and they proceed to remove them by a surgical operation. If a husband will not give a Get to his wife, Reform says "We will do without his consent". Proselytes are accepted without question. ... It is my view that the modern Reform Jeroboams may, in time, succeed in causing the secession of ten-twelfths of the Jews from the ranks of Orthodoxy.

Whilst there may have been discreet interest in the work of the Reform Beth Din there was no question as to its unacceptability in Orthodox eyes. Their opinion of Reform gittin is revealed in the letter of a recalcitrant ex-husband whose wife had applied for a get through the Reform Beth Din. He based his non-compliance with the Reform court partly on the

90

views of the Chief Rabbi's Court :

88. Edict of the Chief Rabbi's Court, published in J. C. 17th January 1949.

89. J. C. 12th May 1949.

90. Corper to Reinhart 7th June 1955; Corper file 1955 R.B.D.

I hereby also send you a copy of the letter I received from the Orthodox Beth Din : "With regard to the penultimate paragraph of your letter I can confirm that the so-called Get issued by the body to which you refer is of no value or effect in Jewish Law".

The only public comment on the Reform Beth Din was that in a book on aspects of contemporary Anglo-Jewry published privately by the author. It included a review of the gittin issued by the Reform Beth Din and provided a detailed analysis of the ways in which they deviated from Jewish Law. It was largely a polemical work and described the Reform Rabbis as "worse than Hitler and his followers".⁹¹

In view of the awareness of the existence and policies of the Reform Beth Din, it is strange that there was no official denunciation of it by the Chief Rabbi's Court. It may have been that no significant difference was seen between the ad hoc courts of West London Synagogue and the formal Reform Beth Din, although its establishment would have provided a good opportunity to condemn Reform conversions under whatever structure they were conducted. A more likely explanation consists of two other factors : first, Dayan Abramsky was vehemently opposed to using The Jewish Chronicle, which was the only medium for contact with the general Jewish community. He despised it for its attacks on the Chief Rabbi's Court, never replied to any comments, urged his colleagues, including Chief Rabbis Hertz and Brodie, not to give any interviews to it, and⁹² "regarded it with utter contempt". He preferred to ignore

91. Shmaryahu Manasseh Ha-Cohen Adler Mareh Cohen p. 147.

92. Private conversation 19th October 1982 Professor Chimen Abramsky.

Reform and treat it as irrelevant to Jewish life. It was "an aversion to any form of public relations" that many lamented⁹³ but were unable to influence.

A second factor behind this public reticence was that the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue were opposed to any public attacks. They themselves were related to, or good friends of, many within the Reform movement and considered such attacks as personally distasteful. They were also much more relaxed about religious differences. Thus Sir Robert Waley Cohen, President 1942-52, often felt justified in asking Chief⁹⁴ Rabbi Hertz:

To consider carefully before resuming continued attacks upon first one and then another of those who are working for Anglo-Jewry. The perpetual continuance of this destructive blight is a severe handicap on all those who are working for the benefit of Anglo-Jewry ... and a source of continual grief.

The policy he urged was to avoid unpleasant confrontation:⁹⁵

The right way for the Beth Din to defeat the Reform and Liberals is to convince their flock that the Orthodox way is the right one - not that the Reform way is the wrong one.

Similarly Ewen Montagu, Vice-President 1942-54 and then⁹⁶ President until 1962, summed up the general attitude to Reform:

The Honorary Officers took the line that it was right that people should worship the Almighty and if they

93. N. Cohen 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Religious Life'.

94. R. Henriques Sir Robert Waley Cohen p. 346.

95. Private conversation 19th October 1983 Ewen Montagu.

96. Idem.

did it in a slightly different way to us, they should not be attacked for it.

This combination of the reticence of the Orthodox religious leadership and the distaste of the lay leadership had the result that there was no public comment on the establishment of the Reform Beth Din. When condemnation did come several years later, it was because by then it had become a threat that could no longer be ignored.

The authorities of the Federation of Synagogues, of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations, and of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregations never made any public comment on the Reform Beth Din. Their silence did not imply any approval but was because all three bodies catered for their own members only. Unlike the United Synagogue they did not regard themselves as serving the wider community of Anglo-Jewry and so did not feel any challenge from the existence of the Reform Beth Din.⁹⁷ Moreover, none of their own members approached the Reform court, so there was no concern that it might impinge upon their own constituency.

For their part, the Liberals made no comment. At that time their conversions were conducted by a Rites and Practices Committee, which consisted of both ministers and lay representatives. Neither the minutes of the Committee nor the

97. This was confirmed in conversation with leaders of all three movements : Maurice Goldman (General Secretary of the Federation of Synagogues) 31st July 1984; Josef Lobenstein (Executive member of the Union of Orthodox Hebrew Congregations) 31st July 1984; Rabbi Maurice Gaguine (former minister, Withington Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews) 3rd November 1983.

minutes of the Council of the movement have any reference to the establishment of the Reform Beth Din, and it had no impact on Liberal thinking or policy. There were no sizeable defections of their members to the Reform court, with only one instance of the partner of a Liberal Jew seeking conversion, and six Liberals obtaining a get (for which the Liberal movement did not make any provision). It was primarily those synagogues recognising the Chief Rabbi's authority that were most affected by the Reform Beth Din.

The Orthodox reaction described above continued for several years, with no formal mention of the Reform Ben Din but periodic attacks on "the aggressive infiltration" of the Reform and "the inroads of Reform Judaism". The first sign that a major shift in policy was taking place came in November 1957 when Chief Rabbi Brodie convened a conference of over twenty Orthodox Rabbis from Western and Eastern Europe. It was held in Amsterdam and was the first such general gathering of its kind. Its purpose was "to initiate a campaign to combat what is said to be a threat to Orthodoxy from Reform movements". The fact that there was felt a need for concerted action indicates the growing concern with the advances of the

98. This was confirmed in private conversation with Rev. Dr. Leslie Edgar (minister of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue 1925-1961) 8th November 1985.

99. Chief Rabbi Brodie speaking at the Anglo-Jewish Preachers Conference in London, J. C. 8th May 1953.

100 Chief Rabbi Brodie speaking in Glasgow, Jewish Echo 26th March 1954.

101. Opening address by Chief Rabbi Brodie, J. C. 25th October 1957.

Reform, which had only very small membership in the rest of Europe and was predominantly based in England itself. Despite declaring that "our opponents" belittle Judaism, "almost throw Halacha overboard" and have "nothing uniquely Jewish about them",¹⁰² much of the discussions were concerned with the effects of Reform. The particular worry was that of Jewish status and maintaining a clear definition of Jewish identity. This was voiced early the following year when Dayan Swift described Reform Judaism as "deformed Judaism".¹⁰³ He accused Reform ministers of:¹⁰⁴

Increasing mamzerim through granting marriages which had no validity in Jewish law, and of admitting into the Jewish communities a number of non-Jews for reasons which were not in accordance with the din.

Without mentioning the Reform Beth Din by name, he was attacking its policy of allowing remarriages in which a get had been awarded by the court because one partner had refused to give it of their own accord. He was also referring to the Reform policy of permitting proselytes whose reason for conversion was to marry a Jew. Both of these were prohibited according to the Orthodox interpretation of Jewish Law. It should be noted that not all Orthodox ministers adopted such a hostile attitude. In one case that has emerged, envious approval was felt. It concerned a lady who divorced her first husband in the civil courts because of lack of consummation of the marriage. As she neglected to also obtain a get the

102. Israel Brodie The Strength of my Heart p. 180.

103 Speech at Torah Va'Avodah Conference, Jewish Gazette 3rd January 1958.

104. J. C. 3rd January 1958.

children of her second marriage were declared mamzerim by the Chief Rabbi's Court and were unable to marry in synagogue. The lady therefore obtained a get from the Chief Rabbi's Court which released her from the religious bonds of the first marriage. However it did not ameliorate the status of her children by the second marriage and remove the stigma of being mamzerim. Unable to progress any further with the Orthodox authorities she took the case to the Reform Beth Din. Mindful that the first marriage had now been terminated civilly and religiously, and being anxious to avoid penalising the children for a fault that had nothing to do with them, the Reform court issued a document recognising the divorce of the first marriage, the legality of the second marriage and the unblemished status of the children. The Orthodox minister who had first dealt with the case, Rev. Dr. S. Goldman of St. John's Wood Synagogue, wrote to Reinhart:

105

Thank you for sending me the copy of the decision of your Beth Din in the F. case. I found it interesting and the sort of decision which I wish we could have given. But of course it was not possible as the Halacha makes it clear that the laws of marriage have nothing to do with consummation.

In spite of this, and no doubt other instances of private congratulations, the prevailing mood was one of total opposition to the Reform Beth Din. As a practical means of combating what was seen as the insidious effect of the Reform Beth Din, counter-measures were announced at the 1958 Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers. Dayan Lew declared:

106

105 S. Goldman to Reinhart 17th June 1957. Folkson file 1957 R.B.D.

106. J. C. 2nd May 1958.

In the future it is hoped to introduce a register at the Chief Rabbi's Office for births of Jewish children. This may lead to the issue of Jewish birth certificates as is now the case with Jewish marriages.

The proposed measure was clearly aimed at preventing the children of Reform conversions, and of remarriages under Reform auspices, being accorded Jewish status. Moreover, it was a matter that Dayan Law said that the Chief Rabbi's Court had been considering for some time. In the event it was never put into practice, but its suggestion illustrated the profound worry that the previous Orthodox monopoly on status cases was now being challenged by the small but growing Reform Beth Din.

This public declaration of counter-measures against the Reform was followed by a period of even more vociferous public attacks on Reform. Dayan Swift again took the lead and, in the most direct reference yet, deplored the fact that:

In the past some sections had departed from Jewish tradition; now there was a departure from honesty. The Reform movement had printed letters, similar to those of the London Beth Din, on behalf of the "Beth Din Zedek". That was a "deception" as it was neither a "Beth Din" nor "Zedek" [righteous]. The development was a great danger for the Anglo-Jewish community. The Reform movement accepted the "rejects" of the London Beth Din.

The title "Beth Din Zedek" had been in use by the Reform Beth Din for several years already, but was only now commented upon. On another occasion Swift also lambasted the Reform movement as "an escalator out [of Judaism]. It was the first rung on the

108

steep ladder to extinction".

In a further speech he referred explicitly to the question

109

of proselytes:

No Rabbinical authority in the world whose directive is the Shulchan Aruch either can or will recognise the conversion of the Reformers - there is no validity whatever in their proselytisation ... As far as we are concerned the Liberal or Reform convert remains a non-Jew.

In associating both the Reform and the Liberals together, Swift was echoing the common Orthodox view that although the former had an official court and structure of its own and the latter did not, the two were equally unacceptable and equally invalid.

Similar attacks were made by the Chief Rabbi, who noted the growth of the Reform communities despite their inability to guarantee "maintenance of Jewish consciousness for any length

110

of time". In Manchester Rabbi Unsдорfer devoted his New Year message to warning that Reform conversions were not

111

recognised :

This is one of the greatest social-religious problems now facing Anglo-Jewry, as this "mixed" element within reform sheds doubt upon the whole company, and everyone of its members will have to be carefully scrutinised before an entry or re-entry into the orthodox community can be granted.

It is clear that the previous policy of fighting Reform by

108. Talk at Jewish Graduates Association, Manchester, Jewish Gazette 10th April 1959.

109. Talk at Torah Va'Avodah meeting J. C. 27th November 1959.

110. Jewish Echo 17th April 1959.

111. Jewish Telegraph 2nd October 1959.

ignoring it and suggesting that it had no importance had now been fully abandoned. The effects of the Reform Beth Din were felt to be sufficiently grave to risk giving it publicity through criticism. In addition the restraining influence of Abramsky's dismissive attitude to Reform had ceased with his retirement and departure to Jerusalem in 1951. Some public commentators felt that such attacks were unnecessary. The Jewish Chronicle columnist, Ben Azzai, questioned the authority of the Reform Beth Din, but added:

112

But to accuse the Reformers of deception is nonsense: no one appearing before the Seymour Place establishment imagines that he is in Adler House.

However it was not a view shared any longer by the Orthodox authorities themselves, although it took another year for the Court of the Chief Rabbi to make its first official proclamation against the Reform Beth Din and actually to mention the court by name. On 25th March 1960 the Chief Rabbi and other members of the Court issued "an important announcement addressed to all Rabbis and religious institutions throughout the Diaspora":

113

We wish to draw your attention to a serious and urgent matter. In this country there exists an organisation known as "Reform Synagogue" which calls itself 'Association of Synagogues in Great Britain'.

Of late they have ventured to issue documents in matters of marriage and divorce, proselytisation, etc., under the heading 'Court of the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain'. They deliberately mislead the public to believe that this is a real Beth Din and that their actions are according to the

112. J. C. 6th March 1959.

113. The announcement first appeared in public in J. C. 25th March 1960.

laws of the Torah and the religion of Israel.

In fact, they directly undermine all the foundations of the Halacha, and take no notice of the principles of the Shulchan Aruch, particularly in matters of marriage and divorce, proselytisation and family relationships, which have been sanctified for generations. All their actions are in sharp contradiction to the laws and principles of the Torah, causing havoc in the personal and family life of our brethren in the Diaspora. Of course, their actions have no validity and are completely worthless, while their documents are mere scraps of paper.

In view of the above, we consider it our sacred duty to call upon all Batei Din and other Rabbinical authorities carefully to examine all certificates in religious matters which they may receive from this country and to ensure that they do not emanate from the source indicated above. In all cases where there is the slightest doubt the Rabbinical authorities are requested to communicate direct with us.

The proclamation was designed ostensibly to warn unsuspecting Rabbis abroad that documents from the Reform court have no validity. However, its publication in The Jewish Chronicle indicates that it was also very much intended for the eyes of Anglo-Jewry. By labelling the Reform documents as "mere scraps of paper" it was intended to frighten off those nominally Orthodox Jews who might be tempted to turn to the Reform for matters of status problems. While there is nothing unexpected in the text itself, it is remarkable that it had taken twelve years since the inception of the Reform Beth Din for such a refutation to be issued.

The factors behind the new policy of the Chief Rabbi's Court have already been discussed above. The precise timing of

the proclamation itself also merits some attention. The document was issued as a leaflet by the Court and dated as Kislev 5740, which corresponds to December 1959, some three months before its public appearance. It is noticeable that from January 1960 there was an unprecedented barrage of criticism directed against the Chief Rabbi's Court in The Jewish Chronicle both by correspondents and leading articles. This related to a decision regarding a conversion case in Glasgow, but it developed into the whole issue of the Chief Rabbi's Court's attitude to conversion and clearly touched a raw nerve amongst the community. As well as scores of letters
114
by individuals, the Jewish Chronicle itself commented that:

Responsible communal leaders and social workers are well aware of the indignation that is being increasingly felt on this issue. It is therefore time that public expression should be given to the grave criticism that the present policy of the Beth Din has aroused among many staunch supporters and exponents of Traditional Judaism.

The criticisms continued throughout January, February and March. It was brought to a close by another leading article
115
which declared:

Correspondence pouring into this office reflects the wide interest and, indeed, disquiet in the community regarding the conversion policy of the Court of the Chief Rabbi ... there is wide discretion in applying the Law and it has not been contradicted that the Chief Rabbi's Court acts in these matters infinitely more restrictively than responsible Batei Din (elsewhere) ... there can be no justification for the disdainful attitude adopted by the Beth Din in refusing to explain its policies to the community.

114. J. C. 29th January 1960.

115. J. C. 25th March 1960.

It seems a curious coincidence that the very issue in which the criticisms against the Chief Rabbi's Court ceased also saw the publication of its three-month-old proclamation against the Reform Beth Din.

With a formal condemnation of the Reform Beth Din now publicly issued, attacks by the Orthodox escalated even more. Only a week later came further refutations of Reform at the Second Conference of European Orthodox Rabbis, this time meeting in Westcliff-on-Sea. Opening the conference, Brodie¹¹⁶ announced a new spirit of militancy :

The time has come to go over to the offensive, we have been on the defensive for too long and too much. We have got to assert ourselves.

The militant tone was echoed by other speakers : Rabbi Rogosinsky of Cardiff called for a "war against the Reform and Liberal movement", while Dayan Weisz of Manchester suggested that all members of Reform Synagogues, even if fully Jewish, should undergo an Orthodox conversion before being granted an Orthodox marriage licence. The conference ended with an appeal to the Jewish public not to be party to marriages, divorces or conversions effected under Reform auspices. It is clear, however, from the steady increase of cases that were brought to the Reform Beth Din that such appeals went unheeded. The failure of the official condemnation by the Chief Rabbi's Court to have any effect is evident from the fact that the following year saw the highest ever number of applications for conversion to the Reform Beth Din and a substantial rise from the previous

117
year. Moreover the majority of the applicants were engaged or married to Jews who were not members of Reform synagogues but came from Orthodox backgrounds. A similar rise in the number of divorce cases heard by the Reform Beth Din also occurred that
118
year.

For their part, the leadership of the Reform was most concerned about the increasing ferocity of the attacks, and the matter was discussed by both the Assembly of Ministers and the R.S.G.B. Council, as well as by individual Synagogue Councils.
119
While some urged a forceful response and issue of counter-claims, the leading article of The Synagogue Review proved the
120
most representative view :

Following an "Announcement" denouncing the R. S. G. B. Court came a Conference of European Orthodox Rabbis cast in a similarly fighting mood. We take all this very calmly, though with great regret, as a counsel of spiritual despair on their part, not a sign of strength.

117. See Appendix IX.

118. See Appendix XVII.

119. E.g. meetings of the Ass. of Min. 30th March 1960; the R. S. G. B. Council 3rd April and 12th May 1960; W. L. S. Annual General Meeting 14th June 1960. For earlier discussions, see Wimbledon Synagogue Council 16th May and 4th June 1956; R. S. G. B. Executive 28th June 1956. A resolution proposed by the Bradford Synagogue Council to the 1959 R. S. G. B. Conference highlighted the worry felt "This assembly views with sorrow and concern the pronouncements concerning the illegitimacy of children whose parents were married in a Progressive Synagogue, even though they are of 100% Jewish origin, by which the seeds of strife are sown where Jews should live together in harmony, and this assembly further requests that the RSGB should investigate any such pronouncements or any pronouncements or actions which tend to divide the Jewish Community".

120. The Synagogue Review May 1960.

These sentiments were repeated at the Annual Conference of the RSGB in May 1960, at which full confidence was expressed in the Reform court. It was decided that no public reply would be worthwhile as "We cannot convince them and they cannot convince us".¹²¹

The decision not to respond to either of the attacks helped to lessen the tension and there was a cooling of passions on both sides. Almost exactly a year later, A. S. Dianond, the Chairman of West London Synagogue was able to¹²² report :

During the past year the public attacks have ceased in deference to the voices raised in various quarters calling for toleration.

This relative calm, however, did not signify any rapprochement between the two movements, or that the workings of the Reform Beth Din was any more acceptable to the Orthodox. The Third Conference of European Rabbis re-iterated its appeal to Jewry to shun conversions and divorces performed by the Reform.¹²³ The Chief Rabbi took his opposition even further and ruled that no recognition should be given to Reform marriages and banned the use of United Synagogue halls for wedding¹²⁴ receptions of those married in Reform synagogues. Commenting upon the Orthodox-Reform divide, Dayan Golditch admitted that

121 Rabbi Berg, then Chairman of the Assembly of Ministers. Minutes of R. S. G. B. Conference 22nd May 1960.

122. Minutes W. L. S. Annual General Meeting 15th June 1961.

123 Jewish Echo 24th November 1961.

124. J. C. 28th March 1962.

the Orthodox hostility was due to the increasing influence of the Reform movement. Whereas previously it could be dismissed,
125
now it had to be opposed:

Before the war I could ignore Manchester Reform Synagogue and even patronise it - it did not then present a vital challenge. I personally was very friendly with the then minister ... and he used to come to see me from time to time. But today I dare not be seen in the company of the Reform minister.

The testimony, remarkable for its frankness, highlights the changed relationship and the element of fear that lay behind it. Shortly afterwards came a second direct attack on the Reform Beth Din by the Chief Rabbi's Court. In March 1962 it issued a pamphlet on Jewish marriage and divorce, written by
126
Dayan Swift, in which the Reform Beth Din was labelled as:

The subversive elements in our midst - subversive to obedience of the laws of Moses and of Israel, subversive to the historic customs and traditions that have shaped and moulded the Jewish home ... whose repudiation of the Divine authority of the Torah is playing a major part in the disintegration of the Jewish family in our Community.

Swift condemned the Reform Beth Din for their presumption in
127
using, and usurping, the title "Beth Din". He warned:

Anglo-Jewry must be guarded against the danger of their practices, particularly in cases of marriage, divorce and conversions. Their rulings are not recognised by any authentic rabbinic body in the world. In Jewish law the get they issue is no get, and the conversions they perform have no validity.

125. Address to Liverpool Jewish Graduates Association. Jewish Gazette 9th February 1962.

126. M. Swift Jewish Marriage and Divorce p. 12.

127. Ibid. p. 14.

The pamphlet provoked considerable anger within Reform circles. The Assembly of Ministers issued an immediate public refutation defending the sacred character of its marriages and upholding the validity of its court.¹²⁸ Lay members of the movement threatened legal action for libel against the Chief Rabbi's Court.¹²⁹ A. S. Diamond wrote a letter of protest to Brodie which resulted in a meeting between them.¹³⁰ Although Brodie stated that it was impossible to give any recognition to Reform conversions, he did reassure Diamond that copies of the pamphlet had now been exhausted and would not be reissued. Moreover, he suggested a private meeting between himself and Van der Zyl, then Senior Minister of the West London Synagogue and also Chairman of the Assembly of Ministers. The meeting was strictly confidential and was held without the knowledge of the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue.¹³¹ The object of the discussion was to find ways of bridging the divide between the Chief Rabbi's Court and the Reform Beth Din, and encompassed the areas of divorce, conversion, marriage and general relations.¹³² Brodie suggested that all cases of divorce should be referred to the Chief Rabbi's Court. If a get could

128. The document was drawn up by Rev. Philip Cohen; see Appendix XVIII.

129. Minutes Ass. of Min. 11th June 1962.

130. Minutes W.L.S. Council 19th July 1962 and Minutes Ass. of Min. 11th July 1962.

131. Ewen Montagu, then President of the United Synagogue, was unaware that the meeting had taken place. Private conversation 19th October 1983 Ewen Montagu.

132. The summary that follows is taken from Minutes W.L.S. Council 18th October 1962 and Minutes Ass. of Min. 31st October 1962.

not be arranged the parties should be informed that difficulties might ensue later in dealing with Orthodox authorities. Van der Zyl pointed out that this was already the practice of the Reform court.¹³³ Brodie did acknowledge the high level of Reform instruction of their proselytes and considered that their preparation was satisfactory. However as tevilah (ritual immersion) was not observed they were unacceptable in his eyes. He hinted that if tevilah was observed, recognition of the proselytes might be granted, although no explicit statement was made or personal commitment given. When Van der Zyl asked if marriages between halachically-acceptable Jews in Reform synagogue were valid as far as the Chief Rabbi was concerned. Brodie answered in the affirmative. Van der Zyl also raised the question of increased co-operation between the different sections of Anglo-Jewry, but Brodie replied that he wished to settle the Beth Din questions first.

None of the discussions were ever made public and no action was taken on the ideas mentioned. However, Brodie had been willing to discuss matters of Jewish status with the representative of a group he publicly opposed and whose religious leadership he castigated for having "lightly and vainly and wrongfully assumed the title of Rabbi and who have neither read nor studied nor waited upon the disciples of the

133. From December 1962 onwards - perhaps in response to Brodie's remarks - the verbal explanation was supplemented by a written "Acknowledgement" that applicants for both conversion and divorce at the Reform Beth Din were asked to sign, stating that "I understand that certificates granted by this Court may not be considered valid by the orthodox authorities".

134
wise". His opposition to deviations from Jewish Law was deep-rooted and was evident even before his Rabbinic ordination :
when justifying his choice of Karaism as a subject for his
135
university thesis he had declared:

Nothing can convince a man that every schismatic movement in Judaism is a blind alley, that its followers wither away and are doomed to disappear, so surely as the study of Karaism, the most important of all Jewish schisms.

His meeting with Van der Zyl, despite such views, indicated the seriousness with which he considered the challenge presented by the Reform Beth Din. It also highlighted the enigmatic position of Brodie himself : although associated with a restrictive outlook and described as "the most Orthodox of
136
Chief Rabbis", his upbringing and previous ministry had suggested that he would have had a broader and more tolerant perspective. Commenting on this paradox, The Jewish Chronicle
137
noted that on his appointment as Chief Rabbi

There were two methods by which it [Anglo-Jewry] might have been tackled : reappraisal or retrenchment. He chose the latter. No one could have been more surprised than his most zealous supporters on the Chief Rabbi's Selection Committee. His background certainly indicated a liberal outlook, but it was his very background that was in part responsible for his alignment with the most conservative elements in the community. He came among men steeped in East European traditions and learning. If he had been a Slobodka man he might

134 Address of Jews' College Speech Day 1960 I. Brodie op. cit. p. 329.

135 Quoted in J. M. Shaftesley 'Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi, A. Biographical Sketch' p. xxi.

136. Dr. Chaim Pearl, J. C. 5th June 1964.

137. J. C. 4th June 1965.

have been in a better position to assess their counsel, but he was a Balliol man.

The inference was that Brodie lacked the learning and traditionalism of the East-European trained Rabbis over whom he presided, and who accounted for the dayanim of the Chief Rabbi's Court. He therefore lacked the confidence and authority necessary to pursue a path of reconciliation with Reform which would have been more akin to his liberal outlook. Although Brodie described himself as "a cross between Kovno and Oxford" he shifted more and more from Oxford to Kovno under the influence of the dayanim. A similar evaluation was made by Ewen Montagu, who had worked together with him ever since he had become Chief Rabbi. Montagu described him as "a weak man who allowed himself to be bullied; he was often over-persuaded by members of the Court as he lacked confidence in his own rightness". It was a character judgement that was also applied to Brodie's role in the "Jacobs' Affair" which arose at the end of 1961. It concerned Rabbi Dr. Louis Jacobs, an Orthodox Rabbi who had departed from tradition by espousing the findings of Biblical Criticism. As a result he was prevented by Brodie from ^{resuming} ~~taking up~~ a United Synagogue position. There were many who felt that Brodie had reacted unnecessarily harshly and the issue caused a major furore within the community. Montagu commented:

138. Private conversation 19th October 1983 Ewen Montagu. Similarly : "Brodie was brought under control and changed from left of centre to extreme right - his lack of knowledge was his downfall and he felt unable to stand up to the Dayanim". Private conversation, 3rd November 1983 Rabbi Maurice Gaguine.

139. J. C. 8th May 1964.

The Chief Rabbi was not to blame for the attitude he had taken and the controversy that followed, since he had been under the pressure of dayanim whose spiritual home was not in Anglo-Jewry.

It was a view echoed by no less an authority than Abramsky,
140
from his retirement home in Jerusalem, who declared:

What a pity that I was no longer in England - this need never have happened... They [the dayanim] are little men and they are frightened of him, and Rabbi Brodie alone is not strong enough to fight them.

The "Jacobs Affair" not only illustrated the personal weakness of Brodie, but also turned much of the Orthodox energy and attention away from the Reform movement. Between early 1962 and middle 1964 it became the dominant issue within Anglo-Jewry. During this period there was a noticeable decline in attacks against the Reform movement or its Beth Din, with the Orthodox authorities being much more concerned in combatting their own internal heresy. The struggle against Reform was put aside temporarily in order to meet the challenge within the ranks of the United Synagogue.

In view of the theological differences between Orthodoxy and Reform, the opposition of the Orthodox authorities to the Reform Beth Din was inevitable. Its reaction was all the more hostile owing to the move towards the right within its Rabbinate. However, this attitude contrasts greatly with that of many lay members of the Orthodox community who 'voted with their feet' and approached the Reform Beth Din with their conversion, adoption and divorce cases. For them the Reform

Beth Din was responding to changes in Jewish lifestyle for which the Chief Rabbi's Court failed to cater. The gulf that had grown between the Rabbinate and laity within Orthodox congregations was nowhere more evident than in their reaction to the Reform Beth Din : for the former it was the perverter of Jewish values; for the latter it was the answer to their needs.

CHAPTER V

THE EFFECT AND IMPACT OF THE REFORM BETH DIN

There had been little fanfare when the Reform Beth Din had come into existence on 1st February 1948, yet its birth was to herald a new age within the Reform movement. Moreover it was to prove of considerable significance for Anglo-Jewry as a whole. In order to measure its effect it is necessary to review briefly the hopes invested in it and then examine both the extent to which it fulfilled them and the impact it had in other ways.

Reinhart, the guiding force behind the establishment of the Reform Beth Din, had been motivated by three main concerns. Firstly he had wanted to avoid the anarchy he had experienced in the American Reform movement of his early ministry, in which every community dealt with its own status cases and which resulted in widely differing requirements and standards. He had felt it essential to have a centralised authority which could ensure uniformity of approach and which could promote a high degree of competence. Secondly, Reinhart had wished to ensure that Jewish law and tradition be interpreted by those most qualified to do so, which meant exclusively by the Rabbinate. He had considered the involvement of laymen in deciding matters of status an unfortunate step which blurred

the distinction between the laity and ministers, and which detracted from the authority of any such decisions. In his eyes a properly constituted Beth Din, entirely Rabbinic in character, would be a valuable means both of guaranteeing Rabbinic control and of enhancing the reputation of the courts. A third aspect had been not so much on the practical level, but more of an ideological point. The institution of a Beth Din had been an integral part of Jewish life throughout the centuries. Reinhart was always at great pains to stress that Reform Judaism was a continuation of the Jewish heritage and not a deviation from it. It only introduced reforms that were necessary to preserve the original spirit and dynamism of Judaism. Establishing a Beth Din was part of his larger campaign to present Reform Judaism as normative Judaism and to show that it was capable of maintaining Jewish tradition fully.

These had been the personal and long-held motives of Reinhart. In addition there had been further factors pressing for a Reform Beth Din as a result of the changing character of the Reform movement in Britain. The growth of new Reform congregations had meant that the ad hoc courts organised by West London Synagogue to serve its own members were no longer suitable for the wider demands placed upon them. A national Reform organisation had been established in 1942 and this had resulted in a process of centralisation taking place in administrative and educational spheres. Inevitably it paved the way also for greater uniformity in areas of religious

issues and status matters. We must now examine how the Reform Beth Din responded to the tasks demanded of it.

The initial prospects for achieving a centralised Reform Beth Din had been dubious. Some of the ministers had expressed reservations when the idea was discussed formally and objections were raised by the laity too. The unanimity needed for it to have sufficient authority to make it viable seemed lacking. A major split in attitude would have seriously flawed the possibility of a unified Beth Din. However, despite differences in the discussion stage, once the Reform court had been established it was utilised by all the ministers save Goldberg. Apart from Manchester all locally sponsored courts were abolished in deference to it. Those courts that did sit occasionally in individual synagogues were always held under its auspices. Although the separate stance of Goldberg prevented the complete acceptance of the Reform Beth Din, the support given to it by all the other ministers meant that there was a general consensus in its favour. By the time Goldberg and Manchester gave their full support it was merely adding a final acknowledgement to what was already a nationally recognised court within the Reform movement. Even if de jure recognition had to wait a while, a de facto central authority was achieved almost instantaneously and most ministers felt able to subordinate their own individual authority to its regime. It was able, therefore, to lay down regulations as to procedures for all cases that came before it. As a result a

divorce or conversion arising in London, Bradford or Glasgow all met the same conditions, were prepared in the same way, and received the same response. Uniformity was achieved. A further consequence of such central control was that a high standard could be set and maintained. Reinhart himself expressed his pride in the level of knowledge attained by proselytes, comparing it favourably with that of the Chief Rabbi's Court. Indeed it is noticeable that amid all the criticisms of Reform conversions by Orthodox authorities, the actual knowledge of candidates was never the point at issue.

The success of the Reform Beth Din in achieving Reinhart's first aim also resulted in the realisation of his second one - the enhancement of the authority of the Rabbinate. From its very beginning the Reform Beth Din was served only by ministers, and lay members in the movement had no role whatsoever. Not only did the court make a clear distinction between laity and clergy, but it also distinguished between those ministers that were fully ordained Rabbis and those that lacked semichah. Only the former were allowed to supervise divorce cases, and so it separated even further the field of expertise open exclusively to Rabbis. It also acted as an impetus for non-ordained ministers to acquire Rabbinic status, as Goldberg eventually did, and set a standard for those entering the ministry in the future.

This development of Rabbinic influence had much wider

implications than just the day-to-day workings of the Reform Beth Din. It was also a test-case for the religious direction of the Association. Reform Judaism had been a breakaway from what some regarded as the inflexibility of Rabbinic Law. In Britain the movement had been founded by the laity, and its first minister, D.W. Marks, urged a return to the pure principles of the Five Books of Moses and a rejection of the subsequent Rabbinic additions that had stifled Judaism. The establishment now of a Reform Beth Din seemed to signal a restoration of the Rabbinic authority that had been resisted so vehemently beforehand. There were fears that a new Orthodoxy would be introduced, innovations would be repressed, and Rabbinic powers grow dictatorial. Such worries were to be found amongst both laity and ministers themselves. Basil Henriques was appalled at the increase of Rabbinic influence and the thought that their decisions might be binding on all the congregations "without their having a right of appeal"¹. Maybaum was equally perturbed that the proposed court might emerge as an infallible final authority and warned his colleagues against "playing orthodoxy"². Whilst many sympathised with such concerns, they also recognised the benefits of a court professionally manned by ministers. The influx of German Rabbis, whose attachment to tradition and level of scholarship was often higher than that of the English

1. Henriques to Reinhart 21st April 1947 R. P. Box :
A.S.G.B./Society of Jewish Studies File : A.S.G.B. 1946,
1947.
2. Minutes Assembly of Ministers 15th March 1950.

3

or American trained ministers facilitated the change in attitude. Despite their doubts, both Henriques and Maybaum were to drop their objections to the Reform Beth Din once it was established and neither ever claimed that their initial fears had been justified. It should be borne in mind, though, that the increase in Rabbinic authority was still subject to certain limitations. There was a right of appeal for dissatisfied individuals included in the recommendations on the court in order to allay some of the concerns raised. It was a feature that had no parallel in Jewish Law and was not present in the Chief Rabbi's Court. Moreover no change was ever made to Article Nine of the A.S.G.B. constitution which declared that the governing body of the Association was Conference, the annual gathering of the constituent synagogues. When it appeared that the Assembly of Ministers had refused to accept the directives of the Special Conference of November 1956 over the length of tuition for proselytes a crisis had loomed. The ministers conceded the general principle that final authority rested with the Conference and that the Assembly had an advisory role only. However they won the particular point at issue concerning tuition length. Thus while the decision-making process of the Reform movement remained in the hands of the laity, the Reform Beth Din gave the ministers a considerably enhanced voice and it delineated clear areas where their authority was paramount.

These were tangible achievements. Reinhart's other

concern of portraying Reform Judaism as the true heir of past traditions is less easy to measure by objective criteria. The history of religion is replete with countless groups claiming legitimacy for themselves while other groups deny it with equal vehemence. Religious validity is a highly subjective and contentious issue. There is no doubt that the Reform Beth Din served as a distinguishing feature between the Reform and Liberal movements. The latter never sought to create a formal Beth Din, and merely had a Rites and Practices Committee to deal with its status cases. It therefore marked the Reform as a much more traditional form of Judaism and one that retained the traditional structure of Jewish communal life. In the eyes of the Orthodox establishment, however, Reform Judaism still lacked any legitimacy and was regarded as a renegade off-shoot, if not a separate religion altogether. Reinhart himself did not consider their disapproval as a yardstick and was concerned solely with his own perception of what were the relative demands of tradition and modernity. Yet Reinhart's views were not shared by all within the Reform movement. many of whom considered that there was no shame in acknowledging that Reform Judaism was different from traditional Judaism and was not the mainstream interpretation. Much to his disapproval many new synagogues adopted the adjective "Reform" in their title, such as the Hendon Reform Synagogue. It is no coincidence that whilst Reinhart was active in the movement all attempts to change its name were defeated, but within a year of his

departure the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain became the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain. There is a further irony in that whilst Reinhart's campaign for "non-adjectival" Judaism failed within the Reform movement itself, it perhaps had greater impact on the wider Anglo-Jewish community. As will be seen below, the Reform Beth Din became one of the movement's main beacons to Jews outside of Reform circles and it assisted in the presentation of the movement to the mass of Anglo-Jewry as much more acceptable than ever before.

To highlight the changes that had been accomplished in the establishment of the Reform Beth Din, comparisons can be made with the West London ad hoc courts. Their format and operation were very different. Instead of a "private, oral Beth Din"⁴ there were official procedures that had been vetted publicly. Whereas previously policy had been decided by those sitting on a court as and when the need arose, now it was debated formally by the Assembly of Ministers. When individual cases arose that were of particular complexity or were highly unusual, a small sub-committee was appointed to give guidance. The scant records that were kept in the past were replaced by an extensive range of precise records : personal files for all cases, containing correspondence, progress reports and other documentation; a minute book of all court sittings; and a register of all decisions reached by the courts, kept in chronological order and indexed in alphabetical order of surnames. The appointment of a Clerk gave the Reform Beth Din a cohesive structure that had been lacking in the ad hoc

4. Private conversation 19th May 1982 Rabbi Arthur Katz.

courts. Moreover his presence at all sittings ensured a standardisation of approach even though each sitting was manned by different ministers. A major difference in policy was that the ad hoc courts had dealt with proselyte cases only, for no get was required for remarriage in synagogues providing a civil divorce had been obtained. The Reform Beth Din, however, insisted on a get being arranged before remarriage could take place, and it spent much time on matrimonial problems. Whilst the West London ad hoc courts provided the embryo from which the Reform Beth Din emerged, it developed into an organisation independent of any one synagogue and with a character of its own.

The Reform Beth Din played a pivotal role in both responding to, and acting as a catalyst for, the changing situation within the Reform movement. What had started as a loosely linked association of synagogues was developing into a more centralised and co-ordinated organisation. The struggle for the recognition of the Reform Beth Din was connected closely with the struggle for the acceptance of a more unified structure to ~~the~~ the movement. It was to this which Manchester objected so strongly, and its frequent complaints were not so much on religious grounds as administrative ones. Thus⁵ Goldberg had opposed "a centralisation of authority", his Council had declared it "an innovation that was directly⁶ opposed to their custom of many years standing" and the issue was regarded as one of "some rather extravagant ambitions that

5. Minutes Assembly of Ministers 7th December 1949.

6. Minutes A.S.G.B. Conference 17th April 1948.

were not visualised when the Constitution [of the A. S. G. B.] was originally drawn up⁷". In this respect the Reform Beth Din became a test-case as to whether the individual congregations were prepared to surrender a certain amount of authority in order to strengthen the movement as a whole and to bring a corporate benefit to each of them. With the exception of Manchester they were all willing to give more uniformity and structure to the A. S. G. B.

The political problems that were unleashed by the establishment of the Reform Beth Din meant that a formal recognition of the court by the movement had to be postponed, and it operated initially under the aegis of the Assembly of Ministers. Eventually Manchester too gave up the right to unlimited congregational autonomy in status matters and accepted the need for religious cohesion within the movement. A further series of debates over the "Unification Procedures for Proselytes" had the similar effect of arousing wider political issues that were quite separate from the particular religious question in hand. It was again Manchester that raised the most objections, and it was symptomatic of Manchester's general discontent with the A. S. G. B. When the matter was resolved it meant that not only was the tuition length of proselytes agreed upon, but also that the central authority of the Association over internal congregational affairs had been extended yet again. It was highly appropriate, therefore, that a statement by Curtis on the

7. Minutes A. S. G. B. Conference 7th November 1956.

function of the Reform Beth Din concluded with the remark:⁸

It will be acknowledged from the short report of the activities that our Beth Din is an important institution of the A. S. G. E. It renders valuable service to the members of the Synagogues of the Association and, by maintaining the Jewish tradition, solidifies the structure of the A. S. G. E.

It was an accurate assessment of the significant role that the Reform Beth Din played in the development of the A. S. G. E. itself. Its establishment furthered the centralisation of the Association considerably.

The formation of the Reform Beth Din also had profound religious implications for the Reform movement. They were less dramatic and controversial than its administrative effects, but were equally important. Once the secession from Orthodoxy in 1840 and the publication of its own Prayer Book had been accomplished the radical infancy of the West London Synagogue had turned into a relatively complacent adulthood. There was no further evidence of reforming zeal and no attempt at missionary activity. Indeed, when congratulating the West London Synagogue on its one hundredth anniversary, the Jewish Chronicle⁹ had commented:

Beyond its own walls, its influence on British Judaism, which was anticipated so ardently by its brave founders, has been restricted and almost negligible, and no great impulse has flowed from it.

Other Reform synagogues that arose were of the same

8 Our Beth Din (undated, but pre-1958) Archives of the Reform Beth Din.

9. J. C. 30th January 1942.

disposition and it was only with the arrival of Reinhart at West London in 1929 that a new and dynamic spirit emerged. The Reform Beth Din was the direct product of that religious revival. The establishment of the court was the first major religious innovation of the Reform movement. It reflected a renewed confidence and was founded upon a forthright assertion¹⁰ of the religious justification of Reform thinking :

To develop the law and to adapt it to the changing conditions of the centuries as was the aim of our great teachers in former times. Lack of courage and rivalry among the religious leaders have brought a factual standstill in the development of Jewish law which has resulted in a rigid legalism that bears no longer any relation to the needs of the Jewish community. That is why we have instituted our own Beth Din not to abrogate the law, but to develop it again. In all humbleness and in true Jewish spirit we endeavour to make it again a living force that it had always meant to be.

Thus the Reform Beth Din was not only seen as a method of helping individual congregants but also as a rejuvenation of Jewish Law itself. Reinhart often emphasised that although the court might be considered a novelty it was in fact a return to the dynamic quality of Jewish law before it stagnated.

According to him, the basis of the court was "sound scholarship and interpretation in the true spirit of humanity which

¹¹
characterised the Rabbis of old". Certainly the establishment of a formal court gave much impetus to searching for response to contemporary problems which harmonised both tradition and humanity. Although no definitive Reform halachah emerged and

10 Our Beth Din op. cit.

11. Sermon preached by Reinhart at the West London Synagogue 28th March 1954; quoted Golden op. cit. p. 171.

no new laws were immutably codified, there was a surge of religious creativity and research : papers were read at Assembly meetings on matters such as the origins and exact requirements of circumcision,¹² responsa were sought from abroad¹³ on subjects such as the donation of eyes after death,¹³ and a Halachic Sub-Committee was formed and examined questions such as the religious validity of civil marriages.¹⁴ There was also much greater awareness of the attempts of other Reform movements to establish halachically-based rulings, and particular attention was paid to the work of the American Reform Rabbi, Dr. Solomon Freehof. Guidelines were issued concerning not only matters of status and relating directly to court cases, but also for a wide area of modern issues, such as the disposal of cremated ashes and sterilisation.¹⁵¹⁶

There was no hint among the decisions reached of any return to Orthodoxy or any inclination towards a stricter application of Jewish law. The new development was the vigour behind such productivity. Of course this was partly the result of there now being sufficient number of Reform ministers to have such debates, whereas before the war the ministers were too few in number and no collective statements were issued. However, the new attention devoted to policy issues was also a

12. Halachic Decisions 1949-1963 (unpublished collection)
p. 34. Archives of the Reform Beth Din.

13. Ibid p. 41.

14. Ibid p. 22.

15. Ibid p. 12.

16. Ibid p. 42.

matter of organisation and thus, to a large extent, the offshoot of the Reform Beth Din. Regular meetings of the ministers were initiated precisely because of the need to discuss procedures for the new court. The pattern of debate and decision-making was established because of the request for the ministers to present a recommendation concerning the court to the A.S.G.B. In the process ~~the~~ the informal meetings of the ministers themselves became institutionalised into the Assembly of Ministers, and the ministers also turned their attention to other areas of modern Jewish life. Thus although the Assembly of Ministers developed quickly into an entirely distinct body with a very different purpose from that of the Reform Beth Din, its roots lay in the impetuses created by it. It is clear, therefore, that both as an innovation in its own right and as a catalyst for wider debate the Reform Beth Din was a religious milestone in the history of Reform Judaism in Britain.

The Reform Beth Din also occupied a unique position internationally. Its centralised authority was revolutionary and without any counterpart in Reform movements elsewhere. Once established it was described as "a novelty in the Jewish world".¹⁷ Amid all his criticisms of it Dayan Swift drew attention to the fact that "Never before have so-called progressive elements claimed to possess such a body. This is now a direct invasion of religious territory which they have not claimed hitherto".¹⁸ While he was incorrect in thinking that

17. L. Jacobs 'The Beth Din : The Jewish Ecclesiastical Court' p. 19.

18 M. Swift Jewish Marriage and Divorce p. 14.

it was a deliberate attempt to challenge the Orthodox courts, he was right in describing its singularity. In both Germany and the United States matters of general policy were debated at Reform Rabbinic conferences, but the decisions were never binding on constituent synagogues, which reserved the right to maintain full religious autonomy. Cases affecting individuals were dealt with by the Rabbinic and lay leadership of the congregations concerned. No central authoritative body¹⁹ existed. The only attempt to form a national Reform Beth Din was by Rabbi Max Lillienthal in New York in 1847 and it held one²⁰ meeting only. The stress on diversity and communal autonomy that was so characteristic of American Reform militated against further developments. When the Union of American Hebrew Congregations was established in 1873 it was expressly laid down that it was to carry out its objects "without interfering in any manner whatsoever with the affairs and management of any congregation".²¹ A Responsa Committee was appointed in 1906 by the Reform Rabbinic body, the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Its brief was "to bring about some order within the Reform Jewish practices and to provide ready access for those²² who sought answers in rabbinic matters". Whilst this recognised implicitly the disorder in Reform practices, the Committee's decisions were purely for guidance and had no powers of enforcement. There was neither the means for

19. W. Jacob 'The Source of Reform Halachic Authority' p. 35.

20. S. Temkin 'A Beth Din for America' p. 409.

21. Ibid, p. 414.

22. W. Jacob Contemporary American Reform Responsa p. xvii.

implementing its finding nor any willingness within the movement to create such a mechanism. Religious authority remained firmly in the hands of the local congregations, and each congregation was able to modify its practices without reference to a higher authority. Thus the American Reform background from which Reinhart came was dominated by the principle of 'congregational policy', and there was no Reform role-model for the Beth Din that he was to create in Britain.

The Reform movement was also evident in South Africa, but once again no central Reform Beth Din existed. Instead there was a regional system with a central co-ordinating body. Each locality had an Ecclesiastical Committee which dealt with its own proselyte and matrimonial cases. The committee contained both Rabbis and laymen. A Central Ecclesiastical Board consisted of representatives from these various committees and they met annually to discuss problems and principles, but it was advisory only and had no executive power. The independence of the local committees and the involvement of laity made such a system unacceptable as far as Reinhart was concerned.

The one parallel institution to Reinhart's concept of a centralised Beth Din was the Chief Rabbi's Court, which officially served only the London congregations belonging to the United Synagogue, but in fact had a jurisdiction that covered the whole country. Although there was a Beth Din in other towns of major settlement, and although they were

competent according to Jewish Law to deal with all matters affecting their communities, it was automatic practice to refer all applications for conversion, as well as difficult cases of divorce, to the London court. This policy of centralised control amongst Orthodox synagogues was limited to Britain, for in the United States and Europe matters were decided through a local or regional Beth Din. This had been traditional Jewish practice over the centuries and there was no national Rabbinic authority. This penchant for centralisation was characteristic of Anglo-Jewry. In turn it reflected the national model of the non-Jewish community and the structures offered by both the Church of England and the Parliamentary system of government. The language used by Jewish communal leaders indicated their attachment to such English institutions, conscious or otherwise. Thus Chief Rabbi Nathan Adler would at times refer to the Jewish community as "our communion" while Benjamin Cohen²³ referred to Adler as "the head of our Church". When Chief Rabbi Hertz spoke of the Reform synagogues he described them²⁴ as "His Majesty's Loyal Opposition". The use of ecclesiastical garb, such as Roman collars and Geneva bands, and of the title 'Very Reverend' further indicates the influence of English institutional customs. The Chief Rabbinate itself was an invention of Anglo-Jewry that was unknown within Jewish Law and did not exist in many other Jewish communities. It was a²⁵ typically English institution", with "a distinct English

23. Israel Finestsein 'Post-Emancipation Jewry : The Anglo Jewish Experience' p. 16.

24. M. Leigh 'Reform Judaism in Great Britain' p. 48.

25. C. Roth 'The Chief Rabbinate in England' p. 384.

26

flavour" which gave Anglo-Jewry an office parallel to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The way in which the United Synagogue had been established through non-Jewish legislation by Act of Parliament differentiated it from any other synagogue body. It was yet another reflection of the Church of England, which was also established by law. It was a remarkable step, while the Trust Deed which implemented the Act empowered the Chief Rabbinate with sole authority to certify the fitness of ministers serving in pulpits under United Synagogue jurisdiction and thus gave him unique control over other ministers. This was a major departure from Jewish tradition, according to which all Rabbis are equal ecclesiastically and was more a reflection of the powers of appointment of the Archbishop. Thus the influence of national institutions on the religious organisation of Anglo-Jewry was considerable.²⁷ The creation of a Reform Beth Din that also operated along the same principles of a central body enjoying national jurisdiction followed this uniquely English pattern. Whilst there is no evidence that Reinhart based the Reform Beth Din consciously on the Chief Rabbi's Court, the latter's existence must have been of some influence in what was a total innovation in the Reform movement worldwide.

The success of the Reform Beth Din must be measured also in the way in which it carried out its basic function as a court and discharged its day-to-day affairs. It is noticeable

26. I. Finestein op. cit. p. 5.

27. For influence on secular Jewish organisations see A. Newman The Board of Deputies of British Jews p. 5.

that no letters of complaint concerning the attitude or policies of the court are to be found externally in any of the Jewish newspapers, or internally in synagogue newsletters or council minutes. This is in great contrast to the many complaints raised publicly about the efficiency and courtesy of the Chief Rabbi's Court. Moreover while provisions for an Appeal Court had been inserted into the original recommendations concerning the Reform Beth Din there was no instance of any dissatisfied applicant or sponsoring minister calling for the appeal procedure to be put into action. The only instance of any contention was a matrimonial case in 1965 in which there was a disagreement between two of the ministers on the court as to how the case should proceed. It was resolved by convening another court, of three different Rabbis, with the two ministers concerned appearing before it as witnesses.²⁸ The complete absence of any public criticism by the laity suggests that within the movement there was a high degree of satisfaction with the manner in which the Reform Beth Din operated. There were no complaints, moreover, that its activities ever exceeded its authority or threatened the autonomy of the local congregations. Whilst the possibility of such a situation had been one of the major objections raised against it, the Reform Beth Din always operated within the agreed parameters and it successfully avoided causing any constitutional problems through its practices. In this respect credit must go to Curtis, who was responsible for its daily affairs and who managed to steer a clear path through the minefield of congregational sensitivities.

28. Minutes Assembly of Ministers 30th March 1965.

The one reservation that was raised occasionally concerned not the workings of the Reform Beth Din but the whole issue of conversion itself. In some quarters it was felt that proselytes often lacked sincerity and that too many were admitted. Such protests were not frequent but did find²⁹ expression throughout the period under study. In some instances these claims were based on the principle that conversion should be allowed for purely religious motives only,³⁰ and not when a marriage to a Jew was intended. In other instances they were the result of fears that the appearance of easy conversion would give ammunition to Orthodox criticisms of³¹ Reform Judaism. In reply to such concerns it was pointed out that a balance had to be maintained between insisting on strict³² standards and remaining open to genuine enquirers:

In the R. S. G. B. every application is considered carefully by our Beth Din and the standard of instruction has been kept high. We do not wish to discourage the sincere applicant for proselytisation, however - so many have enriched our Jewish heritage throughout the ages.

These reservations did not present any serious challenge to the work of the Reform Beth Din and the only area that they did affect was the length of tuition of proselytes. This remained

29. Minutes A. S. G. B. Annual Conference 11-13th May 1956; Minutes Leeds Council 19th February 1956; Goldberg to Curtis 3rd June 1957, Collins File R. B. D., Minutes A. S. G. B. Annual Conference 26-28th June 1959; Minutes Hendon Council 3rd July 1961; The Synagogue Review February 1962 p. 171 and July/August 1965 p. 260.
30. Minutes A. S. G. B. Special Conference November 1956.
31. The Synagogue Review November 1961 p. 64.
32. The Synagogue Review February 1962 p. 171.

under the control of local congregations. Whereas most synagogues considered approximately a year to be sufficient, Manchester insisted upon a minimum period of eighteen months in order to discourage insincere applicants. It was to prove a contentious point when the A.S.G.B. embarked on the "Unification Procedure for Proselytes" because Manchester's position threatened to endanger a unified approach by the synagogues of the Association. Ultimately that too was resolved. By contrast, other congregations had no objections to converts and were very supportive towards them. Commenting on the proselytes at Wimbledon Rabbi Berg wrote:

33

Nearly all have found it relatively easy to integrate themselves into the lives of the community. Their children have been blessed in our Synagogue and are attending our religion classes. Parents and children look upon themselves and are looked upon as complete Jewish families.

Elsewhere, Edgware decided that once a candidate had been accepted for instruction all tuition should be given to them free of charge.

34

The significance of the Reform Beth Din within the Reform congregations was matched by its impact on the wider community, for it attracted a considerable number of applicants from outside of the Reform movement. A high percentage of those seeking resolution of divorce or adoption cases were either members of Orthodox synagogues or unaffiliated but originally from Orthodox backgrounds. An even greater percentage of those

33. Ibid February 1959 p. 153.

34. Minutes Edgware Council 14th May 1962.

applying for conversion were non-Jewish partners of Jews in those same two categories. Some had approached the Orthodox authorities first but had failed to achieve a satisfactory result, and so had approached the Reform instead; others had applied directly to the Reform court. Indeed, Reform Synagogue members were only a small minority of those served by the Reform Beth Din. Not only was the Reform court seen as an alternative avenue for those with status problems within the Orthodox fold, but the traditionalism of its structure gave it an added appeal. For those who wished to find a Jewish solution to their situation yet who could not do so via the Orthodox authorities the Reform Beth Din fulfilled a vital role.

It must be stressed, of course, that it had not been the intention that the Reform Beth Din would compete with the Orthodox authorities. The Reform court had been established purely as a service for the membership of the A. S. G. B. Applicants from Orthodox congregations were often advised to try their own authorities first. Reinhart in particular had been at pains to discourage the idea that the Reform Beth Din was an easy option for those wishing to short-circuit the normal procedures. He often urged individuals applying to him to stand by their convictions and, if they were Orthodox ones, to pursue their case in the appropriate quarters. Other Reform ministers adopted the same approach and viewed with caution the influx of cases from Orthodox members. When Rabbi Miller, then

minister at West London, was approached by an individual who had been rejected by the Chief Rabbi's Court and who turned to the Reform as "being the nearest to Orthodox Judaism" he
35
replied:

I must confess to not feeling too happy about what you write. If, as you say, you are an Orthodox Jew and if, as you seem to imply, your own Beth Din appears to be demanding over-stringent terms from a would-be proselyte, I would have thought that by far the most honourable thing to do in your position would have been to approach your Beth Din and attempt to make their attitude a little more reasonable. Or am I to assume that you, in common with so many other Orthodox Jews of your ilk, regard the Reform Synagogues as a sort of gathering place of the pariahs of the Jewish community, unfit for orthodox consumption but not quite unfit enough for Liberal Judaism? We are neither impressed nor flattered by these obvious implications in your letter. We are a synagogue body endeavouring to face up to the problem of leading an authentic Jewish life in the twentieth century.

Unaffiliated Jews who approached the Reform Beth Din were also informed that one option was to approach the Orthodox authorities, particularly if an Orthodox synagogue was nearer
36
to them than a Reform one. Thus the Reform Beth Din was not seen by Reinhart and his colleagues as a means of gaining new members. That, however, was one of its major consequences. For despite their reticence at being viewed as a second attempt for those who failed the Orthodox requirements, there was no policy of refusing such applications. Defending the extraordinarily high number of cases from non-Reform members,
37
Curtis wrote:

35. The Synagogue Review November 1961 p. 61.

36. Michael Curtis to Mr. S. Kaufman 14th May 1964. Kaufman file R.B.D.

37. Annual Report R.B.D. 1962 p. 4.

From the fact that the vast majority of the Jewish partners of our applicants came from an orthodox background, the conclusion might be drawn that we do the work that should be done in the orthodox Courts. I submit that it would be a wrong conclusion. The Jewish partner, when confronted with the problem of a mixed marriage, is forced to examine his own attitude to religion. He then discovers that his views and his practices are not in accordance with orthodox Judaism and quite rightfully he applies to us ... They remain members with few exceptions, and, in general it would be unfair to say that they take advantage of us. A similar situation applies in Get cases.

Cases of non-members were dealt with in the same manner as those cases arising from within the movement. Naturally they joined their local Reform Synagogue once their application to the Reform Beth Din had been accepted. It was necessary from a practical point of view : those obtaining a divorce from the Reform Beth Din would not have their get recognised by the Orthodox authorities and would only be able to remarry in a Reform synagogue and would become members there. The Jewish partners of persons converting under the auspices of the Reform court were expected to accompany their partners to services regularly at their local Reform synagogue and so would also become a member there. In some instances it also resulted in the families of those individuals changing their affiliation to the Reform as well.

As was shown earlier, in every single year of the period under study the majority of partners of proselytes whose religious background is known came from Orthodoxy. In the provinces the situation was even more dramatic. Applications

from some provincial Reform synagogues were almost exclusively from partners of Orthodox Jews. Thus D. Hilson, warden of Manchester, reported in 1963 that in the last twenty years only three of the countless conversions arranged by the synagogue had been for partners of members.³⁸ Similarly Rabbi Atkins of Glasgow declared that only three of the fifty conversions conducted by the synagogue were of partners of existing members.³⁹

The steady stream of those non-Reform members seeking the assistance of the Reform Beth Din made a sizeable contribution to the growth of the movement. Exact membership figures are hard to gauge as most Reform synagogues have not preserved records of their membership, while the R.S.G.B. itself has attempted to compile overall figures only since 1978. An estimate has been made that the membership of Reform synagogues in London rose by some eleven thousand during the period under study.⁴⁰ If one adds together the number of proselytes from Reform synagogues in London, their non-Reform partners, and those from non-Reform backgrounds seeking a Reform divorce, it amounts to a minimum of sixteen hundred people. As this is approximately fifteen percent of the total growth it is clear that it is a significant factor and needs to be taken into account when assessing the rise of Reform membership. Moreover, those using the Reform Beth Din also had an even more considerable impact on the number of marriages performed in

38. Jewish Telegraph 17th May 1963.

39. Jewish Echo 17th December 1965.

40. S. Sharot Judaism - A Sociology p. 160.

Reform Synagogues, which increased dramatically during the period under study whereas the Orthodox marriages decreased.⁴¹ If the total number of proselytes whose conversion was followed by a marriage (1204) is added to the number of individuals whose divorce was followed by a remarriage (211), the total sum accounts for 45% of all Reform marriages during that time (3139).

A leading article in the Jewish Chronicle on the subject of the growing numbers transferring from Orthodoxy to the Reform movement commented on the role of the Reform Beth Din:⁴²

Moreover, a significant number of them are brought within the fold more often by the intransigence of the Beth Din [of the Chief Rabbi] in matters of personal status and proselytisation than by convictions of a more positive nature.

It was their bad experiences with the Orthodox authorities that propelled many Jews towards Reform synagogues. The practical benefits of the Reform approach regarding status matters in the eyes of most Jews were summed up by Goldberg when he declared:⁴³

I passionately believe in Reform Judaism with all my heart :

- because of the young man due to be married who came to me. His father had married a non-Jewish lady and she had died soon after he was born. He went to live with his Jewish grandmother who brought him up in an orthodox Jewish manner. He went to Jewish youth clubs, in an orthodox synagogue, was barmitzvah ... believing he was Jewish. When he came to be married it was discovered that he was not Jewish. I recommended him to our Beth Din who examined him and

41. S. J. Prais and Marlana Schmool "Statistics of Jewish Marriages in Great Britain" p. 161-6.

42. J. C. 12th May 1961.

43. Jewish Telegraph 19th July 1963.

declared him Jewish. He was married in our Synagogue.

- because of the lady to whom I spoke. She married during the war, had two children, and at the end of the war her husband was killed. She recently met a man whom she wanted to marry, but she was told that because she had not seen the body of her husband she could not re-marry in an orthodox synagogue. She did so in ours.

- because while we do not agree with inter-marriage, we do know that it exists, and rather than drive away members from the community, if there is sincerity and conviction, we believe it is better to bring them into the fold after showing proof of their sincerity and knowledge.

- because of the lady who divorced her husband in the civil courts. She told me that she wanted to re-marry but obviously needed a get first. This can only be given by her husband, and in this case he refused to give it to her unless she paid him a sum of money. The orthodox authorities advised her to pay. She was allowed to re-marry in our Synagogue - without paying her husband.

Despite its declamatory style it presents an accurate picture of how the Reform were perceived by many as answering a need that Orthodoxy failed to satisfy. The end result was numerical gains for the Reform movement. As Goldberg remarked on a different occasion "The [Orthodox] Beth Din is my best recruiting agent".⁴⁴ Thus a new channel of growth emerged as a direct effect of the Reform Beth Din, and the Reform movement enjoyed a steady increase of membership as a result of its existence.

It should be emphasised that there were many other factors in the growth of the Reform movement. One group of factors was the addition and contribution of foreign Jews coming to Britain: There was the personal initiative of Reinhart in promoting

new Reform congregations. There was the arrival of continental Jews coming from a committed Reform background who wished to maintain it in England. This influx also included refugee Reform Rabbis who were able to provide the religious leadership that had been lacking previously. Another group of factors was the changes taking place within Anglo-Jewry : The effects of the Second World War led to a disruption of traditional patterns of settlement and observance, caused a lessening of ties with Orthodoxy, and resulted in an increase in inter-marriage. In addition the move of Jews into new areas provided⁴⁵ the opportunity for some to affiliate to new forms of Judaism. A third group of factors was the developments within the Reform synagogue : the increasing sense of common identity among the Reform congregations themselves, leading to the creation of a central co-ordinating body, which in turn gave added impetus and direction to the movement. The new energy and confidence of the Reform synagogues resulted in further internal developments that provided an invaluable supply of future lay and religious leadership. One of these developments was a highly motivated and exceptionally active youth group, the Youth Association of Synagogues in Great Britain. Founded in 1946, many of its members later took leading roles in

45. It was often a mixture of motives, some being discontented with Orthodoxy and others being attracted to Reform : "Some persons genuinely cannot stand what pass for religious services in the Orthodox community. There is no doubt that unimaginative Judaism, allied to a feeling that decorum invariably leads to reform, has many made orthodox services unaesthetic as well as unintelligible. Some persons prefer to associate themselves with religious organisations where their standard of observance will be considered proper rather than heterodox" (Norman Cohen 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Religious Life'. Jewish Life in Modern Britain p. 50.)

individual Reform synagogues as well as in the A.S.G.B. itself.⁴⁶
Another development was the establishment of the Leo Baeck
College in 1956 to train teachers and Rabbis. As a result of
this many English-born candidates entered the Reform Rabbinate,
and the College graduates were to dominate the movement in
future years.⁴⁷

It was a combination of all these factors that was
responsible for the accelerated growth of the Reform movement
and that provided the impetus for a continued momentum. The
Reform Beth Din was one of the important elements in this
process, attracting members from outside the movement and
providing a structure that became increasingly used as the
movement expanded. It was thus both a part of and a
contributing factor to the new sense of purpose and optimism
displayed by the Reform synagogues.

The existence of the Reform Beth Din had major
consequences also for the Orthodox authorities. They
themselves did not recognise its validity but they were aware
that others in Anglo-Jewry did accept it and that even members
of Orthodox synagogues were prepared to utilise its services.
In effect the Orthodox authorities had lost their monopoly over
matters of status. It was a unique situation and unparalleled
in modern times. Not since the Karaite schism, which had
sprung up in the eighth century, had the Rabbinic authorities
faced such a challenge to their interpretation of Jewish Law

46. M. Leigh op. cit. p. 43.

47. Ibid. p. 45, 47.

and to the decisions they formulated. The only other major development of a movement within Judaism had been Hasidism in the eighteenth century. It had led initially to a clash with the Rabbinical establishment, but in general the controversies had been peripheral to Jewish Law and status matters, and the Hasidim later became the staunchest pillars of Orthodox Judaism. The challenge to Orthodoxy first presented by the Reform movement in Germany (which had lacked a central Beth Din) was now institutionalised by the Reform Beth Din in Britain.

It is conceivable that the novelty of the Reform Beth Din might have resulted in more flexible attitude by the Orthodox, particularly in matters of conversion and divorce, concerning which so much criticism had been expressed. Such a course might have been adopted in order to respond to the new situation, in the same way that policies in other areas had also changed. For example, once the Reform had elevated the status of women and allowed girls to have the same barmitizvah ceremony as boys, many Orthodox synagogues had established a special 'coming-of-age' ceremony for girls - a bat chayil. Although it was not an exact imitation of the Reform innovation, it was a parallel ceremony and a clear response to the development. Adopting a more flexible attitude in status matters might also have undermined the appeal of the Reform court and limited it to serving Reform members rather than attracting a much wider range of applicants. Certain individual Orthodox Rabbis did take cognizance of the Reform Beth Din in their approach to cases. Thus Rabbi Maurice Gaguine of Manchester occasionally made use of the Reform Beth

Din's existence by threatening husbands who refused to grant a get to their wives for no good reason that unless they did so he might send their case to the Reform court. If that happened, he warned the husbands, their wives would be awarded the get and would be able to remarry in a Reform synagogue, while the husband would be unable to remarry in his own Orthodox synagogue as they would not consider the get valid. Apparently the threat always worked and the husbands agreed to
48
the divorce.

The reaction of the Chief Rabbi's Court, however, was to ignore totally any implications raised by the establishment of the Reform Beth Din. Its existence did not persuade the Orthodox to give a new response to any of the problems it faced. Indeed, it may be said to have had the opposite effect, causing a siege mentality and a determination to adhere even more strongly to the strict interpretation of the Law. The prominence of a liberal viewpoint encouraged the belief that it was even more important to maintain and fortify traditional attitudes. When a major internal review of the work of the Chief Rabbi's Court reported its findings in 1955 a number of administrative changes were suggested, such as reducing the waiting time for those seeking a preliminary interview regarding conversion. However, the report rejected any alterations in the conversion policy itself, adding the warning "Nothing should be read into this proposal to suggest that

proselytisation should be made easier".⁴⁹ The few figures publicly available regarding conversions at the Chief Rabbi's Court show that whereas in 1924 sixty-one applicants were accepted, only twenty-three were accepted in 1955. Moreover in 1924 the number accepted was approximately a quarter of all those applying for conversion, whereas in 1955 those accepted⁵⁰ only amounted to a tenth of the total applications. Both sets of figures show clearly that the Chief Rabbi's Court did not merely maintain a static policy in regard to converts, but in effect responded to the new situation by lessening the number admitted considerably. In an analysis of the Chief Rabbi's Court presented to the non-Jewish legal world Rabbi Louis⁵¹ Jacobs, then still within the United Synagogue, commented:

The London Beth Din have adopted the policy of discouraging prospective converts. Very severe demands are made of applicants as a test of sincerity ... This policy has certainly reduced the number of successful applications and it is extremely rare to find a man or woman converted to the Jewish faith in under three or four years. It is an open secret that in this the London Beth Din depart from the more lenient procedure adopted by some courts in other lands and that many influential members of the Anglo-Jewish community do not see eye to eye with the Beth Din in this matter.

It is noticeable that the Jewish press in the 1960's was voicing the same concerns and personal anguish that had been in evidence long before the Reform Beth Din had been established.

49. Recommendations of the Chief Rabbi and the President of the United Synagogue Concerning the Organisation and Administration of the Beth Din.

50. See Appendix XIX.

51. Louis Jacobs 'The Beth Din : The Jewish Ecclesiastical Court' p. 23.

The problems associated with conversion were still as great as
52
before :

Evidence accumulates of a growing tide of discontent with the Beth Din's management of matters. This evidence comes not only from aggrieved persons who complain bitterly of their alleged unjust treatment. It is also forthcoming from rabbis and ministers who are continually being brought up against concrete problems which they feel are being aggravated instead of solved under the present regime.

Of course, it is not the authority of the Halacha which is being impugned but the Beth Din's determination to interpret it along the most harsh and rigid lines. The trend of its decisions seem to indicate that an extremist interpretation of Jewish Law is consistently applied. Often these rigorous and unconscionable decisions conflict with the more humane judgements given by other rabbinical authorities, both of the State of Israel and also of the London Beth Din itself in more tolerant times. Impossible demands and conditions are often imposed ... Moreover, procrastination and even discourtesy not infrequently add to the troubles of applicants.

It was also pointed out that the rigidity of the Chief Rabbi's Court not only caused individual distress, but failed to address the issues of inter-marriage and conversion themselves.

53

In fact, the result was counter-productive :

If the present policy of the Beth Din is designed to prevent inter-marriage then it has demonstrably failed and will continue to do so. All available evidence points to the fact that refusal by Chief Rabbi's Court to admit converts has not the slightest effect upon intermarriage; the couples will either go to Reform or Liberal synagogues, or marry at a Registry Office. One certain result is that they and their children are lost to the Orthodox community.

As well as conversion still being a source of discontent, a second unresolved problem was the inability of many women to

52. J. C. 29th January 1960 (leader).

53. J. C. 25th March 1960 (leader).

obtain a get from their husbands in order for them to remarry.

The dayanim themselves acknowledged that the machinery for
54
Jewish divorce was not working and that :

For every case that is settled there is at least one
dead-locked, and of course there are many couples who
receive a civil divorce without bothering about a
get.

While the Chief Rabbi's Court declared its sympathy for such
women, no new solutions were forthcoming. The difficulty was
so insurmountable within the Orthodox legal framework that it
was suggested that it could only be dealt with by calling
together a Sanhedrin (assembly) in Jerusalem consisting of
55
world-wide scholars of repute. However, as this was thought to
be possible only in the Messianic age, it was effectively an
indefinite postponement of any major innovation. Subsequent
public statements by the Orthodox Rabbinate merely urged
divorcing couples to obtain a get and warned of the serious
56
consequences arising if they failed to do so. Thus whereas
the Reform Beth Din took upon itself the power to award a get
without the permission of a recalcitrant husband, there were no
such developments in the Orthodox courts and Dayan Lew conceded
57
that many cases "constitute a problem defying solution".

54. J. C. 17th November 1961.

55. Rabbi Dr. S. M. Lehrman speaking at the Annual Conference
of Anglo-Jewish Preachers; quoted J. C. 12th May 1949.

56. e.g. resolutions of the Conference of (Orthodox) Rabbis in
the British Isles quoted J. C. 20th January 1950 and 16th
July 1954.

57. Dayan Dr. M. Lew 'Communal and Social Problems Confronting
the Beth Din' Addresses at the Twelfth Conference of
Anglo-Jewish Preachers p. 45.

Another matrimonial problem was chalitzah, the lack of progress concerning which was commented upon by an Orthodox minister,

58

Rabbi S. Mestel:

I am at loss to understand why that body [the Chief Rabbi's Court] has been reluctant to adopt means to prevent unscrupulous people from perpetrating terrible scandals in connection with the Mosaic Law of Chalitzah ... It has come to my notice that there are people in the community who hold those poor women to ransom and are prepared to free them only on receipt of large sums of money.

A third area of continued public criticism was that of adoption. Here too there was little change of approach. The adoption of non-Jewish children was made dependent on the parents being strictly Orthodox, while similar conditions were imposed even when the child was of proven Jewish descent. It was pointed out publicly that this policy was a new departure in Jewish law:

59

60

This attitude to adoptive children is based upon discussions held by members of the Batei Din only over the past few years; it has no foundation whatever either in Halacha or in civil law.

Thus not only was there no effort to facilitate adoption but, if anything, conditions were made even more restrictive. In 1958, one of the few years for which figures for the Chief Rabbi's Court are available, only 21 out of 51 applications for adoption were accepted. When asked whether this unnecessarily

61

58. J. C. 21st September 1951.

59. M. Lew op. cit. p. 44; Jewish Telegraph 30th March 1962.

60. Jewish Echo (leader) 23rd November 1962.

61. J. C. 10th July 1959.

demanding attitude might not force people to apply to the Reform court instead, Dayan Golditch replied that although it might seem difficult to accept, there could be no compromise :
62
"We cannot make concessions with the Din". The existence of the Reform Beth Din was seen as being of no significance at all in terms of ameliorating the stringent conditions for adoption.

The poor public image of the Chief Rabbi's Court led to internal dissent too. At the 1958 Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers several Orthodox ministers complained that not only was the Beth Din not "public relations conscious" but that
63
they themselves "were perplexed at times over certain matters". When the Chief Rabbi's Court moved its premises from Whitechapel to Bloomsbury the following year, the Jewish Chronicle took the opportunity to call for "better liaison with
64
the Jewish public". The still negative perception of the Orthodox Rabbinate in general was graphically expressed by Rabbi A. Carlebach in 1960 at the second Conference of European
65
Orthodox Rabbis when he compared their image to:

That of a man swimming against the stream ... the great "No" which was continuously heard from the rabbis was bewildering to the Jew in the street. Could not the rabbis take more account of public opinion and occasionally say "Yes" ... There was a crisis of confidence between the rabbinate and the ordinary Jew.

Describing the years from 1951 to 1962 when he had been

62. Jewish Telegraph 9th November 1962.

63. J. C., 2nd May 1958.

64. J. C. 10th April 1959.

65. J. C. 1st April 1960.

Secretary to the Chief Rabbi, Michael Wallach reflected on:

The many stories of woe that emerged from the Beth Din's sittings, for which the London Beth Din has become a by-word ... In a period when even the deeply encrusted hierarchy of Rome has found it necessary to bend to the prevailing winds, it is a misfortune for Anglo-Jewry that our religious leadership should have become more distanced, aloof and divorced from personal contact with the market-place ... and so out of touch with its membership.

Thus the orthodox authorities were determined not to be identified with reforming tendencies in any way. If the existence of the Reform Beth Din had any effect on them it was to encourage a policy of retrenchment and the belief that all hint of compromise should be avoided.

In 1965 Chief Rabbi Brodie retired. His departure from the leadership of Orthodox Anglo-Jewry signalled an end to years of divisiveness and acrimony within the community, first over the Reform Beth Din, and then over the "Jacobs Affair". When Dr. Immanuel Jakobovits took office as the new Chief Rabbi he would attempt to bring a spirit of concord, and invite Reform leaders and Rabbi Jacobs to his installation service. A new chapter had begun in communal relations. Moreover he would preside over a different Anglo-Jewry from that which his predecessor had inherited, in which assimilation had increased and religious affiliations had changed. There was also an additional Rabbinic court - the Reform Beth Din. It had begun very quietly and unofficially in the same year that Brodie was elected Chief Rabbi, but by 1965 was an established and well-

known institution within Anglo-Jewry. It had a major impact on the lives of the many individuals and families that had cause to approach it. Of much greater significance, however was its role in the general community. It was the only Beth Din to have the majority of its cases come from applicants outside of its own constituency, indicating its widespread reputation and its importance for Anglo-Jewry as a whole. Moreover, it not only played an active role in itself, but its existence and development reflected major changes within the community.

First, the very establishment of a Reform Beth Din reflected a new era in the religious life of Anglo-Jewry : the emergence of the Reform movement. Without the increase in the number of Reform synagogues there would have been no need to depart from the system of ad hoc courts used by West London. Its existence was dependent also on the ability of the Reform congregations to agree to a common policy and to curtail their individual rights in favour of a central organisation. The formation of a Reform Beth Din mirrored the transition of a group of isolated Reform congregations into a national movement with a shared ideology and administrative structure. Whereas Reform synagogues had been present in Britain since 1840, it was not till a century later that there arose a sense of common identity, a desire to work together, and a willingness to plan a joint strategy for the future. Apart from the founding of the Associated British Synagogues itself (later known as the A. S. G. B.), the Reform Beth Din was the most tangible symbol of

this new development. As a standing institution, open to the public, it gave concrete expression to the fact that a new movement had arrived in Anglo-Jewry. Moreover, it then furthered the process of unification amongst the constituent synagogues by presenting issues, such as the length of tuition for proselytes, which demanded common assent. Whilst this sometimes caused considerable debate and even dissension, particularly with Manchester Reform Synagogue, the issues were resolved eventually and extra links were forged between the members of the Association. Fierce jealousy of congregational autonomy gradually mellowed and an increasing number of rights and powers were delegated to the central Reform Beth Din. It was an important transition of authority, both in principle and in practice, and greatly strengthened the cohesiveness of the Association. It was a test-case for the ability of the nascent Reform movement to harmonise central control with local independence. Thus the Reform Beth Din both reflected and contributed to the progress of the Reform movement in Britain.

Secondly, the establishment of the Reform Beth Din signalled a radical new development in the religious institutions of Anglo-Jewry. Until 1948 there had been virtually an Orthodox monopoly on conversion and divorce. No Beth Din existed other than under Orthodox auspices. A get was not issued by non-Orthodox synagogues, and all that could be obtained elsewhere was conversion through a limited number of Reform and Liberal synagogues who lacked any official Rabbinic

structure and arranged matters themselves. The Reform Beth Din, although intended for members of Reform synagogues, meant that for the first time Anglo-Jewry had a formal Rabbinic court that was an alternative to the Chief Rabbi's Court. It was a situation without parallel in modern times. It presented a new avenue for the resolution of status issues and became used by the wider community with increasing frequency. The intensity of the attacks on its validity that were later levelled against it by the Orthodox leadership were highly significant. It indicated the extent to which they felt that the Reform Beth Din had become a threat to their authority.

Thirdly, the large percentage of cases of Jews from outside of the Reform movement highlighted the increasing gulf between the Orthodox religious authorities and the lay membership. The United Synagogue which had once adopted the attitude and policies of "progressive conservatism" had become increasingly rigid and changed character considerably. Its leadership passed into the hands of those most steeped in traditional learning and scrupulous observance. Whilst they felt that they were rescuing the community from lax standards and the inroads of assimilation, it was not a view shared by much of the laity. The latter considered it to be a return to obscurantism and the imposition of a rigid outlook that was unrepresentative of Anglo-Jewry in general. They clamoured instead for a more flexible interpretation of Jewish Law and a readiness to take account of modern conditions. As a result of

this divergence of opinion the Orthodox rabbinate became increasingly distant from the attitudes and practices of lay members. Whilst many members of Orthodox synagogues retained their affiliation, the rapport that had previously existed between laity and rabbinate dwindled considerably. Many would have preferred the policies of the Reform Beth Din to have been that of the Orthodox courts, an indication of the religious vacuum that they felt existed within their own community.

Fourthly, the growth in the number of cases that came before the Reform Beth Din paralleled the ever-increasing growth in the membership of Reform synagogues. It reflected the changing pattern of religious affiliation within Anglo-Jewry. As was discussed earlier this was due to a variety of factors, such as the decline in levels of Orthodoxy and new patterns of settlement. It included, too, those who felt sufficiently strongly enough that Orthodoxy no longer corresponded to their religious feelings for them to transfer to Reform congregations. It was also partly due to the Reform Beth Din itself, whose approach to conversion and divorce attracted Jews who might otherwise never have considered joining a Reform synagogue. When their personal affairs and status questions failed to be satisfied by the Chief Rabbi's Court their solution was to change to Reform congregations and appeal to the Reform Beth Din. At least 15% of the increase in Reform membership during the period under review was accounted for in this way. The children of such couples were then

brought up in Reform communities and compounded the extent of their growth. The role of the Reform Beth Din as a source of recruitment was a significant one, and it contributed to the growth of the Reform membership.

Fifthly, the rising number of non-Jewish applicants who appeared before the Reform Beth Din for conversion in order to regularise a relationship with a Jewish partner is a feature of its work that was significant for the whole of Anglo-Jewry. Whilst the figures are only one aspect of the problem, they do reflect the increase in inter-marriage within the community. The applications bear witness to the accelerating social intercourse between Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, in nearly 50% of the cases the couple had already married before approaching the Reform Beth Din. The extent of the assimilatory trend is evident from the high proportion of marriages in a Reform synagogue involving a convert, amounting to just under 40% of all weddings. The trend is also apparent in the static number of applications for a get at a time when the number of Jews becoming divorced was increasing. It indicates that many considered the civil certificate sufficient by itself. Those who remarried without obtaining a get did so outside of Jewish auspices. It might be argued that, in a sense, the purpose that the Reform Beth Din served was as a means of countering assimilationist tendencies: thus it prevented Jews with non-Jewish partners from abandoning Judaism by permitting them to bring their partners into the Jewish community. Similarly it

facilitated the efforts of Jewish parents to adopt non-Jewish children and raise them as Jews. In these and other cases it is clear that the Reform Beth Din was merely responding to a situation that existed throughout the general community; it was a pattern of assimilation that crossed religious and geographical boundaries, affecting those in Orthodox and Reform synagogues, as well as those in large urban Jewish communities and in areas without any Jewish life. The growing number of conversion cases that appeared before the Reform Beth Din typified the problem of assimilation and inter-marriage that the Jewish community at large was facing.

Sixthly, the creation of the Reform Beth Din also attested the political events on the world-stage that affected both British and European Jewry. The upheavals caused by the rise of Nazism led to the arrival in Britain of numerous German Reform Rabbis. They were essential to the formation of the Reform Beth Din, without whom it could not have functioned. Alongside the Reform Rabbis were some 70,000 continental Jewish refugees of all shades of religious opinion. They were a vital new addition to a community whose strength had depended greatly on migration from abroad and which had not seen any major influx since the massive injection of East European Jews at the turn of the century. The new arrivals contributed to a wide cross-section of the different Jewish groups in Britain, but had a particular impact on the Reform and ultra-Orthodox. They were to play an important role in the leadership of both groups

and they gained prominence within the community with remarkable speed. They strengthened Anglo-Jewry numerically and qualitatively. Their domination of the Reform Beth Din highlighted the way in which they both contributed to and transformed the Jewish community. The other result of the war years was less positive. There was a simultaneous weakening of Anglo-Jewry through the disruption caused to communal life. Traditional loyalties shifted, ritual observances declined, and communal cohesion was disturbed. The problems and impetuses of those years found expression in many of the cases that came before the Reform Beth Din and were to have a marked effect on the religious trends of Anglo-Jewry.

Seventhly, the Reform Beth Din occupied a unique role internationally and differentiated the A.S.G.B. from Reform movements elsewhere in the world. None of them had a central Beth Din which commanded national jurisdiction and which could enforce uniform procedures. In this respect the Reform Beth Din echoed the penchant for centralised institutions peculiar to Anglo-Jewry, amongst which the Chief Rabbi's Court was a prime example. In turn this tendency was, consciously or unconsciously, an imitation of the models provided nationally by general institutions such as the Church of England. Thus while the Reform Beth Din was to have an influence on Anglo-Jewry, it was also influenced by the structures adopted by Anglo-Jewry.

In summary, the establishment of the Reform Beth Din was a

highly significant development both for the Reform movement in Britain and for Anglo-Jewry at large. In each case its importance lay in two separate areas - what it achieved in itself, and what it represented. For the Reform movement it was a catalyst in the process of centralisation that welded several independent congregations into one homogeneous organisation. It also mirrored the post-war expansion and confidence of Reform synagogues as they changed from a peripheral group to a substantial force within the wider community. For Anglo-Jewry the Reform Beth Din was the first non-Orthodox Beth Din, breaking a long-held monopoly and offering an alternative approach to widespread problems within the community that had appeared to lack any solution. The influx of applicants from Orthodox synagogues attested the gulf that had grown between the religious leadership and lay membership of Orthodox communities. In addition, the Reform Beth Din reflected aspects of the general life of Anglo-Jewry: the impact of the continental refugees, the changes in synagogue affiliation, and the inroads of assimilation. The Reform Beth Din both contributed to and mirrored the new post-war Jewry that had emerged, and it serves as an important barometer of the changing religious patterns within Anglo-Jewry.

APPENDICES

I	: Dayanim serving the Chief Rabbi's Court	p. 269
II	: Hertz's Letter to the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue	p. 270
III	: The Growth of individual Reform Synagogues 1930-1965	p. 274
IV	: Reinhart's Letter to Schiff	p. 275
V	: Recommendations of the Ministers of the A. S. G. B.	p. 277
VI	: Revised Draft Recommendation of the Ministers of the A. S. G. B.	p. 278
VII	: Alternative Formula regarding Proselytes proposed by Manchester Executive	p. 280
VIII	: Procedure concerning Proselytes suggested by Goldberg	p. 282
IX	: Proselyte Cases at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 284
X	: The Expansion of the Reform Movement	p. 285
XI	: The Personal and Marital Status of Proselytes at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 286
XII	: The Age of Proselytes at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 287
XIII	: The Geographical Origins of Proselytes at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 288
XIV	: The Religious Background of Proselytes at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965.	p. 291
XV	: The Synagogal Affiliation of the Jewish Partners of Proselytes at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 292
XVI	: Adoptions at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 293
XVII	: Divorce Cases at the Reform Beth Din 1948-1965	p. 294
XVIII	: Statement by the Assembly of Ministers	p. 295
XIX	: Conversions at the Chief Rabbi's Court	p. 297

APPENDIX I

DAYANIM SERVING THE CHIEF RABBI'S COURT

The immigrant Rabbis who came to England from the Continent in the 1930's are underlined.

1934	A. Feldman	H. M. Lazarus	M. Gollop	
1935	A. Feldman	H. M. Lazarus	M. Gollop	<u>Y. Abramsky</u>
1938	H. M. Lazarus	M. Gollop	<u>Y. Abramsky</u>	<u>I. Grunfeld</u>
1945	<u>Y. Abramsky</u>	<u>I. Grunfeld</u>	<u>J. Jakobovits</u>	M. Swift
1949	<u>Y. Abramsky</u>	<u>I. Grunfeld</u>	M. Swift	<u>L. Grossnass</u>
1952	<u>I. Grunfeld</u>	<u>L. Grossnass</u>	<u>A. Rapoport</u>	<u>M. Lew</u> [*]
1956	<u>L. Grossnass</u>	<u>A. Rapoport</u>	<u>M. Lew</u>	<u>M. Steinberg</u>
1957 -1965	<u>L. Grossnass</u>	<u>A. Rapoport</u>	<u>M. Lew</u>	<u>M. Steinberg</u> <u>M. Swift</u>

* although born abroad, Dayan Lew was largely educated in England.

APPENDIX II

HERTZ'S LETTER TO THE HONORARY OFFICERS
OF THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE

9th April 1945.

Having disposed of those portions of your letters of March 14th which deal, or evade dealing, with the Finchley Synagogue case, I must not neglect answering the other charges you level against me.

You stigmatise my letters as "the culminating effort to exercise a dictatorship in disregard of the constitution of the United Synagogue".

This is odd. It attributes to me the bearing and manner of "dictatorship" which is notoriously characteristic of one of your own body. You wisely give no details: but, as it is a libellous charge, I must request you to furnish me with a list of those dictatorial efforts. And I assume you will accompany each item in that list with concrete details, and some evidence for the allegations made.

In the meantime, you assure me that the authority of the Chief Rabbi, "has always been recognised and maintained by the Honorary Officers". This assurance that you give me sounds like mockery. In confirmation, I need but bring a few memories which will clearly point out on which side real, and not imaginary, dictatorship is to be found.

- A) You may still remember the abortive attempt made to destroy Jews' College by the introduction of an un-Orthodox "Academy". I fought that proposal with all my might because I deemed it fatal to Judaism; and the overwhelming majority of British Jews, whether within or outside the United Synagogue, fervently applauded my stand. Not so the Honorary Officers of the United Synagogue. In that historic conflict, all the then Honorary Officers publicly voted against me!

B) But to come to more recent cases of "dictatorship".

- 1) In October 1943, Sir Robert appointed, without my knowledge, a minister of the Liberal Synagogue as temporary Senior Chaplain in circumstances that made it probable that he would become the permanent head of the Jewish Chaplaincy department, at any rate "to the end of the War". As my protest was disregarded, I appealed to the Army Council - with the result that Rabbi Brodie is now the occupant of that responsible office.
- 2) When three years ago, the Hampstead Synagogue printed a sermon of mine in which I urged the duties of Kashrus and obedience to authority in Judaism, Sir Robert ordered the destruction of the whole edition of that printed sermon. I have never found out how it was destroyed, whether by fire or otherwise. "Please don't press me", piteously pleaded the Parnass when I asked him for details. At any rate, never before has a British Chief Rabbi's sermon been suppressed by the lay administrators of the community.
- 3) In 1939, Sir Robert would not consent to my giving a Passover address to thousands of German refugees at Richborough Camp. I placed the matter before the Marquess of Reading, the Chairman of the Central Council: Sir Robert was ordered to invite me to give the address. This is further evidence of the loyalty to the Rabbinate on the part of the President of the United Synagogue!
- 4) Even stranger is the following act of all the Honorary Officers. When as a result of the dispersion from the blitzed Metropolis, United Synagogue Groups sprang up in Central and Southern England, I asked to be furnished with a list of those associate synagogues, for the purpose of pastoral visitation. I received an official refusal. This was an astounding reply to have sent, and I called attention to it at the next meeting with you in vain. So I went to Mr. Lionel de Rothschild, and asked him point-blank whether he really wished me to take legal action. The list duly arrived.
- 5) This ardent desire to shut the doors of United Synagogues houses of worship in the face of the Chief Rabbi was accompanied by an attempt to eliminate me from the executive of the educational organisations. This was

undertaken by several of the Honorary Officers who decided against requiring the approval of the Chief Rabbi for syllabuses of instruction, and also against his certification of teachers. As I could not consent to such monstrous proposals, the whole matter had to be placed before the public, and the President of the Board of Deputies had to intervene before you came to see that Jewish Religious Education was one of those "subsidiary charities" of the United Synagogue which are "under the supervision and control of the Chief Rabbi" (Deed of Foundation, 1871).

All the above instances - and they could be multiplied tenfold - show but too plainly how little the eight signatories of the last letter to me respect the rights and office of the Chief Rabbi. It seems that when you complain of the Chief Rabbi's "dictatorship", you are adopting the all-too-human device of ascribing our failings to those whom we desire to discredit.

- C) You never tire of reiterating that "the authority over financial and secular matters is vested solely in the Council". Everyone agrees; but you are not satisfied with this. You maintain, in effect, that, whenever in any human situation a financial factor enters - and where does it not enter? - there the religious guidance by the Chief Rabbi is "impertinent interference". Thus, in September 1938 I ruled that a male proselyte who had not undergone Meelah could not become a member of the United Synagogue. I am informed on high authority that when Sir Robert heard of this ruling, he fairly fumed over "priestly dictatorship". I soon received a curt communication from him, telling me that admission to synagogue membership was a "financial matter" and was no concern of the Chief Rabbi, and that the Secretary of the synagogue in question had been instructed to disregard the interference of the Chief Rabbi, and to proceed with the membership admission. Though eventually, after I had met you, Sir Robert retreated from the untenable position taken up, there were the usual table-bangings. This Meelah incident left an unpleasant memory behind it; viz., the readiness on the part of the Honorary Officers to abolish even the Abrahamic Covenant for a membership fee. Such definition of the financial came as a complete surprise to me; and fully justified me in my lament that there are leaders in Anglo-Jewry who, so to speak, are ready to tear down the Tables of the Law from the portals of our synagogues and replace them by the balance sheet.

Your personal hostility to me leads you to defame me even

to Government departments. I need not recall your Home Office denunciation. Though you proudly refer to it even in yours of the 14th March, it was something distinctly damaging to the Jewish name, and against all ethical teaching. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour".

But enough. There is little more that I could say to induce you to give up your Quixotic fight against the windmill of "priestly dictatorship". It is pure hallucination.

APPENDIX III

THE GROWTH OF INDIVIDUAL REFORM SYNAGOGUES 1930-1965

<u>Year</u>	<u>Settlement</u>	<u>N. W. R. S.</u>	<u>Edgware</u>	<u>Sinai Leeds</u>	<u>B' mouth</u>	<u>Wimbledon</u>	<u>Hendon</u>
1930	228 fam.						
1934	291 fam.	190 mem					
1935	302 fam.		30 mem				
1936		303 mem					
1937	312 fam.						
1939	355 fam.		20 fam				
1945		500 mem					
1946			54 fam				
1947				100 mem			
1948	463 fam				77 fam		
1949	533 fam						18 fam
1950						63 fam	60 fam
1951	620 fam						92 fam
1952							120 fam
1953			169 fam		106 fam		
1956		1162 mem		120 mem		150 fam	
1957						180 fam	
1958		1343 mem	320 fam				
1959			450 fam			200 fam	
1960			540 fam			225 fam	380 fam
1961				300 fam			
1962		1730 mem					
1964			800 fam				
1965				345 fam			

mem = individual member

fam = family units (comprising of a married couple or single adults)

APPENDIX IV

REINHART'S LETTER TO SCHIFF

10TH JANUARY 1939

My dear Mr. Schiff,

I must write you a few lines anent the policy of the Advisory Committee for the Admission of Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers.

A small congregation in Manchester, called Chevra Tillim, after carefully considering the matter, decided to bring to England, one Rabbi Dr. Arthur Rosenthal of Berlin. They had not previously enjoyed the services of a Rabbi; and, as such congregations frequently do, they could probably have gone on without one. But they felt that they could make the post; and they wanted to have this man. The Advisory Committee for the Admission of Jewish Ecclesiastical Officers, however, was said to have refused to allow them to do this, on the grounds that the man was "too liberal". This was told to me by one of the members of the congregation, who came to see me about the matter - a Mr. H. Hymanson. On enquiry, I received a letter, dated the 3rd January, 1939, from Mr. A. Mundy, stating:

"Dr. Rosenthal applied for a position in a Synagogue in Manchester, and when we investigated the application, we found that the Synagogue is an Orthodox one, and that Dr. Rosenthal is a Liberal Minister. We could not therefore consider taking up this application with the Home Office".

It seems to me quite unnecessary for an advisory committee to take such a stand, if the arrangement between the Rabbi and the congregation is satisfactory, and if the congregation is prepared to be responsible for the Rabbi. Surely a moment like the present (The man under consideration is said to be in imminent danger) is not one for theological quibbling. In Heaven's name, let us get the man out of hell first; and settle the theological compatibility afterwards. In our tragic situation, we want an "advisory committee" not to obstruct but to facilitate "the admission of Jewish ecclesiastical officers", just as we need all our committees to save the

victims. I feel certain that it is only in this spirit that you want the work to be done. There may of course be some circumstances that I do not know; but the facts in this case, as far as I do know them, look terrible to me, and I cannot refrain from expressing my dismay to you.

Believe me to be yours most sincerely,

(signed) Harold Reinhart

APPENDIX V

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MINISTERS OF THE A. S. G. B.

2nd December 1947

In the Congregations of the A. S. G. B., the Conference of Ministers is the body to advise on matters involving Jewish Law.

The Conference shall consist of the Ministers of the Congregations of the Association and such other persons as may be co-opted by them.

This Conference shall meet annually in the month of and at such other times as requested by three of its members.

Regarding matters involving general interpretation of Jewish Law, the Conference itself shall render decisions.

The Conference shall appoint from its own members a panel of judges for the Beth Din. Judgements involving the application of Jewish Law to specific cases shall be given at a sitting of the Beth Din. Such a session shall be held at the request of any minister of a Congregation of the Association, and within a specified time to be determined by the Conference.

The Conference shall keep a central Register of decisions by the Conference and by the Beth Din.

APPENDIX VI

REVISED DRAFT RECOMMENDATION OF THE MINISTERS OF THE A. S. G. B.

9th March 1948

1. a) In the Congregations of the A. S. G. B., the Assembly of Ministers is recognised as the appropriate body to give Advisory Opinions on matters of principle involving Jewish Law.
- b) The Assembly shall consist of the Ministers of the Congregations of the A. S. G. B. and such other persons as may be co-opted by them.
- c) The Assembly shall meet annually in the month of and at such other times as may be requested by three of its members.
- d) The Assembly shall make its own rules of procedure as to quorum, method of sitting, voting etc. and shall render as its own collective act opinions upon matters involving general interpretation of Jewish Law when consulted by one or more Ministers of A. S. G. B. Congregations.
- e) Opinions of the Assembly, regarding matters involving interpretation of Jewish Law, shall be submitted to a Conference of the A. S. G. B. In the event of the disapproval of an opinion by such a Conference, the matter shall be discussed by the Conference and referred back to the Assembly.
2. a) The Assembly shall appoint from its own members a panel of judges for the A. S. G. B. Rabbinical Court. Three of these judges shall sit to give a decision on specific individual cases involving Jewish Law concerning marriage and divorce. The judges shall hear such a case at the request of any Minister of the A. S. G. B. and within a specified time to be determined by the Assembly. The hearing of evidence and the giving of the decision (except where the decision is in writing) shall be open to the parties concerned and their advisers; where the decision is

in writing a copy shall be supplied to the parties.

- b) In a case where a decision has been rendered by an A. S. G. B. Rabbinical Court, a dissatisfied litigant shall have the right of appeal within a limited time to the Assembly of Ministers, who may, at their discretion, appoint an Appeal Court. In the event of such an appeal the Executive of the Synagogue (or Synagogues) whose members are concerned shall be taken into consultation. The existence of the right of Appeal and the procedure for exercising such right shall be made known to every litigant.
- 3. The A. S. G. B. Rabbinical Court shall sit also, under similar conditions, to hear applications for conversion, for such Congregations of the Association who signify their desire for such service.
- 4. The Assembly shall keep a Central Register of Opinions given by the Assembly and of the decisions given by each of the A. S. G. B. Rabbinical Courts (including the Appeal Court). The Register of the latter shall omit the names of the parties and other persons concerned who shall be referred to as "A. B.", "C. D." etc. The Assembly shall keep separately a key to the last mentioned Register from which the names of the actual parties and persons concerned can be identified. The Registers shall be open to public inspection but the key shall be confidential and kept under the control of an officer of the Assembly who shall only disclose its contents in accordance with instructions given by or on behalf of the Assembly.

APPENDIX VII

ALTERNATIVE FORMULA REGARDING PROSELYTES

PROPOSED BY MANCHESTER EXECUTIVE

15th February 1950.

1. The prospective proselyte shall apply in writing to the Secretary of the local Congregation.
2. The Minister and Executive shall consider the Application and if the candidate is considered suitable, he shall be interviewed by the Minister and one of the Executive.
3. The Minister shall arrange for the instruction of the candidate.
4. In cases where the proselyte resides at a distance from any A.S.G.B. Synagogue, the application shall be diverted to the nearest A.S.G.B. Synagogue or to the Assembly of Ministers.
5. When desired, and especially when no Minister is locally available, advice regarding instruction may be obtained from the Clerk of the Court of the Assembly of Ministers.
6. After due preparation, the Minister in charge of instruction shall inform his Executive that the candidate is ready for examination.
7. The local Executive shall arrange for a Court of Examination consisting of :
 - A. The local Minister.
 - B. A Minister deputed by the A.S.G.B.
 - C. A member of the local Executive.
8. The expenses incurred in holding that Court (wherever

possible in the home town of the candidate) shall be borne by the candidate, except in cases of exceptional hardship, when the Court may decide that the Association should make a contribution thereto.

APPENDIX VIII

PROCEDURE CONCERNING PROSELYTES SUGGESTED BY GOLDBERG

18th September 1954

Principles.

In the spirit of Jewish tradition we recognise the right of Gentiles who show a genuine inclination to become Jews and we consider it a religious duty to give them such assistance as we can.

In the same spirit, as a safeguard for the community as well as to protect those concerned from any unpleasant circumstances which can ensue, we consider it to be no less our religious duty to discourage from becoming Jews those who do not evince a genuine inclination to do so.

1. A minister of the A.S.G.B. who having interviewed a person desirous of being accepted into Judaism and being satisfied 'a priori' as to the applicant's sincerity, shall require him (her) to undergo a period of probation which will assist the applicant to qualify as a Jew and will enable the minister to acquaint himself with the character and inclinations of the applicant.
2. During the period of probation the applicant shall receive such theoretical instruction in Judaism as recommended by the minister and shall be expected to practice Judaism by way of attending synagogue services and particularly in the life of the synagogue generally.
3. Whereas no time limit can be fixed for the duration of the instruction, the whole of the probation period, i.e. from the first interview with the minister until the applicant's presentation before a Beth Din, shall not be less than 18 months.
4. The recommendations for a person desirous of being received into Judaism to present him (her) self before a Beth Din must come from a minister of the A.S.G.B.

5. The decision for acceptance into Judaism rests with a Beth Din of the A. S. G. B.

.....

PLEASE NOTE:

The two sentences of the preamble are not mutually exclusive. The first sentence welcomes those who 'show a genuine inclination'. This phrase includes those who desire conversion for its own sake as well as those who ultimately want to marry Jews and who are genuinely sincere in their desire to embrace Judaism because of family unity and future happiness etc. etc.

The second sentence expressly discourages those who seek conversion for the sake of marriage alone and where it is obvious that the desire is simply to put a 'face' on the situation by having the marriage solemnised in a synagogue.

In paragraph 2 I have joined the period of probation to the period of instruction. This is on mature consideration and in order that the applicant shall understand the reason for the observances before fulfilling them.

As will be seen from paragraph 3 the end result is the same because a total period of 18 months is demanded.

P. SELVIN GOLDBERG

Rabbi

APPENDIX IX

PROSELYTE CASES AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965

<u>Year</u>	<u>Adults</u>	<u>Children</u>
1948	40	9
1949	46	13
1950	50	12
1951	46	11
1952	63	15
1953	58	7
1954	63	21
1955	67	29
1956	87	24
1957	68	12
1958	66	36
1959	84	40
1960	93	39
1961	122	47
1962	80	33
1963	110	50
1964	97	30
1965	109	39

APPENDIX X

THE EXPANSION OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT

- West London (1840)
Manchester (1856)
Bradford (1873)
+ St. George's Settlement (1928)
North Western (1933)
Glasgow (1933)
Edgware (1935)
Leeds (1944)
Bournemouth (1947)
Cardiff (1947)
Southport (1948)
Hendon (1949)
Wimbledon (1949)
Maidenhead (1953)
Brighton (1955)
South West Essex (1956)
* Westminster (1957)
Harlow (1957)
Middlesex New (1957)
Blackpool (1961)
Finchley (1962)
Southgate (1962)
Menorah (1964)
Bromley (1965)
Newcastle (1965)

Synagogues which are underlined are in the Greater London area.

Dates of foundation are in parenthesis.

+ Jointly affiliated to the Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues.

* An independent Reform synagogue, but using the Reform Beth Din.

APPENDIX XI

THE PERSONAL AND MARITAL STATUS OF PROSELYTES

AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965

	<u>Total</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Engaged</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Not</u>	<u>Divorced</u>	<u>Widow</u>
				<u>to a</u>	<u>to a</u>	<u>rel.</u>	<u>non</u>	<u>Known</u>	<u>from a</u>	<u>of a</u>
				<u>Jew</u>	<u>Jew</u>		<u>Jews</u>		<u>Jew</u>	<u>Jew</u>
1948	40	5	35	20	15	1	-	4	-	-
1949	46	6	40	24	19	3	-	-	-	-
1950	50	8	42	25	15	5	-	5	-	-
1951	46	7	39	29	16	1	-	-	-	-
1952	63	11	52	25	26	12	-	-	-	-
1953	58	12	46	22	29	7	-	-	-	-
1954	63	11	52	28	33	2	-	-	-	-
1955	67	7	60	36	26	1	2	-	-	2
1956	87	27	60	36	39	10	-	-	1	1
1957	88	10	58	24	38	4	-	-	-	2
1958	66	11	55	33	24	8	-	-	-	1
1959	84	7	77	46	31	5	-	-	1	1
1960	93	9	84	46	37	10	-	-	-	-
1961	122	17	105	62	52	7	-	-	-	1
1962	80	9	71	40	30	10	-	-	-	-
1963	110	20	90	50	49	10	-	-	-	1
1964	97	28	69	40	41	16	-	-	-	-
1965	109	24	85	42	54	10	-	-	1	2
Total	1349	229	1120	628	574	122	2	9	3	11

rel = relationship with a Jew.

APPENDIX XII

THE AGE OF PROSELYTES APPEARING BEFORE THE REFORM BETH DIN

1948 - 1965

<u>Year</u>	<u>21-30 Yrs</u>	<u>31-40 Yrs</u>	<u>41-50 Yrs</u>	<u>51-60 Yrs</u>	<u>61-70 Yrs</u>	<u>Total</u>
1948*	1	1	-	2	-	40
1949*	10	2	3	-	-	46
1950*	18	7	2	-	-	50
1951*	11	6	2	1	1	46
1952*	27	5	4	-	-	63
1953*	36	8	7	-	-	58
1954	38	19	5	3	-	63
1955	38	19	9	1	-	67
1956	60	18	6	3	-	87
1957	51	9	4	4	-	68
1958	41	14	10	1	-	66
1959	51	16	14	3	-	84
1960	62	18	10	3	-	93
1961	77	26	17	2	-	122
1962	55	15	10	-	-	80
1963	72	26	12	-	-	110
1964	66	21	5	4	1	97
1965	77	24	6	2	-	109
Total	789	254	126	29	2	1349

* years for which figures are incomplete.

APPENDIX XIII

THE GEOGRAPHICAL ORIGINS OF PROSELYTES

AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965

(a) Proselytes from London 846

(b) Proselytes from provincial towns 503

Provincial towns are listed in alphabetical order, with the total number of proselytes beside them.

R denotes that the town contains a Reform synagogue.

O denotes that the town contains an Orthodox synagogue.

Ashton-on-Trent	1	O Cambridge	1
Ayrshire	1	RO Cardiff	47
		Carshalton	1
		Chalfont St Peter	1
Basildon	2	Chigwell	2
Basset	1	Choddeston	1
Bedde	1	Cleethorpes	1
Bedford	1	O Coventry	1
Beeston	1		
O Belfast	1	O Darlington	1
Birkenhead	1	O Dewsbury	1
O Birmingham	3	O Doncaster	1
O Blackburn	1	Dorset	1
RO Blackpool	2	Dunure	1
O Borehamwood	1		
RO Bournemouth	14	O Eastbourne	1
Bradfield	1	O Edinburgh	3
RO Bradford	19	Egham	1
RO Brighton	16	O Elstree	1
Brumhill	1	Esher	1
Burgess Hill	1	O Exeter	1
Bury	5		
Bushey	4	Farnborough	1
Buxton	20	Fife	1

	Gerrards Cross	1		O Peterborough	3
O	Giffnock	3		O Plymouth	3
RO	Glasgow	53		O Pontyprid	1
	Great Yarmouth	1		O Poole	1
O	Grimsby	1		O Portslade	1
	Guildford	1		O Portsmouth	2
				O Preston	3
	Halifax	1		Prestatyn	1
	Harkham	1			
R	Harlow	3		Rochester	4
O	Harrogate	2		Rotherham	1
	Haywards Heath	4			
	Hednesford	1	O	St. Albans	4
O	Hemel Hempstead	1		St. Margarets	1
	Henley	1	O	Sheffield	5
O	High Wycombe	1		Shepperton	1
	Hoddeston	1		Shipley	1
	Horley	1		Shoreham-by-Sea	1
O	Huddersfield	4	O	Slough	1
O	Hull	7	O	Southend	3
	Hullridge-on-Crouch	1	O	Southampton	4
	Hurely	1	RO	Southport	21
	Hurston	1	O	Southsea	1
				Sutton Coldfield	1
	Idle	1	O	Swansea	5
	Ipswich	2			
	Isle of Wight	1		Taplow	2
				Tring	2
	Kings Langley	1			
				Wakefield	4
	Lancing	1		Wallingford	1
RO	Leeds	57	O	Watford	10
O	Leicester	4	O	Welwyn Garden City	2
	Leyland	3		Wentworth	1
	Lichfield	1		Westbrook	1
O	Liverpool	2	O	Westcliff	1
O	Luton	3		Weston-upon-Mare	1
			O	Whitley Bay	1
R	Maidenhead	4		Wickham	1
RO	Manchester	66		Wigan	1
	Marple	4		Wingate	1
O	Middlesborough	1		Workington	1
				Worthing	1
	Nelson	1			
O	Newport	5		Yatton	1
O	Newton Mearns	5		York	1
O	Northampton	1			
	Northumberland	1			
O	Nottingham	6			
	Oldham	1			
	Oxshott	1			

Total number of towns :

without a synagogue	68
with an Orthodox synagogue only	48
with both an Orthodox and Reform synagogue	9
with a Reform synagogue only	2

(c) Proselytes from abroad 11

Germany	2
Holland	3
Rhodesia	1
South Africa	3
Switzerland	1
New Zealand	1

APPENDIX XIV

THE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF PROSELYTES AT THE REFORM BETH DIN

1948-1965

Church of England	742
Roman Catholic	158
Methodist	41
Church of Scotland	17
Baptist	15
Presbyterian	13
Lutheran	10
Non-conformist	8
Welsh Chapel	6
Evangelist	5
Christian Scientist	3
Church of Wales	3
Greek Orthodox	2
Congregationalist	2
Episcopalian	2
Salvation Army	2
Serbian Orthodox	1
Unitarian	1
Plymouth Brethren	1
TOTAL	1032

APPENDIX XV

THE SYNAGOGAL AFFILIATION OF THE JEWISH PARTNERS

OF PROSELYTES

AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965 AND PRIOR APPLICATIONS

<u>Year</u>	<u>Orthodox</u>	<u>Reform</u>	<u>Liberal</u>	<u>Not Recorded</u>	<u>Prior Applications to the Chief Rabbi's Court</u>
1948	9	3	-	23	3
1949	12	2	-	29	3
1950	28	3	-	9	8
1951	18	4	-	23	4
1952	19	3	-	29	6
1953	12	3	-	36	9
1954	13	5	-	43	6
1955	12	5	-	45	12
1956	13	3	-	59	11
1957	9	-	-	53	6
1958	5	2	-	50	9
1959	6	2	-	69	14
1960	65	5	1	12	16
1961	94	19	-	1	18
1962	60	10	-	-	13
1963	74	8	-	17	15
1964	51	22	-	8	8
1965	79	9	-	8	13
Total	589	108	1	504	174

APPENDIX XVI

ADOPTIONS AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965

	<u>Adoptions</u>	<u>Prior applications</u> <u>to the Chief Rabbi's Court</u>
1948	-	-
1949	-	-
1950	-	-
1951	-	-
1952	-	-
1953	-	-
1954	1	Not Known *
1955	-	Not Known *
1956	2	Not Known *
1957	2	Not Known *
1958	7	Not Known *
1959	11	1
1960	8	-
1961	11	1
1962	17	2
1963	12	3
1964	7	2
1965	15	1
Total	93	10

* Application forms before 1959 did not ask if prior application had been made to other courts.

APPENDIX XVII

DIVORCE CASES AT THE REFORM BETH DIN 1948-1965

Year	Total number of cases	Ortho- dox Syna- gogue	Reform Syna- gogue	Liberal Syna- gogue	Prior Application Registry at Chief Office Rabbi's Court	Initiated by Husband	Wife
1948	18	9	6	3	-	-	15 3
1949	18	17	-	1	-	2	16 2
1950	14	12	-	-	2	-	10 4
1951	18	10	2	-	6	3	7 10
1952	19	13	2	-	4	3	9 10
1953	16	9	1	-	6	2	7 9
1954	16	8	1	-	7	-	6 10
1955	17	9	3	-	5	2	6 10
1956	13	9	2	-	2	1	5 8
1957	18	14	1	-	3	3	4 11
1958	25	14	3	1	7	10	8 16
1959	8	4	1	-	3	2	2 3
1960	30	14	7	-	9	10	14 14
1961	23	15	6	-	2	4	13 10
1962	19	14	2	-	3	7	5 12
1963	23	15	3	-	5	5	10 11
1964	22	17	3	1	1	9	7 15
1965	10	7	3	-	-	1	5 5
Total	327	210	46	6	65	64	149 163

APPENDIX XVIII

STATEMENT BY THE ASSEMBLY OF MINISTERS

21st March 1962

- 1) It must be stated at the outset that Reform Synagogues strongly emphasise the Divine Sanction of Jewish Marriage Laws and of their sacred character today. Reform Judaism cannot urge too strongly, as all members of the Jewish Community ought, that respect for the sanctity of Jewish marriage and, what is equally as important, of the Jewish home which is subsequently established, is one of the corner-stones of Reform Jewish teaching.

The religious leaders of the Reform Movement try as hard as they can to inculcate in the participants to the marriage, the realisation that the ceremony beforehand must inaugurate a life and home built up on the strongest religious and moral foundations, and is even more vital today in our modern day and age, when too much immorality and licence are practised and countenanced.

- 2) The solemnisation of the marriage, known in Jewish tradition as Kiddushin, therefore, is very much the core and essence of Reform Jewish practice, and is the theme which pervades the whole ceremony. It is basically traditional and completely within the framework of Jewish Halachic development. There is nothing in the ceremony as at present performed in Reform Synagogues which is contrary to Halachic teaching. Far from it. The Divine precept established in the Torah and later developed by rabbinic authorities, and summed up in the most important sentence in the marriage ceremony 'Behold thou art consecrated unto me with this ring according to the Law of Moses and of Israel' is faithfully followed by Reform Jewish practice. This, it must be stated, refers specifically to marriage between Jews whose religious status cannot be questioned by any Jewish authority in the country. There are a few instances where Orthodox Judaism may raise objections because they differ from their practices, as e.g. in the case of Chalitza and marriage between a Cohen and a divorcee. But these form a very small part of the whole. They are the exception not the rule. Any doubts, therefore about the legitimacy of the children of parents married at a Reform Synagogue are not only completely baseless so far as Jewish teaching is

concerned, but the expression of them is unwarranted. For it must surely be known to all aspiring to have Jewish knowledge in this matter that, where parents are both 'professing the Jewish Faith', the marriage performed in a Reform Synagogue is religiously K'dat Moshe v' Israel ('according to the Law of Moses and of Israel') and legally 'according to the usages of the Jews'.

- 3) The allegation that the Beth Din of the Reform Synagogues of Great Britain is unhistoric is quite without foundation. Reform Judaism, like Judaism of all ages, has acknowledged development and progress and has tried to integrate into Jewish life all that is best in this progress and development.

Reform Judaism, in this vein, whilst respecting the great halachic traditions and teachings of the past and striving all the time for its rightful place as a member of K'lal Israel, is most anxious to combine Judaism with humanity and civilised progress. And it is on these lines and principles that its Beth Din guides and interprets Jewish Law. This is nothing new in Jewish history, as a glance at any competent rabbinic authority of the past will show.

APPENDIX XIX

CONVERSIONS AT THE CHIEF RABBI'S COURT

Owing to the refusal of the Chief Rabbi's Court to release details concerning the number of applications for conversion or the number of conversions effected, full figures are not available. However, the following table has been compiled¹ from figures occasionally made public:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Applications for Conversion</u>	<u>Actual Conversions</u>
1923	93	96
1924	154	61
1925	184	43
1926	167	-
1927	265	-
1928	123	-
1929	132	-
1930	99	-
.		
.		
.		
1936	170	-
1937	171	-
.		
.		
.		
1955	237	23
1956	120	23
1957	121	9
1958	137	21
.		
.		
.		
1963	200	-

1. Annual Report of the United Synagogue 1923-30, 1936-7; J.C. 10th July 1959 and 12th March 1964.

NOTES ON THE SOURCES

The records of the Reform Beth Din were made available fully for the purpose of this thesis. Complete access to papers was also given by the Assembly of Ministers and the Reform Synagogues in Great Britain (previously known as the Association of Synagogues in Great Britain). However, the original minute book of the Assembly of Ministers, covering the years 1948-1958, had been lost and no duplicate copy had been made. An additional obstacle encountered was the poor state of individual Reform synagogue records. Some synagogues no longer had minute books or membership lists from the period under study, while others had sporadic records only. This haphazardness reflects the voluntary nature of synagogue bodies, with hard-pressed honorary officers paying little attention to the need to preserve information for the future. It also emphasises the autonomy of the synagogues, each one responsible for its own affairs, and with no central control or record-keeping by the A. S. G. E. It was not till 1978 that the A. S. G. E. began to collect membership information, whilst even now it does not receive minutes of Council ^{meetings} ~~minutes~~ from its constituent synagogues. A further problem was that it was impossible to consult the records of the Chief Rabbi's Court owing to its policy of not opening its files to public inspection. As an alternative approach several requests were made to the Court for it to supply specific pieces of information and statistical details, but it felt unable to

comply, deeming such material to be confidential. This has been a consistent policy of the Court and similar requests, for instance, by the Community Research Unit of the Board of Deputies have been refused in recent decades.

A source that has provided much material is the Jewish press, particularly the Jewish Chronicle. It was the most-widely read and influential Jewish newspaper in Britain, with an estimated readership of over half of Anglo-Jewry.¹ It regarded itself as the communal voice, reporting on all aspects of Anglo-Jewry, and its editorials dealt with the duties and problems facing the community. It was not so much self-flattery but an accurate description of its importance that it carried the sub-title "The Organ of Anglo-Jewry" on its masthead. As a result it provides "a wealth of history and historical material relating to the Jews ... and the research worker finds it an inexhaustible source of information".² In its attitude to religious matters the Jewish Chronicle maintained a consistent editorial policy of being committed to the support of the Jewish faith, with a deference to tradition yet also advocating full, informed and intelligent enquiry. It supported the religious 'establishment', although at the very end of the period under study it led a campaign against the Chief Rabbinate over the Jacobs Affair. Its attitude to the Reform synagogues was one of sympathy though not of agreement.

Provincial Jewish newspapers existed in Manchester - the

1. C. Bermant Troubled Eden p. 167.
2. C. Roth The Jewish Chronicle p. 44.

Jewish Telegraph and the Jewish Gazette - and in Glasgow - the Jewish Echo. They covered local Jewish news, but gave occasional comment on national events and issues. Initially they gave little attention to the Reform movement, reflecting the comparatively weak Reform presence in the provinces. This changed noticeably in the late 1950's, after which the Reform synagogues had a much higher profile and their ministers were asked to contribute to the annual section on "New Year Messages". In 1958 the Jewish Gazette came under the ownership of the Jewish Chronicle, although retaining editorial independence.

In addition to consulting written records, several interviews took place with individuals who played a leading role in the events under study.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES:

1) Unpublished Manuscript Collections.

a) Anglo-Jewish Archives, Mocatta Library, University College, London.

Moses Gaster Papers
Bernard Homa Papers
Bruno Italiener Papers
Philip Goldberg Papers
Joseph H. Hertz Papers
Harris M. Lazarus Papers
Harold F. Reinhart Papers

b) The Sternberg Centre for Judaism, London.

Assembly of Rabbis Minute Books (formerly Assembly of Ministers).
Reform Beth Din Archives.
Reform Synagogues of Great Britain Archives (formerly Association of Synagogues in Great Britain, formerly associated British Synagogues).

c) Synagogue Archives.

Bournemouth Reform Synagogue, Bournemouth.
Bradford Synagogue, Bradford.
Cardiff New Synagogue, Cardiff.
Edgware and District Reform Synagogue, London.
Glasgow New Synagogue, Glasgow.
Hendon Reform Synagogue, London.
Sinai Synagogue, Leeds.
Liberal Jewish Synagogue, London.
Maidenhead Synagogue, Berkshire.
Manchester Reform Synagogue, Manchester.
North Western Reform Synagogue, London.
Settlement Synagogue, London (formerly St. George's Settlement Synagogue).
West London Synagogue of British Jews, London.
Westminster Synagogue, London.
Wimbledon and District Synagogue, London.

d) Miscellaneous Jewish Institutions Archives.

Community Research Unit, Board of Deputies of British Jews, London.
Jews' Temporary Shelter, London.
Spanish and Portuguese Jews Congregation, London.
Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, London.

2) Published Editions of Documents.

Artom, Benjamin Sermons (London, 1876).

Blank, Joseph E. The Minutes of the Federation of Synagogues (London 1912).

Brock, Michael and Eleanor (ed) Letters to Venetia Stanley (Oxford, 1982).

Brodie, Israel A Word in Season - Selected Addresses and Sermons (London, 1959).

Brodie, Israel The Strength of My Heart (London, 1969).

Cowen, Anne (ed.) New London Synagogue - The First Twenty Years (London, 1964).

Hertz, Joseph H. Sermons, Addresses and Studies (London, 1938).

Marks, David W. (ed.) Forms of Prayer (London, 1841).

Marks, David W. Sermons Preached on Various Occasions at the West London Synagogue of British Jews (London 1885).

Plaut, W. Gunther The Growth of Reform Judaism (New York, 1963).

Plaut, W. Gunther The Rise of Reform Judaism (New York, 1963).

Polier, Justine and Wise, James (ed.) The Personal Letters of Stephen Wise (Boston, 1956).

St. George's Jewish Settlement Fiftieth Anniversary Review (London, 1964).

3) Contemporary Published Sources.

a) Official Publications

i) The Sternberg Centre for Judaism.

Annual Reports of the Reform Beth Din.

Decisions of the Ministers Assembly 1949-1975
(ed. Pavey, Roger).

Halachic Decisions 1949-1963 (ed. Marmur, Dow).

ii) Newsletters.

A. J. R. Information, London (Association of Jewish Refugees).

The Synagogue Review, London (formerly The West London Synagogue Magazine).

The Westminster Synagogue Review, London.

iii) Reports.

Recommendations of the Chief Rabbi and the President of the United Synagogue concerning the Organisation and Administration of the Beth Din, United Synagogue, London 1955.

b) Newspapers.

Jewish Chronicle, London.
Jewish Echo, Glasgow.
Jewish Gazette, Manchester.
Jewish Telegraph, Manchester.

4) Autobiographies.

Asquith, Cynthia Diaries 1915-1918 (London, 1968).

Joseph, Simon Autobiography (unpublished mss. in author's possession).

5) Interviews.

Abramsky, Professor Chimen (son of Dayan Abramsky) 19th October 1982.

Cassell, Rabbi Curtis (former Minister, West London Synagogue) 16th December 1983, 14th January 1986.

Curtis, Rabbi Michael (former Clerk, Reform Beth Din) 5th November 1980, 19th May 1982, 20th April 1983, 30th May, 1985, 4th February 1986.

Dreyfus, Rabbi Stanley (former Minister, West London Synagogue) 10th January 1989.

Edgar, Rabbi Dr. Leslie (former Minister, Liberal Jewish Synagogue) 8th November 1983.

Frankel, William (former Editor, The Jewish Chronicle) 28th July 1987.

Gaguine, Rabbi Dr. Maurice (former Minister, Withington Congregation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews) 3rd November 1983.

Goldberg, Rabbi David (son of Rabbi Percy Selvin Goldberg) 2nd November 1983.

Graf, Rabbi Dr. Gerhard (former Minister, Cardiff New Synagogue) 26th November 1980.

Jacobs, Rabbi Dr. Louis (Minister, New London Synagogue) 30th August 1984.

Katz, Rabbi Dr. Arthur (former Minister, Hendon Reform Synagogue) 19th May 1982.

Lindsay, Rosemary (former Secretary of the Reform Beth Din) 13th August 1985.

Montagu, Ewen (former President, United Synagogue) 19th October 1983.

Reinhart, Mrs Flora (widow of Rabbi Reinhart) 17th December 1980.

Schonfeld, Jeremy (son of Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld) 12th April 1988.

Stiebel, Joan (former Secretary to Jewish Refugees Committee) 24th March 1986.

Van der Zyl, Rabbi Werner (former Minister, North Western Reform Synagogue) 20th June 1981.

SECONDARY SOURCES:

6) Books.

Adler, Shmaryahu Manasseh Ha-Cohen Mareh Cohen (London, 1958).

Alderman, Geoffrey The Federation of Synagogues 1887 - 1987. (London, 1987).

Barnett, Arthur The Western Synagogue Through Two Centuries (London, 1961).

Bentwich, Norman They Found Refuge (London, 1956).

Berghahn, Marion German-Jewish Refugees in England (London, 1984).

Bermant, Chaim Troubled Eden (London, 1969).

Braude, W. G. Jewish Proselytising (New York, 1940).

Briggs, Asa The Age of Improvement 1783-1867 (London, 1951).

Budd, Sidney Towards The Golden Year - The First Half - Century of Edgware and District Reform Synagogue (London 1985).

Cohen, J. Simcha Intermarriage and Conversion (New Jersey, 1987).

Cohen, Stuart A. English Zionists and British Jews (New Jersey, 1982).

Eichorn, David Max Conversion to Judaism - A History and Analysis (New York, 1965).

Endelman, Todd M. The Jews of Georgian England (Philadelphia, 1979).

Freedman, Maurice A Minority in Britain (London, 1955).

Fried, J. (ed.) Jews and Divorce (New York, 1968).

Gerlis, Daphne and Leon The Story of the Grimsby Jewish Community (Hull, 1986).

Gissing, Vera Pearls of Childhood (London, 1988).

Goldberg, P. Selvin The Manchester Congregation of British Jews 1857-1957 (Manchester 1957).

Golden, Lewis and Jacqueline Harold Reinhart - A Memorial Volume (London, 1980).

Harris, Isidore Jews College Jubilee Volume (London, 1906).

Henriques, Robert Sir Robert Waley Cohen (London, 1966).

Homa, Bernard A Fortress in Anglo-Jewry (London, 1953).

Hyamson, Albert M. The Sephardim of England (London, 1951).

Jackson, Carlton. Who Will Take Our Children (London, 1985).

Jacobs, Louis, Helping with Enquiries (London 1989)

Jakobovits, Immanuel The Timely and the Timeless (London, 1977).

Joseph, Morris Judaism As Creed and Life 4th edition (London, 1958).

Joseph, Zoe Survivors : Jewish Refugees in Birmingham 1933-1945. (West Midlands, 1988).

Klein, Isaac A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice (New York, 1969).

Krausz, Armin Sheffield Jewry (Jerusalem, 1980).

Krausz, Ernest Leeds Jewry (Cambridge, 1964).

Levin, Salmond S. A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life 1870-1970 (London 1970).

Levy, Arnold History of the Sunderland Jewish Community 1755-1955 (London, 1956).

- Lipman, Vivian D. Social History of the Jews in England 1850-1950 (London, 1954).
- Liss, A.S. A Short History of Reform Judaism in South Wales (Cardiff, 1970).
- Loewe, L.L. Basil Henriques (London, 1976).
- Marmur, Dow (ed.) Reform Judaism (London, 1973).
- Meyer, Michael A. Response to Modernity (Oxford, 1988).
- Mielziner, M. The Jewish Law of Marriage and Divorce (Cincinnati, 1884).
- Newman, Aubrey The United Synagogue 1870-1970 (London, 1976).
- Newman, Aubrey The Board of Deputies of British Jews 1760-1985 (London, 1987).
- Niewyk, Donald L. The Jews in Weimar Germany (Manchester, 1980).
- Philipson, David The Reform Movement in Judaism 4th edition (New York, 1967).
- Picciotto, James Sketches of Anglo-Jewish History (London, 1875).
- Rose, June Fifty Years of Alyth - A Short History of the North Western Reform Synagogue (London, 1933).
- Rosenbloom, Joseph R. Conversion to Judaism (New York, 1978).
- Roth, Cecil A History of the Jews in England 3rd edition (Oxford, 1964).
- Roth, Cecil The Federation of Synagogues 1912-1937 (London, 1947).
- Roth, Cecil The Jewish Chronicle (London, 1949).
- Sharot, Stephen Judaism - A Sociology (London, 1976).
- Sherman, A.J. Island Refuge - Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich (London, 1973).
- Silverman, William B. Basic Reform Judaism (New York, 1970).
- Simmons, Vivian G. The Path of Life (London, 1961).
- Sklare, Marshall Conservative Judaism 2nd edition (New York, 1972).
- Sterne, Ernest C. The Early History of Sinai Synagogue Leeds, 1944-1970 (Leeds, 1983).

Wicks, Ben No Time To Wave Goodbye (London. 1938).

Wilcock, Evelyn Peace and the Jews (unpublished mss. in author's possession)

Williams, Bill The Making of Manchester Jewry (Manchester, 1976).

7) Pamphlets.

Finestein, Israel Post-Emancipation Jewry : The Anglo - Jewish Experience (Oxford, 1980).

Fraenkel, Josef The Jewish Press in Great Britain 1823-1963 (London, 1963).

Friedlander, Albert Reform Judaism in America (New York, 1956).

Jakobovits, Immanuel Intermarriage and Conversion (London, 1971).

Jakobovits, Immanuel Preserving The Oneness of the Jewish People (London, 1988).

Kosmin, Barry A. Divorce in Anglo-Jewry (London, 1982).

Newman, Aubrey Chief Rabbi - Dr. Joseph H. Hertz. (London, 1972).

Salaman, Redcliffe N. Whither Lucien Wolf's Anglo-Jewish Community ? (London, 1954).

Schmool, Marlana Can We Measure Outmarriage? (London, 1958).

Simmons, Vivian G. Reform in Judaism (London, 1943).

Swift, Morris Jewish Marriage and Divorce (London, 1962).

8) Articles.

Adams, W. 'The Refugee Scholar of the 1930's' The Political Quarterly XXXIX Vol. 1 (1968).

Altmann, Alexander 'The German Rabbi 1910-1939' Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XIX (1974).

Berg, Charles 'Revolution, Halachah and Mitsvah' Reform Judaism ed. Dow Marmur (London, 1973).

Brotz, Howard 'The Outlines of Jewish History in London' A Minority in Britain ed. Maurice Freedman (London, 1955).

Carlebach, Alexander 'The German-Jewish immigration and its influence on Synagogue Life in the U. S. A.' Leo Baeck Institute Year Book IX (1964).

Cohen, D. 'The London Beth Din'. Mosaic 24.

Cohen, Norman 'Beth Din Extremism' Jewish Review Vol IX No. 250 (1956).

Cohen, Norman 'Non-Religious Factors in the Emergence of the Chief Rabbinate' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England Vol. XXI (1968).

Cohen, Norman 'Trends in Anglo-Jewish Religious Life' Jewish Life in Modern Britain ed. Julius Gould and Shaul Esh (London, 1964).

Curtis, Michael 'The Beth Din of the Reform Synagogues in Great Britain' Reform Judaism ed. Dow Marmur (London, 1973).

Davis, Moshe 'Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry : Historical Background to the Jewish Response'. Journal of Jewish Sociology Vol. IV No. 1 (1962).

Eichorn, David Max 'Conversion to Judaism by Reform and Conservative Rabbis' Jewish Social Studies Vol. XVI No. 4 (1954).

Feldman, A. 'The London Beth Din' The Juridicial Review (June 1929).

Finestein, Israel 'Anglo-Jewish Opinion During the Struggle for Emancipation' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England Vol. XX (1964).

Finestein, Israel 'Sir Moses Montefiore : A Modern Appreciation' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England Vol. XXIX (1938).

Finestein, Israel 'The Anglo-Jewish Revolt of 1853' The Jewish Quarterly Vol. 26 No.'s 3 and 4 (1979).

Finestein, Israel 'The Uneasy Victorian : Montefiore as Communal Leader' The Century of Moses Montefiore ed. Sonia and V. D. Lipman (London, 1985).

Freedman, Maurice 'Jews in the Society of Britain' A Minority in Britain ed. Maurice Freedman (London 1955).

Freedman, Maurice 'The Jewish Population of Great Britain' Journal of Jewish Sociology Vol. IV No. 1 (1962).

Goulston, Michael J. 'The Theology of Reform Judaism in Great Britain' Reform Judaism ed. Dow Marmur, (London, 1973).

Graf, Gerhard 'The Influence of the German Rabbis on British Reform Judaism' Reform Judaism ed. Dow Marmur (London, 1973).

Jacob, Walter 'The Source of Reform Halachic Authority' Central Conference of American Rabbis Year Book Vol. XC Part Two (1980).

Jacobs, Louis 'The Beth Din : The Jewish Ecclesiastical Court' The Lawyer Vol. 5 No. 1 (1962).

Jospe, Alfred 'A Profession in Transition : The German Rabbinate 1910 - 1939' Leo Baeck Institute Year Book XIX (1974).

Lew, Myer 'Communal and Social Problems Confronting the Beth Din' Papers from the Twelfth Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers (1958)

Leigh, Michael 'Reform Judaism in Britain' Reform Judaism, ed. Dow Marmur (London, 1973).

Lipman Vivian D. 'The Development of London Jewry' A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life ed. Salmond S. Levin (London, 1970).

Lipman, Vivian D. 'The Rise of Jewish Suburbia' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England Vol. XXI (1968).

Lipman, Vivian D. 'The Structure of London Jewry in the Mid-Nineteenth Century' Essays presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the occasion of his Seventieth Birthday ed. H. J. Zimmels, J. Rabbincowitz, and I. Finestein (London, 1967).

MacInnes, Colin 'Social and Personal' Quest 2 (1967).

Maybaum, Ignaz 'German Jews and Anglo-Jewry' Britain's New Citizens (London, 1951).

Neustatter, Hannah 'Demographic and Other Statistical Aspects of Anglo-Jewry' A Minority in Britain ed. Maurice Freedman (London, 1955).

Prais, S. J. 'Synagogue Statistics and the Jewish Population of Great Britain' Jewish Journal of Sociology Vol. 14 No. 2 (1972).

Prais, S. J. and Schmool, Marlana 'Statistics of Jewish Marriages in Great Britain 1961 - 1965' Jewish Journal of Sociology Vol. 9 No. 2 (1967)

Prais, S. J. and Schmool, Marlana 'Statistics of milah and birthrate in Great Britain' Jewish Journal of Sociology Vol. 12 No. 2 (1970).

Prais, S. J. and Schmool, Marlana 'Synagogue Marriages in Great Britain 1966 - 1968' Jewish Journal of Sociology Vol. 12 No. 1 (1970).

Prais, S. J. and Schmool, Marlana 'The Size and Structure of the Anglo-Jewish population 1960-1965' Jewish Journal of Sociology Vol. 10 (1968).

Roth, Cecil 'The Chief Rabbinate of England' Essays in Honour of the Very Reverend Dr. J. H. Hertz ed. I. Epstein, E. Levine, and C. Roth (London, 1942).

Rowntree, G. and Carrier N. H. 'The Resort to Divorce in England and Wales 1858-1957' Population Studies Vol. 11 (1958).

Schwab, Walter 'Some Aspects of the Relationship between the German and the Anglo-Jewish Community' Leo Baeck Institute Year Book III (1957).

Shaftesley, J. M. 'Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi. A Biographical Sketch' Essays presented to Chief Rabbi Israel Brodie on the occasion of his seventieth Birthday ed. H. J. Zimmels, J. Rabinowitz, and I. Finestein (London, 1967).

Shapiro, Alan 'The Sociology of Progressive Judaism' European Judaism Vol. 1 No. 2 (1966).

Simmons, Vivian G. 'The Problem of Proselytes' Papers from the Second Conference of Anglo-Jewish Preachers (1925).

Stiebel, Joan 'The Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief' Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England Vol. XXVII (1982).

Tempkin, Sefton D. 'A Beth Din for America' Perspectives on Jews and Judaism ed. A. Chof (New York, 1978).

Ungar, Andre 'My Ten Synagogues' The Jewish Spectator (Spring 1987).

9) Theses

Greenstein, Stanley M. 'The Reception of the English Jewish Proselyte' Leo Baeck College, (London 1973).