

Research Seminar
HIST 230.403
Michael A. Meyer

University of Pennsylvania
Fall 2014
Thursdays 3:00–6:00 pm

History and Principles of Reform Judaism

Objectives

Divided into History, Platforms, and Issues, this seminar provides the student with a comprehensive understanding of the Reform movement in Judaism, both past and present. It includes the history of the movement in both Europe and the United States: its origins, its philosophies and ideologies, and its changing statements of principle. It locates the Reform movement within other streams of religious Judaism from Orthodoxy to Jewish Renewal. Finally, it presents a thematic and historical analysis of particular issues in Reform Judaism as they have developed and as they appear in the present-day American context.

Texts (For use in class)

(All of the following texts can be purchased new or used on the internet.)

Michael A. Meyer & W. Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader*

Max Wiener, *Abraham Geiger and Liberal Judaism*

Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*

Jewish Theological Seminary, *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*

Materials That Will Be Made Available

Avi Weiss, "Open Orthodoxy! A Modern Orthodox Rabbi's Creed," *Judaism*, Fall 1997, 409–421

Marla J. Feldman, "Not Your Father's or Your Mother's Advocacy: The Moral Voice of the Rabbi in Challenging Times," *Reform Jewish Quarterly*, Summer 2010, 12–24

"Platform on Reconstructionism" (1986)

Jack Wertheimer, "The Rabbi Crisis," *Commentary*, May 2003

(Various other brief source documents will be distributed in class)

Other Relevant Literature

Central Conference of American Rabbis, *Gates of Mitzvah*

CCAR, *Gates of Shabbat*

Jakob J. Petuchowski, *Prayerbook Reform in Europe*

W. G. Plaut, *The Rise of Reform Judaism*

W. G. Plaut, *The Growth of Reform Judaism*

D. E. Kaplan, *American Reform Judaism: An Introduction*
M. Washofsky, *Jewish Living: A Guide to Contemporary Reform Practice*
D. Barden, *Wrestling with Jacob and Esau: Fighting the Flight of Men*
M. Cohen & M. Katz, *The Observant Life: The Wisdom of Conservative Judaism*

Requirements

1. Regular and informed class participation, based on preparation of assigned readings. Students will be asked to make oral presentations.
2. Meeting with the instructor to determine a topic for a research paper and the methodology to be used
3. An outline and bibliography for the research paper, due by the sixth week of class
4. A research paper of 15–20 pages, including a proper introduction, cogent discussion, conclusion, footnotes and bibliography, due at the last session of class.

Grading

Class participation counts 25 percent and the research paper 75 percent.

Schedule of Topics and Assignments

Part One: Europe

August 28

Introduction: "Yes, Sarah, There is a Reform Judaism"

Reading: *Response*, vii–xii, 3–9.

September 4

Origins of the Reform Movement: Birth Trauma, Tantrums and Parental Abuse

Reading: *Response*, 10–61; *Reader* vii–xi, 1–4

September 11 & 18

Systematic Philosophers, Engaged Scholars, and Intense Ideologues

Reading: *Response*, 62–99; *Reader*, 4–15; Wiener, 83–93, 179–186, 262–264.

September 25 (No class, Rosh Hashanah)

October 2

Spreading Out: in Germany, France, England, and Eastward

Reading: *Response*, 100–224, 335–352; *Reader*, 15–20

October 9 & October 16 (No class: Fall Break & Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah)

Part Two: The Principles of American Religious Judaism

October 23

American Origins, Classical Reform Judaism, and the Beginnings of a Reform Reorientation

Reading: *Response*, 225–334; *Reader*, 195–203

October 30

Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Renewal Judaism

Reading: *Emet Ve-Emunah*, Reconstructionist Platform

November 6

Modern and Not-So Modern Orthodoxy

Reading: "Open Orthodoxy"; other materials to be distributed

Part Three: Issues

November 13

The Synagogue Service, Shabbat and Holiday Observance

Reading: *Reader*, 18–20, 55–77; Recommended: Petuchowski, 31–83; *Gates of Shabbat*.

November 20

Issues of Halakhah and Gender

Reading: *Reader* 99–131; 155–156; Rec.: *Gates of Mitzvah*; Washofsky; A selection of Reform responsa at the CCAR website.

November 25 or 26 (shift on account of Thanksgiving)

Issues of Social Justice, Zionism, and Reform Jewish Education

Reading: *Reader*, 132–160; Feldman

December 4

The Reform Rabbi, Reform Today, and the Future of Reform Judaism

Reading: *Response* 353–386; *Reader*, 161–194, 208–214; Wertheimer