

Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association RESOLUTION

THE CHILDREN OF MIXED MARRIAGES, JEWS BY CHOICE AND PROSELYTISM

1980

As Reconstructionist Jews, we welcome the recent proposals concerning the Jewishness of a child, either of whose parents is Jewish. We are pleased to note that such a recommendation was adopted already by the Reconstructionist Movement two decades ago at a joint convention of rabbis and laity and later re-affirmed by the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association in its Guidelines on Conversion, (adopted at last year's convention, and containing the deliberations of a 3-year working committee, 1976-79), to wit:

"If one parent is Jewish, either the mother or the father, the offspring is to be regarded as Jewish and should undergo the rites prescribed by our tradition (b'rit milah for boys, or a covenantal naming ceremony for girls) but no special conversion procedures are required." (Guidelines on Conversion, VI:4)

In addition, it was affirmed:

"We deem it the responsibility of Jewish congregations and of the Jewish community at large to welcome warmly into their midst and involve in all their activities persons who have converted to Judaism." (Guidelines on Conversion, I)

"Every possible outreach effort should be made to incorporate warmly into the Jewish community those people interested in conversion to Judaism, especially non-Jewish spouses of Jews." (Guidelines on Conversion, III)

We call upon Reconstructionist Rabbis and congregations to join efforts with like-minded colleagues and groups in developing activities which will strengthen the Jewish people quantitatively and qualitatively through the mitzvah which our Guidelines have labeled "Hakhnasat Hager" (welcoming Jews by choice.)

We are, however, averse to developing any active method of proselytizing for Judaism. While every effort should be made to make the non-Jew, as well as the Jewish community, aware of the fact that Judaism is open to and welcomes those wishing formally to join our religious civilization and peoplehood, it is our grave concern that any programmatic missionary activity, no matter how restrained, dignified and decorous in the beginning, might snowball in directions which might later be regrettable.

It is our opinion that active missionizing of any kind will be self-defeating, in that it can hurt the Jewish community more than it can help, as it might stimulate counter efforts that would, considering our small number, affect us significantly. Moreover, any efforts on our part to proselytize, even among the unchurched, might lead to the deterioration of the good relations which have existed between the Jewish community and responsible Christian leadership and church entities. Just as we would not appreciate, and have indeed resented and spoken against the fact that there have been Christian missionary efforts directed at the unaffiliated Jew, let us be sensitive to the fact that an unchurched Christian might still be claimed by his community as a Christian by the mere fact of his birth, family ties and initiation into that fellowship.

Let us ever be aware, particularly as Reconstructionist Jews, that Judaism does not operate on the assumption that "salvation" is limited to Jews. Wary of fundamentalism and militant fanaticism which are prevalent in our day, let us not participate in any effort that might promote the slightest impression that ours, too, is a triumphalist religion.

While we respect the integrity and good intentions of those who have so far called for some form of programmatic missionizing, we hereby express our disapproval and disagreement in this matter. Even as we recognize the fact that there is a history of missionary activity in Judaism, let us be aware that times and conditions have changed. Let our Judaism convince others by example rather than through persuasion. Let us, in accordance with the counsel of our tradition, as voiced recently by Elie Wiesel, not attempt to make the world Jewish, but to make it more human.