Preface

I write this book as a scholar working out of a university, but it would be disingenuous to claim that I come to it from a detached, neutral perspective. I grew up in the Reform movement and feel a strong sense of attachment to it. I studied at the Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) in Jerusalem and have served as a Reform rabbi in Georgia, Missouri, Wisconsin, and Michigan in the United States as well as in South Africa, Australia, and Israel.

Even before I was born, my family was connected to the Reform movement. Rabbi Edward Klein at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue in New York married my parents in 1958. After we moved farther uptown, we joined Congregation Rodeph Sholom on West Eightythird Street. At the same time, there were substantial traditionalist influences on me as well. My mother's parents were traditional eastern European Jews, although by the time I got to know them toward the end of their lives, they had become less observant. My parents sent me to Ramaz School, an Orthodox Zionist day school on the Upper East Side. Even as a young child, there were aspects of Reform Judaism that I was very attracted to and others that I found less appealing. The astute reader may see some of these prejudices in the manuscript. I can only say that I have tried to be objective. I believe that the manuscript highlights not only the difficulties but also the rewards of trying to pioneer a Jewish liberal religious movement within contemporary American society in a global age.

I thank the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and its director, Gary Zola, for awarding me an Ethel Marcus Memorial Fellowship, which enabled me to spend a month doing **x** Preface

research not only in the extensive archives, but also in the Klau Library. I thank the University of Missouri–Kansas City for awarding me a Meriweather Lewis Fellowship, which facilitated the research and the writing in its final stages. Temple B'nai Israel of Albany, Georgia, provided a warm congregational setting to participate in as well as observe Reform Judaism at its finest. Congregational leaders Robert Kraselsky and Peggy Posnick and many, many others in the Peach State were always encouraging and supportive. David Myers, my editor at Rutgers University Press, was able and willing to provide consistently helpful feedback. David's insight and vision has molded this manuscript and helped me become a better writer. Marlie Wasserman, Bobbe Needham, Nicole Manganaro, Adi Hovav, Kristi Long, and the entire staff at Rutgers University Press were all invaluable. Professor Jonathan D. Sarna of Brandeis University has always been ready to answer my every question, from my first inquiry writing from a student pulpit at Temple Shalom in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia. Professor Yaakov Ariel of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Rabbi Uri Regev of the World Union for Progressive Judaism helped me learn about the Reform movement during my years of study at HUC-JIR in Jerusalem. Professors Milton Shain of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town and Yair Mazor of the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee encouraged me during my research work at those institutions. Professor Lloyd Gartner of Tel Aviv University supervised my Ph.D. dissertation at Tel Aviv University and initiated me into the profession, along with Professors Ron Zweig and Robert Rockaway. I thank Professor Haim Shaked of the Miller Center for Contemporary Jewish Studies and Professor Jaime Suchlicki at the Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies for their recent assistance. I thank Professor Arthur Hertzberg for writing the foreword to this book. I have been inspired for many years by not only his published work but also his communal activism. Rabbi Hertzberg has combined scholarship with rabbinic leadership and provided me with a model for my own life path. Rabbi Eric H. Yoffie has honored me by writing the afterword, and I likewise thank him.

I thank the many friends and colleagues who gave me advice or feedback on this manuscript in the various stages of its development:

Preface xi

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I have been fortunate in having been able to try out many of my ideas in academic journals as well as popular magazines and thank these publications and their editors for these opportunities. I have published on the Reform platforms, which are discussed in chapters 3 and 11, in "A Statement of Principles for Reform Judaism: The American Reform Movement's Most Recent Debate" (Australian Journal of Jewish Studies 14 [2000]: 31–53); "Reform Jewish Theology and the Sociology of Liberal Religion in America: The Platforms as Response to the Perception of Socio-Religious Crisis" (Modern Judaism, February 2000, 60–77); "The 1999 Pittsburgh Platform and Its Impact on American Reform Judaism" (Scottish Journal of Religious Studies 20, 2 [December 1999]: 135–157); "The New American Reform Pittsburgh Platform of 1999" (Jewish Spectator, winter 2000, 24–26); "Politics and Piety in the Religious Marketplace" (Congress Monthly, July/August 1999, 11–14).

On Reform Jewish education, which is discussed in chapter 7, I have published "The Educational Crisis in American Reform Judaism" (*Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 22, 2 [2001]: 183–196). On outreach, intermarriage, and conversion to Judaism, which is discussed in chapter 8, my publications include: "Opening the Gates of the Jewish Community" (Conservative Judaism, summer 2000, 32–46); "Conversion to Judaism: A Historical Perspective" (*Judaism*, summer 1999, 259–274, 285–289), with responses from Harold Schulweis, Ephraim Buchwald,

xii Preface

and Steven Lerner; and "Millions of Converts?" (Manna—Journal of the Sternberg Centre for Judaism at the Manor House, winter 2000, 2–3).

Some of my ideas on Reform Judaism generally were first published in "Reform Judaism" in *The Companion to Judaism*, edited by Jacob Neusner (Blackwell, 2000, 291–310). Perhaps most importantly, many of my ideas on Reform Judaism developed in the process of editing two collections on the movement, *Contemporary Debates in American Reform Judaism: Conflicting Visions* (Routledge, 2001); and *Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).

I originally discussed many of the topics covered in this volume with my late aunt Ruth Moskowitz during my high school years in Waterbury, Connecticut. We spent hours talking of the future of the American Jewish community, and I owe her a great deal for stimulating this interest. My uncle Herman Moskowitz has been a source of strength for me over the past few decades. He celebrated his ninety-third birthday recently, and I hope that this volume appears in time for his ninety-fourth. My father, Dr. Norman Kaplan, has recently begun reading Judaica at a furious clip and will certainly be one of the first to read this work. I was particularly pleased that he was able to hear me speak recently at Temple Emanu-El on Fifth Avenue.

I hope this work can make a modest contribution to fair and dispassionate discourse on modern Judaism. May we all try to live up to the words of Micah 6:8: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice, to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God."

American Reform Judaism