

satisfy himself that the pledge they make to raise their children as Jewish, to live a Jewish life, is a sincere one. If he is convinced of that, he certainly may convert and marry them. All this is understood as from our more liberal Reform point of view. This is the clear decision of the Conference; see "Report on Mixed Marriage and Inter-marriage," from which I quote:

If, however, the Christian member of the couple desires to convert, we should accept him or her, if sincere, as a candidate for proselytizing. In this regard our attitude would be consistent with that which we take in the case of a mixed civil marriage, in spite of the fact that under such circumstances traditional law would hesitate to accept the convert. Similarly, after conversion we would insist that the couple shall be re-married by a Jewish ceremony, (p. 12)

° 20 °

Conversion Without Marriage

May we convert, without consent of parents, a fifteen-year-old Christian girl who is voluntarily attending the congregation's Sunday school? (From Rabbi Meyer Heller, San Francisco, California)

You raise a difficult and painful question. Much of whatever answer we can give depends rather on judgment than on Halacha. Theoretically, of course, any conversion is permitted, especially a conversion that has not to do with marriage. According to the Talmudic law, conversions for the purpose of marriage are specifically considered untrustworthy but, as far as that is concerned, at the Central Conference of American Rabbis, after the Report on Mixed Marriage and Intermarriage was adopted, it was decided definitely that we do not deprecate such conversions as are made for the purpose of marriage, since the desire to establish a harmonious household would help, rather than hinder, the sincerity of the conversion. But strictly speaking, such a conversion as the one you describe would be more in harmony with Talmudic law than those premarriage conversions which we make frequently.

Also, I presume we must consider this girl who is fifteen as beyond the religious age of consent or religious responsibility, which is thirteen for boys and twelve for girls. This applies to Jewish children. I presume we may assume that these maturity stages apply also to Gentiles in Jewish law. So much for the law. But from our modern point of view the situation is much more difficult. The old law was dubious as to the validity or actuality of family religions among non-Jews (pagans) in those days. Therefore they would question whether a proselyte could marry someone closely related to him by marriage in his preproselyte stage. They later prohibited it on practical grounds, but *only* on practical grounds. But the Gentiles in our environment are not idolaters and we respect their family status, and, especially nowadays, we must consider that this is a child of Christian parents. They may not object today to

our converting their child away from their religion, but may bitterly object tomorrow, and we must be considerably cognizant of their rights as parents. The Christian family, as a family, should not be broken up in this way.

There is a wider aspect to the problem. We Jews have suffered greatly from the snatching away of Jewish children and the breaking of our family bonds by the church. We stood on firm, human, moral grounds. We cut the ground from under us if we now do the same thing.

Furthermore, while there are references, chiefly in the New Testament, that Jews once engaged in an active conversionist effort, all we can really learn from the Hellenistic period in Jewish history is that they tried to influence the pagans, but not that they tried actually to convert them. But whatever it was that occurred in those ancient days, for centuries we avoided conversion and missionizing. This was based upon our respect for the Christian religion. They were "children of Noah," righteous, observing the seven commandments of decency, and "had their portion in the world to come." Would that Christianity had respected and would still respect, in its canon law, the status of Judaism as we, in actual Jewish law, respect the status of Christianity. When we start converting, we are destroying a moral decency which we have maintained.

When we convert in preparation for marriage, our fellow citizens understand it. They know we hesitate even then and they know also that our motive is to establish a harmonious home. But just to convert a Christian to Judaism, as Christians try to convert Jews to Christianity, violates the type of respect which we hope will someday be given our faith by the faiths we respect.

All this is based rather on the spirit of Jewish tradition

than on its actual letter. The girl in this case may attend any of our classes. (See *Reform Jewish Practice*, II, 72 ff. on the right of Christians to attend our religious schools.) But I urge you to discourage her strongly and, if possible, not to convert her.

° 21 °

Circumcision Before Eighth Day

In a number of hospitals the custom has been established that mothers and their babies are sent home on the fifth or sixth day after the baby's birth. This situation affects the time and place of circumcision. Shall the child be circumcised at home on the eighth day, or shall we yield to the physician's preference to circumcise the child while it is yet in the hospital and therefore earlier than the eighth day?

Before going into the halachic side of the question, inquiry was made as to the actualities of the present situation with regard to hospital practice in this matter. Through the kindness of the administrative head of a well-known hospital, inquiries were instituted of obstetricians and from famous lying-in hospitals. From these inquiries it is evi-