What happened to Rabbi Solomon Freehof?

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(This blog entry expands on one of the pieces noted in our **November newsletter on LGBT issues** in the American Jewish community. Don't miss it!)

In 1973, **Rabbi Solomon B. Freehof** wrote a responsum on the **permissibility of Gay and Lesbian synagogues** for the Reform movement. His position must have been at least somewhat unsurprising at the time, but looking back makes it clear how far the Reform movement has come in the last forty years:

> To sum up: Homosexuality is deemed in Jewish tradition to be a sin--not only in law, but in Jewish life practice. Nevertheless, it would be in direct contradiction to Jewish law to keep sinners out of the congregation. To isolate them into a separate congregation and thus increase their mutual availability is certainly wrong. It is hardly worth mentioning that to officiate at a so-called "marriage" of two homosexuals and to describe their mode of life as "Kiddushin" (i.e., sacred in Judaism) is a contravention of all that is respected in Jewish life.

Rabbi Freehof was born in 1892 and must have been about 81 years old when he wrote those words. By then, he'd already served as president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. He was also a congregational Rabbi in Pittsburgh for more than thirty-five years. He lived until he was 97.

In 1990, the year he died, the Reform movement issued **Report of the CCAR Ad Hoc Committee on Homosexuality and the Rabbinate**. By then, the movement had issued resolution recognizing the **Human Rights of Homosexuals**, Hebrew Union College officially admitted out Gay and Lesbian students, and there was support in the Reform rabbinate, albeit minority support, for religious gay marriage.

I wonder what he would have thought, if he had made it to 120, of where the Reform movement is today.

"Rabbi Freehof's positions on other issues are significantly more liberal. He supported **women wearing a prayer shawl**, for example, in part because "in our Reform movement . . . special emphasis is placed on the equality of men and women," and permitted **gentiles** who wished to to wear a prayer shawl in synagogue "for the sake of peace." This year, the **Freehof Institute for Progressive Halacha**, founded in 1989, is holding its annual symposium on the subject of bioethics."