

The First Fifty Years: A Jubilee in Prose and Poetry Honoring Women Rabbis. Eds. Sue Levi Elwell, Jessica Greenbaum, and Hara E. Person. New York: CCAR Press, 2023

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***The First Fifty Years: A Jubilee in Prose and Poetry Honoring Women Rabbis.* Eds. Sue Levi Elwell, Jessica Greenbaum, and Hara E. Person. New York: CCAR Press, 2023.**

Reviewed by David J. Zucker, Independent Scholar, Aurora, Colorado

Worldwide about eighteen hundred women have been ordained as rabbis, most in the United States, but also in Europe, and Israel. The vast majority are part of the Progressive movements, but there also have been women who self-define as Orthodox, taking on the terms *Maharat*, *Rabba*, *Rabbanit*, *Morateinu*, and even Rabbi. Women rabbis lead congregations, are part of academia, organizational work and education in a variety of forms. Although the book does not mention these statistics, the fact is that currently women comprise over one-third of the Reform rabbinate, over a fifth of the Conservative rabbinate, and probably half or more of the Reconstructionist rabbinate. These women rabbis have been ordained through the more traditional seminaries, such as the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and the Leo Baeck College in England, but they also have studied at other institutions like the Academy for Jewish Religion in New York and in Los Angeles, as well as other seminaries such as the Hebrew College Rabbinical School in Newton, Massachusetts.

This volume, just over 130 pages of text, begins with an Introduction by Rabbi Hara E. Person, Chief Executive of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis. Some of the articles/chapters are biographical, others deal with the impact of woman rabbis, or what it means to the author that she is a woman and a rabbi. The authors cover a wide field. They are rabbis and laity, women, men, and non-binary, and span the full spectrum of religious life, for example one of the authors is Daphne Lazar Price, the Executive Director of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA) (pp. 59-60). The book divides into three sections: Pioneers, Ripple Effects, and then What Comes Next? There are about one hundred selections, which means that most of the entries are succinct: but a page long, less than five hundred words. Historian Pamela S. Nadell reflects on the "Pioneers Who Paved the Way" (p. 7), which eventually led to the first woman to be ordained in the United States, Rabbi Sally Priesand in 1972. Later in the book Rabbi Dalia Marx writes about Rabbi "Regina Jonas (1902-1944) the first woman to become a rabbi" (p. 26) who

was privately ordained in Germany in 1935 and practiced primarily in homes for the elderly; Jonas was murdered in Auschwitz. While most of the entries are written by authors living in the United States, there also are representative samplings from Israel (for example, by Rabbi Kinneret Shiryon and Rabbi Naamah Kelman (pp. 46-47), and (though she does not mention her locale), Rabbi Deborah Kahn-Harris in Great Britain (p. 55). Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso writes about the “revolutionary changes in ritual, theology, leadership, prayer, history, and community” brought about by women rabbis (p. 8). Rabbi Ellen Lippmann points out correctly that “A Woman Rabbi Stands on Many Shoulders.” She accurately points out that “Each of us stands on the shoulders of those who came before and those who held us up and those who inspired us and those who opened doors so that we could walk through” (p. 31). Rabbi Ellen Weinberg Dreyfus reflects that she realizes “that being a woman is more than an essential part of who I am and what kind of rabbi I became. I am the rabbi I am *because* I am a woman” (emphasis in original, p. 9). Rabba Sara Hurwitz, “the first female Orthodox rabbi” to be ordained, writes that “the story of Orthodox women as rabbis is only just beginning to be written” (p. 62). Rabbi Shira Stern explains that “a growing number of women rabbis have chosen to serve at the bedside, in long-term care facilities, in prisons, and in disasters, elevating the act of chaplaincy to a sacred art” (p. 32). Still, it has not been a road without difficulties. “Women rabbis” explains Rabbi Denise L. Eger, “still face tremendous pushback from those in the Orthodox community who fail to recognize that the Jewish world has changed forever and that women rabbis’ scholarship and leadership are here to stay.” Eger notes also, that women “rabbis still face hurdles of misogyny” (p. 92) including pay differential with male rabbis. The book features a glossary. While there is a short biographical statement about the three editors, the work would have benefitted from biographical information about the various contributors.