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REFORM JUDAISM IN THE UNITED STATES AND ITS  
RELATIONSHIP TO ZIONISM AS REFLECTED PRIMARILY IN  
SOURCES HERETOFORE NOT RESEARCHED 1889-1948

HAROLD FLOYD CAMINKER

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1978

Referee, Prof. Jacob R. Marcus



## NOTES

This thesis is an overview of the remarkable history of the Zionist  
movement within Reform Judaism. The purpose of the study is to examine the  
debates which took place within the Reform Movement revolving around  
Zionism. Only fifty years after Isaac Mayer Wise's famous 1897 address to  
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The third chapter, 1938-1945, deals with the decade in which Reform  
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## DIGEST

This thesis is an overview of the remarkable history of the Zionist issue within Reform Judaism. The purpose of the study is to examine the debates which took place within the Reform Movement revolving around Zionism. Only fifty years after Isaac Mayer Wise's famous 1897 address to the CCAR, in which he blasted Zionism and Theodor Herzl as a soon-to-be extinct passing fad, the Jewish State was coming into being in Palestine. Rabbi Wise was surely unable to even imagine the course of events that would shape Jewish history in the twentieth century.

The Prologue and first chapter of the thesis deal with the nearly monolithic anti-Zionism which dominated Reform Jewry until the promulgation of the Balfour Declaration in 1917. The anti-Zionists were challenged by only a tiny minority of Reform Jews who were sympathetic with the ideals of Jewish nationalism. Chapter two covers the period of 1917-1937. These twenty years saw the increasing legitimization of a position known as non-Zionism. This interim non-Zionist phase symbolized the gradual transition of an entire movement from anti-Zionism to enthusiastic support of Zionist ideals.

The third chapter, 1938-1948, deals with the decade in which Reform Jewry almost unanimously embraced Zionism. Only the tiny, yet all too vocal American Council for Judaism, which was formed in 1943, represented the extremist anti-Zionist minority of Reform Jews. These Jews had inherited the legacy of anti-Zionism which prevailed half a century earlier, failing miserably, however, in their attempt to apply that stale rhetoric to a world Jewish community which was in a state of shock as a



result of the Holocaust of one-third of its people. By 1948 the family of Reform Judaism was solidly in favor of the establishment of the State of Israel.

The Epilogue covers the period since 1948, showing the increasingly strong ties between world Reform Jewry and the independent Jewish State. History has justifiably credited the Reform Movement with having possessed the open-mindedness and tolerance of minority opinion needed to vindicate its credentials as a liberal religious movement. Even in the heyday of anti-Zionism, those few who supported Zionism were usually allowed to voice their ideas openly and freely at rabbinic and lay conferences.

The thesis documents this evolution of Reform Judaism from anti-Zionism to support of Zionism as it occurred within the rabbinic, lay and academic branches of the Movement. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College were all instrumental in the move toward Zionism within Reform Judaism during the first half of the twentieth century. Newspapers and periodicals have also been cited in order to reach an understanding of how these events were perceived by the American Jewish public at large.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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But my greatest thanks go out to Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus of the Hebrew Union College. At every step of the way, Dr. Marcus encouraged me in the preparation and writing of my thesis. He means much more to me than simply a thesis advisor, however. He has been a genuine source of support and friendship.



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PROLOGUE  
BEFORE 1889

The debate over the issue of Zionism in the Reform rabbinate has gone down in history as symbolic of one of the most critical questions ever faced by Liberal Jews. The very self-image of Diaspora Jewry was at stake. Could a Jew living in the Diaspora hope to survive without a Jewish homeland in Palestine? Could Zionism qualify as one's primary source of Jewish identity? The Zionist debate affected the issues of Jewish messianism, universalism and particularism in addition to the fundamental issue of Jewish nationalism.

Before the year 1889, when the Central Conference of American Rabbis was formed, Reform Judaism had taken a stand of unequivocal opposition to any and all forms of political Zionism. These Reform rabbis and lay people could not imagine that fifty years hence, the Reform movement would go on record in support of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. They could not have dreamed that sixty years hence a Jewish state in the land of Israel would be a political reality. These leaders of early Reform Judaism saw Jewish nationalism as a threat to the security of Jewish communities everywhere.

They were people who believed most of all in the universal mission of the Jew. They saw their loyalty to Judaism as a religion only. Any loyalties to national or political Judaism would have been contradictory to their understanding of Israel's divinely-inspired mission among the nations of the world. Precedent had already been established for Reform anti-Zionism at the first of the "Conferences of the Rabbis of Germany."

The first Conference was held at Brunswick in June, 1844. The views of Samuel Holdheim, second in stature only to Abraham Geiger in the movement for reform in German Judaism, were strongly anti-Zionist. Holdheim



declared that a distinction must be made between the religious and the political spheres of thought. "We do not grant," stated Holdheim, "that there is such a thing as a 'Christian state', and certainly we should not speak of a 'Jewish state,' or of the overlapping of the religious and the political in Judaism." This separation of religious and political affairs was to become a hallmark of the reformers, which is, of course, incompatible with a movement like political Zionism.<sup>1</sup>

A year later, in July, 1845, the second Conference was convened at Frankfort-on-the-Main for the purpose of dealing with the issues of liturgical reform and the messianic idea. The conflict was between the reformers, who interpreted Jewish messianism in universal world-wide terms, and the traditionalists, for whom a personal Messiah and a restored Jewish homeland were crucial. The report of the commission stated the following: "The Messianic idea is to occupy a prominent place in the liturgy also in the future, but all politico-national elements are to be eliminated."<sup>2</sup> This was a radical change in Jewish messianic doctrine. A hope for the rebuilding of the Jewish state had been transformed into the most universalistic and spiritual of sentiments.

The discussion at Frankfort reflected certain attitudes and events which influenced the rabbis. First, the Enlightenment had a powerful effect on the deliberations: In our era Messianism must foster the universal emancipation of mankind. Second, the liberation of the Jew by the Emancipation, and the statements of the Paris Sanhedrin in 1807, insured the feeling that the destiny of Judaism is not tied to a Jewish state, but rather a close and sincere attachment to the nations in which Jews reside. The desire for a Jewish state arose due to past oppressions and persecutions. Such parochial thoughts are no longer appropriate for the modern Jew! Third, the universal mission idea was totally humanitarian



and devoid of all particularity. Therefore, the messianic prayers should express the hope of Jewry for the inevitable spiritual union of all people in faith and love, as accomplished through the mission of Israel.

The rabbis of Germany felt the need to produce some of their own rules and binding decisions for Jewish conduct and belief. To this end, rabbinical synods were held in 1869 and 1871. These synods, held at Leipzig and Augsbourg, were dominated by the presence of Abraham Geiger. The views of Geiger on the issue of Jewish national identity are clearly recorded. He felt that "the national side of Israel must be pushed into the background." Furthermore, Geiger had asserted that "the hope that all Israelites be gathered from every corner of the globe and returned to the promised land has vanished entirely from our consciousness. The expression of such a hope in a prayer would be a naked untruth."<sup>4</sup> The resolutions passed by the synods were carefully worded to stress the anti-nationalism of classical German Reform. All emphasis was laid upon the universal mission of Israel throughout the world. It was Geiger who hailed the coming of the 'New Age' of science, reason and enlightenment. In the following words he called upon Jewry everywhere to become a part of this utopia: "Beloved pilgrim, cast off your rough coat of mail, there is no longer hostility abroad; undo the wrappings that hide and disfigure you, frosty and icy winds no longer blow against you - love will blossom everywhere - you have a warm heart, and all mankind appreciates it; take them all in your embrace."<sup>5</sup>

The first conference of rabbis of the reform movement in the United States was held in Philadelphia during November of 1869. Included in their statement of principles, the first such document issued by reformers in America, were sentiments of anti-nationalism:

The Messianic aim of Israel is not the restoration of the old Jewish state under a descendant of David, involving a second separation from the nations of the earth, but the union of all the children of God in the confession of the unity of God, so as to realize the unity of all rational creatures and their call to



moral sanctification... We look upon the destruction of the second Jewish commonwealth, not as a punishment for the sinfulness of Israel, but as a result of the divine purpose revealed to Abraham,...for the realization of the high priestly mission, to lead the nations to the true knowledge and worship of God...<sup>6</sup>

In November of 1885, the important Pittsburgh Conference was held to formulate a definitive platform of reform principles. The conference, called by Dr. Kaulmann Kohler, officially included anti-nationalistic theology within its platform:

We recognize ...the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope...We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state...

...We acknowledge that the spirit of broad humanity of our age is our ally in the fulfillment of our mission, and therefore we extend the hand of fellowship to all who operate with us in the establishment of the reign of truth and righteousness among men.<sup>7</sup>

This Pittsburgh Platform was the declaration most expressive of the early beliefs and attitudes of Reform Judaism. It represented however, such a radical break with various elements of traditional Jewish thinking, that more conservative members of the movement felt alienated and even rejected. As a matter of fact, the conservatives were so upset by what they held to be the destructive tendency of the Pittsburgh Conference, that they founded the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, for the training of more conservatively oriented rabbis than those being ordained by Hebrew Union College.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, the Reform rabbis in America went on affirming those ideals already put down in writing by their German and American predecessors. In 1890, at the first Convention of the CCAR, the rabbis affirmed "that the proceedings of all the modern Rabbinical Conferences...shall be taken as a basis for the work of this Conference." Thus early American Reform



Judaism was establishing a direct relationship going back to Brunswick, Leipzig, Philadelphia, and even as far back as to the Emancipation itself.<sup>9</sup> America was truly their Zion; Washington was truly their Jerusalem!

Established in the city of Detroit, The Conference has met in regular session every year since then. The site of the annual conventions changes from year to year. Nearly all rabbis ordained by the reform seminary are members of the Central Conference. The CCAR was organized by Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1903), who became the first president, and remained in that office until his death. About 30 members attended the first Conference Convention; 67 were present at the 1905 session. From its inception it has been noted in the *Philologist* the CCAR had gone on record as unequivocally in opposition to Jewish nationalism and political Zionism.<sup>10</sup> In 1896 the following resolution was presented:

Although it has been stated time and again that the Jews are no longer a nation, and they form a religious community only, yet this thought has not been thoroughly appreciated by the community at large. We will bear of the Jewish nation and the Hebrew people, and therefore this Conference feels itself called upon to declare more and more that there is no Jewish nation now, only a Jewish religious body, and in accordance with this fact, neither the name Hebrew nor Israelite, but the universal appellation Jew is applicable to the adherents of Judaism today.

The rabbis spoke out forcefully against Zionism during the decade of the 1890's. They felt the need to defend their position of anti-Zionism in sermons, speeches, papers and in the press. One reason for their anger, and if you will - defensiveness, was related to the fact that their position represented a minority viewpoint on the American Jewish scene at large. The leaders of Reform Judaism were engaged in a competition with a Zionist ideology that challenged the fundamentals of Reform theology. In addition these Zionists were challenging the hopes of Reform leaders that their movement would soon become the dominant force on the American Jewish scene. It must be understood that the



CHAPTER 1  
1889-1917

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"Although it has been stated time and again that the Jews are no longer a nation, and they form a religious community only, yet has this thought not been thoroughly appreciated by the community at large: we still hear of the Jewish nation and the Hebrew people, and therefore this Conference feels itself called upon to declare once more that there is no Jewish nation now, only a Jewish religious body, and in accordance with this fact, neither the name Hebrew nor Israelite, but the universal appellation Jew is applicable to the adherents of Judaism today."<sup>11</sup>

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Zionist forces were seen by the Reformers as a real threat to the existence of their movement. "Anti-Zionism was a response to a two-fold challenge - the threat of Zionism to the security of American Reform, and the threat of East European immigrants bearing the Zionist message."<sup>12</sup>

At the 1891 Convention of the CCAR, held in Baltimore, Maryland, Rabbi David Philipson presented a paper entitled "Judaism and the Republican Form of Government." In the paper, which was delivered as an address before the Convention, Philipson stressed his reasons for opposing the new Zionist movement. He viewed 'separation' and 'nationalism' as the evils so inherent in Zionist ideology. Jews, he asserted, ought to feel no need to be separate from the peoples of the world:

There is no such thing as a Jewish nation or a Hebrew people; the Jewish nation ceased to exist eighteen hundred years ago. There is no Jewish nation now, we are Jews in religion only... The idea of Jewish separatism is too widespread now. The Jews themselves may do nothing which shall tend to impress that thought more deeply on the minds of men. I believe it would be in place and proper for this conference here assembled to express its disapproval of that movement to declare to the world at large that in as much as it is a separatist scheme it has not the sympathy of the rabbis of the country. I believe this is due to the stand that Judaism and the Jews take in this country, being Jews in religion only, men like others in everything else. One more point. The great immigration of Jews into this country at present caused by the expulsion from Russia carries with it a great danger to Judaism in its relation to the republic unless proper steps are at once taken....

...Now Judaism wants no little Russia, no little Poland, no little Austria, no nationality here whatsoever except Americans .....Judaism is so thoroughly in accord with republicanism that it desires all its adherents to become imbued as soon as possible with free republican ideas. Therein lies their salvation. Therein lies the salvation of the world.<sup>13</sup>

Philipson was all too representative of the majority of the German Jewish establishment in America. Their attitudes and therefore, their actions, toward the masses of Russian and East European immigrants were suspicious and filled with antagonism. The American Jewish Archives published a study of the attitude of the American Jewish Establishment toward the great East European immigration, and it made the following



observations:

By the 1880's the migration of the East European Jews, due to the pogroms, had become a mass movement. These unfortunates swamped the relief agencies and created a problem for the older, established "German Jewish" community. Fearful of their own status, unaccustomed to spend large sums for philanthropy, the Americanized Jews viewed with trepidation the coming of these "Russian" masses with their orthodox folkways and their recourse to strikes and trade unions. The old-timers did not exert themselves to their fullest to help the newcomers financially or morally. They accepted the new immigrants with resignation, created temporary institutions for shelter and aid, furthered their "Americanization" linguistically and industrially, and attempted, unsuccessfully, to divert them from the old East Side ghettos into agricultural colonies. Yet...if the welcome accorded these immigrants here was not as generous as it might have been, it was still warmer than that given to any other group of immigrants by their former countrymen.<sup>14</sup>

Not all of the Russian Jews, however, wished to make America their new home. A small minority of the Russian and East European emigrants moved in the direction of Palestine as their new home. These men and women, organized in groups known as "Bilu", "Chovevei Zion," etc, were the first pioneers to actually take up residence in sparsely - populated Palestine. The Jewish Exponent took note of the not so insignificant work being done by these settlers in Palestine. In an editorial on June 20, 1890, Charles Hoffman wrote:

"The tendency in Russia toward Palestine colonization also progresses. We have no exact statistics telling of the annual number of Russian immigrants to the Holy Land, but we know that the passion to dwell there is still a ruling impulse among many Russian Jews, and in the past decade this has found expression in colonization schemes that have neither lacked in numbers nor in enthusiasm. "Chovevei Zion" and other societies have been formed, both throughout Europe and America, aiming, if not toward direct emigration thither, at least to help Russian emigrants from Russia to Palestine.....There are, moreover, signs of decided improvement in that land itself; a railroad is building between Jerusalem and its seaport, Joppa, of which great results are justly expected; building societies have sprung up in Jerusalem, and the price of land has risen. With this new and well-regulated state of immigration, not of beggars, of the old and decrepit, but of the young, the stalwart and the strong, who come to live and not merely to die in the land of their fathers, it would be rash indeed to say that Palestine is forever forsaken, or that it will not again become an important factor in the world's civilization."<sup>15</sup>



Immigration to Palestine was becoming a fact of life. Zionism was gradually growing as a movement. But the leaders of Reform Judaism were still adamantly opposing the movement. In 1895 a Conference of Ministers of various denominations took place in Cincinnati, Ohio. Rabbi David Philipson, responding to an article read by a Baptist minister entitled "Are the Jews to Return to Jerusalem?", said the following:

This notion that the Jews expect to return to Palestine is still a standing article of belief with our Christian brethren. They seem to be ignorant of the fact that one of the tenets of modern Jewish thought is the rejection of the modern belief in the return to Palestine. The Jews do not expect to return to the holy land of old. It has become an accepted tenet in modern Judaism that the Jews do not constitute a nation, but only a religious community. They have no political hopes or ideals other than those of the land in which they dwell. They are Americans in America, Englishmen in England, Frenchmen in France, and the like... The hope of a return to Palestine, was a firm belief of the Jews up to this century, the date of the emancipation of the Jews from the civil disabilities rested upon them in the various parts of the world. As long as they were excluded from the rights of citizenship in the states of Europe, they were truly men without a country. They were in the state, but not of it. So long as this was the case, it was not surprising that the hope of a future national existence in the land of Palestine should have burned strongly in their breasts. But as soon as the emancipation of the Jews was accomplished, this hope of a return began to wane, and soon it was repudiated altogether.....

...The rejection of the expectation of a return has involved a corresponding change in the interpretation of the dispersion of the Jews over the world. Not as a misfortune, but as a blessing, is the dispersion now looked upon. We feel that not as an expiation for wrong-doing did the Jews lose Palestine and were they cast far and wide over the earth, but that the dispersion was a stage in the providential scheme of the mission of the monotheistic people.<sup>16</sup>

At the same Conference of Ministers, the Baptist minister (referred to above) maintained that the restoration of the Jews to Palestine is progressing rapidly, and it is a very promising development indeed. Rabbi Isaac M. Wise, editor of the American Israelite, responded to the minister in the following editorial comment, which was entitled, "We do not go to Palestine.": "Let the Jew alone, you do not know much about him anyway. We in America are here to stay, we are not going to Palestine in spite of



all the discoveries you made in sacred Scripture. That is all fantastic speculation, after all, the constitution and the country of the United States are realities, stubborn facts. We give preference to facts."<sup>17</sup>

The Rev. Dr. Wise was the Rabbi of Cincinnati's Plum Street Temple, and one of the foremost ministers of Reform Judaism in America. His views on the subject of Zionism were unmistakably negative, and he expressed those views freely to a reporter in an article entitled, "The End of the World - The Jews Return to Palestine - Other Nonsense":

"As to the Prophets, they have been grossly misinterpreted by Christian preachers in order to make them prophesy the re-establishment of a Jewish empire in Palestine, such a thing never entered the minds of the Prophets. They stated in unmistakable language that the Jewish faith will eventually become the faith of the world, and their writings meant nothing else. They spoke of the future triumph of the Jewish faith and not of the Jewish Country, concluding with such statements as 'then the Lord will be King over all the earth and on that day God will be One, and His Name will be One.' This means the universal freedom of mankind, the reign of justice and purity and nothing else. It applies to the entire world, and not in any sense to Palestine or any other individual country.

"This talk about the Jews going back to Palestine is all bosh, and will never come to pass. Throughout the civilized world Jews would not go to Palestine to live. In fact, even big inducements could not get them to go, a few eccentric gentlemen excepted. Only about one-tenth of those who were driven out of Russia went to Palestine, and they went to that country, not because they were attracted there, but merely because they had to go somewhere, and went wherever they could find a home."<sup>18</sup>

Other Reform rabbis echoed similar anti-Zionist sentiments. This was truly the heyday of anti-Zionism in Reform Judaism. One could scarcely find a Reform rabbi in any part of the country, who lent his support to the cause of Zionism. Reform Judaism would remain monolithic in its opposition to Zionism for at least a few years to come. Baltimore Rabbi A. Guttmacher shared his strongly anti-Zionist views in a newspaper article entitled "The Jews and Palestine":

"It was but natural that during the Christian persecution and hatred the Jew longed for Palestine. But from the very day



that the Jew left the narrow lanes of the ghetto and entered the world with the rights of a human being, from that day all his efforts were bent upon his identifying himself with the nations among which he lived. The Jew of France is a Frenchman to the very core. The Jew who lives in Germany loves his fatherland and is ever ready to lay down his life upon the altar of his country. The Jew in America is an American. The aspirations of the American nation are the aspirations of every Jew who dwells in this beloved land. We invoke in our daily prayers the blessings of our heavenly Father upon the executive, legislative and judiciary branches of our government and prayer for the welfare and peace of the country and all her inhabitants....

"It is time that the world should know that the Jews no longer form a race, but only a religious community. Palestine has no charms for us who enjoy and breathe the air of freedom. The Jew does not look to Palestine as the future home of his children, but he hopes and trusts that, with the help of God, they and their children's children will dwell in this land, whose religious and civil freedom God may protect from fanaticism and demagogism."<sup>19</sup>

In the same issue of the American Israelite, Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger expressed his anti-Zionist feelings in an article entitled "Zionism":

"...the Messiah died when liberty came to the ghetto Jew, and Palestine became shadow land and the whole world, instead of bard districts became the Jews' habitation.

He continues:

"....Zionism is an unhappy doctrine born of the fear of persecution, not of the hope for redemption. It is the child of anti-semitism. It is the sentiment of people, who are either huddled together by the fear of out-breaks of fanaticism, or else impressed by the hopeless condition of numbers of Jews in their midst.

After mentioning the problems of Jews in Russia, Germany, Austria and England, he continues:

"Palestine for the Jews" - if that is the motto - does not mean the shaping of its policy by any other power. Zionism, we fear, relies too much on some such intervention for the realization of its dreams. "We in America, little as we are understood by our European brethren, have a nobler conception of this momentous question. With sentiments of profound reverence for the old sacred abode of our race, we believe that greater Israel needs the greater, wider world in which to demonstrate the deathless truths of Judaism. We are none the less Jews - good Jews - because we believe this great ideal to be misunderstood by the Zionists. Perhaps, - we are very willing to believe it - our advantageous conditions hinder us from thoroughly sympathizing with the preachers of the Jewish faith. But that would imply, then, that if our own conditions, untrammelled liberty, equality and toleration, were to prevail throughout the habitable world, the idea would be generally understood as we understand it. Then let us pray for the advent of such conditions everywhere. They will make a Jewish question impossible, anywhere, everywhere."<sup>20</sup>



Meanwhile, on the Zionist side of the fence, men who were in favor of the Jewish homeland in Palestine were waging their own campaign to convince American Jewry of the validity of their cause. The Reformers had been stressing the theological position that Judaism was a universal religion. The mission of the Jews, who were of course the bearers of this message, was to spread the universal religion of the great prophets of the Bible to every part of the world. The Jewish diaspora was crucial to the success of the worldwide Jewish mission.

The Zionist movement, on the other hand, can be seen as an outgrowth of the traditional Jewish longing for a return to Palestine. The Zionists would even allow for the secularization of this great part of the tradition of Judaism, if the return could somehow take place. The Zionists placed primary emphasis on the national rather than the religious character of Judaism. This secularism was the cause of early opposition to Zionism by various religious groups in American Jewry. Orthodox and Conservative groups insisted that a return to Zion be based on religious and spiritual principles. A secular Zion could simply not solve the Jewish question for these religious groups. Reform, however, did not only question the means which the Zionists were employing to achieve their goal, but rather rejected completely the very idea of a return to Zion.<sup>21</sup>

The greatest Zionist leader during the early years of the movement was certainly Theodor Herzl. Dr. Herzl wrote his monumental "Der Judenstaat" ("The Jewish State") in Paris during the summer of 1895, while he was still a correspondent for a Vienna newspaper. A year later, during the summer of 1896, Herzl was in England to gain support for the Zionist cause. He found himself squarely in the middle of the heated debate over Zionism which had engulfed much of world Jewry. Herzl was the guest of the evening at a dinner of the Maccabees, a London organization which



had been founded for the purpose of re-establishing the Jewish State in Palestine. Herzl made the following comments that evening, in an address entitled "The Jewish State":

The Jewish State is no longer the isolated dream of an individual, but rather shared by innumerable human beings, today, I know, and tomorrow the world will know, that the Jews wish to have a state wherein they may at last thrive as free citizens. Many seem still confused, to be rubbing their eyes and asking whether this is their dream or mine. We have said during so many many years "L-shono Ha-bo B-roo-sho-lah-yeem", and have grown accustomed to look on it merely as a phrase, as a sigh. Now it is suddenly at last to become a possibility. The Jews wish to be delivered from the dread of periodically recurring persecutions. For even in those countries where our brethren are not at present in a state of suffering, their happiness is not permanently secured... ..Smaller nations than ourselves have ventured to claim political proprietorship of a portion of the earth's surface. And because they were bold, because they possessed the spirit of citizenship, they gained what they asked. And our people, famous as it is unfortunate, our people, whose history is written in Holy Scripture, is not to be permitted to pronounce this wish! Cannot the Jewish opponents to the Jewish State understand that the mere expression of this claim gains us the world's respect? We have, least, an equal right with the others to demand a piece of land as the concrete expression of our national existence. We have won this right through sufferings unexampled in the history of mankind. A stream of blood has followed our march through the centuries. And our agonies would have been meaningless were they not born in the hope of seeing a revival of a Jewish State. Let us throw our Judaism aside like a tattered old garment, if we do not believe in a Jewish State!....The very men who laughed at our enthusiasm yesterday, will tomorrow be ashamed.

Although the comments of Herzl were published in his own American Israelite, Isaac Mayer Wise still viewed with disdain the political movement of the Zionists. He had however, begun to take notice of "Thomas Herzl [sic!] with his novel scheme of the 'Jewish state' in 1896, and had remarked that Herzl was in London...But later he contended that Herzl had met with no genuine degree of success in attempting to play the part of the modern Messiah".<sup>23</sup>

One man who had not yet emerged as being either an enemy or a staunch supporter of Zionism was Charles Hoffman, the editor of the Jewish Exponent of Philadelphia. Surely his neutrality on the issue,



coupled with a simultaneous desire to follow the right political and religious path, was representative of the mood of many Jews in America during the 1890's. Hoffman used his newspaper's editorial page as a sounding-board for his questions regarding the debate over Zionism. In an article in May of 1897, Hoffman asked a question by titling the editorial, "What Zionism may Accomplish?":

"Sometime ago in referring to the movement known as Zionism, we declared that it was a phenomenon to be observed; that our disposition in regard to it was like that of Moses with the burning thorn bush; to step aside and ascertain if possible what its true inwardness might be.

"Since that time the movement has continued to spread and has reached the shores of America, where it has become a real issue....

"...What then is Zionism? Probably as many different answers to this would be given as there would be persons to answer. One thing, however, might be found common to all definitions, that is, that in the land of Palestine was to be found the key to the Jewish question...

"...The movement, however, does not necessarily involve the establishment of an independent state nor the return of all Israelites to the Holy Land. We do not find that the plan justifies any charge of lack of patriotism; it does not imply that all Jews should pay allegiance to any ruler in Jerusalem. Whether a feasible plan can be solved upon; whether with modernization and reason colonization in Palestine may be successfully carried on; these are questions that experience and investigation can decide with perfect clearness and certainty."<sup>24</sup>

Just two weeks later, Hoffman's Exponent published a symposium of seven articles on the issue of "The Zionist Movement." Four of the

articles were written by rabbis. Rabbis Morais and Levy opposed Zionism.

Dr. Friedenwald gave a qualified endorsement to the movement, albeit with a criticism of the methods of Dr. Herzl. Finally, Rabbi Bernard Felsenthal gave a strong endorsement to the movement. Felsenthal was one of the few Reform rabbis who were committed to Zionism during the 19th century. As the rabbi of Chicago's Zion Congregation, he became actively committed to Zionism toward the end of his career. Felsenthal's article in the Exponent symposium was entitled "An Asylum For Oppressed Israel":



"I gladly comply with your request to express my views in regard to the movement of the Zionists.

"...Let me say right in the beginning that, to a certain extent and in a certain sense, I am decidedly in sympathy with Zionists....

"...I do not bother my mind with the question whether or not in a near or in a more distant future a Jewish State will be a possibility. For the present, I, for my part, have no other object in view, except that the Jews now living oppressed and persecuted be helped in reaching a better and a higher level of living. In my opinion, we shall for the present not have an independent Jewish State. So much seems certain to me. But suppose that in 50 or 100 years there would be such a Jewish State, - would this be such an unfortunate turn of events? In more or less civilized countries by far the larger part of the Jews would remain and would not emigrate to the new Jewish State. And instead of having an evil influence upon the status of the Jews in other countries, the existence of such a Jewish State would, on the contrary, be benefiting for the Jews in the Diaspora.<sup>25</sup>

The publication of Herzl's "Der Judenstaat" in 1895, and the plans to convene the First Zionist Congress in Europe during the summer of 1897, only served to deepen the rift between Reform and Zionism. Reform leaders were becoming more and more uneasy over the continued growth of immigration and Zionist fervor in America. Much of Isaac Mayer Wise's Presidential address was a concentrated attack on the Zionists, Theodor Herzl and the soon to be held Basle Congress. Wise's remarks did however, give support to non-political colonizing of Palestine, for the sake of a universalistic concern for the persecuted, of course. His address was delivered at the eighth convention of the CCAR in Montreal, on July 6, 1897. Part of his attack on Zionism follows:

"I consider it my duty also, Rev. Colleagues, to call your attention to the political projects engaging now a considerable portion of our co-religionists in Europe and also in our country, especially in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other large cities. I refer, of course, to the so-called "Friends of Zion," Chovaveh Zion, who revive among certain classes of people the political national sentiment of olden times, and turn the mission of Israel from the province of religion and humanity to the narrow political and national field, where Judaism loses its universal and sanctified ground and its historical signification. The persecution of the Jews in Russia and Roumania and the anti-Semitic hatred against the Jewish race and religion, as it still exists in Germany, Austria, and partly in France, roused among the persecuted and outraged persons the hapless



feeling of being hated strangers among hostile Gentiles. It was quite natural that this humiliating experience roused in their memory the glory of the past, when Israel was the great nation, the chosen people, and inspired in them the consolation, "we are the great nation yet." So the wronged man revenges himself on his oppressors generally with the pretense, "I am as good and better than you." Generally spoken it is true, the persecuted is always better than his persecutors. This experience roused in those outraged men and women the old hope of restoration, the reconstruction of the Hebrew nationality, as in days of yore. The first step in this direction was the colonization of Palestine with Jewish agriculturists. This, of course, found favor and support among all good people, not indeed for the sake of Zion, but for the redemption of the persecuted, and with the conviction, that those poor and neglected families can be redeemed morally and physically only by making of them honest and industrious tillers of the soil. Idealists and religious phantasts took hold upon this situation, and made of it a general restoration of the Jews, and their returning to the holy land, although the greatest number of Jewish citizens in the countries where they enjoy all civil and political rights, loudly disavowed any such beliefs, hopes or wishes;... At last politicians seized the situation, and one of them called Dr. Herzl, proposed to establish and constitute at once the Jewish State in Palestine.....However, all this agitation on the other side of the ocean concerned us very little. We are perfectly satisfied with our political and social position. It can make no difference to us in what form our fellow citizens worship God, or what particular spot on the earth's surface we occupy. We want freedom, equality, justice and equity to reign and govern the community in which we live. This we possess in such a fullness, that no State whatever could improve on it. That new Messianic movement over the ocean does not concern us at all. But the same expatriated, persecuted and outrageously wronged people came in large numbers also to us, and they being still imbued with their home ideas, ideals and beliefs, voiced these projects among themselves and their friends so loudly and so vehemently, that the subject was discussed rather passionately in public meetings, and some petty politicians of that class are appointed as delegates, we learn, to the Basle Congress, and in each of those meetings, as reported by the press, so and so many rabbis advocated those political schemes, and compromised in the eyes of the public the whole of American Judaism as the phantastic dupes of a thoughtless Utopia, which is to us a fata morgana, a momentary inebriation of morbid minds, and a prostitution of Israel's holy cause to a madman's dance of unsound politicians.... The honor and position of the American Israel demand imperatively that this conference, which does represent the sentiment of American Judaism minus the idiosyncrasies of those late immigrants, do declare officially the American standpoint in this unpleasant episode of our history.<sup>26</sup>

The special significance in Wise's remarks was the fact that this great leader of American Jewry was trying to comprehend the yearning for



national restoration in Palestine as a response to anti-semitic hatred and persecution in Europe. Yet he was unable to deal with this situation, and concluded that Reform would do best to have nothing to do with these Zionist Jews. He could simply assert that "this agitation on the other side of the ocean concerned us very little." Nothing however was proposed as a viable alternative to Zionism for Jewish suffering. Thus the Reform movement found itself isolated from the mainstream of worldwide Jewish opinion.<sup>27</sup>

The American Jewish community viewed with interest the events at the Central Conference convention in Montreal. The Jewish Exponent reported to its readers about Dr. Wise's speech against Zionism, and the strongly worded Conference resolution, which was unanimously adopted by the Committee on the President's Message:

"Your committee, to whom was referred that part of the President's message relating to Zionism, beg leave to recommend the adoption of the following resolution:

'We totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish State. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission, which, from the narrow political and national field, has been expanded to the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish Prophets. Such attempts do not benefit, but infinitely harm our Jewish brethren where they are still persecuted, by confirming the assertion of their enemies that the Jews are foreigners in the country in which they are at home, and of which they are everywhere the most loyal and patriotic citizens.

'We reaffirm that the object of Judaism is not political or national, but spiritual, and addresses itself to the continuous growth of peace, justice and love in the human race, to a Messianic time, when all men will recognize that they form one great brotherhood for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.'<sup>28</sup>

The First Zionist Congress at Basle, Switzerland, held in August of 1897, produced worldwide enthusiasm and headlines among Jews and non-Jews alike. Dr. Herzl outlined the plans of the Zionist movement for countless reporters and interviewers. The Jewish Exponent published some



of Herzl's remarks at the Congress:

"My plan is simple enough. We must obtain the sovereignty over Palestine - our never to be forgotten historical home.

"At first we shall send only unskilled labor, that is, the very poorest, who will make the land arable. They will lay out streets, build bridges and railroads, regulate rivers, and lay down telegraphs according to plans prepared at headquarters. Their work will bring trade, their trade the market, and the market will cause new settlers to flock to the country. Everyone will go there voluntarily, at his or her own risk, but ever under the watchful eye and protection of the organization.

"I think we shall find Palestine at our disposal sooner than we expected." 29

Dr. Gustav Gottheil, about to retire as Rabbi of Temple Emanuel in New York, was a supporter of Zionism. He was inspired and moved by the proceedings of the Basle Congress. Gottheil attempted, in writing, to put to rest certain fears on the part of American Jews who were still unsure of their feelings about Zionism. First, he stated that the Zionists have no intention of asking the Jews all over the world to leave their homes and return to Palestine. Secondly, he asserted that it is a misconception which sees in Zionism a danger to Jewish loyalty toward the countries in which they reside. Gottheil's article was entitled, "What Zionism Means," and excerpts from the article reveal the excitement which Basle had engendered in many Jews across the world:

"The wonderful and almost spontaneous response which Zionism has called forth in nearly every part of the globe in which Jews live has re-echoed in Basle, and has there received an impetus which will go far to the realization of those hopes and ideas for which it stands...

"We need a whole solution, not a half one; we need a permanent solution, not a temporary one. And that permanency can only be given by giving the colonists a political constitution; by so organizing them that they come as a factor in the comity of nations, where international obligations will preserve them intact. As I write these lines the figures of three persons rise up constantly before me. How our own Emma Lazarus would have sung the return of the Jews to life and to liberty! How George Eliot would have sympathized with such a movement as now thrills the Jewish people the world over! And how Disraeli would have seen the grandeur of the idea and have worked for it with might and strength." 30



Charles Hoffman seems to have solidified his views more favorably toward Zionism following Basle. The editor of the Jewish Exponent appears by this time, to be giving up his wait-and-see attitude of neutrality. His editorials have begun to reflect the positive value of Zionism for the Jewish people:

"The two good consequences of the Congress that we anticipate are a sturdier Jewish sentiment of solidarity, and a strong impetus towards colonization of Palestine. One thing seems clear, that the Zionist Movement in some shape has come to stay and play at least for some time yet a considerable part in Jewish affairs. Scorn and ridicule and earnest opposition have been unable to crush it. Mere frothy enthusiasm will not enable it to accomplish anything. The calm judgment of the Jewish people will eventually sift the wheat from the chaff and decide the fate of the Movement."<sup>31</sup>

Meanwhile, David Philipson and Isaac M. Wise were speaking out against Zionism more strongly than ever. It appears that these two men felt the need to expose the 'great' Basle Congress as having been nothing more than a farce. Dr. Philipson, Rabbi of the Mound Street Temple in Cincinnati, preached a sermon devoted to an attack on the Zionist movement. He said the following:

"The much heralded and much advertised Zionist Congress took place during the past week at Basle, Switzerland. The reports that have reached us thus far are very meager. That the Congress would not accomplish anything has been a foregone conclusion, since the ideas it represents are so utterly at variance with the real and true work of Judaism.....

"From the first there has been an antagonism even between the societies known as Lovers of Zion, whose avowed object it is to work toward a restoration of the Jews to Palestine, and Dr. Herzl, the head in front of the Congress. For, with the Lovers of Zion, the hope for the restoration has a religious foundation, Dr. Herzl's scheme is purely political. He is a Jew by race and has never been known to take the slightest interest in Judaism as a religion....

"All the talk of a Jewish State is idle. It means the turning back of history 2,000 years. The separate political existence of the Jews was only a preparation for the dispersion all over the world. That separate existence came to an end when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem 1800 years ago.

"The Jews then ceased to be a nation.. The nations work was finished. The people of the land became the people of the God-idea, and so the Jews have lived on in all lands witnesses of the belief that in them lay.....



..."Herzl and his confreres have furnished a mid-summer sensation, welcome indeed, to the press in the traditional season of dearth of news. The Jewish State is a chimera. Zionism, even as a religious movement, is spelling history backwards. Judaism, the experiment of monotheism, is not meant to be confined to one land; its mission is world-wide, penetrating into all the lands of the earth."<sup>32</sup>

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise also pounded away at the very integrity of the Zionists and their Basle Congress. According to an article in Wise's American Israelite, the rabbi was quoted by the New York Times as having made the following remarks:

"The ancient kingdom of Judea was overthrown by the Romans in the year 70 A.D. The entire country of Palestine was annexed to the Roman Empire. Its government was abolished, its surviving inhabitants become politically merged in the general population of the empire; Judea ceased to be a nation.

"The various attempts made at different times, beginning with the heroic Simon Bar Cochba in the year 130 A.D. to restore the Judaic nationality proved only so many failures. It is therefore self-evident that the Judaic nation, and Judaic nationality as well, are, and have been, extinct these 1,800 years....

"If facts are eloquent witnesses and prove anything, they prove, in this case at least, that the Jews do not wish to and will not go to Palestine; furthermore, that most of them, being citizens of this and other countries of advanced civilization approaching the ideals of Moses, want no Jewish State; would join none if the establishment of a State was possible. They will not separate themselves from the powerful organizations of the great nations of the world to set up a miniature statelet, a feeble dwarf of a government of their own in Palestine or in any other country. .... The truth of the matter is that there does not exist the barest possibility of purchasing any country, of forming and establishing a new government anywhere with the consent of the European powers or of securing the 400,000,000 to 500 million required for such an enterprise anywhere among Jews and gentiles the world over. Nor is there even the shadow of a possibility to get, among all the Jews in the world, within the next 10 years, 100,000 immigrants to go to Palestine to begin life anew under the precarious protection of a dwarf Statelet.

"Everything is possible in dreamland or in utopia. That Congress in Basle was a novelty, a gathering of visionary and impracticable dreamers who conceived and acted a romantic drama and applauded it all by themselves."<sup>33</sup>

The man who would eventually succeed Rabbi Wise as the President of the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati was Dr. Kaufmann Kohler. Kohler was already a staunch anti-Zionist as well as a defender of the universal



mission idea of the Jewish people. One of four participants in a symposium on Zionism held in Philadelphia in December, 1897, Kohler made the following critical comments about Zionism:

"Zionism is a romantic dream that can never be turned into practical consummation. Religious, economic and political conditions were incompatible with its accomplishment. Never will the great powers of Europe consent to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine, nor will the great religions appoint Jews as guardians of their sacred places. The narrow strip of Palestine can never support the many millions of Jews. ... The Mission of Israel was a spiritual one. The national idea has fallen into disrepute with leaders of Jewish thought. Zionism is a product of anti-semitism, and is not in accord with Jewish history, which points to the fact that the re-establishment of a petty State in the far-East would be the severest blow to Israel's mission - to proclaim the glory of God, and to be a priest kingdom." <sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, in June of 1898, Isaac M. Wise's editorial in the American Israelite was sounding Zionism's death knell as a politically viable force. Wise was prepared to allow the persecuted Jews of Russia and Rumania to flee to Palestine, in order to become farmers there. He was even encouraging financial assistance for the poor Jews. But Zionism as a political movement was obviously dying fast, wrote Wise:

"It may now be safely asserted that political 'Zionism' has practically ceased to exist. The handful of zealots who are still preaching it with Dr. Herzl at their head are quarreling among themselves and are losing in numerical strength every day. The 'Juden-staat' had ceased to be a thing hoped for; and the dream of re-establishing a Jewish theocracy in Palestine under the aegis of Turkey has dissolved into mist. What is left of Zionism has for its object to help Jews to leave the country with whose people they cannot assimilate, and to settle in Palestine as agriculturists, and to help them there until they are able to help themselves. This means of course the unfortunate of those countries where active persecutions are going on, namely, Russia and Roumania. This kind of Zionism will recommend itself to every good man, for even a little should contribute to it." <sup>35</sup>

1899 was a turning point year in the debate over Zionism within the ranks of the Reform rabbinate. The CCAR convention was held that year in Cincinnati, on March 13-18. One of the speakers against Zionism was Rabbi Henry Berkowitz. Berkowitz felt the need to speak out against the funda-



mental principles of Zionism, as they had been formulated by Professor Richard Gottheil, President of the Federation of American Zionists, in the following words: "We believe that the Jews are something more than a purely religious body; that they are not only a race, but a nation, though a nation without, as yet, two important requisites - a common home and a common language. We believe that if an end is to be made to Jewish misery and to the exceptional position of the Jews a new home must be supplied... We believe that the home of their fathers, Palestine, is the only place for such a home....this does not mean that all Jews shall return to Palestine." 36

Rabbi Berkowitz gave three basic reasons why he was not a Zionist: First, he does not believe that the misery of the Jewish people is hopeless; He still has faith in the triumph of justice in the world. Rabbi Berkowitz admits that three-fourths of the Jews of the world, in 1899, were living in bondage. But he says that the one-fourth of Jewry living in freedom, are living in the greatest freedom the Jew has experienced in nineteen hundred years! Second, he believes that the newer methods of organizations had begun to develop "practical, feasible and sensible" techniques for working toward the elimination of specific Jewish problems; by contrast, Rabbi Berkowitz sees Zionism as being "sentimental and chimerical;" and he believes the Zionists to be intentionally ignoring all these noble and generous enterprises currently going on in France, England and Germany, as well as in America; on behalf of our 'co-religionists': Third, and most important, Rabbi Berkowitz is not a Zionist "because Zionism makes race and nationality, rather than religion, ultimate and essential for Jews, who have no lasting claims for a separate existence excepting their religious mission." On behalf of this mission, Jews must be prepared to face the



prospect of martyrdom.<sup>37</sup>

Another speaker against Zionism at the Conference convention of 1899 was Rabbi Samuel Sale, who condemned Zionism as the antithesis of universalism. Zionists were criticized as visionaries who would be content to see the end of Jewry's universal mission:

"To my thinking, Zionism is a dead issue; it is hardly a fad that is worthy of passing notice, for it seems to have its main support from those who have lost all feeling for and relation to Judaism. Our co-religionists of this country especially have lost every sense of sympathy and understanding for this proposition. The American Jews are so intimately bound up with the history and destiny of our country, they love its institutions with such fervor and patriotism, and they are so wedded in mind and heart to the principles of right and freedom, which underlie our national life, that it seems to us to border almost on lunacy to ask us to give up our glorious birthright here for a mess of pottage elsewhere...The Jews, the world over, are merely a religious community, and they are held together by common religious ties, and for exclusively religious purposes. They neither constitute nor do they desire to constitute a separate national body any more than the Christians, who are scattered over the civilized world; and like these they are but one of the religious denominations which live under the protection of the state.

"The Zionists are prophets of evil. Despite periodical Jew-baiting, the cause of the Jew and Judaism has been steadily advancing. The light of humanity has been spreading wider and deeper, and the Jew holds a more exalted position to-day than ever before at any period of his history."<sup>38</sup>

The following week a most interesting editorial appeared in the American Israelite, praising the anti-Zionist presentations of Rabbis Berkowitz and Sale in the following manner: "At the Conference of American Rabbis held at Cincinnati last week, the unanimous opinion was against Zionism. When the chairman asked for someone to speak for Zionism, nobody came forward. The anti-Zionistic papers of Doctors Berkowitz and Sale were most heartily applauded by the audience."<sup>39</sup> The unanimous opinion of the Conference truly was against Zionism. Almost unanimous, at any rate. The 1899 Conference proved to be historical due to the events which followed the presentations of Rabbis Berkowitz and Sale. For the first time ever, the Zionist position was formally and unexpectedly presented before the



members of the Reform rabbinate in America. The solid monolith of anti-Zionism had been challenged for the first time, and would continue to be challenged thereafter.

Following Rabbi Sale's anti-Zionist address, Rabbi Joseph Silverman, First Vice-President of the Conference, revealed that he had been asked by the New York Federation of Zionists to invite someone to defend the Zionist side of the issue. The chairman then asked if anyone present would wish to take the floor in order to speak on behalf of Zionism. Only one member present was a Zionist, and he chose not to defend his position. Professor Caspar Levias then stated that he had not previously been invited to speak on Zionism, but he would have done so had he been asked. The Conference, after substantial debate, then took the unusual step of inviting Levias to prepare a paper which would be published together with the papers of Rabbis Berkowitz and Sale in the Conference Yearbook of 1899. It was actually against Conference policy to publish any paper which was not formally read before the Conference convention.<sup>40</sup>

Professor Levias wrote his paper, entitled "The Justification of Zionism," in 1899. He argued that even if we support the idea of a universal Jewish mission, the Jews themselves must be able to live out the "prophetic ideal" in a Jewish homeland before they can properly carry the message to the nations of the world.

Levias rejected the view that nationalism is totally evil. Instead, he substituted for the word 'nationalism' the term 'collective individualism'. And the best of individualism, Levias maintained, can be developed only in congenial society. The "Ghetto-Jew" would be an example of what happens to a human being subjected to uncongenial influences. The hostile spiritual influences of Christianity have continued to hamper our spiritual development. Levias continued:



"The hostility of Christianity lies in its very essence, and will only cease with the ceasing of Christianity itself; (I hope the reader will not confuse Christianity with Christians;) and this will prove to be too long a time even for an anti-Zionist. The only way, therefore, to develop the peculiar spiritual gifts of the Jew is to take him out of his Christian milieu....  
 ...There are only two alternatives, either you are a nation, or you have no mission. If you have no mission, you have no reason for wishing to stay in dispersion. Turn as you will, if you are consistent, you must become Zionists.<sup>41</sup>

Professor Levias also dealt with the Jewish paranoia or fear which was a cause for extreme Reform anti-Zionism. He wrote: "One of the speakers finished his address with the declaration: 'America is our Palestine and Washington is our Zion'...(But what was) the cause of these patriotic hysterics? It is the fear that our Christian fellow-citizens might deny our patriotism, or impugn our loyalty...(but) why should our loyalty be impugned? The best proof that Zionism does not impair our loyalty and patriotism was furnished by the present war. The greatest number of volunteers that have offered their services to the country of their adoption were Russian, Roumanian and Galician immigrants, avowedly all Zionists."

Finally Professor Levias responded to the charge that Zionism is simply impractical. He stated that since the Zionist leaders themselves did not expect instantaneous results, but anticipated that the re-establishment of a Jewish homeland could take several generations, the practicality of Zionism could not be evaluated at that time.<sup>42</sup>

Professor Levias' justification of Zionism has been called one of the masterpieces of early Zionist apologetic. It had little effect, though, upon the views of most of the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, as was noted by the American Israelite in an editorial published soon after Levias' paper appeared in the Hebrew Union College Journal:

"In the April number of the Hebrew Union College Journal, Pro-



Professor C. Levias presents a paper in which he argues very ably in favor of Zionism. He seems however to take his premises for granted, namely: That the professors of the Jewish religion the world over forma race, and one race only. The weight of the scientific opinion of today is that this is a fallacy and that the Jews are in all essentials, racially as well as nationally, homogenous parts of the nations, except possibly where artificial barriers have prevented complete amalgamation; as for instance, in Russia, Roumania, etc. The belief in this country, for instance, certainly is that a citizen is nonetheless an American because he is a Jew, and none the more because he is a Christian. Professor Levias starts by assuming the opposite to be true, but makes no attempt to prove the truth of his premises. Hence, the arguments which he bases on them, logical though they seem, are of absolutely no value."<sup>43</sup>

There were three supporters of political Zionism who appeared early in the ranks of the Central Conference, during this era of its most intense anti-Zionist fervor. They were Professor Levias, Bernard Felsenthal, and Max Heller. It took great courage to stand up for Zionism within the early Reform movement. Still these men helped pave the way for the great transitional period of the 1920's and 1930's, when the Reform movement would eventually abandon its anti-Zionist dogma.

Rabbi Felsenthal of Chicago's Zion Congregation lent his support to Zionism through speeches, sermons and articles. Felsenthal would castigate his fellow Reformers, and accuse them of being not only anti-Zionists, but even of working toward Jewish extinction and assimilation; as in this fiery message:

"We do not charge all the opponents of Zionism with consciously aiming at and working for the disappearance of Israel from the world. But this disappearance will become a sad fact, in case the Zionistic movement should, God forbid, turn out to be a failure. What is the gospel preached by the anti-Zionistic leaders of the masses? 'Assimilation!' But assimilation leads to amalgamation, and amalgamation leads to becoming absorbed, and becoming absorbed leads to becoming extinct, to total annihilation of Israel. We have no quarrel with those individuals who honestly think that mankind would best be served by Israel committing a national suicide. But there are still millions who differ; there are still millions who are not ready, or willing, to 'assimilate'."<sup>44</sup>

Although Levias, Felsenthal and Heller represented the Zionist camp in the CCAR, the Reform movement was still trying to maintain its position



of pure universalism, along with solid anti-nationalism. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the parent organization for all Reform congregations in America, met at Richmond, Virginia in January of 1899. The position of the UAHC still echoed that of the CCAR as far as Zionism was concerned, as one can see from the reports on the Richmond convention, which appeared in the American Israelite. The following resolution was adopted by the UAHC:

"The Union declares that it is - unalterably opposed to political Zionism. The Jews are not a nation, but a religious community. Zion is a holy memory, but it is not a hope of the future. America is our Zion. Here in the home of religious liberty we have aided in founding this new Zion, the fruition of the beginning laid in the old. The mission of Judaism is spiritual, not political. Its aim is not to establish a state, but to spread the truths of religion and humanity throughout the world."<sup>45</sup>

1900 was a year of great loss for the Reform movement in the United States. Its great leader and pioneer, Isaac Mayer Wise, died on March 26. Memorial services were held for Wise throughout the country. The American Israelite of April 5 was a memorial edition for Dr. Wise. A marble headstone over his grave notes the monumental accomplishments of his life.

"Rabbi of Plum Street Temple (K.K. Bene Yeshurun), Founder of the UAHC, CCAR and Hebrew Union College."<sup>46</sup> Isaac Mayer Wise remained, to the end of his life, a forceful opponent of Zionism. And although, for a short period, he appeared to favor Jewish colonization in Palestine, Wise reversed his position on this issue numerous times. As Melvin Weinman noted in the American Jewish Archives, Wise was a staunch opponent of Zionism and colonization throughout most of his life:

Because of his universalist concept of Judaism, Wise was never a Zionist. Impending political freedom in all lands would also do away with the need for a Jewish political state. Up to the time of the Russian pogroms in 1881, Wise was interested in making productive citizens of the poor in Palestine and in encouraging the migration of persecuted refugees to that land. From about 1880 to 1885, he favored the migration of the Russian Jewish victims to America. After 1885 he reversed his stand. He was not happy about their coming to the United States and now urged that the East European emigres go to Palestine and become farmers. In 1897, the year of



the first Zionist Congress, he reversed himself again, so that by 1900, the year of his death, he was definitely opposed to colonization as well as to statehood in Palestine.<sup>47</sup>

Wise's Junior Rabbi, Louis Grossman, took over the writing of Wise's weekly article in the American Israelite entitled, "The Week", following his death in March. One of the subjects on which Grossman maintained a consistency with Wise was that of the Zionist issue. We may note that Grossman was indeed against Zionism, as is evident from the following issues of "The Week" in the American Israelite:

"The Three Congresses at Basle and at London have been three too many, and the moral mischief that has been done by them has not lain in the exquisitely phanatic speeches alone that were delivered; for, after all, reforms are not made by speeches, even the most exquisite, and evils are not disposed of by oratory, but are rather intensified by them. ....

"We Jews are not agitators and we do not take naturally to campaigns. Judaism too is not a religion of "revivals," nor of revival meetings, and we will never achieve our emancipation, neither our political, nor our moral emancipation, such as Zionists<sup>48</sup> rightly desire, by means of Congresses and party organization.

"Zionism is gospel of separatism, and the anti-semites have not said worse things against us than these Jewish nationalists are saying when they declare that we Jews do not want to be part of the communities in which we are, but away from them.<sup>49</sup>

The death of Wise had varied effects upon the members of the Reform rabbinate. His passing may have created just enough of a leadership vacuum in the Central Conference of American Rabbis, allowing the Zionists to begin an even heartier fight to increase the small minority of Zionist Reform rabbis. A change can be noted in the intensity of the fight between the Zionists and the non-Zionists following Wise's death in 1900. The Zionists were fighting harder for their cause, and the anti-Zionists were defending their old, established status quo within the CCAR more ferociously than ever. At the meeting of the Federation of American Zionists' Executive Council in December, 1900, the Jews who rejected the Zionist cause were accused of treachery against their persecuted brethren. Rabbi Henry Illowizi made that accusation as he addressed the Assembly in the following



words:

"It can not be too often reiterated that Zionism does not imply a restoration of the Jewish people to their original home. No, those who enjoy elsewhere the benefits of human equality shall stay where they are. What must be the great, yea, the sacred cause of every conscientious Israelite is to provide a safe refuge for those of his brethren whose lives are embittered by a lot too hard to be expressed in words. In this respect Zionism reduces itself to the endeavor of affording help to bleeding humanity, and the Jew who declaims against it is guilty of a wrong that may without a stretch of propriety be placed next to treacherous desertion of a brother in distress....

"The plain truth is that the Jew in undisturbed peace and comforts has grown painfully indifferent to the agonies endured by his kindred elsewhere." 50

Charles Hoffman, the editor of the Jewish Exponent, had by now become at least a moderate supporter of the Zionist cause. He wrote an editorial in January of 1902, which in no uncertain terms, called upon any anti-Zionist Jew in America to search out the real reasons for his rejection of Zionism:

"Those who believe that Zionism, instead of curing the ills from which the Jews suffer in many centuries will intensify them, are justified in their opposition to it. But those who oppose it simply because its continued agitation and final success might injure them in the eyes of their neighbors by casting suspicion on their patriotism, their love of country and fealty to its institutions, are simply juggling with their consciences in permitting selfishness to override their sense of right." 51

Mr. Louis Edward Levy was the writer of an article entitled, "Jewish Immigrants". Mr. Levy noted with accuracy, and deep sympathy, the value of Zionism for the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia. He also reflected on why some Western Jews had been seemingly unable to appreciate Zionism's great worth for world Jewry:

"Meanwhile the broad gleam of hope afforded by the Zionist Movement, though seeming but scarcely to have become brighter, has at least not lessened during the past year. In the ghettos of Eastern Europe, and the great ghetto of the Russian 'Pale', especially, and in many a dark spots in other lands of the Dispersion, this hope is affording weary sufferers a larger reason for existence, without which the problem would seem useless of solution. For us who live in the radiance of modern enlightenment, under the



ægis of religious liberty and political freedom, the value of this Zionist hope is not easily appreciated, and the import of its realization scarcely understood. But for the Jews who yet live in the shadow of the middle ages, out in Russia, Roumania, Austria, the way east to Palestine is then nearest to redemption, and its goal is nearest to their hearts." 52

One of the writers who took notice of the early changes within the anti-Zionist American Jewish Community was Rabbi Julius A. Greenstone. Writing within a year of the death of Isaac Mayer Wise, Rabbi Greenstone pointed out subtle, yet significant, events which had taken place at Wise's own Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati:

"An ardent Zionist though I am, I still do not expect political Zionism to gain predominance with the American Jews. Zionism undoubtedly is gaining ground on the American soil more rapidly than could ever be hoped for by the most visionary of its followers. Not only does it sway the thoroughly national Russian Jew, but it is also gaining adherents among the foremost leaders of American Jewish thought. Gottheil, Felsenthal, Jastrow, Szold and many more of the older savants, who were the first in eliminating the national element from our ritual, have now openly identified themselves with Zionism. Even in the very institution where Reform Judaism is taught and expounded, there are professors who are heart and soul with the Movement, and recently a branch of a Zionist fraternity has been organized among the students of the Cincinnati College. Small though the number is, it is a tendency, a marked indication of a change that is coming on." 53

Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, of Chicago's Sinai Congregation, authored an article in 1901 entitled "The Jews in the Twentieth Century". The eminent Rabbi Hirsch, allowing for the possibility of a national Jewish homeland within the century ahead, threw down the crucial challenge before his Reform colleagues. His words must have been food for thought for many Reform rabbis who identified themselves as 'anti-Zionists':

"It is very likely that Zionism will not relent until its program is realized, unless anti-semitism ceases its fury. ....

"The Jews in Russia, Roumania, and the lower Danube will continue to propagate the doctrine of Jewish nationalism, and the possibility is not preposterous that before the 20th Century will have gone to its burial their dream of national restoration in Palestine will have come true.

"What about the Jews, notably in England and America, who will



not be provoked to share in this agitation for the re-establishment of Jewry as a political entity?

"They will have to draw the consistent conclusions of their position. If Judaism has ceased to be a national hope and destiny, it must be recast along the lines of a universal, ethical religion."54

The 1901 rabbinical convention was the twelfth meeting of the Central Conference. It was held during the month of July in Philadelphia. Rabbi Joseph Silverman, the President of the CCAR, found himself in the midst of a heated debate over Zionism within the ranks of the Conference. Silverman became involved in the controversy himself due to some of the remarks contained in his Presidential Message. He appealed to the CCAR to give money to Herzl and the Zionists, in order to acquire land in Palestine, and to establish colonies for the purpose of alleviating the misery of Eastern European and Russian Jews. The following are excerpts from Silverman's controversial message:

"Side by side with this intellectual achievement, which was, at first, only a dream, a chimera, another movement, of a different character, but of equal, if not greater, importance to Israel has, during the past few years, taken definite shape. I may somewhat surprise you when I say that I refer to the Zionist Movement. I am not unmindful of the fact that this Conference has set itself on record as being opposed to political Zionism - that is, to the founding of a Jewish State, but I also do not ignore the fact that we, at the same time, favored the colonization of Jews in Palestine. Since the adoption of both resolutions four years ago, Zionism has progressed in numbers, in importance, in influence and in its controlling ideas or projects. It does not confine its endeavors exclusively to the formation of a Jewish State, though that may still be its ultimate goal, but is content, at the outset, to establish large colonies of Jews in Palestine under the protection of the Turkish government and with the sanction of the other powers. This purpose, if successful, would have a tendency to relieve the congested Jewish quarters, in the first instance of Russia and Roumania and perhaps also of London and New York....

"Whatever may be the outcome of political Zionism, whatever may be the attitude of Jews, in general, towards the idea of a Jewish State, upon this, at least, all are agreed, that any experiment that will relieve the misery of our brethren in the Orient and make them self-supporting and independent, that will remove them from the Jewish Pale and decrease the causes that give rise to anti-semitism, is worth trying, whether it will cost 10 or a hundred millions of dollars.....

"I am not ready to ask you to endorse this view of Zionism, but I believe it is our duty to study every phase of the movement and be as



ready to espouse in it whatever is good, as we have been to condemn what we regarded as evil. I merely submit this subject for your consideration." 55

The Jewish Exponent gave lengthy coverage to the Central Conference debate over Zionism. The newspaper reported the excitement which had been engendered by Rabbi Silverman's message, and then presented a selection of the views of seven of the more prominent members of the Conference. The article was entitled, "Rabbis Discuss Zionism":

"The exciting episodes of the day grew out of the report of the committee on President Silverman's message in which the question of the attitude of the Conference on the subject of Zionism aroused considerable feeling. One of the recommendations of the committee was, 'the inadvisability of considering cooperation with the Zionists and other colonizational societies in the work of Jewish colonization.'

"The clause relating to the societies' attitude on Zionism evoked the most spirited debate of the three day session. The President explained that he had not in the message endorsed Zionism, nor proposed the colonization of Palestine. He asked that the words 'endorse Zionism' be stricken from the committee's report.

"RABBI PHILIPSON said that the Conference had at previous Conventions placed itself on record as opposed to Zionism and did not desire to change. There should be no hedging. If there were any cooperation it should be with the Jewish Colonization Society.

"RABBI SALE pointed out that the Conference was not at this time in a position to cooperate with the Zionists nor to assist in the colonization of Palestine.

"After some discussion, RABBI STEPHEN S. WISE, of Portland Oregon, was given permission to address the Conference on the status of Zionism. Dr. Wise said that he thanked God for an important question in Judaism. There were



six million Jews in Russia and Roumania who were unemancipated and who were living under intolerable conditions. Signs were abundant that Zionism was gaining in strength every day. He asked for a candid, honest study of Zionism, and pleaded eloquently with the Conference not to be indifferent to this question.

"RABBI MOSES, of New York, though opposed to Zionism, asked that the subject be treated in a reverential manner. There were, he said, many thousands of earnest, honest believers in Zionism. Any suggestion showing this body's friendliness toward a great movement would be, he thought, appropriate.

"RABBI GRIES, of Cleveland, was sorry the subject had come before the Conference. Very few had any clear idea what Zionism was. He doubted whether the Zionists themselves had a definite idea. He protested against the leaders of the Zionist Movement accusing the American Rabbis of forgetting the millions of Jews suffering in Russia, as though they were faithless in their obligations. The Conference, he said, should not declare itself for or against Zionism.

"RABBI BENJAMIN, of New York, made a strong arraignment of Zionism. He asked the members to remember that it was this Conference which had, under the guidance of its lamented President, Isaac M. Wise, come to the fixed conclusion that Zionism was a misleading of the poor members of the Movement.

"RABBI R. GROSSMAN expressed surprise that the Conference should listen to a report on Zionism. He protested against it being made the subject of a paper to be read before the Conference, and thought the work of the Alliance Israelite was far more worthy of support ....

"After some further discussion, the Conference adopted the following: Concerning the suggestion of the President, that we consider the subject of colonization as proposed by the Zionists and other Societies, such as the



Alliance Israelite, Anglo-Jewish Association, etc., we recommend that a committee be appointed to study the subject of colonization and all its phases and report to our next Conference." 56

No concrete action however, was ever taken on the proposal to aid the colonization societies in Palestine. But the Zionist rabbis sensed that they were indeed making some progress within the CCAR. If rabbis as prominent as David Philipson and others supported the efforts of a Jewish colonization society, then perhaps there was some hope for Zionism and the Reform movement. Still the signs were primarily negative. The 1902 CCAR convention at New Orleans heard no official report on Zionism. Furthermore, the Conference felt the need to "condemn Zionism and reaffirm the previous utterances of the Conference on the question (Montreal, 1897)." 57

The Jewish Exponent ran a weekly column in the early years of the twentieth century entitled, "Our New York Letter". For two weeks the column's sub-caption read: "Dr. Silverman and Zionism." The December 5, 1902 article, while critical of the CCAR President, also showed the trap in which Rabbi Silverman now found himself - between the anti-Zionists and the Zionists both. Apparently Dr. Silverman could neither win nor lose on the hot issue of Zionism:

"Rev. Dr. Joseph Silverman has had a variety of experiences in his handling of the Zionist question, and ought next to tell which hurts the least, the attacks of Zionists or anti-Zionists. At a recent meeting of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, he was roundly criticized for venturing to suggest in his presidential message that Zionism was worthy of consideration. Apparently he has now determined otherwise, and for this he is denounced by the Zionists." 58

Only two weeks later, the December 19 issue of the Exponent carried another attack on Rabbi Silverman within the "New York Letter" column.



This time however, Rabbi Silverman was criticized for taking a position which was too "reform" for the ultra-Zionist editors of the newspaper:

"Having repudiated and denounced Zionism, Dr. Silverman proceeded on Sunday to give 'his' solution of the Jewish question. Naturally enough he took hold of the other horn of the dilemma and espoused the cause of assimilation in everything - but religion; an exception not so easily made as he thinks. As for the Jews in the lands of persecution, let them not be cowards, and run away; let them stand their ground and be martyrs. It's a good thing to be a martyr. So says Dr. Silverman." 59

The pressure being exerted upon Reform Jews to support Zionism was growing. Literature, pamphlets, speeches and newspaper articles were devoted to coercion of Reform Jews and rabbis to embrace the Zionist cause. An interesting example of one man under such pressure was Rabbi Maurice H. Harris of New York. Rabbi Harris was an anti-Zionist for many years. When it appeared to some as though he was changing his ideas on the subject, the editors of the Exponent blew up the news in their "New York Letter" column of January 23, 1903. Though the rabbi's position on Zionism was anything but fixed at the time, the sub-caption of the column was entitled, "Why Dr. Harris is now a Zionist":

"Rev. Dr. Maurice H. Harris has reconsidered his attitude towards Zionism and now declares his allegiance to this cause. He based his newly formed conviction on the new manhood that a revived nationality would impart to the Jew, and also to the relief from congestion that it would afford to our large cities in the abatement of future immigration. Waiving aside the question of the practicability of the Movement, his other difficulty is that it places the Jews along side of the Moslem Turk, and he would rather have them in America or England. Yet, Judaea is preferable, because the



sentiment connected with it makes its barren hills mean more to the Jew than any land on earth." 60

The above example of a pressure tactic on a Reform rabbi may be only one example of shoddy journalism. But the Exponent was not the only newspaper to 'encourage' Reform rabbis to support Zionism, and to 'condemn' them when they did not. In 1901, the Federation of American Zionists launched its official monthly journal, The Maccabaeian. It was to be a journal devoted to various facets of American Jewish life. But with Zionist editorial figures emerging, such as Jacob de Haas and Louis Lipsky, the journal was destined to become one of the leading Zionist publications in America.

Naomi W. Cohen has researched the impact of The Maccabaeian in America from 1901 - 1914. The journal clearly favored Jewish nationalism over the idea of a universal Jewish mission. Reform Judaism was attacked by the journal primarily because of its concepts of Jewish universalism and anti-Zionism. An issue of The Maccabaeian rarely appeared without some attack on Reform Judaism. Naomi Cohen made some interesting observations regarding the journal's bitter animosity toward Reform Judaism:

"Reform was attacked on the grounds that it aimed for complete assimilation and betrayed the essence of Judaism. Specifically, the charges were that Reform was only present-minded, born to justify the political emancipation of German Jewry, and deficient in 'sincerity, genuine piety, and manliness'. To underscore its disapproval of Reform's universalist teachings, for several months The Maccabaeian ran a separate page on Reform activities under the heading 'Among the Mission-Jews'... Political Zionism, on the other hand, though drawing sustenance from the traditional yearning for a return to Palestine, was more of a secular movement, a child of nineteenth century nationalism. Like Reform, it provided emancipated Jews with a compromise formula between modern mores and Jewish loyalty. The ultimate issue between the two missionary movements was secular nationalism vs. universalist religion. Zionist criticism of Reform on religious grounds was chiefly a means of discrediting the anti-nationalists in the eyes of more traditional Jews, for The Maccabaeian conceded that had Reform accepted the concept of Jewish national group life, it would have condoned even its repudiation of the Torah." 61



Indeed such pressures were beginning to take their toll on Reform's absolute anti-Zionism. A more modified position began to take shape not only within the Conference, but within individuals who had at one time been staunchly anti-Zionist. The 1905 Conference convention met in Cleveland, Ohio, and the Presidential message of Rabbi Joseph Krauskopf contained more of a non-Zionist sentiment rather than an anti-Zionist one. Although he went to great lengths to reassure the Conference that he did not see Jews as a nation or a race, he did convey an understanding of Zionism's worth for Eastern European and Russian Jews. Though he recognized that Judaism was not national, neither was it solely religious:

"An equal contradiction of fact it would be, were we to deny that even at this very day the desire to return to the land that once was their own is strong, in such countries as Russia and Roumania, where the Jew has not yet obtained equal rights with his fellowmen, notwithstanding his having been a law-abiding, tax-paying, military-serving subject for centuries, where he is still treated to exclusive laws and to degrading discriminations; where schools and colleges, the professions, and the higher callings are still closed to him; where Kishineff massacres and Gomel outrages are of frequent occurrence; where the mere fact of being a Jew awakens hatred and invited insult; where the Jew has but the alternative between the loss of self-respect by becoming a convert to the dominant faith, or suffering degradation and misery by continuing faithful to the religion of his fathers."<sup>62</sup>

Krauskopf's openness though was still not shared by a majority of the membership of the Central Conference. A striking difference of opinion between a Conference President and his own organization is evident from the report of the Committee on the President's Message of 1905. The committee report was a rebuke of the President's expressed views: "While the president naturally desired to emphasize the fact that persecution and ostracism made and make for the so-called exclusiveness of the Jew, the committee feels impelled to re-emphasize the fundamental truths that the real bond of union among Jews is the historic consciousness of being a priest people among the nations, and that his birth imposes upon the Jew the mission to witness



to and to work for the realization of the kingdom of the one God, which implies one humanity." <sup>63</sup>

Even with the Conference's strong record of anti-Zionism however, President Krauskopf underscored a principle of personal freedom over the power of the Conference to dictate opinion - or to penalize dissenting members. The Conference, while often expressing collective judgment on a given issue, represented only a consensus of opinion, and not legislative authority. As far back as the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885, the rabbis reserved the precious right to dissent from any Conference statements or opinions. Now this principle was eloquently reiterated in 1905 by President Joseph Krauskopf, who declared: "It is in this wherein lies the strength of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, and the promise of its future. It is and will continue to be merely a deliberative and advisory assembly, not an ecumenical council, convened for the purpose of establishing creeds and dogmas, of fixing forms and ceremonies, and making compliance with them obligatory and differences from them heretical." <sup>64</sup>

Herein lies the greatness of American Reform Judaism at least with regard to the great debate over Zionism. Due to the principle of personal freedom over Conference dogma, it was possible for individuals, and even for the entire Conference, to eventually reverse itself on a given issue. As Rabbi David Polish and others have observed so perceptively, when the Conference had the power to dictate anti-Zionist views, or to exclude Zionists from membership, it chose not to do so. In the years of debate and struggle which lay ahead, "the tide would shift toward Zionism because freedom of conscience had been preserved." <sup>65</sup>

Kaufmann Kohler was appointed the successor to Isaac Mayer Wise in 1903. The new President of the Cincinnati Hebrew Union College was opposed to any Zionist sympathies within the school program. His writings, speeches and



letters all show him to have been a rabid anti-Zionist. A letter in the files of the American Jewish Archives, from Dr. Kohler to the President of Congregation Berith Kodesh of Rochester, New York, shall serve as an illustration of Kohler's stand on Zionism. The letter is dated May 3, 1907, and it reads as follows:

"Let me extend to you and your Board of Trustees my sincere thanks for the Resolutions passed on April 7th approving of and supporting my endeavors in defence of the principles of American Reform Judaism against a pernicious Zionist propaganda at the Hebrew Union College. Our dear mutual friend, Dr. Landsberg, has no doubt, by this time, informed you that the good and righteous cause triumphed at the last meeting of the Board of Governors, and the sacrifices brought by Dr. Landsberg in coming here twice were not made in vain.

With sincere regards, 66  
Yours, Dr. K. Kohler"

The "endeavors in defence of the principles of American Reform Judaism" to which Dr. Kohler makes reference occurred earlier in the same year in which the above letter was written. The Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College had just accepted the resignations of three of the finest professors at the college - Henry Malter, Max L. Margolis, and Max Schloessinger. All three men were avowed sympathizers with the Zionist movement. Earlier in Kohler's initial years as President of the college, several other faculty members imbued with Zionist sympathies had departed from the college scene rather abruptly. Judah L. Magnes resigned his position in February, 1903. The Zionist leader, Louis Lipsky, claimed that he was forced to resign his position because he held Zionist views. Similarly, the Zionists charged that Caspar Levias, who taught at the College from 1895 to 1905, was forced to leave because of his Zionist opinions. But the incidents which aroused the greatest furor were the resignations of Professors Malter, Margolis and Schloessinger in late 1906 and early 1907.<sup>67</sup>

David Polish maintains that these professors had been dismissed by President Kohler "ostensibly because they were Zionists." Referring to



this incident, Polish notes that Max Heller, a contemporary, wrote that "as a Zionist...you are an outlaw and like the ex-professors, must be disciplined."<sup>68</sup> But others have not dismissed the matter so lightly. Dr. Michael A. Meyer, Professor of History at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, has investigated the 1907 incident thoroughly. Meyer concludes that "their resignations cannot be explained by reference to any single cause. At least three factors played a role in the dispute: money, personalities, and Zionism."<sup>69</sup>

That the three professors were strongly pro-Zionist is clear. The Boston Advocate of February 22, 1907 contained a rather remarkable article entitled, "Professor Max Margolis." It was the text of a letter defending his position at the Cincinnati College, and offering his active cooperation for Zionism. The letter was addressed to Dr. Harry Friedenwald, President of the Federation of American Zionists, from Professor Max Margolis of the Hebrew Union College, and it reads in part:

"My full reason for avowing Zionism, presented in a systematic manner, is as follows:

1. I am convinced of the centrifugal tendencies of the Antipodal movement, which, if carried out logically, may result in absorption. It is true, the instinct of self-preservation is stronger than logic. As soon, however, as this instinct is raised to a conscious thought, it will express itself in Zionist tendencies. Zionism is merely an explicit statement of what is latent in every Jew 'not prejudiced by knowledge'.
2. The movement which stands for denationalized Judaism is, on the one hand, rooted in the now obsolete cosmopolitan notions prevalent at the end of the 18th century, and on the other hand a belated imitation of the Christianizing sects of the 1st century. ....
3. The truer nationalistic conception of Judaism is that it is a cult of history. Christianity is individualistic, Judaism collectivistic.....Christianity may superimpose itself upon the nations, and, in theory at least, disregard their existence; for Judaism the religious life and the national life are one. And for a collective, corporate influence upon the nations of the world, we need a geographical map..
- ... 5. Zionism means to me above all, orientation. It reasserts the prophetic conviction of the indestructibility of Israel. 'If the ordinances of the sun by day, and of the moon and stars by night, depart from before Me, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation from before Me forever.' Zionism proclaims that in the going back to Jewish life and Jewish ideals and Jewish hopes lies our salvation. ... In all matters affecting Jewry, Zionism will take a leading part. We stand for the whole of Jewry, and not for a part thereof..."<sup>70</sup>



Just one month later, the Boston Advocate carried the front-page news that Professor Max Margolis had resigned from the Hebrew Union College. "The tender of the resignation," reported the Advocate, "resulted from friction between Professor Margolis and President Kohler over the question of Zionism." <sup>71</sup>

Were the three professors dismissed because they held Zionist views? There appears to be more involved in the issue than just superficiality. Naomi Cohen has noted that Kohler had already complained about the insubordination of Malter, Schloessinger, and Margolis prior to the actual incidents of late 1906 and 1907. <sup>72</sup> Also she maintains that the resignations of the three men may not have been a united gesture, as had been maintained by much of the pro-Zionist press in the country. As a matter of fact, Cohen has stated that Malter's motives for resigning in December, 1906, concerned matters of tenure and salary. Therefore it was only in connection with the resignations of Schloessinger and Margolis that the Zionist charges against the College could be based. <sup>73</sup> And in those two cases, there seems to be more than just Zionism involved, although that issue may indeed have played an important role in the resignations.

In particular, the resignation of Professor Margolis caused a tremendous uproar on the campus of Hebrew Union College. Two students resigned from the college because they felt that Margolis' Zionist opinions had been discriminated against by the administration. Furthermore, Cohen notes that President Kohler "himself discussed the issue publicly as concerning the dangers of Zionism at the Hebrew Union College. Since the aim of the college, according to Kohler, was to inculcate the specific religious views of Reform, it was necessary to prevent a Zionist professor from twisting and distorting the grand universal teachings of the prophets and sages of Israel or of the Pentateuch with the view of turning them into crude and nationalistic utterances." <sup>74</sup>



Margolis felt that his personal freedom of opinion had been tampered with by the administration. He maintained that he had never brought the subject of Zionism into his classroom, and he further claimed that Kohler had denied him freedom in teaching because he was a Zionist. Margolis quoted President Kohler as having stated that "as a Zionist I could not be entrusted with the teaching of Biblical Exegesis at the College." In addition, Margolis' contention that he never brought Zionism into the classroom was corroborated by twenty-five of his students, in a letter to the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College, dated March 19, 1907. The letter, written on the stationery of the college, reads as follows:

Cincinnati, O. March 19, 1907

To the Board of Governors of the Hebrew Union College:-

Dear Sirs,

In view of the report current that Dr. Max Margolis has discussed Zionism while teaching at the Hebrew Union College, we, the undersigned, who have had the good fortune to study under him, deem it our duty to state that Dr. Margolis has never, in any way, discussed Zionism in class, but, on the contrary, has always sought to avoid any such discussion.

(Signed): Joseph I. Gorfinkle

Samuel Thurman

Horace J. Wolf

Felix A. Levy

William Reisz

Sam Schwartz

Aaron L. Weinstein

Jacob Pollak

Arthur B. Bonnheim

I. Isaacson

H. Buchofski

David Rosenbaum

J. Blau

H. Rosenwasser

J. Singer B. Laas

George Fox

Leo B. Hexter

Elkan C. Voorsanger

Morris S. Lazon

Emanuel Jacobowitz

L. D. Gross

M. Hoffman

Charles B. Latz

Benno Leon 75

Currently there are scholars, like David Polish, who see the issue as having been linked to differing attitudes toward Zionism. Others, like David Philipson, a member of the College Board of Governors at the time, saw the resignations as stemming from disloyalty and insubordination on the part of the professors rather than Zionism.<sup>76</sup> Michael Meyer views the causes of the resignations as having been three-fold: money, personalities and Zionism. An editorial in the Boston Advocate, while sympathizing with



the Board of Governors in accepting the resignations of the three professors, also took note of an atmosphere of turbulence beginning to take hold at the Hebrew Union College:

"Many of us have treated the Hebrew Union College with some indifference; many of us have treated Zionism in the same way. Now these two things - a college and an idea have come together, and there seems to be more than the usual 'storm in a teacup,' brewing. Drs. Margolis, Malter, and now Schloessinger, have resigned their professorships because they have been denied 'Lehrfreiheit.' There seems to be a simple enough view of the situation. The Cincinnati institution is a college of Reform Judaism, and Reform Judaism having set itself officially against Zionism, Zionist teachers are not to be tolerated in the college. The professors knew their positions, and Dr. Kaufman Kohler, as principal, is right in his interdict, and their resignations are acceptable.....

"Truly, everyone can sympathize with the governors of the college. If they refuse three resignations, they destroy the influence of Dr. Kohler; if they accept the resignations, they have made martyrs of 3 men of culture and scholarship, who, because of his martyrdom, will be surrounded by a host of friends who must fight their cause in order to make good their position in Zionism."

Not only the Hebrew Union College, but the entire Reform movement was in the throes of 'more than the usual storm in a teacup'. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, still on record as an anti-Zionist organization, installed as its President in the year 1909 the strongly pro-Zionist Rabbi Max Heller. Rabbi Heller (1869-1929), a native of Prague, was honorary Vice-President of the Zionist Organization of America from 1911-1929. He sought to achieve an ideological balance between Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism. How ironic that the fifth President of the CCAR to be elected to that position following Isaac Mayer Wise was an unequivocal Zionist.<sup>78</sup> In his President's Message to the 1911 St. Paul-Minneapolis CCAR convention, Heller attempted to show that Jews were a religion and a people. One could not be divorced from the other. In what were somewhat mildly Zionist tones for the forceful rabbi, Heller made the following comments:

"In addressing a rabbinical convention it would almost seem presumption to labor the patent truth that religious teaching and religious example are both the outstanding achievement of our past and the sole justification of our survival, the cement of every loyalty that holds us together. Yet, as an ardent Zionist, who



has always avowed his convictions as such without hesitation or reserve, I owe it to you and myself to forestall some of the misunderstandings that haunt the popular mind in this connection. In my view and to my feeling the religious life must be the crown and summit of any full-blown culture; the real point of divergence between Zionism and anti-Zionism can not be the question as it is sometimes crudely put, whether we are a religion or a race, but whether we shall achieve our religious mission as a people scattered to the four corners of the globe, or as a nation upbuilding a typical culture upon its ancient soil. Upon the fact of the religious nature of our mission, there can be no difference save between extremists, either of nationalism at the one end, or of assimilationism at the other." 95

The years between 1910-1920 saw the number of Zionist Reform rabbis increase gradually. Although the intensity of the anti-Zionism felt by the majority within the CCAR did not diminish, it is clear from the remarks of these men that they realized that they were fighting more and more of a defensive battle as the years progressed. Consider the nearly hysterical diatribe of Rabbi Leo M. Franklin (CCAR President, 1919-1921) at the March 7, 1914 dedication of a Temple in Birmingham, Alabama:

"Whatever the east may have given us, it is to the west that we look for our inspiration. Not toward Palestine the land of memories, but toward America, the land of promise, our lodestar points. Zionism, that fungus growth upon the trunk of Judaism, is not only a misrepresentation of the Jew's history, but as well a misreading of his destiny. The realization of the Zionist's dream would be the saddest day in Jewish history... But there need be little fear that this hallucination of the Zionist will ever become reality. It is at best - or at worst - a spark of hope that has for the moment inspired the discouraged sons of Israel in the lands of their oppression. But alas, the hope that it spells for them turns only to hopelessness, and the refuge which it pictures shows itself upon nearer approach to be only a disappointing mirage." 80

Rabbi David Philipson, the eloquent anti-Zionist of Cincinnati, did not reduce his hyperbolic sentiments either. Speaking at a meeting of rabbis in Baltimore, Maryland, Dr. Philipson continued to insist that internationalism alone will enable the Jews to retain their place among the nations. Yet his remarks reflect the increasing feeling of defensiveness which had begun to affect the anti-Zionists:



The protagonists are being last to scorn. Our claim that Israel is an international community is being held up to ridicule. We are told that only by drawing ourselves off from our fellow inhabitants in the land in which we live as a separate nationalistic group can we perpetuate Jewish life.....

But that we will not do. We internationalists, basing our claim on what has been Israel's task in the world, taking our stand on the religious, idealistic interpretation of history, whereof we believe Israel presents the most striking symbol; as over against the materialistic interpretation whereof the present war, the apotheosis of nationalism, is the climax - we internationalists, despite all the frightfully distressing days through which we are passing, must hold our rudder true, feeling that the mists will disappear before a re-arriving sun. <sup>81</sup>

The American Israelite also reflected a changed mentality on the part of the anti-Zionists. In March, 1916, the newspaper carried an article by Rabbi William Rosenau, President of the CCAR from 1915-1917. Rosenau, an outspoken anti-Zionist, said nothing that was new or revealing in his statement. But instead of referring to Rabbi Rosenau as an anti-Zionist, the Israelite headlined the article, "Zionism from the Standpoint of the Non-Zionist"! <sup>82</sup>

As the anti-Zionists displayed signs of increasing defensiveness, the Zionists became more and more assertive. In April, 1915, the Eastern Council of Reform Rabbis met in its annual convention at Temple Emanuel of New York City. The rabbis refused to openly support Jewish nationalism. But the remarks of President Maurice H. Harris, who was evolving into being a supporter of Zionism (unlike the Maurice H. Harris of 1907 who criticized 'Zion' as nothing more than a noble thought), caused a divisive discussion within the group. Rabbi Harris made the following perceptive observations:

"Many of the Rabbis of the liberal school have modified their views on Zionism. The worst fears have not been realized; the unexpected has happened. We are beginning to understand that the continuance of the Jews as a people favors the perpetuation of Judaism as a faith. If Zionism deepens the Jewish consciousness, it may be a step to deepening the Jewish conscience.  
"We cannot be wholly indifferent to a Movement that has made so strong an appeal to so large a number of our brethren, many of whom had become estranged from the synagogue. We intensely believe that Israel has yet a great mission to fulfill in the world. Let us then not reject any Movement that may seem to promote it." <sup>83</sup>



At the twenty-seventh annual convention of the CCAR in 1916, a symposium on "Religion and the Jewish Child" was held. One of the speakers in the symposium was Rabbi Abba Hiller Silver, a man who was to become one of Reform Judaism's greatest contributions to the Zionist movement. Forcefully, yet with great eloquence, Rabbi Silver spoke out in defense of Zionism, or any other cause which might serve to intensify and strengthen Jewish communal life:

"We must realize that there are certain cultural movements among our people which, while they touch, like a tangent, the circumference of the synagogue at some one point, do nevertheless possess a vision and an extension of their own. Blind, indeed, is he who in a spirit of theologic intolerance would suppress these evidences of the inner strivings and agitations of the soul of our people. It is not the logical soundness of these new tendencies and movements which should recommend them. Rather is it their functional value as spiritual and emotional dynamics that render them of value to us. These movements, be they Nationalism, Political or Cultural Zionism, the renaissance of Hebrew or Yiddish literature, the aesthetic revival which is seeking expression in a new Jewish art; these movements and others, I say, are valuable in so far as they intensify Jewish communal life, charge it with new energy and thrill it with new purposes. They should be welcomed as so many more dikes against the onrushing tides of assimilation. All these movements and tendencies, all these loyalties and aspirations can remain discordant notes in our life or they can with sympathy and tolerance be welded into a great spiritual symphony." 84

The 1917 CCAR convention took place in Buffalo, New York, from June 28-July 4, 1917, just four months before the issuance of the British Government's Balfour Declaration, supporting a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Buffalo convention may be seen as the end of the era of monolithic Reform anti-Zionism. The Conference was torn by a debate over the President's Message, and the report by the Committee on the President's Message. The Zionists officially put the Reform movement on notice that hereafter the Zionist position would become a formidable, albeit still a minority presence, within the Conference and within the movement as a whole. President William Rosenau, still a 'non-Zionist', opened the 1917



convention with the following 'anti-Zionist' statement, juxtaposing nationalism versus religion:

Another movement, which in my judgment is calculated to suppress the religious vitality which Judaism should manifest, is one not making itself felt from without, but rather from within the camp of Israel. I refer to Jewish nationalism. I am not here to quarrel with Zionists. Mine is only the intention to declare that we, as rabbis, who are consecrated to the service of the Lord, whose lips are to guard knowledge and from whose mouth the people are to seek the law because we are messengers of the Lord of Hosts, have no place in a movement in which Jews band together on racial or national grounds and for a political state or even a legally-assured home. Upon us rests the obligation to take up and sound unremittingly the keynote to which the Jew has ever given expression. The religious Israel, having the sanctions of history, must not be sacrificed, to the purely racial Israel of modern planning. If it is sacrificed, the religious demand of the Jews of our age, apart from other considerations, cannot be satisfied. The time has come for this Conference to publish the statement that it stands for an Israel whose mission is religious and that, in the light of this mission, it looks with disfavor upon any movement the purpose of which is other than religious. 85

The debate then erupted over a portion of the report by the Committee on the President's Message. It became the majority report, and the controversial section read as follows:

We herewith reaffirm the fundamental principle of Reform Judaism, that the essence of Israel as a priest-people, consists in its religious consciousness, and in the sense of consecration to God and service in the world, and not in any political or racial national consciousness. And therefore, we look with disfavor upon the new doctrine of political Jewish nationalism, which finds the criterion of Jewish loyalty in anything other than loyalty to Israel's God and Israel's religious mission.

Leo M. Franklin  
David Alexander  
Henry Berkowitz  
Hyman G. Enelow  
Solomon Foster  
Louis Grossman  
Joseph Krauskopf  
Joseph Kornfeld  
Clifton Harby Levy  
Alexander Lyons  
Isaac Landman

Harry H. Mayer  
Morris Newfield  
David Philipson  
Chas. A. Rubenstein

Marcus Salzman  
Samuel Schulman  
Joseph Stolz  
Abram Simon  
Joseph Silverman  
Samuel Sale

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The minority report was presented by Rabbi Max Heller, and it sought to distinguish between the idea of Israel's universal mission and the desirability of Diaspora life. Most important however, was the resolution's



rejection of any innate incompatibility between Zionism and Reform. The minority report continued the following resolution:

Inasmuch as Reform Judaism does not dogmatize on the geographical habitat or political status of the Jew;  
 Inasmuch as Reform Judaism does not insist on the dispersion of the Jews as an indispensable condition for the welfare and progress of Judaism;  
 Be it Resolved, that there is nothing in the effort to secure a publicly and legally safeguarded home for Jews in Palestine which is not in accord with the principles and aims of Reform Judaism. <sup>87</sup>

A second minority resolution was presented by Rabbi Louis Kopald. It made the important observation that Reform congregations were also divided on the issue of Zionism, and he called for the vital concept of freedom of conscience to be affirmed within the Conference. <sup>88</sup> Many rabbis were participants in the debate which ensued. The speakers were Zionists, anti-Zionists and moderates. Rabbis Rosenau, Schulman and Philipson condemned Zionism. Rabbis Wise and Heller maintained that the Zionists might soon come to feel unwelcome in the Conference, and they warned against forcing Zionists out of the CCAR. Rabbis Calisch, Deutsch and others were non-Zionists, who urged that the Zionists' right to freely voice their opinions within the Conference be scrupulously safeguarded. <sup>89</sup>

Finally, a substitute resolution was offered by Rabbi Stolz, which was adopted by a vote of 68-20. The Stolz resolution recognized the legitimacy of differing opinions over great issues. It stressed the need for Jewish unity; and instead of directly attacking Zionism, it opposed non-religious interpretations of Judaism. The resolution read as follows:

In view of the present conditions in American Israel, the President has deemed it of urgent importance that the Conference at this time puts itself on record in regard to the nationalistic movement among Jews. Your Committee recognizes that a difference of conviction regarding this question exists among our own members, as well as among the Jews of America in general, even as differences of opinion regarding most important questions have always existed in Israel. Your Committee, therefore, recommends that the Conference reaffirm its traditional position that the essence of Israel as a priest-



people consists in its religious consciousness and in the sense of consecration to God and his service to the world. And that, therefore, we must and do look with disfavor upon any and every unreligious or anti-religious interpretation of Judaism and of Israel's mission in the world.

It furthermore recommends that at a time of universal conflict and suffering, such as the present, it is of prime importance that the Conference emphasize not the differences that divide us, but those sacred principles which all Jews hold in common, and those great tasks which it is our paramount duty at the present moment to promote and perform together for the alleviation of human suffering and the healing of the Jewish people. <sup>90</sup>

Rabbi Stolz himself acknowledged that the resolution was not acceptable to all of the rabbis present at the committee meeting. And two rabbis had their votes recorded as "opposed to any action whatsoever on the subject of Zionism." <sup>91</sup> But the resolution did preserve the unity of the Conference at a crucial moment in its history. Furthermore, the legitimate presence of the Zionist rabbis was now established. In principle the anti-Zionism of the Central Conference of American Rabbis remained, but it was less intense, and it now stood in confrontation with an increasing Zionist minority. The minority was increasing in size and strength.

The early Reform leaders had been social idealists and political optimists. In the face of crisis after crisis in American and Jewish life, they held onto their fervent messianic hopes. But as World War I erupted, they could no longer close their eyes to the realities of world history. Spokesmen for East European and Russian Jewry now stood within the very ranks of the Reform rabbinate. If events had shaped early Reform, so events now reshaped it no less. The Balfour Declaration would signal the end of a monolithic creed of anti-Zionism within American Reform Judaism. <sup>92</sup>



## CHAPTER II

1917-1937

The end of World War I and Great Britain's issuance of the Balfour Declaration symbolized great gains for the world-wide Zionist movement. The Turks had been crushed by the Allied powers, and it appeared likely that British rule over Palestine would soon put an official end to the harsh Turkish sovereignty. Zionists throughout the world were in a euphoric mood. They were celebrating their successes of the moment.

Reform Judaism, meanwhile, was becoming more and more torn between the anti-Zionist majority and the ever-increasing pro-Zionist minority. Within the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College, Reform Jews were questioning long-held ideas about Jewish nationalism. The Hebrew Union College had just ordained two men who were spokesmen for the Zionist cause, James G. Heller and Abba Hillel Silver. Furthermore, the College was admitting students for the rabbinic program who were committed Zionists.

One such student to be admitted to the Hebrew Union College was Leon Fram, the Founding Rabbi of Detroit's Temple Israel. Fram was a staunch supporter of Zionism who was admitted into the College in 1915, and ordained a rabbi in 1920. Rabbi Fram recalled, in an interview, his motivations for becoming a Zionist, which went as far back as his pre-high school days. He attributed his strong love of the Jewish nationalistic cause to his upbringing in the Orthodox Jewish environment of East Baltimore, Maryland. Fram recalled how he became attracted to the Zionist society of early twentieth century Baltimore:



Zionism appeared to be a very positive, definite philosophy--something to work for. And as I recall, it is remarkable. What was Zionism at that time? It was the merest dream. I had no contact with Jews who were living in Palestine. And there was certainly no world news that was favorable to Zionism. But I was at the age when young men form ideals . . .

I was very much fascinated by the personality of Theodor Herzl. And I went about the city--at that time you raised funds for Zionism by selling Herzl stamps--and I went around from house to house in the Jewish section of East Baltimore, and really wore my feet out. My feet still hurt from the steps I climbed! I disfigured my feet really by selling Zionist stamps--making pennies for the Zionist movement. It was just something that took hold of me. There it was, and it never let go . . . In that environment, the people that I was most attracted to were the people who were Zionists. And from them I conceived that fire, that loyalty, that devotion. 93

Rabbi Fram then recalled that it was none other than the fiery anti-Zionist leader, Rabbi William Rosenau of Baltimore (CCAR President, 1915-1917), who inspired him to enter the Hebrew Union College and study for the rabbinate. Fram praised Rosenau, however, for although he was an anti-Zionist at heart, he never argued about Zionism with any of his young disciples. Fram remembered how he chose to seek out the rabbinate for his career:

Rabbi Rosenau of Temple Oheb Shalom was one of those Reform rabbis who could be flexible. I believe formally he always voted with the non-Zionists or anti-Zionists, but he could be flexible, and he could say a good word for Zion. So he was every now and then invited to deliver lectures on Jewish history by the Zionist Organization. And so he was a congenial personality on the East side of Baltimore . . .

When I graduated from high school in Baltimore . . . I took a liking to chemistry, and I won a scholarship to study chemistry at Johns Hopkins University, where there was also a Department of Semitic Studies. Rabbi Rosenau was a member of the faculty. Occasionally I visited his class and became acquainted with Rabbi Rosenau, and evidently he took a liking to me, because he came to me one day . . . and he said to me: "Look, Leon, you're studying chemistry. Now chemists are in abundant supply.



The world isn't crying out for you as a chemist. But Reform rabbis are in short supply--they are needed--and you have the background, you have the education that could take you into the Hebrew Union College and graduate you as a Reform rabbi. And you'd have a career all ready for you." And he persuaded me . . .

So I dropped chemistry, and I began to prepare for the College. And of course, I have an idea that despite Philipson's opposition, the fact that Rosenau--one of the most important Reform rabbis at that time--supported me, got me into the College, I'm sure. And Rosenau . . . achieved the reputation of being the most effective recruiter for the Hebrew Union College . . .

. . . (Also) Rosenau never argued Zionism with us . . . He had several of us (students) come to his house at 7:00 in the morning . . . Between seven and nine o'clock he taught us Talmud. He went over a 'blatt Gemara' with us. That's how dedicated he was.<sup>94</sup>

The great irony of the situation was that Leon Fram, who would soon become a spokesman for Zionism within the Reform Movement, was recruited for the Hebrew Union College by Rabbi William Rosenau, a leader of the anti-Zionists. Although he is not certain, Rabbi Fram suspects that David Philipson did vote against his entering the College, based on Philipson's opposition to Zionism. Rabbi Fram recalled the uncomfortable exchange he had with Dr. Philipson during his College admissions interview in Cincinnati, Ohio. The year was 1915:

Dr. Philipson, a member of the Admissions Committee, said to me: "Mr. Fram, you're a Zionist--you admit it--and the Hebrew Union College is devoted to a universal concept of Judaism. Now if you come to the Hebrew Union College, you would only come to be in constant trouble. So why don't you just apply instead to the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York, which is all Zionist?" And my reply to him was simply: "I am a Reform Jew. I believe in everything about Reform Judaism, except its attitude toward Zionism. And I think I would like to work it through, to express this viewpoint. And I hope that the College can be broad-minded enough to let someone who loves Reform Judaism become a rabbi, even though he doesn't agree with you on this particular point . . ."



. . . And at that time already, evidently David Philipson was in the minority. The rest of the Admissions Committee evidently favored me, so I was admitted. But I'm sure that Philipson voted against me . . .

. . . The rest of the Committee wasn't really pro-Zionist, but it was liberal-minded. It was willing to take a chance on a young man who was a Zionist . . . (Ironically enough), afterwards David Philipson and I became friends! . . .

. . . Silver and Heller had already broken ground for me at the College, but the student body was divided. Kaufmann Kohler was at that time the President of the College, and he was very definitely an anti-Zionist. And you could tell by the sermons delivered by the students in the Chapel. There were the students at whose sermons Kaufmann Kohler smiled radiantly--these were the anti-Zionists. And there were the students at whose sermons Kohler frowned--they were the Zionists . . .

. . . There was almost an equal division. And Zionism was a constant theme of the sermons. It was the predominant theme of the students' sermons. They were thinking all in terms of whether they were Zionists or anti-Zionists . . . So virtually every sermon delivered in the Chapel by a College student was either pro or anti-Zionist. . . .

. . . In my time there was also a middle body of students who tried to maintain neutrality. I imagine even Jake Marcus was one of those . . . They were interested in other matters. They didn't want to be committed to one side or the other. They were interested in other things, and on Zionism they were neutral and awaiting developments. Of course, the development everybody awaited was Adolf Hitler. He changed the atmosphere for everybody, including the students at the College (who were not already committed to Zionism by the 1930s) . . .

. . . Hitler converted everybody. By that time, men were completely converted to the cause of Zionism. There was nowhere for the Jewish people to go but to Zion. The alternative was destruction . . . The Holocaust answered all arguments, stilled all opposition to Zionism. Any opposition to Zionism became a suicidal position . . . History vindicated the Zionist position.  
95

Certainly Adolf Hitler would put a virtual end to anti-Zionism within Reform Judaism. But Hitler did not become the Chancellor of



Germany for another sixteen years following the promulgation of the historic Balfour Declaration. The Declaration caused a great stir in the Jewish world. On November 2, 1917, the Right Honorable Arthur J. Balfour, the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, sent a letter to Lord Rothschild. The letter contained the following sentence, which has come to be known as the Balfour Declaration:

His Majesty's Government views with favor the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.<sup>96</sup>

The issuance of the Balfour Declaration forced into national and international attention the great division between the Zionists and the anti and non-Zionists. "To the Zionists the Declaration became a summons to all of American Jewry for support of a noble and practical cause, worthy of international sponsorship. To the anti-Zionists it was a challenge that called for the mobilization of all their forces to battle against what they considered a calamity for Judaism."<sup>97</sup>

The monthly Maccabaeon, publication of the Federation of American Zionists, devoted its December, 1917 issue to the Balfour Declaration. Under the banner heading which read, "The Vision Come True," columns of comments by leading Zionist personalities were printed. Its editorial comment stated, in part: "Today Herzl is exalted. The world acclaims the living spirit of our immortal leader."<sup>98</sup>

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, one of the leading Reform Zionists, and Chairman of the Provisional Zionist Committee, declared the following:

It has come to pass--the day long wished for in all its momentous and farthest-reaching consequences to Israel and the world. Zionism was. Zion is about to be. The declaration of the Right Honorable



James Balfour on behalf of the British government has transferred Zionism from the field of national aspirations to the realm of political facts. Not in centuries has any word been spoken of equally vital consequence to the well-being of Israel. The British government, true to a policy of 200 years of sympathy with and friendship for the Jew, leads the way in indicating to its allies and to the world that the day has come for the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and that it will use its best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object . . .

It is to be taken for granted that opposition to Zionism is ended. Whatever some Jews may heretofore have thought and said about the Zionist hope, they face a fact which cannot be controverted nor annulled. . .

. . . The doors of the Zionist organization have never been shut even to those who kept themselves outside of the Zionist organization. If anything, the doors are to be wider open than ever before. It is our business to forget who was or was not a Zionist or an anti-Zionist before this time. The time has come to put away the memory of difference and division in the past, and to welcome the service and helpfulness of every Jew who recognizes that this is the hour of Jewish destiny.<sup>99</sup>

Rabbi Max Heller of New Orleans (CCAR President, 1909-1911) was another Zionist Reform rabbi who contributed to this special issue of the Maccabaeon. Like Stephen Wise, Rabbi Heller also called upon those who still were anti-Zionists to climb aboard the Zionist bandwagon of history. But his remarks were more sharp than those of Rabbi Wise.

Rabbi Heller stated the following:

. . . They (the nations of the world) will see in the resurrection of the Jewish Nation the righting of the most ancient of the wrongs of despotism. The world has been tending all these years towards such a consummation. The last to be convinced will be the snobs and autocrats in our ranks, but they also are bound to fall in line.<sup>100</sup>

Apparently some anti-Zionists heeded the calls of men like Rabbis Wise and Heller. One anti-Zionist weekly publication, the Jewish Tribune, modified its position after President Wilson sent an open letter to



Rabbi Wise endorsing the Balfour Declaration. Furthermore, many 'non-Zionists' received with "subdued satisfaction" the Balfour Declaration, namely the members of the American Jewish Committee, of whom a large percentage were anti-Zionist Reform Jews. After the issuance of the Declaration, many of the lay members of the Committee "took a more favorable view towards Zionism."<sup>101</sup>

A number of anti-Zionist Reform rabbis, albeit a small number, actually abandoned their anti-Zionism after the Declaration was issued. One such rabbi was Hyman G. Enelow, who would serve as President of the CCAR during the years 1927-1929. In one of his sermons in 1918, Rabbi Enelow said:

We ought to put a stop to disputes about Zionism and anti-Zionism . . . in the name of Reform Judaism. Israel is greater than Zionism, and Palestine more important than parties. Let us unite for the common good. It is because of divisions and disputations, the Rabbis tell us, Jerusalem was lost; let us not permit a similar cause to keep us from restoring it. . .

. . . Rabbi Enelow's statement "Reform Judaism is not bound up with anti-Zionism" became a guiding principle to many Reform Jews.<sup>102</sup>

With all the excitement over the Balfour Declaration, the Reform Movement was still determined to stay on record as officially opposed to political Zionism. There was, however, some movement away from rigid anti-Zionism on the part of the Conference President, Rabbi Louis Grossman. Grossman was shifting his position from anti-Zionism to non-Zionism. In his President's Message of 1918, Grossman acknowledged the Balfour Declaration as "a document of great importance." He also viewed the colonization of Palestine as a valuable opportunity for world Jewry. Then he outlined problems that he felt the Zionists had



not yet solved. Primarily he saw difficulties in the Zionist hopes for independence being based upon the permission of other powers, as in the case of the Balfour Declaration.

Grossman's moderation therefore represented a departure from his earlier anti-Zionism. His words were perceptive and even conciliatory at times. In a rejection of his moderation, the Committee on the President's Message expressed appreciation for the Balfour Declaration as "an evidence of good-will toward the Jews," and then went on to reject the idea of "Palestine as a home-land of the Jewish people."<sup>103</sup> The text of the resolution, which was adopted by a nearly unanimous vote of the Conference, is as follows:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis notes with grateful appreciation the declaration of the British Government by Mr. Balfour as an evidence of good-will toward the Jews. We naturally favor the facilitation of immigration to Palestine of Jews who, either because of economic necessity or political or religious persecution desire to settle there. We hold that Jews in Palestine as well as anywhere else in the world are entitled to equality in political, civil and religious rights but we do not subscribe to the phrase in the declaration which says, "Palestine is to be a national home-land for the Jewish people." This statement assumes that the Jews although identified with the life of many nations for centuries are in fact a people without a country. We hold that Jewish people are and of right ought to be at home in all lands. Israel, like every other religious communion, has the right to live and assert its message in any part of the world.

We are opposed to the idea that Palestine should be considered the home-land of the Jews. Jews in America are part of the American nation. The ideal of the Jew is not the establishment of a Jewish state--not the reassertion of Jewish nationality which has long been outgrown. We believe that our survival as a people is dependent upon the assertion and the maintenance of our historic religious role and not upon the acceptance of Palestine as a home-land of the Jewish people. The mission of the Jew is to witness to God all over the world.<sup>104</sup>



One rabbi was outraged by the Conference's response to the Balfour Declaration. Rabbi Max Heller felt the need to deplore the resolution cited above. In a fiery letter to the American Israelite, Heller stated in part:

. . . Could you believe it? A Rabbinical Convention thanks a great government for the reopening of Palestine. What do they find to thank for? The 'facilitation of immigration,' in other words, the opening of a storm-shelter, and the prospects of equality. What kind of Rabbis are these? Immigration to Palestine, to them, is mere stress of economic necessity or flight from persecutions; the things they look for in Palestine are no more than safety and public rights. Is Palestine, then, to these Rabbis, a mere stretch of country? A 'geographical term?' A valuable livelihood opportunity? Does not one single stimulating memory attach to it? Not a spark of inspiration? No particular hope for a higher future? Have these gentlemen ever heard the expression: 'the Holy Land?' Has the term holiness any associations for them? . . .

. . . As a member of the Conference, I beg the right publicly to deplore what I consider the unworthy response which a majority of the Convention has chosen to make to a historic offer. I cannot speak for my Zionist brethren within the Conference, from whom I have no mandate, and who may prefer to take joint notice of this important matter; speaking for myself, I feel humiliated that the official body of the American Reform Rabbinate should have met with (what seems to me) so prosy and pretty and selfish a spirit an occasion so unique in history. . . .105

Rabbi Heller's sentiments were the bold expression of a Zionist rabbi frustrated by the actions of his colleagues within the Central Conference of American Rabbis. What must have added to the sense of frustration felt by Heller and the other Zionist rabbis was the call by the anti-Zionists, led by David Philipson as chairman, for more extreme measures to combat the growing challenge of political Zionism. A committee met in Chicago on July 2, 1918, during the Conference convention week, calling for the convocation of a special conference of



prominent Jewish leaders. The purpose of this special conference would be to discuss political Zionism, and to formulate active plans for combating it. The special conference was discussed further at meetings held during September and October, 1918. But in the end, the conference never got off the ground, "owing to a number of occurrences which have taken place since steps towards issuing a call for such a conference were begun."<sup>106</sup>

The 1920 convention of the Central Conference was held in Rochester, New York, from June 29-July 5. Another major confrontation took place between the Zionists and the anti or non-Zionists. The Zionist minority in the Conference was gradually increasing in size, and it was also becoming increasingly articulate. The anti-Zionist majority view was still prevalent, but efforts were being made with the conscious intent of placating and conciliating the minority.

In the year 1920 the League of Nations' San Remo Conference granted a Mandate over Palestine to Great Britain. This news was greeted by Zionists and Jews in Palestine with great joy and hope for the future. But the anti-Zionist Rabbi Leo M. Franklin, CCAR President from 1919-1921, had turned down the invitation from the Zionist Organization of America to send a delegation from the Conference to a meeting in New York City on May 9 and 10, 1920, in celebration of the San Remo events.<sup>107</sup>

In his President's Message at Rochester, Franklin explained his refusal to send a CCAR delegation to the New York meeting. He said that he had refused the invitation because the Conference had already taken a position on the issue at hand. He quoted the resolution on the Balfour Declaration adopted by the Conference at its 1918 convention. But he also



stated that he believed the Conference would cooperate in any moves to rehabilitate Palestine, in order to make it not only a "refuge for the down-trodden Jew, but a place where a fuller expansion may be given to the spiritual genius of the Jew." He asked that the Conference endorse the sentiments expressed in his Message. That request brought about a majority and a minority report, the former signed by fifteen rabbis, and the latter signed by two. In addition a heated debate took place within the ranks of the Conference over the two reports. The majority report which was adopted by a vote of fifty-eight to eight, approved of President Franklin's remarks.<sup>108</sup> The report stated the following in

part:

We endorse the action of the President in declining the invitation of the Zionist Organization of America to appoint a delegation to participate in the Extraordinary Convention of delegates representing the membership of the Zionist Organization held in the city of New York, May 9 and 10, to celebrate the issuance by the San Remo Conference of a Mandate over Palestine to Great Britain.

We rejoice, indeed, at the present decision of the San Remo Conference to give to Great Britain a mandate over Palestine in line with the Balfour Declaration. But, we hold today what the Conference declared about the Balfour Declaration two years ago. We do not subscribe to the phrase in the declaration which says "Palestine is to be a national home land for the Jewish people." We believe that Israel, the Jewish People, like every other religious communion, has the right to live, to be at home, and to assert its message in every part of the world.

With confidence in the free institutions of Great Britain, we rejoice in and recognize the historic significance of such a British Mandate for Palestine, in that it will offer the opportunity to some Jews who may desire to settle there to go there, and to live full, free and happy lives. And if facilities are offered for an appreciable number to go there from lands in which they suffer from religious, political



or economic persecution they may be enabled so to shape the communal life that, inspired by the hallowed associations of the land in which Israel's Prophets announced world-redeeming ideas, they may become a great spiritual influence.

While we thus rejoice, we do not, however, admit that this historic event is what it has been called, the Geulah or the Redemption of Israel. Convinced that the mission of the Jew is to witness to God all over the world, emphasizing the religious function of Israel, and rejecting any assertion of Jewish nationality, which it has long ago outgrown, we hold that Israel's Redemption will only be realized when the Jew will have the right to live in any part of the world, and, all racial and religious prejudice and persecution ended, Israel will be free as a religious power and integral part of all nations to give world service. . . .

. . . In the present circumstances we believe that while nothing Jewish is alien to our Jewish hearts, and that while we are ready to help in the work of rebuilding Palestine for some Jews, we reemphasize the view of Jewish life for which our Conference stands-- that Israel is not a nation, but a religious community; that Palestine is not the homeland for the Jewish People, but that the whole world ought to be its home.<sup>109</sup>

The proponents of the majority report argued that the report was a balanced one, with concessions to the Zionists, and a growing recognition of the historical realities in the world. They pleaded with the Zionists not to introduce a minority resolution. But the debate was bitter, and the pleas of men like Rabbi Samuel Schulman went unheeded. Rabbi Schulman declared the following:

Let us brush aside all personalities. Let us consider non-existent all that was said preceding this debate. Knowing human nature, it was for that very reason that almost on my knees I begged the gentleman who brought in the minority report not to bring in a minority report, "For," I said, "no one expects you to sign the majority report as a public man, known as a Zionist. You can vote against it. But there is no compelling necessity for you to bring in a minority report and bring up this debate for the fourth time." . . .



. . . The facts prove that the majority report was not conceived in any spirit of the old aggressive anti-Zionism, but is a genuine desire to do something for Israel. . . .

. . . Is it not time that the partisan spirit should end? That is what this report means. It says to America, to Israel, to the world, "We will do all we can for those Jews that have to go to Palestine." We even say that if they go in sufficient numbers they will become a great spiritual influence. What more do you want? Is that an obscure object, an uncompromising, reactionary attitude? I think this Conference has taken a great step forward. It states clearly the position of American Jewry. . . .

. . . You must adopt this report. You cannot do anything else. And if you send this out to the world, the world will say that the Central Conference of American Rabbis has not only maintained its high standard and traditions, but it has pointed a path of statesmanship, wisdom and genuine love of Israel to that organization which has been claiming, as a monopoly, that it alone can work for Israel.

Paradoxical as it may seem, the partisan Zionist organization stands today in the way of a union of Israel for the practical work of doing anything for Palestine. That is the meaning of this report, and that is the motive that animated me.<sup>110</sup>

Rabbi Schulman's pleas were thoughtful and conciliatory. But Rabbis Max Heller and Horace J. Wolf were unimpressed. They still felt obliged to offer a substitute resolution. Therefore their minority report stated, in part:

. . . This Central Conference of American Rabbis must perceive that conditions annihilate theories. Truth and justice have not changed; but solemn duties are arising out of inexorable circumstances.

Now that Palestine is to be, by world consent, a national homeland for our people, our duty is, first of all, to lift our hearts in fervent gratitude to the mysterious Providence which is guiding the Jewish people out of its wildernesses into the Promised Land; then to convey the expression of our own warm appreciation to those human agencies; the Zionist Organization, the British Government, the Entente Powers and President Wilson, who have been instrumental in bringing

within the next decade, changes would take place gradually within



about this consummation; to honor the memories of those no longer with us who have fought and suffered for the realization of our longings of almost two score centuries; lastly, to call, as earnestly as we can, upon our people that they shall take up, in a spirit of fervid loyalty and steadfast hope, the delicate and difficult tasks which now await us.<sup>111</sup>

In spite of the trend away from "the old aggressive anti-Zionism" within the Central Conference, the position of the Hebrew Union College was still dominated by the intransigent anti-Zionism of President Kaufmann Kohler, and the Board of Governors of the College. The Board of Governors appointed a committee which included Dr. Kohler, to report on the action taken by the Supreme Council of the League of Nations in awarding a Mandate over Palestine to Great Britain. The committee's task was "to define the position of the hundreds of thousands of American citizens, who are Jews in religion and Americans in nationality." According to an article appearing in the Jewish Advocate entitled, "Hebrew Union College Authorities Object to San Remo Action," the College heads stated the following:

1. We deny the right of any body of men to determine our citizenship for us, as the Supreme Council presumed to do in the Declaration that a Jew of American, French, British, or other nationality, may retain his nationality although he is a citizen of the State of Palestine. It is almost unbelievable that this is a true report. How can American Jews be declared citizens of Palestine, or any other land, without their consent? This would mean a divided national loyalty. This we repudiate emphatically and unreservedly. We have but one citizenship, the American, and desire no other; we know but one national loyalty, the American, and recognize no other.

2. We declare that no one land, Palestine or any other, can be called "the national home for the Jews," as has been done by the Supreme Council. Each land, whereof Jews are loyal citizens, is the national home for those Jews. Palestine is not our national home. We are not now and never expect to be citizens of that land.<sup>112</sup>

Within the next decade, changes would take place gradually within



the Hebrew Union College. In 1921-22, Julian Morgenstern would become President of the College, succeeding Kaufmann Kohler. But Morgenstern, as well as Kohler before him, professed strict anti-Zionist convictions. Though he saw that the Jewish homeland in Palestine was a reality, and he felt that "recriminations about it were irrelevant," Morgenstern still believed that Zionism and American Judaism were incompatible. "While acceding to the reality of the Yishuv," writes David Polish, "and even the possibility of a Jewish State, he posited a clear separation of American Judaism from Judaism in the land of Israel."<sup>113</sup>

Clearly, the opinion of the student body at the College was moving toward non-Zionism or pro-Zionism more quickly than was the opinion of the College administration. According to the results of a survey of student opinion conducted at the College in 1930, "even then 69 percent were favorable to some form of Zionism, 22 percent were neutral, and only 9 percent were opposed. A generation earlier, only 17 percent had been pro-Zionist. As early as 1932 two Hebrew-speaking societies flourished on the campus."<sup>114</sup>

Another study of student opinion on Zionism was published only two years later, in the Brandeis Avukah Annual of 1932. In an article entitled, "Palestine and Our Rabbinical Schools," Armond E. Cohen, a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York City, set out to determine the attitudes towards Palestine being manifested among the students of America's four leading rabbinical seminaries. At the Yeshiva College, Cohen found the future Orthodox rabbis to be passive and lethargic, toward Zionism as well as toward other vital Jewish problems of the day. At his own Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary



of America, Cohen encountered the predictable love for Palestine and Zion, and at least an attitude of openness toward political Zionism as an organized movement. He described the Seminary student body as "unanimously pro-Palestine, as it has always been . . . and unanimously Zionist." <sup>115</sup>

The Hebrew Union College, however, was described by Cohen as the most interesting of all the seminaries he surveyed. His report is clearly biased in favor of the Zionist side of the issue, as can be perceived from the tone of his comments. Nonetheless, the results of his survey show the trend of the Reform rabbinical students regarding the issue of Zionism:

Not so long ago the Hebrew Union College was not a healthy place for one who suffered from Zionist "dementia." The College atmosphere emanating directly from its monied trustees and indirectly from its faculty, did not make for Zionist activity. The early forefathers of Reform were too busy in their mission of de-Judaizing American Israel to permit their students to waste their time in thoughts of rehabilitating in Palestine the scattered remnants of Israel. But even College walls have a conscience, and to atone for its lack of Zionist personalities in the early days, the Hebrew Union College in later years more than acquitted itself by turning out such men as Abba Hillel Silver, James G. Heller, Barnett R. Brickner, et alii. There are today in the various departments of the Hebrew Union College ninety-one students. Of these, twenty-one are active Zionists, nine have Zionist inclinations (they may pull through); fifty-two are good traditionally Reform Rabbinical material (they are indifferent or undecided in attitude), seven are definitely anti-Zionists (their definiteness indicating that they hardly belong in the Rabbinate), and two are actively propagandistic against Zionism. . . .

Although to the ardent Zionist a total of thirty active Zionists out of a student body of ninety-one may not seem hopeful, considering the fact that these thirty are to be weighed against only nine who are active anti-Zionists, the situation takes on a more encouraging aspect. The fifty-two who are indifferent cannot be



considered, and for practical purposes it is as though there were a student body of only thirty-nine, of whom thirty are pro-Palestine. . . .

. . . This group will in the very near future mould the opinions of the monied class of American Jewry. This group should be the hope of the leaders of Zionism. Years ago, had these leaders seen even the slightest budding of Zionist interest within the sterile confines of the Hebrew Union College, they would have said "Dayenu." And now, seeing so promising a growth from barren soil they should proclaim "nissim v'niflaot" and sing "Hallelujah" even while the departed and sainted forefathers of American Reform rant and rave in their roseate abodes. Much may be hoped for from the Central Conference of American Rabbis. And from the sedately silent Temples of Reform the plea for Zionism will yet emanate with a vengeance. These young men may be called traitors to Reform, but they are determined to be faithful servants to Israel. 116

Also of interest was the attitude of the student body at the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City. Founded in 1922 by the great Zionist leader of Reform Judaism, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the Jewish Institute of Religion was an alternative seminary to the Hebrew Union College, for predominantly Reform rabbinical candidates. Cohen chose to conclude his study of the four seminaries with the Jewish Institute of Religion, "because we wish to leave our readers with an encouraging note." These were his enthusiastic findings at Rabbi Wise's seminary in 1932:

The students of the Jewish Institute of Religion think about Palestine and work in its behalf as they do of all other aspects of Jewish life. They think and do as Dr. Wise does. No greater compliment could be paid them, for this means that theirs is an insatiable love for Zion; this means that they not only think of Zion, but are actively engaged in bringing about its restoration; this means that they are unsurpassed in Zionist activity by any other group of theological students, and perhaps unequalled. Two past Presidents of Avukah are men of the Jewish Institute of Religion.

The Director of the Avukah Summer School since its inception, is a student of the J.I.R. The Editor of



this Avukah Annual is a student of the Institute. Every important Avukah Committee is strengthened by a sincerely interested Institute student. A strong Avukah chapter finds its home in the Institute.

Although Dr. Wise's long period of leadership in Zionist activity overshadows the activities of lesser lights, the other faculty members too are unanimously Pro-Palestine and Pro-Zionist. Professors Tchernowitz, Slonimsky, Spiegel, Baron, Benderly, Binder, Touroff, all are adornments to world Zionism. Here, as in the case of the early Non-Zionist Hebrew Union College, or as in the case of the consistently Pro-Palestine Jewish Theological Seminary of America, or as in the case of the apathetic Yeshiva College, the spirit emanates from the faculty and penetrates to the studentry. Leaders and Zionist elders of Zion sing ye Hallelujah!<sup>117</sup>

Meanwhile, the rabbis of the Central Conference were still occupied, during the decade of the 1920s, with the task of finding their 'resting point' regarding the issue of Zionism. The Conference seemed bent on pursuing a non-Zionist, yet actively cooperative course of action. The rabbis felt the desire to aid in the development of Palestine, mostly for Jewish refugees from Europe and Russia. But they were not yet ready to affirm the principles of political Zionism. The CCAR had begun to acknowledge its responsibility to help rebuild Palestine, but organized, secular, and political Zionism would not yet receive Reform assistance.

An example of Reform aid for Palestine was the contribution of money for the establishment of certain educational and cultural institutions in Palestine, such as Jerusalem's Hebrew University. A 1921 resolution passed by the Conference noted the "endeavor to arrive at some practical and expedient method of cooperation with the Zionist organization towards the rebuilding of Palestine." It was noted as well that what "prevents our whole-hearted cooperation is the attempt to force us to accept the principle of political Zionism."<sup>118</sup>

In 1922 the House of Representatives passed the "Fish Zionist



Resolution" on July 1. The resolution favored the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. The resolution contained the following preamble:

Whereas the Jewish people have for many centuries believed in and yearned for the rebuilding of their ancient homeland, and

Whereas, owing to the outcome of the World War and their part therein the Jewish people are to be enabled to recreate and re-organize a national home in the land of their fathers, which will give to the house of Israel its long-denied opportunity to re-establish a fruitful Jewish life and culture in the ancient Jewish land!

A number of Reform rabbis had gone to the House of Representatives in Washington to testify against passage of the strongly pro-Zionist resolution. The Jewish Advocate noted speeches in the "Congressional Record" by three Jewish Congressmen. One of the three, Congressman Rossdale, "unsparingly attacked the Reform rabbis who opposed the Fish Resolution in Congress."<sup>119</sup>

By 1924 the Central Conference of American Rabbis was on solid non-Zionist ground. Two events occurred in that year, however, which served to nudge the Reform rabbis even closer to the Zionist point of view. First, the racist restrictions against immigration in the Johnson Immigration Act of 1924 seemed particularly directed against countries containing large Jewish populations. Secondly, the proposal to create a Jewish Agency for Palestine, composed of equal Zionist and non-Zionist representation, was considered by the Central Conference. The President of the Conference, Rabbi Abram Simon, pleaded for acceptance of this plan of action regarding the Jewish Agency. Rabbi Simon, filled with fear over the recent immigration restrictions, saw the political realities clearly. His President's Message contained the following



perceptive and carefully worded remarks:

. . . The official statement of our Conference . . . remains as its repudiation of Nationalistic Zionism. Nothing has transpired to suggest any change in that well-worded document. The march of events, however, often leaves finely woven theories behind. Life breaks through the meshes of logic. Whatever we may say to the contrary, Palestinism is a more impressive responsibility, and calls to us as insistently as the condemnation of political Zionism. We are not viewing the segment of Palestine as equal in size or responsibility to the circumference of Israel's world hope. The rehabilitation of the Holy Land has our profound sympathy; yet we have only expressed it in a willing co-operation with the Palestine Development Council. The reclamation of Palestine cannot succeed on resolutions. Burning zeal, practical co-operation and financial support of a united Israel can alone make this hope come true. Accepting our Conference Resolution in its fullest import, the conclusion is inevitable that we must assist in the rehabilitation of the Holy Land either as individuals or as an organization.

The use of the words Zionist and non-Zionist is necessary so long as important distinctions are comprehended by them. That these distinctions lie imbedded in historical and philosophical interpretations is obvious. That they cannot be legislated out of the minds of sincere advocates by mere protests is equally obvious. What is the common-sense point of view? What should we do to make good our determination to facilitate immigration and to help in the reconstruction of Palestine?

A basis upon which non-Zionists may labor is furnished in the authoritative declaration of the recent Carlsbad Conference that a Jewish Agency be created of equal Zionist and non-Zionist representation to carry into effect the expectation of the Balfour Declaration. The non-Partisan Group is the first and only body which has thus far made any serious effort to formulate a workable program. Its tentative outlines may be delineated as follows:

(a) The Council or Jewish Agency shall be composed of one hundred and fifty members, to be equally divided between Zionists and non-Zionists. Forty per cent of the non-Zionist members are to be chosen from the United States.

(b) An Executive Board of eighteen is to be created of equal representation.



- (c) A Body of Experts is to be selected by the Executive Committee to function in Palestine.
- (d) With the acceptance of the Jewish Agency in all lands, the Zionist Organization will discontinue as The Jewish Agency. . . .

. . . More and more tightly will the lines be drawn around immigration into our country. If race shall be added to nation, and then religion added to both as bases of restriction, the coming of Jews to our land in a few years will be impossible. In other words, the Jewish population in our land must grow from within. The outlook in European lands for Jewish settlements is not promising. Palestine, at least, holds out a beacon of hope for those of our brethren who wish to live there. To make it possible for them to come within the limits of reasonable and assimilable numbers implies an adequate preparation of the country, and this in lines of irrigation, colonization, hygiene, education and industrial development calls for a huge sum of money. Our interest in this great adventure is sincere enough to override our fears that some with whom we are to co-operate still find comfort in the illusive dream of a Jewish State. What form of political unity may be necessary five decades hence cannot be raised as an impassable obstacle against our desire for the creation of a Jewish Agency. It is our fond hope that the above mentioned formula for a Jewish Agency may be presented to a conference of Jewish representatives of our land for adoption. Without awaiting such an assembly, our conference is now in the Valley of Decision. Can we Jewish leaders not accept this formula or so modify it by safeguarding reservations as to express the willing attitude of non-Zionists? There are three courses: Organize a new non-Zionist group or continue our present irreconcilability, or co-operate with a non-Partisan Conference. I recommend the acceptance by our Conference of the basis recommended by the non-Partisan Group, and the appointment of a Committee to co-operate with the same or a more inclusive body in the further development of this program.<sup>120</sup>

The Conference was led by an assertive non-Zionist President, Rabbi Simon. He was heartily in favor of cooperation in all efforts for the physical rehabilitation of Palestine. The report of the Committee on the President's Message was equally open to such sentiments toward Palestine. The Committee's report, which was adopted unanimously, was as follows:



Your committee having studied with the greatest care the President's review of our cooperation in the social-economic rehabilitation of Palestine, the account of his contacts with the non-partisan group which is studying the same problem, his recommendation that the Conference accept the tentative outlined program of the newly contemplated Jewish Agency as suggested by the non-partisan group, and his recommendation that a Committee be appointed to co-operate with this group or with a more inclusive body in the further development of this program recommends:

- (a) That the Conference reaffirm its agreement to co-operate in the rehabilitation of Palestine.
- (b) That the Conference favors the formation of a non-partisan group for the development of Palestine, that the President continue his unofficial co-operation with the non-partisan conference mentioned in the message, in the further development of its program, but that no final action be taken until approved by the members of our Conference in convention assembled.<sup>121</sup>

The resolution was actually put off until the 1930 convention in Providence, Rhode Island. In that year, following the bloody 1929 riots of Arabs against Jewish settlers in Hebron, and other parts of Palestine, the Conference finally joined the Jewish Agency for Palestine.<sup>122</sup> By the early 1930s, a new atmosphere on the issue of Zionism had taken hold in the CCAR. The anti-Zionist position appeared to be virtually dead. Anti-Zionism had become a minority viewpoint. Non-Zionism, now dominant in the CCAR conventions, seemed to be merely an interim measure, and a stepping-stone along the road to full-fledged support of the Zionist cause. Of course, the voices of Zionist rabbis in the Conference were being increasingly heard with authority and greater acceptance. By 1927, at least ten percent of the Reform rabbis were political Zionists. These included Joseph Fink, Leon Fram, James Heller, Max Heller, Judah Magnes, Abba Hillel Silver and Stephen Wise. Furthermore, the year 1926 saw the first ordines graduate from the Jewish Institute of



Religion in New York. This event, inspired by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise's dedication to Zionism, fueled the move toward pro-Zionism within the ranks of the Central Conference.<sup>123</sup>

The 1930 convention of the Conference was the scene of the uncanny "Hatikvah Debate." The fight was over the inclusion of the Zionist anthem, "Hatikvah," in the proposed new hymnal of the Reform Movement. The debate, which could have been an all-out battle in earlier years, was moderate in its tone. Stephen S. Wise rose to defend the anthem's rightful place in the hymnal. Wise asked if the anthem had been purposefully omitted from the book. Rabbi Louis Wolsey replied that only devotional music had been included in the hymnal. To which Wise countered by asking why "the military, bellicose, and in other ways objectionable 'Star Spangled Banner'" was included. Finally it was moved and passed that "Hatikvah" be added to the new Reform hymnal.<sup>124</sup>

In 1932, Barnett Brickner, like Max Heller two decades earlier, called for a new approach to the Reform idea of the Jewish Mission in the world. In his address of that year, Brickner suggested giving new significance to the Reform Mission idea by charging it with some healthy Jewish nationalism.<sup>125</sup>

The year 1933 saw the rise of Adolf Hitler to the position of Chancellor of Germany. CCAR President Morris Newfield lost no time in calling for strong measures to avert a catastrophe for German Jewry. In his President's Message, Rabbi Newfield made the following observations and recommendations to the members of the CCAR:

. . . The plight of German Jewry will force a large number, especially of the younger generation, to migrate. The cruel laws and decrees passed by the Nazi government place the Jews of Germany into an inferior class of citizenship, the inevitable result



of which will be economic destruction. The future of Jewry in Germany seems hopeless. No wonder that in spite of their natural love of the Fatherland, large numbers will be compelled to find a new home.

The gates of very few countries are open to immigration. Palestine alone seems to offer possibilities for settlement of a comparatively large number. The Jewish Agency is taking steps to make such a mass-settlement possible. Large sums of money will be needed to accomplish this. The Jews of the world are asked, or will be asked to raise funds for this purpose. Irrespective of our views on Zionism, American Jewry will respond to this appeal. . . .

. . . I therefore recommend that the Central Conference of American Rabbis heartily endorse the appeal of the Jewish Agency for adequate means to promote the settlement of large numbers in Palestine, and that we urge the members of the Conference to support this endeavor in their respective communities.<sup>126</sup>

In his Conference sermon in 1934, Rabbi Abraham Feldman called for a partial revision of the old Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. Like Rabbi Brickner two years earlier, he saw the need for combining the religious and ethnic aspects of Judaism. He believed that Zionism could combine political and spiritual elements into a legitimate Jewish life-style.

Said Rabbi Feldman:

We should revise the fifth paragraph of the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. That paragraph, in one part of it, defines the people of Israel to be a "religious community" exclusively, and renounces any future hope for the rebuilding of Palestine. I feel that we should now revise that paragraph and make it more consonant with our modern needs and convictions. . . . Nearly half a century has elapsed since the "Pittsburgh Platform" was adopted. . . . A new statement, a new declaration of principles is imperative.<sup>127</sup>

Within three years' time, Rabbi Abraham Feldman would have his wish for a new statement on Zionism granted. It was at the 1935 convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis that Reform anti-Zionism died, and neutrality became the official attitude of the CCAR



on the issue of Zionism. Many perceived correctly that soon the Conference would debate its commitment to the principles of Jewish nationalism. The Committee on Resolutions offered the following resolution, which passed by a vote of 81-25:

WHEREAS, At certain foregoing conventions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, resolutions have been adopted in opposition to Zionism, and . . .

WHEREAS, We are persuaded that acceptance or rejection of the Zionist program should be left to the determination of the individual members of the Conference themselves, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, That the Central Conference of American Rabbis takes no official stand on the subject of Zionism; and be it further

RESOLVED, That in keeping with its oft-announced intentions, the Central Conference of American Rabbis will continue to co-operate in the upbuilding of Palestine, and in the economic, cultural, and particularly spiritual tasks confronting the growing and evolving Jewish Community there.<sup>128</sup>

The year 1935 was also the year in which 241 Reform rabbis from all across America joined with hundreds of Conservative and Orthodox rabbis in giving their approval "to the principles and ideals of Labor Palestine or the Histadruth." The statement of the rabbis expressed their belief that "the prophetic ideals espoused by Liberal Judaism are especially compatible with those of the Labor movement in Eretz Israel." The statement of the 241 Reform rabbis concluded with the following message:

This program of the Histadruth in Palestine, and the League for Labor Palestine in America, seems to us to be at one with the essential principles of prophetic idealism. Many of its economic aims are part of the Social Justice Program of the Central Conference of American Rabbis.

We conclude, therefore, with the declaration that, as we see it, Liberal Judaism, in addition to its general sympathy with the rehabilitation of Palestine as the



Jewish homeland, should feel an especial enthusiasm for labor Palestine. We commend to our colleagues and to our followers hearty support for the Histadruth and the League for Labor Palestine.<sup>129</sup>

The 1935 convention of the CCAR was called the convention of Zionist "neutrality," because of the official resolution expressing the non-Zionist position of the Conference. It was at that Conference, however, that a debate took place between Abba Hillel Silver, the great Zionist leader, and Samuel Schulman, the now aging yet implacable foe of Jewish nationalism. It was truly a meeting of giants--Schulman defending the classical Reform, anti-nationalist position; and Silver, the incomparable leader of American Zionism. How ironic that Reform Judaism should produce some of Zionism's most implacable foes on the one hand; and yet on the other, some of its most prominent and effective leaders.

At any rate, the debate between Schulman and Silver of 1935 showed how substantial the growing support for Zionism was among Reform rabbis. A complete reversal of momentum had taken place since the addresses of 1899. Now the anti-Zionist case is presented as apologetic by Dr. Schulman. Whereas Dr. Silver's pro-Zionist statement reveals the certainty that Zionism must be the wave of the future, and that the majority of American Jews are firmly pro-Zionists.<sup>130</sup>

In Dr. Schulman's speech, he attempted to prove that Israel is NOT a race; it is NOT a nation; it is NOT a nationality; it is NOT a civilization! Israel, said Schulman, is now, and has always been, a religious faith; a universal and ethical religion designed only to serve the One God of all Humanity. Jewish messianism is universalism for Schulman. At one point in his address, he stated:



If we ask ourselves, in all frankness, just what it is that all who belong to Israel today have in common . . . what they have in common is the fact that mornings and evenings they say, or ought to say: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One. There is nothing else that binds them. . . . Israel became a Congregation of God and this is what Israel is today, a religious community and nothing else.

And what, according to Schulman, is Jewish nationalism? "It is a distinctive break with the whole of Jewish history." It is, for the first time in Jewish history, placing Israel over God; instead of preserving God as enthroned over Israel!<sup>131</sup>

Dr. Silver sought to prove in his address to the Central Conference of American Rabbis that Israel was many things, and not just one monolithic entity. Israel, he argued, certainly was a religious community, with a unique spiritual mission in the world. But Silver maintained that Israel's status as a religion did not deny its status as a nation, a race or a people with its own land and language. He lambasted the Reform rabbis who included in the Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 the following declaration of principle: "We consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community, and therefore expect neither a return to Palestine . . . nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State." Silver points out that this was the first statement of its kind ever made by any group of religious leaders in Jewish history. He states that if persecuted European and Russian Jews in past years had never resorted to a declaration of this kind, in order to alleviate the hatred of anti-Semitism from their lives, then it is incredible that American Reform rabbis would completely renounce this vital area of Jewish identity.

Jewish nationalism has always been crucial to our identity as Jews,



according to Silver, and to remove nationalism from Judaism is a distortion and an error. The prophets spoke of a nationalistic restoration as they called for the rebuilding of the political life of the Jewish nation. The universal mission of the Jews was never meant to commit our people to eternal life in the Galut--Dispersion was never meant to be seen by the Jews as a blessing. And certainly, the Messianic hope of Judaism has always been "bound up with the restoration of Israel to Palestine," ever since the days of Second Isaiah. Only the Hellenistic apocalyptic writers and some Reform rabbis have attempted to separate national restoration from the Jewish Messianic ideal.<sup>132</sup>

Surely one of Silver's most convincing arguments of all was this delineation of the striking similarity between the positions taken by Paul and the Hellenistic Jews, and those taken by the anti-Zionist leaders of Reform Judaism. Both groups accepted Jewish universalism and rejected most of Jewish particularism. Both groups insisted upon religious faith being entirely divorced from nation, race, land or language. Both groups saw Jewish Law as a burden. The extreme Reformers hated the Talmud and the Shulchan Aruch. "The Bible they spared," says Silver, "for after all the Bible was sacred also to Christians." But both groups simply did away with such laws as circumcision, Sabbath observance, and dietary laws. Both groups believed that the Messianic Kingdom of God was just around the corner.

Dr. Silver concluded by accusing those leaders who insist that Judaism is just a religious community of being guilty of substituting a part for the whole. Even if the religion of Israel has been the most potent force for our survival, and even if our religion has been the greatest gift of the Jews to civilization, we are still not synonymous



with religion. The Jewish people produced the Jewish religion as well as Jewish morals, culture, racial ties and nationalism. And "in relation to its religion," concludes Silver, "Israel is both immanent and transcendent, as is every great artist in relation to the creation of his genius."<sup>133</sup>

The next two years saw the non-Zionist phase of the Central Conference of American Rabbis come to a close. The non-Zionism of the Conference was giving way to a strong stand favoring Zionism and the re-establishment of the national Jewish homeland. In 1936, Felix Levy became the second avowed Zionist to hold the office of President of the CCAR. Admitting openly in his President's Message of 1936 that he was indeed a Zionist, Levy declared the following: "As for us, Israel's ways must be peace, surely on its own traditional soil. We pledge our help to Palestinian Jewry and assure them of our constant and deep interest in their welfare." Levy's message was approved by the members of the Conference without dissent.<sup>134</sup>

Most important, however, in the Reform transition to pro-Zionism were the proceedings at the CCAR's 48th Annual Convention, held in Columbus, Ohio, during the week of May 25-30, 1937. There the Conference adopted a document entitled "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism." The most significant section of this new platform for Reform Jews was the section on Israel. The preamble to the principles stated the following observation:

In view of the changes that have taken place in the modern world and the consequent need of stating anew the teachings of Reform Judaism, the Central Conference of Reform Rabbis makes the following declaration of principles.<sup>135</sup>



The all-important section on "Israel" read as follows:

Judaism is the soul of which Israel is the body. Living in all parts of the world, Israel has been held together by the ties of a common history, and above all, by the heritage of faith. Though we recognize in the group-loyalty of Jews who have become estranged from our religious tradition, a bond which still unites them with us, we maintain that it is by its religion and for its religion that the Jewish people has lived. The non-Jew who accepts our faith is welcomed as a full member of the Jewish community. In all lands where our people live, they assume and seek to share loyally the full duties and responsibilities of citizenship and to create seats of Jewish knowledge and religion. In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.

Throughout the ages it has been Israel's mission to witness to the Divine in the face of every form of paganism and materialism. We regard it as our historic task to cooperate with all men in the establishment of the Kingdom of God, of universal brotherhood, justice, truth and peace on earth. <sup>136</sup> This is our Messianic goal.

Ironical as it may have appeared to many of the Reform rabbis at Columbus, it was none other than the ardent anti-Zionist Rabbi David Philipson himself who moved for the adoption of what would soon be known as the historic "Columbus Platform." In what would appear to have been a gesture of great courage and strength, Philipson told the Conference members:

I am now the only man living who was at the Pittsburgh Conference. I was not in favor of a new Declaration but the Conference wanted it. . . . For the sake of historic continuity, I should like to be the one to move the adoption of this Declaration of Principles. <sup>137</sup>

The turn toward support of Zionism would also be made by the lay leaders of Reform Judaism, the members of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. In a resolution adopted at its 35th Biennial Convention



in New Orleans in 1937, the Union affirmed its support for and eagerness to cooperate in the upbuilding of Palestine. The resolution, which would be reaffirmed in even stronger terms during the Holocaust of European Jewry in the 1940s, made the following statement:

The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in Council assembled, expresses its satisfaction at the progress made by the Jewish Agency in the upbuilding of Palestine. We see the hand of Providence in the opening of the gates of Palestine for the Jewish people at a time when a large portion of Jewry is so desperately in need of a friendly shelter and a home where a spiritual, cultural center may be developed in accordance with Jewish ideals. The time has now come for Jews, irrespective of ideological differences, to unite in the activities leading to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, and we urge our constituency to give their financial and moral support to the work of rebuilding Palestine.<sup>138</sup>

The year 1937 was a turning point for the Reform Movement. Only twenty years earlier, the Central Conference responded out of anti-Zionist sentiment to the issuance of the Balfour Declaration. Since 1917, the views of anti as well as non-Zionism had virtually been eliminated from the ranks of the Reform Movement. With the exception of the extreme American Council for Judaism, which was organized in 1943, Reform Judaism had gone full swing from dogmatic anti-Zionism to active moral and financial support for the movement to rebuild the Jewish national homeland.



## CHAPTER III

1938-1948

This study of the Reform Movement in the United States and its relationship to Zionism shall be completed with a discussion of the decade 1938-1948. These ten years saw a majority of Reform rabbis, scholars and lay people proclaim their whole-hearted allegiance to Zionism. Adolf Hitler and the Holocaust of European Jewry ended virtually all anti-Zionism. This final chapter in the history of the debate over Zionism is characterized by a solidly pro-Zionist Reform Judaism. The two major events within the Reform Movement during this decade were, however, the Jewish Army debate at the 1942 CCAR convention, and the subsequent formation of the tiny, extremist, anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism. The Reform rabbis who formed the Council were declaring publicly that although anti-Zionism was 'down,' it was it was not yet 'out.'

Nevertheless, the Reform Movement was, collectively at least, voicing its new support for the aims and aspirations of political Zionism. The British government was planning, as early as the mid-1930s, to curtail at least a portion of the growing Jewish immigration to the Yishuv in Palestine. By 1938, the CCAR had spoken out against the restriction of immigration to Palestine. Rabbi Max C. Currick, in his President's Message to the Forty-Ninth Annual Convention of the CCAR in 1938, pleaded with the immigration authorities to reduce the unjust restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, and other free nations:



Further, that to our Government and to other Governments, and to official bodies which are engaged in the legislation and regulation of immigration, representations be made showing the additional hardships and distress caused political and religious refugees by the drastic restriction of immigration prevalent in practically all countries; to plead for a more uniform administration of the regulations in the various consular offices of the respective countries. The recommendation for more liberal immigration laws and regulations refers also to Palestine, but not without due consideration of the conditions existing there.<sup>139</sup>

The CCAR's Committee on Contemporaneous History and Literature, also at the 1938 convention, recommended that the Central Conference of American Rabbis register a strong protest with British authorities in regard to the severe immigration restrictions that went into effect in Palestine on April 1, 1938. The committee's report concluded with the following urgent plea:

. . . The hundreds of thousands who yearn to come to Palestine have been barred by the action of the English authorities who have granted an allotment of only three thousand immigration certificates for the six months beginning April 1, 1938.

In spite of civil war at home, the threat of world war abroad, and the vacillating policy of the British, Palestinian Jewry is determined to go on. The passenger harbor at Tel Aviv, built during the past year, stands as a symbol of the will of the people to keep the Promised Land open as a home and a haven. And now, more than ever before, it is necessary that the symbol be expressive of reality, that the dream become fact. In view of the growing distress in Central and Eastern Europe, it is imperative that the gates of Palestine be kept open and that England be held to her solemn pledges with respect to Palestine as a land of immigration.

Your committee, therefore, recommends to the Central Conference of American Rabbis that its Executive Board transmit a request to the British authorities, through the British Ambassador to the United States, urging that the people of England be true to its finest traditions and to its own solemn promises by opening wide the gates of Palestine to Jewish refugees and pioneers who seek a home in their own Homeland.<sup>140</sup>



The worst, however, was still yet to come. In 1939 Great Britain issued its first repressive and restrictive "White Paper on Palestine." The worst fears of world Zionist leaders had been confirmed. The British declared that they would limit immigration to Palestine to 15,000 Jews per year for a period of five years. This would allow a total immigration of only 75,000 Jews, among the millions of refugees attempting to flee the horror of Nazi Europe. Furthermore, additional Jewish immigration to Palestine would not be allowed without the approval of the Arab majority population there. CCAR President Max Currick expressed the moral outrage of the members of the Central Conference against the British White Paper. Rabbi Currick declared:

The proposed settlement of the Palestine problem, as was prophesied before the British White Paper was published, will bring no settlement or peace in Palestine or elsewhere. An Arab state is to be established with the Jews in a definite and permanent minority. The National Home, in the sense in which Great Britain has interpreted it ever since the Balfour Declaration and the Mandate, is to be brought to an end. The Jews will be reduced to a minority status and forbidden ever to become more than a fixed fraction of the population. The magnificent civilizing work they have already done in Palestine will be blighted, and they will be denied the right, which has been solemnly pledged by Great Britain and by the League of Nations, to grow and flourish according to the capacity of the country . . .

. . . Unfaithfulness to that bond at this time is an extreme and special cruelty to hundreds of thousands of dazed and desperate, homeless, landless and stateless Jews who have looked to Palestine as their one hope of freedom and a measure of security. Faithfulness to its word which may still be reestablished, since neither Arabs nor Jews approve the plan announced, will win for Britain the moral approbation of enlightened mankind and even prove, it is to be expected, a greater measure of defense than the devices of cold political expediency. This position we take because of our love of our own brethren and our sorrow over their undoing, and without altering our personal opinions on the



controversial political questions in which we have been involved. But not only for these reasons. We are advocating only truth, justice and national good faith. We also have in mind the 110,000 Christians in Palestine, 90% of whom are natives, who, while they have been supporting the Arab nationalist movement under pressure, dread a return to Moslem rule.<sup>141</sup>

The Committee on the President's Message of 1939 agreed in no uncertain terms with the sentiments of the Conference President. The committee report called on Great Britain not to break its promise to the Jewish people throughout the world. The following statement of the Conference was to be transmitted to the government of Great Britain via our State Department:

We share the distress and chagrin expressed by the President of the Conference in connection with the issuance of the British White Paper and the action of the British government in renouncing its pledge to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine. We trust that the present program of the British Empire will be rectified speedily and that the development of the Jewish settlement in Palestine will not be frustrated, and the hope of finding in these tragic days a refuge for our persecuted brethren will not be destroyed. We recommend that the Conference transmit this statement to the British government through our State Department, earnestly pleading that Great Britain shall finally not renounce its word, plighted not only to the Jewish people but also to other nations.<sup>142</sup>

In 1940, Julius Gordon delivered a lengthy scholarly address to the CCAR convention. His paper was entitled "Palestine in Jewish Life and Literature." Gordon related part of his address to the old and divisive issue of "split" or "dual" loyalties on the part of America's Jews. His remarks gave support to the notion of American cultural pluralism rather than America as one big melting pot of many cultures. Gordon quoted Louis Brandeis to reinforce his view that Americanism and Zionism are compatible. Portions of his eloquent address follow:



. . . In view of this challenge, would it not be wise for all Jews, regardless of their personal definition of Judaism, to stand together and unitedly advance a new definition of true tolerance and ideal citizenship? We should emphasize that true tolerance implies an appreciation of differences; that any covenant of peace must partake of the symbolism of the rainbow which stands for harmony in difference. In the same vein we should also re-define the concept of citizenship. We should make it clear that the desirable citizen is not a diluted and crushed personality but a vital and dynamic personality capable of making a distinct contribution to his environment and civilization; that the American Jew is a better citizen of the United States of America by virtue of retaining his loyalties to his people. This is the view of Louis D. Brandeis whose "Americanism" can hardly be questioned. "Let no American," says Brandeis, "imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with Patriotism. Multiple loyalties are objectionable only if they are inconsistent. A man is a better citizen of the United States for being also a loyal citizen of his state, and of his city; for being loyal to his family, and to his profession or trade; for being loyal to his college or his lodge. Every Irish-American who contributed towards advancing home rule was a better man and a better American for the sacrifice he made. Every American Jew who aids in advancing the Jewish settlement in Palestine, though he feels that neither he nor his descendants will ever live there, will likewise be a better man and a better American for doing so."

I believe the time has come for Reform Judaism to crystallize a positive, affirmative attitude towards Palestine. We have eliminated Zion from our prayerbook, but we have not succeeded in removing Zion from the hearts of our people. And if we are to be at one with our people we must become aware of both the romance and the realism of this movement which embraces the Jewish past as well as the Jewish future. . . .143

The last crucial debate over Zionism within the Central Conference of American Rabbis would take place during 1942 and 1943. The Jewish Army debate of 1942 and the subsequent formation of the American Council for Judaism were the significant final turning points in Reform Judaism's growing support for political Zionism and its programs. On January 2, 1942, the Jewish Exponent summarized the four main arguments for the creation of a Jewish Army in Palestine:



1 - The Jews want the right of self-defense, and they have a special claim in that Jews were singled out for persecution in Europe.

2 - There should be a Jewish Army similar in status to units representing free France or free Belgium, since the mandate regarded the Jewish national home as a recognized political entity.

3 - In September, 1940, Churchill had promised that the Jews could have their army in Palestine, to fight with Britain, but under a Jewish flag. In March, 1941, the Colonial Secretary delayed it, claiming technical difficulties, and on October 15 retracted the original promise.

4 - The Jews should have the same right as other nations conquered by the Nazis, who formed national forces under British jurisdiction.<sup>144</sup>

A nationwide "Committee for a Jewish Army," headed by journalist Pierre Van Paassen, and comprised of Jews and non-Jews alike, had a membership of thousands of concerned citizens who were frustrated and angered by official U.S. and British procrastination.

The Committee's arguments for a Jewish Army are that: 1) it would provide an effective and belligerent military force; 2) by proving the military courage and heroism of Jews it would counteract anti-Semitism; 3) by giving Jews a place of their own in the fighting, it would guarantee them a part in the peace. To Jews who back the Army proposal, a part in the peace means a Jewish state in Palestine. The Committee is supported by most of the 400,000 American Zionists.<sup>145</sup>

Congressman Andrew L. Somers of New York delivered a powerful speech in the U.S. House of Representatives on March 26, 1942, in which he sought American government influence to coax Great Britain to allow a Jewish Army in Palestine. Somers called upon all freedom-loving Americans to support the "Committee for a Jewish Army." He claimed that thousands of Jewish soldiers demanded "the right to fight," and that they would greatly help the Allies in the war against fascism. These are excerpts from Somers' speech in the House of Representatives:



Mr. Speaker, in an apprehensive statement, Prime Minister Churchill told the united forces today that "we are likely to lose the war unless we use our combined overwhelming strength and use the multiplying opportunities that will present themselves to us." I want to call to the attention of the Prime Minister the fact that the Committee for a Jewish Army has pointed out repeatedly that there is in Palestine and other Middle East countries a manpower capable of supplying an army of approximately 200,000 Jews ready to fight with the valor that is characteristic of those who are defending their homelands. The immediate mobilization of these people must suggest itself as a wise course to all who want to see America win this war quickly. . . .

. . . I venture to assert that it is only a question of a few weeks when American boys will be sent to Palestine to protect that region. Obviously there is an available army there now; a fierce army of traditional soldiers, for the Jewish people have, throughout the history of their existence, been a fighting people. Why not use it? The Jews were the first victims of Hitler. They want to fight. Why not let them fight, and in that way reserve our men for other important sections?

For some reason the United Nations have failed to take advantage of this ready manpower. Therefore I respectfully suggest that the President of the United States, at the earliest possible date, negotiate with the British Government in an effort to utilize this manpower. . . . 146

The momentum was impressive, therefore, for organizing a Jewish Army in the Middle East. The Central Conference of American Rabbis, with the ardent Zionist Rabbi James Heller as President, met in convention in Cincinnati, Ohio, from February 24 to March 1, 1942. The exact sequence of events which occurred surrounding the Jewish Army Resolution is confusing. Suffice it to note that the CCAR did finally pass a resolution favoring the creation of a Jewish Army in Palestine. The vote was 64-38, and the final text of the resolution reads as follows:

WHEREAS, the free peoples of the world are now engaged in a war for decency, justice and good faith in international relations, and for the defense of their homes and their freedoms against oppression and slavery



And whereas, the Jewish population of Palestine is eager to defend its soil and its home to the last man,

And whereas, despite its formal approval of the plan, the government of Great Britain has still failed to avail itself of the offer of the Jewish Agency for Palestine to establish a military unit based on Palestine, composed of Palestinian and stateless European Jews,

Be it resolved that the Central Conference of American Rabbis adds its voice to the demand that the Jewish population of Palestine be given the privilege of establishing a military force which will fight under its own banner on the side of the democracies, under allied command, to defend its own land and the near East to the end that the victory of democracy may be hastened everywhere.<sup>147</sup>

The debate over the resolution was intense and filled with bitterness on the part of both the Zionist and the non-Zionist rabbis.

Following are some excerpts from the debate:

Rabbi Brickner: It would be incongruous, indeed, for this conference to place itself on record as approving the right of the Jews of Palestine to fight in the armed forces of the British. They are already doing so to the tune of 15,000 and therefore do not require our approval. It is a right that they possess and that is inalienable to them. It is a right that they are exercising at the present time.

What they are demanding is the endorsement by this Conference of the right of the Jews of Palestine to muster a large army, based on Palestine, to fight under the Jewish banner as an integral part of the forces of the United Nations. It is something that has been granted to the Free Dutch, the Free French, and the Free Poles, and many of us believe that right should be granted to the Jews of Palestine. I believe that this would have the effect of mustering a much larger Jewish army than is possible under the present arrangement, which ignores the military needs of the situation, and surrenders to a policy of futile appeasement of the Arabs. A Jewish Army would be in the interest of the military strategy of the United Nations. It would give us an army of 50,000 to 60,000 men . . . and enable the Australians and New Zealanders to remain at home where they are greatly needed, and leave the defense of Palestine in part to the Jewish army.



Rabbi Goldenson: A few days ago a member of this Conference informed me of his intention to bring in a resolution, calling upon the Conference to put itself on record as opposing the creation of a Jewish Army as is being advocated in certain quarters. I said that I did not think it advisable to offer any such resolution . . . I said that I thought if such a resolution was offered it would stir up bad blood. As a result no such resolution is offered asking the Conference to go on record in opposition to the Jewish Army idea . . . Now we are asked to take up the old question again in a new form. But after all it is the same question that will divide us in this Conference and lead to other mischief at the same time. We are after all a religious body and as a religious body we should go slow about putting ourselves on record for the creation of a Jewish Army. . . .

Rabbi Goodman: I hope that the lines today are not going to be drawn on the question as to whether the men are Zionists or non-Zionists. I think this is a human issue and a Jewish issue. The law of Great Britain recognizes the Jews of Palestine as constituting a nationality. I do not consider myself a part of this Jewish nationality, but as a member of the Jewish people I sympathize with the Jews of Palestine who may be the next victims of Hitler. I believe they have the right as a national element in Palestine to fight under their own flag if they so desire. In Palestine the remnants of the Polish Army have been reorganized and are fighting under the flag of Poland, and I believe that the Jews of Palestine are entitled to the same privilege.

Rabbi Wolsey: . . . In my judgment the formation of a Jewish Army is going to confuse the attitude of America towards the Jew. We should not want to interfere with the self-determination of the Jews living in Palestine. Let them do whatever they think is best under the circumstances. But we have a right to say what shall be the attitude of the Jew in America in the present very serious emergency. I believe there is great danger of a schism in American Jewish life if we pass a resolution like this. Whether you wish it or not this resolution would be looked upon as an endorsement of a Jewish Army. The Central Conference of American Rabbis then becomes an agency for confusing the public mind upon the subject of militarism so far as the Jew is concerned. I trust that this resolution will not be passed. Each member of the Conference has the right of opinion as to whether or not there should be a Jewish Army, but I do not believe that the Conference, a religious organization, should take any action on this subject.



Rabbi Eisendrath: I am one who interprets Jewish life religiously and spiritually rather than nationally, and I have been laboring in the British Empire so I can speak about leaving things to the judgment of the British government. I think I have seen more real religion, more real application of social justice and moral righteousness in the labor colonies of Palestine than I have seen as a consequence of much of our work as rabbis. I want to see that endeavor for which we as a Conference stand, protected, and I am not certain that it will be protected if we carry out the policy of appeasement of certain influences in the British government. To whose judgment in the British government are we going to leave this question? At the time of Munich we were told to leave everything to the judgment of Mr. Chamberlain. Today . . . I urge the adoption of a resolution with teeth in it on this question. We are seeking to protect spiritual and religious values in America even though regretfully by force--let us grant the same right to our brethren in Palestine.

Rabbi Philip Bernstein: It has been stated that the welfare of American Jewry is paramount. In my opinion this position is as unrealistic as it is immoral. American Jewry can not be isolated from the fate of world Jewry. If one thing has become absolutely clear since 1933 it is that there are no impenetrable frontiers that anti-Semitism can not surmount. The fate of world Jewry is involved with our fate. The current tragedy of Israel will inevitably affect our destiny.

Even when men set up the selfish interests of American Jews as paramount they are compelled to face the fact that the security of American Jews has been threatened in the last decade not by the existence of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, but by the fate, the homelessness, the insecurity, the persecution of the Jews in Europe. Purely in terms of our own self interest it is imperative to work for a constructive solution for the Jewish problem in Europe. The future for our people there is exceedingly black and difficult regardless of the outcome of the war. Millions have been driven from their homes and most of them have been extruded from the Economy of Europe. What realistic basis for hope is there that they will be accepted into normal positions in the European economy when millions of men discharged from the armies will be seeking again some niche in that chaotic order? The Jewish National Home in Palestine will be more necessary than ever when this war is over.



Yes, there are political implications in this resolution. Whether the Jews will receive anything from the peace table but crumbs will depend in no small measure upon what we Jews do as Jews during the war. Peace is not made on the basis of abstract justice or pleas to the world's conscience. Peace reflects the contributions that the peoples make to victory in the war. Whether the Jews will emerge from this war helpless and defenseless, or whether they will emerge strong, vigorous and hopeful will depend in no small measure on whether the Palestinian and stateless Jews will have the right to fight for their rights and human freedom in a Jewish army under the Allied command.

Rabbi Freehof: My opinion is different from anyone who has spoken so far. If a motion had been introduced here for a Jewish Army and such a motion would be defeated, it is going to cause pain and disappointment to many in world Jewry. If the motion is passed it is going to cause a great deal of ill feeling in our Conference. I suggest that the whole discussion and the whole debate, including all resolutions, be expunged from the records.

The motion to table was lost by a vote of 45 to 51.

The motion that the original resolution be adopted carried by Aye, 64--Nay, 38.<sup>148</sup>

The Jewish Army resolution was adopted by the CCAR in Cincinnati in February, 1942. But the passage of the resolution intensified the bitterness between the non-Zionists and the Zionists within Reform Judaism. The resolution was to be an open wound in the hearts of the opponents of Jewish nationalism. For them the battle was just getting underway. Immediately following the CCAR convention, the UAHC Board of Trustees objected to the Jewish Army resolution.<sup>149</sup>

Public statements of opposition to the CCAR resolution began to appear in the press. The Jewish Exponent of Philadelphia carried a statement by sixty-three rabbis who were announcing their displeasure with the Jewish Army resolution. This article, one of the earliest carried by the press, appeared in the March 20, 1942 edition of the newspaper:



Asserting that American Jewish opinion is sharply divided on the question of creating a Jewish Army in Palestine, 63 rabbis from many parts of the country issued a statement declaring that such an army would cause misunderstanding throughout the world and lead to further friction in Palestine.

"We would urge, however," the statement said, "consideration of the immediate arming under the British flag of all Palestinians loyal to the British and United Nations. As American rabbis, we earnestly appeal to all peoples and groups to put aside their particular interests and separate programs at this crucial time and concentrate upon one objective only--winning the war."<sup>150</sup>

Two weeks later, the April 3 issue of the Jewish Exponent carried an impressive advertisement, with the headline stating: "Sixty-five Reform Rabbis Oppose the Creation of a Jewish Army." The rabbis who signed the statement were from all parts of the United States.<sup>151</sup> Almost immediately after the appearance of the non-Zionist declarations, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, chairman of the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs, announced that he had received word from more than 350 Reform, Conservative and Orthodox rabbis, approving the proposal to establish a Palestine Jewish Army to fight independently under British command in the Near East. The article in the March 22 New York Times related that supportive messages had been received from James Heller, President of the CCAR, and the presidents of the Conservative and Orthodox rabbinical associations. The article contained the following comments made by Dr. Wise:

Attempts have recently been made by a small group of rabbis to suggest that American Jewish opinion is sharply divided on the proposal to organize a Jewish fighting force in Palestine under British or Allied command. These rabbis have acted not only contrary to the expressed opinion of their own rabbinical organization, which more than two weeks ago in solemn conferences adopted a resolution favoring the establishment of such a force; they have equally acted contrary to the overwhelming sentiment of the Jewish people of this country.



Sanction of the proposal has come not only from the vast majority of Jewish religious leaders in the land; it has found equally strong approval among the lay leaders of the American Jewish community. It has been accorded no less enthusiastic support among large numbers of non-Jews.

The organization of a Jewish military force in Palestine is dictated by elementary justice no less than by common sense, and the great mass of American Jewry stands firmly behind the demand of the Jews in Palestine for their own force, fighting under their own name though under British or Allied command and defending their homeland in full stature as a people.<sup>152</sup>

Two days earlier, the New York Times carried the actual names of the hundreds of rabbis who supported the Jewish Army resolution. Under the bold headline, "We Approve--The Rabbis of America Endorse A Palestine Jewish Fighting Force," the following statement appeared above four full columns of names of rabbis:

Together with the great majority of all other American Jews, the overwhelming majority of American rabbis heartily favor the proposal to establish a Jewish Fighting Force in Palestine. Individually and through three of their leading organizations, they have put themselves on record with the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs. They represent every wing of the Jewish faith, Orthodox, Conservative and Reform, in every section of the country.

Listed below are the names of individual rabbis who have telegraphed their endorsement.<sup>153</sup>

On April 16, 1942, Rabbi Louis Wolsey invited all non-Zionist rabbis to meet at a special conference scheduled for June in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Various attempts were made by Rabbis Heller and Freehof to force the cancellation of the Atlantic City meeting. Furthermore, the Jewish Army debate had laid the groundwork for the establishment of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism. Heller and Freehof were also engaged in a flurry of activity to bring about the abandonment of any such organized opposition to Zionism. The efforts toward compromise



failed, however, and June 1, 1942 found the non-Zionist rabbis convened in Atlantic City. The meeting of rabbis organized the association which subsequently became the American Council for Judaism.<sup>154</sup>

Some sixty rabbis attended the Atlantic City meeting from June 1 to June 2. They agreed on the four following principles, according to an article in the American Israelite:

- (1) That the Jews are a religious group.
- (2) That there should be no Jewish army.
- (3) That the physical rehabilitation of Palestine is desirable.
- (4) That there should be no Jewish state.<sup>155</sup>

The reaction to the events in Atlantic City was swift and angry. Rabbi Stephen S. Wise wrote to Rabbi James Heller saying that " . . . I do not want to take this lying down from a little group of malcontents, who ought to be ashamed of themselves. . . ." He referred to the sixty rabbis who signed the statement of non-Zionist principles as adding their names to "the role of rabbinical dishonor."<sup>156</sup> The official Zionist publication, the New Palestine, ran an editorial that was critical of the non-Zionist rabbis. The article was entitled, "Jewish Opposition to Zionism," and excerpts follow:

In view of the general endorsement of Zionism by the leaders of American opinion from the President down, what a pitiful spectacle was the confab of anti-Zionist rabbis in Atlantic City! How seriously these rabbis seem to take their verbal pyrotechnics, although nobody else pays any attention to them! They cannot believe that the period in which they represented the dominant opinion, at least in the Reform rabbinate, has definitely passed. They mouth the slogans of a bygone day and seem personally aggrieved that these slogans do not find favor any longer. . . .

. . . Zionists have a great job before them in convincing these jittery Jews that their craven policy is nothing more nor less than an appeasement of anti-Semitism, and that it is about as effective as an appeasement policy has generally shown itself to be.<sup>157</sup>



The Cleveland Jewish Review and Observer of June 5, 1942 ran an editorial blasting the non-Zionist rabbis. The editors maintained that these men could do great harm to millions of Jews abroad. In particular, they singled out the remarks of Rabbi Morris A. Lazaron, a member of the committee to organize the American Council for Judaism nationwide, for severe condemnation. The editorial contained some of the following observations:

Sixty non-Zionist Reform Rabbis, meeting in solemn conclave at Atlantic City, have expressed their opposition to the idea of a Jewish Army. This is the group which broke away from the general resolution favoring the Army adopted by the Central Conference.

Dr. Morris A. Lazaron and the others certainly have a right to speak their minds, especially when "there are those who look" to them "for guidance." But the good and "responsible teachers in Israel" do not refrain from casting aspersions which cannot fail but harm those unfortunate millions of Jews who do not look to them for guidance. These rabbis, acting on behalf of their trembling constituents, are straying far afield in the attempt to pin the Army idea down to the mat of un-Americanism. . . .

. . . A dyed-in-the-wool demagogue would find it difficult to be more glib than Dr. Lazaron. He does not take the trouble of pointing out in what way the Zionists are impeding the efforts of the United Nations by insisting that the Jews of Palestine, together with the stateless victims of Nazism, should be allowed to fight under their flag in defense of that United Nations area where that flag deserves and has a right to fly. . . .

. . . As for the dual nationalism so broadly hinted by Dr. Lazaron's words, we need only quote him further. "It makes me sick . . . that the people which gave the world its universal dream is urged to turn its back upon its greatest gift at the very moment in history when the free people of the world are united in an epic struggle to preserve that dream." Dr. Lazaron evidently forgets that the Promised Land was at one time the nucleus of that dream, and that which makes him sick today has already made well hundreds of thousands of his fellowmen.<sup>158</sup>

The most incredible of the attacks against the non-Zionist rabbis was revealed by the Pittsburgh Jewish Criterion, in an article entitled,



"Anti-Zionist Rabbis Branded as 'Traitors' in Synagogue Declaration."

The article reported the reaction of the American Mizrachi rabbinate, on Yom Kippur, to the participants in the non-Zionist proceedings:

Rabbis affiliated with the Mizrachi Organization of America, Orthodox wing of the Zionist movement, read a proclamation in their synagogues on Yom Kippur praying for victory for the United Nations, reaffirming faith in the restoration by God of His people to Zion and branding as "traitors" the anti-Zionist American rabbis who recently issued a statement condemning Zionism.

As part of the holiday statement of principles, which emphasized justice to the Jews as an essential ingredient of postwar victory, the Mizrachi leaders protested "with all the force at our command against the traitors in our own camp who, in the eyes of the world, stepped forward to repudiate the hope for the redemption of Eretz Israel. We brand them as people who have betrayed the interests of the Jewish religion and of the principles of the Jewish faith."<sup>159</sup>

During 1943, the American Council for Judaism formulated its fundamental statement of principles. The Council, which was formed officially on December 11, 1942, named Elmer Berger as Executive Director, and it elected Lessing J. Rosenwald to serve as President. The Council saw as its primary function the presentation of "the views of Americans of Jewish faith on problems affecting the future of their own lives and the lives of world Jewry in the present hour of world confusion."<sup>160</sup> And they did present their views. Radio talk shows, speeches, magazines and newspapers were some of the many avenues used by members of the Council to present their views to the American public.

The American Council for Judaism, a small, extremist group of non-Zionists and anti-Zionists, exerted a disproportionately loud voice in an attempt to influence the American public and its views on Zionism. One of their methods was to advertise nationally their statement of principles. In this way, the Council openly sought new members



for the organization. Publication of their principles was viewed as being "in the interests of a full and free public discussion of controversial issues."<sup>161</sup> The following are some significant portions of the highly controversial statement of principles of the American Council for Judaism:

. . . As a result of the bigotry, sadism, and ambitions for world conquest of the Axis powers, millions of our co-religionists who had homes in and were nationals of other lands have been violently deported and made victims of indescribable barbarism. No other group has been so brutishly attacked and for one reason only--on the false claims that there are racial barriers or nationalistic impulses that separate Jews from other men.

The plight of those Jews, together with millions of oppressed fellow men of all faiths, calls for the profoundest sympathy and the unbounded moral indignation of all freemen. The restoration of these broken lives to the status and dignity of men endowed by God with inalienable rights is one of the primary objectives of the peace to come as expressed in the Atlantic Charter and the Four Freedoms of President Roosevelt. We believe that the Jew will rise or fall with the extension or contraction of the great liberal forces of civilization. By relying upon the broad, religious principles inherent in a democracy and implementing them wherever possible, we join our forces with those of all lovers of freedom; strengthened, in that we do not stand segregated and alone upon exclusive demands.

We ask that the United Nations secure the earliest feasible repatriation or resettlement under the best possible conditions of all peoples uprooted from their homes by Axis powers, and that even in the face of obvious and discouraging obstacles the United Nations persevere in their efforts to provide immediate sanctuary for refugees of all faiths, political beliefs, and national origins. We believe that wherever possible the forced emigres should be repatriated in their original homelands under conditions which will enable them to live as free, upstanding individuals.

For our fellow Jews we ask only this: Equality of rights and obligations with their fellow nationals. In our endeavors to bring relief to our stricken fellow Jews and to help rebuild their lives on a more stable basis, we rely wholly upon the principles of freedom, justice,



and humanity, which are fundamental to both democracy and religion, and which have been declared as the principles which shall prevail in the better world for which the United Nations are fighting. We ally ourselves with those who believe this war will not have been fought in vain, that the mistakes of the last peace will not be duplicated.

Palestine has contributed in a tangible way to the alleviation of the present catastrophe in Jewish life by providing a refuge for a part of Europe's persecuted Jews. We hope it will continue as one of the places for such resettlement, for it has been clearly demonstrated that practical colonizing can be done, schools and universities built, scientific agriculture extended, commerce intensified, and culture developed. This is the record of achievement of eager, hard-working settlers who have been aided in their endeavors by Jews all over the world, in every walk of life and thought.

We oppose the effort to establish a National Jewish State in Palestine or anywhere else as a philosophy of defeatism, and one which does not offer a practical solution of the Jewish problem. We dissent from all those related doctrines that stress the racialism, the nationalism, and the theoretical homelessness of Jews. We oppose such doctrines as inimical to the welfare of Jews in Palestine, in America, or wherever Jews may dwell. We believe that the intrusion of Jewish national statehood has been a deterrent in Palestine's ability to play an even greater role in offering a haven for the oppressed, and that without the insistence upon such statehood, Palestine would today be harboring more refugees from Nazi terror. The very insistence upon a Jewish Army has led to the raising of barriers against our unfortunate brethren. There never was a need for such an army. There has always been ample opportunity for Jews to fight side by side with those of other faiths in the armies of the United Nations.

Palestine is a part of Israel's religious heritage, as it is a part of the heritage of two other religions of the world. We look forward to the ultimate establishment of a democratic, autonomous government in Palestine, wherein Jews, Moslems, and Christians shall be justly represented; every man enjoying equal rights and sharing equal responsibilities; a democratic government in which our fellow Jews shall be free Palestinians whose religion is Judaism, even as we are Americans whose religion is Judaism.

We invite all Jews to support our interpretation of Jewish life and destiny in keeping with the highest



traditions of our faith. We believe these truths provide the basis for every program of a more hopeful future put forth by freemen. To proclaim those views at this time, we believe, is to express the abiding faith, shared by a great number of our fellow Jews, that in the fruits of victory of the United Nations all, regardless of faith, will share alike. It is also, we believe, to render a service to the task of clarifying the hopes and the purposes for which this war is being fought by freemen everywhere.<sup>162</sup>

Reaction to the American Council for Judaism within the American Jewish press continued to be critical and even damning. Many American Jews felt sickened and betrayed by this fanatical band of non-Zionist rabbis. One highly caustic editorial appeared in numerous American Jewish newspapers. It was preceded by the bold headline, "Monstrous Callousness":

As incredible as the monstrous bestialities of Hitler's men in their slaughter of millions of Jewish innocents is the monstrous callousness of a small group of men calling themselves rabbis, who have chosen just this moment of horror and agony for the Jewish people to launch a campaign to weaken and destroy the one hope, the one consolation--Palestine--that rises like a warning beacon above the charnel house of Europe.

While millions have perished and other millions of Jews feel the wind of Death in their ears, a handful of men who minister to wealthy Reform Jewish congregations have highly resolved that what they call the American Council of Judaism shall summon their adherents to make it impossible for Jews to become a majority in the Jewish National Home. . . .

. . . It is truly heart-breaking, when Jews need spiritual ministrations, when they need positive, affirmative, forward-looking guidance from their rabbis, that they should have added to their heavy burden the fantastically perverted venomousness of men like Morris Lazaron, Louis Wolsey, Samuel H. Goldenson, David Philipson and others whose names are too trivial to be linked even with this infamy.<sup>163</sup>

The most powerful repudiation of the Council, however, came in November of 1942, when 733 (later the number rose to 757) rabbis and



the leaders of every rabbinical organization in the United States issued a strongly worded statement which condemned the anti-Zionists' actions. The statement rebuked the anti-Zionists for misrepresenting Zionism and misinterpreting historic Jewish religious teaching. The New Orleans Jewish Ledger carried an editorial praising the statement which was entitled, "730 Rabbis Sign Rebuke":

More than 730 rabbis, including the heads of all the national rabbinical associations signed a statement to rebuke the opponents of Zionism, saying the non-Zionists had dealt a "cruel blow" to the Jewish people. The statement refutes the charge that Zionism is a secularist movement . . . and scores anti-Zionism as a departure from the Jewish religion.

We need go no further. It is a long statement as that of 733 rabbis would be. If it includes the heads of all national rabbinical associations, that is speciously fortuitous. . . .164

The move was on to crush the American Council for Judaism. The Council was a thorn in the side of American Zionists and an embarrassment to the CCAR. The Central Conference convention of June, 1943 was to be held in New York City. The Council leadership sensed correctly that a move was planned, in early 1943, to force the termination of the non-Zionist body of rabbis and lay people. In March of 1943, an article appeared in the Jewish press with the title, "American Council for Judaism Says It Refuses 'To Commit Suicide' Now." The Council leadership charged that Rabbi Heller was misinforming the members of the CCAR as to the real motives and intentions of the Council, and they listed eight specific complaints against the Zionist movement in America. The article began by reporting the following developments:

In a circular letter addressed to the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Executive Committee of the American Council for Judaism declares its unwillingness to "commit suicide," a fate



presumably consigned to it in a plan proposed by Rabbi James Heller, president of the C.C.A.R. Issued from Philadelphia on stationery bearing a Flint address for its executive director, Elmer Berger, the broadside accuses the Zionist movement of "totalitarianism" and claims democratic purposes for the Council. . . .<sup>165</sup>

The leaders of the Council were correct in their expectations of the New York CCAR Convention in June, 1943. The Central Conference would go on record regarding the renegade Council and it would not be in favor of the non-Zionists' activities. Four papers were presented at the convention on the question, "Are Zionism and Reform Judaism Incompatible?" Speaking in the affirmative were two active members of the American Council for Judaism, Rabbis William Fineshriber and Hyman Schachtel. Speaking in the negative on the question were Rabbis Felix Levy and David Polish. Rabbi Levy, a past President of the CCAR, supported the Zionist viewpoint within the Conference when he declared:

There is no need for the American Council for Judaism. . . . Under any circumstances at a time when Jews can suffer no further sectarianisms and when the need of a united people, for its own salvation as a people is paramount, the Council has no reason for its existence. Its organization, despite its assertion to the contrary, is secession from the Conference, if not from Reform Jewry.<sup>166</sup>

It was apparent that the solid majority of the membership of the CCAR agreed with the sentiments expressed by Rabbi Levy. More important than the debate over the incompatibility of Zionism and Reform Judaism were the two resolutions adopted by the 1943 convention. The first resolution answered the question raised in the debate once and for all:

Of late some of our members have renewed the assertion that Zionism is not compatible with Reform Judaism. The attempt has been made to set in irreconcilable opposition "universalism" and "particularism." To the members of the Conference, this appears unreal and misleading.



Without impugning the right of members of the Conference to be opposed to Zionism, for whatever reason they may choose, the Conference declares that it discerns no essential incompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism, no reason why those of its members who give allegiance to Zionism should not have the right to regard themselves as fully with the spirit and purpose of Reform Judaism.<sup>167</sup>

The second resolution passed by the CCAR came to grips with the harsh political reality of the Council's existence. It called on the American Council for Judaism to disband. The resolution was passed by an overwhelming vote of 137 to 45, and it reads as follows:

While members of the CCAR are fully within their rights in espousing whatever philosophy of Jewish life they may accept, nevertheless, the American Council for Judaism, because of the special circumstances under which it came into being, has already endangered the unity of the Conference. Its continued existence would become a growing threat to our fellowship.

The American Council for Judaism was founded by members of the CCAR for the purpose of combating Zionism. The Zionist movement and masses of Jews everywhere, shocked by the rise of this organization at a time when Zionists and others are laboring hard to have the gates of Palestine re-opened for the harassed Jews of Europe, could not avoid judging this event in the light of past controversies, or seeing in it an example of what they had come to consider the constant opposition of Reform Judaism to Zionist aspirations. This impression does grave injustice to the many devoted Zionists in the CCAR and in the Conference itself.

Therefore, without impugning the right of Zionists or non-Zionists to express and to disseminate their convictions within and without the Conference, we in the spirit of amity, urge our colleagues of the American Council for Judaism to terminate this organization.<sup>168</sup>

The Central Conference of American Rabbis had gone somewhat beyond the neutrality resolution of 1935. It officially approved of the legitimacy of the Zionist viewpoint within Reform Judaism. The only remaining step was for the Conference to officially endorse political Zionism, which it was not yet ready to do. The Union of American Hebrew



Congregations, at its 1943 Biennial Convention, saw fit to reinforce its support for Zionist goals in Palestine. The Union reaffirmed "its positive sympathy with and eagerness to cooperate in the upbuilding of Palestine, as stated in its resolution adopted . . . in New Orleans in 1937." Since the adoption of that earlier resolution, the lay leaders of the Reform Movement recognized that "the situation of world Jewry has tragically deteriorated, and the part that Palestine must now play has become correspondingly more significant."<sup>169</sup>

Meanwhile, according to Howard Greenstein, within one year after the meeting at Atlantic City, the American Council for Judaism had been weakened considerably. A split had occurred within the ranks of the Council, and by 1943, the majority of the members were laymen. Very few of the founding members remained in the Council, and by August of 1943, only twenty-six rabbis still retained membership. According to Greenstein, many Reform Jews joined the Council because of their fear of "Mah Yomru Hagoyim"; and it was precisely this obsession with acceptance by non-Jews which led most of the rabbis to resign from the Council. Most of the Reform rabbis who had joined the Council did so for the purpose of restoring the priority of religion in American Jewish life. They would not support the Council solely for its anti-Zionist dogma. Therefore, the original foundations of the Council gradually began to erode. With the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the debate became academic. The American Council for Judaism then appealed only to that small circle of fanatics who refused to recognize the Jewish State.<sup>170</sup>

The Zionists now had the right to function legitimately within the Central Conference of American Rabbis. Early 1944 saw the Zionist Organization of America appoint Rabbi James Heller, a former President of



the CCAR, to direct its nationwide campaign against the activities of the American Council for Judaism. A new status quo had taken hold in the CCAR. It was clear that anti-Zionism was no longer "compatible" with the new Reform Judaism. Writes David Polish: "While clearly not Zionist 'de jure,' the declarations and commitments of the Central Conference were to place it 'de facto' into the Zionist orbit."<sup>171</sup>

The two most ardent Zionists within the CCAR were Stephen S. Wise and Abba Hillel Silver. When the war came to a close and concentration camps disgorged thousands of displaced persons, pro-Zionist sentiment ran high. And when the Conference met in 1946, it found Stephen Wise acting as chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council, and Abba Hillel Silver presiding over the CCAR itself.

Early in the meeting, a telegram from Wise was read, requesting that a message be sent to the President of the United States urging action in favor of a Jewish Commonwealth. Though the Conference would not go so far as to ask for a Jewish Commonwealth, it did wire President Truman, "urging free immigration and the abrogation of the White Paper." A further protest was lodged at the arrest of Jewish Agency officials on the Sabbath, an act which the Conference labelled similar to "unjust Gestapo acts." The indignation of the entire Conference was expressed in a resolution drawn up by Maurice Eisendrath, George Fox and Julius Gordon. Even David Philipson expressed his "deep-seated horror" over the actions of the British in Palestine on that "Black Sabbath" of June 29, 1946.<sup>172</sup> The CCAR resolution itself stated the following:

The Central Conference of American Rabbis in convention assembled in Chicago, Ill. has just learned the shocking news of the unconscionable arrest of members of the Executive of the Jewish Agency in Palestine and of thousands of other Jews; and of other acts of violence



and terror tantamount to the inauguration of war by the British authorities on the Jews of Palestine. We are outraged even further by the manifestly deliberate desecration of the Jewish Sabbath by this wanton violation of one of the basic elements of religious freedom, and which represents a reversion to the barbaric practices of ancient Syria and Rome.

This Conference of 500 American Rabbis is unable to express adequately in words its grief and its horror at these unprecedented, unjust Gestapo acts.

In the bitter struggle of the forces of right against the powers of evil, the Jews of the world played a valiant part and Palestinian Jews particularly distinguished themselves in spite of the unfriendly and unsympathetic attitude of the British Colonial Administration in Palestine.

It is a matter of record that the Palestinian Jews under the guidance of the Jewish Agency have been an invaluable and an indispensable factor in Allied victory.

In view of the important role in the titanic struggle played by Jews of all lands and of which the Jews of Palestine are a part, we had a right to expect that simple justice would have been meted out to our people everywhere, but, instead of justice, Jewry has had thrust upon it the infamous White Paper, oppressive and tyrannical measures in Palestine, continuous aggressive and provocative acts against Palestinian Jewry; the breaking of sacred promises and now the supreme act of betrayal, the arrest of the Executive of the Jewish Agency and thousands of others.

We, the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, are resolved to resist this act of flagrant injustice with all the moral power at our command. We hereby petition the President of our country to use his good offices to procure the immediate release of the members of the Executive Agency and of all other victims of this terroristic procedure, and the prompt implementation of that recommendation of the Anglo-American Inquiry Commission's report which calls for the unconditional admission of one hundred thousand Jews into Palestine.

We are firm in the conviction that the moral conscience of America is in full agreement with our stand, will support our protest, and will join us in this appeal in the name of the God of justice.<sup>173</sup>

The year 1947 witnessed a remarkable change in the position of Julian Morgenstern regarding Zionism. Still President of the Hebrew Union College,



and throughout his life an implacable anti-Zionist, Morgenstern had been undergoing a gradual shift in his attitude. Delivering the 1947 Conference Lecture entitled, "With History As Our Guide," Dr. Morgenstern felt compelled by history itself to declare:

. . . Political Zionism represents the latest response of the Jewish people to the conditions which confront it in this new age, recrudescence racial nationalism and ruthless sadistic persecution in many, and steady deterioration of status in most lands. This aspiration for restored Jewish Nationhood is but the natural reaction of the soul of the Jewish people throughout the world to their sad and seemingly hopeless lot. . . .<sup>174</sup>

"Only after the results of the Holocaust were apparent to all," writes Michael A. Meyer, "and death-camp survivors were clamoring to enter the Land of Israel, did he change his view, saying in 1947 that the events of the last years 'have made Zionists in a certain sense of all of us who are worthy of the name Jew.'"<sup>175</sup>

The 1947 Central Conference convention was held in Montreal, Canada. Ironically, just 50 years earlier, in the city of Montreal, and in the year of the Basle Congress, the CCAR had listened to Isaac Mayer Wise attacking Zionism as nothing more than a passing fad. This year, 1947, saw men like Julian Morgenstern and Samuel Schulman praising the efforts of Abba Hillel Silver and the Jews of Palestine. The year 1947 also saw the Central Conference adopt a five-point resolution which declared that the Palestine issue was ultimately tied to the fate of the survivors of the Holocaust.

The five-point resolution called for:

1. A visit of the U.N. inquiry committee on Palestine to the European Displaced Persons Camps.
2. The abolition of the British White Paper.
3. Free immigration and colonization in Palestine.
4. An immediate end to the deplorable use of violence



against the Jewish cause, and an equal condemnation of British repressive policy.

5. A commendation of the U.J.A.<sup>176</sup>

In 1948, following the culmination of the Zionist ideal, and the May 14th declaration of the independent State of Israel, the CCAR convention adopted a seven-point resolution, which highly praised the existence of the new State. The seven-point resolution stated the following:

1. Israel was saluted as the bastion of "spiritual revival . . . Hebrew cultural contributions . . . social and democratic advances . . . for the enrichment of Judaism the world over, and the benefit of all humanity.
2. The Haganah was commended.
3. The invasion of the Arab states was condemned.
4. The British "duplicity" was likewise condemned, and the British government was asked to support partition.
5. American governmental recognition of Israel was praised.
6. A prayer was offered that the UN attempts at peace negotiations would be successful, without impairing the integrity of Israel's position.
7. American Jewry was urged to continue its support of all organizations involved in Israel's well-being.<sup>177</sup>

The Central Conference was most elaborate in its praise based on points 1 and 5 above. The following is an excerpt of the CCAR resolution, which rejoiced in those nearly messianic events of May, 1948:

We salute the Republic of Israel and offer our Israeli brothers all possible encouragement and assistance in the maintenance of independence and in the achievement of security. We pray that Israel will go from strength to strength and that with God's help, it may soon attain peace and prosperity, that it may carry forward the spiritual revival, the Hebrew cultural contributions and the social and democratic advances already fostered in the Yishuv, for the enrichment of Judaism the world over, and the benefit of all humanity.



We are proud of, and grateful for American recognition of the Republic of Israel and voice our gratitude to President Truman for his prompt action.<sup>178</sup>

Naomi Cohen has perceived with accuracy the extent of the shift of opinion within Reform Judaism on the Zionist issue. Cohen states that from Basle to the establishment of the Jewish State, Reform Judaism ran "the entire gamut of opinion with respect to political Zionism":

The twenty-five years following 1922 saw major changes in the Reform attitude towards Zionism. The non-Zionist, rather than anti-Zionist, trend which became manifest after the Balfour Declaration continued in the twenties with Reform co-operation in the rehabilitation of Palestine and the work of the Jewish Agency. The next two decades marked the beginning of the active pro-Zionist policy which meant the advocacy, for the first time, of the political aims of Zionism by the preponderant majority of Reform leadership. Echoes of the traditional aggressive anti-Zionism were still heard, however, from the small minority who organized the American Council for Judaism in 1943 and whose policies were largely reformulations of the sentiments voiced by Isaac M. Wise in his address before the Central Conference in 1897. Thus, within a period of fifty years, did Reform Judaism run the entire gamut of opinion with respect to political Zionism.<sup>179</sup>



## EPILOGUE

Since 1948

On a personal level, the beginning of Chapter II in this thesis related the story of Leon Fram's personal commitment to Zionism during the early years of his life. Rabbi Fram founded Temple Israel of Detroit during the early 1940s. His Temple, which would become Detroit's largest Reform congregation years later, served as a Zionist alternative to the more classically Reform Temple Beth El. I believe that the influence of only one pro-Zionist Reform rabbi must not be underestimated. My own upbringing as a Jew took place during the 1950s and the 1960s. The influence of a Jewish home was, of course, paramount in molding my identity as a Jew. Rabbi Fram's Temple Israel, however, gave me the communal and educational aspects of Jewish identity. Zionism and a love for Israel--the people and the State--came across strongly to the many youngsters who passed through the doors of Temple Israel's Sunday School.

My childhood idols, on a Jewish level at least, were Moses, King David, Queen Esther and Judah Maccabee. But they were also Theodor Herzl, Ben Gurion, Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan. As a Jew who now stands ready for rabbinical ordination, I have the flexibility of the Reform Movement to thank for my identity as a Jew, an American and a Zionist. Had Reform Judaism not been flexible enough to change, we might still be mired in the old anti-Zionist dogma of the pre-World War I era. Had Leon Fram not possessed the courage of his Reform Jewish convictions to enter the Hebrew Union College during years of intense anti-Zionism, 1915-1920, and had he not taken the initiative of founding a Zionist-



oriented Temple for Detroit's Reform Jews twenty years later, then I might not today possess that special 'love of Zion' which lends integrity to my Jewish existence in a post-Auschwitz world.

The 1950s and the 1960s saw a changed temper on Zionism within the institutions of the Reform Movement. The papers and discussions of those two decades reflected that change within the Central Conference of American Rabbis. According to Rabbi Bernard Bamberger: "The anti-Zionist philosophy has been rendered obsolete by history . . . Sympathetic non-Zionism has become the dominant attitude among American Jews, but the mood and content have changed. Instead of calling it non-Zionist we may now title it simply 'pro-Israel!'" The change of mood was also symbolized by the Conference Executive Board's approval of a memorial resolution on the 50th anniversary of Theodor Herzl's death--a far cry, indeed, from Isaac Mayer Wise's disparaging references to Herzl in the late 1890s!<sup>180</sup>

But still there was a need for added clarification of the relationship between Reform Judaism and Jewish nationalism as embodied in the new State of Israel. Amidst fears of making dangerously premature generalizations, a special committee was appointed to arrive at a new definition of this relationship. In 1962, the committee brought in its report, which was adopted by the Conference. It was actually more of a "non-definition," for it stated the following:

For us, Jewish religious faith is indispensable to the Jewish way of life. Yet we Jews are one people the world over, with a common historic background and a distinct consciousness of Jewish brotherhood. The familiar classifications of race, nationality and church do not properly describe us. We are a unique community.<sup>181</sup>

The institutionalization of the Reform or "Progressive" Movement began to take place in Israel, where the status quo of religion was



zealously guarded by the Orthodox rabbinate. Progressive Judaism in Israel gained in stature with the building of the Jerusalem branch of the Hebrew Union College in 1962. At formal ceremonies in 1963 the building was dedicated, in the presence of high Israeli government officials. The Jerusalem School was the greatest achievement of the College's President, Nelson Glueck (1900-1971). Glueck, an eminent archaeologist in the Near East, was a friend of Prime Ministers Ben Gurion, Eshkol and Golda Meir. In the face of great opposition from Orthodox Jews in Israel, Glueck procured the assistance of the municipality of Jerusalem, and was successful in the establishment of the School, and a small Reform sanctuary inside the School building. It was soon to become the center for the Progressive Movement in Israel.<sup>182</sup>

Michael A. Meyer has noted that Glueck, like his predecessor Morgenstern, was not a ritually observant Jew. He was a classical Reform Jew at heart. But, according to Meyer, Glueck showed great flexibility on the issue of Zionism. Initially an advocate of bi-nationalism like his friend Judah Magnes, after 1948 he became an ardent Zionist. Writes Meyer:

What remained consistent over the years was Glueck's love of the land, especially of Jerusalem and the Negev desert. When he was in Israel Glueck was a different man. In Cincinnati he felt compelled to represent the dignified, distant, and restrained head of a rabbinical seminary. In Israel he could be Professor Glueck, the archaeologist, the romantic, uninhibited explorer of desert wastelands. In Cincinnati he was always formal in attire and manner, in Jerusalem he dressed casually and mingled easily.<sup>183</sup>

Michael Langer views the period between 1967-1973 as the turning point era for Reform Judaism and its relationship to the Jewish State. Langer, writing in a recent issue of Midstream magazine, has made the



following observations, in an article entitled, "Zionism and Reform Judaism: Responses to Modernity";

It was in the period between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War that the Reform movement began to seriously think in terms of its impact on the Jewish State. In order to confront the political and religious reality it was clear that a progressive Jewish presence would have to be established. The World Union for Progressive Judaism moved its headquarters to Jerusalem. The Hebrew Union College established a campus in Jerusalem and made a year of study there mandatory for ordination in the Reform Rabbinate. A group of Rabbis from the Central Conference of American Rabbis initiated a series of dialogues with leaders of the kibbutz movement and the idea of a Reform kibbutz was born. . . .

. . . The central event at the Fiftieth Anniversary Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism held in Jerusalem in November, 1976, was the dedication of the Reform movement's first kibbutz--Yahel--located in Israel's Arava, 45 miles north of Eilat. Later, in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin addressed the conference and stated:

. . . With the establishment of this kibbutz the pluralistic and spiritual life of Israel is enriched. It marks a new and perhaps historic threshold of Reform Judaism's involvement in the actual life of the Jewish State. . . .<sup>184</sup>

As Langer noted in his article, the Hebrew Union College now requires a year of study in Jerusalem for rabbinical ordination. What he did not mention was that this program began in 1970, and the College entered a new era as it became the first Jewish seminary to require all of its students to spend their first year of studies at a Jerusalem campus. The current President of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, who has continued Dr. Glueck's emphasis on the Jerusalem School. Dr. Gottschalk has just announced the creation of a new program which allows young Israelis to be ordained as rabbis at the Jerusalem School. The Chronicle, a publication of the College-Institute, recently publicized this new development at the Jerusalem School:



In a development of historic significance, the board of governors of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion has approved the introduction of a graduate program at its Jerusalem School which will prepare Israelis for careers as rabbis in the Reform movement in Israel.

Reform, or Progressive, Judaism in Israel is currently served by rabbis who were trained elsewhere in the world. Never has a Reform rabbi been ordained in the Jewish state, where the Reform movement is attracting a growing number of adherents.

"Reform Judaism is filling a vital need in the spiritual life of Israel," President Alfred Gottschalk said in announcing the new program. "In keeping with its traditions and commitments, Hebrew Union College is responding to this need by instituting an educational program which will enable Israelis to serve modern Judaism in their own country."

The World Union for Progressive Judaism, with headquarters in Jerusalem, in hailing the innovative move by Hebrew Union College, has pledged its support in meeting the additional academic and administrative costs. Rabbi Richard G. Hirsch, executive director of the World Union, said there was need today for the services of rabbis in Progressive congregations, in the Israeli Youth Movement, in kibbutzim and in other aspects of Israeli community life. He said Haifa, Nazareth and Beersheba were among a number of communities in which Reform congregations are now without the services of full-time rabbis.<sup>185</sup>

In 1970 the Central Conference of American Rabbis held its annual convention in Israel, a first for any Diaspora rabbinical association. Three hundred Reform rabbis marked the opening of the historic convention at a special gathering on Mount Scopus' Hebrew University amphitheater. In his opening address, President Roland Gittelsohn announced that Reform Jewry would observe the 5th of Iyar, Israel Independence Day, as an official holiday. A special liturgy would be prepared for the occasion as well. It was also decided that the Central Conference would meet in Israel at least once every seven years. Between 1972-1974, the CCAR and the UAHC each joined the World Jewish Congress. And in 1975,



the World Union for Progressive Judaism joined the World Zionist Organization. In a dramatic move in 1974, the WUPJ moved its international headquarters from London and New York to Jerusalem. These actions all represent increased Reform participation and sharing in the life of "Klal Yisrael." The growing Reform presence in Israel has challenged the Orthodox religious establishment. The possibility is now greater that authentic Jewish options and religious pluralism will soon come to the citizens of Israel.<sup>186</sup>

At its Biennial in November, 1975, the members of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations heard President Alexander Schindler, a Reform rabbi himself, respond to the United Nations resolution calling Zionism a form of racism. Schindler declared:

We are all of us Jews and whether we use the small z or the large Z, we are all of us Zionists. The land of Israel which is Zion, and the children of Israel who constitute the Jewish people, and the God of Israel are all bound together in a triple covenant. At no time in our history have we ever stopped praying or longing or working for Zion.<sup>187</sup>

Responding to Schindler's remarks, Michael Langer made the following observation in his recent Midstream article:

Heady stuff for a movement that harbored within it the most vocal Jewish anti-Zionist element--The American Council for Judaism. Nor should one underestimate the ambivalence felt towards the "establishment" in Israel by prominent circles within Reform--because of "dovish" proclivities with regard to Israel's foreign policy, because of the Orthodox stranglehold on established religious expression, and lastly, because of the demand for increased funding for Judaism in America.

Hence it would be incorrect to assume that Reform Zionism will imply uncritical support of the State of Israel. Its central thrust will probably be a socially concerned cultural Zionism with particular emphasis on the development of a progressive Judaism in Israel.<sup>188</sup>



Notwithstanding Langer's cautious note, however, the Reform Movement is establishing itself in the State of Israel, and official government recognition of "Progressive Judaism" should be granted in the not too distant future. In June, 1976, the CCAR adopted a statement entitled, "Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective." Section V concerns "Our Obligations: The State of Israel and the Diaspora." In this section, the statement expresses real enthusiasm for the State of Israel, while maintaining the ideally healthy balance between genuine Jewish life in Israel and the countries of the Diaspora. The text of Section V is as follows:

We are privileged to live in an extraordinary time, one in which a third Jewish commonwealth has been established in our people's ancient homeland. We are bound to that land and to the newly reborn State of Israel by innumerable religious and ethnic ties. We have been enriched by its culture and ennobled by its indomitable spirit. We see it providing unique opportunities for Jewish self-expression. We have both a stake and a responsibility in building the State of Israel, assuring its security and defining its Jewish character. We encourage aliyah for those who wish to find maximum personal fulfillment in the cause of Zion. We demand that Reform Judaism be unconditionally legitimized in the State of Israel.

At the same time that we consider the State of Israel vital to the welfare of Judaism everywhere, we reaffirm the mandate of our tradition to create strong Jewish communities wherever we live. A genuine Jewish life is possible in any land, each community developing its own particular character and determining its Jewish responsibilities. The foundation of Jewish community life is the synagogue. It leads us beyond itself to cooperate with other Jews, to share their concerns, and to assume leadership in communal affairs. We are therefore committed to the full democratization of the Jewish community and to its hallowing in terms of Jewish values.

The State of Israel and the Diaspora, in fruitful dialogue, can show how a people transcends nationalism even as it affirms it, thereby setting an example for humanity which remains largely concerned with dangerously parochial goals.<sup>189</sup>



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