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ATTEMPTS AT CREEDAL FORMULATIONS

IN AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
requirements for the Degree of Master of
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Digest of the Thesis

This thesis deals with the problem of the lack of authority in Reform Judaism, and the various efforts which were made to solve the problem prior to 1938. More specifically, it examines the different attempts which have been made to formulate a creed, and to establish an authoritative hierarchical structure, viz. a Synod, in American Reform Judaism. The investigation of these attempts discloses that American Reform Judaism has been unable to formulate any kind of authoritative doctrinal declaration or pronouncement.

The thesis begins by introducing the subject with the question, "Does Judaism have dogmas?" It briefly discusses Schechter's and Mendelssohn's answers. It then proceeds to show how German Reform dealt, I should say failed to deal, with its inability to construct an authoritative basis for its reforms, a factor which was instrumental in leading to its decline. Then the thesis studies American Reform, from its earliest beginnings in Charleston, up to and including the Columbus Conference (1937). It devotes much discussion to the Reform Rabbinical Conferences held in Pittsburgh (1885) and Columbus (1937), for it was especially at these Conferences that American Reform made attempts to define its theological position. Yet, neither of these platforms were authoritative statements, because Reform lacked, as it still does today, any instrument of authority by which to enforce its definition of Reform Judaism.

Margolis' Creed (1903) is discussed in some detail for it represents the greatest effort in American Reform to establish an authoritative creed for Reform Jews. Also, much discussion is spent

on the struggle to establish a Synod (1902 - 1906), for the defeat of the Synod-idea marked the end of any real attempt to establish a source of authority in Reform.

Chapter Eight discusses Reform's views on Zionism. Reform's position on the issue of Zionism changed drastically between 1897 and 1937, due mainly to the tremendous influence which the Eastern European immigration had upon the essential nature of Reform. The subject of Zionism exemplifies Reform's weak ideological foundation. American Reform evolved in only forty years from being "religion-centered" to being "people-centered".

The thesis shows that Reform has never had a source of authority, and how any attempt to give a clear-cut authoritative statement of what constitutes the essence of Reform has been rejected by the movement.

To Suzanne

Acknowledgment

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INTRODUCTION

The emancipation of the Jews in the latter part of the eighteenth century placed Judaism in a dire dilemma. The acts of emancipation, which were by-products of the French Revolution, found Judaism completely unprepared for its newly acquired liberty. Judaism had to quickly adjust to the new surroundings in such a way that it could still preserve itself against complete assimilation.

In its origin, Reform showed great promise of being the perfect solution for the problems that were facing the newly emancipated Jew. However, out of the inherent nature of Reform, especially in the unique manner in which it has manifested itself in America, certain basic theological and philosophical problems arose.

At the root of practically every ideological problem which has faced American Reform Judaism since its inception as an organized movement is the one basic fact that Reform Judaism has lacked a source of authority. The Traditional Jewish source of authority broke down under the weight of the Emancipation, and was buried in America! Thus, because there is no longer a source of authority on which it can be based, American Reform has continually been without any kind of authoritative statement, pronouncement, or declaration as to what constitutes its essential theological beliefs and commitments.

This last statement would have undoubtedly thrown most nineteenth century American Reform Jewish theologians into a state of consternation. They would have said that Reform's greatest virtue lies in its absolute freedom, in its ability to face unhindered

any problem that the modern Jew has to face.

As Reform developed in the twentieth century there arose a growing segment of members within its ranks who felt that if Reform Judaism continued without authoritative guidance, it would end in the dissolution of the movement. They claimed that Reform had become too flexible, that there was such a thing as too much freedom leading to anarchy. They felt that Reform had permitted each individual to become his own source of authority. Each rabbi was allowed to do whatever was meaningful in his own eyes.

From the very beginning, American Reform Judaism has been confronted with a philosophical dilemma caused by having destroyed the very foundation of Traditional Judaism. The old question, "Can there be deeds without a creed?" has been a real and burning issue in American Reform. Does Reform indeed have a creed? If there is one, from where does it derive its authority? If there is not one, then who can say what constitutes the essential beliefs and commitments of American Reform Judaism?

Many American Reform rabbis and laymen have, through the approximately one hundred and twenty-five year old history of their religious movement, anxiously requested and sought an authoritative creedal statement for Reform Judaism. They have felt that there was such confusion, contradiction and uncertainty in the movement that such a statement was desperately needed. Their opponents have argued that a Reform Jewish creed would be a contradiction in terms, that a dogmatic creedal statement would turn Reform into an orthodoxy.

This rabbinical thesis, "Attempts at Creedal Formulations in American Reform Judaism" shall deal with the basic problem of

authority alluded to here in the introduction. It shall:

- a) discuss the nature of the problem of a creed for Reform Judaism
- b) discuss the relationship between Reform Jewish history from 1800 - 1937, and Reform Judaism's attitude towards formulating authoritative statements
- c) discuss Reform Jewish attempts to establish a Synod as a source of authority
- d) state the nature of Reform Jewish creeds and statements of principles that are to be found within its literature

The thesis will deal with German Reform in general terms, but will be mainly concerned with the American Reform movement, from its earliest beginnings, up to and including the Columbus Conference in 1937.

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem of Dogma

Pre-Mendelssohn

Solomon Schechter, says in his essay "The Dogmas of Judaism", "It is true that every great religion is a concentration of many ideas and ideals, which make this religion able to adapt itself to various modes of thinking and living. But there must always be a point round which all these ideas concentrate themselves. This centre is Dogma."¹

Schechter traces the history of Jewish dogma from Biblical times till Mendelssohn. He shows that certain religious concepts have been prevalent in Judaism from its very beginning which have given a certain inner unity to its development. The two basic beliefs of Judaism have been:

- a) Belief in God, and
- b) Belief that the God of Israel will one day be the God of the world

These two beliefs have been at the heart of the Jewish religion, and when not overtly expressed, were taken for granted.

Even though the Bible does not order one to believe in anything, the Bible is filled with "implicit" beliefs. For the faithful Biblical Jew believed that there was a God who demanded certain requirements to be fulfilled. He believed in a God who rewarded or punished on the basis of whether His demands were carried out or not. These beliefs and others were implicit in the great emphasis on deeds and acts which constituted much of Biblical Judaism.

In Rabbinic Judaism there were numerous attempts to delineate

the basic dogmas of Judaism. Maimonides was the first great Jewish thinker to formulate a creedal statement, but he was not the only one who stated in a succinct form what he believed to be basic Jewish dogmas. Among the others were Albo, Crescas and Nachmanides. Arbarbanel took the interesting position that it was impossible to draw up a list of basic Jewish dogmas, because every word in the Torah must be considered as a dogma by itself. To him, the Torah consisted of at least six-hundred and thirteen dogmas!

Schechter's objective in outlining the history of Jewish Dogmas prior to Mendelssohn is that, "We usually urge that in Judaism religion means life; but we forget that a life without guiding principles and thoughts is a life not worth living. At least it was so considered by the greatest Jewish thinkers, and hence their efforts to formulate the creed of Judaism."²

Not every modern Jewish theologian would agree with Schechter's evaluation of Jewish Tradition, that it either implicitly or explicitly contained a number of dogmas. Schechter himself states (in 1896) that a majority of theologians accept the notion that Judaism has had only one dogma--the "dogma of dogmalessness".³ The person he holds most responsible for this distortion of Jewish dogma, and the person generally given the most credit for being the champion of the "dogma of dogmalessness" is one who often has been mistakenly called the "Father of German Reform Judaism"--Moses Mendelssohn.

Mendelssohn

Moses Mendelssohn is often mentioned as being the person most responsible for the existence of the modern problem of a creed in

Judaism. He was one of the very first Jews to leave the ghetto and to find acceptance in the non-Jewish world. His close friendship with Lessing, the noted dramatist, was well known throughout Germany. As a noted author and philosopher he found admittance into social circles which had heretofore been closed to Jews. Although he was a Jew, he was usually considered as being "different" from most Jews.

Having left the Ghetto and having tasted the "sweet fruits" of the non-Jewish world, Mendelssohn desired that all Jews might be given the same opportunity as he. Yet, he realized that most Jews did not know the German language, making it virtually impossible to communicate with the non-Jew. So he set before himself the difficult task of translating the Jewish Bible from Hebrew to German. This monumental task was accomplished by him in 1783. By this one act, he introduced German culture and language, and ideas of the Enlightenment into the isolated Jewish world. Thus, he helped pave the way for the Emancipation of German Jewry.

His desire that Jews might find acceptance in the world of the Enlightenment led him to stress that the Jewish religion completely excluded dogmatic beliefs. Living at a time when Deistic philosophy was very popular among the intellectuals, Mendelssohn knew that for the Deist dogmatism in any form was considered an evil. Thus, he sought to show that Judaism was a religion based purely on reason, which did not demand that one accept certain dogmas in order to be a follower of Judaism. In his Jerusalem he made the following famous statement: "Hence Judaism has no symbolical books, no articles of faith. No one is asked to confirm by oath either symbols or

articles of faith; indeed we have no conception of what is called oaths of confessions, and must regard them, in the spirit of genuine Judaism, as untenable."⁴ Mendelssohn advanced the idea that Judaism had never required Jews to believe in any dogmas, but that it demanded deeds on the basis of a revealed legislation. These laws were the exclusive possession of the Jews. Not creeds or dogmas, but deeds were commanded by the Torah--this for Mendelssohn was the essence of Judaism.⁵ It was a conception of Judaism which he felt worthy of being held in the Enlightenment.

Mendelssohn's position raised the question, "Does Judaism have dogmas?" If Judaism does have dogmas, what are they? The answer to the question, "Does Judaism have a creed?" depends on the answer to the question, "Does Judaism have dogmas?" For it is impossible to have a creed without dogmas which must be believed. If it were decided that Judaism had dogmas, and also had a creed, it would be important to ask "From where does the creed derive its authority?" These questions have been of central importance in Reform Judaism since its inception as a movement in Germany. They are questions which have raised much discussion and controversy throughout the entire history of the Reform movement. They are the basic philosophical questions of the movement.

The statement has often been made that Judaism is a religion of "deed, not creed". Those who have sought to show that Judaism lacks dogma, that it is entirely a religion of deeds often invoke this statement. They have maintained that this is what distinguishes Judaism from Christianity, Christianity being a religion of "creed, not deed".

On the other hand, their opponents have stated that "without religious convictions, beliefs or creed there can be no religious deeds."⁶ Deeds must be based on certain convictions. There must be a raison d'etre for a deed. Even if a creed was not explicitly stated, it was implied in the halachic structure.

One of the biggest difficulties in the discussion of creeds and dogmas has been one of semantics. There has been a constant use of the term "creed" in its Christological sense by those who maintain that Judaism never has had a creed. The term has been used to mean a set of beliefs, whose binding character has been derived from the decision of an authoritative body and which must be believed in order to gain life in the hereafter. Those who affirm the other side have generally used the term "creed" to designate the basic beliefs of Judaism, beliefs that one must adhere to in order to be a faithful Jew. The necessary distinction has often not been made between these two different meanings of the term "creed". Much of the emotion generated over this issue has been caused by this semantic problem. For, if the question had been posed, "Does Judaism have any basic beliefs?", the answer given by most would undoubtedly have been in the affirmative.

Attempts to establish a creed, an authoritative list of definitive principles for Reform Jews have arisen sporadically through the years. These attempts have not met with much success. Undoubtedly, the major ideological factor which has prevented attempts at formulating a creed from achieving any kind of wide success has been the fear that a creed or any kind of authoritative doctrinal statement would be a contradiction of the essential Reform

position. That is to say, there has been the fear that a creed would stultify Reform, would fixate it, and transform Reform into another Orthodoxy. The establishment of a creed would mean that an authoritative body would be needed to enforce it, a body which would undoubtedly endeavor to prevent any deviation from the creed it would be empowered to enforce.

On the other hand, there have been those who have maintained that Reform already has basic dogmas with which it operates. They have urged that these dogmas be made more explicit so that all who seek a clear and succinct statement of what constitutes Reform will be able to obtain such a statement. They have sought to establish an authoritative body, a Synod, which would clearly specify these dogmas of Reform. They felt this would prevent Reform from developing into a movement of anarchy.

These attempts to define Reform Judaism are the consequences of Reform's almost revolutionary tendencies in the nineteenth century. In many respects, Reform broke with much of what was considered to be essential to Traditional Judaism. Yet, in spite of its denial of basic Traditional concepts, Reform has maintained that it is within "the mainstream of Judaism", nay, even more, that it represents "the essence of Judaism".

For Reform to exist, it was necessary to deny the authority of the Traditional rabbinate. Instead, the essence of early Reform Judaism was considered to be Biblical Judaism, especially the individual prophets, where Truth came through Divine inspiration. The early Reformers claimed that the rabbinical texts, the Talmud, and the codes, bury within them the pure truths of prophetic

teaching. Einhorn conceived the task of the Jewish reformers as being twofold, "First to unchain by the breath of the living spirit the forms that had become rigid and to make them fluid, and secondly, to sift these forms according to their antiquity and essentiality, and in accordance with such sifting to reduce their great number, beneath whose burden Judaism, without a doubt, is sighing and panting."⁷

The Reform movement ostensibly represented in overt form the explicit manifestation of what had previously been the implicit, inherent essence of Judaism. When Orthodox Judaism attacked the Reformers as "revolutionary" and "heretical", Reform found it necessary to justify itself, to show that it and not Orthodoxy was "true Judaism". Thus, the need for Reform rabbinical conferences, the demand by many Reform laymen and rabbis for authoritative statements and the innumerable sermons and lectures by Reform rabbis stating what they believed to be basic principles of Reform Judaism. This was to be found in Germany, where Reform began, and even more so in America where Reform blossomed forth.

Mendelssohn's quote was the beginning of what has proven to be a difficult and arduous task for Post-Emancipation Reform Jewry-- defining what it means by a "Reform Jew". The problem has been to define Reform Judaism without defining it into an Orthodoxy. The nature of this struggle, from the Emancipation till the Columbus Platform in 1937, constitutes the essence of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

European Reform JudaismPre-Emancipation Jewry

Rufus Lears has written, "Ashkenazim and Sephardim alike accepted the authority of the Talmud; it became an object of passionate study and endless elucidation, and the summary of its vast legislation known as Shulchan Aruch, which appeared in Palestine in the sixteenth century, became the guide to the pious in all things that touched their earthly life from the cradle to the grave. The only serious challenge to the Talmud had arisen in the eighth century and led to the formation of the sect known as Karaites".⁸

The Shulchan Aruch remained as the unshaken autocratic authority in Jewish life in Europe for two centuries. The ultimate source of authority for the halachot included in Karo's work was Divine Revelation. It was believed that God had revealed His entire truth at Sinai. By means of an extraordinary legal process, the Jewish people continually interpreted what they regarded as being the word of God, adjusting it to meet their needs throughout their history.

"As long as Jewry constituted a world apart, the Talmud and the Shulchan Aruch ruled its life. Under the force of social pressure and public opinion, Jews readily subjected themselves to the strict and often heroic discipline of rabbinic tradition. Its binding character, as we have seen, was derived from the belief that it is implicit in the Sinaitic revelation...The rabbis...defined the written law and applied it to the changing exigencies of Jewish life. Rabbinic law, therefore, claimed the loyalty and obedience of all Jewish people".⁹ When the Shulchan Aruch was codified in the six-

teenth century, it soon came to be considered as a record of Divine ordinance binding through Divine Authority upon every Jew.

This last paragraph adequately describes the place of Rabbinic law in Judaism prior to the nineteenth century. However, after the Emancipation there gradually arose a group of laymen and rabbis who were anxious to change some of these laws. They desired to see the newly emancipated Jews received into the Western World, and they found many of the restrictions and prohibitions of the rabbis cumbersome and disadvantageous for the achieving of this end.

Emancipation and Early German Reform (1785 - 1825)

As was later to happen in the United States, German Reform began as laymen's movement. When the ghetto walls began tumbling, German Jewry was suddenly confronted with the opportunity of completely assimilating into the German nation. After centuries of persecution and isolation, the inner urge to assimilate was too great for many Jews, and thousands of them forsook their Judaism. Yet, there were many Jews who desired to remain Jews and at the same time be German citizens. But many of these laymen found many aspects of their Jewish religious life "behind the times", and they desired to have Judaism "up to date".

The first generation of German reformers were mainly interested in changing externals, rituals. They sought such reforms as having an organ in the synagogue, prayers in the vernacular, singing hymns in German and decorum in the conducting of services. They wanted services that would more closely resemble those of their non-Jewish neighbors. Theological problems, for the most part, did not concern

them. Theologically, they remained essentially "Traditional" Jews.

Later German Reform (1825 - 1845)

The emphasis in German Reform in the 1830's and 1840's changed from a desire for ritual reforms by laymen to a seeking of a theoretical basis for the reforms by those rabbis interested in Reform. The "Science of Judaism" (1819 - 1824) had made its influence felt amongst these rabbis. The rabbis sought an authoritative basis for their ritual and theological changes. They avidly studied the Tradition for their authority to reform.

The Emancipation had raised new problems within Judaism. These scholars declared that just as Judaism in the past had adjusted to new circumstances in order to survive, so now Judaism had to re-adjust once again. History became the authority for Reform.

They taught, for example, that just as the Judaism of the Biblical period was different from the Judaism of the Hellenistic period, and the Judaism of the Hellenistic period was different from the Judaism of Medieval Judaism, so German Reform was different from Ghetto Judaism. "Basic Judaism" had evolved through the centuries, changing and adapting itself according to the times and conditions. The "eternal truths" of Judaism remained, but ideas and rituals which Judaism had acquired through its history and which served as a protecting shell for the "eternal truths" could be changed, added or eliminated.

The leader of these "moderate" Reform rabbis was Abraham Geiger. "It mainly was Abraham Geiger, who, with his profound historical research into the entire Jewish past, biblical and

rabbinical, offered the scientific impulse and basis to systematic reform, observing as he did, that Judaism throughout the ages formed a continuous process of evolution and growth, both theoretical and practical..."¹⁰

Hamburg Prayerbook (1841)

In 1841, The Hamburg Reform Temple (founded in 1818) published a revised prayerbook. In it the traditional belief in a personal Messiah was replaced by the idea of a Messianic Age, and prayers for the deliverance of all Jews from exile were omitted. Also eliminated were references to bodily resurrection.¹¹

The immediate Orthodox reaction was a bitter, virulent one. It accused the reformers of abandoning historic Judaism. It especially denounced the reformers for their attitude towards important Jewish doctrines. Rabbi Isaac Bernays, an Orthodox rabbi, issued a public ban forbidding the use of the prayerbook to all Jews. Officials of the Hamburg Temple went before the Hamburg Senate, and had this ban rescinded. The controversy attracted much attention throughout Europe.¹²

Frankfort Reform Society (1843)

In 1843, an extremely radical organization, called the Frankfort Society of the Friends of Reform, was founded. This group, composed entirely of laymen, desired to completely eliminate the authority of rabbinical Judaism. It sought to return to a constantly changing "Mosaic Judaism". The two major teachings of this group were:

1. It recognized "the possibility of unlimited development

in Judaism", and

2. "the collection of controversies and prescriptions commonly designated by the name Talmud possess for us no authority either from the dogmatic or the practical standpoint."¹²

It was in some respects a modern "Karaites" movement, which was given great impetus by the large number of Jews who wished to eliminate all signs of Jewish distinctiveness established by the rabbis. This extreme position was denounced by Reform and Orthodox Jews alike. Reform leaders from the more conservative Geiger to the extremely liberal Holdheim reacted against the Society. Holdheim recognized the danger of the Society's declaration. Geiger considered it confused in thought.¹⁴ They saw in it the dissolution of Judaism.

Yet, this radical group served the purpose of stimulating the Reformers into seeking the concretization of their ideology. It forced them to recognize the dangers of an "unbridled liberalism". It necessitated a "drawing of the line" between "Reform Judaism", "Orthodox Judaism" and "Radical Mosaism". The German conferences (1844 - 1846) dealt with this problem.

David Einhorn, who was very active in the German Reform movement, spoke out against the Society as follows: "The entire history of Judaism, yea, the Talmud itself, gives evidence of Judaism's capability of development. But such a development could and can take place upon the immovable foundations of Mosaism--which are monotheism and belief in divine revelation...(The Reform Society) wants to put anarchy in the place of law. Instead of pointing out what is mutable and transitory and what is immutable and permanent, either in the doctrine or the law of Mosaism, it declares the same

to be in a process of perpetual and unlimited motion, which is tantamount to saying that it has no divine character at all, that it is human in origin and may culminate in Spinozism."¹⁵

The Influence of German Philosophy

The philosophical currents of the times swept Reform along with them. Hegel and Kant's influence was strongly felt by the German Reformers. The philosophical climate of the nineteenth century was permeated by the thinking of these two great German philosophers. Hegel's ideas, especially, made a strong impact. His conception of God as the Absolute Spirit, Who has progressively revealed Himself in history, and Who was causing human conditions to constantly become better and better, met with eager acceptance by many Reformers. Naturally, they did not accept the Christian emphasis in Hegel's thought. Yet, they saw in Hegel's notion of the "Geist" the philosophical justification for Reform. God had progressively revealed Himself in Biblical and Rabbinic times, and now in the Enlightenment period, His fullest revelation was occurring. By using the dialectical method properly through reason, one could discover the way in which the Absolute Spirit had operated in history. An age of freedom and brotherhood was about to begin.

Samuel Hirsch, a leading Reform Jewish philosopher of the day, attempted a synthesis of modern philosophy and Judaism. His Philosophy of Religion closely followed Hegel, but he tried to show that Judaism was the absolute religion, a position which Hegel had denied to it. Hirsch believed that the arrival of the Messianic Age was about to occur. Then came the "reaction" in Europe against

the optimism of the Enlightenment, and Hirsch and other Reformers emigrated to America. He came to America in 1866, and had a great impact upon Kohler and Emil G. Hirsch (his son).

Hegel's theory of history was ideally suited for German Reform, as was Kant's great emphasis on the importance of Reason. Kant's critical inquiry into the functioning of the mind had justified the Enlightenment's affirmation of Reason as being the key to unlocking the secrets of the universe, to understanding nature and the tool to use in constructing a Golden Age. Kant himself said "Reason could show men how to control their environment and themselves. Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred minority. Minority is the incapacity for using one's understanding without the guidance of another. And this minority is self-incurred when it is caused by the lack, not of understanding, but of determination and courage to avail yourself of your own understanding--that is the motto of the Enlightenment!"¹⁶

Undoubtedly the major idea of the Enlightenment was the doctrine of progress. The old ideas, institutions and ways of doing things were suspect. New ideas, new thoughts were sought. There was considered to be no limit to what might be accomplished.

When the Emancipation occurred, it was into this bright, optimistic, forward-looking environment that the Jews of Western Europe suddenly found themselves. Leaving the dark, squalid ghettos, which had prevented the rays of the Enlightenment from penetrating through, they were overwhelmed by the concepts of universal freedom, brotherhood, and progress which dominated the intellectual world of their day. And when the second generation

Reformers began searching for an ideological basis, they did not have to look far. Deism, Hegelianism, Kantianism, all beckoned, and each philosophy found adherents within the ranks of the Reformers.

German Rabbinical Conferences

Reform Rabbinical Conferences were held in the years 1844, 1845, and 1846, the first being in Brunswick, the second at Frankfort and the third at Breslau. These Conferences were called to consider the problems created by the Emancipation, and to establish authoritative reforms in Jewish belief and ritual. They sought to give plan and unity to the movement.

The major ideological reform accomplished at these Conferences was the reinterpretation of the Messianic concept. In Israel's wanderings amongst the nations, Traditional Judaism had seen the hand of God punishing the Jews for the sins which their ancestors had committed in the days of the Second Temple. The Jews looked forward to the day of God's forgiveness and their triumphant return to Palestine.

Following the French Revolution, the sense of patriotism became very strong among many Jews. The affect of this is seen, "in the abandonment of the idea of the national existence of the Jew and the flowering of the thought that the Jews are citizens of the land of their birth or adoption. They are a religious community, not a nation. Hence the rejection of a personal Messiah and the substitution therefore of the postulate of a Messianic age."¹⁷

The Reformers interpreted the exile as having been for the purpose of spreading God's message to the whole world. Judaism was in its essence, a

universal religion, a religion which was not uniquely the possession of the Jews. Judaism did not seek to separate Jew from non-Jew, but sought a world of brotherhood and unity.

The future looked bright. Many thought that possibly Germany would be the site where Messianic times would begin. They were no longer the "wandering Jews". For the first time in centuries they were permitted to establish roots and to become citizens of the nation in which they lived.

These Conferences also made changes in Jewish practice and holiday observance. As a matter of fact, this was their area of greatest involvement. A number of Orthodox ordinances regarding mourning, marriage and the status of women were changed. The extra days of holidays, except Rosh Hashonah, were eliminated.¹⁸ Organs were permitted in the synagogue and also prayers in the vernacular.¹⁹

However, German Reform was not united in its efforts at these Conferences. Like most "reforming" movements, all sides of opinion were represented; from a Zechariah Frankel, who considered Reform too radical, to a Geiger, who was a moderate reformer, to a Samuel Holdheim who desired more radical changes. An example of the differing views is to be found on the issue of Sabbath observance. Holdheim was very strongly in favor of transferring the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, because he felt it was impractical to observe the Saturday Sabbath. He regarded the Sabbath as a symbol. Thus, it was the idea of observing one-day a week for the Sabbath which the symbol represented that was important and not the particular day it was observed. On the other hand, Geiger flatly contradicted Holdheim by saying that the Bible does not consider the Sabbath a symbol.²⁰ As

a result of the wide variety of views, strong agreement could not be reached at these Conferences. A united European Reform movement could not be created, and thus it did not have the strength to combat the pressures brought against it by an entrenched Orthodoxy.

It was the failure of European Reform to establish a united authoritative structure in face of strong Orthodox reaction which ultimately led to its decline. The inability to give an authoritative basis to reforms was later to prove an outstanding problem for American Reform.

Later Conferences in 1869 and 1871 came at a time when the Orthodox power was at its greatest heights and anti-liberal governments ruled Europe. Consequently, these "Synods" at Leipzig and Augsburg proved inconsequential, and European Reform entered into a state of atrophy. Reform assumed a secondary position in Europe.

In 1848, unsuccessful political revolutions rocked much of Western Europe. Especially in Germany, the struggle was bitter and intense. Just as bitter was the reaction which set in after the abortive revolutions. Because of the difficult political and religious situation a large scale German emigration occurred. And many Jews, among them some of the outstanding liberal Jewish leaders, left for America, bringing their Reform views with them.

CHAPTER THREE

American Reform JudaismBeginnings of American Reform

The official beginning of American Reform can be said to have taken place in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1824, a group of forty-seven congregants, led by Isaac Harby, petitioned the Board of Trustees of their congregation asking for certain reforms in the ritual of the religious services. They sought to have an organ and some prayers in the vernacular included. Their petition was not even discussed by the Trustees, who refused to recognize their requests. In disgust, twelve congregants resigned from the synagogue and began their own congregation. They called themselves the "Reformed Society of Israelites". When they were on their own they established a number of changes. They compiled their own prayerbook and announced in their introduction that "they act only for themselves, for their children, and for all those who think the period has arrived when the Jew should break in pieces the scepter of Rabbinical power, and assert his attribute as a free agent, obedient only to the laws of God, and responsible for his thoughts and actions to the merciful Creator along."²¹ In drawing up their own prayerbook they omitted all references to a return to Palestine, the restoration of the sacrificial cult, the resurrection of the dead, and belief in a coming personal Messiah.²² They also drew up a creed of belief based on the Maimonidean Creed, omitting the articles declaring belief in bodily resurrection and the coming of the Messiah. These German Reform conceptions found favor in their eyes. This group, in a few short years, had as many as two hundred members. But, because

of a lack of rabbinical leadership and group unity, the group collapsed after eight years of existence, and most of the members rejoined their old congregation, Congregation Beth Elohim.

Nevertheless, even though their movement at first ended in defeat, they subsequently triumphed. The road to Reform began in 1836 when the congregation hired Gustavus Poznanski as its new rabbi. Poznanski had been a rabbi in Germany, and had been tremendously influenced by the Hamburg Reform movement. However, when he first came to Charleston, he adhered closely to the Traditional minhag of the synagogue.

In 1840, a fire destroyed Beth Elohim. While the new building was under construction, a group of laymen once again requested certain ritual changes, similar to those made sixteen years earlier. Poznanski gave them his support, and the reforms were approved by a vote of forty-seven to forty by the congregation. As a result of the vote, the dissenting members left the congregation. In his new synagogue dedication sermon (March 9, 1841), Poznanski gave expression to his German Reform views. "This synagogue is our temple, this city our Jerusalem, this happy land our Palestine."²³ And Beth Elohim thus became the first Reform congregation in America.

Slowly the movement for Reform began spreading amongst middle-class laymen. In 1842, the Har Sinai Society was formed in Baltimore. Temple Emanu-El in New York was founded in 1845. The fourth congregation began in 1850 in Albany and was founded by Isaac Mayer Wise, who had come to the United States in 1846. By 1871, Reform Temples were in many American communities.

The initiative to create Reform Temples in America during this

time was taken predominantly by laymen who sought to make changes in the religious services that were conducted in the German synagogues. The concern with Jewish theological questions and with theological support for the ritual reforms were problems that later confronted the rabbis, but which for the most part did not bother these laymen.

German Immigration

From 1845 - 1885 a great wave of German-Jewish immigration entered America. During these years many of the great German Reformers such as Wise, Einhorn, Hirsch and Kohler came to America. They felt that America offered them the freedom and opportunity to fulfill their ideas and dreams of a universal, modern, Reform Judaism. As we noticed before, Germany had frustrated their desires, but fortunately the gates of America beckoned.

America did not disappoint them. It proved to be a land of religious freedom, a land where liberal thinkers were welcomed and not denounced, a land brimming with opportunity. Jews were given full rights as American citizens, and permitted to integrate into the general American milieu.

During these years, Reform's numbers grew rapidly. It was an aggressive, positive, optimistic, modern Judaism which appealed to many German immigrants who were seeking to become Americans in every respect, including their religious lives. The fundamentalist and dogmatic Orthodox approach was left behind in Europe. America seemed to be the perfect solution for all the problems of being a Liberal Jew.

Friedlander describes this period of Reform Jewish history.

"The (German) rabbis found an American Jewish community adapting itself to the liberal influences of its environment, eager for a ritual and a theology that would partake of this liberalism, that would speak to their special needs. German Reform, with its rationalism and optimistic outlook, represented by rabbis of great intellect and vision, put its roots deeply into this fertile soil. But in their application, the ideas of German Reform changed--had to change in the context of America...It was America, rather than Germany, that was seen as the height of political development, as a threshold to the Messianic age. European ideas, in their native lands, were constrained by all the weight of tradition and formalistic framework. In America, this inhibiting factor was removed and thus the ideas expanded freely and received a development that was uniquely American."²⁴

America was extremely conducive to the spreading of Reform. America was a new nation, "conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal", a nation which was freely admitting the homeless and downtrodden from across the seas. How different from the reactionary governments of Western Europe! In Europe, the governments had given their coercive support to the Orthodox leadership in their struggles with the "heretical" Reformers. In America, the situation was quite the reverse. Religious freedom was guaranteed by the law. Religious dogmatism was looked upon as a lingering relic of a bygone age. Liberalism was the "spirit of the times". Adventure, liberty, freedom, independence--these were terms used in every-day speech, concepts which were taken for granted. Immigrant Jews fleeing autocratic, liberty-hating lands found America a virtual "haven of liberty", a land welcoming differences of

opinion, and of religious convictions. Of course, many Jews chose to remain adherents of the religious orthodoxy which they had followed in Europe. For this was the religion to which they were accustomed. But in America, one had the choice of being or not being an Orthodox Jew!

CHAPTER FOUR

American Rabbinical Conferences (1855 - 1885)

Cleveland Conference (1855)

In the year 1846 Isaac Mayer Wise emigrated to America. He came with great hopes of establishing Reform in a free society. Once he landed in America and became fully aware of the opportunities America offered, he came to consider Reform Judaism ideally suited for the American temperament. He looked upon it as the Judaism of the future. It was Wise's dream, practically from the moment he arrived, to unite all American Jews into one united Judaism, a Judaism with one common minhag—a "Minhag America". It was towards the fulfillment of this goal that Wise devoted his life.

As early as 1848, Wise, in collaboration with Max Lillienthal, attempted to form a Bet Din in New York. This plan was a complete failure.²⁵ Nevertheless, Wise continued working for the establishment of an authoritative organization of rabbis and laymen which could represent American Jewry.

Isaac Leeser, who was the leading spokesman of Orthodoxy, was interested in Wise's "unity" ideas. He even permitted Wise to write articles for his newspaper, The Occident. In July, 1855, Wise founded the Israelite, and began agitating for a conference to unite Judaism. In these articles Wise continued urging the formation of a united Israel. He was very much distressed with the great indifference and lack of unity amongst American Jewry. There seemed to be virtual anarchy of belief and custom. American Jews were without authoritative leadership.

In October 1855, Leeser and some other rabbis and laymen

accepted Wise's call for a conference in Cleveland for the purpose of forming a "Synhedron" which would authoritatively represent all Jews. The conference met and Wise and Lillienthal, leading Reform rabbis, were elected as the chief officers. It was Wise's optimistic hope to draw up a set of authoritative principles on which the Synhedron could be based.²⁶ The Orthodox faction dogmatically insisted on basing all decisions on the authority of the Talmudic legislation. Wise recognized that if he did not accept this Orthodox dogma, there would be no chance of successfully unifying the conference.²⁷ So he compromised with his own Reform views for the sake of organizational unity, and he and Leiser drew up a very important document containing the following four platforms:

1) The Bible as delivered to us by our fathers and as now in our possession is of immediate divine origin and the standard of our religion.

2) The Talmud contains the traditional, legal and logical exposition of the Biblical laws, which must be expounded and practiced according to the comments of the Talmud.

3) The resolutions of a synod in accordance with the above principles are legally valid.

4) Statutes and ordinances contrary to the laws of the land are invalid.

The one positive contribution of the Conference was the drafting of Wise's Minhag America. Wise hoped it would become the common American-Jewish prayerbook. The Minhag America closely followed the traditional service, making revisions only where the ideas were contrary to the establishment of a vibrant American Judaism, i.e., the

return to Palestine, the restoration of the sacrificial cult, and the personal Messiah. He added a few new ideas, such as the belief in the immortality of the soul. A large number of Western Reform congregations ordered his prayerbook.

Although Wise at first thought he had achieved his much sought-after goal of unifying Orthodoxy and Reform, he quickly was shown to be mistaken.²⁸ The Orthodox faction, led by Leiser, had no sooner returned to their communities, than they began attacking the Cleveland Conference. They did not trust the Reformers and considered their words as unreliable. But, by far the greatest attacks were those levelled against the Conference by Eastern Reform rabbis--led by David Einhorn.

East-West Struggle

David Einhorn had come to the United States early in 1855 and had become rabbi at Har Sinai Temple in Baltimore. He had left Europe a bitterly disappointed person, frustrated by Reform's failure to make any progress against Germany's entrenched orthodoxy. Like Wise and the other German reformers who came to this country, he was very optimistic that Reform could succeed in America. Shortly after he arrived, the Cleveland Conference took place. He was shocked by the entire proceedings. He felt that the platform represented a complete betrayal of Reform.²⁹ Einhorn was not one to compromise his principles! Unleashing a heavy attack from his paper Sinai, Einhorn castigated Wise in bitter language of denunciation. Wise answered these attacks in his paper, the Israelite. Other Eastern Reform congregations joined ranks with Einhorn in

attacking the Western Reform rabbis who, in their eyes, were traitors.

Thus, a split occurred in the ranks of Reform that was not to be completely healed until thirty years later at the Pittsburgh Conference. It was almost disastrous in its consequences. It turned Reformer against Reformer and threatened to destroy any chances of Eastern and Western Reform ever uniting. At a time when the ranks of Reform were swelling with increasing numbers, Reform, because of disunity, was unable to exert its growing strength. Any hope that Wise might have had that the Cleveland Conference would create an authoritative body capable of dealing with problems of Judaism, and of formulating a definitive statement of Jewish doctrine, was crushed by the violent attacks of Einhorn and his Eastern associates. Wise was bitterly disappointed by the reaction.³⁰

The East-West struggle, triggered off by the Cleveland Conference was a bitter feud. Through the years Wise took the East to task for what he called "Negative or Radical Reform." "Reform must be doing something for the common cause of Judaism and not only for the minority. Reform cannot be disconnected from the historical development of Judaism".³¹ Two factors were extremely important in creating this unfortunate schism within the ranks of the Reformers. One factor was the tremendous influx of German immigrants which was causing Reform Jewish temples to take on a greater German tinge. "Hence, there soon emerged the conflict between the German type of Reform Judaism, as influenced by Einhorn, and the developing American Reform Judaism. It is precisely on this issue of American versus German Reform Judaism that Wise and Einhorn parted company. The latter insisted upon the sectarian pattern already in vogue in

Germany, while the former stressed unity in American Judaism."³²

The second major factor was the essential differences in the nature of Reform and Orthodoxy in the East, and Reform and Orthodoxy in the West. Eastern Orthodoxy was very much like the Orthodoxy Reform left behind in Europe. It was militantly anti-Reform. It looked upon Reform as an enemy within its camp. Eastern Reformers, who were outnumbered, considered the battle against Orthodoxy as a continuation of the European struggle. The idea of uniting on a common platform, where Reform principles would be watered down was thoroughly repugnant to them. They would have regarded it as a major defeat. "Engaged as they were in controversy, they felt the need of crystal-clear statements that would outline their position, rather than conciliatory measures that would obscure the basic differences between Reform and Orthodoxy."³³

Western Reform on the other hand, was not confronted with the great challenge from Orthodoxy. There was no strong organized Orthodox faction to keep Reform constantly on the defensive, constantly justifying itself. It could afford to be lenient, to be conciliatory. "In the virgin country of the Midwest, closer to the frontier, where the Orthodox had not obtained a strong foothold, Wise had a freer hand in molding...a less extreme philosophy of Jewish life."³⁴

These two factors combined to produce a tremendous power struggle, a struggle to determine who would authoritatively speak for American Reform.

Philadelphia Conference (1869)

Because of the Civil War and its aftermath, and because of the fierce East-West feud, another rabbinical conference was not held for fourteen years. Then, in 1869, David Einhorn issued a call to Reform rabbis to meet at Samuel Hirsch's home in Philadelphia. This invitation, unlike the Cleveland invitation, was sent to Reform rabbis only. Thirteen rabbis attended this first American Reform Jewish conference. Among them were some of the leading reformers of the times--Einhorn, S. Hirsch, I.M. Wise, K. Kohler, and B. Felsenthal.

This conference represented the turning-point in the struggle between Eastern and Western Reform. The increasing numbers of German immigrants along with the growth in number of German Reform rabbis gave the East a decided advantage in the conflict. Einhorn and his Eastern associates completely controlled the proceedings from beginning to end. It was Einhorn who came well prepared to the meeting with a list of Reform Jewish principles which served as the basis for discussion. In the end, all these principles were adopted as representing the essence of Reform, and there was very little change in Einhorn's original wording of them.

Wise had come with the hope of reconciling the two factions. He needed a united Reform movement in order to work for the establishment of his favorite dream--the creation of a united American Judaism. He should have saved himself the trip, for it was wasted effort. His views fell on deaf ears. "Wise had come in the interest of unity, swallowing his pride in hope of bringing the Reform rabbinate closer towards this goal. But he arrived late, into a conference that was dominated by Einhorn, to find himself snubbed and

ignored, his viewpoint misunderstood, his act of conciliation considered a weakness".³⁵

The purpose of the conference was to formulate Reform Jewish doctrine. Seven principles were drawn up, discussed and adopted. They emphasized: 1) Messianic Age; 2) Mission of Israel; 3) Abolishing references to sacrificial cult; 4) Eliminating distinctions between priests, Levites and Israelites; 5) Israel as the chosen people; 6) Spiritual immortality; 7) Cultivation of Hebrew.

The rabbis specified the major theological issues of Reform, by

a) declaring that the Messianic hope was universalistic and not national, and that the dispersion of Israel was ^{for} the purpose of fulfilling a divinely ordained commission as a priest-people, and by

b) eliminating the doctrine of resurrection and replacing it with the concept of spiritual immortality.

The impact of the German Reform movement was clearly to be seen at this important gathering. The essential theological statements that were adopted were basically the same as those which were accepted by the German reformers. Just as in Germany, the concern was to get rid of the nationalistic aspects of Judaism and to stress the universalistic aspects. American Jews were to be considered American citizens whose religion was Judaism. All distinguishing characteristics which set Jews off as a group were to be eliminated. Thus, in 1869, "German Reform", as championed by the Eastern Reformers became the accepted ideology of American Reform.

After the Philadelphia Conference in 1869, Wise made futile attempts in 1870 and 1871 to have another East-West conference,

but the Eastern Reformers did not attend. It was not again until 1885, in Pittsburgh, that such an event was to take place.

Age of Reason

The second half of the Nineteenth Century witnessed an intellectual revolution in America. The discoveries of a number of outstanding scientists proved the great usefulness of the Scientific Method in searching for truth. The objective eye of the Scientific Method was turned upon all areas of society. No institution was sacrosanct, no aspect of life was untouched by its gaze. This was the Age of Science and Reason. Not even the Jewish Holy Scriptures, which recorded the Traditional Jewish belief in supernatural revelation were left untouched. Higher Biblical criticism came into its own. It proclaimed that the Pentateuch was not the Word of God, the record of a unique revelation, given at one time, once and for all. These critics claimed that it was written by many men over a period of many centuries. They denied the miraculous and supernatural elements of the Torah and ascribed to them natural causes.

The conclusions of these Bible scholars threatened the entire Divinely Authoritative structure of Traditional Judaism. They challenged the very basis upon which the structure was built. If there was no supernatural revelation at Sinai, then ultimately upon what basis did the Written and Oral Laws acquire their authority?

This Scientific Age and Higher Biblical Criticism had a tremendous impact upon those rabbis in America who were looking for a justification to reject a large number of Traditional concepts and customs. They felt that these concepts and customs hindered many

Jews from completely adjusting to the American milieu. Thus, they accepted to a large extent many of the important conclusions of the scientists and Biblical critics. This was to be seen at the Philadelphia Conference, but even much more so later at the Pittsburgh Conference!

Dewey and Adler

John Dewey's philosophy also had a tremendous influence on American Reform Judaism. Together with William James, Dewey was considered one of the foremost spokesmen of that most American of philosophies--Pragmatism. Many of his ideas, especially his ethical views won numerous adherents amongst the Reform rabbinate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

His ethical views represented a rather sharp break with those of traditional philosophy. Man became the source of values. There was no objective standard by which ethical judgments could be evaluated. He attacked the attempts of traditional philosophers to expound ethics in terms of absolute principles. He opposed the idea that man can make ethical judgments apart from his environment. His sociological "liberal" approach was especially well received by many liberal religious leaders, who were attempting to liberalize their traditions' religious concepts.

Dewey depicted Man as a problem-solving creature, who is constantly making adjustments to the changing conditions which confront him. The proper way for Man to solve his problems is through reflective thinking, which Dewey equates with scientific inquiry.

Man learns from his past experiences. As a Being who has been

related in constant interaction with his environment, he is able to discover what are the best ways of conducting his life, and also enable him to predict the possible consequences of future actions.

Since Man is regarded as a part of nature, he is subject to the laws of nature. And just as nature is to be studied by means of empirical examination, so human affairs are to be studied scientifically. The truth of anything must be discovered empirically. Thus, Dewey regarded the philosopher of ethics as a scientist investigating the hypothesis of morality. The experimental method is to be used in every area of life.

The basic criteria of Dewey's philosophical system was the betterment of society. Any act that bettered social conditions was good, and conversely any act that hinders the advancement of the social conditions of the human race was bad. Man could improve the world.

Dewey's great faith in human intelligence and human progress was similar to that faith which motivated many Reform rabbis in an "Age of Reason and Science".

Also, in the late Nineteenth Century, the ideas of Felix Adler's Ethical Culture Movement had wide appeal among religious liberals. Adler believed that the two ethical religions of Judaism and Christianity had failed to deliver their messages, mainly because their answers had not been ones which could be accepted universally: Judaism, because it claimed to be the chosen people, in an age of universalism, and Christianity, because it claimed man is born in sin.

Nevertheless, Adler did regard two ethical propositions of

Judaism as being outstanding: the sacredness of the human being and its teachings concerning the help and aid imperative upon each individual to give to his society.

Adler believed that the emergence of a world ruled by ethical principles was hampered by contemporary society. Laws, limitations, and regulations which limit an individual's freedom, limit also his potential as a human being. These ideas were preached from a number of Reform pulpits, as Ethical Culture made its impact felt.

A very interesting description of the Philosophical-Scientific impact on Reform of 1885 is this one by G. Deutsch: "The scientific spirit was manifest in all the affairs of life. The writings of Lyell, Buchner, Holeschott, Darwin, Tyndall, and Spencer, which had played havoc with the church, were playing no less havoc with the Synagogue. Indifference to all things Jewish prevailed everywhere... In some Reform pulpits, the cherished traditions of Israel were openly flouted and a dangerous Universalism was being preached... The latest utterance of the last-printed scientific book was the religious pabulum of many Reform congregations."³⁶

CHAPTER FIVE

Pittsburgh ConferenceKohut - Kohler Controversy

In early 1885, Alexander Kohut, a Hungarian Conservative rabbi, arrived in New York. He became rabbi at Congregation Ahavat Hessed. Kohut was shocked by the religious conditions he found in America. Barnett A. Elzas tells us, in his "A Memoir of Alexander Kohut": "Judaism was in a parlous state. The scientific spirit of the day was manifest in all the affairs of life...Indifference to all things Jewish prevailed everywhere. Ethical Culture, Christian Science, Spiritualism and the various occult movements were winning an ever increasing number of adherents from within the ranks of Judaism."³⁷ The largest and most influential pulpits were under the control of the Reformers! He immediately determined to oppose Reform with all his strength. Consequently, he began launching vituperative attacks from his pulpit against Reform. In a series of sermons he sought to show that Reform was outside the Jewish tradition, that it had misconstrued and deliberately distorted the Jewish tradition for its own ends and that it was not "reform" but surrender.³⁸ Practically overnight, Kohut became the champion of Orthodoxy in opposing Reform, in castigating Reform's giving in to what he believed to be the desire to assimilate.

The gauntlet thrown by Kohut was quickly picked up by Kaufmann Kohler, a leading Reform rabbi of New York. Kohler, the perfect representative of late nineteenth century American Reform Jewry, imbued with "the spirit of the times", the champion of reason and progress, arose to the occasion. He reacted by delivering a series

of five sermonic lectures defending the principle of Reform in Judaism.

Kohut had said that a Reform which seeks progress without the Mosaic-Rabbinical tradition was a deformity. This was Kohut's main point. Kohler responded by accusing Orthodoxy of never looking to the future, but of always looking to the past, to the days when Israel was a nation. Reform Judaism, on the other hand, looked "forward with a hope of a far brighter future, beholding in the Messiah the ideal of mankind to be realized by the Jewish people. through all the...agencies of civilization and progress."³⁹

Kohler regarded the issue as threefold. First, must belief in divine revelation remain? "Shall the intelligent...class of Jews henceforth go to a free Christian church, there to hear the truth hitherto preached from every Jewish reform pulpit all over the land; that reason is the light of God in the soul of man; that there is no contradiction between God's revelation in nature and God's revelation in the law of man's conduct, that divine revelation is not a matter of the past, no absolute and complete system, but a constant unfolding of truth and knowledge...No. The Jew, having in the very night of medieval darkness been trained by his Maimonideses and Gersonideses to think, shall not go back and stop thinking in the broad daylight of intellectual culture." Second, must all rites and ceremonies of Mosaic-Rabbinical Judaism be observed? No. He felt the meaningless practices must be abandoned, and modern meaningful ones formulated. Third, must the restoration of the Jewish state, with its temple, priesthood and sacrifices be looked forward to? No. "Or may we believe that, as

the Mosaic Law has been substituted by Rabbinism, so will Rabbinism be replaced by a higher and purer shape of religion."⁴⁰ It was an aggressive, confident Kohler who thundered forth against his Orthodox foe. Reform was now in the driver's seat, and he did not have the slightest reservation in claiming Reform was "the American Judaism", and that Orthodoxy represented the unhealthy, backward, ghetto Judaism of pre-Emancipation Jewry.

The Kohler - Kohut controversy stirred up a great deal of interest, for this brought to a head the general problem of how Reform was justifying itself, vis a vis Traditional Judaism. It was followed with intense interest by many congregations who were seeking a clearly expressed presentation of Reform Judaism.

The Conference

After his controversy with Kohut, Kohler felt this was an appropriate time to call for another rabbinical conference. The issues raised in the controversy were basic ones, and the need for a clear definite statement of the basic principles of Reform Judaism was strongly desired.

Kohler communicated with Isaac Mayer Wise and Samuel Hirsch and received favorable responses from them on the feasibility of convening another conference. Then he sent the following letter to the Reform rabbis in America:

"Having consulted with several friends and colleagues, among whom I will mention as seniors the Reverend Doctors Samuel Hirsch of Philadelphia, and Isaac Mayer Wise of Cincinnati, and having received encouraging responses, I herewith take the liberty of

inviting all such American Rabbis as advocate Reform and Progress and are in favor of united action in all matters pertaining to the welfare of American Judaism, to meet in conference...for the purpose of discussing the present state of American Judaism, its pending issues and its requirements, and of uniting upon such plans and practical measures as are demanded by the hour..."⁴¹

Nineteen rabbis attended the conference which was held in Pittsburgh on November sixteenth and seventeenth, 1885, and eighteen others communicated their disappointment at being unable to attend. Like Einhorn, at the Philadelphia Conference, Kohler brought a carefully prepared list of principles he wished to have the conference adopt. He began the proceedings with a lengthy address in which he described in great detail the religious situation in America. He spoke of the widespread confusions in Reform ideology, of the yearnings of the laymen for a definite declaration of Reform principles and of the necessity of answering the Orthodox opposition in vigorous terms.⁴² Also, in this speech he specified the ten principles which he felt represented the essence of Reform Judaism. These ten statements of Kohler served as the nucleus for the discussion of the Pittsburgh Platform which was later passed by this conference.

Prior to the adoption of the Platform the conference discussed the problem of the Sabbath. One of the greatest problems (if not the greatest) facing Judaism in 1885, was the problem of the Sabbath. Since the Emancipation the Sabbath had steadily lost in importance and significance. The Industrial Revolution which gripped Europe in the early nineteenth century and which spread to America

in the middle of the century played havoc with the Sabbath observance of the Jew. If the Jew wished to compete economically with the non-Jew, it was necessary to engage in economic endeavors on the Sabbath. As a result, synagogue attendance drastically was reduced, and the whole regimen of Sabbath observance virtually forsaken. The Sabbath problem had been discussed at great length at the Breslau Conference in 1846, at which time a proposal to transfer the Sabbath to Sunday was rejected.

In 1874, the Sinai Congregation in Chicago began holding a Sunday service, in addition to its Sabbath service. The Sunday service was an immediate success. It aroused a great deal of controversy, and was vehemently denounced by Orthodox rabbis, but nevertheless, a number of other congregations also began holding services on Sunday. For all intents and purposes in these congregations, the Sabbath was switched to Sunday. Though it made sense, from a pragmatic view to many other Reform rabbis, the emotional hold of the Saturday Sabbath prevented them from holding services on Sunday.

At the Pittsburgh Conference the Sabbath problem was discussed and the following motion was passed:

"Whereas, We recognize the importance of maintaining the historical Sabbath as a bond with our great past and the symbol of the unity of Judaism the world over; and

Whereas, On the other hand, it can not be denied that there is a vast number of workingmen and others who, from some cause or other are not able to attend services on the sacred day of rest, be it

Resolved, That there is nothing in the spirit of Judaism, or

its laws, to prevent the introduction of Sunday services in localities where the necessity for such services appears, or is felt."⁴³

After the discussion on the Sabbath the process of formulating and adopting the basic principles of Reform began. There was much discussion over different proposed principles. After agreeing as to what statements should be included within the final declaration of principles, the entire matter of formulating a platform was referred to a committee of five. This committee consisted of Rabbis Kohler, Emil G. Hirsch, Sonneschein, Krauskopf, and Philipson.⁴⁴ This committee discussed and formulated the principles. Their platform was then adopted unanimously by the nineteen rabbis.

This very important conference accepted a platform containing eight statements. These eight statements were not considered to be a creed, but "guiding principles", principles which were flexible, principles which could if necessary change over a period of time. For, there was no authoritative structure which could enforce adherence to these principles. Only "moral" authority existed.

The Pittsburgh Conference came at a time when America was "booming" culturally, as well as industrially. Not only was it an "age of science and reason", but it was an age of humanitarianism, of brotherhood, and of tremendous interest in social issues. Lewis Morgan, the American anthropologist, sounded like many Reform rabbis, preachers, and intellectuals of the day, when in 1877, he said, "Democracy in government, brotherhood in society, equality in rights and privileges, and universal education, foreshadow the next higher place of society to which experience, intelligence and knowledge are

steadily tending."⁴⁵

Since the Civil War, the American economy was rapidly expanding as the American Industrial Revolution began to make its impact felt. Everything was getting "bigger and better" in America. Optimism pervaded the air, filling the lungs of all Americans as well as the hundreds of thousands of European Jewish immigrants who came to America from 1850 to 1885. This spirit also permeated the Conference, for these rabbis saw in the "golden times" the heralding of the Messianic Age. As a result, a strong American nationalistic spirit seized these rabbis and manifested itself in their strong emphasis on defining the American Jew as an "American citizen of the Jewish religion."

The Platform devised at the Conference sought to take fully into account the optimistic feelings and intellectual currents of the times. It tried to construct a Judaism worthy of aiding in the hastening of the Golden Age, a Judaism which would permit the Jew to wholeheartedly participate in American life as an equal with his non-Jewish neighbors.

Eight principles were unanimously adopted, dealing with God, Messianic Age, Mission of Israel, Resurrection and Immortality, Religious Practices, Halacha, Judaism and Science, and Social Justice.

It began with the following preamble: "In view of the wide divergence of opinion and of the conflicting ideas prevailing in Judaism today, we, as representative of Reform Judaism in America, in continuation of the work begun at Philadelphia in 1869, unite upon the following principles:" In essence, the platform was as

follows:

1) God - The Jewish "God-concept" was the highest yet conceived by man. (A rational "God-concept", not a belief in the Traditional God who has revealed Himself.)

2) Science - There is no conflict between Judaism and the discoveries of modern science.

3) Ceremonies - Reform Judaism keeps only those ceremonies which will elevate and sanctify lives, but rejects all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.

4) Halacha - All laws which regulate diet, priestly purity and dress are abolished. (They would prevent the Jew from being one-hundred percent American.)

5) Messianic Age - Modern era indicates Messianic Age is near. Judaism is a religion, not a nation. (The basic nineteenth century Reform position)

6) Mission - As a progressive religion, Judaism is dedicated to spreading its universalistic message.

7) Immortality - Man has an immortal soul. There is no bodily resurrection.

8) Social Justice - Judaism seeks to participate in social causes which will better the human condition.

Results of the Conference

These eight principles were definitely the products of an "enlightened" Judaism. They were the direct consequences of an effort to show that Reform Judaism was a religion truly American, rational and humanitarian in outlook. The platform attacked much

of the Mosaic-Rabbinical legislation as being out of keeping with modern times.

Just as in Germany, the Reformers sought to develop a type of Judaism which would best enable the Jew to become a first-class, American citizen, indistinguishable from other non-Jewish citizens. They were interested in doing away with those characteristics of Jewish life which marked Jews off in social intercourse. Thus the following principle was passed: "We hold that all such Mosaic and Rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present and mental state." (Principle # 4)

Judaism, like Christianity, was defined purely in religious terms. America was the homeland of the American Jew, and all of the nationalistic hopes and dreams which had been so important in helping to keep up the spirit of the Jewish people through the centuries were now considered as having been answered. Reform Judaism was completely American in spirit, and modern in its thinking.

Another aspect of the Pittsburgh Conference that must be mentioned is the high degree to which the Platform represented the successful transference of German Reform to America. The Platform's strong emphasis on Judaism as a "progressive" religion, containing eternal verities, its rejection of Judaism's nationalistic elements, its denial of the authority of Rabbinical legislation, its denial of bodily resurrection, and finally its stressing of an imminent "Messianic Age", are all ideas which originated in Germany under the influence of the Enlightenment and which were successfully established in America. In America, with the blessings of civil liberty and with

the complete separation of Church and State, these ideas found the fertile soil in which to grow, and in 1885, they reached their greatest heights.

Kohler was later to say: "Reform Judaism as has been said by way of reproach, is a German importation. This is true. The men unfamiliar with German philosophy and philology, and uninfluenced by a Lessing, by Mendelssohn and Schiller, by Kant and Hegel, can to this very day have no real understanding of the development of the leading principles of Reform Judaism."⁴⁶

The Conference brought together the leading Reform rabbis of the East and the West. It succeeded in reconciling the outstanding differences between them. Isaac Mayer Wise was elected president for the Pittsburgh Conference (a shrewd political move by Kohler), and he gave his wholehearted support to making the conference a success, even though the large majority of the rabbis who attended were rabbis of eastern congregations. Wise had recognized the impossibility of uniting all of American Jewry and had decided to work for unity in the Reform camp. After the conference, Wise wrote in his newspaper, attacking Orthodox criticisms of the conference: "There is too much rationality and universality in it for the priestly brain to have found an adequate expression in any ecclesiastical body except among the emancipated representatives of American Judaism. They have spoken and they have spoken well... We expect like ourselves, the members of the conference will never forget the happy days in Pittsburgh, which were a continuous love feast and intellectual treat."⁴⁷ One can say that the unfortunate East-West struggle begun in 1855 at the Cleveland Conference ended

in 1885 at the Pittsburgh Conference.

Kohler called the Platform a declaration of independence and like the greater declaration it was regarded as a summons to arms.⁴⁸ The Jewish Theological Seminary was opened in 1886 to train Conservative rabbis. This was the reaction of the Conservative movement. In the Orthodox and Conservative press, the Conference was strongly denounced. The Reformers took these criticisms in stride, confident of their position, and certain that the future was theirs. The optimism of the times was strongly felt by the Reform Movement.

An interesting critical evaluation of the Platform is the following by the historian Elbogen: "Its declaration of principles is a peculiar document which can only be understood on the basis of contemporary intellectual currents. Nothing was said of faith or piety; the advantages of Judaism over other religions were indeed mentioned, but not clarified. It was not a Confessio Judaica but a homage to the latest European school of thought in science, in history of religion and particularly of the religious evolution of Israel. The laymen did not get much out of this platform; they did not learn what to believe and what to do, but only what not to believe and not to do. There was an emphatic denial of the validity of Mosaic legislation."⁴⁹

In defense of the Platform, it must be acknowledged that it represented the end-product of social, economic and intellectual developments which were occurring in the late nineteenth century. The Platform undoubtedly represented the convictions of a large percentage of American Jewry, who having left their European homelands to seek political and religious freedom, desired to become

satisfactorily integrated into the "American way of life." This Platform offered these immigrants an "American Judaism" which permitted them great freedom in belief and ritual, and which at the same time delineated a number of guiding principles which placed a limitation on their freedom. Those Jews who sought absolutely binding, dogmatic principles were disappointed by the results of the conference. But, in an age of "reason and freedom" it would have been incongruous for Reform to have formulated a more dogmatic "platform of beliefs" than it did.

Although the Pittsburgh Platform cannot technically be spoken of as representing the official position of Reform Judaism (since the C.C.A.R., the official organization of the Reform movement was not founded until 1889), in actuality it did serve as such a declaration. It helped to guide Reform thinking for forty years, and was not replaced from its important position until the adoption of the Columbus Platform in 1937.

C.C.A.R.

The Pittsburgh Conference was adjourned with the understanding that the rabbis would meet again in Cincinnati the following year. It was intended that the Pittsburgh Conference should be the first of yearly conferences. However they did not meet.

In 1889, a group of Reform rabbis who were attending a convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in Detroit decided to found a central rabbinical conference, and at that time, the Central Conference of American Rabbis was organized. In 1890, the first annual meeting of the C.C.A.R. took place. It met at a

time when the current philosophical, sociological and scientific formulations of the age presupposed the inevitability of a constant change for the better. The ideas of Hegel, Spencer and Darwin were being interpreted so as to indicate an optimistic future. Reform was now at its zenith in terms of influence and numbers. It felt it knew from where it derived its authenticity and it believed that it had successfully won its battle to justify itself. Good times seemed to be ahead.

The first C.C.A.R. Conference began by passing a resolution which declared that the previous German and American Reform Conferences were to be the basis of this Conference's authority. It read as follows: "Resolved, That the proceedings of all the modern Rabbinical Conferences from that held in Braunschweig in 1844, and including all like assemblages held since, shall be taken as a basis for the work of this conference in an endeavor to maintain in unbroken historic succession the formulated expression of Jewish thought and life of each era."⁵⁰ Thus, the Conference happily looked upon itself as the latest link in the chain of Reform tradition.

CHAPTER SIX

Creedal Attempts (1890 - 1910)

East European Immigration

Reform's "happy state of affairs" was rudely disrupted, when, beginning in the 1880's, hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews began emigrating to America. They were fleeing from terrible political oppressions and violently anti-Semitic outbreaks which the Eastern European countries, especially Russia, suddenly began directing against the Jews in those countries. These Jews had not experienced any Emancipation. They had not been confronted by the Enlightenment. When they came to America, they brought with them a very strong emotional and loyal adherence to Traditional Judaism. By 1910 these Eastern European Orthodox Jews, together with the Orthodox already in America, greatly outnumbered the Reform Jews, perhaps by as large as a five to one majority.

This sudden, overwhelming wave of immigration had a profound effect on Reform Judaism. Suddenly, almost overnight, Reform found itself toppled from its position as the most popular form of Judaism in America. Unexpectedly, it found itself on the defensive, under heavy attack from an extremely powerful and aggressive foe.

The Orthodox rabbis grew more vociferous as their position became more and more the dominant one. As a result of the large scale immigration, the fortunes of the Orthodox changed virtually overnight. Attacks like the following were daily heaped upon the heads of the Reformers: "In truth, there is no difference whatsoever between these Jews and the Christians. They do not merit the name 'Jews' (simply) because they believe in one God, for Moslems

also believe in one God. (They do not merit it because they) believe in the immortality of the soul, for so do the Christians...Are their synagogues different from Christian churches? No! In the (synagogue) structure itself there is not the slightest difference. The sermons of their preachers are exactly the same as those of Christian preachers..." etc.⁵¹

Reform reaction to the threat of Orthodoxy generally assumed either one of two forms. Either Orthodoxy was denounced and the differences between the two groups stressed, or the opposite approach was taken; there was an attempt made to minimize the differences between Orthodoxy and Reform and to speak of a "United Israel". Surprisingly, it was Kohler who was the champion of the latter approach. The new conditions caused a great change in his position. Just eight years after the Pittsburgh Conference, he said the following: "The banner of Reform at all times does, did and shall stand for Judaism one and inseparable, for a Judaism broad, comprehensive, and large-hearted enough to allow wide differences of opinion, of belief and of practice; and yet solid, strong and uncompromising in the maintenance and defense of its eternal principles of faith and its time-honoured institutions..."

In front of Mount Sinai, Israel was One. One God, One Law, One Humanity, and One people appointed to stand by this Unity...Not to cause, but to prevent breaks, reform measures were at all times proposed and taken."⁵²

On the other hand, the more consistent "radical" reformers, like Emil G. Hirsch did not change their positions: "Friends, we are a Jewish congregation and still have the most modern religion...If

we come to consult really who are our co-religionists, we shall discover that we have more in common with the Unitarians and Ethical Culture people than with the Orthodox Jew. We shall not leave the Orthodox Jews for the sake of establishing ourselves distinct from them, but we shall try and must try to bring them up to our amplitude and see our own construction of Judaism. We must missionize among them..."⁵³

Demands For a Creed

Reform leaders were beset with requests from many congregants for a strong, definitive Reform position to counter the Orthodox charges of heresy and unbelief. The Pittsburgh Platform, with its collection of broad, universal concepts, did not seem to offer the kind of unequivocal position necessary to oppose a belligerent Orthodoxy. There arose demands for a creed and a synod which would give Reform an effective, authoritative answer to Orthodox attacks. As a result, during the years 1890 - 1910, there arose in Reform a bitter internal struggle over the questions: "Should Reform Judaism have a creed?" and "Should Reform be governed by a Synod?"

The move to establish a creed and a synod represented two different sides of the same coin. Both were manifestations of the desire to establish an authoritative structure within Reform. The creed, which would have been the authoritative doctrinal pronouncement and the Synod, which would have been the authoritative legislative body, dominated the C.C.A.R. Conferences for over ten years. Often both issues were included together in the speeches of some rabbis. Obviously, if someone contended for a creed, implied in his

position was the establishment of some form of authoritative body which would issue the creed and give it the necessary authority. The reverse was not necessarily true. It was possible to support the creation of a Synod which could make authoritative judgments in halachic and ritual matters and yet be opposed to the formulation of any authoritative theological pronouncement. The issues were complicated and confused by the variety of different positions taken pro and con by a great number of rabbis on these matters.

It is very difficult to separate attempts at creedal formulations in Reform during these hectic years from synodal attempts. Nevertheless, for the sake of clarity in understanding, we shall discuss creedal attempts in this chapter and leave our discussion of the Synod for the next chapter.

Isaac Mayer Wise constantly urged the formulation of a creed throughout his tenure as president of the C.C.A.R. Typical of his strong convictions is the following: (1898) "Before I close, permit me to reiterate my old problem, to lay before the world a clear and comprehensive statement of the principles of Judaism—call them dogmas, principles, doctrines, precepts, or by any other name—but let the world know clearly and distinctly what is the substance of Judaism, what are its criteria of distinction from other religious systems, and what is the scientific, philosophic or documentary evidence upon which these principles rest...But let us no longer stand before the world as a denomination without principles...If we are teachers in Israel...let us define it for him and for the world, and let not the congregation of Israel be like sheep that have no pastor."⁵⁴ Thus, Wise sought a creed which would define the

nature of Reform.

Kaufmann Kohler, who, in his struggle with Alexander Kohut had emerged as the champion of Reform, sought to prevent a creedal formulation. He opposed it on two grounds. First, he recognized that for Reform's continued existence it had become necessary not to give the impression that Reform was a separate sect, disconnected from the mass of the Jewish people. "Whosoever follows the battle cry: Shema Yisrael is a Jew. Mark well! There is no plural in the verb sh'ma - hear; no plural to the noun Israel. There is but one Israel. The people sent forth to proclaim God's Unity to the world throughout the ages should show one solid front to the nations. One God, one humanity, and one Israel—this is our creed—we have no other."⁵⁵

Secondly, Kohler had a fear, shared by other members of the Conference, that a creed would stunt Reform's progress, by limiting one's freedom in theological matters.

Margolis' Creed

In 1903, Max Margolis delivered his famous address on "The Theological Aspects of Reform Judaism". In this extremely important speech Margolis discussed in a very learned manner what he believed the essence of Reform Judaism to be. Within his long lecture, Margolis included the first comprehensive, formal Reform Jewish creed ever to be submitted to the C.C.A.R. for consideration. It came at the end of his speech and he recommended that this creed, or a creed similar to it be adopted by a Synod composed of Reform rabbis and laymen which he urged be established.

He began by surveying the history of German Reform, and attempted to show that Reform Judaism had been a religious movement with a theological basis virtually from its inception. This theological basis represented the essence of Reform Judaism.

For Margolis, "the theologian, by dint of philosophical insight and of a peculiar tact which knows how to seize upon the constant and essential and living, seeks to sum up in one definite number of leading principles, called dogmas, which in their totality make up the creed of the Church."⁵⁶ This was what Margolis sought to do for Reform Judaism. He traced the various Jewish theological attempts to state the essential beliefs of Judaism, discussing in some detail the views of the Bible, Talmud, and the other main Jewish sources, and the philosophical views of Saadia, Philo, Judah Ha-Levi and Maimonides.

Margolis gave credit to the German Reformers Holdheim, Geiger, S. Hirsch, Einhorn, and above all Isaac Mayer Wise, for having untangled the "imperishable, eternal religious part of Judaism from the perishable, that is, the nationalistic aspects."⁵⁷ For them, this was the primary justification for the emergence of Reform, Reform, ideally, was a modern attempt to "reformulate" the basic religious teachings of Judaism which had in the past been imperfectly and less adequately expressed, but which now in Reform were being taught in a more purer manner. "In this fundamental assertion lies the theological aspect of Reformed Judaism."⁵⁸ Closely following the Maimonidean Creed in its form, Margolis then presented what he believed to be the Creed of Reformed Judaism. He divided his Creed into four divisions: Theology, Anthropology, Psychology and Ecclesiology. In essence, this is his creed:

A. Theology - "I believe in God, the One, and Holy, the Creator and Sustainer of the World"...

B. Anthropology - "I believe that Man possesses a Divine power wherewith he may subdue evil impulses and passions, strive to come nearer and nearer the perfection of God, and commune with Him in prayer. That select individuals are, from time to time called by God as prophets and charged with the mission of declaring His will unto men...That Man is subject to God's law and responsible to the Searcher of the human heart and the righteous Judge for all his thoughts and deeds...That he who confesses his sins and turns from his evil ways and truly repents is lovingly forgiven by his Father in heaven..."

C. Psychology - "I believe that the pious who in this life obeyed God's Law and do His Will with a perfect heart, and those who truly repent, share, as immortal souls, in the everlasting life of God..."

D. Ecclesiology - "I believe that Israel was chosen by God as His annointed servant to proclaim unto the families of mankind His truth and, though despised and rejected of men, to continue as His witness until there come in and through him the kingdom of peace and moral perfection and the fulness of the knowledge of God, the true community of the children of the living God."⁵⁹

At the conclusion of his address, Margolis moved that a Conference Committee be established to formulate a creed, and secondly that a Synod composed of rabbis as well as laymen be created to promulgate a creed and to deal authoritatively with present and future problems of American Jewry.

Rabbi M. Friedlander then gave an address in which he reacted strongly against the basic ideas of Margolis. Friedlander gave expression to the great fear that many rabbis held about a creed, that it might prove disastrous to a liberal religious movement. More basic, however, to Friedlander's position was his view that Reform differed mainly with Orthodoxy in matters of ceremonies and rituals, and not theologically.⁶⁰ There was no need to force a new theology on Reform, a creed which might turn Reform into a separate sect. Every theological change which had occurred in Judaism in the past had come about unconsciously, and not through the promulgation of any synodal pronouncement.

The great desire of Reform to remain a part of the people of Israel was manifested in Friedlander's rejoinder. There was a fear of dividing Reform from the Jewish masses, who paradoxically, were becoming increasingly dominated by the East European immigrants. Twenty years before this concern had been of little importance. Now, the tables had been turned! "Let our cry be: one Judaism, and one theology...Whatever reform is doing must breathe a spirit of union. Whatever questions and problems are brought before, and solved by this Conference must be questions and problems of Israel, not of reform Israel."⁶¹

Friedlander also offered a long list of objections to Margolis' Creed. It used vague language; e.g. what does 'divine spark in man' mean? There were no prerequisites for being a prophet. It was verbose and ambiguous on the problem of immortality. He claimed that Margolis did not offer anything on the question of ethics, and did not deal with the immense problem of the Sabbath. Friedlander said

that Margolis should have stated in unequivocal language his position on freedom of the will, authority of the Bible, on the problem of Revelation.⁶²

A committee was chosen to study and discuss Margolis' ideas. Kaufmann Kohler was selected as its chairman. The report of this committee (written by Kohler) was delivered at the C.C.A.R. Conference in 1905. For the most part, the report was very critical of Margolis' suggestions, and showed very little interest in them. It expressed Kohler's strong concern that a Reform creedal pronouncement would split Reform off from American Jewry. "Any attempt at formulating a creed for one section of Judaism with the exclusion of the rest, is a dangerous proceeding which should by all means be discouraged, as it tends to create a schism in antagonism to the spirit and tradition of Judaism. Furthermore, your Committee observes in the paper a certain tendency to lend to Reform Judaism the character of finality which is in direct contradiction to the principle of historical progress and continuous growth upon which it is essentially based."⁶³ The Committee recommended the publishing of a book which would give a clear and comprehensive statement of the theological principles of Judaism. This would answer the need for a statement of what constitutes Judaism, but these principles would not be finalized. They would not be authoritative. They would be "guiding" principles, principles which could be amended or changed if the need arose. They would not be a creed which each Reform Jew would be required to believe.

Interestingly, the Committee, headed by Kohler, criticized Margolis' Creed for being too rational, too abstract. They

considered it too philosophical a document, not one suitable for religious purposes. The death of "The Age of Reason" had coincided with the tremendous immigration of Eastern Europeans and the subsequent decline in power of American Reform. Twenty years before it would have been quite unusual for one Reform thinker to attack another as being too philosophical! But times had changed, and Reason had fallen off its once high and mighty throne. Kohler himself had said back in 1894: "There is no doubt that the century has at its close come to a retrograde movement. Intellectualism has exhausted its powers; Radicalism has run mad. Reason, enthroned as a goddess at the close of the last century, is fast becoming a dreaded demon..."

With all due deference to our sainted pioneers and the still living leaders of Reform, I say that Reform theology, when based on sole reason as fundamental principle, is, or was built on sand and quagmire. Reason, which often ends in doubt and anarchy, is a corrective, not a constructive force of humanity. All the great men and events of history are impelled, not by intellect, but by the inspiring power of faith."⁶⁴

Margolis politely reacted to the report of the Committee on his paper: "There is so much common ground on which all sections stand that I do not apprehend the fear that a clear formulation of our own platform will be construed as a schism...Modern Jewry, whether we wish it or not, is divided at least into three larger or smaller camps...Zionists,...those who are naively Orthodox...We are at the other end; to us the Jewish body is not an ethnos, but an ecclesia...We look upon the dispersion as final, and we would

co-ordinate ourselves with the Christian Church or any other body which takes the religious interests of human kind into its keeping... A creed let me add, is not for the individual; it is rather for the body. The Synagogue, in order to compete with the Church and in order to be understood by the Church must make her position known."⁶⁵ He supported Kohler's motion that the Conference appoint a committee to look into the possibility of publishing a book on a systematic Jewish theology, a book which would trace the historical development of Jewish religious beliefs, and which would set forth the beliefs held by modern Jews.

Margolis' plea for a creed and a Synod did not meet with much success. This scholarly effort to convince Reform Judaism that it needed an internal authority, an authority which could establish Reform solely as a Church and which would have the power to formulate an authoritative creed, struck too many rabbis as being a "return to Orthodoxy". Thus, Margolis' futile attempt to create interest in establishing a creedal formulation for American Reform Judaism, an effort which dominated the Conferences of 1903 - 1905, marked the turning-point for this issue.

The Attempt to Write a Systematic Theology

Kohler's motion, which he raised after he finished his report on Margolis' paper, to have the Conference establish a committee which would compose an extensive book on Jewish theology, was passed. A Committee on the Elaboration of a Systematic Theology was created, with Samuel Schulman as its chairman. The formation of this committee was apparently done to placate those dissident members who were

continually agitating for the formation of a creed. It would serve as a convenient side-issue on which they could "let off steam", and yet not really achieve anything, and this is exactly what happened.

After two years of futile attempts to accomplish their mission, the committee did not give its first full report until 1908. At that time, Schulman recognized the impossibility of writing a book on a systematic theology for Judaism and made the following statement: "For the last few years there has been repeated discussion as to the necessity of a creed, or summary of principles, which shall put an end to what is deplored as the anarchistic individualism rampant in Reform Judaism. This so-called anarchy, however, is very much exaggerated. As a matter of fact, actual unanimity as to the fundamental principles exists, as can be seen from the leading thoughts in pulpit discourses, and from the practice in the public worship and daily life of those who are members of reform congregations.

It is contrary to the genius of Judaism and to its historical development to manufacture creeds in Conferences. Whatever authority in matters of theology was established in the past, came about through the moral authority of the learning and character of the individual."⁶⁶ For him, the writing of a systematic theology which would be endorsed by the Conference would be in a sense formulating a creed, in a disguised form. He strongly suggested that his committee be given a different mandate by the Conference, that instead of writing a systematic theology, each member of the committee write an essay on a different aspect or problem of Judaism and these essays be compiled into one volume. Thus, he asked in effect

that a new committee be established. His report touched off a heated discussion. Once again, the issue of a Reform Jewish creed came on the floor of the C.C.A.R.

The reactions to the report are interesting. Both Friedlander and Enelow are among those who objected to the report, but they objected for two different reasons. Friedlander felt that a volume of essays would undoubtedly result in a book filled with incoherence and inconsistency--the consequence of having essays written by eleven different authors. Enelow disapproved because the committee failed to carry out what he believed to be its main task--the formation of a creed: "I think the committee has virtually brought in the report that the formulation of a creed is not advisable. This practically disposes of the original work of the Committee."⁶⁷

Berkowitz also regarded the real issue under discussion as being that of the feasibility of formulating a creed. "The question has been before this Conference in the course of its history from session to session, both in the papers which have been presented at various times, and in the resolutions upon which action has been taken, until it has become more and more manifest that the distinct formulation of a creed is impossible...The genius of our religion seems to have been opposed to that rigidity which comes from fixed formula, and evidently the committee has recognized this by advising against the formulation of a creed."⁶⁸

C. Levi was not going to admit defeat quickly. He reminded the members of the Conference that the issue of the creed was not new, that it had been discussed in regards to Margolis' paper and the efforts to establish a synod. This indicated that there was a great

demand for a creed. He went on to say, "We (the Reform movement) are on the defensive no longer. I say that Reform Judaism is the orthodoxy of American thinking today. It has crystallized itself to that extent. Therefore we can formulate our beliefs and doctrine on the great underlying questions that go to form the body corporate of American Reform Judaism...We will have a creed."⁶⁹

When the debate (over Schulman's report) ended a vote was taken on his suggestion to have his committee formulate and publish a volume of eleven essays, instead of attempting to write a book on a systematic Jewish theology. His suggestion was accepted by a vote of twenty-five to fifteen. This was the last serious discussion of a creed on the floor of the C.C.A.R. Since 1908, Reform has become steadily less interested in any attempt to establish either an authoritative creed or Synod.

Between 1908 - 1911, the Committee was not able to carry out the Conference's mandate. In 1911, Schulman, in his report, complained that he felt the committee was merely a publication committee. Also, he said that geographical distances between members of the committee made it impossible to meet. He requested that the committee be limited to five members from one part of the country, and that the committee be required to write only five essays. The Conference granted its permission. Nevertheless, the years passed and the committee, for various reasons, failed to fulfill its assignment. Finally, in 1918, when Kohler's Jewish Theology was published, the committee asked that it be permitted to abandon its attempts to publish a book of essays on Jewish theology. It praised Kohler's book and said that his work made its work meaningless. The

committee stated about the book, "All Israel will find in it a systematic and historical presentation of the development of the fundamental ideas of Israel's religion."⁷⁰ The Conference accepted with thanks the committee's request to be disbanded. Thus, on this dismal note of failure, the last stage in a series of events that went back to 1903 with Margolis' paper came to an end. By 1918, there was very little desire in the Conference for anything resembling a systematic theology or authoritative creed.

Note:

There are those who might say that the pledge taken by a convert represents a creed of Reform Judaism, since it states basic beliefs which a convert must accept. But this has not been the intention of the C.C.A.R. Conferences which have formulated them in the past. They may have been "creeds" for converts, but not for Reform Jews! It is an interesting point that some of the very rabbis who have opposed the formulation of a creed for Reform Jews have taken active roles in the framing of pledges for the convert. In 1892, the C.C.A.R. adopted the following resolution, submitted by Kohler:

A proselyte must resolve: "1. To worship the One, Sole and Eternal God, and none besides Him. 2. To be conscientiously governed in his or her doings and omissions in life by God's laws ordained for the child and image of the Maker and Father of all, the sanctified son or daughter of the divine covenant. 3. To adhere in life and death, actively and faithfully to the sacred cause and mission of Israel, as marked out in Holy Writ." (C.C.A.R. Y.B., Vol. III, p. 36)

The convert's pledge, found in the Rabbi's Manual (1928, pp. 31-32) also strongly resembles a creed. But, there is a big difference between appearance and reality!

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Synod QuestionThe Sabbath Problem

During these important formative years of the C.C.A.R. Reform once again grappled with the Sabbath problem. This problem had constantly bothered the German Reformers, and in America there was no change in this critical situation. Since the Emancipation, the economic necessity of working on Saturday had tremendously lessened the importance of the Sabbath in the Jew's life. Various speakers made reference to the Sabbath problem on the Conference floor, during the years 1892 - 1902.

In 1902, Voorsanger delivered his famous address on "The Sabbath Question", in which he traced the history of the problem in America. Studying the question from basically a historical and sociological perspective, he outlined the various causes for the failure of many liberal Jews to observe the Sabbath. He stated that two factors were primarily responsible for the decline of the Sabbath:

A) Dissipation of spiritual authority - "If we believe the Sabbath to be a copy from an older Babylonian institution, as in a measure it is, can we continue to endow it with the traditional interpretation that it is divinely ordained, and that...the pledge of its authority comes from its being a covenantal sign, inextinguishable as long as Judaism remains an affirmative expression of the relations of God and man?"⁷¹

B) Economic - "The economic difficulty is perhaps at the bottom of all our trouble, and from its point of view it may be seriously doubted whether any remedy can at all be devised to encourage and

promote a better observance of the Sabbath."⁷²

Even though Voorsanger was very pessimistic about the future existence of the Sabbath, nevertheless he expressed the hope that it would continue, for he regarded it as the basic religious institution of Judaism. At the conclusion of his lecture he made seven suggestions. Included among them were suggestions that the Conference authorize an official statement regarding the position of Reform Judaism on the problem of the Sabbath, that the Conference define the spiritual authority that guides and directs the religious practice of Reform Jews, and that the Conference inquire as to whether the institution of a Sunday Sabbath is inconsistent with the historical and theological principles underlying the Sabbath.⁷³ Following an interesting discussion of his paper, in which twelve rabbis spoke out favorably for retaining the Traditional Sabbath, and Wolsey, Silverman, Enelow, and two others spoke out very strongly for Sunday Sabbath services, Voorsanger commented that if Reform is to guide the people, it must have the authority to discipline its followers, and it must be a "discipline responsive to the conditions of the times", by which "we must lead them back to more positive ground than they occupy at present".⁷⁴ As a result, a Sabbath Commission was established with Voorsanger as chairman, to study the seven suggestions made by Voorsanger regarding the Sabbath problem and to report back to the Conference the following year with suggested recommendations which the Conference could study. Seven different rabbis were assigned a separate suggestion on which to report.

The following year, when the Sabbath Commission was called upon to report, it announced that only three men had fulfilled their

assignments: Sonneschein, Enelow, and Voorsanger. Therefore, the Commission could not issue a report, but that the three men who had done their work could give individual reports. Some rabbis objected that the discussion should be put off until such a time as the Sabbath Commission had a report to give. This objection was defeated.

Enelow, in his report, attempted to justify Sunday services, and Sonneschein spoke out against the Sunday Sabbath.

Voorsanger's report was very important because it went beyond the Sabbath issue to an even more basic question. It dealt with the lack of a spiritual authority in Reform. He strongly felt that what was needed to resolve the Sabbath problem, as well as to solve all present and future problems was a Synod. "The question at issue eminently demonstrates the great need of our American congregations, namely, an authority to which all questions of discipline and religious practice may be deferred; an authority, democratic enough to be able to popularize and insure acceptance of its decrees and decisions...No religious organization, if we can consult the experience of history, can permanently flourish without presenting its constitutional principles in a permanent and concrete form. American Judaism has no such permanent form at the present time...Under present conditions no rabbi has individually any authority."⁷⁵

A new Sabbath Commission was formed with Voorsanger as chairman to report again in 1904. In 1904 the Commission declared that it could not give a report because some of its members had failed to meet with the Commission during the year. Then, because Voorsanger was absent from the Conference, Enelow read Voorsanger's communication to the Conference and asked that it be accepted as the

Commission's report. Krauskopf, who was the President, ruled that it was not a report. A motion was raised that Voorsanger be asked to give a report in 1905. This motion was defeated. A motion asking that the Sabbath Commission be discharged with thanks for its labors was passed thirty-one to fifteen. The Sabbath Commission was not reestablished.

The difficult problems involved in attempting to preserve the traditional Sabbath were fully discussed at the Conferences of 1902 - 1904. The C.C.A.R. was unable to do anything of a constructive nature to improve the situation. Voorsanger's strong recommendation that a Synod be created to deal with the problem was included with the demands of other rabbis who sought to have a strong, authoritative body within Reform. The Synod idea, widely discussed between 1902 - 1906, stimulated much heated discussion and focused the attention of the Conference on Reform's great problem of its lack of authority, but it failed to meet with the necessary amount of approval for acceptance.

The Attempts to Establish a Synod

It was presupposed by those who favored the formation of a creed that an authoritative body would have to be created in order to formulate it, and to create the necessary authority needed to guarantee its enforcement.

The establishment of a Synod for the purpose of bringing order and consistency into American Jewish life was an old idea of Isaac Mayer Wise, going back as far as the Cleveland Conference (1855). The main purpose of that conference had been to establish a

"synhedron" which would produce an "American Judaism". But, that conference ended in failure. Nevertheless, Isaac Mayer Wise did not desist from continuing to work for the creation of a Synod. Wise felt only in this way could order in Jewish life emerge from its chaotic condition. In 1857, Wise wrote to Samuel Adler, "Reform has up to this time brought only disruption (I plead guilty for myself also), it has nowhere united its own forces, it has not permeated the people because it has lacked authority, viz. the pronouncement of a synod."⁷⁶ David Philipson was later to write of Wise, "In regard to his main contention he did not change until the day of his death, viz. the need of a synod as the authoritative body in Judaism. He attributed the lack of the complete success of the reform movement to the fact that no authoritative body like a synod was in existence to give the weight of its support to the necessary changes in views and practices called forth by new conditions of time and place."⁷⁷

In 1900, H.G. Enelow spoke before the C.C.A.R. on the subject, The Synod in the Past and its Feasibility in the Present. The speech, a condensation of his rabbinical thesis, was an extremely well-written justification for the reestablishment of a Synod in Jewish life. It was a historical study of the institution of the Synod. He concluded with the following statement: "We have, by simply following the course of events, discovered a Synod at every notable historic juncture...What wonder, then, that this genuine Jewish idea, the importance of the Synod, should have swayed most strongly the man whose name none shall shine more brilliantly in the annals of the American Jews (Wise)?..."⁷⁸

Enelow's paper created quite a stir among the conference members, and provoked a number of emotional responses, both pro and con. Emil G. Hirsch, the "radical" reformer said that laws come from the people and not from Synods, which only sanction what the people have already created.⁷⁹ M. Mielziner opposed a Synod on the grounds that it would lack power and merely be a deliberating assembly. Also, he felt that a Synod might further split American Jewry.⁸⁰ C. Levi believed that a Synod representing Judaism as a religion, would emphasize the "true" character of the Jew in America and would help to strengthen his religious life.⁸¹

The question of the Synod was formally brought to the floor of the C.C.A.R. in 1902 by Joseph Silverman in his Presidential Address. He sought to have the decisions of the Conference supported by some form of authority. "In the absence of a Synod or Sanhedrin, the Conference ought, in a measure, to be that central body whose duty it shall be to give a decisive interpretation of Jewish law and practice."⁸² Towards this end, he appointed a committee to investigate the possibility of establishing a Synod. Again in 1903, Silverman spoke out for a Synod.

A strong recommendation for a Synod was included in Margolis' Theoretical Aspects of Reform Judaism (1903), which ended with the recommendation that an official creed be formulated by a Synod. It also was included in Voorsanger's report (1903). Thus, in 1903, the President of the Conference (Silverman), the chairman of the Sabbath Commission (Voorsanger), and the main Conference lecturer (Margolis) all spoke out strongly for the establishment of a Synod as an absolute necessity for Reform Judaism.

Bernard Felsenthal in his speech in 1904, "Thoughts Concerning Some Jewish Questions of the Day", took the opportunity to express his views on the Synod. It was obviously an issue on which he felt quite strongly. "A firm and decided stand should be taken by the C.C.A.R....that we...will not, and never shall, accept a mediaeval system of hierarchical government for the Jewish people. In the grand principle of perfect and unrestricted freedom for every individual to do his own thinking and to profess his own convictions... we recognize one of the highest and most valued results of the long warfare between the powers of light and the powers of darkness...; between the dominion of an intelligent democratic individualism and the dominion of an obscurant, spirit-killing clericalism."⁸³

Joseph Krauskopf in his presidential address (1904) called upon the Conference to again discuss the possibility of establishing a Synod. The Conference heeded the message of its president. It was at this conference that the forces favoring a Synod made their strongest bid for victory.

A majority of the Committee Number One on the President's Report stated that they endorsed the recommendation of the President (referring to the Synod).⁸⁴

The minority report stated in part: "Do we not remember that... within the last few years endeavors have been made, and the demand has been accentuated, to publish a "Union Catechism", to formulate a crystallized creed, to bring about a uniformed American Israel in matters spiritual and exclusively religious, in matters which should forever be left to the individual?"⁸⁵

When the two reports were discussed, the opposition to a Synod

assumed the lines of the attack used against creedal attempts: viz. the formulation of an authoritative statement of principles or the establishment of a body of officials with the power to make authoritative decisions would tremendously handicap the freedom of expression and belief of the individual Reform rabbi and thus limit the rabbi's autonomy.

Joseph Silverman gave expression to the general feelings of those who favored a Synod when he said, "I am ready to vote with the majority in favor of the Synod, for a curtailment of these very liberties that have run riot in American Judaism. Too much liberty defeats itself and becomes the very source of the weakness of any institution."⁸⁶

The vote on accepting the report of Committee Number One of President's Report was passed by only twenty-four to twenty-three. As a result, the committee by leave of the Conference withdrew its report. It felt that such a close vote invalidated its effectiveness.

In 1905, the question of the Synod was raised anew on the floor of the Conference. Joseph Krauskopf in his Presidential Address once again urged a rediscussion of its feasibility. Everyone at the Conference had expected the issue to come up again. Only two weeks before the Conference a one hundred and sixty-one page pamphlet was distributed to each rabbi, entitled "Views of the Synod", containing all the relevant material published by Reform rabbis pertaining to the question, and the personal views of many outstanding Jews. This was to serve as source material for the anticipated redebating of the subject.

But in 1905, the debate did not really occur. The Committee on

the President's Message recommended that the Conference create a commission which would report on the issue the following year. After the committee had made its recommendation, discussion was open to the floor. During the brief discussion which followed, Rabbi Stolz said, "I would like to ask Rabbi Silverman what he meant by a Synod, when, two years ago, in his presidential message, he recommended the establishment of a Synod?" Silverman responded, "I meant a general assembly of Rabbis and laymen. Since then I have studied the question, and I have come to the conclusion that such a Synod would be detrimental to modern American Judaism, that it will create a schism in the whole house of Israel, and that the only Synod we can have is one of Rabbis."⁸⁷ Only two years after recommending its creation, Silverman was now opposed to a Synod. Schulman, who had come to the Conference solely because of this issue, stated, "The Synod would not bring about that which is expected from it, the putting an end to anarchy. The Synod that has no power to enforce its decisions cannot bring an end to the supposed condition of affairs. And the Synod that has power does not want to control us always...I prefer to be a heretic in catholic Israel, and to trust my own mind, rather than endorse the platform or creed of any organization that tries to impose its beliefs upon me."⁸⁸ And Kohler said, "There was a time I advocated a Synod in America because I was sure that American Judaism would have its progress and reform furthered by the existence of such a Synod. Today matters have changed altogether. Today it would be suicide if we were to advocate a catholic Synod, where we would be in the minority by all means."⁸⁹

These interesting anti-Synod statements were the only important

utterances made at this Conference. It was decided to accept the recommendation of the Committee on the President's Message, because the "Views of the Synod" had been circulated only two weeks before the Conference, so that many rabbis had not carefully studied the material. This put the question of the Synod automatically on the agenda of the 1906 Conference.

During the year between the 1905 and 1906 Conferences, violent pogroms in Russia broke out anew. A great concern over this critical situation was evidenced in America. The American Jewish Committee was organized by some outstanding laymen to serve as a national Jewish organization which would represent American Jews. There was real nationwide interest exhibited in creating groups which would unite American Jewry to handle national and international Jewish problems. This interest was also felt by the members of the C.C.A.R. Rabbi Joseph Stolz, in his Presidential Address in 1906 gave expression to the need for a national Jewish religious organization.

When the Committee on a Synod reported, there was a majority report given favoring the establishment of a Synod and a minority report opposing it. However, the proposed Synod was to be different from the idea of a Synod discussed at the previous conferences. This Synod would represent all American Jews and be concerned with all problems of concern to American Jews. It would be called "The Central Jewish Assembly of America" and would be composed of rabbis and laymen representing the major Jewish religious groups, and not just an organization composed of Reform Jews. It would be a deliberative body which would study and discuss outstanding Jewish

problems, religious as well as non-religious, seeking to guide and represent Jewish public opinion. But, it would "not be an ecclesiastical court with disciplinary power to dictate to the individual conscience, to interfere with freedom of either belief or conduct, or to restrict congregational autonomy."⁹⁰ The majority report favoring such a Synod was signed by six: Philipson, Enelow, Margolis, Krauskopf, Levi and Kohler (who a year before had opposed a Synod).

The minority report was given by G. Deutsch. He considered "the coupling of communal and religious aims as so prejudicial to the cause of the proposed organization that it will render it impossible."⁹¹ He felt that the C.C.A.R. already existed to handle Reform religious problems, and if the proposed national organization became involved in the religious field a conflict could emerge and many difficulties could result. He also added, "Judaism has no hierarchical organization, and it is rather late in the day to create it now. On the other hand, we are endangering the good which we might do by assisting in the creation of a central organization."⁹² In the ensuing debate which followed the reports, it was evident that the idea of establishing a Synod which would serve as the authoritative body for Reform Judaism, and which would promulgate a Creed for Reform Judaism, was no longer the issue under discussion. The conception of the Synod recommended by the Committee was in essence quite different.

After some bitter discussion, Grossman moved the following amendment: "While we are in favor of union of action in American Israel, on occasions of emergency, we declare the formation of any organization through this Conference is impracticable and

inadvisable."⁹³ This amendment was passed forty-two to twenty-one. Then, a move to table the majority report was passed fifty-two to sixteen. The report never came back to the floor of the Conference. The 1906 Conference rang the death knell for the possibility of any kind of a Synod.

Yet, the "ghost" of a Synod lingered on. From 1906 through 1937, several rabbis in speeches before the C.C.A.R. urged the formation of an authoritative body in Reform. Binstock said in 1925: "If we would preserve Judaism, we must have halachas or dogmas that shall be clear and definite so that not only all Israel but all people shall know what we think and believe--dogmas that shall be issued by an authorized representative body and shall not be subject to change except by that body--dogmas that shall be mandatory upon all members of our progressive faith...The Conference, to my mind ought to be this kind of a Synod and ought to act in this way today."⁹⁴ In 1937, at the Columbus Conference, Samuel Schulman presented a statement of principles he urged the Conference to accept. Part of plank number ten was the following: "It is important...to emphasize the truth that while the individual conscience determines the final decision, that conscience will humbly seek guidance and will respect moral authority. It will not treat lightly the truths by which Israel lived in the past. It will, above all, be guided by the deliberate pronouncement of a Rabbinical Body which represents a large section of Israel...In our time of excessive liberty, some form of authority must be reestablished."⁹⁵

The position of the C.C.A.R. on the question of authority during this important period of the Conference's existence was a very

consistent and steadfast one. It remained determined to give each member complete freedom. "It has not arrogated to itself any authority, ecclesiastical or synodical, but its members have discussed the many and varied questions of Jewish belief, thought and practice, and have embodied in resolution and pronouncement after earnest deliberation the views of the majority on points under discussion. This majority view, however, has never coerced the minority, nor even the individual...Its authority lies not in the application of police measures; it has no power to enforce its views by methods of excommunication or otherwise, nor would it if it could."⁹⁶

The Synod idea was dead, and with it any notion of establishing a formal Reform Creed.

Note:

The C.C.A.R. has always frowned on the idea of establishing a Synod. Yet, the question may be raised, "Is not the C.C.A.R. already, in fact, a Synod, in that each year it makes official pronouncements on social and political issues, as well as on issues which are of direct concern to Reform rabbis?"

The answer would have to be "no", because these pronouncements are not binding on any member of the C.C.A.R.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Zionism

Introduction

The great influx of the Eastern European Jews in the late nineteenth century was the most momentous event in American Jewish life (prior to 1938). The direct results of this emigration are still being felt today. It was primarily responsible for the creedal and synodal attempts which were made in the early twentieth century by Reform Judaism. Also, Reform's position on the extremely important question of Zionism underwent a drastic change because of the tremendous East European influence on Reform. Involved in Reform's attitude towards Zionism was the question, "What constitutes the essence of Judaism, religion or peoplehood?" Within a period of less than fifty years, Reform's answer changed.

1885 - 1917

Plank number five of the Pittsburgh Platform read as follows:

"We recognize, in the modern era of universal culture of heart and intellect, the approaching of the realization of Israel's great Messianic hope for the establishment of the kingdom of truth, justice, and peace among all men. 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."

In 1885, that statement represented the unanimous viewpoint of Reform Judaism in America. Reform Jewry wished to eliminate every

vestige of Jewish separatism so as to be able to share fully in the American way of life. The Messianic Age was believed to be "right around the corner" and America was going to be the land where it would begin. It would be an age of universal brotherhood, and universal religious freedom. This meant a complete renunciation of any nationalistic aspirations, and the wholehearted championing of Judaism as a universal religion, worthy of being adhered to in an optimistic age of Reason and Progress.

From 1885 - 1897, the issue of Jewish nationalism was a minor one for Reform Judaism. Reform Jews regarded themselves as American citizens of the Jewish religion! However, during these years the tremendous East European Jewish immigration began flooding the American shores. These Jews brought with them strong emotional feelings and allegiances towards the ancient Jewish homeland. These feelings remained with them even after they reached this country. Their emphasis on the Jewish people as a nation in Galut antagonized some of the rabbis in the Reform movement.

In 1897, the first World Zionist Congress took place in Basle, Switzerland. This international meeting focused widespread attention on this group of nationalistic Jews. These Zionists announced for all the world to hear that the Jews were a nation in exile, who yearned to be "home" again in Palestine. This Congress meeting dramatically forced the American Reform Movement to take cognizance of the fact that an alien Jewish ideology was becoming a worldwide movement. In the eyes of the reformers this movement represented a terrible threat to both the stability of Jewish life in America and to the ideological raison d'etre for the existence of the Jewish

people.

Isaac Mayer Wise, in his presidential address in 1897 gave expression to Reform Judaism's opposition to the Zionist movement. He denounced the Zionist's ideology as a distortion of the Jewish religious mission. "I consider it my duty also, Reverend Colleagues, to call your attention 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."⁹⁷ Apparently Wise's feelings were shared by the other members of the Conference, for they unanimously passed the following important resolution: "Resolved that 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...

We reaffirm that the body of Judaism is not political nor 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."⁹⁸

This strong reaction to the secularistic, political, nationalistic aspirations voiced by the Zionists was completely in keeping with Reform's strong emphasis on the universal religious beliefs of

Judaism as constituting the essence of Judaism. Reform Jews living in America were enjoying the freedom and the opportunity for advancement in the general society that Jews for centuries had prayed for. They were achieving this as American Jews. It even seemed conceivable that the long sought Messianic Age was already beginning in America.

During the years 1897 - 1917, Zionism was castigated and denounced time after time by members of the Reform movement. The reformers regarded Zionism as an unfortunate fad, as something which had only momentary appeal for irreligious Jews. Samuel Sale said in his "Address on Zionism" (1899), "I am free to admit that the question at issue is repugnant to me, and I can hardly bring myself, both as a Jew and an American, to discuss it calmly and seriously."⁹⁹ David Philipson said (1906), "Reform Judaism and nationalism, or let me use the synonym for Jewish nationalism, Zionism, are absolutely incompatible and irreconcilable. Reform Judaism is spiritual, Zionism is political. Reform Judaism is universal, Zionism is oriental. Reform Judaism looks to the future, Zionism to the past; the outlook of Reform Judaism is the world, the outlook of Zionism is a corner of Western Asia...Zionism means a surrender of all the ideals for which Reform Judaism stands."¹⁰⁰

Though the Zionist cause was extremely unpopular with most Reform rabbis, nevertheless, there were a few "brave" Reform rabbis who did become Zionists during these two decades. The most well-known one of the period was Bernard Felsenthal. Others included Gustav Gottheil and Stephen S. Wise.

1917 - 1937

The early years of the twentieth century were very difficult ones for the Jews of Eastern Europe. Anti-Semitic outbreaks were frequent occurrences. The governments of these nations did nothing to prevent these atrocities. The Russian pogroms of 1902 - 1905 "revealed such bestiality as was not thought possible in the twentieth century in a society which called itself Christian."¹⁰¹ Hundreds of thousands fled to America. American Reform Jews were deeply touched by the pathetic plight of their brethren across the seas. Protests were issued. Hundreds of sermons and speeches were given denouncing the tragic treatment of these Jews. As a result, a greater interest in the possibility of establishing a Jewish homeland as a dwelling-place for persecuted, oppressed, homeless Jews, began to be felt within the Reform movement throughout America. Thus, by the time the Balfour Declaration was published there existed in Reform a much more sympathetic attitude towards Zionism than had existed twenty years previously.

In November 1917, the Balfour Declaration was issued. It stated that the British government looked favorably upon the reestablishment of a Jewish homeland. This statement had a strong effect upon many members of the C.C.A.R. They felt the necessity to restate Reform's position on the question of Zionism, yet they desired not to be too antagonistic and unsympathetic in their attitude.

At the 1918 Conference, the following resolution was passed: "The C.C.A.R. notes with grateful appreciation the declaration of the British Government by Mr. Balfour as an evidence of good-will

towards the Jews...(But) 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 re-assertion of Jewish nationality which has long been out-grown...The mission of the Jew is to witness to God all over the world."¹⁰² Thus, even though the Conference regarded with approval Balfour's statement, Reform refused to change its opposition to the idea of building up Palestine as the national home-land for all Jews. Nevertheless, Reform still desired to help its homeless brethren throughout the world. Kohler reflected the new Reform attitude towards Zionism when the following year he said: "Let Palestine, our ancient home, under the protection of the great nations...again become a center of Jewish culture and a safe refuge to the homeless. We shall all welcome it and aid in the promotion of the work...We shall all hail the undertaking and pray for its prosperity. (Yet) The historic task of the Jew is not to be, and cannot be accomplished therewith...the Jew will ever remain an international force influencing the world."¹⁰³

During the 1920's and 1930's, as the numbers of the East European Jews who became members of Reform congregations increased, Reform's "sympathetic" attitude towards Zionism developed into one of open friendliness. Other factors were also responsible for this change. With the influx of the East European Jews into America, Reform became a definite minority group in Jewish life. Building up Palestine was an endeavor which crossed "party lines", which enabled Jews of both the Reform and Orthodox "persuasion" to work together as Jews. Many Reform leaders felt that if Reform refused to

cooperate in this effort, it might find itself divorced from the great masses of the Jewish people. Another great factor which caused Reform's attitude towards the rebuilding of Palestine to radically change within a period of less than forty years was the rise of Hitler. The Nazi menace brought into sharp focus the realization of the great need for a homeland for the "despised" Jew. Barnett Brickner gave expression to this feeling: "When modern Zionism was born, the leaders of Reform were still hopeful of the messianic effects of political emancipation for the Jew...Yet, the spectacle of how our people are being treated in Germany should, by itself alone, be sufficient to indicate the inadequacy of political emancipation to solve the Jewish problem."¹⁰⁴

By 1934, the reversal in Reform's position was so great that the C.C.A.R. was ready to declare its approval of the Zionist cause. But it hesitated to do so for fear of touching off a bitter, internal feud. Instead, it passed a resolution, which, even though it was "watered down", must have caused Isaac Mayer Wise to turn over in his grave!

"Whereas, at certain forgoing conventions of the C.C.A.R., 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 C.C.A.R. takes no official stand on the subject of Zionism; and be it further

Resolved, that in keeping with its oft-announced intentions, the C.C.A.R. will continue to co-operate in the upbuilding of

Palestine, and in the economic, cultural, and particularly the spiritual tasks confronting the growing and evolving Jewish community."¹⁰⁵

CHAPTER NINE

The Columbus Conference (1937)

New Creedal Demands (1910 - 1928)

Even after the Committee for the Elaboration of a Systematic Theology had failed in its attempt to formulate a systematic Reform theology, and the Synod-idea was squelched by the Conference, a few individuals from time to time in addresses before the Conference, still strongly requested that the Conference adopt a creed for Reform Jews. They could not bring themselves to fully recognize that because of the very make-up of the Conference, it would not tolerate the formation of any authoritative statement which would be binding upon each member. The Conference might accept a list of "guiding" principles, but nothing that might be considered a creed.

In 1925, Louis Binstock spoke out in "Dogma and Judaism" for an authoritative guide of Reform principles. But, he was virtually talking to himself when he said, "Permit me to repeat that I am aware not only of the dilemma but also of the danger we find ourselves in...And yet I do feel that Reform Judaism must declare itself positively; decree definite dogmas of affirmation or denial...; furnish a clear chart of religious principles and truths by which we may steer safely and surely in the present storm tossed sea of religious strife."¹⁰⁶ In the discussion which followed it was evident that Binstock's suggestion was not very well received. Reichler: "To say that we Reform rabbis are to introduce dogmas is nonsense. Jews never had dogmas."¹⁰⁷ Goldenson: "He seems to think that if we express ourselves in certain formulae...about the meaning of Judaism, that we will solve the problems of Judaism. There I

think is the mistake."¹⁰⁸ Rappaport: "Let us not try to establish set dogmas. Woe betide the day when Reform Judaism shall have fixed tenets."¹⁰⁹ Only Cohon spoke out strongly in defense of Binstock's request. Cohon did not want a creed, but "a clear formulation...of the principles of our faith."¹¹⁰

In 1929, Walter Peiser said, "Creeds of Judaism have differed according to time, place and group, it is true; but there has never been in Jewish history, a section of Jewry that I know of, that has at least for the current moment, refused to formulate its own beliefs."¹¹¹

Between 1910 and 1928, there was little interest expressed in formulating any kind of official Reform theological pronouncement. The great East European immigration had ceased, and Reform was forced to accept its new subordinate role in Jewish life. Being a minority grouping within Jewish life, Reform sought a more harmonious relationship with the Orthodox. A creedal statement would have proven disastrous. Consequently, Reform rabbis became mainly concerned with national and social issues, and "practical" problems, such as running an effective religious school, etc. Its interests shied away from theological matters. These were years of apathetic concern over problems which only a generation before had been of extreme importance to most Reform rabbis. These were literally years of "deed, and not creed". Thus, anyone who sought even "guiding principles" was wasting his time.

Theological Interest (1929 - 1937)

Then, almost overnight, the theological climate in Reform began

to change. New ideologies from the outside began to make themselves felt with the movement. New events caused great upheavals in American, as well as Jewish, life.

The years 1929 - 1937 were extremely disturbing ones for Jews. In America, the Great Depression occurred, and in its wake strong anti-Semitic feelings were encountered by many Jews. Atheistic and humanistic philosophies vied for the allegiance of the populace. Americans felt insecure and anxious. Many sought security through "a return to religion". Naturally, American Jews were strongly affected by the new turn of events. To add to these difficulties, Hitler's emergence brought much personal unhappiness to American Jews, many of whom had close relatives in Germany. Hitler's invidious Jewish hatred also spread across the ocean helping to strengthen the anti-Semitic forces in America.

Reconstructionist Influence

The pro-Zionistic feelings held by many Reform rabbis, coupled with the upsurge of anti-Semitism brought into sharp focus a latent discontent with the nineteenth century "traditional" Reform conception of Judaism as being merely a religion. There was a growing conviction that this conception did not adequately fit the times, that in a very real sense, Jews were bound together as a sociological and historical people, regardless of the particular religious commitment of each individual Jew. Consequently, Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionist movement, which preached the message that the Jews were a "humanistic" civilization, that had as one of its major tasks the upbuilding of a Jewish state in Palestine made a

tremendous impact on the thinking of numerous Reform leaders.

The Reconstructionist movement strongly affected the shaping of the "new" Reform ideology of the 1930's. An indication of the popularity of the Reconstructionist-type approach even as early as 1925 is found in a questionnaire submitted in 1925 to members of the C.C.A.R. "Is the trend toward placing less emphasis on Judaism as a cult and more emphasis on Judaism as a civilization, i.e. identifying it with all the activities and relations of life?" Fifty members answered "yes", and only fifteen answered "no".¹¹² The movement met with strong opposition from Reform rabbis who feared to attack the growing Eastern European power within Reform ranks, but who through their attacks on Reconstructionism attempted to manifest their great disapproval of the "peoplehood" trend in Reform. They regarded it as a denial of the centrality of religion in Jewish life, and asserted that it relegated religion to a secondary position in what was essentially a secularistic interpretation of Jewish life. This was considered as a definite betrayal of the "traditional" Reform conception of Judaism as being religious and universalistic in essence, a conception which dominated the thinking of the formulators of the Pittsburgh Platform.

Enelow in his "President's Message" (1929) used the opportunity to violently denounce the Reconstructionists. "As far as I am concerned, we have no task more important than the combating of this view, which not only misrepresents Jewish history, but must also serve to confuse the Jewish mind, to vulgarize Jewish life, and to undermine the Jewish future."¹¹³

Goldenson in his "President's Message" (1935) kept up the futile attack. "It is to find a place for the secular, the racial and the purely nationalistic, as well as the religious aspects of Zionism that civilization is offered as a great and non-committal category to include them all."¹¹⁴ But, such denouncements were in vain. The times and conditions had drastically changed in American Reform Jewish life, and the Pittsburgh Platform no longer represented the majority viewpoint of the Reform rabbinate.

Jewish affirmation, Humanism and Zionism blended together in the Reconstructionist outlook, and even though the movement itself did not attract many followers, its influence was strongly felt in the Reform movement, and was a great factor in Reform's new interest in Jewish theological problems in the 1930's. Its influence is evident in the phraseology of the Columbus Platform (1937).

Humanism

Another ideology which was significant in helping to bring about a greater interest in theological matters in Reform was the widespread impact that humanistic thinking had in America, especially after the Depression began. Humanism spoke of man striving to better himself without Divine assistance. It urged a greater interest in scientific achievement and discovery as the means by which the evils in society could be eliminated. This basically secularistic, scientifically-oriented philosophy appealed to numerous rabbis who saw in its concern for social betterment a rediscovery of the prophetic ideals. Other rabbis however, viewed excessive involvement with humanistic thought with some apprehension. They wondered

where Judaism ended and Humanism began. Lefkowitz said in his "President's Message" (1931): "It is quite clear that a certain group of rabbis, fortunately very insignificant in numbers, has chosen its new direction along the road of Humanism. If that is their conviction, they should certainly preach it, but not in Jewish pulpits. Humanism...dispenses with God and removes the divine sanctions from human ethics."¹¹⁵ The Committee on the President's Message proposed the following resolution, which was strongly endorsed by the Conference: "The Conference sees no reason...why any Jew, whether rabbi or layman, should need to turn to Humanism, or to any other ethical or religious system for this particular conception of values."¹¹⁶

East European Influence

As we have seen, unquestionably the greatest influence on Reform thinking between 1895 - 1935 was the enormous East European immigration. This immigration ended just before the World War. Most of these immigrants remained faithful to the Orthodoxy of their upbringing. But many of their offspring, desirous of becoming more "Americanized" forsook the Orthodoxy of their fathers and entered Reform Temples. Consequently between 1915 - 1935, the numbers of Reform Jews in America greatly increased. In a survey of Reform Judaism published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, in 1931, it was reported that "about equal proportions of Temple members are of German parentage and of East European origin."¹¹⁷ Many of these "new" Reform Jews brought with them some of their "Traditional tastes"—an interest in the rebuilding

of Palestine, more Hebrew and ritualism in the services, a "nationalistic" conception of the nature of Judaism.

Samuel Gup in his address "Currents in Jewish Religious Thought" (1931), discussed in very favorable terms, the East European impact on American Reform. "The eastern European Jew,... brought with him the idea that the Jew formed a separate group based on something more than a religion, and it is this view which has filtered into the Reform ranks bringing the recognition that the group is of equal potency with the religious idea in the fulfillment of the Messianic principle..."

This bent capitalizes loyalty both to the community of Jews as Jews as well as our devotion to the Synagog. It marks a slowing down of our proneness to become too much like the world, and a rearing of safeguards adequate for the preservation of the individuality of the Jew."¹¹⁸ Elsewhere in his speech, Gup states, "Unquestionably, Reform Judaism has been greatly disturbed and modified by the presence of this vast reservoir of Jewish life. The immigrants have made available the boon of ^{their} Jewish knowledge and quickened our need and appreciation of it...They have reanimated our sense of Jewish unity."¹¹⁹

Many of the Reform rabbinical graduates of this period came from an East European background and they preached these notions from their pulpits, and championed them at the C.C.A.R. Conferences. Slowly, their impact began to be felt within Reform. Over a period of years they gradually began taking over the leadership of the Reform movement. By 1935 a new generation of Reform leaders had emerged, a leadership radically different in its conception of the

nature of Reform than that of the previous generation.

The Call for a New Platform

The impact of: Zionism, the Depression, Humanism, Naziism and anti-Semitism, the Reconstructionist Movement, and the growing numbers of East European offspring in Reform congregations and pulpits—all these factors joined together in the early 1930's and caused a ground swell of demands and requests to come from the Reform laity for guidance in Jewish matters, and for a meaningful restatement of the essence of Reform Judaism. In these difficult and confusing times, the optimistic and idealistic pronouncements of the Pittsburgh Platform, which had met with the unanimous approval of the Reform rabbis at the Pittsburgh Conference fifty years before, seemed completely irrelevant to a large number of laymen and rabbis. In 1933, Isaac Landman in the Conference lecture, succinctly and dramatically stated the situation when he said, "Never more than today were the issues that confront American Israel so complex and confused, and the problems that face us so anarchical and distracting. At no time have American Jews been more perplexed; nor have they been so inadequately and inefficiently prepared to cope with inner and outer chaos. Our ideologies are ill-defined, entangling us hopelessly in a labyrinthic rundle that terminates in a blind end...Reform Judaism is quite befogged; becalmed; uncertain of its direction and woefully artless to steer a fearless course."¹²⁰

The formation of another set of Reform "Guiding Principles" was formally requested by Abraham Feldman in his Conference Sermon in 1934. "Nearly half a century has elapsed since the Pittsburgh

Platform was adopted. Much has happened, much has transpired and changed in Jewish life and thought, as indeed in world thought, in these forty-nine years. A new statement, a new declaration of principles is imperative, a declaration that will recognize and reassert the spiritual and ethnic Gemeinschaft of Israel and take sympathetic cognizance of the Palestine that is being rebuilt, of the spiritual and cultural values inherent in that phenomenal development. Such a declaration, I urge, should be made forthwith."¹²¹ The following day his recommendation was placed before the Conference by the Committee on Resolutions, which proposed the following resolutions: "The year 1935 will mark the fiftieth year of the adoption of the Pittsburgh Platform. In view of the many ideological and material changes in Jewish and general life which have taken place since then and which have had their inevitable repercussion on our Reform point of view, we recommend that the Executive Board of the C.C.A.R. plan to have presented at next year's sessions a symposium re-evaluating the platform with a view of formulating a pronouncement touching the philosophy and program of present-day Reform Judaism."¹²² The resolution was passed.

In 1935, in keeping with the resolution passed in 1934, a number of addresses were given before the C.C.A.R. on the topics of God, Israel and Torah. In addition, Philipson also spoke on the Pittsburgh Conference. The purpose of these lectures was to present learned studies dealing with subject-matter which would be necessary to carefully consider in any reformulation of "guiding principles" for Reform Judaism. After the discussion of these lectures, a Commission on Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism was

created, with Samuel Schulman as its chairman. The Commission was instructed to report back the following year with a declaration of principles to be presented for the consideration of the Conference. During the year Schulman became ill, and the president of the Conference appointed Samuel Cohon as the new chairman. Schulman later resigned from the Commission.

At the 1936 Conference, the Commission presented its "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism". Even though the report sought to represent the feelings of the "average" member of the Conference, it created a great deal of controversy. Its opponents generally felt that the "principles" would be in actuality a creed of Reform Judaism. Those who favored the report generally expressed a strong concern over the great confusion in Reform Judaism and demanded a clear-cut statement of the essence of Reform. They felt it would serve as a fine pedagogical tool, and in addition, would help to make Reform a more coherent and consistent movement.

James Heller, the most outspoken opponent of the report, said, "The adoption of a statement of principles will have the tendency to congeal Reform Judaism...I believe it is part of the most valuable tradition of Judaism that it has refused to adopt creeds; I believe that we Reform Jews ought to be the very last to try to change it."¹²³ Samuel Cohon, who skillfully defended the report stated, "The whole discussion about creeds is out of place. We are not presenting a new creed...We offer our people information on everything but Judaism. The time has come for us in this age of chaos, to take our Judaism seriously and to instruct our people in the way they should follow and the things they should do. We should show them we believe

in God, in Israel and in Torah."¹²⁴

It was moved and adopted that the Declaration of Principles be accepted as the basis for a final formulation, and that members of the Conference send whatever suggestions or criticisms they wished to make to the Commission during the year. The final report would be discussed and acted upon at the next conference, in Columbus, Ohio.

The Columbus Platform

In 1937, the Commission on Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism presented a slightly revised edition of its 1936 Guiding Principles. After the report, another lively discussion ensued. The opposition argued desperately in an attempt to prevent the Principles from being adopted. Schulman, who in 1936, had submitted a draft of principles to the Commission, which had rejected them, demanded to have his draft reconsidered. His reason was, "Unless you send forth a stronger statement than the one which is at present before the house, you should not send forth any statement at all."¹²⁵ Those who opposed the Guiding Principles championed Schulman's request. They hoped by having the Conference discuss the two drafts together so to muddle the issue that the final result would be no platform at all. But, in the end, after a series of exceptionally close votes on each principle of the Platform, which was considered seriatim, the entire Platform was adopted, with only seven out of the one-hundred and ten members present asking that their names be recorded as having been opposed to its adoption. Thus, the Columbus Platform came into existence.

The Columbus Platform was the first official declaration of guiding principles of the C.C.A.R. It began with the following introduction: "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 C.C.A.R. makes the following declaration of principles. It presents them not as a fixed creed but as a guide for the progressive elements of Jewry." In essence the Platform was as follows:

Judaism and Its Foundations

1. Judaism - Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people. Its message is universal. There is no conflict between Science and Judaism. (The important word here is "people". Reform now regarded Judaism and peoplehood as having been irrevocably linked together. The notion that the Jews are essentially a people, and not members of a religious movement reflected the great transformation in the nature of Reform which had occurred since 1885.)

2. God - God rules the world. We worship Him as the Lord of the universe. In God, mankind has its ideal of conduct. (This is basically the same as the Pittsburgh Platform.)

3. Man - Man is created in the Divine image. Man is the co-worker of God. His soul is immortal.. Man has freedom of the will. (This is basically the same as the Pittsburgh Platform.)

4. Torah - Revelation is a continuous process. The Oral and Written Torah enshrines Israel's consciousness of God and of the moral law. It is the source of life for all Jews. (The Oral Law, which virtually had been relegated to an obsolescent status in 1885 was now regarded as being an important source of Reform Judaism.

The once negative attitude towards rabbinic legislation had now changed to one of positive and affirmative interest.)

5. Israel - All Jews have been held together by the ties of a common history and a heritage of faith. Jews seek to be loyal citizens of whatever country they live in. Jews are obligated to work for the upbuilding of Palestine as a haven of refuge and also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life. (Once again the doctrine of "peoplehood" is stressed. Also, it was now incumbent upon each Reform Jew to aid in rebuilding of Palestine as a Jewish homeland--certainly a great change since the resolution of 1897!)

Ethics - (Like the Pittsburgh Platform, Planks 6, 7, and 8, reflect Reform's continued interest in problems of social welfare and international relations.)

6. Ethics and Religion - We strive to establish the kingdom of God--a world of brotherhood, etc. In Judaism, religion and morality blend into an indissoluble unity.

7. Social Justice - Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society by the application of its teachings to all aspects of life.

8. Peace - Judaism, from the days of the prophets, has proclaimed to mankind the ideal of universal peace.

In addition to the eight planks mentioned above, the Columbus Platform included a whole section dealing with religious practice. This section emphasized the importance of actively participating in the Jewish community and of rituals and ceremonies in Jewish life, stressing the role of the home, synagogue and school in inculcating a love for the Jewish people within each Jew.

A Comparison of the Pittsburgh and Columbus Platforms

The Columbus Platform was, as was the Pittsburgh Platform, framed in response to serious challenges directed against American Reform Judaism. Its formulation arose out of the deep need to give direction and support to Reform Jews in a period of crisis, for the 1930's were indeed trying years for all American Jews. Reform Jews sought a clear-cut, understandable statement of the meaning of Reform Judaism, and the Platform sought to fill that need. Yet in its attempt to satisfy everyone, it probably satisfied very few. Its statements were vague, which allowed for a very wide range of interpretation. True, in an age of conflicting isms, one probably could not have expected much more. But, it was a far cry from being any kind of definitive statement.

Nevertheless, the Platform is an exceedingly interesting document. When it is compared to the Pittsburgh Platform which was drawn up only fifty-two years before, a number of important differences and similarities are immediately noticed. There are a number of statements on similar subjects: on God (theologically, the two Platforms were in basic agreement); on immortality of the soul; on the evolutionary development of Judaism; on the mission of Judaism; on the relationship between Science and Judaism; on social justice. But the Columbus Platform went beyond the Pittsburgh Platform on a number of other subjects. It called for: the rebuilding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine; the stressing of the "peoplehood" of Israel (the Pittsburgh Platform continually emphasized the idea of Judaism as a religion); and greater importance to be given to

religious practice. It affirmatively supported those elements in Jewish life which would aid in assuring the meaningful survival of the Jewish people.

However, the most striking difference between the two Platforms is the almost opposite states of spirit reflected in them. In 1885, caught up in the nineteenth century American nationalistic spirit, Reform Jews regarded themselves as being Jews by religion only. Reform was a confident religious movement. It was sure of itself and of its mission. It believed that the Messianic Age was about to commence, and it felt that its enlightened, scientific, idealistic religious message would be ideally suited for the new age that was dawning. This optimistic, universalistic attitude shines through the Pittsburgh Platform.

On the other hand, in 1937, the Messianic Age seemed centuries away. This was a period of fear and confusion, of doubt and uncertainty. The Jew was unsure of his position in the world. Consequently, American Jews were more prone than ever before to regard each other as "brethren", for they needed one another. As a result, in Reform, the importance of the mission of Israel was greatly minimized, as were the religious differences between Jews. Emphasized were the notions of the "one Jewish people", of the upbuilding of a Jewish homeland, and the value of "traditional" Jewish symbolism in religious life. The spirit manifested in the Columbus Platform was basically cautious and much less optimistic than that of the Pittsburgh Platform. Thus, the Columbus Platform reflected both the revolutionary changes that had occurred within the Reform movement from 1885 to 1937, and the troublesome historical conditions of the 1930's.

CHAPTER TEN

Union Prayer Book

An examination of the attempts at creedal formulation in American Reform Judaism (before 1938) would be incomplete without at least a brief discussion of the Union Prayer Book. Even though neither the original Union Prayer Book (1895), nor its revised edition (1922) contain within them a Reform Jewish creed or a systematic presentation of any "guiding principles" of Reform, nevertheless both books are valuable sources of Reform theology. They mirror the essential beliefs and concepts of the movement at the time of their publication.

There were many Reform Jewish prayer books in circulation before the Union Prayer Books. The two most popular were the Minhag America and the Olat Tamid. Isaac Mayer Wise long sought to have a common prayer book for all American Jews. The Minhag America (1855) was his contribution to the fulfillment of this goal. It was basically the traditional prayer book, but with a number of "negative" revisions; viz., a denial of the following: the sacrificial system, resurrection of the dead, personal Messiah and Palestine as the Jewish homeland. His prayer book was very popular among Reform congregations in the West and South.

David Einhorn's Olat Tamid (1858) was the second most popular Reform prayer book. It was an Eastern "radical's" answer to Wise's rather conservative approach. His book was much more than a mere revision of the traditional service. In addition to including the same reforms as Wise, Einhorn introduced original prayers, which strongly stressed the ethical content of Judaism. Universalistic

statements filled its pages, as it reflected a strong feeling against Jewish nationalism. The optimism of the early German immigrants to America was manifested in its idealistic and rationalistic spirit. Many of the largest eastern Reform congregations used Einhorn's work.

When the C.C.A.R. was founded (1889) one of its first tasks was to undertake the creation of a standard Reform prayer book. Isaac Mayer Wise graciously agreed to use the one which the C.C.A.R. would publish and to stop publishing his own Minhag America. He realized the impossibility of formulating a standard American Jewish minhag, recognizing that the best that could be achieved was the formation of a common Reform minhag, and to this new goal he dedicated himself.

Einhorn's prayer book was taken to serve as the basic liturgical structure for the C.C.A.R.'s Union Prayer Book. In 1895 the Eastern Reform congregations completely dominated the Conference, and Einhorn's spirit (he died in 1879) was still the motivating force in Eastern Reform thought. Thus, German Reform, which had been the predominant ideology of both the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh Platforms now became the basic ideology of the Reform prayer book.

The Union Prayer Book was virtually no sooner published than there began to arise within Reform ranks marked feelings of dissatisfaction towards it. Some of the very radical reformers felt that it was not radical enough, and some of the more conservative reformers felt just the opposite. Also, on top of this internal dissension over the nature of the prayer book, the impact of the large-scale East European immigration was beginning to be felt at this time. This immigration, which we have seen was the biggest

factor in the attempts to establish a source of authority in Reform, was also very influential in producing discontent towards the prayer book. As more and more of these immigrants began to become members of Reform congregations, the demands for a more "traditional" liturgy began slowly increasing in volume.

The Revised Edition (1922) was an attempt to answer some of the criticism raised against the original version. It made the Reform liturgy less theologically-oriented, and less rationalistic in its spirit, placing more emphasis on social justice. But in its effort to please different, widely varying views, it became a more inconsistent document of Reform belief. In 1928, in a paper entitled "The Theology of the Union Prayer Book", Samuel Cohon dealt with this problem. He stated that because the prayer book was the product of committee endeavor, with men representing different viewpoints, it was often necessary for compromises to be reached. Because of these compromises, the Revised Union Prayer Book was filled with inconsistencies on the mission-idea, afterlife and revelation.¹²⁶ In the discussion which followed his paper, rabbi after rabbi asked for a change in the Revised Prayer Book because they said that their congregants found the cold, over-rationalistic services unstimulating. By the time of the Columbus Conference, in 1937, there was a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction. It was clear that another revision was imminent. And, in 1940, the Newly Revised Union Prayer Book was published.

It has been said, "The prayer books of the Synagog are the truest guides to what our people cherished at different ages and in different lands. Like other movements, Reform Judaism is reflected

in its books of devotion. The very multiplicity of its rituals, the frequency of their revisions and their ready adjustments to new viewpoints and situations reveal the elements of strength and of weakness of Reform Judaism."¹²⁷

The inability of American Reform Judaism to formulate any definitive statement of Reform belief has been manifested in its prayer books. The virtual lack of any kind of authoritative ideological boundaries has opened the gate in Reform to inconsistent and sometimes contradictory ideas. Consequently, it has been impossible for Reform to compose a systematic, homogeneous prayer book. This confusion and contradiction has been reflected in the religious thinking of most Reform Jews.

Yet, the Union Prayer Book has been the practical "agent of union"¹²⁸ between the Reform congregations. It probably has been more responsible than any other factor for keeping the Reform movement together, a religious movement which has lacked a creed, any fixed dogmas, or authoritative hierarchical structure.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Solomon Schechter. Studies in Judaism (London, 1896), p.221.
- 2 Ibid., p. 220.
- 3 Ibid., p. 180.
- 4 Moses Mendelssohn. Jerusalem, Schriften III, pp. 321-2 as quoted by Samuel Cohon. Christianity and Judaism Compare Notes (New York, 1927), p. 44.
- 5 Kaufmann Kohler. Jewish Theology (New York, 1928), p. vii.
- 6 Solomon Schechter, quoted in Cohon. Christianity and Judaism Compare Notes, p. 45.
- 7 David Einhorn as quoted by Samuel Cohon. "Authority in Judaism", Hebrew Union College Annual XI, 1936, p. 634.
- 8 Rufus Lears. The Jews in America: A History (New York, 1954), p. 113.
- 9 Cohon. "Authority in Judaism", p. 631.
- 10 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXIV, p. 223.
- 11 David Philipson. History of Reform Judaism (New York, 1931), p. 113.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 114 - 120.
- 13 Cohon. "Authority in Judaism", p. 636.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLI, p. 297.

- 16 Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" (essay) as quoted by Walter Kaufmann. Critique of Religion and Philosophy (New York, 1958), p. 294.
- 17 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLI, p. 297.
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- 19 Ibid., pp. 244-58.
- 20 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XX, p. 277.
- 21 Cohon. "Authority in Judaism", p. 633.
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- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Albert Friedlander. Reform Judaism in America (New York, n.d.), p. 42.
- 25 Isaac Mayer Wise. Reminiscences (New York, 1901), p. 55.
- 26 Ibid., p. 307.
- 27 Ibid., p. 312.
- 28 Ibid., p. 317.
- 29 Friedlander, p. 17.
- 30 Wise. Reminiscences, p. 319.
- 31 Martin Ryback. "The East-West Conflict in American Reform Judaism", American Jewish Archives, January, 1952, p. 11.

- 32 Ibid., p. 4..
- 33 Friedlander, p. 21.
- 34 Ryback, p. 23.
- 35 Friedlander, p. 33.
- 36 G. Deutsch, "Alexander Kohut's Contribution to Jewish Scholarship", in Elzas, Ethics of the Fathers as quoted by Beryl Harold Levy. Reform Judaism in America (New York, 1933), p. 57.
- 37 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXV, p. 263.
- 38 Ismar Elbogen. A Century of Jewish Life (Philadelphia, 1944), p. 343.
- 39 Kaufmann Kohler, "Backwards or Forwards", p. 9 as quoted by Levy, p. 58.
- 40 Kaufmann Kohler, "Backwards or Forwards", p. 12 as quoted by Ibid., p. 59.
- 41 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLV, p. 196.
- 42 Levy, p. 60.
- 43 Philipson. History of Reform Judaism, p. 505.
- 44 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLV, p. 198.
- 45 Crane Brinton. The Shaping of the Modern Mind (New York, 1959), p. 159.
- 46 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XIX, p. 252.
- 47 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLV, p. 204.

- 48 Elbogen, p. 345.
- 49 Ibid., p. 344.
- 50 C.C.A.R. Y.B., I, p. 23.
- 51 Judah David Eisenstein. "Between Two Opinions", American Jewish Archives, October, 1960, p. 128.
- 52 C.C.A.R. Y.B., III, p. 101.
- 53 Emil G. Hirsch. My Religion (New York, 1925), p. 220.
- 54 C.C.A.R. Y.B., VIII, p. 16.
- 55 Kaufmann Kohler. A Living Faith (Cincinnati, 1948), p. 8.
- 56 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XIII, p. 188.
- 57 Ibid., p. 293.
- 58 Ibid., p. 295.
- 59 Ibid., p. 301.
- 60 Ibid., p. 328.
- 61 Ibid., p. 336.
- 62 Ibid., pp. 321-8.
- 63 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XV, p. 83.
- 64 C.C.A.R. Y.B., IV, p. 132.

- 65 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XV, p. 104.
- 66 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XVIII, p. 106.
- 67 Ibid., p. 111.
- 68 Ibid., p. 113.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXVIII, p. 112.
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- 72 Ibid., p. 115.
- 73 Ibid., p. 121.
- 74 Ibid., p. 152.
- 75 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XIII, p. 153.
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- 77 Ibid., p. 420.
- 78 C.C.A.R. Y.B., X, pp. 130-2.
- 79 Ibid., p. 59.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Levy, p. 117.

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- 83 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XIV, p. 196.
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- 85 Ibid.
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- 87 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XV, p. 125.
- 88 Ibid.
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- 90 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XVI, p. 133.
- 91 Ibid., p. 134.
- 92 Ibid., p. 135.
- 93 Ibid., p. 141.
- 94 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXV, p. 261.
- 95 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLVII, p. 422.
- 96 C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXIV, p. 201.
- 97 C.C.A.R. Y.B., VII, p. X.
- 98 Ibid., p. 41.

⁹⁹C.C.A.R. Y.B., IX, p. 174.

¹⁰⁰C.C.A.R. Y.B., XVI, p. 317.

¹⁰¹Elbogen, p. 381.

¹⁰²C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXVIII, p. 133.

¹⁰³C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXIX, p. 287.

¹⁰⁴C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLII, p. 179.

¹⁰⁵C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLIV, p. 103.

¹⁰⁶C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXV, p. 266.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 273.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 277.

¹¹¹C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXIX, p. 484.

¹¹²C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXVI, p. 320.

¹¹³C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXIX, p. 164.

¹¹⁴C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLV, p. 135.

¹¹⁵C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLI, p. 193.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 148.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 300.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 307.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLIII, p. 139.

¹²¹C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLIV, p. 188.

¹²²Ibid., p. 132.

¹²³C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLVI, p. 95.

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 105.

¹²⁵C.C.A.R. Y.B., XLVII, p. 106.

¹²⁶C.C.A.R. Y.B., XXXVIII, p. 268.

¹²⁷C.C.A.R. Y.B., XL, p. 276.

¹²⁸C.C.A.R. Y.B. XXIV, p. 217.

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