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# ASPECTS OF CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN THE ROLE OF THE RABBI

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Arnold G. Fink



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## THESIS DIGEST

This thesis is a sociological and historical study of the rabbinate as an evolving institution. Its organization is based upon the forces of continuity and discontinuity present in the rabbinate since its inception to the present day. The basic premise is that the combination of these two opposing forces have determined the ultimate form that the rabbi's role has taken.

The thesis is divided into three major sections:

Chapter One is a discussion of the origins of the rabbinate in Ashkenazic countries and the establishment of precedents which then became standardized aspects of the rabbi's role during the medieval period. Stress is placed upon the duties which became incumbent upon the rabbis, the authority they claimed for themselves, and the type of training they possessed. Also considered are the symbolic status of the rabbi and the incentives which motivated his conduct.

Chapter Two is a study of discontinuities which developed out of the classical rabbinate. Discussion centers on inconsistancies in the rabbinic position which were due to the structure of the medieval community, the change in the original character of the rabbis due to social and economic forces, and the dissolution of the medieval rabbinate in the Nineteenth

Century. The evolution of a post-Emancipation rabbinate as the foundation of the present profession is then considered.

Chapter Three is a study of the modern rabbinate as an institution determined both by forces of continuity from the past and novel elements. Both the causes and the outward manifestations are analyzed in an attempt to discern the structure of the rabbi's role. His functions, authority and training are explored. Also included are the incentives which determine his conduct and the symbolic status he occupies in an open society.



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is the outgrowth of preliminary efforts to determine lay and rabbinic conceptions of the modern rabbi's role. In the course of investigation it was found that the modern rabbi's role has been molded both by precedents established by the classical rabbinate of Medieval Europe and by totally new forces at work in modern American society. As a result, an independent study of the nature of the medieval rabbinate and a consideration of the similarities and dissimilarities existing between the medieval and modern rabbinate were deemed essential and necessary. This thesis represents such a study. Historical writings which consider the development of the rabbinate have been probed and recent sociological studies of the modern rabbinate have been analyzed and compared. As a non-apologetic work, findings have been scientifically and objectively scrutinized, with a mind to truth content rather than the maintenance of either of the two extreme positions which many rabbis often hold: (1) that the rabbinate has never changed its essential character, or (2) that the modern rabbinate is in no way related to its historical antecedents.

The sociology of occupations and professions has developed only recently along scientific lines, but

research findings have proven extensive. Investigations have revealed central features of many professions. These tools of analysis can now be focused upon the clergy.

The rabbinate, the "Jewish ecclesiastical occupation" is a specialized career and a profession. Analyses of the rabbinate tend to focus on either supernatural or natural determinants. Our study shall deal with the rabbinate not on either a purely natural or supernatural level, but as a totality of motives, tasks, objectives, and external forces.

The rabbinate is a unique profession. It is like no other way of earning a livelihood. The rabbi is, in a true sense, a professional under the lifelong employ of an ethnic religious group. He traces the origin of his vocation to both the priest and the prophet of the Biblical period. He sees the continuity of the religious specialist proceeding then to the early scholars, Pharisees, the Tannaim and Amaraim of the Talmudic period. These were men who devoted their lives to the perpetuation of Judaism through scholarship and piety during periods when Judaism suffered transitional pangs of being rooted from its land. He notes the proliferation of religious scholars in Diaspora countries, through the tenth century, and finally sees the emergence of the rabbinate as a profession in its classical form which preserved European Jewry through the Middle Ages



until the Emancipation in the Nineteenth century.

This study shall embrace three chapters. The first chapter shall be a discussion on continuities of the medieval rabbinate. "Continuities" are here used in the technical sense as elements tending to be perpetuated in a stabilized form. The second chapter shall be an analysis of discontinuities that developed out of the medieval rabbinate - "discontinuities" here being the elements which tended to part from established forms. The third chapter shall be a study of the modern rabbinate in an attempt to gauge elements of continuity from the past within its realm, and elements of discontinuity, or novelty, which now comprise aspects of the rabbi's role. It is my hope that this method - the establishing of historic trends and novel elements - will provide insight to the reader and will establish a basis for any further research into the rabbinate.

- CHAPTER I -

THE MEDIEVAL RABBI: ESTABLISHMENT OF CONTINUITIES



## THE MEDIEVAL COMMUNITY AND THE RABBI

The medieval rabbi was a unique person who developed out of a unique community. His thoughts, his actions, his whole way of life reflect the entire Jewish mode of existence in the medieval period. As the community grew in strength, so too his role increased in importance, and when the community weakened, his role correspondingly diminished. An analysis of the medieval rabbinate, with its continuities and discontinuities, therefore, involves a similar analysis of the Jewish community as a whole.

In turning to the community, however, we are immediately faced with the question: In what sense can we use the term "community" to apply to medieval Jewish life? Once ties to the Palestinian homeland had been broken, Jewish life became splintered and segmented. Individual settlements of Jews were found scattered throughout the world, each with its own local autonomy. It would seem logical that as each isolated Jewish group developed its own customs, the difference among settlements would far outweigh any similarities among them. If this were the case, we would not be justified in using the term "community" to tie all the settlements together under a single heading.

Yet, in practice, it has become customary to group all the medieval Jewish settlements together and to refer to them, en masse, as "The Jewish Community". The modern

historian, Salo W. Baron has done so in titling a three volume study by that name, although he frankly admits "the usual embarrassment in defining the highly ambiguous term 'community'".[1] Baron feels justified in his choice of title, for he feels that, despite the differences that divided the far-flung Jewish settlements, there were unique unifying forces which prevailed and vindicate usage of the expression, in the generic sense. He states:

> It may readily be admitted.... that the medieval Jewish community, like most other corporate bodies of the time, was a true community of destiny and culture.[2]

But a word of caution is required here. Perhaps it is best not to use the term "The Jewish Community" in such a broad sense as to ignore differences that did, in fact, exist to a strong degree. The Ashkenazic Jewish settlements of central and eastern Europe came under different political rule and cultural influences than the Sephardic settlements of Spain and the Near East. As a result, the community structure of the Ashkenazic settlement differed greatly from that of the Sephardic community. In this study, we shall focus our attention on the Ashkenazic settlements, since this complex of settlements has had an infinitely greater impact upon western civilization. Consequently, in our discussions of the rabbi and his society, we are justified in using the term "community" to apply to the settlements of central and eastern Europe.



More specifically, what were the forces which cast the segmented and scattered settlements of the Jewish world into a common mold? Most important was the impact of the tradition which was manifest in Talmudic legalism, commentaries, and law codes. Herein was a legal structure which became the constitution, as it were, of each Jewish settlement. Every aspect of the Jew's life was regulated by this legal tradition, which subsumed the secular under the category of the religious. Each Jewish group was thus bound in obedience to the self-same sacred system, and the real backbone of the community was the prestige and high regard in which the tradition was held by each member.[3] As a result, an intense loyalty system developed so that the Jew internalized the need to obey the sacred law. As a buttress to the internalized loyalty, severe sanctions were created by the community which made violation of the law a heinous offense.[4] The end result was a uniformity of values which pervaded the European community.

In addition to the uniformity spawned by loyalty to the sacred system from within the community, similar coercive forces were at work upon the European dispora from without. All Jews were segregated from the rest of the world by order of the various European state governments. By creating the segregated Jewish community, these governments were able to facilitate the process of tax collection, for officials collected from designated persons in each

settlement the tax on each of its members. While there may have been occasional attempts to tie the geographically separated settlements together into a centralized form of government, state authorities generally agreed that keeping the communities separated and giving each the power of self-government was the most expedient means for exploiting these communities without fear of reprisal. Indeed the impetus to organize individual communities of Jews came often from the state rather than from the Jews themselves.[5] Thus, when we speak of the Jewish community, we are referring to a prototype, for segregation, self-government, and external coercion were characteristics of each smaller unit of Jewish settlement.

Meanwhile several other forces were at work to give each individual Jewish settlement a strong sense of solidarity from within. Notable among these forces were the then overwhelming power of organized religion throughout Europe, which worked to increase the Jew's loyalty to the religiously centered community, and the unique compound of an ethnic-religious culture.[6] This compound was a contributing cause to the common value structure which persisted among all the members of the group. Each member worked for a common goal. Status differences became minor, and would continue to remain at a low level as long as the sense of kinship and shared goals persisted in the medieval Jewish society.



Sociologists note that there are four factors which work toward the continuity of any religious organization,[7] factors which were present in the medieval Jewish community.

(1) There is need for rational authority. In the Jewish community, the sacred law provided that authority, which became vested in the hands of the rabbis.

(2) The composition of the group needs to be such that the organization is managable. Composed of persons of similar needs and backgrounds, and limited in size, the Jewish community was managable.

(3) There must be a solidarity of membership. In the Jewish community, this solidarity was assured by the common concensus of group values and goals, and by loyalty to the tradition.

(4) The common good of the group cannot be endangered by frictions within the group. Within the Jewish community, we have noted the sanctions which could be brought against the dissenter who refused to abide by the community's law. And in addition to these four factors present within the Jewish community which helped to give it permanence, there was the additional power of the coercive force of the state, which forced the community mold to remain intact.

The early leadership of the European community came from Palestine.

> The Patriarch or the Sanhedrin who appointed the judges of Palestine also appointed the judges for the Jewish communities of Europe.... The Parnasim also were appointed by the authorities in Palestine, and were always chosen from among the learned. It seems that the Patriarch, or the man who was delegated by him not only appointed judges in the communities of the Diaspora but also appointed the Archon, the leader of the community.8

Not only was the Diaspora leadership determined in Palestine, but additional controls were also employed by the Palestinian authorities. In a direct manner, they kept the Diaspora dependent upon the ancestral homeland through imposing economic obligations on the European community and directing its religious life.

> The Patriarchs used to send messengers, apostles, into the different communities of the Diaspora not only to collect the money for the maintenance of the Patriarch and the academies in Palestine but also to instruct the Jews and supervise the religious life of the Jewish Communities.9

The dependency of the Diaspora upon Palestine was quite sufficient to maintain the structure of the European community as long as communication was open between the two centers of Jewish habitation. In the seventh century, the Arab conquest of Palestine totally broke off communication between Christian Europe and Palestine, which then became dominated by the Moslems. This proved most critical to Diaspora Jewry, for it was cut off from its source of direction. By assuming the right to choose their own Parnasim, the European communities could maintain civil lead-



ership. Out of this chaos eventually emerged the rabbinate, the answer to the Diaspora's need for religious direction.

We have noted that communication between Europe and Palestine ceased in the seventh century. Yet, it took considerable time for the rabbinate to emerge as a mature institution. Certainly it evolved through a number of transitional steps before it emerged as the institution with continuity. These steps are lost in obscurity however. The dating of the emergence of the classical rabbinate as a fully developed institution is itself a subject of great debate. It is assumed that it emerged somewhere in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries however.[10] Dating its rise is not as important as understanding the forces which led to the creation of the rabbinate however, and here we are on safer ground. It is a rule that groups must be concerned both with self-preservation and maintaining the works for which they exist.[11] We have noted that to preserve itself the community had to create religious leadership. More than this, however, when the community was cut off from Palestine, the threat arose that leadership would be held solely by a privileged class, which would impose its will upon the other members of the community, thus threatening great internal conflict which could rip apart the Diaspora community.[12] The rise of the rabbinate can be seen as a response to this threat, a movement for impar-

tial leadership so that the community could continue to exist. Rabbinical scholars were called to discover, by reference to Talmudic law, just what were the rights of a community over its members.[13] In doing this, these scholars also maintained the works for which the community existed; they continued the tradition of the past which the community was obligated to preserve. In doing this, the rabbinic scholars created a role with continuity for themselves. They performed a service needed by their society which no one else could do, because they were masters of the religious law.

Each individual settlement of Jews came to have its own rabbi, and each rabbi had jurisdiction over the community he served. Competition grew among each settlement of Jews to obtain a true man of letters for its rabbi. The rabbi was the head of the Beth Din, or religious court which ruled on all legal matters within the community. As the rabbi presided over a court beyond which no appeal was possible,[14] it was considered mandatory that a capable rabbi be found. A strong tie came to exist between the community and its rabbi, as he directed its spiritual life, and assured respect for its statutes. It may be reasonably said that the community needed the rabbi more than the rabbi needed the community.[15]

Since the rabbi held a position of influence in the community and did determine its law, it is easy to understand how the state desired to control who was appointed to the position. Because he was a rallying point of the settlement, the state government saw the rabbi as a possible agent to be used in tax collection. Thus, the government continually attempted to appoint men to the position of community rabbi with whom it could easily work. Evidently the state must have ruthlessly chosen men repugnant to the community for a ban was issued by all the European Jewish settlements in the twelfth century not only forbidding the government from appointing any community's rabbi, but also prohibiting any prospective rabbi from obtaining the slightest measure of support from the state authorities in obtaining a position.[16] In Germany and Austria from the sixteenth until the nineteenth centuries the state persisted in appointing a "crown rabbi" in addition to the rabbi chosen by the community, but the state's appointee merely supervised tax collections and was not regarded by the community as its true rabbi. These state appointed rabbis were generally irreligious and often informers for the state.[17] They never held any important positions within the community, for from the time of the twelfth century, no community would relinquish the right to make its own choice of rabbi.

Each community of thirty or more Jewish families would elect a rabbi.[18] Yet the method of choice differed from place to place. In some areas, the Parnasim controll-

ed the choice. Elsewhere, committees were drawn up to study the candidates and to make recommendations which were then finally acted upon by the members of the community. Finally, we have instances where whole communities engaged themselves in the task of debating, eliminating, and finally deciding who would fill the vacant position. When the decision was finalized, messengers were sent out to inform the incumbent, and he was greeted at the city gate with much joy. The choice of a new rabbi was indeed an event of great significance in any community.

Thus, the rabbi came to occupy a highly important role in the life of the medieval community. As he was needed by the community, so too his role became invested with much continuity. He alone could administer the law, for he alone knew how to interpret it. He had shown the community its raison d'etre, and enabled it to define itself in acceptable terms when relations with Palestine were broken. As administrator of the sacred system, the rabbi more than any other person kept the community alive through the medieval period.

## ROLE FUNCTIONS

> Roles are defined in terms of the actions performed by the person to validate his occupancy of the position. In sum, all societies are organized around positions and the persons who occupy these positions perform specialized actions or roles. These roles are linked with the position and not with the person who is temporarily occupying the position.19



It has become evident that the medieval rabbi performed specialized actions which only he could do, and thus validated the role in society which he occupied. As director of the spiritual life of the community and guardian of its legal structure, he occupied a position with expectations that rested upon him, not as an individual, but as the holder of that position. Insofar as his activities were a justification of his occupancy of his position, they were forces of continuity. They flowed from his role as rabbi and enhanced it.

### The Rabbi as Judge

The function most directly related to the rabbi's role requirements was that of judge. Litigation brought before him involved both secular and religious matters, because in the medieval society where a sacred system determined civil law there was no distinction between the two aspects. Those who desired to take legal action could either bring their suit directly to the rabbi, or else to the law court over which he presided. Here he was assisted by Dayyanim, scholars of lesser authority. While either course of action was open, certain cases might better be judged in the law court, such as those involving wage disputes, because the decision of the court, through its rabbi, might have great-

er legal status in the state courts than those tendered by the rabbi on his own.[20] In either case, the decision was binding upon those involved in the litigation.

A wide variety of cases faced the medieval rabbi, and there is an abundance of literature discussing rabbinic legislation. Typical rabbinical contracts enumerate that the rabbi was to judge cases involving such matters as contracts and inheritance. In cases of damage, he was given the power to impose fines.[21] With two other scholars, he was to decide all monetary disputes. In addition to civil law, he decided ritual laws and customs. No aspect of communal law circumvented the decision making process of the rabbinate.

Closely allied with the function of judging lay another function which gained in importance in the passing of time, i.e., the writing of responsa. As judge, the rabbi considered cases brought to him by members of his community. As the author of responsa, however, the rabbi considered legal and ritual questions posed to him by persons outside his community. The questioners sought answers to problems which had been raised in concrete situations. The rabbi would study the problem, solve it through his knowledge of law, and send his answer to the questioning party. Any rabbi could write responsa, and a responsum of one rabbi might be in opposition to that of another. Much responsa was written by the rabbis with established reputation, for



the questioner sought a definitive answer which could best come from one who had gained wide repute for his scholarly abilities.[22] The famed Rabbi Meir of Rothenberg became extremely well known for his acumen in writing responsa, and it is noteworthy that by the time when he lived, in the thirteenth century, most of the problems dealt with civil, rather than ritual law.

> The great majority of R. Meir's Responsa deal with business transactions, real estate, inheritance, marriage contracts, partnerships, agents, sureties, trustees, employees, informers, community government, community property, settling rights, and taxation. 23

Since he was the most renown scholar of Germany, questions concerning litigations involving large sums of money were directed to him from many communities. His decision could not be overridden.[24] Yet, the responsa activities of the rabbis did not lead to any true hierarchical structure. They did lend a measure of uniformity of practice to the separated communities. When questions were directed to a well-known scholar, they often were done so by the rabbi of the lesser communities.

## The Rabbi as Teacher

The yeshiva, or academy for higher Jewish learning, came to occupy an important position in the structure of the medieval community. The apparent reason for this was that the learning employed by the rabbis to derive legis-

lation became highly valued by each member of the community. Any male youth who had the ability to learn came to the academy to study the law, regardless of whether he intended to make the rabbinate a career or not. At the same time, the academy was a natural recruiting grounds for the rabbinate, and the means through which the rabbinate - and the community - was to perpetuate itself. It became of great concern to the rabbis to make certain that the academy was functioning at maximum capability in producing scholars able to carry on the tradition.

Supervising the academy became one of the rabbi's principle functions, and it is not surprising to learn that, until the rabbinate emerged as a full-fledged profession, the title "Rav" meant "Head of the Academy".[25] Thus, heading the academy was his most important duty, until the fourteenth Century. Following this time, when the functions of the rabbi multiplied, he was permitted to designate another scholar to take over the duty of directing the academy.

> A busy rabbi might also delegate the presidency of the academy, formerly his most cherished prerogative, to another officer. Such "heads of academies", common in Poland, were necessary particularly in large centers with several academies. The rabbi retained, however, general supervision, participated in arranging curricula, and visited each academy, often examining students. 26

Still the academy always remained of primary importance,



and in all towns where he was physically able to do so, the rabbi continued as head of the yeshiva. The stipulation of some communities that they would withhold the rabbi's salary were he to ignore his responsibilities to his students indicates the primacy of the rabbi's teaching function.[27] Moreover, he was often obliged to share living quarters with his students. The community would provide a home for the rabbi with sufficient space to accomodate his students. In this manner, the master was in constant contact with his students, and able to avail himself to their questions at all times. Often rabbis went far out of their way to accomodate students. They quartered more students than their communities felt they should. Finally, in 1628 it was agreed that the rabbi should be permitted to take in as many students as he deemed possible.[28] The study sessions, operated on a continuous basis, reached a crescendo in the weeks prior to Shavuoth and Chanukah.[29] The success of the rabbis in maintaining the academies is evidenced by the high regard for learning which always characterized the Jewish community.

## The Rabbi as Preacher

The rabbi's preaching function was one which varied in importance from community to community, but which generally evolved into a role of greater importance through the middle ages. Originally, he preached only on special

occasions, and evidence in one rabbi's contracts suggests that he was expected to preach but twice yearly - on the special sabbaths of Sabbath HaGadol and Sabbath of Repentence.[30] The necessity of educating the laity about special festival law led to the custom of the rabbi's expounding the law in public on the holidays, however, and preaching increased as it was seen as a means of teaching the tradition to the uneducated.[31]

But education was not the sole reason for preaching. Preachers addressed themselves to social issues of their day and related them to Jewish thought and doctrine.[32] Their preaching was exhortive, and an additional tool in the hands of the rabbi to gain conformity to the community's ethical standards.

In addition to the rabbis, there were also itinerant preachers who traveled throughout the country preaching to earn a livelihood. Although their messages were simple homilies that might appeal to the less educated, the travelling preachers lacked the training, eloquence, and prestige of the rabbis, and were never in direct competition with them.

The rabbis' preaching was on a much higher level.[33] Their sermons were constructed around the three major themes of God, Torah and Israel. These themes came into usage prior to the medieval period, but became standard focal points for much of Jewish thought. Using a variety of



homiletical techniques which varied from rabbi to rabbi, and some of which may have been borrowed from Christian preachers, the rabbis employed their full abilities to drive home their lesson. Textual preaching was the general rule, for in deriving their lesson from the text, the preachers could reinforce their listeners' ties to the sacred literature emotionally, as well as teach them scripture. Thus, not only the content of the preaching, but also the technique, served as positive factors contributing to the enhancement of the rabbinical role. The rabbi was creating among his listeners an emotional tie to his product, the Jewish heritage.

We now know, despite earlier notions, that preaching did definitely become a major function of the rabbi's role. Israel Bettan has fully investigated the scholarly eloquence of the rabbis. There were, of course, those who did not excel in the fine art of preaching, and who consequently de-emphacized this rabbinical function. Yet, it was expected that each rabbi would preach, and by this means he could further justify his role in society.

## The Rabbi as Pietist

Perhaps the greatest single expectation of the rabbi was that he would cultivate personal piety.[34] In addition to encouraginghim to evidence his piety in his social relations with others, the community permitted him to live in a semi-

private world where he could grow in devoutness and encourage his disciples to do likewise. It is interesting to note that the rabbi was not expected to take upon himself the obligation of leading the community in worship. In fact, he was rarely expected to attend daily worship services with the rest of the community. Instead, he was permitted to hold semi-private services with his pupils in the quiet of his own home.[35] It may be seen, then, that the rabbi was permitted to spend at least a part of his time living away from the outside world alone with his students, where he might teach, contemplate, and grow in personal devotion. Thus, piety, while not a rabbinical function in the narrow sense, was at least regarded as the intangible quality which the rabbi might cultivate and attempt to pass on to others through his contacts with them.

Other Functions

To this point we have discussed major operations of the rabbi's role which were universal in scope and expected of all rabbis. As such, these duties were mandatory upon the office per se, rather than upon the person occupying that office. Other operations appear to be less universal and not required of every rabbinical position. They might, therefore, be associated with the rabbi rather than with his office, or else with the positional expectations of only a limited number of communities. Thus, we note that



in certain communities rabbis devoted themselves to the task of writing amulets,

> The common man did not believe a rabbi was fully competent unless he was adept in the writing of amulets. Therefore a rabbi, if he was to retain the confidence and trust of the people, had to be conversant with all the arts which entered into the making of amulets.[36]

Similarly, we read of rabbis who served as fund raisers, who wrote letters to obtain funds for communities in financial distress.[37] Other rabbis directed themselves to safeguarding community ethics through supervising weights and measures.[38] Still others, living where relations with Christians were good, used their position in the community to become the representative of the Jewish group to the Christian authorities. They were the defenders of the Jewish community in debates and discussions with learned Christians.[39] These were the early "Supporters of the faith" who could justify Judaism by scholarly arguments. Other rabbis devoted much time and effort to attacking heresy and breaking the influence of heretics who threatened normalized Judaism.[40]

These many functions, not inherent in the position, were nonetheless supportive of the community and, as a result, were forces for continuity of the rabbinate. But as time passed, rabbis found themselves with an ever increasing number of functions to fulfill. They took on the duties of supervising and licensing the Shochtim who performed ritual

slaughter,[41] of conducting life cycle ceremonies,[42] and of keeping the community record book.[43] Many of these duties were assumed by rabbis as a matter of personal choice, indicating that the rabbis grew to have a certain amount of freedom in choosing secondary functions. Still, communities demanded that their rabbis attend to a certain number of these lesser functions, and as a result many rabbis found their time constantly in demand.

To recapitulate, we have noted that the rabbi performed definite functions which were expected of him in fulfilling his rabbinical role. The major functions were to serve as teacher, judge, and preacher. In addition, he was called upon to live a life of strict piety, although this did not absolve the rest of the community of its religious obligations. The rabbi also performed a variety of minor functions, the nature of which varied from one Jewish locale to another. But it was in performing his major functions that the rabbi justified his role as a community functionary, for these functions were expectations of the office he held. In performing them he kept the tradition alive, served the community, and strengthened his own position as the occupant of a high position in his society.



## THE AUTHORITY OF THE RABBI

We have noted how the functions which were ascribed to the rabbinate resulted from the various historical and theological forces which were at play in the community. In his immediate perspective however, the rabbi would not see his functions in this light. Rather, he would see them as permanent aspects of his position, unconditioned by changing conditions. And in the same way, he saw his authority as a power stemming from occupancy of an office which contained inherent authority, that was passed on from generation to generation. It is a tradition that the authority of the religious functionary is held by virtue of his position.[44] The rabbi saw himself as an heir to the authority vested in the office when he entered the rabbinate.

It is clear that the office, rather than the functionary, was the depository of authority in the Jewish community. The authority was transmitted from one occupant, generally an elder, to another, usually his disciple, in the traditional ceremony of Semikah ordination. The ceremony involved placing the teacher's hand on the pupil, thus transmitting authority to him. The origin of this ceremony was considered to be Moses' laying his hands on Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9) and thus delegating all of his spiritual powers to Joshua. The ceremony itself partook of super-

naturalism.

> Laying the hands upon a person, or even upon an animal, was considered in ancient times the transference of good deeds or iniquities. From the Bible we learn that one who brought a sin offering was required to lay hands upon it. Thus, one transferred all one's sins to the animal that was to be sacrificed to God. Also, by bringing a peace offering to God, the owner was supposed to lay hands upon the animal to be sacrificed. On the Day of Atonement when the goat was sent to Azazel, according to the Bible, the priest had to lay hands upon the goat. "And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness." By laying the hands upon the goat the ancient Jews believed that they had transferred all their sins to the animal which was sent into the wilderness. 45

In the case of ordination, the power of the teacher's good deeds was transferred to his disciple. It became a tradition, so the ordained could consider himself as a direct descendant in the chain which continued the Mosaic authority undiminished.

The lengthy history of the ceremony involved a number of changes, as, in Palestine, ordination became an act to be performed by a minimum of three rabbis, then the whole Sanhedrin. Finally when the state threatened those who continued to give ordination, it reverted to a ceremony performed by a single rabbi in privacy.[46] In the Babylonian center, the act of ordination ceased, but it continued in



Palestine. Since the European communities were originally under the influence of the Palestinian center, and had been settled by Palestinian Jews, the ceremony continued through the middle ages in an unbroken tradition.[47] The individual inherited the authority of the office when he was ordained, for then he was formally given the name of "rabbi" and given authority to act as judge in community judicial affairs.[48] The ceremony of ordination had great powers toward the continuity of the rabbinic office, then, because the members of the community gave full credulence to the authority which was transmitted to the person being ordained.

Since the ordination itself was sufficient to give the rabbi authority, the original practice of the ceremony in Palestine was for the ordained to simply state the name of the rabbi who had authorized him when anyone doubted his authority. Such a method was quite sufficient for a limited geographic area, where by word of mouth one's authority could be verified. When the authorization of rabbis through the Semikah ceremony was carried into Europe, certain elements of discontinuity threatened to discrete the authorization. Verbal attestations of authorization were sufficient in a stable, geographically limited area such as Palestine where verification was a simple matter. But in Europe, itinerants might claim ordination from rabbis unknown to the community, without any visible sign

of proof. To eliminate this threat, it was decided in the fourteenth century that rabbis must have written documents proving their ordination was valid.[49] In this document, the ordaining rabbi praised the merits of the disciple he was authorizing, and proclaimed to all that his protege was now authorized to exercise all rabbinic functions.[50] In reality, the document did not contain the authority, however. It merely attested to the fact that a legitimate Semikah had taken place. As such, protestations against, not withstanding, the authorizing power of the ceremony of Semikah was never superceded by the document of proof. The value of the document was that it assured that those holding rabbinic office had been trained sufficiently to meet the standards of ordination as set by known teachers, and prevented fraudulent ascendancy to the position. The document maintained ecclesiastical standards at a high level, and consequently served to maintain rabbinic authority at a correspondingly high level.

The conveying of a title is not in itself a transmission of authority. It is, rather, an indication that the recipient holds membership in a certain office of authority. Thus, the conveying of the title "rabbi" signified that the recipient was entitled to the authority of the office of the rabbinate, and given the full power to judge in ritual and civil cases. Yet, as symbolic of the office, the title can come to mean much in its own right. Thus, we



note that when the document of ordination came into usage, the title morenu, ("our teacher") was assigned to those who were ordained.[51] Similarly, the title haber was assigned to those who had not yet been completely authorized, but who enjoyed a lesser degree of authority.[52] The possession of title thus came to symbolize authority.

The authority the rabbi obtained through his ordination was, hence, regarded as divine authority. But this was not the sole basis for his position of power in the community. He also had a basis for his power in the contractual nature of his relationship to the community. Before accepting the role as communal rabbi, the rabbi was given a contract explicitly stating that his decisions would be accepted by the community as binding. Those persons living under his jurisdiction were, therefore, completely duty bound, by virtue of a bi-lateral pact, to yield to the authority of his decisions.

In discussing rabbinic authority in France and Germany, Solomon Zeitlin writes:

> Since in the Franco-German communities the rabbi had to be either appointed or elected by the members of the community, every individual of the community had to obey the decision of the rabbi, and could not contest it by appealing to another Bet Din (Court) of another city, even though the latter might have greater scholars. 53

It was recognition of the authority they were giving to this rabbi that caused communities to be so meticulous

when going through the process of selecting and electing a man.

A further basis for the rabbi's authority was the coercive power of the state. While the community had early refused to permit civil authorities to tamper with the selection of rabbis the community was always threatened with the possibility of civil intervention. It was expedient for the state to allow the Jewish community to govern itself as long as there was no insurrection. The state hence had an interest in the rabbi, for it was he who kept order in the community. As a result, while the state did not choose the rabbi, it sanctioned his authority and, became a basis for his power.[54]

Ultimately, however, authority of any office cannot stand alone. The functionaries who fill the office either add to its power or detract from it, and consequently an ineffective functionary detracts from the authority of the office that he occupies. The office and its occupant become inextricably linked in the justification for authority. We may note, therefore, that the rabbi's authority was greatly justified by his own personal scholarly repute. Meir of Rothenberg claimed his authority because of his personal intellectual abilities.

> R. Meir himself based his authority on his knowledge of talmudic law and on his intellectual attainments both of which enabled him to arrive at a correct decision in questions of law or ritual; he did not consider it to be dependent upon appointment, election, or even ordination.



> Thus, he once wrote in high-spirited defiance: "You, the aforementioned community leaders (of the Rhine communities), probably delude yourselves with the idea that since your permission is required before a person may divorce his wife, no scholar is permitted to render decisions in ritual law unless he receives your authorization. No, this is not true, for the Torah is free to anyone who is capable of arriving at a correct decision." [55]

Thus, he felt that his power did not stem totally from his occupying a rabbinic office, but instead resulted from his ability to cite detailed explanations involving Talmudic principles underlying his decisions.[56] But in general, the traditional ordination, the contractual relationship with the community, the title he held, the sanction of the civil government behind him, and his own proficiency were the bases for the rabbi's authority.

Despite these foundations of authority, in practice the rabbi did not always wield such power. He often found impediments to exerting the authority he thought he possessed. Zeitlin had depicted Jewish communal leadership as a power struggle between secular leaders (the Parnasim) and the religious leaders (the rabbis) with each maintaining control at different times. He sees Rashi as the person who restored community control to the hands of the religious leaders, thus making the rabbis the supreme authorities in the community.[57] But the relationships between the rabbis and the Parnasim continued to be often strained, as each sought the leadership of the community. Communal

leaders would excommunicate persons without consulting the rabbi until in the twelfth century it was decreed that no excommunication shall be made without the consent of the rabbi.[58] Throughout the medieval period there was the threat of secular leaders overstepping the rabbi's power, and we find rabbis constantly fighting against lay encroachment and against any decisions lacking rabbinical sanction.[59]

But for extended periods of time the strong power wielded by the rabbi remained a positive force toward continuity of the rabbinic position. In 1628 and 1631 town meeting were held in Lithuania in which it was decreed that the Parnasim could make no rulings without the signature of the head of the court, the town rabbi.[60] As head of the court, the rabbi held not only legislative and judicial but also executive authority. He could enforce his decisions. Although there was little external coercive force used to carry out his will, there was no need for such. The community's acceptance of the sacred system also meant that its members must accept the rabbis decrees.

> There are no police to implement the verdict of the rabbi or the decisions of other officials. Enforcement is solely by the combined authority of God and of man. As long as belief in the Almighty is effective, the Holy Books are the Law and the rabbi's interpretation of the Law carries weight. As long as concern about what people think is strong, the popularly accepted arbiter keeps his authority - and such concern is extremely strong in the shtetl. 61

Yet, he might order any one of a number of negative enforce-



ments at his command. Fines, fasting, lashing, social boycott, and deprivation of the honor of being called to the Torah were punishments he might impose.[62] But the most serious punishment he might use and could do so only with the community's approval in grave cases - was herem (excommunication). It is:

> ...the ultimate form of ostracism and isolation, complete rejection by man and by God. Few have witnessed the ceremony but it is referred to with horror as extremely sinister, taking place in darkness while black candles are being burned... Threat of excommunication is the proverbial ultimate in menace. 63

The person excommunicated ceased to be a member of the community.[64] So serious was this punishment, that the simple threat of it was generally sufficient to secure conformity to the rabbi's demands.[65]

But the rabbi's authority did not express itself solely in prohibitions. Through influencing his disciples, the reputation of the rabbi might be spread. His decisions, promulgated by his pupils would then become normative throughout the country.[66] And since within his own community, its leading members were his students who owed him honor and obedience, he maintained power by virtue of being their teacher,[67] and spread his authoritative view through them. With authority within his community guarded by his holding certain tools to gain conformity, and with a certain amount of non-local authority he might gain through

obtaining a known reputation, the rabbi had sufficient continuity of authority to last while the sacred system continued in tact.

## BACKGROUND AND TRAINING OF CANDIDATES

Any organization which offers services to others and whose members are convinced of the value of that organization, seeks to perpetuate itself as long as its services are in demand and its members dedicated to the cause for which the organization exists. As the rabbinate served a vital role in answering needs of the community, and since the rabbis had strong beliefs about the validity of their role, they were obliged to encourage younger men to enter the rabbinate. This also necessitated the formulation of a proper training ground, in which candidates for the rabbinate could learn their prospective role. We have considered the importance the rabbis attributed to their function of teaching. In analyzing the background, the training given to the prospective rabbis, and the prerequisites required of them we may now better understand the outcome of this concern.

All of the rabbi's pupils were possible candidates for the rabbinate. He was, in a realistic sense, a potential recruiter. The individual teacher might, as a personal example, have represented the whole of the rabbinate to his students. And the students themselves, were drawn together



by a common set of values. Their interest in study provided the common meeting ground which might find ultimate fulfillment in joining the rabbinate.

While the rabbinate was open to candidates regardless of birth it is interesting to note that many rabbis' sons followed their father's occupation. There appear to be unbroken chains of rabbinical tradition within selected families. It is logical that a father, firmly convinced of the superiority of his life's work, would rear his sons to follow him in the rabbinate. We are told how, certain rabbis were born into rabbinical traditions and influenced to
68
continue the tradition.

It is futile to speculate on the economic background of candidates. A candidate might come from a wealthy home
69
with a prestigious background. Yet, he might just as well come from an impoverished family. The wealthy Parnasim might well have favored rabbis from substantial backgrounds, since this might create a religious leadership sympathetic with their secular leadership. Still, in general perspective, the rabbis appear to represent diverse economic backgrounds.

The period of training for the rabbinic student was long and arduous. We are told of study sessions that began
70
when a child was as young as three years, and continued until maturity. Discipline was extremely strict, and it was considered rare for a pupil to take issue with the

teacher.[71] The indoctrination was directed toward imbuing the student with a complete and total loyalty to the values of the tradition, as well as an intellectual understanding of the intricacies of the legal structure and exegetical methods.

While study was conducted for its own sake, this was not at variance with the rabbinical role for which the student was being trained. Being a scholar was the integral function of the rabbi. As a result, the training accorded the student was practical for the role he was to assume. As the students often lived with their rabbi in an isolated atmosphere,[72] they adopted, to a limited extent, an attitude of withdrawal from the community. The inculcation of this attitude was necessary for the student later would find the necessity of achieving a measure of solitude, so he might apply himself to probing the legal writings in rendering his own judgements for the community. It also served to elevate the rabbi above the mundane level of the rest of the community, although his life was integrally connected with the community.

The long training period leading to ordination was replete with difficulties sufficient to cause the drop out of those unsuited for the rabbinate. At the same time, the technical training to sharpen the minds of those suited, was a skillful means of maintaining the rabbinic office on a high level. To eliminate the possibility of potential



leaders leaving the academy because of economic need, rabbis convinced the communities, through inter-community edicts, to contribute to the support of a minimal number of students.[73]

It is clear that there were prescribed standards the candidate had to fulfill before he would be deemed worthy of ordination. We have knowledge that the candidate's background was completely checked if it were otherwise unknown, and other rabbis might be questioned about their knowledge of the candidate's desirability.[74] Intellectual ability was certainly a prime consideration as considerable intelligence was required to carry through the scholar's duties. In addition to ability, knowledge of commentaries, codes, and Talmud was a stipulation, and some communities required their candidates to have a broad, general education before considering them for the rabbinate.[75] In addition, the character of the prospective rabbi was closely considered, and it was mandatory that he be devoted to the spiritual aspects of life, in contrast to the Christian clergy which, during the medieval period had grown extremely wealthy and not indifferent to material gains.[76] Candidates were expected to have reached maturity and to be married. It seems that the criterion of marriage was imposed in recognition that the rabbi shared in the basic temptations of all men, and the thought was that being married, the rabbi would be beyond suspicion of unchastity.

In addition, there was the hope that since the rabbi was married, his home would become a model for all other homes in the community and would, in addition, become the center of a cultural circle.[77]

We have seen how the high standards were set for those who were candidates for the rabbinate. Similarly, we have noted the intensity of the training program, designed to prepare the candidate for rabbinic duties. The caliber of the rabbinate rested directly on the continuance of these training procedures.

## THE FACTOR OF INCENTIVE

Two primary factors tending toward continuity of any institution are utility of the services offered by the institution to its clientele, and motivation of its functionaries to maintain those services. Analysis has shown that the medieval rabbinate served functionally to answer definite needs of members of the community. Yet, this had to be supplemented by motivational factors sufficient to evoke the desire of personnel to devote their lives to providing the requested community services. Since without this latter element, the rabbinate could not perpetuate itself, it was incumbent upon the Jewish community to provide incentives for personnel to dedicate themselves to the rabbinical role.

Incentives to the rabbinate were originally strictly



non-economic. The rabbi did not receive income for performing rabbinical functions, but earned his livelihood in another manner.

> The medieval Rabbis earned a living as artisans, physicians, merchants, authors, penmen, marriage-brokers, finance ministers, men of science, and it was not till the fourteenth century that the Rabbis became dependent on the support of their congregations. 78

Many rabbis were engaged in mercantilism and some served as money lenders.

> The progressive concentration on money lending encouraged combining scholarly and commercial activities. A German rabbi well described the situation by stating that "the reason why the Torah holds a higher place in Germany than in other countries is that the Jews here charge interest to Gentiles and need not engage in a (time consuming) occupation." 79

A most popular profession for the rabbi was that of physician.

> The frequency with which the Jewish Rabbis followed the profession of medicine was due in part to the regard which Judaism teaches for bodily health, and in part to the great compatibility of this profession with the Rabbinical function; for a fine feature of the Jewish medical man of the middle ages was his devotion to the poor. 80

Since the rabbinate was not yet a profession, incentives to the rabbis were derived largely from the value system. The sacred system, which was internalized by each member of the community placed a high premium on those achievements possible in the rabbinate. The community's concept of success was oriented along lines of tradition.

The successful Jew was he who had mastered the scholarly writings of the Jewish tradition. Motivation toward success entailed motivation toward the rabbinate. Achieving this goal and performing its scholarly functions thus became a means for the individual to achieve his ambitions which were in turn, derived from a tradition oriented value system.

Status factors must also be considered as motivating elements. Everyone would look up to the rabbi for he had achieved that for which they aspired. As a result, he was rewarded with much status and this manifest itself in concrete ways. He was afforded a special seat in the synagogue, and given the privilege of being called to the Torah every Sabbath and festival.[81] When he attended services, the congregation would pay him the respect of waiting for him before the services began. At all occasions he was given special honor.

> Even when a powerful provincial elder visited a small Moravian community, he would be called to the Torah only after "the local master." The rabbi's appearance at a wedding or funeral was regarded as an honor to the family. In many communities he was the syndic (godfather) at all circumcisions. In communal councils he had the seat of honor, often serving as host to the gathering in his own dwelling. He often wrote the minutes, and generally was the first to sign them. In short, "in his own community every rabbi is to be considered a high priest," asserted Rabbi Moses Sofer of Pfessburg, with some exaggeration of the facts. 82



His office became invested with great esteem. The high status of the rabbinate must be recognized as a force for continuity.

The factors of status and achievement sufficed to maintain the rabbinate as long as time demands on the rabbi were not overbearing and he was able to maintain a separate means of income sufficient to meet his needs. But increased duties forced the rabbis to lessen the time spent in earning income, and threatened to reduce them to poverty. In response to this trend, and recognizing the possibility of deterioration of the rabbinate as a result of intense poverty, the community agreed to make certain economic concessions to the rabbinate. At first, rabbis were granted special dispensations and services which permitted them to continue to subsist despite their lack of funds.[83] They were exempt from the community's taxes, and were given homes by the community.[84] They were given patronage in their trade due to their prestigious position in the community. At the same time, rabbis were permitted to accept fees for some of the legal services they rendered.[85] These provisions represented a step toward the professionalization of the rabbinate at a point where direct financial support of the rabbi as a community functionary had not yet been recognized as proper.

The rabbi now found that he had to devote full time to his rabbinic duties. Yet, the community regarded the

rabbinate as essentially an honor, and held it a sin for the rabbi to accept direct remuneration, a reaction at least partially prompted by the wealth accumulated by Christian clergy.[86] The community's realization in the fourteenth century that the rabbi had to be paid was not achieved without much difficulty, for many felt that providing extrinsic reward would debase an institution whose members had previously labored solely for the love of Torah. There was also the fear that with professionalization the rabbi would lose the independence he had when he derived his income through separate sources, that his indebtedness to the community which paid his salary might adversely affect his judgements.[87] Yet, these objections had to be overruled because the community duties had come to demand the rabbi's full attention.

Financial remuneration in the rabbinate did become somewhat of an incentive to youth with scholarship abilities. The community designated a specified salary, the amount depending upon the economic condition of the community.

> The salary paid Judah b. Asher by the rich community of Toledo (1290 guilders at first and 3000 in the end) was exceptional. It was so high because of the elders' fear of losing Judah to another community, as well as because of his reluctance to accept gifts. Small and insecure salaries, such as that of S. Abenporat, preacher and teacher of Teruel at an annual salary of 350 solidi, were more typical. After a year of service, he complained he had received no salary whatever. (1338) [88]



The uncertainty of adequate salary in most towns caused the rabbi's fees to become his chief source of support. He was paid for arranging marriages, performing weddings,[89] and issuing litigation.

> The largest source of revenue undoubtedly consisted of fees attached to civil litigations, often regulated by local ordinances...In Hamburg the rabbi received eight shillings for each examination of witnesses, and four marks for each judgement. 90

In addition, they administered special trusts.

> The Rabbis obtained additional revenue from administering communal monopolies such as the sale of citrons for the Feast of Tabernacles, from fees for conferring the titles morenu and haber on qualified candidates, and from authorization and examination of ritualistic slaughterers. 91

We even hear of rabbis who were willing to donate their own funds to a community treasury in order to gain the position of rabbi,[92] because of the large amount in fees the rabbi might accumulate. Hence, the community rabbi gained the assurance that his position would guarantee him a livelihood.

In addition, the rabbi worked under a contract which provided for a measure of security. Extending for a number of years, the contract was generally renewed, and provision was made to notify the rabbi in ample time should the community wish to terminate his services.[93] Often rabbis

were given lifetime tenure by a community.

> Permanency of rabbinic tenure became unwritten law. Moses Sofer stated that "no one ever heard or saw in these lands that a rabbi should have been deposed, and one ought never to do such a thing." 94

It can be concluded that security was a reasonably strong incentive toward entrance into the rabbinate, and a means of affecting continuity of the rabbinic office.

In summary, there were a variety of incentives which served to induce young men into entering the rabbinate. Such a dedication would represent the individual's highest level of attainment under the tradition-oriented value system of the medieval community. It followed that the rabbi was rewarded with a high position of status, which manifest itself in many deferences paid him by community members. Initially he was given financial concessions to make it easier for him to devote full time to his teaching, studying and the evolving of legal decisions. As his duties became more complex and the rabbinate became a full profession, he was voted a salary. Special fees for performing functions at the request of individuals, earned him considerable income. And the contracts insuring reasonable longevity and sometimes life tenure provided security. These considerations were important factors in maintaining continuity.



## THE RABBI AS CULTURAL SYMBOL

Analysis has revealed that the rabbi's authority was derived from the office he held. Generations of functionaries exerting authority in the same areas, cause that authority to be associated with the position rather than with the functionary per se. Similarly, a position may become invested with a symbolic representation. The requirement here is that the succeeding occupants of that position possess similar character traits. As these traits become assigned to the position rather than the person occupying it, their symbolic nature is determined by the valuational system of the society. It follows that persons occupying positions which have benefited the society may be recipients of positive symbolic imagery.

The medieval rabbinate strongly benefited the community, and this must be regarded as a possible source for the positive image of the rabbi. Yet, it was the continued existence of similar character traits that was most responsible for his achieving that image. During the era of strong rabbinic authority, those who held rabbinic posts were regarded by all as men who had lived up to the highest measure of the ethical code. Tradition required not only knowing the law, but also living it. We have noted how piety and sobriety were prerequisites for rabbinical appointment. Initial sentiment against paying the rabbi

was at least partially motivated by a communal image, which depicted the rabbi as being indifferent to money.[95] The character expectations for the rabbi often approximated those expected of a saint,[96] and the rabbi re-enforced these expectations by voluntarily internalizing and accepting them, living up to them in practice.

The whole demeaner of the rabbi reflected his recognition that he represented more than his individual self. He expected to dress with special care and to conduct himself with dignity.[97] Rarely was he seen eating in public.[98] The rabbis flowing beard came to symbolize his saintliness, and certain communities stipulated that their rabbis must have beards.[99] But the appearance of the rabbi simply mirrored his dedication. Pledging himself to a high code of conduct, he became a living symbol of the community's traditional values in the eyes of all its members.

Despite his saintliness and the symbolic image he came to represent, it never was assumed that the rabbi lived the religiousity of the community vicariously for its members.

> The rabbi was not a man set apart from the people to cultivate the domain of the spiritual. He was not to be the priest in the exclusive possession of a technique by virtue of which he was a mediator between God and man. The rabbi was one of the people who like them prayed daily for the privilege of learning and teaching Torah. He differed from them only on having his prayer granted, to some extent, and in his awareness of the responsibility which such privilege brought with it. 100



The rabbi excelled in those qualities and deeds which every member of the community aspired to realize. He became in short, the embodiment of the cultural ideal.[101] Since the rabbi was symbol of the community's cherished values, his very presence in the community was sufficient to disturb those who might subvert those values. Without resorting to sanctions and relying only on the image he projected, the rabbi served as a community conscience. It is little wonder then that the rabbi who committed any act of moral turpitude would have been violently rejected by the community, for he would have placed himself in direct opposition to the image in which he was held.

The image of the rabbi as the personification of cultural values acted to unify all the aspects of his role. All his functions could be considered a validation of this image. As a result, the continuity of the rabbinate was dependent upon the willingness of the rabbis to accept upon themselves the image which the community had projected.

## SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the elements of continuity in the medieval rabbinate. Initially, we noted that we could not examine the rabbi without first understanding the nature of the community which he served. We found that there was a European community in the generic sense, for although medieval Jewry was divided

into separate self-governing units, all these units were affected by the same forces of segregation, the impact of the sacred system, and a common loyalty among Jews. The rise of the rabbinate was attributed to the community's need to produce its own religious leadership when communication with Palestine had been cut off, and we noted how the community became ever more dependent upon its rabbi, as he was invested with the power of interpreting the tradition.

Investigation showed that the rabbi fulfilled a number of important role functions. Among his major duties were judging and issuing litigation which provided a legal basis for the community's way of life, issuing responsa in answer to questions that arose when his opinion was sought by Jews outside of his own community, supervising and teaching the educational program of the community, and cultivating a certain pietistic detachment from the commotion of the marketplace. We also noted a number of minor duties rabbis would fulfill in validation of the role they occupied, duties which would vary from place to place such as raising funds, supervising Kashruth, and presenting scholarly arguments before Christians in defense of Judaism.

Our inquiry into the authority of the rabbi disclosed that the individual rabbi was the recipient of authority by virtue of his occupying a hallowed office. Through the traditional ceremony of ordination, the rabbi was granted the right to render legal decisions. The conditions of



his contract also assured him of an authoritative position in the community. Moreover, his own intellectual attainments as a scholar enhanced the authority that was inherent in his position.

We noted that continuity was manifest in the background and training of candidates for the rabbinate. Fathers would encourage their sons to study for the rabbinate, and would start them on rabbinic studies from childhood infancy. Communities would recompense students in order to permit them to continue their studies, and would house them with the rabbi so they could constantly be exposed to the influence of their master. High standards were set for these future rabbis, including high moral character and intellectual ability, so that the rabbinate would not cease to be an exalted position.

In discussing incentives to the rabbinate, we noted that attaining this goal represented a high accomplishment among Jews of the medieval period. The position was also endowed with high status, and the rabbi was awarded many honors. When the rabbi became so occupied with his rabbinic duties that he had no time to maintain an outside occupation, he was given a salary by the community for performing his work, and also received many perquisites for special services that he rendered. Often his economic position was well above average in the community.

Finally, we discussed the symbolic image of the rabbi. We noted that he came to represent the cultural values of the society in which he lived. Thus, aside from any actions he might perform, his very presence in the community was as a living testimony to the purity of the ethical standards of the tradition.

These were the elements of continuity which kept the rabbinate as a vital force throughout the medieval period. The ability of the rabbinate to maintain itself also is a major reason for the success of the whole community structure of self-government, for he enabled the community to face new situations in the light of an established tradition. The final proof of the supremacy of rabbinic continuity is the existence of the rabbi to this day.



- CHAPTER II -

## THE DECLINE OF THE CLASSIC RABBINATE

## ORIENTATION

Forces tending toward the destruction of any institution may emanate from within the structure of that institution or impinge upon it from without. The effect of the two types of forces working together in combination hastens the disintegrative process so that the institution may suddenly and cataclysmically collapse. When the disruptive forces operate at both internal and external levels, the institution can only survive through the operation of countervailing forces sufficient to outlast the storm. Yet, when the disruptive forces reach such an intensity, the institution can rarely survive without the necessity of adopting significant changes in its structure.

This general analysis of the causes of institutional decay is evidenced concretely in the breakdown of the Jewish community and the fall of the medieval rabbinate in the nineteenth century. The external coercion which held the community together and sanctioned the rabbinate came to an abrupt end with the Emancipation, and the Jew no longer found himself living forcibly within the narrow confines of a ghetto community. Within the community, forces of corruption ate away at the rabbi's authority, until he remained a power in name alone. The metamorphosis was sudden and devastating. The end of the external coercion combined with the force of the internal corruption



to topple the rabbi from the pedestal he had occupied.

While the explosion resulted from the presence of these immediate forces, still it would be incorrect to state that elements of disintegration had not been building up prior to the Emancipation. In general, revolutions represent the outbreak of forces which have been seething beneath the surface for considerable lengths of time. Even prior to the age of Enlightenment when statesmen began their work of creating a new image of the Jew, a work which eventually led to the crumbling of the ghetto wall, weaknesses of the Jewish system of self-government had begun to show up within the community. Inherent in the medieval system were elements of discontinuity, forces which by themselves did not succeed in causing the overthrow of the community and its rabbi, but which existed nonetheless and were responsible for sapping the strength of the community as a functioning entity. These elements played an important part in the eventual disintegration of the independent, self-governed community in the nineteenth century, although they were not as obvious nor dynamic as the sudden unleashing of new forces which gave the death blow. In this chapter discussion shall center on (1) discontinuities inherent in the community organization, (2) the growth of disruptive forces within the community, and (3) the forces of ultimate disruption in the nineteenth century. Finally, we shall discuss the post-emancipation

rabbi as he groped to find a new role for himself, and the predicament of the newly-emancipated rabbi who sought a new Judaism on American shores.

## DISCONTINUITIES OF THE RABBINATE INHERENT IN COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

The Jewish community of the medieval period was like a small island surrounded by a mighty sea. The roads linking towns were dangerous, and the fear of robbers was sufficient to discourage travel. The corporate body of diaspora Jewry had been severed into its constituent parts, each of which recognized a kinship with the whole, but was unable to affect any unity because of the geographical distances between Jewish settlements. It was in response to this atomization that self-government became the guiding principle within each community, and the rabbi of the community achieved an authority which was absolute within the community he served, for no rabbi from another municipality could override his decision. Thus, we read in an ordinance of 1554 at Ferrara, typical of the regulations of the medieval period, that:

> No Rabbi shall issue any order or decree to any inhabitant of a city which has another Rabbi unless the local Rabbi agrees or declares in the presence of witnesses or in writing his unwillingness to interfere in the litigation. 1



Yet, acceptance of the independent status of each Jewish settlement could never find complete favor within the Jewish heart. Life in Palestine had been characterized by a single community centralized under the Temple in Jerusalem, with a centralized leadership. The Babylonian exile had been regarded as an aberration; the exiles were in a condition of bewilderment simply because they were separated from the community. The idea of k'lal yisrael, the unity of the Jewish people, developed in Palestine, and the diaspora Jew could never forget it. This idea permeated the books he studied, found expression in interpersonal relationships, and flew in the face of the atomized structure of European diaspora Jewry. Conflict and confusion was only inevitable.

The rabbi fell heir to this inherent problem of community organization.. He could never feel completely authoritative in his decisions. Originally, with the realization that geographical distances rendered impossible the achievement of any unified diaspora Jewry, the splintered settlements decided that if self-rule on the local level was necessary, it was best that each locality govern itself through complete democracy. The result was that all decisions had to be made unanimously, since the presupposition was that each member of the community had voluntarily joined himself to that community, and the power of that community lay in each member's voluntary adherence to each

ordinance.

> A l'origine, la communauté juive est un groupement qui s'est constitué librement et dont les différents membres ont librement pris certains engagements. Ces engagements ont été pris à l'unanimité et sont seuls contraignants. Ainsi lorsque la communauté a décide d'établir le Herem ha-Yishub elle l'a fait avec l'accord unanime de ses membres; pour le supprimer, il faut à nouveau réunir cet accord unanime. Le refus d'une seule personne suffit pour maintenir le statu quo. 2

A result of the requirement for unanimity was the impossibility of achieving effective legislation.[3] The community, faced with this problem, called upon the rabbi, who was originally not a legislator but a scholar,[4] to determine an expedient means of effecting legislation. This, in itself, provided a built-in limitation to the rabbi's authority. Due to the original voluntary nature of the community, the rabbi's decision had to be acceptable to that community. Even when he had achieved authoritarian status in the community, the rabbi was not permitted to give judgement in an issue unless both parties, the plaintiff and the defendent were to come before him.[5]

Yet, the greatest problem facing his authority lay in the realization that he could only give decisions affecting the community in which he had been chosen rabbi. The chaos emerging from decisions which might vary widely from one Jewish settlement to the next, and the persistance of the attitude that all Jews should be under a common juris-



diction led to the founding of the rabbinical synods. These synods were convened during intercommunal trade gatherings, times when the early rabbis, being tradesmen, would have the opportunity to get together. Discussions centered around judicial problems which could not be settled at the local level. Out of these synods came takkanoth, legal enactments which were meant to be binding upon all Jewish communities throughout the country.[6]

Yet, these measures designed to create uniformity of practice did not alleviate the basic problem. The question still remained: Did the local rabbi have ultimate jurisdiction within his community, or was there a higher authority? On one hand, the necessity of establishing the jurisdiction of local courts forced an enactment that any rabbi who attempted to handle cases outside his local jurisdiction was to be excommunicated. Thus, at the Synod of Frankfort in 1603, a takkanah was issued stating:

> No Rabbi or head of a Court shall extend his jurisdiction over communities or districts which are traditionally subjects to another court; if any men refuse to obey the orders of their court and prefer to choose a Rabbi for themselves, that Rabbi or Teacher shall be excommunicated as shall also be those men until the heads of the provinces are reconciled to them. 7

On the other hand, legal questions were submitted to rabbis from communities other than those over which those rabbis presided. Moreover, persons seeking answers to legal questions could reject the responsum of one rabbi, and seek an

answer from another,[8] thus breaking down demarcations of authority. Compounding the chaos, a thirteenth century rabbi had decreed that no legislation was to be passed on the local level; instead, only the greatest scholars of the generation were to legislate.[9] It became clear that the problem of isolation versus interdependence of Jewish settlements was more than an academic question.

In the tenth century, Rabbenu Gershom had issued takkanoth with the intention of thereby bringing all the independent communities together into a federation. His attempt was to substitute a voluntary constitution among the scattered communities, gaining its authority solely from the members of the communities, in place of obedience to an authority based on past ages.[10] Ultimately, the plan did not succeed however. Although the chaos resulting from the decentralization of diaspora Jewry was reduced by the unifying effects of the takkanoth, the medieval communities continued to function in an independent manner. Each community derived most of its legislation from its own rabbi who interpreted the traditional law and translated it into terms acceptable to his community. Still, the most prominent rabbis in a country did tend to become courts of appeals when questions of community rights arose.[11]

In brief, the rabbi's problem of authority was implicit within the problem of community organization. The opposing movements toward both poles of centralization and



decentralization created uncertainty whether the local rabbi's jurisdiction was complete, or whether it could be overridden by higher sources. The fact that the rabbinate continued despite the tension does not minimize the problem, for it was never completely overcome.

## DEVELOPMENTAL DISCONTINUITIES

As a functionary of the Jewish community, the rabbi was keenly involved in changes that evolved within the community. His ability to adapt to changed conditions and thus maintain a role for himself has already been noted. Yet, certain changes operated in a way to reduce his effectiveness and his authority within his community.

An important development which had telling effects on the rabbinate was the stratification of the community into economic and social classes from its earlier, classless condition. The wealthy Parnasim, though relatively few in number, came to dominate the vast majority of community members who, in times of economic distress, suffered the anguish of extreme poverty. The fortunate minority sought to control the rabbi, so his decisions would favor their cause at the expense of the impoverished majority. We are told how wealthy community leaders strived to depose the rabbi when he favored the masses in his decisions.

> Influential interests among the Jews stood ready to rid themselves of the Chief Rabbi whose close contact with the masses and

> whose sympathy for the unfortunate poor made him their natural protector...Economic motives were revealed more openly until the aggressive leaders of the wealthy class finally declared themselves willing to disrupt, if necessary the united...Community. 12

Bitter struggles arose between the upper and lower classes for leadership in the community.

> The poorer classes tried to seize the leadership over the community, while the wealthier classes fought to retain their leadership...In the eighteenth century, the struggle became even more acute, particularly after the Lisbon earthquake in 1755 which had a great influence on the economic life in Hamburg, and which ruined many of the wealthy class who lost their fortunes, and consequently their leadership in the community. The aristocracy was no longer strong, and the poorer classes gained some power, and tried to snatch leadership from the leaders and the rabbis. 13

Class enmity and oligarchic rule, unheard of in the fourteenth century,[14] now reached a crescendo.

The relationship between rabbi and Parnasim had always contained possible grounds for conflict. Even prior to the rise of the rabbinate, the Parnasim had held some power within the community.[15] As their power increased and they assumed the right of choosing the rabbi for the community, the question arose whether the rabbi's authority extended over those Parnasim who selected him as well as over the rest of the community.[16] Some rabbis became completely dominated by the wealthy community leaders.

> R. Ezekiel Katzenellenbogen had been completely under the thumb of the leading parnas, Issachar Baer Cohen. Baer Cohen, who, in



> particular, ruled the community with an iron hand called the Chief Rabbi, Zeide (Grandfather), and he would ask condescendingly, "What does Zeide think of this or that?" Katzenellenbogen seemed only too anxious to please the rich parnas. 17

Others fought vigorously against the lay encroachment on their ecclesiastical authority.

> Indeed, so devoted was Leon (da Modena) to the rabbinate, that he fought with great tenacity against any restrictions of its powers or any reduction of its privileges. It was Leon who in 1594 and again in 1616 wrote poems deploring the attempts of the laity to deprive the rabbis of some of their power. Similarly, there is every reason to believe that he was instrumental in advocating a unified opposition of the rabbis to lay encroachment; and it is clear from his responsum attacking the communal ban against gambling that he objected to lay decisions which lacked official rabbinic sanction. 18

As class stratification grew more blatant the rabbis lost ground to the mounting power of the wealthy. They were overruled in the law courts,[19] forbidden from investigating community finances, and deprived of the right to sign any documents without first obtaining permission.[20] The rabbi's position no longer entitled him to a seat on Kahal Gadol,[21] the important community governing board. In those instances where the rabbi was wealthy enough to gain admission to this body, his vote was regarded as no more than a single opinion, and had decisive force only when there was a tie in the balloting.[22] Since the Parnasim controlled the salary of the rabbi, they could threaten to

withhold the rabbi's pay unless he was willing to adhere to their wishes.[23] By 1614 the rabbis of Venice were forbidden from giving ordination without consulting the community elders,[24] and by 1628, the community leaders usurped the right to impose bans without consulting the rabbi.[25] A handmaid to the privileged and disowned by the poor because of his favoring with the wealthy, the rabbi no longer was the voice of a unified Jewish community. Rare was the rabbi who could defy the wealthy leaders of the community, and his reward would be poverty and dismissal.

The subordination of the rabbinate to the wealthy class had telling effects in destroying the symbolic image the rabbi had established. Saintliness and frugality lessened as typical traits of the rabbis, as many of them accepted the worldly view of their benefactors. In striving to obtain high-ranking positions, rabbis resorted to bribery and intrigue, thereby debasing their office. Seeking lifetime tenure, they would employ flattery.[27] They would render unfair judgements, oppressing the poor in favor of the wealthy,[28] and generally hold the masses in contempt.[29] Their sermons would deliberately avoid reference to the social evils. Jonathan Eibeschuetz, an eighteenth century rabbi who courageously upheld the lower classes said in one of his own sermons:

> It is fortunate that our preachers perpetually deal with themes relating to our duties to God. The expatiate on prayer and ritual practices. But they refrain



> from condemning the evils that disrupt our social relations such as plunder, deception, expropriation, slander, contention, and detraction. The people justly despise such a preacher. They contend that he always soars heavenward busying himself with the mysterious and remote and averting his gaze from the more patent wrongs because he is bent on pleasing people. For, sad to say, of many of the above social sins, especially those arising out of the inequitable collection of the special taxes, in which favoritism plays such a glaring part, most of the leading members are guilty.... Therefore, they say that he deliberately ignores these evil practices. It is for this reason that preachers are held in contempt. But let the preacher without fear or favor raise his voice against the malpractices of men of prominence, and the people will soon learn to love him and to delight in his sermons. They will admire his courage and be drawn to his message.[30]

Again, functions of the rabbi's role, such as heading the academy, were delegated to lesser men who came to regard their trust as but a stepping stone to a better position in the community.[31] As a result of this, the quality of the rabbinate dropped severely, and scholar-saints in the rabbinate became the exception rather than the rule, as history moved toward the Emancipation.

The realization of the decay of the power and majesty of the rabbinate often led the rabbis to stubbornness in last ditch efforts to assert their authority. Excommunication, the final expression of their sovereignty which they earlier used only in consultation with the whole community[32]

became a tool which they brandished in their own right, and totally misused it. So constantly did they declare their opponents excommunicated, that instead of fearing it people began to ignore it.[33] Thus, by using their authority so unscrupulously, the rabbis in fact undermined that authority, thereby depriving themselves of the only effective means of asserting their power over the community.[34]

In summary, the rabbinical role declined throughout the medieval period because of changed conditions. With the development of classes within the community, the wealthy Parnasim gained control and proceeded to exert their authority upon the rabbi. The rabbis, unable to stop the growth of power of the community's leaders, adapted themselves to the new conditions by abdicating their traditional saintly role, and searching for ways of gaining new wealth for themselves. Their last attempt to retain power, by imposing excommunication, backfired on them, for they were so liberal in application of this punishment that it ceased to carry any weight.

These conditions were not inherent outgrowths of fourteenth century situations, but evolved toward the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In themselves, they might not have caused a total disintegration of the rabbinate, for despite these factors, the rabbi still served the useful purpose of reminding the people that they were the depositories of a religious heritage which needed preservation



despite internal conflict. But it was the nineteenth century, with its totally new set of conditions, that sealed the doom of the medieval rabbinate.

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND DISRUPTION OF THE RABBINATE

In writing about the role of the rabbi, Morton M. Berman describes the chaos engendered by the Emancipation. He states:

> By 1841 the process of emancipation had produced Jews who felt that they could no longer be bound by the traditional order. Not only the reformers, but even those who were loath to yield one iota of tradition were faced with the necessity of readjusting themselves to the new forces, political, social and intellectual, which were molding their lives. 35

In countries where separation of church and state was proclaimed, the element of governmental enforcement was totally removed. In other lands, Jewry became amalgamated with Western society so that Judaism was treated as a denomination, and Jews denied ethnic-cultural self-government. The community generally faded into insignificance. In those few countries where the community did survive as an institution enforced by public law, its functions became closely circumscribed and limited to the collection of taxation.[36] Availing themselves to the opportuni-

ties for obtaining a secular education, Jews left the confines of traditional learning and immersed themselves of the learning which they could obtain in European universities. The incidence of conversion was high among those Jews who exposed themselves to secular learning. The doors leading from the community to the outside world were flung wide open, and all who desired could cast aside Judaism as though it were a relic of the past. In those places where the community continued in an emasculated form, Jews abandoned it if only to save the expense of Jewish taxation.[37]

The advent of the Reformers somewhat stemmed the waves of conversion, for these men were dedicated to formulating a Judaism in consonance with the new freedom. Yet, the growth of the Reform movement further mutilated what was left of the community, for its leaders envisioned a religious organization which would meet only religious, non-secular needs at the expense of sacrificing a communal life which had combined both aspects. Furthermore, the growth of Reform and Zionism created splinter groups within the community, and the result was internal strife. Communities were broken into separate bodies, often at warfare with each other.[38] The coup de grace was the new atheism which began to sweep through the community. Having lost their faith, the young intellectuals by word and deed proclaimed to the world that the God whom their fathers had known so intimately, was dead. The sacred system and the commit-



ments on which it rested lay smoldering in the ruins.

The resultant impact on the rabbinate was devastating. When Jews sought their rabbi in order to find a new direction, rabbinic leadership knew not where to turn.

> Judaism, in its great hour of need, was left practically defenseless by its interpreters. When the ghetto was abolished and the lure of non-Jewish learning and society became almost irresistible, the rabbis were not able to adapt Judaism to the new age, and make its vitality and grandeur felt. Perhaps they could not have done it, but they did not even try. Consequently, many deserted the Jewish people and others found new leaders. Mendelsohn, Friedlaender, Jacobsohn, Wesseley became the guides to the next generation, and the western rabbinate never fully regained the leadership which it then lost.[39]

The factors leading to the sudden collapse were manifold, and often lay beneath the surface. As we have indicated, forces had been eating away at the rabbi's authority, and the symbolic image he projected had lost impact through his association with the oppressive upper class. When Jews no longer had to live in the closed community which had been split by vested interests, their rebellion was not only against that community but also its leadership. The rabbi was rejected along with all the upper-class leaders. So complete was this rejection that any rabbi, however sympathetic to their cause, found it most difficult to be accepted by the rebels from the ghetto. The internal sentiment which had been building up against

corrupt religious leadership suddenly let loose when the external bonds which forced the Jews of a community to obey their leaders were removed.

Other factors were involved also. By the time of the Emancipation, the rabbis had fallen victims to intellectual inertia. The suddenness of the transition into the light of the Western world caught them unaware and completely overwhelmed them. In the face of his cataclysmic change, the rabbi of the period could hardly be expected to make such a rapid change.[40]

Again, the rabbis were directing their battle against the wrong enemy. When Sabbatai Zevi announced that he was the Messiah in 1648, he attracted throngs of followers who were anxious to be delivered from the poverty of the ghetto. When it became evident that Zevi was but an impostor, general disillusion prevailed. Yet, the hope that the Messiah would soon come became rampant, and an air of anticipation prevailed for a long time. Capitalizing on these hopes, demagogues arose with messianic claims. The rabbis saw only too clearly the potential threats of these imposters, and devoted their efforts to eradicating all traces of false messianism. So inflamed were these rabbis, that they often went to the other extreme and sensed false messianism where none existed. Being so involved in this struggle, the rabbis had no time to study and adjust to the new trends around them.[41] As a result, when the Emancipation dawned, the



rabbis had their sights elsewhere.

Thus, the Emancipation marked the end of the classical rabbinate. The community collapsed as Jews were granted political freedom and received new status. The influence of the community rabbi ceased, as competing groups fought for ideological leadership of the Jewish group, and atheism and agnosticism cut the underpinnings of the sacred order. The rabbis, as a group, were helpless against the new forces. They had permitted their authority to wane, had attached themselves to the wrong causes, and were unable to adapt themselves to the new type of scholarship which dealt with non-Jewish matters. The days when the rabbi could direct and represent the Jewish community had come to a crashing close.

## TOWARD A NEW ORDER

In our study, we have explored three varieties of forces of discontinuity which affected the medieval rabbinate. We found that the first discontinuity emerged out of the ambiguous nature of the community. Movement existed toward sovereignty of the local communal unit and, at the same time, toward consolidation of diaspora Jewry. The community responded to this ambivalence by giving the local rabbi authority within his limited jurisdiction but yet superceding his authority by appealing to more widely re-

puted rabbis for answers to legal questions that arose.

A second discontinuity had its roots in the disintegration of communal values, which commenced in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Upper classes gained control of the community's self-govenment and dominated the rabbi, forcing him to comply with their demands. In response to this, the rabbis surrendered their saintly role, adapted materialistic values, and lost the respect of the masses.

The third discontinuity was the removal of the state sanction which was behind the rabbi's authority, an event which occurred with the Emancipation in the nineteenth century. The Jews were free to leave the ghetto, immerse themselves in secular culture, and free themselves from t the sacred system. The rebellion was sudden and complete. The rabbi was unequipped to cope with the new conditions and abdicated his authority, as his former role lay in the dust.

The fact that the rabbinate continued to exist following the advent of the Emancipation is nothing less than amazing. The forces of discontinuity had come to a head and the existence of any forces of continuity working to perpetuate the rabbinate seemed to fade into insignificance. Yet, the rabbinate continued through this period of stress and evolved into a form which justified its continuance into the present day. To achieve this, it had to confront



itself with the realization that a totally new orientation was required. Authority had to be won on a different basis, and new role functions had to be discovered. In confronting the problem and undergoing the stress of creating a new role for themselves, the rabbis of the nineteenth century showed a flexibility rarely evidenced by a group dedicated to the conservative purpose of preserving a heritage. The rabbis were faced with the realization that the sacred system was dead.

During the first decades of the Emancipation, discussions were held to determine precisely what need there was for the rabbi within the new order. Leopold Zunz stated, at one point, that the rabbi scarcely had to exist at all, since he no longer had judicial power, for the law[42] of the state now replaced rabbinic law as a means of directing the life of the individual Jew. Still, this view did not become the concensus of opinion, and it may have represented Zunz' view toward the future of a particular rabbinic function (i.e., rendering legal judgements) rather than his outlook on the nineteenth century rabbinate in toto.

Out of these discussions came the conviction that the rabbi did have a role to fulfill in the new world, but that his role must not be a throwback to the pre-emancipation position he had occupied. Thus, it was agreed that the rabbi must be fully at home in the secularized culture of integrated Europe. The main prerequisite set for the rabbi

was that he possess a modern general education. Zunz goes to special pains to give credit to those rabbis who had obtained Ph.D.'s at German universities and those who had written German books.[43] By studying the culture of the secular society, it was hoped that a rabbinate would emerge that could maintain itself through presenting to the Jewish masses a Judaism fully compatible with the new life.

In addition to subjecting the rabbi to the currents of secular culture, it was recognized that the Jewish heritage must be taught in a new form. The methods of indoctrination employed for centuries could no longer be effective in an open environment, where the rabbinic candidate could call into question all that he was taught. The result of this was the creation of the theological seminary. The difference between the seminary and the yeshivah was immense. The primary purpose of the former was enlightenment rather than indoctrination, and its method was to turn the light of scientific method upon the tradition. There is no doubt that this concession to modernism met considerable opposition. Gruenewald states:

> The establishment of the rabbinic Seminaries constituted a break with the school tradition of the Jewish people. They were and they still are being frowned upon by those who regard the Yeshivah as the only adequate instrument of higher Jewish learning. Yeshivoth may differ in their methods, in their emphasis on and presentation of Talmudic treatises, in their intellectual and moral discipline, but



> they are not Seminaries with their historical methods and diversified curricula. In Berlin as well as in Breslau (Seminaries) there was awareness, of course, of the novel character of a Seminary and also of the outright opposition to this new venture.[44]

Still, even the orthodox were forced to create seminaries for the training of their rabbis.

As instruments of change which promised to lend continuity to the rabbinate, the seminaries did not achieve their purpose without difficulty. Internal conflict within the seminary complemented the external pressures of traditionalism which beset it. Conflicts between the traditionalists and the Reformers constantly raged, with the result that students could take either side, although the bulk of students avoided taking sides, presumably to gain a better vantage point from which to view the struggle. The teachers in the seminaries steered toward the Orthodox position. As a result, although acceptance of scientific method was the foundation of the seminary, Biblical criticism assumed lesser importance, as the traditional teachers felt they might more safely direct their criticism to other areas of Jewish research.[45]

Yet, the seminaries ultimately appealed mostly, to liberals, for doubts could be openly expressed. Hebrew was rejected as being ultimately important to the preservation of Judaism, and students with wider interests and from less intensive religious backgrounds were accepted for

admission.[46] Attention was concentrated on developing a theology to defend Judaism, in the face of Christian attacks upon the 'inferior' Jewish religion.[47] These measures were large steps toward creating rabbis who could justify themselves by the standards of an open society.

The success of the seminaries in preparing candidates for the rabbinate was far from complete however. Years after the founding of the seminaries, it still remained an open question as to what the role of the rabbi should be.[48] Moreover, by devoting themselves to creating enlightened rabbis, the seminaries had ignored the duty of indoctrinating their graduates with a meaningful Jewish ideology. Berman states:

> This kind of approach produced, first of all, the rabbi who was content to think of Judaism only as a catechism, as a set of universal principles or ethical axioms capable of meeting all the needs of Jewish life. It is apparent that what happened here was a protestantization of Jewish values. The makers of the Jewish catechisms were blind to the fact that Judaism was not a mere abstract of universal principles, but a vital world in itself, as much as the outer world had participated in its shaping. 49

Possessing a set of universals but no particulars, the rabbi might well have wondered precisely what he was to convey to his people, and how he was to do it. The protestantization of values left the rabbi bereft of uniqueness. The result was that he preached a Judaism lofty with prophetic idealism, but an idealism which frequently did not touch



concrete realities.

Still, this was the period of the great transition. With all its shortcomings, the rabbinate of the nineteenth and early twentieth century succeeded in providing a Judaism that could survive outside of the self-governed community. The European seminaries created a model for the rabbi through which he could justify his choice of profession, and they motivated him to search for new functions through which he could promulgate the religion he served. It was this model, this concept of the rabbi, which Isaac Mayer Wise carried when he came to America and, in 1875 established the Hebrew Union College, a seminary designed to produce rabbis to serve in the new land.

On July 13, 1894, Rev. Dr. M. Landsberg preached the Conference Sermon before the assembled members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis on the topic, The Duties of the Rabbi in the Present Time. The message is that of an emancipated European rabbi who was attempting to define the role of the rabbi in America. He defines the duties of the rabbi in prophetic terms:

> Never have the duties of the religious teacher been more concise, in language more significant, than in the outline given by the Prophet Ezekiel, of the work which he feels called to accomplish,(XXXIII, 7). "I have set thee a watchman to the House of Israel, that thou shouldst hear the Word from my mouth, and warn them from me." 50

The conception of the rabbi as watchman over Israel is the

central force of continuity which has extended from the Biblical prophet until the present day, for Landsberg.

More specifically, Landsberg notes that the modern rabbi must be aware of historical trends and scientific progress.

> If he be a true watchman he will closely observe the signs of the time, all events and conditions which fashion the religious and moral life of the people. And certainly his field of observation should not be confined by any narrowing limits of sectarian or partisan consideration. Who would ask of the Jewish teacher to lose sight of the progress made by science, in all branches of literature, and of every interest of domestic, commercial and public life. 51

In confronting science, the rabbi need not fear that it conflicts with religion, for,

> He can show that, to the Jewish thinker there can be no conflict between the teachings of his religion and the established results of scientific investigation, because Judaism accepts the revelation of God as much in the laws of nature, in the lessons taught by the rocks and the stars, as in the ethical law which wells up in the consciousness of man and produces the sensation of the supremacy of duty. 52

Landsberg understood that the leaders of the Reform movement were often accused of stripping so much away from Judaism that it was reduced to liberal Christianity. He retorts:

> He (the rabbi) can show how liberal Christianity has done nothing but cut off excrescences which had never disfigured the stem of Judaism,



> nothing but discard Greek and pagan dogmatism and revert to the simple faith and the pure ethics of the mother religion, as taught by the ancient prophets and preached and practiced through all the centuries by the learned expounders of Jewish thought, often under the most unfavorable conditions. 53

And the rabbi is to be a good-will ambassador to the Gentiles.

> Of equally as great importance, however, it is that we should set Judaism and the Jews in the right light before the world. 54

Finally, Landsberg takes note of the attitude toward ritual that he feels the American rabbi should adopt. He states:

> Prayer and song and liturgy and ceremony are unquestionably a means of awakening and strengthening religion, they are a help; but only a help, they are not a religion. 55

Here Landsberg was touching upon a controversial issue, for in his day much discussion centered on the centrality of traditional forms of worship. Wise, in attempting to create a unified American Judaism was willing to make concessions to the traditionalists. David Einhorn and a number of rabbis on the eastern seaboard disagreed however, feeling that Reform should risk a schism in order to rest itself on the conviction that ceremony was not central. Consequently, these radicals wished to strip the worship service of orthodox ornamentation that they considered out of keeping

with the liberal viewpoint. The conflict between the two parties continued past the turn of the twentieth century.

The path toward the reconstruction of the rabbi's role which commenced in Europe during the Emancipation gained impetus and direction in America. Gone was the communal rabbi; the rabbi now served a congregation. Gone was the sacred system; the rabbi now had to justify Judaism in the face of protestantized values. No more did the rabbi inherit an authority derived from tradition; now he found that he could gain respect of others, and perhaps there was reverence for his office, but he could not rely on his ordination to give him authority over his people. He had to earn their respect.

For better or for worse, the progressive rabbis of the nineteenth century, both in Europe and America, had embarked on a path which leads us to this very day.



## - CHAPTER III -

## THE MODERN RABBI:
## CONTINUITIES AND DISCONTINUITIES IN HIS ROLE

## ORIENTATION

A study of the modern rabbinate reveals a variance of opinions held about the relationship of the present role of the rabbi to that of his medieval predecessor. One rabbi may feel that his role is basically a continuation of traditional rabbi's role which evolved over the centuries:

> The changes that have taken place and are still taking place in the functions of the rabbinate have not impaired the unity and continuity of the rabbinate as an institution and as a profession. This can be true only on the presumption that the rabbinate is conscious of one specific function inherent in it. This function has always been and must always be - to teach the Torah to the end that "all thy children shall be taught of the Lord and great shall be the peace of thy children." 1

Another rabbi may understand the historic growth of the rabbinate but feel that today's rabbi fills a role that is totally alien to the rabbinic role of the past:

> The emergence of the American rabbi is a novel and unique phenomenon in Jewish experience. His office is related to the earlier forms of Jewish leadership by historic continuity; yet the modern rabbinate presents so radical a change both in function and temper as to constitute a virtually new profession. 2

In an area where opinions are dogmatically held and clarity is lacking, we seek answers to these questions: To what extent does the role of the rabbi today evidence continuity with the historic role? What aspects of the



modern role are total discontinuities? Are there areas where the modern rabbi's role involves similarities with the past in form but not in content?

In exploring these questions we may refer to various sources. There are a limited number of writings by trained sociologists which deal specifically with the rabbinate in a scientific, non-apologetic manner. Among these we find Marshall Sklare's analysis of the Conservative rabbi in his book, Conservative Judaism. Here the author studies the relationship between rabbinical training at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and the realities of Jewish life which the rabbi finds when he leaves the Seminary. He and Vosk are responsible for the Riverton Study which, while it does not treat the rabbinate directly, nonetheless discusses the values of contemporary Jewish life which effect the role of the rabbi. Sklare's anthology, The Jews, also contains an article by Jerome E. Carlin and Saul H. Mendlovitz entitled, "The American Rabbi: A Religious Specialist Responds to Loss of Authority". This latter article, an adaptation of the authors' Master's thesis for the University of Chicago is based upon a survey undertaken to determine the rabbi's attempt to cope with the new values of American Jewry. In addition, there are Lee Braude's article, "The Rabbi: Some Notes on Identity Clash" in the January 1960 issue of Jewish

Social Studies, and Joseph Zeitlin's work, Disciples of the Wise, a study of the religious and social opinions which are held by American rabbis. All considered, it must be stated that there is a paucity of research which has been done on the modern rabbinate, and these studies have only mentioned incidentally the continuities and discontinuities in the role of the American rabbi.

Much work has been done however on the role of non-Jewish religious functionaries. Noteworthy here is the work of Joseph Fichter, s.j. on the Catholic functionary, entitled Religion as an Occupation, and the writings on the contemporary Protestant minister by Samuel Blizzard, including such articles as "The Protestant Parish Minister's Integrating Roles" in Religious Education, July - August 1958, "The Parish Minister's Self-Image of His Master Role" in Pastoral Psychology, December 1958, "The Minister's Dilemma" in The Christian Century, of April 25, 1956, and "The Parish Minister's Self-Image and Variability in Community Culture" in Pastoral Psychology of October, 1959. Insofar as the modern rabbi is a religious functionary who, like the Christian minister, participates in the larger American society which has created values common to all religious groups, we are justified in utilizing these studies of non-Jewish personnel to establish categories and preliminary hypotheses for studying today's rabbi.



In addition to the above writings there are a number of publications by American rabbis which attempt to define the role of the rabbi in contemporary society. Some of these repute to be scientific; others are impressionistic views of the rabbi's role taken from the experience of particular individuals. We shall utilize, among other writings, Bernard J. Bamberger's article, "The American Rabbi: His Changing Role" in Jewish Life in America, edited by Theodore Friedman and Robert Gordis, and a number of writings by Abraham J. Feldman, including The Changing Functions of the Synagogue and the Rabbi, and The Rabbi and His Early Ministry. Additional sources of this nature may be found in rabbis' biographies and autobiographies, addresses before rabbinical seminaries, and articles in annual and quarterly publications by rabbinical conferences.

In this chapter we shall examine these writings by and about the modern rabbi and attempt to relate the findings toward the discovery of aspects of continuity and discontinuity within the modern rabbinate. Opinions expressed by the rabbis in their own writings will be compared, sociological observations noted, and through the critical approach we shall attempt to arrive at definitive conclusions.

## STANDARDIZATION OF ROLE

Investigation into the contemporary scene reveals little standardization of the rabbinic role. This is due to the fragmentation of the American Jewish community into three major segments, the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform groups, each with its own rabbis who subscribe to the ideological position of the group they serve. The rabbi's role is determined by all the participants in the religious social system to which the rabbi gives leadership, but since the major part of the rabbi's leadership is confined to the particular synagogue which has hired him, the major determinants of his role evolve from within his congregation. The lay leaders of the congregation in addition to non-leaders exert the strongest force in determining precisely how the rabbi shall construct his role. Since it is assumed that these persons believe the ideology of the Reform, Conservative or Orthodox congregations to which they belong, their effect upon the rabbi will be to project an image upon him which has been determined by the denominational ideology. Thus, the rabbi finds that his rabbinate cannot be compared to a model role in the present period for many variables exist. The traditional rabbi may conceive of his role as a continuation of the historical role, but even so he cannot carry the blueprint into the



present without making major modifications. The anarchy of the modern role is a far cry from the model of the medieval rabbi whose role was determined not by a segmented group within the Jewish community, but by the community as a whole.

The split into rabbinic types may be fragmented beyond the obvious differential groups of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Carlin and Mendlovitz have noted seven major rabbinic roles: (1) the Traditional rabbi, (2)the Free-Lance rabbi, (3) the Modern Orthodox rabbi, (4) the Intellectual Reform rabbi, (5) the Social Reformer rabbi, (6) the Traditionalistic Reform rabbi, and (7) the Conservative rabbi.[3] This estimate may itself be conservative. The tendancy toward specialization has evidenced itself in the rabbinate as it has in all other professions, with the result that we have such specialists as preacher rabbi, the youth group rabbi, the educator rabbi, the Hillel Foundation rabbi, and the rabbi who is employed by national organizations. A standardized rabbinic role appears to be an illusion in the face of today's denominalization and specialization.

A word of caution. It is true that in our study of the medieval rabbinate we uncovered a prototype of the rabbi, a singular role which evidenced itself throughout European Jewry. By comparison, today's fragmentation appears as a total discontinuity. At the same time how-

ever, we noted that the medieval rabbi performed a number of optional functions which varied from community to community, and which became aspects of the role of a rabbi only in the town in which he resided. We noted, for example, that certain rabbis represented Jewry to the non-Jewish world; others devoted time to keeping the community records; still others made amulets. We must conclude that these functions, however important they were, were only subsidiary to the standardized role which the rabbi fulfilled, and hence it is the lack of a common denominator rather than the performance of the varied tasks that constitute a discontinuity of the present rabbi's role.

There is a limited amount of standardization in the rabbi's role today. The term "rabbi" is denotative of a certain general role to all Jews and especially to non-Jews who may only have a vague understanding at best of the differences among the Jewish groups. Here we may make reference to the "master role" concept which Blizzard has developed. He states:

> The minister plays many professional roles. The clergyman qua clergyman plays a master role...that distinguishes him from those in other professions (lawyers, physicians, social workers) and occupations (policemen, salesmen, plumbers). The master role not only identifies him as a minister but it also identifies his occupation in relation to other roles he plays. 4



Applying Blizzard's concept to the rabbinate, we find that it is what the rabbi does to identify himself as rabbi which may be called his master role.

What then is the rabbi's master role? Here we can find no clear-cut formulation of what the word "rabbi" denotes. Yet Morton Berman presents an opinion that has much truth value:

> There remains a field that is the special realm of the rabbi. It is Judaism. Here we behold the factor that makes for consonance with the values of all Jewish experience. The rabbi has always been the one recognized authority for Judaism and in those other matters of common life where they touch Judaism. ...The rabbi thus becomes, for lack of better terms, the Judaizer and the legitimatizer of Jewish life. 5

The singular master role of all rabbis today is being a legitimist for Jewish life and values. This aspect of the rabbi's role is reflected in the general image of the rabbi which is held by all actors affecting his role. It is inconceivable for a rabbi to do other than to uphold the traditional values of the group which he serves. At this core level there is standardization in the rabbi's role and direct continuity from the past. It is when we leave this level and move in the direction of the rabbi's orientation toward those values and the various means employed to bring them into concrete expression that the standardization falls apart and we confront discontinuities from the past.

## THE SOURCE OF THE RABBI'S AUTHORITY

In our discussion of the authority held by the medieval rabbi we concluded that his power was determined partly by virtue of his holding a sacred office and partly by the respect given him as an individual who had mastered traditional learning. The community was bound to follow his decisions, and he had sanctions behind him to enforce his decrees.

It is clear that the modern rabbi has not the great authority of his historical predecessor. Yet, there may be vestiges of his former authority which cultural forces are now serving to maintain. Certainly the question of the rabbi's authority, its basis and extent, is the subject of much debate among rabbis today. An exploration of this problem must make reference to the social factors which influence the rabbi's role today.

The traditional ceremony of Semikah, ordination, is still conferred by many rabbinical seminaries upon its graduating rabbis as a mark of continuity of authority from earliest times. From the rabbi's view, receiving ordination may seem a basis for his authority. Yet, objectively seen, the authority of the ordination only could have validity if those whom the rabbi serves were willing to concede authority-giving powers to the ceremony. But modern society does not condone authority



which claims a supernatural basis (with the notable exception of the linear transmission of power found among functionaries of the Catholic church). The movement of rationalism, in striking a blow against such concepts as the divine right of kings also has succeeded in militating against the idea that authority is transmitted by the ceremony of ordination. The congregant is scarcely aware of any importance which may be attached to this ceremony which marks the culmination of the rabbinic student's training. It becomes simply a ceremony of graduation, a mark that the student has familiarized himself in detail with the tradition, and is comparable with the graduation of any other student from a professional school.

We have also discussed how the medieval rabbi earned authority through mastery of the traditional lore. Changed values today render such a basis for the rabbi's authority impossible. The emphasis on utility in present society relegates knowledge without practical application to the category of the worthless. A traditional rabbi recalls the old days when his knowledge had value and earned him esteem and authority:

> A rabbi is good to be if you have the correct authority. The authority has been broken. A rabbi like in the old home, a rabbi for the town, we know his word was law. We knew that the people must obey the rabbi, and if they have a shaleh (ritual question),

> to ask the rabbi; if they have a milk pot and it get mixed up then with the meat dishes. Or it occurs an argument between some people and the rabbi should decide...The rabbi felt that he was needed and he was leader, and he was satisfied with his position. They needed me and I they. But take a look at America - they are lost... their position, their correct position doesn't exist. It's that way throughout the country. Satisfaction is at a minimum. 6

This rabbi is reflecting the frustration born of the knowledge that traditional studies no longer serve a purpose in society and do not create any respect anymore. A Reform rabbi reacts:

> People (formerly) turned to the rabbi spontaneously, as the talmid chacham, for the satisfaction of their actual needs. They lived by the Law and so they had to know what it meant, they sought authoritative answers on questions to which they needed answers.
>
> That situation is gone, and no amount of magical incantation of the word "organic" will recreate it, just as no amount of prophetic preachment from the pulpit will erace the present separation between religion and life. Test it by the fact that within that pre-emancipation situation the people looked to the rabbi as an authority. In what areas of concern that genuinely count do people look to the rabbi as an authority today? For a few of the ignorant he is an authority on everything, for a few of the sophisticated he is an authority on nothing, for the most part he is ignored. 7

If a liberal rabbi is not frustrated, it is only because he never expected the authority of old and is



reconciled to his uncertain state.

To some rabbis, the basis for their authority lies in an area of specialization to which they have devoted their lives and in which they have become highly proficient. This, according to Carlin and Mendlovitz, is a recognition of the loss of original authority and an attempt to re-establish it on a new foundation. Various means may be employed to gain this new basis and they manifest themselves in what Blizzard terms the "integrative role" - the minister's goal orientation or the particular frame of reference he develops to his work.[8] For example, we read of the Intellectual Reform rabbi who integrates all his duties by an intellectual approach:

> The Reform rabbi sought to base his authority within the philosophies of rationalism, idealism, humanism, and in line with the scientific method. In this way he began the process whereby he was to substitute his claim for authority in terms of knowing and living a sacred law by a claim for authority in terms of his intellectual ability. In effect he sidestepped the problems of rabbinic authority; the authority he claimed was that of an intellectual. 9

The Intellectual Reform rabbi seeks an authority based on his congregants' respect for intellectuals, much as they would respect a university professor. He attempts to gain proficiency in both secular and religious knowledge.

Again we are given the example of the Social Reformer rabbi who seeks to improve existing social conditions in conformity with prophetic idealism. Carlin and Mendlovitz state that such a rabbi seeks authority through assuming the role of general community leader.

> When we come to the question of the kind of authority that the Social Reformer possesses, we must remember that he sees himself as a leader in both the Jewish community and the general community. He integrates his position and activities by insisting that the maintenance and fulfillment of the values and beliefs of the Jewish community are dependent upon the realization of the generalized liberal democratic values as well as the goals of the wider community. His authority in one is therefore inextricably bound up with his authority in the other. 10

The Intellectual Reform rabbi and the Social Reformer have sought new foundations for their authority that form a discontinuity. We have noted how the medieval rabbi was often well versed in secular wisdom and sought to relieve social inequities, but these activities never formed the basis for the authority he claimed. They represent a resort to the secular realm for a new authority.

Rabbis who may not be subsumed under these two categories can only seek to re-establish their authority by attempting to imbue Jewish values in their congregants and thus gain respect as having authoritative knowledge of the source of those values. We have noted the frustration of the ultra-orthodox rabbi at seeing how Jews have become alienated from the closed Jewish culture. Yet, both he and his more liberal colleagues seek to inculcate these values in the laymen in order to substantiate a position of power. The rabbi feels no other basis can exist for his authority. He must master the Jewish past and he cannot relinquish the tradition despite the amount of acculturation the Jew has experienced in his free environment. Berman writes:



> The rabbi's expertness in his field provides for him, as expertness in other fields provides for others, the basis for authority. He becomes an expert only by expert knowledge. This means that the main stress in the education of the rabbi must be on the acquisition of Jewish knowledge...He was the man who was granted sanction by the community to teach and to judge only upon the basis of his ceaseless application to Jewish learning in every field. As has always been the case in Jewish history, superior learning is still the principal basis for rabbinic authority. 11

Berman then adds:

> But our history has also shown that the extent of Jewish information is not the only condition of rabbinic authority. The other condition which cannot be dispensed with is personal piety. 12

There is no way of gauging the amount of authority that piety conveys upon the modern rabbi, however. The pious person may be genuinely respected as a rugged individualist who follows a pattern of behavior much

different from that of others who direct themselves by more marketable values such as popularity and success. Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether the respect accorded the pietist is sufficient to place him in a position where he can exert authority over the behavior of others who do not personally accept his pietistic values. The rabbi who seeks authority through his piety is re-affirming a continuity of the past rabbinic role, but may not be achieving pragmatic results.

On the other hand, there are forces at work within the general American culture that tend to give the rabbi a measure of authority. American society makes religion an important factor in classifying individuals. The individual Jew is viewed as a member of a religious body, a "church", and he becomes highly conscious of this fact. In addition, Americans hold a high degree of esteem for religious institutions; this tends to increase the status of their functionaries. The rabbi benefits from these cultural values, for he shares in the high status of American religious functionaries.

To buttress this general respect which he achieves from being identified as a religious leader, the rabbi also receives authority because of the special nature of the sub-culture which he serves. Despite the breakdown in sanctions which occurred during the Emancipation and the decline of the medieval Jewish value system in



the freedom of American society, the modern Jew still is cognizant of the authoritarian position of the rabbi in earlier times. While Jews may realize the lack of sanctions that stand behind the rabbi and may operate from a different value system than their rabbi, they still are aware of the ethnic nature of the group to which they belong and pay credulence to a history which magnifies rabbinic leadership. As a result, vestiges of authority may yet be attributed to the rabbinic office.

We may note here that there are two distinct kinds of authority that the religious specialist may possess. These are: (1) imperative authority, which involves the possibility of applying specific sanctions including coercion, or (2) influential authority, which involves hortatory or exemplary conduct and only unorganized, diffuse sanctions.[13] Clearly the rabbi has no imperative authority today. At the very best his authority is influential, a far cry from the rabbi of the past. Sidney Goldstein has written:

> His relation to the members of a congregation is not a command-obey relationship. The most that he can hope for is compliance with suggestion. The rabbi is a noncharismatic person, possessing no supernatural power by virtue of which he dominates the external world in an authoritative way. 14

Yet, the rabbi's influential authority can be great. The extent of that authority is determined by the ability of the individual rabbi to combine the status inherent

in his office with his personal program for relating the values he represents to the lives of his people.

Ultimately, the rabbi's authority may be largely determined by the force of his own personality. He may be personally adept at conveying to others an authoritative image of himself, or may more subtly present a program which will bring others along the road he wishes them to tread. On the other hand, without leadership abilities, he may lose all effectiveness. This prerequisite for authority marked by the importance of the rabbi's personality contrasts starkly with previous bases for rabbinical authority.

In summary, we have noted that ordination and the document of Semikah no longer serve as a basis for rabbinic authority. Similarly, the rabbi's knowledge of law which enables him to settle ritual and legal matters cannot be considered as an element which gives him any power over the laity. Faced with the loss of his former authority, the rabbi has become a specialist with a particular orientation, such as being an intellectual or a social reformer, and thereby he hopes to establish authority on the basis of his mastery of a limited area. The majority of rabbis hope to gain respect and stature by acquiring an expertness in the totality of Jewish knowledge themselves and then by teaching their congregants a respect for those Jewish values. This involves the rabbi's dedication to a pietistic life.



But the ultimate basis for the rabbi's authority must be attributed to the high evaluation of religion and the elevated status of clergymen in general in the American culture. This is supported in the Jewish group by remnants of the old community life and respect for the rabbi as a preserver of Jewish values. These forces give the rabbi influential rather than imperative authority and raise the problem that the final source of the rabbi's authority is the power of his own personality and his ability to take advantage of whatever ascribed status he may possess. The authority of the present rabbi is largely determined by new forces and is severely circumscribed, a strong discontinuity from the past.

## SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS

The specific functions of the rabbi are determined today no less than in the past by expectations of the participants in the social religious system to which the rabbi gives professional leadership. The role of the medieval rabbi was determined by the membership of a closed community sharing common values, its Parnasim, and his own expectations which came largely from the lengthy training at the feet of his teachers. But today both the participants and the values which determine the rabbi's functional roles differ to such an extent that it is possible to find a variety of new functions. More-

over, in virtually every case where there is a continuity of function from the past we shall see that the content of these functions is markedly different from former days.

The Rabbi as Scholar-Teacher

The rabbinic function of being a scholar-teacher most closely resembles the traditional function of the rabbi of the past. As scholars rabbis are most prolific writers of scholarly works, their writings including dissertations, compilations of sermons, community and congregational histories, religious school textbooks, and aids for the practical ministry. In these areas rabbinic scholarship resembles that of the past, although the medieval rabbi's work was more of a commentary on the sacred texts which he inherited from his ancestors.

Modern rabbinic scholarship also deals with new areas of Jewish investigation, such as theology. Poetry and prose from the hands of today's rabbis are not rare phenomena.[15] In devoting their efforts to these areas the rabbis are not perpetuating aspects of the intellectual life which were essential parts of the rabbinic role, Yet earlier rabbis did often pursue these means of expression but they did so as individuals. Today these areas of endeavor represent the attempt to supply new forms to the original role of scholar which the rabbi filled.



A correlation to study in the Jewish tradition is teaching, and consequently the scholar who does not also have an enthusiasm for passing on his insights to others is a rarity. We have examined the great importance of teaching in the medieval rabbinate and have seen its centrality in the rabbi's role. Modern rabbis continue this emphasis. One rabbi states:

> What are the basic functions of the American rabbi? He must be the teacher and interpreter of Judaism to his people. To this end he must have a comprehensive knowledge of Judaism in all its historic manifestations, together with an understanding of the needs and the temper of our time. He must present the message of the ages in light of the perplexities and tensions of the age. 16

To implement this program, rabbis have established a wide variety of educational programs affecting both adults and children. Forum series are held, a comprehensive religious school program planned, and adult education groups organized. Many congregations have hired full-time educational directors, but the rabbi still bears the brunt of the success or failure of the educational program, for he is its instigator and sees the need for this program as demanding his full attention. A rabbi writes:

> In relation to education the rabbi must also assert his function as Judaizer and legitimatizer. He is the ultimate authority on what shall constitute the

> content and aim of Jewish education. He should concede to the educator the right to devise methods and apply them but he must never yield in his authority to say what should be taught and for what ends. 17

In fact, the rabbi often does not totally concede to the educator the right to devise methods. Courses in Jewish education offered at seminaries have given the rabbi insight into techniques by which he can achieve desired ends. The rabbi learns that he must make Jewish education palatable to his laymen:

> Of course the rabbi may still do some teaching and interpreting, but he no longer claims authority for his declarations. He does not attempt a legitimation in terms of the divine system and he acts more like the secular teacher who communicates a body of knowledge which the listener is free to accept or reject on the merit of content. 18

Thus, a major function of the rabbi's role is that of scholar and teacher. While pressing time demands may force him to relinquish hours he might spend in scholarship, rabbis still manage to produce scholarly writings and cultivate an intellectual atmosphere. As teachers, they are expected to make Judaism relevent to the acculturated Jew. This requires knowledge of the corpus of tradition and proficiency of technique, for the rabbi faces a laity unwilling to accept the indoctrinational procedure of the closed community.



## The Rabbi As Preacher

The centrality of preaching in the modern rabbi's sphere of duties is an open question today. One Reform rabbi states:

> We must admit with (David Phillipson) that "the rabbi stands and falls in his pulpit work". The importance of preaching is felt just as strongly today as it was in early days of Reform - if not more so. 19

Another rabbi disagrees about the relative importance of preaching:

> Preaching is still a major task; but its relative importance seems to have diminished. The silver tongued orator in the pulpit is now a comparative rarity. The rabbi is expected to be a competent preacher, but this alone will no longer suffice. A great part of the rabbis' task must be accomplished through direct dealings with people. 20

But regardless of the importance which attaches to his preaching, he must still spend countless hours in preparation of his weekly sermons:

> The sovereign place given to the sermon from the early history of Reform until quite recently, still haunts us today. The sermon not only hovers over our day's work and sullenly regards every other duty as an intruder, but completely pre-empts our Thursdays and Fridays. 21

We have noted how preaching was a function of the rabbi of the past but it never reached such proportions in the rabbis' role as it now does, especially among Reform rabbis.

Moreover, the purpose of preaching in the medieval period was primarily to teach Torah. Textual sermons were continually used. But today the content and form of the sermon has been altered. The text sermon is but one type used today. Moreover, the objective of the sermon is not necessarily the teaching of Torah:

> The content of the Reform rabbis' sermon covers a wide range of subjects; social and economic problems, racial and labor problems, the latest novel and play, psychiatry, philosophy, politics and the care and feeding of children have all been discussed from the Reform pulpit. One rabbi informed us that he had spoken on Arthur Miller's Death of A Salesman on seven successive weeks...It would be fair to say that the majority of Reform rabbis that we spoke with, conceived of the pulpit as a lecture platform, and the sermon as a learned discourse only incidentally related to Jewish values. 22

This observation is descriptive of the place of the sermon in the Reform rabbinate. The same secularizing forces are at work upon more traditional rabbis also. Jewish values cannot be preached except by relating them to current secular ideas, and the traditional rabbi finds that he must devote more time and effort to sermon preparation than in prior times.

Seen in the larger context, preaching becomes but a method of teaching. As such the rabbi must utilize techniques which will make his people want to learn and must bridge the gap between his storehouse of Jewish



knowledge and their lack of it:

> Rabbis today preach to people who have little or no Jewish learning. The successful preacher, says (Solomon) Freehof, moves from the known to the unknown, takes advantage of the fears, griefs and disturbing problems of the modern man, and uses them as a springboard to motivate his listeners to an interest in what he wants to teach them. The real problem in modern Jewish preaching, therefore, seems to be finding a way to get the people to be willing to be taught. 23

Today's preaching thus embodies both continuities and discontinuities from the past. It is continuous because it represents an aspect of the rabbi's role as teacher and it continues a form of teaching which was followed to some extent in the middle ages. Its discontinuities lie in the overbearing weight which is placed upon its relative importance, a result of the Protestantization of the rabbinate, and the new themes discussed in sermons today which may vary considerably from Torah Lishmoh, study for its own sake which highlighted many a medieval sermon.

## The Rabbi As Priest and Pastor

As leader of the prayer service, the rabbi performs a function that has evolved only since the Emancipation. Prior to that time the laymen were well qualified to conduct the ritual and consequently the rabbi either remained at home to conduct daily worship with his students

or else to come to shul on the Sabbath and participate in the worship as a regular member of the congregation. But the inability of the layman to master the liturgy, and the effect of the Christian model in which the minister is responsible for conducting the service have combined to make the rabbi's priestly function a major aspect of his total role.

The rabbi is responsible for conducting an orderly service in which he is the unchallenged leader and his congregants often passive followers. He may be the vicarious intercessor to God for his congregants who feel an inability to pray to a God who means little in their day to day activities:

> It has been said not without reason that the American rabbi prays for the congregation. The ability to read the liturgy calls out the spiritual and religious qualities of the rabbi. Here he moves in the world of feeling amd emotion, evoking a mood that touches the heart-strings amd creates the music of prayer. This too is a modern role. In the past the ordinary layman could have lead the congregation in prayer...Today, few indeed are the Jewish laymen who can conduct the religious worship service in the average congregation. This is among the duties of the rabbi as spiritual leader. 24

The figure of the rabbi leading prayer and even praying for his congregants is totally discontinuous from the past rabbinic role but does find precedent in the priestly functions of the Kohanim of the First and Second



Commonwealth, who offered sacrifices on behalf of the people.

Present priestly functions supplementing the rabbi's role as the leader of worship include rabbinical participation in life-cycle ceremonies. Again we are confronted with new elements introduced into Judaism which were borrowed from the Christian environment. No more can the layman conduct weddings, funerals and other priestly functions. Those ceremonies are now entirely in the hands of the rabbis. Moreover, the occasions for such functions have been increased to include consecrations, baby-namings, confirmations, anniversaries and a host of other occasions that the modern rabbi feels should be sanctified. Rabbis' manuals now include appropriate ceremonies for all these occasions and more. At times such as these, times of joy and sorrow when the congregant (or non-congregant in many cases) exhibits strong emotions, the ceremony and the presence of the rabbi as a surrogate of God may have a strong impact upon the layman - far stronger than daily rabbinic-lay contact where emotional involvement is lacking.

Closely allied to the rabbis priestly duties are his functions as pastor. Such a role is an adaptation of the Protestant ministers pastoral operations. The closest proximity to any precedent in rabbinic tradition was the rabbi's function as judge, for both as judge

and pastor the element of rabbinical direction of others is found. Here the similarities cease however, as the rabbi as judge handed down mandatory decisions whereas the rabbi as pastor may give advice when it is requested, but he is more concerned with the welfare of those seeking counsel than with upholding a legal structure.

As pastor the rabbi is present at many occasions of emotional impact even when he does not perform priestly activities. Carlin and Mendlovitz report the rabbis' motivation for engaging in these activities.

> As one correspondent told us: "This gives the rabbi a chance to identify himself with the family in their time of joy and honor. I also go to a home when they have some special birthday such as the seventieth. I visit couples when a baby is born." During grief situations the Reform rabbi feels that he may be able "to explain to the Vassar grandchildren the meaning of these traditions." During condolence calls he acts as spiritual adviser, personal confidant and business consultant. Many rabbis have felt that their influence with congregants has been enhanced on such occasions. 25

The rabbi is taking a new function and is endowing it with traditional content. He seeks to relate Jewish values to persons when they may be most receptive to them.

But pastoral counseling occurs in less dramatic situations when the rabbi is sought out by those with personal problems. Here we search in vain to find a



continuity from the past in relation to which the rabbi's therapeutic (but not psychiatric) counsel is sought:

> What is "Jewish" or "rabbinic" in the rabbi's counseling? He does not establish his roots by the formal and perfunctory act of citing a rabbinic quotation. He could rationalize his counseling role as an act of Gemiluth Hasadim. But his congregants already accept him as a friend. He is considered a professional teacher and preacher of whom it is natural to anticipate more personal counsel when such is needed. Much of the rabbi's counseling, frankly has no specifically Jewish or traditional orientation. 26

It must be concluded that as pastor and priest the rabbi is performing functions which were not a part of his earlier role. They have resulted from the transference of Christian ministerial functions to the rabbinate and are maintained by the influence of Protestantism upon present-day Judaism. The original Protestant concept of a minister and his flock may now be applied to the rabbi and his congregants. 27 These functions have now become major aspects of the rabbi's role and are likely to remain so.

## The Rabbi as Administrator and Organizer

Serving as administrator and organizer of his synagogue has today become a major function of the rabbi's role. This is an outgrowth of the proliferation of synagogal activities which have evolved, their purpose

being to combat indifference to Jewish values and to compete with other congregations and extra-synagogal activities.[28] Rabbis now find that they are harnessed with the responsibility for maintaining the smooth operation of youth groups, young marrieds and unmarrieds, golden-agers, brotherhoods, sisterhoods, and a myriad of committees whose concerns may range from community ethics to social affairs. The congregational rabbi finds that he must be a constant source of new ideas, a resource person who can deliver suggestions to improve the operation of these synagogal activities, and as a result he must keep aware of activities of other congregations and of successes and failures where innovations have been attempted. He must be in constant liason with the synagogue staff, and, with its members, he plans programs and meetings, offers suggestions about the layout of the temple bulletin, and often involves himself in the business aspects of the congregation, such as raising dues and allotting funds for use by various activities. Thus, the rabbi is both an administrator of the manifold activities associated with the synagogue and synagogue center, and an organizer who is seeking new means through which the congregation can reach its members and expand its membership. He becomes a promoter who knows he must "sell" his congregational program, using much the same technique as a merchant



attempting to interest a customer in his products.

The rabbis' reactions to the new activities which have become part of the synagogal program are largely negative. There is a feeling that these new activities are not essentially religious in nature and have overshadowed the purposes of the synagogue as a religious institution. A rabbi writes:

> In actual practice, the Synagogue Center too often becomes a substitute for the Synagogue, since people come there to derive benefit from the multiple activities of the Center, but remain aloof from the specifically religious activities of the Synogogue...The recreational and social attractions are primary, while the religious functions are little more than a concession to the proprieties. 29

The present attempt to make the synagogue an all inclusive organization represents an attempt to restore its centrality in Jewish life by giving it all the activities performed in the name of Judaism, just as the synagogue was the focal point for the whole community in the medieval period. But non-synagogal agencies have already usurped many of these communal activities, and it appears that this effort by the synagogue to include all that is Jewish under its domain defies a separation between the secular and the holy which did not exist during the medieval period. A Jewish educator has expressed the opinion:

> The synagogue must make its choice between one or the other functions of organized community life. It must either frankly and openly devote itself to the strictly religious activities, namely to preaching, the conduct of public worship and to pastoral duties, or it must definitely become the agency through which the more numerous normal non-religious needs of Jewish men and women can be satisfied. 30

In his analysis of the Protestant minister's role, Blizzard found that ministers derived the least amount of enjoyment and felt least effective in performing their administrative and organizational functions. There is an apparent lack of clarity as to what is "religious" about these functions and why the minister as a religious personality should involve himself in such mundane pursuits. Blizzard concludes:

> The minister is urged to spend much time organizing and administering programs. The national church body is at the same time failing to give him an adequate theological understanding of these offices. That is the minister's dilemma. 31

This also is the rabbi's dilemma. Rarely does the rabbi see anything essentially "rabbinical" about these functions. Rabbis do, in fact, react against this obvious discontinuity in their role more than any other aspect. Carlin and Mendlovitz report this response of a Conservative rabbi concerning his function as organizer:

> There has been an unfortunate change in the function and role of the rabbi. Whereas the whole momentum of Jewish life for the rabbi in Eastern Europe was positive, that is it was something, today it is something else. He is warding off working against assimilation. In doing so, he becomes a drummer, a fifer, a salesman, an advertising agent. Let us remember, too, that drummers and fifers and not generals, they are drummers and fifers. He becomes a campaigner, an administrator of the community endeavors. The rabbi becomes an extrovert and is a functionary at a ceremony. We see him at the opening of golf clubs, birthday parties, club meetings, weddings and many such occasions. 32



Yet, there is the realization that this function, so strongly discontinuous from the role of the earlier rabbi, is increasing rather than decreasing in importance. The force of centralization has now made itself felt in Jewish life, as national Jewish organizations have attracted rabbis as full time organizers and administrators. On the local level the rabbi must coordinate activities both sent down from the national congregational bodies and those which have grown out of the particular nature of the local body. It would thus appear that as this function increases in importance, the rabbi's role will become even more discontinuous from that of his earlier medieval predecessor, who in no way served as administrator or organizer.

## The Rabbi As Community Worker

The needs of his own congregation are major

determinants of the modern rabbi's functions. But beyond the performance of duties which directly affect his congregants alone, the rabbi is often expected to engage in activities which transcend the limitations of his role as congregational rabbi. This is especially true with the Reform rabbi. The congregation is but one segment of Jewish life and congregants expect their rabbi to represent them as a group in public affairs. Before the larger community he stands as representative of his congregation, and he stands as the Jewish ambassador before the non-Jewish world, a symbol of Judaism.

Within the Jewish community the rabbi may participate in charitable, fraternal and Zionist organizations. It is not uncommon to hear of rabbis who have assumed highly important positions within such organizations. Here the rabbi is generally given freedom to choose the organization with which he desires to work, and as a result, rabbinic participation in community endeavors is manifest in virtually all Jewish organizations which follow a wide variety of goals. B'nai B'rith, the Zionist Organization of America, and the United Jewish Appeal are but a few of these organizations to which the rabbis have lent their active support.

In reference to membership in such groups, Carlin and Mendlovitz mention:



> While most rabbis feel that their rabbinic status offers them entrée to these organizations, they realize that outside their own synagogue they are unable to sustain their influence. 33

Such a statement can actually be neither affirmed nor denied. It is possible that a rabbi with overwhelming status within a prestigious congregation may well find that some of that prestige spills over into non-synagogal Jewish organizations; whereas the rabbi who enjoys little respect in a synagogue which itself may not enjoy high evaluation in the community will find he has lost all power when he leaves the confines of his synagogue. But it is becoming evident that should the Kehillah movement toward a unified American Jewish community gain any momentum, rabbis will, with full consent of their congregants, play an active part in the non-synagogal aspects of Jewish life.

As good-will ambassador to the Gentile world, the rabbi also performs a function of which his congregants approve. He exchanges pulpits with ministers, devotes time to community service organizations such as Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions, etc., and participates in service and philanthropic organizations, such as Red Cross and Community Chest. The rabbi who works successfully with non-Jewish organizations and activities often gains heightened respect and influence in his own congregation.[34]

Rabbis also serve to uphold the Jewish viewpoint as spokesmen on issues such as church and state, discrimination, social action, legislation and opposition to political corruption. The rabbi may well feel that the Jewish ideology demands that he lift up a prophetic voice against injustices. Weinstein states that rabbis may be grouped into three major categories according to their attitudes toward social action. There are (1) rabbis who feel that charitable organizations will alleviate social injustices; (2) rabbis who cry out, but alone against such wrongs, and (3) rabbis who quietly but effectively persuade laymen to participate in social movements.[35]

In serving the function as a community worker, the modern rabbi is creating a precedent. We have no evidence of any such functions being an aspect of the rabbinic office prior to the Emancipation. It is true that certain medieval rabbis would represent the Jewish community in apologetic discussions before Christians. It is equally true that a number of rabbis actively devoted themselves to improving social conditions and to raising charities. Yet, these activities are to be associated with these men as individuals rather than being seen as necessary functions of their rabbinate. To be a rabbi one did not have to be a community worker - (even though the rabbi was a symbolic representative of the community)-



whereas this is a mandatory function incumbent upon today's rabbi, both in the larger Jewish and non-Jewish worlds.

Summary

In our investigation of present rabbinical functions, we have established a number of categories and analyzed the continuities and discontinuities included within each. We have found that the rabbi's function as scholar-teacher contained the most continuity from the past rabbinic role, for in performing this function the rabbi devotes himself to absorbing knowledge and transmitting it to others. It was noted, however, that many of today's rabbis are concerned with different subject matter than their predecessors, for pursuits into secular knowledge and theology are relatively new to the rabbi's domain, although certain medieval rabbis did delve into the areas of non-religious thought. We also noted that, as teacher, the modern rabbi employs scientific method and uses techniques far different from those of the early rabbi-teacher. He must now relate the subject matter to the lives of his congregant; it no longer is of inherent value as a body of knowledge.

We also noted that in his preaching function the rabbi embodies some continuities from the past. Early

rabbis used the pulpit to teach Judaism, and today's rabbi also uses it for educational purposes. Yet, the modern pulpit has assumed an importance which is entirely new, and the rabbi may preach on themes totally different from those which formed the basis of the medieval rabbinic sermons.

As priest and pastor, the rabbi now performs functions which were formerly in the hands of the laity. While it was not unusual to find the rabbi performing a priestly function on special occasions or making pastoral calls, he did so not because it was required of him, but simply to lend the honor of his presence. Anyone could perform these duties. Yet, the modern rabbi finds that through these functions he can often gain closeness to the members of his congregation and hence he regards them as important to his ministry.

The functions of administrating and organizing a congregation are total discontinuities from the rabbinic role of the past. The complexities of synagogue life have placed the rabbi in a position where he must synchronize and organize the various activities which are performed under its aegis. The rabbi must also be a promoter of the activities of his congregation, for they are competing with other congregational and non-synagogal activities. There are indications that rabbis approach these functions with negative feelings. There



is an uncertainty about the specifically religious nature of these present rabbinical functions. Yet, there is a recognition of their importance in present society.

As a community worker, the rabbi is representative of his congregation to both the Jewish community and the non-Jewish world. He may engage in any number of philanthropic, social, civic and cultural activities; the choice is his own. But this too is a new rabbinic function. The pre-Emancipation rabbi may have engaged in communal activities and may have represented the community in discussions before the Christian world, but these functions were never part of the rabbinical office nor did they assume the importance they have today.

The very proliferation of practitioner roles is itself a discontinuity from the past. The rabbi today may feel the burden of performing many activities, none of which is necessarily related to the others. A rabbi writes:

> It is just not possible to be accepted and approved by a congregation by rounding out but one aspect of the rabbinic position. So the rabbi must be something of a trapeze artist, working out a balance and an allocation of time with the hope that he may equate expectation with performance...The attempt to behave in so many ways is itself the wellspring of conflict. 36

The result of this confusion may be specialization of

the rabbinate, just as this solution has been evidenced in other professions. Yet, the majority of rabbis, those who serve congregations without assistant rabbis, will be unable to devote themselves totally to specialization and will of necessity remain general practitioners.

Our analysis of rabbinic functions is subject to modifications. There is a variability in expectations from one community to another, which is strongly manifest in the differences between urban and suburban communities.[37] The weight accorded to the various rabbinic functions in differing types of communities is a subject where empirical investigation would prove fruitful.

## THE RABBIS' BACKGROUND AND TRAINING

Early American rabbinical leadership was provided in great measure by European immigrants. Trained to serve European Jewry these men faced the immediate problem of adapting their ministry to serve a laity which was molded by new forces. The founding of American rabbinical seminaries somewhat alleviated the problem, but the early supply of rabbis emanated from Orthodox Jewry, thus continuing to pose a problem to the more liberal Jewish groups who sought to produce rabbis from among their own adherents. This problem continued until recently when it became evident that each movement - the



Reform, Conservative and Orthodox - had reached a maturity where it could produce many of its own leaders.[38] Some mobility is maintained, with a number of Reform rabbis stemming from Conservative backgrounds and Conservative rabbis from Orthodox backgrounds, but a point of relative stability appears to have been reached.

With the attainment of this stability, new problems have arisen in the area of recruitment. Sklare's study of the Conservative rabbinate reveals that many parents downgrade the rabbinate as a profession for their sons, and thus discourage them from entering such a career.[39] This obvious discontinuity from the past where the rabbinate was considered a highly desirable profession is likewise applicable to the Reform group. The relatively limited chances for attaining high income compared with the other professions may dictate this attitude on the part of the parents who wish to see their offspring succeed and measure success by the yardstick of material gain. Little can be done to alleviate this problem, as long as the present concept of success prevails in American culture, for positions of high economic gain remain limited in number. In addition, while assuming a pulpit over a large congregation may be another criterion of success, such pulpits are few, and many who aspire for these are faced with disappointment.

A second recruitment problem is the lack of

adequate preparation available prior to enrollment in the rabbinical seminary, another discontinuity from the past when rigorous religious training assured the Yeshivah of a steady supply of well-trained rabbinic students. Sklare indicates there is only a small enrollment of Conservative children in schools which provide a reasonable Hebraic background,[40] and the problem is likewise evident in the Reform movement. Only the right wing Orthodox have provided training in early childhood which is fully adequate in preparing the child for rabbinic training. As a result, the adolescent considering a career in the religious field is frustrated by his inadequacies and will often turn from the rabbinate to either a career in Jewish communal organizations or else completely abandon the idea of a religious career. This problem will continue to exist until each movement provides a program which will enable prospective candidates to meet standards of admissions to its seminary.

The choice of the rabbinate as a profession is not based upon a "call", a concept popular in Christian circles based on the idea that the candidate for the ministry feels personally compelled by divine choice to enter the ministry. Lee Braude has written:

> Attached to the role of the religious specialist is a charisma of office. for the minister or priest, this



> charisma exercises a peculiar fascination; one does not choose the ministry, it chooses him. The person is "called" to the service of God; unless the aspiring minister senses this "call" the life of the cleric is not for him. Now, the rabbi, on the other hand the data suggest, is quite aware of the step he takes; he enters the rabbinate quite consciously and for a variety of reasons. He may commit himself rather late during his pre-seminary life. Or he may decide, or his parents may decide for him quite early that he is to be a rabbi, and he prepares only for this. 41

The choice of career is performed rationally, after a survey and weighing of the other alternatives, such as law, medicine and teaching. As a result, rabbis do not evidence the missionary zeal of some Christian ministers.

The requirement of a thorough secular education for rabbinic candidates introduces new prerequisites to the profession. It was not uncommon to find medieval rabbis who devoted a certain amount of their time to gaining secular knowledge, particularly during periods of relative freedom for the Jewish group. But rarely was this expected of the rabbi qua rabbi. Recent statistics reveal that one hundred per cent of the Reform and Conservative rabbis in this country possess Bachelor's degrees, and eighty-seven per cent of the rabbis who have graduated from Orthodox seminaries in the United States have similar degrees.[42] The requirement of four years of a liberal education is now a prerequisite for ordination in leading seminaries. It is evident

that the rabbi is now expected to have a thorough secular as well as religious knowledge.

The seminary training accorded rabbinic students is intended to perform the joint tasks of teaching them a corpus of Jewish knowledge as well as preparing them for the rabbinate by giving them certain tools by which they may relate themselves to realities they will find in Jewish life. There is a conflict between these two elements. Traditional studies find little relevance as aids in the rabbi's practical career, for they mean little to the Jewish laity. Conflicts may develop between schoolmen, who favor the traditional studies, and practitioners, who wish their seminary to present courses which will better prepare them for realities of congregational life.[43] The weight of Jewish tradition favors study of classical sources, and as a result, courses stressing traditional studies form the bulk of the seminaries' program. This has prompted Horace Kallen to write:

> What is at present of moment is the fact that in spite of all the brave language about leadership and living Judaism in American life, welded together by rabbis, the rabbinical training has no specific American or generally Jewish as against Judaistic content whether in method or attitude. It is a thing apart, pre-occupied with very little beyond the remote past, and needing translation to get present significance. 44



Seminary curricula have been updated since Kallen's writing (1932), and catalogs issued by the seminaries now reveal that courses involving the study of human motivations and effective means for the rabbi to relate himself to his congregants and to his future role now are integral parts of the seminaries' programs.

A related problem is the attempt of modern seminaries to present material in a scientific way and to indoctrinate the student with a meaningful ideology simultaneously, - a problem which has existed since the advent of the Wissenschaft des Judentums in the nineteenth century. During the medieval period no problem of this nature existed since indoctrination and education were viewed as synonymous. Thus, the objective presentation of Jewish law and literature which opens the possibility of the student's rejection of traditional elements, formerly endowed with sanctity, is a discontinuity from the past - so much so that the method often itself may be regarded as the cause for destruction of the past.

The problem of indoctrinating the rabbinic student with a personal ideology is part of the seminaries' larger problem of presenting the student with an identity, the concept of what his later role will be and toward which he can mold himself. Some students experience a clash between early conceptions of the nature

of their rabbinate and that which they evolve while at the seminary. Others do not sense the clash, for they either have no clear conception prior to entrance at the seminary or else they find their conceptions legitimated during their seminary experience.[45] But it is clear that the seminary exerts a great influence on the rabbinic student:

> To some it provides an outlook and a pattern of behavior which will guide the person in the work world. To the majority it provides but a set of tools and a system of concepts and perspectives which will orient the rabbi as he molds his profession in the light of previous experience. But to all, it serves as a validating agency for whatever the vocational identity happens to be...the receipt of ordination after a period of intense study and preparation legitimizes the sort of rabbinical entity the person has. The very fact of graduation validates his conception of the rabbinate and his place in it, and since this is, for most, primarily the identity with which he entered the institution, graduation - ordination - literally puts the stamp of the denomination upon it. 46

We have noted basic discontinuities between the background and training of the modern rabbi and that of the rabbi of the pre-Emancipation period. Parents now do not feel any strong motivation to direct their children toward a career in the rabbinate, and the lack of any extensive program for providing a thorough Jewish education involving study of traditional sources has



resulted in discouragement for those who, had they the adequate background, might consider the rabbinate more seriously. The requirement that the rabbinic student possess a Bachelor's degree testifying to his having acquired a broad secular education is new, as are seminary courses designed to give the student techniques for improving their effectiveness as religious practitioners.

There is some uncertainty as to the goals the seminary should pursue with conflict existing between expectations of practitioners and schoolmen. The rabbinic student also experiences difficulties in maintaining an identity, a concept of his rabbinate. But as repository of the Jewish traditions, todays seminaries may be regarded as the strongest force for continuity of Jewish life to be found in the community, even though they themselves represent a considerable change from the Yeshivoth.

## THE RABBI'S INCENTIVES

The downfall of the values spawned by the medieval Jewish community is responsible for lowering the status of the rabbinate from its former state. No longer is the rabbi adored for his meticulous scholarship or for the deliberated judgements he renders in legal and ritual matters. We have seen how he must now battle for

any authority he possesses, and how the rabbinate has ceased to be an office for which many outstanding young men aspire. The youth who studies for the rabbinate is regarded as if he had abandoned the popular drive for success instead of working toward its pinnacle. His goals are not the community's goals, his concept of success not theirs. The question arises: What motivates the rabbi to perform the activities that fall upon his office?

A motivation continuous with that of the medieval rabbi is the perpetuation of Judaism as a source of value. The rabbi is aware that he speaks on behalf of a tradition that is impeded by the existence of opposing values and the lack of a common core of lay assent. He may be driven by the incentive to preserve Judaism because it is a historical religion that he feels must be maintained. Or, the rabbi may be motivated by a strong sense of idealism, a recognition that through placing Jews in contact with specific Jewish teachings he can inspire them, bring meaning into lives which would be otherwise devoid of purpose, or lead society along a messianic path. Again, the rabbi may find his most important incentive not in the larger continuities of his role, but in the newer pastoral aspects which enable him to get close to his congregants, to aid them in solving personal problems and to enhance institutions



such as the family; hence, he gains a sense of being appreciated.

A difficulty facing the rabbi is the inability to gauge the measure of success he is achieving in his activities. He does not receive the satisfaction felt by the medieval rabbi who had settled a problem perplexing himself and his community. A modern rabbi writes;

> But what, you ask, has the minister to show as a result of a life of sacrificial effort? What monument is there for him, or what achievement by which, when he has passed away, men shall remember and honor him? Let it be remembered first of all, when one asks such questions, that spiritual results are seldom obvious and palpable. One cannot measure the renewal of spirit, or the strengthening of faith, or the changed life, or the courage to face the present and the future without flinching by any standards that are wholly material. Nor can one always know what the fruitage shall be of the seeds which he is sowing here and there. 47

The lack of clear criteria as to success in the rabbinate may be the source of a great amount of frustration and alienation from the rabbi's original sense of direction. This problem is one that faces the general American ministry. There is a need for the minister to constantly define his goals, a problem compounded[48] when success is so elusive.

We must conclude that the rabbi's incentives to fulfill his functions are diffuse and sundry. He stands at one with his earliest predecessors in striving to

preserve Jewish values and institutions, but differs from them to the extent that he is motivated to work intimately with others in solving personal problems and improving social conditions. He may find difficulty in evolving suitable criteria of success, and this poses problems to his sense of direction. But the intrinsic reward of serving a religious cause and the esteem he achieves through personal counseling efforts complement the rewards of high status and relative security to produce a rabbinate with great devotion to its duties.

## THE RABBI AS A RELIGIOUS SYMBOL

The pre-Emancipation rabbi's stature as a symbol of cultural values has been discussed in detail in chapter one. Through personally devoting himself to the cultivation of piety and scholarship his life became the accepted standard by which others could measure their own achievements or failures within the tradition-oriented value system to which they subscribed. He never became a vicarious Jew for them because he was not distinct from them nor did they abandon their own religious obligations to him. But his cultivation of the holy, his saintly demeanor and his aspiration to learn and live by the precepts of the Torah tradition made him the community's conscience and a symbol worthy



of emulation.

Symbolic features of this early rabbinic prototype are still manifest in lay images of the modern rabbi. Tradition - determined values which still exist are projected symbolically upon the modern rabbi. He becomes the link between the Jewish past and the present. The values cherished by the earlier community are viewed as the modern rabbi's values. He is expected to live up to the mitzvoth and to devote himself to scholarship and piety.

The rabbi is in a precarious position where his personal life is the direct concern of the community. But in this position, the rabbi remains the only authentic interpreter and conserver of Jewish values. Insofar as laymen have an emotional attachment to these values, the rabbi becomes a source of strength and trust, and also gains prestige. He becomes a symbol of the unity and integrity of the entire Jewish community and a potential unifier of all its members.

But the decline of the Jewish communal value system has had important effects on the rabbi's image among laymen. His values are not theirs. Thus, he becomes a vicarious Jew, a symbol of the old order which is no longer feasible, a representation of the God which modern man rejects except during times of personal crises. He becomes the scholar that modern Jews have given up

all hopes of becoming, a visionary who refuses to conform to the lay pattern which despairs of ever achieving Messianic goals. The congregant may wish him to remain as such and attaches a positive valuation to its symbolic image of him. But he resists any attempt of the rabbi to inculcate him with this idealistic fervor. Rabbi and congregant have separate channels of discourse. A writer states rather despondently:

> The rabbi may be more or less successful in enlightening his congregants, but they associate themselves with his Jewish learning. Someone, it seems, must be actively Jewish, and if the member is not, or cannot be, he at least derives satisfaction from the paid employee who is, on his behalf.49

With the dissolution of the integrated community and the alignment of Judaism along congregational configurations, the rabbi becomes father-figure of the congregation in a psychological sense, a member of many families as he is leader of the congregation. This strengthens the impact he may have on his congregants. In moments of grief or joy, he can enjoy close proximity that no one else can achieve. His preaching and the sheer impact of his personality are heightened by the latent father - image others have of him.

But as father - image the rabbi may be the recipient of both positive and negative responses. The origin of the individual's response lies in the multitude



of forces which compose his own background and in the attitudes he assumes toward his membership in a minority group. In his study, Clergymen, Teachers and Psychiatrists, Kaspar D. Naegele states:

> A minister, even if tolerance and compassion are prominent among the standards he represents, cannot become to his parishioner a vague enough figure so that many feelings which have their origins in early patterns of relatedness far removed from him can nevertheless be projected on to him. He may be thought of as a "father figure" but one cannot tell him how much one hates or loves him, for contact with him is not confined to a specific occasion. 50

Thus, the rabbi may be regarded as either a hating or loving father, a competitor, a partner, a symbol of rationality, a useless ornament or an important member of society, an integrator of Judaism with Americanism or the disturber of one's marginality. The elements determining the projected image upon the rabbi are found in each layman's individual background and value system.

The rabbi is aware that many images have been projected upon him. He knows that his effectiveness in interacting with his congregants may be either helped or hindered by the congregant's pre-conceptions and expectations. Nonetheless, the rabbi does not submit passively to these projections or conceive his actions only to justify expectations. He maintains the freedom

to determine his actions as an expression of his individual personality and thus can validate, invalidate or alter the congregant's initial expectations.

In review, we note that vestiges of the symbolic imagery projected on the medieval rabbi are retained by the modern rabbi. He is regarded as the embodiment of the Jewish cultural and religious ideal. But the dichotomy between lay and clerical values have made the rabbi into more of a vicarious Jew. He occupies a symbolic membership in the family of each of his congregants, but may be regarded either positively or negatively, the determinants being the degree of the layman's marginality as a Jew and his personal psychological factors. It is to be expected among non-marginal Jewish elements that, as lay participation becomes greater and the rabbi becomes an enabler rather than a doer, he will become closer to the lay peer group and lose some of his symbolic status as a vicarious Jew. Still, he will retain lay projections of Jewish cultural ideals.

## CONCLUSION

Our exploration into the modern rabbinate has shown that its present state is due to a composite of forces. Tendencies work to remake the rabbinate into a new profession employing novel patterns of response to changed



conditions. At the same time forces of tradition pull the rabbi back to his original role as scholar-saint. The conflict evidences itself in every sphere of the rabbi's activities. He is faced with an inability to formulate a consistant self-image - a problem about which the layman is totally unaware. As a result, the traditional rabbi's call to his colleagues to maintain the continuity with the original rabbinic role can be analyzed as a protest against his own inability to make peace with changed conditions and with the new rabbinic role which is developing.

We first noted the lack of standardization of the modern rabbi's role as a total discontinuity. There is no modern prototype, no model to which the rabbi can compare his own conception of his role. A lack of stability is the result, since the model of the pre-Emancipation European rabbi is no longer applicable. Not only are there Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis each searching for a model (which may evidence itself in the rabbi's pursuit of a modern code of practice which will bring about uniformity), but there are sub-categories of each. There is also an increasing number of rabbis who devote their rabbinate to a specialized area. It is true that the term "rabbi" is denotative of certain specific characteristics, and we may say that all rabbis have the same "master role" of being unifiers and

legitimators of Jewish values. Yet, the means used to fulfill this master role differ so widely among rabbis that it must be concluded that the term "rabbi" signifies little about expected performance.

The authority of the modern rabbi is singularly lacking the strength of the medieval prototype. Neither Semikah nor scholarly ability nor piety convey authority upon him. The rabbi may either become a specialist and thus earn authority through the respect shown him as an expert in a limited area, or else try to teach the value system of Judaism which developed over centuries and earn authority as the legitimate interpreter of that value system. But the most authority that he can achieve is only a non-imperative influential authority, and the ultimate source of this is the power of his own personality and the ascribed status of the clergy in American society.

The functions performed by the rabbi find only limited precedents in the rabbinate of the middle ages. As scholar and teacher, the rabbi performs functions derived from the original rabbinic role. But the modern rabbi utilizes a more scientific method in both scholarship and teaching, and the subject matter with which he works may be quite different from that with which the medieval rabbi was concerned. As preacher the rabbi follows a function established in the medieval period,



but the themes on which he discourses and the centrality of the sermon as a part of his role are newer innovations. In performing functions as pastor, administrator, organizer and community worker, the rabbi has undertaken totally new tasks.

In our discussion of the background and training of the modern rabbi, we noted the unfamiliarity of the potential rabbinic student with traditional law and the failure of parents to motivate their sons to prepare for a religious career. Analysis of rabbinic training showed the new prerequisite established by seminaries that their students have a liberal education. We also noted that modern seminaries find themselves on the horns of a dilemma, trying both to indoctrinate the student and to present traditional studies in a scientific, objective manner, a dichotomy quite non-existent in earlier times.

Our study of the rabbi's incentives has shown them to be diffuse and uncertain. The rabbi is motivated to preserve Jewish values, but often this concern may be equalled by the desire to be a counselor in a face to face situation where he feels useful. He also recognizes that as a rabbi he possesses a high status and can maintain a comfortable livelihood with security. The rabbi is somewhat confused by an inability to determine personal criteria of success. He can no longer feel

a strong motivation to settle a ritual or legal question, nor can he feel the joy of success experienced by the old rabbi who had managed to solve a technical problem of Talmudic reasoning.

The modern rabbi, like his ancestral predecessor, possesses symbolic representation in the eyes of the laity. There is a continuity in the image of the rabbi as the embodiment of the cultural ideal. But the modern rabbi is a vicarious Jew for many laymen who themselves cannot subscribe to his value system. He also is a father symbol to each member of his congregation, and as such may be the unwarranted recipient of both adulation and hostility. The rise of an educated laity may reduce the symbolic status of the rabbi however, as laymen come to see him more as a peer.

Our study leads us to certain convictions regarding the future rabbinic role. The prototype of the medieval scholar will have a lessened impact upon determination of the future rabbi's role, but in a quest for authority and an authentic role for himself in a secular society, he will attempt to gain proficiency in a limited area. Inherent conflict will continue, as he will find he must perform a wide variety of operations and although he can determine priorities he cannot become the expert counselor, social worker, or administrator who devotes his whole life to a limited area.



The rabbi will continue to be disturbed by the dichotomy between his own value system and that of his laymen. His demands will often be ignored or rejected, and he will find that to work effectively he must form a satisfactory synthesis between religious and secular values. Unless this can be achieved - and the prospect does not appear likely - there will be elements of inherent instability in the rabbi's role.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter I

1. Salo W. Baron, The Jewish Community, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1942, Vol. I, p. VII.

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