

YEARS OF STRUGGLE

A HISTORY OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT - 1891-1900

by

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DIGEST

It is the purpose of this thesis to delineate the historical processes involved in the rise of Conservative Judaism from 1891 to 1900. These nine years depict conservatism's struggle to maintain itself as a movement.

The theological emphasis of the movement was based on a pragmatic approach to Tradition. Whatever ritual or practice could be maintained by American Jews should, because of its historical importance, not be circumvented for the sake of mere convenience.

The tremendous flow of East European immigrants into the New York City area presented a noteworthy challenge to the Conservative leadership. If they could gain adherents among these newcomers, the numerical strength of the movement alone would enable them to challenge Reform Judaism as the representative Jewish group in America. The attempt, however, failed for two reasons. Firstly, the immigrants suspected that Conservative Judaism represented the missionary aims of the Reform movement. Secondly, the limited source of wealth among the immigrant group taxed the already debilitated financial structure of the Conservative movement.

The financial difficulties of the movement also hindered the Jewish Theological Seminary from attracting notable scholars to prepare students for the rabbinate. Although Sabato Morais died in 1897, it was not until 1901 that the Conservative leadership could convince Solomon Schechter to accept the presidency of the institution.

The major religious question at this time centered around the proper

observance of the Sabbath. The Conservative leadership set up programs to help the immigrants find employment that would allow them to observe the sanctity of the Sabbath. However, their financial resources were so limited that eventually these programs had to be discontinued.

The Conservative movement presented no united front on the major issues facing Jews during the 1890's. The question of Zionism found the Conservative leadership divided as to the necessity of re-establishing the political state of Palestine.

The personal lives of these stalwarts of conservatism were fraught with tragedy and disappointments. Key men in the movement died, while others faced congregational difficulties that, in one case, led to the resignation of the rabbi.

Thus, during the years 1891 through 1900, the Conservative movement was continually faced with the problem of extinction. Lacking financial backing as well as popular support from the Jewish masses, it struggled merely to exist.

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Introduction

The historical configuration of the Conservative movement in the 1890's was one of struggle. The theological position of the movement was based on the philosophy of Historical Judaism. As such, it emphasized a pragmatic approach to Tradition.

However, the Conservative influence on the Jewish American scene was not very effective. The movement was finding it difficult to maintain itself due to the lack of finances. This hindered them from promoting educational and religious programs among the East European immigrant community. Thus, their only hope for converting the masses to the philosophy of Historical Judaism was thwarted because of this lack of funds. Also, the immigrants did not trust the motives of a religious group who recognized the validity of Tradition, but, at the same time, sought to introduce a new way of thinking about religious practices.

The conservatives recognized the fact that the Jewish Theological Seminary could be the institution to solidify the multi-faceted views of Conservative adherents. However, after the death of Sabato Morais in 1897, the financial strain of meeting the yearly budget nearly caused the collapse of that institution. During the next three years, the Conservative leadership attempted to woo Dr. Solomon Schechter away from England in order that he might take over the presidency of the Seminary. However, the lack of finances forced Dr. Schechter to maintain his residency in England until after the turn of the century.

From 1891 to 1900, the deterioration of the Conservative movement

was evident. Most of the research depicting the decline of Historical Judaism in America comes from the pages of The American Hebrew. This Jewish weekly clearly indicates that the leadership was divided on many issues. Zionism, in particular, engendered several discussions among the conservatives as to its importance to American Jews. Although no official proclamation was ever made during the entire controversy, there was a definite cleavage of opinions as to Zionism's relevancy for Conservative Jews.

This paper was researched with no preconceived philosophy as to the direction the Conservative movement took during the 1890's. Overwhelming evidence, however, delineated the thrust of the movement. It was, for the most part, negative in nature. Its rebellion against Reform Judaism was, in reality, the only reason for its existence. During this time, however, Conservative Judaism was faced with the sobering thought that Reform was moving back into the mainstream of Judaism. The Sunday Sabbath issue, which represented a major controversy between the conservatives and reformers, was rendered innocuous by Kaufman Kohler's rejection of the validity of Sunday services in 1891. Now, the only difference between the two movements was one of degree and not of mode.

The philosophy of Historical Judaism might well have represented a valid expression of Jewish thought which differed from both orthodoxy and radicalism. But on the practicable level of existence, it made very little difference to the Jewish masses as to who represented the more liberal side of Judaism--Conservative or Reform. Reform Judaism was already well-established and, therefor, at that time, represented the majority of liberal-minded Jews in America. Conservative

Judaism, realizing its fate was bound up with the numerical hegemony of the East European immigrants, had to comfort itself with the idea that time, and time alone, would favor its continued existence as a movement. The 1890's for Conservative Judaism might well be termed the "years of struggle."

Chapter I

An interesting phenomenon of the Conservative movement in America is that it has rarely issued formal statements which expound the philosophy or theology of the movement.¹ Instead, it has attempted to formulate its principles as a pragmatic compromise between the two extreme positions of orthodoxy and reform. Therefore, it remains passive in the same sense that it must weigh each issue as it arises in the Jewish theological continuum in order to propound a pragmatic alternative.²

As early as 1891, Dr. F. DeSola Mendes recognized this factor as the source of the Conservative movement's strength. In a lecture before the School of Applied Ethics, at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in July of 1891, he outlined this philosophical position.³ Judaism, he claims, has always recognized a theological continuum, with regard to Jewish law, ranging from a literalist position to a liberal one. The religious situation of the Jews in America necessitates the existence of the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform movements in order to give legitimate credence to the religious expressions of all Jews.⁴

The best analogy possible, according to Dr. F. DeSola Mendes, to describe the actual configuration of American Jews is to view Judaism as a wheel. Orthodoxy, in this sense, may be considered the hub of the wheel--simply because it is the closest representation of rabbinic Judaism in America. Moreover, it tenaciously refuses to depart from those teachings for the sake of compromise with society. Hence, it is the source from whence the other two expressions of Jewish faith receive their nourishment.⁶

In the light of this analogy, we may consider Reform Judaism to represent the felloe of the wheel or the outside rim. As the felloe, it is "far removed from the central hub, but paralleling it exactly, on a larger and wider scale."⁷ It adheres to the main principles of its ancestral faith, while accepting new religious principles founded on a critical approach to religion. Hence, it is closer in appearance to the religious practices of the liberal Christian community than it is to Orthodox Judaism.⁸ It attempts to conform to the forces that the American society exerts on all groups partaking of its democratic philosophy.⁹

In the language of the analogy, Conservative Judaism must henceforth be viewed as the spoke of the wheel. This position affords it the opportunity to root itself to the hub as well as to the felloe.¹⁰ It provides the necessary link between orthodoxy and reform. Therefore, it is capable of carrying out the double purpose of sustaining the faith of those who do not feel comfortable in either of the two extreme camps.¹¹

Suffice it to say, the Conservative movement has received opposition from both the Orthodox and Reform groups. The reason for this is clear. Neither group is willing to admit that a middle ground is legitimate. The Orthodox claims that it is too liberal, and the Reform fulminates against its adherence to its ancestral traditions.¹² Nevertheless, the position adhered to by the Conservative movement is that it offers the best of all religious worlds for both the native-born Jew as well as the increasing number of immigrants flowing into this country from Russia.¹³

Conservative Judaism is seriously concerned with the religious situation of American Jews. It believes that those traditions capable of

being maintained in the modern world should be sustained.¹⁴ However, it must deny at least part of the Orthodox position. What it will retain are those principles of faith flowing from Judaism's historic past that can be translated into workable religious practices.¹⁵

In many ways the outward appearance of Conservative Judaism still resembles orthodoxy. This is so, because it firmly adheres to those rituals such as the Sabbath, circumcision and the dietary laws that are closely associated with orthodoxy by the Christian community. However, in the realm of public worship, it attempts to maintain a mean between the Hebrew and the English vernacular. In this manner it is able successfully to balance the Oriental and Western influences of the modern day Jew.¹⁶

Unlike the Reform Jews, Conservatives advocate the coming of the Messiah.¹⁷ However, the movement is cognizant of the fact that historically the Jewish Messiah has always been considered a political emancipator rather than a personal savior. Therefore, conservatism views the coming of the Messiah as a distinct possibility:

Recognizing the Messiah for what he really was, a political emancipator, Conservative Judaism looks for his advent yet, in view of existing political disabilities, eagerly watches political events foreshadowing progress toward him. It hopes for the days of Messianic peace among men.¹⁸

Historical Judaism, which is the expression of Conservative Judaism, advocates a program of the national restoration of Palestine for Jews.¹⁹ It does not necessarily have to be a political restoration of the land, but simply as a "home where the Jew would in no way be an alien."²⁰ It is important to note, however, that the concept of restoring Palestine as a homeland for Jews does not indicate that the American Jew rejects approximation in social matters with Christians; rather, Jews believe

that their race has been spared from annihilation for reasons other than socio-economic ones.

In a word, while deferring to the duty of welcoming approximation in social matters with our neighbors, it sees therein no reason to abate its national, its patriotic, its ethnic sentiment and believes that the race has been spared for other ends than absorption and amalgamation with the Gentiles. It believes in a restoration, not of all Jews to Palestine, but a Palestine to all Jews--not perhaps as a monarchy, nor as a hierarchy, but simply as a land for the landless nation ...²¹

Solomon Schechter, who followed Morais as President of the Jewish Theological Seminary, agreed with Dr. F. DeSola Mendes' pragmatic approach as to the religious position of Historical Judaism. He wrote in 1896:

The historical school has never, to my knowledge, offered to the world a theological programme of its own. By the nature of its task, its labours are archeology, and it pays but little attention to purely dogmatic questions. On the whole, its attitude toward religion may be defined as an enlightened Scepticism combined with a staunch conservatism which is not even wholly devoid of a certain mystical touch. As far as we may gather from vague remarks and hints thrown out every now and then, its theological position may perhaps be thus defined: It is not the mere revealed Bible that is of first importance to the Jew, but the Bible as it repeats itself in history--in other words, as it is interpreted by Tradition.²²

Although Schechter, at that time, represented the European school of thought of Historical Judaism, his thinking parallels the sentiments expressed by Mendes. Dr. Schechter, like DeSola Mendes, propounds a pragmatic approach to Judaism where even the written work of Scripture is analyzed in the light of history. Tradition thus transmutes all outmoded Laws into meaningful expressions of faith:

Another consequence of this conception of Tradition is that it is neither Scripture nor primitive Judaism, but general custom which forms the real rule of practice. Holy Writ as well as history, Zunz tells us,

teaches that the law of Moses was never fully and absolutely put in practice. Liberty was always given to the great teachers of every generation to make modifications and innovations in harmony with the spirit of existing institutions. Hence, a return to Mosaism would be illegal, pernicious, and indeed, impossible. The norm as well as the sanction of Judaism is the practice actually in vogue. Its consecration is the consecration of general use--or, in other words, of Catholic Israel ...²³

The pragmatic philosophy of the Conservative movement during the late nineteenth century did not go unchallenged. Dr. Kaufman Kohler, speaking before the third Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, claimed that once an individual accepted the responsibility of changing any aspect of the Law, he was automatically a progressive or Reform Jew.²⁴ Emotionalism with regard to one's faith was not called into question by Kohler. When, however, emotionalism becomes the *raison d'etre* of an entire philosophy of Judaism, it is time to investigate its legitimacy as an expression of Jewish theology:

Conservatism as opposed to strict orthodoxy is a catchword for the masses, but has no basis or meaning. As soon as it has admitted one single reform measure ... it has virtually taken side with Reform. It has entered a compromise with and begun to recognize progress as a motor of Judaism. To the so-called Conservative, Reform is a question of degree and mode, not of principle.²⁵

... Moreover, it seems to me that every Jewish teacher who appeals to reason as an arbiter in matters of religion, every one who discards the orthodox maxim: "Whatever is commanded by the Law is an edict of the Heavenly Ruler and must not be pondered over ..." is eo ipso an adherent of the principle of Reform and Progress.²⁶

Kohler's attack was devastating insofar as it attempted to prove that Conservative Judaism is a movement without a philosophy, creed or definition. It therefore, cannot explain to itself why it exists. Kohler claims that Reform cannot argue with orthodoxy since it must

respect the integrity of its theological position.²⁷ He thus intimates that conservatism has no basis for existence as an organized movement. This is because no reasonable limits or guidelines are established with regard to its theological position.

Kohler had to be answered. Theologically, it would be folly to fall back on the argument that Conservative Judaism had the right to interpret Judaism as an on-going process of Tradition. This position would not be accepted by the reformers because it lacked the authority of reason. There is another difficulty involved in Kohler's challenge: From what ground or position shall conservatism take its stand? If it answers the challenge in the name of Conservative Judaism, then it severs itself from the European school of Historical Judaism and, thus, admits that the premise of Historical Judaism is erroneous for an American expression of faith. If, on the other hand, it utilizes the name "Historical Judaism", it is tied to the premises Kohler had already refuted.

A rebuttal of Kohler's charge came indirectly from the Rev. Dr. H. Pereira Mendes in a sermon delivered at the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue in 1895. Although Mendes does not indicate the reasoning that prompted him to deliver this sermon, it would be credulous to dismiss the fact that he offers a cogent theological position for conservatism. In fact, the method of presenting his argument serves a twofold purpose. First of all, by overtly ignoring Kohler's challenge to conservatives to admit that Historical Judaism differs from Reform in degree and not mode, he denies the major premise of Kohler's entire argument. Secondly, by presenting a theological position for Conservative Judaism, without affirming or negating any past utterance of either the European or

American school of thought, he postulates a consensus of belief among all adherents of the historical school.

He accomplished this simply by stating that Historical Judaism is a way of thinking that finds its genesis in Abraham, elaborated on by Moses and the prophets, and transmitted to Jews throughout their history by a vast collection of religious literature.²⁸ It, therefore, is a valid expression of Jewish theology with concomitant behavioral demands on its adherents.

I propose, therefore, to set before you today what is expected of us according to Historical Judaism, that the awakening, so far as it affects you, may be in harmony with the past and with our future as our prophets paint it.²⁹

The essence of Historical Judaism is found in the "Bircath Abraham", or the "blessing of Abraham".³⁰ "It, therefore, **presents** the following four 'articles' as conveyed in God's message to that patriarch known as the founder of our faith or religion:"³¹

1. God is God, and we are His people.
2. We are to like the stars of heaven, like the dust of earth, like the sand of the sea.
3. Palestine is our fatherland.
4. We are to be a source of blessing for all mankind.³²

The first principle of the Blessing of Abraham is that God is God, and we are His people. By declaring that God is God, Judaism is also saying that the Deity has an essence that we recognize as One.³³ However, subsumed in the first principle is the premise that the essence of the godhead manifests itself in the history of Israel in a threefold manner. Namely, this is manifested as a God of Love, a God of Law, and a God of Light.³⁴

That God is a God of Love is deduced from the fact that belief in Him gives man a sense of happiness.³⁵ That He loves Israel is evident from the mere fact that the Jewish people have often turned to God as a Friend, and found Him the mainstay of their existence.

Thus, we derive comfort, consolation, hope and courage--elements indeed of human happiness, proof indeed that God is Love.³⁶

The second manifestation of the godhead is that the Deity is a God of Law. This premise is explicatory only if one postulates a Divine source for the Laws of Nature and Morality.³⁷ According to Nature's Law, which is tantamount to God's Law, the growth and maturity of any entity depends on its innate powers for survival in its native environment. In the human situation it is necessary that man has the correct religious environment to realize his spiritual potential.³⁸ Otherwise, deprived of spiritual nourishment, man's very character will wither and decay. Judaism has, throughout its history, provided a rich soil for Israel to take root and grow in. It has nourished the spiritual nature of the Jews from the time of Abraham until the present.³⁹ Yet, unless Israel continues to derive its strength from its native soil, it will not grow properly.

The greater our spiritual development, the greater possibilities of happiness open before us. Spiritual evolution for better or worse is within our own reach. It is but saying in other words, that God is Law. He so ordains it. He tells us we can choose between spiritual life or development and death, between blessing and blighting, advising us, of course, to choose the "Life".⁴⁰

The third manifestation of the godhead is that God is Light.⁴¹ Just as light is composed of three primary colors, so the Divine Light depends on three primary qualities - Love, Justice and Purity.⁴² When man incorporates these qualities into his life, he responds to the "Light

of God's Countenance"⁴³ by increasing his level of responsibility to his fellow **man**.⁴⁴ This is the Divine Light that touched the lives of the prophets who taught us the type of response we should endeavor to make:

The response means brightening our lives and beautifying our characters with all the colors of Happiness.⁴⁵

The declaration, God is God, indicates that Historic Judaism believes in a universal godhead, capable of being interwoven into the fabric of any theistic religion.⁴⁶ It posits a loving God, who, as the source of all Law and value, enables man to grow in his appreciation of values. Moreover, his response to Divine Love evinces a sense of responsibility for the happiness and well-being of others.⁴⁷

Suffice it to say, this component of the first principle of Historic Judaism is in agreement with both Reform and Orthodox Judaism.⁴⁸ All three expressions of Judaism would concur that God is God in the manner described by Mendes--i.e. that His essence does manifest itself in Divine Love, Light and Law. Because Mendes equates God's Law as a universal principle, it thus exceeds the boundaries of Jewish particularism. It becomes the Law for all people.⁴⁹

The second component of the first principle declares that "We are His people."⁵⁰ This implies that there is a covenant relationship between God and Israel. It is for this reason that "we are called a people holy to or consecrated to Him--a nation of priests ..."⁵¹ Moreover, the role assigned to Israel indicates that its mission in history is to save mankind⁵² by promoting the happiness of other peoples.⁵³

The second component, as the first, would meet little opposition from the Reform or Orthodox camps of Judaism, for they, too, assent to the principle that Jews have a Divine role to play in the history of

Complete

mankind. The interpretation might be slightly different according to the theological predilection of each group, but the principle is generally agreed upon.

The second principle of Historic Judaism claims that "we are to be like the stars of heaven, the sand of the sea, the dust of the earth."⁵⁴ This threefold designation of the principle is an allegorical expression of the actual and potential role of the Jews in history.⁵⁵ The stars are symbolic of the fact that Israel was chosen to "illumine the paths to God in Heaven."⁵⁶ Like the sand, "we beat back the waves of error and superstition ..."⁵⁷ Like the dust, we are a downtrodden nation that silently suffers for the well-being of humanity.⁵⁸ Again, it is ascertained by Mendes, that Reform, Orthodox and Conservative Judaism could find mutual agreement in this principle.

The third principle states that "Palestine is our fatherland."⁵⁹ Unlike the Rev. Dr. DeSola Mendes, Dr. Pereira Mendes advocates a Zionism based on the political re-establishment of Palestine:

As England is to the English, so will Palestine be to us. Its possession may mean for us the solution of anti-Semitism and persecution. But the doctrine of Jewish restoration to Palestine is of prime importance for the world. For it means a means for the conservation of humanity's best and holiest interests.⁶⁰

Hence, the re-establishment of Palestine as the homeland for the Jewish people is the sine qua non of Historical Judaism.⁶¹ However, it is important to note that the leadership of the Conservative movement was divided over the question of the re-establishment of the Jewish commonwealth.⁶² Drs. Marcus Jastrow, H. Pereira Mendes, and Benjamin Szold were ardent Zionists; while Drs. Sabato Morais⁶³ and Cyrus Adler⁶⁴ totally rejected political Zionism as an expression of Historical Judaism.

According to Mendes, however, the establishment of a third Jewish Commonwealth is necessary in order to carry out the Divine plan of a united world.⁶⁵ Palestine, as the center of a united world, would exert hegemony in the realm of law and morality.⁶⁶ Moreover, a world court of arbitration would be established that would put an end to wars by making firm the foundations of peace.⁶⁷

The re-establishment of Palestine is a vital issue for world Jewry. Only when Palestine exercises hegemony in this area of religious Law will the question of "change" in the Law be a valid one.⁶⁸ Changes in the Law will then be accomplished constitutionally by leading Jewish theologians.⁶⁹ This factor alone would eliminate the need of such rabbinical conventions as the Central Conference of American Rabbis.⁷⁰ Such conventions are outside of the mainstream of Historical Judaism. They claim that a single body, represented only by men who hold the same views, has the freedom to institute doctrinal changes.⁷¹

It is in the area of doctrinal changes that Reform Judaism and Historical Judaism are in complete disagreement.⁷² Conservative Judaism permits change only in the realm of synagogue ritual or practice.⁷³ Reform Judaism, on the other hand, has been indiscriminate in its theory of religious change. They arbitrarily accept some rituals and Laws; and, yet, discard others through the workings of a factitious rabbinical convention composed of rabbis who do not have enough knowledge about Jewish Law to make a thoughtful decision.⁷⁴

Change in religious Law can only be accomplished by a body of learned men who meet the following requirements:

1. They must be of the "elders of Israel," (Number 12:16)
2. They must be "men who are wise and of understanding and know--i.e. of reputation." (Deut. 1:13)

3. They must be "able men, who are known for their reverence for God and His Law, men of sincerity, hating personal advantage, even notoriety." (Exod. 18:21)
4. They must include the minister, as indicated by the term "priest"; (Deut. 17:9) those learned in Hebrew Law, as indicated by the term "Levites"; (Deut. 17:9) in the text, "by whose mouth shall be decided every case and contention" (Deut. 21:5) and the erudite or specialist, even if he be a layman, as indicated by the word "Judge" (Deut. 17:9).⁷⁵

Hence, Historical Judaism views the modus operandi for change in the realm of religious Law as being rooted in the Torah. Furthermore, it does not overthrow any of the religious principles of Law advocated by orthodoxy. It merely attempts to suspend judgement with regard to changing the Law until the proper conditions are met; that is, the restoration of Palestine where proper constitutional changes can be adopted.

The fourth principle of Historical Judaism states that "we are to be a source of blessing to all mankind."⁷⁶ Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism agree in this particular principle. Throughout the history of Western Civilization, Judaism has been the source of countless values. Moreover, whatever "is good and beautiful in ancient philosophy and civilization, as in modern, is due to Hebrew teaching."⁷⁷

Conservative Judaism is committed to the evolution of Judaism through an understanding of the historical processes of Judaism. Any law or custom that is possible to maintain in the modern world is incumbent upon the Jew to follow. However, any custom or law that presents an apparent incompatibility with modern life and culture may be suspended until proper means are agreed upon to change it.

The historical school in the late nineteenth century viewed its existence as a valid expression of Judaism. Hence, it saw its purpose on the American scene as the ameliorating element of Jewish tradition

--mainly because it was able to sustain the quality of traditional Judaism while accepting a responsible social and cultural position in the community.⁷⁸

Chapter II

In the late nineteenth century, the Conservative movement was forced to confront the arduous task of winning adherents from Reform and Orthodox Judaism. The Conservative's leadership was aware that the changing milieu of the Jewish community in America accentuated the need for a flexible theological position. However, both the Orthodox and Reform groups were already established as viable expressions of Judaism in America. They gave both the native-born and the immigrant Jew a choice as to the mode of religious expression one should follow. Hence, the only ideology Conservative Judaism could offer at this time was that of dissatisfaction, and this had little appeal to the masses involved in the changing milieu.

Despite all the magnanimous expectations of the builders of Conservative Judaism, the movement was beginning to crumble for lack of popular support.⁷⁹ The mere fact that Historical Judaism acted as a rallying center for diverse groups and individuals who were dissatisfied with the existing manifestations of Jewish faith naturally excluded it from the main supply of the financial potency of wealthy American Jews. Until the Conservative movement was able to demonstrate its survival potential it was destined to remain in dire financial straits.

The debilitating factors that Conservative Judaism faced in the late nineteenth century necessitated the member congregations of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association to decide whether or not they wished to maintain their membership in the movement. Hence, by the beginning of the twentieth century, most of the major congregations

of the Association divorced themselves from the movement.⁸⁰ In fact, all the left-wing congregations,⁸¹ with the exception of B'nai Jeshurun in New York City, shifted their loyalties to Reform Judaism.⁸² The right-wing congregations, with the exception of Chizuk Emunah of Baltimore and Mickveh Israel of Philadelphia,⁸³ also left the Conservative fold and formally enrolled in the Union of Orthodox Congregations.⁸⁴

Immigration

On the surface, one might well suspect that these negative factors could not long sustain the Conservative movement in America. However, two basic sources of strength gave the movement the impetus to survive the crises of the late nineteenth century. That is, they discovered that the immense immigration of Russian Jews could be a source of numerical strength. Moreover, the maintenance of the Jewish Theological Seminary as the ideological center of conservatism would eventually play a leading role in the formulation of Jewish theology in America.⁸⁵

The need to gain adherents among the immigrants was recognized by the Seminary as well as those proponents of conservatism in the wider Jewish community. For instance, the editorials in The American Hebrew continually called for recognition of this vast source of power.⁸⁶ The need for missionary work among the Russian immigrants was depicted as the hope and strength of the Conservative movement.

Our great metropolis has all the elements to make this movement a success, if they are but marshaled wisely from a broad and elevated point of view. We have not only, in our midst, the men of wealth, able and willing to support such an undertaking; but our large Russian community, numbering more than 500,000 souls, furnishes also the right material for our future teachers and spiritual leaders, if only the right influence be exerted, the right method applied to utilize the immense amount of Hebrew lore stored up in the brains of our new fellow citizens.⁸⁷

Also, the Conservative leadership was cognizant of the fact that the Seminary's sphere of influence depended on how many rabbis they could graduate and then place in American congregations. The Rev. Dr. H. P. Mendes urged the leadership to actively seek out the Russian immigrant before he would be lost to the movement forever. Therefore, for reasons of self-survival, the Seminary had to accept the responsibility of missionary work among the expanding immigrant community.⁸⁸

Our own safety ... demands that we shall not neglect these congregations. Our own interests require that they shall be supplied with ministers who shall be acceptable to them ...⁸⁹

The movement's potential to gain adherents among the new Americans was viewed as an excellent opportunity by the Conservative leadership. They were aware of the fact that the Americanization process of the East European Jew would, in the main, create a liberalizing attitude with regard to religious practices, but not the desire to reject the external forms of Tradition.⁹⁰ Moreover, for the first time in their lives, they were exposed to three different expressions of the Jewish faith - Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism.⁹¹ Thus, the freedom of choice was considered a positive factor by the Conservative leadership.

Furthermore, it was felt that the Reform movement was not interested in the Americanization process of the Russian immigrant, nor did they find it desirable at that time to convince them of the veracity of Reform's theological position. Hence, the conservatives felt secure in their evaluation of Reform Judaism's position in this matter and did not consider them a restricting element to their own missionary goal:

Certainly, the graduates of the Cincinnati Union College will never seek positions in Russian congregations. And it is equally certain that such

congregations will never receive them, for their ideas and their lives are not in accord with what such congregations would require.⁹²

It would be unjust, however, to unequivocally state that Reform Jews were not sensitive to the needs of their fellow Jews arriving from East Europe. The American Hebrew indicates that there were reformers who expressed genuine concern over the plight of the Russian immigrant. But, it is to be noted, according to The American Hebrew, these reformers concurred that the Seminary would be the ideal institution to syncretize the religious practices of the Russian Jew with the pragmatic values of American society.⁹³ Moreover, Reform Jews contributed to the Morais Fund of the Seminary for the explicit purpose of enabling the immigrant Jew to meet his religious needs.⁹⁴

As early as 1890, the Conservative leadership attempted to convince the East European immigrant that Historical Judaism was a valid expression of traditional Judaism.⁹⁵ The import of their argument stressed the fact that in a democratic country where social amelioration was a distinct possibility, a ghetto brand of Judaism would retard the economic mobility of the immigrant.⁹⁶

In 1892, The American Hebrew reported that the Seminary was actively engaged in "Americanizing Russian immigrants by training their preachers."⁹⁷ Although the results were gratifying, the Seminary was unable to expand **its influence because of a serious lack of funds.**

It is this phase of its usefulness that is being tardily and grudgingly recognized by the Jewish community in this city. With the means at its disposal, the Seminary has thus far maintained good results. The range of its effectiveness has been seriously limited, however, by reason of the lack of funds to secure those additional advantages needed for perfecting its power.⁹⁹

The ultimate goal of Conservative Judaism in the late nineteenth century was to imbue the philosophy of Historical Judaism into the mainstream of American Jewry.¹⁰⁰ However, lack of financial aid in this endeavor restricted the Conservative influence among the immigrants. This is evidenced by the fact that The American Hebrew periodically entreated the wider Jewish community in the New York area to donate money to this cause.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the Seminary Association issued a yearly Channukah appeal to its member congregations for financial aid in its missionary program among the Russian immigrants.¹⁰²

By the year 1900, it became clearly evident that the program envisioned by the Conservative leadership was a failure. A deficiency of pecuniary support prevented the practical application of the conservatives' plan to convert the immigrants' religious views to the philosophy of Historical Judaism. It is important to note, however, that the dynamics of the situation that caused the stultification of the movement's program in this area of endeavor might have been prevented if the immigrant community possessed its own financial resources. The fact that it did not possess any wealth at all was recognized as a determining factor by the Conservative leadership:

Clearly the Seminary authorities recognized that the fate of the Seminary was bound up with that of the newcomers. They also realized that these people were unable, even if willing, to share in the maintenance and development of the institution. Appreciating the financial instability of the Seminary, they readily conceded that its (i.e. the Jewish Theological Seminary) reorganization was necessarily inevitable, provided that it assured an adequate endowment and the integrity of its original purpose.¹⁰³

Any program created and upheld with the specific aim in mind of winning adherents from another group necessitates personal involvement in the internal affairs of that group. Suffice it to say, the proponents

of Conservative Judaism involved themselves in both the religious and secular affairs of the immigrant community.¹⁰⁴ In that way, they could protect the rights of those Americans who were not cognizant of the socio-economic nature of America, as well as display conservatism's sense of concern for their welfare:

The prevailing attitude within the historical school of personal, communal and spiritual responsibility for the immigrants as brothers-in-need, whose children would contribute to the future American community, was reflected by the acts of individual members of the school as well as their corporate coordinate effort.¹⁰⁵

In order to meet the religious needs of the Russian immigrant, the Conservative leadership secured places of worship where the East European Jew might pray according to his own minhag.¹⁰⁶ Also, the theological position of Historical Judaism was introduced to the immigrant by means of public lectures held at the various Conservative synagogues.¹⁰⁷

Once involved in the religious affairs of the immigrant community, the leadership also became involved in the secular problem of raising their standard of living. Thus, when the immigrants employed in the shirtmaking industry called a strike against their Jewish employers because of poor working conditions, Drs. Jastrow and Morais publicly supported their efforts.¹⁰⁸

The attempt to influence the immigrant community was, of course, borne out of the conviction that Historical Judaism reflected the religious thinking of most American Jews. It was felt that the Reform movement represented a particular segment of Jewish thinking that would be rejected by the immigrant community. Orthodox Judaism, according to this way of thinking, also represented an extreme that was not conducive to the pragmatic approach to life found in America.

Therefore, it seemed logical to assume that Conservative Judaism would in fact represent the main-stream of Jewish thinking.

The hopes of the Conservative leadership, however, never came to fruition, for the immigrants were not accepting the Conservative position as readily as had been expected. There was, to be sure, some increase in membership, but no evidence supports the theory that conservatism had, at that time, made sizeable inroads into the religious life of the new Americans. On the contrary, there is evidence to show that the immigrant community suspected the Conservative movement of collusion with Reform Judaism.¹⁰⁹ Elias L. Solomon, a student of the Jewish Theological Seminary, informed the editors of The American Hebrew that since the Seminary was located in the higher rent district of New York City, the immigrants automatically equated it with Reform Judaism.¹¹⁰ According to Solomon, the immigrant community may have been justified in its assumption because of the fact that most of the adherents of Reform Judaism resided in that particular area of the city.¹¹¹ Moreover, they could not fully understand why a group of Jews who acknowledged orthodoxy as the truest expression of rabbinical Judaism would attempt to persuade them to give up their cherished beliefs.¹¹² Thus, Mr. Solomon reported that they suspected the Seminary of perverting the sublime truths of Judaism:

In fact, I am even willing to excuse the recent arrivals from across the Atlantic who refer to the Seminary as the Jewish Theological Cemetery; and I am ready to admit that this confusion of terms is not due to ignorance; but that it is a willful perversion intentionally made by those who suspect that the Seminary, instead of being an institution seeking to spread the living truths of Judaism, even of that form of it to which they themselves adhere, consists of a faculty and students, dead to the beauty and sublimity of our time-hallowed justification.¹¹³

Suffice it to say, the Conservative leadership was aware of the existing problem of communication between the Seminary and the emerging Orthodox community. It also realized that without their loyalty the diminution of conservatism's influence in America would be assured.¹¹⁴

In 1898, a final attempt appears to have been made by the Conservative movement to win the loyalty of the Tradition-minded immigrants. The leadership, representing the right wing of the Conservative group, proposed a union between the proponents of Historical Judaism and the "down-town" Orthodox congregations:

These congregations are composed of those who have a warm attachment to ancient forms, to whose spiritual wants the graduates of the Seminary could minister acceptably, while ministers from other seats of learning would never be accepted. The guidance of the spiritual well-being of these congregations which adhere to the standard of Historical Judaism must, necessarily, be of importance; for under that flag is ranged, by far, the greater majority of American Jews.¹¹⁵

It is evident that the conservatives took the initiative in proposing this merger between the proponents of Historical Judaism and the Orthodox Jews.

One can only surmise that since Conservative Judaism failed to win a substantial number of adherents away from orthodoxy through its missionary efforts, it was now attempting to confute the suspicions of the immigrants by suggesting a theological merger between Historical Judaism and rabbinical Judaism. It is also within the range of possibilities that the right wing adherents of Conservative Judaism were cognizant of the decay of their movement and, therefore, decided to salvage the philosophy of Historical Judaism by imbuing it into the mainstream of Orthodox thinking. Whatever the real intent of the proposed merger was, however, it was overshadowed by the fact that under

the terms of this union, both Conservative and Orthodox Judaism would preserve the Tradition-centered emphasis of Judaism in America.

According to The American Hebrew, it was the hope of the Conservative leadership that the Jewish Theological Seminary would play a major role in this merger. The leadership felt that the reasoning behind this move was quite logical, especially when one considers the enormous cost of maintaining an institution of higher learning.¹¹⁶ With the Seminary as the center for Jewish education, the need to maintain a large number of yeshivoth would be eliminated.¹¹⁷ Thus, the member congregations could pool their financial resources and thereby obtain the finest minds in the field of Judaica to teach and train rabbis.¹¹⁸ Moreover, by having only one seminary, the union would be able to act from a position of strength when it spoke for American Jewry. Thus, under the terms of this proposal, the "union would stand to the Seminary of New York as the constituent congregations of the Hebrew Union stands (sic) to the Union College."¹¹⁹

It is important to note, that such a union drawn in accordance with the wishes of the Conservative leadership would necessitate a permanent theological cleavage between modernists and ~~the~~ traditionalists.¹²⁰ No longer would an individual be able to adhere to a "middle of the road" position in matters of Jewish practice, for one would have to support either the Union of Hebrew Congregations or the Union of Orthodox Congregations. This situation, however, is not one to be lamented over since the history of Judaism is replete with similar cleavages. The people were always forced to choose between the opposing philosophies of the Pharisees and Sadducees.¹²¹

The union, it was suggested, would benefit all who agreed to support

its principles since the prestige of traditional Judaism in America would be tantamount to the position of orthodoxy in Europe. Thus, in this way, "its voice could be heard asserting its principles whenever required."¹²²

Because Historical Judaism does not deny the validity of tradition and since it does represent a more pragmatic approach to religion, it was also envisioned that it would someday become the prevailing philosophy of Judaism in America.¹²³ Furthermore, by exerting its hegemony over the religious life of the American Jew, it would be able to establish guidelines for Jewish opinion in the political realm of life as well as the religious one. For instance, questions relating to Zionism or Sunday legislation could be discussed by the leading rabbinic minds of the union; whereas, questions concerning changes in dogma would not be discussed.¹²⁴

The first meeting of the Convention of Orthodox Congregations convened in the vestry room of the Shearith Israel Synagogue, where the Rev. Dr. H. P. Mendes presided over the session.¹²⁵ The historical school was adequately represented on all the policy-making committees. In fact, Drs. H. P. Mendes, S. Solis-Cohen, H. W. Schneeberger, Judge Mayer Sulzberger, Mr. Lewis Dembitz, Mr. Joseph Blumenthal and the Rev. D. H. Wittenberg all played an active role in formulating the constitution of the Union.¹²⁶

The mechanics of the sessions were so arranged as to permit both the immigrant and the native-born representative the benefit of translations of each other's remarks. However, it is noteworthy to point out that when the American members began to discuss subjects politically or theologically sensitive to the immigrants' representatives, they did so

only in English. This prompted the non-English-speaking representatives to protest that the rules of translation were not being observed.¹²⁷

The first meeting began with a protest from the more traditionally -centered members as to who decided what congregations were invited to join the Union? The query was a legitimate one since some of the representative congregations attending the convention indulged in reforms where "organ and pews were in vogue".¹²⁸ However, Dr. H. P. Mendes, the chairman of the convention ruled such a protest out of order on the grounds that the mere acceptance of the invitation to join the Union entitled these congregations to send representatives.¹²⁹

The question was then raised as to the exact nature of the Union. Mr. Lewis Dembitz objected to the word "Orthodox" because "it did not sufficiently indicate the purpose of the organization".¹³⁰ By adopting the name "Orthodox Union", the convention would be giving particular credence to those who represented the Orthodox congregations. It would give the impression that those Jews who held to another persuasion of traditional Judaism were outside the theological consensus of the Union.¹³¹ He, therefore, argued that the convention **should** change the name of the organization from "Orthodox Union" to "Shomre Hadath", Observers of the Law.¹³² Drs. Drachman and Schneeberger, however, stated that the term "Orthodox" was a useful one because it enabled all Jews who believed **d in** Tradition to identify with the matrix of Jewish thought.¹³³ This position was further upheld by Mendes who recommended that the Dembitz motion be sent back to the committee for further study.¹³⁴

Another difficulty encountered by the convention involved the question of Zionism. The committee on Zionism submitted a resolution that recommended the eventual rebuilding of Palestine as a homeland for those

Jews "dwelling under the rigor of oppressive laws ... "135 However, the protagonists of Zionism argued that the statement formulated by the committee was too innocuous. Furthermore, they rejected any compromise with their basic philosophy of the political re-establishment of Palestine. Thus, that section of the resolution that recognized the precarious nature of political Zionism was completely rejected. It read:

The elimination of the idea of the political State from the present programme of Zionism averts the possibility of opposition from the Turkish Government or from those European powers that have special interest in the holy places of the cradle of Christianity.¹³⁶

Under the leadership of Dr. Bernard Drachman, the Zionists submitted a counter-resolution calling upon all the congregations of the Orthodox Union to favor political Zionism.¹³⁷ After a heated debate between the Zionists and anti-Zionists, the Drachman proposal was accepted as an official plank of the convention's principles.¹³⁸

The next resolution that was passed made the Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America an established society. The first principle promulgated by the convention recognized Historical Judaism as a valid expression of traditional Judaism:

This conference ... is convened to advance the interests of positive Biblical, Rabbinic and Historical Judaism.¹³⁹

It is important to note that the conditions by which a Jewish synod might be called to discuss religious matters¹⁴⁰ is a reiteration of H. P. Mendes' philosophy of Historical Judaism as depicted in an article by him in an 1895 issue of The American Hebrew.¹⁴¹

The primary goal of the Conservative group, however, appears to have been a failure. That is, the Jewish Theological Seminary was not

mentioned in the official minutes of the conference as the proposed center of rabbinic study for the member congregations of the Orthodox Union. Hence, the Union would not stand to the Seminary as the constituent congregations of the Hebrew Union stood to the Hebrew Union College.¹⁴²

The second session of the conference involved the election of permanent officers to the Union.¹⁴³ That the Conservative group played an important role in determining the future policy of the Union is evidenced by the fact that many of them were elected to powerful positions within the organization.¹⁴⁴ For instance, Dr. H. P. Mendes was elected president, while Lewis N. Dembitz was elected first vice-president. The secretary was Dr. B. Drachman, and the trustees included Drs. H. P. Mendes, Joseph Hertz, Schneegerger, Cyrus Adler, Solomon Solis-Cohen and Messrs. L. N. Dembitz, Joseph Blumenthal and K. H. Sarasohn.¹⁴⁵

In an attempt to justify the motives of those conservatives represented in the Orthodox Union, Dr. H. P. Mendes wrote in The American Hebrew that the public should not confuse the word "orthodoxy" with any specific sect.¹⁴⁶ Rather, people should realize that "whatever in the Bible conduces to higher standards of conduct, constitutes our religion, or Orthodox Judaism ..."¹⁴⁷ Orthodoxy, then, does not refer to overt conformity to ceremony, but to the internal striving of the individual to be at peace with man and God through certain spiritual disciplines.¹⁴⁸

According to Mendes, the three guiding principles of civilized humanity are: justice, loving-kindness and purity.¹⁴⁹ In order to safeguard these three articles in Judaism, the true Orthodox adherent is compelled to protest against any deviations from Tradition that would

weaken these principles.¹⁵⁰ Thus, the Orthodox person must speak out against all forms of idolatry that restrain the spirit of man from recognizing the One God.¹⁵¹

The second component of true orthodoxy is the element of separatism.¹⁵² That is, in recognizing the responsibility involved in taking the Lord's word seriously, the individual must remove himself from any element that will make him impure before God.

Conduct is an important area of concern in the program of separatism.¹⁵³ Thus, while the ceremonies in one's religion may indicate the extent of his separatism, it is one's moral conduct that is considered of primary importance.¹⁵⁴

Let me thus present true orthodoxy to you. It is to raise the standards of protest, to proclaim our separatism, but to live lives that are hallowed by Justice, consecrated by Loving-kindness and beautified by Modesty.¹⁵⁵

To be sure, H. P. Mendes' interpretation of orthodoxy is a personal one. **Yet, it is on** this basis that he considered it proper to propose a merger between the Orthodox congregations and the Conservative movement. Since, he felt, both groups adhere to Tradition, the differences between them are of degree and not mode.¹⁵⁶

It should be noted, however, that the reasons behind Mendes' affinity for orthodoxy appears to have been his deep dislike for Reform Judaism.¹⁵⁷ He believed that the antithesis of Reform Judaism, on any level, represented true orthodoxy. Therefore, orthodoxy could rightly offer the people the philosophy of protest and separatism instead of the reform principles of compromise and assimilation. Hence, what orthodoxy really has to offer American Jews is the attribute of quality:

The secret of the strength of orthodoxy is the secret of the arrival of Judaism. It is loyalty

to the Torah and the teachings of the Bible as the best minds expound them. I say the best minds. The word "best" is essential. It constitutes the main difference between Orthodox and Reform Judaism. Orthodox Judaism tolerates exposition by only the best minds. Reform permits exposition by any minds, even by trustees.¹⁵⁸

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, the concerted drive of the historical school to gain adherents from the orthodox ranks was extremely negligible.¹⁵⁹ In fact, after the turn of the century, Dr. H. P. Mendes' congregation, Shearith Israel, along with Dr. B. Drachman's congregation, Zichron Ephraim, left the ranks of the Conservative movement to embrace Orthodox Judaism.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the evidence indicates that the Conservative infiltration into the ranks of orthodoxy served two purposes: one, it helped further the aims of the historical school by legitimizing its theological position, and, two, it enabled the right wing members of the movement to honorably accept the Orthodox movement in the face of conservatism's own probable disintegration.

In the final analysis, their apparent failure to secure Orthodox support for their movement must be reconciled with the fact that they had the foresight to recognize the need to gain adherents from among the Russian immigrant community:

However, the time was not yet ripe ... for the Seminary to profit from this circumstance. Therefore ... they readily conceded that its (the Seminary's) reorganization was necessary and inevitable ... "¹⁶¹

The Jewish Theological Seminary

The importance of gaining adherents from the Russian immigrants was only one of two major reasons for the survival efforts of Conservative Judaism. The second important reason for survival centered around

the conservative's singular conviction that if the Seminary could realize its potential in the academic world, it would someday exert hegemony in the field of Jewish studies.

The original purpose for the existence of the Seminary was to act as a scholarly center for the rebuttal of Reform Judaism.¹⁶² The conservatives had no quarrel with the Orthodox. In fact, Morais originally suggested that the institution be called "The Orthodox Seminary".¹⁶³ Likewise, even the students attending the Seminary were inculcated with the idea that the Seminary was "founded for the purpose of obeying the Torah in the spirit of the Talmudic sages."¹⁶⁴ According to Mr. Henry Speaker, a rabbinic student at the Seminary, the main purpose of their scholarly endeavors was to enable them to protect the faith from those who would deny the validity of Tradition:

Because religion implies a rigid and high standard of virtue, therefore, religion is a mere superstition. Because self-denial is inconvenient, therefore, self-denial is folly. Because calumny, mockery, hatred and persecution are often the rewards of the highest and noblest order of mind and since such rewards are not very pleasant in their nature, therefore, our ancestors who suffered and bled for their ideas and convictions were ignorant and pitiful visionaries. They did not understand the elevating idea of self-worship. An age that prides and boasts itself on its lack of faith, or its indifference toward everything magnanimous or sacred ... cannot produce prominently active and heroic men. Every grand and immortal action must have for its foundation, faith, faith in God, faith in religion, faith in the Divine Spirit ...¹⁶⁵

It would be quixotic, however, to maintain that the only purpose of the Jewish Theological Seminary was to combat the reform tendencies in American Judaism in order to protect the ancient faith. For the Seminary was also attempting to evolve a set of standards based on the scholastic potential of the institution. Hence, the positive

reasons for maintaining the Seminary existed coterminously with the negative ones. On the positive side of the ledger, it may be noted that as early as 1892, Dr. Cyrus Adler proposed that the purpose of the Seminary was to revive Hebrew learning so that a renaissance of Hebrew scholarship might flourish:

The central point for this renaissance of Hebrew scholarship in America should be the Jewish Theological Seminary which is geographically in the heart of this intellectual activity.¹⁶⁶

The scholarly goals enunciated by Dr. Adler could only be met if the Seminary could matriculate enough rabbis to exert an influence on the religious attitudes of Jews in America. They recognized the need to produce scholars who would propound the principles of Historical Judaism to the Jewish populace. At the present time, however, there existed only a few men in the entire movement that could exert this type of influence. One of these men, Dr. Alexander Kohut, declared that the guiding purpose of the Seminary involved the delineation of the philosophical and theological principles of Historical Judaism to those willing to think clearly about their religion.¹⁶⁷ He argued that a definite scheme of beliefs ~~was~~ intricately bound up with the philosophy of Conservative Judaism. Thereby, it eliminated its theology as a "fata morgana of eccentric legends and visionary personalities."¹⁶⁸ That is not to say, however, that the conservatives accept every new approach to the study of Scripture. In fact, Kohut claims the conservatives reject the main import of higher critical studies in the area of Scripture.¹⁶⁹ On the other hand, Conservative Jews are not hindered from investigating the Bible since one of the guiding principles of Historical Judaism involves the use of human reason to understand all areas of religion.¹⁷⁰ Thus, it may be stated

that Conservative Judaism believes in the use of reason as an essential codicil of God's commands to Israel:

We are authorized to argue and to reason; we are exhorted to take heart, meditate, search, investigate, study and practice.¹⁷¹

In the final analysis, Kohut claimed that the rationale for the existence of the Seminary was not merely to do battle with Reform Judaism, but to uphold a theological position based on the philosophy of Historical Judaism:

For the perpetuation of this noble purpose has the New York Jewish Theological Seminary been erected. For the recognition and rejuvenescence of American Judaism has our institution been founded. It shall utter forth in due time its graduates who will valiantly espouse the cause to which they are devoted.¹⁷²

This concern for scholastic achievement also manifested itself in the educational requirements of the Seminary. The Conservative leadership felt that in order for an American-orientated rabbi to be effective, he would have to be erudite in both secular and religious matters.¹⁷³ Therefore, one of the basic educational requirements set forth by the Seminary was that no student over twenty-one years of age would be admitted to the rabbinic program unless he was qualified to enter an accredited college.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, any person over twenty-five years of age was not allowed to matriculate as a rabbinic student unless he already possessed a college degree equivalent to a Bachelor of Arts degree.¹⁷⁵

In the late nineteenth century, the Seminary was recognized by Columbia College as an accredited institution for the study of Judaica.¹⁷⁶ The Trustees of Columbia accorded the Seminary the same recognition it gave to the Union Theological Seminary and the General Theological Seminary by gratuitously admitting the Jewish Theological Seminary students

into the schools of Philosophy and Political Science.¹⁷⁷ This accomplishment quickly became a source of deep pride for the Seminary's supporters. This pride is evidenced by the fact that when a question was raised by another journal regarding the scope of the Seminary's educational program, The American Hebrew retorted:

... The Seminary infuses its pupils with a full, impartial and critical knowledge of Jewish history, imbues them with an intelligent and enthusiastic love for Jewish literature, and imparts to them an accurate and reverential knowledge of Jewish Law. In addition, it exacts from them such a pursuit of secular learning as the best school, college and University facilities of the City of New York can afford.¹⁷⁸

No amount of pride in the scholastic accomplishments of their students could mitigate the Seminary leadership's need for a building to house their library and study rooms. They were aware of the fact that the Seminary's educational standards were being weakened simply because they lacked the physical facilities to educate their students.¹⁷⁹

In 1891 a series of public meetings were instituted for the purpose of rendering financial aid to the Seminary. The American Hebrew, however, lamented over the lack of public support from New York Jewry. They wrote:

The Jews of other cities have effectively organized in support of the Seminary and have contributed in far greater proportion than their brethren in this city where it is situated.¹⁸⁰

In fact, up until the time the first Seminary building was dedicated in May of 1892, Dr. Morais publicly complained that the Jews of New York did not seem as vitally interested in the success of the institution as were the Jews of Philadelphia and Baltimore.¹⁸¹

The founding fathers of the Seminary had to realize a \$10,000.00 annual budget for the maintenance of the institution.¹⁸² The problem

of raising that yearly sum, however, remained an acute one because of the Seminary's reliance on public donations.¹⁸³ With the single exception of a \$5,000 bequest by a Miss Ellen Phillips of Philadelphia, the Seminary received no outstanding donations throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century.¹⁸⁴

The lack of financial support was to plague the Seminary throughout this entire period, as evidenced by The American Hebrew's frequent lament that the institution was having difficulties meeting its annual budget. Nevertheless, a suitable home had to be found and maintained if the Conservative movement was to realize its goal as the rallying center for the defendants of Historical Judaism.¹⁸⁵

The aspirations of the Conservative leadership were realized in May of 1892, when the first Jewish Theological Seminary building was dedicated. The American Hebrew depicted this proud moment as the first real success of the Conservative movement.¹⁸⁶ This sentiment was re-echoed by the dedicatory remarks of the President of the Board of Trustees, Mr. Joseph Blumenthal:

... You will excuse a pardonable pride on my part and on the part of the friends and well-wishers of the Seminary, that we have a permanent abiding place, and that the migratory experience of the last six years has been ended. Like all new settlers or migrators, we have under difficulties attempted to pursue our work; but, at last, although modest, and not to be compared in any sense with many of the old and noble institutions which adorn this great City, yet we are proud of our new home, affording us as it does and will, for the present at least, ample facilities for our work, and promising, from that fact, the best results attainable.¹⁸⁷

However, Mr. Blumenthal was also mindful of the fact that the Seminary would be in constant need of funds in order to maintain itself:

I do earnestly beg of you, I entreat you to make this institution a part and parcel of your thought

and your efforts... I entreat you to give it that moral and material support which it deserves, which all institutions of learning deserve, but which certainly the Jewish Theological Seminary, in the Empire City of this continent not only deserves, but should amply receive.¹⁸⁸

The new Seminary building took the place of the "incommodious, ill-adapted quarters"¹⁸⁹ of the YMHA where, heretofore, many of the classes were conducted.¹⁹⁰ The physical proportions of the new building afforded the rabbinic students ample facilities for study and research. The new Seminary was located on Lexington Avenue and was fitted with classrooms, a library, meeting room, synagogue and dormitory.¹⁹¹

For the most part, the course of study at the new building was concerned with biblical scholarship.¹⁹² The only explanation for this emphasis on biblical exegesis was the fact that many of the leading conservatives were adamantly opposed to the study of higher criticism advocated by some liberal scholars. That is not to say that the study of rabbinics was neglected. On the contrary, Midrash, Codes, and Talmud were emphasized almost as much as the study of the Bible,¹⁹³ and the Seminary conducted examinations in all these areas of endeavor.

It is important to note that the Jewish Theological Seminary recognized the prerogative of respected rabbis of other theological persuasions to partake in the student examinations as examiners. For instance, Dr. Kaufman Kohler, in 1898, assisted Drs. Davidson, H. P. Mendes and Drachman in administering the annual examination of students in the Seminary.¹⁹⁴ According to The American Hebrew, Dr. Kohler's reaction concerning the proficiency of the students was most favorable:

At the close of the day's exercises, the assemblage was edified by an address from Dr. Kohler, who had taken an active part in both sessions. He expressed himself as highly delighted with the evidence of earnest work which he had seen, and with the excellent results which had been attained.¹⁹⁵

Dr. Voorsanger of San Francisco also visited the Seminary and was, likewise, invited to help administer the student examinations. His enthusiastic impression was reported in The American Hebrew:

I must say in advance, that though I came uninvited and unexpected, I was cordially welcomed and given a seat among the examiners. A young candidate for Rabbinical honors was on the rack. Six men fired questions at him. The Dutch or English Boards of Examiners would have been surprised at the absence of all ceremony from this important examination. It was sene gene, but nonetheless thorough-going and far-reaching. The candidate read and discussed three difficult "Shittoth" in Hullin in the most satisfactory manner. Then he was examined in commentaries, subsequently in the literature of the responsa, then in the "Hilkoth Shehitah" and in the mass of domestic "dinim" with which every Jewish minister should be familiar. This was but a fragment of the final examinations, and if the candidate made as creditable a showing in all other branches as he did that morning in Talmud, I would have no hesitancy in declaring him fully competent to pass on to the responsible duties of the Rabbinical office ... The impression I bore away with me from that morning's work was, that the Jewish Theological Seminary of New York deserves to be treated with more consideration than it has hitherto received.¹⁹⁶

The importance of leadership in the Conservative movement directly involved the success of the Jewish Theological Seminary. When Sabato Morais died in 1897, the Seminary seemed to have lost sight of its direction. It needed the guidance and foresight of a man of Morais' calibre--but it found no scholar in America who exhibited his charismatic qualities. The desire to elect Dr. Solomon Schechter as the new President of the Jewish Theological Seminary now became common knowledge. However, the financial difficulties of the Seminary prevented Schechter from assuming the duties of presidency.¹⁹⁷

Schechter was also needed to unite the different factions within the Conservative movement, for the hiatus in power structure was weak-

ening the influence of the Seminary. This in turn, would debilitate the financial solidarity the Seminary needed in order to exist:

What the Seminary especially needs at the present time is a scholarly head, who, in conjunction with the active business spirits...can place the institution on a firm basis of scholarship and financial prosperity. 198

The situation at this time, however, did not look promising. The failure to gain numerous adherents among the Russian immigrant community and the waning influence of the Seminary engendered The American Hebrew to publicly announce that:

There must be an awakening on the part of the officers of the Seminary, if they wish to preserve its prestige. Like the Judaism which saw itself dragged under the heels of the victorious Roman, modern Conservative Judaism rests for its preservation upon the schools that propagate its principles...Unless the officers of this Seminary, which has already proved its right to exist, tone up and increase the scope of its activity, it will certainly decline. 199

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Jewish Theological Seminary itself was in danger of becoming defunct. Without that institution, to serve as the symbol of unity for the Conservative movement, the historical school would have lost its grasp on the pulse of American Jewry. Thus, the Seminary had to be maintained if Conservative Judaism was to exist as a viable movement.

Chapter III

The guiding principles of the Conservative movement in the late nineteenth century centered around the general philosophy of Historical Judaism. The free flow of Tradition was therefore utilized as the base from which the Conservative theoreticians could formulate guidelines for Jewish practices. This approach permitted a degree of religious flexibility not found in Orthodox Judaism. However, it must be noted, that the customs and practices of the Orthodox masses predestined the theological course Conservative Judaism had to take. Hence, any aberration of religious thought that would endanger existing religious practices constituted unwarranted radicalism. Radicalism was considered as deprecating as reactionism by the historic school of thought. Both had the tendency to weaken the entire religious structure of Judaism. Whereas reactionism engendered the creation of reform movements, radicalism had to be countered by a re-examination of those practices deemed useful to the religious fabric of the people. This was the role of the Conservative movement during the latter half of the nineteenth century.²⁰⁰

The Sabbath

During this brief span of time, one religious argument in particular aroused the indignation of all tradition-minded Jews. That is, the stand some reformers took with regard to the Jewish Sabbath.²⁰¹ Led by Kaufman Kohler, the radical thinkers within the Reform camp attempted to introduce Sunday as the Jewish Sabbath.²⁰² The rationale behind this attempt to break with Tradition was that the historic Sabbath in America was being neglected alike by the adherents of traditionalism

and reform.²⁰³ The economic conditions of the times prevented synagogue attendance. It was, therefore, time to promote the ideal of the "universal Sabbath" for all peoples who wished to live in harmony and peace in a world dedicated to the principles of ethical monotheism.²⁰⁴ Hence, the reformers felt that "upon the altar of broad humanitarianism ... they would willingly sacrifice their own tribal traditions."²⁰⁵

The adherents of Conservative Judaism remained firm in their belief that the historic Sabbath was a basic principle of Judaism. Dr. DeSola Mendes, in an article entitled "Why Not Sunday" indicated that the idea of a "universal Sabbath" was indeed a noble reason for wanting to change the Sabbath day, but not valid according to the dynamics of Jewish history.²⁰⁶ To support his argument he claimed that there were three good reasons why the Sabbath could not be moved to Sunday.

In the first place, Dr. DeSola Mendes asked, why do Jews keep the Sabbath at all? The answer is rooted to the fact that Judaism was a religion borne out of the revelatory experience at Mt. Sinai.²⁰⁷ Hence, God commanded that Jews should observe the Sabbath throughout all generations as part of their covenant with God.

Since then, it is to God's express command that we owe the institution of the Sabbath as we have it, is it not clear that we are bound, if we observe it at all to observe it in the way and on the day precisely which the commandment intimates? And the day the commandment intimates quite unmistakably is the day we call Saturday.²⁰⁸

Accepting a theistic position, one would have to contend with biblical thought itself in order to do away with the centrality of the Sabbath in Judaism:

My Sabbaths, and no other Sabbaths, shall ye keep;
My selected sanctuary and none other shall ye honor;
and I, I am the Lord. That is God's veto on the
Sunday Sabbath.²⁰⁹

The second reason for not changing the day of the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday involves the recognition of the validity of Christianity. Mendes contended that since Sunday represents the day Jesus was resurrected, it would be folly on Judaism's behalf to concur that the Sabbath should commemorate an advent it does not accept.²¹⁰

The third reason for not changing the Sabbath day is the most practical one of all. The flow of history would not permit it. Christianity would not welcome a change in the Jewish Sabbath if its import only centered around the ideal of a "universal Sabbath".²¹¹ Thus ... "we would be debasing our own Sabbath and undermining the importance of the Christian Sabbath."²¹²

It is important to note, however, that Dr. DeSola Mendes' persuasive arguments against changing the Sabbath reflected the sentiments of Dr. Kaufman Kohler, uttered almost four months earlier. In August of 1891, the leading exponent of the Sunday Sabbath rescinded all prior pronouncements in favor of that issue. In fact, Dr. Kohler publicly announced that he found sufficient reasons to change his views on the subject.²¹³

The Sabbath, he claims, is one of Judaism's foremost contributions to the world. Because of this particular institution, man was given the freedom to seek physical rest from his daily toil:

It was instituted to cheer and liberate man ...
It was the first abolitionist. It declared the
bondman free; it laid down the first fundamental
principle of democracy; it disseminated the seeds
of religious truth among priest and prophet alike.²¹⁴

For the Jew, however, the Sabbath represents the matrix of his religious obligation:

Like the unity and holiness of God, the Sabbath
forms part of the Jewish Constitution, the Sinai

Covenant. As morality derives its sanctity from God, the Lawgiver, so does purity of life find its strength and shield in the Sabbath. Without the Sabbath, Judaism is a religion without God, a life without a hallowing spirit, a voyage on the stormy sea without a haven of rest, a ship without an anchor.²¹⁵

Hence, Kohler did not deny the importance of the Sabbath. In fact, he made it central to his own religious position.

Kohler's attempt to sustain the Sunday issue for almost eighteen years²¹⁶ was the result of his deep and abiding conviction that eventually all men and races could be united "upon the common ground of a pure faith in God and men in all its grand simplicity."²¹⁷ He could not believe that a mere day designated on the calendar as Saturday or Sunday would hinder men of faith from pursuing the goal of Messianic peace.²¹⁸ Thus, his motivation for supporting the Sunday Sabbath ideal was borne out of his conviction that the enlightenment of mankind was at hand and that the evolution of man's spirit demanded growth in the spiritual realm of life as well as the physical one.

Kohler's hopes, however, were dashed on the rocks of prejudice. The enlightenment of mankind was a mere dream and not a reality:

How rudely have we all been aroused from our dream! How shockingly were all the illusions of the beginning of the 19th century destroyed by the facts developed at its close! What a mockery has this so-called Christian civilization turned out to be! What a sham and fraud has this era of tolerance and enlightenment become! ... Without cause, without guilt of their own, hundreds of thousands of Jews are driven from their homes in the middle of the night, not as if they had lived there long before the Russian bear had laid his bloody clutches upon the land, but as if they were foes and fiends, the relentless tyrant on the throne not sparing the child in the womb nor the aged nearing the grave.²¹⁹

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Moreover, the responsibility for history's step backward must be laid at the feet of Christianity. For in the face of these atrocities against the Jews, the Christian churches maintained absolute silence. Thus, he felt, the spiritual leadership of Christianity was either ineffective in the moral sphere of life, or else it did not care what was happening to the kindred race of their Saviour.

Neither the Pope, whose lips overflow with pity on the lot of both the laboring man and of the bondsmen in Africa, nor the leaders of the Protestant churches, have a word of condemnation for the persecution of these Jews. Now is this, pray, the time for a speedy realization of Israel's Messianic hope? Does this generation relapse into barbarism permit the Jew to seek alliances with the liberal wings of Christianity, whose liberality is very far as yet from lifting them above narrow prejudices and race hatred? Dare we, in the face of such great disappointments, recognize the predominance of Christian culture by accepting the Christian Sunday as our day of rest, in place of the ancient Jewish Sabbath? ... No! Let us declare before the world that we hope and long for a universal Sabbath day, not stained by the blood of persecution.²²⁰

The idea of a universal Sabbath therefore contained both theological and historical significance for Kohler and his followers. Theology, however, could not overcome the flow of history. It must adjust its views of man and God in the light of the events shaping the mundane destiny of mankind. Hence, Kohler now felt that he must rebuild the theological importance of the Sabbath in order to protect the historical significance of that day for the Jew. The Jew must never again be willing to throw out the theological precedence of the Sabbath day for the unpredictable processes of history:

Our faith, our hope, therefore, must be bound up with the sign of the old covenant, the Sabbath, until history will put the seal of perfection upon the completed work of mankind and proclaim the earth as the holy mountain of God and man

as its king, the vice-regent of the Ruler on high. Which Sabbath will then obtain the victory? Which ring will then prove to be the genuine one? We leave that to God to decide, and in the meantime we wait and hope.²²¹

Reform Judaism now had the obligation to restore the beauty of the Sabbath as a symbol of devotion to God.²²² The pristine idea of hallowing the Sabbath as a day of spiritual contemplation and physical rest had to once again be imbued into the thinking of every Jew--both traditional and progressive.²²³ Even the Reform Jew should refrain from work on the Sabbath. It would not, Kohler argued, be considered a stigma on his concern for acceptance by the larger community:

We must, with united forces rally around the sacred Sabbath. We can, and we must, make the influence of the Jew felt upon the great markets of the world and force the mercantile world to recognize the Jewish Sabbath as a day of rest. Does not the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Jewish Day of Atonement, stop the wheels of business and silence the din and noise of the money exchange once a year? Why should the Jew not throw his whole power in the balance in favor of the still holier Sabbath, which is a loud protest against the worship of the earthly powers, and the pledge and promise of a world united in peace and love? The time has arrived for a universal effort to reconquer the lost Sabbath of the Jew. We cannot but gain in the world's respect, in our own self-esteem, materially and spiritually, by a restoration of the pristine Jewish Sabbath. And instead of lessening its powerful hold upon the people, Reformed Judaism must do its utmost in making the Sabbath resonant with the victory of the Jewish cause over its assailants ... The question of form and reform should no longer interfere in matters pertaining to the very essence and vitality of the Jew.²²⁴

There is nothing wrong, Kohler insisted, in experimenting with various approaches to one's religion. If we did not do so, religion would remain a stagnant and ineffective way to serve the Deity.²²⁵

Therefore, it was not wrong in any sense of the word for Reform Jews to embark on the Sunday Sabbath journey for the sake of promoting peace among men of faith everywhere. Their journey, however, was unsuccessful. Hence, they should be cognizant of the fact that it is their duty as Jews to reinstate those symbols of the Sabbath that had to be forsaken when they journeyed forth on their new Sabbath mission.²²⁶ For example, Reform Jews should reinstate the family reunion on Friday evenings and the Kiddush alike as an effective way to hallow the Sabbath day, for these are two important ways of strengthening the symbolic significance of the Sabbath.²²⁷

Dr. Kohler raised the rhetorical question of just how successful was the Sunday Sabbath movement? In terms of numbers, he was forced to admit that it was successful. But, he pointed out, the Sunday service suffered from a lack of Jewish topics.²²⁸ The rabbis had to rely on their own homiletical skill to "awaken the dormant spark of religious fervor ..."²²⁹ Moreover, Kohler reported that:

The principles of Jewish faith have nowhere taken a deeper hold on Sunday audiences. On the contrary, laxity appears to be the result. Scepticism and agnosticism are on the increase.²³⁰

Dr. Kohler's willingness to admit that the Sabbath had to remain a primary concern for the Jew was hailed by The American Hebrew as an indication of the reformer's sincerity in the ideals he espoused.²³¹ In the past, his belief in the validity of the Sunday Sabbath had been evidenced by his strenuous and somewhat successful efforts in its behalf.²³² The American Hebrew concurred that, numerically, the Sunday Sabbath was most successful, but it also points out that the superficiality of the service was evident to all who attended.²³³ It was especially noted by Dr. Kohler, who had nurtured this service from the time of its intro-

duction until the moment he realized its harmful effects:

... the sincerity of Dr. Kohler was not content with that superficial result, and hence the suspension of the Sunday services in that congregation.²³⁴

It should be noted, however, that not all of Dr. Kohler's Reform colleagues agreed with his prognosis of the Sunday Sabbath situation. Their rebuttal of Dr. Kohler's argument took two distinct forms. The first was advocated by Dr. Joseph Silverman, in a sermon delivered at Temple Emanu-El. In this sermon, Dr. Silverman did not deny or reject the fact that the traditional Sabbath is to be preferred over the Sunday Sabbath.²³⁵ Unfortunately, the Jew was experiencing social mobility in the modern world for the first time in centuries, making it necessary to supplement certain practices.²³⁶ This does not mean that the time-cherished traditions are forgotten or replaced by a completely new phenomenon,²³⁷ but, rather, that the love and devotion that was formerly exhibited for the old tradition is transferred to a more expedient approach in order to perpetuate its essence.²³⁸ In the case of the Sabbath, it became evident that most modern Jews could not attend services on Saturday; therefore, the Reform temples merely followed the Orthodox approach of providing services on days other than on Saturday.²³⁹ This is not to say that the Saturday service was discontinued. It does, however, impel loyal Jews to gather on a day convenient for worshipping, so that they may join in common prayer.²⁴⁰

Those temples that regard the eight o'clock service on Friday evening as a legitimate Sabbath service are sadly mistaken.²⁴¹ Services on Friday should, if they are in accord with Jewish Tradition, begin at sundown. This is precisely what Temple Emanu-El advocated.²⁴² Hence, it is erroneous for one to consider Sunday services as a non-

Jewish practice, especially if that temple also conducts a service on Saturday:

In Temple Emanu-El, the experience has been that, since the inauguration of Sunday services, there has been a perceptible increase in the attendance at worship both Sabbath morning and Friday evening.

It is also natural that Sunday morning services should be beneficial to Judaism for they attract ... such people who would not be drawn to the synagogue at all, or very rarely.²⁴³

The second type of argument against the abolition of the Sunday Sabbath was advocated by Dr. Emil G. Hirsch. In a letter to The American Hebrew, Dr. Hirsch protests against using Sunday as merely another day of prayer. It is, according to the Reform rabbi, fallacious and hypocritical to assume that one can observe two Sabbaths rather than one.²⁴⁴ He feels that it is extremely important to set aside one day of the week for community prayer.²⁴⁵ It is also important to provide an adequate time and place for public worship. Hence, the Sunday Sabbath should be the logical choice of those spiritual leaders who strive for sincerity in this area of endeavor.

Thus, Sunday must squarely and openly be made the Sabbath and, as such, invested with all the solemnity which, with our great grandfathers, the old historical Sabbath did possess.²⁴⁶

The American Hebrew retorted by agreeing with Dr. Hirsch that there can only be one Sabbath in Judaism.²⁴⁷ Two Sabbaths present a logical inconsistency to the mind when one realizes the very meaning of a Sabbath.²⁴⁸ That is, the Sabbath is a special day of the week devoted to contemplation and prayer. Furthermore, it would have been quixotic to deny that Judaism was not facing a dire crisis with regard to this issue.²⁴⁹ The very survival of Judaism as an historical con-

tinuum was at stake. Without the historical Sabbath, there would be no rationale for keeping any of the holy days or festivals.²⁵⁰ The American Hebrew, therefore, felt it its duty to question the sincerity of Hirsch's proposal:

In all seriousness, we must ask ourselves whether Judaism is to be maintained as a mere perfunctory institution, with an annual demand of a few hours attention ... or whether it shall be as of old, an actual vital force, working for the moral elevation of our people.²⁵¹

During the last half of the nineteenth century, the threat of the Sunday Sabbath presented conservatism's greatest theological battle. For, if the Sunday Sabbath could become invested with the same type of feeling the historical Sabbath manifested in the past, then Judaism in America would certainly be irrevocably divided.

The question concerning the Sabbath was not an easy one to solve. Reformers as well as conservatives recognized the imminent danger of the Sunday Sabbath movement. Therefore, it is not surprising to find rabbis, of the calibre of Dr. Louis Grossman of Detroit, making a passionate plea for the observance of the historical Sabbath:

I do not believe that much essential Jewish theology is involved in the matter, but I know that Jewish history and the continuity of it are obviously implicated in so abrupt a transference of the time for worshipful assembly, and it may involve a change of conception of the Sabbath.²⁵²

It should be noted here, that Dr. Grossman was, at one time, an advocate of the Sunday Sabbath movement. Moreover, the special services held in his temple on Sunday were successful from a statistical standpoint. It was unsuccessful, however, from the standpoint of improving the religious commitments of his people.²⁵³

This argument, The American Hebrew points out, supports the proposition that the Sunday service was merely a kind of accomodation to the existing economic conditions of the times.²⁵⁴ That the reformers were not really interested in the deeper significance of the Sabbath is evident. In fact, one could go so far as to claim that the radicals who instituted these services were opportunists who took advantage of the peoples' willingness to follow the path of least resistance in matters of religion.²⁵⁵ Of course, it must also be realized that many of the Jewish journals of that time supported the Sunday Sabbath movement as a legitimate cause mainly because Sunday was the only day when the majority of the people could attend the services. Such newspapers as The Jewish Messenger,²⁵⁶ the Tidings of Rochester,²⁵⁷ The Hebrew Observer of Cleveland,²⁵⁸ and The Reform Advocate of Chicago,²⁵⁹ advocated the Sunday Sabbath as a legitimate successor to the historical Sabbath.

With the exceptions of Dr. Kohler and Rabbi Grossman, the only other significant leader of Reform Judaism to speak out definitively against the Sunday Sabbath was Dr. Isaac M. Wise, the President of Hebrew Union College.²⁶⁰ Dr. Wise claimed that there was no ground for such a theological position to be found in any of the teachings in Judaism. During a speech in Cleveland, he spoke in a vigorous language, saying:

A rabbi in Israel takes upon himself the solemn duty to teach, expound, promulgate and preserve Judaism intact as taught by Abraham, Moses and the Prophets, as the history and literature of Israel presents and reflects it. Any argument based upon the ever changing tenor of criticism, science or philosophy, antagonizing the Judaism of three thousand years of evidence is null and void for the rabbi in Israel, for he has not the duty to justify what is now called science or philosophy; his duty is to teach, expound, promulgate and preserve Judaism. If he cannot do

that, it becomes his duty as an honest man
to step down and out.²⁶¹

In 1899, The American Hebrew attempted to investigate the Sabbath problem in terms of the three different approaches to Judaism.²⁶² First, Reform Judaism and Orthodox Judaism attempted to improve the religious situation by applying power from without.²⁶³ That is, in the case of Reform Judaism one must realize that its assimilatory nature provided the secularists in the movement to rationalize that economic and social conditions coterminously warranted changes in the religious realm of life.²⁶⁴ Thus, many Reform rabbis quickly concurred with those who advocated a Sunday Sabbath as the most rational approach to this problem.²⁶⁵

Secondly, the Orthodox approach was to exert religious pressure on the people by means of religious laws, but without ever attempting to probe the reasons that caused their neglect of the Sabbath.²⁶⁶ This approach also had to end in failure, for it disregarded the peoples' yearning for clarification and improvement.²⁶⁷

The Conservative approach was, by far, the most sensible, since it utilized the dynamics of Historical Judaism. That is, it searched out the feelings of its adherents in order to realize just how deep the emotional level was:

What is the force of love that will not submit
to sacrifice? What stuff is our love for God
made of, if we will not sacrifice anything for
him?²⁶⁸

Thus, Conservative Judaism attempted to use the power of religion in a new fashion--i.e. through a pragmatic investigation of Judaism. "Reform Judaism, and, for that matter, Orthodox Judaism cannot build up, revive, inspire and improve by only power from without. It must use the power from within."²⁶⁹

By 1899, according to The American Hebrew, the trend away from secularism in religion was beginning to take effect.²⁷⁰ In the earlier part of the nineteenth century, Darwin's theory of evolution and the conflict between religion and science shook the very foundations of organized religion, but by the turn of the century, a more conservative approach to religious practices was being reinforced on the leadership level as well as the popular one.²⁷¹ Hence, it was the duty of the conservatives to take advantage of this favorable situation by securing greater observance of those traditions that had been wantonly discarded:

First in importance among such observances is the Sabbath. We are not so deluded as to believe that because of the more favorable existing attitude toward religion, the difficulties attendant upon Sabbath observance have been dispelled.²⁷²

Conservatism's concern over the Sabbath question manifested itself in the leadership role it took to enhance Sabbath observance. Through the efforts of individual rabbis, questions regarding Sabbath observance were confronted in a forthright manner.²⁷³ For instance, Dr. Kohut and Dr. H. P. Mendes stressed the need for recapturing the Sabbath spirit. Dr. H. P. Mendes, in an open letter to his congregation asked the congregants not to ride on the Sabbath, and to refrain from shopping, sewing and embroidering. Also, in order to enhance the spirit of the day, he urged that the family should join together in reading Jewish literature and attending these worship services together.²⁷⁴

Strangely enough, The American Hebrew considered the actions of women the prime reason why the Sabbath was often times broken in the traditional Jewish homes.²⁷⁵ They claimed that Jewish women needed to realize a sense of duty toward their religion. Thus, if they would stop shopping on Saturday, the first step toward a more comprehensive understanding of the Sabbath might ensue.²⁷⁶

A concerted effort on the part of the conservatives gave impetus to the founding of an organization dedicated to engender a more somber attitude toward Sabbath observance by traditional-minded Jews.²⁷⁷ Notwithstanding the Sunday Sabbath influence, the conservatives also recognized the economic necessity of many people working on the Sabbath who would ordinarily refrain from all such endeavors.²⁷⁸ Yet, some sort of reconciliation between an individual's religious commitment to Judaism and his economic needs was necessary if the Sabbath was to maintain its sacred position in the religion:

To what extent this can be done will only be known when some zealous effort is put forth to organize the leaders in the various branches of trade and industry, for the purpose of effecting an arrangement whereby some settle policy of Sabbath observance would be possible.²⁷⁹

Moreover, such an organization might find it possible to exert pressure within the political realm in order to secure fair Sabbath legislation for those citizens who observed Saturday as the Sabbath.²⁸⁰ For at that time, there was evidence that people observing the seventh day as the Sabbath were molested and subjected to iniquitous demands in the nature of bribes in order to secure immunity from police persecution.²⁸¹

The American Hebrew contended that the time was right for such an organization to effectuate worthwhile results in this area of concern.²⁸² Movements in the past that were dedicated to the general observance of the Sabbath were, it is true, unsuccessful.²⁸³ Yet, with the right organizational approach to the question, the people would at least be aware of the recreant nature of their acts against the Sabbath.²⁸⁴

Approximately fifty people met for the express purpose of devising an appropriate schema for the organization.²⁸⁵ The Honorable Joseph

Blumenthal was elected chairman.²⁸⁶ Dr. Drachman, who drafted the Sabbath appeal, acted as secretary.²⁸⁷ The first order of business for the new organization was to formulate a constitution and by-laws as well as find a proper name for the group. Arguments pro and con were advanced by Drs. Maisner and Wise, the Rev. Stephen Wise, Dr. H. P. Mendes, Mr. Max Cohen, the Honorable Joseph Blumenthal and Mr. Ottinger.²⁸⁸ After much discussion, Dr. Wise suggested that they utilize the organizational structure advocated by Dr. Kohut when he introduced such a program into his temple.²⁸⁹

The name voted upon was "The Jewish Sabbath Observance Association."²⁹⁰ The primary constitutional scope of the society concerned itself with finding ways to render material aid to people who desired to observe the Sabbath, but found themselves economically deprived when they refrained from working on the seventh day.²⁹¹ The main point of disagreement, however, centered upon the advisability of the clause, "All Jews or Jewesses in sympathy with the objects of the organization shall be eligible as members."²⁹² The chairman, Mr. Blumenthal, and a small minority of followers argued that only Sabbath observers should be allowed to join the organization,²⁹³ while the Rev. Drs. H. P. Mendes, Drachman, Messrs. Neumark and Bullowa supported the Constitutional Committee's liberal recommendation that all those in sympathy with the organization should be eligible for membership.²⁹⁴

At the second meeting of the Jewish Sabbath Observance Association, the following officers and trustees were voted into office:

David M. Piza, President; Max Cohen, First Vice-President; H. P. Mendes, Second Vice-President; Percival Menken, Secretary; A. J. Bloomberg, Treasurer; Drs. B. Drachman, F. DeSola Mendes, Directors; A. Neumark, Rev. Stephen Wise, Honorable Joseph E.

Newberger, Messrs. Nathan Hirsch, Abraham E. Rothstein, Max and Moses Ottinger, Alfred Bullowa, Julius Dukas, Adolph Cohen, Louis Mirsky, L. Napoleon Levy, Jacob Louis and Henry Balais, Trustees.²⁹⁵

The Constitution of the Association represented a brief statement of its goals:

1. Name - This organization shall be known as the Jewish Sabbath Association.
2. Object - To further the object of the Biblical Sabbath.
3. Method - To awaken public sentiment by publication, the press, the pulpit; to seek additional legislation where necessary, and vigilantly to oppose unfavorable legislation; to keep the one issue distinct from all other questions; to employ private remonstrance and appeal when practicable; to enlist, by justice of the measures taken, the cooperation of good citizens; to establish an Employment Bureau in the interests of the Association; to afford temporary relief or assistance with tools or goods, when necessary and possible, to applicants of the Employment Bureau; to foster the formation of Sabbath Observance Committees in congregations by their respective ministers; to further the organization of Sabbath Observance Committees in the various professions and trades; and by such other methods as may from time to time be revised.²⁹⁶

Moreover, the pledge signed by interested parties attested to the fact that the Association sought influence in the sphere of Sabbath observance as depicted in the Constitution:

Being in full sympathy with the object and method of the above organization as set forth in the Constitution, _____ hereby apply for membership in the Association, and authorize you to affix _____ name to the Constitution.²⁹⁷

The American Hebrew took up the banner of the Association and wrote numerous articles favoring its continued existence. They constantly stressed that there were no dues set by the Association, that it would

subsist on voluntary contributions instead.²⁹⁸ However, the most popular experiment of the new Sabbath society, was the establishment of the employment bureau.²⁹⁹ It urged employees who were in sympathy to register their firm's name and address so they could help observant Jews obtain useful employment without sacrificing their religious ideals.³⁰⁰ Moreover, the possibility existed that if enough Jews were employed in a particular trade, some sort of work arrangement might be secured whereby observant Jews could make up the time they missed on Saturday.³⁰¹

Unfortunately, it must be noted that the Association was handicapped in that it was supported solely by voluntary contributions.³⁰² In order for the Jewish Sabbath Observance Association to have met all the commitments outlined in the constitution, an annual income of at least two thousand dollars was necessary.³⁰³ Funds for the following areas of concern were dependent on public support: the employment bureau, the issue of tracts publicizing the Association's purpose, the organization of the Association in various trades and professions, the formation of congregational Sabbath-observing leagues and the protection of Sabbath observers who sought employment on Sundays.³⁰⁴

Mr. David M. Piza, the president of the organization, reported, at an assembly of members of the Association, that within the span of six months, the membership of the Association had grown to five hundred members.³⁰⁵ Also, seven hundred and twenty business establishments were closed on the Sabbath, at the same time, employment was secured for a few Sabbath observers.³⁰⁶ Also, Dr. H. P. Mendes reported that he interviewed several large business establishments.³⁰⁷ According to The American Hebrew, only the Ehrlich Bros. gave assurance that if a Jew desired to remain away from the premises on Saturday, they would respect

his views.³⁰⁸ However, due to the firm's own pecuniary responsibilities, the Sabbath observers would have to submit to a one-sixth diminution of their weekly salary.³⁰⁹

Membership in the Jewish Sabbath Observance Association increased rapidly. Thus, by the end of the first year, the Association listed a membership of over a thousand names.³¹⁰ Moreover, the society deemed it necessary to secure an office in order to accommodate its members seeking employment, as well as the employers desiring the employment of Sabbath observers.³¹¹ In fact, the number of registered employers had risen from seven hundred to nine hundred and fifty, and eleven jobs were found for strict Sabbath observers.³¹²

By the year 1900, however, the Jewish Sabbath Observance Association could no longer sustain the financial responsibility of its annual budget.³¹³ The services it offered had to be terminated, mainly because the immigrant community with whom they were endeavoring to assist in the realm of Sabbath observance, lacked the finances to re-appropriate the Association on a yearly basis.³¹⁴

It is important to note that the need for an association dedicated to remind the Jewish public of its obligations with regard to the Sabbath did not cease coterminously with the termination of the Sabbath Observance Association. A new organization drawn along less formal lines than the old society made its appearance in February of the year 1900.³¹⁵ Its statement of principles depicted a new emphasis in the area of Sabbath observance. No longer was it overtly concerned with the mundane problems of the Sabbath observant; rather, it stressed the religious obligations of Jews to sanctify the Sabbath as part of the revealed Decalogue.

The prevailing public desecration of our holy Sabbath has become such a crying evil, and the neglect of its observance is proving so deplorably destructive of that religious family life and domestic happiness once again an effort to stem the tide that is leading our people to destruction, notwithstanding their recognized material prosperity!

To many of us, who are yet inspired by love for our holy religion and patriotic devotion to our people, it seems a most criminal apathy to remain indifferent and unaffected by this dead-long desertion from a fundamental command of the Decalogue, and, feeling it our duty to make a strenuous effort to recall those who now neglect the Fourth Commandment back--to its observance --to duty and to greater happiness, we earnestly and hopefully unite in pledging ourselves to the proper observance and consecration of the holy Sabbath, and use all honorable efforts to induce others to do likewise.³¹⁶

The language of these principles revealed a certain degree of success in the area of Sabbath observance. That is, the vigorous condemnation of Sabbath neglect indicated that there was sufficient agreement among the Jewish masses as to the importance of that day. Otherwise, a more innocuous statement would have been desirable in order to plead the case for the new organization. This is evidenced by the fact that Cyrus L. Salzberger, in a letter to The American Hebrew, reported that the demise of the Sunday Sabbath issue was at hand.³¹⁷ Even Dr. Hirsch of Chicago admitted that "he has very nearly reached the conclusion that Sunday-Sabbath is a failure ... "³¹⁸

Hence, no longer did the Conservative leadership have to content themselves with a defensive role with regard to this controversy. The overwhelming number of East European Jews immigrating to America now exerted numerical hegemony over the Jews of Portuguese and German descent.³¹⁹ Furthermore, it was recognized by the conservatives that the Russian immigrant exhibited a theological propensity for the traditions of

Judaism.³²⁰ Therefore, Conservative Judaism believed it could play a supportive role in perpetuating the importance of the Sabbath.

The Synod

Conservative Judaism's concern for proper Sabbath observance received only the tangential support of the Jewish populace. The Sabbath, as Historical Judaism interpreted it was not being honored.³²¹ The fight over the Sunday Sabbath controversy could never again be a salient feature of those arguments the supporters of the traditional Sabbath propounded in order to explain the failure of Sabbath observance; rather, there came a growing recognition that a united front on the part of the three segments of Judaism was necessary if new vigor was to be inculcated into the apathetic attitude of Jews toward observance of the Sabbath.³²² Religionists who were deeply concerned with this state of affairs, ventured forth to propose and support the idea of calling a Jewish synod for the sake of preserving Judaism in America:

The Sabbath was not being observed and Historical Judaism was honored in the breach. Whatever the reason--despair or anxiety--the synod proposal once again appeared on the agenda of American Jewish religious life as a way to stir interest where apathy reigned.³²³

Rabbi H. G. Enelow, in 1900, investigated the origin and purposes of the "synod" in Jewish life. Precedence for calling a synod in America, he concluded, was well substantiated, for throughout the history of Judaism, a synod was called "at every historical juncture."³²⁴

The Elders, the Great Synod, the Gerusia, the Synedrion of Jerusalem, the Synedrion at Yamnia and its successors, the Babylonian Synedria, the stately series of Medieval Synods spanning five centuries at least, the Synods of Lithuania and Poland, the Modern Synods--their records, you may be sure, would make the best synopsis of the development of Judaism, not to mention their share in our secular history.³²⁵

To be sure, many religionists advocated the convening of a synod in America long before the Sabbath question and the general apathy of American Jews toward religion prompted the Reform and Conservative leaders to press for its convocation.³²⁶

However, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, new efforts were made to unify the various segments of Judaism under one banner. In 1892, The American Hebrew condemned the idea that Judaism did not possess the innate strength and depth to furnish a common meeting ground for all exponents of the Jewish faith.³²⁷ Without the unification of all Jews, the mission of Judaism would be a failure.³²⁸ How could they influence the thought and conduct of the world if they advocated three different Judaisms? Of what value would their mission be?³²⁹ Moreover, the dissensions in the religious camp of Israel had hindered the internal development of Judaism.³³⁰ Instead of evolving a religion concerned with man's deepest yearnings for God, Judaism in America sought to magnify its difficulties and then remain content in its division.³³¹

"Those who believe that the carrying on of the work of Judaism is performing the work entrusted to it by Divine commission, cannot but realize that not even the union of the divided sons of Israel is an impossibility if the task is undertaken in the right way."³³²

In 1894, The American Hebrew again asserted its position with regard to a synod.³³³ However, this article went beyond the calling of a synod in order to substantiate the philosophical position of "the chosen people". It called for a synod composed of the leading scholars from ~~the~~ Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism, to discuss frankly and openly those areas of concern that separate believing Jews in America.³³⁴ It would be understood that the synod would not meet in order

to defend any particular theological position lest it embarrass the ideological position of any group.³³⁵ Instead, they would meet as a holy convocation without fear of exposing ideological weaknesses or strengths, for there would be no notoriety attached to these meetings,³³⁶ nor would they be committed to support the majority opinion.³³⁷ In the main, it would be an assemblage where:

... Kohler, Kohut and Jacob Joseph could discuss the current religious problems of Israel, strive to come to some understanding on as much as they could find to agree upon, and to shake hands and go their several ways in peace over those questions as to which no common meeting ground could be found.³³⁸

It is important to note, that The American Hebrew was supported in this endeavor by the American Israelite,³³⁹ which also suggested that a synod was necessary in order to bring various factions together to discuss matters of vital importance.³⁴⁰

Perhaps the strongest and most passionate plea for a synod was proposed by the reformer, Kaufman Kohler,³⁴¹ when before the Central Conference of American Rabbis he pleaded:

The time for strife and for party division is over. We need consolidation. My message is: A United Israel! Let all differences of opinion be waived. Let all wrangling and bickering between Reform and Orthodoxy, between Conservative and Radical, between East and West, in pulpit address, cease once and for all. Let us stand as one man for an undivided Judaism. There is no orthodoxy or heterodoxy in our Confession. Whoever follows the battle cry: Sh'ma Israel, is a Jew. Mark well! There is no plural in the verb Sh'ma--hear, no plural to the noun Israel. There is but one Israel. The people sent forth to proclaim God's unity to the world throughout the ages should show but one solid front to the nations. One God, one humanity and one Israel--this is our creed--we have no other.³⁴²

The workings of this synod would follow the conceptual scheme of past synodical establishments such as existed in the time of Hillel and

Shammai.³⁴³ In that way, reasonable changes in Jewish Law could be secured for the benefit of all Jews.³⁴⁴ Both consciously and unconsciously, the majority of Jews have discontinued a number of traditional observances that render their retainment an undue burden on the people.³⁴⁵ Traditions would not be neglected for convenience sake if the people believed in the efficacy of those practices.³⁴⁶ Moreover, one should realize that not all of Reform Judaism's practices were congenial to the Jewish spirit.³⁴⁷ Reform's appeal to reason as the final arbiter in matters of religion had impaired "the feeling of reverence and humility, the sense of responsibility and solidarity among the modern Jews."³⁴⁸

What is after all the gain in having big temples filled to overflowing with spell-bound listeners to enrapturing oratory? Is religion the gainer? Have Sunday attendances changed the lives of young men for the better? Has the Jew in his heart of hearts been touched and led to a purer and holier life, to a life that would lead the world by its exemplary priestly sanctity?³⁴⁹

Hence, all the divisionary factors of Judaism had to be discarded by a fair and impartial study of the religion, which took into consideration the demands of reason as well as the emotional needs of the Jewish people.

Kohler recognized that the immigration factor would eventually play an important role in determining the impetus of religion in the life of American Jews.³⁵⁰ According to Kohler, the next twenty years would determine the fate of American Judaism.³⁵¹ The Russian element, that was undergoing the process of Americanization, might not only reject traditionalism because of the element of sequaciousness, but would very likely reject religion in its entirety.³⁵²

In the forefront of Kohler's perceptive analysis of the Americanization process of the Russian immigrant was the idea that Reform Judaism was already geared to those who were Americanized. Hence, there would have been little opportunity for the immigrant population to understand the dynamics of Reform Judaism's liberal thrust.³⁵³ How, for instance, could Reform explain its liberality unless viewed from the perspective of the liberal religious thought that was permeating the thinking of American intellectuals. "Our Reform ideas will as little impress them as they did the Nationalist Graetz or any of our brethren of Portuguese descent. Reform to them means not Judaism spiritualized, but, as it did to Graetz and others, Judaism Christianized."³⁵⁴

The answer, as Kohler understood it, rested in "wise and conservative methods ..."³⁵⁵ That is, to become more comprehensive in nature and scope so that freedom of religious expression would become an integral part of the movement's philosophy.³⁵⁶ This would allow a continuum of religious ideas about ritual and tradition to exist without dividing the house of Israel.³⁵⁷

The necessary step for the reformers to take for the rebuilding of a united Israel would first involve a change of name. Instead of retaining the separatist title "Reform Judaism", the members of the Central Conference of American Rabbis should decide to substitute it with the name "Progressive Judaism".³⁵⁸ The comprehensiveness of this name would allow the proponents of Historical Judaism and the theological liberals of Reform Judaism to maintain the dignity of Judaism, as a religion mindful of the past, present and future:

We need both a power working for expansion
and assimilation, and a power working for
stability ...³⁵⁹

Historical Judaism, therefore, was equated with Progressive Judaism.³⁶⁰ Both recognized the same desire to progress according to the needs of the people.³⁶¹ The problem thus far centered around the question of determining the extent of these religious needs. Every movement needs two points of view--one directed to the past, and the other striving for the future.³⁶² Alone, neither Reform nor Conservative Judaism could capture the interests and loyalties of American Jews who would not accept an either/or explanation of religion.³⁶³ Religion must be comprehensive if it is to be effective, and Judaism can only be effective if it is one religion:

...in our theological teachings let us be the first to drop party colors and raise the flag of Judaism all the higher. There is no such thing as an Orthodox or Reform Jewish Science. Science has neither color nor party. Historical study is the study of progress. Theological study is the study of that which is permanent and eternal. Both must go hand in hand...As the rays of light of the sun are reflected in the manifold colors and hues of the rainbow, so is God's majesty mirrored in the many views and conceptions, the various creeds and philosophical systems of man and ages. Israel stands between them all for the idea of Unity, the One God, for the One Humanity, and so should we today stand before the world, not divided, but one Israel, in view of the common cause of God and mankind. ³⁶⁴

Kaufman Kohler's plea for the unification of Judaism opened the door wide for frank discussion on the subject by conservatives and reformers alike. The belief that an American synod could successfully cut across party lines was advocated by such men as Meldola DeSola, Maurice H. Harris, Isaac M. Wise and Sabato Morais. Meldola DeSola of Montreal, for instance, insisted that the history of Judaism was replete with synodical meetings.³⁶⁵ Whenever the exigencies of the time demanded a synod, Jewish leadership was quick to respond.³⁶⁶ In

fact, "the non-existence of such a body had given rise to many deplorable evils."³⁶⁷ With the conceiving of a synod, perhaps even those individuals who sought to change religious Law in the past would bow to the dictates of the synod.³⁶⁸ But, at the present time, he claimed, the abandonment of religious institutions engendered anarchical elements into the religion of Israel.³⁶⁹ Thus:

Laws respected by one class of Jews are rejected by another, and an Eastern Jew feels that he is a stranger in many a Western Jewish land.³⁷⁰

The necessity of Jewish unification was recognized by the Orthodox Conference held in New York in June of 1898, when it expressed itself in favor of a synod.³⁷¹ Unlike the Kohler proposal, however, the Orthodox plan favored a synod that would have the authority to pass restrictive measures against dissident Jews who refused to bow to its decisions.³⁷² Such a clause would be necessary if the synod was ever to enact changes in religious Laws.³⁷³

Another important reason for the convening of a synod was the Zionist controversy.³⁷⁴ It was believed that as Zionism extended its sphere of influence, it would begin to speak for world Jewry:

Another circumstance that is likely to hasten the formation of a synod is the holding of the great Zionist conventions. If Zionism spreads as rapidly in the near future as it has within the past eighteen months, a Zionist Congress will be to all intents and purposes a Jewish Parliament.³⁷⁵

Moreover, the step from a Jewish Parliament to a Jewish Synod would not be such a long one.³⁷⁶

Maurice H. Harris also advocated a synod to control the religious life of American Jews.³⁷⁷ However, it was his contention that Orthodox Jews were united in matters of theology; therefore, there would be no need to include them in a synod desiring to innovate forms of Jewish practice:

As in the past, it finds its ultimate authority in the Talmud, or, better still, in the final redaction of Talmud law, in the Schulchan Aruch. Today there are some dead letters in the Orthodox code, there are some lines of differences between the Orthodox proper and those called by way of distinction ultra-Orthodox, as for instance, with regard to the wearing of paes or ringlets, as to the cutting of the hair of the bride, as to the rigidity of Sabbath ceremonial ... not only during worship, but at all times; and, in brief, as to the degree of strictness of all minutiae of the vast Jewish ceremonial. This slight difference of degree can really take care of itself.³⁷⁸

Orthodoxy was totally involved in the traditional practices of the past and would not come to terms in any way with the modern world. Therefore, orthodoxy and reform represented two distinct schools of thought that could never be reconciled.

Harris believed that both ways of thinking engendered serious problems for their adherents. If Orthodox Judaism faced the problem of assimilation, then Reform Judaism faced the problem of secularism. Of the two, Reform Judaism had even a more serious problem in that it had no authoritative text by which those Jews adhering to its fundamental beliefs could live by.³⁷⁹ Many suggestions concerning the conduct of Reform Jews had been presented by the leading reformers of the day, but none possessed that "touch of holiness" so characteristic of the Orthodox rabbis.³⁸⁰

The policy structure of Reform Judaism had always rejected the idea of a religious hierarchy. Although Harris felt that this was sagacious on their part, he was aware that the lack of centrality of authority often created a state of anarchy within the Reform ranks.³⁸¹ Reform, like orthodoxy, needed guidelines for its adherents to follow.³⁸²

In Reform Judaism there was an anastomosis between confusion and

religious ignorance. Because each congregation was a law unto itself, questions concerning fundamental credal beliefs were often expunged on the grounds that religion was a private matter.³⁸³ Thus:

There is much uncertainty and confusion in the Reform Jewish mind as to the burying of Christians in Jewish cemeteries and the burying of Jews in Christian cemeteries, as to the conditions of admitting a proselyte, and as to whether the Abrahamic rite should be waived in the case of an adult male. Many are at a loss to know whether Reform absolutely prohibits the eating of leaven on Passover, or only commands the eating of Matzoth with leaven. When it comes to the question of what constitutes the breaking of the Sabbath, we are all at sea. There are absolutely no recognized Reform Jewish laws with regard to proper Jewish practice.³⁸⁴

Lastly, he asked the question of just how much authority does a rabbi have in Reform Judaism?³⁸⁵ A congregation, through no fault of its own, is subject to the vagaries and errors of each new rabbi that occupies its pulpit.³⁸⁶ On the other hand, important changes in ceremony may be enacted by a congregational majority vote or by a ritual committee composed of a half dozen merchants.³⁸⁷

According to Harris, the situation in Reform Judaism was analogous to a government whose constitution was based on anarchy.³⁸⁸ Moreover, it was in the throes of suffering the fate of an anarchist. It gradually lost all respect with the people since it offered nothing but confusion as a principle:

Consequently, this indeterminate attitude is disintegrating our religion and our members are fast drifting away. Therefore, do we need a synod, a gathering of recognized representatives, of rabbis and laymen of this land, to agree on some common line of observance that all shall faithfully fulfill.³⁸⁹

However, he believed that a meeting of the minds was possible between the proponents of conservatism and radicalism.³⁹⁰ But, in

order to accomplish a union between these two schools of thought, three conditions were going to have to be met. Firstly, the recognition of individualism as an evil within the religious realm of life, for it leads "to confusion in belief, robs both Faith and its followers of respect and dignity, and leads to religious neglect."³⁹¹ Secondly, the price of union would involve mutual concessions on the part of the conservatives and radicals.³⁹² For instance, the conservatives should be willing to abandon some practices that are mere vestiges of ancient traditions, provided that such an abandonment would not violate their conscience.³⁹³ The third condition was vital to the lasting success of the union. It stated that all parties must be willing to abide by and conform to the majority rulings of the synod.³⁹⁴

It is evident by Dr. Harris' remarks that he considered Conservative Judaism as analogous to the right wing expression of Reform Judaism, while the radical reformers represented the left wing element of the movement. Together, they could represent the religious convictions of the vast majority of Jews in America. A synod composed of both elements:

... would bring us all more closely together through truer conformity of observance, and, perhaps, win a wider recognition of the Jewish religion from our brethren at large.³⁹⁵

It is interesting to note, however, that The American Hebrew refused to recognize this as an attempt of reconciliation on the part of Dr. Harris.³⁹⁶ As long as Harris refused to include all segments of Judaism, he was merely advocating a constitutional body for reformers alone:

We are reluctant to see Judaism split into two religions, though the racial tie will always be there to make Israel one.³⁹⁷

Although The American Hebrew concurred that a synod was necessary, it remained adamant that it must represent K'lal Yisroel.³⁹⁸

Lewis Dembitz, a leading Conservative figure in the nineteenth century, granted some of the premises of Kohler's plea for a synod.³⁹⁹ He agreed, for instance, that Pharisaic Judaism was a reform of Mosaism, worked out by the Great Synod, and by the Synedria that followed it.⁴⁰⁰ He is in full agreement with Kohler's point that many Jews classified themselves as Orthodox, when, in reality, they discarded several laws and customs, or reduced the observance of religion to pure emotionalism.⁴⁰¹ Notwithstanding the differences between Conservative and Reform Judaism, Dembitz acknowledged that the reformers were not wrong to discard several outmoded practices in order to save Judaism.⁴⁰²

However, Dembitz strongly disagreed with Kohler on the need to call a modern day synod. As far as he was concerned a synod would only benefit Reform Jews--not the Orthodox whose influence he regarded as inconsequential:

A synod such as my reverend friend contemplates, must, in the main, be made up of men as "far gone" as he is, for the Orthodox in this country are poor and disorganized, and their leaders are "heavy of tongue".⁴⁰³

Furthermore, a synod should be ecumenical, in that it would meet in the holy land with representatives of world Jewry in attendance.⁴⁰⁴ An American synod would only have the impress of American Jewry on it, or, rather, Reform Jewry.⁴⁰⁵

A synod, he felt, would only be used by the reformers to enhance their own interests.⁴⁰⁶ This is so, because they have discarded most of what is considered sacred in Judaism for the sake of convenience.⁴⁰⁷ Would they then offer to sit down and discuss ways of securing greater observance from their Orthodox or Conservative brethren?⁴⁰⁸ The answer would have to be in the negative. They would no more have reinstated

the traditional Sabbath, than would the conservatives have relinquished their stand with regard to that holy day.⁴⁰⁹ The best course for American Jewry to take, Dembitz asserted, was to drift along at its present speed and course. Any attempts to bring the three groups together at this juncture of history would only widen the breach of American Jewry.⁴¹⁰

Judge Mayer Sulzberger of Philadelphia was far more adamant about the impossibility of a synod than was Lewis Dembitz. He reasoned that even though it would be theoretically desirable, it would have been physically as well as theologically impossible.⁴¹¹ First of all, it would automatically have had to exclude Jewish leadership from many foreign countries.⁴¹² Secondly, according to the teachings of orthodoxy, "the whole Church of Israel is powerless to change anything."⁴¹³ Therefore, how could Jews sit down together and calmly discuss questions that represent the core thinking of each participating group? Who would be the first to announce that their religious directions were erroneous? Is there only one true expression of Judaism, or is two or three only possible?⁴¹⁴

It was Sulzberger's considered opinion that until these questions were solved before such a synod took place, it would be doomed to utter failure:

I wish that I could express sanguine hopes that the question will be treated in a becoming spirit by our non-orthodox or conservative brethren. They do not seem to realize that there is a serious question. Such remarks as I have heard or seen on the subject are rarely free from tempestuous declamation or personal abuse.

Until the times change so that the whole community will feel a personal interest in these deep and far-reaching problems, there will be no general assembly; I mean none that can achieve useful results.⁴¹⁵

The views of various conservative scholars on the possibility of a synod indicated that the majority of these people did not think such a meeting would be fruitful. However, two of the most damaging statements as to the feasibility of a synod, were uttered by Solomon Schechter and Henrietta Szold.

When Schechter was asked by The American Hebrew as to whether or not he thought a synod was possible, he replied tersely:

On the whole, I think, synods, unless confined to purely administrative affairs, are useless, and even harmful. Religion is one of the "dvarim ha mesurim la-lev", which are vulgarized by every public discussion.

Besides that, I think, no man is capable of representing other men in matters spiritual.

Synods have also a tendency to create among us a certain sacerdotalism which is quite foreign to the Jewish spirit.

Personally, I hate and detest all priests, whether they breakfast on oysters, or Matzo Sh'moru.⁴¹⁶

In an article entitled "Catholic Israel", Henrietta Szold closely examined the ideology of the historical school and came to the conclusion that Conservative Judaism had a religious philosophy to offer the American Jew, that would eventually make it the most popular of the three groups.⁴¹⁷ Consequently, a synod would be damaging to the success of the Conservative movement.⁴¹⁸

The method of reasoning by which she drew the above conclusion was by an analytical study of Schechter's philosophy of Catholic Israel. She agreed with Schechter that Judaism was a living entity "which constitutes the final authority for the interpretation of the Scriptures and the fixing of customs ..."⁴¹⁹ The needs of Israel remain in flux and are never stultified.⁴²⁰ Therefore, no one age or group in the

historical continuum has the authority to restrict the expansion of Jewish thought.⁴²¹

The Chassidim of Galacia and the Bene Israel community of Bombay alike may contribute to the spirit informing Catholic Israel. On the other hand, the American Jew, liberal and cosmopolitan, may fail to grasp it in its breadth.⁴²²

The Diaspora, with its physical, governmental and ideological restrictions, placed the Jew under the religious authority of Tradition.⁴²³ Jews were not living in one land where they could bow to the religious authority of a Sanhedrin, but are scattered throughout the world. Under these conditions, a synod would be most impracticable.⁴²⁴

Moreover, the whole question of a synod had to be viewed in its true perspective according to the age in which it is called. In the nineteenth century, the burning religious question involved the observance of the Sabbath:

What, now, can a synod do about it? Invent a legal fiction which shall prove that it is all a mistake about the Sabbath we have been celebrating these three thousand years ... ?⁴²⁵

Hence, according to Miss Szold, questions of such magnitude as Sabbath observance could not be worked out by a synod. Rather, the answers have to arise out of the flow of history.⁴²⁶ This is evidenced by the fact that only a handful of individuals decided that Sunday would become the Jewish Sabbath.⁴²⁷ Yet, the force of Jewish history emasculated the theological position of the Sunday Sabbath proponents to the point where they completely destroyed the religious significance of that day.⁴²⁸

At this point, she claims the philosophy of Catholic Israel can be

beneficial to those who sincerely desire the continuation of the Jewish Tradition. The solution it proposes is a program of education.⁴²⁹

The remedy has at least the quality of universal applicability to recommend it. It may be adopted by Zionists, and need not be scorned by the synod partisans ...⁴³⁰

The way to achieve a successful educational program for all Jewry, however, is not to begin at the top, with the training of rabbis, but by educating the people.⁴³¹ This means that every individual Jew has a stake in the future of his religion.⁴³² It also means that a synod would not be necessary if the leaders of Judaism actively engage in an educational program for their people, so they, themselves, could follow the direction historical Judaism points to.

The remedy is efficacious and universal, but not easy. Discussion helps little, enthusiasm alone is abortive. Every man and woman of us must stop talking and buckle down to steady work. It again resolves itself into the impressive home thrust: "Thou art the man." Upon thee everything depends. Thou canst create a world, thou canst destroy it. The alternatives are set before thee: in the Ghetto of American Judaism, death and evil; in open-hearted, intelligent communion with Israel, past and present, life and good. Choose thou life everlasting.⁴³³

Education, according to Miss Szold, is what should be of primary concern, not a synod. The philosophy of Conservative Judaism should stress the study of Tradition as the way to secure proper observance for all Jews.

The Conservative leaders as a whole then, rejected Kohler's plea for a synod. Yet, it should not be overlooked that the movement was divided on this question. Cogent reasons, both pro and con, were discussed at length, but the impetus for the convocation of such a meeting never materialized at that juncture of history.

Chapter IV

Although American activity on behalf of the colonization of Palestine began in 1884 with the establishment of a Hoveve Zion society in New York, Zionism as a movement only began to gather momentum in America during the 1890's.

The deleterious attitude of the Russian government during the 1890's toward the Jewish people caused several thousands of them to migrate to the United States. Once in America, these newcomers formed the rank and file of the Zionist movement. The possible reasons for this appear to have been threefold: First of all, they were able to partake in the development of a national movement and, secondly, "Zionism became a substitute for the Jewish way of life left behind in the shtetel."⁴³⁴ The third reason was that Zionism represented "the link to Jewish history and the Jewish people throughout the Diaspora."⁴³⁵

However, the main thrust for Zionism's growing popularity in the early 1890's came in the form of a Memorial presented by William Blackstone of Chicago to President Benjamin Harrison and Secretary of State James G. Blaine.⁴³⁶ Blackstone's petition urged the President and Secretary of State to use their good offices and influence with the European governments to the end that an international

conference would consider the pitiful condition of Israelites and their claims to the holy land as their ancient homeland.⁴³⁷

The Memorial was presented to the government of the United States at the White House on March 5, 1891. At the ceremony Blackstone told President Harrison:

...believing that protests against Russia would make matters worse, he drafted this memorial (which does not) antagonize Russia but seeks peaceably to give Jews control of their old home in Palestine.⁴³⁸

The petition to the President was an important one in that it was signed by some of the most eminent men in public life. Among the 413 signers were Chauncy M. Depew, U. S. Senator from New York; Melville W. Fuller, Chief Justice of the United States; Thomas B. Reed, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Sereno E. Payne, Chairman of Ways and Means Committee; Robert R. Hill, Chairman of House Committee on Foreign Affairs; William E. Russell, Governor of Massachusetts; William McKinley, Representative from Ohio and later the President of the United States; several judges, state and federal officials and many mayors.⁴³⁹

The document asks the question, "what shall be done for the Russian Jews?"⁴⁴⁰ Blackstone claimed:

Europe is crowded...shall they come to America? This will be a tremendous expense and require years. Why not give Palestine back to them again? According to God's distribution of nations, it is their home--an

inalienable possession from which they were expelled by force. Under their cultivation, it was a remarkably fruitful land, sustaining millions of Israelites...They were agriculturists and producers as well as a nation of great commercial importance...The center of religion and civilization. 441

The author of the document also felt that world Jewry would rally to the cause of their brethren seeking to establish their ancient homeland:

If they (the Jews) could have autonomy in government, the Jews of the world would rally to transport and establish their suffering brethren in their time-honored habitation. For over 17 centuries they have patiently waited for such a privilege opportunity. 442

Moreover, he felt the time was right for such a move:

We believe this is an appropriate time for all nations and especially the Christian nations of Europe, to show kindness to Israel. A million exiles by their terrible sufferings are piteously appealing to our sympathy, justice and humanity. Let us now restore to them the land of which they were so cruelly despoiled by our Roman ancestors. 443

The American Hebrew greeted Blackstone's petition warmly. Commentating editorially, the newspaper stated that there were two alternative courses open to the international conference. The first would simply be to ensure that forms of local government be established to protect life and property. 444 Also to insure speedy and impartial judiciary, and a suitable plan for industrial and commercial growth. 445 The second alternative would be to follow a more radical course and "invest Palestine with territorial independence. 446

Whatever the future course of events would be, however, The American Hebrew desired to make public its sense of gratitude for Turkey's patience and understanding of the plight of the oppressed Jew:

The Turkish Government has manifested the most gracious liberality and tolerance in the treatment of the Jews, and whatever is sought to be done for the Jews by the Great Powers should be done in the spirit which will conduce to the dignity, prosperity and satisfaction of the country which has so generously opened its doors as an entrance to a haven for the hapless refugee from the hate and intolerance of another country.⁴⁴⁷

Notwithstanding this announced "sense of gratitude," The American Hebrew was well aware of the fact that the Turkish government instituted a series of regulations against the settlement of foreign Jews in Palestine as early as 1888.⁴⁴⁸ Therefore it is not surprising to learn that in November of 1891, The American Hebrew publicly regretted Turkey's endeavors to restrict Jewish immigration to the "mere admission of individuals and the exclusion of families."⁴⁴⁹

The fear of being denounced as unpatriotic to America because of the Zionist stand with regard to the reclamation of Palestine, prompted several Jewish newspapers to reject the Blackstone petition on the grounds that it fostered the ideal of political Zionism. The Jewish Messenger editorially regretted Blackstone's Memorial as an unfortunate act of friendship which placed the Jew in a precarious political situation:

First, it revives the old reproach of the anti-Semites that the Jews cannot be patriots if Palestine is their national

home today. Secondly, it makes the Jews again a subject of newspaper comment when such publicity and notoriety work more harm than good.⁴⁵⁰

The Jewish problem, according to The Jewish Messenger, will not be solved by forcing governments to make room for the Jews in a desolate country.⁴⁵¹ Rather, it advocated the calling of a conference to bring the moral power of Christian nations to bear on the recalcitrant political regime of Russia.⁴⁵² Not only for the immediate amelioration of the oppressed condition of Jews, but of all minority groups within that state. The editorial concluded with the statement that:

The remedy proposed by Blackstone is worse than a disease. The Jewish problem will be solved in Russia and Russian enlightened opinion...we deprecate artificial pressure. The Jew to be emancipated must emancipate himself.⁴⁵³

On March 8, 1891, The American Israelite also rejected Blackstone's Memorial as harmful to the Jewish position in all friendly countries.⁴⁵⁴ Also, it declared that "Not one Jew in 100,000 living in a civilized land under a tolerant form of government would leave."⁴⁵⁵ The real solution to the Jewish problem would be to allow the Russian Jews to emigrate to all cultured and civilized countries so that they could become assimilated into the general milieu. In that way they would develop all the traits of good citizenship.⁴⁵⁶ But a large concentration of Jews in any country would be unwise since it would leave the door wide open for anti-Semitism.⁴⁵⁷

The American Israelite was also fearful of the possibility of orthodoxy becoming the official religion of a Jewish state. If that were to happen then the possibility of reinstituting antiquated forms of practice would undermine the evolutionary spirit of Judaism.⁴⁵⁸ It would, in fact, undermine the entire religious growth achieved in the Diaspora.⁴⁵⁹ Moreover, it would also jeopardize the religious position of the Christians and Moslems in the holy land:

Sabbath breakers, the Roman and Greek Catholic missions would not be tolerated. The tomb of Christ and the numerous spots held sacred by Christians and Moslems would be wiped out by whose religious enthusiasm invited their return to Palestine.⁴⁶⁰

On April 17, 1891, The American Hebrew took to Blackstone's defense.⁴⁶¹ It expressed astonishment that the Reform rabbis, and those Jewish newspapers presenting the Reform point of view, could misrepresent every effort to render Palestine more accesible to the migrating Russian Jews.⁴⁶² It argued that American Jews seriously debated the possibilities of settling their brethren in Argentina, Dekota and even Kansas; but when Palestine was mentioned as a possible homesight, it was immediately rejected as impracticable.⁴⁶³

The argument concerning the merits of Zionism did not become a full-blown controversy until Theodor Herzl's Jewish State appeared in 1896. From that time on, Zionism became a movement to contend with on many levels. Of central importance to the Jews in America, was the fact

that it was definitely a politically motivated program.

The American Hebrew reacted unfavorably to political Zionism. It was their hope that the proposed Zionist conference to be held in Munich would receive scant encouragement from those who represented Judaism.⁴⁶⁴ They reiterated their approval for the colonization of Palestine, as long as it was carried on under the auspices of the Turkish government. However, the idea of forming a Jewish state would only antagonize Turkey who was already unfriendly to the idea of Jewish immigration.⁴⁶⁵

The American Hebrew not only withheld its support of Herzl's plan to establish a political state in Palestine, but condemned the proposed conference as dangerous to Jewish interests:

If any delegates are sent to Munich from this country, we hope it will be with instructions to take no steps in favor of a Jewish state...we very much fear that the Congress will not attract those members of our race who are deeply interested in communal work in general and the Jewish Question in particular. There will be hobbies to ride by such men as Dr. Herzl, Max Nordau, and others who have never been specially identified with the Jewish community, and each will ride his particular hobby at the expense of what concerns the larger Jewish world.⁴⁶⁶

Moreover, the feelings expressed by The American Hebrew were reiterated by the Jewish press throughout the world.⁴⁶⁷

Rabbinic leadership in general, appeared at that time, to have been "just as unanimous as the press in their disapproval of the Congress."⁴⁶⁸

Only one Jewish journal published in the United States in the 1890's supported the Zionist cause.⁴⁶⁹ However, The American Hebrew is fully aware that the proponents of Zionism in America were most vociferous in support of their cause.⁴⁷⁰ In fact, it was precisely because of the belligerent nature of the Federation of Zionists against the anti-Zionists, that The American Hebrew decided to withdraw the weekly section entitled "The Zionist Department" from the newspaper:

The Federation of Zionists in The American Hebrew, will be discontinued hereafter, owing to the unwillingness of the officers of the Federation to accede to our request that both sides of the Zionist question, be discussed in the same department.⁴⁷¹

The threat of damaging the already strained relations of Jews living in Palestine under the Turkish government, prompted The American Hebrew to denounce the Zionist movement as acting without discretion or interest in the Jewish problem.⁴⁷² Furthermore, no objective view of the Zionist position would possibly support their claims to Palestine.⁴⁷³ Turkey had to protect its own political interests. Self-interest forced Turkey to prevent the wholesale colonization of Palestine by the Jews.⁴⁷⁴ This was clearly shown in a telegram from Washington:

The Department of State recently received from the U.S. Minister at Constantinople, information that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey had informed him that the Turkish government had no intention of preventing American citizens, whether Jew or Christians, coming as individuals, and not en mass from vis-

iting Syria or Palestine as travellers or visitors, the only object of that government being to prevent further colonization of Palestine by Jews, as the settlement of there religious bodies in preponderating numbers might lead to political complications, which it is the purpose of the Ottoman Empire to avoid.⁴⁷⁵

The general attitude toward the Zionist endeavors to re-establish the political independence of a Jewish Palestine was suspect.⁴⁷⁶ Therefore it was no surprise to The American Hebrew that the Turkish government placed new restrictions on colonists of the Jewish faith.⁴⁷⁷ Jews were now prevented from acquiring land, building houses and, in a few instances, were expelled from some colonies in Eastern Palestine.⁴⁷⁸ The reason for this Sir Charles Wilson,⁴⁷⁹ The Director of Military Education in Jerusalem, explained was that the Sultan so feared the Zionists' desire for the acquisition of Palestine, that he even had "spies at every Zionistic meeting...⁴⁸⁰" to report their progress.

In May of 1899, The American Hebrew printed a statement issued by Ali Ferrough Bey, the Turkish Foreign Minister, in order to enlighten the American public about Turkey's attitude toward the Zionists' desire to eventually purchase Palestine for the Jews:

There seems to be a prevailing idea in this country that only a monetary consideration is involved in the plan being now agitated in high Hebrew circles over the proposed purchase of Palestine. I have noticed that all press accounts dwell on the fact that the Hebrews are also to raise millions ad infinitum and with these millions the sale of Palestine is then assured.

I can assure the American people that such is not the state of affairs. The Sublime Porte does not desire to sell any part of its Arabian country, and no matter how many millions of gold are offered this determination will not be altered. This statement is the official reply from Constantinople to many Turkish envoys who have been asked to sound the government on this point. There appears to be an opinion among the American people that our government is in need of financial assistance. This is a grave error. At no time since the Crimean War has Turkey been so well equipped as to her monetary apparatus. Her public debt has been yearly decreased until now it is but a trifle. So rapidly are our revenues increasing that we are about to change our fiscal system in order to meet the growing demands. The purchase of Palestine then becomes a political question and not one of swelling our exchequer. The present agitation to establish a free home for the Hebrew race within the old confines of the Promised Land, the historic patrimony of Abraham, seems to me a very chimerical proposition. I cannot understand why the Jew under the Turkish sovereignty should be more discontented than in other countries.

I know that they hold that they are persecuted and oppressed in some lands, but such is not the case in ours. The Jewish people under the Turkish Sultan are happy and contented. Scores of them hold important positions. In their private and individual pursuits they are never troubled.

Now the Turkish government does not consider it wise to change this state of affairs. For some could not fail to cause political and economic confusion. It must not be considered that personally I am hostile. I merely voice the official statement of the Constantinople office.

But I do not think it fair to encourage by silence false hopes, the realization of which would only lead to trouble and embarrassment to a nation

which never persecuted the Hebrew race. If the promoters of the plan would heed this advice, I know it would save their co-religionists in Europe and Asia trouble hereafter.⁴⁸¹

The political aspirations of the Zionists affected the thinking of religious leaders in the Orthodox, Conservative and Reform camps of Judaism in America. The objection to Zionism on the part of some of these religionists existed on three different levels. The first argument against Zionism was that acceptance of its principles presented the problem of dual allegiance. Could Jews support the political state of Palestine and, at the same time, support the government of the United States? Sabato Morais, in an article in The Jewish Exponent, claims that it would not be patriotic for Jews in America to support, in any way, the building of another political state.⁴⁸² His point of view was also shared by the conservative-minded Jewish weekly, The American Hebrew.

Thus it is evident that Conservative Jews did not support the Zionist group en masse. Along with the reformers they felt an overwhelming need to assert their loyalty to the government of the United States.

The second reason for their rebuttal of Zionism was humanitarian in nature. That is, the propaganda issued by the Zionists had caused a serious deterioration in the relationship between the Jews already living in Palestine and the Turkish government. Cyrus Adler, in a passionate plea to the Zionist groups in America, asked them to consider what they were doing to intensify the misery of their co-religionists living in the Holy Land.⁴⁸³ Nor he claimed, was

the government of Turkey to blame for the situation:

The Turkish government is not prejudiced against Jews as such, but it has two evils to combat; the possible uprising against the Jews of fanatic sects, and still more the fear of adding to the dreadful misery, destitution, and hunger now existing among the Jews visiting in Jerusalem.⁴⁸⁴

Hence, full moral responsibility for the plight of the Jews already settled in Palestine rested squarely on the shoulders of the Zionists.

The third objection to Zionism was based on the theological argument that a return to Palestine would automatically restore many of the ancient forms of practice. It would also give rise to messianic speculations that might be unfounded due to the fact that the re-establishment of Palestine was not accomplished by the Divine will, but by political aspirants from Europe and America.

Sabato Morais did not impugn Dr. Herzl's motives for desiring the establishment of the Third Commonwealth; but he did feel that the deliverance of the Jews should only come about when God desired it, and not when the Zionists wanted it.⁴⁸⁵

Dr. F. De Sola Mendes believed that Political Zionism was an absurd cause that was damaging the political position of those Jews already living under the Sultan's rule.⁴⁸⁶ It was also a philosophy that ran counter to the religion of Israel since God was the sole arbiter in the fate of Judaism.⁴⁸⁷ Moreover, on the practical level of religion one had to be aware of the fact that Christianity and Islam both had a stake in the Holy Land.⁴⁸⁸

Would they then have permitted the Jews to gain political control over their places of veneration?⁴⁸⁹ F. De Sola Mendes' answer was in the negative. The Jews could never maintain the law of the land without being biased in their own behalf. Once they violated the rights of the Moslems or Christians in matters pertaining to their religion, the Jewish state would invite the wrath of several nations on them.⁴⁹⁰ What would the Jews do, for instance, to maintain law and order around the time of Easter when the pilgrims normally reacted against the Jews as well as against each other.⁴⁹¹ Would they be able to maintain impartiality? No! The sword of religious severance had cut too deeply into the fabric of history for the Jew, Christian and Moslem to say together "Let us go into the House of the Lord--Israel's Lord--with rejoicing and confidence."⁴⁹²

On the positive side of the scale, however, it should be noted that The American Hebrew recognized that the Zionist movement was bringing "into the fold Jews by birth who have heretofore not been in affiliation with their brethren."⁴⁹³ Also, it would be quixotic to imagine that the bulk of those individuals comprising the Conservative movement rejected the philosophy of Zionism. On the contrary, many of the leaders of the historical school adamantly supported the Zionist cause. Such people as L. N. Dembitz, Marcus Jastrow, Benjamin Szold, Solomon Solis-Cohn,⁴⁹⁴ Henry Illowizi, H. P. Mendes, Joseph H. Hertz, Stephen S. Wise and Henrietta Szold were deeply committed to

Zionism.⁴⁹⁵

In 1897, Solomon Solis-Cohen defended the probity of political Zionism in a debate with Kaufman Kohler.⁴⁹⁶ Dr. Solis-Cohen laid emphasis on the fact that developing the Jewish state in Palestine was not incompatible with one's loyalty to the United States.⁴⁹⁷ He further stated that it was the anti-Zionist within the Jewish fold that was raising the issue about the patriotism of American Zionists.⁴⁹⁸ Moreover, "the fact that individuals might or might not favor the creation of a Jewish state gave them no right to interfere in any way with their fellowmen, who had the right to do as they pleased in the matter."⁴⁹⁹ In fact, the attitude displayed by the anti-Zionists was an indefensible one from the standpoint of the principle of freedom of speech.⁵⁰⁰

Dr. H. Pereira Mendes, in 1899, also defended the right of American Jews to participate in the Zionist movement.⁵⁰¹ To begin with, he declared that it was good to be an American, but it was nobler to be a Jew.⁵⁰² This was not to infer that it was the destiny of the Jewish people to establish a state which would demand political allegiance from all other Jews in the Diaspora;⁵⁰³ rather, it meant that a Jewish state was a necessary step in the spiritual evolution of man:

To establish a Jewish state for spiritual purposes is more than necessary. It is essential for the existence of society, for human liberty and for humanity's progress.⁵⁰⁴

The humanitarian claim that a Jewish state will give refuge to its oppressed peoples, is not of primary consideration.⁵⁰⁵ It is an accidental cause which should not be propaganized at Zionism's expense. Suffice it to say, anyone who would lower the sublime goal of Zionism by inferring that its primary goal is providing a homeland for oppressed Jews, would in fact belittle the movement.⁵⁰⁶

Once the actual political state was formed, the spiritual leaders of the Jews would gather in its academies in order to propound "the highest expressions of human thought for human guidance."⁵⁰⁷ They would emphasize the moral law in their teachings and, thereby, influence the political actions of nations for good.⁵⁰⁸ The same relationship would hold true to Jews in other lands. They would not be under the direct political control of Palestine, but would give spiritual loyalty in all things pertaining to the spiritual realm of life.

A Jew, resident outside those borders will be expected to be a faithful citizen or subject of the country of his residence; he must be loyal to it and serve it faithfully in every way. I repeat, he will owe to Palestine no allegiance in things temporal. For spiritual guidance the individual Jew and the Jewish community will look to Palestine.⁵⁰⁹

The importance of a Jewish state should not be relegated to a minor position by the Reform, Orthodox or Conservative groups in this country. Once Palestine will exert its rightful hegemony over Jews in the area of religion, the question of reform versus tradition could finally be solved.⁵¹⁰

Dr. Joseph H. Hertz claimed that Zionism was a valid expression of the Jewish faith. The reason why so many rabbis, responsible laymen and the Jewish press heretofore denounced the Zionist cause was because they were ignorant of the very meaning of Zionism.⁵¹¹ They never bothered to read its literature, study its progress; or view its achievements in its true perspective. Actually, Dr. Hertz claimed that it may be asserted that nine-tenths of the rabbinical leadership in the United States never bothered to examine the facts of world history. If they did, then they too would not have sat back in their arm chairs and denounced the Zionist cause as lacking spirituality.⁵¹²

Due to the Zionist Congress in Basle, the anti-Zionist now had to contend with that movement as an accomplished fact. Dr. Hertz asserted that the movement in America could no longer be considered a joke or a devious scheme on the part of Dr. Herzl to gain wealth at the expense of his people.⁵¹³ Moreover, the anti-Zionist contention that the movement was a farce only depicted the sad state of their own moral condition.⁵¹⁴

American Jews, Dr. Hertz felt, must realize the conditions Jews were facing in Europe, Africa and Asia. In Russia, for instance, five million Jews were being deprived of the privilege to call themselves citizens of that country. In Algiers, homes and synagogues were being reduced to ashes by marauding mobs. In Galicia, children, women and men were being murdered and their business establishments pillaged. In Greece the Jews were also being mistreated by the

government. Also, it was rumored that Turkey and Persia planned to exterminate a portion of their population as a scapegoat for their own political failures--they planned to exterminate the Jews of course.⁵¹⁵

In view of those facts the Zionists alone realized that something would have to be done about the Jewish problem. Sitting in one's arm chair and talking about the situation meant precious little to those oppressed people. The Zionists confronted a condition and not a theory. They, therefore, felt it their duty to insure the freedom of all Jews who wished to be free. This meant getting to the root of the problem and then attacking it with all the resources available to them:

Prepared to call things by their proper names, they have studied it, and find that they must provide for these poor outlawed creatures a place of refuge from the cannibalistic lust of their persecutors, and furthermore that such a place of refuge must ~~be~~ ⁵¹⁶ be duly protected by the Law of Nations!

If Jews had to lay the blame on anyone for their conditions, the honor would have to go to Christianity.⁵¹⁷ They practiced injustice, cruelty and barbarity on the Jews. The indescribable atrocities they committed against Jews throughout the last eighteen hundred years testified that Christendom preached love but practiced evil.⁵¹⁸ How ridiculous then are those comfortable Jews in America, Dr. Hertz claimed, to decry the Zionist position because their Christian neighbors would not understand their pristine motives.⁵¹⁹

Of course the Jew always wanted to become assimilated into the general milieu, but this was only possible in America.

Does this then mean that American Jews had the right to throw their brethren in Europe, Asia and Africa to the burning furnace of hate and prejudice.⁵²⁰ Why did, Dr. Hertz lamented, American Jews cry out:

Let them stay in Russia. They have there a mission to perform. As there seems to be something sanctimonious about this advice, and it is always our privilege to know whether practices, let us look and see who are they that preach thus? Is it fellow sufferers, who bid them courageously endure for the fathers' sake? No, for the most part this phrase is on the lips of those who lounge in luxury; who never knew suffering, least of all for conscience sake; to whom martyrdom smacks somewhat of madness; who among other things trade away their Sabbath and gamble away their Sunday; who have crossed the word "self-sacrifice" from their vocabulary; to whom self-denial, especially for religion's sake is synonymous with devil-worship.⁵²¹

The case for Zionism, according to Hertz, was extremely clear. The reasonable gamble the Zionists were taking in order to secure Palestine as the homeland for all oppressed Jews was, at the very least, an honest attempt to do something about the situation.⁵²² Also, out of the Zionist movement a new type of Jew was emerging. One that was not afraid of being recognized for what he was--a Jew!⁵²³ In fact, Jews who never admitted their Jewishness were now becoming enthusiastic workers in the movement.⁵²⁴

Perhaps, Dr. Hertz believed, the most important aspect of the Zionist movement was the fact that the Jew was at last looking at history with a view to the future.⁵²⁵ This lesson of seeing the direction of history through the concerted efforts of man had erased the narrow-mindedness of many Jews involved in Zionism.⁵²⁶

If the Conservative leadership was divided over the question of Zionism, the student body of the Jewish Theological Seminary was not. The Seminary men were attracted to the Zionist movement as early as 1896.⁵²⁷ In fact, they organized the first collegiate Zionist society in America.⁵²⁸ It was known as the Young American Zionists and was coed in composition.⁵²⁹

Some three years later, in 1899, the society revised its constitution and became an exclusive Zionist fraternity.⁵³⁰ It also changed its name to Z.B.T., which are the initial letters of the words Zion b'mishpat tipodeh, "Zion shall be redeemed through Justice."⁵³¹

The membership requirements of Z.B.T. excluded all non-Zionists. But if a person was a Zionist, over eighteen years of age, and attended a recognized college, university or professional school for at least two years, he was eligible to join the fraternity.⁵³²

The transformation from a pro-Zionist movement to an exclusive Zionist fraternity was indicative of the growing popularity of Zionism among the young intellectuals at the turn of the century. In May of 1899, the Z.B.T. membership rose to sixty.⁵³³ By the beginning of the twentieth century, Z.B.T. had a membership of seventy men:

Representing the Jewish Theological Seminary, the College of the City of New York, Columbia University in its various branches (the School of Arts, the School of Medicine, the

School of Law), New York University with its different schools, and other professional schools in this metropolis.⁵³⁴

Some of the professional schools in the New York area included: the Long Island Medical School, the New York Law School and Bellevue Medical College.⁵³⁵ Also, there were chapters of Z.B.T. at John Hopkins in Baltimore; the College of the City of Baltimore; the University of Cincinnati and Hebrew Union College; and at Harvard and Yale universities.⁵³⁶

In the 1890's, Zionism played an important role in formulating a esprit de corp among the native born and immigrant Jews. Yet, it should be noted that the Conservative Movement did not officially support or reject Zionism. It had no official position with regard to that subject and, suffice it to say, it created a difference of opinion within the ranks of conservatism's leadership. Some actively supported it and others fulminated against its very existence. However, most of the founding fathers of Conservative Judaism in America were sympathetic to Zionism in one way or another. Certainly, the students at the Seminary during the latter part of the nineteenth century recognized the importance of this movement. Their direct involvement in it provided the impetus to form the first Zionist fraternal organization in the United States.

Chapter VJoseph H. Hertz

The first graduating class of 1894, was not very large. In fact, it consisted of one man, Joseph H. Hertz. As he was the first graduate of the Seminary, it was his fortune to explore the various frontiers for the Conservative movement. He was the first student to preach at the Seminary; he was also the first student to receive a Ph.D from Columbia College; he was the first Conservative Rabbi to minister to a congregation outside the continent of the Americas; and he was the only Conservative rabbi who ever became the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire.

He entered the Jewish Theological Seminary at the impressionable age of fifteen.⁵³⁷ For seven years he studied under the tutelage of Dr. Sabato Morais, until he was prepared to enter the rabbinate.⁵³⁸

Joseph H. Hertz' first exposure to the general public was a memorable one, both for him and the Seminary. On January 7, 1893, young Hertz attempted to show the general Jewish public that the Seminary equipped its ministers with all the essential qualities necessary for a successful preaching career in the American rabbinate.⁵³⁹

The American Hebrew reported that the sermon was well received by those attending the Sabbath services.⁵⁴⁰ In the text of the sermon itself, Hertz attacked those Jews who reformed Judaism on a secular level but were blind to the deeper meanings of faith.⁵⁴¹ The Torah, he claimed, was the essential and primary concern of Judaism and not our transitory interests in the sciences, arts or humanities.⁵⁴²

The next public appearance young Hertz made was at his ordination exercise, a year later. It was conducted at Shearith Israel, and Dr. H. Pereira Mendes delivered the Baccalaureate sermon.⁵⁴³ His charge to Hertz stressed the importance of the young rabbi's role as Conservative Judaism's first ordained missionary to American Jewry:

The only reason for the Seminary's existence is that its students shall be exponents of its ideals--a thorough knowledge of the Torah and personal example of respect to the Torah's teachings,--or in two words "Scholarship and Consistency." "Scholarship and Consistency"--that is its motto.

Do not belie your Seminary.
Study and study, that ye may be guides.
Be loving and gentle, that ye may be
pastors. Be strong and of good courage,
reverent of the Law, and practising
it, so shall ye have the right spirit,
the spirit of Godliness, loving and
serving God and man.⁵⁴⁴

Years later, when Mendes reminisced about that solemn movement he remarked:

Well do I remember how young Hertz felt the spirit of the ceremony. His face paled as he stood

before me to receive the solemn charge from the pulpit, and the whole congregation rose when I pronounced upon him the Priestly Benediction.⁵⁴⁵

Dr. Bernard Drachman represented the faculty when he conferred upon Joseph H. Hertz the Hattarath Horaiah. Upon receiving both the English and Hebrew diplomas, Hertz stepped forward and delivered the valedictory address.⁵⁴⁶ In it he displayed a concern that Conservative rabbis would be vilified and "accused of clogging the wheels of progress, of stemming the tides of Advance, of aiming to hurl our brethren back into the frantic exclusivism of the Ghetto ..."⁵⁴⁷ Nevertheless, it was their duty to instill the traditional concepts of Judaism into the very fabric of Judaism.⁵⁴⁸

Upon receiving his rabbinical degree, the Rev. Dr. Hertz began his ministry by serving in Syracuse, New York.⁵⁴⁹ In June of 1898, a communication from the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation of Johannesburg, South Africa was received by The American Hebrew.⁵⁵⁰ The trustees of that congregation were anxious to secure a rabbi who was also a scholar. They wrote:

... with that object in view, it was thought advisable to advertise in the American Jewish press in order to acquire the services of gentlemen holding rabbinical and academical degrees, and those who can mix with and lead educated men, whilst sufficiently charitable not to forget the poorer classes.⁵⁵¹

The American Hebrew was quick to point out that the requirements were such that only an extremely conservative or orthodox rabbi would be chosen.⁵⁵²

Nothing more was heard of the offer until a two line announcement appeared in The American Hebrew stating that Rabbi Hertz was awarded a two year contract and was forced, because of the necessity of reaching South Africa by the Holydays, to leave his congregation on short notice.⁵⁵³

A furor arose in the Jewish press as to why The American Hebrew represented the American Jewish press.⁵⁵⁴

In defense of its position the editor of that newspaper retorted that The American Hebrew did not attempt to control the type or amount of inquiries made by rabbis of various shades of Judaism.⁵⁵⁵ In fact, inquiry was also made by the congregation as to Dr. Issac M. Wise's availability.⁵⁵⁶ Therefore, no religious leader should have felt slighted if he was not chosen.⁵⁵⁷ Actually, the choice was made by a single individual, Mr. Julius Bien, the head of the I.O.B.B. He was familiar with the congregation and its needs and it was he who suggested that Dr. Hertz be chosen for the position.⁵⁵⁸ The congregation, however, at first rejected Dr. Hertz' name because he did not meet their requirements as a mohel or schochet. Furthermore, they did not want an unmarried man. Thus they notified Hertz that he did not measure up to their requirements. But after a more diligent look into the rabbinical situation in America they reconsidered their action and invited him to serve their congregation.⁵⁵⁹

The American Hebrew thought the choice of Dr. Hertz showed good sense on the part of the Johannesburg congregation. After all, the Rev. Dr. Hertz was a rabbi and

possessed a Ph.D. degree from Columbia College.⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, he was closely identified with both the religious and secular endeavors of the Jewish community. He was, for example, involved in the Jewish Historical Society, the Chautauqua Society and the Jewish Publication Society.⁵⁶¹

No one could blame Dr. Hertz for accepting the Johannesburg congregation.⁵⁶² The Syracuse congregation was not too large and could only pay a small salary to the rabbi.⁵⁶³ The South African congregation, however, presented Hertz the opportunity of bettering himself financially:

The (Syracuse) congregation was a small one, and could only pay a small salary to its Rabbi; and Dr. Hertz could have improved his financial position by accepting other positions of somewhat better salary, but disliked the constant change of position and preferred to bide his time till the opportunity of materially bettering himself should offer. Needless to say he has now found his reward.⁵⁶⁴

The appointment of Dr. Hertz now gave the Conservative movement the opportunity to extend its influence outside the religious confines of the United States.⁵⁶⁵ Whereas Reform Judaism represented an American phenomenon in that it advocated assimilation, the Conservative movement had a more international appeal as evidenced by the fact that its first graduate was chosen to serve another type of Jewry.⁵⁶⁶

The idea of conservatism extending its influence across the seas to the Orthodox enclaves of the world, appealed to many Conservative leaders. At the meeting of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association Dr. Hertz was praised for his activities "on behalf of liberty."⁵⁶⁷

When, however, this noteworthy praise engendered a motion to enter it into the minutes of the Association's meeting, a heated debate broke out with regard to Dr. Hertz' activities in South Africa.⁵⁶⁸ Dr. Solomon Solis-Cohen objected to the phrase "on behalf of religious liberty," because it meant that the Conservative movement condoned the actions of rabbis who became politically involved with the affairs of state.⁵⁶⁹ He further stated that Dr. Hertz, who was asked to leave Johannesburg because of his involvement in the British-Boer war, acted as a free agent and, therefore, the "matter was foreign to the convention."⁵⁷⁰

Revs. Stephen S. Wise, Nieto and Morais argued that Hertz maintained the dignity of the rabbinate and of the Conservative movement, and that the convention would be doing itself an injustice by not recording his achievement.⁵⁷¹

Mr. Blumenthal, the President of the Association, sided with Dr. Solis-Cohen in this matter by deciding that the convention could not act hastily in matters that were of a political nature.⁵⁷² Hence, under the influence of Blumenthal and Solis-Cohen, the convention tabled the motion to praise the Rev. Dr. Joseph H. Hertz.⁵⁷³ But the influence he was to exert on world Jewry as Chief Rabbi of the British Empire was not dependent on this entry in the minutes of the Jewish Theological Association. In fact, in the year 1900, his rabbinical career was just beginning to show promise.

Marcus M. Jastrow

Dr. Marcus Jastrow was one of the founding fathers of the Conservative movement in the United States. Throughout most of his rabbinical career he served as the rabbi of Rodef Shalom Congregation of Philadelphia.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, Dr. Jastrow's career reflected vicissitudes of the Conservative movement. The struggle to keep the philosophy of the historical school alive during this period culminated in Jastrow's failure to keep his congregation within the pale of Conservative Judaism.

In 1891, the congregational minutes of the Rodef Shalom Congregation showed that it had sixty-eight paid-up members and eighty-four seat holders.⁵⁷⁴ These one hundred and fifty-two people, represented by the Board of Directors, voted to officially celebrate Jastrow's silver anniversary as the rabbi of their congregation.⁵⁷⁵ It was also voted to present Dr. Jastrow with the sum of \$4,000.00 as an expression of the congregation's gratitude.⁵⁷⁶ This magnanimous gesture, to be sure, did reflect the membership's feelings for their esteemed rabbi. However, it also marked the beginning of the end of Dr. Jastrow's career in the active rabbinate.

On October 1, 1891, the first hint of the congregation's dissatisfaction with Jastrow was mentioned in the minutes of the Board meeting.⁵⁷⁷ It was proposed that Rodef Shalom should

engage an English-speaking rabbi to assist Dr. Jastrow in his duties.⁵⁷⁸ It is interesting to note, that at the next official meeting of the congregation a motion was made that the new rabbi would strictly adhere to Dr. Jastrow's conservative position.⁵⁷⁹ However, this motion was voted down 55 to 25.⁵⁸⁰ As a consequence of this meeting an advertisement for an English-speaking rabbi was placed in The Jewish Messenger, The Israelite, and The Philadelphia Exponent.⁵⁸¹ Of particular importance is the fact that, for the most part, these newspapers represented the liberal religious viewpoint of the reformers. Also, The American Hebrew, the leading Conservative Jewish paper at that time, was not given any notice about Rodef Shalom's interest in another rabbi.

At a meeting of the Board of Directors, two items were mentioned that clearly indicated Rodef Shalom's dissatisfaction with the Conservative movement. The first item was that the minutes of the meeting duly noted that a prominent Reform rabbi by the name of Dr. Louis Grossman of Detroit, was being considered for the vacant position.⁵⁸² In as much as Dr. Grossman was already deemed to be well-established in the American rabbinate, the evidence clearly points to the congregation's intent about hiring a second rabbi. That is, it appears that they were earnestly searching for a man to serve the congregation in the capacity of senior rabbi. The second item of importance was the fact that the Board voted to eliminate Hebrew from the worship services.⁵⁸³ Only the Shema and the Torah portion were to be retained in the holy language.⁵⁸⁴

On September 14, 1892, the Board of Directors appointed a committee of three to "wait on Dr. Jastrow and ask him if he would kindly retire from his position as rabbi of the congregation, as the interests of the congregation demand this."⁵⁸⁵ On the 19th of that month a congregational meeting was convened for the express purpose of considering a replacement for Dr. Jastrow.⁵⁸⁶

The general meeting was well-attended by the congregation.⁵⁸⁷ A heated debate concerning the Board's action detained the vote to elect a new spiritual leader for several hours.⁵⁸⁸ Eventually, a vote was considered and Dr. Henry Berkowitz was elected the new rabbi of Rodef Shalom, by a vote of sixty-one to fifteen, which was afterwards made unanimous.⁵⁸⁹

Moreover, the following resolution with reference to Dr. Jastrow was agreed to:

Whereas: After twenty seven years of continued and arduous labor, devoted zealously to the welfare of Judaism and to the upbuilding and prosperity of the Congregation Rodef Shalom, the time has now come when, because of weakened physical strength, it is deemed fitting to relieve our esteemed Rabbi, Rev. Dr. M. Jastrow, of the duties hitherto devolving upon him, and of placing the burden upon younger shoulders; and whereas this Congregation desires to express its appreciation and gratitude for the work that he has done for it, and their continued confidence and adherence to the principles of our faith of which our esteemed Rabbi has been for many years the exponent; therefore, be it resolved, that Rev. Dr. M. Jastrow be and is hereby made the Rabbi Emeritus of the Congregation at a salary of \$4,000 per annum during his life.⁵⁹⁰

The American Hebrew in an attempt to mitigate the crushing blow toward the Conservative movement, congratulated Dr.

Berkowitz on his election as Rabbi of Rodef Shalom.⁵⁹¹ Although, they noted, he was indeed a Reform rabbi, they insisted that "Dr. Berkowitz has shown a spirit of comparative conservatism."⁵⁹²

In the next issue of The American Hebrew, the editorial on Dr. Jastrow's retirement, commented that, although Dr. Berkowitz was a capable person, the congregation went out of its way to insult Dr. Jastrow by hiring an alumnus of the Hebrew Union College.⁵⁹³ It was, they claimed, the erratic religious attitude of Dr. Isaac M. Wise, and "the instability of views"⁵⁹⁴ taught at the Hebrew Union College that always prompted Dr. Jastrow to oppose Reform as an unsuitable expression of Judaism in America.⁵⁹⁵ Nevertheless, it was the opinion of the editor that Dr. Berkowitz was not connected in any way to the irreverence shown to Dr. Jastrow:

He has responded to a call, and we are confident that he will not emulate the the bad example of the congregation, but will display towards Dr. Jastrow the respect that is due to him.⁵⁹⁶

Dr. A. Friedenwald, a leading Conservative figure, could not concur with The American Hebrew's statement that offered congratulations to Dr. Berkowitz.⁵⁹⁷ Dr. Berkowitz, he declared, was a radical reformer whose election to Rodef Shalom was tantamount to a desertion of conservative principles heretofore observed by that congregation.⁵⁹⁸ Thus he felt that one of the leading strongholds of conservatism in America had deserted the cause of Historical Judaism:

I take the liberty to say this of the congregation, out of respect to Dr. Berkowitz...Rodef Shalom has utterly discarded consistency, and Philadelphia is not to be congratulated upon such conduct in so important a congregation. 599

The Jewish Exponent, was able to shed some light on the matter for both Dr. Fiedenwald and The American Hebrew. According to that newspaper, Dr. Jastrow was present at the congregational meeting that chose Dr. Berkowitz as the new rabbi to Rodef Shalom.⁶⁰⁰ It appears that when the committee of three, under the direction of the Board of Directors, asked Jastrow to tender his resignation, he demanded to know who was being considered to replace him. He was then informed that four candidates were being considered as possible successors to him. Although he objected to all four candidates as being unfit for that particular pulpit, he announced that he would be present at the general meeting and that he would abide by a majority vote of the congregation as to who would succeed him.⁶⁰¹

At the congregational meeting he advised the congregation to wait until someone could be found whom he felt would be suitable for the position of rabbi in that congregation. After making that brief announcement he withdrew from the meeting. It was after that incident, The Jewish Exponent reported, that a heated debate ensued, but when it abated, a motion was made to elect Dr. Berkowitz.⁶⁰²

On November 26, 1892, Dr. Jastrow gave his farewell address to the Rodef Shalom Congregation.⁶⁰³ He declared that,

although there was justification for bitterness on his behalf, he would not leave the pulpit with feelings of anger.⁶⁰⁴ Rather, it was his intention to remain in the congregation in order to serve the needs of those conservatives who sought his instruction.⁶⁰⁵

The reason why he was being retired, he stated, was because some progressivists in the congregation felt that his views were antiquated.⁶⁰⁶ In his judgment the majority of the congregants were Conservative Jews, who would not swerve from their theological positions even though the radical element financially controlled the congregation.⁶⁰⁷

He believed that the financial considerations of the congregation was the determining factor in their selection of a Reform rabbi.⁶⁰⁸ However, he warned them that "religion must not be bartered nor are convictions to be made subordinate to convenience."⁶⁰⁹ To emphasize this point he turned to Dr. Berkowitz and reminded him that, in the main, the congregation was conservative in nature. The majority of the people did not wish to forget their Jewish heritage.⁶¹⁰ He reminded the in-coming rabbi that it was his duty to teach Judaism and, if he did so, Dr. Jastrow said he would "render that support which my conscience and convictions permit me to extend."⁶¹¹ His final statement to Dr. Berkowitz, however, gave insight into his inner feelings about the idea of a Reform rabbi occupying his pulpit:

Appeal to what is noblest in your heart,
not to self-love. Appeal to what is most
earnest and you will not call in vain.
Remember it is the Jewish religion, the

Jewish creed, it is your mission to teach. We need not look around for a philosophical basis for our ethical culture.⁶¹²

Dr. Jastrow's prediction was correct in as much as some of the members of Rodef Shalom did remain loyal to the Conservative movement.⁶¹³ Because of their general dissatisfaction with the new reform practices, they severed their connection with the congregation.⁶¹⁴ The American Hebrew, however, urged the dissident group not to form their own synagogue, but to join existing Conservative synagogues.⁶¹⁵ The newspaper was sympathetic to their cause, but in the end it would only extenuate the power of the larger Conservative congregations.⁶¹⁶ It claimed that the congregational break-up of Rodef Shalom clearly indicated that Reform Judaism represented "Novelty-mongering Judaism."⁶¹⁷ And as such, it could not have expected to retain those members who earnestly sought to adhere to the conservative principles of traditional Judaism.⁶¹⁸

True to the predictions of The American Hebrew, the dissident group eventually disbanded because they were unable to meet the financial demands involved in maintaining a synagogue.⁶¹⁹

In February of 1894, the bitterness Dr. Jastrow was harboring against the congregation finally came to the attention of the Jewish press. In a letter to The Jewish Exponent, he urgently requested some editorial space in order to express his own feelings on the question of intermarriage, then being discussed in his synagogue.⁶²⁰ The reason for this action,

he claimed, was the fact that he no longer was able to communicate directly with his congregation.⁶²¹

Unfortunately, Dr. Jastrow did not use the editorial space merely to give his rabbinical opinion on the matter of intermarriage, but personally attacked the integrity of Dr. Berkowitz:

When, at the suddenly improvised meeting of the congregation Rodef Shalom, on the 19th of September, 1892, Dr. Berkowitz was proposed as my successor, exception was taken to his action in Kansas City of admitting into Judaism (and marrying) a non-Israelite without the rite of the covenant. To this objection one representative of the congregation replied that it was true Dr. Berkowitz had made a mistake, but he was sorry for it, and would not repeat it again. What authority that gentleman had for a statement of such a strange nature, nobody ventured to question... Fortunately, the laws of our congregation allow the minister to perform no marriage ceremony without the president's authorization in the shape of a marriage license, called a "permit."⁶²²

The Board of Trustees lost no time in contacting their Rabbi Emeritus about the matter. In strongly couched language they reminded Jastrow that it would be beneath the dignity of the Board to answer him through the medium of the Jewish press.⁶²³ Instead, it was their duty to inform him through an official communique, that his remarks were "hostile to the interests of our Congregation, and by creating and fostering strife, it is bound to injure its worth and usefulness."⁶²⁴ He was further reminded that as the Rabbi Emeritus, he was bound to honor the right of privacy in congregational matters.⁶²⁵

As to the charge of not being allowed to preach to his

congregation, the Board of Trustees claimed that his remarks were unjust and unwarranted. He would never be denied the right to express his opinion on any subject. However, the pulpit was the private domain of the rabbi who was actively engaged in directing the congregation. Therefore, it would at no time be used as a debating platform. This fact was made known to Jastrow before he was retired and it was, they felt, their duty to remind him once again that the pulpit was free only to one rabbi at a time.⁶²⁶

The Board understood the feelings of Dr. Jastrow, in that they made special mention of their indebtedness for all his years of service. But at the same time it had to convince Dr. Jastrow with whom the congregation placed its loyalty:

We would also note that we know that we are voicing the sentiment of the Congregation in expressing our confidence in the sincerity and earnestness which prompt the utterances of our honored and esteemed Rabbi, Dr. Henry Berkowitz, and we recognize gratefully how much he has done during his short incumbency to further our interests and maintain the true religious standard of our Congregation.⁶²⁷

With this statement, the Board of Trustees ended the matter. No more would the press hear from Dr. Jastrow concerning his dissatisfaction with Rodef Shalom. From that day onward both parties maintained a mutual silence.

Alexander Kohut

Alexander Kohut was fifty-two years old when he died on May 25, 1894. Until the day of his death he was the recognized theologian of the Conservative movement in America. It was he who valiantly waged ideological warfare between the two extremes of Judaism, orthodoxy and radicalism.⁶²⁸

The years 1891 to 1894, however, tell a very poignant story about a man who, knowing that he was dying from cancer, refused to relinquish his gifts of preaching and teaching until he could no longer talk.⁶²⁹

His love for teaching prompted him, in 1893, to undertake a strenuous teaching schedule in order to conduct a class on in the Introduction and Isogogy of the Talmud.⁶³⁰ Aware of the physical inconvenience of teaching such a course, The American Hebrew wrote:

This self-sacrificing devotion to the cause of Hebrew learning and the interests of the Seminary, deserves emulation on the part of other rabbis who could in like manner contribute to the effectiveness of the instruction.⁶³¹

When the pain hindered him from going to the Seminary, he insisted on continuing his classes at his house.⁶³² And when his pain became too severe to endure, the students "came to his sick-room and sat at his bedside."⁶³³ He held these classes almost up to the time of his death. In fact, a few days before he died, he conducted his last lesson with Stephen S. Wise, Joseph H. Hertz and his son George. Too weak to even hold the textbood, his students held it

for him.⁶³⁴

Dr. Kohut was able to carry on his regular duties at the synagogue until April of 1892.⁶³⁵ Whenever he was not able to preach, other rabbis--both Conservative and Reform ---willingly occupied his pulpit. In April of 1892, his son George delivered the sermon;⁶³⁶ and in May of 1893, when Kohut had to miss the confirmation exercises, Dr. Silverman of Temple Emanu-El agreed to occupy his pulpit.⁶³⁷ When he felt well enough to return to the pulpit in June, he was dissuaded from delivering a sermon "and contented himself with expressing his thanks to all for their kindly interest in his condition, and to his physicians, to whom he felt a strong debt of gratitude."⁶³⁸

It is interesting to note, that Kohut's ideological dispute with Reform Judaism did not impinge on his personal friendship with many leading reformers. It was Dr. Gottheil, for instance, who helped Kohut raise the money to defray the cost of publishing the seventh and eighth volumes of the Aruch Completum.⁶³⁹ It was also Dr. Gottheil who, at the Central Conference of American Rabbis in Atlantic City, praised Kohut as a great scholar.⁶⁴⁰ Referring to his willingness to make friends from the opposing camp he said:

He was born in a conservative world, and had remained true to his early training, though when here his views became modified by the prevailing conditions. He was not faratical, did not tolerate, but associated with those differing from him.⁶⁴¹

His personal friendship with Dr. Isaac M. Wise was well-known. The two men held opposing views in matters of theology and, according to Rebeccah Kohut, would always end up arguing whenever Wise visited their house in New York City.⁶⁴² However, their friendship withstood the strain of their opposing views.⁶⁴³ Moreover, after Kohut's death, it was Dr. Wise who counselled George Kohut about his future career.⁶⁴⁴

When Dr. Kohut was alive he constantly worried about his son's health. George had been sick with a lung disease throughout most of his life.⁶⁴⁵ For this reason his father sent him to Georgia when he was barely eighteen to recuperate from his illness.⁶⁴⁶ In 1892, on his eighteenth birthday, he received a letter from his father expressing his gratitude to God for sparing George's life:

When these lines reach you, you will be eighteen years old, which in Hebrew, as you know, means life.

I send you my heartfelt wishes and the expression of my gratitude that the Almighty in His goodness has seen fit to spare you to us. You are very dear to me. Especially during the past two years you have endeared yourself to me.

You have learned to become aware of your greatest duty, that of being conscious of your health and with God's will, you will make up for lost time...⁶⁴⁷

George, however, did not find out about the severity of his father's illness until he returned from Georgia.⁶⁴⁸ When he arrived in New York, his father's physician, Dr. Adler, informed him that Dr. Kohut's days were numbered.⁶⁴⁹

Alexander Kohut's love for his native Hungary and his love for Judaism both played an important role in the last few weeks of his life. On March 20, 1894, Dr. Kohut received news that Louis Kossuth, a Hungarian hero in the movement for independence, had died.⁶⁵⁰ Kohut, himself an ardent Hungarian patriot, was so moved by the news of Kossuth's death that he felt he had to attend services at the synagogue on Saturday morning.⁶⁵¹ He had promised his family not to expend his energy by speaking. When the Sabbath service concluded, however, he approached the pulpit, and instead of giving the benediction, he delivered a sermon on Kossuth's relation to Judaism. As soon as he finished his impassioned address he collapsed and had to be carried home.⁶⁵² This was the last time he ever left his home again. He died on May 25, 1894.⁶⁵³

The funeral services for Dr. Kohut were held on a Tuesday morning at Temple Ahawath Chesed.⁶⁵⁴ Dr. Gottheil, of Temple Emanu-El, delivered the eulogy. He related how the deceased firmly believed that he was placed on earth to perform some holy mission.⁶⁵⁵ He conceived of this mission in terms of his own intellectual prowess. That is, he felt that it was God's purpose to assign him "to chronicle aright the intellectual records of his people."⁶⁵⁶ When he was consigned to rest, Dr. H.F. Mendes delivered the final eulogy.⁶⁵⁷

The leading rabbinical figures of New York conducted a joint memorial service for Dr. Kohut the following Sunday at Temple Ahawath Chesed.⁶⁵⁸ The Rev. Stephen S. Wise delivered the opening prayer, followed by the El Moly Rachamim which was said by the Rev. Raphael Benjamin.⁶⁵⁹ The two major

addresses were delivered by Drs. Kohler and Harris.

Dr. Kohler felt that Kohut's death was a crushing blow to those who valued original scholarship.⁶⁶⁰ Dr. Harris claimed that through Kohut's careful research in the field of Talmud "he did more to help the religious needs of to-day than by talking about them or offering cheap theories for their solution."⁶⁶¹

On that selfsame day, the faculty and students of the Jewish Theological Seminary assembled to render honor to the memory of Dr. Kohut.⁶⁶² Dr. Morais said that no memorial could outlast the usefulness of the Aruch Completum.⁶⁶³ Dr. Drachman, on the other hand, remarked how Kohut was able to be understood by all three segments of Judaism in theological matters. Whether they agreed with him or not, the fact remained that a mutual understanding of terms always existed with whatever group he addressed.⁶⁶⁴

Dr. Kohut was a faithful representative of Conservative Judaism. His early demise, to be sure, prevented him from achieving greater levels of success for the Conservative movement. Nothing, however, can describe the man's most inner thoughts as well as his request to his family. It was his wish that on the anniversary of his death each of his eight children would do some good deed for a poor theological student, so that the Biblical dictum "The memory of the righteous shall be for a blessing" would be literally carried out.⁶⁶⁵

Sabato Morais

Dr. Sabato Morais was the founder and first president of the Jewish Theological Seminary. He undertook the task of pioneering the administration of that school when he was already sixty-three years old. Together with H. P. Mendes, who remained faithful to the Seminary during Morais' lifetime, they attempted to transmute the principles of Historical Judaism into an active educational program for the training of rabbis.

Morais claimed that the basis of the Seminary revolved around the belief that Moses "was in all truth inspired by the Living God to promulgate laws for the government of a people sanctified to an imprescriptible mission; that these laws, moral and ceremonial...broadly formulated, needed in all ages an oral interpretation."⁶⁶⁶ But in America it was too simple a matter to discard the oral law for the comfort of assimilation.⁶⁶⁷ That is what the reformers did and that is why he felt it was necessary to base the Jewish Theological Seminary on the evolving spirit of the oral law.⁶⁶⁸

Dr. Morais found the administrative duties of a president no easy task; mainly because he was required to commute from Philadelphia to New York three times a week.⁶⁶⁹ His friend and colleague, Dr. H.P. Mendes offered to trade pulpits with Morais in order to lighten the burden of serving a congregation in Philadelphia and administering a school in New York City.⁶⁷⁰ This, to be sure, was a noble gesture in itself, since Mendes' congregation, Shearith Israel, was a much larger congregation than Morais' Mickveh Israel.⁶⁷¹

During the years 1891 to 1897, Dr. Morais was totally involved in the maintenance of the Seminary. He was only able to devote time to those issues of great importance to the Seminary. For instance, a most common theme in his lectures and writings during this period was his denial of the validity of higher critical studies on the Bible. In 1892 he cautioned his students at the Seminary to beware of falling into the trap of thinking that mere logic could unfold the truths of the Bible.⁶⁷² The purpose of such an undertaking, he claimed was to disprove the possibility of the Mosaic revelation.⁶⁷³ Outside of that narrow margin for scribal errors that produced some literal perversions, the Bible had to remain, for Conservative Jews the source of God's revelation.⁶⁷⁴ It was, in fact, the higher critical methods that left American Jewish youth bereft of any positive faith:

It has changed these youths...into cold, calculating beings, looking upon the stupendous past of God's chosen missionaries as a fiction, upon the grandest figure in the annals of mankind; upon the matchless liberator of the chosen tribes, as a myth.⁶⁷⁵

The President of the Seminary also spoke out against the failure of American Jews to sanctify the Sabbath as did their forefathers.⁶⁷⁶ The question about the Sunday Sabbath, according to Morais, was no question at all. Those Jews who would not give the Torah proper credence by following its injunctions concerning the Sabbath, were really not very interested in the faith of their fathers. The Decalogue precisely proscribes what day of the week the Jewish Sabbath falls on.⁶⁷⁷

Nor should Jews who were concerned about the desecration of the Sabbath, blame the poor Israelites who were unable to support themselves; they had to work on Saturday.⁶⁷⁸ It was the wealthy Jews who were really to blame. They were able to refrain from work, but they did not because their minds were too occupied with methods of achieving the physical comforts of life.⁶⁷⁹

Morais believed that Jewish involvement in Herzl's scheme to re-establish the political homeland of the Jews was by far the most dangerous proposal made against the spiritual well-being of all Jews.⁶⁸⁰ Political Zionism was, for Americans, unpatriotic. How could an American Jew, he claimed, support the political government of the United States and at the same time work for the political aspirations of another country?⁶⁸¹ Of greater importance, however, was the fact that Palestine was only to be re-established when God desired it.⁶⁸² Political involvement would not lead to the spiritual redemption of the people. Therefore, it was wrong for Jews to support a cause that only contained political overtones and not spiritual ones.⁶⁸³

The strenuous pace of activities Dr. Morais endured during the latter part of the nineteenth century began to weaken him as early as 1891. The American Hebrew reported on December 31, 1891, that Dr. Morais was seriously ill and would be unable to maintain his rabbinical duties.⁶⁸⁴ A student from the Jewish Theological Seminary was thus given the chore of occupying the pulpit of Mickveh Israel.⁶⁸⁵ In

1893, he once again fell ill, but recovered sufficiently to continue his dual activity of being an active rabbi and the Seminary's president.⁶⁸⁶ However, in 1896 he became quite ill and had to forego his officiating at the High Holy Day services of Mickveh Israel.⁶⁸⁷

On Friday, November 19, 1897, The American Hebrew reported that Morais fell ill immediately after dinner on the previous Wednesday. Later that evening he became comatose and remained that way until he died on Thursday night.⁶⁸⁸

The news of Morais' passing left the Conservative movement bereft of a most charismatic leader. The editor of The American Hebrew remarked that not since the death of Isaac Leeser had traditionally-centered Jews suffered such a profound loss.⁶⁸⁹

Tributes to the fallen leader of the Conservative movement came from the adherents of Reform Judaism as well as from the ranks of orthodoxy. Kaufman Kohler said, "he was the very soul of devotion and loyalty to truth..."⁶⁹⁰ Although Kohler disagreed with Morais in theological matters, he nevertheless stood in awe before his unwaivering sense of duty to the principles of Conservative Judaism.⁶⁹¹

Dr. Emil G. Hirsch also extended his sincerest sympathies to the family and colleagues of Sabato Morais. His respect for the Conservative leader grew out of the battles they waged against each other:

He did not approve of my views. His attitude on all questions bothering Israel were antipodal to mine. But his opposition was honest and consistent... He lived his Judaism, and would make no

concessions no matter what might be the reasons of personal or congregational policy to the contrary which were urged upon him. Such a consistent unbending loyalty had the right to disapprove of my radicalism--a right which vacillating time-servers may usurp but do not own. 692

Of all the tributes Morais received, perhaps none were as poignant as the one from his friend and colleague, Dr. Marcus Jastrow. Jastrow, to be sure, made mention of the man's great intellectual and administrative powers. 693 He also recounted how Morais founded and organized a number of worthwhile charitable institutions, and how he singularly carried on the fight for his religious principles. 694 Yet, nothing measured up to the amount of respect paid to him by the immigrant community of Philadelphia:

But all this appears almost insignificant in the face of that side of his activity, the magnitude and grandeur of which became manifest to-day to the dimmest eye. Who were the hundreds and thousands that crowded Fifth Street this afternoon for entire squares from side to side, leaving just room enough for the cars to pass? Who were those hundreds whose weary feet traveled the distance from Fifth and Green to Twelfth and Federal Streets? A guard of honor it was which kings might envy. Who were they? The poor and the outcasts of our brethren, those whom Russia's atrocities have made so unsightly in appearance that many of us are ashamed to acknowledge fellowship with them...They will mourn for him, they will miss him. 695

Solomon S. Schechter

The Conservative leadership attempted to secure the services of Solomon S. Schechter as early as 1890. In that year Cyrus Adler presented a message to Schechter from Sabato Morais on behalf of the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary, asking the Cambridge scholar to consider the possibility of accepting a teaching position at the Seminary.⁶⁹⁶

In 1891, Dr. Alexander Kohut received a reply from Schechter saying: "I should be willing to accept the post of teacher in your seminary provided the remuneration will permit me to live independently."⁶⁹⁷ However, the financial situation of the Seminary was still precarious at that time, and nothing came of the proposal. Nevertheless, Schechter was still interested in the Seminary, for in 1893, he again wrote to Kohut saying:

What is your College doing? America must be a place of Torah, because the future of Judaism is across the seas. You must make something great out of your Institution if Torah and wisdom are to remain among us. Everything is at a standstill in Germany; England has too few Jews to exercise any real influence. What will happen to Jewish learning if America remains indifferent?⁶⁹⁸

Such a positive attitude on Schechter's part toward the possibility of creating a center of Jewish learning in America, prompted Judge Mayer Sulzberger and Dr. Cyrus Adler to visit him in England in order to persuade him to lecture in the United States.⁶⁹⁹ Schechter consented to lecture before the Mickve Israel association on the subject of Jewish Theology.⁷⁰⁰

His expenses and fees for the lecture were paid for by the Hyman Gratz Fund. Originally, the Gratz Fund was set up "for the establishment and support of a College for the education of Jews residing in the city and county of Philadelphia."⁷⁰¹ Dr. Solomon Solis-Cohen was appointed chairman of a congregational committee to investigate the possibility of setting up such an educational institution.⁷⁰² However, the \$6,000.00 per annum income from the "Fund" did not prove adequate enough to maintain such an institution. Thus:

At a meeting of the committee held November 29, 1894, it was resolved that a series of lectures be given during the year 1894-95, and that Mr. S. Schechter, Reader in Rabbinics in the University of Cambridge, England, be invited to deliver a number of lectures of this series.⁷⁰³

The American Hebrew hailed the trustees of the Gratz Fund for its wise and liberal-minded use of the finances of the trust.⁷⁰⁴ They recognized that Schechter's visit would provide them with a first hand look at this renowned scholar from England. Moreover, negotiations on a more serious level could begin once Schechter had the opportunity to investigate the growth-potential of American scholarship.⁷⁰⁵ It is interesting to note, however, that The American Hebrew was well aware of the indifference of New York Jewry toward the Seminary. Hence, that newspaper pleaded with their New York brethren for them not to display their usual indifference.⁷⁰⁶ Notwithstanding such a plea, it soon became apparent that New York Jewry was not yet ready to be wooed by Dr. Schechter, for all plans to have him lecture in that city were cancelled.⁷⁰⁷

Schechter delivered six lectures on Rabbinic Theology in the Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.⁷⁰⁸ The lectures were a success in that they were widely covered by the Jewish press.⁷⁰⁹ But Schechter's own reaction toward his popularity prompted him to say:

I gave my first lecture yesterday. The hall was crowded, and I hope that at least a minyan understood my English, and that I shall be saved for the sake of ten.⁷¹⁰

Schechter returned to England after the lecture series. Between 1895 and 1897, he unearthed the Cairo Genizah and discovered the Hebrew text of the Book of Ecclesiasticus. Hence, his popularity now became world-wide. It was now believed that it would be quixotic for the Seminary to offer him a teacher's position. Realizing this fact the Seminary leadership again approached Schechter in 1897. However, they now offered him the presidency of the Seminary. The reason for this offer was that Dr. Sabato Morais had died, and the Seminary needed a scholar of at least equal renown to succeed him.⁷¹¹ The Cambridge scholar filled all the requirements of leadership and was already assured of American Judaism's respect and admiration.⁷¹² This was evidenced by the fact that he confided in Judge Mayer Sulzberger in order to secure some advice from him regarding his future in the United States:

I was lately approached from New York with the question whether I should care to come to New York to take charge of the Chancellorship of the Jewish Theological Seminary. I do not care to mention the name of my correspondent as the matter is confidential. Besides you know probably by now who it is. I have not answered him

yet: but I am going to refer him to you. I hardly need to tell you that America has certain attractions for me. But I am anxious to be there quite independent as well as doing there some good by founding there a school on a scientific basis. You probably know what I want or rather what I ought to want better than I myself. Hence the best thing is that you decide for me in this respect.⁷¹³

The Judge, as well as Cyrus Adler, urged him to be patient in the face of the Seminary's insecure financial position:

Some of his more impetuous friends urged him to join the Seminary at once, but I was very solicitous and in this Judge Sulzberger joined, that he should delay until we had a sufficient foundation to make him secure here.⁷¹⁴

Schechter, however, was not interested in coming to America just for the sake of the Seminary. In a letter to Judge Sulzberger on January 14, 1898, he made it quite clear that the New York school was not his main interest in coming to America.⁷¹⁵ He had heard that Gratz College had been reorganized, and he wished to be associated with that institution.⁷¹⁶

In reply to his query, Judge Sulzberger advised him not to make any commitments in America for the present time.⁷¹⁷ His advice, it seems, was heeded since Schechter, on March 8, 1898, wrote to Sulzberger stating:

The New York news are so far satisfactory and I thank you for all you have said and you have done.⁷¹⁸

These negotiations with the Jewish Theological Seminary continued apace. The American Jewish press, representing the Conservative viewpoint, however, was getting impatient with the long drawn out negotiations. They recognized Schechter's

qualifications and began to push for some concerted action by the Seminary. For instance, in the October 6, 1899 issue of The Jewish Exponent, the editor called attention to the fact that in their opinion Professor Schechter was the only individual that could properly fill the position of President of the Seminary.⁷¹⁹ It was also their belief that he would find unlimited success in his capacity of president. Therefore, they felt it the duty of the Jewish press to publicize "the efforts that (they) are now making to induce him to accept the call of the Seminary."⁷²⁰

Although The American Hebrew echoed the appeal of The Jewish Exponent, it was also cognizant of the fact that the Seminary's financial problems prevented it from acquiring the services of Schechter at that time.⁷²¹ Thus its plea to secure his services was directed toward the philanthropic interests of American Jewry.⁷²² Schechter's acceptance would not merely be a gain for the Seminary, but for all Judaism:

Every Jew who loves his race and religion, whatever be his "doxy" must recognize the value to American Judaism of the transference of the influence and labor of Professor Schechter to this land.⁷²³

The American Hebrew's concern over the financial status of the Seminary was a point well taken by that newspaper. It appears that the shaky financial foundation of that Institution was the determining factor in Judge Sulzberger's constant advice to Schechter to remain uncommitted to the Seminary's proposals.⁷²⁴ The Judge's interest in Schechter's welfare prompted him to write a letter to Cyrus Adler explaining his position as both a supporter of the Seminary and a personal

friend of Schechter.⁷²⁵ In this letter he reminds Dr. Adler of the many sacrifices Schechter would have to make in order to preside in America:

If he is prepared to make the sacrifice of (1) scholarly implements, such as a library, and (2) social position, for which in this city a man without money cannot find even a proximity of an equivalent; if, further, he is prepared for a certain gratuitous hostility which could only be endured and not battled with, then I think that his usefulness here can be greater than anywhere else, and I have no objection to his accepting this offer....⁷²⁶

To protect Schechter from making a financial error of judgment, however, Sulzberger also insisted that he should not accept the presidency unless a certain sum of money was raised in advance so that he would not face financial ruin if the Seminary could not meet its responsibilities.⁷²⁷

Nevertheless, Joseph Blumenthal, the President of the Jewish Theological Seminary Association, urged Schechter to accept the Seminary's offer.⁷²⁸ It is probable that such an offer was misinterpreted by The American Hebrew, for it announced that Professor Schechter accepted the offer made to him and was going to take over his duties as president by the early part of 1900.⁷²⁹ It is important to note, however, that Schechter eventually replied to Philip Cowen, the editor of The American Hebrew, and informed him that he had no intention of coming to America at that time.⁷³⁰

Sulzberger foresaw the necessity of the Seminary's reorganization as the only way to improve the financial stability of the Seminary.⁷³¹ Without such a reorganization,

he saw no possible way he could advise Schechter to accept the presidency. The major drawback, as far as Sulzberger was concerned, was the fact that the Board of Trustees of the Seminary was under the direction of a Rabbinical Board.⁷³²

In a letter to Schechter he intimated "that unless the Board of Trustees is reorganized on the basis of secularity, I shall advise your declination."⁷³³ In fact, it was the Judge's opinion that although the Rabbis comprising the Board:

may be properly orthodox in belief or expression...they do not command the financial support of the only people to be relied upon to maintain the Institution in permanence.⁷³⁴

Sulzberger's next move on Schechter's behalf was to speak to Jacob H. Schiff. Schiff, according to the judge, was "the Yehudi" in New York.⁷³⁵ However, it appears that Schiff would not render proper support of the Seminary unless there was a reorganization of the Board of Trustees under the presidency of Louis Marshall.⁷³⁶ But the reorganization of the Seminary did not take place until after the death of Joseph Blumenthal in 1901.⁷³⁷

The struggles encountered by the active participants who desired to bring Schechter to America were, in the year 1900, still unresolved. Joseph Blumenthal, in his annual report to the Jewish Theological Seminary Association was cognizant of the fact that Schechter would not accept the position offered to him without adequate remuneration.⁷³⁸ Yet, without Schechter at the helm, Blumenthal foresaw the collapse of the Seminary:

We must secure the services of a recognized scholar as the President of its Faculty, and in order to do so the financial status of the organization must be raised to a level that will ensure its permanence in a high degree of efficiency. 739

The entire period, from 1891 to 1900, was one of mutual expectation and hope. Schechter desired to settle in America and the Conservative Jews in America wanted him to accept their offer. - first as a teacher and then as the president of the Seminary. However, neither party was able to conclude the negotiations because of the lack of money. The affection on Schechter by 1900, prompted him to write Judge Sulzberger:

...of New York I can only say
מ'אד מ'אד (the whole
matter is wearisome). 740

Indeed by the end of 1900 the whole matter seemed no closer to a solution than it did in 1891.

Footnotes

1. Herbert Parzen, Architects of Conservative Judaism, (New York: Jonathan David, 1964), p. 1.
2. Ibid., p. 1.
3. The American Hebrew, (New York, July 7, 1891), Vol. XLVII, No. 13, p. 268.
4. Ibid., p. 268.
5. The American Hebrew, August 7, 1891, Vol. XLVIII, No. 1, p. 286.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 287.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 297.
13. Ibid., p. 287.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Solomon Schechter, Studies in Judaism, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896), p. xvii.
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