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# THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM AS REFLECTED BY THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS DURING THE YEARS 1890 - 1937

by Milton Matz, B.A., B.H.L.

This thesis contains one hundred pages of subject matter, nine pages of notes and one page of bibliography. The prime sources drawn upon for this thesis were the proceedings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis from 1890 to 1937.

It was the purpose of this thesis to attempt to delineate the basic currents of thought and to describe the logic of the theology of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. The subject matter was handled chronologically in order to observe the flow of development.

Different theological emphases were found within the various periods under study. The years 1890 - 1897 were characterized by universalism and the consequent emphasis upon the mission of Israel. In the years 1897 - 1910 a loss of optimism occurred which required a reorientation of the theological picture. The Conference searched for stability through the means of creed and synod. But Conference opinion could not accept either of these two proposals. In 1908 - 1923 it placed more emphasis upon the definition of Reform as a process of religious development. In the years 1919 - 1935 disatisfaction increased with regard to the piece-meal policy of the Conference, which handled issues only as they arose, making no over-all formal commitment. Objection came

from two sources: the Zionists who were dissatisfied with their status of mere toleration in the Conference, and those who were disquieted by the growth of religious apathy. This criticism led to the formulation of the Columbus Platform in 1937.

It was observed that the basic theological issues of the Conference revolved about its inability to formulate any stable credo. Its own definiton of its nature posited ultimate truth as existing at the end of days; consequently, it found it well nigh impossible to present its beliefs in absolute terms. It was seen that it had devised several means of establishing temporary religious truth. These attempts were largely based upon the Conference's faith in the validity of reason, in the evolution of history and the divine nature of ethics. It is to be remarked that on the whole the field of Reform theology has been woefully neglected, and that the Conference yet faces a heavy task.

TO

MY MOTHER AND DAD

# THEOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN AMERICAN REFORM JUDAISM AS REFLECTED BY THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS DURING THE YEARS 1890-1937

by

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# Table of Contents


| | | page |
|---|---|---|
| I. | Historical and Purpose ..... | 1 |
| II. | Immediate Basis of Conference Authority ..... | 4 |
| III. | 1890 - 1897 | |
| | a) 1890 - 1897 ..... | 6 |
| | b) Universalistic Optimism ..... | 7 |
| | c) Revelation and Inspiration ..... | 14 |
| | d) Concept of God ..... | 21 |
| | e) Beginnings of Controversy Over Creed .. | 24 |
| IV. | 1898 - 1902 | |
| | Loss of Heart ..... | 27 |
| V. | 1903 - 1910 | |
| | a) Synod ..... | 35 |
| | b) Creed ..... | 39 |
| | c) Reform as a Process ..... | 44 |
| VI. | 1911 - 1918 | |
| | a) 1911-1918 | 49 |
| | b) Increased Emphasis on Social Justice .. | 53 |
| | c) Zionism ..... | 59 |
| VII. | 1919 - 1928 | |
| | a) 1919 - 1928 ..... | 64 |
| | b) Emphasis on Emotional Aspects of Religion ..... | 69 |
| VIII. | 1929 - 1937 | |
| | a) The Search for Authority ..... | 77 |
| | b) The Issue of Humanism ..... | 84 |
| | c) The Issue of Nationalism ..... | 89 |
| | d) Acceptance of the Columbus Platform ... | 92 |
| | Conclusion | 97 |
| | Footnotes | |
| | Bibliography | |

## Historical and Purpose

The Pittsburgh Conference of 1885 formally marks the beginning of a new era in the development of Reform Judaism. It terminated much of the animosity which existed between the Eastern and Western factions of Reform, and it produced a set of doctrines acceptable to the large bulk of the American Reform Rabbinate. On the basis of this commonly accepted core of agreement united action became a live possibility.

Another factor motivated for even greater unity. As soon as the Conference adjourned it became subject to the vehement attacks of both the Conservative and Orthodox rabbinate. This opposition caused the liberal rabbinate to stand out most sharply from the background of the more conservative elements in the American-Jewish scene, and thus made mandatory its unification. That Rabbinical Conferences with radical purposes should arouse opposition is not new, the Cleveland and Philadelphia gatherings also were followed by vituperation, but now a change is seen. Dr. Philipson puts it this way:

> The great difference, however, between the opposition engendered by the Pittsburgh Conference and that aroused by former Conferences was that, in earlier instances, reformers were arrayed against reformers, while the Pittsburgh platform accentuated the differences between the reformers on one hand and the orthodox on the other. Happily here the reformers were not divided.[1]

The Pittsburgh Conference adjourned with the understanding that it would convene again the following year in Cincinnati, however this meeting never materialized. Four years elapsed before a national Conference was called. In the year 1889, in the city of Detroit, the

Central Conference of American Rabbis was organized as a permanent organization. A plan of organization was drawn up and a slate of officers elected. This organization has functioned to this day.

## Purpose

It will be the purpose of this paper to analyze the theological issues touched upon in this Conference, between the years 1890 - 1937: to attempt to delineate the basic currents of thought and to describe the logic of its development. But before this task is begun some explanatory remarks are in order. Firstly, the years of study 1890 - 1937, have been chosen for practical considerations: 1890 represents the first fully documented Conference Year, 1937 ends an epoch in the development of Reform, it is marked by the adoption of the Columbus Platform. This study will involve the analysis of those trends which led to the modification of the originally accepted Pittsburgh Platform and to its reformulation as the Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism at Columbus, touching upon the nature of the modifications, compromises, and reversals of position involved. Special emphasis will be given to the problem of authority.

Secondly, it can be validly objected that the proceedings of this Conference do not accurately reflect the thinking of the Reform rabbinate. This objection can be justified. Individuality, the basis of theological honesty, is subverted in a Conference environment. Papers and remarks too often become reactions to environmental needs of the moment, thus losing the quality of calm considered introspection so necessary for theological speculation. Thinking is largely dominated

by the convention crisis of the moment, forcing theological thought to be placed in strongly problematic terms. On the other hand, this paper would maintain that the dynamics of Reform theological thinking is best observed when applied to concrete situations. Then the aspects it regards as most pertinent will rush to the fore, the doctrines regarded as minor will become noticeable by their absence. These processes become evident when issues such as nationalism, defection of the laity, centralization of authority, are brought forward for action. This then will be the purpose of this paper: to examine the basic theological doctrines of the Conference, and to trace their development under the impact of the pressures, needs, and moods of the day.

## Immediate Basis of Conference Authority

The first issue which the Conference faced was that of determining its own scope of authority. It attempted to define its position on this matter at its very first sessions. At the preliminary meeting in Detroit, on July 10, 1889, the committee on organization submitted the following resolution:

> Whereas, at the meetings of the Council of the U.A.H.C. and other occasions, at which a number of Rabbis have in the past come together, they, in obedience to a natural and spontaneous prompting, have endeavored to organize themselves for mutual co-operation, encouragement and support; and
> Whereas, all such organizations, though they may have failed to perpetuate their existence, have nevertheless been of inestimable benefit to those participating in their proceedings, and by their deliberations and resolutions have established certain norms, guiding principles and precedents which have become recognized as an authoritative expression of the best intelligence and purpose of their respective times; therefore do we, Rabbis of America, gathered in the city of Detroit, in obedience to the same natural prompting, and urged by the same needs and longings, herewith organize ourselves for like purposes into a Central Conference of American Rabbis and elect five officers, a President, Vice-President, Corresponding Secretary, Recording Secretary and Treasurer.
> Resolved, that the proceedings of all the modern Rabbinical Conferences from that held in Braunschweig in 1844, and including all like assemblages held since, shall be taken as a basis for the work of this Conference in an endeavor to maintain in unbroken historic succession the formulated expression of Jewish thought and life of each era.[2]

The Conference becomes established as an organization empowered to deliberate and to reach decisions, but not to have the power to establish these decisions. Their function, however, is more than advisory for it is based on the underlying hope that their opinions will in time achieve status as guiding principles and precedents. Immediately they take a position with regard to the issue of a Sanhedrin. The Conference is not to be an authoritative organization as the Sanhedrin once was,

its function is immediately deliberatory, its only form of coercion that of favorable public opinion.

Its functioning as an advisory and guiding body is clearly borne out in a resolution sponsored by the "Committee on the President's Message" at the Conference in 1892.

> The Committee recommends the endorsement of the standpoint set forth in the message that the Conference, though not an authoritative religious body, still claims to itself the right to formulate such principles as represent the convictions of progressive congregations and to suggest such constructive measures as will be helpful to those who share their views.[3]

This principle, though it came under fire during the first ten years after the turn of the twentieth century, and also during the years of the thirties, has remained operative during the entire history of the Conference until this day.

The Conference does, however, establish for itself a certain basis for authority, though it is tenuously defined, in the concluding phrase of its 1889 resolution: " ... in an endeavor to maintain in unbroken historic succession the formulated expression of Jewish thought and life of each era." Time and again the Conference bases its actions on its desire to maintain unbroken succession with the past; often in its affirmations it speaks of its obligations to the eternal truths emerging from the crucible of Jewish experience. It accepts as an almost unopposed axiom that religious validity is to be found in historic experience, and that the past must be made the basis for orientation towards the future. The exact nature of the indebtedness to the past is however a bone of contention. Yet it must be constantly borne in mind, that the validity of the historic tradition is almost constantly utilized as one of the basic premises of Reform theological

thinking.

It would have been expected that the initial meeting of such a group would be marked by the formulation of a set of guiding principles, but this was not the case here. The Conference was a direct outgrowth of the Pittsburgh Conference of 1885. The common core of consent so necessary for the founding of any such deliberative body was apparently based upon the program embodied in the Pittsburgh Platform. In this regard Dr. Philipson writes:

> The principles of the men forming the Conference were so well known that there was not thought to be any necessity for making a declaration of principles, notably as at its second meeting the Conference passed a resolution to the effect that all the declarations of Reform adopted at previous Rabbinical Conferences in Europe and this country be collected and recorded in the yearbook and be considered the working basis of the Conference.[4]

It is upon this definition of its scope and its principle that the Central Conference began its formidable task of serving the needs of the American Jewish Community.

## 1890 - 1897

It is felt that the subject matter be best approached chronologically in order to obtain an understanding of the process of development at work in the thinking of the Conference. To make this task feasible it is essential that the forty-seven years under consideration be divided into manageable blocks of time. This division will be attempted along logical lines, endeavoring to conform to the nature of the activities of the Conference. Thus when specific issues are central for a period of years, forming a natural time unit; or when a specific project is under way directing the thinking of the Conference

in specific channels (i.e. the issues of synod and creed in the years 1902-1909, that of the Guiding Principles in the early thirties); they will be used as the basis for the divisions. The first period for consideration will be the years 1890-1897 which show a definite consistency of mood and purpose.

## 1890-1897 Marked by Universalistic Optimism

The Conference then operated in an environment of rationalism. All was within the scope of the human spirit or potentially within its ken. The great physical mysteries of the universe were fairly well in hand; the mathematical developments proceedings from Newton's law of gravity had practically reached the terminus of their purpose. The dogma's of Darwinian and social evolutionism forced men to accept a fate of inevitable progress and change for the better and The evils of the day were sloughed of as some of the cruder aspects of the "survival of the fittest" process, aspects which man will leave far behind as he travels on the road of evolution. The biological, sociological, and philosophical formulations of the day largely presupposed the inevitability of constant change for the better. Hegel's onrushing movement of the world spirit, Spencer's sociological development, Darwin's evolution of body and mind, even Marx's materialist dialectic -- all painted resplendent visions of human destiny. Is it any wonder that the Reform rabbinate was influenced by the belief in progress, or as they put it theologically, the Messianic Age. The belief was something very real even imminent, it seemed to be just around the corner. Kaufman Kohler put it in these words:

> Here on the boundary of the Messianic land we must stand with the Ark of the Covenant upon our shoulders, waiting

> till all our brethren can join us in entering the land where the prophetic vision will be realized: one God, one humanity, and one martyr-priest and herald nation praising the "Adonai Echad", the only God enthroned in all hearts.[6]

It was no idle theological speculation which was involved but an existent reality. This belief becomes one of the basic touchstones necessary for the understanding of the thinking of this period: it is an essential point of reference whereby formulations are evaluated, it becomes the vital current which suffuses the systematic thinking of the period. An example of this is seen in Kohler's application of this dogma to his statement concerning the immanence of God.

> Is now our era of enlightenment and progress, of historical consciousness and evolution void altogether of the 'Ruach Hakkodesh", the Holy Spirit, deprived of the power of divine inspiration? Does the Shechina, the Divine Majesty, not dwell also above and within us in our "Arbah Amoth Shel Halachah," our religious creations and institutions? Who that compares the state of Judaism of the Pre-Mendelsohnian era with ours the world over, is so biased and blind as not to see that the same spirit which made the prophet Ezekiel see the dead bones of Israel rise to new life, has also worked a wondrous resurrection in our days?[6]

This spirit of optimism made for the enlargement of the world picture. In a world of progressive evolution they were caused to think in terms of the logical finalities of the situation. Ultimately evolution was to bring under its redemptive fold all of mankind. The Messianic doctrine could thus only be defined as a universalistic process of unfoldment destined to embrace all of humanity. (Of course it must be remembered that previous to the eighteenth century or more accurately prior to Voltaire, the doctrine was couched insupernaturalistic terms involving a supernatural redemption; now the thinking is purely in terms of the natural-humam personality becomes the agent which brings about the onset of the Messianic Age.) The doctrine is traditionally

an old one, it is first formulated by the prophets, but infrequently did it receive the realistic universal potentiality which it had during this period.

Universalism becomes the banner under which Reform moves; almost all its doctrines are given broad universalistic implication. Gustav Gottheil thus defines the nature of God:

> The Unity of God, that chief corner-stone of Judaism, is conceived of more in its inclusive than exclusive bearing ... Faith in the One Father in heaven imposes upon us the obligation to bring all his human children into the bond of one common brotherhood. Rituals intended exclusively to keep the Jews apart from his environment we abandon for that very reason; all traces of hostility to any one section of mankind, no matter what their religion, no matter what justification the compilers of our liturgy had when they called for vengeance on their persecutors, are expunged from our prayers and hymns.[7]

God is defined on the basis of universalism and his religion must be placed in a corresponding cast. The insularity which the religion of the Jews evolved through the trying ghetto years must be abandoned, the new role must be accepted. Judaism is defined as the universal religion. At the first annual convention of the C.C.A.R. in 1890, I. M. Wise gave the following description of Judaism:

> It need not be reiterated in this assembly that the Prophets, one and all, and after them the sages of the Talmud, the philosophers of the Middle Ages and the teachers of the nineteenth century, all of them, an unbroken chain of reasoners, maintain the very same thing: Judaism is the universal religion; and all of them predicted and hoped for the time when God will be King over all the earth, and God will be known as One, and One his name will be. It was the mission of Judaism from its inception to become at the fullness of time the religion of the human family. Its mission is the conversion and fraternization of mankind, not merely because it claims to be divine revelation, but because it is the only twin sister of pure reason.[8]

Dr. Wise is firmly outspoken on the purpose and method of Judaism;

its purpose is that of the Messianic redemption and its tool is that of reason. He is solidly entrenched in his confidence in the validity of the ideals of the Messianic era and reason.

The need to define Judaism as a universal religion brought about many responses. Most of them, as that of Dr. Wise, remained within the camp of Judaism. But dangers were close at hand. It is on the verge of paradox to yearn for a universalist goal while anchored on a particularist premise. A new definition of the nature of Judaism as a social unit became a necessity, one sufficient to include universalist aspirations yet remaining compatible with the continued existence of the Jews as a community. This problem of an adequate definition of the Jewish community is one that still plagues Reform today, and the issues are still similar to those of the period under discussion. At that period the need was for a broadening of the scope of Judaism. Emile G. Hirsch was one of the most radical in his definition.

> It is not in the storm of fanaticism nor in the fire of prejudice, but in the still, small voice of conscience that God speaks and is to be found. He believes in God who lives a God-like, i.e., a goodly life. Not that he mumbles his credo, but he who lives it, is accepted. Were those marked for glory by the great teacher of Nazareth who wore the largest phylacteries? Is the sermon on the Mount a creed? Was the Decalogue a creed? Character and conduct not creed will be the keynote of the Gospel in the Church of Humanity Universal.[9]

And again in the same vein:

> The day of national religions is past. The God of the universe speaks to all mankind ... But, and this is essential as marking a new advance, the universal religion for all the children of Adam will not palisade its courts by the pointed and forbidding stakes of a creed. Creeds in time to come will be recognized to be, indeed, cruel, barbed wire fences wounding those that would stray to broader pastures and hurting others who would come in.[10]

Emile G. Hirsch swayed by the Ethical Idealism, then so persuasively

taught at the German Universities where he had studied, defined Judaism under its broadest, most inclusive aspect, that of ethics. Cultus and creed become unnecessary, indeed, inimicable to his concept of the "Church Universal". The nationalist elements of Judaism become obstacles to the unfoldment of religion.

Though this radical position was by and large not accepted, its spirit was essentially in accord with that of the Conference. In 1897 following the publication of Herzl's The Jewish State, and the birth of political Zionism, the Conference felt compelled to clarify its position on the touchy issue of nationalism. The following resolution was submitted by the Committee on the President's Message and subsequently adopted:

> Resolved, that we totally disapprove of any attempt for the establishment of a Jewish state. Such attempts show a misunderstanding of Israel's mission, which from the narrow political and national field has been expanded to the promotion among the whole human race of the broad and universalistic religion first proclaimed by the Jewish Prophets. Such attempts do not benefit but infinitely harm our Jewish brethren where they are still persecuted, by confirming the assertion of their enemies that the Jews are foreigners in the country in which they are at home, andof which they are everywhere the most loyal and patriotic citizens. We reaffirm that the object of Judaism is not political nor national, but spiritual and addresses itself to the continuous growth of peace, justice and love in the human race, to a messianic time when all men will recognize that they form 'one great brotherhood' for the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.[11]

There was only one position the Conference could logically take with regard to Zionism, otherwise it would have had to deny its basic premise. Zionism betokened a threat which could not be disregarded. As opposed to that point of view which saw God's guiding hand at work in the evolution of mankind was the theses of Zionism that the world was a cruel world, one in which Jews could never live unless they fashinned their own destiny in the form of a national state. The premise of Zionism

was the anti-theses of that of Reform. The syntheses still remained many years in the future.

Reform could not accept the definition of the world which Zionism offered, for it was opposed to Reform's central concept: namely, that the world through its natural processes make for the continuous creation of goodness which will inevitably pervade the world. This doctrine is precisely stated by I. M. Wise.

> The good and the true existing in man, or evolved by man in the course of his history under the love of God, remains forever imperishable, indestructible, and unforgotten, and increases in quantity and quality as the historical process goes on, as thus revelation announces "He preserveth grace (the good and the true) to the thousandth generation," i.e., forever. On the other hand, the opposite of the true and the good - evil, wickedness, and all that is nugatory to mankind, produced by "the iniquity of the fathers", by deviation from the straight line of God's law, with its evil effects upon humanity - will perish and not reach beyond the third or fourth generation of those who hate God. He, by a peculiar arrangement of transpiring facts neutralizes the effects produced by the evil doors, so that they cannot reach beyond the third or fourth generation. So God's love is manifested and actualized in the life of nations as well as individuals.[12]

The life situation of man as well as the historical process in which he is enmeshed is portrayed optimistically by the Reform group. The theological equivalent for this attitude is presented by the Pittsburgh Platform.

> We re-assert the doctrine of Judaism that the soul is immortal, grounding the belief on the divine nature of the human spirit, which forever finds bliss in righteousness, and misery in wickedness.

or as stated by Joseph Stolz:

> In Jewish ethics the center of gravity in therefore not to be diverted to the other world. This life is not to be shunned and our obligations here are none of them to be slighted because there is a hereafter. On the contrary, without any regard for future reward or punishment it is our duty to make this life perfect and this world perfect ..[13]

The context of man's life situation is interpreted in keeping with the over-all description of social progress, providing a unified framework conducive to the forward progress of man.

## Summary

This section has attempted to demonstrate the far-reaching effect which the concept of progress had had upon the thinking of Reform Judaism. Judaism which traditionally must be described as life-affirming was infused with a new conviction of the reality of its potential. Reform took the vital concept of "Redemption", applied it to the this-worldly scene and cloaked it with meaningful reality. This concept in turn brought new life to many of the doctrines of Judaism.

## 1890-1897 Revelation and Inspiration

Revelation can be understood as being prequisite to theistic religion. It provides the vertical bond between the two levels of the natural and the supernatural. It is thoroughly in keeping with the logic of a supernaturally oriented philosophy to establish a thoroughgoing conception of revelation, one which would be effective in supplying an authoritative basis for action. But this is not the case in a modernistic philosophy. From its point of view it is almost impossible to declare any doctrine absolutely divine and binding, removing all equivocation and relativity from its formulation. An alternative too easily taken is that of denial of revelation, or, what amounts to the same thing, declaring revelation to be simply one of the aspects of normal human knowledge. Reform attempts to follow a middle course, steering clear of both the absolutist and naturalist position -- with what success it does so remains to be seen.

The Conference unequivocally states its belief in revelation, or as it prefers to call it, divine revelation. I. M. Wise goes so far as to designate it as one of the dogmas of Judaism:

> The scriptures from the first to the last page advance the doctrine of DIVINE INSPIRATION AND REVELATION. Reason about it as you may, it always centers in the proposition: There exists a faculty of intercommunication between that universal, prior, and superior being and the individualized being called man; and this is also a dogma.[14]

It is keenly felt that some other-worldly power must be the source of religion; though it be completely rational in nature, religious wisdom is felt to have some source other than merely that of the human mind. Kaufman Kohler states:

> Tradition has only one name for the power that created this Judaism of Antigonus and Judas Maccabaeus, of Hillel and Akiba -- the same that moved the founders and father of the Christian Church -- the "Ruach Ha-kkodesh" -- the Holy Spirit, the living force of the Jewish truth, or as we call it, inspiration.[15]

It is all very well to discuss revelation hypothetically but the strength of the doctrine is tested under trial. The specific issue involved ~~concerned~~ the nature of the Bible. If revelation is determined as having a validity beyond that of ordinary knowledge, the Bible as the source of revelation must be given a central position in Reform thought. All doctrines must be squared with the position of Scripture. If the Bible is regarded as being simply the best available thought of the Biblical period than the validity of revelation is for all practical purposes abrogated. This issue received cursory attention during this period. The Conference did not go beyond the position maintained by the Pittsburgh Platform.

> We recognize in the Bible the record of the consecration of the Jewish people to its mission as the priest of the One God, and value it as the most potent instrument of religious and moral instruction. We hold that the modern discoveries of scientific researches in the domain of nature and history are not antagonistic to the doctrines of Judaism, the Bible reflecting its conception of divine Providence, and Justice dealing with man in miraculous narrative.[16]

The Platform affirms the validity of the doctrines of the Bible largely on tha basis of their prior validation through reason, and morality. Essentially it attempts to identify revelation with reason, and morality, and defines them as being mutually self-evident and self-validating. This position involves a possible contradiction -- what if reason and scripture fail to agree.

This contradiction is evident in the following statement by Wise:

> The Foundations of Judaism is in the Pentateuch. This is historical Judaism. Its provisions and teachings may be differently expounded, reduced to practice, applied to meet emergencies according to different places, ages and circumstances -- honest free thought is a privilege of man older than all liturgical works -- without disturbing the unity of Judaism. The various phases of Judaism ... philosophic, rationalistic, rabbinistic, and kabbalistic ... are everyone legitimate in its time, anyhow in as far as based upon the pentateuch provisions and teachings.[17]

I. M. Wise thus finds himself in the anomalous position of basing Judaism upon the pentateuch yet without defining its authority, without determining the extent to which 'pentateuchal provisions' are binding upon 'honest free thought'. (It should be pointed out that this discussion refers essentially to theological doctrines, the Pittsburgh Platform specifically dealt with the issue of biblical ritual, declaring as valid only those ritual which still have religious or moral significance). In 1895 this issue was broached on the conference floor, but nothing definite was formulated.

At the meeting of 1895 held in Rochester, New York, the president in his address proposed the following question for discussion: "What is our relation in all religious matters to our own post-biblical, our patristic literature, including the Talmud, casuists, responses, and commentaries?" The committee to whom this was referred submitted the following report:

> ... from the standpoint of Reform Judaism, the whole post-biblical and patristic literature, including the casuists, responses and commentaries, is, and can be considered as, nothing more or less than "religious literature." As such it is of inestimable value. It is the treasure house in which the successive ages deposited their conceptions of the great and functional principles of Judaism, and their contributions to the never-ceasing endeavor to elucidate the same. Consciously or unconsciously, every age has added a wing to the great treasure-house, ... To have awakened the consciousness of this historic fact is the great merit of Reform Judaism; and the more this consciousness grows upon our mind, the more the conditions and environments of our

> modern life force it upon us, the more persistently we have to assert: that our relations in all religious matters are in no way authoritatively and finally determined by any portion of our post-biblical and patristic literature.[18]

This statement in no way defines the position of the Conference as regards to Biblical literature; however, an interesting insight is gotten through Philipson's comment on this resolution.

> This report was considered at the last session of the Conference. Many of the members had left for their homes, so that only twenty were present. The report called forth long and warm discussion. A number of the most pronounced reformers took the ground that the report did not go far enough, and that it ought to have stated the attitude also in reference to the biblical books. They declared that in the stream of tradition the biblical books must be considered with the post-biblical, that the two cannot be separated. Therefore they voted against the report of the Committee.[19]

The statement reveals that the authoritative nature of the Bible was by no means accepted by the rabbinate. However no further action was taken along this line, and the question of the authority of the Bible still remains an unresolved issue.

Though Reform at that time refused to commit itself regarding the status of the Bible it has attempted to define what it means by inspiration. Its basic premise is that maintained by the Pittsburgh Platform which stresses the interrelation of revelation, reason, and morality. Thus does Wise interweave these three concepts:

> The Torah maintains that its "teaching and canon" are divine. Man's knowledge of the True and Good comes to his reason and conscience (which is unconscious reason) either directly from the supreme and universal Reason, the absolutely True and Good; or it comes from him indirectly from the same source by the manifestations of nature, the factors of history and his power of induction. This principle is in conformity with the second postulate of theology (revelation), and its extension in harmony with the standard of reason.[20]

Wise's theology approaches a thorough going idealist position. The essence of the world is "reason", man's inner essence is also reason,

thus is the gap bridged between man and divine. He does not find it necessary to resolve the contradictions between pure and practical reason which challenged Kant. To him both the purely conceptual categories of thought and the moral category, which he calls unconscious reason, are capable of reacting to the divine reason which pervades the world. God as reason becomes an immanent factor in the world. It is interesting to note how universal Reason is equated with the True and Good, and how these in turn are assumed to permeate 'the manifestations of nature, and the facts of history'. Reason with moral overtones and revelation appear to become synonymous. This position is stated with another emphasis by Louis Grossman:

> We shall have to revise our notions of revelation. I deem this an eminently felicitous occasion. We have for a long time clung to a too restrictive scope of the idea of revelation. The untutored man implied by it a guess of the grand. He had come upon many a thornbush all aglow with a mystic message, and dared not approach nearer to it. We, too, have profound visions; our legislation is a farce and insecure, unless we have as prototype a state of order and a community in peace. Our theologies are impertinences, unless we have the ideal of piety. Socialism, ethics, politics, all pre-condition a sort of Utopian hope. Of course we fall short of these high aims. We say God gave the ten commandments from the top of Mount Sinai. But we know that the whole world is even at this late date far from a complete obedience to them. The magnificient visions into the harmony of the universe, into the unity of the races, into the justice of thw world, into the moralness of fate, poets and legislators, and the popular instinct share alike. From the cleft of the rock, shaded from the dazzling brilliance of a divine illumination, each man sees a vision of his own. Thw whole world is revealing and all men are seers ... Even speech, that second soul of man, that pilgrims across continents, making brothers of nations, reveals. The language of the world is the most reverent symbol we have. Every sound which now bridges mind with mind and fraternizes the world, is revelation. And there are so many languages. There is not one sentiment which we share in common but is coined into speech and binds the race more closely. That which makes manifest a common truth is biblical. The oracle, therefore, is given us from many tripods.[21]

Rabbi Grossman extends Wise's position to a near pan-entheism; the

entire context of man partakes of the divine, and his awareness of any aspect of his environment becomes revelation. The Bible has no unique status above that of the other forms of revelation. Indeed, as he puts it, 'That which makes manifest a common truth is biblical.' The pan-entheism is implied not only by the implication of divine immanence but also by the emphasis upon the unity of the world. All sound which bridges mind with mind and fraternizes the world is called revelation. Revelation no longer is an event out of the ordinary scope of human affairs, it is a cardinal datum of every existence, as the divine is a constant part of every man's environment.

Yet he does not discard the moral basis of revelation. Indeed he largely follows Kant in basing religious apprehension upon moral reason. Only those perceptions which make brothers of nations, which fraternizes the world, which binds the race more closely are dignified by the term revelation. He erects his structure not on the parallel pillars of morality and reason as did Wise, but more sharply upon the ethical aspects of reason.

A constant theme in Reform thought deals with the divine nature of morality. As we have seen above the maxim is posited that all that is moral, partakes of the divine and is based upon revelation. The categories of revelation and morality assume an interdependence which is rarely challenged. Indeed it may be argued that revelation may be more than morality, but rarely is the assumption challenged that ethics composes the essential cornerstone of revelation. This is typified by the statement of Alexander Kohut:

> The Hebrew race has found the revelation needed to breathe the emotion into the laws of morality and make morality religion. This religion revelation is the capital fact of the old testament and the source of its grandeur and power. For

> while other nations had the misleading idea that this or that, other than righteousness, is saving, and it is not; that this or that, other than conduct, brings happiness, and it does not; Israel had the true idea; that righteousness is saving, that to conduct belongs to happiness.[22]

Reform Judaism optimistically placed revelation in the every day context of human affairs. It is no longer necessary that revelation be surrounded by a halo of the supernatural, but this does not mean that it has been removed from participating in the nature of the divine; for revelation, morality and reason, the attributes of divinity, are immediate in the lives of man, part of the grand unfoldment in the sure process leading towards messianic redemption.

This placing of revelation in a human context immediately poses the question: what authority can such revelation have? Each man becomes as authoritative as any other, no absolute position is possible. When revelation becomes a human construct it becomes indissolubly enmeshed in the subjectivities and relativities of the mortal situation. This issue will arise time and again to plague the Reform position.

## 1890-1897 Concept of God

During the years 1890-1897 the Conference did not find it necessary to wrestle with a philosophic definition of God. Apparently the earlier formulations were acceptable, or most probably, their general theological spirit easily embraced the concept of God without need for the development of an apologetic literature on this subject. At any rate Conference material did not appear challenged by a need to define God. Reference to the God concept are completely in accord with the idealist approach of the Conference to revelation, reason, and morality.

God's existence is posited as a dogma by I. M. Wise:

> The scriptures begin with an account of creation. Expound this as you may, it always centers in the proposition of the priority and superiority of a substantial being -- call it spirit, causative power, God, or by any other name -- prior and superior to all material being and its modalities, and this, however formulated, is a dogma.[23]

This God concept is given a validity all its own, beyond the sphere of the human and the natural, Wise continues:

> It is a unique YHVH monotheism without precedent or parallel in history which scriptures teach, a belief in an eternal living God, the author, preserver and governor of the entire cosmos, who possesses, enlivens, and permeates the All without any dependency on the All. "God is he that is, and all the rest but seems to be." ThisYHVH monotheism is no philospheme; reason neither could nor did invent it, reason cannot deny it, it can only construe it.[24]

Wise leaves no room for equivocation regarding his belief in God. His God concept is not predicated upon any philosophic speculation nor temporal commitment, it is grounded upon a faith beyond the onslaughts of criticism. Of course it may be argued that no man can divorce his beliefs from the tempers of his time, but this statement nevertheless, points to the sincerity of his belief in God, and undoubtedly to some extent

reflects the general temper of the Conference at this time. For God was not an issue which then need be subjected to analytical dissection.

The nature of deity is found to be described largely in relation to the three concepts of Reason, Morality and Universalism. As we have seen in the previous section God has been referred to as the universal Reason. God's nature though in no wise comparable to the reason of man is somehow most effectively conceived in terms of reason. His essence is subject to the category of thought if not equivalent in some way to it. Man's relation to God then becomes possible through reason. Wise in his presidential address of 1891 states:

> Human reason can conceive no idea or ideal of deity superior to the Jehovah of Moses, the absolute being by whom and in whom the All exists, lives and perpetuates itself in its innumerable varieties of forms; who is in his manifestations, both in nature and history, absolute power, universal and sovereign, intellect supreme, love and benignity, the only perfect being.[25]

Though reason only partially conforms to that aspect of God designated as 'intellect supreme', yet it is conceived of as being man's fianal source of validity. Wise's statement "Human reason can conceive no idea or ideal of deity superior to the Jehovah of Moses", thus becomes tantamount to a proof for the existence of God.

Another category which is applied to God is that of holiness. God's nature is the highest expression of the ethical, it is infused with mercy and conceived of as showering love and grace upon man. The aspect of God as the epitome of moral perfection is most strongly emphasized by the Conference. It is the distinguishing characteristic of Deity. I. M. Wise states:

By this attribute of holiness the God of revelation is

> distinguished from all gods and god-ideas in the theology of the world. It represents Jehovah as the highest ideal of moral perfection, and it is made incumbent upon the congregation of Israel to become holy, morally perfect. Here is the foundation of YHVH ethics, which was known to Israel only.[26]

Holiness is described as the chief relational characteristic of God; ethics thus becomes paramount in the Reform conception of religion. But this ethical emphasis in keeping with the spirit of the Conference, is given a broad universalist scope. "The unity of God ... is no longer, as it has been, a cause of separation and estrangment from people of other faiths, but the opposite, a stimulus for seeking their fellowship and co-operation in all things good and right. Faith in the one father in heaven imposes upon us the obligation to bring all his human children into the bond of one common brotherhood."[27] The ethical aspect of God is given a universal scope and translated into terms of challenge, motivating men to seek after the good, to strive for the God-like in life.

The Conference sums up its position on God in the first statement of the formula for the reception of proselytes which was prepared in 1896.

> I believe with a sincere and steadfast faith, that God is one, an only one, the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of the Universe.[28]

In general it may be concluded that during this period of optimistic universalism the Concept of God as an all powerful being was firmly entrenched.

## 1890-1897 Beginnings of Controversy Over Creed

Ever since Mendelsohn's emphasis upon the importance of ritual and deed in contradistinction to belief in creed, this subject has occasioned much argument. The position of the liberal rabbinical conferences in Europe and America prior to 1890 was essentially that of Mendelsohn. Creed was regarded as secondary to deed. Creedal formulations were regarded as being more advisory than coercive. The C.C.A.R. inherited this position and likewise did not attempt to form doctrinaire confessions. Its position, however, was subject to criticism. The first of such criticisms, occured at a convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in New Orleans:

> in connection with the convention address by Leo N. Levi ... This brilliant attorney, one of the leading Jews in the southland took the Reform Rabbis to task for not furnishing a satisfactory definition of Judaism so that he who ran might read ... At the close of the address the hall rang with applause and cheers. Then it was that Isaac M. Wise arose and thundered his indignation at this unworthy attack on the Rabbis. When he sat down the volatile public applauded him as vigorously as they had the attacking speaker ... That same evening the officers of the Central Conference of American Rabbis met and drew up the following protest: "We the officers of the Central Conference of American Rabbis ... do hereby protest against the strictures made upon the rabbis and their work, it appears that Mr. Levi, in his eager search for enlightenment, has overlooked the volume lately published by the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, entitled, Judaism at the World's Parliament of Religions. Within its pages he would have found his questions answered time and again by the very Reform Rabbis whom he has so severely arraigned.[29]

But this issue seems not to have been forgotten, at least not by Isaac M. Wise himself. In his presidential address in 1896 he embraces a position almost diametirically in opposition to that which he defended at the Union convention. He declares:

> He maintains and preaches loudly the superiority of Judaism as the universal religion, the religion of the future, the only religion of redemmed enlightened and fraternized humanity,

> and claims this as Israel's mission, or the very cause of its preservation, the very element of its life ... And yet how inconsistently was this important subject treated in our proceedings. When some one arose in our midst and maintained this: "If any one should ask himself conscientiously what is that great truth which we possess and so zealously promulgate and advocate; what is its contents, its criterion, its quiddity, its essentiality, and admits that what we do not know scientifically, we do not know well enough to impart to others, he will be astonished to learn, how little heknows and how little prepared he is to teach it. And yet it is true, that whatever is knowable is definable and expressible in words can be ratiocinated and cast into scientific form of principle and system, to be accessible to the intelligence of the world and comprehensible to ourselves" -- When this was advanced loudly and emphatically, there rose in our midst the antiquated horror of what was called in Christian theology "dogmas", with all the spectors of persecution, excommunication, damnation, sword, pyre and hell-fire behind it, as though such a Satanic cyclone could ever rage where religion and reason, faith and common sense are not in conflict, as this was always the case in Judaism, and is especially the case in this phase of it which we have made our standard in American Judaism. Not only was the idea rejected in the Chicago session of this Conference, but also the minor idea of publishing a manual of religious instruction for the young was vetoed. It was indirectly established then and there, that we should go on in teaching, preaching and advocating what undefined something which we call the great truth of which Israel is the historical exponent; and all that was done in a Conference which is reformatory, liberal, progressive, and comprises the intelligence of our people and its representative men. What a tremendous inconsistency.[30]

Wise then proceeds to review the struggle within the Conference itself for the establishment of a set of principles, and it becomes evident that strong opinions are already in existence both pro and con. The groundwork is being well prepared for the controversy over creed and synod which was soon to ensue.

However, despite this conflict, the tenor of the years 1891 - 1897 can well be described as being optimistic and self-confident. The Conference had done what no free liberal rabbinical body had yet done, it had established a permanent rabbinical body. True there were inconsistencies and inadequacies in their theology; but they were con-

vinced of the validity of the premises of their thought and that time could take care of the rest. Indeed progress had already been made. Many of the ritual issues were clarified: the Union Prayer Book was edited and adopted by many congregations throughout the land, the rabbis had clarified the question of the admission of proselytes, and had resolved the conflict concerning cremation. All in all, the Conference was able to bask in the praise of its leader, I. M. Wise who stated in 1897:

> Never, as far back as memory carries, never did any similar body among our co-religionists meet with such success anywhere.[31]

## 1898-1902 The Loss of Heart

These years were marked by a decided change in heart. The first flush of success was soon replaced by a more realistic outlook. The demands placed upon the Reform Rabbinate were onerous and demanding; too often their efforts were met with disinterest on the part of the laity. Now that the honeymoon period of the Conference was over they settled down to the task of realistically appraising what they had accomplished and what had yet to be done. What they saw did not please them. Often they expressed their deep dissatisfaction with the religious picture about them. Their despair is reflected by the words of those who valiantly tried to stem the tide of pessimism.

Joseph Silverman pleads:

> Shall we listen to the pessimist who points to persecution and anti-semitism as our reward or to him who says this is an age of indifference, of materialism, of irreligion; or shall we listen to him who says the mission of Judaism is ended? Now in the very hour of indifference and materialism, when the opportunities for doing good are so inviting, when the possibilities of Judaism are so great, we need heroics in the ranks, true men and women who will stand by the flag of Israel to battle against this irreligion, batter down the fortress of skepticism, take the citadel of ignorance and superstition and unfurl the banner of the Jew.[32]

More pointedly I. L. Leucht states:

> I would not have risen at all to express an opinion, had I not been painfully struck, Mr. President, by the pessimistic spirit displayed by the young men of this Convention. If it were true, what has been said concerning our young men and women who have been reared in our Sabbath school, if it were true that Judaism has gone down in this country beyond resurrection, then there would hardly be a Jewish home found any longer in the land. Let me tell you, young gentlemen, you have lost your faith in yourselves. Let me tell you that Judaism looks much brighter than it did many years ago. Let me tell you that as long as we continue to do our duty ... we will always find, in the course of time, the right way to do the right thing.[33]

The problem of the spirit of the rabbinate appears to have become a crucial one. The individual members were groping for some valid basis for their activity, and too often they found themselves deep in the throes of disquietude. Adolph Guttmacher describes the situation as he sees it; he finds fault with both the laity and the clergy.

> Since we have abandoned some of the old landmarks, reverential awe has given place to a spirit of criticism that is cold and calculating and have we not imbued, those who look to us for light and guidance, with that self-same spirit and attitude toward our faith.[34]

Joseph Krauskopf approaches the situations with a slightly different emphasis. He says of the laity:

> They can but esteem and value what is real and tangible, what can be appraised an invoiced, what had marketable value, what can be converted into gold or pleasure. In time the very cardinal truths of religion are discarded. In the end the very belief in God is cast aside.[35]

But the pessimism was not all limited to a superficial disquietude with the contemporary scene. There apparently was involved some deeper questioning of the validity of the optimistic position which Reform took with regard to the nature of man and society. The extent of this questioning was probably limited, but it does receive formulation on the Conference floor with regard to the issue of Zionism. Reform is taken to task by Caspar Levias, who declares its conception of the nature of society to be naive. His position reflects the spirit of Zionism which finds no salvation for the Jews outside of Palestine. Whether this attitude characterized the other two or three Zionists who belonged to the Conference (Felsenthal and Heller) is not known. Levias states:

> The roseate view taken of the future by those who enjoy at this moment comparative ease is due to various delusions. It would lead me too far were I to attempt to expose them

> all, since arguments that are not susceptible to logical demonstration are apt to lead to interminable controversies ....
> The dream of the prophet that nature shall be transformed, that the lion shall lie down with the lamb, and a small boy shall lead them, is a beautiful dream, an inspiring dream, but an unrealistic dream after all. The Jew that takes this dream into consideration in affairs of practical life is no less a visionary than his Christian neighbor who attempts to realize in human society the New Testament dream of non-resistance to evil.[36]

The challenge which faces reform was a real one and steps had to be taken to meet it. Reform had to defend its basis for validity. The response to this issue was essentially twofold: a) a return to specifically Jewish ground was demanded; Reform Judaism must be anchored more firmly in its particular tradition; and b) the demand that the authority of the rabbis be strengthened in order to give them more power in dealing with the issues they faced.

Concerning a): It is conceivable that this demand was prompted by the development of Zionism with its particularist emphasis. The success of Zionism in so quickly capturing the interest of the masses might have influenced some to borrow in highly modified form their particularist program. More likely, however, the particularist theses is firmly in keeping with the stress of Reform upon its historical ties with the past; this movement is but the return swing of the pendulum from the extreme universalist position which it had previously occupied. This position is stated in various forms. Jacob Voorsanger states:

> ... if you desire your people to remain faithful to the moiety of historical discipline that is left us ... making that discipline responsive to the conditions of the times, that, in that case we must lead them back to more positive ground than we occupy at present.[37]

S. H. Sonneschein:

> Teach the grandest of all reform lessons, viz.: Liberty is not license, and independence is not indifference. Study the past.[38]

> Abandon the method of imitation! There is ten times more strength, beauty and vitality in our home-made institutions and organizations, then in all borrowed plumage and fading fashions.[38]

Israel Aaron states less equivocally:

> We must again commit ourselves to the ideas of thorough going purity in doctrine, in institutions, in worship, in marriage and in giving in marriage. There must be a pride in deserving the adjective Jewish, and a cessation of latitudinous mouthing to gain cheap praise for a cheaper liberalism.[39]

The tendency then was toward a greater emphasis upon particularism at the expense of universalism. The universalist position was blamed, at least partially, for the failure of the Jewish group to maintain and develop its position. The most virulent statement against the universalist plank is made by Levias:

> "A universal religion dreamt of by our visionaries is as impossible as a universal language. The road to messianic times does not lead through an imaginary universality of belief, but lies rather in the development of the various groups of mankind along the innate peculiarities and natural idiosyncrasies to the greatest possible perfection each one of them is capable of attaining." In other words, religious development can only advance along parallel lines.[40]

By no means does all this imply that a through going particularist position was taken by the Conference, but it does suggest the nature of some of their attempts to resolve this problem.

Concerning b): The issue of expanding the authority of the Conference as a means of resolving the current unrest was broached under two headings, that of the formulation of a creed, and that of the formation of a synod. In his message of 1898, Wise repeated his request for a creed:

> Before I close, permit me to reiterate my old problem, to lay before the world a clear and comprehensive statement of the principles of Judaism - call them principles, dogmas, doctrines, precepts, or by any other name - but let the world know clearly and distinctly what is the substance of Judaism.[41]

As a result of this plea a committee 'on the draft of principles for Judaism' was formed consisting of three men; Wise, Mielziner, and Deutsch. The committee presented its report in 1900, but not before Wise had passed on. The action of the committee was tentative, and their conclusions, as they themselves admitted, of superficial nature. It pointed to the need of a sound historical framework as a basis for any further Reform efforts. It sums up its conclusions in these words:

> Our standpoint must be the acknowledgement of the historical evolution of religious truth which is like that of the mechanical world. The newspaper of our day is only the consistent evolution of the runes scratched roughly in stones and in the bark of trees by prehistoric people. Both serve the need and the desire of communicating thoughts. So our religion has its essentials which are lasting, while external forms change. This truth we still find in Israel's literature, although a considerable portion of it has lost its meaning to us in both matter and form.[42]

Historic evolution is posited as supplying the authoritative premise upon which religious truth can be based. But the specific issues of what in evolution is authoritative, on what grounds is it so, and what is the extent and nature of its coercive powers, these were all bypassed. The committee also saw fit to single out the concept of Israel's mission as being vital to the nature of Judaism.

> It is further necessary to lay stress on Israel's mission as a message-bearer of divine truth to the world as the righteous servant of the Lord, who by his knowledge shall make many righteous and shall bear their iniquities.[43]

The committee singled out the concepts of evolution and the mission of Israel as being central to Reform.

Though no final action was taken, the question of creed now became an issue which ultimately had to be resolved one way or another.

The second aspect of the search for authority was that which involved the formation of a synod. Enelow, a young graduate from H.U.C.,

prepared a scholarly essay on this subject. In his paper he buttressed the theses that a synod has always been central to the social organization of Judaism and therefor should once more be instituted.

> ... we have, by simply following the course of events, discovered a synod at every notable historic juncture ... 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 ... Both the rabbinical and the congregational unions are manifestations of the synodal idea - they are two fragments of the ideal which Wise never ceased to nourish and which possibly yet awaits complete realization: the continuance of Jewish religion in the New World through the medium of that time honored Jewish institution, the Synod.[44]

The issue was formally introduced on the floor of the Conference by Joseph Silverman in the presidential message of 1902. He stated the question in its most practical aspect. He sought for some means of augmenting Conference authority whether it be by means of a synod or otherwise.

> It seems to me also advisable that this Conference should place itself in touch with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations in order to devise some plan by which its deliberations may receive proper recognition from congregations and its decisions be regarded as authoritative. In the absence of a Synod or Sanhedrin, the Conference ought, in a measure, to be that central body whose duty it should be to give a decisive interpretation of Jewish law and practice, and determine what united course of action congregations shall adopt.[45]

The issue of synod was now before the Conference.

## Summary

The Conference found itself dissatisfied with the theological and ritual anarchy which ensued from the rationalistic nature of their basic premises which made it almost impossible to formulate the principles of Judaism in any absolute or near absolute catechism. The rabbis searched for some authoritative basis for both their theology

and the dicisions of the Conference. The only basis for authority which they could utilize was that of historical tradition, but this too was of an highly amorphous nature - it could not resolve the situation. The solution to the problem seemed to depend on the Conference's ability to decide upon an authoritative creed and to fashion a synod with coercive powers. Synod and creed thus became the key issues in Conference activity during the following decade.

## 1903 - 1910

In 1903 the Conference was completely embroiled in the twin issues of creed and synod. It is difficult to separate the two for they originally represented the two faces of the same coin. The question involved a clarification of the religious authority of the Conferences: a creed would give it a doctrinal basis, and a synod would invest it with a religious legislative authority. In order to more adequately pursue the ensuing developments it is wiser to follow each issue individually.

### Synod

In 1903 the cry for a synod was strong and compelling. As a result of the near deadlock over the Sabbath question, Voorsanger turned to the expediency of a synod:

> The question at issue eminently demonstrates the great need of our American congregations, namely, an authority to which all questions of discipline and religious practice, may be deferred; an authority democratic enough to be considered representative of the people andyet strong enough to be able to popularize and insure acceptance of its decrees and decisions.[46]

He presents in detail the structure of such an organization. His main demands are:

> 1. State Conferences to be organized, to be composed of the rabbi and president of each congregation within the state and three delegates at large from each congregation.
>
> 2. At a certain time during each year each State Conference shall elect five delegates, composed of two rabbis and three laymen, to a National Conference ... This national Conference ... shall immediately upon its convocation divide into two bodies, one to be known as the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the other representing the Union of American

> Hebrew Congregations. The first body shall discuss and pass upon all matters pertaining to religion and discipline, the second shall concern itself with all matters pertaining to education and (communal) administration ....[47]

Though the synod resulted from the need for theological clarification, when it was put in a concrete social framework it was caused to include another aspect, that which involved the organization and political problems of the Jewish community. Voorsanger apparantly realized that the synod could not ignore the communal and political policy making needs of the community; therefore, according to him, the synod was conceived af as both political and religious in purpose.

This dual purpose of a synod was not accepted by Silverman. In his presidential message he recognized both the religious and the political needs of the day but he attempted to resolve them individually. A synod should be formed to handle specifically theological issues, and a Jewish political congress should be assembled to deal with vexing political issues, i.e. the Kishineff massacre. Defining the scope of the synod, which is to deal with religious issues, he states:

> It is imperative that such a Synod be convened at as early a date as possible for the purpose of deciding upon the following matters on which the Conference has already acted: 1. Articles of Jewish Theology. 2. How to further Sabbath Observance. 3. Best methods of electing Rabbis. 4. Best Methods of Gaining the Unaffiliated. 5. Intermarriage. 6. Proselytism. 7. Cremation. 8. Uniformity in Synagogue Music and Ritual. 9. Better Observance of the Festival and Holy Days. 10. Uniform System of Religious Instruction.[48]

The synod according to Silverman was to be merely a continuation of the activities of the Conference on a more authoritative level; it answered the specific question of the authority of the Rabbinate. With regard to the political needs of the Jewish community he stated:

> It must therefore be patent to all that our greatest need is organization, a united Israel -- a central authoritative body that in crisis and emergencies shall have the indisputable right to speak and act for all Israel. The Kishineff massacre and other events of a similar nature have demonstrated our lack of organization and it is high time that steps be taken toward a solution of this growing problem.[48]

He specifically recommended an investigation

> Into the possibility and benefit of forming a Central Board consisting of the Executive Committees of the various orders and national organizations, said board to have full authority to act for all constituent societies in matters of general interest to all of Israel.[49]

It is seen that two distinct motivations were involved in the question of the synod. At the outset the religious motive was stressed. In 1903 Margolis in his formulation of the organization of the synod states that its primary function is that of acting upon a creed. Krauskopf in his presidential message the following year also thought in terms of the religious aspects of the synod. He states:

> Enough for us to have decisions rendered on ritual or liturgical or vital religious questions, after mature study and deliberation by an authoritative body such as this, merely for guidance.[50]

Consequently, when the issue of the synod was first brought to a vote on the Conference floor it was primarily in relation to its religious aspect.

Two reports were submitted in 1904 by the Committee on the President's Message. The majority report favoring a synod was sponsored by Philipson, Heller, Stolz, Margolis and Harris. They held that the synod composed of clergy and laity is a traditional institution which is needed in American Israel as a central religious organization to decide questions of religious, ethical and communal

import. The synod

> shall not be an ecclesiastical court with power to dictate to the individual conscience, to restrict or interfere in any wise with freedom of either belief or conduct. The purpose of such a synod, in our judgement, is to guide by a concensus of academic and practical wisdom and thereby educate Jewish public opinion.[51]

The minority report was submitted by Felsenthal, Sale and Schanfarber. They objected that a synod would ultimately become an autocratic instrument, disrespectful of minority opinions, leading to suppression of the 'free organic development' so vital for religion. Felsenthal, who because of his age appeared to be quite influential at this time, minces no words in stating his case.

> No, we need not a Synod, or an Ecumenical Council, or a provincial Council, or any other hierarchial power above us to regulate our theological thinking, or to rule in our ecclesiastical domain. United we are without such arachronistic and artificial institutions, -- we are united by the creator himself who has put us into the world as a separate people and has made us as of one family.[52]

The vote taken on the majority report indicated that it could not pass. The record of the proceedings is a bit confused concerning the actual vote. Though it is stated that the final vote was 23 to 23, subsequent remarks imply that a majority of one favored the report. At any rate the vote was so evenly divided "that the committee by leave of the Conference withdrew its report."[53] This synod which could not command a majority vote was to have had jurisdiction in matters of a religious character, it was not to have been a general communal body. The debate on the synod continued but now emphasis was upon the political aspect, it was no longer regarded as an answer to the specific problem of religious authority.

This transformation is most obvious in the remarks of Joseph

Stolz in 1906, who asks for a specifically political organization.

> After pending two years it now remains for you to decide at this convention whether or not in your opinion the American national Jewish organization which is bound to come into existence in the very near future, because the people who are clamoring for a democratic organization will never be satisfied with a self-constituted, self-perpetuating, mutually admiring, aristocratic Committee, should have as one of its distinctive objects 'the promotion of the cause of Judaism'.[54]

It is obvious that the force of historic development had completely altered the concept of Synod. The Conference had originally conceived it as a theologic necessity, now it assumed completely different dimensions, and as such no longer belongs to the scope of this study. (Let it be noted that the proposal to agitate for the organization of such a political organization was decisively defeated in 1906 by the Conference.) Of importance to us is the fact that the synod conceived of as an ecclesia was not able to command sufficient votes in 1904 to allow for its institution.

## 1903 - 1910 Creed

The striving for an official Reform code of belief was destined for more productive development - but the process was slow and painstaking. It was during the year 1903 that the first comprehensive creed was presented to the Conference for approval. Max Margolis, Professor of Bible at the Hebrew Union College, was asked to submit a statement on the Theological Aspects of Reformed Judaism. He submitted his work for approval as the creed of Reform. His creed assumed this form:

> A. Theology
> I believe in God, the One and Holy, the creator and sustainer of the world.[55]
> B. Anthropology
> I believe that man posses a Divine power wherewith he may subdue evil impulses and passions, strive to come nearer and nearer the perfection of God, and commune with him in prayer.[56]
> That select individuals are, from time to time, called by God as prophets and charged with the mission of declaring His will unto men.[57]
> That man is subject to God's Law and responsible to the searcher of the human heart and the Righteous Judge for all his thoughts and deeds.[58]
> That he who confesses his sins and turns from evil ways and truly repents is lovingly forgiven by his Father in heaven.[59]
> C. Psychology
> I believe that the Pious who in this life obey God's Law and do his will with a perfect heart and those who truly repent, share, as immortal souls, in the everlasting life of God.[60]
> D. Ecclisiology
> I believe that Israel was chosen by God as his anointed servant to proclaim unto the families of mankind His truth and, though despised and rejected of man, to continue as his witness until there come in and through him the kingdom of peace and moral perfection and the fullness of the knowledge of God, the true community of the children of the Living God.[61]

The context of his thought is rationalistic as is to be expected. In the discussion of his doctrines he clearly points to

the centrality of the concept of reason. Deity and reason became interlocked premises: "God is the thought that is diffused through all space and active in all time."[62] His nature is immanent to man, who through reason apprehends it. Holiness and morality also become linked with reason. Man's apprehension of the Good is a function of his mind. "We may not wholly indentify this divine element with reason, but we may say that it is not conceivably present in a rational being."[63] This element of reason, or rather the moral element of reason, in turn forms the basis for divine revelation. However, he does reserve a special sanctity for tradition. He says: "We believe in a general revelation; but, at the same time, we maintain that God revealed himself more clearly and truly to our forefathers."[64]

Concerning God, revelation and tradition he is in keeping with the past trends of the Conference, but a modification of the optimistic outlook of the nineties is evident. Concerning the nature of man he realizes the complexity of the problem of evil more fully, his statement that man has the power within himself to overcome sin, reflects that sin is as much at home in the economy of the universe as is goodness. He finds no relentless process at work which makes for goodness aside from the inherent power of man to choose good. He does not see the redemption of mankind as waiting around the corner. He states: "The millenium is not quite so near. But it is true that we welcome every step that brings us nearer unto the ideal."[65] On the whole he presents a much more cautious estimate of the nature of man and society.

Margolis' sugestions evoked much discussion. One of the

most interesting comments came from Rabbi M. Friedlander who attacked the inadequacy of Margolis' discussion on morality. He demands that theology face the task of validating moral truth. Friedlander's remarks on this question were as follows:

> One of the most vital and troublesome questions upon which depends the hold of religion on the life and thought of our generation, and a belief regarding which in clear and strong language is expected from one who undertakes to formulate creeds, is the question of moral conscience; whether moral conscience is intuitive, or acquired; whether moral consciousness, duty, obligation, impulse, ideal longing, the verdict of ought and must -- is indwelling, an ingredient part of man's nature placed there by the creator of man to make it possible for man to sympathize with and lift himself up to the Divine Spirit, or all this is the mere accidental outgrowth of external conditions.[66]

Friedlander questions the divine origin of morals, he asserts that the possibility of the natural evolution of morality be considered. But, according to him, this is not the only oversight. He continues:

> One should state in unequivocal terms his position on the freedom of the will, on the integrity of the Bible, on revelation; knotty questions which are now agitating the mind of every one concerned in religion.[67]

As a result of Margolis' paper a committee was organized to follow through on his suggestion for the formulation of a creed. But their task was a difficult one for there was strong sentiment in the Conference against the issuance of a binding creed. A formidable spokesman for the opposition was Bernard Felsenthal. He declares:

> As to a formulated creed, is there really a pressing necessity for having one? Must we have one? What for? Many kinds of flowers bloom in God's garden, and many kinds of trees grow in God's orchard. The best way is to leave metaphysics, speculative theology, dogmatics and the like, to the individual philosophers and would be philosophers, to the theologians, to men whose mental proclivities run that way.[68]

In 1905 the committee on Dr. Margolis' paper, after meeting

with endless difficulty, attempted to revise the nature of its task. It found it well nigh impossible to obtain a concensus of opinion, but it felt that agreement would be forthcoming if the creed were to be descriptive of the tenets of Judaism historically considered. They urge:

> Only as far as we oppose the principle of stability and stagnation are we reformers, otherwise we claim to stand upon the historical ground of Judaism, upon the "rock from which we were hewn." While recognizing wide differences of opinion, of belief, and of practice in Judaism throughout all the lands and the ages, we know of but one Torah, One Israel, and One God. It is in accord with this view that the sainted Dr. Wise ever reiterated the proposition before this Conference, to formulate the principles not of Reform Judaism, but of Judaism.[69]

The committee succeeded in altering the original intent of its function, hoping to thus simplify its task. No longer is its purpose to resolve the basic creedal issues facing the Conference; its function now is to prepare a descriptive statement dealing with the historical development of Judaism.

> Let it be written ... not by one man, but by a body of man, each master in his special sphere, and the world will learn to understand Judaism as Israel's trust and glory of the ages.[70]

The committee on the 'Elaboration of a Systematic Theology' was appointed for this revised task, but it too met with difficulty. Its function was "to place itself in correspondence with other bodies with the object of constructing a creed." Enelow states its position in 1908. "I think the committee has virtually brought in the report that the formulation of a creed is not advisable. This practically disposes of the original work of the Committee."[71] His statement was echoed by that of Berkowitz: " ... it has become more and more manifest that the distinct formulation of a creed is impossible."[72]

The plan was once more revised, this time stating:

> "that there be prepared a work consisting of eleven or more essays on the fundamental principles of Jewish Theology, each essay to be prepared by a different scholar, recognized as an authority in that field.[73]

But the progress of this project was likewise exceedingly slow. Three years later the Committee obtained permission to reduce the number of essays to five.[74] Finally the Committee was able to find release from its obligations by profering that Kohler's Systematic Theology be accepted in lieu of their own work.[75] But by this time the issue of creed had become unimportant, for the Conference had found another basis for action -- the description of Reform as a methodology.

## 1903-1910 Reform as a Process

The first decade of the twentieth century saw the Conference actively engaged in the task of clarifying the scope of its authority. It searched for an authoritative basis both for its own work, and for the functioning of the entire Reform group. We have seen in the section dealing with the years 1898-1903, that two alternative solutions were posited: one favoring the adoption of a creed and the institution of a synod; the second proposing, rather tenuously, that Reform return to more positive historical ground, thus obtaining validity.

During the early part of the decade the first solution was tried but it was found that the temper of the Conference would not accept a creed or a synod. But inversely, as enthusiasm for these institutions waned, interest grew with regard to the second proposal. It was found to offer interesting potentialities. Judaism must not be described in static creedal terms for its essence is historic evolution, constant progression. A creed would arbitrarily elevate one aspect of its development to undeserved importance. Judaism to be true to itself must be true to its historical process and to the potentialities it must yet fulfill. Reform is described as a religious dynamic, a methodology - not a creed but action is stressed.

Reform is not a movement which need be validated; it is the inevitable result of the spirit of the times, its validation comes from the historical forces which demanded its creation. Max Heller keynotes this attitude in his presidential message:

> Nor need we apologize, at this late day, for the existence of Reform Judaism. Let those who interpret history through

> the inverted fieldglass of personal pettiness decry reform as the gospel of convenience, as a secession of rebels, an imitation of the gentile, a destructive 'deform' of ancient heirlooms. The sober student of history discerns its inevitableness at just this period and the strides it is making in the face of important abuse. Liberalism, in one form or another, must always follow in the wake of a ripened civilization.[76]

The emphasis on the evolutionary nature of Reform is not new, the progressive nature of all Jewish religious and communal institutions was the accepted premise upon which almost all of the liberal scholarship of the nineteenth century was based, but now it is given added stress. That this was so is born out by the action of the Committee on the President's message. It found it necessary to propose the following resolution which was accepted.

> We agree that Reform was inevitable. And we, too have an abiding conviction that the Reform movement, the product of historical forces, is a legitimate growth on the parent stem, and is bound to extend to ever larger numbers as modern civilization at its best, expands its realms.[77]

The emphasis is no longer on creed, but on deed. "Our mission," says Isaac Rypins, "is not to perpetrate systems of belief, whether orthodox or reform, but to live ethically true, and morally Jewish lives."[78]

This position though it lends itself to a fairly happy resolution of the Conference's difficulty did not by any means lead to a revival of the high optimism of the first days of the Conference. The attitude was sober and realistic.

> Though there is still much that is disheartening, especially great indifferentism to religion ... we need not despair. All that is necessary is, not to lose courage but to continue building on the established foundations, to strengthen them with sound scholarship, to draw the practical conclusions, and to announce them fearlessly to the world. Then we may be sure that our visions of the coming dawn will not be disappointed and our honest work will be crowned with glorious success.[79]

This interpretation of the nature of Reform agreed with its conception of the Bible. The Bible is seen as the point of genesis of the development which continues through this day, and if its essence is properly understood it provides guidance for our own day by pointing out the unique understanding of Judaism. Morgenstern writes:

> Reform Judaism has nothing to fear from Biblical science. For more than anything else Biblical science establishes the legitimacy and sanction of Reform Judaism, and points out the path it must pursue. And pursuing this path the goal shall surely be reached in God's own time, and the prophets word be literally fulfilled.[80]

Morgenstern realized that the description of Reform as a product of the times could lead to a dangerous fatalism. He attacked any such conception and stressed the need for establishing the positive demands which the past places upon Judaism; Reform must seek to regain the emphasis of its tradition, to continue in its path. He stressed the importance of the Bible in accomplishing this task.

> Reform Judaism cannot find its sanction in mere expediency, in the mere phrase, "This is what we want", or "It is the spirit of the times." We seek not to excuse, but to establish the logic and legitimacy of Reform. And this can be only when on the one hand we have disproved the theory of literal divine revelation and on the other hand have established beyond question the principle of evolution in Judaism. The first step has long since been taken. The second, the positive step, the determination of the actual sanctity and impelling force of Reform Judaism has been the inevitable contribution of Biblical science.[81]

The logical step of the Conference should then have been to determine exactly what is "the logic and legitimacy of Reform", but this was not done. Reform remained defined as a methodology for action, but the uniquely Jewish elements in this process of development were not clarified. Claude Montefiore, though an

Englishman, presented the most definitive description of this process of development. His remarks won favor at the Conference which passed a resolution acknowledging "the help of his inspiring words, voicing at its noblest the aspirations and obligations of progressive Israel."[82] In this address before the Conference Montefiore attempted to present the basic premises of both English and American Liberal Judaism. He defined Reform Judaism as "an attitude of mind"[83], governed by specific standards. With regard to an absolute creed he states: "We occupy a new position towards authority, for we do not recognize the absolute authority of any book or code."[84] Not being bound to any stabilized concept Reform is capable of "fearless acceptance of the ascertained results of historical criticism, and science."[85] Belief is not a rigidly defined affair, it is capable of readjustment to scientific developments. Thus will belief keep pace with life. And so Montefiore can say, "Let your belief and action form a unity: let your doings be an expression of believings, your life of your faith."[86]

Montefiore in his description of Reform does not deal with basic doctrines and dogmas, his emphasis is placed upon its flow of development. He finds Judaism involved in the tensions caused by the pull of the past, the present, and the future. The task is to resolve the dilemna. "Such a reconciliation," he says, "such a wise apportionment of three insistent claims, is no easy task, and here again we see that hard is the good. But we do not despair, remembering, as we saw and said before, that difficulties are made to be overcome. Judaism is an historical religion, and a distinctively historical religion we desire that it shall remain."[87]

Montefiore presents in his paper a set of principles for growth; they deal with the realities of everyday interaction, and they aim at providing a dynamic framework for Jewish development.

Though Montefiore's principles were never accepted in any offical manner, they do characterize the spirit which prevailed in Reform during the following decade or so. The emphasis was not on creed but on practical issues: if a doctrinal matter is raised, the issue is to be decided on its merits, and in its practical context. The Conference was in no position to make any sweeping creedal commitments at this time.

## 1911 - 1918

The position of the Conference during these years was fairly clear. The rabbis approached the issues of the day on a piece-meal basis, they were not concerned with the development of any all inclusive doctrine, as the issues arose they were met. This attitude is officially stated in a resolution adopted in 1916, The Committee on the President's Message phrased the accepted resolution as follows:

> While agreeing with the position that the Conference should be always ready to enunciate the principles of reform Judaism, the committee does not consider it necessary that such a declaration of principles shall be formulated at present, especially in view of the fact that it is the policy of the Conference to pronounce upon particular principles according to special needs, as they arise from time to time.[88]

The emphasis in the Conference at this time was upon the rights of individual differences; it apparantly was felt that any strong creedal pronouncement might splinter the body into fragments. During this period an increasing number of the rabbinate were coming from Eastern European backgrounds, reflecting the more particularistic emphasis of their environments. Their orientations undoubtedly resulted in the creation of discrepancies of opinion at the Conference. The issue of Zionism was one of the most crucial issues involved. The Conference apparently realized that caution was necessary in dealing with the situation and it wisely refrained from any divisive action. Isaac Moses describes the situation:

> How then can any man, or a number of men, define for others what should be the exact and final form of their intellectual, moral and spiritual attitude? And as no ome can make a creed for any other, except for the broad generalities, so no one has a right to exclude anyone from

> a religious fellowship to which he feels himself attached.[89]

The Conference, as a result of this attitude, opened its doors, at least theoretically, to all shades and colorings of rabbinical opinion. It demanded no obeisance to any particular credo or doctrine. Samuel Schulman makes this clear in his Presidential Message in 1913.

> The Conference has invited all Rabbis to join it. This means that while it has had a definite tendency, it has neverllost sight of the larger Jewish interest. It has not emphasized its partisanship. It definitely claimed to represent the whole of Judaism.[90]

Reform embraces within its scope all of Jewry, its platform is that of "Klal Yisroel". In the same vein Moses J. Gries writes:

> Within our body radical, liberal, conservative and those of orthodox inclinations, have fellowshipped with one another. Perfect freedom of discussion has prevailed and the smallest minority has never been denied a hearing. The Conference claims no binding authority - it proclaims no laws - but its decisions and resolutions have been generally accepted as the established rules of practice. It has influenced and guided its members and American Israel by the force and weight of its opinions and judgements.[91]

The Conference was not able to reach a common position on doctrinal matters but it was able to resolve its difficulties by defining Reform as a process of development, which can include within itself contradictions and discrepancies which could by their interaction result in a higher synthesis. By some this position was accepted as being almost definitive of their desires. Man lives in a scientific age of constant new discovery, where the positions of yesterday are constantly being exchanged for the outposts of tomorrow; therefore, so must our positions be in affairs of religion. Religious redemption results from this very evolution inherent in history; we find redemption by clinging to evolutionary process rather than by the elaboration of dogmatic form. This position

is affirmed by Harry H. Mayer:

> We have no mystical anachronisms that we must apologize for, such as the "Fall of Man", the Incarnation and the Resurrection. We acknowledge no Revelation that was the final word in religion. We face the future undismayed. We welcome scientific investigation. We glory in our independence of all ecclesiastical authority.[92]

The most extreme description of Judaism as an a-creedal religion was presented by Moses P. Jacobson. It will be discussed in the next section.

This position was challenged by the many who looked beyond the process itself and realized that it was but the means to an end of which we must never lose sight. The purpose of evolution is not free untrammeled development, it must be a controlled process leading towards deepened religious meanings. "While congregational autonomy has carried the victory as against unbending tradition and legal code, we must by no means, rest on our laurels and be content with such triumph and glory in the external reforms brought about. We have indeed reached the constructive period, and we must feel the want of a genuine, inner, moral and religious reform."[93] Reform could not be undirected process.

But the most telling criticism came from those who still retained their belief in a creed. The Conference, as is to be expected, still contained spokesman for the formulation of a creed and though they were relatively small in numbers their voices were not stifled. They spoke out against the substitution of a methodology for a belief. Most influential of these men was William Rosenau. He condemned the type of thinking which turned Reform into a stamping ground for all beliefs. "In order that Reform may be successful in the appeal made

by the Reform Rabbinate of America it must possess Jewish individuality. It dare not be "all things to all people." It must not be exposed to the peoples mistrust in consequence of a colorless theology and a characterless worship.[94] He could not accept a definition which would turn Reform into a meaningless rap, showing neither vigor nor conviction. Instead he demands that Reform face its responsibilities and forthrightly declare its position. In his presidential message of 1916 he urges:

> The Pittsburgh Platform is Reform's last prounciamento. We have our specific interpretation of Jewish history, Jewish faith and Jewish life. If we expect to adhere to the Pittsburgh platform, let us say so. If it is open to modification, because of radical changes which have ensued in the world of thought, let us not shirk our responsibility. Whatever our declaration shall be it will give character and stability to our Conference and through our Conference, to our cause.[95]

Despite these criticisms the spirit of the Conference during these years remained as first described. Their emphasis was placed upon the tangibles of the social situation. They focused their attention on the specific issues of education, group cohesion, and especially social justice.

## 1911-1918 Increased Emphasis on Social Justice

Superficially there appears to be much in common between the attitude of the years 1891-1897 and that of the present years under discussion. Both emphasized predominantly the principle of progressive evolution - but beyond this point the similarity largely disappears. The earlier reformers held a compelling belief in the reality and even in the imminence of the 'Messianic Age' of universalism. The 'Kingdom of God' was close, and amidst the eager anticipation, caution could largely be thrown to the winds. Issues such as individual ritual, group cohesion, and authority, became comparitively insignificant in relation to the anticipated redemption of mankind.

But it was not so in the second decade after the turn of the century. Mankind still believed that it was destined to progress but was no longer certain that redemption was waiting at the turn of the road. As man saw it the path of evolution was well-nigh an endless one, and the Messianic Age seemed an illusive vision across the plains of time. Deliverance was not immediately on its way, man had to fend for himself, to mend his walls, and heal his diseases he had to bide his time. The issues of the Conference likewise became predominantly practical ones, they were concerned with anti-semitism, education, character formation, and social justice.

The ideals of Justice and Mercy basic to a social justice platform, were the dominant religious motifs of the Conference at this time. The tone of the Conference became even more strongly Prophetic in its demands for social and economic amelioration. Judaism was often defined from this point of view. Moses J. Gries

writes:

> Surely not one among us doubts the convincing force of Judaism and of Jewish history. No religion out of its spiritual treasury can interpret with more of truth and power the moral problems of our age and generation. No religion, of time past or present, speaks more clearly on behalf of social justice and individual righteousness. Israel with its historic message of the rulership of God and of the divinity enshrined in every human soul, is called to spiritual leadership.[96]

In the same vein Louis Grossman states:

> The preacher nowadays takes his text out of the book of that life which teems with social perplexities and social idealisms, and the Rabbi who witnesses the tragedies of the collapse of careers or of homes feels he cannot give adequate comfort and zest for renewed effort nor establish confidence in the world by words of pastoral theology.[97]

The role of the rabbi is seen as largely related to the social implications of his duty, his role is one of social service. Apparently this conception was a fairly prevalent one for we find that it occasions its share of criticism. Jacob Singer points out this inadequacy.

> Historic Judaism demanded Social Service and religious culture, but religious culture is essential and not secondary or incidental. Today Social Service is tending to become an exclusive obsession. As such it is fraught with serious danger. It may, as Dr. Schechter once warned, turn our place of worship, including our religious schools, into settlement houses in disguise.[98]

Indeed it seems evident that the temper of the Conference was well summed up by the words of Morris Renson who said, "Judaism subordinates metaphysics to ethics."[99] Many issues of social justice found careful hearing at the hands of the Conference during this period. The tendency became prominent in the 1909 and remained so during this period under discussion. This does not imply that at the conclusion of this period interest was reduced, or that prior to this period it didn't exist, it simply points our that it was during this time that strong interest in affairs of social justice

asserted itself.

Issues broached were those of white slavery,[100] the penal system,[101] the workingman and the synagog,[102] anti-semitism,[103] wages and morals,[104] synagog and social service,[105] scholarly study of Judaism and social service,[106] synagog and industrial relations,[107] synagog and philanthropies,[108] among others. It was a period of high social awareness.

It was stated before that Judaism at this time was subjected to definition which played up the theme of social justice. One of the most heretic definitions of this type was made by Rabbi Moses Jacobson. It involves one of the most aggressive attacks upon the traditional theistic position. He begins with the premise that the Jews have always been conditioned by their environment, accepting its basic scientific and philosophic judgements. He then attempts to predict what effect the present American environment, with its scientific stress, will have upon the traditional values of Judaism, namely, monotheism, revelation, and the moral law.[109]

Concerning revelation: he finds that it is almost an untenable position at the present moment. He writes: "But how will you get at the belief in God? There has been - we have seen - no revelation to base it. Its inherency in human nature is denied by as many of those who can speak with authority on the subject as it is affirmed. Will you have recourse to idealistic philosophy? But if, according to this philosophy, we can be conscious only of the affections of our mind and can not be conscious of what occasion these affections, how is it possible for us to have a consciousness of God."[110]

He finds science to be equally outspoken against the possibility of the existence of a God. "Science is beginning to rumble menacingly. There are scientists today who are saying unambiguously - I do not say, mind you, that they are right - that in the whole process of evolution from the palpitating ether through the electrons and the atoms up to matter and plant and animal and man, all the way up from ether up to ethics, there is simply one continuous, unbroken automatic, inevitable play and interplay, with not a pinpoints space permitting the intervention of a superior will or control.[111]

He spares no doctrine in his attack. The next to feel the lash of his logic is the moral law. "Finally to the moral law - this, even according to the Bergsonian theory of the superior evolutionary value of the intuitions, is not a miracuous gift, but merely one of the inevitable blossomings of the inescapable process, a process in which Bergson has not as yet, any more than any scientist, admitted the least loophole for a Deity. And the impossibility of making a religion out of ethics pure and simple is virtually pathetically confessed by Felix Adler - in that lecture of his a few years ago whereby he sought to introduce into his school, in order to give it substance and backbone, the whole calendar of pagan rituals and even a counterpart of the Catholic confessional.[112]

Jacobson places Judaism in the dilemna whereby the environment has become philosophically opposed to her beliefs; however, he finds hope even though her beliefs are no longer viable. This is the problem: "Now suppose that tomorrow this monistic thinking should become so dominant that, like the Aris-

totelian philosophy in the time of Maimonides, it would enforce its dictum upon enlighted Jewry, would it be a necessary consequence that for that advanced Israel, Judaism's message would be utterly exhausted? I for one do not think that we are constrained to any so desparate an inference."[113]

He then proceeds to describe what he considers to be the essence of the Jewish position, Judaism's true calling. "There is however one sober scholar in Judaism whom I can follow. I refer to Israel Abrams. When he, too, had finished substantially the same analysis, he uttered these significant words: "Israel is the protestant people. Every religious or moral innovator has also been a protestant. Socrates, Jesus, Luther, Isaiah, Maiomides, Spinoza, all of them, besides their contributions - very unequal contributions - to the positive story of truth, assumed also the negative attitude of protestors. They refused to go with the multitude, to acquiesce in current conventions. They were all unpopular men. The Jews as a community have fulfilled and are fulfilling, this protestant function. They have been and are unpopular just because of their protestant function, they refuse to acquiesce ... There is permanent value to those in the world of Israel's determined protestant attitude."[114]

Thus the platform of social justice is carried on to its farther-most extreme. To be sure Jacobson's position was not endorsed by the Conference, it went to the length of declaring by special action that his paper "reflects his individual opinions and does not express the views of the Conference."[115] However, his remarks paved the way for the humanism which later found its

way on the Conference floor in the twenties and thirties. Let it suffice to say that the concept of social justice played an exceedingly important role during this period.

## 1911-1918 Zionism

Zionism, probably the most controversial issue which the Conference faced, stepped into its share of the spotlight in the year 1917. In that year the Conference faced this issue and began the chain of development which finally resulted in the compromises of 1935 and 1937. The problem was raised in abrupt form by William Rosenau, who in his presidential message demanded that the Conference declare its opposition to Zionism. He stated:

> The time has come for the Conference to publish the statement that it stands for an Israel whose mission is religious and that, in the light of this mission, it looks with disfavor upon any movement the purpose of which is other than religious.[116]

This suggestion was referred to the Committee on the President's Message and was consequently re-submitted to the Conference in the form of one majority and two minority reports. The majority report affirmed the traditional position of Reform. It read as follows:

> We herewith reaffirm the fundamental principle of reform Judaism, that the essence of Israel as a priest-people, consists in its religious consciousness, and in the sense of consecration to God and service in the world, and not in any political or racial national consciousness. And therefore, we look with disfavor upon the new doctrine of political Jewish nationalism, which finds the criterion of Jewish loyalty in anything other than loyalty to Israel's God and Israel's religious mission.[117]

The first of the two minority reports was submitted by Max Heller, who had been an outspoken Zionist since the early years after the turn of the century. He writes:

> Inasmuch as reform Judaism does not dogmatize on the geographical habitat or political status of the Jew;

> Inasmuch as reform Judaism does not insist on the dispersion of the Jews as an indispensable condition for the welfare and progress of Judaism;
> Be it resolved, that there is nothing in the effort to secure a publicly and legally safe-guarded home for Jews in Palestine which is not in accord with principles and aims of reform Judaism.[118]

The second minority report was submitted by Louis J. Kopald, a non-Zionist who felt strongly that the Conference should not attempt to suppress honest minority opinions. His statement declares:

> We are convinced that whether the individual Zionist call himself rece-Zionist, nation-Zionist or religious Zionist, Zionism is ultimately nothing but an interpretation of the best method of conserving Judaism; and that when especially we realize that our liberal congregations, which the members of this Conference serve, are in all cases divided into Zionist and non-Zionist viewpoints, all the members of which, however, are recognized as having equal rights to membership in their congregations, it becomes unjust as well as logically untenable that this Conference go on record in any resolution aimed directly and prescriptively at one wing, and a growingly important wing, of Judaism. The writer of this minority report is himself not a Zionist, and yet he feels keenly the need of protecting the principles of Jewish liberalism, and of urging the members of the Conference not to take action so inimical to liberalism and so essentially un-Jewish.[119]

The reaction of the Conference to this set of proposals was, as of course was to be expected, sharp and immediate. The Conference broke down along the lines of the three reports. There were those who held to the classic description of Judaism which would remove all traces of nationalism from Judaism. The Zionists on the other hand protested that "It is not true that Reform Judaism has eliminated the idea of Nationalism."[120] And the third position, that of tolerant liberalism, was utilized by some non-Zionists, as we have seen in regard to Kopald, and of course by Zionists.

The Zionist used a variety of premises for their argumen-

tation. Stephen S. Wise utilized the argument for tolerance. "I would not have you say that a reform teacher or rabbi has forfeited the right to be a teacher because he has subscribed to the Zionist platform. I appeal not for Zionism, but for the inclusiveness and comprehensivenss of liberal Judaism."[121] Another strong argument utilized by the Zionists is stated by Harris. "I have seen young people, suddenly coming into contact with Zionism, become all aflame not only with nationalism, but with religious fervor and brought back to the observance of Judaism."[122] Also the argument was stressed that universalism is not incompatible with particularism. Rabbi M. Silver states: "Zionism is a movement of idealism. It includes all kinds and phases and shades of Zionists. But official Zionism is political Zionism and properly so. But in spite of this I can see no imcompatibility between Reform Judaism and Zionism."[123]

The anti-Zionist position received its most outspoken defense from Rabbi Schulman, who declared: "Zionism is a deliberate rejection of the whole movement and aspiration of the modern Jew which began with Mendelsohm and is crystalized in American Reform which says that Israel is a priest people, telling the world that Israel is a religious union."[124] The anti-Zionist case rested on the principle of the religious, rather than the national, definition of Judaism. Rabbi Rosenau rephrases this position in more personal terms: "We who believe that the religious interpretation of Jewish history is the correct one have as much right to our opinion as have they who insist upon the national theory of Jewish life. We are constantly being told that we are

"not Jews", that the only kind of a Jew to be reckoned with is the Zionistic Jew. We, too, have traditions - the traditions of reform, and I would rather cling to the traditions of a movement that lays stress on the religious interpretations of life than to the traditions of a movement that care nothing for that which is religious."[125]

A third group took a comparatively neutral position, declaring that no decision need be made. Rabbi Calisch insisted that it is not within the scope of the Conference to make decisions which are binding upon members who cannot subscribe to them.[126] Felix Levy echoed this position: "Voting on a matter of this kind brings us no nearer to a solution of the problem."[127] Dr. Cohon felt that the issue was an economic one beyond the scope of the Conference. He states: "Zionism is a purely economic interpretation of life and we, as a religious organization, have no such problem before us."[128]

The issue was finally resolved by means of a compromise resolution which reflected the opinion of the group which urged neutrality. The Conference affirmed that though it still retained its religious definition of Judaism, this was no time in which to aggravate internal differences. The actual wording of the crucial paragraph of the resolution is as follows:

> It furthermore recommends that at a time of universal conflict and suffering, such as the present, it is of prime importance that the Conference emphasize not the differences that divide us, but those sacred principles which all Jews hold in common, and those great tasks which it is our paramount duty at the present moment to promote and perform together for the alleviation of human suffering and the healing of the Jewish people.[129]

In effect the Conference retained its traditional religious emphasis, yet at the same time it tacitly admitted that Zionism must be accepted within its ranks. In 1918 the Conference was forced to enlarge its attitude once again. The question arose as to what should its attitude be towards the Balfour Declaration. The issue was no longer one specifically of Zionism. It was given broader implications. The Declaration promised to give a haven to the countless Jewish refugees who otherwise had nowhere to turn, for this reason the Declaration could not be opposed; yet the Conference could not accept the appelation "National home-land" which the declaration stressed. The resolution which it adopted expresses this ambivalence. It reads:

> We naturally favor the facilitation of immigration to Palestine of Jews, who because of economic necessity or political or religious persecution desire to settle there. We hold that Jews in Palestine as well as anywhere else in the world are entitled to equality in political, civil and religious rights but we do not subscribe to the phrase in the declaration which says, "Palestine is to be a national homeland for the Jewish people." This statement assumes that the Jews although identified with the life of many nations for centuries are in fact a people without a country. We hold that Jewish people are and of right ought to be at home in all lands.[130]

But regardless of the equivocation, the principle of Palestine as a haven was affirmed.

During the years 1917-1918 the Conference accepted two seemingly minor principles which ultimately paved the way for the later resolution of the issue of Zionism in 1937. The acceptance of the right of Zionists to belong to the Conference and the recognition of the importance of Palestine as a haven, layed the groundwork for the future reconciliation.

The definition of Judaism as a process of religious growth allowed the Reform movement to sidestep two well-nigh irresolvable issues, that of creed and of Zionism. The Conference was free to skirt these problems while at the same time granting the adherents both pro and con of either position full acceptance at the conference. This position was influential during the period presently under discussion, but it was constantly subject to increasing criticism.

The main tenets of this definition were forcefully rephrased by men such as Kohler, Enelow, Grossman and Morgenstern. Kohler's sounds the keynote of the attitude. He describes Judaism in this vein:

> Not a church universal, not a uniform religion for all, but the divine truth reflected in many systems of belief and thought, just as the diamonds reflects light by its many facets, a religion ever progressive on lines of historical continuity, but never finished or final, leading all the nations and classes of men to the mountain of God - this is Judaism's aim, the realization of our Messianic hope, the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.[131]

H. G. Enelow develops this idea to a further degree. Reviewing the development of Reform Judaism he finds that three elements are exhibited in its development, these he regards as the theoretical principles of Reform Judaism.

> Thus, the paramount principles of Reform Judaism, I believe, are three: first, that Judaism is a mobile rather than a fixed form of religion; second, that its permanent and essential part is found in certain ethical and spiritual affirmations rather than in fixed ceremonial observances; and thirdly, that by nature and destiny it is universal, and not national or local.[132]

But the definition of the "permanent and essential part" remains

vague and indeterminate. This glorification of the truths of Judaism without delineating them is beautifully exhibited in the words of Louis Grossman:

> A Reformer is always a defender and protector of the essential facts of life. Isaac M. Wise stood out not for expedients but for absolute truth. He gave this conference a positive character. We represent what is historically true and that which neither radicalism can foist nor reactionism pervert. American Judaism had developed along with the logic of religious, social, economic and political movements of which it is a part and not according to the pre-conceptions and whims of abstrue idealists or impulsive theorizers.[133]

Reform stands for the truth, whatever it be, and its validation, is that truth is the product of historic development. History is accepted as the final validity. This position regarding the validity of history is most boldly asserted by Morgenstern.

> Nor may we ask, after a hundred years of labor and progress, whether the movement was justified. It was a historical necessity, the inevitable creation of historic evolution. What history calls into being can neither be justified nor apologized for. It can only be guided along proper channels and toward a definite exalted good.[134]

As we have seen before, the theorem of Judaism as a process was ramified into two corollaries: first the piece-meal approach to religious issues which placed stress on Social Justice, and secondly, the attitude of tolerance towards all the conflicting segments within Judaism, offering all the varied points of view a haven. But whereas in the past decade these two corollaries did not conflict now they do.

The social justice position is taken by men such as Goldenson and Franklin. Franklin states: "Our scheme of life, otherwise called religion, was a dispensation, not only at the time of Moses, but throughout our historic and wisespread adjust-

ment to the world. Judaism is sociology of universal scope in meaning and intercontinental in fact. And it is verified and not merely a theory. Our solidarity, our self-restraint, our loyalty, our sobriety, our virtues that have held us firm and uncontaminated in the feverish world are uncontradictable evidence that we have a right to speak and advise ..."[135] The context of his thinking is made clear when he states: "Judaism is not a faith it is a dynamic."[136] Franklin is clear in defining Judaism as a methodology whose major function is sociological. Goldenson is a bit more hesitant in his manner but he reaches the same conclusion. It is apparent from his words that he too regards Judaism as a dynamic, whose major concern should be issues of social reconstruction. He writes: "If I should put into a single sentence the present status of Reform, I would say that we are on the eve of another period of profound searching and the motive of this re-examination is to be found in the evergrowing belief that modern Judaism must justify its continuing existence by contributing to the spiritual sanctions needed in the hopes and labors of social reconstruction."[137]

But this emphasis on social justice is challenged by the more Zionistically oriented members of the Conference. In opposition to the corollary of social justice they affirm that of Klal Yisroel. In direct response to Goldenson, Brickner states:

> We are divided and I am glad the issue has come frankly to a head ... One group is driving the principles of Holdheim and Geiger to their logical consequences, namely, Humanitarianism, and there are men outside of the Jewish group who because of certain cultural forces have come to the same conclusion. They would agree absolutely with Dr. Goldenson and say to him, "Come let us join in a fellowship of Ethical Humanitarianism, and

> we will build a Community House of worship and over the door shall be this motto: "This house shall be a house of prayer unto all people."
> The second group is a group small in number in the Conference ... We shall stay close to the lines of the Jewish people and our Reform shall be, not a logical development of certain principles which we extracted from a certain portion of Jewish History, but we shall continue the whole line and make Reform as Dr. Enelow said in his paper, "A principle of Jewish tradition."[138]

Brickner objects to the position which defines the goal of the evolution of Judaism as being social justice, he argues for a more inclusive definition which would include all the aspects of Judaism, and particularly that of Zionism. Bernard Heller makes the same point with more clarity.

> Groups are attempting to define Judaism in terms of a single principle. One wishes to read Judaism purely in terms of race. Judaism to them is "The Jewish People" ... Then we have, or perhaps I ought to say, we had, a school that defined Judaism purely in terms of creed - Judaism is monotheism - and that was all. Then we have a school that displayed a tendency to define Judaism in terms of ethics, purely ethical principles, Judaism is Justice, etc., and then we have a group that attempts to make out of Judaism a pure culture. They are the staunch Chassidim of Jewish Music, art, etc. Now all of these definitions are inadequate. All four go to make up Judaism.[139]

The Zionists were objecting to the rigid definition of Jewish evolution which would ignore the specific values of Jewish nationalism. Abba Hillel Silver took his stand upon this point. He attacks that view which deemphasizes the importance of nationalistic elements in the development of Jewish History. He writes: "The strength of Liberal Judaism has been and is its adherence to the mission ideal. Its weakness lies in the fact that it has labored under an anti-nationalistic, anti-nomistic incantation, which is fundamentally foreign to prophetic and Pharisaic Judaism ..."[140]

It has become apparent that the issue of Zionism could

no longer be continued by the expediency of defining Judaism as an all-inclusive process. As the Zionist group became larger and more influential, it grew more active in its demands for a more positive appreciation of its position, it could no longer be satisfied with the half-hearted tolerance which it had been offered.

## 1919-1928 Reform Emphasis on the Emotional Aspects of Religion

The methodological approach to religious issues was also open to criticism on a specifically religious level. Perhaps it was the fault of the times, the fault of the Reform movement in general or that of the methodological approach in particular; but it became most apparent during these years that personal religion was very much on the wane and personal piety was fast becoming a disappearing art. Conceivably the methodological approach which played down the creedal aspects of religion did militate in further aggravating this condition. Fineshriber feels that the lack of emphasis on a creed and the overemphasis on issues of social welfare were prerequisite causes.

> In one sense, the relative absence of popular theology has been advantageous. It has diverted energy into Judaism's favorite channel - action. The religious impulse, especially in our day, has flowered forth in protean forms, in the organization of charities, the founding of settlement houses, the participation in and frequently leadership of numerous civic causes ... But unfortunately the effects of the this primal religious impulse have not always been religious, and not infrequently have been irreligious. The same causes that have made theology unpopular have succeeded in divorcing philanthropic and social agencies from the synagog. The religious sanction is missing, and until this is applied to the synagog, like its intellectual expression, theology, it will wane in influence.[141]

The Conference, long involved in the broad social issues of Jewish life, had overlooked to a large degree, the specific problems of individual belief. They ignored such basic religious issues as, for example, personal convictions, faith, individual religious maturity, the religious personality, and variation in individual religious needs. In the years 1919-1928 the members

of the Conference became increasingly aware of this void which existed in congregational life. The Jews as an individual found himself without any guidance for the issues of his own inner life; he was at a loss when he attempted to define his own religious nature. Goldenson writes:

> Our people are becoming more and more uncertain and hesitant in determining the significance of so-called religious experience, because they do not know precisely what element in their composite Jewishness has made them susceptible to a particular influence. They wander and waver among all these elements. At one time they think of culture, at another, of religion, then of nationality, and then of the negative forces, as anti-semitism and persecution, forces that underlie and reinforce their positive beliefs and predictions.[142]

Many members of the Conference were seriously concerned with this problem. There seemed to be almost complete agreement, with regard to the specific cure which was needed, on the part of those who broached this subject. The situation was approached from many points of view but the conclusions were almost consistently the same. Kaufman Kohler minces no words. "Indeed the main issue is no longer between Orthodoxy and Reform, but between a world with or a world without God, and the question is how to counteract the intellectualism and outward culturalism which pervades our entire educational and social system by a strong appeal to our emotional nature, to the spiritual needs of man."[143] The problem of belief must be approached from the emotional side of the individual. Schulman states a similar view. Vital religion, he holds, expresses itself through four personality types, that of prophet, sage, priest and mystic. Reform has stressed the first two and all but ignored the last two. "We threw into the background entirely the priestly function of conserv-

ing what is valuable in tradition and with a very horror of mysticism, we have lost sight of the fact that religion in the present always means the mystic feeling of realizing God's presence."[144]

Again the basic theological problem of the Conference was raised: how is it to present its beliefs in compelling form, and on what authority, be it ethical value, legislative coercion, rational lucidity, universalistic optimism or mystic conviction, shall it base its message. During 1890-1897 the problem was resolved by the urgent belief in the imminence of the Messianic period. At the turn of the century the answer was sought through the aegis of creed and synod, but this, too, was not found to be expedient. During 1911-1918 the problem was sidestepped: authority, was found in the processes of history; the very historical existence of the group was declared to be sufficient reasom for its continued existence. During 1919-1928 the issue arose with regard to the individual: What are the religious truths which Reform teaches, and how can the individual be impressed with their urgency? In the past interest was focused upon the group; now emphasis was shifted to the individual and it was hoped that through the quickening of the emotions of the individual, new spirit may be infused into Judaism.

This religious atrophy is described as resulting from the lack of a definitive authority within Judaism. Reichert writes:

"The glorification of science and materialism and the lack of respect for all forms of authority, may be held largely responsible for the religious indifference so prevalent today."[145] What is necessary is the search for a newer more effective basis for authority. Enelow states the problem well: "Our greatest need at the present time is a vindication, scientific, philosophical, intellectual or emotional -- whatever you may call it -- but a vindication of the fundamental truths of religion."[146] However the matter be put, whether it be traced to lack of authority, or to the need for vindication, the response of the Conference was comparatively clear - vindication or authority is to be found through the cultivation of the emotional aspects of the individual.

In 1922 an abortive attempt was made to legislate a religious revival within the ranks of American Judaism. Though this plan did not get beyond the legislative stage it is highly indicative of the temper of the Conference at the time. In 1922 Edward Calisch in the course of his presidential message suggested the following: "I recommend that a committee be appointed to consider the feasibility of a revival service as a regular feature of the synagog service, and to report to the Conference as to the time and manner of its conduct."[147]

The Committee on the President's Message gave this matter careful consideration which resulted in the following resolution, which was accepted: "We deem it, the president's message, in regard to the possibility of reviving interest in synagog worship and of intensifying religious zeal as worthy of earnest consideration. We, therefore, recommend that the Executive board be requested to

appoint a member of the Conference to present at the next convention, a paper dealing with the elements of emotionalism and mysticism in relation to modern Judaism. The specific purpose of this paper shall be to ascertain whether or not there is a possibility of stimulating religious fervor through exercise of these factors in public worship. We note with interest that the Association of Reform Rabbis of New York City and Vicinity has already appointed a committee to consider this problem."[148] It is apparent that the issue was given thought.

The extent of the impact of this attitude upon Reform thinking is best demonstrated by a study which was made by Marvin Nathan in 1926, entitled, "The Trend Today of the Reform Movement." It is a statistical study of the then prevalent attitudes among members of the Conference. He presents the following statistics:[149]

Is the trend in Reform today towards

a) theory .... 14
or
practice ... 40

b) Rationalism
yes .... 26
no .... 32

c) Universalism
yes .... 39
no .... 16

d) Clearer Understanding pf Principles
yes .... 28
no .... 33

e) Customs
yes .... 56
no .... 16

f) Mysticism
yes .... 33
no .... 20

g) Social Service

| | |
|---|---|
| yes .... | 37 |
| no .... | 6 |

h) Preaching

| | |
|---|---|
| yes .... | 42 |
| no .... | 10 |

Nathan interprets his findings in this manner. "There is no doubt that the trend is away from the rational to the emotional and the mystic. The weakness of Reform has been its over-emphasis on the rati onal; the swing is now on back to the emotional, from "rationalism to feelingism".[150] He states that this is true not only of the rabbinate but of the people, and that the search for emotional validity is one that the people have also embarked upon. "The question of biblical criticism does not perplex our people. The supposed conflict between science and religion does not interest them. As a matter of fact the reconciliation is taken for granted. Abstract principles do not appeal, rational interpretation does not take hold. There is a craving for something warm, definite, concrete, -- that appeals to the heart, that grips the soul. That there is a return to the customs and ceremonies in home and synagog is evident on every side."[151]

The return to emotionalism was very much in evidence during this period. Most of the thinking done was on an individual level; the Conference did not attempt to legislate upon this issue.

Religion was often defined in terms of the emotions. Abram Simon states: "I define religion as man's conscious desire to be in helpful communion with the powers manifest in the universe upon whom he feels dependent. It has the advantage of finding the origin of religion, per se, in the emotions ... The soul feels the

need for such communion; and grows by what it feeds upon."[152] Reichert offers a similar definition: "Religion is not an intellectual theory ... but a far off remote vision of the soul, which grows stronger in intensity and richer in colorfulness through deep emotional experience ... Imagination creates it, reason defines it, but mysticism identifies the individual with it."[153]

Prayer too came in for its share of mystic definition. Bernard Heller states: "The basis of prayer must be faith and fancy, a faith which develops in one the sense and faculty of intuition and the fancy which impels the soul to adventure to realms that are unknown and uncharted. Instead of stressing the element of rationalism when we pray, let us stress and cultivate the elements of mysticism and imagination."[154] Psychology is brought into the picture by Rabbi Parker who regards it as the tool for the manipulation of the emotions. He maintains: "If the function of worship is to refresh and revise the big and meaningful emotional experiences of life, to restore them into the ruling position from which they have been crowded by the immediate demands of life and perhaps to reassociate them in more significant ways, then we must be guided by the youngest of the sciences, psychology."[155]

With regard to the problem of creed: positions both pro and con were taken on the basis of the mystic orientation. Opposed to creed, Isaac Moses writes: "We need more spirituality and less theology; we need the stimulating and vitalizing influences of art, architecture, music, the inspiring power of symbolism, feeding the imagination with sublime sentiments and strengthening the will by

noble resolutions."[156] In agreement with this disdain for theology Felix Levy said: "The absence of a generally accepted creed may be a source of weakness but it is the source of strength to our faith, as it has been handed down to us through the ages, permitting the free and untrammeled spirit of our helpfulness and power to adjust itself to changing conditions."[157]

On the other hand Ettelson used the mystic orientation as a possible basis for the formation of a creed. Through a "leap of faith" we must reach our theological position, and maintained by our emotional inertia we shall obtain the strength to cling to our beliefs. He writes: "Let us not, because of rightful repugnance to mere emotionalism in religion, deny ourselves the right to the deepest religious emotions. There is such a thing as making a fetish of the sane and balanced. It is no virtue in a religion to claim as its main characteristic that it is wholly and solely rational. Not thus are the hearts and souls of men lifted beyond themselves! No program became an all conquering cause, inspiring its heroes and martyrs by being no more than just sensible and practical. If we want a higher response in spiritual enthusiasm ... we must make a daring venture of faith. It is the mystery of faith that it must be genuinely lived in order to be really believed."[158]

Many words were uttered on the question of personal religion, and it was obvious that a spiritual turmoil was involved. The unrest caused the Conference to re-examine its original premises, and once again the question of creed is hurled to the forefront of the thinking of the Conference.

## 1929-1937 The Search for Authority

The Conference could no longer countenance the subterfuge of 'methodology' which sidestepped the issues of the day. America was involved in the throes of depression, the cries and appeals of many "isms" filled the air and Reform was forced to take a concrete position in order to compete for its existence. It could no longer fall back on the position which tolerated all beliefs but affirmed none. Landman writes: "We have many programs, but no program. Our ideologies are ill-defined, entangling us hopelessly in a labrynthic rundle that terminates in a blind end. We have leaders who darkly ren us asunder, but no leadership that directs us toward the sun ... Reform Judaism is quite befogged, becalmed; uncertain of its direction and woefully artless to steer a fearless course."[159]

What was needed was a concrete theological basis which could provide direction to the Reform group. But what is to be the basis for this theology? It could not be the historicism of the past, that seemed certain. Enelow writes: "Nor can we rest content with the theologic effects and achievements put forth hitherto by Reform Judaism. The pioneers of Reform Judaism - from Geiger to Einhorn, from Holdheim to Kohler - did devote themselves to theology; that was one of their merits; but theirs was a historical theology. They were true to the needs, and shared the favorite method, of the nineteenth century. Their aims was chiefly to give a portrayal of the religious concepts of the past, with emphasis on the process of development through which concepts had gone in the course of ages. We need to go beyond the historicism of the last century. We need

to construct a new theology, which would not merely relate the story and depict the evolution of the past, but would embody the knowledge and voice the convictions of the present, and thus serve as a basis for the renewal and strengthening of our religious life in the future."[160]

What was needed was a systematic rethinking of the issues of the day in honest contemporary terms, to get down to basic premises and reevaluate them, to determine what exactly is the nature of Reform belief. Reform theology could not be construed as being a survival of the hoary past requiring no vindication other than its antiquity; it was not an orthodoxy which needs no justification for faith except revelation. "Reform," Felix Levy states, "anxious to adjust its professions to the present, must frequently restate its position and even examine premises, e.g., the historicity of the revelatory event. A philosophic investigation of the validity of religious experiences, of its claim to truth, etc., is courted .."[161]

But a mere philosophical presentation is not sufficient. A philosophical disquisition is primarily valuable for the sake of entrenching conviction, it is only moderately capable of creating conviction, what was still needed was some voices of authority which could compell belief and help create a unifed spirit within the Jewish camp. "If Judaism is to be a force in our lives," Cohon writes, "it must continue to speak to us with a voice of authority. It may no longer speak in the name of God with regard to ceremonial matters that have lost their appeal to some moderns; but it still can and must inspire and stimulate to ethical and spiritual behavior by virtue of its inner truth and excellence."[162] He decries that

form of liberalism which would prevent us from taking stands on the basis of our convictions. "Liberalism must serve not as a corrosive acid but as a cohesive force. Let us not hesitate to come into agreement among ourselves on the intellectual as well as upon the moral foundations of our religion."[163] Cohon's demand is for a creed which could unify action and thought. The Conference was to be influenced by this plea.

But what is to be the basis for this authority? Two alternative methods were considered: that of science and that of mysticism. There were those who thought science could provide religion with its strongest basis. Men like Levy, Heller, and especially Brickner discussed this possibility. But by and large the response of the Conference was luke-warm. Speaking on this subject Lazaron states: "I have read Eddington and Jeans and Whitehead and Einstein. And I make bold to state that though we welcome these great thinkers as allies in religious belief, we cannot -- we must not depend upon them for our religious position. Religion must stand on its own feet. The fields of religion must be recognized as separate and distinct, though intimately and inevitably related. Science deals with facts; religion with faith. Science is interested in the law that governs the universe of things; religion is interested in the meaning and value of life. It is futile to base our claim for religious truth upon any possibilities that science may have to offer because what science declares today is denied tomorrow."[164]

What was sought was a source of religious validity, one that is independent of the shifts in contemporary intellectual modes. Reform thinkers attempted to get beyond the dilemna which the original

rationalist emphasis of Reform created. Religion if it is to be a source for moral reconstruction, and spiritual awakening, must obtain some validity beyond that which contemporary culture condescends to give it. The search was a difficult one, and indeed, in terms of the thinking of the day, a well nigh impossible one. It required man to go beyond the confines of his mind, if mind is accepted as being culturally defined, to find a source of validity in some undefinable mental stratosphere, for thus alone can a strong basis be provided for a theological formulation.

In search for some means of resolving this dilemna, Cohon turned to the teachings of Rudolph Otto. In Otto's conceptual category of the Holy, Cohon found a category of thought which establishes an area of ultimate religious validity. He presents his views in this fashion:

> Religion, as our tradition maintains and as Rudolf Otto has forcibly reminded the world, is more than philosophy, ethics or any scheme of human betterment. When true to itself it represents the consciousness of the holy, the sensing of ultimate needs, whether in the cosmic order or in the personality of man, the espousal of the indestructible values of truth, of goodness, of justice, not as growing out of subjective preference but as grounded in the heart of reality. The holy is a distinct category which may be approximated by other ideal human expressions but cannot be covered by them. At the heart of religion, as at the heart of life itself, lies mystery, which no philosophy ethic or art can adequately express. It can only be sensed by the spirit of man when in reverence and in awe it turns to the all highest.[165]

This position, which could have provided a basis for an absolutist position, was not followed through to its logical end, for it could not be squared with the spirit of the conference. Though the rabbinate had swung away from its strong reliance upon reason, it had not yet reached the point where it could find validity

apart from reason. The strong mystic bent in evidence at the Conference, was apparently no more than a reaction to the past which was not taken as a serious alternative. A purely religious category was not acceptable as grounds for theological validity.

The most acceptable basis for a theological formulation was suggested by Louis Binstock. He proposed a method for the formulation of a creed which would neutralize the charge that all creeds are by nature, rigid, and intolerant. He made the following proposal: "The same attitude that people manifest toward the dogmas of government and science, they must display toward dogmas of religion. Just as a dogma or theory of government or science is acceptable only so long as it is not superceded in the minds of men by a superior and more useful dogma or theory, so a dogma of religion should be acceptable only so long as according to the decision of a reputable representative body of men, it still serves the spiritual needs of human souls. All dogmas should be fluid and not fixed."[166] Cohon rephrased this proposal in more moderate terms. "I wish to second Rabbi Binstock's demand for a clear formulation grounded in modern philosophy and psychology of the principles of our faith and the practices of our faith, not as a test of religious conformity, but rather for the sake of aiding ourselves in our religious thinking and living."[167]

This attitude was a definite compromise. Authority was not to be based upon one factor alone but on several. The belief in historical evolution and progress is not disregarded. Every formulation is to be regarded as temporary, preparing the ground for the succeeding position; every hypotheses is tentative and

anticipatory. Reason is to judge the validity of each hypotheses determining when it has outlived its usefulness, and when its successor has come of age. Yet throughout the premise holds that a creed does exist, though it be a temporary one, that it does have a historic validity beyond the common run of human knowledge. Admittedly this position does injustice to the essential meaning of creed as an authoritative binding document, but it does bring about the syntheses of reason, historical evolution, and creedal authority, concepts which have proven to be basic to Reform thinking. This position proved to be the touchstone for the formulation in 1937 of a modified creed, called The Guiding Principle of Reform Judaism.

## 1929-1937 The Issue of Humanism

The legislative machinery for the enactment of the 1937 creed was set into motion by this resolution in 1934:

> In view of the many ideological and material changes in Jewish and general life which have taken place since then and which have had their inevitable repercussion on our Reform point of view, we recommend that the Executive Board of the Central Conference of Rabbis plan to have presented at next year's sessions a symposium revaluating the platform with a view of formulating a pronouncement touching the philosophy and program of present-day Reform Judaism.[168]

In keeping with this resolution, the 1935 yearbook contained essays on the topics of God, Israel and Torah. The issue of Torah raised little discussion. Joseph Rauch summed up Conference attitudes: "Torah becomes the best and the most we know of God at a given time, all the revelation that have unfolded before us and the expression of Divine Law under which we are to order all of life."[169] He recognizes that "All this is in complete harmony with the pithy and pregnant declaration of the Pittsburgh Platform on this subject: We recognize in the Mosaic legislation a system of training the Jewish people for its mission during its national life in Palestine and today we adcept as binding only its moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adopted to the views and habits of modern civilization."[170] Thus the issues of Torah and revelation remained.

But the matter was not resolved this simply with regard to the definition of God and Israel. First let us turn to the issue which arose concerning God. At this time there was a group within the rabbinate which had been influenced by the philosophy of Humanism. The Conference reacted vigorously to this threat to

a theistic definition of Judaism. Lefkowitz brought this issue before the Conference in 1930. He said:

> There is something in Humanism which seems to respond to the modern temper, and a lusty battle is in sight between the new religion and the old religious outlook which posits the living God. Some of our Rabbis seem to be drawn to certain phases of the new philosophy, and have gone so far as to denominate our prayers as so much poetry and nothing else. If Judaism is to continue to be a well defined way of life we must proceed toward some sort of definite pronouncement of Judaism on the points mentioned.[171]

The same issue was presented much more vigorously the following year by Morris Newfield.

> It is quite clear that a certain group of Rabbis, fortunately very insignificant in numbers, has chosen its new direction along the road of humanism. If that is their conviction, they should certainly preach it, but not in Jewish pulpits. Humanism as generally conceived and presented by its recognized protagonists, dispenses with God and removes the divine sanctions from human ethics. To identify Judaism with Humanism ... is either a symptom of muddle-headedness in the pulpit or downright conscious betrayal of the sacred trust ...[172]

The Conference treated this issue carefully in 1931, for it was apparent that the matter of Humanism could not be quickly disposed of. Cohon expressed the gravity of the situation:

> We are facing the greatest danger in Judaism that we have ever had in our history. The foundations of everything that we are doing are being undermined in a surrepetitious fashion in the name of a spurious liberalism. Atheism is being made the only foundation of certain pulpits and certain congregations. Now I do not say that a man who is an atheist should be burned in the public square. I do not believe that a man who is an atheist has no right to his belief. I would rather be the first man to go to the defense of his right of opinion, but I say that that man has no right to sail under false colors in our Jewish congregations, which stand upon the foundations of the unity of God and we as a Conference ought not to countenance this continuous sapping of the vitality of our congregation.[173]

Mayerburg restated this attitude in the terms of his own

experience. He related what occurred to one of his younger colleagues who gave a vigorous presentation of the subject of Humanism in which he attacked the Jewish or any other God idea, and announced himself allied with the new movement. His congregation immediately proceeded to ask his resignation. "He came to me in tears, claiming that his right of freedom of speech had been abrogated, that they had trampled upon his conscience, I told him that while he had a right to express his opinions and his own convictions, that the congregation was well within its rights in demanding that a man who occupied its pulpit should subscribe to the cardinal principles at least of Judaism, and I feel that since one congregation, a small congregation in the Southwest, has fearlessly spoken out on this subject that it behooves the leaders of American Israel to reaffirm their God concept and to say that their colleagues cannot take shelter behind their refusal to endorse a distinct God belief in Judaism."[174]

Brickner was the only member of the Conference who outspokenly came forth to defend the tenets of Humanism. His remarks clearly present his point of view. He maintains:

> There are some in this Conference, and I believe that they are by no means in the minority, who find the existing formulations of religious belief and philosophy, even as it has been formulated in the theology of Reform Judaism, in many respects, spiritually unsatisfying, and not in consonance with their scientific and philosophic outlook.[175]
>
> They approach the reconstruction of their religious belief through the method of experience rather than through Revelation and Tradition. Some of them frankly do not believe nor preach a God conceived as personality. In good Jewish fashion, because they are at heart deeply religious men, they are seeking to give the God idea reality in other than personal terms. They are concerned not so much with questions that revolve around the idea of God as creator of

> the source and origin of the Universe, as they are with a God who is the goal of human destiny.[176]

> I look upon these men in the Conference, who are rethinking and reformulating Reform belief, as those who are doing the major work to attract the thinking youth, and bring them back to the Temple from which, alas, too many have strayed - because the Temple has been too cautious when it should have been courageous; timid when it should be prophetic.[177]

It was obvious that the humanistic elements in the Conference were reacting to the general religious problem which affected the Conference. They sought for religious validity in the human personality, giving up all hope of finding truth from some source beyond that of the personality and achievements of man. But the Conference could not accept this position. The majority opinion was summed up in a resolution on this subject in 1931:

> ... the Conference may well take this occasion to reaffirm its faith in Judaism as an interpretation of life transfused by the consciousness of the divine and assert accordingly that any system of thought, when interpreted as making light of or discountenancing the belief in God, is not in keeping with Israel's teachings throughout the ages. As to the positive side of humanism this Conference is not unmindful of its emphasis upon human experiences, needs and aspirations, as the center of life's values; but anyone at all acquainted with the literature of Israel must realize that there is nothing novel in this ethical note. The Conference sees no reason, therefor, why any Jew, whether Rabbi or layman, should need to turn to Humanism or to any other ethical or religious system for this particular conception of values.[178]

Though the affair of Humanism was apparently settled in 1931, at least on a formal level, it motivated careful consideration of the God concept during the years immediately prior to the formulation of the Columbus platform. The most influential presentation on this subject is that of Samuel Cohon in his essay "The Idea of God in Judaism." God is defined in terms of revelation, ethics, and history. Cohon's position, except for its lack of emphasis upon God as reason,

is in accord with the definitions of 1890-1897. Concerning the historical context of monotheism Cohon writes: "Judaism arrived at the idea of monotheism through historic experience, as interpreted by the intuitive insight of the prophets, rather than by speculation regarding the nature of the universe. Having come to this conviction, Judaism visioned God as the unconditional source and origin of the ordered universe, as the Creator of all things. Viewing God as living and active Judaism conceived of the universe under the symbols of creation and of purpose."[179]

Ethics and revelation are viewed as being intimately related with this historical process. "Judaism views history as the progressive revelation of the Divine in the lives of men and nations, reaching its culmination in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth ...."[180] And again: "The ethical nature of God exhibits even more clearly the impress of Jewish social experience."[181] "The ideal elements of human law, truth, righteousness, and love are as much a revelation of God as are the starry skies."[182] "God's revelation in history assumes a central position in Jewish thought."[183] God is primarily known by his ethical revelation through history.

Cohon does by no means limit God to 'Good', he is defined as active personality:

> The Jewish doctrine of ethical monotheism affirms: (1) The reality of the living God; (2) He is best conceived as personal - not in the sense of anthropomorphism but of individuality, intelligence and will; (3) He is the creative principle who called the universe into being, and sustains it by his wisdom and might; (4) He makes for order not only in physical nature but also in the life of man. He is the power not ourselves who makes for and wills righteousness and love. He it is that evokes man's response to ideal values. Through him we attain our noblest human ends. We behold His presence in righteousness and may commune with him in prayer. He is nigh in those who call upon him in truth.[184]

This doctrine is in substance utilized by the Columbus Platform's paragraph on the nature of God which states:

> 2. God. The heart of Judaism and its chief contribution to religion is the doctrine of the One, living God, who rules the world through law and love. In him all existence has its creative source and mankind its ideal of conduct. Through transcending time and space, He is the indwelling Presence of thw world. We worship him as the Lord of the universe and as our Merciful Father.[185]

The Conference thus clarified the air with regard to the controversy concerning the nature of God.

## 1929-1937 The Issue of Nationalism

Zionism was still far from being a dead letter. In the year 1935 the cudgels were once more publicly resorted to, resulting in more concessions to Zionists from the non Zionist group. The issues raised were essentially the same as those aired earlier. Schulman, spokesman for the non Zionist faction, charged that Zionism is an escape from Jewish responsibility, a denial of the mission of Israel:

> As I once put it some nine years ago, when I was in Palestine in a phrase whose truth was recognized by distinguished nationalists themselves: "Whereas we, the Reform Jews or anti-nationalists, wish to be ba-goyim in the midst of the nations, they said, 'We wish to be ka-goyim." After 3500 years of Jewish history and the unique experience of Israel in the world, incomparable with that of any other people's history, they declare that our only salvation, our only possibility of survival, the only solution of the Jewish problem, will be found when we go back to the ancient soil and there become again a what? A theocracy with God as the centre of our life? No. That we become new. That we become a secular people like other people's.[186]

He maintains that the Jewish people can be defined in no other wise but as a purely religious community. "The very word, 'Israel' is itself already a commitment to the thought that it is a religious group, primarily and essentially."[187] He regards the definition of Judaism as a civilization as the cloak behind which the Zionists hide their spiritual nakedness, for all the spiritual wealth of Judaism they have salvaged only meagre nationalist gleanings. Zionism to him is a flirtation with what we call today Humanism. It emphasizes man and throws God into the background, if it thinks of him at all. "As I said some time ago, Jewish nationalism for the first time in Jewish history enthroned in the consciousness

of the Jew, Israel in the place of God."[188] The Zionists used time tested response in reply. They claimed that Zionism is not a limitation but an expansion of the scope of Judaism. God is not being ignored but given a more meaningful context. Felix Levy, among others, applies this argument: "This (Reform) emphasis of the primacy of the God idea lead to the overlooking of other factors, less important, perhaps in Jewish history, but no less vital to Jewish existence and persistence, namely, Israel as a people with all this implies. Having drunk the refreshing draught of universalism, in their exhiliration they threw away the nationalistic cup into which they had poured their portion, nay, they sometimes forgot that the well from which they had drawn the pure liquid was the fountain of Israel's national history and thought."[189]

Silver repeated this claim that Reform through its denial of nationalistic elements approximated the attitude of early Paulinian Christianity. "There is a striking similarity", he notes, "between the theoretic position taken by Paul and that taken by the extreme leaders of Reform Judaism, and had these men been as consistent as Paul, and had they translated their loquacity about the mission of Israel into a real missionary propaganda as did Paul and his followers, the logic of events would have brought about the secession of their group also from Jewish life. But with Paul, the mission was a race to save the world. With the Reform Rabbis it was a rocking-horse race. These reformist Rabbis, too, were denationalized Jews. They, too, conceived of Israel as "a candle which lights others and consumes itself." They too tried to erect Jewish life upon the slender, sagging stilts of a few theologic abstractions." [190]

The demand for formal modification of the Conference position was made by Feldman, who demanded that "We should revise the fifth paragraph of the Pittsburgh Platform ... and make it more consonant with our modern needs and convictions."[191]

Conference action took two forms. First: in 1935 a resolution was passed in keeping with the neutrality resolution of 1917, but this statement was much more positive in its leaning towards Zionist aims. It reads:

> Whereas, at certain forgoing conventions of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, resolutions have been adopted in opposition to Zionism, and
> Whereas, we are persuaded that acceptance of rejection of the Zionist program should be left to the determination of the individual members of the Conference themselves, therefor
> Be it resolved, that the Central Conference of American Rabbis takes no official stand on the subject of Zionism; and be it further
> Resolved, that in keeping with its oft-announced intentions, the Central Conference of American Rabbis will continue to co-operate in the upbuilding of Palestine, and in the economic, cultural, and particularly spiritual tasks confronting the growing and evolving Jewish community.[192]

The second response of the Conference to the desire for a restatement of Reform's relation to Zionism is found in the paragraph which deals with Palestine in the Columbus Platform. It is outspoken in its recognition of Palestine as a Jewish homeland, and of the responsibility of American Judaism in the upbuilding of the land.

> In the rehabilitation of Palestine, the land hallowed by memories and hopes, we behold the promise of renewed life for many of our brethren. We affirm the obligation of all Jewry to aid in its upbuilding as a Jewish homeland by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life.[193]

In this fashion was the compromise on Zionism embodied in the Columbus formulation.

## Acceptance of the Columbus Platform

In 1936 an initial draft of the "Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism", was submitted to the Conference for approval. The document was similar in spirit to the platform which was accepted in Pittsburgh almost forty years ago. The major disagreement between the two is with regard to Zionism: the Pittsburgh Platform is outspoken in its denial of all nationalistic elements, the Columbus Platform is equally firm in its emphasis upon the rebuilding of Palestine as a Jewish homeland and as a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life. But beyond the issue of Zionism differences between the two documents are limited to variations in emphasis.

The Columbus Platform devoted entire sections to the topics of 'Ethics' and 'Religious Practice,' while its predecessor handled these issues more superficially. In the 1937 Document ethics is treated in three paragraphs: the first stresses the interrelations of ethics and religion, the second is devoted to Social Justice emphasizing economic relations, and the third is concerned with the attainment of universal peace. This section is a lengthy elaboration of the eighth paragraph in the 1885 Platform which contains all of these thought, but in germinal form.

With regard to ritual: the Pittsburgh Platform had little to say regarding the worth of ritual beyond the sentences: "We ... maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization."[194] The Columbus Platform is much more positive and

specific. In the opening paragraph of section three of the Guiding Principles it is maintained that Jewish life "calls for faithful participation in the life of the Jewish community as its finds expression in home, synagog and school and in all other agencies that enrich Jewish life and promote its welfare."[195] The section continues, urging the importance of the education of each new generation 'in our rich cultural and spiritual heritage'; and of the necessity for the preservation of the traditionals of home, synagog, prayer and the 'retention and development of such customs, symbols and ceremonies as possess inspirational value'. With regard to ritual the Columbus statement is clearly positive in tone.

The final major difference in emphasis concerns the mission idea. On this point the Pittsburgh Platform is most definite in its affirmation, indeed of the eight paragraphs in the Pittsburgh Platform, fully half of them (paragraphs 2, 3, 5, 6) refer to the centrality of the mission concept. This is certainly not so with the Columbus Platform. There the mission idea is limited to a five line sub-paragraph under the title of Israel. The statement corresponds fairly closely to the point of view of the Pittsburgh Platform in its definition of the mission, but its tone is subdued, it lacks the confident anticipation of the older document. Both agree that the message of Judaism is universal, aiming at the perfection of mankind, yet behind this underlying agreement is a basic difference in temper. The Pittsburgh Platform is largely extrospective, involved almost entirely in universal issues and goals; the Columbus Platform is an introspective document, looking

inward, concerned largely with specifically Jewish, specifically national issues. It is evident that the issue of Zionism involved more than a political shift, it was a change in mood, from universalism to particularism, from outgoing optimism to inner concern.

The centrality of the issue of Zionism is born out by statements made on the Conference floor. "One of the chief points of dissatisfaction", Cohon writes, "is the section on Palestine. Anti-Zionists complain that we have gone too far in the direction of Zionism, and Zionists criticize us for not going far enough. The difficulty with some of us is that we permit an isolated phrase to obscure the general context. As a matter of fact, the section on Palestine restates the position taken by the Conference last year, when it adopted the so-called "neutrality resolution."[196]

It is apparent that the Platform was designed to follow a middle of the road position, swinging neither too far to the nationalist left nor the universalist right. The position taken with regard to Palestine was crucial to the acceptance of the entire document, the difficulty in reconciling the diverse factions at the Conference is described by Felix Levy, a member of the committee for the formulation of the principles:

> As I said in my letter to the members which accompanied this report, the commission met with the almost insuperable difficulty of attempting to reconcile points of view that seem to be diametrically opposed, but the restatement of Principles represents what might be called the point of view of the average man of the Conference, who neither leans too far to a nationalistic interpretation of Judaism nor to the old religiously denominational interpretation. Some of the men in the commission were willing for the sake of peace to compromise to some extent in order to arrive as some kind of a concensus of opinion. It cannot include every shade of opinion: it attempts to strike an average.[197]

Thus the Platform represented the syntheses of many of the conflict-

ing points of view at the Conference. It struck out in no new direction, rather it attempted to consolidate the most acceptable aspects of Conference thinking into one document. The platform made no claim to any authority beyond the fact that it was to serve as a normative guide to Reform thinking until such time as it will have outlived its value and in this form it was submitted to the Conference.

As was to be expected it met with immediate opposition. The arguments used so effectively against a creed in the past were once again trotted out. James Heller stated: "I believe it is part of the most valuable tradition of Judaism that it has refused to adopt creeds; I believe that we Reform Jews ought to be the very last to change it. I should like to move, therefore, that this Conference should dismiss the commission; with gratitude for the arduous labor which it has performed, because it hascome to the conclusion that no declaration of Principles is advisable at the present time."[198] William B. Schwartz said: "As I carefully read this statement, I found it was simply a restatement and reaffirmation of the ideology of Reform Judaism as expressed in our prayerbook. In Kohler's Jewish Theology, in Professor Cohon's book What the Jews Believe. I believe that this declaration should be published but I cannot see why it should be adopted as a fixed creed."[199]

When the issue was brought to the floor for action near deadlock ensued. This caused Dr. Goldenson to say, "The situation in our Conference at the present moment is of such a nature and the division is so close that this is no time and this is not the atmosphere in which to deal with the most important problem in Jewry

today. Feeling as I do, I do not wish to take part in the consideration of the report of the commission. I therefor request the privilege of registering my intention or not participating in the discussion and not voting upon the report of the committee."[200]

A motion to postpone action until next year lost (42-46). Then the Declaration of Principles was read and considered seriatim. All articles were adopted as amended. Rabbi David Philipson moved that the declaration of Principles be adopted as a whole. Of one hundred and ten members present five requested that their votes be recorded in the negative.[201] And thus was the Columbus Platform adopted in the year 1937.

## Conclusions

The years 1890-1937 were hectic ones for the Conference. The thinking of the Conference was troubled and frequently divided, but underlying it all a unanimity of belief can be found. The rabbis, with rare exception accepted the credo that 'ours is a reasonable universe and that the forces of history within it are to be described as moving inexorably towards an ultimate ethical goal'. This belief was based upon two premises: that history is a process at whose end lies redemption, and that ours is a reasonable world which conforms to the canons of reason. This belief; however, also resulted in a dilemna. A vision of a tomorrow brighter than today invites a dissatisfaction with the status quo, for the present must inevitably be found wanting. If it be granted that religious truth lies at the end of an historic process what form of religious validity can be retained for them who still live within the process?

During the years under discussion, the Conference tried to resolve this problem by maintaining that religious authority can be found a) in the past, through the revivification of historic practices and beliefs including nationalistic aspirations, b) in the processes of history, that by conforming to the lines of Jewish development Reform is given an historic sanction; c) in the universalistic concept of the mission of Israel, which gave an urgency and a purpose to Israel; d) through the teachings of reason and science, which guide Judaism in its search for True and the Good; and e) in the realm of ethics, for through ethics alone can the nature of the divine

best be apprehended.

The Columbus platform represents a synthesis of these five categories of religious validity. In terms of the nature of Reform it can be argued that the Platform represents the highest religious validity of which Reform is capable, for it embraces all of its central tenets into one all inclusive doctrine. But one must seriously question whether this would supply sufficient basis for a firm religious belief. Whether Reform desires it or not the logic of its development does not permit it to deviate from the formulaes of the sciences and the changing phrases of the current philosophies, and in our society it thus becomes bound to an arid materialism or what is worse a philosophical diletantism. Reform becomes securely anchored to the shifting winds of contemporary thought and finds that it has embraced the expediencies of easy acceptance in exchange for the bed-rock of meaningful faith.

But if the premises of Reform are unassailable no other choice can be made. Reform must bow to the spirit of the times and she must acknowledge the mastery of the latest thought both scientific and philosophic, for only thus can she hide her nakedness. But are the premises of Reform unassailable?

Enchanted by the dawn of liberalism, Reform had embraced Liberalism's most enchanting handmaiden reason, and enthroned her on a pinnacle to reign supreme in the house of Reform. Today reason has lost its lustre. The teachings of Marx which placed research in an economic context, those of Freud which described reason as the rationalizations of passions, and those of Lobatchevsky which

challenges its absolutivity — these but prepared the way for the contemporary philosophies of pragmatism, intuition, phenomenalism, logical positivism, and instrumentalism who stand firm in their challenge to the centrality of reason.

Reason can no longer span the mysteries of the universe, indeed there are areas where her weapons are powerless, and man can only be deceived by reliance upon her ways. The sphere of the senses, the totality of that which has objectivity, still remains within her reign; but the yearnings of the heart, the endlessness of space, the purport of time can no longer remain within her unfeeling grasp. Religion in so far as it deals with the goods and and evils, the purposes and goals, the ultimates of human existence, must now look to other quarters for succor. Reason has lost its lustre; perhaps it is time for Reform to take cognizance of this fact and thus find its own soul. Then let it state its beliefs and let them be tempered by the flame of reasoned thought, but let them have an existence of their own, phrased in the only language that men's souls can understand, the language of faith.

Man has long since known that God, creation, revelation and salvation, are categories beyond the immediate senses of man. If they are to be given a permanence and validity of their own, an act of commitment is required, otherwise they remain pious platitudes decorously intoned at proper occassions but without any vitality which brings life to belief and purpose to belonging. Reform has for too long refrained from determining its nature. It would rather remain a vacuous bin feeding all as they desire

to be fed, meaning all things to all men ultimately meaning nothing to no one. If Judaism does have a message, and it does have a message of redemption and ethical revelation, of the nature of man and of evil, of mercy and of atonement; let it state its view and live its view. Let its thought be the house it dwells in, for otherwise its course can lead only to intellectual ineptitude and spiritual sterility.

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