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THE IMPACT OF HISTORICAL FORCES ON THE INTELLECTUAL OUTLOOK

OF

THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS

FROM

1889 TO 1910

by

Mordecai Podet

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Hebrew Letters Degree and Ordination.

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SUMMARY

This is the second of a projected series of studies aimed at garnering a body of topically and chronologically classified data bearing on the intellectual life of American Jewry, with an intellectual history of American Jewry as ultimate goal.

The convention proceedings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis over a period of twenty years were used for this study. The topical and chronological arrangement grew out of the data.

The intellectual preoccupations treated may be organized about the rabbis' thinking in regards three questions: (1) What is the Conference? (2) What are Jews and Judaism? (3) To what beliefs are we committed? The epicenters about which the data bearing on these questions revolved in each of three periods is indicated by the chapter headings. Topics are dealt with in the same order in each period, so that the three chapter headings (one from each period) relating to any of the topics summarize its development over the twenty years. Zionism was omitted except for a few corroborative references. Sub-topics on which the data was scant or somewhat tangential to main issues were included where they buttressed other evidence of general trends.

The data shows that in different periods, Conference spokesmen -and sometimes even the same individual- held different and often conflicting views on many issues. The period from 1889 to 1894 is characterized ^{by RABBINIC} ~~as one of~~ libertarianism, pride and confidence, rejection of Orthodoxy, and the conception

of Judaism as Reason. From 1894 to 1903 there appears a trend toward uniformity and a synod, a decline in morale, an attempt at rapprochement with Orthodoxy, and the conception of Judaism as involving Race prominently. In the final period, 1904-1910, the synod sentiment reaches its peak and fails, a further decline in morale ends, for some, with a rebirth of the older Reform spirit, the Conference for the first time comes to grips with the problem of the ghetto and fails to make any headway in it, the controversy as to whether Israel is a church or a race continues. In all three periods, unsuccessful efforts are made toward creating a systematic theology which will officially represent the stand of the Conference.

The outstanding event in the American Jewish history of this era is the so-called Russian Jewish immigration, and it is the Conference's adaptation to this that the foregoing represents. The relation of the numerous minor currents in that history to the changes in the Conference's intellectual framework have not been underscored because the data from the proceedings is, for many inquiries, too scant to justify pressing for evidence.

לפני כן, אבי ה'ק"ג

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PREFACE

This is the second of a projected series of studies aimed at garnering a body of topically and chronologically classified data bearing on the intellectual life of American Jewry with an intellectual history of American Jewry as ultimate goal.

The convention proceedings of the Central Conference of American Rabbis over a period of Twenty years were used for this study. The topical and chronological arrangement grew out of the data. But data is dynamic and the static categories required for preliminary comprehension cannot always contain it perfectly. Hence overlapping occurs. Future extension of this study's scope chronologically or in sources of data may result in different topical or periodical analyses and emphases. In any case, the classifications and periodization used in this paper more or less exactly but unquestionably document, bound and characterize the intellectual movements reflected in the proceedings, examined. shk

The intellectual preoccupations treated may be organized about the rabbis' thinking in regards three questions: (1) What is the CCAR? (2) What are Jews and Judaism? (3) To what beliefs are we committed? The epicenters about which the data bearing on these questions revolved in each of three periods is indicated by the chapter headings. Topics are dealt with in the same order in each period so that the three chapter headings (one from each period) relating to any of the topics summarize its development over the twenty years covered by the study. Zionism was omitted except for a few corroborative

references, a separate study being intended for this. Sub-topics on which the data was scant or somewhat tangential to main issues were included ^{only} where they buttressed other evidence of general trends.

A thesis with pretensions to historical understanding should do more than show simply that all-too-solid roots in the Conference's past may be discovered for a variety of often contradictory beliefs and tendencies. It is true that not only the Conference's spokesmen taken as a whole, but sometimes even selfsame individuals have stood, in different periods, for individual rabbinic freedom and against it, for the clear demarcation of Reform from Orthodoxy and against it, for Judaism as Reason, and against it, for the unification of religions and against it, for Biblical Criticism and against it, and so on. 1/16

But a historical thesis should attempt to demonstrate that the changes are not the result of hermetically ~~made~~ insulated intellectual labors or caprices but the outcome of altered social conditions compelling active minds to regroup their intellectual forces in ways effective in the new social climate. So far as the scope of this paper permits, such an attempt has been made.

The specific content of the intellectual positions, taken together with the particular times in which they appear argues the conclusion that they represent, among other things, the Conference's accommodation to the so-called Russian-Jewish immigration during the ~~p~~ era under study. A comparison of the dates of the largest immigration during this era with the dates of the decline of Conference morale and the accompanying

changes in outlook(as shown by the titles on the Contents page) is most suggestive. The relation of the numerous minor currents in American Jewish history to the changes which occurred in the Conference's intellectual framework in this era have not been underscored because the data from the proceedings is, for many inquiries, too scant to justify pressing for evidence.

Although the judgement is to some extent insightful and not objective, it may not be too far fetched to propose that there is a persuasive if not a necessary logic binding the conception of Judaism as Reason, the rejection of Orthodoxy, the Conference's self-confidence and its libertarian structure to one another. Similarly, the topics of each of the other periods. That is, the attitudes and beliefs prominent in any one period are related not only individually to the corresponding position in the other periods, but to each other in a meaningful configuration. There is an inner unity among the positions taken in any one period, a horizontal as well as a vertical relationship.

As regards the immediate ~~applicability~~ application, the insight may be more useful than the conclusion - a not uncommon occurrence in research. The distinct parallels between the Conference's preoccupations in the second and third periods of the study and the trends in contemporary Reform organization~~al~~ life will be obvious to the informed reader. The questions to which this leads are: (1) Can we find similarities in the two historical situations to account for the parallels? (2) Can we predict the future course on the basis of these already existent parallels? The answers are not within the purview of this

paper, but depend upon the type of data and organization represented by it.

I should like to express my profound appreciation of Dr. Ellis Rivkin's mentorship, which I found to be a peerless combination of scholarly breadth and depth wedded to a third dimension - the art of social relationships.

My indebtedness to my wife, to whose lot it has fallen to suffer with me tribulations which are not hers, is beyond repaying.

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* The first was a study of the theology of the Rabbinnical Assembly.

CCAR PROCEEDINGS 1889-1894

Conference Structure and Function: Free Enterprise

The CCAR came into existence in Detroit, July 10, 1889, when a group of rabbis adopted the amended report of an organization planning committee which had been appointed in a preliminary meeting the day before. Its aims it declared to be rabbinic cooperation and encouragement, as well as the establishing of guiding principles or norms. ⁽¹⁾ The latter's function was not to curb deviation from orthodox usage. An occasional allusion to "rash" reformers notwithstanding, the proceedings of the CCAR for the years in question evidence no dismay over the individual rabbis' freedom to reform Jewish usage according to his own convictions. On the contrary, the primary - not to say sacredness - of this liberty is repeatedly invoked. The Conference is portrayed as shunning authority over its members and serving only to stimulate and foster their continued progress toward truth through free discussion. ⁽²⁾ The constitution presented at the 1889 meeting neither mentions ^Nsactions for those who fail to comply with the anticipated enactments nor describes them as definitive Judaism. It invests them, by implication, with the same compulsoriless character as the legislation of earlier liberal rabbinic conferences, which it describes as simply "recognized as an authoritative expression of the best intelligence and purpose of their respective times." ⁽³⁾

What purpose, then, were these enacted norms to serve?

They were to protect the individual rabbi who was under attack for his reforms. The "recognized ecclesiastical authority, would, presumably, shield the rabbi from the fire of his more traditional coreligionists, as well as guard Judaism from the excessive reforms of "rash men."⁽⁴⁾ The CCAR, by enacting ~~compulsoriless~~ ^{of compulsory} norms, was to provide moral support to reform rabbis without infringing on their freedom.

Its Pride and Confidence

In its first years, the Conference was proud, aggressive, self-confident. It saw itself as the unconquerable and inevitable standard bearer of "historicā, progressive Judaism", a phrase endlessly reiterated by Conference speakers; it felt itself to be a vigorous constructive force making for the unification and progress of the fragmented American Jewry of the time.⁽⁵⁾ The proceedings fairly glow as speakers announce the Conference's intention to abolish ignorance, superstition and indifference as well as bigotry and fanaticism; to sift the good and true from the evil and error; to preserve the former and use it for the inevitable progress of Judaism. Nor is this program sufficiently ambitious for the Conference. Not Judaism alone, but the very world is its oyster. We are met not merely to make speeches, but to give the world some-⁽⁶⁾ thing to read, to talk, to feel, to think about! Its own objectives and those of Israel's history, the Conference considered to be identical: the salvation and satisfaction of

Israel and all mankind. It beheld with pride what it considered to be its constructive attainments in this direction: the removal of ritual and racial barriers to proselytes; the declaration of the equality of all before God; the classification of patriotism and obedience to the law of the land as a religious duty for every Israelite; the exaltation of the most sacred ethical doctrines as commandments of God, given to Israel from the beginning. (7)

The Conference took pride in the constituencies of its rabbis, and heaped plaudits upon their laymen~~s~~ for their myriad virtues including their culture, education, progress, enlightenment, humanity, thought, activity and life! In the proceedings of these years there is almost no indication of queasiness as regards the cultic practices or lack of them on the part of their congregations. On the contrary, encomiums are uttered for their "fixing their eyes on the highest ends of modern civilization", and having at heart the welfare, progress, elevation and happiness of their country as well as all humanity! They are duly appreciated as the "liberal" and "progressive" majority of American Jewry; as the philanthropists responsible for the "palatial temples", the hospitals, orphan asylums, homes for the aged, the UAHC, the HUC, and innumerable similar accomplishments; as those who have "naturalized Judaism in America." The very temple structures, are applauded as comparing "well with the finest churches" in splendor and architecture. Surely this good feeling was reciprocal. We find that during the Cleveland convention, 1890, the Conference members were invited to pay visits to various

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local institutions, among them "the rooms of the Excelsior Club, which is the club of our most respected Israelites." (8)

Its Rejection of Orthodoxy

The attitude of Conference leadership toward other elements in contemporary Jewry is concisely put in Wise's phrase: No concessions to the anachronists! On Wise's view, Orthodoxy and Conservatism failed to take into account the "just demands" of the new era and country; the only existing alternatives to Reform, he judged to be "Kabbalistic mysticism" and "rabbinic legalism", both used as terms of disapproval during this period by numerous Conference speakers. The constitution of 1889 opens membership in the Conference not only to rabbis, but also to "autodidactic preachers", authors of ~~EMINENT BOOKS~~ ~~WINNER BOOKS~~ on Jewish theology or literature, and all who render important services to Judaism; a simple majority vote (9) of approval admits to membership. Despite this liberal policy Wise asserts in 1893 that only "representative men of the progressive school, none of the staunch legalists, were accepted to membership." In 1894 he reports that the Conference has grown to over 100 members but explains that no Polish, Russian, or other "so-called Orthodox" are in this number since the Conference "at once rejected all illiberal elements and stands exclusively for American Israel of the liberal and progressive school...." (10)

I have no evidence that occasions for refusing membership to "staunch legalists" actually arose, but the tenor of the remarks cited is not calculated to conceal the attitude which motivated them. Unlike Wise, ^{Kohler} ~~he~~ differentiated between Orthodoxy and Conservatism; the former he thought deserving of filial respect, but the latter he described as a "catchword for the masses." Kohler evaluated the conservatism of Frankel and Marnheimer as an adjusted Reform calculated to satisfy a larger number, i.e. to satisfy those who did not belong to the Jewish intellectual aristocracy. (11)

ambivalent?

As one would expect, those "anachronist" attitudes which are reflected in the Conference proceedings are not conciliatory. The Conferences' aim, so the Orthodox opined, was the abolition of Judaism. (12) From the proceedings alone it is not clear whether Wise's inclusion of Talmudic sanction in justifying Reform reflects a specific form of attack on Reform. (13) On the other hand, Kohler's repeated insistence that Reform has always stood for Judaism one and inseparable, that Reform attempts to prevent, not to cause schisms, is as obviously aimed at specific accusations as is the title of one of his addresses to the Conference, viz., "Is Reform Judaism Destructive or Constructive?" (14)

In Kohler's address just referred to is revealed the unusual nature of Conservative theory and practice in this period. The "so-called conservative Jews of this country" have no right to criticize Reform since their position is the same as ours, says Kohler. Their use of reason to discriminate between Mosaic

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and Rabbinic laws, their admitting change in the Biblical writings or Rabbinic statutes, their playing organ in the synagogue especially on the holy days, Sabbaths and festivals, their introducing the confirmation rite or abolishing rabbinic rules such as keeping fasts, signs of mourning for the Temple, carrying a watch or handkerchief on the Sabbath, all these make their opposition to Reform illogical and void of principle since they have virtually taken sides with Reform. It is no longer a matter of principle but of degree and mode. Where, Kohler asks, is the consistency of that conservative Rabbi who has publicly denied the authenticity of Deutero Isaiah and yet said, at the dedication of the JTS the other day, (15) that the Pentateuch should be fenced as a noli me tangere?

Judaism Means Reason

The Conference's spokesman unanimously held Judaism to be not only superior to all other religions but the highest possible form of religion and destined to become the religion of all mankind. To Wise, the Mosaic God-concept appeared so lofty as to be unattainable by mere human speculation and therefore, he felt, it argued the reasonableness of revelation! Since, he syllogized, a religion's doctrines regarding ethics, immortality, reward and punishment, etc. must align with its God-concept and since Moses' God-concept is the most exalted attainable by man, Judaism must, as a supreme religion, be the universal religion. This, indeed, was Judaism's mission, to become the religion of all, to convert and make brothers of all men.

This too, was the reason the Jew was necessary for the continued development of humanity, i.e. because he carried within him this "precious germ" a universal religion of humanity, because through the Jew all the families of the earth would be blessed. (16-19 incl)

The innate superiority of Judaism they recognized not only in the excellence of its revelation but in its perfect agreement with pure reason. For the Jewish thinker, they averred, no conflict between religion and science could exist, for Judaism being reason's "only twin sister" never taught blind belief, but only "thou shalt learn and understand." For Judaism, both ethical and natural law are revelations. Oh! how fortunate are we, one Conference speaker rhapsodizes, that we have a purely historical religion whose genius is in perfect harmony with science; that we are hampered neither by a creed against which reason rebels, nor a rigid, unchangeable ritual! (20)

The precise content of this Judaism is outlined in broad strokes, not in detail. "Historical Judaism," whose foundation is "absolute truth," is manifest in Israel's history and literature not in one time or place but in all, from Abraham to Zunz. The criterion for distinguishing this "absolute truth" from extraneous materials is its occurrence in all Israel's literature. The mutable and perishable is not part of it, hence Kabbala and legalism are not part of it, the former having been vanquished by science and the latter being occupied only with the temporary adjustments of changing society. What remains as

the foundation of historical Judaism? Only eternal verities. (21)
"Spiritual unity" and moral progress" are the Jew's contribution
to the unfolding life of humanity. (22)

Elsewhere, the foundation of historical Judaism is said to be the Pentateuch "however understood and expounded in all sincerity and good faith." That is, it may be interpreted and applied in anywise without disturbing the unity of Judaism. By this test, "American Judaism" was clearly one with "Judaism in general" as long as it "adhered" to Pentateuchal provisions and teachings" even according to our own construction." (23)

The Conference's "construction" of the Law is not discussed in these proceedings. But a program for the Conference as regards Judaism is outlined. The preservation of Judaism "in its pristine purity and beauty" depends both on theory and adequate practice, forms and institutions. While we must guard and sanctify the adequate inherited and ancient usages, it is our duty to replace inadequate ones. Judaism's development requires the liberation of its universality from antiquated, tribal, meaningless paraphernalia. Its prophetic universalism was cramped into the particularism of the halacha. It requires new forms at least approximating universalistic themes as well as the (forms) outlook and feelings of the "largest community." (24) Philipson taught that here in America prophetism - the true Judaism - is preached again in its purity, and he added, if our religion conflicts with our government, religion must take second place. We are American

in nationality, Jews in religion. There is no Jewish nation, only a Jewish religion which, in striking arg^{ment} with the "Republican form of government," stands for freedom, exalts human dignity to the highest point, and desires the separation of church and state. (25)

The Conference discovered that elements of this program were constant factors in Jewish history. Wise announced that Israel's mission to become the universal religion not only began at Israel's very inception, but was so considered and understood by the prophets, sages, philosophers, not to mention the nineteenth century teachers. (26) Kohler analyzed all Jewish history as consisting of one "Reform" after another. Moses' God-concept reforming and improving on that of the Patriarchs, the Deuteronomic Reformation, the Deutero-Isaianic Reformation, the Ezranic Reforms and rabbinic history including Hillel and Saadia all validate the concept of Jewish history as a chain of "reformist" and "liberal" developments. (27)

Toward a Systematic Theology

In "an endeavor to maintain in unbroken historic succession the formulated expression of Jewish thought and life of each era," the Conference's organizational meeting in 1889 had adopted the proceedings of all modern rabbinical conferences from Braunschweig, (28) as "basis".

The exact intent of the term "basis" had not been specified. Apparently Wise understood it as officially committing the Conference members to the principles set down in these earlier conferences, for he remarked in 1890 that within the

CCAR no difference of opinion as regards the right to adjust Judaism to time and place could "justly prevail" since the earlier German and American conferences had been adopted as (29) "basis."

For most Conference members, however, no authority inhered in this "basis", as the following demonstrates. At this same convention (1890) a split committee reported on a resolution to "reassert and embody" in the Conference Yearbook the declaration of principles made by the Pittsburg conference, one of these earlier conferences which had been adopted as "basis." The majority report favored the move; Dr. M. Machol, a one man majority, opposed it on the grounds that he disagreed with some parts of the Pittsburg platform and knew that other Conference members felt similarly.

Negative sentiment was strong enough to result in the Conference's rejection of the "reassertion;" an amended committee report directing that all declarations of reform by various conferences simply be collected and recorded in the (30) Yearbook, was adopted instead. Hence this volume of the Yearbook contains such a collection but no word of "reassertion", of their authority or binding character. From this time on neither Wise nor anyone else invoked the authority of these earlier proceedings with the exception of the Pittsburg platform to which there were rare allusions.

Wise's presidential message in 1894 spoke of the Conference's efforts to establish a uniform and "rational expression

in the didactic form of Israel's beliefs, doctrines and practices to be known by all that seek God's truth." (31)

This activity had received an impetus two years ~~later~~ before apparently because the Conference had been invited to represent Judaism at the Columbian Exposition, for at the July convention of 1892, a "Committee on the Columbian Exposition" recommended the preparation of papers on Jewish history, Jewish Ethics, Polemics and Apologetics, i.e. the relation of Judaism to Christianity, Statistics and Archeology. (32)

No action was taken. At the midwinter convention that same year, a "Committee on the Columbian Congress of Religions" reported, once more calling for implementation of the paper - preparation, program. Again there was no result, because, as Wise explained, no Jewish scholar had volunteered to take up any of the subjects, and it was too expensive for the Conference (33) to invite European scholars.

In his presidential message the following year (1893), Wise vigorously pressed upon the Conference what he considered to be the urgent need for a systematic theology of Judaism, for a "catachism" officially authorized by the Conference. He advanced two arguments. First, a systematic theology of Judaism is prerequisite to our Sabbath school teachers' inculcating in our young sound Jewish doctrine, "equidistant from superstition and agnosticism," as well as "thoroughly Scriptural" and "thoroughly rational." Second, Israel, as the bearer of a truth which includes all virtues, and as anticipating the perfectability of humanity or Messianic future through the universal "triumph" of this truth, must promulgate it to the world. This era is ripe for it and, indeed, we are called upon to do so in

the religious Congress and Parliament. But, not knowing that truth "scientifically" and systematically - what is it? he asks pointedly - we are not equipped to impart it to others. If that truth is ^{KNOWABLE} ~~honorable~~ - and if not, he asks, how could we know it? - it must be subject to analysis and systematizing so as to be comprehensible both to us and the world. In fine, a systematic theology of Judaism agreed to by the entire CCAR is prerequisite to both a school catechism and Israel's messiahship. ph

Having been appointed to speak in the Parliament of Religions on the theology of Judaism, Wise had prepared a "comprehensive introduction" which he distributed at the Conference, inviting criticisms and calling for official adoption ~~of the~~ of the pamphlet (34) by the Conference as an initial step toward an authorized theology.

The Conference's negative reaction to Wise's proposal he described in retrospect as a violent "horror of 'dogmas'" and "persecution." (35) The report of the Committee on the Presidential Message, ignoring the issues of Messiahship and systematic theology, directed itself exclusively to the pedagogic aspects of Wise's proposals. It recommended that a textbook of Jewish Ethics and Practical Religion be published. An amendment from the floor added that a "statement of Judaism" be prepared but specified circumspectly that this was not to be considered a catechism. The Conference was in no mood to dally with proposals that smacked however faintly of official theologies. Despite the safeguard, there was no reassuring the Conference; both the amendment and the motion voted down. (36)

Wise, however, did not let the issue collapse. There appears later in the proceedings of this convention the report of a "Special Committee on the Presidential Message's Recommendation" that there be compiled a systematic theology and a catechism based on the same. This committee was probably appointed by Wise, in the face of Conference squelching of the whole proposal, in an attempt to bring the matter onto the Conference floor for discussion - which the original committee on the presidential message had failed to do.

The report asked that a committee of five be appointed to collaborate in editing a book of the "Religion and Ethical Teachings of Judaism" as understood by American Reform. The contents of the proposed book are given in terms which are pedagogically oriented, and this apparently appeased the Conference, for - after a lengthy discussion, the motion was passed and Wise appointed the committee of five. Felsenthal of Chicago (37) asked to have his "nay" recorded.

My interpretation of these events is supported by Wise himself, who in speaking about this (1893) convention at a later time, clearly states that it not only rejected the proposal that an authorized systematic theology should be attempted but even went so far as to "veto" the motion to publish a manual of religious instruction. He makes no mention of the later success of the "Special Committee" but, to the contrary, sums up sarcastically that the actions of this conference (1893) "indirectly established...that we should go on teaching, preaching and advocating that undefined something which we call the great truth

of which Israel is the historical exponent." (38)

The five man committee appears in the proceedings of 1894 as the "Committee on Catechism," and the preamble to its report parallels Wise's presidential message of the previous year with suspicious exactness. Whereas, it pronounces, the Conference desires a precise statement of the principles of Judaism so as to make possible "uniform conception and instruction," the committee proposes (1) that it be instructed to present to the next convention a draft of a manual for religious instruction, (2) that preparatory to this, a syllabus of the proposed manual's subject matter be prepared by the committee and distributed to Conference members for criticisms and suggestions, enabling the committee to present an acceptable draft, (3) that Conference members present their views by letter. (39)

The Conference immediately objected to the term "catechism" in the committee's title, and substituted "Manual of Religious Instruction." (40) The discussion of the report on the Conference floor paid little heed to the pedagogic aims set forth in the language of the report but addressed itself heatedly to the question of legislating uniformity in faith, strong negative opinions being voiced. In the end, though, the report was adopted with a minor change. (41)

Soon, however, the negative party rallied and achieved a victory. On motion the committee was dissolved; another motion called for presidential appointing of a ten man committee on "Manual of Religious Instruction, to report according to the earlier resolution. (42) What seems to have happened is this:

the group opposed to legislating theologies, fearing that the five man committee was dominated by Wise and the pro-theological elements, added to the number in order to safeguard the Conference from a coterie which might use the pedagogic franchise for theological ends.

Toward Uniformity and A Synod

The initial attack on the zealously guarded individual freedom which earlier characterized the Conference came in 1894 from Kohler's paper "The Spiritual Forces of Judaism," which burst upon the otherwise undistinguished convention like a blaring discord in a pastorate, and set the key in which the Conference was to play during coming years.

The individual, Kohler announced, neither creates, sanctions nor abolishes forms and beliefs. It is the community or the "representatives of the people" on whom God's spirit rests and who, by "ratifying" them, clothe reforms with sanctity and spiritual power. This "leading idea of Judaism" does not bar progress but prevents "mere individualism and arbitrariness." And who was it that needed restraining? The "radicals" in the Conference. They had "run mad," he thundered, and we must not do as they do, for their building is
(43)
destruction.

Kohler did not propose concrete organizational measures for controlling and restraining individual members' beliefs or actions, which meant, practically, their departures from tradition or Orthodoxy, but the sentiment for such measures increased in subsequent years' proceedings. The very next year (1895), Hirsch, a leading radical, delivered an address in which he was apparently defending "radicalism" against charges coming from within the Conference as well as from without. That year's Conference sermon argued against establishing official definitions or creeds on the grounds that these would simply trammel and cramp, and result inevitably in driving the "honest and intelligent" outside "the pale" while the "ignorant and hypocrite" remained within. The
(44)
(45)
welcoming address to the convention of 1896 informed the listeners that the Conference, far from having "revolutionary" intentions, contemplated neither attacking Judaism, legislating restrictions upon individual minds, nor

(46)

establishing new dogmes or creeds. Such assurances were iterated in later years also. The Conference's longevity was ascribed by Wise to its refusing to command,⁷ to assume any but an advisory role. (47) Another president gave as the "Principle" of the Conference that it was simply a "clearing house" of Jewish thought, having no authority except what it derived from persuasions, i.e. its members had the "widest latitude." (48) These repeated assurances are in their way revealing, but far less candid than the title of a paper read at the convention of 1896 by Aaron, "Our Shifting Attitudes."

Deploing the "license" he saw existing, Aaron explained that the "moral force of the majority ought to intimidate the self-opinionated" and announced that what the Conference needed above all was "solidarity." I do not ask for a "synod", he assured the wary, introducing the term into the proceedings for the first time, but for discussion based on "sentiment, inspiring tradition and reason." (49) During the discussion of Aaron's paper, (50) the need for united action was again cited.

This mild yet threatening position subsequently gave way to successively sterner ones. The committee on the presidential message of the 1898 convention formally denounced "rampant individualism," as the evil most afflicting "our religious life." (51) At the Convention of 1900, Enelow's paper entitled "The Synod in the Past and its Feasibility in the Present" argued for the creation of a synod on the grounds of current need, tradition and sentiment, presenting it as a thoroughly Jewish institution appearing at "every notable historic juncture" etc., as well as the object of the constant hope, ideal, and striving since 1855 of Wise who had died that year. (52) *Amly p...*

During the discussion of Aaron's paper of 1896, Hirsch had protested:

Why are we crying for "union"? What coerciveness can the Conference exert when it is obviously the congregations which "control their buildings," elect rabbis, and make demands upon the rabbi? (53) Aaron in discussing his paper had intimated, perhaps unknowingly, a remedy. It had called for combatting the "tendency to divergence" by bringing into the Conference the "scholarly and clearheaded men from the pews", the "brainy men of the congregation," by bringing together the pew and the pulpit in a Central Conference of Jews. (54) But the Union of American Hebrew Congregations had been in existence independently since 1873 and this was taken into account more adequately by another proposal, in Silverman's presidential message six years later (1902).

He suggested the formation of a committee to extend the scope and authority of the Conference by forming a relationship with the UAHC such that the Conference's decisions would receive "proper recognition" and be held authoritative by the congregations. In this manner, the uniformity, which already existed as regards the prayer-book, might be extended to matters such as proselytism, intermarriage, cremation, dietary laws, etc., on some of which the Conference had expressed an attitude but had failed to make it "known or felt in the community at large." (55)

The committee on the presidential message approved the formation of such a committee as Silverman suggested. It was to report at the next convention but failed to meet in the interim because of the death of its chairman, Mielziner. Hence, at the convention of 1903, Silverman, after appealing for a synod in his presidential message, presented a plan of organization he himself had drafted. It recommended a synod composed of the Conference and lay delegates from congregations. Any Conference recommendation approved by three-quarters of the synod was to "be declared the law and practice." (56)

At the same convention (1903), Margolis delivered a lengthy paper on Jewish Theology, which closed with a call for a synod defined as not infringing on local autonomy but operating only in matters affecting all, e.g. publishing, leading activities, etc. It was to consist of equal elected representation from the Conference and the UAHC, although the presiding officer was always to be from the Conference and the synod was to act only on matters put to it by the Conference. A two-thirds vote was to be binding. (57)

Three important spokesmen each called for the creation of a synod at the convention of 1903. (58)

An intensified interest in the scholarly and professional advancement of rabbis was manifest within the Conference during this period. Some members seem to have thought of the Conference as a body of researchers in "science, literature, theology and Higher Criticism," although the proceedings do not testify that such pursuits were engaged in by members either widely or successfully. Although the Conference's commitments to principle were quite sparse in this period, some imply that it has been too one-sided in making its religion only a "systematic combination of ideas" or "logical chain of truths." (59)

Others began to call for the "professional spirit" as well as for increased "literary work" in the form of learned papers. One president denounced the "half-hour" treatment given to papers read at the conventions and cited the need for "exhaustive" lectures, the themes he and others were suggesting dealt, in the main, with practical problems of the ministry of that era. He suggested further that sections on Bible study, Talmud, History, and Religious School form within the Conference; that a Jewish Quarterly Review be published, that, in brief, the Conference should become a more learned and professionally competent body! (60)

An address delivered at the convention of 1900 was entitled The Rabbi as Scholar and urged post-seminary learning in such fields as Jewish literature, Semitic philology, Comparative Religions, Folklore and Mythology, Bible Criticism, The History and Development of Ethics and Pedagogy. The Hebrew Union College should have a post-graduate department, it was asserted. Plans drawn up for a Summer course of lectures included corresponding with "leading American scholars" to secure their services for "academic and theological" subjects. The course was to be given in a "city with a university". The following year it was reported that no definite plans on forming a Summer School could be presented because Hirsch was not in attendance at the convention - presumably he was chairman of the committee - but for the coming Summer, the Conference was accepting the invitation of Rabbi Berkowitz, head of the Jewish Chatauqua Society to use its school as the Conference's Summer School; this took (61) place and a Summer School was called again the following year.

Although it appears to have done so until this period, the Conference now learned from a presidential message that it neither could nor did ignore scholars such as Leeser, Kohut and Morais. The admission into the Conference of Jewish scholars occupying chairs in Semitics in American and European universities and colleges was suggested but turned down on constitutional grounds. The original organizing committee's report of July 10, 1889 opened membership in the Conference to laymen. The constitution of the Conference opens membership to all rabbis who hold or have held office, to professors in rabbinical seminaries, and to "all persons worthy to be members...." But in 1896, the draft of a revised constitution barring laymen from membership was presented and passed. According to the rollcall that year, 39 were in attendance at the convention. That year's directory lists 136 members, (62) none of whom are laymen.

In the convention of 1902 it was decided to prepare and publish that symbol of ecclesiastic professionalism, a manual for rabbis! (63)

The Decline in Morale

The proceedings of the period 1894-1903 are characterized by a decline in morale. The 1890 convention had contemplated glowingly the beginning of the nineteenth century when "the sun of political liberty rose" and Reform prepared itself for the new era of "religious flourishing in Israel," as well as political and social rights. But Kohler, in 1894, cast a cold eye on the nineteenth century which had, as he judged, come at its close "to a retrograde movement." The following conventions echoed and reechoed the view that Reform Judaism had or was failing, because it had overemphasized reason and permitted too much individuality. Occasional reports were paid to the pioneers of Reform who "justified Judaism" by distinguishing the essential from the non-essential and whose "tearing down was for the new structure of positive faith." But more often, the past of Reform was looked at askance. (64)

The same Kohler who, in 1892, exalted Geiger's theology as providing Israel with "a grand, vital principle of Reform, viz, historical, ever progressive Judaism," two years later declared "culpable" the theologians since Zunz for failing to make Judaism alive, a superior ethical and spiritual life; instead, he accused, they had allowed themselves to be enticed by German thoughts and had made Judaism a cold, archeological and philological science. (65)

"With all due deference to our sainted pioneers and the still living leaders of Reform," Kohler described Reform as "built on sand and quagmire" when based solely on reason and intellectualism which, so he judged, had been enthroned at the close of the eighteenth century

as a goddess, but had exhausted its powers and was "fast becoming a dreaded demon as leader of the fin de siecle mob." Reform had confused mind and spirit, it had stressed reason, but overlooked the intuitive perception of truth by the soul in touch with the Infinite. Indeed, the novelty of Reform, had worn off, he admitted, the fire had gone out. (67)

Jews were drifting away from Judaism; Judaism was in crisis; and who was to blame? Reform Judaism and the spirit of the age, for being eager to break down, but too slow to build up, for rebelling against ceremonial, for failing to invest the home and daily life with sanctity as of old, to inspire Jewish lives with the spirit of their mission, for neglecting festivals, symbols and home ceremonies, while stressing the synagogue, for drifting toward a spineless humanitarianism bordering on agnosticism! (68)

Others followed in Kohler's wake, mourning the failure of Reform to hold a checkrein on itself in the past, and nineteenth century. Jews making license out of liberty, throwing aside "our holiest observances" as "empty formalities." Some regretted Reform's earlier "suspicion" of "any religious rule," its "overthrowing" older views, its overstretching even "central principles" and its allowing adjustment to every dominant "social and general condition" to become a "lauded virtue." The retreat from tradition, it was said, was not based on sound principles; legitimizing all changes by the criterion that only those possessing "living force" should be retained, was far from satisfactory, for it resulted in the "widest license." The Reform Movement had "disappointed us all." Wise was saying that the time for synagogal reforms was over; even Hirsch, the arch-radical, was agreeing that Reform's earlier tendency was negative and that the problem in this "transition period" was - how to build up. The early worship reforms of David Friedlander and Israel Jacobson were sneered at as "specious," superficial and destructive, not arising out of Judaism's "genius". The Conference's spirit had, indeed, sunk quite low by the time Stolz in a Conference Sermon

appealed to his colleagues to cease crying "Alas!" and to make some attempt to regain the offensive. (69)

The very name "Reform" became distasteful to some members of the Conference. "Reform" often means "surrender", not progress, was the message of one Conference sermon. A year before Kohler proposed dropping the term altogether, and replacing it with one more "comprehensive and positive." One of Wise's eulogists, speaking in 1900, recalled that Wise had "thoroughly disliked" the term "Reform Judaism" and had, instead, "loved to call it 'our progressive Judaism'". The speaker himself preferred "liberated Judaism." (70)

The Conference's evaluation of and attitude toward the Reform layman underwent drastic revisions in this period. He was accused of requiring "artificial attractions" to "drag" him to service, of being ignorant of Judaism beyond a few contentless generalizations or "grand truths" such as the belief in God or immortality. The congregations were described as lax in observances, and the rabbis were advised to emphasize to them "the grandest of all Reform lessons": that liberty is not license and independence not indifference. They were scored for being critical, for no longer accepting the rabbis' views as authoritative, for tending toward "divergence"! When a speaker suggested that one of the important twentieth century tasks of Reform should be to free the Sabbath of Talmudic rigors, an incensed critic replied that Reform's problem was not a trammelled Sabbath but the absence of any Sabbath at all! The Sunday service ~~was~~ attacked more bitterly than in the past as "dissipated Judaism", and as teaching everything except "religion and Judaism". The Conference is on record as greeting one of these attacks

with "hearty applause". Hirsch's defense against another attack seems to
(71)
have had no effect.

Although references to a "hurtful multiplicity of synagogues", to rivalries between them, to their financial needs and the failure of those able to do so to support them, were made at the Philadelphia convention without specifying Reform, the contest would permit assuming that Reform
(72)
institutions were the referents.

One of the two positive characterizations of the Reform Jew in the proceedings of this period described him, by contrast to the Eastern European Jew, as "well balanced", i.e., neither extremely religious nor
(73)
extremely free-thinking and becoming increasingly "mediocre". (For the other see page 29.)

Toward Rapprochement With Orthodoxy

Wise remained adamantly loyal to his motto - no concessions to the anachronists - until his death in 1900. He felt that the Conference had, by resolutions and papers, definitely distinguished between the "American standpoint" and the "old school", and that it stood foursquare for the mission of Israel, for a "purely historical" and "rational" American Judaism, and for the distinctions between itself and the "old school", viz., the rejection of ~~Rab~~ biblical authority, the "abolition" of circumcision for adult proselytes, and the deletion from the liturgy of prayers concerning the return to Palestine, the coming of the Messiah, corporeal resurrection and "Outcries of woe" over persecution. As late as 1898, he insisted he saw
(74)
"no prospect" of any other rabbinical organization existing in the United States, and predicted confidently, "the future is ours".

Others in the Conference, however, were less obdurate and sought - with increasing desperation - rapprochement with Orthodoxy. Kohler set the pace, his promulgation of such views in 1894 being furthered only by

himself in 1898 and finally by a host of speakers in 1901.

In his earlier address, Kohler called attention to the dangerous debilitation of Judaism and blamed it on Judaism's lack of spirituality, of "soul-Life", of uplift and comfort, of prophetic and psalmistic inspiration which had long ago been obstructed and obscured by meaningless, powerless forms and formulas. The fault lay in Judaism's "over-intellectualization". The talmudists, the medieval philosophers, in fact, all Jews and Judaism, with the exception of Halevi, Bachya and the Kabbalists, had philosophized too much, cultivating the intellect "which uproots" instead of sentiment, "which roots". What remained to render one a Jew once the ghetto fell? Only "false race pride" or "narrow ritualism". Having been trained to consider only deed and conduct, not creed and confession, he argued contradictorily but toward the same end, the young Jew now draws "the practical conclusions". (75)

The solution? Reform must inculcate in the Jew "a system of consecration", of self-control and sanctification; it must strengthen home and synagogue ritual and symbolism; it must not weaken racial distinctiveness; it must rebuild the emotional life of the Jew "as did Mosaic and rabbinic law". Indeed, only the Jewish ideal of holiness as embodied in the "Jewish system of life of old" trains men to be truly ethical. (76)

Although Kohler's solution is worded in terms of a program for Reform alone, the context of his remarks suggests that he was thinking of the problem as that of all American Jewry. This is etched more clearly in his later address, in which his motive is obviously not merely the benefit of the Reform movement but the preservation and safeguarding of

Judaism in America. The object of our concern today, he tells the Conference, must be not Reform, but Judaism. Why? The Russian element, which is already the majority in American Jewry, is inclined to extremes, to swinging from "superstitions and mystic orthodoxy" to a "rationalism approaching ^{Nihilism} ~~millianism~~ and skepticism". He warns the Conference not to overlook the fact that "the next twenty years will decide the fate " of American Jewry. A "wholesome influence" must be exerted upon this Russian element. Our Reform ideas will be ineffectual, for they consider us Christianized. How, then, is this "wholesome influence" to be brought to bear?

Kohler had closed his earlier address (1894) with brief remarks about a "United Judaism" which would win and unite the world. The later address(1898) was entitled "A United Israel", and in it he expanded that notion as a solution to the problem posed above. The time for party discussions and wrangling is over, he told the Conference; the time is here for peace, union, harmony. Reform and Orthodoxy, conservatism and radicalism, East and West must all stand as one for Judaism! America provides a favorable atmosphere for such cooperation, for nowhere else do various creeds work so harmoniously as here, intolerance and fanaticism being antagonistic to America's liberal spirit. Just as Orthodoxy and Reform work together for charity and education, they can find a meeting ground for religious work. The Conference should strive for a union of congregations, irrespective of religious differences, in every city and town. It should open membership to all rabbis, and as regards its "theology", it should be the first to "drop party colors and raise the flag of Judaism all the higher"! Let us present to the world a union of

congregations and rabbis representing both the most radical and the most conservative views, yet devoted to the common cause. Judaism needs reviving, and to this end we must work hand in hand with Orthodoxy!

But is such a program consonant with Reform Judaism? Our Judaism is "Progressive Judaism", Kohler replies to this implied query. There is no such thing as an Orthodox or Reform Jewish science! "Reform" is no principle in itself; "Progress" is. Every progress, he explained to the Conference, has two foci or parties, an origin and a goal. Similarly Judaism's progress; one party moves hastily toward expansion and assimilation; the other, moving slowly, tends toward "stability" and isolation. But *ד"ר קהלר זצ"ל*

Like a dove in flight, Judaism needs two wings!

For Kohler, Jewish history shows that "in all times", leading authorities have differed as regards God, revelation, creation, resurrection, miracles, etc. but all are considered within the fold. [But how would Orthodoxy look at this plan? The Orthodox would scarcely be pleased with Hirsch's assurance that although he and his congregation could just as easily be with the Christians, they chose "to be Jews because it means something to us, because without it our lives would be incomplete". (77)]

Beginning with the aside that it was Orthodoxy and not Reform that divided the camp of Israel, Kohler went on to "pay homage" to the "mother", "soil" and "marrow" of Reform, seeing "only good come from "the recent Orthodox conference and organization. Far from conciliatory, however, was his expressed attitude toward those who, though "unentitled" wear Orthodoxy's "badge". Apparently he meant the Conservatives, against whom (78) he had expressed himself sharply in the proceedings of the first period.

The Conference's awareness that it now represented a minority movement came quite gradually. It was not until 1897 that the phrase "Reform Wing of American Israel" was heard at conventions. (79)

In the conventions of 1901-1903 similar sentiments vis-a-vis Orthodoxy were voiced by many speakers, and several, including Kohler himself, displayed a friendlier attitude toward Conservatism. The congratulatory telegram sent to Wise by the students of the Jewish Theological Seminary on the occasion of his eightieth birthday was more than matched by the Conference's reaction to the new Seminary president, Solomon Schechter, whom it officially welcomed as "a star of great magnitude", and to whom it sent at least two congratulatory telegrams. (80) Kohler delivered an address at the dedication of the Seminary building in which he iterated that Judaism had always consisted of two trends, though it was one in essence. Another Conference member had written in a congratulatory letter to Schechter that though their "ways and methods may differ in some respects, the aims and objects of both institutions are the same". There is some indication in the proceedings that even Hirsch's thinking had moved in this same direction. (81)

Throughout this period the Conference's trend toward reconciliation with traditional Judaism waxed. The nineteenth century was the "pacemaker"; let the twentieth be the "peacemaker", one speaker said hopefully, and many echoed him, regretting the past decades of "acerbic mutual attacks" by Reform and Orthodoxy on each other's aims, personalities and scholarship. (82)

The Conference's spokesmen yearned for "deeper enthusiasm" as well as for rabbis who would be "warmly Jewish" and inspirational. Some even began to look favorably upon Zionism "as a kind of rejuvenation". One assured the Conference that it had the strength to check "vandalism" and show Reform in its true light, which would reveal - according to another - that Reform was

not and was never intended to be anything but the same old Judaism with some of the exotic or objectionable elements eliminated. A third adjured the Conference to "study the past", and floor discussion not only defended "Rabbinicism" and "ceremonialism" as containing "deep conviction" but attacked the compromise view that ceremony was, after all, a vulgar necessity, as un-Jewish! It was asserted that "all" had traced worship and Sabbath School laxities to disregard of "well tried" observance; that the Conference "as a body" was convinced that these observances were desirable; that "every Reform rabbi" had "insisted" upon them; and that the efforts to reinstate them had been partially successful, a "marked tendency for Reform Jews to rise above unobservance" allegedly having been noted in the preceeding years! As was truly uttered on the Conference floor, it was really "hard to say where the line" was that divided Reform and Orthodoxy, as far as the Conference was concerned. (83)

Conference spokesmen saw the opposing forces as no longer Reform versus Orthodoxy, but as both versus indifference. Repeated reference was made to the existence of two schools - a "lenient Hillel" and "rigorous Shammai" - in "all generations". The Conference saw "no reason" why Reform and Orthodoxy could not coexist with "mutual tolerance", there being sufficient leeway in the conception and application of Israel's mission for legitimate differences of thought and practice. Clearly anxious to go more than half-way toward "mutual tolerance", the Conference officially urged upon its members the need for promoting amity and fraternity between the Reform and Orthodox factions of their respective communities. We differ in some essentials, it admitted, but not in either the principles of our faith nor in the necessity for maintaining the great

historical mission of Israel. Besides, it argued, "Reform" and "Orthodoxy" are, after all, names that designate only opposing tendencies, not opposing truths; and once again the felicitous phrase sounded on the Conference floor: *ר"ח ר' שלום '227 18411k* (84)

The change in the Conference's outlook did not occur totally unrecognized and unchallenged. Philipson once rose to remark that what he heard in the Conference "greatly surprised" him, for it was "apparently coquetting with Orthodoxy". Indeed, it seemed to him "strange that the Conference should be considered anything but an organization of Reform Rabbis". American Judaism is Reform Judaism, he insisted; there are shades of Reform but none of Orthodoxy; hence there is no choice but Reform on the one hand, and the *2128 /h de* on the other; therefore Conservatism, too, is Reform! A more moderate speaker, admitted that he no longer indulged "in invectives against Orthodoxy as in my youth, but...we should not lose sight of the essential differences in aim and purpose of Reform and Orthodoxy." (85)

71 The following year's convention sermon exclaimed: "Colleagues! Reaction is in the air", and went on to pose numerous questions to the Conference. Was it not symptomatic that Reform Jews should endow an Orthodox seminary? Shall we stop our labors and admit to having blundered? Shall we condemn our efforts as disloyalty and faithlessness, deny the evolution of Judaism? Shall we assert our fathers infallible and the *2128 /h de* our final authority? Will not the "reactionaries", the more than half-million Russian and Roumanian Jews who have arrived in the past twenty years and who are "ritualists", as well as the Zionists, all "endeavor to buttress themselves behind the sweet-savory name of the great scholar who has just been trans- (86) planted to our shores? Colleagues, it closed, we must once more become (87) aggressively Reform!

Neither was the reaction of Orthodoxy as promising as the Conference anticipated. The Conference's confidence that America's tolerant atmosphere that "makes Catholics, Protestants and Jews respect each other's opinions and convictions" would make itself felt, also, in Reform-Orthodox relations seems to have been misplaced. One year's convention announced this "atmosphere" to be meliorating these relations; the right to existence of "two...interpretations of Jewish law and practice...one in the light of the past, the other of the present" was now "accepted as axiomatic". Reform and Orthodoxy had agreed, said the Conference, that men might differ in religious conviction yet agree on the worship of God and the salvation of man. A new era was opening for American Judaism, the breaches of the past would undoubtedly heal and the two camps of Israel would together engage the foe: "materialism and the modern worship of Baal". The presidential message hailed the trend toward "better understanding", and the "mutual, friendly attitude between the two great wings of our people" was reaffirmed in committee. The very next year, however, the same president complained bitterly of persecution, attacks (88) and malicious caricatures inspired by Orthodox "intolerance".

Nevertheless, the Conference was not to be denied its new outlook. Despite Reform qualms and Orthodox rebuffs, the trend continued in the direction of de-emphasizing "Reform". Whatever occupies Reform and the Conference, one speaker warned, "must breathe a spirit of union", must fall into the category of "questions and problems of Israel, not of Reform Israel". (89)

Documentation for the Conference's relations with Christianity, is absent from the proceedings of the first period (1889-1894) and meager in those of the second (1894-1903). Still, the latter deserves relating

since, considered in the light of all the foregoing, it has significance, i.e., an interaction may be claimed between this area of Conference attention and the others already discussed.

It appears that attempts at "close fellowship" with Christian liberals were being made, at least about 1894, for in that year Kohler belittled "our radicals" for this activity, declaring that "Religions fundamentally differ", and the "cosmopolitan talk of our enlightened is but light French Revolutionary talk".⁽⁹⁰⁾

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday Wise received congratulations and greetings, in the form of an address to the Conference, from Dr. W. A. Robinson representing the Methodist Episcopal Preachers of Cincinnati.⁽⁹¹⁾

The welcome address to the 1901 Convention told the Conference that the "Christian community" took deep interest in its proceedings, and that the "Honorable John Wanamaker", described as "the greatest merchant in the land" was to address the Conference but was prevented by illness. For him was substituted Dr. Talcott Williams of the Philadelphia Press.⁽⁹²⁾

The following two conventions heard welcome addresses by the Mayor Capdeville and Mayor Maybury of New Orleans and Detroit respectively.⁽⁹³⁾

In the former convention a rabbi [Leucht] told of an accident which had befallen a local Presbyterian minister "loved by all sects" and moved that the Conference and listening audience rise to express their sympathy for the minister's recovery. This was unanimously adopted.⁽⁹⁴⁾ The latter convention heard an address by Dr. McCallister of the Universalist Church.⁽⁹⁵⁾

Meanwhile, Kohler, Wise and others had been calling for Jewish ceremonial individuality and distinctiveness. Kohler warned against "unrestrained progress" which might end in a "cowardly surrender to the majority", and

Wise advised against Reform's copying Christianity even in the matter of preparing a hymnbook, because Christianity "is the age behind us". He preferred simply the Book of Psalms. In the earlier period, Wise had felt that Judaism required forms approximating those of the "largest community".⁽⁹⁶⁾ A Conference sermon called for greater distinctiveness in "Israel's practices".⁽⁹⁷⁾

By 1901 the idea was being put more forcibly to the Conference in a variety of metaphors; abandon the method of imitation of the gentile; do not wear borrowed plumage; stand on your own holy ground! Two years later a motion was unanimously adopted to have no more addresses by Christian clergymen or communal figures. The convention's opening services, it was said, should be sacred in character. The motion was presented by Philipson and Voorsanger, and was not, we should hope, a response to McCallister's address that year!⁽⁹⁸⁾

Judaism Means Race

The evaluation of Judaism as superior to all other religions and destined to become the world's faith persisted into this period of the Conference's proceedings, but appeared less frequently than before, and - after 1900 - not at all.

At the beginning of the period, three quite disparate spokesmen were contrasting Judaism and Christianity, to the detriment of the latter. Presbyterianism, Congregationalism, Unitarianism were not "free from theological trammels and doctrinal bias"; a "sick world rejects the Cross" along with secular philosophies of life as inadequate. Here, indeed, is Judaism's opportunity, for it is the world's pure monotheistic faith" and it alone "knows the magic word that can make man free" of dogma and give him the "dowry of a world historic mission".⁽⁹⁹⁾

After 1895, only J. Silverman continued to echo such sentiments. In a Conference sermon (1898) and a presidential address (1900) he declared that Judaism was uniting all men in one faith and was destined to become a world religion. As late as 1900 he was asserting that this was "now conceded more than ever before", that Judaism held the key to the solution of the world's religious problems. (100)

Reason, which in the earlier period had been Judaism's "twin-sister", was now relegated to step-sister. It was still agreed by some that Judaism's unconcern with "mysteries" made it superior to Christianity, whose mysteries were "incompatible" with reason. Judaism, it was said, gave the world the basis for a true philosophical and scientific explanation of the universe; Judaism always was and it "must yet be rationalistic". (101)

But for many Conference spokesmen, ceremony and emotion were growing in importance. Judaism was not merely ethics for them; it was a "training system" in ethics for a whole people. Religion was not merely a "systematic combination of ideas", a logic of self-evident and permanent truths; it needed enthusiasm, festivals, institutions, etc. Newly emphasized was the role of prophetic and saintly "intuition" in perceiving God, Who is "beyond the reach of reason". (102)

Reason, Kohler explained, is a corrective, not a constructive force. It often ends in doubt, disintegration and anarchy. All the great men and events of history are impelled not by intellect but by "the inspiring power of faith". Sentiment is more effective than reason. Cultivate a man's reason and you cultivate only one side of his nature. Cultivate his emotions and

you have the whole man. Reason liberates the individual but "it fails to bind man to man and group to group. This Religion does".

Perhaps the most startling development of this era was the prominence attained by the concept of Jewish nationhood and racial distinctiveness. For Kohler, the essential difference between Judaism and other religions lay in the former's preoccupation with and working through the group, the Jewish people, not individuals. Judaism's aim, he said, is the salvation of man, not an individual, as well as the sanctification of human life, not other worldliness. The Decalogue, Divine care, reward and punishment, the hope of resurrection and the idea of revelation, all were addressed to and centered in Israel as a "nation", not any individual. The spiritual or "psychic" force of Judaism is in the "Jewish race", the Jewish people as a whole; this people works as a spiritual force in the prophet, hero or martyr, and thereby the soul of the nation touches God and realizes His purposes. So revelation and inspiration, for Kohler, come in and through the "instinct of the race", the unconscious yet providential working of the spirit of the nation, the ethnico-psychic force, the genius or soul of the nation...⁽¹⁰³⁾ Mere "monotheism is not Judaism"⁽¹⁰³⁾ for Kohler; for him there is "no other Judaism but Race Judaism"!

Many speakers of later conventions agreed that Judaism involved not only a religion but a "peculiar people...different from others" and "distinctly unique", which included all Jews, Reform, Orthodox, or whatever they might be - all were Jews, and

Judaism represented the developing of the Jewish "national soul". Without Jews there could be no Judaism, no Jewish church. The Jew had given rise to Judaism, and not visa versa. Israel's distinctiveness as an ethnic unity and racial group was a "scientific and divine fact". (104)

Even Hirsch was speaking of Judaism as not something one might accept or reject by free choice but a call to duty "that comes with the accident of birth, or rather, it is providential appointment". Birth alone does not make the Jew, he added. Potentialities must be realized in convictions. There is a Jewish Volkseele, upon which Judaism pivots, but it does not operate mechanically; unless each Jew acquires it anew, he is "merely possessed by it". We are not a nation, i.e. we have no land, but we are a Volk. Just as Germans in America belong to the German Volk and have a German Kulturmission, we Jews have a Volkseele which sounds its message through us; we, too, have a "historic mission". But the Volkseele does not operate merely through birth and blood; conviction and spirituality are necessary. Because the "spirit" can confer the Volkseele even upon the stranger, both "race" and "universality" are preserved within Judaism. (105)

The Conference proceedings for this period reveal a struggling with the problem of Judaism's nationalistic and universalistic elements. (106)
Several speakers declared it impossible or unwise to define Judaism otherwise than to simply point at its literature. For Wise, as well as for others, Judaism in this period continued to consist of "those truisms which were true in all lands and periods of history". It stood for the fullest civic and religious liberties and was bound by no "irenclad" creed

form, book, myth, tradition or rabbinic ^{ipse} ~~ipse~~ dixit. No temporal or other potentate could hamper its growth; it could enact or abolish laws freely; it had limitless scope within certain points on which it was based, viz., unity of God, love of God and man, truth, righteousness and justice. Its interest was in ethics, not metaphysics; in its mission and its "golden dream" of the future. One speaker equated Judaism, that is, "all-time Judaism", with "Reform", with the endeavor to harmonize Judaism with the thought and interests of the time, shedding inadequate forms. But others, as has been noted above, were speaking of Judaism as having in all ages consisted of "two schools", the liberal and the conservative. (107) Kohler criticized Reform's stressing "prophetic ideals and pure ethics; without a "positive religion", fear of God, a lofty "aim and object of life as a motive for righteousness", ethics was only empty phraseology. Aaron speaking in similar vein, admonished the Conference that "we should give our attention to details" instead of to the "perpetual principles". (108)

Wise's attitude toward the Pentateuch, that he was opposed to Higher Criticism, regarded the Sinaitic revelation as historically accurate, judged Moses to be the greatest prophet, explained the "rational" reasons and explanations underlying miracles, dietary laws, etc., was recalled by a eulogist in 1900, but such views were not repeated even by Wise during this period (1894-1903). His description of the talmud as the "Higher Criticism of the fifth century" and scientifically superior to the German School of Bible Criticism, of his day, may have had some silent support in the Conference, but the proceedings do not reveal such views. On the contrary, Hirsch's assertion that Biblical Criticism

proves circumcision, sacrifice, ^{and Levitical laws to be non-Jewish accretions intended to convey the} prophetic thoughts which are truly ^{earlier, essential} Jewish, evoked no comment, it appears from the proceedings. (In the next period, objections were raised to such remarks). Kohler spoke of the Bible as being the inspired book not because God dictated it or because, "as the shallow Unitarians say," it is still inspiring to the reader, but because it is "impregnated with the spirit of the nation that gave the world "the highest religion. Biblical miracles, he explained, were not historical but simply typified the religious spirit of Israel. Ceremonial law, he went on, is intended also as symbol, i.e., to symbolize Israel's character and priestly mission. (109)

Towards a Systematic Theology

It seems that Wise attempted once more to circumvent the Conference's determination to avoid subscribing to a specific theology or set of principles. The original ten-man committee on Manual of Religious Instruction formed in 1894 ⁽¹¹⁰⁾ appears in the proceedings of 1895 subdivided into several, one of which is the subcommittee On Principles. This subcommittee, however, failed to report in the conventions of 1895 and 1896, being continued on both occasions but disappearing from the proceedings, after the latter date. ⁽¹¹¹⁾

Wise's interest, nevertheless, did not flag. In 1896 he castigated the Conference, reviewing its timid refusals to take the smallest steps in the direction of an official creed in the conventions of 1893, 1894 and 1895 - incidentally, misrepresenting the events of 1894 in favor of his own subsequent action - despite the fact, he reminded it, that textbooks, manuals, the Union Prayer Book and the rabbis themselves were acclaiming Judaism as the superior and universal religion of "redeemed

and enlightened humanity". The failure of the Conference to produce an authoritative theology meant that, as regards the Judaism it praised, it was "still in the dark" along with its congregations and "the world". Wise pointed sarcastically to the inconsistency of such a position, especially since the Union Prayer Book elaborated "even more than necessary" all the principle tenets of Judaism. The Union Prayer Book Wise felt overemphasized certain doctrines, e.g. creation, revelation and immortality," on the principle, I suppose....that dogmas most doubted in any age but established in the conscience and consciousness of the learned must be so much the more emphasized by the authorities that strive to impress people with holy sentiments for goodness' sake." It was, he concluded, the duty of the Conference finally to do something about theology!
(112)

The following year he urged again the "fixing of doctrines" as necessary for the future of Judaism in "this age of criticism and skeptical tendencies" and a year later, professing that he was old and busy, he called upon "you who are young and strong" to define Judaism for the sake both of Jews and of the world, so that all might have a clear, comprehensive understanding of its principles, its substance, ~~its substance~~, its differences from other faiths, and the "scientific, philosophical or documentary evidence on which these principles rest". Let us, no longer, he pleaded, stand before the world as a denomination "without principles", when in fact, every earnest thinker knows what Judaism is,
(113)
although he may not be able to define it intelligibly.

Wise had enormous difficulty in committing the Conference officially to even so patent a principle as its freedom from the authority of post-

Biblical Jewish literature. In 1895 he proposed a discussion and committee to reach a decision on the Conference's relation "in all religious matters to our own post-biblical and patristic literature, including Talmud, casuists, responses and commentaries". This was passed and Wise appointed a committee, whose report is not recorded in the proceedings; the discussion of the report does appear. Considerable dissatisfaction is expressed over the report's separating Bible from the other literature, the critics' intentions being, to judge from the discussion, that the Bible has no more authority for the Conference than the other literature. The report was sent back to committee for revision.

The revised report, after terming Jewish post-Biblical literature "of inestimable value" and "a treasure house" of conceptions of Judaism in different ages, concluded that "our relations in all religious matters are in no way authoritatively and finally determined by any portion of our religious literature". Objections were raised to this revised report also. Some objected to the sweeping language of the conclusion, which apparently included the Bible! Another admitted he did not believe that the Bible was Mosaic but regretted, nevertheless, the mention of Bible in the report. Wise defended the report, explaining that it intended no reference to the Bible, since "we dare not contradict" what we ourselves say in the Union Prayer Book, but wanted only to declare that post-Biblical literature had no authority in American Judaism. Two objections were raised by speakers who agreed with the sense of the report; one understood it to include the Bible and felt that approval of the report would be unfair to absentees, since originally the report was not intended to deal with Bible. The other reminded the Conference

that some of its members might be injured by such a report and moved to table it. The motion passed by a vote of 11 to 9, whereupon Wise burst forth in protests that the Conference was stultifying itself, that the report only said officially what was already the "well known practice". By a vote of 10 to 8 the report was taken off the table and a motion was made to amend the last line to read "by any portion of our Post-Biblical and Patristic literatures", i.e., to exclude Bible from the report. The amendment was accepted. After more discussion including another attempt to postpone action by a motion to submit this report to the entire membership of the Conference which would entail another report the following year, the amended report was finally adopted ^{as} ~~as~~ the Conference's stand by a vote of 11 to 9, the "nays" asking to be recorded in the proceedings. Since some of those who voted against the motion had previously expressed their agreement with the position of the report, it may be assumed that their motive in voting "nay" was the protection of the rights of absent colleagues or of colleagues in more traditionally minded congregations. (114)

Wise, the following year, protested the vote, explaining that it gave the impression that nine out of twenty Conference members considered the literature in question authoritative, when - in fact - the negative votes were simply intended as consideration for those rabbis who had already left the convention, only twenty being in attendance at the time. [The rollcall p.3, 1895 shows an attendance of 39 on July 11, 1895] Lest anyone think that the negative votes represent "orthodox Rabbinism", the "legalism of the Talmud, the Kabbalism of the Zohar, the literalism of the Karaites, or even the rationalism of Maimonides and Mendelssohn", let us reconsider the vote, Wise requested. The committee on the presidential message, however, dismissed the matter with the opinion that if the

negative vote was so understood by anyone, it was "certainly misunderstood". (115)

A well thought out paper on philosophy and religion was delivered at the convention of 1895 by Adolph Moses; it evoked no interest. (116)

A fresh beginning was made toward solving the problem of drawing up an official Jewish theology by the appointment of a committee for this purpose on recommendation of the presidential message of 1898. At the March convention of the following year, Wise, who with M. Mielsiner and G. Deutsch constituted the committee, reported in his presidential message that the work of formulating principles was being retarded by his inability to ascertain the areas of agreement within the Conference. Three years ago, he reported, two subjects for papers had been assigned to Conference members, viz., The Messianic Doctrine in Judaism, on which depends - in Wise's view - the whole body of doctrine, especially the distinctions between Judaism and Christianity as well as between conservative and progressive Judaism; and The Theology of the Union Prayer Book, for which the Conference as a body is responsible, the doctrines and beliefs laid down therein being the body of "our theological doctrine, telling all the world what Judaism signifies to us in theory". Neither paper having (117) been prepared thus far, the committee could not do its work.

In 1900, the committee presented a lengthy report despite the fact that the two papers mentioned by Wise earlier had not yet been prepared as late as 1901. (118) Wise, having died in the interim, the committee now consisted of G. Deutsch and M. Mielsiner. They began by observing that contemporary religion was being affected by the problems of evolution and historical criticism, and that Judaism was especially unsuited to defining because (a) it had been more occupied with Law than with doctrine, and it

and (b) it had no canon law, ergo no generally recognized ecclesiastic authority. Hence they suggested two independ^{ent} criteria for judging^{truly} Jewish tendencies: first, the universal acceptance (among Jews) of a particular religious theory; or second, its promulgation by a "theologian" of recognized authority. Noting in passing the "insurmountable difficulties" of framing a dogma that will satisfy all factions and generations, they passed on to a survey of Judaism "from the historical standpoint", applying the two criteria as they went. They argued that until recent times, Kabbala was considered thoroughly Jewish and for many authoritative; Rabbinic literature, in every detail, was considered of "indisputable authority", even in scientific matters; and the Bible was generally accepted in Judaism "we have to admit" as infallible in both facts and morals. We have proven, they concluded somewhat illogically, that the naive thought of our ancestors is no theological standpoint at all because they "were not conscious of any principles". They went on to approve and agree with the report of the committee on Post-Biblical and Patristic Literature, (119) and declared that "unreserved acceptance of Biblical authority, would lead back to the "narrow-mindedness from which Reform Judaism liberated us". The Conference's standpoint must be, they asserted, the acknowledgement of evolution in religio^{us} truth just as in the "mechanical world". Judaism consists of lasting essentials and changing, external forms. While this truth appears in Israel's literature, much of that literature has lost its meaning for us both as to form and matter! We should stress Israel's mission and accentuate our belief in the glorious prayer of our rabbis: "Rule, O Lord...over the whole world..." They closed this report by moving that "these suggestions" be given to another committee to be phrased in concise language

and ^{SENT} send them to the Conference's executive board, which, in turn, would distribute copies to Conference members for criticism and suggestions, and that the following year's convention should on this basis adopt a "draft of principles" and "devise means to have it spread broadcast amongst the Jews of this country." (120) This moderate and circumspect report evoked neither discussion nor implementation, for both the committee and the motion fail to appear in proceedings after the one report given above.

A different approach was tried by Kohler, who asked, in 1898, that a committee be appointed to write a treatise on Talmudic and Rabbinic Ethics as a beginning toward a systematic understanding of Judaism. The committee was appointed and reported at the same convention, the report being received and adopted by the Conference but misplaced, it does not appear in the proceedings. It is described as a plan for elaborating Jewish Ethics from the "historical point of view". The following year, the committee reported only that it was making progress and that its majority thought a report on Moritz Lazarus' Die Ethik des Judenthums [first published 1898] would be in order for the Conference. The committee was, in fact, awaiting the completion of this work before proceeding itself. None of the committee, however, had prepared such a report! So Kohler, who had reviewed the book for the American Hebrew, delivered an "oral report". The committee was continued on motion but (121) does not appear again in these proceedings.

Still another attempt, having both scholarly and theological aims, began with a recommendation in the presidential message of 1897 that the Conference establish a publishing house and publish both an encyclopedia of Biblical and Talmudic literature and a series of systematically arranged

papers on Jewish Ethics, the latter being "one of the most urgent duties before us" and in "great demand" among both Jews and non-Jews! The papers, were to explicate the basis of ethics, family, public and business ethics, and other topics. Conference members were to write them. Two committees were appointed, one for the encyclopedia, the other for the ethics papers. It was decided to extend the scope of the proposed encyclopedia to the "whole field of Jewish theology" and bibliography. We are not in competition with the Jewish Publication Society, it was said, but that organization's publications are of necessary "popular literature" while our province is "science" and scholarly literature. (122)
The expense involved "is no problem," the Conference was assured.

The committee for the papers on Jewish Ethics is not heard from again, its activities having been swallowed up, presumably, by the ill-fated one initiated by Kohler and discussed above. The convention of 1898 did hear the Encyclopedia committee's report specifying that the goal was a "standard work" for students of Judaism, comparable to Christian Bible Encyclopedias and works on "Christian theology" such as Wetzer and Welte for the Catholics or Herzog and Plitt for the Protestants, (123)
but written from the "rabbinic" point of view.

This venture collapsed, however, when the Conference learned that Funk and Wagnells had already initiated such a project and wanted the Conference's cooperation. Some objections were raised to having a non-Jewish firm carry out such a task and to other minor issues, but the matter closed with dismissal of the committee. The Conference officially endorsed the Funk and Wagnell's Jewish Encyclopedia, and a presidential message praised the first volume when it appeared, asserting that the

Conference had collaborated in it. ⁽¹²⁴⁾ [The Jewish Encyclopedia does not credit the CCAR, but several CCAR members are listed as editors and contributors.]

Two other attempts at publishing ventures were attempted in this period. In 1900 and again in 1902 the presidential message called for publishing a Jewish Quarterly Review, but a committee first agreed then turned down the suggestion on the grounds that several good magazines of Jewish interest already existed, and, besides the Conference had no funds. ⁽¹²⁵⁾

In 1899 Wise had suggested that the Conference publish and distribute brief, popular tracts on practical religious subjects, including narratives, addresses, apologetics and polemics. The faculty of the Hebrew Union College were to judge the submitted manuscripts, deciding which should be published. A committee reaffirmed the "great need and demand" for tracts and recommended implementation of Wise's suggestion. The proposition was renewed two years later by another president and the following year as well, no action having been taken in the interim. Each time the idea fell on barren ground it disappeared from the proceedings until 1908. ⁽¹²⁶⁾

The necessity for some sort of ceremony and condition of proselytism almost provided the Conference with a creed. As early as 1892 a committee on proselytes had submitted a resolution that the proselyte should sign a statement of his intention to worship none but the One God; to be governed by God's laws in divine covenant; to adhere in life and death to Israel's mission as explained in Scripture. A committee was requested to frame the formulas for the relevant documents, and there seems to have

been no negative reaction from the Conference. (127)

By 1894 the committee had not yet, it appears, reported. Wise was praising the Conference for removing "rite and race" barriers to proselytism. (128)

In 1895, however, the committee presented its formulated tenets and the Conference - now on the alert - reacted strongly. The "storm" raised by the Conference resulted in the whole matter's being postponed to the following convention when new discussions, during which Wise protested against defining general doctrines in too specific terms, resulted, so it appears, in rejection of the formulas by the Conference. (129)

No more was said, during this period, of creeds for proselytes. A special interest seems to have arisen, though, toward the end of the period. In the convention of 1901, the welcoming address and presidential message called for clarification of the Conference's attitude toward proselytism and a more aggressive policy of proselytizing, respectively. However, the committee on the presidential message cautiously decided against the Conference's "departing from the traditional policy of Judaism" and this report was adopted by the Conference. (130)

Wise had initiated in 1897 the attempt to reach a "clear and crystallized" doctrine of Judaism by having individual Conference members present papers on limited theological topics. A beginning had been made that year with M. Margolis' paper, The Theology of the Old Prayer Book, which defined theology as a discipline trying to conciliate a particular philosophy with the current popular religion, or, as the sum of the thoughts underlying religious activity as expressed in rite, ceremonial, song and prayer. On this basis, Margolis concluded, the Old Prayer Book had no well-defined

(131)

system of Jewish theology. A year before Felsenthal had delivered a paper on Jewish dogmas giving an answer to the question, "Gibt es Dogmen in Judentum"? A dogma he defined as "ein für eine religiöse Gemeinschaft feststehender und für dieselbe bindender Glaubenssatz, welcher innerhalb dieser Gemeinschaft allgemeine anerkannte Geltung hat, und welcher als wahr angenommen werden soll, auch ohne dass man Beweise dafür beibringt". Hence the command to ^{Be Holy} "Behold" is not a dogma or belief, but a moral principle. Neither is belief in the Messiah a Jewish dogma. In fact Judaism or - more exactly - the new "judische Religionslehre" has only two articles of belief: (1) The existence of one God, and (2) The eternal chosenness of Israel to carry the flag of light and truth about God and His holy "Sittengesetz" unto the world. These two dogmas qualify both in age and general acceptance as the true, fundamental Jewish dogmas. (132)

Now, in 1897, it was resolved that Felsenthal's paper be published in the Yearbook of the Conference. No action resulted from either this paper or Margolis'. (133) In the conventions of 1901 and 1902 President Silverman renewed Wise's proposals for a series of papers, invoking Wise's memory but altering the list of proposed topics significantly. In 1899 Wise had nominated as suggested topics The Messianic Doctrine, The History and Philosophy of Reform Judaism, The Theology of the Old and New Prayer Books. Silverman's recapitulation in 1901 added to this list The Distinctive Character of Jewish Monotheism and Jewish Ethics, Judaism as a Missionary Religion, The Qualifications of the Rabbi, The Relation of the Synagogue to the Individual. His 1902 suggestions are The Bible and Modern Thought, The Sabbath, The Religious School, Congregational Activity Outside the Pulpit and School. (134) The 1901 list adds to Wise's original interests a concern

with Jewish distinctiveness, proselytism and problems of the professional rabbinate. The 1902 list is almost exclusively occupied with professional problems of rabbis.

The problem of confirmation education stimulated a presidential appeal for the publication of a "union Catechism or Manual for Confirmation which shall contain a plain statement of Jewish tenets and such other data of a religious and ethical character" as might be appropriate. It was without
(135)
result.

The lengthy paper on Jewish theology read by M. Margolis at the convention of 1903 seemed at the time to be the most important theological production in the history of the Conference. It was voted to have the paper printed and distributed among the clergy and laity. Margolis' paper presented a survey and draft of Jewish theology generally and a Reform theology in particular, ^{He} conveyed the impression that he considered Reform to be the final fruition of all that had gone before. He closed his address with a calling for a synod and moved that the Conference appoint a committee to prepare "the creed of Reform Judaism", i.e. a brief text plus exhaustive historical and theological commentary" in language accessible to educated classes, using, if it so chooses", his own draft as basis; this committee was to report "in manuscript" at the next convention. He moved further that the Conference after adopting such creed, lay it before a synod, to be convened in 1905, for confirmation, and that the synod promulgate the creed as the "Creed of the Reformed Jewish Church of America." The synod should revise the creed, he continued, when this is recommended by the Conference, and the latter should

have a standing committee on creed and doctrinal matters.

A special committee headed by Kohler took two years preparing a report on this paper. But a discussion took place at this 1903 convention. Kohler was in attendance at this convention but did not enter into the discussion. The main discussant, Rabbi M. Friedlander, attacked the paper's terminology, details, verbosity and logic in heated fashion. He criticized particularly the attempt to formulate a theology for Reform and thereby distinguish Orthodoxy and Reform in theology, when in fact - Friedlander insisted - they do not differ in theology but only in the extent to which ceremonial controls practical life. By Jewish theology, Friedlander understood "the principles and sentiments essential to the perpetuity of Jewish individuality", and in this Reform and Orthodoxy were alike. Friedlander cited leading Reformers to substantiate his view, and pointed to the danger inherent in a Reform theology. It would be "fatal" to the Jewish historical principle that Judaism cannot undergo a full and sudden change in theology, in fact, that is how Christianity originated! Reform dare not go "away beyond" the life and ideals of the people [the Reform people?] while trying to enlighten them, but it must stand united with Orthodoxy "in tenacious insistence that there cannot and must not be a *אברהם אבינו* a new theology". Jewish history teaches, Friedlander argued, that change must come unconsciously; it never comes consciously. This is the method of the prophets, the "most radical reformers in Israel" who changed concepts without announcing that they were preaching a new theology. Reform Judaism has no new theology; it simply "infuses the Jewish ideal as conceived at the present into the theology long since there".

Friedlander objected also to the implication that Reform Judaism was the final form. The source of Israel's strength, he observed, is that no matter how dispersed or disagreed factions may be unity prevails always on the essentials, viz., Jewish life, Jewish character, Jewish consciousness and Jewish destiny. The Conference's approval of a Reform theology, would, he warned, divide Israel! It would "give the Orthodox cause to suspect Reform of secession". Let our motto be, he concluded, (137) one Judaism and one theology.

No concrete steps implementing Margolis' motion were taken by this convention and the Conference remained without official commitment to a defined Judaism, Silverman's remark that articles of Jewish theology had been adopted notwithstanding. (138)

CCAR PROCEEDINGS 1904 - 1910

The Synod's Birth and Death

The trend toward centralising authority in a synod reached its peak and expired during this period. In the convention of 1904 the pro-synod and anti-synod forces clashed repeatedly. President Kraushoff, Stolz and Enelow led the former; Felsenthal the latter.

We must decide about the synod, beginning in this convention the actual formation of one, the former were saying. It is what American Jewry needs most for its self-clarification, for advancing its mission, for ameliorating the situation which has resulted from each doing what is right in his own eyes. Wise's memory and wishes were invoked. Was it not patent to all that questions of religious, ethical and communal import were constantly arising and should be decided by a central religious organization?

style

A synod would be un-American, unnecessary, dangerous and would restrict freedom of thought, the opposition replied. A few years ago we thought, one said, it would be impossible that among "Jewish-American freemen" the institution of "spiritual slavery" should be attempted. No synod shall rule over us, no papers, no propelings! The Conference should disclaim all desires for legislative authority and come out for complete freedom. The bad odor attached to the phrase "A Synod for American Israel" is well deserved because it implies governing the beliefs and practices of congregations.

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(140)

But the reaction to anti-synod speakers appears to have been cool. Felsenthal's remarks were "admired"; he was thanked; but no real comment was evoked except from Enelow - who reported for the Committee on Synod.

He recognized the "dread" which existed for the synod lest it confine Judaism, which "they say...is immeasurably broad, a philosophy, an ethical principle, a mission", etc. Yes, the word "synod" is ominous and unpopular, but whatever its foundation and goal - is not Judaism presented to the world as a religion? A religion needs more than abstract concepts. In the past Judaism needed no ecclesiastical organization because Judaism and the Nation were one. Reform Judaism, having cut loose from the nationalistic conception of Israel's destiny, nevertheless recognized that there is such a thing as Knesseth Israel with a communal mission. Israel is a community, not a collection of separate synagogues, and it ought to have a central organ, a synod as the Zion of Judaism detached from political Zionism. A synod must be the heart of the Jewish community. If Israel is a nation, then the Jew's central institution must be Zion; (141) if Israel is a church, it must be a synod.

The convention heard two reports from the Committee on Synod. The majority report called attention to the president's recommendation that there be formed a social and religious union to bring laymen and ministers (Reform) together socially, but in affirming this it changed the content slightly, calling for a synod of rabbis and laymen to guide by consensus of "academic and practical wisdom and thus educate public opinion". The report presented such a synod as a "historic and traditional" Jewish institution and stated plainly that the synod would not have dictatorial powers to interfere with belief and conduct. It recommended that the executive committee of the Conference publish a pamphlet containing all papers related to the topic, as well as relevant extracts from presidential messages, and thereafter attempt the organization of a synod. Philipson, (142) M.Heller, J. Stolz, M. Margolis and M.H. Harris signed the majority report.

The minority report rejected both the synod and the proposed "Union Catechism" as attempts to crystallize creeds and bring about uniformity in matters which should be left to the individual. The present intention, it admitted, may not be bad. But in the future, such a central power may be misused, so destroy it now! Where the concerted action of American Jewry is necessary, we can call ad hoc conferences. Felsenthal, S. Sale and T. Schanfarber signed the minority report. (143)

In the discussion which followed these reports, the anti-synod speakers asked what good a synod could do? The Conference alone could reply to laymen's questions or express its opinion through the executive committee with as much authority as the proposed synod would have, since it could not "these days" do more than express its opinion. Besides, one added, Reform is becoming a minority and ought to avoid separating itself from the rest of American Jewry in a Reform synod. The pro-synod advocates argued for the synod on the ground that it would not be coercive and would have only the power its members would give it; that it would be only a sort of council not a court of authority; and that it was necessitated by the absence of recognized rules in departures from the Pentateuchal Mosaic law by "those who choose to depart..." The question was called on the majority committee's recommendations; the vote was tied at 23 including the vote of the President, ^{as} the committee withdrew all of its report for the part about publishing the literature relevant to the synod question. (144)

The following year (1905), the synodal-literature pamphlet having been distributed before the convention, Philipson moved that the synod be discussed without further delay. Enelow attempted by parliamentary means to put the

matter off that year's agenda, and a long discussion over parliamentary procedures concluded that the Conference would await the decision of the committee on the presidential message as to whether the synod discussion should take place at this convention or next year. (145)

In his presidential address, Krauskopf assured all that the Conference was and would continue to be merely a deliberative and advisory assembly, voting only in order to learn the consensus of opinion but not to throttle independence, establish creeds or fix ceremonies. He attempted to allay fears, remarking on the misunderstanding of the proposed synod on the part of both rabbis and laymen. Its proponents wanted only to create "a body of scholarly and representative men" to study subjects brought to them and to "submit to the Conference their opinion and the literature they used to arrive at it; this opinion would be discussed by the Conference and accepted or rejected by its membership "in accordance with their inalienable rights". Invoking once again Wise's hopes, the "urgent need of an authoritative body" to "speak with a certain authority on questions concerning which authority is needed and sought", and the "chaotic state" of "beliefs and practices in Israel", he recommended that this convention bring the matter to a final vote. (146)

It was not to be. The committee on the presidential message took cognizance of the disagreement and confusion which prevailed over the need for and exact function of a synod, and it advised the appointment of a committee to define and plan "precisely" the structure and function of the proposed synod. Their report was to be distributed to the Conference and discussed at the next convention. (147)

The debate on this last proposal elicited Kohler's admission that he had at one time advocated the syned (1898) because he had felt sure that "American Judaism would have its progress and reform furthered by...such a Syned. Today matters have changed altogether. Today it would be suicide if we were to advocate a catholic syned where we would be in the minority,..." He did not make clear whether or not he favored a syned of limited composition. Others argued for a catholic synod for the "whole Jewish people". Finally the proposal was put to a vote and the report was accepted, so that action was postponed a year ! (148)

The committee's report the following year (1906) was both the syned's birth certificate and its death warrant. Philipsen, chairman of the committee, together with K. Kohler, Enelow, M. Margolis, Krauskopf and C.S. Levi submitted a majority report in which they gave the results of their "three meetings. A preamble had been worded citing the increasingly evident need for a central Jewish organization in America, one in which all Jews had ~~have~~ an interest would be represented, to pronounce upon questions of a religious and communal character in which all Jews have a common interest as well as to meet occasional emergencies here and abroad. A name had been chosen: The Central Jewish Assembly of America. Its scope was defined as ~~will~~ deliberation, as well as representing and guiding Jewish public opinion not by disciplinary power but by the "authority of its Jewish learning, practical wisdom and devotion to...Israel..." At this point the committee's work had been interrupted by the action of a group who sent out fifty invitations to a conference to be held in New York...for the purpose of consulting" as regards the "formation of a general committee to devise...an organization of American Jews..." The ^{pro}posed organization being so much like the one the Conference committee was planning, the latter deferred their work until after the New York meeting, which four of the committee attended. At the New York meeting, Philipsen had been appointed to the organizational committee of seven. Therefore, the majority report concluded, the committee moves that its preamble and scope paragraphs be approved, and

that the Conference "educate" the Jewish public in favor of such an organization as is forming in New York", "whose primary purpose shall be the promotion of ...Judaism, and ...the recognition of the principle that the synagogue is the basic institution of Judaism and the congregation its unit of representation." (148a)

Prof. Deutsch read a minority report representing only himself. He approved the new organization but objected to "coupling... communal and religious aims" for it would prove harmful to the organization. Let the new organization concern itself with communal affairs and the Conference continue to serve as it already does, viz., as an advisory body in religious affairs. (149)

The fact that these reports bypassed entirely the original intent of the pre-syned faction was not lost in the discussion which followed. The sights, which had been on religious uniformity and control, suddenly had been raised to communal problems. The reports were tabled and never heard from again. (150) So with the founding of the American Jewish Committee, the syned idea died in the Conference.

Following the efforts of the previous period, one final attempt to bring laymen into the work of the Conference was made in the 1904 presidential address which noted that the Conference was one of the few denominations barring laymen from discussing religious questions and suggested that including "our men of affairs" in Conference discussions, having the laity participate in the Conference's work, would create stronger lay interest as well as offset the excessive pedanticity of the conventions ! However,

the time was right neither ^{from} the point of view of the rabbis ^{that of} nor the laymen. The committee on the presidential message rejected the suggestion because it believed "the Conference should remain a professional body. The trend of laymen's thinking, on the other hand, seemed to be toward a central Jewish secular organization. Philipsen reported that he and Stoltz attending a U A H C convention, had proposed an American Jewish Congress." I have never seen such enthusiasm in a convention," he told the Conference. The idea simply swept the convention off its feet ! (151)

The decision of the 1902 convention to prepare and publish a rabbi's manual (p. 21 above) had not yet been implemented two years later, when a committee on Jewish Ministers' Handbook echoed the original proposal. Reform having arrived at its constructive period, the report said, the time has come to create such a Handbook out of the varied forms used by rabbis. Again, the idea was adopted. (152) It is not mentioned again during this period. The professional outlook appeared in the presidential message this same year, with a demand that the Conference "widen" its scope by preparing papers on practical problems such as synagogue membership, attendance, and Sunday Schools. (153)

Further Decline and Confidence Reborn

We are a minority ! We are on the defensive ! We must change our ways ! These were the leading motifs of Conference self-evaluation in this period. Addresses and sermons were advising Conference members to act wisely by facing the ^{RN} "stern fact" that the American Jewish World had changed altogether.

since the early days of the Conference; that the arrival of masses of immigrants over the preceeding twenty years had made Reform a "small minority", putting it on the defensive, and causing some Reform rabbis to become "apologetic" while "dismay ... seized many" others. The "tide of reactionism" had swept them off their feet, and the Reform camp had become timid, not because it lacked the courage of its convictions, it was assured, but because it could not determine just what its convictions were ! It had become hesitant to press its claims, it was being said in the Conference. The optimistic nineteenth century note had changed "in many quarters" to a pessimistic wail, a despairing conviction that the Judaism represented by the Conference "cannot possibly hold its own against the overwhelming odds" which to some speakers spelled "reactionism, ghettoism, romanticism, neo-nationalism and neo-orthodoxy". Reform, the Conference recognized, was being "put to the test as never before in the United States and "notably" in New York. (154)

While a convention sermon protested all the talk about the "futility and foolishness of Reform", its critics denouncing it as a "peril to Judaism.., and the advice that "we must revive Orthodoxy", that "we need a reaction", the mood of the Conference seems to have been better reflected by the presidential message which adjured the Conference "as earnest leaders in Israel", to welcome the controversies about Reform, to hearken to the critics' reproofs without denying them the right to criticize, to heed their warnings and admonitions no matter how unsympathetic they might be. If by

the remotest possibility, Reform might lead to Israel's total assimilation, deterioration, to the "death of Judaism", it was the duty of the Conference to "make a candid acknowledgment of failures ... in order that we might plan more intelligently ... in the future. For we are only fallible men"(155)

"There is something wrong at ...the Mountain-head of Reform" the Conference was advised. Reform is "not a fetish above and beyond criticism". We need a change of attitude toward Judaism. While we advocate a liberal interpretation of our religion, we should not fight Orthodoxy. We do not wish to create a new sect, breach the unity of Israel or break the chain of tradition which "binds us to the past and links us to the future", for we "owe the past love not hate". Too much tradition may be a misfortune; lack of any tradition is a calamity. If "racial Judaism" is spurned and religious Judaism fails to replace it, and if this is truly the "inevitable fruit of Reform", we must feel the deepest concern. We loyally preserved our patrimony in the past; shall we give it up now for the "first smile of Christianity?" We have realized in this modern day that Israel's past needs no apologies, that the Jew should not imitate the gentile merely because the latter "wears the spurious stamp of a shallow modernity", that we should not compose our ritual and services to the tune of "lest we be ashamed" before our Christian neighbors. To the contrary, our originality is a crown of glory, not a badge of shame; the Jew should be original and different;

Judaism is something in which to take pride. (156)

Depiction of Reform as opposed to Judaism was challenged, but many seem to have seen some justice in that view. (157)

In the spirit of the foregoing, ~~if~~ the awakening of a "deeper religious feeling" in American Jewry was attributed by one speaker to the influx of Russian Jews. The Conference decided to change the Union Prayer Book arrangement of selections from the weekly Scripture portions back to ^A system uniform with general Jewish practice, despite a protest that the revision was unjustified and represented only fear of being Reform. (158) A conference sermon expressed satisfaction that title of the Conference gave "no indication" that it represented Reform; its concern should be the "whole of Jewry". (159)

The chairman of the Synagogue Extension Committee, George Zeppin, told the Conference that "the UAHC counts among its members Orthodox as well as Reform congregations", and while some people suppose that the object of the Union is to establish Reform congregations, "I desire to state for the Union that this is not the case." The Union "is committed to neither Orthodoxy nor Reform, but to Judaism." (160)

A committee endorsement of a presidential message calling for the reviving of those traditional home observances "that can still be invested with religious significance" was unanimously adopted by the Conference. (161) Kohler read a paper on The Origin and Function of Ceremonies in Judaism, concluding that Reform should encourage viable ceremonies and create new ones, the principle of evolution

offering the key to continuity. (162)

A conference sermon called for a "redeclaration" of Reform's stand, and went on to explain that Reform opposes distinctness from Orthodoxy where principle is not involved, ergo the Reform rabbi should not "introduce a needless change". We should sacrifice anything except principle "to maintain the solidarity of the Jew". We are glad to report, it continued, "that Reform's sober second thought has checked the revolutionary tendencies of the radical in its midst and restored some institutions too indiscriminately swept away." In this sense, it argued, Reformers are "conservative", i.e., wishing to conserve! Reform's great evil, it avowed, was individualism and excessive latitude. "It grieved me", the preacher concluded, that the Conference decided against a synod to formulate theory and regulate practice. He hoped the question would be reopened. (163)

Even Philipson was announcing that although the Conference was known as Reform, its interests include all Israel and its membership was "catholic" enough to hear papers on all important Jewish figures. Thus he informed the Conference that it would hear M. Heller read a paper on "the head and front of the so-called neo-orthodoxy, Samson Raphael Hirsch". (164)

At one time during this period the Conference was advised that each year an increasing number of HUC graduates would have difficulty finding positions. Later, a speaker observed that, after a slump along with other faiths,

Reform had entered upon a constructive period in which it stressed the "more positive" or traditional ways, and this augured a better time for the Reform movement". (165) The success of these predictions is not ascertainable within the chronological limits of this paper.

It is clear that, particularly toward the end of this period, a resentment and repudiation of the current trend made itself felt in the Conference, and "Reform" was once more put forward by some spokesmen as right and necessary.

We need not "apologize... for the existence of Reform Judaism" they were saying. Let others deny and decry Reform saying that it was born "when a Jewish peddler ate a ham sandwich", that it is opportunism, the "gospel of convenience", rebellion, imitation of the gentile, and a "deform" of heirlooms. The Conference should stand for the "modern, progressive spirit", for "progressive modernism" as well as a "wise conservatism" and reverence towards tradition.

Our stand is the forward movement in Judaism, discriminating between eternal values and their temporary expressions. We continue the line of tradition, but we must evaluate its power to express the message of religion. Hence we reemphasize the principle of the pioneer reformers that "the revelation of God is continuous and that the dead forms of religion must drop piecemeal into the dust if the living spirit of religion is to continue to bring blessing to men;" continuous development in Judaism!

Even though our members have not to bear testimony to the faith that is in them, it is as true today as a decade ago, that, although we represent varied shades of opinion, we share the conviction that in espousing Reform Judaism we have not sinned against Judaism's spirit and are "not guilty of disloyalty to our forefathers. On the contrary, Reform is a legitimate and necessary development. In the United States, all are caught up in the whirl of "reform"; even our so-called "conservative" brethren. It is simply a matter of degree. Reform will inevitably extend to ever larger numbers as modern civilization "at its best" expands. (166)

At the convention of 1910 three separate addresses on the history of Reform were delivered, this being Geiger's centenary birth year. The Reform Movement After Abraham Geiger, a paper by Dr. M. Landsberg, presented Reform Judaism exactly as it would have been presented in the first period (1889-1894). The "most perfect comprehension of Reform Judaism" was said to be that of a rabbi who had described it as "a religion without mysteries, without a revealed dogma, without an official theology, without priests, hostile to all superstition... admitting no other criterion of truth than the light of truth itself."

Landsberg, in 1910, made the same evaluation (in almost the same words) of Geiger's contributions to Reform as Kohler had in 1892, viz., that Geiger had established the primary principles of Reform Judaism. Geiger showed that revelation is not supernatural; that Judaism produced

the Bible and not vice versa; that Judaism's originality lies not in "these oriental forms and peculiar laws and ceremonies but in the ethical monotheism of the prophets". Geiger demonstrated further, that Israel's destiny was to prepare and be prepared for "a new world which is all embracing; for a time when the religion of ethical monotheism taught by the Hebrew prophets will be the religion of the whole human race." (167)

Sometimes the speaker began with a reassertion of the older Reform stand but closed with a platform that departed from the earlier views. "Not one of us thinks of a renunciation of the principles of Reform," one began, and went on to tell of his resenting and despising the "sarcastic allusions" to the mission-idea as well as the "aspersions cast upon "nineteenth century Reform leaders. But progress, he explained, "depends on a nice balance between continuity and change", and so it is now the duty of Reform to test its earlier teachings by contemporary "spiritual life", history and the "latest results of philosophy and criticism". The program this speaker called for was the fostering of home ceremonies, practices, home piety, the "ferver of our desire to pray", the "national consciousness" and "racial bonds". Of orthodox symbol, law and doctrine he said: "If the seed bore desirable fruit we must plant again or else go about with a hunger that will have to be appeased elsewhere..." (168)

Coping with the Ghetto

It was in this period that Reform fully discovered

there were non-religious facets and problems of the new immigration. Kehler had said, in 1898, that the problem facing the older Jewish settlers was not combatting Orthodoxy but confronting "nihilism and skepticism" among the Russian immigrants.

In his presidential message to the convention of 1901, Silverman had called for efforts on the part of the conference to eliminate national prejudices within that "heterogeneous mass", American Israel, to "inculcate" both the native and immigrant Jew with the idea that "residence here" entails forgetting European national differences and "assimilating with the great body of American Israel and American citizens in general". (169)

The conventions of 1904 and 1905 directed the attention of the Conference for the first time to the problems of the "horribly congested ghettos" of New York and other large cities. The "new generation" growing up in the ghettos was described by one speaker as readily absorbing anarchistic and "infidel" teachings; another characterized the Jewish immigrant generally as leaving Judaism and "tenaciously" subscribing to atheism, "extreme liberalism", anarchy and radicalism. The ghetto synagogues were not meeting the needs of the ghetto, the Conference was told. The "elder services" are beneath the intelligence of the new ghetto generation. Their minds are active, as shown by their rebellion against their miserable lots. They have outgrown the Orthodox service and can derive neither comfort nor light from it. The "new form of religion", on the other

hand, has not yet been brought to them, with its comforting solace, inspiring hope, and music to cheer and lift them "above the sordid and harassing struggle for existence".

Reform Judaism," with a few noble exceptions" has done nothing to "reach the souls of these seething masses, the Conference heard. Almost all its efforts in the past were aimed at their physical needs. The tragic pressing necessities required the application of almost all time and funds to alleviate immediate suffering. In clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, etc. we did our duty. But we failed to give them ideals and surroundings which would result in their moral uplift and economic betterment. We failed to "convert their infidelity" to uplifting God-belief, to change their "rebellious complaints of real or imagined injustice into a spirit of pious resignation", to change immoral tendencies into moral habits, to arouse within them a sense of responsibility to their God, their country, their people and themselves. Consequently, their undercutting economic standards, their racial differences and "religious prejudices are threatening to create a Jewish question of serious proportions... and afford ammunition to our antisemitic enemy", who claims the "slum Jew" is too oriental and not enough American. There is some truth in this allegation. The slum Jew is the "prey of commercial vultures" and "unscrupulous employers",

hence he rebels against what " professional agitators amongst his own people make him believe are the dominant and controlling forces of society". Considered a disruptive economic factor by his neighbors, he is victimized by his own ignorance, the " tyranny of the sweater" and the " wiles of the political agitator".

Although legislation for restrictive immigration would lessen our burden, it is our "first and immediate duty" to fight to keep the doors open in this emergency, to get them access. We must correct the impression held by many, including Jews, that ^T these immigrants are undesirables and prospective public charges. We must correct the errors, misrepresentations and distortions; we must keep America accessible to all our oppressed brethren.

Their undesirable qualities result from life under hostile governments. American justice and liberty will make them forsake the " incendiary doctrines" and become " good citizens of the republic".

What should Reform do now about this " invasion that threatens to undo the work of two generations of American Jews", especially since, " as is oft repeated", the future of American Judaism rests with the Russian Jews? Relations between the immigrants and Reform have been quite bad in the past. But now the time has come for the Conference to organize People's Reform Synagogues in the ghettos of our larger cities. It is a "splendid field for" some young men. The Conference should set aside funds guaranteeing the rabbi a livelihood until the congregation is established. For both Judaism and Reform, let th

the rabbi go " bravely from his study into the ghetto to fight", to overthrow the conditions which debase its morals and make for social unrest and discontent. Let the rabbi raise his voice against its rags and dirt, misery and poverty, its Hebrew political clubs, its professional and socialistic agitators, its false prophets and preachers, its clannishness, etc. Let the rabbi identify himself with and work for and in the ghetto. (170)

Discussion ~~of this subject~~ of this theme on the Conference floor evoked the opinions that the Russian Jews was ^a fine specimen, that " we have no message for them", that orthodoxy was fine and uplifting, and that the Conference was not anti-zionist, (the Russian Jew had been stigmatized previously as having an allegiance to Zionism). Only Philipson and a few others expressed contrary views, commenting on the applause drawn from the Conference by " conservative statements"! (171)

A congregation was established in the orthodox section of Philadelphia by the UAHC. Zepin, reporting on this venture in 1905, described the synagogue as not radical but calling itself and being called Reform. After explaining that the urban unsynagogued far outnumbered the rural, Zepin told the Conference that Philadelphia had a Russian Jewish population of about fifty thousand ,while the total seating space of orthodox synagogues there did not exceed ~~the~~ ten thousand. Despite this condition, and despite the aid of " men who have built up vast congregations of their own, the synagogue did not - in its

first six months - garner enough members to become self-supporting. Out of " forty thousand " (the unsynagogued) it attracted " at the most " about four hundred individuals during Zepin's efforts. They don't want Reform, Zepin concluded. Even this Reform congregation would not use that adjective in its title. Zepin's advice was that the Conference stop this " missionary work". The synagogue in Philadelphia " was a mistake ". Orthodox teachings, he concluded, are " pure and uplifting". (172)

Nevertheless, the Conference continued to feel some responsibility for fighting the " prevailing movement making for the restriction of immigration.

The Conference had taken cognizance of antisemitism in scholarly literature as early as 1901, when the executive committee was instructed to appoint a " competent member" to reply to Harnack's presentation of Judaism in his Wesen des Christenthums . No action resulted. (173) The following year, Kohler read a paper, Assyriology and the Bible, directed against F. Delitzsch's Babel und Bibel. This paper, according to Silverman, was written ^{at} by the Conference's request as the " authorized " reply of American Judaism to Delitzsch, and the Conference decided to distribute the paper, " sending a copy each to Emperor William and Dr. Delitzsch.

A presidential recommendation to the convention of 1905 that a committee on anti-semitism be formed to provide " active and persistent warfare against the growing and fast-

spreading" antisemitism in this country, was rejected by a committee on the grounds that antisemitism is " a political creed among some European peoples and, God be thanked,... no such creed [exists] in this country, [hence] we do not consider it necessary to appoint a committee... much as we deplore any and all evidence of anti-Jewish social prejudices".⁽¹⁷⁵⁾

Pro and anti Zionist sentiments were voiced throughout this period. A conference sermon attacked many Zionists for having " little or no Jewish feeling ", in evidence of which it was told that the two " most prominent leaders in Zionism" were married to unconverted Christians' women.⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ Philipson judged Reform Judaism and Zionism or " nationalism" to be " absolutely incompatible", the former^{er} being spiritual, universal, future and world oriented, while the latter is political, oriental, concerned with the past and a " corner of Western Asia". The Conference should cease all " attempts at defending...the possibility of reconciling" the two. The attempts are " sheerest casuistry". Zionism entails surrendering "all the ideals for which Reform Judaism stands".⁽¹⁷⁷⁾

The following year Felsenthal presented to the Conference resolutions asserting that the antithesis was not Reform and Zionism but " Progress" and " Ossified Reform". If the Jews have a mission to the world, he argued, their dispersion is not necessary to its fulfillment, for modern technology would enable them to communicate easily with the rest of the world even from Zion ! The committee on resolutions

decided to publish Felsenthal's views in the proceedings as "opinions" but refrained from acting on them as resolutions. (178)

At that same convention M. Heller ^{L-20} lead an unrecorded round-table on the Compatibility of Zionism and Reform Judaism. (179) Kohler explained that "many Reformers" were "induced... to seek refuge in Nationalism" by the perplexing situation in which they found themselves, viz., rejecting the authority of the written and oral Law and simultaneously claiming loyalty to the Torah as divine revelation. (180) Three years later Landsberg gave as "the fundamental principle of Reform Judaism" the rejection of nationalism, citing Wise and others to prove his assertion. (181)

In the last three conventions of this period, Philipson and Heller as presidents of the Conference, and Landman as a speaker, reasserted the rightness of the older type of Reform Judaism, its inevitability and the advances "it is making in the face of impotent abuse". Admitting that the contemporary Jewish press had a great deal to say both about "the pretended bankruptcy of Reform Judaism" and the necessity and beginning of "what they call a counter-reformation", these speakers adjured the Conference not to become cowardly but to be courageous and confident. There are still a "large number" of rabbis who understand and accept scientific principles, they asserted. Despite the "many untoward signs", there is no cause for despair. The current state of affairs is temporary; "ghettoism", "reactionism", "East-European Judaism" are only passing phases in the Americanization of "our most recently

arrived brethren", and neither can nor will thrive in " the free atmosphere of this country". Russian Jewry will be Americanized; if not the first generation, then " their children...will stand with the descendants of the earlier comers to the land as the representatives of that union of progressive modernity and sane conservatism which this Conference symbolizes". Romanticism, obscurantism, " artificial medievalism" and all the " perverted viewpoints " will pass. What will remain? The mission-ideal of the Jews" as a people of religion, and of Judaism as a religious force through all the world". Let the Conference, they exhorted, continue to build by sound scholarship, drawing the practical conclusions and pronouncing them " fearlessly to all the world". Nothing can prevent " the eventual triumph of the liberal movement..." (182)

Race or Church or Both ?

In the conventions of this period protagonists^{Both} of both Judaism as a church and Judaism as a " race"-church shared the speaker's platform; the ineluctable role of "race" in Judaism appears to have been openly asserted or inferentially accepted by most.

Stelz's presidential address of 1904 urged upon the conference the building up of an American Judaism as Wise had conceived it, based on the old tradition but in accord with " reason and conscience,... the love of freedom, the spirit of charity and benevolence, humanism and fraternization, patriotic principles and national attachments, with the American spirit of progress

and unification. (183)

Two years later he was avowing that " we form what, for want of a better name, is called a nation or a race, and not what is technically known as a church." It was generally conceded, he said, that " we are Jews by virtue of our birth and not by the confession of a creed." (184)

Felsenthal described Jews as conscious of their "separate ethnic situation", as maintaining their religious separateness because it is "adapted" to Jews and Jews "only". While non-Jews' teaching of Judaism's universal elements in " liberal channels", books and colleges was acknowledged and welcomed by Felsenthal, he declared that Israel's being " a race united by national[#]ities " was a " firm and self-evident principle... in consequence of a God-ordained fact".... Every member of this race, he added, has full freedom as regards theology and practice.

Even a Conference sermon which preached that " Israel is a church", that the " whole content of Jewish consciousness is exclusively religious", that the Jew can assimilate what is best in his environment, that he is at home everywhere , even such a sermon did not avoid the implications of the assertions that the "physical element" of Judaism refers to its past not its goal, and that " the mere race Jews dies out" but the " sincere convert is hospitably grafted on the Jewish tree." (185)

One of the resolutions sent by Felsenthal to the convention of 1907 recognized " as a Jew everyone born of

Jewish parents", all who belong to the race of Israel", as well as " everyone connected with us by racial ties". This was not acted upon ~~by~~ as a resolution but entered in the proceedings as an opinion. (186)

On the other hand, M. Margolis insisted that Judaism as a church, not a nation, was the correct and proper stand for the Conference. Three interpretations of Judaism are being entertained today, he explained, viz., Judaism as an ethnos; Orthodox Judaism which combines ethnos and ecclesia; and Judaism as a pure ecclesia. The last is the superior understanding of Judaism. (187)

In a conference sermon, M. H. Harris urged that Reform Judaism identify itself with " humanity's interests". Admitting that ~~his~~ history tended to differentiate the Jew, " creating a Jewish type and strengthening the fraternal bond", he went on nevertheless to assert that Jews are not a nation or distinct by virtue of blood but held together by ideals and a common faith. As a program for Judaism he proposed that Jews should foster the Peace Congress and Pure Food campaigns as expressions of the Jewish ideals of sholem and kashrut. But what raison d'être have Jews beyond humanitarianism ? He replied to the question with a four point platform. First, let the Jews be only a religion, thereby illustrating that religion outlives the state. Second, let the Jew be the protesting liberal par excellence in both religion and politics, a world citizen; since liberal means helping all men

to live their own lives as their best selves, let the Messianic era be understood not as the time when all will have one religion but when all will be religious. Third, let the Jew be conspicuous for "the greater sanctity of our homes", i.e., as an example of domestic virtue. Fourth, let the Jew live for kiddush hashem standing as the "Puritan among the nations, an example of righteousness". (188)

Quite egragious was the interpretation of Judaism offered in the presidential message of 1905. Although it was repudiated by the convention and does not appear again in this period, it is significant as revealing the enormous influence temporary conditions may exert on even the measured and planned presentations of a Conference president. In ancient times, said Krauskopf, "like teaching and like suffering constituted... the bond of brotherhood between Jew and Jew." In the Middle Ages, it was neither national, racial nor religious ties that linked Jew to Jew but "common injustice and outrage suffered" In modern times, Israel "therefore is not a nation nor a race, it is a people of fellow-sufferers." Not in the blood of the Jew but in the antipathy of the non-Jew lies the cause that links Jew to Jew in a bond of brotherhood. The close bond of union with his fellow Jew^s and his social separation from the non-Jew are largely forced upon him from without by religious and social antipathy; they do not spring from within." (189)

The committee on the presidential message rejected

this and emphasized that the true bond between Jews is the " historic consciousness of being a priest people... and that his birth imposes the Jew the mission to witness to and to work for the realization of the kingdom of the one God... This entails... the duty of suffering martyrdom, if necessary.... Therefore this real bond of union is not imposed from without, but comes from within." (190)

Vigorous differences of opinion regarding the nature and significance of the Bible were expressed at the conventions of 1908 and 1909. Julian Morgenstern read a paper accepting and approving Bible science and explaining that the value of the Bible, in its new light, for Reform lay in its documenting the growth of the spirit of Judaism, the ever " growing knowledge of God." Reform has no need to fear Bible science, he assured the Conference. To the contrary, Bible science sanctions Reform and gives it direction. (191)

The paper evoked a mixed reaction. Admitting that theoretically " we " are in accord with Higher Criticism, one speaker was troubled by the Union Prayer Book's failure to take it into account as well as the congregation's understanding that when " we say *אנחנו* " the traditional Bible is meant. " Why delude ourselves about this ? " he asked. An enthusiastic reaction to an anti-Zionist passage of Morgenstern's paper was protested. Another speaker objected to the paper as a whole, asserting that there was some truth to Schechter's quip, " Higher Criticism was Higher antisemitism." There had been insufficient pointing out

of the positive value of the Bible in the light of Higher Criticism, he felt. (192)

The following year, during a discussion of curricula for Jewish schools, there arose the question of using the Bible as a children's text. Among the many comments made was Kohler's asserting that "We are not Bibliolators" and that he did not believe in the Bible, i.e. in "its letter as it stands." Immediately two speakers objected. The Bible, including "the Psalms and everything" is the "Word of God", one protested. "Let it not go forth that here it was said the Bible is not our textbook." A second speaker began by announcing that he was a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary. (Ehrenreich; he is already listed as a Conference member in the proceedings of 1907) "I have been trying to delve into the secrets and mysteries of Reform Judaism as understood by the Conference, but have been unable to fathom them so far, he went on sarcastically. "I am astounded that the president of the Hebrew Union College should make the statement that the Bible is not the Word of God.... We have been told that the Talmud is not and the Midrash is not." What is authoritative, he inquired. He received no reply beyond Philipson's adroit explanation that Kohler intended to convey by his remark that "not only the Bible but everything that has been brought forth by the spirit of Jewish tradition is our torch." To this Kohler assented. (193)

Toward a Systematic Theology

The presidential address of 1904 made no mention of needs but individual speakers called for a discussion of

creeds or protested the attempt to frame dogmas by "an accidental majority" of a conference or synod of any type. The danger of schism in Israel because of a creed was mentioned once more, and those inclined to dogmas were advised to formulate and publish them without insisting on their acceptance by others. (194)

Meanwhile, the Conference relied on the Union Prayer Book when the occasion for acquainting people with the tenets of Judaism arose. (195)

The following year Kehler, as chairman of a special committee on Professor Margolis' paper on Jewish Theology, read a report praising and thanking Margolis for his research but advising against formulating a creed for Reform alone, (as Margolis had proposed) lest it prove schismatic and because it would be contrary to the spirit and tradition of Judaism. Instead, the committee suggested, let a committee be appointed to advise the conference on the feasibility, of presenting a systematic exposition of the Jewish articles of faith "from a historical and dogmatic point of view" to the English speaking world.

Only for the sake of "our spiritual independence" from Orthodoxy would an occasional statement of Reform principles, like the Pittsburgh Platform, be justified. We are not "Reform Jews" but "Jews"; our allegiance is to Judaism. (196)

Traditionalism seems "to be in the ascendancy at present", the report said, and we are Reformers inasmuch as we oppose stagnation and recognize differences in

belief and practice. But we know of only one Torah, one Israel, one God. Hence the attempt should be made to formulate not Reform Judaism but Judaism. The attempts in English by Schechter, Montefiore, M. Joseph, and in German by Gudemann and Baeck are not equal in power and thoroughness to comparable Christian efforts. A committee should be appointed to correspond with other organizations with the same object. (197)

Margolis objected that a creed for Reform would not be schismatic except to the extent that Jewry was already divided. To us, he told the Conference, Jewry is a church, the dispersion is final, and we would coordinate ourselves not with "nations" but with the Christian church or any other body of religious interests, with them to work for the betterment of men. The synagogue, he continues, in order to compete with and be understood by the church, must make her position known. Against Margolis, several of Kohler's committee members made known their approval of Kohler's criticisms and added some of their own. (198)

In the end, Kohler's motion was passed and Margolis' bypassed. (199) In the proceedings of the next two years there is mentioned a committee on The Elaboration of a Systematic Jewish Theology, but no report was ready either year and the committee was continued.

The first report, given in 1908 by chairman S. Schulman, failed to mention any attempt at including other groups in the venture. It began by telling of the frequent calls for a creed in the past years to end the "anarchistic

individualism " rampant in Reform Judaism. This anarchy, Schulman said, was exaggerated; unanimity actually existed on fundamentals, as was shown by the sermons and practices of Reform congregations. Manufactured creeds are contrary to Judaism's genius, he continued, theological authority, having, in the past, derived from the promulgator's learning and character. Nevertheless, clear thinking and an effective presentation of Judaism would be aided by the Conference's publishing a volume of essays on the essential ideas of Judaism. This existing committee would designate the writers - preferably Conference members but not necessarily, it being understood that " the authority of the essays would depend entirely upon the writers." Themes were suggested and it was noted, that, ideally, one man should write the whole of such a work. When such a man appears, his views will compel assent by their own authority ! Meantime, the committee moves this plan, enabling the conference to contribute to the unification of Jewish thought without involving ^{commitment to} either a creed or a systematic theology. (200)

One committee member, Dr. Friedländer, was against this report and motion because (1) it did not fulfill the conference's original intention, viz., to elaborate a systematic theology [Cf. close of Kehler's paper, Yearbook vol. XV, pp 83-110] ; (2) Using several essayists would result in inconsistency and incoherence. (201)

The discussion which ensued revealed that Kehler was himself preparing a book on Jewish theology. He, too,

objected to the report because (1) the essays would be mere " dissertations " instead of " solemn and authoritative " presentations of Judaism, and (2) multiple authorship cannot result in a unified theology. (202)

Other speakers approved the report, noting with satisfaction or regret that the original idea of an official creed had been abandoned. The discussion then turned to the problem of approving the essays. Should this be the responsibility of the committee or of the whole conference? Enelow apparently considered even this essay-Project an attempt at a creed and argued for keeping the approving power in the hands of the Conference. Ettleson felt contrariwise, that the essays would avoid all the difficulties of a creed " while giving us all the moral support " of a creed; we are not trying to sneak in a creed or put the " stamp of the Conference " on these essays, so let the committee decide. Similar opinions were expressed on both sides and one speaker changed his mind, saying that two days before he " pleaded " for the Conference's limiting individualism and sending forth " something without the perpetual warning that this was simply an individual expression." But now, he continued, I warn the Conference against issuing these essays without such a warning. Finally, the motion was passed by a vote of 25 - 15 . (203)

The following year the committee could report only " progress ", the work having been delayed, Schülman explained, by the departure of some of the committee members from membership in the Conference. (204)

Again, as in the previous period, practical considerations exerted more force than ideological needs. In 1966 a committee recommended that the conference issue a series of popular tracts and listed, among the suggested subjects, Theology. The question was immediately raised; would anything authority be implied? After discussion the entire matter was postponed to ^{falling} next year. (204 a) The following year it was passed after a discussion that either forgot or ignored the original difficulty and was occupied primarily with the question of finances. Thus the conference agreed to publish a tract on theology. (205) Consequently "What Do Jews Believe" by H.G. Enelow was published and prefaced by the warning that "although published...by the Conference, these publications are not to be regarded as official pronouncements. The writer is alone responsible for the views presented." This, despite the Tract Committee's description of Enelow's essays as "a clear and excellent presentation of the essentials of Judaism." (206) Shk

In the heated ensuing discussion, the problem of authority versus freedom was solved finally by a peculiar decision to eliminate the objectionable preface but to consider all tracts as representing only their authors' opinions! (207) Shk

A similar practical problem and solution occurred with regard to the Ministers Handbook. The committee responsible for writing one reported in 1966 that it had "taken the liberty of adding...Kohler and Deutsch to the committee to formulate a number of Halakot... (to)

serve as a guidance for Reform Rabbis." Despite assurances that no constraint was intended, the halakot were branded, in the discussion, " a new Shulchan Aruch ", and rabbis requiring " guidance " were advised to write private letters to men of " larger experience. " Even the suggestion that a book of " advice " be published by the conference was attacked by Philipson and Morgens-tern, who warned that the taint of " authority " would cling to it. Perhaps the private letters of advice might be published as a book of responsa; but no more than that. It was voted to exclude from the committee's report all reference to halakot. (208)

The next convention's presidential address urged the creation of a committee on Responsa to publish in each year's proceedings their answers to ritual questions put to them. The convention, in discussion, decided that the responsa should not be discussed on the floor before publication because this would imply that they had the authority of the Conference behind them ! It was adopted that the executive committee alone would pass on which responsa would appear in the Yearbooks, and it was clearly stated that the responsa were " individual opinions. " (209)

The 1910 report of the committee on the Minister's Handbook suggested forms for various rituals including a Confirmation Service. It recommended a Declaration of Jewish Faith, in creedal form, defining God, the nature and end of man, Israel, body and soul, and included theodicy, revelation and Messianic doctrines. Philipson inquired

during the discussion, are the children to "vow or swear to something?" We have no right to demand intellectual belief, another added, only in the realm of right and wrong can we make demands. Children should make a positive affirmation, Schulman replied, saying "I believe and I accept for myself the religion of the fathers." Intellectual belief may change, he agreed, but we should lay deep foundations so that "the storms shall not touch them." The committee's suggestion was approved by the conference and it found itself again in the inconsistent position Wise deprecated so many years before; it had an officially approved confirmation catechism but no Conference — approved creed. (21e)

Two decades of committees and discussion had as its one concrete result the official rejection, by a narrow vote, of the authority of post-Biblical Jewish literature.

NOTES

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(7)	1894	69-74	Wise
(8)	1890	7-8	
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(14)	1892	101-6	
(15)	1892	101-6	
(16)	1890	17-18	Wise
(17)	1891	5	Schoenfarber
(18)	1892	14-21	Moses
(19)	1893	27-29	Wise
(20)	1890	17	Wise
	1894	121-5	Landsberg
(21)	1892	4	Wise
(22)	1892	14-21	
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(24)	1890	18-19	Wise
(25)	1891	52-5	Philipson
(26)	1890	17-18	Wise
(27)	1892	106-8	Kohler
(28)	1889	3	
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(43)	KK. 1894	132, 138-6, 141-5	Hirsch
(44)	1895	90-1, 104-5	
(45)	1895	138-9	
(46)	1896	7	Hedt
(47)	1898	11-12	
(48)	1901	25-7	Lieberman
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(52)	1900	104-132	Enclow
(53)	1896	26-28	Hirsch
(54)	1896	26-28	Aaron
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(82)	1901	114	
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(84)	1902	17, 92	
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(110)	<i>see page 14.</i>		
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