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## List of Abbreviations

ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AIPAC	American Israeli Public Affairs Committee
AJC	American Jewish Committee
AJCongress	American Jewish Congress
AJS	Association for Jewish Studies
CCAR	Central Conference of American Rabbis
CJF	Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds
CLAL	National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership
HIAS	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
HUC	Hebrew Union College
HUC-JIR	Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion
JCC	Jewish Community Center
JDL	Jewish Defense League
JOFA	Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance
JTS	Jewish Theological Seminary
JWB	Jewish Welfare Board
NCCJ	National Council of Christians and Jews
NJPS	National Jewish Population Survey
OU	Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America
RA	Rabbinical Assembly
RCA	Rabbinical Council of America
UAHC	Union of American Hebrew Congregations
UJA	United Jewish Appeal
UOR	Union of Orthodox Rabbis
URJ	Union for Reform Judaism
WCC	World Council of Churches
WPR	World Parliament of Religions
WZO	World Zionist Organization
YKUF	Yiddisher Kultur Farband
YU	Yeshiva University

### 3 Trends in American Judaism from 1945 to the present

DANA EVAN KAPLAN

When the Second World War ended, the American Jewish community became aware that it had unprecedented responsibilities as the largest and most important Jewish community in the world. The Holocaust had not yet become a public concern, but it nevertheless had a sobering effect on American Jewry, who played an important role in assisting Holocaust survivors in Europe. During this time, American Jews provided economic as well as political support for the establishment of a Jewish state. Nevertheless, many American Jews understood that they needed to retain a religious as well as an ethnic identity. Although there was a renewed consciousness of their obligations, only a minority of American Jews had a clear conception of what religious beliefs they adhered to or had a consistent approach to ritual practice. Arthur A. Goren contends, "American Jews intuitively sensed that the functional consensus based on supporting Israel and defending a liberal America was not sufficient. What was needed was a doctrinal and ideological core that, while identifying the group, would also justify the operative elements of the consensus."<sup>1</sup> That doctrinal core would be supplied by the preservation and evolution of the Jewish religion in America.<sup>2</sup>

#### INCREASING SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

In 1945, the United States was, in Will Herberg's words, a "three-religion country" consisting of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews. Religion rather than ethnicity was the primary distinction between Americans. "The newcomer is expected to change many things about him as he becomes an American – nationality, language, culture. One thing, however, he is not expected to change – and that is his religion. And so it is religion that . . . has become the differentiating element and the context of self-identification and social location."<sup>3</sup> Protestants, Catholics, and Jews all adhered to the "American way of life," which held to the values of political democracy, economic free enterprise, and social egalitarianism. These three religious groups all believed in and worked toward promoting the American way of life. Jews in particular,

embraced the post-World War II emphasis on goodwill, brotherhood, pluralism, and tolerance. What could be interpreted as a heretical indifference to the core beliefs of one's religion was actually a pluralistic affirmation of the common "Judeo-Christian heritage."

During the Eisenhower years, the American civil religion endorsed religious identification as an element of good citizenship. Thus, Americans stood for democracy against the state-sponsored atheism that existed in the totalitarian communism of the Soviet Union. This atheism was one of the many evils that had to be refuted, and thus it reinforced the importance of American religiosity. President Dwight Eisenhower emphasized that "our government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith – and I don't care what it is." Religion was a "good thing" for the individual American, the family, the local community, and the country as a whole. And yet the decade was, in Robert S. Ellwood's words, "full of spiritual strife."<sup>4</sup> On a daily basis, the adaptation to new lifestyles in new neighborhoods was stressful for many American families. On a much grander scale, the threat of nuclear annihilation was troubling to Americans. People of faith needed to balance freedom with conformity in an effort to redefine their role in American society. Many rabbis, such as Reform Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, argued that Judaism could help Americans understand how to cope with this dilemma. In his 1946 bestseller, *Peace of Mind*, Liebman suggested that religion could provide the tranquility to restore health, security, and prosperity for Americans still recovering from the atrocities of World War II and only beginning to adjust to the realities of the Cold War.

Even following the Allied victory over the Germans during World War II, American Jews still perceived the world to be a hostile and frightening place for them. Although the Holocaust was not discussed very often in the immediate postwar years, all Americans knew of Hitler's murder of 6 million Jews; this shocking crime made any public expression of anti-Semitism disreputable. Even as they reveled in the accomplishments of many of their coreligionists, American Jews remained suspicious, worrying about what their neighbors thought of them – and justifiably so. Many corporations had a "No Jews" policy firmly in place, and even many "Jewish fields" tried to ensure that Jews hired would not carry identifiably ethnic names. American Jews therefore placed much of their energies into the fight against anti-Semitism both domestically and worldwide.

As it became more evident that it was no longer fashionable to overtly express anti-Semitic views, American Jews began to feel an unprecedented sense of security, self-confidence, and well-being. Nevertheless, in 1949, Eli Ginzberg forewarned that the fight against anti-Semitism could not by

itself create a strong American Jewish identity, nor could it be the basis for building a vibrant Jewish community. "Today at least among large numbers of American Jews, the 'defense activities' have usurped a position of priority. This was more or less inevitable since many of these Jews have lost all interest in positive Jewish values; their entire adjustment is externally oriented."<sup>5</sup> Although many American Jews felt the need to affirm their Jewishness in public, this obscured the fact that their inner religious life was shallow. Thus, in the battle to protect their Jewish ethnicity, many Jews lost sight of what the Jewish religion truly meant.

#### AMERICAN JUDAISM ON THE SUBURBAN FRONTIER

Beginning in the mid-1940s, Americans of all faiths began seeking out a more independent existence away from the inherent pressures of city life, and they started establishing new communities in the suburbs. American Jews followed this trend, joining the exodus to suburbia and further accelerating the assimilatory process. Many Jews were exposed to Christianity, the dominant religion in America, for the first time. Considerable numbers were influenced by the allure of the commercial aspect, and some even accepted secularized Christian symbols, holidays, and ideas. The exposure to Christianity had tremendous implications for how Jews saw themselves and their religion. This resulted in creating a new form of Jewish identity that emphasized to them what they were not – Christians. While many American Jews had taken being Jewish for granted, they nevertheless struggled to find new ways to express their Jewish identities in the suburbs, which lacked the intense ethnic feel of the urban Jewish neighborhoods. The cutting of ties resulting from the move out of the urban neighborhoods, such as The Lower East Side in New York, led to the development of new paradigms in their religious and cultural life.

The newly suburban Jewish families needed houses of worship where they could meet people of a similar background. As a result, the 1950s and 1960s saw a massive building boom of synagogues, as it appeared that the American Jewish community had an "edifice complex." These suburban temples, many designed by architect Percival Goodman, featured an elevated Bimah (pulpit) that separated the rabbi and cantor from the congregants. The architectural plans provided plenty of space to expand for the High Holy Days by separating the social hall from the sanctuary with a removable partition. Increasing numbers of American Jews were joining these new synagogues. Whereas in 1930 only about 20 percent of the American Jewish population belonged to a synagogue, by 1960 this number had risen to

almost 60 percent – a threefold increase in only thirty years. Scholars have cautioned that this increase did not mean that American Jews were becoming more devout. Herberg wrote in his classic work *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* that the suburban Jewish synagogue stood for “religiousness without religion.” Rather, it was “a way of sociability or ‘belonging’ rather than a way of orienting life to God.” Religious leaders tried to integrate their theological identities with the social and communal needs of their congregants. As believers in ethical monotheism and prophetic Judaism, Reform rabbis saw political activism as one of their functions. Orthodox rabbis saw themselves as teaching the practical implications of their belief in Torah Le-Moshe Mi-Sinai, the revelation from God to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Conservative rabbis suffered the most severe “confusion of roles,” unable to successfully combine their self-image as Talmudic scholars with the communal expectation of them as therapeutic providers.<sup>6</sup> Most congregants participated in Jewish rituals on specific holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Hannukah, and Passover) and at life-cycle events (brises, baby namings, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and funerals). Despite their lack of piety, suburban Jews felt compelled to participate in the religious affiliation that was seen as a cornerstone of American citizenship.

Societal attitudes were evolving quickly, and the religious denominations struggled to respond with innovations that would attract congregants to attend synagogue services. With the exception of the High Holy Days, synagogue attendance was typically poor and it was hoped that religious change might inspire new devotion. Beginning in 1945, each of the movements produced new prayer books. With the exception of the Orthodox, they all introduced new liturgy that they felt reflected the current state of belief. Nevertheless, many congregants found the aesthetic dimension to be more important than the theological expression. The non-Orthodox movements began to make ritual changes, such as giving women greater roles in synagogue governance and ritual. The Reform movement experimented with traditional rituals that had been jettisoned in earlier decades and also pioneered innovative services that stressed creativity and originality. In a dramatic departure from the traditional interpretation of *Halacha* (Jewish law), the Conservative movement began allowing worshippers to drive to and from synagogue on Shabbat.

Conservative Judaism, which was “dedicated to the conservation and development of traditional Judaism in the modern spirit,”<sup>7</sup> dominated the American Jewish religious landscape during this period. While many American Jews fondly remembered attending small Orthodox synagogues in the urban ghetto, they considered the movement and its emphasis on the

observance of Halacha too confining, as they yearned to be Americans in every sense of the word. However, many of these “fallen Orthodox” suburbanites felt uncomfortable in Reform temples, which they found to be “churchlike.” They preferred the traditional prayers of the Conservative synagogue and its respect for Jewish ritual practice. Congregations nevertheless had difficulty generating religious commitment. As Rabbi Morris Adler told a United Synagogue Convention in 1948, “Multitudes of our people are untouched, uninformed, uncovenanted. They have not enough Judaism to live it, nor enough interest to reject it. They go on in routine indifference.”<sup>8</sup> The suburban synagogues began organizing formal and informal educational programs. Family services proved very popular, as they attracted those eager to find constructive activities for their growing children. Because many parents became enthused when their children became involved, religious life became very child-centered, thus launching a short-lived trend that many leaders found disturbing. Still, the religious schools, which met on Sunday mornings and even on one or even two weekday afternoons, were unable to transmit much at all about Judaism, Hebrew, Jewish history, or Biblical studies to its young students. However, despite the many problems, some believed that the experience inculcated a pride in being Jewish and an understanding of the need to affiliate with the synagogue as an adult.

#### SHIFT FROM UNIVERSALISM TO PARTICULARISM

In the 1960s, there was a palpable diminution of interest in Jewish religious life, although the synagogue building boom continued. Many young people began joining the counterculture, listening to rock ‘n’ roll, imbibing drugs, and joining in “free love.” Hippies, flower children, runaways, cult followers, and groupies searched for their own identity and destiny. Full of youthful idealism, activists and protesters sought to overturn the status quo. The New Left developed out of heavily Jewish community action groups that had supported various liberal social and political causes. Many idealized Chinese and Cuban communism, just as many leftists of an earlier generation had romanticized the Bolsheviks from Soviet Russia. Rabbis did their best to try to reach out to alienated Jewish youths. Rabbi Joseph R. Narot of Temple Israel in Miami wrote a series of letters to the “NOW generation,” stating “I do not deplore much that you do and are. I applaud you. I approve of you . . . but also understand the context of concern for other things, people, places, and hopes into which your rights must be set and seen.”<sup>9</sup> Ellwood argues that both Jews and Protestants were rejecting the melting-pot leveling that had been promoted so heavily in the 1950s: “Protestant churches tended

to lose something of traditional ethnic and denominational identities, picturing themselves either as parts – ideally as servants – of a larger society, or as collections of spiritually questing individuals. Jews, on the other hand, came out of the Sixties often more ready to affirm an ethnic and cultic identity that had been there all along.”<sup>10</sup>

Both the Reform and the Conservative movements placed universalistic issues of ethical and moral concern high on their agendas. The laity as well as the rabbinate organized political action groups, established activist commissions, and worked closely with non-Jewish organizations for the benefit of the poor and the oppressed. American Jews responded with great enthusiasm to the civil rights movement, which formed in the mid-1950s under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr. Jews who had been raised equating Judaism with prophetic justice found King’s stress on passive resistance rather than violence to be compelling, and they felt an obligation to help fight for Negro rights. However, the commitment of the American Jewish community to helping African Americans achieve equality was eventually damaged by what many Jews perceived as overt black hostility. The black leaders of the younger generation, such as Reverend Jesse Jackson and Louis Farrakhan, were quoted as making antagonistic remarks about American Jews as well as the State of Israel. Nevertheless, many Jewish religious leaders felt that it was very important for Jews to remain involved in the struggle for civil rights. In their view, this struggle reached the heart of what America means as an idea and as an ideal. Jews felt compelled to fight to keep America as a land of opportunity for all people, regardless of the color of their skin or the background of their families. Nevertheless, a gap developed between many of the Jewish communal leaders, who on the whole remained very liberal, and the Jewish population overall, which was becoming more politically conservative.

Social justice and other activist involvement reached a zenith during the 1960s, when many Jews participated in the civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War effort, the counterculture, feminism, and other causes. Leading rabbis such as Abraham Joshua Heschel tried to link social justice causes with Judaism. The Jewish communal agenda slowly shifted focus from universalistic issues such as civil rights and the Vietnam War to particularistic issues that directly affected the Jewish people. Much of this was due to the new interest in the Holocaust that followed the Adolf Eichmann trial of 1961. In the years following the trial, numerous books were published on the Holocaust and its aftermath. Elie Wiesel wrote the international bestseller *Night*, one of a series of gripping novels based closely on his own experiences as a youth in Auschwitz. In 1967, journalist Arthur Morse published *While Six Million Died*, which criticized the American government’s failure

to attempt to save more European Jews. While Morse's primary concern was President Roosevelt's apparent apathy, he also raised the question of whether American Jews had done enough to save their brethren. Perhaps gripped with "survivor guilt," many American Jews resolved to work diligently on behalf of oppressed Jewries throughout the world. Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League (JDL), publicized a Jewish activist response to the Holocaust and the apathy that surrounded it – "Never again!" Although communal leaders worried about Kahane's extremism, he was an inspiration to many lower-middle-class urban youth. Eventually, mainstream Jewish groups adopted similar, if less militant, activist approaches.

In the spring of 1967, American Jews underwent a mixture of emotions, as they feared for the very survival of the State of Israel. Arab nations had threatened to obliterate Israel and drive the Jews into the sea. Heschel recalls the sentiments that many had at that time: "Terror and dread fell upon Jews everywhere. Will God permit our people to perish? Will there be another Auschwitz, another Dachau, another Treblinka?... In the midst of that thick darkness there is one gleam of light: the return of our people to Zion."<sup>11</sup> Arthur Hertzberg commented in August of that year that "the mood of the American Jewish community underwent an abrupt, radical, and possibly permanent change [following the war]... the immediate reaction of American Jewry to the crisis [preceding Israel's preemptive strike] was far more intense and widespread than anyone could have foreseen."<sup>12</sup> In the face of the Israeli victory, American Jews felt an unprecedented pride. The State of Israel had redeemed them from being perpetual victims of persecution and destruction. Support for Israel now became a central pillar of the American Jewish civil religion. Jack Wertheimer explains: "Whereas American Jews had demonstrated sympathy in the past, Israel now was incorporated into the very structure of American Jewish identity."<sup>13</sup>

In the aftermath of the Israeli victory in 1967, many began to see the Holocaust as a catastrophic event that led up to miraculous victories. The Israeli victories in the Six Day War helped American Jews to put the Holocaust in a religious context. The Holocaust on its own was such a horrible event that it seemed impossible to give it religious meaning. Taking a radical view, Jacob Neusner argues that "the extermination of European Jewry could become the Holocaust only on 9 June when, in the aftermath of a remarkable victory, the State of Israel celebrated the return of the people of Israel to the ancient wall of the Temple of Jerusalem." He believes that the Six Day War transformed the political and military events into a sacred story with not only tragedy but also a miraculous conclusion, endowing a symbol with a "single, ineluctable meaning."<sup>14</sup> This "Judaism of Holocaust and Redemption" provided American Jews with a compelling myth.

## NEW APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

A set of values and beliefs crystallized during the 1960s that Jonathan Woocher calls “civil Judaism” or “Jewish civil religion.” Woocher argues that the core of this civil Judaism was a commitment to Jewish group survival as a sacred value. By the 1970s, though, many American Jews were finding this approach to be insufficient to keep them closely connected to the tribe. The majority, who Samuel Heilman refers to as “Jewish-Americans,” made their Jewish involvement subordinate to their American identities. Heilman explains that their Jewish attachment was similar to that of other hyphenated Americans who also absorbed American values and cultural patterns. They had adapted themselves to the American way of life and observed only those rituals that would not compromise their personal autonomy.

Charles S. Liebman similarly argues that the “ambivalent American Jew” was torn between “integration and acceptance into American society” and “Jewish group survival.”<sup>15</sup> Jews now felt they were able to integrate fully into American society, where they could work in most professions and participate in secular extracurricular activities. There was so little hostility from the outside that it now became very easy to break all connections with the Jewish community without experiencing any adverse repercussions. Many American Jews simply drifted off, needing Judaism neither for a social network nor for existential meaning. In an increasingly postmodern world, commitment to Judaism became a matter of personal faith rather than a question of fate.

A minority of American Jews was still deeply committed to perpetuating Jewishness not only as an ethnicity but also as a compelling religion. While not necessarily Orthodox, these Jews were more than likely to be highly observant and participate in Jewish activities on a weekly basis. Many attended synagogue regularly, studied in adult education classes one or more nights a week, and sent their children to Jewish day schools. Heilman writes that “one either took Jewish life and Judaism more seriously and actively engaged it” or “one let meaningless rituals and old traditions fade.”<sup>16</sup> The gap between those who cared and those who did not grew. For those who chose to embrace Judaism, the paths leading toward religious practice were many and diverse.

One of the most innovative Jewish religious groups was the Havurah movement, which consisted of small, spiritually oriented communities that integrated joyous musical expression, creative religious readings, art and dance, and even left wing politics into their Judaism. Finding the mainstream congregations spiritually passive and overly materialistic, they searched for an opportunity to mold their own religiosity based on their emotional

needs, personal experiences, and life expectations. Although men initially dominated the Havurah movement, the rising spirit of social equality soon had an impact. In fact, it has been an important source of inspiration for women. Judith Plaskow explains that, "Many women, myself included, had our first experiences of egalitarianism in the context of Havurot."<sup>17</sup>

For those looking for "cutting edge" Judaism, the Jewish Renewal movement provided a congenial setting for expressing heartfelt spirituality through innovative modern approaches such as folk crafts, music, and dance. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi started his career as an emissary for the Lubavitch before becoming the spiritual elder of the Jewish Renewal movement. He favors what he calls "Davenology," the art of enhancing Jewish worship through meditative practices and mysticism taken from Hassidism and even other religious traditions. Former 1960s activist Arthur Waskow gave the Jewish Renewal movement its name in a 1978 article in his journal *New Menorah*. Waskow now directs ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, which coordinates religious and organizational activities. The movement is characterized by nonconformity and creativity, and it attracts many "searchers" who are looking to find a spiritual path that they can claim as their own. Michael Strassfeld's *The First Jewish Catalogue* has become a Jewish Renewal "Bible" for the millions who have read it since its publication in 1974.<sup>18</sup> *The First Jewish Catalogue* was subtitled a *Do-It-Yourself Kit*, and the early Havurah movement emphasized that, as Strassfeld himself put it, "We don't need rabbis, we should just do it ourselves and rabbis get in the way."<sup>19,20</sup>

However, many young Jews were indeed looking for rabbinic authority. The followers of *Ba'alei Teshuvah* (singular: *Baal Teshuvah*), literally meaning "those who repent," embraced Orthodox Judaism in their search for religious meaning. These young Jews had not been raised in observant homes but sought the type of structure that the rigorous Halachic system provided. There seemed to be an explosion in the number of young American Jews proudly wearing their yarmulkes (head coverings) and tzitzith (ritual fringes). This phenomenon went against what most observers expected would be the momentum toward greater acculturation and higher levels of assimilation. *Rolling Stone* journalist Ellen Willis wrote a personal account about her brother Chaim, a Baal Teshuvah, who studied at Aish HaTorah Yeshiva and became an Orthodox rabbi. The article became a recruiting tool for the many Ba'alei Teshuvah yeshivas in Jerusalem and their associated institutions worldwide. Despite the great interest in this movement, the numbers involved were relatively small and a high percentage of Ba'alei Teshuvah reverted to their original levels of observance within a few years. Demographer Barry Kosmin has recently argued "the much heralded return to Judaism

in the 1980s and growth of Orthodoxy turned out to be of little statistical significance."<sup>21</sup> Even so, the Ba'alei Teshuvah have had an enormous influence on Orthodoxy, generating interest among many Jews who have reembraced the religious tradition of their ancestors.

While many saw Judaism as a way to express Jewish particularity, others hoped that it could answer the big questions about life. Increasing numbers of Jewish thinkers began to speak and write, not only for committed Jews, but also for the masses. In 1981, Conservative Rabbi Harold S. Kushner published *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* to help him deal with the death of his young son.<sup>22</sup> Kushner stressed that he did not write an abstract book about God and theology, but rather a very personal book that helped him deal with the "deep, aching sense of unfairness. . . . If God existed. . . . how could He do this to me?"<sup>23</sup> This question haunted Kushner and compelled him to document the important lessons he had learned through his years of emotional turmoil. He wanted to encourage people to maintain their belief in God regardless of adverse situations. Even though many theologians were less than impressed with Kushner's spiritual revelations, millions of Americans found comfort in his words.<sup>24</sup>

Another group of Jews found Judaism unfulfilling and joined new religious movements, or cults. Many of these cult members were from Jewish families, where they had likely received little religious direction. Even if some members had attended religious school, they had learned only what they did *not* want to find in religion. The result was that they looked elsewhere for authentic spirituality. New religious movements such as the Unification Church, the Church of Scientology, the Family, and the Church Universal and Triumphant all had disproportionate numbers of Jewish members. Eastern approaches to spirituality such as Transcendental Meditation (TM) and American Buddhism were also very popular.

American Judaism is presently characterized by eclecticism. Many Americans are following the approach of Sheila Larson, a woman interviewed in Robert Bellah's *Habits of the Heart*. "I believe in God. I am not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. [Yet] my faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice."<sup>25</sup> Many American Jews share Sheila's perspective. Whereas once an individual had to believe in order to belong, today Americans are freer than ever before to express their religious individualism. Religion is personalized, privatized, and voluntarized. Many different types of Jews have come forward with many different types of Judaism. Some stress the power of spiritual healing, others scrupulously observe the Mitzvot, while still others organize Jewish men's groups.<sup>26</sup> In an effort to feel spiritual, Americans attempt to incorporate a variety of approaches to achieve this goal.

## INTRARELIGIOUS TENSIONS

Orthodoxy had been strengthened by the arrival, after World War II, of almost 150,000 immigrants between 1944 and 1952. Many of them were Holocaust survivors from Eastern Europe and came to America to rebuild their religious life. Using the Old World as their model, these immigrants contributed to the growth and development of Orthodox communities throughout the United States. Almost 100,000 additional Jews hailing from diverse locations such as Hungary, Egypt, Cuba, Iran, and Israel settled in the United States between 1952 and 1965. Many joined Orthodox congregations and established synagogues designed to cater specifically to their national group, although the main factor contributing to the “drift to the right” was the influx of Ultra-Orthodox Holocaust survivors who settled in urban neighborhoods in large cities such as New York and Chicago. Eventually some Haredi, Ultra-Orthodox groups, moved to the suburbs, always as a community.

Several surviving Hasidic leaders came to America, including Rabbi Joel Teitelbaum, the Satmar Rebbe. Many Satmar settled in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, while many Lubavitch, another Hasidic sect who followed Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, moved to Crown Heights. Other Ultra-Orthodox groups were Mitnagdim, fervent opponents of the Hasidim, who established yeshivot in Brooklyn. One of their highest priorities was the establishment of appropriate school facilities for their many children. Whereas before World War II there were less than 20 Jewish day schools, by 1963 there were 257 Orthodox day schools in the United States, of which about half instructed in Yiddish. This growth in Orthodox day schools contributed to the intensification of Orthodox Jewish life in the United States.

Lawrence Grossman argues that, beginning in the 1950s, “religious polarization became a serious concern of American Jewry.”<sup>27</sup> The Orthodox in the United States became stronger and more extreme while the rest of American Jewry began intermarrying at very high rates and made religious decisions that affected the Jewish status of their offspring. Orthodox partisans saw this as violating an unspoken arrangement in which they would tolerate non-Orthodox violations of the Halacha and their belief in heterodox theology while the non-Orthodox would abstain from any decision that would affect personal status issues. The rate of intermarriage had begun to worry Jewish communal leaders, and they debated how best to respond. While the Orthodox refused to soften their opposition, most other Jews shifted their emphasis from prevention to outreach. Rejection slowly turned to acquiescence and then later acceptance. The Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) of the Reform movement reaffirmed the position that “mixed marriage is contrary to the Jewish tradition and should be discouraged.” They

declared their “opposition to participation by its members in any ceremony which solemnizes a mixed marriage.” However, given that all CCAR resolutions were nonbinding, rabbis were free to ignore this declaration. As early as 1973, Reform Rabbi Irwin Fishbein urged his colleagues to agree to officiate at intermarriages in order “not to slam a door that might be only slightly ajar.” Indeed, the increasing social acceptance of intermarriage led many Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis to officiate at such ceremonies, even though the Orthodox were staunchly opposed. The Conservative rabbinical group (the Rabbinical Assembly) took a position similar to that of the Orthodox, refusing to allow its rabbis to officiate at intermarriages. However, many Conservative congregants held similar views as Reform Jews and agitated for their rabbis to help them in their moment of need, requesting that their rabbi officiate at such ceremonies.

By the beginning of the 1980s, relations between the Jewish denominations were deteriorating. This was not due to any one factor, but the Patrilineal Descent Resolution of 1983 was a crucial turning point. While patrilineality had been accepted informally in most Reform congregations for decades, Rabbi Alexander Schindler urged the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) to formally adopt new criteria for establishing Jewish identity. The resolution, passed by CCAR, affirmed that a child born of a Jewish father and a gentile mother could be considered Jewish if he or she was raised in the Jewish religion. Orthodox leaders felt that this decision made it impossible to cooperate with the Reform movement on a wide range of issues, because they felt that the Reform movement had taken the first steps toward creating two Jewish peoples – accepting as Jewish those individuals who were not Halachically Jewish.

As a result of the perceived interdenominational “polarization,” some Jewish leaders made attempts to encourage interdenominational dialogue, while others unequivocally rejected the notion. In 1986, the annual General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds (CJF) chose the theme *Klal Yisrael* (Jewish Unity). Rabbi Harold Schulweis of Encino, California, spoke heavy-heartedly about what he saw as the coming cataclysm between the Jewish religious streams. “The division is no longer between ‘them’ and ‘us,’ but within us.” By March 1987, the situation had become so grim that the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL) sponsored a conference, Will There be One Jewish People by the Year 2000? As a prerequisite for attending, the Orthodox insisted that speakers not appear on the same platform at the same time. Rabbi Norman Lamm, the President of Yeshiva University, spoke in favor of a joint Beit Din<sup>28</sup> to handle issues of personal identity, but his idea was rejected by most of the Orthodox rabbinical establishment, rendering that the last time he would

attempt to suggest such a cooperative venture. The rift deepened further in June 1987, when Rabbi Louis Bernstein announced that the Orthodox were withdrawing from the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) Commission on Jewish Chaplaincy because Reform Rabbi Joseph Glaser had certified a female rabbi without consulting them. Knowing that the Orthodox would never agree to certify any woman as a chaplain, Glaser explained that he went ahead on his own, feeling it was a matter of conscience to allow her to serve. Thus, in August 1987, a new system was put into place in which each movement's rabbinic organization would endorse its own candidate without the need for approval from the other denominations.

Interdenominational dialogue had always relied on the mediation of the modern Orthodox. However by the late 1980s, modern Orthodoxy was in decline, as the passing of the modern Orthodox mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, weakened their stature in the world of Talmudic scholarship. The word *modern* became so stigmatized that many began to refer to themselves as centrist Orthodox while others preferred the term *Open Orthodoxy*. Any word was acceptable as long as it did not connote modernity. There was increasing pressure on modern Orthodox rabbis to withdraw from organizations and activities in which there was theological discussion and social interaction with non-Orthodox leaders. Modern Orthodox rabbis who served on interdenominational committees were urged to resign, and many local rabbinical associations lost most or all of their Orthodox members. The Synagogue Council of America, a national organization headquartered in New York, had to disband because of Orthodox withdrawal.

In 2001, Samuel G. Freedman published a best-selling work entitled *Jew vs. Jew* that seemed to capture the feeling that a "civil war" was "tearing apart" the American Jewish community: "It is tragic . . . that American Jews have battled so bitterly, so viciously, over the very meaning of being Jewish."<sup>29</sup> However, while Freedman speaks of a "civil war," the reality is that there has been a gradual process of separation since 1945 that may rather be leading to a "divorce" between the Orthodox and all other American Jews. Some believe that the Orthodox will dominate American Judaism in the coming decades. In *Jew vs. Jew*, Freedman argues that, "in the struggle for the soul of American Jewry, the Orthodox model has triumphed." Not all scholars agree. Jonathan D. Sarna points out that this triumphalism has been seen before. In the mid-1870s, the Reform movement believed it would become "the custom of [all] American Jews," while the Conservative movement appeared destined to dominate American Judaism during the era after World War II. Nevertheless, both movements fell far short of expectations. Sarna stops short of predicting that Orthodoxy will follow the same trajectory, but he points out that there are a number of serious vulnerabilities that indicate

that Orthodoxy's dramatic rise could be followed by an equally precipitous decline.<sup>30</sup>

#### THE SEARCH FOR ACCEPTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY JUDAISM

All of the American denominations faced increasing pressures to respond to the needs and wants of previously neglected groups, to include women, gays, and lesbians. The more liberal movements, namely Reform and Reconstructionists, granted full equality to women, gays, and lesbians with only a small struggle. In 1972, Sally J. Priesand was ordained as a rabbi at Hebrew Union College, thus paving the way in the more liberal movements. However, the Conservative movement had a much more protracted and bitter struggle over the women's rights' question as well as gay and lesbian rights. Indeed, when the Jewish Theological Seminary decided to admit women to the Conservative rabbinate, some right wing Conservatives left the movement in protest. Furthermore, even as Orthodoxy has faced persistent calls to allow women to take a larger role in religious life, it by definition refuses to countenance gay sexual behavior.

By the 1990s, women had achieved equal religious rights in most of the American Jewish religious denominations. Even some liberal modern Orthodox tried creative strategies for engaging women's spirituality without violating Halacha. Women's educational programs were established to allow women to study Talmud, and *minyanim* (prayer quorums) were set up in which women could read from the Torah. Despite the fact that the feminist Orthodox leaders ardently tried to ensure that they abided by all Halachic restrictions, many ultra-Orthodox and even a few centrist Orthodox rabbis condemned these innovations. Nevertheless, the changing status of women in American society has influenced even Haredi society, and male rabbinical leadership is taking women's perspectives into account.

Ultra-Orthodox women are now leading study sessions for other women and writing articles and books. Nevertheless, women must study for ordination privately, as the Orthodox remain opposed to women rabbis. In 1994, Rabbi Haviva Krasner-Davidson struggled with what she perceived to be the lack of equality in the Orthodox ritual system and eventually decided to accept upon herself the positive time-bound commandments such as wearing tzitzit, putting on tefillin, and praying three times a day. She applied for admission to Yeshiva University's rabbinical program, but she allegedly never received a response to her application. She later found a sympathetic Orthodox rabbi in Israel willing to train and ordain her. Few reputable Orthodox rabbis have recognized her as a colleague.

The Conservative movement similarly struggled with the women's issue, as they were in the middle religiously, caught in between following the Orthodox standards but wanting to advance with the changing times. In 1955, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards voted to allow women to recite the blessings proceeding and following the reading of the Torah.<sup>31</sup> In 1975, a resolution submitted to the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) Convention to admit women into the rabbinical school was tabled. Two years later, another resolution urging Jewish Theological Seminary chancellor Gerson D. Cohen to establish an interdisciplinary committee to study the possibility of ordaining women was tabled again. On October 24, 1983, Jewish Theological Seminary faculty and the RA finally agreed to admit women and thus passed the resolution that eventually allowed the first woman rabbi to be ordained in spring 1985.

Gays and lesbians were also demanding that their voices be heard so that they might enjoy their religious rights. In 1972, gay and lesbian Jews inspired by the Metropolitan Community Church founded a Jewish religious community in Los Angeles. In 1978, Rabbi Allen Bennett became the first openly gay rabbi, serving as the first rabbi of Sha'ar Zahav, a gay and lesbian outreach congregation founded in 1977 in San Francisco. Throughout the 1990s, the CCAR dealt with the issue of gay and lesbian rights. At their annual conference in 2000, they voted to accept a resolution urging rabbis to look favorably on same-sex commitment ceremonies. The Reconstructionist movement had already taken similar steps and the Conservative movement seems likely to follow suit. Rabbi Steven Greenberg has "come out" of the closet as the first Orthodox gay rabbi, even though most Orthodox leaders regard homosexual behavior and Orthodoxy as incompatible.

## CONCLUSION

American Jewish identity in the period after World War II is a complex one, with religious and ethnic elements intertwined. Nathan Glazer has argued "for the great majority of American Jews, Judaism means an *ethnic* commitment more than a transcendent faith."<sup>32</sup> Arthur Goren has explained that, despite the emphasis on Jewish ethnicity, religiosity has played an important role in how Jews identified themselves: "As individuals, Jews identified themselves as belonging to a religious community. As a group, they acted like an ethnic minority."<sup>33</sup> This ethnic identity derived in large part from the Eastern European Jewish background, and the cultural, religious reinforcement by a steady stream of immigrant waves. These immigrants enriched Jewish life and reinforced the ties that existed with the Old World. However, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, American Jewry can no

longer count on continued Jewish immigration from traditional societies to replenish their numbers and bring them back in touch with their roots. Rather, they are going to have to develop strategies to produce indigenous American Jewish experiences that can excite and enthuse the next generation and the one after that.

American Judaism in the twenty-first century has to find its place in “A New Religious America.” What was formerly seen as a Christian country has become one of the most religiously diverse nations in the world. Whereas the religious landscape of the 1950s that Will Herberg surveyed had three religions – Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism – contemporary America now has many other faiths, including Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Islam, and Hinduism. Diana L. Eck comments that “not only is America changing these religions, but these religions are also changing America.”<sup>34</sup> Judaism will have to take account of and respond to this new religious pluralism. How can Jews articulate the meaning of Judaism in a country that has opened up to so many new faiths? Judaism faces the challenge of reinterpreting what it means to be a religious minority that is composed primarily of adherents who are classified as part of the white majority. Can Judaism find a meaningful role to play in twenty-first-century American society?

American Jews have to answer this key question: Why would I want to forever maintain a distinct Jewish identity in an open, liberal society? Arthur Hertzberg argues that religious faith is the only answer. “After nearly four centuries, the momentum of Jewish experience in America is essentially spent. Ethnicity will no doubt last for several more generations, but it is well on the way to becoming memory. But a community cannot survive on what it remembers; it will persist only because of what it affirms and believes.”<sup>35</sup>

#### Notes

1. Arthur A. Goren, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.
2. I thank Lawrence Grossman, Charles S. Liebman (z”l), and Kayla Ship for critiquing this essay.
3. Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in Religious Sociology* (Garden City: Anchor/Doubleday, 1955), 23.
4. Robert Ellwood, *The Fifties Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).
5. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 331.
6. Daniel J. Elazar and Rela Mintz Geffen, *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 120–22.
7. Robert Gordis, *Understanding Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 1978), 216.

8. Morris Adler, "New Goals for Conservative Judaism – An Address [1948]," in *Tradition and Change: The Development of Conservative Judaism*, ed. Mordechai Waxman (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1958), 280.
9. Joseph R. Narot, *Letters to the NOW Generation* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations Press, 1969), 2, 72.
10. Robert S. Ellwood, *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 248.
11. Melvin Urofsky, *We Are One: American Jewry and Israel* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1978), 31.
12. Arthur Hertzberg, "Israel and American Jewry," *Commentary* 44, 2 (August 1967), 69–73.
13. Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1997), 30.
14. Jacob Neusner, *Death and Birth of Judaism: The Impact of Christianity, Secularism, and the Holocaust on Jewish Faith* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 279.
15. Charles S. Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion, and Family in American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1973), vii.
16. Samuel C. Heilman, *Portrait of American Jews: The Last Half of the 20th Century* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1995), 72.
17. Rodger Kamenetz, "Has the Jewish Renewal Movement Made It Into the Mainstream?" *Moment* (December 1994), 42.
18. Michael Strassfeld, Sharon Strassfeld, and Richard Siegal, *The First Jewish Catalogue: A Do-It-Yourself Kit* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1974).
19. Rodger Kamenetz, "Jewish Renewal Movement," 81.
20. Ironically, Strassfeld later became a rabbi and took on a congregation.
21. Barry Kosmin, "Politics of Blame Play into Jewish Population Study," *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California* (8 November 2002), 25A.
22. Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (London: Pan Books, 1982).
23. *Ibid.*, 10.
24. Abraham Cohen, "Theology and Theodicy: On Reading Harold Kushner," *Modern Judaism* 16, 3 (1996), 229–61.
25. Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individuality and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 4.
26. Julie Becker Grossman, "Heal! O Israel: A New Jewish Movement Discovers Spirituality Helps," *Moment* (December 1997), 62–64, 92–96.
27. Lawrence Grossman, "Jewish Communal Affairs," *American Jewish Yearbook* 88 (1988), 188.
28. A Beit Din is a rabbinical court consisting of three rabbis that is required or at least recommended to do conversions, divorces, and other technical Jewish legal processes.
29. Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 359.
30. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Future of American Orthodoxy," *Sh'ma* (February 2001). Available from <http://www.shma.com>.

31. Aaron H. Blumenthal, "An Aliyah for Women," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 19 (1955), 168–81.
32. Nathan Glazer, *American Judaism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), xii.
33. Arthur A. Goren, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 8 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 9.
34. Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 22.
35. Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 374.