

## Chapter 1

### *A History of Ambivalence*

Political philosophers and constitutional architects from earliest times have understood that institutions are products of their foundings, and that foundings continue to play a decisive role in the form and behavior of those institutions for generations thereafter. The origins and history of the Conservative Movement reflect its American and Jewish roots and the ambiguities with which it is constantly wrestling, which give it both its strength and its weaknesses.<sup>1</sup>

Conservative Judaism began as (1) a *faction*<sup>2</sup> within an undifferentiated traditional Judaism in the nineteenth century and moved to (2) a brief period when it was simultaneously a faction within an undifferentiated modernizing Judaism (within the Union of American Hebrew Congregations until the Pittsburgh Platform and the notorious *treifa* banquet). (3) It then became a movement designed to articulate a modern version of traditional Judaism without actually breaking with that segment of traditional Judaism to its right, which was on its way to becoming Orthodoxy in the United States. (4) At the beginning of the twentieth century, it achieved articulation as a separate movement within the four ells of *halakhic* Judaism but with a historical approach to understanding *halakhah* and an evolutionary approach to *halakhic* decision making. (5) After World War II, it became a separate *party* (see note 2) within the Jewish religious community in which the organizational

interests as a movement/party began to take precedence over earlier ideological positions.

Now Conservative Judaism is faced with the prospect of becoming a *camp* (see note 2) in which there are several parties or institutional frameworks, all coming out of a serious Conservative Jewish perspective and network.

### A RELUCTANT SEPARATION<sup>3</sup>

The coming of the modern epoch in the middle of the seventeenth century and especially its climax in the American and French Revolutions shattered the traditional Jewish communal structure of the autonomous *kehillah* (community) functioning as a state within a state to serve a nation in exile wherever Jews found themselves, with its own constitution and laws, administration and politics, and taxation and foreign relations. Modernity shattered that accepted arrangement, because it shattered the world that tolerated such autonomous communities in its midst. The Jews were first denied autonomy and then to a greater or lesser degree were offered citizenship in the polities in which they found themselves. That citizenship was contingent upon Jewish abjuration of communal autonomy and of its civil dimension and acceptance of unqualified membership in the polities in which they found themselves.

For some Jews, these new possibilities were so enticing that they forsook Judaism altogether, accepting nominal baptism as Christians in a world that they saw was becoming increasingly secular, *de facto* if not *de jure* in any case, in which they could be admitted as equal partners without any encumbrances from the past. For those Jews who wished to preserve their Jewish identity in the West, enhanced religious identity of one kind or another was the answer. Three kinds emerged: Reform Judaism elected the way of the Protestant West and tried to turn Judaism into a modern Protestant sect, entirely dropping its political and civil dimensions, rejecting the binding character of *halakhah*, and abjuring the restoration of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel at the end of days or the rebuilding of the Temple and reinstitution of sacrifices. The goal of the new Reform Movement was to transform its members into citizens of the Mosaic faith.

Orthodoxy was another response to modernity. It is a mistake to see Orthodoxy merely as a continuation of the traditional Jewish life of premodern times, since it was a deliberately developed ideology and

way of life designed to combat the perils of modernism as much as Reform was. It was based on two new movements of modernity, Hasidism, which developed in Galicia in the latter part of the eighteenth century, parallel to Methodism and other revivalist religious efforts in Europe, and the Lithuanian yeshiva movement, generated at approximately the same time, which emphasized a new learning elite as distinct from the Hassidic emphasis on popular religion.

After the end of the Napoleonic Wars, at the same time that Reform took institutional form, so did Orthodoxy in two manifestations: one, ultra-Orthodox, which took a firm position against any innovation and indeed sought to find ways to stiffen *halakhah* against change or even moderation, and two, modern Orthodoxy, which took a similarly strict stance on what the West considered religious matters but, like Reform, jettisoned the political dimension of Judaism.

Later in that generation a third wave began to emerge, what came to be called the "historical school," which tried to define a middle road. Judaism in full was to be preserved. *Halakhah* was to continue to be binding and all of the messianic hopes kept in place except perhaps the restoration of animal sacrifices, but these were deferred until an unknown future time.

The historical school in Judaism that developed in Europe early in the nineteenth century was an intellectual movement that fostered an evolutionary understanding of the development of Jewish laws and tradition.<sup>4</sup> In the United States, on the other hand, it became a dynamic religious movement, embracing hundreds of thousands of Jews. It is not unfair to claim Isaac Leeser, the first American Jewish religious leader of countrywide influence and a contemporary of the European founders of the historical school, as a precursor of Conservative Judaism. While he was the undisputed leader of traditional Judaism in the mid-nineteenth century United States, his many efforts at institution building had little success. Moreover, he remained within the undifferentiated traditional framework, rejecting the first Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which appeared on the scene during the peak years of his career.

By 1880, there were 200 synagogues in the United States, of which only twelve did not identify with the Reform Movement. Many of these traditional congregations, including Leeser's Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, were the old Sephardic ones dating from the colonial period, by this time led by rabbis born and trained in Western or Central Europe. Many of these leaders seriously considered the offer of the Reform Movement, to join in a common Union of American Hebrew

Congregations, however, in 1885, the Reform Movement adopted the Pittsburgh Platform in which its rabbis made a decisive break with *halakhah* and traditional Judaism. One year later Rabbis Sabato Morais, H. Pereira Mendes, and Alexander Kohut, joined by a number of prominent non-rabbinical leaders, founded the Jewish Theological Seminary. Its articles of incorporation specified that the Seminary would be dedicated to "the preservation in America of the knowledge of historical Judaism as ordained in the law of Moses, expounded by the prophets and sages of Israel in biblical and talmudic writings."

As Moshe Davis has shown, the first congregations that became the nucleus of the Conservative Movement and, for that matter, the Jewish Theological Seminary itself, were not consciously interested in developing a movement of their own separate from traditional Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, they were so committed to maintaining Jewish unity that they even went along with the experiment of Reform Judaism to make the Union of American Hebrew Congregations an umbrella organization for American Jewish congregations of all persuasions. Charles Liebman has argued that Davis is wrong about even identifying those early congregations as Conservative, given that they viewed themselves as, at most, a faction within a larger body of traditional Jewish congregations (Orthodoxy as a concept and a movement was essentially absent from the United States, since it was still in the process of being defined in Central Europe).<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, they can be considered as representing the beginnings of Conservative Judaism because of their deliberate commitment to the historical approach. The first founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary was a reflection of their ambivalence. It was designed to be a seminary to train traditional rabbis who were at home on the American scene and who did not move from that position until the World War I period.<sup>7</sup>

The experiment with a single umbrella synagogue movement failed. The last straw was the famous "*treifa* banquet" in Cincinnati in 1883, where the last attempt to unify all American Jewish congregations failed because the *center* served shell fish to the group, to the horror of the traditional rabbis present.<sup>8</sup> With the breakdown of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) effort, on the one hand, and the arrival of truly committed Orthodox Jews as the result of the mass migration of Jews from Eastern Europe, both occurring at the same time as the founding of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), these pioneering congregations, their rabbis, and nonrabbinical leaders were forced to identify themselves more clearly vis-à-vis both, and the Conservative faction emerged as a movement. They took this step

reluctantly. As recently as the 1950s, Louis Finkelstein, the then Chancellor of the JTS, was quoted as saying privately that, "The Conservative Movement is a gimmick to bring Jews back to authentic Judaism."<sup>9</sup>

That statement reflected an accurate view of what the Movement set out to be. It saw itself as totally and thoroughly *halakhic* in the traditional sense. It differed from the then-emergent Orthodoxy, in that it understood *halakhah* as the product of historic evolution and was willing to continue that evolution under conditions of modernity, which the Orthodox feared to do on the grounds that liberal changes by recognized *halakhic* authorities would only hasten the disintegration of the Jewish people.<sup>10</sup> This, indeed, became one of the keystones of the Movement, which will be discussed further.

While the founders of the Movement were principally from Western and Central Europe, and many of them were Sephardim at that, the Movement's success rested upon the fact that the mass immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe began only a few years before the founding of the Seminary. It was these Eastern European Jews who became the backbone of, and in short order captured the leadership of, the new Movement.

At first, the relative handful of traditional Jewish congregations in the United States embraced traditional Jews of all stripes. But hardly more than fifteen years after the founding of the Seminary, those Jews from Eastern Europe who remained Orthodox led a schism whereby the Association of Orthodox Synagogues, founded in 1898, repudiated the authority of the graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary. They took over and expanded a small *yeshiva* (institution of religious study), now the Rabbi Isaac Elhanan Theological Seminary, the nucleus of Yeshiva University.<sup>11</sup> The JTS was reorganized in 1902 at the initiative of the principal leaders of American Jewry of the time, none of them rabbis, and all, in fact, Reform Jews. They undertook that task because they saw the need for an American yet traditional rabbinical training school to assist in the Americanization of the Eastern European immigrants who would not be Reform and, indeed, who were not wanted by the fancier "uptown" Jews. Scholar-rabbi Solomon (Schneur Zalman) Schechter, the Romanian-born Cambridge lecturer who had uncovered the famous Cairo Geniza, was brought to the States in 1902 as the new head of the reorganized institution.<sup>12</sup> The actual leadership of the Seminary passed to Schechter and to Cyrus Adler, who held a doctorate in Semitics and was active in Congregation Mikveh Israel. Adler was a young member of the "Philadelphia Group," then leaders of American Jewry.<sup>13</sup>

With that act, the Conservative Movement can be said to have been born. Even so, it was not until 1913 that internal conflict over whether to fully organize a separate movement was resolved by the founding of the United Synagogue of America (now the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism), whose purpose was "the maintenance of Jewish tradition in its historical continuity." The ambivalences that accompanied its founding are reflected in the preamble to its constitution, written by Schechter himself. At that, the new United Synagogue (Schechter brought the name and concept of the United Synagogue with him from England) sought to leave the door open for a broad coalition of non-Reform congregations and was very ambiguous with regard to innovations such as mixed seating for men and women and the use of the organ in the synagogue service.

Schechter, who while broadly traditionalist and strongly committed to Jewish unity was willing to organize separate institutions and build a movement, died prematurely in 1915. He was succeeded by Adler, who had opposed him on the issue of separate institutionalization. Adler was acting president or president of the Seminary from 1915 until his death in 1940. Since he was not a rabbi, leadership in rabbinical matters passed to Professor Louis Ginzberg, one of the faculty members whom Schechter had persuaded to join the JTS faculty after he had come to the United States from his native Lithuania and who became perhaps the leading talmudic scholar in the America of his time.<sup>14</sup>

Adler's successor, Rabbi Louis Finkelstein, also of Litvak descent, continued in the Adlerian tradition and resisted efforts on the part of the majority of the Seminary graduates to more sharply differentiate Conservative Judaism from Orthodoxy. Finkelstein continued in office until 1972. The same year that he became president, Saul Lieberman joined the Jewish Theological Seminary faculty. Upon Ginzberg's death, Professor Lieberman succeeded him as the *Mara d'atra* (authoritative leader) of the Movement, with an even less liberal outlook than his predecessor.

It was not until the accession of Professor Gerson Cohen to the chancellorship in 1972 that the institution came under leadership clearly committed to articulating a separate Conservative approach to Judaism. Despite a severe illness that began early in his tenure, Cohen remained chancellor of the Seminary until 1986, when he was succeeded by Professor Ismar Schorsch. Both Cohen and Schorsch were professional historians. Thus with their accession to the chancellorship the leadership of the JTS passed from the hands of scholars of classical Jewish texts to scholars of how the Jews lived in the past; in essence, from

students of continuity to students of change. The results were almost immediately seen in the shift in the balance between continuity and change in the Conservative Movement, in essence, a move from the conservative camp, indicated by its original name, to the liberal side of the ledger. It might be said that until 1972 the movement looked over its shoulder to the right at the Orthodox, whereas after 1972, it looked over its shoulder to the left, to the Reform, even as it tried to stake out a position of its own vis-à-vis both.

In the meantime, the Movement proceeded to grow. Its first great burst of growth came in the 1920s, but an even greater burst came after World War II, with the 1950s being the golden age of Conservative Movement expansion. The Conservative Movement became the largest religious movement among American Jews at that time. As late as 1970, the Movement claimed some 350,000 family members. Using estimates derived from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey, 36 percent of Jews identified themselves as Conservative of whom approximately half were affiliated with a Conservative synagogue, giving Conservative Judaism 47 percent of the Jews formally affiliated with synagogues in the United States. In contrast, 38 percent identified themselves with Reform Judaism, but only 36 percent of all synagogue members were affiliated with Reform congregations. Orthodoxy, on the other hand, while having only 6 percent of the total who claim identification by movement, had nearly twice that percentage (11 percent) in their share of total synagogue members.

## THE MOVEMENT AS A PARTY

By that time, however, the Movement had long since become a party, what those who were delicate called a "branch" of Judaism and what those who were less delicate and more influenced by the American Protestant environment referred to as a "denomination." There developed a network of institutions, membership in which defined who was a Conservative Jew, and that dominated the development and choosing of leadership for the Movement. Inevitably, that institutional network took on a life of its own in which self-maintenance became an important concern, going beyond larger issues of ideology. In other words, in the normal way of the world, those involved in the Movement had a stake in keeping it and its various institutions and organizations alive and flourishing, even if it was necessary to ignore or downplay earlier ideological commitments to retain members and to

otherwise strengthen its various instrumentalities. Often the latter were sacrificed to institutional concerns, except where they were in the custody of senior professors at the Jewish Theological Seminary who did not share that institutional commitment yet, who, because of the nature of the Movement and its leadership (which will be discussed later), retained a dominant influence with its rabbinical leaders.

Accompanying this growth were greater efforts among the congregational rabbis to provide a separate definition of what constituted Conservative Judaism. As early as 1948, the Rabbinical Assembly (incorporated under that name in 1901 to embrace JTS alumni and others seeking Conservative pulpits) rejected any dominant Seminary influence on its Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. Twelve years later, the Law Committee made its first major *halakhic* decision, challenging Orthodox doctrine when in 1960 it permitted the use of electricity on the Sabbath and accepted traveling to the synagogue by motor vehicle for the purpose of attending services.

The work of the Law Committee and its history are deserving of a separate study.<sup>15</sup> What is especially important to note here is that it was a product of efforts of rabbis in the field and, as such, the first effort to reshape the Conservative Movement, which did not come from or through the Seminary. Two figures in particular deserve mention in connection with the Law Committee. Rabbi David Aronson of Beth El Synagogue, Minneapolis, a childhood friend and classmate of Chancellor Finkelstein, shared with the chancellor a strong commitment to *halakhah* but also saw the need for serious change across a number of fronts, particularly in the status of women and in meeting the needs of Conservative congregants in the contemporary world through an active and aggressive *halakhic* process. (In this he differed from the third member of what was then a triumvirate of childhood friends who had become leading Conservative rabbis. Solomon Goldman of Anshe Emet in Chicago increasingly adopted a non-*halakhic* position in his desire for significant change.) Rabbi Aronson was the driving force behind the organization of the Law Committee.

Subsequently, Rabbi Isaac Klein of Buffalo became the Committee's strongest figure because of his high level of scholarship, the fact that he was one of the few *musmahim* (fully ordained rabbis) to come out of the JTS, and because of his willingness to write *teshuvot* (rabbinic response). Rabbis Aronson and Klein each produced basic guides to Jewish living for Conservative Jews; the former, *A Jewish Way of Life*, which opened the postwar generation, and the latter, *A Guide to Jewish Religious Practice*.



However, it was only after the departure of Professors Ginzberg, Finkelstein, and Lieberman from the JTS that the Law Committee became fully comfortable with its growing role as religious innovator. Those three giants, as teachers of the vast majority of the Conservative rabbinate, served as a restraining force on the inclinations of so many congregational rabbis to adapt to what they viewed as the realities of American Jewish life. The Law Committee has been most successful in this regard in connection with extending the rights of women to fully participate in religious life, culminating in a JTS decision in 1985 to ordain women as rabbis.<sup>16</sup> In other cases, the committee's permission for change was largely ignored. For example, its 1969 decision to permit individual congregations to observe only one day of full holiday of the pilgrimage festivals, as done in Israel, has rarely been implemented.

Indeed, as part of this adaptation, Conservative synagogues confronted a painful dilemma. On the one hand, they saw themselves as the custodians of tradition; on the other hand, to reach out to the people, their leaders felt that they had to appeal to them on "modern" and "American" terms. Thus in some respects the synagogue, in its effort to retard assimilation, became an agent of assimilation. This is a problem inherent in a centrist, moderate position, whose adherents see themselves as defending tradition by adapting it. Holding the line on essentials while changing the rest leads to continual tension and is very difficult to achieve, especially in a rather populist democratic society where not only being Jewish is voluntary but also how to be Jewish in a competitive marketplace.

Since all Conservative Jews agreed that some assimilation was desirable, the problem was—and is—always how much, where, when, and how to control it. Thus individual congregations adapted and transformed traditional Jewish practices, at times strengthening them by making them more acceptable to moderns, but at other times weakening them. Like most American Jews, their leaders fell into the trap of dropping Hebrew terms in favor of ostensibly "English" ones, such as referring to Sukkot as the Feast of Tabernacles, as though Americans used "tabernacles" in everyday language more than they would have used "Sukkot," had the Hebrew been preserved. But for an immigrant society attempting to acculturate, the Hebrew word reminded them of their foreign origins, while "tabernacles" sounded like elegant English. Or, to take another example, Conservative rabbis seeking better communication with their congregants would refer to them by their English names in ceremonial activities, ceasing to use Hebrew names except in the call-up to the Torah, thereby losing an opportunity to educate.

In Jewish education, the Conservative congregations took over the functions from communal and private afternoon schools. While they raised the standards of the latter, they also lowered the standards and hours of the former to what seemed more "realistic." Their efforts attracted more children to those schools, and by insisting on a minimum number of years of Jewish schooling prior to bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah, they came close to establishing a compulsory standard for Conservative Jews. This they did at the expense of the Hebrew language, other than that of the Siddur, which it was decided was not teachable within the limited time available and was not as important as more substantive subjects relating to the religious tradition. There were serious grounds for such an educational decision, but unfortunately, the movement away from Hebrew language instruction in practice often did not strengthen the substance of religious education but left the focus on "synagogue skills" without rooting them in a proper substantive framework.

In the face of diminishing Jewish observance in the home, traditional home functions were often transferred to the synagogue—the second Passover *Seder*, some Friday night dinners, and the like. While on the one hand, this provided many Jews with experiences no longer available elsewhere, on the other hand, it sent a message that traditional Judaism was something that could be transmitted by the synagogue alone.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the difficulty and pain involved in making these decisions, although all too many rabbinical and lay leaders became militant on behalf of these changes, deliberately seeking to foster "modern" and "American" ways. At the same time, there was the successful development of new customs such as the bat mitzvah ceremony for girls, which attracted American Jewry and spread beyond the confines of the Conservative Movement to influence both Reform and Orthodoxy.

Perhaps the most decisive change was the introduction of the terminology "customs and ceremonies" in place of *dinim* (laws) or *mitzvot* (commandments). In other words, even where traditional practices were fostered, they were justified implicitly, if not explicitly, as being customary, not legally binding, as was commonly understood in all earlier versions of *halakhic* Judaism.

The end results of all of this were mixed. The Conservative Movement did succeed in making the continuity of Jewish tradition a norm for hundreds of thousands of non-Orthodox Jews, and it gave them ways to identify and affiliate Jewishly and to educate their children to

do the same. However, the Movement's stated goal, the development of observing *halakhically* committed lay Conservative Jews, was not achieved.

Conservative Judaism spread because it offered second-generation Jews a chance to identify with the traditions of their ancestors, while demanding less in the way of personal religious observance on their part. By paying dues to a Conservative synagogue and supporting a rabbi and other "professionals" who would observe the canons of Conservative Judaism, the congregants endorsed the legitimacy of a modern traditional Judaism, even though they were personally prepared to deviate from it. As long as that generation remained dominant, the Conservative Movement remained powerful.

However, warning signs came fairly early. By 1962, the so-called "religious revival" of the postwar period had come to an end.<sup>17</sup> Synagogue membership, like church membership, stopped growing. After 1965, it even began to decline and continued to decline for nearly a decade before it stabilized.

The changes of the 1960s were particularly hard on the Conservative Movement. In the first place, the expansion of Conservative movement or congregational activities into new spheres was stopped by the rising power of the local Jewish community federations and the Council of Jewish Federations and associated institutions nationally. Second, the crises of the 1960s brought about a youthful rejection of middle-class suburban Judaism, of which the Conservative Movement was the prime example. Delayed marriage and a general reduction in the Jewish birthrate led to a demographic decline that affected all Jewish institutions, especially mass institutions.

By the mid-1970s, it was apparent to academic students of Jewish affairs that the Conservative Movement was facing difficulties, but the Movement itself, deeply involved in its new struggle for separate identity and *halakhic* singularity, continued to ignore the danger signals. It was encouraged in this by the end of the downward trend of the 1960s. By 1975, membership started growing again, although to those who looked carefully, it was apparent that the Reform Movement was growing faster.

By 1985, the elements creating trouble for the Movement had come together to a point where they could no longer be ignored. Not only did the Reform Movement proclaim that year that it was the largest Jewish religious movement in the United States, but fissures appeared within the Conservative Movement itself. The Reconstructionists had left the Movement earlier. A number of the independent *havurot* had left it less

dramatically, and now there were threats of secession from the traditional wing as well, in the wake of the women's ordination issue.

### FROM PARTY TO CAMP?

Today the Conservative Movement may be on the threshold of another shift, from party to camp—from a single, all-embracing movement to a community of separate movements that shares a common *masorti* (generally traditional, not necessarily connected with the Conservative Movement) foundation and outlook. What characterized it as a party was the fact that all Conservative Jews who belonged at all were within the same institutional framework. There were tensions, sometimes severe, among the institutions that fit into that framework and that constituted the movement, but essentially all were controlled by a common leadership that was heavily interlocking. Moreover, even given the blurred understanding of what constituted Conservative Judaism, there was a sufficient consensus among the members of the Movement who saw themselves as ideologically as well as institutionally part of the same party.

In the last three decades, this has changed. The Reconstructionist Movement was the first to leave. Mordecai Kaplan developed Reconstructionism in the 1930s, but until the 1960s, it remained a faction within the party rather than anything more separate. This, indeed, was Kaplan's desire, at least until the early 1960s, and it reflects the fact that Kaplan himself, in his 102 years, lived through the entire history of the Movement and its various stages. When he started studying at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the Movement was a faction within what could already be called Orthodoxy. When he graduated, it was just beginning to become a movement. That idea was so new that Kaplan as a young rabbi could still be the founder of Young Israel, which became a major institutional bastion of modern Orthodoxy. His next great invention, the synagogue center, became the key field institution to which the Conservative Movement aspired as the focal point of its development outside of the JTS and, indeed, the key to its success in the major Northeastern metropolitan centers.

By the time the synagogue center was catching on, Kaplan was developing the ideology of Reconstructionism while teaching at the JTS. For the next thirty years or so, that ideology was one of those competing in the struggle to define what constituted the belief system of Conservative Judaism, and it continues to have real echoes to this day.

Kaplan himself did not want to separate Reconstructionism from Conservative Judaism. At most, he sought the establishment of congregations that accepted the Reconstructionist ideology within the framework of the Conservative Movement. Indeed, for at least two decades, he was a restraining influence on his students and younger colleagues who saw Conservative Judaism as too conservative and too unwilling to change and who felt the need to break away.

When Reconstructionism finally did break away in the 1960s, it was either because Kaplan was too old to resist or because he had become more radical ideologically and was less willing to compromise with the right wing of the Conservative Movement and its—to him—slow pace of change. The younger Reconstructionists had no sentimental ties to the Movement and were eager to strike out on their own. At the same time, the Conservative Movement was at the height of its development as a party and was not willing to brook secessionist tendencies or parallel institutions claiming to be in some way Conservative. So when the break came, the Reconstructionists really had to leave.

Even so, for about a decade, it was possible to think of the fledgling Reconstructionist Movement as being akin to Conservative Judaism. It was only in the 1970s, when Reconstructionism took a more radical turn, that it became at first equally akin to Reform and further removed from the tenets of Conservative Judaism through its principled antinomianism. At the end of the 1980s, the Movement formally joined the World Union for Progressive Judaism, the umbrella organization of the Reform camp. Today, most observers agree that the Reconstructionist Movement is at the left of Jewish religious life.<sup>18</sup>

It was precisely at that time that another phenomenon emerged within Conservative ranks—the *havurah* (fellowship) movement.<sup>19</sup> The *havurah* movement was an authentic product of Conservative Judaism, but it was in fact, if not in theory, virtually disowned by its parent. Most of the founders of the *havurot* were products of the Camps Ramah and the various programs of the JTS who had been turned off by what for them was the sterility of the large synagogue, then at the height of its domination of the Conservative Movement. The major Conservative synagogues had come to suffer from an orthodoxy of their own. Neither rabbis nor synagogue lay leaders wanted competition from dissident members within the synagogue walls. In most cases, they preferred to see the younger members go elsewhere and develop their *havurot* outside of the synagogue, where they expressed the kind of Judaism with which they had come to identify as the result of their Ramah and related experiences.

Unlike the Reconstructionist Movement, the *havurah* movement has not broken away from Conservative Judaism, in part because it did not want to become an established movement in its own right and in part because enough connections remained between its members and the mainstream institutions to prevent that. This could be, of course, simply a repeat of the Reconstructionist story, with the *havurah* movement now going through what the Reconstructionists went through from the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s. The difference is that most *havurah* members are more traditional than most Conservative Jews. They are part of the Conservative elite and take seriously the Conservative Jewish understanding of tradition. They are not seeking an alternative understanding of tradition that is less observant in the way that Reconstructionism did, hence there is little incentive for them to leave the Conservative fold. On the other hand, especially now that they have a national body of their own, they are no longer part of the dominant party of Conservative Judaism but may represent a new party that is equally legitimate ideologically but is institutionally more separate. The persistence of some linkage was signified symbolically at the close of the century by the fact that the National Havurah Committee was chaired from 1998 to 2000 by a Conservative pulpit rabbi. This offers the mainstream Conservative Movement a real challenge—to find a strategy for connection or reintegration with one of its most active and dynamic offspring for their mutual benefit.

If the *havurah* movement was the only such phenomenon, the smallness of its size would not make any particular difference for Conservative Judaism as a whole, but it is not. Another group has split from the mainstream. It too is more observant, not less. Indeed, it dropped the word Conservative, which it originally used, from its name to become the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ) in 1990 as a result of an effort to merge with the now-defunct Federation of Traditional Orthodox Rabbis (FTOR), a left-wing splinter group of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA).<sup>20</sup>

The precipitating issue for the founding of the then Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism (UTCJ) was the status of women. Here too the same characteristics were displayed as in the *havurah* movement. The revolt was an affair of the Movement's elite and represented a rightward trend of about 5,000 to 10,000 people who, at the time, had nowhere to go outside of Conservative Judaism. Moreover, for most of the 75 percent who have supported radical changes in the role of women, those changes had been made, in their eyes, within the framework of *halakhah*. Unlike the Reconstructionists, there was no antinomi-

anism present but rather for them what was a more appropriate interpretation of the law had evolved. Thus, in their eyes, their *halakhic* commitment was no less than that of the right wing.<sup>21</sup>

This is not necessarily an unfortunate occurrence. Handled properly, it can become a "plus" for Conservative Judaism, because with three such groups—and there may be more developing—the Conservative Movement will become a camp or a community and not simply a party. The history of Jewish life suggests that this is a natural phenomenon. Especially in periods of normalcy, Jews have been divided into several camps, each of which is comprised of several different parties. We need only mention two examples.

In the last historical epoch, before the destruction of the Second Commonwealth, the Jews of Eretz Yisrael were divided into Sadducean, Pharisaic, and Essene camps, within which were further divisions. Thus the Pharisees were divided among the House of Hillel and Shammai, the two major competing parties, plus other smaller ones. The Essenes constituted the largest party among the sectarians but, as we now know, since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, there were various other sectarian groups as well, each of which constituted a party in its own right.

In our own times, the Zionist Movement was built upon the same system. Very early in the history of Zionism, three camps emerged: labor, civil, and religious. The combination and recombination of parties in the labor camp continued until the emergence of Mapai, Mapam, and Ahdut Avodah (Labor Unity) in the 1940s, an arrangement that lasted for nearly a generation, after which there was a subsequent regrouping into the current Labor, Mapam, and Citizens Rights Movement. The civil camp was originally dominated by the General Zionists, now the Liberals, but it included the Revisionists, now Herut, the two of which merged in the 1960s to form Gahal. A decade later, they broadened their base to become the Herut-dominated Likud. Subsequently, it became known as the national camp. The religious camp had Mizrahi as its anchor, and Agudat Israel, willy-nilly, was linked to it, even though it was first anti-Zionist and then became non-Zionist. Today, it is further fragmented, as each of the two main religious parties have splintered.<sup>22</sup>

On the religious front, one of the strengths of contemporary Orthodoxy is that it is a camp comprising a number of parties or movements. There is no single "Orthodox movement." Rather, Orthodoxy is composed of several different mainstream groups and the moderate ultras such as Agudat Israel and the ultra-ultras, plus the numerous Hassidic

groups, each with its own *rebbe* (spiritual mentor). The result is that, within Orthodoxy, one can find almost anything that one wants in the way of religious expression, all of which recognize each other, even if sometimes grudgingly, as being within the same camp.

One of the serious problems of the Conservative Movement is that there has been only one way to be an affiliated Conservative Jew: to be a member of a Conservative synagogue (or to be on the faculty or staff of the Jewish Theological Seminary). If one does not fit into that very narrow framework, there has been no way to express oneself within Conservative Judaism. The development of additional avenues of Conservative Jewish expression and affiliation in this sense can only enrich its various movements. Thus, at the end of its first 100 years, the Conservative Movement may be on the threshold of restoring its vigor, not by becoming more monolithic but by becoming a community of movements. This is a prodigious challenge that offers great opportunities for the next century.