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The Conservative Synagogue

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The Conservative synagogue is a twentieth-century creation of American Jews. Although other Jewries also founded synagogues that charted a course between the extremes of Orthodoxy and Reform, the particular mixture of religious and social activities that characterize the Conservative synagogue first emerged in the United States.¹ The earliest versions of the Conservative synagogue were initially established by dissatisfied members of either Reform or Orthodox congregations seeking alternative worship services and synagogue programs. Led mainly by rabbis trained at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and guided by the then fledgling congregational organization known as the United Synagogue of America, these congregations gradually developed a distinctive Conservative style and identity by the early 1920s. Thereafter, Conservative synagogues experienced a dramatic rate of growth so that by midcentury the United Synagogue of America numbered over 850 affiliates whose members constituted the plurality of American Jews identified with any Jewish religious movement.

This chapter is about the historical evolution of the Conservative synagogue. In particular, it examines the programmatic development and numerical growth of congregations from one era to the next. Because the concerns of such synagogues have varied over the course of time and because even within the same era there was no uniformity among contemporaneous congregations, the Conservative synagogue is given an institutional definition here: The congregations of interest are those that affiliated with the United Synagogue of America or in other ways identified themselves as Conservative.²

Origins

The first Conservative synagogues emerged in response to the increasing polarization of American synagogue life during the late nineteenth century. Following the Civil War, older congregations were swept by a seemingly irreversible tide of Reform Judaism. By 1870, notes historian Leon Jick, “there were few congregations in America in which substantial reforms had *not* been introduced and in which an accelerating program of radical revision was *not* in process. Even some of the surviving old-line Sephardic congregations had succumbed.”³ However, just when the triumph of the Reform Movement appeared inevitable, a countervailing trend began: Hundreds of traditional congregations mushroomed across the American landscape as newly arriving East European immigrants transplanted their synagogues to the New World.

The older American congregations were quite different from the recently founded immigrant synagogues. The former, serving Jews who had arrived in America prior to the onset of the mass migration from Eastern Europe, were frequently housed in ornate cathedrals that had been erected during the synagogue building boom of the post-Civil War era. Prayer services were characterized by Reform innovations: The liturgy included English readings and eliminated many traditional prayers; organ music and the voices of mixed choirs accompanied worship services; rabbis wore black robes and preached sermons either in English or German; and their flock sat in family pews and adhered to western norms of decorum. In contrast, East European *shuls* generally were housed in modest surroundings, since most immigrants could ill afford to subvent a lavish building program. Because many such congregations were formed by *landsleit* (fellow immigrants from the same area of Eastern Europe) services followed the liturgical and musical practices of the Old Country. Immigrant congregations catered primarily to men; if women attended, they were relegated to a separate gallery, as was customary in the traditional synagogue. Those congregations that could afford to hire a rabbi were served by Yiddish-speaking leaders. Thus, by the turn of the century, the great majority of American synagogues either had adopted radical reforms or adhered steadfastly to Old World patterns.⁴

Within both types of congregations, however, bitter struggles erupted between reformers and traditionalists. In the older, so-called Sephardic and German congregations, the tide of reform was powerful, but not uncontainable. Innovations were adopted piecemeal, and, in some cases, congregations blocked the introduction of what then were regarded as more radical reforms. New York’s Shaarey Tefilah, for example, voted

in 1880 to introduce mixed pews, an organ, a mixed choir, and English prayers; but it also rejected proposals to read the Torah according to a triennial cycle, to censor prayers that "we would not dare to put into the hands of our young daughters and sisters," and to abridge the holiday services. Only decades later, did Shaarey Tefilah fully embrace Reform Judaism. Other congregations introduced moderate innovations, but refused to join the burgeoning Reform Movement. In Ohab Sholom of Newark, a Bohemian congregation, mixed seating was already permitted during the mid-1880s, but, according to its rabbi of that period, Bernard Drachman, it otherwise adhered to the "Orthodox religious code." During the same decade, Beth El in Buffalo, New York, introduced an array of innovations, including mixed seating at Friday evening services and confirmation of both boys and girls; however, traditionalists fought off more radical reforms. To cite an additional case, B'nai Jeshurun in Cleveland sanctioned family pews and late Friday evening services before the turn of the century, but continued to adhere to the traditional prayerbook and Torah readings.⁵

The behavior of these congregations illustrates that, among older congregations, reform was indeed in full swing during the last decades of the nineteenth century. As Herbert Parzen has noted, "The only established American congregations that did not succumb to the current fashion to reform the ritual were the Sephardic congregations in New York and Philadelphia." Such was the pervasiveness of reform that contemporaries questioned whether New York's B'nai Jeshurun would "resist the influence of the Reform movement by which it will be, so to say, surrounded." Yet, B'nai Jeshurun and other congregations did resist the tide; even as they introduced moderate innovations, they rejected the radical program of the Reform Movement. Significantly, these moderately reformed congregations were all of the so-called German variety, consisting of Jews from Central Europe. Their role in the emergence of the Conservative synagogue deserves to be noted, for in time some of these German congregations banded together with comparable East European synagogues to constitute the founding nucleus of the United Synagogue of America, the Conservative synagogue organization.⁶

Controversies over reforms flared in East European congregations as well. In general, moderate reformers were drawn from the ranks of immigrants who were among the first to arrive from Eastern Europe in the 1870s and 1880s. By the turn of the century, they and their children had climbed to the middle rungs of the socioeconomic ladder after having weathered exposure to American life for several decades, so that they were no longer satisfied with the Old World practices of immigrant synagogues. Under the prodding of reformers, congregations gradually

innovated. In some cases, such synagogues simply introduced a few American practices: Chicago's Rodfei Zedek already permitted mixed seating in 1905 and shortly thereafter adopted norms of decorum that were enforced by ushers; the first innovation of Kansas City's Keneseth Israel was to abolish the auctioning of synagogue honors, and then it gradually adopted other reforms.⁷

Perhaps the major catalyst for change was the decision of a congregation to relocate to new housing. Once such a decision was taken, members were forced to consider questions of design, such as whether to build a separate women's gallery. Equally important, the act of moving to a new geographic locale symbolized the congregation's break with immigrant life. The transplantation of Beth Israel Bikkur Cholim from New York's Lower East Side to its new uptown location in 1887 prompted this thoroughly traditional congregation to introduce mixed seating. Similarly, when Beth El of Buffalo, a predominantly East European congregation by the turn of the century, relocated in 1910, even the inclusion of mixed pews and an organ in its new structure did not satisfy reformers, who, over the next years, agitated for additional innovations. By the first decade of the new century, the more affluent and Americanized sector of the immigrant population was rapidly abandoning its original areas of urban settlement and finding housing in more prosperous neighborhoods. In these new quarters, generally areas of second settlement, they introduced American innovations. Even when such new congregations formally defined themselves as Orthodox, they now insisted that English must be the language of public discourse and some prayers. In time, such congregations voted to introduce mixed pews, organ music, late Friday evening services, western aesthetic norms, and special programs for young people. By the onset of World War I, dozens of such moderately reformed congregations had been established outside the ghetto areas by first- and second-generation East European Jews.⁸

The efforts of local Jews to steer both German and East European congregations on a course of moderate innovation were significantly abetted by the emergence of the Jewish Theological Seminary as the rallying point and organizing force for Conservative Judaism. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Sephardic and Central European rabbis who had founded the Jewish Theological Seminary Association in 1886 served as spokesmen for Jews dismayed over the radicalism of American Reform. But it was not until the early twentieth century that the reorganized seminary wielded sufficient influence to affect local synagogue life. Its initial contribution was to provide a growing cadre of rabbis to lead congregations that desired a traditional yet

Americanized service. As congregations floundered between traditionalism and reform, they turned to Seminary-trained rabbis (and even rabbinical students) for leadership. In the decade before World War I, early graduates of the Seminary such as Paul Chertoff in Rochester, Max Drob in Buffalo, Charles Hoffman in Newark, C. Hillel Kauvar in Denver, Eugene Kohn in Baltimore, and Marvin Nathan in Philadelphia decisively shaped the programs and practices of their congregations.⁹

Seminary graduates also assumed pulpits in traditional synagogues and gradually nudged their immigrant congregants toward Americanized practices. In such congregations the movement toward moderate reform was slow and fraught with danger for young rabbis. At Boston's Mishkan Tefila, for example, Herman Rubenovitz labored for years to convince his board to introduce a mixed choir and organ music. His colleague, Louis Egelson, managed to introduce a few innovations at Washington's Adas Israel, only to be fired when traditionalists gained the upper hand. Despite such setbacks, Seminary-trained rabbis gradually steered traditional congregations toward innovations.¹⁰

The Seminary assumed more direct leadership in synagogue affairs when it organized the United Synagogue of America in 1913. To be sure, the founders of this body did not share a common vision of its purpose: Some were primarily concerned with establishing a financial base for the Seminary; others saw the new agency as a force for unifying all traditional Jews in a common struggle against Reform; still others viewed it as an instrument for forging a third religious movement between Orthodoxy and Reform. In fact, at the founding convention Solomon Schechter, the first president of the United Synagogue, promised "not to create a new party, but to consolidate an old one." Once established, however, the United Synagogue developed its own momentum. Its very existence made it possible for member congregations to develop a sense of unity as well as a clearly defined identity distinct from the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform) and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Congregations unwilling to join either body now could rally to the United Synagogue. Moreover, when Jews wanted to establish a new synagogue or revamp the programs of existing congregations, the United Synagogue could offer its support and guidance. By serving as a rallying point and central address for congregations seeking a course of moderate innovation, the United Synagogue helped spur the growth of a new synagogue movement, the Conservative Movement.¹¹

The founding of the United Synagogue of America therefore represents the beginning of a new era in the history of the Conservative synagogue. During the three decades prior to 1913, congregations had struggled on

their own to define an alternative to Reform and Orthodoxy. It had been, as Joel Blau wrote in 1909, a period of “gropings and wanderings and even of disorder and chaos.” The new agency did not immediately bring order out of chaos. Its original mandate from Solomon Schechter to “appeal to all such congregations as have not accepted the [Reform] Union prayer-book nor performed their religious devotions with uncovered heads” was far too vague. In the coming decade, however, the United Synagogue and its affiliated congregations, along with the Seminary and its alumni, gradually crystallized a new synagogue program, a program that was increasingly identified as Conservative Judaism.¹²

The Era of Urban Expansion, 1913–1929

The Conservative synagogue entered its first era of sustained growth and consolidation during the second and third decades of the twentieth century. The extent of this expansion was tangibly evident in the dramatic increase of congregations that joined the United Synagogue. A decade after it had been launched by merely 22 congregations, the new body boasted a membership of over 150 affiliates. By 1929 congregational strength leaped to 229 affiliates, thereby almost matching the 281-member Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which had been in existence since 1873.¹³

One of the more noteworthy features of this stunning expansion was the disparity between patterns of affiliation with the United Synagogue and the population distribution of America’s Jews. In 1917, for example, there were an equal number of United Synagogue affiliates in Chicago and in the combined boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan, even though close to five times as many Jews resided in these two sections of New York City as lived in Chicago. Figures for 1929 reveal an even greater imbalance between patterns of affiliation and Jewish population density. Why was there only one affiliate in Los Angeles and five in Newark, New Jersey, when both cities contained approximately the same number of Jews? Why did Detroit’s 75,000 Jews establish only one Conservative synagogue, whereas Pittsburgh’s 53,000 Jews maintained five? Why were there fourteen United Synagogue congregations in Philadelphia and only nine in the Bronx, even though the latter was populated by 150,000 more Jews? And why did Maryland contribute one affiliate and adjacent West Virginia three, when the Jewish population of the former was nearly ten times the size of the latter?¹⁴

These disparities suggest that a variety of circumstances – aside from population density – accounted for the establishment of Conservative synagogues in particular locations. Perhaps the most universal factor was

the upward mobility and Americanization of East European Jews: As immigrants and their children achieved a measure of economic success and moved away from ghetto neighborhoods, they established a new type of synagogue to reflect their current achievements and aspirations.¹⁵ The pace and quality of this upward mobility, however, differed from one locality to the next since they depended upon the health of the local economy, the possibility for economic advancement, and the availability of housing. In addition, two other local peculiarities played a role: whether East European Jews had settled in a particular city during the early years of mass migration (and therefore had experienced decades of exposure to American life by the 1920s); and whether local immigrant culture was sufficiently developed to retard the process of Americanization or so attenuated that it had little hold on the newcomers.

Although these impersonal processes were important, the initiative of key individuals often was the decisive factor in the establishment of a Conservative synagogue in a particular locality. Congregational histories are replete with oral traditions about the determination and forcefulness of a few strong-willed and wealthy laymen who convinced others of the need to modernize a traditional synagogue or establish a new congregation that would better serve the needs of the community. Rabbinic leadership was equally crucial. Even though rabbis rarely founded Conservative congregations, but generally assumed leadership of synagogues that already had decided to introduce some innovations, they nonetheless played a critical role in providing a coherent program of congregational practices for a laity that possessed only an ill-defined agenda for change. For this reason, synagogue historians routinely credit Seminary-trained rabbis with introducing new religious rituals, educational programs, and social activities. These rabbis did not create their synagogues, but they did transform their congregants' vague impulse for change into specific new programs. Furthermore, they fostered institutional allegiance to the national bodies of the Conservative Movement, thereby shaping their congregations' identities and legitimizing the adoption of more uniform Conservative practices. Thus the presence of lay and rabbinic leadership committed to a particular program was crucial in the formation of Conservative synagogues.¹⁶

A final factor in the growth of Conservative synagogues was the success of the United Synagogue in promoting its programs to local congregations. Shortly after its founding, the synagogue body established new means to win adherents: It organized several district offices around the country to publicize United Synagogue activities; it published a newsletter that advertised and coordinated the activities of affiliates; and it established a women's auxiliary, the Women's League of the United

Synagogue, to widen its appeal and programs. With the appointment in 1917 of Rabbi Samuel Cohen as director of activities, the United Synagogue embarked on an aggressive campaign to attract new affiliates. Cohen offered guidance to congregations that had no clear denominational allegiances in the hope of winning them to the Conservative cause. Moreover, he approached lay leaders in communities where there was no Conservative presence and tried to convince them of the need to establish a congregation affiliated with the United Synagogue.¹⁷

Although affiliates of the United Synagogue were hardly identical during this period, they shared several common concerns and features. Perhaps most important, these synagogues consciously strove to attract the Americanized children of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Philip Joslin, the lay leader most responsible for the founding of Providence's Temple Emanu-el, expressed an oft-repeated sentiment when he warned: "Unless something is done to check the indifference and apathy which is on the daily increase, particularly among our growing children and young folks, numberless of our people will be estranged and forever lost to the faith of their ancestry. I have the firm conviction that an appeal in a tongue and under conditions which are more tasteful to our modern American life, yet not forgetting the fundamentals, the traditions and the ideals of Judaism, is the way to the solution to the problem."¹⁸ In the opinion of lay leaders such as Philip Joslin, neither the foreign ways of Orthodox immigrant congregations nor the radical departures from traditionalism in American Reform temples could attract the second generation.

In the light of their concern over the apathy of young people, it is not surprising that Conservative leaders oriented their congregations to meet the needs of youth. Characteristically, when a Conservative congregation was formed, it swiftly organized a Hebrew School. (Some congregations even developed schools before they could arrange for regular religious services.) Indeed, the general growth of Jewish congregational schools in America coincided with the expansion of Conservative synagogues. In New York, for example, enrollments in congregational schools leaped by 150 percent between 1917 and 1927, a pattern closely paralleled in the rest of the country. Although they hardly held a monopoly on congregational schools, Conservative synagogues accounted for much of this growth. Moreover, it was already in the decades of the 1920s that Conservative congregations struggled to shift Jewish education from the Sunday school (one day a week) format common in Reform temples to the thrice-weekly program of the Hebrew school. At first, they offered members a choice of sending their children to Sunday school or Hebrew school; but then gradually some congregations began to require several

years of Hebrew school education as a prerequisite for the celebration of a Bar Mitzvah.¹⁹

Congregational programs focused on the needs of youth in other ways, as well. According to Rabbinical Assembly surveys taken in 1933 and 1936, close to three-quarters of rabbinic respondents claimed that their congregations organized special children's services and 65 percent celebrated the educational achievements of young people at special confirmation or consecration services, programs that simply did not exist in traditional synagogues. Efforts were also made to attract young adults to the synagogue by orienting late Friday evening services to their interests; such services were capped by lectures and discussions on topics of particular interest to younger American-born Jews. Congregations also founded special young people's clubs, which in 1921 were organized nationally in the United Synagogue's Young Folk's League.²⁰

A second area of concern to founders of Conservative synagogues was the development of religious services that balanced traditional Jewish and modern American values. The ten-point program put forth in 1922 by founders of the Jamaica Jewish Center both illustrates how this was done and adumbrates much of the Conservative synagogue's religious program to the present day: "I. Family pews; II. Conservative services in Hebrew and English; III. English preaching; IV. A Mixed Choir consisting of boys and girls; V. Congregational singing; VI. Two services on Fridays: the first at Sundown all year round, and the second at 8:00 o'clock for the fall and winter seasons only; VII. Confirmation exercises on Shevuoth; VIII. Observing the first and last two days of each and every holiday; IX. Eliminating all auctioneering of *aliyot* and excessive *mi-Sheberachs* on High Holidays; X. Daily services, mornings and evenings when a permanent house of worship is established."²¹ On the one hand, traditional observances such as the Sabbath, all holidays, and daily worship services were affirmed; on the other hand, western church norms such as English preaching, congregational singing, and a choir were introduced, and undecorous practices such as the auctioning of honors were eliminated. It was symptomatic of the tension that the congregation offered two Friday evening services – one at the traditional time and another at an hour more convenient for working people.

A survey on ritual undertaken by Rabbi Morris Silverman in 1933 provides some limited quantitative information on the uniformity of particular religious practices in Conservative synagogues around the country. On the basis of 110 responses from Rabbinical Assembly members (a better than 50 percent rate of return), Silverman reported the following: (1) approximately 70 percent of congregations conducted daily services; (2) late Friday evening services were almost universal (95 percent

of the respondents officiated at such services) and included many English readings and supplementary selections that were not based on the traditional liturgy; (3) Saturday morning services conformed to the traditional liturgy and Torah readings (only two respondents used the triennial cycle and five more abridged the Torah portion); (4) approximately 20 percent of congregations had organs, but only half of these allowed them to be played on the Sabbath or holidays; (5) Bat Mitzvah ceremonies for girls were virtually nonexistent in this period (many rabbis did not even know what they were); (6) fewer than one-fifth of congregations held special Friday evening services on the eve of American holidays; (7) in the absence of a uniform prayerbook, at least seven different *Siddurim* were in use for daily services and several *Mahzorim* were employed on the High Holidays, whereas for festivals the prayerbook recently compiled under the United Synagogue's auspices was gaining a small following; (8) over one-third of rabbis preached sermons both on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings.²² (The survey provides no information on the presence of mixed pews, a practice that apparently was taken for granted in United Synagogue congregations by the 1920s and 1930s.)

Attendance figures for this period are sketchy, but several patterns were frequently discussed in contemporary journals. In general, synagogue services were poorly attended, except on the High Holidays. Counts of actual synagogue attendance in several small Jewish communities around the country in 1928 indicate that fewer than 20 percent of Jews attended *any* synagogue on a regular Sabbath, a figure that also held true for members of Conservative synagogues. The demographic profile of those who did attend Conservative synagogues, however, differed sharply from the population that frequented Orthodox immigrant congregations. Whereas adult men virtually monopolized the latter, they were underrepresented in Conservative synagogues on the average Sabbath. Reporting on his congregation in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Louis Levitsky noted in 1936 that only a half-dozen men out of a membership of 250 did *not* go to work on Saturday. Although the Great Depression may have accounted in part for this stunning statistic, articles written in the early 1920s already noted the emptiness of Conservative synagogues on the Sabbath because men were away at work. As a consequence, noted Rabbi Alter Landesman, "in many Conservative congregations and in practically all of the Reform congregations the proportion of women and children is very large on Saturday mornings."²³

It is in this context that the activities of women in the Conservative synagogue must be understood. Writing in the *United Synagogue Recorder* in 1921, Deborah Melamed urged Jewish women to participate more in religious services by filling the pews left vacant by men and by learning

to join in congregational prayers and singing. Significantly, Melamed entitled her essay "Woman's Opportunity in the Synagogue." By their sheer presence, women could no longer be relegated to passive and minor roles: If they were to constitute the majority of worshipers at prayer services, they could not be segregated in a separate gallery; and if they were to organize fund-raising events, bazaars, school programs, and social activities, they would have to be given places on congregational boards. Thus, out of practical necessity as much as personal taste and ideology, women assumed a more active role in congregational life virtually from the inception of the Conservative synagogue.²⁴

The low level of attendance also occasioned a far-reaching rethinking of the structure and purpose of synagogues. As Rabbi Israel Levinthal of the Brooklyn Jewish Center noted during this period, "The Synagogue as a *Beth Hatefilah* has lost its hold upon the masses . . . ; [therefore] some institution would have to be created that could and would attract the people so that the group consciousness of the Jew might be maintained." That new institution was the synagogue-center. Originally conceived by Professor Mordecai Kaplan of the Jewish Theological Seminary as a "deliberate and conscious . . . experiment to help us solve the problem of Jewish life and religion," the center was to serve as a setting for prayer, education, physical recreation, and social action. Such an environment could best foster a vibrant Jewish life. The synagogue-center, contended the president of the Brooklyn Jewish Center, "will show the world the ideal that you can be a Jew and enjoy life, and will express in every thing you do that the same thing can be done in a Jewish way." Not coincidentally, the center's manifold programs also served as a magnet to bring Jews back to the synagogue. To quote a gushing contemporary description of another synagogue-center in New York, B'nai Jeshurun serves "every member of every family affiliated with our congregation. The center building is used every afternoon and every evening of the week by our own groups who come here for educational, philanthropic, social, and athletic activities. Our synagogue is fast becoming the real center of the whole of Jewish life for all the week 'round."²⁵

Convinced that the synagogue-center could become such a communal center, Conservative congregations embarked on a frenzied building program during the 1920s. New congregations founded in second and third areas of settlement hastily drafted ambitious plans for mammoth edifices to house a panoply of recreational and social programs, while existing congregations, under pressure to compete, poured considerable resources into programs for expansion. By the late 1920s, when construction was in full swing, over thirty new structures were dedicated in a one-year period (most were Conservative). A survey of fourteen Conservative

congregations scattered across the country found that construction expenses ranged from \$35,000 to one million dollars, with the average synagogue shouldering costs of nearly a quarter of a million dollars. Much of this construction was undertaken in the anticipation of expanded membership, but, whereas some congregations in fact grew within a few years from a few score members to over one thousand families, others struggled under staggering mortgage debts when their optimistic expectations of increased membership proved erroneous. Despite the dangers of overexpansion, lavish synagogue-centers proliferated. They served both as a testament to the new middle-class attainments of their members, upwardly mobile East European Jews, as well as a means to remedy the decline of the synagogue as a house of prayer.²⁶

Some dissenting voices, however, questioned the wisdom of burdening congregations with the responsibility of supporting elaborate social and recreational programs. In an address to his rabbinic colleagues, Rabbi Israel Goldstein lamented the failure of centers to live up to expectations:

Whereas the hope of the Synagogue Center was to Synagogize the tone of the secular activities of the family, the effect has been the secularization of the place of the Synagogue. . . . If the Synagogue Center has had the effect of easing the distinction between the sacred and the secular, it has been at the expense of the sacred. The Synagogue as a week-end institution may have seemed aloof and ineffective. As a week-day institution, functioning through the Center, it has become banal, and even vulgar.

It could be demonstrated easily that the popularity of social and recreational functions did not translate into impressive attendance figures at worship services. Still, proponents of the synagogue-center rejoiced at the numbers of people who were now flocking to the synagogue, arguing that “many will come for other purposes than to meet God. But let them come.”²⁷

These debates came to a halt when new fiscal circumstances severely curtailed synagogue construction during the 1930s. With the onset of the Great Depression, synagogues were hard-pressed to maintain, let alone expand, their facilities. Most congregations sustained a severe loss of membership so that existing facilities went underutilized. At Sinai Congregation in Los Angeles, for example, 350 member families struggled to keep afloat a synagogue that had been built for a far larger membership (its sanctuary alone seated over 1,200 people). The problem was not simply caused by a halt in membership growth, but by the loss of members who felt they could not afford to pay dues or other synagogue-related expenses. The experience of Chicago’s Rodfei Zedek is illustra-

tive: In 1929 the congregation had 234 member families and 350 children enrolled in its religious school; four years later, membership stood at 113 families and enrollments at 62 pupils. Under such circumstances, additional synagogue expansion was neither warranted nor feasible.²⁸

However, the problem went far beyond a moratorium on new construction. Most Conservative congregations struggled to provide services while paying off their enormous mortgage debts. Not surprisingly, synagogues cut their programs, and when that failed, they released their personnel. The experience of Temple Emanuel in Bayonne was particularly depressing, though not atypical: Unable to cover its expenses, the congregation first released its senior rabbi in order to hire a younger and less expensive spiritual leader; not long thereafter, the new rabbi was let go and replaced by a rabbinical student who only officiated at High Holiday services. (Temple Emanuel's cantor also departed in frustration with the congregation owing him close to \$1,700 in back pay.) Given these difficult financial problems, Conservative synagogues, like most American religious institutions, endured a decade of stagnation and depression during the 1930s.²⁹

The Era of Suburban Growth, 1940–1965

As America emerged from the Great Depression and entered an era of sustained prosperity, the Conservative synagogue experienced its second era of explosive numerical growth. Already during the war years there was evidence of a rebound from the decline of the 1930s: New congregations were formed, existing ones revived, and the United Synagogue found the resources to hire new personnel and establish several new publications. Such growth, however, paled in comparison with the dynamic expansion of the postwar era. United Synagogue membership, which stood at approximately 350 affiliated congregations at the end of the war, leaped to 800 congregations within two decades. Particularly during the 1950s, it seemed that Conservative synagogues were being formed in unending succession. The United Synagogue inducted 131 new congregations from 1955 to 1957, another 58 during the next two years, and 80 additional affiliates from 1959 to 1961.³⁰ It is little wonder that when rabbis and students of religious life surveyed the contemporary scene at midcentury, they heralded the Conservative synagogue as the paramount institution of American Judaism, one that had much to teach to both Reform and Orthodox congregations.³¹

In contrast to the Conservative synagogues of 1900–1930, which were primarily located in urban centers, the new affiliates were concentrated in suburbia. They were founded by the masses of Jews who joined the

larger American population shift from urban to suburban areas. Initially, the greatest growth occurred in the suburbs of New York City, where dozens of new congregations mushroomed in Queens, Nassau, Westchester, and the suburbs of cities in New Jersey. (In Queens and Nassau counties, alone, some fifty new Conservative synagogues were established in the decade after the conclusion of World War II.) Once these areas reached their level of saturation, the greatest growth occurred outside of the New York metropolitan area. This movement profoundly affected the fortunes of existing urban synagogues, which were forced to choose between staying put (and thereby risking eventual abandonment) and transplanting themselves in the suburbs and leaving behind the huge physical facilities they had struggled so hard to build. Congregations that waited too long to decide frequently found their membership base eroded by the inexorable movement of congregants to the new suburban areas.³²

Although the movement of Jews to the suburbs accounts for the synagogue boom of the postwar era, it does not explain why so many of the new congregations chose to identify as Conservative. In part, the decision was motivated by pragmatic, rather than ideological concerns. Since founders of synagogues could not anticipate how large a Jewish population would eventually concentrate in a particular suburban community, they created middle-of-the-road congregations that would appeal to the broadest spectrum of Jews. As one synagogue organizer told Rabbi Albert Gordon, a Conservative rabbi who wrote several books on the suburbanization of American Jews, "We figured that the Conservative [synagogue] was 'middle of the road' and would not offend any group in the community. So we called it a Conservative congregation." Later, after the Jewish population had grown sufficiently to support additional congregations, Reform and Orthodox synagogues were established as well.³³

Although such pragmatic considerations undoubtedly were crucial, some additional factors accounted for the astounding growth of Conservative synagogues. A great many congregations were founded by Jews who had previously attended Orthodox synagogues but were no longer satisfied with either the religious practices or social programs of immigrant or American Orthodox congregations. Often housed in delapidated ghettos or unfashionable areas of second settlement and offering congregants only limited programs aside from worship services, such congregations held little appeal to Jews who no longer adhered to Orthodox practices and had Americanized. As a result, some of these congregations moved to the suburbs and merged with new Conservative synagogues. Others tried to accommodate to their congregants' needs by instituting

changes in traditional practices. As a consequence, the 1950s were punctuated by a series of bitter controversies between traditionalists and reformers as previously Orthodox congregations began to introduce American innovations. The removal of physical barriers separating men and women in the synagogue and the introduction of mixed pews came to symbolize a congregation's defection from the Orthodox to the Conservative camp.³⁴

Perhaps most important, Conservative synagogues mushroomed in the postwar era because they appealed to a specific generational cohort of American Jews. The Jews who joined Conservative synagogues during the 1940s and 1950s were primarily children of East European immigrants who had arrived after the turn of the century (the era of most massive Jewish migration to America). Born in the years between 1900 and 1940, this huge generational cohort came of age in the postwar era and constituted the preponderant majority of Jews who moved to suburbia after World War II. Like the larger population of Americans that participated in this geographic shift, young Jews abandoned urban centers in search of spacious, yet more affordable housing outside of large cities. Many became the first members of their families to own homes. As a consequence of their mobility, however, these Jews were forced to sever their ties to the ethnic communities that had sustained them in urban areas. Having been raised in densely populated Jewish enclaves where identification with Jewishness, if not necessarily Judaism, was taken for granted, they now found themselves in far more integrated neighborhoods that provided no natural outlet for Jewish identification.

Conservative synagogues attracted these young suburban Jews precisely because they were structured as synagogue-centers. Although Rabbi Leo Spitz may have exaggerated somewhat when he declared the synagogue-center a "Conservative patent," the overwhelming majority of Conservative congregations were organized as centers. They did not necessarily boast swimming and gymnasium facilities, but they offered a broad range of social and recreational programs, including men's and women's auxiliaries, dances and entertainment, adult education, fund-raising for synagogue and other causes, and sports programs. By offering these activities, suburban Conservative synagogues helped to diminish the loneliness of transplanted urban Jews living on the suburban frontier. They provided a communal setting for Jews who shared common generational experiences, as well as the trials and tribulations of geographic and socioeconomic mobility in postwar America.³⁵

Equally important, Conservative synagogues appealed to this generation because, in the words of a contemporary observer, they offered families "a new adventure in Jewishness, expressing itself in formal af-

filiation for the first time in their lives with a Jewish community institution.” Sociologist Marshall Sklare has explained why this particular population was especially in need of Jewish affiliation: “Suburbanization brought with it the problem of the maintenance of identity, and it was to the synagogue that the new Jewish suburbanite tended to look for identity-maintenance. The result was that the synagogue emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as the crucial institution in Jewish life. And Conservatism exemplified that which was most appealing to the new suburban Jew.” As already noted, Conservative congregations contributed to the maintenance of Jewish identity by offering second-generation Jews a center for communal activities. Moreover, they appealed to parents who wanted their children to acquire a measure of Hebraic and Judaic literacy and also wanted their children to socialize with other young Jews. In the words of a contemporary promotional leaflet: “The community needs a place for our children and we adults need some place to carry on our social lives. What better place can there be than our synagogues?”³⁶

All of these factors came into play during the founding of the Israël Community Center of Levittown, a congregation that was regarded in the 1950s as the quintessential Conservative synagogue in the model suburban community. Established in 1948 by World War II veterans and their wives, the congregation produced a brochure to advertise its programs. The pamphlet begins with the question, “What is the Israel Community Center?” and responds that, as its name implies, it “combines the functions of a Synagogue with those of a Community Center.” This means that “our members look upon the Center not merely in terms of ‘seats for the observance of the three holy days,’ but rather do they and their families look to the Center for ‘all-year-round Congregational activity,’ social as well as cultural and religious.” The pamphlet then proceeds to announce that its “accent is on youth,” not only because it was founded recently, but because its membership consists of young people. Finally, it candidly explains what brought its founders to the center: “Most of our people have had little previous contact with synagogue life, having hitherto regarded the synagogue as the province of their elders. Many have not seen the inside of a ‘shule’ since their Bar Mitzvah. Now, however, they feel it is time that they ‘grow up’ . . . The responsibilities of parenthood have led many to rethink their position with regard to the Jewish heritage which they now seek to maintain in order to be able to transmit it to their children.” Although the pamphlet briefly refers to the synagogue as a Conservative congregation affiliated with the United Synagogue and “dedicated to the advancement of Traditional Judaism by revitalizing the tradition and making it more inspiring and more meaningful to the modern American Jew,” it nowhere explains its

ritual program or religious services. We need only compare this brochure to the above-mentioned ten-point program of the Jamaica Jewish Center to discover how the concerns and emphases of the Conservative synagogue had changed between 1922 and 1948.³⁷

During the postwar decades, the process of achieving a uniform and cohesive program for Conservative synagogues continued. The United Synagogue grew into an extensive bureaucracy that strove to shape the practices of its affiliates. Separate offices developed curricula for synagogue schools, plans for congregational budgeting, and guidelines for synagogue ritual practices. (The United Synagogue even offered architectural blueprints to congregations planning to construct new facilities): Auxiliaries such as the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the Federation of Men's Clubs, and the United Synagogue Youth vastly expanded their programs and publications to bring a measure of national cohesiveness to local synagogue branches. And all of these groups cooperated with other Conservative agencies to produce uniform synagogue materials – most notably, prayerbooks and other liturgical texts. Although it is not possible to measure the extent of influence these national bodies exerted over local congregations, it is evident that they managed, through regional and national conventions, publications, and direct advisory programs, to bring a degree of conformity to affiliated congregations.³⁸

One of the central features of Conservative synagogues during this period was their massive investment in congregational schools. According to a survey conducted in the mid-1960s, over 25 percent of synagogue budgets were spent on school programs, an allocation second only to the cost of salaries for synagogue personnel. Certainly, this arrangement of budgetary priorities was in part dictated by the fact that a significant percentage of synagogue members consisted of parents with school-age children. But it also signified the emphasis of Conservative synagogues on youth during the baby boom era. It was widely recognized that a significant number of synagogue members joined congregations primarily in order to provide their children with a Jewish education. Hence congregations used their schools as a means to develop a larger membership: They required parents to become synagogue members if they wished to enroll their children in the congregational school. (According to a 1950 survey, 40 percent of Conservative synagogues did not even charge tuition, but rather financed their schools exclusively through membership dues.) In this manner, congregations attracted new members who were otherwise indifferent to synagogue programs and involved them in the life of the synagogue through PTA activities.³⁹

From the perspective of synagogue lay leaders and especially rabbis,

there was an additional reason to develop strong school programs: to teach synagogue skills to the coming generation. As early as 1928, Max Arzt, a leading pulpit rabbi who later assumed national positions in the Conservative Movement, warned that Sunday schools were not only inadequate, but actually posed a danger to Conservative congregations.

From the view of the synagogue which has the traditional prayerbook and which conducts most of the service in Hebrew, the Sunday School is an enigma. It surely does not and cannot train its pupils for participation in a traditional service and at best it can graduate them into a reform temple where Hebrew is limited to the *Borchu* and the *Shema*. Most of our congregations have now come to realize that a good Hebrew School with an intensive course of instruction and with Hebrew as the vehicle of that instruction, is indispensable to their own future – for when a Jew ceases to tolerate Hebrew he clamors for a translated service and eventually emerges as a Jew of the reform persuasion.

Thus, in order to ensure that young people would develop sufficient Hebrew skills to follow Conservative services, it became imperative for congregations to develop their school programs. It was simply impossible to foster language skills, let alone teach children about ritual practices, the Bible, Jewish history, and other areas of Judaica, within the time constraints of a Sunday school program.⁴⁰

As a consequence of these concerns, a remarkably forceful movement developed within the Conservative Movement to eliminate Sunday schools and replace them with three-day-a-week Hebrew schools. As noted above, a few congregations had already introduced such programs during the 1920s, but it was not until the 1940s and 1950s that this became a movement-wide trend. It began with congregations imposing a requirement upon boys that they attend Hebrew school three days a week for a minimum of three years prior to their Bar Mitzvah. But gradually, the number of mandatory years of Hebrew school was extended and girls, too, were pushed into these schools. According to a survey conducted by the United Synagogue during the 1950s, 74 percent of responding Conservative congregations did not permit their students to attend school only on Sundays. In addition, 7.5 percent required weekday school attendance by ages six and seven, 50 percent by age eight, and another 38 percent by age nine.⁴¹

There were several consequences to this heavy investment in Hebrew school education. First, Conservative supplementary schools were partly responsible for the demise of communal schools. Whereas in the 1920s the majority of children in the United States who were enrolled in Jewish

schools were still educated under communal auspices, by the end of the 1920s most were enrolled in congregational schools, a trend that continued to accelerate in subsequent decades. Second, Conservative efforts ensured the rapid growth of Hebrew schools: Outside New York, almost half the students enrolled in three-day-a-week schools were Conservative in comparison with 34 percent of Jewish children in Sunday schools; in the New York metropolitan area, Hebrew school enrollment was even higher, accounting for nearly three-quarters of all Conservative children.⁴² Third, Hebrew school enrollment occurred at the expense of Conservative day schools: Although a few congregations actually founded their own day schools and thereby helped develop the Solomon Schechter Day School movement, most Conservative synagogues promoted Hebrew schools as the preferred setting for Jewish education. As a result, fewer than 5 percent of children enrolled in day schools outside New York during the 1950s were Conservative (in New York this figure was higher).⁴³ Finally, Conservative congregations paid a price for their insistence upon Hebrew school education. A leading Conservative rabbinic leader has directly attributed the growth of Reform temples in suburbia to the educational demands imposed by Conservative synagogues on prospective Bar Mitzvah boys. Although an exaggeration, this view is supported by the testimony of some local rabbis. In the late 1940s, for example, a rabbi in Youngstown, Ohio, reported that his congregation lost ninety families within two years after it began to require three-day-a-week school attendance; all of these families joined the local Reform temple, whose rabbi proclaimed, "come one day a week to us and they will be just as good Jews."⁴⁴

Given their strong emphasis upon children, it is noteworthy that Conservative synagogues did not invest heavily in extracurricular programs for youth. As of the mid-1960s, merely 2½ percent of synagogue budgets were spent on youth programs.⁴⁵ Although many congregations ran programs for children, they often did not bother to hire professional youth directors; in the early 1950s, for example, fewer than one-quarter of surveyed Conservative synagogues employed a youth director, whereas close to 50 percent relied upon volunteers. Synagogue youth programs varied widely: A larger congregation such as Philadelphia's Har Zion, boasted a range of activities for nursery school children to college age youth, which served some 1,500 young people; other congregations even developed summer camping programs that eventually provided the nucleus for the Ramah Camping movement; but others, in contrast, offered few activities for children other than special youth services.⁴⁶

The greatest degree of uniformity achieved by Conservative syn-

agogues during this period was in the area of public religious and ritual life. One of the most universally accepted practices was the celebration of late Friday evening services. According to a 1941 survey, 97 percent of rabbinic respondents indicated that they conducted such services (70 percent also provided early Friday evening services). As noted by Rabbi Samuel Cohen, these services developed because of the “difficulty of securing an adequate attendance on the Sabbath morning”; it was felt that “a great deal of the Sabbath spirit is saved when the congregation establishes a late Friday evening service.” Rabbis strove to make these services even more popular by dedicating Friday evening services to the celebration of special occasions – Balfour Day, Mother’s Day, Thanksgiving, and so on – and to honor specific synagogue or other Jewish groups – men’s clubs, Sisterhood, Hadassah, the Jewish War Veterans, Hebrew school students, and the like. It is difficult to ascertain how successful these “special occasion” Sabbaths, as they were then called, proved in attracting more worshippers.⁴⁷

On the whole, at least during the 1940s and 1950s, Conservative synagogues adhered to the traditional service on Sabbath mornings. On the basis of a survey conducted for the Rabbinical Assembly in 1941, Rabbi Max Routtenberg claimed that “in the overwhelming majority of cases, the traditional *Shacharis* is conducted with almost no modification or change” and virtually no supplementary readings were used. Similarly, 81 percent of rabbis surveyed reported that Torah readings still accorded with the annual cycle and with the traditional number of men called to the Torah. In the preponderant majority of congregations, the traditional *Haphtorah* portion continued to be chanted in the original Hebrew. Surprisingly, it was still common in the vast majority of congregations of this period for each recipient of a Torah honor to receive a separate benediction (*mi-Sheberach*). In time, a great deal of experimentation developed in several areas as congregations adopted the triennial cycle, eliminated the *mi-Sheberach*, and omitted parts of the traditional liturgy.⁴⁸

A major breakthrough toward liturgical uniformity occurred when the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue agreed to adopt a Conservative prayerbook that had been prepared by Rabbi Morris Silverman. Introduced in the late 1940s, the *Sabbath and Festival Prayerbook* was widely employed by Conservative congregations. Within two years of its official adoption, it was already in use in 185 congregations. Silverman’s *High Holiday Prayerbook* also won official sanction and by the mid-1960s was employed in over 85 percent of Conservative synagogues. With these texts, Conservative synagogues were able to achieve two long-desired goals. First, they now possessed a flexible liturgical work

that contained a variety of poems and prayers suitable for special occasions. Equally important, they now had a common liturgical text deemed acceptable by the vast majority of United Synagogue affiliates. The Silverman prayerbooks brought a new-found uniformity of religious worship to Conservative synagogues.⁴⁹

Several other innovations gradually gained wide usage. By 1948, for example, a "Synagogue Ritual Survey" found unanimous acceptance of mixed pews (although some congregations still maintained both mixed pews and special sections for men and women who preferred to sit separately). According to this survey, two-thirds of congregations also employed a mixed choir. The vast majority also held confirmation ceremonies for both boys and girls. Only 20 percent, however, permitted the playing of an organ at Friday evening or Sabbath services and only one-third celebrated the Bat Mitzvah of girls who had come of age. The latter practice, however, spread rapidly during the next decade.⁵⁰

Despite the growing clarity and uniformity of religious practices, Conservative synagogues continued to suffer from a major gap between official policies and the practices of members. Thus, although the United Synagogue adopted a set of "Standards for Synagogue Practice" that required all affiliates to observe the Sabbath and traditional dietary restrictions on synagogue-owned property, the vast majority of synagogue members observed neither. Similarly, when congregations pledged to accept the rabbi as the "authority on all matters of Jewish law and practices and as the interpreter of the decisions rendered and principles established by the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of the Rabbinical Assembly," they were affirming a public policy that had little relevance to the private lives of individual synagogue members. The contrast between official religious policy and private behavior was made painfully clear in a "National Survey of Synagogue Leadership" conducted by the United Synagogue in the early 1950s. On the basis of questionnaires sent both to congregations and synagogue leaders, the survey found that: (1) two-thirds of members did not attend even late Friday evening services with any regularity, and attendance at Sabbath morning and holiday services was negligible; (2) even among synagogue leaders, 85 percent stated that they did not say daily prayers either at home or in the synagogue; (3) only 35 percent of such leaders claimed they could follow the Hebrew services and comprehend "all" or "a lot" of the liturgy, whereas barely half claimed they could "follow the Hebrew but can understand very little of it"; (4) only slightly more than one-third of leaders kept Jewish dietary laws at home; (5) more than half of the leadership in Conservative congregations could "boast any satisfactory acquaintance with the aims, tendencies and practices of the Con-

servative movement;" (6) only a small minority of synagogue members involved themselves in administrative work or accepted positions of leadership. Reporting on these findings, Dr. Emil Lehman, executive director of the United Synagogue, noted that the survey takes "us behind the scenes into the living rooms where the game of congregational politics is played with great fervor . . . and [turns] the spotlight on stately synagogues filled often with the heavy emptiness of empty pews."⁵¹

In an attempt to remedy this situation, synagogues and especially their rabbis launched a variety of programs to educate congregants and woo them to worship services. The Conservative rabbinate especially focused on intensifying the level of congregants' Sabbath observance with a special campaign launched during the 1950s. At least one pulpit rabbi administered an oath on the Day of Atonement in which his congregants pledged to observe every Sabbath "by kindling the Sabbath candles and reciting the Kiddush at home and by attending the Synagogue with my family." Although it is impossible to determine the success of these efforts, it is clear that low levels of synagogue attendance continued to plague congregations. Whereas synagogue programs for recreation, socializing, and especially education continued to attract impressive numbers of people, religious services were sparsely attended, a trend that deeply disturbed rabbinic and lay leaders who scrutinized the Conservative synagogue during its era of most dynamic growth and robust expansion.⁵²

Recent Trends

Although it is not yet possible to characterize the nature of Conservative synagogues in the last third of the twentieth century, several new trends are apparent. For one thing, the demographic decline of American Jewry has brought a halt to the frenetic pace of synagogue growth that was characteristic of the two postwar decades. During the years from 1965 to 1971, for example, not one new Conservative synagogue was founded.⁵³ Moreover, the needs and interests of synagogue members shifted substantially during the 1960s and 1970s in response to changing American norms as well as new developments in Jewish communal life. As a consequence, Conservative synagogues have innovated and experimented in order to better serve the needs of their members and involve unaffiliated Jews in synagogue life.

Already during the mid-1960s, Conservative leaders took note of the decline in synagogue membership. Not only was it more difficult to recruit new members, but existing congregants slowly began to drift

away from the synagogue. One of the major factors responsible for this decline in membership was the decision of some parents to drop their synagogue membership after their youngest child had celebrated the Bar or Bat Mitzvah. A 1965 United Synagogue survey found that during the previous three years, the primary reason members left a congregation other than death or geographic relocation was that a “son had completed Bar Mitzvah or Hebrew School.” Whereas young parents flocked to Conservative congregations during the postwar baby-boom years in order to provide a Jewish education for their children, now that those children had completed their studies, some parents no longer felt compelled to retain their membership. Not surprisingly, congregational schools suffered a decline in enrollments and were forced to curtail or eliminate their programs; more generally, the 1970s witnessed numerous mergers between Conservative schools and even synagogues because individual congregations could no longer sustain their own programs.⁵⁴

Most congregations, however, were less affected by declining membership than by the aging of their congregational population. This pattern was made particularly evident in a 1979 study conducted by Charles Liebman and Saul Shapiro that found the greatest number of Conservative synagogue members in the age cohorts from forty-six to sixty. By contrast, there were far fewer members in the age cohorts from twenty-six to forty-five. The authors concluded that although American Jewry, in general, is aging, the membership of Conservative synagogues is aging even more rapidly. Put differently, Conservative synagogues were simply not retaining the allegiance of their younger people. Instead, they were populated mainly by Jews who had come of age during the great postwar expansion, a cohort that had reached late middle age by the end of the 1970s. Liebman stated matters bluntly:

The data suggested that the Conservative movement of the 1970s resembled Orthodoxy of fifty years ago – an appearance of numerical strength but the absence of a strong infrastructure. Orthodoxy’s mass strength was confined to first generation American Jews. It never made significant inroads among second generation American Jews. It appeared that Conservative Judaism as the mass movement of American Jews might be a peculiarly second generation American Jewish phenomenon. However, unlike Orthodoxy, it was not clear that Conservative Judaism had a “hard core” membership around whom it might seek to rebuild itself. On the other hand, the data were not clear that such a group was absent.

The question, therefore, was whether Conservative synagogues could replenish themselves by attracting sufficient numbers of third- and fourth-generation Jews.⁵⁵

In recent years it appears that greater numbers of young families *are* joining Conservative congregations. Members of the 1960s generation who deferred marriage and child rearing (as well as joining a synagogue) are belatedly starting families and seeking congregations in which to raise and educate their children. Although conclusive data are not available, there is evidence that Conservative congregations are gradually attracting younger people. In some cases, congregations located in new sunbelt communities or in recently constructed suburban subdivisions are attracting primarily young families, much as the Levittown type of congregations did that were founded during the postwar suburban boom. In other cases, existing congregations have developed programs to attract singles and young couples. Among the most dynamic Conservative congregations in the early 1980s are urban synagogues that were eclipsed during the suburban era and have suddenly experienced rejuvenation because of the gentrification of their urban environment.⁵⁶ Although these developments attest to the vitality of some congregations, they cannot entirely forestall the numerical decline of Conservative synagogues during the last decades of the twentieth century.

In order to broaden their appeal, as well as meet the changing concerns of their members, Conservative synagogues have developed new kinds of programs in recent years. To begin with, efforts have been made to foster a less formal atmosphere in the synagogue and to return to more traditional concepts of Jewish worship. Symptomatic of such efforts were innovations adopted by Congregation B'nai Jeshurun in New York, the oldest continuously functioning Conservative synagogue in the United States: During the 1970s, the synagogue ceased to employ an organ and "encouraged Jews to *daven* rather than worship." In many congregations, rabbis opted for a less formal role, both by ceasing to dress in black robes and by using their time at the pulpit to teach, rather than deliver a sermon. In addition, a perceptible shift occurred in the focus of Sabbath programs, with congregations downplaying late Friday evening services and emphasizing Sabbath morning services instead.⁵⁷ All of these trends indicate a return to traditionalism and a rejection of churchlike behavior, patterns that are evident in other denominational synagogues as well. They may indicate that Jews, like other Americans, are returning to tradition; or that Jews feel so at home in America that they are willing to reinstate rituals regarded as too old-fashioned and alien by earlier generations.

A more comprehensive attempt to break down the formality of large congregations found expression in the formation of *Havurot* within Con-

servative synagogues. Originating on college campuses during the 1960s, the *Havurot* were increasingly embraced by synagogues as a means of reducing the levels of alienation felt by members of huge and impersonal congregations. The *Havurah* was defined by Bernard Reisman, a Brandeis University sociologist, as “a small community of like-minded individuals and families who form together as a Jewish fellowship to offer one another social support and to support and pursue self-directed programs of Jewish study, celebration, and community service.”⁵⁸ *Havurot* serve as a means of dividing the membership of large, impersonal congregations into smaller, more intimate units. *Havurot*, in brief, seek to create a sense of community among congregants.

Synagogue *Havurot* focus their activities principally on study, communal meals, and holiday celebrations; in some cases, they also hold prayer services and retreats away from the main congregation. Not surprisingly, such separatist activities cause concern among both rabbis and lay leaders who fear that *Havurot* will destroy the unity of congregations. Despite such fears, *Havurot* continue to proliferate in synagogues. According to a recent study, synagogue *Havurot* are most apt to be found in “large, non-Orthodox, suburban [congregations] founded after the Second World War, and with a predominant membership of adults aged between 40 and 59 years.” Synagogues in the American West are most likely to sponsor *Havurot*.⁵⁹ Although it is not yet possible to assess the long-term importance of such fellowships, in Conservative congregations they clearly represent a departure from the trend toward ever larger synagogues. It remains to be seen whether the quest for fellowship will collide with the very different agenda of synagogue-centers, for whereas the *Havurah* thrives on the intimacy possible only in small groups, the synagogue-center cannot function without a large, critical mass of financial supporters and participants.

Undoubtedly, the most far-reaching changes in Conservative congregations during the past decade have focused on the changing role of women in the synagogue. Although women have participated to a greater extent in Conservative synagogues than in traditional Orthodox congregations, it was only during the 1970s that congregations moved toward granting women total equality in synagogue life. The first step in this direction, of course, was to eliminate women’s galleries, which had separated women not only from men, but also from the focal points of the service – the *bimah* (when the cantor stands and the Torah is read), the ark housing Torah scrolls, and the pulpit. Mixed seating did not, however, result in equal participation in the service. Only gradually could women play any role in the service and then, as Marshall Sklare noted still in the 1950s, they were excluded from “the ritual surrounding the

handling and reading of the Torah scrolls.” Yet even this varied, Sklare observed, “according to the sanctity of the service. During the High Holidays the exclusion of females from the pulpit is almost complete. The procedure is modified at times during the less awesome Sabbath morning service. Women are frequently allowed considerable freedom at Friday evening worship, for the Torah scrolls are not particularly important in this service.” For the most part, women were only allowed to recite special liturgical poems – especially English prayers – and to open and close the ark; they could not lead the services, be counted as part of the prayer quorum (*minyán*), or enjoy a Torah honor.⁶⁰

The most important breakthrough for women during the middle decades of the century was the adoption of Bat Mitzvah rituals. As noted above, such programs were virtually unknown until the post-World War II era, despite the fact that the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, an innovative United Synagogue congregation led by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan and guided by his Reconstructionist philosophy, had already instituted Bat Mitzvah services during the 1920s. Matters changed dramatically in the 1950s and 1960s however, as increasing numbers of Conservative congregations introduced Bat Mitzvah ceremonies on Friday evenings or Sabbath mornings.⁶¹ During the course of these services, girls who had come of age chanted from the prophetic works and sometimes even from the Torah scrolls – honors that were not granted to their mothers. The activities of Bat Mitzvah girls pioneered the way for adult women: First, by their participation in Torah and prayer-related rituals, Bat Mitzvah girls began the process of legitimizing the involvement of all females in such rites. Second, when they grew to adulthood, women who had at an earlier age participated more in synagogue services during their Bat Mitzvah ceremonies, refused to accept their present exclusion from prayer and Torah rites; they thus formed an important body for change in the status of women in the synagogue.

Changes also occurred in the participation of women in synagogue administration, albeit at a slow pace. Two surveys conducted during the mid-1970s illustrate the dimensions of this change. In a survey of Midwestern congregations conducted by the United Synagogue, 100 percent of the responding synagogues indicated that women could serve on the congregational board and could chair committees, and 87 percent permitted women to serve as president or chairman of the board. In practice, however, not one congregation had ever elected a woman to the last two positions. A national survey conducted by the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism based on responses by 437 Sisterhoods (a better than 50 percent return) discovered that twenty-one Conservative congregations had elected women to preside over them, and over two-thirds

had elected women to chair committees or serve on their boards. Thus, by the 1970s women had made considerable progress in assuming administrative positions, but they rarely were elected to their congregations' highest offices, a circumstance all the more remarkable when we consider that women may well constitute the majority of worshipers in Conservative synagogues.⁶²

The status of women in Conservative ritual and administrative life has undergone rapid and sweeping changes during the 1970s and early 1980s. To recognize the dimensions of change, we need only refer to a survey of some 250 Conservative rabbis conducted in 1962 by Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal, the author of a responsum that permitted women to receive Torah honors. Blumenthal's survey found that only 7 percent of congregations granted women Torah honors (*aliyot*) on a regular basis and 17 percent on special occasions; only 6 percent allowed women to be counted in the prayer quorum; and 11 percent allowed women to read from the Torah and 33 percent from the prophets (*Haphtorah*). Surveys conducted in the mid-1970s, present a dramatically different situation: The majority of congregations surveyed permitted women to speak from the pulpit; and one-third to one-half of congregations counted women in the quorum, granted them *aliyot*, and permitted them to chant part of the service. According to the most recent survey, well over 50 percent of Conservative congregations now grant *aliyot* to women at least on some occasions. Concluding their survey of "Women in the Synagogue Today," Daniel Elazar and Rela Monson contend that urban and small town congregations, particularly on the East Coast, have retained more traditional roles for women, whereas Conservative congregations on the West Coast, in suburban areas, and with a predominant membership under forty years of age are most likely to permit women to participate with full equality.⁶³ It seems likely that such policies will gain wider acceptance as women enter the Conservative rabbinate and cantorate in the late 1980s.

In the preceding historical survey, Conservative synagogues have been defined in institutional terms – as affiliates of the United Synagogue of America. Beyond such institutional loyalties, what shared rituals, programs, and points of view are held in common by member congregations of the United Synagogue of America? To begin with, there are commonalities in the balance of traditional and innovative rituals practiced in Conservative congregations. From their inception, Conservative synagogues have endeavored to conduct thrice-daily prayer services according to the hallowed liturgy and mainly in Hebrew. But they also have instituted reforms in the ritual such as the inclusion of

English prayers, the adoption of the triennial cycle of Torah readings, and the elimination or modification of prayers relating to the sacrificial worship of ancient Israel. Also in keeping with tradition, men (and often women) cover their heads during prayer and don prayer shawls; but men and women also sit together, a practice long identified solely with American Reform synagogues. These commonalities should not obscure the significant differences in worship that have appeared in Conservative synagogues: Throughout the century, there has never been a uniform prayerbook adopted by all congregations; and in our own time, congregations vary greatly in the roles assigned to women during the worship service.

Conservative synagogues therefore are not united by a series of uniform practices, but by common concerns and patterns of behavior. In the realm of synagogue ritual there has always been a concern with hewing to a centrist course between the extremes of Orthodoxy and Reform. Conservative congregations have amalgamated traditional usages and prayers with some of the innovations pioneered by Reform. This approach has often been derided as a compromise, and Conservative synagogues have suffered criticism for their inconsistency. If consistency is not defined solely as adherence to a code or fixed ideology, but rather as adherence to a pattern of choices, Conservative congregations have been remarkably consistent in eschewing the extremes of synagogue conduct prevalent in Orthodox and Reform congregations. Instead, they have adopted elements of both. Within a given locality, Conservative synagogues characteristically include more traditional customs than Reform temples and more innovations than Orthodox congregations.

A second historical pattern characteristic of Conservative congregations is found in their broad conception of the synagogue's proper function. Reports on affiliates of the United Synagogue from 1910 to 1920 and during the 1920s consistently highlight the broad range of programs offered, including adult education forums, congregational schools, recreational events, social activities, and auxiliaries for men, women, young adults, and children. Conservative synagogues have not monopolized the concept of the synagogue-center, but they have played a major role in winning wide acceptance for this model of the synagogue.

Without doubt, the central feature of the synagogue-center has been its emphasis upon congregational schooling. Already at the turn of the century, Conservative synagogues pioneered new forms of congregational education. We have seen that in the 1920s and again in the post-World War II era, much of the growth of congregational schools was directly attributable to the efforts of Conservative synagogues. The Hebrew school was especially promoted by United Synagogue congrega-

tions, in direct contrast to the investment of Reform temples in Sunday schools and of Orthodox congregations first in communal heder schools and later in day schools. Conservative congregations clearly were not alone in offering Hebrew school education, but they chose thrice-weekly supplementary schools as their preferred vehicle for Jewish education. Moreover, most Conservative congregations not only invested a significant part of their budgets in Hebrew schools, but also risked alienating members by requiring minimum school attendance of all their Bar and Bat Mitzvah children. Clearly, congregational schooling has been a central concern of Conservative synagogues.

Such concern derives not only from the professional leadership of congregations, but also from the membership. Conservative synagogue members characteristically want their children to have a Judaic and Hebraic education. In fact, it may be possible to identify Conservative congregants by their commitment to a more intensive Jewish education than that offered by Reform temples. For better or worse, a great many people join Conservative synagogues primarily in order to place their children in a setting they deem conducive to the formation of a strong Jewish identity.

In the light of this motive, it is easier to understand the ongoing attendance problems of Conservative synagogues. From their inception to the present day, such congregations have never attracted more than a scant minority of members to prayer services on a regular, weekly basis. This was the case during the periods of greatest expansion, and it remains so to the present day. The overwhelming majority (75 percent) of Conservative rabbis responding to a 1975 survey reported that fewer than one-quarter of their congregants attend late Friday evening services on a regular basis, and almost half reported an attendance of less than 10 percent of their total membership on the average Sabbath morning service.⁶⁴ Although these figures may be somewhat lower than in earlier eras and the population attending services may be somewhat older than in previous decades, sparse synagogue attendance is a characteristic of the Conservative synagogue.

A related characteristic is the proportionally high percentage of women who have traditionally attended services. In marked contrast to Orthodox synagogues – particularly of the immigrant variety – Conservative synagogues attract fewer men than women to prayer services. There is substantial evidence that this pattern obtained during the first decades of the century when men routinely worked on the Sabbath, and it has persisted to the present. During the mid-1950s, women constituted between 50 and 74 percent of worshippers at the majority of Conservative services on Friday evenings. As Marshall Sklare noted in citing these

figures, "Women in the Conservative synagogue are taking up the slack produced by the male whose decrease in attendance may well represent his acceptance of the general American pattern in the field of religious behavior. The sex distribution during worship in Conservative synagogues may soon approach Western standards; . . . [i.e.,] much concern on the part of women for religion – an interest for which they are presumed to have a special affinity."⁶⁵ Given these demographic realities, it is understandable that women have consistently played a greater role in the ritual and organizational life of Conservative, as opposed to Orthodox, synagogues. It is also not surprising that women's roles have constantly expanded.

In sum, the history of the Conservative synagogue is marked by a cluster of patterns and emphases present in congregations affiliated with the United Synagogue. The Conservative synagogue is characterized by a centrist orientation that amalgamates Orthodox and Reform practices, a particular pattern of attendance and membership involvement, a heavy investment in congregational schooling, and a broad definition of the proper role of the synagogue within the Jewish community. Although particular practices and rituals have changed over time, the Conservative synagogue has developed its own orientation to the three classical functions of the synagogue and therefore represents a peculiarly twentieth-century American version of the Jewish house of prayer, study, and assembly.

NOTES

- 1 This is not to suggest that Conservative synagogues exist only in the United States. In fact, such congregations may be found throughout the world and are even joined together in the World Council of Synagogues. Member congregations of this international organization are located in Canada, South America, several European countries, Israel, and New Zealand, in addition to the United States. However, with the exception of Canadian affiliates (whose development was coterminous with their counterparts in the United States), other congregations borrowed heavily from the American Conservative synagogue and frequently were even founded by Americans. It is also not my intention to suggest that there were no similarities in ideology or ritual practices between American Conservative congregations and nineteenth-century Liberal synagogues in Europe. Nonetheless, the Conservative synagogue is a uniquely American institution, both in its internal structure and function and in the role it plays in the Jewish community.
- 2 I employ an institutional rather than descriptive definition of the Conservative synagogue for two reasons: first, because the practices of synagogues that have identified themselves as Conservative have varied over the course

of time and from one community to the next; and second, because it enables us to rely upon the data collected by the major agencies of the Conservative Movement about their own institutional affiliates. The reader should note, however, that membership in the United Synagogue did not always signify that a congregation identified itself as Conservative. Especially during the first decades of this century, some modern Orthodox congregations joined the United synagogue – including several Young Israel congregations. On the other hand, not all congregations that identify themselves as Conservative or that adopt Conservative conventions necessarily affiliate themselves with the United Synagogue: Some do not join because they are led by rabbis who feel no allegiance to the institutions of the Conservative Movement or because they wish to remain independent, whereas others are stripped of their affiliation for failing to pay dues to the United States. With the exception of the depression years, when many congregations could not afford to support a national organization, the United Synagogue won the allegiance of the preponderant majority of Conservative synagogues. Maurice J. Karpf estimated in 1937 that only 50 percent of Conservative congregations belonged to the United Synagogue; see *Jewish Community Organization in the United States: An Outline of Types of Organizations, Activities, and Problems* (New York, 1937), p. 70.

By adopting an institutional definition of the Conservative synagogue, this chapter eschews the ongoing, often highly partisan, debate about the antiquity of the various Jewish denominations in the United States. Certainly, twentieth-century Conservative synagogues have drawn upon ideological and institutional models developed by nineteenth-century American congregations. However, it was only in the first decades of the twentieth century that distinctive and identifiable Conservative synagogues fully emerged.

- 3 Leon Jick, *The Americanization of the Synagogue 1820–1870* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), p. 174.
- 4 For descriptions of reforms introduced during this period, see Jick, *Americanization of the Synagogue*, pp. 174–191, as well as Jick's essay in the present volume. On immigrant congregations, see Irving Howe, *The World of Our Fathers* (New York, 1976), pp. 183–200. Herman and Mignon Rubenovitz describe the traditional practices of Boston's Mishkan Tefila in *The Waking Heart* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 31–34. In his essay, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," Charles Liebman has questioned the "Orthodoxy" of most East European immigrants on the grounds that they displayed scant interest in some traditional institutions – e.g., the Mikva and Yeshiva. Although this line of inquiry raises important questions about the historical origins of what today is labeled as Orthodoxy, Liebman does not deny that immigrant congregations essentially followed the practices of their East European counterparts. Liebman's essay appears in *The American Jewish Yearbook*, 1965; see especially pp. 27–30.
- 5 Simon Cohen, *Shaaray Tephilla: A History of Its Hundred Years, 1845–1945*

- (New York, 1945), pp. 31–34; Bernard Drachman, *The Unfailing Light: Memoirs of An American Rabbi* (New York, 1948), p. 175; Selig Adler and Thomas E. Connolly, *From Ararat to Suburbia: The History of the Jewish Community of Buffalo* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 266–272; Lloyd P. Gartner, *History of the Jews of Cleveland* (Cleveland, 1978), pp. 166–170.
- 6 Herbert Parzen, “The Early Development of Conservative Judaism,” *Conservative Judaism*, July 1947, p. 11; Israel Goldstein, *A Century of Judaism in New York: Bnai Jeshurun 1825–1925* (New York, 1930), p. 200. There is no question that East European immigrants and their children played the dominant role in synagogues affiliated with the United Synagogue. Nevertheless, the role of so-called German congregations should not be overlooked. Central European Jews who arrived in America during the 1860s and 1870s only slowly introduced reforms, and even German immigrants who arrived in earlier decades did not all succumb to radical reform.
 - 7 Carole Kruckoff, *Rodfei Zedek: The First Hundred Years* (Chicago, 1976), p. 17ff; Joseph P. Schultz, ed., *Mid-America’s Promise: A Profile of Kansas City Jewry* (Kansas City, 1982), pp. 18–19.
 - 8 Drachman, *The Unfailing Light*, pp. 197–204, describes his unsuccessful struggle to stave off the introduction of mixed pews at Beth Israel Bikkur Cholim. On developments in Buffalo, see Adler and Connolly, *From Ararat to Suburbia*, pp. 266–272. For some examples of immigrant congregations that insisted on English discourse, see Henry S. Schnitzer, *Thy Goodly Tent: The First Fifty years of Temple Emanuel, Bayonne, N.J.* (Bayonne, 1961), p. 3; and Allen duPont Breck, *The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado 1859–1959* (Denver, 1960), pp. 88–89, 218–220. The latter work describes the founding of Beth Ha midrash Hagidol as “an English-speaking Orthodox congregation.” On congregations established outside of the immigrant ghettos that gradually introduced American innovations, see W. G. Plaut, *The Jews of Minnesota: The First Seventy-Five Years* (New York, 1959), pp. 196–198; *Rededication Journal: Temple Beth El* (Springfield, Mass., 1968), p. 18; Lloyd P. Gartner and Max Vorspan, *History of the Jews of Los Angeles* (New York, 1970), p. 162. These examples refer only to developments prior to 1913; during the next decades, hundreds of congregations would follow this pattern.
- The present analysis departs from Marshall Sklare’s pioneering study of Conservative Judaism, which traces the development of the Conservative synagogue to areas of third settlement. See *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York, 1954), chaps. 2 and 3. That clearly was the pattern in the era after World War II, but during the first decades of the century, many Conservative synagogues arose in areas of second settlement. For more on this issue, see my essay “The Conservative Synagogue Revisited,” *American Jewish History*, December 1984, pp. 120–121.
- 9 On the efforts of rabbis associated with the Jewish Theological Seminary Association to challenge Reform and define a traditional, yet American alternative, see Moshe Davis, *The Emergence of Conservative Judaism* (New

York, 1964); Abraham Karp, "The Origins of Conservative Judaism," *Conservative Judaism*, Summer 1965; and Herbert Rosenblum, "The Founding of the United Synagogue of America, 1913" (Ph.D. diss. Brandeis University, 1970). For a study of the emerging Conservative rabbinate, see Abraham Karp, "The Conservative Rabbi," *American Jewish Archives*, October 1983. See the references in notes 5–8 on the experiences of early Seminary graduates.

- 10 Rubenovitz and Rubenovitz, *The Waking Heart*, pp. 31–34; on the difficulties encountered by Egelson and others, see Rosenblum, "Founding of the United Synagogue," pp. 133–134.
- 11 Herbert Rosenblum's dissertation provides a first-rate history of the circumstances and deliberations leading up to the founding of the United Synagogue. Schechter's speech at the founding convention appears in *The United Synagogue Report*, 1913, pp. 14–23. Schechter urged the new agency to "be in constant communication with our congregations" and to send "out Rabbis and preachers for the purpose of propaganda, not only to enlist new congregations, but to help such outlying communities in the various states as are in need of advice and counsel" (p. 21).
- 12 Joel Blau, "Conservative Judasim," *The American Hebrew*, 1 October 1909, p. 547.
- 13 To obtain United Synagogue membership figures, I counted affiliates listed in the *Annual Reports of the United Synagogue* (New York, 1917, 1922, 1929). For the membership of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, see *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1929, p. 285.
- 14 Figures on affiliates are based on my compilations from the *Annual Reports of the United Synagogue*. For Jewish populations in various American cities and states, see Harry S. Linfield, *The Jews in the United States, 1927* (New York, 1929), especially pp. 10–11, 18–19, 83ff.
- 15 This analysis of the growth of Conservative synagogues has been put forth most explicitly by Marshall Sklare, in *Conservative Judaism*, chaps. 3 and 4.
- 16 For a few of the numerous communal and congregational histories that credit the initiative of Seminary-trained rabbis for steering congregations toward Conservative practices and allegiance, see the references in note 7, as well as S. Joshua Kohn, *The Jewish Community of Utica, N.Y. 1847–1948* (New York, 1959), pp. 63–77; Lloyd P. Gartner and Louis Swichkow, *The Jews of Milwaukee* (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 213ff.; Joseph Gale, ed., *Eastern Union: The Development of a Jewish Community* (Elizabeth, N.J., 1958), pp. 42–43; Marc Lee Raphael, *Jews and Judaism in a Mid-Western Community* (Columbus, Ohio, 1979), pp. 185–186; and I. A. Melnick, ed., *Bnai Israel Congregation, Pittsburgh 1904–1929* (Pittsburgh, 1929), p. 17ff.

One of the as yet unexamined aspects of Jewish denominational history in America concerns the competitive efforts of the major rabbinical seminaries to place their graduates in pulpit positions. In the period from 1918 to 1927, the Jewish Theological Seminary graduated 95 students, whereas Yeshiva graduated only 55. Moreover, Seminary students took pulpits

- throughout the country, whereas Yeshiva graduates remained in a few key cities. One wonders how these placement patterns affected the growth of Conservative and modern Orthodox synagogues. It is also worth speculating on the impact of immigrant rabbis on the careers of American-trained Orthodox colleagues. It seems that a strong rabbi such as Bernard Levinthal in Philadelphia played an important role in keeping modern Orthodox rabbis out of his city, thereby paving the way for success of Seminary-trained rabbis in Philadelphia. For some reflections on this theme, see Jeffrey Gurock, "Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983," *American Jewish Archives*, Fall 1983, especially p. 172, n. 64.
- 17 On these activities, see *The United Synagogue Recorder, 1921–29*, especially vol. 2, no. 1 (1922), p. 10. On Cohen's instrumental role in the founding of a Conservative congregation in Providence, see *Temple Emanu-El: The First Fifty Years* (Providence, 1976), pp. 28–29.
 - 18 *Temple Emanu-El*, p. 29.
 - 19 For a good analysis of these developments, see Sidney Solomon, "The Conservative Congregational School as a Response to the American Scene" (DHL diss., The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982), especially chap. 3. Solomon cites some statistics on school growth on p. 66ff. For two examples of congregations that required Hebrew school attendance for aspiring Bar Mitzvah boys, see Schnitzer, *Thy Goodly Tent*, p. 41ff; and Louis Levitsky, "The Story of an Awakened Community," *The Reconstructionist*, 7 February 1936, p. 12ff. Levitsky describes how, from its founding in 1923, Temple Israel of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, contained a group of members determined not to permit the establishment of a Sunday school; already during the 1920s, the congregation required attendance at three-day-a-week Hebrew schools of potential *Bnai Mitzvah*. For an example of a congregation that established its Hebrew school several years prior to its organization of regular prayer services, see Israel A. Allen, *History of the Baldwin Jewish Center, 1928–1948* (Baldwin, L.I., 1948), p. 8.
 - 20 Morris Silverman, "Report of Survey on Ritual," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1933*, p. 335; Leon S. Lang, "What Have We Done with Confirmation," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1936*, p. 289. On the Young Folk's League, see *United Synagogue Recorder* vol. 1, no. 2 (1921), p. 3.
 - 21 Isidoro Aizenberg, "The Early History of Two Conservative Synagogues in Queens – The Jamaica Jewish Center and The Jamaica Estates Hebrew Center," TS, p. 4. I thank Rabbi Aizenberg for making this unpublished history available to me.
 - 22 Silverman, "Report of Survey on Ritual," pp. 328–335.
 - 23 Alter Landesman, "Synagogue Attendance," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly, 1928*, p. 41ff; Levitsky, "Story of an Awakened Community," p. 9. On the emptiness of synagogues, see Deborah Melamed, "Women's Opportunity in the Synagogue," *The United Synagogue Recorder*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1921), pp. 12–13.
 - 24 Melamed, "Women's Opportunity," p. 12ff. On the activities of women

in Conservative congregations early in the century, see the reports in *The United Synagogue Recorder*, especially vol. V, no. 2 (1925). According to Marc Lee Raphael, women generally did not serve on the boards of Conservative synagogues during this period or even into the 1940s; Raphael, *Jews and Judaism*, p. 267. See the subsequent discussion for more on the changing role of women in Conservative synagogues.

- 25 Levinthal and the president of the Brooklyn Jewish Center are quoted in Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation Jews in New York* (New York, 1981), pp. 130–131. Chapter 5 of Moore's study contains an important analysis of the development of synagogue-centers in New York City. Kaplan is quoted in Harry L. Glucksman, "The Synagogue Center," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1933, pp. 268–269. The description of Bnai Jeshurun appears in the *United Synagogue Recorder*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1921), p. 15.
- 26 On the synagogue construction boom, see *Census of Religious Bodies, 1936 – Jewish Congregations: Statistics, History, Doctrine, and Organization* (Washington, 1940), especially pp. 1–7; and the *American Hebrew*, 17 May 1929, p. 6ff. On mortgage costs, see S. Joshua Kohn, "The Rabbi and the Congregational Budget," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1932, p. 220.
- 27 Goldstein is quoted in Glucksman, "The Synagogue Center," p. 271; the latter quotation is from Moore, *At Home in America*, pp. 144–146 and represents the views of Israel Levinthal.
- 28 Gartner and Vorspan, *History of the Jews*, p. 210; Kruckoff, *Rodfei Zedek*, p. 38.
- 29 Schnitzer discusses the impact of the Great Depression in *Thy Goodly Tent*, chap. 4. The economic crisis also forced the United Synagogue to curtail many of its programs and suspend publication of its annual reports and *Recorder*.

On the general depression that characterized American religious life in this era, see Robert T. Handy, "The American Religious Depression, 1925–35," *Church History*, vol. 29, no. 1 (March, 1960), pp. 3–16. The "spiritual lethargy" described by Handy applied primarily to mainline Protestant denominations; as Handy notes, "both Judaism and Roman Catholicism were deeply affected by economic depression." Further research is needed to determine whether American Judaism also suffered from a spiritual malaise during this era.

- 30 Congregational histories report on an easing of financial problems toward the end of the 1930s and certainly by the time of World War II. By 1941, the United Synagogue could afford to resume publishing newsletters and even launched *The Torch* for its Federation of Men's Clubs and *The Synagogue Center* to guide boards of synagogues.

For data on congregational growth, see the *Biennial Convention Reports of the United Synagogue of America* 1952, p. 52; 1957, p. 97; 1959, p. 140; 1961, p. 3; 1963, pp. 184–185; and 1965, p. 6, which reports the induction of the 800th affiliate. There are no published statistics on affiliates during the 1940s,

but Albert I. Gordon, a key United Synagogue official, claimed that in 1949 there were 365 congregations in the United Synagogue. See *Jews in Suburbia*, (Boston, 1959), p. 97.

The membership of congregations also increased during this period: In 1957, Eli Ginzburg reported that of United Synagogue congregations, half numbered 250 families or less, a quarter between 250 and 400 families, and another quarter over 400 families, with 20 synagogues numbering over 1,000 members. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1960. p. 23.

- 31 For some cautious, yet celebratory assessments of the Conservative Movement's success, see Morris Freedman, "A New Jewish Community in Formation," *Commentary*, January 1955, pp. 36–47; and Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, chap. 8. Partisans of Conservatism were less restrained in advertising the seemingly endless opportunities of the movement to lead American Jewry.
- 32 See *Biennial Report to the Convention* (a report prepared by the United Synagogue in 1950) on the geographic distribution of affiliates; it reported the most dense concentration (182 congregations) in the New York metropolitan region (pp. 12–13). See also the Biennial Convention proceedings cited in note 30 for the geographic locations of newly inducted affiliates. On the dramatic growth of Conservatism on Long Island, see Freedman, "A New Jewish Community in Formation," p. 36. For an example of one of many congregations eclipsed by the move to suburbia, see Adler and Connolly, *From Ararat to Suburbia*, pp. 324–326.
- 33 Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia*, chap. 4, and especially, p. 97.
- 34 It was not uncommon for such controversies over synagogue innovations to be brought before American courts of law. For documents submitted to courts, see Baruch Litvin, ed., *The Sanctity of the Synagogue* (New York, 1959), pp. 49–77. For more on these court cases, see Louis Bernstein, "The Emergence of the English Speaking Orthodox Rabbinate" (Ph.D. diss., Yeshiva University, 1977), pp. 289–297. Also see *Conservative Judaism*, Fall 1956; and Herman Landau, *Adath Louisville: The Story of a Jewish Community* (Louisville, 1981). It should be noted that the introduction of mixed pews in this period, as well as in earlier eras, did not necessarily mean that a congregation identified itself as Conservative. In some cases, congregations that introduced mixed seating described themselves as traditional and identified with modern Orthodoxy. In other cases, congregations decided not to affiliate with any national religious movement.
- 35 See Leo Spitz, "The Synagogue Center Marches On," *Jubilee Volume of the Brooklyn Jewish Center* (New York, 1946), p. 60. Spitz quotes Rabbi Stanley Rabinowitz, then director of field activities for the United Synagogue, to the effect that three-quarters of affiliates "may be regarded as Synagogue Centers" (p. 63). See also, Marshall Sklare's contention that the Conservative movement pioneered in creating synagogue-centers, in "The Conservative Movement/Achievements and Problems," *The Jewish Community in America* (New York, 1974), p. 179.

One highly visible manifestation of this group's desire to advertise its socioeconomic attainments was its lavish investment in synagogue art and architecture. For two congregations that hired noted artists and architects, see Freedman, "A New Jewish Community in Formation," pp. 37ff and especially Patricia Talbot Davis, *Together They Built A Mountain* (Lititz, Pa., 1974), on Frank Lloyd Wright's achievement in Elkins Park, Pa.

- 36 Freedman, "A New Jewish Community in Formation," p. 36; Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, p. 256; and Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia*, chap. 4, and the quotation on p. 98.
- 37 Gordon, *Jews in Suburbia*, pp. 98–99. Wolfe Kelman, executive director of the Rabbinical Assembly, has suggested that wartime encounters between Jewish soldiers and Seminary-trained chaplains fostered a positive attitude toward Conservatism that bore fruit in the postwar era. Interview, 12 March 1984.
- 38 See the *Biennial Convention Reports* and *The Synagogue Center* for information on the departments and programs of the United Synagogue during the postwar era. For material on the Department for Synagogue Architecture, see especially *The Synagogue Center*, October 1943, p. 13.
- 39 On synagogue budgets, see the Department of Synagogue Administration of the United Synagogue of America, "Survey of Synagogue Finances," November 1963, p. 21. I thank Mr. Jack Mittelman of the United Synagogue for graciously supplying me with these survey data and other information gathered by his office during the 1960s.

On the financing of schools, see the *Biennial Convention Report of the United Synagogue*, 1950, pp. 96–97. See also, Sklare, p. 77ff. on the importance of schools in attracting members. Sidney Solomon provides a good analysis of why Conservatism embraced Hebrew schools as their preferred vehicle for Jewish education rather than day schools (p. 92). Some congregations, however, did support their own foundation and day schools. See Walter Ackerman, "The Day School in the Conservative Movement," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1961, p. 50ff.

- 40 Arzt is quoted in Solomon, "Conservative Congregational School," p. 94.
- 41 The United Synagogue, in fact, founded a publication entitled *The Synagogue School* in order to encourage the development of Hebrew schools. Many issues of the late 1940s approvingly described the efforts of Conservative congregations to eliminate Sunday schools and replace them with thrice-weekly programs. See especially the September 1948 issue, pp. 26–27, on developments in Philadelphia; and the harsh report on Sunday schools issued by the United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education and prepared by Stanley Rabinowitz and Gershon Winer, "The Objectives and Standards for the Congregational School," *The Synagogue School*, January 1951. For the results of a survey conducted in the 1950s by the American Association for Jewish Education, see Alexander Dushkin and U. Z. Engelman, *Jewish Education in the United States*, vol. 1 (New York, 1959) pp. 57, 100.

- 42 For a good analysis of how congregational schools replaced communal schools, see Solomon, "Conservative Congregational School," pp. 67–74.
- 43 On day school attendance by Conservative children, see Dushkin and Engleman, *Jewish Education*, pp. 57–58.
- 44 Wolfe Kelman, interview, 12 March 1984. For some corroboration, see Karp, "Conservative Rabbi," p. 226.
- 45 "Survey on Synagogue Finances," p. 21.
- 46 For data on youth activities and services, see the *Biennial Convention Report* of the United Synagogue, 1950, pp. 96, 97, 104. On Har Zion, see Rose Goldstein, "The Youth Program in a Large-Sized Congregation," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1961, p. 33ff. On Junior Congregations, see Elliot Schwartz, "The Junior Congregation Program," *The Synagogue School*, September 1951, p. 3. On pioneering efforts of congregations in Chicago to found the first Ramah camp in Wisconsin, see Kurckoff, *Rodfei Zedek*, p. 49, and Shuly Schwartz, "Ramah – The Early Years, 1947–1952" (Master's thesis, Jewish Theological Seminary, 1976).
- 47 Morris S. Goodblatt, "Synagogue Ritual Survey," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1948, pp. 105–109; Samuel M. Cohen, "Friday Night Services," *The Synagogue Center*, March 1944, p. 7.
- 48 Max J. Routtenberg, "Report of the Prayer Book Commission," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1942, pp. 147–156.
- 49 For some of the background to this venture, see Routtenberg, "Report of the Prayer Book Commission," p. 150; and Robert Gordis, "A Jewish Prayerbook for the Modern Age," *Conservative Judaism*, October 1954, pp. 7–9. Data on usage appears in Goodblatt, "Synagogue Ritual Survey," p. 108; and "High Holiday Practices in Conservative Congregations," Department of Synagogue Administration of the United Synagogue, July 1967, p. 6.
- 50 Goodblatt, "Synagogue Ritual Survey," pp. 105–109.
- 51 "Standards for Synagogue Practice," *United Synagogue Biennial Report*, 1957, p. 49; Emil Lehman, "National Survey on Synagogue Leadership," (New York: United Synagogue and the Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University, 1953), pp. 6–8, 12–14, 28. Lehman's comments appear in the *Biennial Convention Report*, 1953, pp. 36–37.
- 52 On the Sabbath revitalization plan, see *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1950, pp. 117–125; on the Yom Kippur oath, see *Bulletin of the Rabbinical Assembly*, December 1949, p. 7. The decision of the United Synagogue to publish *The Torch* for laymen was in part motivated by a concern over the poor attendance at synagogue services. See especially Joel S. Geffen, "A Challenge to the American-Jewish Laity," *The Torch*, November 1944, pp. 23–25.
- 53 Wolfe Kelman, "The American Synagogue: Present Prospects," *Conservative Judaism* Fall 1971, p. 13.
- 54 "Survey on Synagogue Membership," p. 8. On mergers, see Kelman, "American Synagogue," p. 13.

- 55 Charles S. Liebman and Saul Shapiro, "A Survey of the Conservative Movement and Some of Its Religious Attitudes" pp. 1, 22 (unpublished). For a critique of this study, see Harold Schulweis, "Surveys, Statistics and Sectarian Salvation," *Conservative Judaism*, Winter 1980, pp. 65–69.
- 56 For evidence of the growth of the Conservative movement in sunbelt communities, see the report on new United Synagogue affiliates in *The United Synagogue Review*, Fall 1984, p. 12. Two urban congregations that have developed extensive programs for young Jewish gentrifiers are Anshe Chesed on Manhattan's West Side and Adas Israel in Washington, D. C. On the latter, see *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1981, p. 128.
- 57 For reports on some of these developments, see the *Biennial Convention Reports of the United Synagogue*, 1975, p. 75, and 1977, p. 19.
- 58 Reisman is quoted in Daniel Elazar and Rela Geffen Monson, "The Synagogue *Havurah* – An Experiment in Restoring Adult Fellowship to the Jewish Community," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, June 1979, p. 67.
- 59 See Elazar and Monson, "The Synagogue *Havurah*," p. 74 for data on synagogue *Havurot*. See also, Gerald B. Bubis, *Synagogue Havurot: A Comparative Study*, (Washington, 1983) on several Reform and Conservative synagogue *Havurot* in Los Angeles; Dov Peretz Elkins, *Humanizing Jewish Life* (South Brunswick and New York, 1976), chaps. 5–8 on the activities of *Havurot* in a Rochester congregation; and "Havurah Failures and Successes," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 1979, pp. 55–75.
- 60 Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, p. 89.
- 61 On the pioneering efforts of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, see "Sex Equality in the Synagogue," *The Reconstructionist*, 6 March 1953, pp. 17–19. See above for surveys that included questions about Bat Mitzvah ceremonies.
- 62 For some data on the role of women in synagogue leadership, see "Midwest Regional Survey on the 'Role of Women' within our Conservative Congregations," March, 1974 (an unpublished survey conducted by the United Synagogue); and especially, Zelda Dick, "Light from Our Poll on Women's Role," *Women's League Outlook*, Summer 1975, pp. 14–15.
- 63 Several surveys were conducted during the mid-1970s to measure the degree of women's participation in the religious services of Conservative synagogues. Unfortunately, they contain wildly disparate findings, a possible consequence of the self-selection of respondents who knew of the sympathies of the surveyors. See Dick's survey of sisterhoods; and also Daniel Elazar and Rela Geffen Monson, "Women in the Synagogue Today," *Midstream*, April 1979, especially p. 25 on the Blumenthal survey and p. 27 for their conclusions; also Anne Lapidus Lerner and Stephen C. Lerner, "Lerner Report Survey Results," *Rabbinical Assembly News*, February 1984, pp. 1, 8 (the latter surveyed rabbis).
- 64 See Rela Geffen Monson's address in *Convention Report of the United Synagogue*, 1977, p. 43.
- 65 Sklare, *Conservative Judaism*, p. 89.