

# JTS and the Conservative Movement

## TOWARD THE BEGINNING

of 1979, the Chancellor of JTS and his board chairman exchanged a series of letters about a matter of pressing concern: How shall the Seminary conceive of its relationship to the Conservative movement? Alan M. Stroock, the chairman of the board, maintained that “the Movement is an arm of the Seminary, and the Seminary is not an arm of the Movement, and, in many ways, is independent of it.” Gerson D. Cohen responded as follows:

Of course, the Seminary is independent in the sense that it has complete freedom in academic matters, the *sine qua non* for maintaining its scholarly integrity. On the other hand, a truer picture of the relationship today would be to say that the Seminary and the Conservative Movement are interdependent. We provide leaders and spiritual guidance for the Movement, and in turn depend heavily upon the Movement for support. This means that we rely heavily on the rabbis who are the intermediaries between us and the laity. We can no longer stand aloof from the Conservative Movement as a whole, nor can we ignore the burning issues that confront these ambassadors and our Movement daily. The Seminary cannot afford to maintain a neutral position, which in the final analysis is a euphemism for the Orthodox position, while the Conservative movement as a whole goes its own way. If the Seminary is to be the fountain-head of Conservative Judaism, it must be in contact with the Movement and give it guidance. . . . While we at the Seminary have always seen ourselves as being “above the battle” as you say, others have seen the Seminary as evading the issues facing our Movement, because it was bankrupt and ill-equipped to confront them.<sup>1</sup>

This exchange, written during the heat of controversy over the admission of women to the JTS Rabbinical School, is remarkable for a number of reasons, not the least of which is its candor. Stroock apparently viewed the Conservative movement

with its eight hundred congregations and nearly two million adherents as an appendage of the Seminary, even as he urged JTS to maintain its independence. Cohen, in turn, while defending the academic freedom of his institution, frankly admitted that the Seminary needed the movement and had failed its constituency in the past by standing aloof on key issues. The role reversal here is quite striking, for we might have expected the head of an academic institution to fight for independence and his board chairman to argue for the pragmatic necessity of bending to the needs of potential donors. But Cohen and Stroock came at this issue from precisely the opposite perspectives: Stroock urged JTS to stand aloof from the Conservative movement and Cohen argued for greater involvement with denominational concerns.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps even more noteworthy was the fact that nearly a century after the founding of JTS in 1886, the two individuals most responsible for guiding that institution were still struggling to define the proper relationship between JTS and the Conservative movement. The primary issues addressed by this essay are why this relationship was so difficult to define and what the sources were for the underlying tension between JTS and the leading organizations of the Conservative movement in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

### *The Fountainhead*

The Jewish Theological Seminary and its denominational partners were somewhat at odds virtually from the founding of the key institutions of the Conservative movement. Indeed, some of the subsequent difficulties can be traced directly to the manner in which Conservative institutions came into existence. The Jewish Theological Seminary was created before there was a Conservative movement. It functioned for a quarter century as a rabbinical seminary and academic center unconnected to a movement or denomination. In time, its leaders created the infrastructure of the Conservative movement—but they took such steps primarily to promote the needs of JTS. We may note, by way of contrast, that the Reform movement developed quite differently: first came the congregational organization (the Union of American Hebrew Congregations) established in 1873, which then founded a rabbinical school (the Hebrew Union College) in 1875.<sup>4</sup> While conflicts between seminaries and congregational bodies are not unusual, they are exacerbated when the seminary possesses greater financial and political clout than the denomination—and when it relates to the denomination with great ambivalence. Such ambivalence has marked the relationship between the Seminary and the organizations of the Conservative movement ever since JTS brought the latter into existence.

The first such organization, in fact, began as an association of Seminary graduates. Founded on 4 July 1901 as the Alumni Association of the Jewish Theological Seminary, this body renamed itself the Rabbinical Assembly of the Jewish Theo-



The JTS Rabbinical School class of 1909. Morris D. Levine, later on the faculty of the Teachers Institute, is second from left. The other class members (in alphabetical order) are Hirsch Goldberg, Louis I. Goldberg, and Raphael H. Melamed. *Ratner Center, JTS*

logical Seminary (RA) in 1919 after it had grown to some 116 members.<sup>5</sup> For its first quarter century, the alumni association relied entirely on the President and faculty of JTS to manage a primary function of any rabbinical organization—the placement of rabbis. Cyrus Adler, in his capacity as chairman of the board and later President, involved himself directly in the process of matching JTS rabbinical students with particular congregations. And when some of these former students were ready to move on to other pulpits, they appealed directly to Adler and members of the faculty for help. Their often plaintive and sometimes boastful letters to their alma mater perpetuated a dependency that could only lead to resentment. Rabbis in the field wrote of their loneliness and frustration and also pleaded for help in finding a congregation that treated its rabbi better. The response from JTS was often sympathetic but not necessarily helpful.<sup>6</sup>

The responsibility for placement matters only gradually began to shift away from Seminary officials. In 1927 a placement committee was created that consisted of six Rabbinical Assembly representatives and two delegates each from the United Synagogue (the congregational body) and the Seminary. Almost another two decades elapsed before the Rabbinical Assembly hired a full-time executive. The RA thus remained a weak and poorly financed operation subject to the wishes of the Seminary for more than four decades.<sup>7</sup>

The next organization was founded far more deliberately by the Seminary. Although Solomon Schechter conceived of JTS as the leader of “Catholic Israel”

and openly expressed early in his administration the sagacity of “avoiding sectarianism, for it is an especial American feature that no preference is given to any denomination or sect or theological ‘*Richtung*’ [orientation],”<sup>8</sup> he gradually came to the realization that a “Conservative Union” was a necessary addition to the American Jewish community. By 1909 plans for such a union were taking serious shape and prominent individuals in the circle around Schechter lobbied to define its mission. Herbert Rosenblum, the historian who has studied this process most closely, astutely captures the conflicting positions in his detailed analysis of the events leading up to the founding of the United Synagogue. Rosenblum writes:

The projected Conservative Union meant different things to different people. To Schechter it was intended to become a bulwark against the further erosion of his Seminary following and a pipeline for his “message” into previously inaccessible communities. To [Rabbi Judah] Magnes, it offered the possibility of structuring a positively tradition-oriented new alignment along moderate lines. To [Rabbi Herman] Rubenovitz, it meant the building of a Conservative Movement devoted to the teachings of Solomon Schechter. To [Rabbi Charles I.] Hoffman, it intimated the organization of a national (or international) apparatus for coordinating the religious observances of the Torah. [Cyrus] Adler saw in the proposed Union a possible source of future problems for the Seminary and traditional standards. [Israel] Friedlaender envisioned in it the possibility of strengthening the Jewish ethnic and national consciousness along cultural and religious lines. [Louis] Marshall, we may legitimately conjecture, saw in the developing Union a possible new source of energy and support for the Seminary.<sup>9</sup>

It is striking that none of these prominent individuals wished to create a Conservative Union as a service institution for congregations. They all regarded the union as a means to another end. And significantly, both Schechter and his board chairman, Louis Marshall, viewed the future Conservative Union as an instrument to help the Seminary spread its Jewish message and recruit funders.

At the founding convention of the United Synagogue on 23 February 1913, Schechter declared his intention “not to create a new party, but to consolidate an old one.”<sup>10</sup> But the organization quickly became a rallying point and central address for congregations seeking a course between traditional practices and moderate innovations in congregational life—that is, its affiliates developed the synagogue program of Conservative Judaism. Under the leadership of Rabbi Samuel Cohen, its first executive, the United Synagogue aggressively courted newly formed congregations, as well as established synagogues that were changing their practices.<sup>11</sup>

In order to attract a broad membership to its congregations, the United Synagogue established a series of auxiliaries: In 1916, the Women’s Religious Union of the United Synagogue was formed with Mathilde Schechter, the widow of

Solomon, assuming the position of president.<sup>12</sup> In 1921 synagogue clubs for young people were organized nationally as the United Synagogue's Young People's League (later renamed the United Synagogue Youth).<sup>13</sup> And a few years later, Samuel Cohen created a National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs of the United Synagogue of America, which in time served not only as a men's auxiliary but also as a vehicle for leadership training and the nurturing of promising youth.<sup>14</sup> These efforts yielded impressive gains: some seventy societies affiliated with the renamed Women's League of the United Synagogue by 1920. And

the United Synagogue itself grew dramatically from the twenty-two congregations represented at the founding meeting in 1913 to 229 affiliates by 1929.<sup>15</sup>

Despite its relatively rapid growth in membership, the United Synagogue long remained a weak organization, heavily dependent upon the Seminary for financing and programmatic guidance. Its first three presidents were JTS personnel: Schechter, who not only founded the United Synagogue but served as its first president, was succeeded by Cyrus Adler and then by the noted Seminary talmudist, Louis Ginzberg. Every executive director of the United Synagogue was ordained at JTS, a tie that may have impeded their independence. And for many decades, the organization was physically housed at the Seminary.

### *Sources of Friction*

Tensions between these organizations and JTS flared almost immediately after their founding, undoubtedly fueled by the disparity between the prestige and financial security enjoyed by JTS and the relative weakness of denominational organizations. But there were deeper sources of dissatisfaction as well, rooted in alternative visions of the Seminary's mission.<sup>16</sup> From the start, organizations of the Conservative movement urged JTS to focus sharply on denominational concerns: they wanted the Seminary to function as the pedagogic arm of a denomination, training its rabbis and later other personnel, specifically for leadership within Conservative synagogues. JTS leaders viewed the institution's mission more broadly—as serving the American Jewish community and eventually addressing non-Jews as well. One resolution to such tensions would have been for the Conservative movement and JTS to part company, but that proved unfeasible because the various parties needed



Brooklyn branch of the National Women's League, luncheon at Beth Shalom of King's Bay, 1963. From left: Isabel Josephberg, Torah Fund chair, and Sophie Adler, branch president. *Courtesy of Torah Fund Campaign, JTS.*

each other too much. Thus, the tensions persisted—and created a long-standing ambivalence in the relationship between the various arms of the Conservative movement.

Expressions of this ambivalence, which simultaneously included barbed criticism and pleas for greater cooperation and respect, recur along predictable lines throughout the century and can be traced back to the earliest contacts between these organizations. Thus, in a letter to Cyrus Adler written just a few years after the founding of the United Synagogue and his appointment as the executive of that organization, Samuel Cohen lamented the inadequate preparation of rabbis ordained at JTS for congregational leadership: “It is a deplorable fact but the average Seminary graduate does not know how to deal with practical communal problems. . . . It might be well to consider the advisability of establishing a regular course treating adequately the problems of communal endeavor, religious education and pastoral theology.”<sup>17</sup> Long after the types of courses recommended by Cohen became part of the required curriculum of the Rabbinical School, the criticism of JTS products persisted.

Even as he criticized JTS, Cohen also urged the Seminary to appreciate the virtues of the United Synagogue—and the role it could play as the Seminary’s partner. He touted the ability of the United Synagogue to improve relations between Seminary alumni and congregations, as well as to educate congregants “to understand the problem Judaism is facing and the way in which progress may be made towards a solution.” According to Cohen, “This work can be done only by one agency, the United Synagogue.”<sup>18</sup>

Fifteen years later, Cohen was still urging the arms of the Conservative movement to treat each other with greater respect and to increase their levels of cooperation. He portrayed his organization as the most important force for “building loyalty to our movement on the part of the lay leaders in the various congregations in the United States and Canada.” And he contended that “a study of the actual procedure followed by the various congregations in calling their rabbis, indicates that the most important factor is their affiliation with one of our regional branches.” The message here was quite explicit: the United Synagogue could help the Seminary place its graduates in pulpits, win adherents to Conservative Judaism, and find work for members of the Rabbinical Assembly.<sup>19</sup>

A similar ambivalence—carping criticism coupled with calls for greater cooperation—would come to characterize relations between the Rabbinical Assembly and JTS. Already during the Schechter period some recent graduates were urging the Seminary to take a more active role in shaping congregational life. Two years after his ordination, Herman Rubenovitz wrote to Schechter arguing that “a program of educational work carried on by the Seminary branches under the auspices of the Seminary, a species of Seminary-extension, would tend to make of them rallying

points for the conservatively inclined of all congregations, and would then spread Seminary influence.” Rubenovitz was among the first, but certainly not the last, to urge JTS to engage the American Jewish community far more directly.<sup>20</sup>

Not long afterwards, JTS alumni petitioned the Seminary’s leading talmudist to clarify the nature of Judaism espoused by JTS, a theme that would recur for many decades in exchanges between rabbis and their alma mater. Several alumni and younger JTS faculty members addressed a letter to Louis Ginzberg urging the Seminary to

formulate in terms of beliefs and practice, the type of Judaism that we believe you profess in common with us. We have failed as a group to exert an influence on Jewish life in any way commensurate with the truth and strength of our position, and that, primarily, because we have never made our position clear to the rest of the world. . . . we maintain that the time has come for us to state frankly and emphatically what we believe in and what we regard as authoritative in Jewish practice. . . . We feel that no good can come to Judaism either from petrified traditionalism or from individualistic liberalism, and that it is our duty to point the way to a Judaism that shall be both historical and progressive.<sup>21</sup>

The failure of the Seminary to articulate a distinctive ideology, coupled with its involvement in matters quite removed from the Conservative movement, would serve as a persistent source of resentment on the part of the rabbis.

And yet, like the United Synagogue, the rabbis were beholden to the Seminary. As noted, they depended on the goodwill of Seminary administrators and faculty when it came to placement matters. The Rabbinical Assembly also drew most of its membership from JTS alumni and in fact granted nearly automatic membership to rabbis ordained at the Seminary.<sup>22</sup> When the Rabbinical Assembly eventually opened a permanent office, it would be housed in the JTS complex. The RA and JTS, in short, were institutionally intertwined, even as friction between them continued to mount during the thirties and forties.

Leaders of JTS, in turn, were even more ambivalent toward the denominational organizations. They continually criticized those agencies for being too weak and ineffectual, even as they simultaneously felt ill at ease whenever those denominational arms acted decisively. As the fountainhead institution from which the denominational organizations emerged, the Seminary insisted on serving as the official voice of the Conservative movement. Indeed, even before the United Synagogue was founded, Cyrus Adler cautioned Schechter not to relinquish authority to the yet to be founded “Conservative union”:

It is not that I shrink from a new organization, but I would have the Seminary not only a place for education and research and not only a center of personal influence but so organized as to speak with authority for all conservative

Congregations. It might even be possible to create a Commission on which there would be representatives of the Faculty, the Trustees, the Alumni and the Teachers' College that would be in a way authorized to speak unitedly with regard to public questions which arise from time to time, where public expression is necessary.<sup>23</sup>

Although presumably each of the four bodies mentioned by Adler would have an equal say, there was little doubt that from the perspective of JTS leaders, the Seminary had to serve as the authoritative voice. Adler continually fretted over the possibility that the "Conservative Union" would "overshadow the Alumni of the Seminary and may even detract somewhat from the Seminary as the authoritative center of Conservative Judaism in this country."<sup>24</sup>

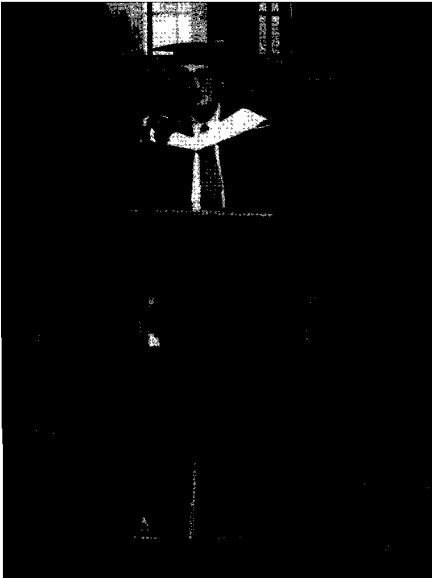
Given this approach, it is not surprising that Seminary leaders expressed embarrassment and anger when prominent individuals within these organizations publicly espoused positions at variance with JTS policies—especially when such statements alienated wealthy donors. Already at the beginning of the century, Solomon Schechter confronted a situation that would become all too common in later decades. Responding to a letter of complaint from a well-to-do patron, Schechter sought to put some distance between JTS and its alumni:

I can very well understand your annoyance at reading the communication [a press clipping about an address delivered by a JTS alumnus] and yet I wish to appeal to your sense of justice and upon reflection not to withdraw your friendship from an Institution which is promoting the ideals which I know you as well as I have at heart. There is no University or College or Theological Institution in this land some of whose graduates have not occasionally erratic views not entirely in accord with its teachings and its policy. But this is unavoidable. All

an Institution of learning can do is to give its best to the young men under its charge with the hope that they will continue to walk in the paths which their feet have set.<sup>25</sup>

This incident was one of many in which the Seminary was held accountable for the lapses—real or imagined—of its graduates.

In truth, JTS leaders expected alumni to serve as goodwill ambassadors for the institution, providing entree to potential donors. This expectation was explicitly articulated during the Schechter presidency by a future board chairman. Writing to Adler in 1911, Sol M. Stroock observed,



Sol M. Stroock,  
chairman of the  
Seminary's board  
of directors  
(1929-1941),  
speaks at com-  
mencement, 1940.  
*Photo by Fellman  
Photo Service.  
Ratner Center,  
JTS.*



"Our main hope for the continued support of the Seminary must come through the Alumni. . . . If each of these young Rabbis could not succeed in getting a considerable number of the members of his Congregation to contribute something annually to the Seminary, I think he could succeed in getting the trustees and the principal members so to contribute. The personal influence of the Rabbi with these members I think would effectually quicken the interest of the members in the Seminary." Stroock also suggested the designation of a Seminary Day on one *shabbat* a year. "I think we ought also in this regard to enlist not only the services of the graduates, but also every Rabbi of every Orthodox Congregation."<sup>26</sup> Here again we see the dual relationship between JTS and its alumni: the latter were relied upon virtually from the outset to serve as liaisons with wealthy potential donors, but they were not to be outspoken—especially as advocates of positions that embarrassed the Seminary.

But the latter was unavoidable, especially as the disparity between congregational practices and Seminary religious norms increased. Cyrus Adler addressed this issue with much equivocation when a correspondent inquired about the stance of the Seminary regarding the playing of an organ in congregations on the Sabbath.<sup>27</sup> Adler took pains to emphasize that "the Seminary is a teaching institution, and does not undertake to pass upon the conduct of congregations. Its sister body, the United Synagogue of America, has a Committee on the Interpretation of Jewish Law, of which members of our Faculty and some of our graduates are members. This Committee makes formal reply to inquiries submitted to it by congregations."



Men's choir with  
organ at the  
Brooklyn Jewish  
Center, 1960s.  
*Ratner Center,  
JTS.*

Adler promptly proceeded to inform his correspondent that the “Seminary conducts a small synagogue of its own. In this Synagogue there is no instrumental music. It is the hope and desire of the Faculty of the Seminary that as our graduates go out they will establish services of the same general character as those they see in the Seminary Synagogue”—i.e., without organs. He then qualified this position and acknowledged, “Nevertheless it is fair to say that the Seminary does not prohibit its graduates from going to a synagogue in which the organ is used if these men themselves have no objection to it.” Finally, he conceded that “we prefer the traditional Synagogue without change in method of worship or liturgy.” However, “where a congregation has departed from this but is yet minded to be conservative, we do not withdraw our aid from them. . . . Were we to refuse this we would simply drive them into the reform or radical wing, where they themselves do not wish to go.”

Here quite dramatically, the inner contradictions of the Seminary, which so affected its relationship with the Conservative movement, were exposed. To begin with, Adler espoused neutrality—the Seminary is merely an academic institution; he then shifted to advocacy—JTS favors traditional synagogue practices; then to a pragmatic engagement with the realities faced by rabbis—they need to take congregations with organs; and finally to the espousal of an ideological position—the Seminary must resist the tide of radical reform. Adler also openly acknowledged the division of labor that would long dominate the Conservative movement: the Seminary would serve as the bastion of traditionalism, while its rabbinic alumni would contend with less than traditional synagogue practices. Adler’s letter underscores the impossible bind in which the Seminary and its rabbinical alumni found themselves. The latter repeatedly called for their Seminary to take a more active role in denominational life, but had the institution done so, it would have promoted positions at variance with—even quite critical of—congregational practices because of the high level of religious traditionalism that characterized the key administrators and faculty members at JTS. The Seminary, in turn, lamented the religious laxity tolerated by its alumni but relied upon the rabbis to serve as its ambassadors. Little wonder that Seminary officials often found it more satisfying to deal with academic and intergroup concerns than to face the insoluble dilemmas posed by denominational politics!

The relationship between the Seminary and the United Synagogue was fraught with the same irresolvable tensions and yet further complicated by the barely concealed contempt of JTS administrators for what they regarded as the incompetence of the synagogue body. Whatever the tensions with the rabbis, a special relationship existed between the mother institution and her alumni. Genuine bonds of friendship forged between Seminary professors and their students often lasted for a lifetime. They were reinforced at rabbinical conventions and through

ongoing correspondence. Such human contacts mitigated tensions. The same cannot be said of relations between JTS and the United Synagogue.

The festering issues were laid bare in great detail in a memorandum written by Louis Finkelstein, then provost of the Seminary, to Cyrus Adler in late 1936. Responding to a declaration by Samuel Cohen of the United Synagogue, which touted the achievements of his organization, Finkelstein wrote with withering derision about the damage sustained by the Seminary through actions of the United Synagogue.<sup>28</sup> He begins by noting:

Rabbi Cohen says nothing about the important congregations with regard to which the United Synagogue, far from being of help to the Seminary, is an actual detriment. Some of them have refused to elect graduates of the Seminary because they thought that would identify them with the United Synagogue, and others were persuaded to elect Seminary graduates only through the use of other agencies and by keeping the United Synagogue in the background. . . . At every one of the last three conventions of the Rabbinical Assembly, the Rabbis have complained that the United Synagogue, by admitting into full membership congregations with so-called "free-lance" rabbis, is actually helping to undermine the status of the rabbinate in this country, which the Seminary is trying to build up. . . . [Moreover] the bad state of the United Synagogue finances has alienated some of the prominent leaders of the Jewish community who were previously associated with the organization, and who thus have become hostile to our whole movement.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, Finkelstein contended that the United Synagogue was not a boon to the Seminary; in fact, it subverted Seminary fund-raising efforts.

He further expressed deep embarrassment over the religious laxity of the congregational body:

In such questions as our relations with the Kashruth Organizations, the tactlessness and impetuosity of the United Synagogue representatives made any arrangement between us and the so-called orthodox group more difficult and practically impossible. . . . The Seminary is held to account for what the United Synagogue does in public, to individual congregations and members of the community; but neither the President, nor the Faculty, nor the Directors of the Seminary, are in any position to prevent the United Synagogue from carrying out the policies of which they disapprove.

Finkelstein went on to cite examples of laxity in the observance of Jewish law at United Synagogue functions: he described a Young People's League program held at the Seminary "to which all the delegates who were housed at the Commodore Hotel had to ride [because of the vast distances], publicly violating the Sabbath." And he referred to conventions scheduled by the United Synagogue where no kosher meat was available and delegates were incorrectly informed that a restaurant was kosher.<sup>30</sup>

All of this was terribly damaging to the Seminary, Finkelstein claimed, because “individuals and congregations outside of New York seem to regard the Seminary and the United Synagogue as one institution.”<sup>31</sup> The Rabbinical Assembly too, according to Finkelstein, had lost confidence in the congregational body. The executive committee of the RA had questioned the financial integrity of the United Synagogue and called for an independent auditor to review its records. The RA also took control of placement matters from the United Synagogue, charging that there had been serious breaches in confidence.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, fifty years after the establishment of JTS and over two decades after Solomon Schechter founded a “Conservative Union,” relations between the Seminary and the major arms of the Conservative movement were tense and rife with contradictions. Both Adler and his lieutenant, Finkelstein, sought to place greater distance between the Seminary and its presumed partners. Adler had already written testily in 1930 that “one thing seems clear to me: these cooperative arrangements do not seem to work out very well.” Regarding the placement of rabbis, he wrote:

If the Seminary is to be in effect responsible . . . , then I would prefer to have it done definitely by the Seminary and have nothing to do with either the Rabbinical Assembly or the United Synagogue. If the United Synagogue feels that it is its function and wants to undertake it, then the Seminary would have nothing to do with it. . . . As for the Rabbinical Assembly, so far as I have been able to see, their contribution has been that of complaint.<sup>33</sup>

Only a set of dramatically new circumstances would prompt the major arms of the Conservative movement to intensify their coordination.

### *The Finkelstein Era*

The intractable fiscal crises brought on by the Great Depression, coupled with the dramatic expansion of the Conservative movement in the postwar era, forced the various agencies of Conservative Judaism to rethink their relationship to one another and their proper place within American Judaism. The upshot was a paradoxical situation in which the various arms of the Conservative movement established new vehicles for cooperation during the Finkelstein years even as the rancor increased to unprecedented levels and each arm moved to distance itself from other agencies of the Conservative movement.

The first steps to achieving economic coordination were taken in 1938, during the waning years of the Adler administration. As a result of the combined effects of the depression, the failing health of Adler, and the deaths of several leading Seminary supporters, JTS found itself in dire economic straits. Even after the faculty and personnel took deep salary cuts and the budget was slashed, the institution

ran annual deficits of \$40,000 in the late thirties. Adler and his primary assistant, Louis Finkelstein, turned to the Rabbinical Assembly for help, and they found it in the persons of Simon Greenberg, then the RA president, and Solomon Goldman, a prominent pulpit rabbi in Chicago. The latter urged the RA convention of 1938 to adopt a resolution to initiate a \$100,000 campaign by the rabbis for their alma mater. Greenberg, in turn, appealed to the RA membership to act because "a critical turning point has been reached in the Movement to which we have dedicated our lives and upon which we believe the future welfare of American Jewry directly, and world Jewry, depends."

He recommended the creation of a systematic national program for rabbis to appeal to their congregants on the High Holy Days in behalf of JTS. For the first time, the Rabbinical Assembly became a full-fledged partner in assuring the fiscal needs of JTS.<sup>34</sup> Almost instantaneously, the Rabbinical Assembly's campaign raised substantial new funds, and it was continued indefinitely.

As the war years unfolded, even this campaign proved insufficient to meet new needs. The institutions of the Conservative movement were under great pressure to expand their scope of operations in these years: Finkelstein launched his interfaith and intergroup activities to enhance the visibility of Jews and Judaism on the American scene; the Rabbinical Assembly threw itself into wartime efforts and especially the task of providing support to chaplains in the armed forces; and during the post-depression boom, the United Synagogue found itself attracting new affiliates that required guidance.<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, as these institutions expanded their programs, their budgets ballooned: expenditures by JTS, alone, rose from slightly over a quarter of a million dollars in 1942 to over two million in 1947; the Rabbinical Assembly budget jumped from \$2,000 in 1940 to \$23,000 in 1946; and the United Synagogue's expenditures rose from \$12,000 in 1940 to over \$100,000 in 1946.<sup>36</sup> But even these vastly increased budgets could not cover all the programming required by the burgeoning Conservative movement.

In 1944, joint fund-raising was placed under a new banner, "The Campaign for the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, in cooperation with the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue." Under this arrangement, all fund-raising by the three organizations was merged into one campaign, which developed an apparatus to reach some ten thousand donors.<sup>37</sup> Most important for relations between JTS and the arms of the Conservative movement, the three partners created a Liaison



Louis Finkelstein addresses the 1957 United Synagogue convention. *Ratner Center, JTS*

Committee primarily to negotiate the proper division of funds. As fund-raising reached new heights, the existing system of allocations required an overhaul so that the comparatively huge new sums of money raised would be divided more equitably.

The Liaison Committee, which functioned for more than twenty years, served as “managing partner” for the Conservative movement. Its primary function was to oversee the allocation of funds raised by the joint campaign, but in so doing, it often dealt with other matters of coordination. Among the items considered by the committee were the opening of a central office in midtown Manhattan, the creation of a national publication for the Conservative movement, and the most efficient means to utilize personnel for the benefit of all three partners.<sup>38</sup>

The spirit of cooperation embodied in the creation of the Liaison Committee proved short-lived. Despite the merging of the campaign and the very significant growth of sums raised by the joint campaign, budget deficits continued to climb. Already by 1945, the campaign no longer covered the expenses of the three organizations. Within three years, the accumulated deficit had risen to half a million dollars.<sup>39</sup> Under such circumstances, each partner in the joint campaign subjected the budgets of the other partners to increased scrutiny and asked, “Is this program necessary?” Such meddling in the affairs of autonomous organizations subverted goodwill.

In addition, the relationship of JTS and its campaign partners grew increasingly strained as those other institutions gained confidence. In the postwar era, the Conservative movement rode the crest of a wave that swept up ever greater numbers of adherents. Between 1955 and 1961, the time of most rapid expansion, some two hundred and fifty new affiliates joined the United Synagogue.<sup>40</sup> Not surprisingly, the new leaders who assumed positions of prominence as professionals and volunteers within the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue wanted to flex their muscles. The time had come to try new approaches and gain some independence from the Seminary.

In contrast to earlier decades, the two partners most at odds in the postwar period were the Seminary and the Rabbinical Assembly. The nadir in relations came in the late 1940s with the reorganization of the Law Committee and the decision to explicitly ban rabbis who were members of the Seminary faculty from “acting as voting members of the Committee on Jewish Law of the RA.”<sup>41</sup> In his contemporaneous analysis of these events, Rabbi Simon Greenberg, then serving as vice-chancellor and provost of JTS, explained that this decision followed from “the Faculty’s determined policy not to be considered as a body making authoritative pronouncements on dogma or law, [and therefore] the RA members who are also Faculty members accepted this limitation upon their rights as RA members without protest.”<sup>42</sup> From the perspective of Rabbi David Aronson, the president of the RA, matters looked

quite different. Aronson claimed that “The Seminary faculty—as a faculty—is not ready to join our committee on Jewish law. It really comes down to the one man on the faculty whose presence would make any difference, and that is Prof. [Saul] Lieberman.”<sup>43</sup>

Within a short time, Seminary faculty members did join the reorganized Law Committee, and JTS and the RA even formed a joint *Beit Din* (tribunal) to deal with a range of marital issues. But relations with the RA remained tense. In 1952, for example, Finkelstein, while traveling abroad, learned from Simon Greenberg, his most trusted advisor, that the RA was planning to convene a conference on Jewish law. Finkelstein was furious because he had previously agreed to participate in a joint Seminary-RA conference and, during his travels, had even enlisted the support of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion to convene an international conference on Jewish law in Israel that would feature JTS faculty and Conservative rabbis. He immediately urged Greenberg to contact Max Davidson, the president of the RA: “Please request—beseech—Max in my name not to permit any precipitate action, which in view of our aspirations and the RA as well as, I hope, the United Synagogue, on the world scene, in Washington, etc., would just about finish us, and mean a break, either formal or informal, between us and the RA organization.” In the event that this approach by Greenberg would fail, Finkelstein drafted his letter of resignation from the Law Committee, which explicitly accused the RA of reneging on its promise to convene with JTS a jointly sponsored conference on Jewish law. And leaving nothing to chance, Finkelstein ordered Greenberg to have every member of the JTS administration attend the RA convention to monitor developments and insure that the proposed conference would not be approved. They were also to make sure that “the next Vice President [of the RA], whoever he may be, is a man of high moral integrity. If one of the men of lesser integrity is elected, I fear the results for our movement will be catastrophic at once.”<sup>44</sup>

Why had relations between JTS and the RA reached such a level of distrust? Michael Greenbaum has written trenchantly of the clash of views between Finkelstein and his rabbinic critics:

While critics like Solomon Goldman and Milton Steinberg wanted the Seminary to embrace and favor the synagogue and its leadership, the Seminary under Finkelstein chose to embrace the broader (not necessarily synagogue affiliated) community and its leadership. Dr. Mordecai Kaplan described the tension between the critics and the Seminary as being between intensification and expansion. Was the Seminary to intensify its work internally? . . . Was it to concentrate on the Conservative movement or was it to concentrate on expansion outward toward the entire Jewish community? More broadly expressed, was the Seminary to emphasize merely the Conservative movement, or rather the perpetuation of Judaism and the survival of the Jewish people in America? . . . Finkelstein believed that “You can’t have a little Seminary and do anything

to save American Judaism.” His critics, however, were not interested so much in saving American Judaism as they were in developing the Conservative movement and defining Conservative Judaism in the process.<sup>45</sup>

Here, then, were fundamental differences in the way Finkelstein and his critics understood the proper mission of JTS.

Many rabbis also criticized JTS for its unbending traditionalism and were particularly bitter at the failure of leading Talmud professors to find warrants in Jewish law to address new challenges. After decades of frustration and complaints, the RA established an independent Law Committee in 1948, which moved swiftly to address the difficulties of Sabbath observance. In 1950, the committee issued a far-reaching *Takkanah* (rabbinic decree) permitting driving on the Sabbath in order to attend synagogue services. It coupled this act with a Sabbath Revitalization Program, aimed at increasing synagogue attendance and intensifying other forms of Sabbath observance.<sup>46</sup> To the dismay of rabbinic leaders involved in these programs, neither the United Synagogue nor the Seminary supported these efforts. Summing up the tepid response, Rabbi Jacob Agus, a leading proponent of the changes, wrote with great bitterness:

In a logically organized movement, the ideological decisions of the rabbinate become the policy of the lay organization, and the various executives of the central agencies regard it as their duty to put into effect the proposals of the rabbinic authorities. No such situation obtained in the past decade within the Conservative organization. In the opinion of those who do control our central institutions, the Responsum on the Sabbath in particular and the Sabbath Revitalization effort in general were ill-advised and even harmful. The national publications did not publicize it. . . . The United Synagogue could find neither the time nor money for this project. When the extent of publicity accompanying other projects in our national organization is remembered, we realize that the indifference of our central agencies to this project was indeed monumental.<sup>47</sup>

From the perspective of the Seminary, of course, the Sabbath responsum was precisely as Agus intimated—“ill-advised and even harmful.”<sup>48</sup>

In addition to these differences in ideology and vision, tensions flared because many pulpit rabbis resented the domineering posture assumed by the Seminary in general—and Finkelstein in particular—especially at a time when rabbis had become such important partners in financing Seminary programs through their fund-raising activities. At the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly in 1955, these resentments were aired publicly in an unusually candid address by Rabbi Aaron Blumenthal entitled, “The Status of the Rabbinical Assembly in the Conservative Movement.” In Blumenthal’s view, three major circumstances marred the relationship between the RA and JTS: “1. The fact that the Seminary is responsible



for the raising of funds for our movement. 2. The public affairs activities of the Seminary. 3. The suspicion that the Seminary's officials strive to dominate the RA." Blumenthal acknowledged the need for a joint campaign and the reality that most funds would have to be raised within congregations. But he lamented the tendency for fund-raisers to think of rabbis mainly as campaign assistants. "'Rabbi X,' they tell us, 'has never done anything for the Seminary.' What they mean is he has not been very helpful in the campaign. In every other respect he may be doing very much for the movement."<sup>49</sup>

Then there was the matter of how the Seminary spent its money. Blumenthal examined the Seminary's "outside" activities, such as *The Eternal Light* radio programs and the Institute for Religious and Social Studies:

Some of us endorse some of these projects and criticize others, but many of us, at one time or another, are afraid of the very fertile mind of this man called Louis Finkelstein. What will he think of next? Tomorrow's newspaper may bring us information about a new project which he has started—a project which commits the Conservative movement to a course of action or to a specific goal, and for which we are expected to find the funds! Even if the project is a perfect one, we wonder with varying degrees of indignation why we were not consulted about it.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, Blumenthal gave voice to claims that "the Seminary seeks to dominate the RA, to thwart us in our desire to deal effectively with the problems of the American Jewish community." He cited unending debates over questions of Jewish law that never found resolution, perhaps because the Seminary was stalling indefinitely. And he charged that the RA and the United Synagogue were manipulated by the Seminary "to make [their] program conform to that of the Seminary."<sup>51</sup> Why is the RA "drifting" and the Seminary "steering?" Blumenthal asked rhetorically. Because the RA has not yet "let go of the apron strings and map[ped] out its own future, independent of Seminary thinking." Blumenthal went on to declare: "We, the RA, simply have no program for Conservative Judaism."<sup>52</sup>

Blumenthal's severe strictures of his own organization notwithstanding, in the mid-1940s the RA had begun a process of defining a distinctive position. Through its enactments in the realm of Jewish law and its public pronouncements, the RA asserted its independence from JTS. Members of the Rabbinical Assembly—as individuals and as organized lobbies—challenged the policies of JTS and articulated their own conceptions of how the Conservative movement should develop. The RA also expanded its institutional structure by hiring a full-time executive and office staff, thereby creating the infrastructure to operate independently.

Within the Rabbinical Assembly, members differed as to the best way for the RA to deal with the Seminary. Some rabbis preferred a firm yet conciliatory approach,

summed up as follows by Rabbi Judah Nadich at a meeting of RA members with Finkelstein:

We all feel that not enough give and take exists between the Seminary and the rabbis. We need this for a united movement (and we are not) to help in the fight (and it's a joint battle). We are in rare contact with the Seminary, and usually only for fundraising, so it is good that we meet on other matters. These occasions are rare and always linked with finance, however. I hope that there will be not only more such meetings where we can discuss what is close to us, but that we may establish machinery for colleagues to be in continuous close touch with the Seminary and with each other. A convention once a year is not enough. We need close communication.<sup>53</sup>

Others, such as Rabbi Jacob Agus, despaired of cooperation and called for the RA to circumvent the Seminary and define its own course of action:

Sadly, I have come to the conclusion that the Seminary group will not permit an ideological position to emerge, except if they control it. They do not regard us as partners, but as a constituency which they have to "handle," or to manipulate. Our best approach, therefore, is to prevent stagnation and to encourage a continuous exploration of the broad belt of religious ideology, extending from the line of Orthodoxy to that of Classical Reform. We must not strive for a unitary approach—only for standards of quality.<sup>54</sup>

Following this line of reasoning, Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, the longtime executive of the RA, hinted that the time had come to displace the Seminary as the authoritative



Abraham Joshua Heschel, left, with Wolfe Kelman at JTS, 1967. *Photo by John H. Popper. Ratner Center, JTS.*

voice of the Conservative movement: "Perhaps, the . . . leadership of the Seminary does not know what to make of the Conservative movement, and prefers not to come to grips with this fact. It is a pure accident that the Chancellor of the Seminary had been *de facto* head of the movement for the past number of years."<sup>55</sup> Thus, toward the close of the Finkelstein era, the accumulated frustration of decades impelled the top leadership of the Rabbinical Assembly to consider means of supplanting the Seminary and its Chancellor as the spokesman for the Conservative movement.

The United Synagogue also asserted its independence from JTS during the Finkelstein era. In 1966 it began a process of removing itself physically from the JTS campus and eventually relocated its entire operation to new headquarters near midtown Manhattan. Significantly, it took this action despite the strong objections of Finkelstein, who urged George Maislen, the president of the congregational body, to stay put:

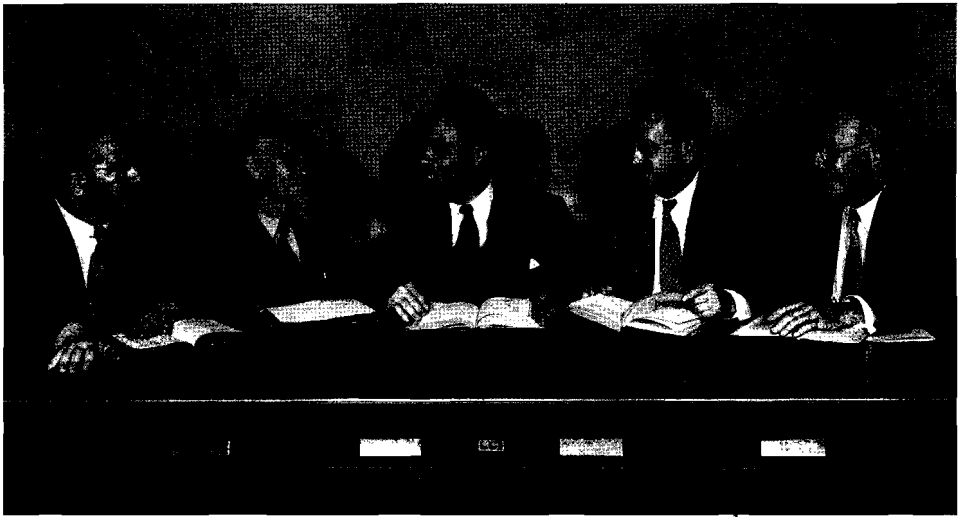
Anyone who has any experience in administration recognizes the importance of physical propinquity among leaders of various organizations so that they have opportunity for free exchange of opinions before issues become crystallized and action is taken in which one of them is opposed to the other. I am sure that one of the reasons that the Conservative movement stands out in American Judaism through the good relationships between its various branches is due to the fact that our various offices are located near one another. . . . All experience in administration shows that physical separation of offices tends to bring about ultimately also spiritual separation.<sup>56</sup>

In truth, JTS and the United Synagogue had undergone a "spiritual separation" long before. The Seminary under Finkelstein continued to harbor mistrust of the congregational body and impatience with its poor organization. Undoubtedly, the periodic need of JTS to bail out the United Synagogue when it had overspent did not improve relations. The congregational body, for its part, resented the Seminary's forays into programming that fell within its own domain. Finkelstein was eager to communicate directly with laypeople in order to strengthen the Seminary's fund-raising, and he often worked around the leadership of the United Synagogue. Writing of these efforts, Michael Greenbaum has aptly described how the Seminary's direct contacts with laypeople subtly undermined the United Synagogue: "While [Finkelstein's programs for lay leaders] could be described as educational ventures totally benefitting an academic center, they, nonetheless, represented an extensive outreach effort by the Seminary to Jewish laity which, given the weakness of the United Synagogue, could only be seen as a threat to its future success."<sup>57</sup>

Despite these turf issues, the Seminary's relationship with the United Synagogue was never as tense as with the Rabbinical Assembly, perhaps because the congregational body was too preoccupied with its own internal problems to challenge the

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The Joint Prayer Book Commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue, ca. 1946. From left: Max Arzt, Elias Solomon, Robert Gordis, Morris Silverman, Israel Levinthal. *Photo by Virginia F. Stern. Courtesy of the Rabbinical Assembly.*



policies of JTS leaders directly. For one thing, the United Synagogue had to struggle to keep up with the vast expansion of Conservative congregations and the services they required. For another, it had to contend with the departure of two major constituents. During the 1940s both the Women's League and the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs moved toward independence from the congregational body and worked directly with the Seminary's leaders.

The Women's League had traditionally focused its attention on strengthening the Jewish home and supporting Seminary students. During the early 1940s, the Women's League assumed increasing responsibility for raising scholarship funds for students. Beginning with an initial goal of \$10,000 in 1941, the Women's League Torah Scholarship Fund was raising \$150,000 by 1948. Within a few years, the League set itself the goal of raising a half million dollars to fund a new dormitory for Seminary students.<sup>58</sup> These activities won it the praise of Seminary leaders. Finkelstein saluted the Women's League as "the strongest organization in our Movement, with a record of great achievements, and with even greater aspirations, coupled with almost unlimited opportunities for future service."<sup>59</sup> He also rewarded the organization with its own seat on the Liaison Committee in 1956.<sup>60</sup> The Women's League became the closest ally of JTS in this period, even as it simultaneously grew apart from the United Synagogue.

The National Federations of Jewish Men's Clubs (NFJMC) also broke away from the congregational body in the 1940s. Rabbi Samuel Cohen, the longtime executive of the United Synagogue, had also administered the Federation of Men's Clubs, but in 1945 Finkelstein appointed Rabbi Joel Geffen, a JTS administrator and fund-raiser, as the "spiritual advisor" of the organization. Within a few years, the United Synagogue began to reduce its financial subvention; by 1967 it no longer supported the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs. Through publications such as *The*



National Enrollment Plan display at a United Synagogue convention, 1957. *Ratner Center, JTS.*

*TORCH* and its programs to underwrite educational ventures spearheaded by the Seminary, such as the Leadership Training Fellowship and Ramah Camps, the NFJMC also became a partner of JTS, although it was long treated as a very junior partner.<sup>61</sup>

Despite the shifting relationships and frequent eruption of tensions between the various arms of the Conservative movement, several new initiatives were launched during the Finkelstein years to strengthen coordination and cooperation. The following is a brief listing of some of the more enduring programs: (1) A Liaison Committee served as a “clearinghouse for all matters which concern the three bodies”—JTS, the RA, and the United Synagogue. This committee also devised a formula for the allocations of funds to maintain the three organizations. (2) A Joint Retirement Board, consisting of representatives of all three groups, developed a pension plan. (Eventually members of the Cantors Assembly also joined.) (3) A Placement Commission funded by the RA, included lay representatives from the United Synagogue and also JTS personnel. (4) The Chaplaincy Availability Board was administered by the RA and was mainly concerned with JTS students. (5) The Prayer Book Committee of the RA committee included two lay representatives of the United Synagogue. (6) The Commission on Jewish Education was primarily a partnership of the RA and United Synagogue and was financed by royalties from the jointly issued *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*. (7) A Social Action Committee was funded by contributions from the RA, the United Synagogue, and the Women’s League. (8) The Commission on Marriage and the Family was a joint project of the RA and United Synagogue. (9) The Joint Commission on Israel and Zionism also constituted a partnership of the United Synagogue and the Rabbinical Assembly. (10) A Youth Commission of the United Synagogue included two members appointed by the RA. (11) The Conference on Jewish Law was an experimental

three-year partnership between the RA and JTS. It produced a revised *ketubah* (marriage document) and established a *Beit Din* (a rabbinic court). (12) The Rabbinic Cabinet functioned as a committee of rabbis who assisted in fund-raising for JTS.<sup>62</sup> (13) A National Enrollment Plan (NEP) sought to enlist congregations in fund-raising for the Conservative movement through a per capita contribution for each synagogue member.<sup>63</sup> Taken together, these joint ventures bound the organizations of the Conservative movement more tightly to one another and suggested a sense of cohesion and unity of purpose.

Nevertheless, a balance sheet of the Finkelstein era would be incomplete without an acknowledgment of the severe strains in relations between JTS and some of the other arms of the Conservative movement, and especially with the rabbinate. We have already explored some of the ideological and programmatic differences that divided JTS and its rabbinic critics. Structural problems also brought them into conflict—particularly over the question, “Who speaks for the Conservative movement?”

Finally, we ought not to minimize the impact of budgetary crises, which resulted in mutual recrimination. Beginning in 1938, Finkelstein needed to turn to the Rabbinical Assembly every few years with pleas for increased financial help. Such appeals were necessary until the end of his administration. In 1958, for example, Finkelstein warned the RA membership: “The entire Seminary program is imperiled by serious budgetary demands. Unless substantial financial help is forthcoming no later than June 20, our services must face drastic curtailment.” He went on to urge every rabbi to raise at least an additional \$500, convince his synagogue’s sisterhood to make a treasury gift and then make a personal gift too.<sup>64</sup> By the mid-1960s, the Seminary had run up a debt of eight to nine million dollars through borrowing from its endowment fund; annual budget shortfalls ranged between one-half and three-quarters of a million.<sup>65</sup> And on the eve of Finkelstein’s retirement in the early 1970s, the budgetary crisis loomed large yet again. Writing to a leading Conservative rabbi, Finkelstein noted in 1970:

The tornado which struck the American economy last spring hit the Seminary with particular force. . . . At the end of June 1970 . . . we found ourselves \$600,000 poorer than at the beginning of the year. . . . No such calamity has befallen the Seminary in my memory. . . . To survive as a great institution, the Seminary must find ways to convince at least 2,000 more people in the Conservative movement that their annual support must be given top priority. . . . In addition, and no less important, is our urgent need for some method of regular consultation with you and your colleagues on all developments at the Seminary.<sup>66</sup>

As a consequence of these shortfalls, the budgets of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue were adversely affected—hardly a circumstance that made for amicable relations.

Seminary leaders vented their frustration by questioning the dedication of rabbis to their alma mater and belittling their contribution. "We just cannot build this institution in the way you, Arthur Sulzberger, and I conceived it, if it has to be an inverted pyramid, wobbling, as it were, on the support of the Rabbinical Assembly alone," wrote Louis Finkelstein to a prominent board member.<sup>67</sup> For its part, the Rabbinical Assembly doubted the fiscal responsibility and competence of the Seminary's administration. Shortly after the retirement of Finkelstein, Wolfe Kelman, the RA's executive, compared the condition of the State of Israel and the Conservative movement: "Amongst other parallels, to which you can add your own, both were led by people with entrepreneurial and mercurial personalities who cared very little about the nuts and bolts of organizational structure, prudent budgetary management, careful systems analysis, and all the other corporate criteria, which probably would have killed the growth of both, had they been applied during their periods of spectacular growth." But at a time of greater austerity for the Conservative movement, Kelman favored the centralization of all dues, membership, and fund-raising.

In other words, we should work toward a structure whereby every member of our constituency would know, both by the ideology we espouse, and the contribution he makes, including membership fees, that he is part of one Conservative movement. That would mean eventually eliminating separate NEP and United Synagogue collections, R.A. membership dues, separate Torah Fund structures, etc. It would also mean the centralization of ideological articulation and the avoidance of competition, and often, mutually irreconcilable, ideological postures.<sup>68</sup>

Kelman, of course, was expressing his hope for institutional and ideological unity within the Conservative movement, a goal that proved elusive in the Finkelstein era, as well as in the subsequent administration of Gerson Cohen.

### *The Cohen Years: JTS as "the Nerve-Center of the Conservative Movement"*

The election of Gerson D. Cohen as Finkelstein's successor raised expectations within the Conservative movement of dramatic changes in the offing. Conservative rabbis, in particular, viewed the changing of the guard as an opportunity to renew the Conservative movement and improve relations between the Seminary and its alumni. One rabbi wrote to the Seminary's board chairman in strong support of Cohen's candidacy and in the harshest of terms expressed his dismay at the prevailing state of affairs:

The Conservative rabbinate is in a state of despair. Overwhelmed by forces in our general society which militate against religious commitment, and particu-

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Gerson Cohen  
with a United  
Synagogue group  
in the Seminary  
*sukkah*, 1977.

From left: Oscar  
Dane, Cohen, Joel  
Geffen, Harry  
Merrisman, Ben-  
jamin Kreitman.

*Photo by Arnold  
Katz. Ratner Cen-  
ter, JTS.*



larly, the specific commitment required by the Jewish tradition, they have looked to the leadership of our Movement for strength and guidance. It has not been forthcoming. That the Seminary and the Conservative Movement has steadily declined in the past twenty years no keen observer of the American Jewish scene will deny. . . . The selection of a Chancellor for the Seminary could be the turning point in American Judaism for a century to come. It could either bring together the marvelous young forces that are still possible in our Movement and fulfill the dream of Schechter, or plunge the Seminary and our Movement into their final doldrums.<sup>69</sup>

Another Midwestern rabbi echoed these views and attributed the decline of JTS to its distance from congregational life: "The services of the Seminary Synagogue—with its 'segregated seating' are not representative of our movement—in fact are a living contradiction of what we stand for." He also itemized other weaknesses of JTS, ranging from its failure to create a program of study in Israel for its rabbinical students to the absence of a strong Conservative religious and ideological component at Ramah camps to the poor relations between JTS and its rabbis.<sup>70</sup> And still another rabbi of a well-to-do Philadelphia synagogue wrote to warn Gerson Cohen of the "total disenchantment of our [synagogue] leadership with the Seminary and the Conservative movement." According to this rabbi, the source of the problem was clear:

There is no direction from the Seminary. In recent years it has been only a service institution which will ask us for money and will supply us with a rabbi or teacher if one is available. We have poured fortunes into the Seminary and have been completely abandoned when we need something in return. . . . What amaze[s] me . . . is that this [is] being said by men who are members of your Board of Directors and Board of Overseers.<sup>71</sup>



For many rabbis and lay leaders of the Conservative movement, Gerson Cohen offered the hope of a new beginning. By virtue of his profound scholarship and impeccable academic credentials, he followed in the footsteps of his illustrious predecessors. As a youthful man fully conversant with American culture and the needs of the hour, he would, it was believed, renew the movement. Cohen encouraged these hopes. He moved quickly to rebuild and expand the Seminary, hire a younger faculty and staff, restructure the academic programs of the institution—and reach out to the Conservative movement.

In line with Cohen's aspiration to rebuild the Seminary and transform its programs, a good deal of time was devoted early in his administration to questions of self-definition. In the mid-1970s, he initiated a self-study process to clarify how the Seminary wished to present itself to the larger American public. In contrast to the Finkelstein administration's efforts to serve all of American Jewry, and indeed, mankind in general, Cohen forthrightly linked JTS to the Conservative movement. When pressed by his public relations advisors to define the Seminary's mission, Cohen responded with the following manifesto:

I want to articulate what I consider to be a statement of goals of the Seminary. I want the Seminary to become the central institution of the Conservative movement *de facto* as well as *de jure*. The Seminary should not only be the institution for ordaining Conservative rabbis, but the supreme academic center for quality Jewish education on the collegiate, graduate and post-graduate levels. It should also be the source or clearing-house of educational policy for the afternoon school, the Hebrew day school and adult education throughout the Conservative laity and Conservative professional groups. . . . The Seminary can no longer afford to remain neutral on major issues—not that it must take a positive stand on such issues as abortions, transplants, war and peace, the West Bank of the State of Israel and the like—but must provide the fora for the discussion of these issues in the light of Jewish values, Jewish theology, Jewish ethics and the historical situation of the Jews. I believe that the Conservative Movement can no longer afford to develop policy without the Seminary at the heart of the discussion. If this does not change, the Seminary will lose the impact it claims to have and which it pretends to have in the context of the Conservative movement.<sup>72</sup>

No previous Seminary head had ever linked JTS so closely to the Conservative movement.

The next year, Cohen circulated an internal memorandum to his top administrative colleagues designed to follow up on this mission statement with a concrete program of action to lead the Conservative movement.

I am beginning to get rumblings from all corners of the country that the Seminary is losing contact with the men [of the RA]. For better or worse, we have to tackle this part of our public relations and of our continuing relationship with

the [former] students. We are not just a “school” we are the nerve-center of the Conservative Movement and I think we must begin to take action.<sup>73</sup>

It was, of course, precisely when Cohen began to “take action” that he experienced firsthand how frustrating it was to work closely with the other arms of the Conservative movement. Within a year of assuming office, Cohen embroiled himself in a debate that would eventually shadow him for most of his years at the helm of JTS: Should women be admitted to a program leading to rabbinic ordination? Writing in the *Women’s League Outlook*, Cohen took a forthright stand against such a course of action. He contended that admitting a woman “to candidacy for ordination *at this time* [emphasis included] would hardly reflect the consensus of the Conservative movement, whether of its laity or its professional leadership.”<sup>74</sup> The article elicited a large number of responses from Women’s League members sharply critical of his position. Here is a sampling: “Our Jewish Women’s Consciousness Raising Group was upset and distressed . . . [by the article]. None of us desire to be ordained as Rabbis. We do, however, demand that we—and all Jewish women—be given the opportunity to experience a full Jewish life. . . . We demand the right to choose a career based on our interests and qualifications.”<sup>75</sup> Another correspondent concluded her letter, “I want to add that I have withdrawn my financial support from the Seminary, until such time as this problem is rectified. I will enlist the support of like-minded friends.”<sup>76</sup> The thorny issue of women’s ordination raised many questions about Jewish law, halakhic process in the Conservative movement, the principles of equality and fair play; but as Cohen quickly discovered, it also entangled him in a dispute with some of the Seminary’s staunchest financial supporters and allies—a fact that was quickly brought home when in November 1973, the United Synagogue resolved at its convention “That it looks with favor on the admission of qualified women to the Rabbinical School of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.”<sup>77</sup>

The following summer, Cohen took a step in the other direction—toward the expansion of religious opportunities for females. In his capacity as the principle overseer of policies at the Ramah camps sponsored by JTS, Cohen approved the calling up of girls to the Torah (*aliyyot*) as of the summer of 1974.<sup>78</sup> In short order, a member of the JTS Talmud faculty lambasted Cohen for not informing the entire Conservative movement that the faculty disassociated itself from this step—and indeed had never been consulted about it.<sup>79</sup> And Cohen began to receive angry letters from pulpit rabbis who interpreted this step as an infringement upon their authority. One of the most stinging rebukes argued as follows:

The Ramah Camps are now being used as an instrument for coercion to force acceptance of a responsum of the RA Committee on Law and Standards. . . . By using the Ramah Camps for a political purpose, the Seminary puts unwar-

ranted and undue pressure upon the traditional elements within the Conservative Movement to accept a decision that conflicts with their principles and their practice. . . . It is, I submit, blatantly unfair to use the children of my congregation, whom I have personally persuaded to go to a Ramah Camp . . . as a lever to pressure me to grant Aliyot to women in my congregation because they have already done it at Ramah: "If the Seminary can do it, why can't you?" This is "brainwashing" of my children and I strongly object to this unconscionable tactic.<sup>80</sup>

Thus within two years of taking office, Gerson Cohen quickly learned that there was a steep price to be paid for taking "direct action" in denominational life. Throughout his years in office, he was violently buffeted by the diverse factions that were loosely allied within the Conservative movement.

The flash point during those years was the question of women's admission to the Rabbinical School, a debate that began in earnest in 1977 when Cohen created a national commission to examine the matter. Significantly, he acted at the urging of the Rabbinical Assembly, which had resolved that a commission was needed.<sup>81</sup> As the debate unfolded, it was clear that virtually all the major arms of the Conservative movement officially endorsed the ordination of women. Cohen was therefore under constant pressure to admit women to the Rabbinical School. No sooner had the JTS faculty voted to table the ordination issue in 1979 than the Rabbinical Assembly forced Cohen to reopen the question. At its 1983 convention, the RA narrowly failed to approve the admission of a woman to its ranks. Because she had not been ordained at JTS, Rabbi Beverly Magidson needed the support of three-quarters of the convention attendees to win membership in the RA. She failed to receive the necessary votes but did win the support of the majority (the vote was 206 in favor and 72 opposed). Cohen feared that the admission of a woman to RA membership who had not been ordained at JTS would undermine the prestige of the Seminary within the movement, and so he urged the convention to let him try one more time to deliver the JTS faculty.<sup>82</sup> In November 1983, the faculty voted to admit women to the Rabbinical School and even before the first woman was ordained, the RA resolved that "any rabbi ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America will be automatically accepted for membership in the Rabbinical Assembly, [the] international association of Conservative rabbis."<sup>83</sup>

The ordination question proved a milestone in relations between the Seminary and the Conservative movement. Never before had the organizations of the denomination intruded so deeply into the internal policies of JTS. The matter at hand, after all, concerned the Seminary's admissions policies. But the leaders of the lay and rabbinic organizations of the denomination felt justified in pressing their perspective on the institution—a development without precedent in the history of JTS, but certainly not without analogues within other seminaries and denomina-

tions. Moreover, denominational interference was encouraged by some faculty members, even as others sought support from factions within the RA and United Synagogue that opposed the move. The controversy over women's ordination, in short, produced a dramatically new type of interaction—marked by much outside meddling—between the Seminary and the Conservative movement, one that rendered Cohen's call a decade earlier for the Seminary to become the “nerve-center of the Conservative movement” ironically prophetic.

Perhaps it also indicated a shift in the power relationships within the Conservative movement. This certainly was the way the president of the Rabbinical Assembly, Rabbi Alexander Shapiro, read the resolution of the question in his address to the RA convention of 1985. “Although . . . the Seminary had its own reasons for Ordination, clearly it felt itself pressed by an increasingly large majority of members of the Assembly who felt that for reasons theological and religious the time had come to complete the process begun so many years ago when first we began the education of women to finally close the circle and to bring women colleagues into our midst as equal in every way to each and every one of us.”<sup>84</sup> The ordination battle thus cast into question who really spoke for the Conservative movement and who set its agenda. Thirty years after Aaron Blumenthal lamented the impotence of the rabbinate, it appeared that the RA was quite actively steering the Seminary, rather than vice versa.

The Cohen era was marked by several new initiatives in denominational cohesion. At the prompting of the Women's League, a series of meetings were organized to strengthen ties between the denominational arms. In late August 1977, a “Summit Conference” was convened (significantly, it was held on neutral turf at a midtown Manhattan hotel) and attended by representatives of the RA, JTS, University of Judaism, the United Synagogue, and the Women's League.<sup>85</sup> The group discussed a range of issues concerning impediments to the growth and staffing of the Conservative movement, as well as means to expand the international role of the movement. When it came to the question of “Intra-Movement Relationships,” some tough questions were placed on the table. This is how the minutes of the meeting summarized the discussion:

The Conservative movement is a coalition of various arms and it was considered advantageous by some of the fathers of the movement to keep it a loose coalition. It was noted with regret that institutionally, it has now become advantageous for every arm to prevent more cohesive work. The Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue make it clear that the great scholars of the Seminary are not their authorities so, for example, the greatest authorities in liturgy are not involved in liturgical compilation. . . . We have never tried to work together and respect each other. . . . We are now a loose coalition of organizations that gets together at various times under various situations. . . . We have a unique system, where the center of gravity is an academic institution

which also allocates funds to the other groups, which causes tensions and rivalry, but it works; it is the only way.<sup>86</sup>

This forthright airing of basic truths, in fact, encouraged sustained conversations between the leaders of the denominational arms and the Seminary for decades to come.

A second critical initiative in movement cooperation, this one personally spearheaded by Cohen himself, was the development of coordinated programs in Israel. Beginning in 1981, JTS organized the Conservative movement to expand its presence in Israel. Collaborative fund-raising and other shared activities were established to aid the *Masorti* movement. Cohen invested a great deal of the Seminary's prestige and his administration's time in winning the support of the other arms of the movement for these Israeli ventures.<sup>87</sup>

Still another set of new initiatives were undertaken cooperatively to strengthen Conservative Judaism on university campuses. Perhaps the best known was called Ometz, the Center for Conservative Judaism on Campus. A joint project of the National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, JTS, and the United Synagogue, Ometz sought to coordinate programs at college campuses through a central office at JTS, a vast and perhaps overwhelming challenge.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, JTS and the Rabbinical Assembly created a Commission on the Ideology of Conservative Judaism in the last year of Cohen's administration. Although there had been calls for the convening of such a commission at least since the 1920s, nothing was ever done—perhaps out of fear that the Conservative movement would splinter if too much ideological clarity was sought. But in 1985 such a commission was founded and eventually included lay members of every arm of the movement in addition to RA and JTS representatives. Only after Cohen's retirement, early in the administration of Ismar Schorsch, did the commission conclude its work and issue its Statement of Conservative Principles, *Emet Ve-Emunah*.

The genesis of this project is somewhat shrouded in mystery. Some have linked it to the bruising debate over women's ordination and the desire to create movement consensus. Others have regarded it as a bid by the Rabbinical Assembly to press the Seminary to align itself even more closely to the Conservative movement. And there is some evidence, too, that the JTS administration saw such a project as a fitting way to mark the Seminary's centennial in 1986.<sup>89</sup> Regardless of the motives, upon its appearance, *Emet Ve-Emunah* was hailed by Chancellor Ismar Schorsch as a tangible expression of the unity within the Conservative movement and "the genuine consensus which prevails in its ranks."<sup>90</sup>

Despite these enormous strides toward cooperation within the Conservative movement, the Cohen era ended amid deep concern over the unity of the movement. The high hopes for reconciliation and unity attendant at the outset of the Cohen administration had not been realized. When the Seminary's board met to

choose Cohen's successor, the issue of denominational disunity loomed large. The diagnosis: the Conservative movement was ailing. In his announcement to the board that a process to select a new Chancellor would commence, the chairman of the board, Stephen Peck, expressed his hope that the selection would "be a healing process and will result in all concerned with the Conservative Movement becoming as one."<sup>91</sup> Shortly after his appointment, Ismar Schorsch noted that "one of the things that came out in the search committee was a hunger for healing, for reconciliation. I'm going to strive to do that," he promised.<sup>92</sup> A century after the seminary's founding in 1886, JTS and the Conservative movement continued to stand in somewhat tense relation to one another; the need for unity and healing was as great as ever.

How are we to understand the persistence of friction and disunity, particularly during an administration as committed to strengthening ties between JTS and the Conservative movement as was that of Gerson Cohen? Undoubtedly, it could be argued that the closing years of the Cohen administration were especially contentious because of the extended battle over women's ordination, a conflict that rent the fabric of denominational unity. This conflict centered less on combat between the Seminary and other arms of the denomination than between factions within each arm. Pro-ordination forces within the Seminary administration and faculty were closely allied with the leadership of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue. And opposing groups also formed a coalition that cut across institutional boundaries.

Still, with the resolution of the ordination question—and the departure of many combatants in the battle over women's ordination—unity remained elusive. This would suggest that deeper conflicts had been at work. Some of these conflicts resulted from the almost inevitable friction between seminaries and denominations, particularly in those seminaries that eschew a strong orthodoxy and aspire to academic excellence. In such institutions "theological education has been pulled in two directions," characterized by historian Conrad Cherry as "two 'yokes of obedience'—to the church and to the academy,"<sup>93</sup> or in the case of JTS, between the religious needs of Conservative Judaism and academic norms. The most overt expression of such disputes usually centers on the "products" of a seminary education. Denominations often question whether the clerics produced by the seminary are adequately prepared for congregational life. Seminaries, in turn, question whether "the chief purpose of theological education is training in the clerical functions."<sup>94</sup> Still another topic of perennial debate concerns the relationship between religious practice and theoretical discussion that often occurs in the academic setting of seminaries: should "the practice follow from theory?"<sup>95</sup> All of these issues arose with regularity in discussions between JTS and the arms of the Conservative movement.

In addition to these nearly universal sources of tension, the unique historical

development of Conservative Judaism's institutions has furthered discord. The fact that JTS was the first institution founded and that, like other Jewish seminaries but unlike most Christian ones, it (rather than the congregation or the denomination) ordains clergy, has given JTS a great deal of independence. In addition, JTS from its inception has relied heavily on the largess of benefactors whose support did not necessarily come through the Conservative movement; especially during the early history of the Seminary, most board members and large donors did not even identify with Conservative Judaism. Moreover, the prestige of JTS has not derived from its relationship with the Conservative movement, but rather from the quality of its faculty (who have never been required to demonstrate personal allegiance to Conservative Judaism) and the contribution of the institution to Jewish culture at large. These have been the sources of institutional glory and acclaim. By contrast, it has always been a far more treacherous undertaking for Seminary leaders to involve themselves in denominational concerns, particularly because the Conservative movement has long consisted of a broad and deeply divided coalition of forces. One faction or another has often sought the Seminary's intercession in disputes, but such involvement has also alienated other segments of the Conservative coalition (a fundamental reality clearly attested by the ordination controversy). All of these factors have historically encouraged JTS to maintain a certain degree of independence from the Conservative movement.

And yet the Seminary and the arms of the Conservative movement have long needed each other. We have examined the financial needs that prompted the Seminary and the arms of the Conservative movement to work cooperatively in the raising of funds. JTS in time grew dependent on benefactors who were recruited from the pews of Conservative congregations. Also, the professionals trained at JTS—the rabbis, cantors, educators, communal workers, and other members of the Jewish civil service—served as vital intermediaries linking the Seminary and the denomination. Strong bonds forged through professional and personal interactions continually overcame some of the institutional rivalries and conflicts that divided the denominational organizations from the Seminary. Finally, JTS presidents and administrators have provided the Conservative movement with a constancy of leadership, which cannot be matched by volunteer heads of denominational organizations who come and go at two-year intervals. For all of these reasons leaders of the Jewish Theological Seminary and the denominational organizations of the Conservative movement have historically engaged one another and sought to work in concert, sometimes with great success but often with much ambivalence and tension.

I wish to thank Timothy Hanssen for his superb assistance in the researching of this essay and Dr. Michael Greenbaum for many fruitful conversations on this topic.

1. Undated letter from Gerson Cohen to Alan M. Stroock, which refers to the latter's letter of 5 February 1979. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11C-14-26, Communications, Gerson Cohen correspondence, 1979.
2. In truth, Stroock was concerned about another constituency—the board itself. He apparently feared that by linking itself too closely with the Conservative movement, JTS would alienate board members who did not share that allegiance. Hence, Cohen reassured him: “I agree with you that members of the Seminary Board need not be affiliated with the Conservative Movement. On the other hand, there has been occasional restiveness on the part of some members of the Conservative Rabbinate and laity because the Board has not been more articulate in its Conservative posture.” *Ibid.*, p. 3.
3. The present essay cannot, of course, substitute for a history of the Conservative movement, a subject that has yet to find its historian. Rather the focus here is on the interaction of JTS with the primary arms of the Conservative movement, particularly the rabbinical and congregational organizations. (Relations between JTS and Conservative organizations abroad are also omitted here.) This essay primarily examines the sources of conflict, rather than chronicling each denominational program that was managed cooperatively.
4. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 260–63, and *idem*, “A Centennial History,” in *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion at One Hundred Years*, ed. Samuel E. Karff (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1976), pp. 3–283.
5. “The Rabbinical Assembly of America,” Rabbinical Assembly presidential files, c. 1950, typescript, p. 1. I am grateful to Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice-president of the RA, for graciously granting me access to the files of the Rabbinical Assembly.
6. See Jack Wertheimer, “Pioneers of the Conservative Rabbinate: Reports from the Field by Graduates of ‘Schecter’s Seminary,’” *Conservative Judaism* 47, no. 3, (spring 1995): pp. 53–70. The correspondence published in this essay includes details about the ill-treatment suffered by rabbis at the hands of arrogant or foolish lay leaders and precise information about actual salaries and financial needs. One cannot imagine that rabbis who felt compelled to write in such humiliating detail to their former teachers could have maintained a positive relationship to their alma mater.
7. “75 Years of Changing Concerns—Emphasis and Philosophy.” Rabbinical Assembly subject files, no date or author specified. Internal evidence suggests that this brief historical overview was probably written by Rabbi Wolfe Kelman, who served as the executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Assembly for nearly forty years. The essay's title suggests that the document was probably written around the year 1976. (See especially pages 2–3 on the early history.) It should be noted that the Rabbinical Assembly had become active in placement matters in the later 1920s—first through the efforts of appointed members such as Rabbis Louis Schwefel and Henry Fisher and later through executive directors such as Rabbis Bernard Segal, Max Routtenberg, and Wolfe Kelman. See the letter of Edward T. Sandrow to David C. Kogen in the RA presidential files, 1960, dated 1 July 1960.

As late as 1936, the Rabbinical Assembly still sought the advice of Seminary leaders about internal matters. Thus when Rabbi Eugene Kohn wrote to Professor Louis Finkelstein about a proposal to alter the name of the rabbinical group from the Rabbinical Assembly of the JTS to the Rabbinical Assembly of America, Finkelstein argued against a name change: “The Rabbinical Assembly's relation to the Seminary is a very intimate one and not to be disturbed. The slight advantage which would come to the RA from having a shorter name would, in my opinion, be more than offset by the disadvantage of disassociat-



- ing it from the mother institution." Finkelstein to Eugene Kohn, 15 June 1936. Rabbinical Assembly executive committee minutes, 1936.
8. Solomon Schechter, "The Seminary as a Witness," *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (New York: Burning Bush Press, 1959), p. 48.
  9. Herbert Rosenblum, "The Founding of the United Synagogue of America, 1913" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1970), p. 151.
  10. Schechter's address is reprinted in *The United Synagogue Report*, 1913, pp. 14-23.
  11. On these developments, see the author's essay on "The Conservative Synagogue," in *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), especially pp. 115-19.
  12. See the minutes of the meeting of the executive council of the Women's Religious Union of the United Synagogue, 29 January 1916. Archives of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism. I thank the Women's League and its executive, Bernice Balter, for granting me access to the archival collection of the league. See also Abraham J. Karp, *A History of the United Synagogue of America, 1913-63* (New York: United Synagogue of America, 1964), pp. 30-37 on these developments.
- The independence of the Women's League from the United Synagogue was a matter of concern to its leaders virtually from its inception. In 1919, Mathilde Schechter pointedly questioned the United Synagogue leadership as to "whether our organization is to be swallowed into the United Synagogue entirely or in what way we are to work together." The Women's League from the outset had its own agenda—"the self-education of Conservative Jewish women"—and sought to maintain a degree of independence. On these matters, see Mel Scult, "The Baale Boste Reconsidered: The Life of Mathilde Roth Schechter (M.R.S.)," *Modern Judaism* (February 1987): pp. 17-19; and Hanna Marx, "Mathilde Schechter: An Appreciation," published by the National Women's League of the United Synagogue of America, n.d.
13. On the Young People's League, see *The United Synagogue Recorder* 1, no. 2 (1921): p. 3.
  14. Charles E. Simon and Joel B. Sperber, "The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, 1929-1989," typescript dated 8 February 1990. In 1983 the word "National" was dropped from the organization's name to acknowledge its ties with Canadian congregations and international concerns. The link with the United Synagogue ended earlier. The Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs and its executive, Rabbi Charles Simon, generously provided me with access to organizational records.
  15. See the *Annual Reports of the United Synagogue* for 1917, 1922, and 1929 to track the rapid growth of affiliated congregations.
  16. This subject has been explored in depth and with great attention to nuance by Michael B. Greenbaum in several works. See his "Mission Conflict in Religiously Affiliated Institutions of Higher Education: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America during the Presidency of Louis Finkelstein, 1940-1955." (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, Teachers College, 1994). See also his essay on "The Finkelstein Era" in the present history and his essay, "Finkelstein and His Critics," *Conservative Judaism* 47 (summer 1995): p. 3-78. The present essay builds upon Greenbaum's work and carries the story through the era of Gerson Cohen. In addition, the present essay focuses more on structural tensions than on mission conflicts. Greenbaum's work in the latter area is indispensable, particularly for an understanding of the Finkelstein era.
  17. Samuel M. Cohen to Cyrus Adler, 23 November 1917. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 15A-5-9. (The entirety of this letter appears in Wertheimer, "Pioneers of the Conservative Rabbinate," pp. 62-63.)
  18. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
  19. Samuel M. Cohen to the leadership of the United Synagogue, 29 September 1932, in the

- Rabbinical Assembly files, 1932.
20. Wertheimer, "Pioneers of the Conservative Rabbinate," pp. 58–59. The letter dates to 1 June 1910.
  21. Quoted by M. Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," p. 30. The letter was dated 9 June 1919.
  22. It was a symptom of the dependent relationship of the RA that when the organization drafted a new constitution in 1928, its president sent a copy to Cyrus Adler (who was not an ordained rabbi) in order "to benefit from [his] counsel." Norman Salit to Cyrus Adler, 30 March 1928. JTS library, Cyrus Adler Papers, box 12, "Rabbinical Assembly." We may note in this context that JTS leaders regarded the women's auxiliaries primarily as service agencies for the Seminary and the spread of Conservative Judaism. At the founding of the United Synagogue, Schechter declared: "I would even suggest that the [Conservative] Union assign a certain portion of its work to women and give them a regular share in its activities. They can become more than an auxiliary to us; indeed helpful in many respects where, as conditions are in this country, their influence is more far-reaching than that of their husbands." Quoted by Gerson D. Cohen in a letter to Mrs. M. [Ruth] Perry, president of the Women's League, 9 December 1977. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11C-14-24. Communications, Gerson Cohen Correspondence, 1967–83. See also Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," p. 119.
  23. Adler to Schechter, 3 August 1909. JTS library, Cyrus Adler Papers, box 18, "1906–1910."
  24. Quoted by Ira Robinson in his essay on the Adler period in volume 1 of this history, note 120.
  25. JTS library, Solomon Schechter Papers, 101–5, n.d. Schechter to an unspecified individual.
  26. Sol M. Stroock to Cyrus Adler, 8 November 1911. JTS library, Cyrus Adler Papers, box 7, "Stroock, Sol. M."
  27. Cyrus Adler to S. D. Tulin of Hartford, 31 October 1923. JTS Library, Cyrus Adler Papers, box 3, "Finkelstein, Louis (1919–1932)."
  28. Louis Finkelstein to Cyrus Adler, 26 October 1936. JTS library, Cyrus Adler Papers, box 3, "Finkelstein, Louis, January–October 1936."
  29. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2.
  30. *Ibid.*, pp. 2–3.
  31. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
  32. *Ibid.*, pp. 4–6. The RA, for its part, had virtually given up on the United Synagogue in this period. A "Committee on Cooperation with the United Synagogue and Seminary" offered the following scathing assessment in a report to the Rabbinical Assembly's 1938 convention: "This committee is of the opinion that [close] cooperation does not now exist. A careful canvas of the situation leads this committee to the conclusion that of the three branches, the United Synagogue is the weakest, due to the failure of the executive personnel of the United Synagogue to win the cooperation and the support of the members of the Rabbinical Assembly who, by their positions, carry the movement of American Jewry. This committee regretfully concludes that the situation cannot be remedied without a change in the personnel of the executive office of the United Synagogue . . . [and] that in making this change it should arrange for the satisfactory payment of the existing financial obligation and for additional financial adjustment in recognition of his many years of devoted service." "Committee on the Report of the Committee on Cooperation with the United Synagogue and Seminary" of the RA." RA files, "Convention Proceedings, 1938."
  33. Adler to Finkelstein, 14 May 1930. JTS library. Cyrus Adler Papers, box 3, "Finkelstein, Louis (1919–1932)."
  34. See the letter dated 20 September 1938 and marked "Personal and Confidential," written by Simon Greenberg in his capacity as president to the membership of the RA. Ratner Center, Simon Greenberg Papers, unprocessed collection, 1938. Greenberg explains why circumstances have become so dire: "We were fortunate and blessed with the fact that while

our Movement was young, the Seminary had a few good friends who were financially able to carry on its work without appealing to the community at large. Some of these friends are no longer with us among the living. Others can no longer be as generous as they were in the past. And while we have reason to hope that the Seminary may still benefit of the generosity of one or another wealthy man amongst us, we cannot depend upon miracles and upon the type of help which is uncertain and sporadic." It should be noted that individual rabbis had played a role in the past as fund-raisers for JTS within their communities, and some cooperative campaigns had occurred for specific projects at JTS. But the effort to initiate an RA campaign with a targeted monetary goal was unprecedented.

35. The United Synagogue, which had conducted its own fund-raising to meet its annual budget of \$20–25,000, ran up a \$50,000 debt that was eventually paid only when JTS lent it the money to wipe out its debt. "The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Assembly: The Nature of the Spiritual and Organizational Relationship That Exists and Should Exist Among Them." First draft signed by S[imon] G[reenberg], undated. (References in the draft to money expended in 1949 and budgets projected for 1950 suggest the document was drafted during the fiscal year that began on 1 July 1949.) Ratner Center, Simon Greenberg Papers, unprocessed collection, p. 13.
36. Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," p. 182, note 654.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 172–74. Greenbaum claims that the donor base for the campaign grew from a thousand in 1936 to ten times that number in 1943.
38. This information on the Liaison Committee is based on Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," pp. 162–68.
39. "The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, the United Synagogue, the Rabbinical Assembly: The Nature of the Spiritual and Organizational Relationship That Exists and Should Exist Among Them." First draft signed by S[imon] G[reenberg], undated, p. 16.
40. On this postwar expansion, see Wertheimer, "The Conservative Synagogue," pp. 123–32.
41. Greenberg, "The Nature of the Spiritual and Organizational Relationship That Exists and Should Exist," p. 9.
42. Greenberg, "The Nature of the Spiritual and Organizational Relationship," p. 9.
43. David Aronson to Rabbi Max Routtenberg, 1 August 1949, RA executive council minutes, 1949.
44. Ratner Center, Simon Greenberg Papers, box 10, Louis Finkelstein correspondence, 1952.
45. Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," pp. 215–16.
46. Some of the key documents are printed in "Responsum on the Sabbath," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 14 (1950): pp. 112–188. In addition to the question of driving a car on the Sabbath, the Law Committee addressed the permissibility of using electricity on the Sabbath and introduced a "Program for the Revitalization of the Sabbath."
47. "Reevaluation of the Responsum on the Sabbath," by Jacob Agus. Ratner Center Collection, R.G. 1Q-199-9.
48. In the late 1960s, religious warfare erupted even more vehemently over another decision of the Law Committee that rendered it optional for congregations to observe *yom tov sheni shel galuyot* (a day added to the celebration of Jewish festivals for Jews living outside of Israel). The chairman of the Law Committee bitterly denounced "the vituperative attacks upon the authors of a responsum and on the Committee in general by some highly placed officials of the Seminary administration and Seminary faculty." Benjamin Z. Kreitman, "Committee on Jewish Law and Standards," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 34 (1970): pp. 194–95.
49. *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 19 (1955): p. 133.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–34.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

52. Ibid., p. 135.
53. Meeting of Louis Finkelstein with RA rabbis on 6 February 1961. R.G. 1Q, 1961, p. 19. A few days after this meeting, Rabbi Edward T. Sandrow, then the president of the RA, called upon Finkelstein to form a joint committee with the rabbis to smooth relations between the RA and JTS and "to overcome many of the fears, tensions and suspicions which have arisen on both sides and which prevent the creation of sound and dynamic communication between us." RA presidential files, 1961. Sandrow to Finkelstein, 10 February 1961.
54. Letter from Rabbi Jacob B. Agus, dated 8 February 1966. RA files, Wolfe Kelman correspondence, miscellaneous.
55. "Committee on Conservative Judaism," meeting of 10 March 1966, p. 3. RA files, Wolfe Kelman correspondence, miscellaneous.
56. Louis Finkelstein to George Maislen, 26 December 1963. Ratner Center, General Files, R.G. 1S-216-30.
57. Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," p. 116. An exchange between a lay leader of the United Synagogue and a JTS administrator is quite revealing about the doubts each organization harbored toward the other. In 1968 Dr. Arthur Jacobs asked for an explanation of the services provided to the United Synagogue by JTS. The response from JTS begins, revealingly, with the assertion that "obviously, without the Seminary there would be no United Synagogue, since it is a fact that we train rabbis for our Conservative congregations upon which rests the whole foundation of a synagogue group with certain interests and concerns." This is followed by a description of the role of the Seminary in providing staff members for a broad range of educational ventures. The letter concludes: "Part of this is, of course, the natural family relationship which causes the United Synagogue to 'boost' the Seminary wherever it is possible to do so, but a good deal of it is indicative simply of the intellectual and educational dependence which inevitably exists." Marjorie Wyler to Arthur Jacobs, Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11C 63-33, Communications, United Synagogue, 1960s-1980.
58. Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," pp. 118-20.
59. Draft of speech delivered at the Women's League Convention. Ratner Center, Marjorie Wyler Papers, unprocessed collection, 1964.
60. Louis Finkelstein to Mrs. Louis Sussman, president of the Women's League, 31 May 1956. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 1L-150-67.
61. Milton Nevins, "A Brief History of the National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs," in *Men's Club Manual*, ed. Jerome Labovitz (New York: National Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs, 1953), pp. 6-11. (In 1987, under the administration of Ismar Schorsch, the NFJMC was given a seat on the JTS board.) In the mid-1950s, the NFJMC formed a National Committee on Seminary Affairs and appointed a seminary affairs chairman in each club to develop support for JTS. See the letter from Bernard Rackmil to club presidents, 6 February 1956. Ratner Center, Joel Geffen Papers, 2a-15-35, NFJMC Seminary Committee, 1954-56. The essay of Michael Brown in volume 1 of this history traces the role of the Seminary in the founding and guidance of Ramah and the Leadership Training Fellowship, two programs through which JTS supervised the education of young Conservative Jews.
62. Most of these are itemized in Aaron Blumenthal, "The Status of the Rabbinical Assembly in the Conservative Movement," *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly*, 1955, pp. 131-32.
63. The National Enrollment Plan was begun in the late 1950s. According to an independent advertising firm that studied the functioning of the NEP in 1972, only one hundred of the 850 United Synagogue congregations organized satisfactory NEP programs in which more than 75 percent of members contributed dues to the plan. In another three hundred synagogues, the congregation had officially voted to join the NEP, but participation was "not satisfactory." NEP was either rejected or never proposed at 450 United Synagogue

- congregations. The Seminary maintained no effective control over NEP collections or the power to audit congregational accounts to ensure it received its proper NEP remittances. Harold Weinberger of Dobbs Advertising Company to Rabbi Henry Michelman, assistant to the Chancellor, 23 January 1973. R.G. 1 unprocessed addition, 1973.
64. Louis Finkelstein to the RA membership, 29 May 1958. Ratner Center, Joel Geffen Papers, 4b-25-36, Rabbinical Assembly, 1954-71.
  65. Simon Greenberg, confidential memo to Louis Finkelstein, 17 February 1966, p. 5. Ratner Center, Simon Greenberg Papers, box 10.
  66. Louis Finkelstein to all Seminary department heads, 4 December 1970. Ratner Center. Marjorie Wyler Papers, unprocessed collection, 1970. Finkelstein to Rabbi Mayer Abramowitz, 4 September 1970. Gerson Cohen, General Files, unorganized, 1970.
  67. Quoted in Greenbaum, "Mission Conflict," p. 180, note 544. This letter was written in 1945, a period of cooperation between JTS and the RA.
  68. RA Papers, Wolfe Kelman correspondence, 10 October 1974. Memorandum, addressee not named.
  69. Letter from a Midwestern rabbi to Alan M. Stroock, 6 October 1971. RA Subject Files, 1971.
  70. Letter dated 10 December 1971. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 1 BB-289-46, General Files, 1972.
  71. Letter to Cohen from Philadelphia, 11 January 1972. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1972.
  72. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11C-37-1, Communications, Gershon Kekst, 1975.
  73. Memorandum dated 18 February 1976. Gerson Cohen, General Files, unprocessed, 1976.
  74. Gerson D. Cohen, "Women in the Conservative Movement," *Women's League Outlook* (winter 1973).
  75. Letter dated 15 March 1974 from Philadelphia. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1974.
  76. Letter from Philadelphia, 20 February 1974. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1974.
  77. Letter from Willima Abrams, 3 March 1975. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1975.
  78. There is no evidence that Cohen altered his policies due to the hostile response to his article in the *Outlook*. To the contrary, shortly after taking office, he already indicated in a private letter that he personally favored granting girls *aliyot* in Ramah camps. Letter to Max Routtenberg, 23 February 1972. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 1BB-290-2, General Files, 1972.
  79. Letter from a Talmud faculty member, 21 August 1974. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1974.
  80. Letter from a rabbi in Queens, New York, dated 1 July 1974. R.G. 1, unprocessed addition, 1974.
  81. Press release, 30 January 1979. Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11B-8-18, Communications, press releases, July 1978-January 1979.
  82. On the debate over Magidson's application to the RA, *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 45 (1983): pp. 218-51.
  83. Press release, 14 February 1985. Ratner Center, Marjorie Wyler Papers, unprocessed collection, 1985.
  84. Report to the Convention, May 1985. Ratner Center, Alexander Shapiro Papers, unprocessed collection, 1986.
  85. See the letters of Mrs. Ruth Perry to Gerson Cohen, 18 May 1977 and 2 August 1977. Gerson Cohen General Files, unorganized, 1977.
  86. Minutes of the Conservative movement "Summit Conference" held on 30 August 1977. Women's League Archives, Subject Files, 1977, especially p. 5. The minutes do not indicate the name of the speaker of these words.
  87. See, for example, Ratner Center, Simon Greenberg's draft memorandum of agreement for

- such a cooperative venture with the United Synagogue, RA, Women's League, and the World Council of Synagogues. 2 November 1981. Simon Greenberg Papers, unprocessed. Greenberg formally headed these initiatives, but Cohen was personally active in seeing them through and often traveled to Israel.
88. See, for example, the Ometz brochure in Ratner Center, JTS Records, R.G. 11C-50-21, Communications, Ometz brochure, 1982-83.
  89. In a draft proposal for "Conservative Movement-Wide Participation in the Seminary's Centennial," it is suggested that self-study "would constitute an act of unity which would be greeted with approval throughout the movement." It would address questions of ideology and also formulate an agenda for action. The document is in the Ratner Center, Alexander Shapiro Papers, box 6, folder 5. In his foreword to *Emet Ve-Emunah*, Kassel Abelson links the commission to the impending JTS centennial, p. 1.
  90. *Emet Ve-Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1988), foreword.
  91. JTS library, board minutes, 19 June 1985, p. 98. In his effort to achieve such unity, Peck convinced the JTS board to amend its bylaws "to include the three largest constituent organizations by naming the chief elected officers of the Women's League for Conservative Judaism, the RA, and the United Synagogue to the Search Committee." *Ibid.*, p. 99.
  92. Sheldon Engelmayer, "Conservative 'Healer': Seminary Chancellor-elect to Strive for Reconciliation." *Jewish Week* (New York), 7 March 1986, p. 4.
  93. Conrad Cherry, *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools and American Protestantism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 156.
  94. *Ibid.*, p. 299.
  95. *Ibid.*, p. 299.