Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel: A Social and Religious Profile

by EPHRAIM TABORY

POWERFUL FORCES are currently at work in Israeli society to modify Orthodox Judaism in the direction of greater conservatism.[1] On a state level, efforts are being made to apply the *halakhah* to many spheres of public life—to enforce Sabbath prohibitions against public entertainment, soccer games, and El Al flights.[2] The Orthodox *yeshivot* and the chief rabbis are also becoming increasingly militant in their demands. It is in this atmosphere that the Reform and Conservative denominations in Israel are seeking to become established Jewish movements on an equal footing with Orthodoxy.

There would appear to be a market for Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel. While about 17 per cent of Israel's Jews classify themselves as "religious" (basically co-terminous with Orthodox),[3] it is estimated that 75 per cent of the population observe a "non-secular" life style.[4] Many among the latter group could presumably be attracted to the more liberal forms of religion offered by Reform and Conservative Judaism. In fact, however, these movements have met with only a limited response in Israel. Of the

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[1]On Judaism and Jewish practices in Israel, see Ervin Birnbaum, *The Politics of Compromise: State and Religion in Israel* (Rutherford, 1970); Samuel Clement Leslie, *The Rift in Israel: Religious Authority and Secular Democracy* (London, 1971); Norman L. Zucker, *The Coming Crises in Israel: Private Faith and Public Policy* (Cambridge, 1973); S. Zalman Abramov, *Perpetual Dilemma, Jewish Religion in the Jewish State* (Rutherford, 1976); and Zvi Yaron, "Religion in Israel," AJYB, Vol. 76, 1976, pp. 41–90.

[2]Fifty-six of the 83 items contained in the coalition agreement to the tenth Knesset (signed on August 4, 1981 by representatives of the Likud, National Religious, Agudat Israel, and Tami parties) deal, directly or indirectly, with religious matters.

[3]Yehuda Ben Meir and Peri Kedem, "Index of Religiosity of the Jewish Population of Israel," *Megamot* (Hebrew), February 1979, pp. 353–362.

[4]See Sammy Smooha, *Israel, Pluralism and Conflict* (London, 1978), p. 73.

more than 6,000 synagogues in the country,[5] only 40 (with a total membership of about 2,000 families) are affiliated with either the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism (Reform) or the Movement of Masorati Judaism (Conservative).[6] The purpose of this article is to describe the social and religious characteristics of these movements and to analyze their possible impact on the future of religious life in Israel.

Establishment of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel

An initial attempt to establish a non-Orthodox form of Judaism in Israel was made by Rabbi Max Elk, an immigrant from Germany. In 1935 he founded a liberal congregation, Beth El, in Haifa, where he also set up the Leo Baeck School in 1939.[7] The school maintains close ties with Reform Judaism (it came under the formal auspices of the World Union for Progressive Judaism in 1971) and is currently headed by an American expatriate Reform rabbi, Robert Samuels.

Beth El congregation existed for only a few years. The generally anti-Zionist attitude of early Reform Judaism[8] was a primary cause of its dissolution.[9] A pamphlet describing the Reform movement in Israel does not even mention its pre-state history.[10] In any event, it is clear that the Reform movement in Israel had its "modern" beginnings only in 1958, with the founding of the Harel synagogue in Jerusalem. There are now about 12 Reform congregations which hold regular Saturday services; all but four were founded before 1970.

The first Conservative congregation was also established by a liberal immigrant rabbi from Germany. David Wilhelm founded the Emet Ve'Emuna congregation in Jerusalem in 1937. The World Council of Synagogues (Conservative) sought to establish a presence in Jerusalem in the 1930's, by constructing what is today one of Jerusalem's most prestigious synagogues, Yeshurun. The religious adherence of the congregants, however, led the synagogue to adopt an Orthodox pattern of worship. The

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[5]Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Religion in Israel* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 37.

[6]Mevakshe Derech ("Seekers of the Way"), a congregation established in Jerusalem in 1962, is an independent liberal synagogue that encompasses several dozen families. Its style of service is similar to that found in Reform synagogues, but the congregation is unaffiliated with any religious organization.

[7]Meir Elk, "First Steps in the History of Our Movement in Israel," *Shalhevet* (Hebrew), 1, 1969, pp. 9–12.

[8]See David Polish, *Renew Our Days: The Zionist Issue in Reform Judaism* (Jerusalem, 1976), for a discussion of the changes that have taken place in the attitude of Reform Judaism toward Zionism.

[9]Ze'ev Harari, "Chapters in the History of the Movement for Progressive Judaism in Israel," (Hebrew), seminar paper, Hebrew Union College, Jerusalem, 1974.

[10]Shlomo Cohen, *Not to Negate Have We Come, But Rather to Pave the Way* (Hebrew), (Ramat Gan, n.d.).

Conservative movement in Israel is larger, though younger, than the Reform movement; about 30 Conservative congregations hold regular services, and all but three of these were founded after 1970.

The manner in which Reform and Conservative synagogues have been founded is indicative of the demand for such congregations in Israel. The driving force behind the creation of many of the Reform congregations has been either a movement rabbi (one rabbi was responsible for the establishment of four different congregations) or personnel from the national movement office. In contrast, Conservative synagogues have generally been founded by a nucleus of American expatriates who, desirous of establishing such congregations, approached the national movement for assistance.

Only a few congregations have their own facilities; most Reform and Conservative groups use rented halls and school buildings. This situation has enabled state-religious authorities to hinder the congregations. Some institutions have allegedly been threatened with removal of *kashrut* certification, if they allowed non-Orthodox congregations the use of their facilities.[11] The efforts of Reform Jews in Tel Aviv to obtain permission to build a synagogue were thwarted for years by the religious parties in the municipal coalition. In one instance, permission to perform a wedding was withheld from an Orthodox rabbi because the ceremony was to be held in the hall of a Conservative congregation.[12]

The Israeli government has no "official" policy with regard to the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel. Local religious officials and local councils either render assistance or seek to impede developments, depending on the personalities and coalition politics prevailing at given times and places. In some communities, congregations have been sold land for the construction of synagogues for mere nominal sums. Even the national ministry of religious affairs has granted money to congregations for educational purposes, although the sums involved have not been listed under the ministry's regular budget lines.[13]

The legal system in Israel entrusts issues of personal status to the religious courts of the various religious communities.[14] Reform and Conservative

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[11]A letter from the mayor of Rishon LeZion (dated January 16, 1977) to the founder of the Reform congregation in that town stated it was impossible to allocate a place of worship to the congregation because of the "danger of increased public and social tension."

[12]These examples, and others, are discussed in Abramov, *op. cit.*, p. 350 ff.

[13]Some persons involved in the Reform and Conservative movements are opposed to the acceptance of such sums. They feel that the receipt of any government aid prevents them from arguing that they are discriminated against. At the same time, the manner in which the funds are transferred does not enable the movement to argue convincingly that this is a form of governmental recognition, especially given the small amounts awarded.

[14]See Zerach Warhaftig *et al.*, (eds.), *Religion and State in Legislation* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1973); Menahem Elon, *Religious Legislation* (Hebrew), (Tel Aviv, 1964); and Pinchas Shifman, "Religious Affiliation in Israeli Interreligious Law," *Israel Law Review*, January 1980, pp. 1–48.

rabbis are *ipso facto* enjoined from being considered as designates of the state for these purposes. Likewise, at times they have been prevented from conducting funerals. The conversions they perform are not recognized. For the past several years, the Orthodox rabbinate has placed advertisements in the press prior to the high holy days stating that the prayers of persons who worship in Conservative synagogues are not valid, and that individuals cannot fulfill the commandment of *shofar* in such houses of worship.[15]

While some Reform and Conservative congregations have had difficulties in renting facilities, and their rabbis are not recognized by the state, it would be a mistake to attribute the limited progress of the movements to these factors. First, in every case facilities have eventually been found. Secondly, movement leaders are aware that they would not necessarily attract more members to their congregations even if Reform and Conservative rabbis were permitted to conduct wedding services. While it might be argued that the actions taken against the rabbis are an infringement of civil rights, their actual effect on the growth of the Reform and Conservative movements has been limited.

Organizational Structure of the Movements

The Reform and Conservative movements in Israel, like those in the United States, are better characterized as federations of synagogues than as satellite congregations of united organizations.

The Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism is formally composed of representatives of all congregations, as well as such affiliated bodies as the youth movement, Leo Baeck School, Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Council of Progressive Rabbis in Israel. A national council makes the major policy decisions that affect the movement on a day to day basis. One of the main responsibilities of the Council of Progressive Rabbis is the preparation of a new Israeli Reform prayer book. The rabbinic body also occasionally deals with religious questions posed to it by members of the Reform kibbutz.

In the Conservative movement the main division is between the synagogue body, the United Synagogue of Israel, and the rabbinic group, the Rabbinical Assembly in Israel. Working together, the two organizations have established a Movement of Masorati (Traditional) Judaism in Israel. The name was carefully chosen because of its compatibility with the philosophy of Conservative Judaism and its potential appeal to the many Jews in Israel who characterize themselves, religiously, as *masorati.*[16]

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[15]Some Reform leaders have been disheartened by the fact that they have not been included in the Orthodox rabbinate's denunciations. Apparently, the Orthodox do not take them all that seriously.

[16]Forty-one per cent of the respondents in Ben-Meir's and Kedem's study, *op. cit.*, stated that they were *masorati.*

The leaders of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel want their movements to be seen as indigenous to the country. At the same time, they are affiliated with counterpart movements abroad. In the case of Conservative Judaism, it is the World Council of Synagogues; in the case of Reform Judaism, it is the World Union for Progressive Judaism. The main branches of both of these world movements are in the United States.

The Reform and Conservative movements in Israel are quite dependent on financial support from abroad. Over half of the Reform movement's budget is covered by the World Union for Progressive Judaism, which also subsidizes the salaries of several Reform rabbis. In general, the Reform movement in Israel appears to be subject to considerable outside influence. Thus, the vice-president of the Israel executive of the World Union for Progressive Judaism holds *ex officio* membership in the national council of the Israel movement. Publicly at least, the holder of this position, rather than the actual chairman of the Israel Movement for Progressive Judaism, is often perceived to be the leader of Reform Judaism in Israel. The Conservative movement in Israel has had some unpleasant arguments with the United Synagogue of America over the question of financial support. The perceived lack of greater support from abroad has led Conservative leaders in Israel to adopt a more independent course.

Demographic Profile of the Movements

A survey of the members of Reform and Conservative congregations, conducted in 1978, provides data on their demographic composition. While there has been some fluctuation in membership in the interim period (more Conservative congregations have been founded), the basic picture has not changed.[17] For comparative purposes, data from the United States National Jewish Population Study will also be presented.[18]

An initial difference between the movements relates to the number of families that have joined them. There were about 2,049 family units in the

[17]Inasmuch as neither of the movements maintained a national membership list from which respondents for the survey could be drawn, it was necessary to obtain lists from each of the congregations. These lists accounted for 815 family units in the Reform synagogues and 1,500 in the Conservative houses of worship. A sample of adults in these households was sent a questionnaire dealing with a variety of synagogue-related issues as well as demographic characteristics. The questionnaires were accompanied by requests for cooperation from the heads of the movements. A total of 977 questionnaires (517 in the Reform movement and 460 in the Conservative movement) were obtained. The response rate in both movements was 85 per cent.

[18]The National Jewish Population Study was commissioned by the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds. Data relevant to this study are found in Bernard Lazerwitz, "Past and Future Trends in the Size of American Jewish Denominations," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, Summer 1979, pp. 77–82, and in Bernard Lazerwitz and Michael I. Harrison, "American Jewish Denominations: A Social and Religious Profile," *American Sociological Review*, August 1979, pp. 656–666.

two movements in 1978; 64 per cent (1,308 units) belonged to Conservative synagogues and 36 per cent (741 units) to Reform synagogues.

Table 1 presents the family life cycle (a composite picture of the age of the members, their marital status, and the age of their children) of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel, as well as comparable data for Reform and Conservative denomination members in the United States.

The Conservative movement in Israel is composed of younger members, and more members with younger children, than is the Reform movement. The Reform movement has a larger percentage of members with children no longer at home. The significance of these findings is evident when com-

TABLE 1. FAMILY CYCLE OF MEMBERS OF ISRAELI REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUES, BY PER CENT

Family Cycle	Reform	Conservative	NJPS[a] Reform	NJPS[a] Conservative
Under 36 and Single	2	3	1	1
Under 36, Married, No Children	1	2	1	6
Married, One or More Children Aged 13 or Younger	18	37	42	36
Married, One or More Children Aged 14–18	12	13	15[b]	18[b]
Married, All Children Over 18 (or No Children)	41	30	35[c]	31[c]
Not Married, Aged 31–54, No Children at Home	2	2	1	1
Not Married, Aged 60 or Over, No Children at Home	22	12	3	5
One-Parent Families	1	1	2	2
NA	1	0	–	–
Total Per Cent	100	100	100	100
N	517	460	841	1,160

[a]Source: Bernard Lazerwitz, "Jewish Denominations, Synagogue Membership, and Attendance," mimeographed, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. Data refer to synagogue members.

[b]Married couples with children 14 years and older.

[c]Married, 36 years or older, no children now at home.

paring the Israeli members with Reform and Conservative members in the United States. Lazerwitz and Harrison report that 57 per cent of Reform and Conservative members in the United States are married and have children under 16 years old in their households.[19] Whereas the Conservative membership in Israel closely resembles the American group (50 per cent of the Israeli members are married with children under 19 in the household), the Reform membership does not (only 30 per cent of the Reform members in Israel are married with children under 19 in the household). Another difference between the Israeli and American data is that a greater percentage of persons in the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel are elderly, with no immediate family members in the household. The implications of this situation will be discussed below.

The continents of birth of the members, presented in Table 2, show that a smaller percentage of Conservative than Reform Jews are of European origin. The basic difference between the movements is the relatively large number of persons in the Conservative movement born in North America (Canada and the United States). Jews of Asian-African and Latin American origins are virtually unrepresented in the two groups. Within Israeli society, Asian-Africans comprise about 46 per cent of the Jewish population.[20]

Over ten per cent of the members in each of the movements are native-born Israelis. These persons are younger than the other members—their average age in each of the movements is 42. The average age of the non-Israeli-born in the Reform movement is 61, and in the Conservative, 55.

The data in Table 2 point up the fact that Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel are basically ethnic movements. Ethnic here is taken to mean that the members have a relatively homogeneous cultural background.[21] This common background is further underscored by looking at the members' continents of emigration in Table 3. It should be noted that the North American presence in the Reform and Conservative movements is embedded in a broad "Anglo-Saxon" framework; 11 per cent of the members are from English-speaking countries other than the United States and Canada. In all, one out of three members of the two movements is from an English-speaking country. These persons account for close to half of all Conservative members, but only for about 20 per cent of the Reform members.[22]

Following the English-speaking countries, the country contributing the largest percentage of members is Germany. Thirty per cent of the Reform

[19]See Lazerwitz and Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 659.

[20]Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Statistical Abstract of Israel.* 1978, Table ii/23.

[21]See Shlomo Deshen, "Political Ethnicity and Cultural Ethnicity in Israel During the 1960's," in Ernest Krausz, (ed.), *Studies of Israeli Society: Migration, Ethnicity, and Community* (New Brunswick, 1980), pp. 117–163.

[22]*Cf.*, CBS, *op. cit.*, Table ii/23.

TABLE 2. CONTINENT OF BIRTH OF MEMBERS OF ISRAELI REFORM AND CONSERVATIVE SYNAGOGUES, BY PER CENT

Continent	Reform	Conservative	Israel Jewish Population[a]
Israel	11	14	12
East Europe	32	20	40
West Europe	45	29	
Asia–Africa	2	2	46
North America	8	24	2
Latin America	1	3	
Oceania	1	8	
Total Per Cent	100	100	100
N	512	455	3.1m

[a]Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 1978*, Volume 29, Table ii/23. First-generation Israel-born are classified according to father's continent of birth.

members and ten per cent of the Conservative members immigrated directly from that country. It is possible that the differences between the movements, with regard to "Anglo-Saxon" members in the Conservative group and the Germans in the Reform group, is due less to the intrinsic attraction of the movements than to the nature of immigration to Israel. The German immigrants to Israel brought Reform Judaism with them. In addition, the nature of Reform Judaism abroad would not lead one to expect a large immigration of Reform Jews to Israel. In fact, Orthodox and Conservative Jews are overrepresented among American *olim* to Israel.[23] For that reason the number of "Anglo-Saxons" in the Reform movement is not higher. Supporting this contention is the fact that the average Reform immigrant has been in Israel 31 years, whereas the average Conservative immigrant has been in the country for 19 years. Over half of the non-Israeli-born Reform members came to Israel before 1944, whereas the median year of immigration for the non-Israeli-born Conservative members is 1965.

The ethnic nature of the Reform and Conservative movements is particularly evident in the synagogues. In only three of the twelve Conservative congregations does the percentage of "Anglo-Saxons" fall below 50 per cent; in only two of the ten Reform congregations does the "Anglo-Saxon"

[23]See Bernard Lazerwitz and Arnold Dashefsky, "Success and Failure in Ideological Migration: American Jews in Israel," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, 1979.

presence rise above 50 per cent. Most members of German origin are found principally in one of the Conservative and three of the Reform synagogues.

Members of Reform synagogues in the United States are generally of higher social status than Conservative Jews, although the difference between them is diminishing.[24] This study measures such social status by education and occupation.[25]

The data in Table 4 show that the members of the Reform and Conservative movements have higher educational levels than the general Israeli public. The differences are considerably diminished when Asian/North African Jews are excluded from the Israeli data, but the contrast remains. The differences between Reform and Conservative Jews themselves are attributable to the specific countries of emigration of the members, and to their periods of immigration. Formal education probably received greater emphasis among the many "Anglo-Saxon" members in the Conservative movement than among the European members of the Reform movement. In addition, Reform members generally immigrated to Israel before the Conservative members, and conditions in Europe prior to their immigration were not conducive to formal education. The needs of Israel at the time also worked against their seeking higher education; there was a greater demand for laborers than for academicians. Thus, while many Reform Jews do have some higher education, their number is surpassed by the Conservative Jews.

TABLE 3. IMMIGRANT MEMBERS' CONTINENT OF EMIGRATION, BY PER CENT

Continent	Reform	Conservative	Israel Jewish Population[a]
East Europe	26	11	38
West Europe	54	30	
Asia–Africa	1	2	54
North America	14	40	4
Latin America	3	5	4
Oceania	2	12	
Total Per Cent	100	100	100
N	450	384	3.1 m

[a]Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Immigration to Israel, 1948–1972, Part II, Composition by Period of Immigration,* Special Series No. 489, Table 2.

[24]See Lazerwitz and Harrison, *op. cit.*

[25]No attempt was made to assess family income because of the problems involved in obtaining a valid response in a mail survey. In Israel's inflationary society, where monthly salaries are supplemented by "bonuses" and extra payments throughout the year, it is particularly difficult to measure income accurately.

TABLE 4. MEMBERS' HIGHEST LEVEL OF FORMAL EDUCATION, BY PER CENT

Education	Reform	Conservative	NJPS[a] Reform	NJPS[a] Conservative	Israel Jewish Population[b]
High School or Less	43	26	23	40	82[c]
Partial College	16	20	24	25	5[d]
B.A. Degree	12	15	25	11	
Some Advanced Studies	10	10	14	10	9
Advanced Degree	14	27	14	14	
NA	5	2	—	—	4[e]
Total Per Cent	100	100	100	100	100
N	517	460	841	1,160	1.1 m

[a]Source: Bernard Lazerwitz, "Jewish Denominations, Synagogue Membership, and Attendance," mimeographed, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. Data refer to synagogue members.

[b]Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 1978*, Volume 29, Table xxii/3. Data are for Jewish population age 14 and over.

[c]Includes primary, heder, yeshiva, vocational school, and secondary schools. Corresponds to 81.3% of the Jewish population having 0–12 years of education (in *ibid.*, Table xii/2).

[d]Includes teacher training colleges and other post-secondary schools.

[e]Referred to as "other."

With regard to education, there is a reversal of patterns between the movements in Israel and the United States. In the U.S., a significantly larger percentage of Conservative Jews than Reform Jews have no more than a high school education. There is a corresponding difference between those holding a B.A. degree. In Israel, the differences relate to the graduate level, and it is the Conservative Jews who have higher levels of education.

Table 5 presents the occupational distribution of three groups: Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel; Israel's general Jewish population; and members of Reform and Conservative synagogues in the United States. The occupations are ranked from those of highest social prestige to those of lowest.[26] There is a basic difference in occupational distribution of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel—a much larger percentage of Conservative Jews are professionals. This pattern, a reversal of that found in the United States, is apparently explained by the differential immigration of American

[26]See Moshe Hartman, *Occupation as a Measure of Social Status in Israeli Society* (Hebrew), Part A., (Tel Aviv, 1975).

Reform and Conservative Jews to Israel. Twenty-three per cent of the professionals in the two movements are American-born, and 70 per cent of the American-born in the Israeli Conservative movement are professionals.[27]

Having examined the general demographic characteristics of Reform and Conservative members in Israel, we now turn to their Jewish traits. The first question to be dealt with is the synagogue affiliation of the members prior to their immigration to Israel. Are they merely continuing an institutional affiliation initiated abroad? Sixty per cent of the Reform members and 70 per cent of the Conservative members did attend some synagogue abroad on a regular basis prior to their immigration. The data in Table 6 refer to these persons.

TABLE 5. OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS, BY PER CENT

Occupation	Reform	Conservative	NJPS[a] Reform	NJPS[a] Conservative	Israel Jewish Population[d]
Professionals	51	71	39	30	21
Managers	8	6	20[b]	44[b]	5
Clerical	16	8	20	14	20
Sales	11	6	15	8	8
Services	1	1	6[c]	4[c]	11
Agriculture	3	1	–	–	5
Skilled Workers	10	7	–	–	24
Unskilled Workers	0	0	–	–	6
Total Per Cent	100	100	100	100	100
N	384	366	841	1,160	1.04 m

[a]Source: Bernard Lazerwitz and Michael I. Harrison, "Denominationalism: What Remains After Americanization," mimeographed, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel.

[b]Owners and managers.

[c]Blue Collar.

[d]Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Israel 1978*, Volume 29, Table xii/18. Data relate to population aged 14 and above who are employed or have actively sought employment.

[27]The percentage of professionals among American-born Reform members (46 per cent) is higher than that among non-American-born Reform Jews (37 per cent). However, the small sample (n=41) of American-born in the Reform movement limits the generalizations to be inferred.

Over 20 per cent of the members in both movements regularly attended an Orthodox synagogue abroad. This denominational "switch" is somewhat surprising, since it refers to the members' own behavior and not to a comparison of intergenerational change. Several possible explanations for this finding may be offered. First, "Orthodox" congregations in one area of the United States may be similar to Conservative congregations in another.[28] Thus some members might have attended synagogues in the United States that were quite like Conservative congregations in Israel, despite the different nominal affiliation. Second, some members might have attended Orthodox congregations abroad out of choice, but were looking for an alternative to the religious services held in contemporary Israeli Orthodox congregations. Indeed, about one-third of the Reform and Conservative members in Israel attended a synagogue of a different denomination on a regular basis subsequent to their immigration; for over one-half of these persons, that synagogue was Orthodox. Additional analysis shows that 80 per cent of those persons in each of the movements who attended an Orthodox congregation abroad at some time also regularly attended an Orthodox synagogue in Israel. This accounts for ten per cent of the total Conservative membership, and six per cent of all Reform respondents.

At least 50 per cent of the members in each of the movements who attended a synagogue abroad on a regular basis did not attend a synagogue affiliated with their current denomination. Furthermore, the members generally come from similar synagogue movements abroad, or from ones which may be considered "more" religious. This finding about the members' own synagogue attendance is matched by data concerning the synagogues their fathers attended. About half of all Reform and Conservative members come from homes in which the father attended an Orthodox synagogue. The pattern of an institutional "decline" from Orthodox to Conservative to Reform appears to be quite characteristic of modern Jewry.[29]

Overall, the data suggest that previous synagogue attendance on a regular basis is a prerequisite for affiliation with Reform or Conservative Judaism in Israel. Still, about 30 per cent of the Reform members, and about 20 per cent of the Conservative members, did not attend services regularly.

Aside from previous synagogue affiliation, there is the question of the members' present religious behavior. Table 7 shows the distribution of ritual practices of Reform and Conservative Jews in Israel. Comparable data for the adult, urban Ashkenazic population are also presented.

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[28]See Daniel J. Elazar, *Community and Polity: The Organizational Dynamics of American Jewry* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 110.

[29]See Morris Axelrod *et al.*, *A Community Survey for Long Range Planning: A Study of the Jewish Population of Greater Boston* (Boston, 1967).

TABLE 6. MOVEMENT AFFILIATION OF SYNAGOGUES MEMBERS ATTENDED ABROAD, BY PER CENT

Synagogue Attended Abroad	Reform	Conservative
Orthodox	28	37
Conservative	19	42
Liberal	28	7
Reform	16	3
Other (+ More than 1)	9	11
Total Per Cent	100	100
N	319	327

TABLE 7. RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOR OF MEMBERS, BY PER CENT

Religious Behavior	Reform	Conservative	Israel Pop.[a]	NJPS[b]
Refrain from Eating Bread on Passover	82	89	78	
Fast All Day on Yom Kippur	74	84	56	51
Light Shabbat Candles in Home Each Shabbat	72	82	60	
Make Kiddush in Home Each Shabbat	41	65	34[c]	19
Eat Only Kosher in Home	41	65	33[d]	
Separate Dishes for Meat and Dairy in Home	23	49		22
Eat Only Kosher Outside Home	23	36	32	
Refrain from All Travel on Shabbat	6	18	15	
N	517	460	784	—

[a]Data on the general Ashkenazic Israeli population were provided by Dr. Peri Kedem, and are based on special computer runs. Missing data are excluded from these calculations. For details on her study see Ben-Meir and Kedem (supra, footnote 3).

[b]Source: B. Lazerwitz, "Minority Jews Contrasted to Majority Jews," unpublished paper, 1979. Data refer to all American Jews surveyed in the National Jewish Population Study (NJPS).

[c]Includes 9%—"occasionally" and "usually."

[d]Question asked was whether there is separation of meat and dairy in the home.

Both in Israel and the United States, Conservative Jews perform more ritual practices than do Reform Jews. The most striking feature of the findings in Table 7, however, is the high level of religious observance of Reform Jews in Israel relative to both the Ashkenazic population and the general Jewish population in the United States. The finding in Israel is all the more significant in that Orthodox persons are included in the Ashkenazic population data. Indeed, it is probable that Israeli Reform members comprise the most observant Reform Jewish body in the world.

A multiple classification analysis of the factors leading to affiliation with either a Reform or a Conservative synagogue was undertaken.[30] This analysis, which accounts for 26 per cent of the variance observed, confirms the importance of ethnicity as a differentiating factor in the movements. (The beta value of the continents of emigration was .23.) Likewise, the type of synagogue attended abroad has a relatively strong impact (beta of .21) on the synagogue attended in Israel. Religious behavior and occupation have a moderate impact (beta values of .16 and .14, respectively). The age of the members has a barely moderate effect (beta of .12).

The differences between the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel may be highlighted by comparing the multiple classification analysis results with those relating to Jewish denominational choice in the United States.[31] In the U.S., education and occupation (as well as income) are not significant factors differentiating the two movements (their beta values are below .07). In Israel, however, the Conservative movement is composed of persons of higher social status than those who join the Reform movement, although the beta values associated with these variables are only of moderate (or only approach moderate) strength. Since the members of Conservative synagogues are also relatively young, the Conservative movement has a distinct advantage over the Reform movement in attracting young, socially mobile Israelis. The Western, "American" nature of the Conservative movement also works to its advantage inasmuch as Anglo-Saxons enjoy the highest prestige of all immigrant groups in Israel.

A factor influencing affiliation with Reform and Conservative Judaism in the United States, at least in the formative years of the movements, was the rising social status of the members.[32] A social status higher than that of the Israeli population in general also characterizes the native Israeli members

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[30]See Frank M. Andrews *et al., Multiple Classification Analysis: A Report on a Computer Program for Multiple Regression Using Categorical Predictors* (Ann Arbor, 1973). The absence of interaction between variables was ascertained by using the AID III program of Osiris. See John A. Sonquist *et al., Searching for Structure* (Ann Arbor, 1974).

[31]See Lazerwitz and Harrison, *op. cit.*

[32]Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York, 1972), pp. 26–28.

(the majority of whom are of Western background). They are five times as likely as the general population to have had at least a college education; a much larger percentage are in professional occupations (57 per cent in the Reform movement, 61 per cent in the Conservative movement, in contrast with 21 per cent among the general Israeli population). How did these persons come to attend Reform or Conservative synagogues? Some married Anglo-Saxon expatriates (7 per cent in the Reform group and 14 per cent in the Conservative group), and their spouses may have been instrumental in their joining the Reform or Conservative movement. Some Israeli members (26 per cent in the Reform group and 19 per cent in the Conservative group) came into contact with non-Orthodox Judaism while on visits or extended stays abroad. Over 30 per cent of the Israeli Reform members and 35 per cent of their Conservative counterparts say that they first heard about the movements from their family or friends. In this connection (but not limited to it), the bar and bat mitzvah services held in these congregations are important in attracting native Israelis. Twenty-eight per cent of the Israeli-born in the Reform movement and 34 per cent in the Conservative movement say that attendance at such celebrations (including those of their own children) first led them to attend their current congregations. It should be noted that membership and periodic attendance are requirements for the conduct of bar and bat mitzvah celebrations in most of the synagogues. Many families apparently do not maintain their membership beyond the requisite year.

It is very rare to encounter a Reform or Conservative congregation that has more than half of its registered membership in attendance on any *shabbat*. Still, the difference between Israeli-born and other members in this regard is noteworthy. Table 8 indicates that Israeli-born members attend religious services much less frequently. In the course of discussions with them, some native Israelis stated that they joined one of the movements only because they wished to indicate their support of religious pluralism, rather than because they were specifically interested in Reform or Conservative Judaism *per se*.

An important indicator of the future of Reform and Conservative Judaism in Israel is the ability of the movements to attract the children of present members. Only about half of the grown children of current members prefer the denomination of their parents; 32 per cent of the children of Reform members and 22 per cent of the children of Conservative members have no denominational preference. Only a minority of children of Reform and Conservative members who no longer live at home attend synagogues of the same denomination as their parents (27 per cent in the Reform movement and 42 per cent in the Conservative movement). Inasmuch as the average number of children of the current members is small (1.9 in the Reform

TABLE 8. FREQUENCY OF SYNAGOGUE ATTENDANCE OF ISRAELI-BORN MEMBERS, BY PER CENT

	Reform		Conservative	
Synagogue Attendance	Israeli-Born	Born Elsewhere	Israeli-Born	Born Elsewhere
Each Shabbat (or Almost Each Shabbat) and Holidays	38	49	24	38
Holidays, and Occasionally on Shabbat	24	23	26	30
On Holidays (Including High Holy Days)	6	6	14	13
On Just the High Holy Days	4	9	17	12
Rarely or Never	28	13	19	7
Total Per Cent	100	100	100	100
N	47	470	62	398

movement and 2.3 in the Conservative movement), they cannot be counted upon to maintain current membership levels in the future.

Responses to the Israeli Setting

The demographic data help clarify the charge occasionally made in Israeli Orthodox circles that the Reform and Conservative movements are "imported."[33] Of course, an ideological element is present in this accusation, as well as in the offshoot argument that the movements are geared to the Diaspora and thus religiously "non-authentic." Nevertheless, Reform and Conservative leaders are well aware that they have not succeeded in attracting large numbers of native Israelis. In the hope of doing so, they have sought to alter some behavioral patterns and to undertake specific activities of an "Israeli" nature. This section focuses on some of these activities and analyzes their implications for the movements themselves.[34]

[33]See David Telsner, *The Sinai Covenant and Cincinnati "Religion"* (Hebrew), (Jerusalem, 1978).

[34]Berger's "market" theory of religion, which analyzes the need of religious movements to adapt to local "market" conditions in order to "compete" with alternative movements, is relevant here. See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, 1967).

An interesting linguistic issue has arisen in the Conservative movement because of the unavailability of a Conservative prayer book containing only Hebrew. Several congregations prefer using an Orthodox prayer book rather than a Conservative prayer book with an English translation. While the liturgical differences between the two prayer books are not great, some congregants wish to avoid too obvious a manifestation of a largely Anglo-Saxon membership.[35]

Several Hebrew-only Reform prayer books have been published in Israel, and they have been clearly affected by the country's traditional Orthodox environment. The Reform movement has decided to issue a uniform prayer book for adoption by all congregations, although it is an open question (given Reform's stress on autonomy in matters of prayer and ritual) how many will choose to make use of it. Interestingly, one compiler of the new Reform prayer book has commented that it will have to be "fat" like the Orthodox prayer book, so that Reform Judaism will not be perceived as merely non-Orthodox. "People generally treat Progressive Judaism as 'abridged Judaism'. The Orthodox pray from a 'fat' *siddur*, while we pray from a shortened 'thin' one," he stated.[36]

The movement has established a Reform kibbutz (Yahel, in the Negev, some 70 kilometers north of Eilat) to demonstrate Reform Judaism's rootedness in Israeli society and its break with its anti-Zionist past. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, stated at Yahel's ground-breaking ceremony in November 1976: "We demonstrate Reform's full flowering in its return to Israel—the people and the land."[37] The cover of a brochure describing the kibbutz features the words "Israel Reform Judaism" and "Rooted in the Land," and shows a smiling *kova tembel* hatted girl holding a cluster of grapes. The text of the brochure reads in part: "With the establishment of the new Reform kibbutz this winter, Israel Reform Judaism becomes, literally, rooted in the soil. . . . Israeli Reform Judaism is not only in the land. It is of the land. . . ." The brochure also states: "Israeli Reform Judaism grows because it meets the spiritual needs of a growing number of Israelis who seek a satisfying alternative to empty secularism and rigid Orthodoxy. It inspires those Israelis who wish to experience the beauty of Judaism."

Publicity wise, the kibbutz has been a great asset to the Reform movement. However, the members of Yahel have felt that the Reform movement,

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[35]Plans to print a Hebrew-only version of the Conservative prayer book, using plates provided by the Rabbinic Assembly in the United States, have not materialized for technical reasons.

[36]See Moshe Chaim Weiler, "On the Eve of Rosh Hashana 5737" (Hebrew), *Telem*, 10, 1976, pp. 1–2.

[37]Jerusalem *Post*, November 19, 1976, p. 2.

and particularly the rabbinic leadership, have been slow in prescribing behavioral norms suitable to their needs. (The kibbutz has decided to observe *shabbat* in all public spheres, but not to interfere with what the members do in their private lives. Nevertheless, members who turn air-conditioners and lights on and off in their rooms have begun doing so in the kitchen and dining-room as well.) A greater question relates to what a kibbutz as a Reform institution means. Inasmuch as prayer and rituals are dispensed with on a daily basis, what distinguishes the kibbutz as a Reform enterprise?

The kibbutz has encountered difficulty in recruiting a sufficient number of suitable members. The Reform movement in Israel does not yet have a large number of youth interested in a Reform kibbutz. With the permission of the leaders of the movement, therefore, the kibbutz has turned to other youth organizations in Israel to recruit youngsters who are in the *nachal* program (combining military training and work in a developing kibbutz) of the army. But the persons recruited to Yahel in this manner have almost no religious background and are not interested in a specifically Reform Jewish outlook. There are Americans willing to settle on the kibbutz, but Yahel's present members fear that the kibbutz (which in 1982 had only about 60 members, about half of whom were American) will become "hopelessly" American if they are permitted to do so. This is one of the reasons why the Reform movement has decided to establish another kibbutz in the same area—to absorb the Americans. At the same time, the new kibbutz will have to absorb those native Israelis who wish to join a Reform kibbutz, so that a balance can be maintained. This means that Yahel will have to do without new members for the next few years.

The Reform and Conservative movements in Israel hope to create a core of dedicated youth through the development of national youth organizations. These organizations are still in the formative stage; in 1981 they claimed a total membership of less than one thousand. In order to reach a wider audience, the Reform youth organization, Telem Noar has affiliated with the Boy Scouts of Israel (Tsofim), and been assigned several lodges. The challenge facing the organization is to turn these youth, who have little, if any, religious background, into Reform Jews. The Conservative youth groups, attached to local congregations, are composed primarily of the children of current synagogue members. Regional and national activities serve to integrate Conservative youth into a united organization, Noam. The Conservative movement, in response to the demands of the high-school age youth, is planning the establishment of a kibbutz, so that young people will be able to devote their army service to the *nachal* (soldier-pioneer) program.

No survey of the youth organizations has been undertaken, but the directors note that many of the current members are either Anglo-Saxon,

or the children of Anglo-Saxons. The movements are clearly serving an important integrative function in Israeli society. It appears, though, that the Conservative movement will have the edge in retaining its young people as members. Many Conservative congregations are well attended by children, thus completing their socialization as Conservative Jews. This is in contrast to the situation in Reform synagogues.

A very significant development in the Reform movement has been the inauguration of a rabbinical studies program for native Israelis. At the time that this study was carried out, five students (all men) were registered. (One of them has since been ordained.) Two of the student rabbis came into initial contact with the movement through the Leo Baeck School in Haifa. Another two became aware of Reform Judaism while they were exchange high school pupils in the United States. The fifth student became active in the movement as a result of having attended a Reform high holy day service (which he had learned about through a newspaper advertisement). None of these persons come from an Orthodox background; their families are either secular or traditional. The father of one student had been a member of the liberal movement in Germany. Two are married to Americans. The high visibility of the student rabbis greatly strengthens the Reform movement's claim of being part and parcel of Israeli society.[38]

While the rabbinical students are being trained to administer to the needs of established congregations, they may be better able than expatriate American rabbis to attract native Israeli youth to the Reform movement. They are very much interested in ideological issues, and participate actively in debates during national conferences. Some of the student rabbis are involved in editing *Shalhevet,* the Reform movement's publication. Their religious leanings and views (still in the formative stage at this point, since they have come to the Reform movement with only limited Jewish knowledge) can be expected to have a significant impact on Reform Judaism in Israel as they assume greater leadership responsibilities in the coming years.

Conclusion

A key feature of both Reform and Conservative Judaism is that they facilitate the "privatization" of religion, the isolation of religious life from public practice. They thus enable Jews to take part in secular social life without undue restrictions. As Sklare and Greenblum note, the practices retained by Reform and Conservative Judaism in the United States tend to be those that are compatible with the American social environment.[39] Many

[38]Wide publicity, including press and television coverage, was given to the ordination of the first Israeli Reform rabbi in February 1980.

[39]Marshall Sklare and Joseph Greenblum, *Jewish Identity on the Suburban Frontier* (New York, 1967).

American Jews who want to be part of the general society and yet retain a degree of Jewish identification affiliate with the non-Orthodox branches of Judaism.

Obviously, in Israel adherence to Orthodoxy is less of an impediment to active participation in the mainstream of society than it is in the United States. Israel is geared to the observance of Jewish holidays; *kashrut* is observed in government institutions and many other places as well. Thus, there is less social pressure pushing Jews in the direction of the more liberal Jewish denominations.

In the United States, Reform and Conservative Judaism function as a vehicle for ethnic as well as religious identification. Non-affiliation with a religious denomination in America appears to lead to (as well as to indicate) marginality in the Jewish ethnic community. Thus, even persons who are religiously lax are motivated to attend, or at least affiliate with, the Reform or Conservative denominations (or other institutionalized forms of Judaism) in order to retain and demonstrate an ethnic Jewish identity. In Israel, however, a full Jewish ethnic life is quite possible; there is little fear of "assimilation" and thus less of a need for affiliation with a synagogue. In addition, the use of Hebrew as the vernacular in Israel and the incorporation of Jewish symbols into Israel's "civic" religion[40] negate or, at least, modify the function that the Reform and Conservative movements might play in strengthening Jewish identity.

A recent development in Israel might be noted, inasmuch as it points to a possible direction that the Reform and Conservative movements might take in the future. In accordance with government regulations enabling such action, some parents of children attending a non-religious state school in Jerusalem petitioned for the replacement of part of the curriculum with a richer program of Jewish studies following a basically Conservative syllabus. Many of the parents initially involved in this project were Conservative Jews who had immigrated from the United States. Significantly, however, the program has met with strong approval from parents unconnected with any Jewish denomination and not of Anglo-Saxon background. Enrollment in the school has consistently increased over the past three years, and there have been attempts by parents to establish similar programs in two other locations.

The desire to establish such institutions suggests that the need for religious modification in Israel might manifest itself in ways other than through synagogue forms and ritual practices. Perhaps there is a role for Reform and Conservative Judaism in transmitting a Jewish heritage that is less coercive

[40]See Charles Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, "Israel's Civil Religion," *The Jerusalem Quarterly*, Spring 1982, pp. 57–69.

than that demanded in Orthodox state religious schools, while richer than that provided in non-religious state institutions. The pattern of many Americans to "return" to the synagogue when their children come of school age in order to socialize them into Judaism may, in Israel, be transformed into a desire for a richer Jewish program in the school system.

One last point remains to be discussed in the light of this study's findings. Both the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel are more "traditional" than their counterpart movements in the United States, in that their religious practices are less "deviant" from Orthodox practices. The range of practices found in the synagogues of both movements is no greater than that observed within either of the movements in the United States. Is there, then, a need for two separate non-Orthodox movements in Israel? This question was posed to Reform and Conservative leaders in the course of the interviews with them. Some replied that the Reform and Conservative movements in Israel should combine forces and develop an indigenous, innovative responses to Jewish life in a Jewish society unfettered by institutional affiliations carried over from the past. This feeling, though, is much more prevalent among the leaders of the Reform movement, which has proven less successful than Conservative Judaism. On the other hand, many if not most of the Conservative leaders believe there should be only one movement, but that it should be their own. They feel that any cooperation with the Reform movement will further antagonize the Orthodox establishment. Furthermore, many Conservative leaders emphasize the basic incompatiblity of the movements with regard to the acceptance of *halakhah* as authoritative law. Some Conservative rabbis have gained a measure of official recognition (including the occasional right to conduct weddings) in the communities in which they serve, and this, too, strengthens their determination to retain their independence.