

# Jews in America

*A Contemporary Reader*

Roberta Rosenberg Farber and  
Chaim I. Waxman

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# Religious Movements in Collision

## A Jewish Culture War?

An analysis of shifts in the policies and practices of each Jewish denomination provides a necessary context in which to assess why relations between the religious groups have deteriorated in recent years. All of the movements have responded to a series of new challenges faced by the American Jewish community: the rising rate of intermarriage and the resulting question of how to integrate the children of such marriages into the Jewish community; the feminist revolution and the demands of Jewish women for equality in religious life; and the declining levels of synagogue affiliation and involvement of third- and fourth-generation American Jews, which has forced all Jewish institutions to compete for members. The policies of Jewish denominations have been shaped as well by the aggressive tenor of religious disputation that characterizes relations between segments of American Christianity—and indeed religious antagonists throughout the world.

### **Heightened Religious Tensions**

Each Jewish movement has responded differently to the new challenges and has embraced policies unilaterally, with little or no consultation with its counterparts in American Judaism. The resulting policies are shaped by profoundly different conceptions of Jewish identity, religious reform, and the future of American Judaism. The Reform and Reconstructionist position on patrilineality is incompatible with Conservative and Orthodox definitions of who is a Jew. The ordination of women as rabbis is viewed by some as a logical extension of Jewish ethical values and by others as an unacceptable deviation from Judaism's differentiation between gender roles. And the self-segregation of Orthodox Jews, many of whose leaders refuse to participate in communal organizations that include non-Orthodox rabbis lest such participation confer legitimacy on inauthentic leaders,

raises the question of whether Jews can act in concert. As Irving Greenberg has suggested, both extremes on the religious spectrum seem to have written each other off; both extremes assume that other Jews can be ignored because those others will become increasingly irrelevant to the Jewish future. Specifically, the majority of Orthodox rabbis act as if they expect the non-Orthodox world to assimilate; and the unilateralism of Reform and Reconstruction on the issue of patrilineality suggests a belief that adherents of halakhah are a dying or fossilized breed. Only those on the Conservative right and the Orthodox left seem overly concerned about religious polarization, perhaps because they have ties to all segments of the Jewish community.<sup>1</sup>

Although much of this disagreement has been confined to the journals of various rabbinic organizations, a few widely reported incidents have focused public attention on the heightened religious divisiveness. One episode that came to symbolize the possibilities as well as lost opportunities for greater religious unity has become known as the Denver experiment.<sup>2</sup> Beginning in 1978, Reform, Conservative, and Traditional<sup>3</sup> rabbis formed a joint *Beit Din* (rabbinic court) to oversee conversions. (Orthodox rabbis refused to participate, and there was no Reconstructionist rabbi in Denver at the time.) The purpose of this program was to avoid a situation in which rabbis in Denver did not recognize each other's converts to Judaism. Under the Denver program, each rabbi still retained autonomy to perform his own conversions, but a very significant number—approximately 750 individuals—underwent conversion in Denver through the communal rabbinic court.

In order to function in concert, all participating rabbis compromised some of their views: the Traditional rabbis “were prepared to say that even though we knew that all of the students coming out of the general conversion process would not be authentic Orthodox Jews, we were prepared to say as long as they were beginning an effort to learn Judaism and aspire to be committed Jews, we were prepared to offer our signatures.” Or as another Traditional rabbi put it: “Our compromise was simply that we did not make the thorough investigation that we might have made of our own converts—whether the person, in practice, was prepared to embrace a larger measure of traditional Judaism.” The Reform rabbis, in turn, compromised by agreeing to teach about traditional observances, such as Jewish dietary laws and special Passover regulations. In addition, the Reform rabbis compromised by acceding to the Traditional and Conservative rabbis' insistence that converts must go to a ritual bath (*mikveh*) and undergo a symbolic circumcision (*hatafat dam brit*).<sup>4</sup> Not coincidentally, the lone Conservative rabbi in Denver, whose conception of conversion represented a centrist position, served as the chairman of the board for most of its history. But the actual conversion ceremony was supervised by three Traditional rabbis.

In 1983, after six years of relatively smooth functioning, the Denver *Beit Din* was dissolved. The move was precipitated by the resolution on patrilineality adopted that year by the Central Conference of American Rabbis. This decision to

redefine Jewish identity, as well as the designation of Denver as a pilot community for a new Reform outreach effort to recruit converts, convinced the Traditional and Conservative rabbis that they could no longer participate in the joint board. Although the Reform rabbis of Denver held varying views on the question of patrilineality, the national decision of the Reform rabbinate placed the Traditional and Conservative rabbis in an untenable position. They could not cooperate in a conversion program with rabbis who held so different a conception of Jewish identity. And furthermore, they could not supervise conversions that would occur with increasing frequency due to a Reform outreach effort that was inconsistent with their own understanding of how to relate to potential proselytes. Thus, the Denver program, a model for other local Jewish communities, foundered because of decisions taken far away from that community at the national convention of Reform rabbis.

The possibility of future cross-denominational cooperation in other Jewish communities was further undermined by the response of Orthodox groups to the Denver program. When the existence of that program became public knowledge (ironically, through the announcement of its demise), Orthodox groups raised a hue and cry over the folly of Traditional rabbis for even participating in a joint conversion effort. As the *Jewish Observer*, an English-language periodical of the Orthodox right, crowed:

While compromise for the sake of unity can often make good sense, when dealing with basic principles of faith, “compromise” is actually a sell-out. . . . It is time that all Orthodox rabbis recognized that Reform and Conservative Judaism are far, far removed from Torah, and that *Klal Yisroel* [the totality of the Jewish people] is betrayed—not served—when Orthodoxy enters in religious association with them.

In the judgment of the *Jewish Observer*, “the Traditional rabbis of Denver have been party to an outrageous fraud.” And lest anyone fail to grasp the implications of this fraud, the periodical’s editor went on to warn “other communities contemplating this type of denominational cooperation . . . [to] take note of the awesome pitfalls involved and step back from the abyss.”<sup>5</sup>

Since the collapse of the Denver program, denominational relations have continued to deteriorate. Among the key flash points have been the veto exercised by Orthodox rabbis of the Rabbinical Council of America to prevent the newly independent Reconstructionist movement from joining the Synagogue Council of America, an umbrella agency linking the rabbinic and congregational bodies of all the other Jewish religious movements;<sup>6</sup> the reconstitution of the Jewish Welfare Bureau’s Chaplaincy Board, which provided chaplains and other support to Jews in the military since World War I, in response to the application of a woman rabbi seeking to serve as a Jewish military chaplain;<sup>7</sup> and the placement of advertisements by rabbinic groups of the Orthodox right urging Jews to stay home on the

High Holidays rather than worship in a non-Orthodox synagogue.<sup>8</sup> When the *New York Times* published a front-page article with the headline, “Split Widens on a Basic Issue: What Is a Jew?” the divisions among rabbis began to attract wider attention in the Jewish community.<sup>9</sup> One organization in particular, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership (CLAL), headed by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, sought to focus communal attention on the growing rift by inviting the leaders of all four Jewish religious movements to a conference that posed the provocative question, “Will There Be One Jewish People by the Year 2000?”<sup>10</sup>

The wider Jewish community was most actively drawn into the fray during the “who is a Jew” controversy in late 1988. An international debate erupted when it appeared that the Israeli government would grant the Orthodox rabbinate the exclusive right to determine the Jewish status of converts, thereby guaranteeing the delegitimation of all conversions not performed under Orthodox auspices.

Long after Israeli leaders had finished with the matter, the bitterness engendered by the controversy continued to fester within the American Jewish community. Opponents of the amendment faulted Orthodox leaders in the United States, particularly the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who resides in Brooklyn, New York, for pressuring Israeli groups to pass the amendment. Orthodox groups were castigated as divisive and mean-spirited. It was frequently argued that Orthodox Jews in America were taking their battle against other Jewish denominations to Israel because as a small minority they could not win such a struggle in the United States. Moreover, non-Orthodox spokespeople claimed that *their* identity as Jews was under attack. Shoshana Cardin, then the chairperson of the Council of Jewish Federations’ Committee on Religious Pluralism put it as follows: “What we’re dealing with here is perceived disenfranchisement of millions of Jews. And in this case, perception is reality.”<sup>11</sup>

Orthodox groups counterattacked. Though some Orthodox organizations supported the campaign to remove the issue of “who is a Jew” from the Israeli political agenda (principally, the Rabbinical Council of America), other Orthodox groups banded together to blame Reform Judaism for causing a religious schism. In an “Open Letter to American Jews” signed by several Orthodox organizations, the halakhic definition of Jewish identity was described as “universally accepted among all Jews for thousands of years. Reform, however, has done away with *Halacha*; and the Conservative movement is forever tampering with it.”<sup>12</sup> In a similar vein, Rabbi Marc Angel, one of the most moderate members of the centrist Orthodox rabbinate, lashed out at those who criticized Orthodoxy for its stand on “who is a Jew”: “Those leaders who speak so passionately for Jewish unity ought to have launched a major attack on the decision of Reform Judaism to consider ‘patrilineal Jews’ as Jews. There has probably been nothing more divisive in modern Jewish history than this decision to unilaterally change the definition of Jewishness to include the child of a Jewish father.”<sup>13</sup> The recrimination and bitterness over this issue brought religious hostility between Orthodox and non-Orthodox groups to a fever pitch.

## The Great Rift

The “who is a Jew” controversy set into sharp relief the central features of recent religious warfare between Jews. First, it demonstrated the inextricable connection between Israeli religious and political developments and religious divisions that characterize American Jewry. Remarkably, actions taken by rabbis in Israel who have virtually no constituency other than Orthodox Jews can spark religious conflict in the United States, where the non-Orthodox groups represent the vast majority of Jews. The hostility of Jewish religious leaders in Israel toward non-Orthodox Jews strengthens the hands of militant Orthodox groups in the United States and antagonizes non-Orthodox groups. It is disturbing enough to some that the chief rabbis of Israel do not set foot in non-Orthodox synagogues when they visit the United States. But when leading Orthodox rabbinic decisors of *both* the right-wing *Haredi* sector and the more moderate faction rule that “in principle it is forbidden to save the life of a Reform or Conservative Jew on Shabbat on the same basis that one is not allowed to desecrate the Sabbath to save a gentile’s life,”<sup>14</sup> there is a serious likelihood that the religious mind-set developing within the official Israeli rabbinate will further poison relations between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews in the United States. In turn, the attitudes of the latter toward Israel have been affected adversely because of the perceived link between the Israeli government and the Orthodox religious establishment. According to a recent survey, the attitudes of Reform Jews toward Israel are strongly correlated with the extent to which they link Israel with its Orthodox rabbinate; the greater the perceived link, the more alienated from Israel Reform Jews felt.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the intensity of the recriminations indicates that issues of personal status are now at the heart of the struggle between religious factions. The explosion, after all, came over the question of “who is a Jew.” Religious polarization became more intense when Jews could no longer agree on questions of boundaries: Who is part of the group and who is outside? Whom may their children marry? Will their grandchildren be considered Jewish and permitted to celebrate a Bar or Bat Mitzvah if those grandchildren have a Christian mother and a Jewish father? If their rabbi was born to a Jewish father and Christian mother, is that ordained rabbi considered to be a Jew? In the past, Jewish religious movements held diverse theological views and observed religious rituals differently; but the observances of one group of Jews had only a limited impact on those of another group; they could be ignored if deemed offensive. Issues of personal status, by contrast, have far wider repercussions: at stake is the community’s recognition or rejection of an individual as a Jew. Soaring rates of intermarriage coupled with disputes over patrilineal descent will only worsen the situation: Rabbi Irving Greenberg has warned that by the end of the century, there will be perhaps as many as half a million children, born to mothers converted by Reform rabbis or

accepted as Jewish under the patrilineal definition, whose Jewishness will not be accepted by other Jews.<sup>16</sup> Thus, regardless of whether the matter is ever raised again in the State of Israel, American Jews do not agree on the question of “who is a Jew.”

Third, there is even no agreement as to the number of American Jews who care about these matters. One survey found that on the issue of patrilineality, the vast majority of Orthodox Jews would be “upset” if their children married someone of patrilineal descent, but only one-third of Conservative Jews and one-tenth of Reform Jews would be “upset.” Thus, perhaps no more than one-quarter of American Jewry rejects the new definition of Jewish identity put forward by Reform and Reconstructionism.<sup>17</sup> This has led to speculation that the rejection of patrilineality by Orthodoxy and by segments of the Conservative movement will give way in time to sociological realities, namely, mass support for patrilineality by American Jewry. Other observers are not so certain, especially as evidence mounts about the minimal Jewish identity of children raised in mixed-married homes and as fears of intermarriage intensify. Orthodox Jews are not about to alter their opposition, and Conservative rabbis who overwhelmingly voted to expel from their association any colleague who accepted patrilineality may yet convince their congregants to reject patrilineality.

Finally, and most important, the “who is a Jew” controversy made it evident that the critical fault line running through the Jewish community separates Orthodox from non-Orthodox Jews. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews explicitly reject Halakhah (rabbinic law) as normative; accordingly, they do not define Jewish identity on the basis of those laws. By contrast, the Conservative movement does regard rabbinic law as normative and agrees with some Orthodox positions on questions of personal status. But in the debate over “who is a Jew” and other controversies in Israel, the Conservative movement has linked arms with the Reform and Reconstructionist movements, thereby blurring its own more nuanced stance: it agrees with Orthodoxy that Jewish identity must conform to rabbinic law, but it sides with Reform on the need to break the Orthodox monopoly on interpreting Jewish law. In order to wage that political battle, Conservative Judaism has allied itself with nonhalakhic movements. The critical divide thus runs between non-Orthodox movements on one side and the Orthodox on the other.

Since the “who is a Jew” controversy, relations between these camps have continued to worsen.

*Item:* Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, the heir apparent to his brother Joseph as the spiritual leader of centrist Orthodoxy, declared that any unified effort to resolve the chaotic issues of personal status through a Jewish court that included a non-Orthodox Jew would be invalid. Moreover, he likened the very act of cooperation with non-Orthodox groups to the biblical sin of the golden calf because it would “mislead ignorant Jewish masses to worship the idol of Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism.”<sup>18</sup>

*Item:* Rabbi J. D. Bleich, his colleague at Yeshiva University, the preeminent institution of centrist Orthodoxy, “proposed to resolve the problem of ‘who is a Jew?’ by recognizing Reform converts in Israel the same way the law recognizes Moslem and Christian converts, that is, as members of a separate religion.”<sup>19</sup>

*Item:* A planned meeting between American rabbis and Pope John Paul II was almost torpedoed by denominational bickering. The Synagogue Council of America, an umbrella agency that coordinates the national policies of Jewish rabbinical and congregational organizations, was paralyzed by the insistence of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations on its right to veto the composition of the delegation. The matter became moot after the pope postponed his visit to the United States. But it is unlikely that the umbrella organization will be able to avert conflict in the future. The head of the Orthodox rabbinic group insisted on the right to veto the appointment of a homosexual or patrilinear rabbi to a position of leadership on the Synagogue Council of America.<sup>20</sup>

*Item:* The Conservative movement has embarked on a program to free itself from reliance on Orthodox functionaries. Since the late 1980s the Jewish Theological Seminary of American has sponsored programs to train Jewish physicians to perform ritual circumcision (*brit milah*) and has taught rabbis how to supervise *kashrut* (Jewish dietary requirements) in their communities.<sup>21</sup> Conservative institutions are also building their own ritual baths as a response to Orthodox efforts to obstruct the performance of Conservative conversion ceremonies at communal *mikvaot*.<sup>22</sup>

Not surprisingly, these policy decisions are accompanied by increasingly uncivil outbursts by leaders of the various factions. Name-calling and invective are now routinely injected into Jewish public discourse. In an address to the Reform rabbinate, Rabbi Alexander Schindler of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations opined: “Where Orthodoxy alone prevails—stale repression, fossilized tradition, and ethical corruption hold sway.”<sup>23</sup> Orthodox writers, in turn, label Reform Judaism a “sect” or an expression of “deviance.”<sup>24</sup> The upcoming generation of rabbis is likely to be even more polarized. According to a recent study, large majorities of rabbinical students at the Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist seminaries viewed Orthodoxy as intolerant, lacking in compassion, and dominated by their isolationist wing. Almost all Orthodox rabbinical students surveyed and two-thirds of Conservative rabbinical students regarded Reform Judaism as “assimilationist.”<sup>25</sup>

Although some observers dismiss these rifts as minor rabbinic squabbling over turf, fragmentary evidence is surfacing of a more widespread social consequence to the religious polarization. There is some evidence of a withdrawal on the part of broader segments of the Orthodox community away from social interaction, let alone friendship, with non-Orthodox Jews.<sup>26</sup> Though it is not widely publicized, the implicit, if not explicit, stance of the more right-wing Orthodox groups is to



avoid such social contacts.<sup>27</sup> One writer who examined audio tapes prepared for Orthodox children found “a universe of discourse . . . [that] is exclusively Orthodox. . . . Jews who are other than Orthodox rarely appear, and then only . . . as negative foils,” as Jews who are not very smart or as potential converts.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, as the overwhelming majority of Orthodox youngsters now attend their own denomination’s day schools, summer camps, and youth programs through their high school years, they increasingly inhabit an exclusive social world that does not even allow for contact with non-Orthodox peers. These moves toward separatism, in turn, have antagonized non-Orthodox Jews: a survey of American Jews conducted in the late 1980s found that the majority claimed to be “very offended” “by Orthodox Jews who show no respect for the way you choose to be Jewish.”<sup>29</sup> Social barriers between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox worlds are growing higher as the religious conflict intensifies.

Recognizing the dangers to Jewish unity inherent in religious polarization, some groups have tried to bridge the divide. This is a central item on the agenda of CLAL, the national Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, which has a specific department called *Am Echad*—One People. The American Jewish Committee has also acted through its Department of Communal Affairs to bring leaders of opposing groups together.<sup>30</sup> In local communities rabbis from across the spectrum have initiated programs to keep the lines of communication open and to cooperate on issues of pan-Jewish concern.<sup>31</sup> Even some of the antagonists are edging away from conflict: the increasingly right-wing Young Israel movement within the Orthodox camp saw fit at the time of the “who is a Jew” controversy to publish an advertisement in the Jewish press to express its understanding “of the pain of those who mistakenly believe that Orthodoxy has denied their authenticity as Jews.” “A Jew is a Jew,” the ad declared, “regardless of his affiliation—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or non-believer—all are, and ever will remain Jews, to be loved and cherished.”<sup>32</sup> Rabbis across the spectrum overwhelmingly assert that Jewish leaders should display unity in public and not delegitimize other Jews. It is those very same rabbis who carry on the disputes, however.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the many laudable efforts to bridge divisions, disputes over Jewish personal status remain unresolved; profound disagreements over religious definition, legitimacy, and change fester; social interactions between different types of Jews continue to be strained or nonexistent. And in the background, Israeli political groups, which do not concern themselves with questions of religious diversity, periodically hurl incendiary challenges into the volatile brew that is American Judaism.

### **A Jewish Culture War?**

The informed observer of Jewish religious conflict cannot fail to note the significant parallels between developments within American Judaism and the religious

upheaval within Christian denominations. "On all sides," writes Robert Wuthnow about the general pattern, "American religion seems to be embroiled in controversy. . . . Scarcely a statement is uttered by one religious group on the issues without another faction of the religious community taking umbrage. The issues themselves shift almost continuously, but the underlying sense of polarization and acrimony continues."<sup>34</sup> Certainly, the tone of discussion and the polarized mood within American Judaism parallel those in American Christianity. But what about the substance of the dispute? To what extent does the great rift between non-Orthodox and Orthodox Jews mirror the great divide in American Protestantism between conservatives and liberals? How apt are comparisons between Protestant fundamentalists and Orthodox Jews? And is the religious struggle gripping the Jewish community the same as the culture war waged in some sectors of American society at large?

The broad brush strokes show many similarities in both the causes and the consequences of religious conflict in American Judaism and in American Christianity. To begin with, the antagonists—religious conservatives and liberals—share a common worldview with their counterparts in other religions. As defined by James Davison Hunter, the worldview of orthodoxy in its various permutations "is the commitment on the part of adherents to an external, definable, and transcendent authority," whereas progressivists<sup>35</sup> share in common "the tendency to resymbolize historical faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life."<sup>36</sup> This distinction applies to Jewish religious movements, which are separated by their willingness to accept a normative religious structure that is commanded by divine (transcendent) authority: Orthodoxy in all its shadings affirms such a structure; the Conservative movement officially offers a nuanced acceptance of such religious norms; and the Reform and Reconstructionist movements explicitly advocate the need to resymbolize Judaism according to contemporary assumptions and to reject a binding religious structure. Clearly, the acceptance or rejection of a normative, divinely mandated Judaism with a legal structure based on commandments is central to Jewish religious division.

Moreover, as Hunter notes, those worldviews then shape social assumptions, especially regarding matters of public policy. Until the 1960s, conservative groups believed that their views of marriage and sexual morality were widely shared. But since the revolutions of the 1960s those comfortable assumptions have been shattered by new social patterns—increasing rates of divorce, permissive sexual mores, divergent lifestyles, changing gender roles, the perceived collapse of the family, more openly expressed homosexuality, and the availability of abortion on demand.<sup>37</sup> Some segments of the Orthodox Jewish community have sympathized with like-minded Christians over these symptoms of declining "family values." For their part, conservative activists have worked to build alliances with Orthodox Jews, as is attested by Jerry Falwell's (founder of the moral majority) proud declarations of his kinship with Orthodox Jews and the publication of approving reports about the warm family life of Lubavitch Hasidim by a conservative "think tank."<sup>38</sup>

In truth, however, only a small segment of the Jewish population is comfortable with these alliances. To some extent, Jews are held back by political considerations: there is an ingrained fear of right-wing groups, because they have traditionally harbored anti-Semites and advocated the Christianization of America. Furthermore, most Jews, including many in the Orthodox camp, cannot subscribe to the total conservative social agenda. To take the most controversial issue, most Jews of all shades support present public policy on abortion; and even the most right-wing Orthodox Jews, who reject abortion on demand, cannot support a ban on abortion, because under certain circumstances they too rule that abortion is permissible. Even Agudath Israel, an ultra-Orthodox, explicitly pro-life organization, which opposes *Roe v. Wade*, stops short of supporting a ban on public funding and facilities for abortions.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, all religious groupings in Judaism maintain that divorce is a legitimate option. Thus, while religious liberals, the vast majority of American Jewry, actively support liberal social policies and sometimes take a high-profile stance at pro-choice rallies,<sup>40</sup> more religiously conservative Jews are not generally active in the American culture war over social policies—even when they sympathize with part of the conservative agenda.

This is true even of those Orthodox Jews conventionally lumped together with fundamentalists, the right-wing Orthodox, or *Haredim*, as they are now more commonly known in Jewish circles. To understand why, we first need to clarify where these Orthodox Jews converge with Christian fundamentalists. If we ignore the original defining feature of fundamentalism, the belief in biblical inerrancy,<sup>41</sup> it is possible to discern some important areas of convergence between the most ultra-Orthodox Jews and the right wing of evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism. Both ultra-Orthodoxy and fundamentalism are responses to the challenges posed by modernity to traditional religion, and therefore both are most likely to exist “where tradition is meeting modernity rather than where modernity is most remote.” Both also engage in a struggle with their own coreligionists who are perceived as “agents of assault on all that is held dear.”<sup>42</sup>

*Haredim* conform to many of the characteristics listed in a recent attempt by Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby to classify the commonalities shared by all fundamentalists.<sup>43</sup>

1. They are militant. “Fundamentalists begin as traditionalists who perceive some challenge or threat to their core identity, both social and personal. . . . They react, they fight back with great innovative power.”
2. They share a “certain understanding of gender, sex roles, the nurturing and education of children.”
3. They fight with a chosen repertoire of resources, including “real or presumed pasts, to actual or imagined ideal original conditions and concepts, and select what they regard as fundamental.”
4. They “fight under God.”
5. “They will fight for a changed civil polity.”

With the exception of the last point, all of these traits characterize the outlook of ultra-Orthodox Jews in the United States

This is not to suggest, however, that ultra-Orthodoxy derives its strategies and programs from American fundamentalism. Ultra-Orthodoxy was born in Europe, and its most important techniques were imported to America at the time of the Holocaust. These include a reliance on separatism in Jewish communal matters—secession from official communal functions and refusal to recognize the legitimacy of non-Orthodox rabbis, even non-ultra-Orthodox rabbis; and the elevation of the Jewish school over the synagogue as the central institution of Jewish life, thereby granting most power to rabbinic authorities in the yeshiva world, rather than to pulpit rabbis. The recent resurgence of ultra-Orthodoxy has been reinforced by the successful application of these transplanted approaches rather than by the model of American fundamentalism.

In matters of American politics, as well, ultra-Orthodox Jews pursue an approach that differs from that of Christian fundamentalists. Undoubtedly, some Orthodox Jews support conservative policy stances; indeed, certain segments of Orthodox Jews tend to vote for political conservatives.<sup>44</sup> But ultimately, these Jews invest little energy and money in conservative social causes—however much they may sympathize. The critical battles for Orthodox Jews are with non-Orthodox Jews and revolve around entirely different matters.

To take up the first distinction, Orthodox Jews for the most part are not invested in the struggle over public policy, the key battleground in the American religious and culture wars.<sup>45</sup> To be sure, Orthodox Jews sometimes become activists on behalf of specific candidates, but they are drawn into politics in order to protect their communal interests, to get their fair share of government funding and protection—not in order to change American society. The conventional right-wing Orthodox perspective was colorfully expressed by Rabbi Yehuda Levin: “I had very little contact with the Gentile world. I was living in a ghetto without walls. . . . It is inbred in our community that what goes on in the outside world is *meshugah* (crazy). . . . So if it is *meshugah*, why should we bother with it.”<sup>46</sup> Levin nevertheless became a militant antiabortion and anti-gay rights activist, but he is the exception that proves the rule. Most Orthodox Jews do not see American public policy as their domain. They fight for their narrow political interests, not to remake American society.<sup>47</sup>

The only society ultra-Orthodox Jews wish to remake is Israel—for both ideological and pragmatic reasons. Orthodox groups in the United States and Israel have invested in the issue of “who is a Jew” and other questions of Israeli public policy because it offends them that Israel is not governed by traditional Jewish law. They have no such expectations of American society. Moreover, ultra-Orthodox Jews, the so-called *Haredim*, have a powerful vested interest in Israeli political life since they are supported by massive government subsidies. As Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman put it: “The [international Jewish] fundamentalism train is pulled by the Israeli [*Haredi*] locomotive; that locomotive is traveling very fast on rails maintained” by the Israeli government.<sup>48</sup>

By contrast, the Orthodox/non-Orthodox rift in the United States focuses not on governmental policy but on communal conflict, particularly regarding the definition of Jewish personal status. True, the various Jewish religious movements differ in their evaluations of modern culture and American mores; and they also assess gender and sexual matters differently. But the critical divide between Jewish religious groups concerns questions of personal status—marriageability and Jewish identity—which have no counterpart in Christian religious disputes. Put differently, the culture war engulfing some sectors of Christianity concerns the proper ordering of American society; at stake in Judaism are issues of group survival and cohesion. As Christians clash over theology and public policy, religious Jews battle over the boundaries of their own society—indeed, they cannot even agree on whether some of their co-religionists are actually Jewish.

### Notes

1. On Irving Greenberg's views, see Gary Rosenblatt, "Judaism's Civil War: How Deep Is the Rift?" *Baltimore Jewish Times*, January 29, 1988, pp. 56–59; Greenberg, "Will There Be One Jewish People in the Year 2000?" *Moment*, June 1985; and idem, "The One in 2000 Controversy" *Moment*, March 1987.
2. The most complete account of this experiment, which includes interviews with all of the participating rabbis, appeared in a special section entitled "Conversion and Patrilineality," *Intermountain Jewish News*, December 2, 1983.
3. Traditional synagogues and rabbis are largely a midwestern phenomenon; Traditional congregations permit men and women to sit together and utilize a microphone during religious services; their rabbis, mainly graduates of the Hebrew Theological Seminary in Skokie, identify with Modern Orthodoxy.
4. For a history of the board written by the leading Reform rabbi in Denver, see Steven E. Foster, "The Community Rabbinic Conversion Board: The Denver Model," *Journal of Reform Judaism*, summer 1984, esp. pp. 27–28.
5. Nisson Wolpin, "Compromise on the Great Divide: Questionable Conversions in Denver," *Jewish Observer*, January 1984, pp. 32–34.
6. Editorial, "The Synagogue Council of America," *Reconstructionist*, July–August 1986, p. 6.
7. When the CCAR placed a female candidate in the chaplaincy program, the commission was reconstituted as the Jewish Chaplains Council in 1986. See *JTA Bulletin*, August 29, 1985, p. 3; and *American Jewish Yearbook* 86 (1986), p. 399; and *American Jewish Yearbook* 87 (1987), p. 400, on the name change.
8. *New York Times*, February 28, 1986, p. A1.
9. *Ibid.*
10. For information on this conference, see *Materials from the Critical Issues Conference*, which includes press clippings from Jewish newspapers compiled by CLAL to publicize the discussions held in mid-March 1986.
11. Cardin is quoted in Arthur J. Magida, "'Who Is a Jew' Dominates Assembly," *Jewish News* (Detroit), November 25, 1988, p. 1. See also "'Who Is a Jew' Issue Threatens

- Funding,” and “Leaders Protest ‘Who Is,’” *Atlanta Jewish Times*, December 2, 1988, pp. 12, 13, as well as “‘Who Is a Jew’ Furor Erupts,” *Atlanta Jewish Times*, November 8, 1988, p. 16A.
12. The open letter appeared in the *New York Times*, December 19, 1988, p. B9. On Orthodox divisions over the issue, see Alan Richter and Walter Ruby, “Rift Develops among Orthodox over Law of Return,” *LI Jewish World*, December 2–8, 1988, p. 3.
  13. Marc D. Angel, “Leaders of U.S. Jewry Have Fear of Losing Power,” *Jewish Week*, December 16, 1988, p. 26.
  14. This is the summary offered by Irving Greenberg, “Will There Be One Jewish People by the Year 2000?—Further Reflections,” in *Conflict of Cooperation: Papers on Jewish Unity* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1989), pp. 9–10.
  15. Steven M. Cohen, “Are Reform Jews Abandoning Israel?” *Reform Judaism*, spring 1988, pp. 4–5.
  16. See the exchange between Greenberg and Steven M. Cohen in Greenberg, “The One in 2000 Controversy.”
  17. Steven M. Cohen, *Unity and Polarization in Judaism Today: The Attitudes of American and Israeli Jews* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1988), p. 5.
  18. Lawrence Grossman, “Jewish Communal Affairs,” *American Jewish Yearbook* 91 (1991), p. 200.
  19. Greenberg, “Will There Be One . . . Further Reflections,” p. 10.
  20. Ira Rifkin, “Intra-Jewish Tension Delays Papal Meeting,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 2, 1990, pp. 43–44.
  21. Rahel Musleah, “Surgically Simple, Ritually Complex,” *LI Jewish World*, January 19, 1990, p. 3; Debra Nussbaum Cohen, “Conservative Rabbis Get Training in Kashrut Supervision,” *JTA Report*, July 23, 1992.
  22. Lawrence Troster, “Conversion and *Mikveh*,” *RA Newsletter*, summer 1989, p. 4.
  23. Alexander Schindler, “Remarks by the President of the UAHC,” *CCAR Yearbook* 92 (1982), p. 63.
  24. Alan J. Yuter, “Is Reform Judaism a Movement, a Sect, or a Heresy,” *Tradition*, spring 1989, p. 94; N. Wolpin, “One Straw, How Many Camels?” *Jewish Observer*, September 1986, p. 16.
  25. Samuel Heilman, *Jewish Unity and Diversity: A Survey of American Rabbis and Rabbinical Students* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991), pp. 27–35.
  26. Samuel Heilman and Steve M. Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials: Modern Orthodox Jews in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 122–23.
  27. Hints of this social stance appear occasionally. It is the subject of an editorial column written by Gary Rosenblatt, a journalist who identifies with Orthodoxy but has many contacts with the rest of the community. Rosenblatt claims that “Orthodox rabbis . . . tell their congregants not to associate with non-Jews, or even non-Orthodox families,” and as a result these congregants “feel they have hardly any common points of reference or connection with their so-called brethren.” Rosenblatt, “‘Frum’ Here to Modernity,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 25, 1992, p. 10.
  28. Ira Robinson, “The Marvelous Midos Machine: Audio Tapes as an Orthodox Educational Medium,” in *Essays in the Social Scientific Study of Judaism and Jewish Society*, vol. 2, ed. Simcha Fishbane and Stuart Schoenfeld (Hoboken, N.J.: Ktav, 1992), p. 165.
  29. Steven M. Cohen, *Content or Continuity? Alternative Bases for Commitment* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1990), p. 71.

Few spokespersons for Orthodoxy will go on record with their views, but it is no secret that many regard non-Orthodox versions of Judaism as another religion. One right-wing activist has spoken as follows: "If we give them a test, use any standard recognized by the most uneducated, uninitiated Gentile as to what would constitute Jewish affiliation—Sabbath observance, eating kosher, frowning on adultery, the Ten Commandments—these people would not match up in any way. So therefore I say that they are practicing a religion which is not Judaism." Quoted by James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (New York: Basic Books, 1991), p. 15.

30. See the joint publication of CLAL and the AIC, *Conflict or Cooperation: Papers on Jewish Unity*.
31. See, for example, "A Message from Our Rabbis," *Community Review*, December 15, 1988, p. 1, which issues an appeal for unity in the name of all the rabbis in Harrisburg, Pa.
32. "An Open Letter to Our Brethren," *Jewish Week*, December 30, 1988, p. 19.
33. Heilman, *Jewish Unity and Diversity*, pp. 16–17.
34. Robert Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 6.
35. Hunter prefers the terms *orthodox* and *progressivist* for what others call religious conservatives and religious liberals.
36. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, pp. 44–45.
37. Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion: Its Changing Shape and Future* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 37.
38. Jerry Falwell, "An Agenda for the 1980s," in *Piety and Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World*, ed. Richard J. Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1987), pp. 113–14; Edward Hoffman, "Thriving Families in Urban America: The Lubavitcher Hasidim," *Family in America* (The Rockford Institute Center on the Family in America) 4 (October 1990), pp. 1ff.
39. See Grossman, "Jewish Communal Affairs," pp. 191–92, for a discussion of Jewish organizational responses when the U.S. Supreme Court took up a Missouri law denying public funding and facilities for abortion.
40. Sarah Gold, "Where Do Jews Stand in the Debate over Abortion," *LI Jewish World*, October 23–29, 1992, p. 3.
41. The claim of biblical inerrancy fundamentally asserts the literal truth of the Bible; such literalism was rejected by rabbinic Judaism, and even the most Orthodox of Jews believes in the necessity for rabbinic interpretations, which sometimes flatly contradict the literal words of the text. For a brief analysis of the theological meaning of inerrancy, see James D. Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 20–25.
42. Nancy Ammerman, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalism in the Modern World* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 8. For a trenchant analysis of the early history of Jewish ultra-Orthodoxy in Europe, see Michael K. Silber, "The Emergence of Ultra-Orthodoxy: The Invention of a Tradition," in *The Uses of Tradition: Jewish Continuity in the Modern Era*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 23–84.

43. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appelby, eds., *Fundamentalisms Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. ix–x.
44. Heilman and Cohen, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials*, pp. 160–73.
45. For the two most important works on the transformation of American religious life under the impact of these political/cultural battles, see Wuthnow, *The Restructuring of American Religion*; and Hunter, *Culture Wars*.
46. Hunter, *Culture Wars*, p. 13.
47. One area of public policy that has attracted Orthodox attention is the question of church/state separation, specifically regarding government support for parochial schools and the public display of religious symbols, such as the Hanukkah menorah. But here too they have pursued the matter out of narrow interest, rather than on broad principle. On other issues such as abortion rights, there is little unity, given the openness of traditional Judaism to abortion under certain circumstances. On separation issues, see Naomi W. Cohen, *Jews in Christian America: The Pursuit of Religious Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 240–41; on abortion rights issues, see Grossman, “Jewish Communal Affairs,” pp. 191–92; and Gold, “Where Do Jews Stand in the Debate over Abortion?” p. 3.
48. Samuel Heilman and Menachem Friedman, “Religious Fundamentalism and Religious Jews: The Case of Haredim,” in Marty and Appelby, *Fundamentalisms Observed*, p. 258.