

# AN ANALYSIS OF THE DECLINE AND FUTURE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM

**Mustafa Şahin**

*The Presidency of Religious Affairs, Ankara-Türkiye*

mustafasah86@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0074-9858>

---

## Abstract

Compared with the Reform and Orthodox movements in the United States, Conservative Judaism has experienced the tension between tradition and change much more intensely. The “middle way” ideal has inevitably left the Conservative movement open to criticism in every period. Conservative Judaism, which remained the most popular movement in the United States from the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century –when it began to evolve into an institutional dimension– until approximately the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is currently experiencing a period of crisis.

This article, which aims to reveal the main reasons that played a role in the decline of the Conservative movement and to develop a framework for its future, examines both of these areas with reference to the founding ideology of the movement. Within this framework, the research has been conducted in the context of the vision of Judaism advanced by the movement’s founding leader, Solomon Schechter (1849-1915). This main groundwork performs a critical function in helping to compare the idealized Conservative understanding of religion with the current state of the movement, thus helping to identify problematic points and to make forward-looking comments and predictions.

---

Ilahiyat Studies

Volume 16 Number 2 Summer/Fall 2025

Article Type: Research Article

p-ISSN: 1309-1786 / e-ISSN: 1309-1719

DOI: 10.12730/is.1649786

*Received: March 2, 2025 | Accepted: November 24, 2025 | Published: December 31, 2025*

*To cite this article* Şahin, Mustafa. “An Analysis of the Decline and Future of Conservative Judaism”. *Ilahiyat Studies* 16/2 (2025), 201-238. <https://doi.org/10.12730/is.1649786>

This work is licensed under *Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International*.

The Conservative movement has not been able to evaluate the ongoing process of decline as part of a comprehensive research initiative from within the movement itself. It is hoped that this article will contribute to the literature as a critical study. Regarding the future of the movement, this article defends the thesis that establishing a close relationship with Orthodox Jews who have certain characteristics can play a vital role in the Conservative movement's recovery from its present state of crisis.

**Key Words:** History of religions, Conservative Judaism, intellectual movements, Solomon Schechter, Catholic Israel, institutional crisis, Modern Orthodox Judaism, Open Orthodoxy

## **Introduction**

Until approximately the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Conservative Judaism was the most popular movement among American Jews. However, as many statistical studies in recent years have shown, Conservative Judaism has experienced a clear downward trend. Among Conservative Jews, a shift toward other movements – particularly Reform Judaism – can be observed. According to the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000–2001, approximately 35% of Jews who grew up in the Conservative movement described themselves as Reformist and 9% as Orthodox.<sup>1</sup> In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (PRC) in 2013, the share of Conservative Jews among American Jews was 18%, the share of Reform Jews was 35%, and the share of Orthodox Jews was 10%.<sup>2</sup> In the last twenty-two years, one-third of Conservative synagogues have closed.<sup>3</sup> Hence,

---

<sup>1</sup> Jack Wertheimer, "Judaism and the Future of Religion in America: The Situation of Conservative Judaism Today", *Judaism* 54/3-4 (2005), 131.

<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center (PRC), "Jewish Americans in 2020" (Accessed August 29, 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Cathryn J. Prince, "In the US, some fading Reform and Conservative synagogues go Orthodox to stay afloat", *The Times of Israel* (Accessed August 29, 2024). It is possible to multiply examples of indifference toward halakhah. See Daniel J. Elazar - Rela Mintz Geffen, *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 56; Abraham J. Karp, *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998), 255; Steven M. Cohen, "Assessing the Vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America: Evidence from a Survey of Synagogue Members",  *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and*

Conservative Rabbi Edward Feinstein is not wrong to be concerned when he stated that “there isn’t a single demographic that is encouraging for the future of Conservative Judaism. Not one”.<sup>4</sup>

This study first explores the main reasons for the crisis that Conservative Judaism is currently facing. Second, the possibility for and means by which the movement may rise again are considered. In this context, the following questions are addressed: What are the reasons for this decline? How successful is the movement in consolidating Conservative communities with its current stance? What did Conservative Judaism, which was the first choice of American Jews for a long time, do wrong or fail to do? To what extent does the movement’s ideology or the way in which it follows this ideology in practice influence the process of decline? Is it possible to reverse this decline? These fundamental questions can be answered by considering both the current internal dynamics of the movement and external factors, as well as its ideological and institutional foundations. Evaluating the main factors that played a role in the decline of the movement will reveal the extent of the relationship between the current representation of the Conservative movement and its original codes.

The *positive-historical approach* or the *Historical School*,<sup>5</sup> proposed by Rabbi Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875) in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and carried to the United States by his followers, forms the basis of Conservative Judaism’s approach to the Jewish sacred texts and the religious tradition. The fact that the historical approach has been accepted as a distinguishing feature from the past to the present makes it necessary for all actions taken in the practical field within the Conservative movement to be evaluated in the context of this basic characteristic. At this point, it would be appropriate to view Solomon

---

*their Members*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 24-25.

<sup>4</sup> Edward S. Shapiro, *A Unique People in a Unique Land: Essays on American Jewish History* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022), 100.

<sup>5</sup> See David Rudavsky, “The Historical School of Zacharias Frankel”, *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 5/2 (1963), 224-244; Ismar Schorsch, “Zacharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism”, *Judaism* 30/3 (1981), 344-354; Elliot N. Dorff, *Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to Our Descendants* (New York: Youth Commission, United Synagogue of America, 1977), 20-32.

Schechter (1849-1915), the name that gave the true identity to the Conservative movement in the United States both ideologically and institutionally, as a starting point. Therefore, in this study, the downward trend of the movement is evaluated in connection with the ideological stance adopted from the beginning.

There is no comprehensive or satisfactory study in the literature concerning the downward trend of the Conservative movement. Similarly, it is noteworthy that there is no specific research or comprehensive and collective work within the movement itself. Hence, this study also reveals that the movement has not undergone a serious process of self-criticism regarding this issue. Since the study has been carried out with reference to the Conservative ideology, Schechter's work entitled *Studies in Judaism* and his other works, as well as books and articles by later Conservative leaders, are taken as the basis. On the other hand, Daniel H. Gordis' article "Positive-Historical Judaism Exhausted: Reflections on a Movement's Future" (1994) within the movement and "Does Conservative Judaism Have a Future?" (1998), written by Reformist Rabbi Clifford E. Librach, stand out in relation to the research topic. The first, which criticized the movement for giving too much authority to the phenomenon of "history" and laypeople, pointed out the need to re-emphasize the value of traditional Judaism. The second considers the rapprochement trends between the Conservative movement and the Reform movement and expresses the difficulty of making a reasonable prediction about the future of the Conservative movement. As such, it is difficult to say that the causes of the given crisis are directly addressed. Considering this situation, apart from these studies, the views proposed regarding the period of crisis of the movement in many different sources, such as Edward Shapiro's *A Unique People in Unique Land* (2022) and Jack Wertheimer's *The New American Judaism* (2018), were considered as a whole and placed within a framework.

In these studies, the context related to both official Conservative theology and Conservative halakhah, and related to the historical background and the roots of the movement, has generally not been explored. In line with the belief that the current situation can be properly understood only with reference to the founding principles and historical background of the movement, this article endeavors to

fill this significant gap. These areas performed a guiding function as cornerstones in this study in illuminating the current crisis period and providing insight and opportunities to interpret the future of the movement. In this sense, this study attempts to present a more holistic and clear perspective on the present representative power of the movement and on the current Conservative identity.

## **1. The Basic Ideology of Conservative Judaism**

### **1.1. Change Based on Tradition: Historical Approach**

Conservative Judaism truly entered the process of identification with the Historical School after Solomon Schechter's presidency of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) (1902). Through his vision, the historical approach became more central to the orientation of the movement. Schechter, who discussed the theological position of the Historical School most clearly in *Studies in Judaism*, attributed a central value to the role of history and, therefore, of human interpretation in the development of religious tradition. Accordingly, what is of primary importance to Jews is the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible), as interpreted by tradition throughout history rather than purely revealing the Tanakh. The interpretation of the Tanakh, which he calls *secondary meaning*, is fundamentally the product of changing historical conditions. In this context, the center of authority is not located in the Tanakh but in the *living body*, that is, in the Jewish people.<sup>6</sup>

Schechter argued that divine revelation would gain meaning and fulfill its true function only when it meets the Jewish people within history. His statement that oral law or tradition was "the more deeply felt"<sup>7</sup> by Jews compared with revelation is important because it points out that social experience and the will of the people are decisive in the formation of religious tradition and that, therefore, change is inevitable. Stating that old Jewish thought is essentially "against the certain" and urges caution and sobriety,<sup>8</sup> Schechter wanted to bring

---

<sup>6</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896), 1/xvii-xviii.

<sup>7</sup> Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/xvi.

<sup>8</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909), 1.

this principle to the Conservative movement. In this context, the concept of *Conservatism* did not mean merely preserving the status quo for him. In other words, it is not right to regard Conservative Judaism as an absolute system that defends a uniform form.<sup>9</sup> Although on the occasion of a session led by Conservative Rabbi David Wolpe (1958-) at the United Synagogue convention in 2006, the name *Dynamic Judaism* was proposed instead of the term *Conservative* in reference to the constantly developing and growing nature of Judaism,<sup>10</sup> in fact, from the early period, the concept of “Conservatism” was already envisioned such that it contains the ideal of *tradition and change*, that is, the principle of organic growth of tradition within itself. According to Schechter, who criticized Orthodoxy through the traditional education system, which he saw as merely repeating the past,<sup>11</sup> the aim of the Conservative movement is to integrate the necessities arising in modern life with the legacy of belief passed down from the past.<sup>12</sup>

Notably, at the core of Conservative Judaism lies the concept of “change” rather than the preservation of the status quo. In this regard, the distinctive feature of Conservative Judaism, which has from the outset maintained a certain distance from Reform Judaism, lies in its avoidance of fundamentalist and literalist approaches to Jewish sacred texts and tradition. When evaluating the current state of Conservative Judaism, it is essential to keep this critical point in mind. In Conservative thought, the content of both written law and oral law is actually restricted to Jewish history.<sup>13</sup> In other words, according to the historical approach, the dominant belief is that the Jewish people were an active, guiding and determining dynamic in the shaping of the religious tradition. The historical approach has determined the official ideology of Conservative Judaism from the time of Louis Ginzberg

---

<sup>9</sup> Elliot B. Gertel, “Is Conservative Judaism-Conservative?”, *Judaism* 28/2 (1979), 203.

<sup>10</sup> Rabbi David Wolpe, “Conservative Judaism Seeks Its True Name”, *HuffPost* (Accessed August 29, 2024).

<sup>11</sup> Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/57-58. According to Schechter, who described the static ahistorical approach as *Mosaism*, the effort to return to it is illegal and, indeed, impossible. See Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/xix.

<sup>12</sup> Bernard Mandelbaum, *The Wisdom of Solomon Schechter* (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1963), 12.

<sup>13</sup> David Novak, “The Distinctiveness of Conservative Judaism”, *Judaism* 26/3 (1977), 308.

(1873-1953) to Jacob B. Agus (1911-1986), Robert Gordis (1908-1992), and the present. In the context of the general acceptance that the process of revelation continued after Sinai through the activities of rabbis, the codes and responsa,<sup>14</sup> Schechter influenced Conservative Judaism as a follower of traditional Judaism, in which “change” is inherent. The point that needs to be emphasized here is that Conservative Judaism does not, in principle, position itself completely outside traditional Judaism. This also provides us with a clue about the target audience of the movement.

## **1.2. The Ultimate Authority: Catholic Israel**

Giving clues about authority by emphasizing *living body*, Schechter presented *Catholic Israel* (the whole of the Jewish community) as the decision-maker in shaping Jewish law. In his words, “The Torah is not in heaven. Its interpretation is left to the conscience of Catholic Israel”.<sup>15</sup> However, the semantic field of the concept has certain limits beyond its literal meaning.

Schechter pointed to today’s Jewish will by stating that the general trends and practices that are current in society reflect the consciousness of Catholic Israel.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, by referring to Rabbinic Judaism in the context of the collective consciousness of Catholic Israel,<sup>17</sup> he took into account the weight of the religious

<sup>14</sup> *Emet ve’Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990), 19. This basic approach is also clearly present in Conservative prayer books. For instance, in *Siddur Sim Shalom*, which sees revelation as a process that changes depending on conditions without confining it to a certain period, it is stated that “creativity and innovation are legitimate”. See Jeffrey Rubenstein, “Siddur Sim Shalom and Developing Conservative Theology”, *Conservative Judaism* 41/1 (1988), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Solomon Schechter, *Studies in Judaism* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908), 2/116.

<sup>16</sup> Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/xviii-xix.

<sup>17</sup> Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, viii; Solomon Schechter, *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers* (Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Co., 1915), 23, 62. It is not difficult to find examples from the rabbinic tradition about the decisiveness of the collective consciousness that directs halakhic life. See Schorsch, “Zacharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism”, 349; Rudavsky, “The Historical School of Zacharias Frankel”, 239; *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Isidore Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1935-1952), Pesahim 66a, Sanhedrin 22a,

tradition and the body of knowledge that developed in this mainstream. Thus, Schechter bequeathed to the Conservative ideology the belief in the continuity of the relationship between revelation and the Jewish people throughout history. In this context, Conservative Rabbi Mordecai Waxman (1917-2002) emphasized that not only the current generation but also previous generations have a say in the acceptance or rejection of inherited traditions.<sup>18</sup>

Schechter has drawn a framework for the Jewish identity that constitutes Catholic Israel. First, it is well known that he had a negative attitude toward the Reform movement.<sup>19</sup> It is clear that the Reform movement, in its form at that time, pushed itself outside the line of Rabbinic Judaism. This means that, in Schechter's eyes, just as Karaism remained outside the mainstream in terms of representing Judaism, Reform Judaism remains far from the legitimate Jewish collective will. On the other hand, the Orthodox tradition in which Schechter was born naturally appears to be the most suitable wing with the potential to contribute to Catholic Israel because the importance of adherence to the Torah, Rabbinic Judaism, halakhah and the concept of "nation" for the community that will form Catholic Israel is indisputable. In this case, Schechter was ready to incorporate traditional Jewish communities into Catholic Israel. In fact, doing so was his main goal. Accordingly, it follows that Jews who have adopted the historical

---

Berakoth 45a, Erubin 14b, Menahot 35b.

<sup>18</sup> Mordecai Waxman, "Conservative Judaism - A Survey", *Tradition and Change: The Development of the Conservative Movement*, ed. Mordecai Waxman (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958), 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> His correspondence with various scholars and rabbis on this matter gives a clearer idea about his approach to the Reform movement. See Norman Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938), 301-302; David B. Starr, *Catholic Israel: Solomon Schechter, A Study of Unity and Fragmentation in Modern Jewish History* (New York: Columbia University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2003), 252, 256; Abraham E. Millgram - Emma G. Ehrlich, "Nine Letters from Solomon Schechter to Henrietta Szold", *Conservative Judaism* 32/2 (1979), 29, 32; David B. Starr, "Saving the Union: Solomon Schechter and Abraham Lincoln", *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 35/3 (2015), 307-308; Meir Ben-Horin, "Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part II. Letters from the Seminary Period (1902-1915)", *Jewish Social Studies* 27/2 (1965), 85.

approach and those who have a moderate and innovative tendency within traditional Judaism have the competence and responsibility to interpret Judaism. In other words, it seems that the concept of Catholic Israel, which was to shape the Conservative identity, in fact represents the union of these two structures.

Another dimension of Catholic Israel concerns the laypeople-rabbi relationship. Importantly, the concept of Catholic Israel includes not only Jewish laypeople but also rabbis.<sup>20</sup> Conservative Rabbi Neil Gillman (1933-2017) noted that the term Catholic Israel suggested by Schechter does not simply refer to the practices of Jews; rather, it implies that there, in fact, is a sharing of power between the Jewish community and rabbis.<sup>21</sup> Essentially, what is idealized with the concept of Catholic Israel is the establishment of a consensus between rabbis and ordinary Jews.<sup>22</sup> Together, then, rabbis and the Conservative Jewish community are conceived as active determinants of the process of change in religious tradition. Consequently, it should not be forgotten that Catholic Israel essentially corresponds to a dynamic structure, not a static structure.

## **2. Why is the Conservative Movement in Decline?**

### **2.1. Weakening Adherence to Jewish Law and Insufficiency in Religious Education**

The expansion of the sphere of influence of tendencies such as liberalism, secularism and egalitarianism since the mid-century and, in particular, of feminism after the 1960s represented a clear challenge for American Jews. The reason is that in this period, the degree of consistency between the fundamental ideologies of the religious movements and their practical responses to these intellectual trends

---

<sup>20</sup> Schechter included prophets, Soferim, scribes, rabbis, interpreters, and teachers within the concept of the *Universal Synagogue*, which he associated with Catholic Israel. See Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/xviii.

<sup>21</sup> Neil Gillman, *Conservative Judaism: The New Century* (West Orange: Behrman House, 1993), 54-55.

<sup>22</sup> Schechter described rabbis only as *primus inter pares* and openly opposed *sacerdotalism*, which would disrupt this relationship. See Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, “Dr. S. Schechter’s Views (1905)”, *Views on the Synod* (Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1905), 135, 141.

was tested. This, in turn, shaped Jews' relationship with the movements to which they belonged, either positively or negatively. In the case of the Conservative movement in the early period, the fact that its ideology largely remained at a theoretical level made it easier for those affiliated with the movement to accept it as the most reasonable and reliable interpretation of religion, without yet being confronted with its practical implications.

In parallel with the increase in liberal tendencies, the general state of indifference to tradition and halakhah in American Jewish religious life, which continues to increase in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is evident. According to a study in 2000, two out of every five Jews no longer consider Judaism their religion. Instead, they described themselves as "secular" or "Christian Jews".<sup>23</sup> According to more recent data, only one in five American Jews regularly attends synagogue on a monthly basis.<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the tendency to move away from the established religious tradition, it has become inevitable for American Jews to shape their own Jewish traditions with a more selective approach to halakhah. This approach has dealt a blow to the tradition built based on halakhah and continued by Conservative rabbis,<sup>25</sup> as adherence to religious tradition is one of the two main principles –tradition and change– on which Conservative Judaism is based. On the other hand, considering the growing number of intermarriages among American Jews, it is not surprising that many Conservative individuals have chosen to position themselves within the Reform movement. At this point, it is meaningful that Schechter, who noticed signs of indifference to Jewish law in his time, stated that the primary problem for the Jewish community would be to remain within Judaism in parallel with the process of Americanization.<sup>26</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild (1919-2009) also

<sup>23</sup> Bruce Phillips, "American Judaism in the Twenty-first Century", *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, ed. Dana Evan Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 398.

<sup>24</sup> Prince, "In the US, Some Fading Reform and Conservative Synagogues Go Orthodox to Stay Afloat".

<sup>25</sup> Pamela S. Nadell, "Developing an American Judaism: Conservative Rabbis as Ethnic Leaders", *Judaism* 39/3 (1990), 360.

<sup>26</sup> Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography*, 215. By saying that "the challenge today is not to liberate traditional Jews, but to bring liberated Jews back home to

remarked that in 1953, Conservative Jews had a tendency to move away from traditional religious practices. In his opinion, in such a situation, finding an acceptable path for the development of halakhah had become the most serious problem for the movement.<sup>27</sup>

Notably, the transfer of both traditional religious knowledge and the sense of devotion to congregation structures to the new generation is not very strong. While there were many children in the Conservative movement whose family members were rabbis in the past, by 1987, this rate had dropped considerably. Additionally, the tradition of serving Jewish congregations, common in rabbinic families, is clearly on a downward trend within the Conservative movement.<sup>28</sup> According to Conservative scholar Arnold M. Eisen, who draws attention to the significant gap between Conservative rabbis and secular society in terms of the level of obedience, at most 10% of secular people overlap with rabbis on this issue.<sup>29</sup> Thus, for example, the Mitzvah Initiative, led by him, was launched as an initiative aimed at increasing reflection on, the study of, and commitment to mitzvot among Conservative community members. Pointing out that the emphasis on spirituality is gradually weakening within the movement, Rabbi Tracee L. Rosen is of the opinion that Conservative leaders should place more emphasis on readings such as the weekly *parashah*<sup>30</sup> (section) or *haftarah*<sup>31</sup> (conclusion).<sup>32</sup>

---

their tradition", Daniel Gordis pointed out the same problem. See Daniel Gordis, "Conservative Observance, Then and Now", *Commentary* (March 2014), 30.

<sup>27</sup> Fritz A. Rothschild, "Conservative Judaism Faces the Need of Change: In What Direction, How Much, and How?", *Commentary* (Accessed September 1, 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Aryeh Davidson - Jack Wertheimer, "The Next Generation of Conservative Rabbis: An Empirical Study of Today's Rabbinical Students", *The Seminary at 100: Reflections on the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Conservative Movement*, ed. Nina Beth Cardin - David Wolf Silverman (New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America - The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987), 35.

<sup>29</sup> Manfred Gerstenfeld, "The Future of Conservative Jewry: An Interview with Arnold M. Eisen", *American Jewry's Comfort Level: Present and Future*, ed. Manfred Gerstenfeld - Steven Bayme (Jerusalem: American Jewish Committee [AJC] - Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs [JCPA], 2010), 233-234.

<sup>30</sup> The weekly section of Torah read in Jewish liturgy.

<sup>31</sup> The traditional reading from the Biblical books of the Prophets in Shabbats and festivals.

<sup>32</sup> Tracee L. Rosen, "Conservative Judaism at the Crossroads: Choosing the Path of

The indifference among Conservative Jews not only to the creation of an obedient Conservative community bound by halakhah but also to other fundamental elements of the Jewish religious tradition has attracted attention. For example, the importance of Hebrew cannot be fully conveyed to Conservative communities. Although Hebrew forms an important part of the curriculum in Conservative educational institutions, in a 1986 survey, only 9% of Conservative Jews stated that they knew a minimum level of Hebrew. While rabbinic students had strong Hebrew proficiency until approximately the 1960s, the situation began to reverse toward the 1980s as acculturation gained momentum.<sup>33</sup> This meant that religious education could not be properly brought together with Conservative communities. Many people raised in Conservative synagogues have minimal Jewish education and therefore have difficulty attending religious services that are largely conducted in Hebrew.<sup>34</sup> As a result, it becomes easier for these people to turn to Reform synagogues, which follow a much more flexible line on these and similar issues. Therefore, it is difficult to assert that Conservative leaders were successful in keeping Jewish memory alive with respect to halakhah and other fundamental principles embraced by the movement.

This weakness has resulted in a negative impact on the functionality, popularity and efficiency of Conservative educational institutions. For example, negative developments such as the liquidation of the United Synagogue's Leaders Training Fellowship in 1971 and Ramah's Mador in 1980, which were two important institutions established to recruit Conservative leaders of the future, must be related to this disrupted situation. Additionally, in the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most rabbinic students were not nurtured by the institutions of the movement.<sup>35</sup> Pointing out that both Reform Judaism and Orthodox Judaism have succeeded in strengthening religious institutions and congregational unions through their

---

Outreach", *Judaism* 54/3-4 (2005), 199-200.

<sup>33</sup> Nitzia Krohn, *The Hebrew Language Needs of Rabbinical Students in the Conservative Movement* (New York: Columbia University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2008), 6-8.

<sup>34</sup> Jack Wertheimer, *The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 129.

<sup>35</sup> Davidson - Wertheimer, "The Next Generation of Conservative Rabbis", 43.

investments, Jonathan D. Sarna is of the opinion that Conservative Judaism should invest in this area. For example, in his opinion, shutting down the Conservative movement's college program, KOACH, was a serious mistake.<sup>36</sup>

In the broad context described above, it is natural that Conservative communities have difficulty internalizing the halakhic Conservative identity and experience a problem of belonging. Establishing a sense of belonging and community and creating congregations that properly observe halakhah are fundamentally of great importance within Conservative ideology<sup>37</sup> because the most important reason for the movement's existence is its belief in the binding nature of halakhah. However, despite the constant emphasis on adherence to Jewish law, as Rabbi Elliot N. Dorff noted, the primary problem of the Conservative movement concerns its practical dimension. The creation of an obedient community should now be, in his view, the most important agenda of the Conservative movement.<sup>38</sup> Considering Schechter's founding perspective, which envisages stopping the radical steps of the Reform movement and reviving traditional Judaism, for Conservative Judaism, it will be possible and valid to truly conceive the evolution of religious tradition and halakhah and, therefore, changes and innovations only if a model of obedient society can be proposed.

## **2.2. Gap in the Laypeople-Rabbi Relationship**

While, in fact, there is no deviation from the ideal of "tradition and change", another of the main problems is the failure to present this central ideology to laypeople in an understandable and convincing way. Indeed, many Conservative Jews are confused about what they believe. Arnold M. Eisen noted the widespread belief that many Conservative Jews have no idea what the Conservative movement

---

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna, "Learning from History", *Jewish Review of Books* (Accessed September 10, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, saying that religious authority is found in communities of committed and observant Jews, Sommer also drew attention to the importance of observance of halakhah. See Benjamin D. Sommer, "Where is Authority Found?", *Jewish Theological Seminary* (Accessed October 24, 2024).

<sup>38</sup> Elliot N. Dorff - Arthur Rosett, *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 342.

means in relation to the Reform and Orthodox movements.<sup>39</sup> This ambiguity in the Conservative mind indicates that there is a lack of communication and dialogue from top to bottom within the movement. In this context, another critical factor that plays a role in the decline of the movement is the failure to properly establish the organic relationship between Jewish people and rabbis, idealized by Schechter, in making the historical approach functional.

In fact, this implies that there is confusion about Schechter's Catholic Israel. The will that determines the course of halakhah essentially arises from the trust, organic relationship and consensus between rabbis and the Jewish community. This principle was inherited in theory by Conservative Judaism.<sup>40</sup> However, it is difficult to say that the relationship and harmony between the two is achieved as required in practice. When the ideology cannot be passed to laypeople in a comprehensible manner, the will that would determine the Conservative halakhah is naturally bankrupt. Even in the 1940s, there was ambiguity regarding the issue in question. For example, Conservative Rabbi Jacob B. Agus, who understood Catholic Israel literally, saw waiting for a consensus among secular society as a complete failing of religious leadership. Therefore, in his opinion, Conservative leaders should, if necessary, enact *takkanot* (decrees) that depart from all previous precedents.<sup>41</sup> With this approach, Rabbi Agus displayed an attitude that gave more priority to the initiative power of rabbis vis-à-vis the Jewish community. On the other hand, Rabbi Elliot B. Gertel opposed this idea on the grounds that it would make the role of the secular Jewish community passive.<sup>42</sup> Like Rabbi

<sup>39</sup> Arnold Eisen, "Torah, Scholarship and the Mission of the Jewish Theological Seminary", *The Reconstructionist* 71/2 (2007), 37.

<sup>40</sup> For example, in 1975, Rabbi Seymour Siegel (1927-1988), president of the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards (CJLS), stated that there needs to be a common attitude together with the community striving to observe halakhah so that they could be true interpreters of Jewish law. See Herbert Rosenblum, *Conservative Judaism: A Contemporary History* (New York: United Synagogue of America, 1983), 125.

<sup>41</sup> See Jacob B. Agus, "Law in Conservative Judaism", *The Essential Agus: The Writings of Jacob B. Agus*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 461-469.

<sup>42</sup> Gertel, "Is Conservative Judaism-Conservative?", 213.

Argus, Daniel Gordis sees it as a vital mistake to leave halakhic decisions entirely to the will of the community in the form of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA), as in the issue of traveling to synagogue by vehicle on the Shabbat. He also sees it as a mistake to follow the approaches of leaders such as Ismar Schorsch, who believe that the voices of laypeople should be listened to.<sup>43</sup>

Samantha Shapiro also notes that Conservative Judaism does not adequately explain how rabbis and congregants will decide to adapt Jewish law to modern times. Shapiro, who believes that the center of gravity in the concept of Catholic Israel is shifting toward secular society, noted that, for example, the decision to ordain women rabbis in the JTS in 1972 was defended not by Talmudic scholars but by a committee of laypeople. As a result, they failed to base their approach on Jewish law.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, it seems that the Conservative consciousness is not strong enough or cannot be reflected in practice as required to bring together and interpret the guidance of rabbis, who are experts in the field of halakhah, and the dynamic structure and foresight of the will of the Conservative community.

Unsurprisingly, this situation has reduced reliance on the movement and created an environment of more doubt and ambiguity. For example, although the three different and opposing approaches that emerged in the CJLS' *teshuvot* (answers) regarding homosexuality were all declared legitimate, a public opinion poll revealed that there were considerable disagreements among the different groups within the movement, from Conservative rabbis to synagogue presidents and from student groups to lay congregational structures. Thus, two-thirds of rabbis stated that they felt embarrassed by the CJLS decisions on the issue, and more than half of lay leaders stated that they were openly confused.<sup>45</sup> Although in 2006, the responsum written by Dorff et al.

<sup>43</sup> See Daniel H. Gordis, "Positive-Historical Judaism Exhausted: Reflections on a Movement's Future", *Conservative Judaism* 47/1 (1994), 3-19.

<sup>44</sup> Samantha Shapiro, "Conservative Judaism Gets a Kick in the Pants", *Slate* (Accessed August 30, 2024). Orthodox Rabbi Avi Shafran reported that only one of the 14 seats on the commission was allocated to a Talmud faculty member, although the Talmud faculty of the JTS opposed ordaining women. See Avi Shafran, "The Conservative Lie", *Moment* (Accessed October 17, 2024).

<sup>45</sup> Steven M. Cohen - Florence G. Heller, "Gays, Lesbians, and the Conservative Movement: The JTS Survey of Conservative Clergy, Students, Professionals, and

entitled *Homosexuality, Human Dignity & Halakhah*<sup>46</sup> received the support of the majority of the committee,<sup>47</sup> the fact that this was not reflected in the collective conscience of the Conservative community in an absolute sense is another example that fails to coincide with the laypeople-rabbi consensus idealized under the roof of Catholic Israel. Daniel Gordis notes that only a small number of Conservative Jews act in accordance with the guidance of their rabbis. For instance, in regard to kosher or Shabbat observance, the Jewish community does not pay much attention to what rabbis think.<sup>48</sup>

It is important to remember that interpreting halakhah within the framework of the laypeople-rabbi consensus is one of the main principles on which the Conservative movement is based. Schechter, who did not identify the living community, that is, Catholic Israel, with either any part of the nation or a pure association of rabbis,<sup>49</sup> envisioned a compromise between the Conservative community attached to halakhah and the rabbis. In this context, unless Conservative leaders, who are in fact concerned that Conservative Judaism will turn into a *rabbi religion* rather than a *people religion*, without a committed and learned laity,<sup>50</sup> are able to translate this principle of consensus into practice, discussions and possible divisions within the movement will be inevitable in the future.

### **2.3. Failure to Achieve a Balance between Tradition and Change**

In addition to the disharmony in the laypeople-rabbi relationship, the balance between “tradition” and “change” in the decisions made

---

<sup>46</sup> Lay Leaders”, *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (Accessed September 10, 2024), 35.

<sup>47</sup> See Elliot N. Dorff et al., “Homosexuality, Human Dignity & Halakhah: A Combined Responsurah for the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards”, *The Rabbinical Assembly* (Accessed August 28, 2024).

<sup>48</sup> Avinoam Rosenak, “Halakhah as Education: Philosophical and Halakhic Trends Within the Conservative Movement”, *The Jewish Law Association Studies 20: The Manchester Conference Volume*, ed. B. Jackson - L. Moscovitz (2010), 226.

<sup>49</sup> Gordis, “Conservative Observance, Then and Now”, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, 1/xviii.

<sup>50</sup> Franklin D. Kreutzer, “Foreword - The Layperson’s View”, *Emet ve’Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990), 7.

by the CJLS regarding halakhah is often disrupted in favor of one of them. The existence of disunity instead of concurrence within the movement regarding the weight and influence of these two elements is another factor that causes Conservative Judaism to be up for debate. This situation also manifests at the community level, essentially creating two structures: modernists, who prioritize the notion of change in religious beliefs and practices, and traditionalists, who emphasize timeless truths.<sup>51</sup> In such a case, it naturally becomes difficult to bring together Conservative communities in a common stance and to speak about a consensus concerning any halakhic matter.

In this context, some Conservative leaders have noted that the belief that the Jewish tradition is in constant development has not been properly demonstrated. Apart from Rabbi David Gordis, for example, Rabbi Alan J. Yuter claimed that the Conservative ideology and practical application do not coincide, which is why the movement appears static. Believing that the Conservative movement should not be dependent on Orthodoxy in making halakhah functional, Yuter emphasized that the structure of norms of halakhah was developed by the rabbinate.<sup>52</sup> According to him, the Conservative movement failed to properly use the dynamism and flexibility inherent in halakhah and appeared almost Orthodox. This also stands out as one of the factors that has played a role in participation in the Reform movement.

In fact, in the Conservative approach, rather than an unprincipled desire for change, there is a principle of maintaining traditional legal precedents and practices of the past as much as possible<sup>53</sup> unless conditions are met and, therefore, keeping changes to a minimum. Specifically, *gradualism* is essential, in principle, in the changes and reforms that are deemed necessary in Conservative Judaism, especially those that have a social dimension, and it is a crucial criterion for gaining acceptance and approval from the vast majority of people. When historical circumstances and social changes in the latter half of

<sup>51</sup> Arnold Dashefsky et al., *Jewish Options: Pluralistic Identities in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America* (Cham: Springer Nature, 2024), 326.

<sup>52</sup> Alan J. Yuter, "Halakhah and Ideology in Conservative Judaism", *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America* 42 (1980), 102-103.

<sup>53</sup> *Emet ve'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism*, 21.

the twentieth century compelled Conservative Judaism to take more concrete actions, in contrast to its earlier period, disagreements, debates, and schisms began to emerge. Therefore, the halakhic stance of the Conservative movement became a matter of debate.

Here, leaders such as Rabbi Neil Gillman and Rabbi Joel Roth have noted that within the movement, traditional religious law and historical religious experience are being ignored. The halakhic confusion, especially regarding how to reconcile the issue of homosexuality with Jewish sacred texts and the Jewish tradition, is evident. In this regard, considering the abovementioned responsum, which had a positive attitude toward homosexuality, for example, Roth is convinced that "Conservative Judaism could no longer lay claim to halakhic authenticity".<sup>54</sup> Thus, Roth, Gillman and those who are of the same mind are of the opinion that, at least on the matter in question, the principle of change has been taken to extremes and that the established halakhic tradition has been compromised.

The fact that there were 13 votes in favor of and 12 against the responsum in question,<sup>55</sup> as well as 13 votes in favor of and 8 against rabbi Joel Roth's responsum *Homosexuality Revisited*,<sup>56</sup> is another concrete sign that demonstrates how controversial the issue is. It is difficult to say that the concepts of gradualism and *process* are prioritized here in interpreting halakhah and translating change into practice. Apart from names such as Rabbi David Golinkin and Joseph H. Prouser,<sup>57</sup> Ismar Schorsch is among the leading figures criticizing the movement's hasty and inclusive attitude toward homosexuality. According to Schorsch, who emphasizes consultation of the basic texts of Judaism and a comprehensive research process over such quick solution seeking, if homosexuality is accepted, one of the greatest differences between Reform and Conservative Judaism will

---

<sup>54</sup> Leonard Levin, "Is the 'Halakhic Authenticity' of Conservative Judaism a Broken Myth?", *Personal Theology: Essays in Honor of Neil Gillman*, ed. William Plevan (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 130.

<sup>55</sup> See Dorff et al., "Homosexuality, Human Dignity & Halakhah".

<sup>56</sup> See Rabbi Joel Roth, "Homosexuality Revisited", *The Rabbinical Assembly* (Accessed December 2, 2024).

<sup>57</sup> See Joseph H. Prouser, "The Conservative Movement and Homosexuality: Settled Law in Unsettling Times", *The United Synagogue Review* (Accessed August 3, 2024).

disappear.<sup>58</sup> In this environment of incompatibility between theory and practice, for example, after the decision to ordain women, the address of Reformist leader Rabbi Eugene Borowitz (1924-2016) to Rabbi Gillman, "Welcome to Reform Judaism",<sup>59</sup> is remarkable, as it indicates the loss of ground of the Conservative movement. The fact that such a call is now coming from a Reform leader, unlike in the past, implies that the Conservative movement has not adequately put into effect the main criteria that distinguish it from the Reformist stance. In other words, the Conservative movement has failed to develop a much more consistent and convincing language both for itself and for Jews outside the movement regarding what is ahistorical and what is the subject of history and science, that is, change.

On the other hand, the tendency to become closer to tradition and secularization within Reform Judaism and Orthodox Judaism, respectively, once again places on the agenda for Conservative Judaism the necessity of presenting or redefining the message of the Conservative movement in a more distinctive and comprehensible way. One of the names that draws attention to this fact is the Conservative scholar Arnold Eisen. He said that from the left wing, the Reform movement was making changes that would bring it closer to the Conservative movement, while from the right wing, the appointments of female rabbis were perhaps imminent, especially through Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the seminary of Orthodox Rabbi Avi Weiss. Thus, those who wish to take a more left or right position within Conservative Judaism can leave the movement much more easily.<sup>60</sup> One of the disadvantages of a movement that essentially has a middle-

---

<sup>58</sup> Shapiro, *A Unique People in a Unique Land: Essays on American Jewish History*, 106; Jennifer Siegel, "Conservative Rabbi, in Swan Song, Warns Against Liberal Shift", *Forward* (Accessed October 27, 2024).

<sup>59</sup> Levin, "Is the 'Halakhic Authenticity' of Conservative Judaism a Broken Myth?", 143.

<sup>60</sup> Gerstenfeld, "The Future of Conservative Jewry", 228. After the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Orthodox movement gradually began to form a more distinctive identity. This change brought Conservative Jews, who wished to live a more traditional life centered on the Torah, closer to Orthodoxy or, more precisely, to structures formed by some groups such as Chabad-Lubavitch. On the other hand, Conservative Jews who accepted and practiced mixed marriages were able to easily switch to Reform Judaism. See Roberta Rosenthal Kwall, "Saving Conservative Judaism", *Commentary* (Accessed September 3, 2024).

ground principle is that it can contain within itself a very wide range of people, including those close to the left and right wings and even an undecided mass. Therefore, the shift of the center of gravity in favor of any of them in putting the theory in question into practice makes it easier for people with these inclinations to join other movements.

### **3. Is a Conservative-Orthodox Alliance Possible Again?**

Another –perhaps the most important– critical issue for the future of Conservative Judaism is related to its addressable audience. Might movement leaders be open to reconsidering and reshaping or updating the identity of the ideal Conservative society? In this sense, is there any structure outside the movement that would be compatible with and identify with the Conservative interpretation of religion? Can its historical background inspire the movement on this issue? Essentially, it is not impossible to positively answer these questions.

In the first half of the twentieth century, when intellectual challenges had not yet reached a wide sphere of influence, the Conservative movement made maximum use of its “middle way” discourse and became a refuge for many Eastern European Jewish immigrants. In the words of sociologist Marshall Sklare (1921-1992), the Conservative movement became the natural partner of Orthodox immigrants, who, caught between the modern world and Orthodoxy, found themselves confronted with a state of disorganization.<sup>61</sup> Particularly during the period between 1880 and 1924, the desire of immigrants arriving in large numbers from Eastern Europe to open themselves to and adapt to a new world was not independent of their religious orientations. Although not all, many Orthodox Jews who were willing to integrate came to regard their Yiddish-centered Orthodoxy as unacceptable as their living conditions improved. Highlighting the role of Eastern European Jewish immigration in the development of the Conservative movement, American historian Pamela S. Nadell stated that while most of these immigrants rejected Orthodoxy as a remnant of the ghettos, they simultaneously found Reform Judaism too extreme. Instead, during the 1910s and 1920s, they established new Conservative synagogues independent of these two

---

<sup>61</sup> Marshall Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), 23-24.

movements.<sup>62</sup>

On the other hand, as reflected in the NJPS and Pew surveys, in the recent period, many individuals who have left the Conservative movement have done so in pursuit of greater freedom, most often by joining Reform Judaism. While at first glance it may appear more natural and likely for Conservative individuals and congregations to find continuity within the Reform framework, it must be noted that such a trajectory is fundamentally inconsistent with the movement's founding principles. By the founding principles, what is meant is the organic bond with the Orthodox tradition that has existed from the beginning. The tension between the present reality revealed by the survey data and the movement's foundational principles and ideals actually exposes the weakness in the transmission of Conservative ideology to its congregations. Therefore, the current tendency of Conservative Jews toward the Reform movement should be understood not as an initiative of Conservative leaders but as a quest for religious transformation at the individual and communal levels. In this context, when considering the ideological and historical background discussed below, it becomes evident that for the Conservative movement, institutional alignment with Reform thought, based on an absolute progressive perspective, basically represents an incidental tendency, whereas a rapprochement with Orthodoxy reflects the essential orientation. Today, one of the main reasons for the crisis that the Conservative movement is in is the failure to properly put this equation into practice. In this context, American law professor Roberta Rosenthal Kwall draws attention to the still considerable tendency within the movement toward traditional religious observance, underscoring that significant distinctions from Reform Judaism remain. In her view, the Conservative movement should emphasize its points of divergence from Reform while simultaneously investing in its core constituency inclined toward tradition.<sup>63</sup>

Undoubtedly, the idea of a "revival of traditional Judaism" is, in principle, the most important characteristic of Conservative Judaism. It should be emphasized that what Solomon Schechter wished to save

---

<sup>62</sup> Nadell, "Developing an American Judaism", 349.

<sup>63</sup> Kwall, "Saving Conservative Judaism".

was not Orthodoxy<sup>64</sup> but “traditional Judaism”, which always possesses dynamism and the ability to develop. In this respect, the main aim of Conservative thought is not to create a new religious movement completely independent of the existing structure but to strengthen and develop the existing structure, that is, traditional Judaism. The early founders of the movement regarded this new movement, that is, the Conservative movement, as a modernized version of traditional Judaism. Marshall Sklare even stated that the Conservative movement was designed by its pioneer leaders as “a kind of 20<sup>th</sup>-century Orthodoxy”. According to him, “if Orthodoxy had retained the ability to change, it would have evolved into Conservatism”.<sup>65</sup> Sklare is right in his determination. In Conservative Judaism, the acceptance of the authority of halakhah and the weight of tradition are the most fundamental common denominators today, not with Reform Judaism but with Orthodox Judaism.<sup>66</sup>

The second important issue is that the organic relationship between the Conservative and Orthodox traditions has clearly manifested in practice. Although Reformist Rabbi Clifford E. Librach (1951-2021) argued that the Reform and Conservative movements had been in close contact with each other from the beginning, especially through the Hebrew Union College (HUC) and the JTS,<sup>67</sup> in fact, it is possible to observe clear examples of manifestations of the Conservative-

<sup>64</sup> Meir Ben-Horin et al., “Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part I. Letters from the Pre-Seminary Period (1895-1901)”, *Jewish Social Studies* 25/4 (1963), 256.

<sup>65</sup> Sklare, *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*, 263-264.

<sup>66</sup> Despite the weakness in adherence to halakhah, it is certain that Conservative Jews present an incomparably more positive image than do Reform Jews on the most essential issues, especially attendance at religious services or Shabbat and kosher law. See Jack Wertheimer et al., “Op-Ed: On Conservative Judaism, Why All the Talk about Failure?”, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Accessed September 3, 2024). David Lieber (1925-2008), senior editor of *Etz Hayim* (Tree of Life), stated, “Although Conservative Jews are not, in the main, ‘shomrei halakha’, observers of Jewish law, they are ‘chovevei halakha’, admirers and fans of halakha”. See Harvey Meirovich, “Time and Tradition as Reflected in The Etz Hayim Torah Commentary”, *Modern Theology* 35/2 (2018), 15; Also, Kwall, “Saving Conservative Judaism”.

<sup>67</sup> See Clifford E. Librach, “Does Conservative Judaism Have a Future?”, *Commentary* 106/3 (1998), 28-33.

Orthodox bond in the formation process of both the JTS and the United Synagogue of America shaped by Schechter. It is an indisputable fact that both of these main institutions owe their existence essentially to a Conservative-Orthodox alliance. The main motivation that united some supporters of the Historical School and some Orthodox figures during the formation process of the JTS was the desire to create an alternative center against the HUC. These leaders were able to overlook the differences between the Historical School and the Orthodox tradition in line with the same objective. On the other hand, the USA, founded under Schechter's leadership in 1913, is similarly essentially the product of a Conservative-Orthodox alliance. In line with the framework drawn by Schechter, the USA has determined and accepted as its audience the congregations that keep a certain distance from the Reform movement.<sup>68</sup> In this context, the congregations that have formed the USA are those that are traditional but open to development and innovation to a certain extent.<sup>69</sup>

In light of the discussion above, it seems that a possible redevelopment of the alliance in question, which constituted a basis for the two central institutions of the movement in the early period, is also at a level that can provide a basis for the Conservative movement to rise again. When the background in question is considered, the range of communities that will constitute the genuine Conservative

---

<sup>68</sup> See Solomon Schechter, "The Work of Heaven", *Tradition and Change: The Development of the Conservative Movement*, ed. Mordecai Waxman (New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958), 163-164, 170; In the preamble to the constitution of the USA, it was aimed to embrace all elements essentially loyal to traditional Judaism within the body of the USA. See Pamela S. Nadell - Marc Lee Raphael, *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 326.

<sup>69</sup> According to Marc Lee Raphael, the USA is the product of an effort to give identity to Catholic Israel. See Marc Lee Raphael, *Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper - Row, Publishers, 1984), 90; As stated by Conservative rabbi Aaron L. Starr, who drew attention to the importance of Catholic Israel, the body that is the decision-making authority in shaping halakhah comprises the members of congregations affiliated to the USA and the rabbis who lead these congregations, which have adopted the historical approach pioneered by Schechter. See Aaron L. Starr, "Tradition vs. Modernity: The CJLS and Conservative Halakhah", *Conservative Judaism* 58/1 (2005), 5.

Jewish identity is actually potentially wider than it seems today. Hence, Jonathan D. Sarna justifiably stated that the word “Conservative”, which Schechter envisioned to include everyone to the right of Reform, has become much more restrictive today.<sup>70</sup> Even Orthodox Rabbi David S. Shapiro is of the opinion that the Conservative movement made a significant mistake by choosing to become an independent movement. In his opinion, the movement should never have separated itself from Orthodoxy. Unable to do so, the movement brought itself close to an alliance with Reform Judaism.<sup>71</sup> According to Kwall, on the other hand, the traditional core group within the Conservative movement and modern Orthodox members can unite on a common ground and contribute to the movement.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, it would not be wrong to say that there are Jewish communities with the tendency in question under the umbrella of Orthodoxy and that there exists an opportunity to focus on common points between Conservative groups and these communities today.<sup>73</sup> It is necessary to remember again that the Orthodox movement is not a uniform structure today. The prominent structures in American Orthodoxy (in order from the strictest to the most moderate) are Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Orthodoxy, Modern Orthodoxy and Open Orthodoxy. Within this religious spectrum, the Haredim are the most distant group from the Conservative movement, while the other two, especially Open Orthodoxy, seem to be the movements with the strongest possibility of reaching a consensus. By claiming that “a large percentage of Modern Orthodox Jews are not *theologically Orthodox*”, Daniel Gordis is correct in his determination that this segment is guided by sociology as much as theology.<sup>74</sup> It is a fact that the ideal of balance between revelation and history or between halakhah and *aggadah* (narrative) advocated in Conservative Judaism finds a partial

---

<sup>70</sup> Sarna, “Learning from History”.

<sup>71</sup> Dorff, *Conservative Judaism*, 219-220.

<sup>72</sup> Roberta Rosenthal Kwall, “Op-Ed: Conservative Judaism has just 2 viable options”, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Accessed September 4, 2024).

<sup>73</sup> For example, there are Orthodox synagogues participating in the USA, such as Agudas Achim in Columbus. See Tami Kamin-Meyer, “An Orthodox Shul Goes Conservative”, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Accessed September 14, 2024).

<sup>74</sup> Daniel Gordis, “Cognitive Dissonance”, *Jewish Review of Books* (Accessed September 18, 2024).

counterpart in Modern Orthodoxy. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that some Haredim describe their opponents as “closet Conservative Jews”. According to a famous rabbi, Open Orthodoxy should actually be seen as “the observant non-Orthodox”.<sup>75</sup> Needless to say, this kind of point of view indicates the existence of a ground compatible with the Conservative ideal, which emphasizes the label “traditional” rather than “Orthodoxy” and attaches importance to both adherence to Jewish law and progress.

There has been a serious Orthodox background in the formation of Conservative communities since the early period. These communities have somehow managed to unite under the motto of “tradition and change”. The adoption of mixed seating at the Orthodox Jewish Center of Cleveland in 1925 under the leadership of JTS-trained Rabbi Solomon Goldman (1893-1953) is an example of the close relationship between Conservative and Orthodox movements in the early period. Abraham Katz’s description of Conservative Judaism as “Orthodox Judaism slightly modernized” also speaks to the same reality.<sup>76</sup> The close relationship between the Conservative movement and Yeshiva University in the 1920s was another remarkable development on the issue in question.<sup>77</sup> At that time, it was quite common for Yeshiva University graduates to serve in the JTS and to hold pulpits in Conservative congregations. In the context of the organic relationship with Orthodoxy, some of the 130 congregations that joined the USA in the 1956-1957 period were newly established congregations, while a significant portion were congregations that were previously Orthodox.<sup>78</sup> The fact that Michael R. Cohen emphasized that

<sup>75</sup> Wertheimer, *The New American Judaism*, 156.

<sup>76</sup> Ira Robinson, “*A Link in the Great American Chain*”: *Studies in the Evolution of the Orthodox Jewish Community in Cleveland, Ohio* (New York: Touro University Press, 2023), 78, 84, 86-87.

<sup>77</sup> Even attempts to merge the JTS and Yeshiva College in the 1926-1927 period were called into question. See Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, “The Attempt to Merge the Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College, 1926-1927”, *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*, ed. Llyod P. Gartner (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1975), 254-280.

<sup>78</sup> Shapiro, *A Unique People in a Unique Land*, 101-102. Some Orthodox Jewish publications labeled those who defended mixed seating within Orthodoxy as “Conservative Jews” and that some congregations that defined themselves as

Schechter's introduction of certain innovations –such as the use of English in traditional services, an emphasis on decorum, and modern education– was largely compatible with Modern Orthodoxy and that his Orthodox students in the USA were generally identified as modern Orthodox is remarkable since it indicates the historical roots of the Conservative-Orthodox alliance.<sup>79</sup>

Considering the principal factors discussed above, it appears likely that in the current context, the Conservative movement will continue to encounter challenges in consolidating its congregations in the future. Apart from Reform Rabbi Paul Menitoff, who predicted that Conservative Jews might join other religious movements in the near future, for instance, Conservative scholar Rela Mintz Geffen regarded it as more likely that traditionalists within the Conservative movement could align themselves with the Modern Orthodox movement.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, between 1990 and 2000, the proportion of those raised as Conservatives who later joined Orthodoxy doubled, rising from five percent to ten percent.<sup>81</sup> Even Rabbi Avi Shafran, the director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America, openly called upon those within the Conservative movement who still seriously adhered to halakhah to join the Orthodox community.<sup>82</sup> All these predictions, in themselves, point to the crisis currently faced by the Conservative movement.

Apart from Haredi groups, the idea of innovation and integration is among the basic principles in modern Orthodox Judaism. There is a clear positive and inclusive attitude toward secular knowledge, world culture, secular Jews and Jewish unity.<sup>83</sup> Within the scope of

---

Modern Orthodox joined the Conservative movement after adapting mixed seating after the 1960s. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Debate over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue", *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 386.

<sup>79</sup> Michael R. Cohen, *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>80</sup> "Reform Leader's Swipe Sparks Angry Rebuttals from Conservatives", *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (Accessed October 7, 2025).

<sup>81</sup> Steven M. Cohen, "Change in a Very Conservative Movement", *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas - Jewish Family & Life* 36/628 (February 2006), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Shafran, "The Conservative Lie".

<sup>83</sup> See Shmuel Singer, "Modern Orthodoxy: Crisis and Solution", *Tradition: A Journal*

*Wissenschaft des Judentums* (Science of Judaism) (WdJ), the idea of synthesis between religious knowledge and secular knowledge has an important place, especially through Yeshiva University.<sup>84</sup> It seems quite significant that fundamentalism does not find a place for itself in Modern Orthodoxy or, more importantly, the Open Orthodoxy movement<sup>85</sup> and that the idea of change based on halakhah is generally an acceptable and even a desired goal. In Modern Orthodox Judaism, there is a clear tendency to view oral law as *divinely inspired* rather than attributing a divine origin to it. For example, Rabbi Ysoscher Katz, chairperson of the Department of Talmud at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, believed that the tradition essentially contained progressive change within itself.<sup>86</sup> In this context, the acknowledgement that halakhah has been shaped by rabbis partly in response to historical influences and that it is therefore open to a certain degree of flexible interpretation reinforces the basis of the relationship between the Conservative and Orthodox movements.<sup>87</sup>

---

*of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 23/4 (1988), 47-53.

<sup>84</sup> David Singer, "The New Orthodox Theology", *Modern Judaism* 9/1 (1989), 36-37.

<sup>85</sup> For more information about Open Orthodoxy, see Avraham Weiss, "Open Orthodoxy! A Modern Orthodox Rabbi's Creed", *Judaism* 46/4 (1997).

<sup>86</sup> Avrohom Gordimer, "Open Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Rebirth of the Conservative Movement", *The Jewish Link* (Accessed September 23, 2024).

<sup>87</sup> Scott A. Shay, *Getting Our Groove Back: How to Energize American Jewry* (Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2007), 187. On the issue of *agunah* (chained women), in 1953, when Talmud scholar Saul Lieberman (1898-1983) attempted to solve the problem by adding an additional phrase to *ketubah* (Jewish wedding document), the Rabbinical Council of America and the Rabbinical Assembly came together to discuss the issue under the leadership of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903-1993) and Saul Lieberman. Conservative and Orthodox representatives agreed on adding this phrase to ketubah and using it in marriage ceremonies. See Mayer E. Rabinowitz, "The Joint Bet Din of the Conservative Judaism", *Hakol Kol Yaakov: The Joel Roth Jubilee Volume Series: The Brill Reference Library of Judaism*, ed. Robert A. Harris - Jonathan S. Milgram (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 268-269. Modern Orthodox Rabbi Emanuel Rackman (1910-2008) also strived for Orthodox-Conservative cooperation on the same matter. See Emanuel Rackman, "Political Conflict and Cooperation: Political Considerations in Jewish Inter-Denominational Relations, 1955-1956)", *Comparative Jewish Politics vol. II: Conflict and Consensus in Jewish Political Life*, ed. Stuart A. Cohen - Eliezer Don-Yehiya (Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1986), 118-127.

In this direction, within Orthodox Judaism, especially since the 1970s, there have been some trends that put women's rights on the agenda, even if not the matter of female rabbis.<sup>88</sup> On the issue of feminism, commentators such as Rachel Adler and Tamar Ross have discussed that there can be a legal basis for feminism in halakhah.<sup>89</sup> In addition to the Hartman Institute in Jerusalem, institutions such as Nishmat in Jerusalem and the Drisha Institute in New York have become prominent for allowing women to participate in Torah studies. Recently, graduates of Nishmat, Drishma, and the women's Talmud program at Yeshiva University have been assigned to provide religious services as religious mentors, even if not completely as rabbis, in various Orthodox synagogues in the United States.<sup>90</sup>

All these tendencies draw attention as points of overlap with the Conservative ideology. Referring to this fact, Noah Benjamin Bickart emphasized the potential of the Conservative movement to appeal to a wider audience than it appears. He reported that the fundamentalist Haredi press strongly condemns Open Orthodoxy and Yeshivat Chovevei Torah by calling this structure "Conservative". He also stated that many people define themselves as Orthodox but are sympathetic to relations with gentiles, approve of women's rights, and additionally accept critical historical research and that these Jews, in fact, have adopted the basic principles of Conservative Judaism.<sup>91</sup>

It would not be a wrong determination to assert that Open Orthodoxy is somewhere between the Conservative movement and

<sup>88</sup> See Michael Maher, "A Break with Tradition: Ordaining Women Rabbis", *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007), 53-56.

<sup>89</sup> See Tamar Ross, "Can the Demand for Change in the Status of Women Be Halakhically Legitimated?", *Judaism* 42/4 (1993), 478-492.

<sup>90</sup> Samantha Shapiro, "Damned if She Does, Damned if She Doesn't", *Slate* (Accessed September 2, 2024).

<sup>91</sup> Noah Benjamin Bickart, "The Problem Is Not Ideological", *Jewish Review of Books* (Accessed September 8, 2024). At this point, it is necessary to mention Rabbi Emanuel Rackman. Rackman, who wanted to create a renewal within Modern Orthodoxy with his emphasis on the thought of integration and the interpretation of halakhah on a legitimate basis, was one of the leaders who tried to base his liberal approaches on halakhah and legitimate Jewish sources. See Norman Lamm, "Rabbi Emanuel Rackman z'l: A Critical Appreciation", *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 42/1 (2009), 9.

the Modern Orthodox structure and that it therefore corresponds to the closest structure, within American Orthodoxy, to the Conservative movement. In this context, it is significant that the former vice-chairperson of the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Steven Pruzansky, stated that Open Orthodoxy continues on the path that the Conservative movement took 100 years ago and, moreover, described this movement as *neo-Conservatism*.<sup>92</sup> Finally, American writer and journalism professor Samuel Freedman also drew attention to the relationship in question. According to Freedman, who describes the new structure that this potential relationship would create as *Conservadox*, Modern Orthodoxy will one day end its current weak relationship with Haredim and find more reasonable partners within the right wing of the Conservative movement.<sup>93</sup>

In light of the discussion above, the question that needs to be answered is whether Conservative Judaism will take this organic relationship with Orthodox Judaism and the historical memory based on it into account in the future. The crucial matter is whether this process is an unrepeatable historical period, in the eyes of Conservative Judaism, or a model from which it can be inspired to rise again in American Judaism. In his letter to Henry Pereira Mendes (1852-1937) in 1913, the vision and farsightedness of Schechter, who stated that the two structures classified as Modern Orthodox and Conservative should definitely unite for the future of Jews,<sup>94</sup> might have the potential to offer today's Conservative leaders a way out of the crisis that they are in.

---

<sup>92</sup> Ari Soffer, “Open Orthodox” or ‘Neo Conservative?’”, *Israel National News* (Accessed September 15, 2024).

<sup>93</sup> Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 355-356. The Union for Traditional Conservative Judaism, which was founded in 1984 and rejected feminist approaches in the Conservative movement, kept the name “Conservative” until 1990. It can be interpreted from this that it considered itself to be associated with the Conservative structure for quite a long time. See Judith Hauptman, “Conservative Judaism: The Ethical Challenge of Feminist Change”, *The Americanization of the Jews*, ed. Robert M. Seltzer - Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 304.

<sup>94</sup> Bentwich, *Solomon Schechter: A Biography*, 211.

## Conclusion

Since Conservative Judaism places the “middle way” ideal at the center of its ideology, it inherently contains an element of risk in the struggle for existence within American Jewry during every era. By virtue of occupying two opposite ends of the religious spectrum, Reform and Orthodox Judaism have been able to respond to historical changes with greater clarity and decisiveness, largely demonstrating a performance aligned with the expectations of their adherents. Hence, both movements have experienced less division. On the other hand, one of the most fundamental factors underlying the Conservative movement’s decline, which became evident after the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, appears to be that the concept of “balance”, which is the main element that shapes its ideology, is losing its central place and importance. In this sense, the problems experienced in establishing the idealized harmony and coherence between tradition and modernity, between secular society and the rabbinate, between the Torah and science, and between halakhah and ethical values have led members of the movement to doubt the reality or applicability of the “middle way” ideal.

In the face of intellectual movements such as feminism, which increased its influence toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, in the face of “history”, the Conservative movement looks far from displaying a stance that is compatible with its main founding codes, which were largely shaped by Schechter. This means that the main goal, which aimed at the revival of traditional Judaism and indicated “gradual change”, has remained in the background. In this sense, a strong Conservative community model based on halakhah could not be proposed as a prerequisite for change and innovation. Owing to the failure of Conservative movement leaders to realize such a model, the authority coming from the laypeople-rabbi consensus that would guide Conservative halakhah has been undermined and become unhealthy and unstable in its functioning. On the other hand, the absence of a road map regarding the identity or basic characteristics of what is historical, that is, what is open to change, and what is ahistorical, that is, what needs to be protected, feeds this unstable picture. In the activity of halakhic interpretation, it is difficult to say that a certain methodology was followed among leaders in the pendulum between the traditional religious approach and the current widespread

paradigms of the period. This situation presents itself as a halakhic model that is not bound by certain standards, and in the current environment of ambiguity, it becomes much more possible for members of the movement to shift to the right wing or the left wing.

Another concept that seems to have decreased in importance in the Conservative movement is the concept of “process” in the interpretation of halakhah. This study has explained that in the steps taken toward interpretations and changes, insufficient room was provided for the organic process required for both the collective will of society to be able to express itself clearly and comprehensive research activity on religious texts. In this context, the “organic development of halakhah”, which was attractive for Conservative people in the early period and distinguishes the Conservative movement from the Orthodox tradition and the Reformist approach, seems to have been undermined by reflexive moves. The failure to include the collective social conscience, one of the most central elements in Conservative discourse, in the process in a balanced manner as a decisive aspect of the development of halakhah is another factor that alienates Conservative Jews from the movement. Therefore, the general approach exhibited in the practical field usually contradicts the belief that Conservative Judaism seeks an agreement between laypeople and rabbis in Conservative halakhah, as emphasized in *Emet ve'Emunah*.

The fact that Conservative Judaism, which is still experiencing the process of decline in question, has not been able to initiate a restructuring process is a significant deficiency on its part. Leaders generally seem to have turned a deaf ear to the deep-rooted problems mentioned above. In this study, it is emphasized that reconsidering the ideal Conservative individual and social identity and the scope of this identity might be a highly critical step for the future existence of movement. This study draws attention to the importance of the strong historical background for the organic relationship with the Orthodox tradition on both ideological and institutional grounds, and it reveals how the movement could not benefit from this historical experience as it should.

In this respect, approaches that draw attention to a consensus ground between Conservative Judaism and certain groups under the umbrella of Orthodoxy, based on certain values, deserve to be paid

attention to earnestly. This study proposes that if Conservative identity, which has a much narrower framework in its current form than that which was originally constructed and envisioned, can be redefined and updated on the basis of the aforementioned relationship, then Conservative Judaism has the potential to directly increase its audience and influence among American Jews. This initiative, which will also redefine the boundaries with the Reform movement, might contribute to the emergence of a more acceptable and moderate Conservative halakhic model based on values such as the religious body of knowledge based on rabbinic tradition, the consensus between the will of the obedient community and the rabbinate, and the organic development of halakhah.

## **DISCLOSURE STATEMENT**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## **FUNDING**

The author received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Agus, Jacob B. "Law in Conservative Judaism". *The Essential Agus: The Writings of Jacob B. Agus*. ed. Steven T. Katz. 461-469. New York: New York University Press, 1997.  
<https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814763551.003.0033>

Ben-Horin, Meir - Gironde, S. S. - Schechter, Mathilde - Landeck, Bad. "Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part I. Letters from the Pre-Seminary Period (1895-1901)". *Jewish Social Studies* 25/4 (1963), 249-286.

Ben-Horin, Meir. "Solomon Schechter to Judge Mayer Sulzberger: Part II. Letters from the Seminary Period (1902-1915)". *Jewish Social Studies* 27/2 (1965), 75-102.

Bentwich, Norman. *Solomon Schechter: A Biography*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1938.

Bickart, Noah Benjamin. "The Problem Is Not Ideological". *Jewish Review of Books* (December 2013). Accessed September 8, 2024.  
<https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/646/the-problem-is-not-ideological/#>

Cohen, Michael R. *The Birth of Conservative Judaism: Solomon Schechter's Disciples and the Creation of an American Religious Movement*. New York: Columbia

University Press, 2012.

Cohen, Steven M. "Assessing the Vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America: Evidence from a Survey of Synagogue Members". *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and their Members*. ed. Jack Wertheimer. 13-65. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Cohen, Steven M. "Change in a Very Conservative Movement". *Sh'ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas - Jewish Family & Life* 36/628 (February 2006), 6.

Cohen, Steven M., Florence G. Heller. "Gays, Lesbians, and the Conservative Movement: The JTS Survey of Conservative Clergy, Students, Professionals, and Lay Leaders". *Berman Jewish Policy Archive* (January 2007), 1-49. Accessed September 10, 2024.  
[https://www.jewishdatabank.org/content/upload/bjdb/493/N-GaysLesbiansConservative-2006-Main\\_Report.pdf](https://www.jewishdatabank.org/content/upload/bjdb/493/N-GaysLesbiansConservative-2006-Main_Report.pdf)

Committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. "Dr. S. Schechter's Views (1905)". *Views on the Synod*. 134-141. Baltimore: The Lord Baltimore Press, 1905.

Dashefsky, Arnold - Sheskin, Ira M. - Winter, J. Alan. *Jewish Options: Pluralistic Identities in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*. Cham: Springer Nature, 2024.

Davidson, Aryeh - Wertheimer, Jack. "The Next Generation of Conservative Rabbis: An Empirical Study of Today's Rabbinical Students". *The Seminary at 100: Reflections on the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Conservative Movement*. ed. Nina Beth Cardin - David Wolf Silverman. 33-46. New York: Rabbinical Assembly of America - The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1987.

Dorff, Elliot N. *Conservative Judaism: Our Ancestors to Our Descendants*. New York: Youth Commission, United Synagogue of America, 1977.

Dorff, Elliot N. - Nevins, Daniel S. - Reisner, Avram I. "Homosexuality, Human Dignity & Halakhah: A Combined Responsum for the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards". *The Rabbinical Assembly* (December 2006). Accessed August 28, 2024.  
[https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/dorff\\_nevins\\_reisner\\_dignity.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/teshuvot/20052010/dorff_nevins_reisner_dignity.pdf)

Dorff, Elliot N. - Rosett, Arthur. *A Living Tree: The Roots and Growth of Jewish Law*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.

Dorff, Elliot N. *The Unfolding Tradition: Jewish Law After Sinai*. New York: Aviv Press, 2006.

Eisen, Arnold. "Torah, Scholarship and the Mission of the Jewish Theological Seminary". *The Reconstructionist* 71/2 (2007), 34-41.

Elazar, Daniel J. - Geffen, Rela Mintz. *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

*Emet ve'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism.* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990.

Freedman, Samuel G. *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

Gerstenfeld, Manfred. "The Future of Conservative Jewry: An Interview with Arnold M. Eisen". *American Jewry's Comfort Level: Present and Future.* ed. Manfred Gerstenfeld - Steven Bayme. 228-236. Jerusalem: American Jewish Committee (AJC) - Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), 2010.

Gertel, Elliot B. "Is Conservative Judaism-Conservative?". *Judaism* 28/2 (1979), 202-215.

Gillman, Neil. *Conservative Judaism: The New Century.* West Orange: Behrman House, 1993.

Gordimer, Avrohom. "Open Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Rebirth of the Conservative Movement". *The Jewish Link* (August 2014). Accessed September 23, 2024. <https://jewishlink.news/open-orthodoxy-and-the-orthodox-rebirth-of-the-conservative-movement/>

Gordis, Daniel. "Cognitive Dissonance". *Jewish Review of Books* (6 January 2014). Accessed September 18, 2024. <https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/673/cognitive-dissonance/>

Gordis, Daniel. "Conservative Observance, Then and Now". *Commentary* (March 2014), 26-30.

Gordis, Daniel H. "Positive-Historical Judaism Exhausted: Reflections on a Movement's Future". *Conservative Judaism* 47/1 (1994), 3-18.

Hauptman, Judith. "Conservative Judaism: The Ethical Challenge of Feminist Change". *The Americanization of the Jews* ed. Robert M. Seltzer-Norman J. Cohen. 296-308. New York: New York University Press, 1995.

Kamin-Meyer, Tami. "An Orthodox Shul Goes Conservative". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (September 2004). Accessed September 14, 2024. <https://www.jta.org/2004/09/07/lifestyle/an-orthodox-shul-goes-conservative>

Karp, Abraham J. *Jewish Continuity in America: Creative Survival in a Free Society.* Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1998.

Kreutzer, Franklin D. "Foreword - The Layperson's View". *Emet ve'Emunah: Statement of Principles of Conservative Judaism.* 7-8. New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1990.

Krohn, Nizza. *The Hebrew Language Needs of Rabbinical Students in the Conservative Movement.* New York: Columbia University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2008.

Kwall, Roberta Rosenthal. "Op-Ed: Conservative Judaism has just 2 viable options". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (December 2015). Accessed September 4, 2024. <https://www.jta.org/2015/12/22/ideas/op-ed-conservative-judaism-has-just-2-viable-options>

Kwall, Roberta Rosenthal. "Saving Conservative Judaism". *Commentary* (April 2017). Accessed September 3, 2024.

<https://www.commentary.org/articles/roberta-rosenthal-kwall/saving-conservative-judaism/#:~:text=An%20emphasis%20on%20thicker%20forms,movement%20of%20right%20its%20direction>

Lamm, Norman. "Rabbi Emanuel Rackman z'l: A Critical Appreciation". *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 42/1 (2009), 7-13.

Levin, Leonard. "Is the 'Halakhic Authenticity' of Conservative Judaism a Broken Myth?". *Personal Theology: Essays in Honor of Neil Gillman*. ed. William Plevan. 130-150. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013.

Librach, Clifford E. "Does Conservative Judaism Have a Future?". *Commentary* 106/3 (1998), 28-33.

Maher, Michael. "A Break with Tradition: Ordaining Women Rabbis". *Irish Theological Quarterly* 72 (2007), 32-60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021140007079135>

Mandelbaum, Bernard. *The Wisdom of Solomon Schechter*. New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1963.

Meirovich, Harvey. "Time and Tradition as Reflected in The Etz Hayim Torah Commentary". *Modern Theology* 35/2 (2018), 1-17.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/moth.12455>

Millgram, Abraham E. - Ehrlich, Emma G.. "Nine Letters from Solomon Schechter to Henrietta Szold". *Conservative Judaism* 32/2 (1979), 25-38.

Nadell, Pamela S. "Developing an American Judaism: Conservative Rabbis as Ethnic Leaders". *Judaism* 39/3 (1990), 345-365.

Nadell, Pamela S. - Raphael, Marc Lee. *Conservative Judaism in America: A Biographical Dictionary and Sourcebook*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1988.

Novak, David. "The Distinctiveness of Conservative Judaism". *Judaism* 26/3 (1977), 305-309.

Pew Research Center (PRC). "Jewish Americans in 2020". (May 2021). Accessed August 29, 2024.  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>

Phillips, Bruce. "American Judaism in the Twenty-first Century". *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*. ed. Dana Evan Kaplan. 397-415. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521822041.024>

Prince, Cathryn J. "In the US, some fading Reform and Conservative synagogues go Orthodox to stay afloat". *The Times of Israel* (June 2022). Accessed August 29, 2024.  
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-the-us-some-fading-reform-and-conservative-synagogues-go-orthodox-to-stay-afloat/>

Prouser, Joseph H. "The Conservative Movement and Homosexuality: Settled Law in Unsettling Times". *The United Synagogue Review* (2006). Accessed August 3, 2024.

[https://web.archive.org/web/20070429173219/http://www.uscj.org/The\\_Conservative\\_Mov7074.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20070429173219/http://www.uscj.org/The_Conservative_Mov7074.html)

Rabinowitz, Mayer E. "The Joint Bet Din of the Conservative Judaism". *Hakol Kol Yaakov: The Joel Roth Jubilee Volume, Series: The Brill Reference Library of Judaism*. ed. Robert A. Harris - Jonathan S. Milgram. 265-277. Leiden: Brill, 2021. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420465\\_011](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004420465_011)

Rackman, Emanuel. "Political Conflict and Cooperation: Political Considerations in Jewish Inter-Denominational Relations, 1955-1956". *Comparative Jewish Politics vol. II: Conflict and Consensus in Jewish Political Life*. ed. Stuart A. Cohen - Eliezer Don-Yehiya. 118-127. Jerusalem: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1986.

Rakeffet-Rothkoff, Aaron. "The Attempt to Merge The Jewish Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College, 1926-1927". *Michael: On the History of the Jews in the Diaspora*. ed. Llyod P. Gartner. 254-280. Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1975.

Raphael, Marc Lee. *Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective*. San Francisco: Harper - Row, Publishers, 1984.

"Reform Leader's Swipe Sparks Angry Rebuttals from Conservatives. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (March 2004). Accessed October 7, 2025. <https://www.jta.org/archive/reform-leaders-swipe-sparks-angry-rebuttals-from-conservatives>

Robinson, Ira. *"A Link in the Great American Chain": Studies in the Evolution of the Orthodox Jewish Community in Cleveland, Ohio*. New York: Touro University Press, 2023.

Rosenak, Avinoam. "Halakhah as Education: Philosophical and Halakhic Trends within the Conservative Movement". *The Jewish Law Association Studies 20: The Manchester Conference Volume*. ed. B. Jackson - L. Moscovitz. 196-230. 2010.

Rosenblum, Herbert. *Conservative Judaism: A Contemporary History*. New York: United Synagogue of America, 1983.

Rosen, Tracee L. "Conservative Judaism at the Crossroads: Choosing the Path of Outreach". *Judaism* 54/3-4 (2005), 198-202.

Ross, Tamar. "Can the Demand for Change in the Status of Women Be Halakhically Legitimated?". *Judaism* 42/4 (1993), 478-492.

Roth, Rabbi Joel. "Homosexuality Revisited". *The Rabbinical Assembly* (December 2006). Accessed Decemcer 2, 2024. [https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/testuvot/20052010/roth\\_revisited.pdf](https://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/sites/default/files/public/halakhah/testuvot/20052010/roth_revisited.pdf)

Rothschild, Fritz A. "Conservative Judaism Faces the Need of Change: In What Direction, How Much, and How?". *Commentary* (November 1953). Accessed September 1, 2024.

<https://www.commentary.org/articles/fritz-rothschild/conservative-judaism-faces-the-need-of-change-in-what-direction-how-much-and-how/>

Rubenstein, Jeffrey. "Siddur Sim Shalom and Developing Conservative Theology". *Conservative Judaism* 41/1 (1988), 21-37.

Rudavsky, David. "The Historical School of Zacharias Frankel". *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 5/2 (1963), 224-244.

Sarna, Jonathan D. "Learning from History". *Jewish Review of Books* (December 2013). Accessed September 10, 2024.  
<https://jewishreviewofbooks.com/articles/654/learning-from-history/#>

Sarna, Jonathan D. "The Debate over Mixed Seating in the American Synagogue". *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed*. ed. Jack Wertheimer. 363-394. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.

Schechter, Solomon. *Seminary Addresses and Other Papers*. Cincinnati: Ark Publishing Co., 1915.

Schechter, Solomon. *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1909.

Schechter, Solomon. *Studies in Judaism*. vol 1. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1896.

Schechter, Solomon. *Studies in Judaism*. vol 2. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1908.

Schechter, Solomon. "The Work of Heaven". *Tradition and Change: The Development of the Conservative Movement*. ed. Mordecai Waxman. 163-172. New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958.

Schorsch, Ismar. "Zacharias Frankel and the European Origins of Conservative Judaism". *Judaism* 30/3 (1981), 344-354.

Shafran, Avi. "The Conservative Lie". *Moment* (2001). Accessed October 17, 2024.  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060106063953/http://www.momentmag.com/archive/feb01/feat2.html>

Shapiro, Edward S. *Unique People in a Unique Land: Essays on American Jewish History*. Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2022.

Shapiro, Samantha. "Conservative Judaism Gets a Kick in the Pants". *Slate* (August 2006). Accessed August 30, 2024.  
<https://slate.com/human-interest/2006/08/why-conservative-judaism-is-ailing.html>

Shapiro, Samantha. "Damned if She Does, Damned if She Doesn't". *Slate* (January 2008). Accessed September 2, 2024.  
<https://slate.com/human-interest/2008/01/why-an-orthodox-institute-s-decision-to-ordain-female-rabbis-isn-t-as-revolutionary-as-it-sounds.html>

Shay, Scott A. *Getting Our Groove Back: How to Energize American Jewry*. Jerusalem: Devora Publishing, 2007.

Siegel, Jennifer. "Conservative Rabbi, in Swan Song, Warns Against Liberal Shift". *Forward* (March 2006). Accessed October 27, 2024.

<https://forward.com/news/6796/conservative-rabbi-in-swan-song-warns-against-li/>

Singer, David. "The New Orthodox Theology". *Modern Judaism* 9/1 (1989), 35-54.

Singer, Shmuel. "Modern Orthodoxy: Crisis and Solution". *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 23/4 (1988), 47-53.

Sklare, Marshall. *Conservative Judaism: An American Religious Movement*. New York: Schocken Books, 1972.

Soffer, Ari. "Open Orthodox' or 'Neo Conservative'?". *Israel National News* (April 2014). Accessed September 15, 2024.  
<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/179142>

Sommer, Benjamin D. "Where is Authority Found?". *Jewish Theological Seminary* (May 2016). Accessed October 24, 2024. <https://www.jtsa.edu/torah/authority/>

Starr, Aaron L. "Tradition vs. Modernity: The CJLS and Conservative Halakhah". *Conservative Judaism* 58/1 (2005), 3-17.

Starr, David B. *Catholic Israel: Solomon Schechter, A Study of Unity and Fragmentation in Modern Jewish History*. New York: Columbia University, Ph.D. Dissertation, 2003.

Starr, David B. "Saving the Union: Solomon Schechter and Abraham Lincoln". *Modern Judaism: A Journal of Jewish Ideas and Experience* 35/3 (2015), 302-317.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/mj/kjv017>

*The Babylonian Talmud*. ed. Isidore Epstein. London: The Soncino Press, 1935-1952.

Waxman, Mordecai. "Conservative Judaism - A Survey". *Tradition and Change: The Development of the Conservative Movement*. ed. Mordecai Waxman. 3-37. New York: The Burning Bush Press, 1958.

Weiss, Avraham. "Open Orthodoxy! A Modern Orthodox Rabbi's Creed". *Judaism* 46/4 (1997), 409-421.

Wertheimer, Jack - Bayme, Steven - M. Cohen, Steven. "Op-Ed: On Conservative Judaism, Why All the Talk about Failure?". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (October 2015). Accessed September 3, 2024.  
<https://www.jta.org/2015/10/12/ideas/op-ed-on-conservative-judaism-why-all-the-talk-about-failure>

Wertheimer, Jack. "Judaism and the Future of Religion in America: The Situation of Conservative Judaism Today". *Judaism* 54/3-4 (2005), 131-136.

Wertheimer, Jack. *The New American Judaism: How Jews Practice Their Religion Today*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Wolpe, Rabbi David. "Conservative Judaism Seeks its True Name". *HuffPost* (November 2016). Accessed August 29, 2024.  
[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/conservative-judaism-seek\\_b\\_8612458](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/conservative-judaism-seek_b_8612458)

Yuter, Alan J. "Halakhah and Ideology in Conservative Judaism". *Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly* 42 (1980), 94-112.