
The Perplexities of Conservative Judaism

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CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM, a movement situated at the center of the religious spectrum between Orthodoxy and the various versions of liberal Judaism, was in the news this past winter when its committee on Jewish law ruled on the status of homosexuality. Hot-button issues of this sort have historically proved agonizing for the movement—as they have not for Orthodoxy, which has tended to side almost automatically with traditional religious laws, or for liberal denominations, which have reflexively accommodated themselves to societal change. By contrast, the underlying assumption of Conservative Judaism has been that any dissonance between shifting social mores and long-established religious laws should and can be harmonized.

In the present case, that assumption proved untenable. The issue was this: how can one maintain fidelity to the Torah's explicit prohibition of male homosexual intercourse, as well as later rabbinic rulings extending that negative judgment to lesbianism, while simultaneously remaining open to new social perspectives and scientific research on the nature of sexuality? After deliberating over the matter for a period of years, the committee on Jewish law and standards voted to approve not one but

three different and frankly contradictory rulings. All three welcome homosexuals into Conservative synagogues. Two, however, uphold the traditional disapproval of homosexual behavior and ban openly gay men and women from holding positions of religious leadership, while the third, even as it restricts male homosexual activities to specific acts not prohibited by the Bible, nevertheless sanctions the ordination of gays and lesbians. When the ballots were tallied, it emerged that, on the issue of gay ordination, equal numbers had voted in favor and against, enough in each case to leave both as equally valid positions for Conservative Jews.

Movement officials lauded the committee's work, characterizing its acceptance of diametrically opposite rulings as proof positive of Conservatism's successful commitment to religious pluralism. But to judge from a follow-up opinion poll, rabbis and presidents of Conservative synagogues felt otherwise. Far from welcoming the exercise as a success, two-thirds of the former claimed to have been "somewhat embarrassed" by the contradictory rulings, and over half of the lay leaders pronounced themselves "confused."

When it comes to actually implementing policy, institutional leaders have not had the luxury of embracing both positions simultaneously but have been forced to choose between them. Within weeks, the two U.S. seminaries of the Conservative movement announced that they would admit gay and lesbian Jews without further delay. Sensing

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they had the upper hand, proponents of gay equality now began to press the view that, as one rabbi put it, welcoming people of all sexual orientations should be, for Conservative Judaism, "a value and not an option"—i.e., that declining to subscribe to complete gay equality in religious life, as two of the three approved legal rulings do, should no longer be tolerated.

The controversy over the status of homosexuals illustrates the extent to which Conservative Judaism is now whipsawed between contradictory impulses: on the one hand, the impulse to build as big a tent as possible and to welcome diverse points of view and, on the other hand, the impulse to define itself more sharply, thereby reading some members out of the movement. This conflict is in turn heightened by a mounting battle for institutional control of what until recently, but no longer, has been the largest Jewish denomination in the United States.

FROM ITS inception, Conservative Judaism has struggled to maintain a balance of one kind or another. There are even two dueling historical narratives about its origins. According to one account, the movement emerged in the closing decades of the 19th century as a response to the seemingly inexorable advance of the more radical antinomian tendencies of Reform Judaism. Some locate the historical turning point in a notorious "*treif* banquet" that marked the ordination in 1883 of the first graduates of the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary—a dinner that, according to one report, featured "littleneck clams, frogs' legs, and crabs, topped off with roast beef, ice cream, and cheeses."* Scandalized by this brazen flouting of Jewish dietary laws, traditionalist rabbis and lay leaders rallied to found the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in 1886. Graduates of JTS soon assumed pulpits around the country and brought their congregants around to the more tradition-minded Conservative position.

In this telling, the Conservative movement was founded by an elite with a clear religious agenda whose essentially conservatizing purpose was captured in its name. But a second narrative traces the movement's origins less to a religious impulse than to a broadly social one: namely, the upwardly mobile aspirations of the second generation of East European Jews whose families had arrived during the great mass migration that lasted from the 1870's to America's imposition of entry quotas in the 1920's. As the children of these immigrants climbed the socioeconomic ladder, they grew disenchanted not with Reform but, on the contrary,

with East European-style Orthodoxy and its Yiddish-speaking rabbis. They sought a refined synagogue service, sermons in the vernacular, mixed seating of men and women, and a shift from an adult-centered religion to a child-centered one. Reform temples would not do; they were often socially exclusive enclaves, and their services were too church-like to appeal to the children of East European immigrants. Instead, this generation overwhelmingly opted for the Conservative synagogue.

Thus the second narrative, first presented by the sociologist Marshall Sklare over 50 years ago. In this telling, Conservative Judaism arose as a modernizing movement in defiance of Orthodoxy, and its religious conservatism was more nostalgic than ideological in nature.

Both accounts contain much truth. Between the teens and the early 1950's, the Conservative movement grew like topsy because it attracted large numbers of Jews seeking a modern, American synagogue that would not require of them a high degree of religious observance. At the same time, much of its leadership, religious and lay alike, observed Judaism in a traditional fashion, keeping the Sabbath and holidays and adhering to ritual obligations even as the majority of their fellow congregants behaved very differently. Thus, from the beginning, the movement was based on the marriage of an anti-Reform elite ideology to anti-Orthodox folk aspirations.

The movement bridged this chasm by offering something for everyone. Its synagogues followed the traditional liturgy and Torah reading in Hebrew, but included some English-language prayers. Sabbath and holiday services were central to synagogue life, but the key gathering time was the "late" Friday-evening service, held hours after the Sabbath had begun in order to accommodate working people. The rabbi prided himself on his oratorical prowess, delivering English-language sermons mainly about the issues of the day, even as he still insisted on his status as an arbiter of religious law. Almost all Conservative congregations utilized an edition of the Torah whose commentary rejected modern biblical criticism, but rabbis and teachers drew upon the latest scholarship in their adult-education classes. The kitchens of Conservative synagogues were strictly kosher, but only in a fraction of members' homes were Jewish dietary laws observed. The movement's elite walked to synagogue on the Sabbath, while the folk drove.

For a long time, the movement was successful in

* See "The Trefa Banquet" by John J. Appel in the February 1966 COMMENTARY.

managing this religious balancing act. Contributing significantly to that success was the fact that Conservative synagogues functioned as, in Sklare's terminology, an "ethnic church." They placed a strong emphasis on rallying support and collecting money for Zionism in the decades leading up to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Later on, while continuing to mobilize in support of Israel, they flocked to the cause of Soviet Jewry in the 70's and 80's. They did all this by creating a comfortable environment for second-generation Jews to enter American society together, as members of a club. More than anything else, perhaps, most Conservative Jews were bound to their synagogue and to each other by the bonds of ethnic solidarity.

THERE WERE strains, of course. But these, while palpable, were also bearable because the movement was constantly expanding and experimenting. During the peak growth years of the 1950's, as Jews moved to the beckoning suburbs, it was not unusual for the movement to add over 100 new congregational affiliates *annually*. "New Jewish Community in Formation: A Conservative Center Catering to Present-Day Needs," proclaimed the title of one 1955 article in COMMENTARY. It was not alone in remarking upon the dramatic expansion of the movement, which by the 1950's claimed a plurality of American Jews affiliated with a religious denomination.

Nor was this just a matter of numbers. The movement's rabbinic leaders achieved renown as spokesmen for American Judaism and as interpreters of Jewish civilization, and some of its lay leaders were figures of national stature. The movement itself was widely admired for its experiments in youth education, initially in its Ramah summer camps and later in day-school education. Indeed, in surveying the achievements of the movement over the course of its entire 120-year history, one cannot but be struck by the sheer extent of its contribution to the cultural and social capital of the American Jewish community, if not of Jews worldwide.

Conservative Judaism has produced a body of scholarship and religious literature informed by an admirable attempt to negotiate polarities. "We are the only group," declared Louis Finkelstein, chancellor of JTS from 1940 to 1972, "who have a modern mind and a Jewish heart, prophetic passion and Western science." At JTS, Finkelstein famously gathered key exponents of differing, even clashing, schools of thought. He himself, and talmudists like Louis Ginzberg, represented a traditionalist approach to Jewish law and observance even as

Mordecai Kaplan, perhaps the most radical Jewish religious thinker of his time, sought to persuade rabbinical students of the need to "reconstruct" Judaism thoroughly to suit the American moment. Later on, Finkelstein balanced Saul Lieberman, an outstanding interpreter of Talmud, against the neo-hasidic and socially activist inclinations of Abraham Joshua Heschel.

Over the decades, whether despite or because of the tension among divergent constructions of religious reality, the result has been a remarkable library of learning in the fields of law, theology, history, and literature. Conservative institutions have also nurtured a core cadre of congregants and leaders profoundly engaged with traditional Jewish religious practices, the Hebrew language, and the Jewish people. On every measure of religious participation, according to the sociologist Steven M. Cohen, Conservative Jews today score higher than all other Jews except the Orthodox. They are the most likely to attend religious services with some regularity, to observe Jewish holidays in their homes, and to put a strong emphasis on Jewish education.

This engagement has redounded in numerous ways to the benefit of the Jewish collective. More than any other non-Orthodox group, Conservative Jews give to Jewish causes, support Jewish organizations, travel to Israel, and socialize primarily with Jewish friends. Much of Jewish organizational life, moreover, is beholden to Conservative Jews working as professionals and volunteer leaders and investing themselves in the needs of the Jewish people.

IT IS IN light of these manifold achievements that the weaknesses of today's Conservative Judaism should be a source of alarm not only to insiders but to anyone concerned about the vitality of religious life in America. Yet those weaknesses, the result of decades of decline, are glaring.

Most apparent to informed observers is the movement's demographic fall, masked until now by the large bulge of mid-20th-century recruits who only recently have begun to pass from the scene. In the single decade of the 1990's, if the 2000-2001 National Jewish Population Study (NJPS) is to be believed, membership in Conservative synagogues contracted from 915,000 to 660,000, dropping the number of affiliated Conservative Jews below that of their Reform counterparts for the first time in a half-century. The former now account for one-third of synagogue members in the U.S., with the latter constituting 39 percent and Orthodox Jews 21 percent.

Even more ominously for the future of the movement, its members tend to be older than Jews in the Reform and Orthodox movements, and the majority are empty-nesters. Not surprisingly, children enrolled in Conservative educational programs number fewer than two-thirds of those in Reform programs. Once the home of second- and third-generation American Jews, Conservative synagogues are much less successful at attracting the fourth and fifth generations, relying instead on smaller cadres of recent immigrants from South Africa, Israel, Latin America, and Iran.

Where have all the Conservative Jews gone? By far the majority of "switchers" have found their way into the Reform camp; over a third of the members of Reform temples claim to have been raised Conservative.

Conventional wisdom attributes most of this defection to the inhospitality of Conservative synagogues to intermarried Jews. As rates of intermarriage have skyrocketed among people raised Conservative, the argument goes, the latter have gravitated to Reform temples whose rabbis are able to officiate at interfaith weddings and readily incorporate children of intermarriage into their congregations and schools. Once intermarried Jews join Reform temples, moreover, they tend to bring along their parents, who often wish to participate in services with their grandchildren.

Undoubtedly, this describes the behavior of some families. But since just as many intermarried Conservative Jews remain loyal to their movement, intermarriage itself cannot be the primary cause of such switching.* Among the additional factors at work, a big one is geographic mobility: over the past quarter-century, vast numbers have migrated from the Middle Atlantic states or the Midwest, places with a strong Conservative presence, to the South and West, where Reform congregations are readily available but Conservative synagogues are not. Nor have these "Jews on the move" bothered to found new Conservative synagogues themselves. Although this has something to do with the movement's structural incapacity to seed new congregations as aggressively as does Reform, it also speaks to the emerging Jewish culture in these locales and elsewhere.

Some mobile Conservative Jews are attracted to the style of a particular Reform temple, its rabbi or other religious functionaries, or the services it offers. But the major factor seems to be that many individuals raised in Conservative synagogues tend to have received a minimal Jewish education, and this has left them, as adults, unable to participate in re-

ligious services that are still almost entirely conducted in Hebrew and presuppose a certain level of Jewish literacy. (Their discomfort may be further aggravated by the presence of younger members better prepared than they to take on roles, like leading services, once reserved for the clergy.) Such Jews naturally gravitate to Reform temples whose services include far less Hebrew and whose members are expected to observe far fewer Jewish rituals and holidays.

ON THE other end of the religious spectrum, interestingly, a smaller but noteworthy minority of Conservative Jews has been gravitating to Orthodox synagogues. According to the 2000-2001 NJPS, 10 percent of affiliated Orthodox Jews were raised Conservative. These particular switchers tend to be among the best-educated products of day schools, summer camps, and youth programs, usually the offspring of the most active and religiously engaged members of Conservative synagogues—young people, in short, who have been groomed to assume leadership roles in their parents' movement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of them are drawn to Orthodoxy less for its ideology than for its strong communal life. They are seeking a religious support system for themselves and their children, one that will reinforce observance and participation—something that relatively few Conservative synagogues can provide.

Some departing members are also drawn to Orthodox "outreach" congregations, especially the hundreds of Chabad centers run by the Lubavitch hasidic group. Another cohort, young and often single, has abandoned the movement to create non-denominational prayer groups whose style, however, is distinctively Conservative, combining the traditional liturgy, mixed seating, and equal leadership roles for men and women with, in many cases, a heavy dose of left-wing "social justice" activism.

While it is possible to track key categories of defectors, many members are being carried away, to places unknown, by a broader trend. This is the decline in the sense of Jewish peoplehood as a viscerally felt commitment.[†] Quite a few Conservative Jews may have grown up in families that had a limited interest in religion but were bound to their synagogues by the strong ethnic identification I spoke of earlier—an identification captured in the

* I am grateful to Laurence Kotler-Berkowitz and Steven M. Cohen for examining the data from the 2000-2001 NJPS survey concerning the allegiances of intermarried Conservative Jews.

[†] For an extended discussion of this subject, see my article with Steven M. Cohen, "Whatever Happened to the Jewish People," in the June 2006 COMMENTARY.

old saw about Schwartz who comes to synagogue to talk to God, while his friend Goldstein comes to talk to Schwartz. As this sense of ethnic solidarity has ebbed, younger Jews unmotivated by spiritual or religious purpose find little reason to identify themselves with Conservative synagogues. Some may find their way into other religious denominations; many have no particular affiliation at all.

THE UPSHOT is a substantial hemorrhage by multiple cuts. The movement is bleeding members of all ages to its religious Left and Right, to new non-denominational groupings, and to a phenomenon once widely described but no longer mentioned in polite company—assimilation. Because the outflow is multidirectional, the movement has been at a loss to decide which populations to focus on or to calculate what it would take to woo them back. Besides, an approach that might work to retain more of the intermarried could alienate those seeking a ritually observant community; what might attract social activists could drive away members committed primarily to the needs of the Jewish people; efforts to enliven religious services and thereby draw in younger Jews might be off-putting to older members.

This is not to say that the movement has been altogether paralyzed. At the grassroots level, some individual congregations have created endowment funds to help tide them over during the coming lean years. Others have altered the spatial configuration within their sanctuaries to create more intimate settings for prayer, or experimented with contemporary liturgical music and even dance, or encouraged members to participate more actively in religious services by, for example, mastering the skill of reading Torah in the traditional chant. More broadly, individual congregations are working on their own to bolster the presence of Conservative Judaism within their local communities.

But if there is evidence of strength on the ground, one is hard-pressed to find a sense of common purpose on the national level. Though the movement is configured like a Protestant denomination—with seminaries, an organization for clergy, another for congregations, still others for women's and men's auxiliaries, and professional organizations for cantors and educators—it never developed a system of internal governance that would enable it to function cohesively. No single person or institution is regarded as authoritative. JTS has long claimed centrality as "the fountainhead" of the movement, but every chancellor in its history has been at loggerheads with his counterparts in

other Conservative institutions. Conversely, some of the movement's most important initiatives—the camping network, day schools, experiments in religious innovation and synagogue renewal—were forced upon chancellors by frustrated local leaders.

Having never learned to work together effectively in the years of growth, the major institutions now flail about at cross-purposes in a time of crisis. Today, perhaps as many as 100 Conservative synagogues have disengaged institutionally from the movement, and the former West Coast affiliate of JTS now claims no allegiance to Conservative Judaism at all. Nor has much energy been expended on conducting a conversation with the rank and file on the question of what a serious effort at renewal might look like.

There have been such efforts in the past, and there is even a rhythm to them. Whenever the movement has taken a dramatic step *away* from traditional religious behavior—sanctioning driving to synagogue on the Sabbath, ordaining women as rabbis—it has balanced it with a campaign to encourage more intense and widespread religious observance. But the latter effort, predictably, has fizzled for lack of follow-through from the top or of interest on the part of the movement's various constituencies. Often, there has not been even a semblance of coordination. In the months leading up to the decision on the status of homosexuals, for example, leaders of Conservative institutions, nonplussed that the issue had been allowed to come to a head before congregants were prepared for so major a change, scrambled ineffectually to delay the vote.

Perhaps the most serious sign of disarray at the center is the movement's failure to capture the imagination of the philanthropists who sit in the pews of its synagogues. As a consequence, its over-arching institutions limp along with insufficient financial support. On the domestic scene, no serious funding has gone into seeding potential affiliates in places of new Jewish settlement; Conservative groups on college campuses receive virtually no backing; and even some of the day schools that were once the pride of the movement have folded or assumed a non-denominational identity for want of financial support. Internationally, the movement has established virtually no presence in former Communist lands, and only a few congregations in Western and Central Europe. It has also permitted its operations in Israel to collapse, even though the sums needed to keep them afloat were smaller than the annual budget of a single mid-sized synagogue in North America.

IN RELIGION as in other areas of life, disunity and disorganization can be symptoms of a deeper confusion. A wag once memorably classified Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism as, respectively, "crazy, hazy, and lazy." The "hazy," at least, is not inaccurate.

Of all the movements, Conservative Judaism has been the least able to condense its religious ideology into a single message. Instead, it has relied mostly on assertions of what it is not—i.e., it disagrees with the movement on its Right for one reason and with the movement on its Left for another—rather than on affirmations of what it is. An easily identifiable set of associations, a clear "branding," has been lacking.

But, for reasons I have spelled out, there is also a vicious circle here. Lurking in any effort to sharpen the movement's definition has been the perpetual danger of exposing irreparable fault lines.

For much of its first century, the movement strove to paper over its ideological divisions by stressing the commonalities of synagogue practice, allegiance to JTS as the spiritual center, and the shared identification of all Conservative Jews with the Jewish people. Rather than making strong statements, it preferred to invoke a vague but innocuous slogan: "Tradition and Change." Not far beneath the surface, however, rabbis holding opposing views on the nature of belief and doctrine seethed with resentment. Their disagreements burst forth at rabbinic conventions, which were often rife with controversy over religious policies and the proper interpretation of Jewish law. Significantly, it was not until the late 20th century that the movement even tried to produce a statement of principles. Attempting to harmonize irreconcilable beliefs, the resulting document, *Emet ve'Emunah* ("Truth and Faith," 1988), was virtually incomprehensible.

As historical irony would have it, *Emet ve'Emunah* appeared at a moment when the movement had already shed its own extreme left and right wings. In the mid-1960's, the Reconstructionists, who regarded Jewish observances as no more than folkways, convinced their leader Mordecai Kaplan that his program for Jewish life could be implemented only through the creation of a separate movement from the one in which he had spent his career. Two decades later, traditionalists who regarded the source of Jewish practice as residing in divinely commanded laws departed when the movement chose to ordain women as rabbis.

Yet the secession of these extremes did not so much resolve as lay bare and perhaps even sharpen the continuing fact of internal disagreement.

Today, that disagreement, embodied in the split decision on gay ordination, has taken on the signs of ideological impasse.

When religious traditionalists dominated the movement's key institutions, the tactic adopted by proponents of innovation was to argue for pluralism. Rather than accept a single understanding of Jewish law, they pleaded, let multiple voices be heard. Let there be majority and minority rulings, with both treated as equally valid, and let each rabbi decide what is best for his or her congregation. During the past quarter-century, the pluralists triumphed, winning the battle over women's religious status and most recently over homosexuality.

Now, suddenly, pluralism does not look so attractive. How can it be, the innovators ask, that the Conservative movement, which trains women to become rabbis and cantors, still permits its congregations to refuse to hire women for those positions? How can a movement undertaking to ordain gay and lesbian Jews tolerate legal opinions that would bar homosexuals from positions of religious leadership?

The Conservative movement thus finds itself locked in a conundrum. Unable to agree on a Jewish way of behaving, it has long touted a "big tent" approach to religious practices and expectations. This, understandably, has left large numbers of its adherents ideologically confused, even as it has created ample room for those not so confused to press for greater clarity—and then for the authority to impose it. These days, such clarity is to be found mainly among the devotees of "progress," which is to say, conformity with advanced social norms.

HAS THE Conservative movement fulfilled its historical role, and should it call it quits? A few years ago, the head of Reform's rabbinical association giddily predicted the demise of Conservative Judaism within two decades. This year, a prominent Orthodox rabbi welcomed the split decision on gays as forcing at last a clean division between those American Jews who accept the centrality of Jewish law as the defining essence of Judaism and those who do not.

In the meantime, many of the concrete proposals put forward to address today's crisis would only make matters worse. Some urge the movement to avoid taking any action that might threaten to alienate any single constituency. Others, counseling the reverse, favor a re-"branding" that would drop the "conservative" altogether in favor of an honest effort not so much to conserve Judaism as to reform, deconstruct, or reconstruct it. Still oth-

ers argue that the battle over Jewish religious law is passé—yesterday's issue—and that the movement should adapt itself to an age of personal autonomy in which Jews seek a spirituality devoid of prescribed behavior and are moved more by poverty in Africa than by rockets falling in northern Israel.

Each of these approaches, naturally, claims to offer a means of bringing large numbers of Jews back to Conservative synagogues. That is frankly naïve, if not quixotic. Each is far more likely to intensify the drift away to other, already better defined alternatives.

If anything, one cannot help wondering whether another approach entirely would not have a better chance of attracting the wayward and, above all, strengthening the hearts of the already committed. Such an approach would, quite simply, get back to basics. Instead of asking what the consumers seem to want at any given moment, it would ask what Conservative Jews need to know, observe, and believe if they are to connect to traditional Judaism. Rather than reaching for a short-term cultural fix, it would focus on building a cadre of Jews who can observe Jewish rituals and conduct their spiritual lives by the Jewish calendar, who can read the Torah and grasp its inmost meanings, who are at home in the Hebrew liturgy and inspired by its grandeur.

Such a frankly traditionalist approach would emphasize high-quality Jewish education and lifelong Jewish learning, rather than the expedient of simply preparing young people to perform at a bar or bat mitzvah. It would work to nurture *belief*, rather than deconstructing Judaism to the point where no particular beliefs are required. It would invest its resources in fostering the skills and knowledge and dedication that would enable its members to rise to the commandments of Judaism. And it would thereby help Conservative Judaism regain its role as a true religious force.

In returning to its roots as a traditionalist movement, such a Conservative Judaism would also rethink its relationship to the larger American culture. As I noted at the start, the prevailing disposition of the movement has been to eliminate discord between that culture and Jewish doctrine. The time has long since come to ask whether this headlong flight into accommodation has been either benefi-

cial or necessary. The assumption that religious communities must capitulate to the (often contradictory or even self-canceling) principles of advanced contemporary life—pluralism, egalitarianism, autonomy, “choice”—may not only weaken religion's ability to remain faithful to its own moral truths but deprive society of valuable contrapuntal voices. A traditionalist Conservative Judaism would do well to emphasize its *countercultural* understanding of what Judaism demands, especially when that understanding is at odds with conventional secular opinion.

IN CONTEMPLATING such an alternative approach, there are important lessons to be learned from the social history of religious life in America. Four decades have passed since a general process of decline began to empty the pews of liberal Protestant churches. All the while, the more conservative churches have grown. Much of American Judaism has blinded itself to this reality, insisting that the Jewish case would be different. But the demonstrable fact is that liberal versions of Judaism, too, have proved far less successful than most traditional versions at retaining the allegiance, and in many instances even the bedrock Jewish identity, of their young.

Investigating the phenomenon of “strict” churches, the sociologist Laurence Iannacone found that congregations willing to make reasonable demands of their members tended not to wither but to thrive. Setting expectations, he concluded, does more to strengthen morale and a common sense of purpose than does a *laissez-faire* approach that, in honoring individual autonomy above all else, leads to indifference if not contempt. Whether the Conservative movement is capable of absorbing or acting on this lesson is a hard question. In offering a clear and demanding religious program, the movement might have to prepare itself to live with some further shrinkage in the short term in order to insure growth in the future. What price, what sorts of trade-offs, could it afford as it built an engaged base that, perhaps for the first time, might feel itself to be part of a real religious movement? A hard question indeed, as hard spiritually as strategically; but perhaps the only one worth pondering.