Continuing the trend of recent years, the American Jewish community in 1992 focused increasing attention on problems of Jewish identity and continuity. While the strength and security of Israel remained high priorities—especially given the growing hostility between the U.S. and Israeli governments—and the fate of convicted spy Jonathan Pollard aroused considerable grassroots interest, organized American Jewry worried most about its own ultimate survival in an open, democratic society.

Loan Guarantees

Having lost the battle to secure $10 billion in loan guarantees for Israeli absorption of Soviet immigrants in September 1991, the organized Jewish community was leery of challenging President George Bush on this issue again. After a January 6 meeting with White House chief of staff Samuel Skinner, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations announced that it would not press for a quick vote in Congress on the loan guarantees, despite the fact that the president had promised to reconsider the matter in January. A week later, the conference sent a mildly worded letter to Bush urging the administration to “proceed expeditiously in its deliberations and its discussions with Israel and to support the necessary legislation to be enacted by Congress.” The letter stressed that the loan guarantees were a “humanitarian concern.” Shoshana Cardin, chairwoman of the Conference of Presidents, arrived in Israel on January 20 to convey the U.S. administration’s views on the subject to Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.

When Shamir stated publicly that none of the funds from the loan guarantees would be used in the territories, but that he would not place a freeze on settlements, as requested by Bush, the chances for American approval dimmed, and American Jewry split over how to react. Americans for Peace Now accepted a settlement freeze as a legitimate condition for loan guarantees. Americans for a Safe Israel, a pro-Likud organization, released a poll indicating that a solid majority of American Jews felt that “Israel should not give up any of the disputed territories.” Some observers expressed serious doubts about the poll’s validity. Meanwhile, the New Israel Fund
sponsored a public debate between former *Moment* magazine editor Leonard Fein and Tom Dine, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), on whether it was legitimate for American Jews to criticize Israel publicly. Dine argued that such public criticism generates “splits among ourselves,” while Fein countered that a Jewish community that stifled dissent risked its credibility. Shoshana Cardin insisted that there was a consensus on loan guarantees: the American Jewish leadership, she said, “remains unanimous in supporting Israel’s request.”

Her assessment was overly optimistic. In mid-February, the annual plenum of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council (NJCRAC)—the umbrella organization that seeks to build consensus among the 117 local community relations councils and 13 national agencies for whom it speaks—addressed the issue. Preparations for the plenum uncovered a high degree of disagreement. The American Jewish Congress—which had recently participated in meetings in Riyadh in an effort to involve Saudi Arabia in the peace process—the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and community relations councils in Milwaukee and Detroit sought an explicit resolution urging a freeze on settlements in the territories, a step that the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, for one, considered “an effort to undermine Israel.” Israeli diplomats expressed concern that a vote against settlements might encourage the administration to harden its position on loan guarantees. A conference call among members of NJCRAC’s Joint Program Plan Committee resulted in a decision not to vote on the question of settlements, but rather to send a transcript of the debate on the subject to the Israeli government—unless two-thirds of the delegates insisted on a vote, which was highly unlikely.

The NJCRAC debate took place on February 19. Over the course of an hour and a half, approximately 50 speakers addressed the plenum. Those advocating silence about the settlements outnumbered those seeking a freeze by more than two to one, with each side accusing the other of endangering the loan guarantees for Israel. NJCRAC then unanimously passed a resolution urging the United States and Israel to work out an agreement on the guarantees.

The next week, the annual study mission of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations arrived in Israel, ostensibly “to see firsthand the facts on the ground.” In their public statements, the Americans backed the official Israeli line and strongly denounced the linkage between the humanitarian need for loan guarantees and a freeze on settlement activity. Privately, however, the mission participants urged Israeli leaders to show restraint on settlements. In his speech to the group, Prime Minister Shamir repeated his pledge not to use the loans beyond the Green Line, but made no commitment on halting the settlements.

The mission was still in Israel when Secretary of State James Baker made linkage explicit, announcing that Israel would have to make a choice: loan guarantees or more settlements. A halt to all building in the territories would trigger the full $10-billion guarantee; the completion of housing already begun would reduce the amount. Mainstream American Jewish organizations voiced displeasure at what
they considered an artificial intrusion into the peace process; settlement activity, they believed, was an issue to be negotiated by the parties concerned. From Israel, the Presidents' Conference charged that the administration was "presenting demands that Israel cannot meet."

The National Council of Jewish Women and the Zionist Organization of America sent delegations to Washington to lobby for loan guarantees, even as the Jewish Peace Lobby, which advocated a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian controversy, circulated a letter signed by over 250 rabbis urging the next U.S. president, whoever he might be, to oppose new Israeli settlements in the territories. The internal debate within the Jewish community even prompted a page-one story in the *New York Times* (March 2) headlined "Uneasy Debate for Jews in U.S. on Loans Issue." It quoted David A. Harris, executive vice-president of the American Jewish Committee, describing American Jewry as "caught between a rock and a hard place. People are not fully happy with some of the ways Israel is behaving, but they don't have confidence in the script being written by the Administration either."

On March 5, the Conference of Presidents held a private meeting with Dennis Ross, director of the State Department's policy-planning staff. The next day, Shoshana Cardin and Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the conference, conducted what Hoenlein described as "a very intense exchange" with Secretary Baker, who proved unwilling to bend on the settlements issue. That same day, former New York City mayor Ed Koch reported in his *New York Post* column that Baker had said to White House advisers, apropos the Jews: "F— 'em. They didn't vote for us." Despite Baker's denial, the charge was widely believed and drew harsh criticism, even from Jewish organizations that agreed with the administration's stand on settlements. "Baker reflects a vision of his role that simply is irreconcilable with his office," commented Rabbi David Saperstein of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. To make matters worse, when Israel's Labor party leader, Yitzhak Rabin, was in Washington to address the United Jewish Appeal's Young Leadership Conference, the administration leaked the charge—later shown to be baseless—that Israel had illegally transferred American military technology to other countries.

As the leading Democratic presidential aspirants vied for Jewish votes with criticisms of the administration's treatment of Israel, Jewish organizations recognized that the loan guarantees would not be passed before March 31, the expiration date for Congress's continuing resolution for funding foreign aid. "The request will be made again," said Shoshana Cardin in the name of the Conference of Presidents, "maybe in June or September." Jewish leaders made no secret of their anger at the administration's refusal to accept congressional proposals for a compromise on loan guarantees, and accused President Bush of going back on a pledge not to link the guarantees to the issue of settlements.

Both the Israeli government and American Jewry gave serious thought to alternate ways of funding the resettlement of Jewish immigrants in Israel without the guarantees. While Joel Tauber, incoming national chairman of the United Jewish Appeal, said there was "no way to replace the $10 billion," Michael Siegal, national
campaign chairman of Israel Bonds, declared: "We have the capacity. There will be no problem in appealing to the marketplace to raise the money." The Council of Jewish Federations entered the picture as well, with the announcement that almost all of its member federations had agreed collectively to guarantee up to $900 million in bank loans to help immigrants to Israel pay their resettlement bills—though this money would not be used to build the infrastructure that the U.S. government’s loan guarantees were designed to provide.

Fury at the administration’s failure to act on the loan guarantees erupted at the national convention in late March of the dovish American Jewish Congress, which was on record in opposition to further settlements in the territories. Although both Robert Lifton, the group’s president, and Henry Siegman, the executive director, favored a resolution backing a settlement freeze, a majority of the 300 delegates defied the leadership and voted to make no public statement on the issue until after the Israeli elections in June. Disappointed, Lifton commented, "I’m not satisfied, but it was a decision within the membership, and we’ll abide by it. . . . I’m not allowed to say anything about it, but if you look at our previous statements, we haven’t retracted them."

AIPAC, which held its annual policy conference in Washington, D.C., in April, came under close scrutiny in the Jewish media for the failure of the loan guarantees. As the preeminent pro-Israel lobby in the capital, what was its responsibility for the series of miscalculations that had put the administration and American Jewry at loggerheads? While AIPAC’s director, Tom Dine, attributed the scuttling of the loan guarantees to a turn in American public opinion against foreign aid generally, others felt that AIPAC’s over-aggressiveness had unnecessarily alienated the president. There was considerable speculation that AIPAC and the broader pro-Israel community, disillusioned with the Bush administration, would seek closer ties with the Democrats in this presidential election year.

**Election Politics**

Indeed, presidential politics came to play an increasingly prominent role in American Jewish deliberations over Israel. Seeking to counteract the growing barrage of Jewish criticism, President Bush wrote a letter—obviously intended to be publicized—to a prominent Jewish Republican who had expressed discomfort at Bush’s stance on Israel. In the letter, which was made public on March 30, Bush insisted that “our fundamental commitment to Israel is just that—fundamental.” Since Israel had the most to gain from a peace settlement, he went on, it should not take provocative steps in the territories that might sabotage the chances for peace. “I will do all that I can,” wrote Bush, “to see that the current strains do not grow worse but, on the contrary, are put behind us. . . .” American Jewish leaders expressed appreciation for the sentiments, but felt, in the words of the American Jewish Committee’s David Harris, that “deeds are still more significant. We will have to wait and see.” In succeeding weeks, a number of high-ranking administration offi-
cials, in private meetings with Jewish leaders, at public forums, and in media interviews, continued to press the case that the Bush policies were, on balance, in Israel's best interests.

Meanwhile, the president’s leading Democratic challenger, Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, articulated his own vision for the Middle East in an address in New York City on March 31. Accusing the administration of Israel-bashing and even of exploiting anti-Semitism, Clinton asserted his support for loan guarantees and argued that the humanitarian task of resettling Soviet Jews should not be held hostage to the peace process. While the Jewish community applauded Clinton’s critique of the Bush policies, some were disappointed that he nevertheless considered the Israeli settlements obstacles to peace and refused to call for the U.S. embassy to be moved to Jerusalem.

In May Jewish organizations offered testimony before the Democratic platform committee in an effort to have their points of view reflected in the national platform. AIPAC, NJCRAC, and other mainstream bodies urged the Democrats to confirm the special U.S.-Israeli relationship, support loan guarantees, and insist on direct Israeli-Arab negotiations without imposition of solutions from outside. Americans for Peace Now wanted the Democrats to espouse Israeli security along with “the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,” while the Jewish Peace Lobby urged the party to endorse the Bush policy conditioning loan guarantees for Israel on a settlement freeze.

The stunning electoral triumph of Yitzhak Rabin and his Labor party in the June elections in Israel had a dual impact on the American Jewish community. First, the replacement of a government committed to continued settlement of the territories by one likely to be far more amenable to a “land for peace” deal was taken both as a harbinger of better U.S.-Israeli relations and as vindication by the dovish Jewish organizations that had called for a settlement freeze. Second, the election results immediately touched off speculation about a shakeup of leadership in the establishment organizations of American Jewry, which, having become identified with Likud positions over the years, would now have to work in tandem with a Labor-led coalition.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, articulated the euphoria of the American Jewish left. When Rabin’s victory was announced, Siegman predicted that “the traditionally warm relations between the U.S. and Israel will be quickly resumed and the Administration will act promptly on the loan guarantees.” Savoring the shift of government in Israel and the chagrin of American Jewish hard-liners, he noted sarcastically: “Suddenly even those American Jews who supported the Likud are saying that they were Labor supporters after all.”

Immediately after the election, Israeli newspapers carried stories about pressures from Israel for the removal and replacement of the top executives at AIPAC and the Presidents’ Conference, Tom Dine and Malcolm Hoenlein, on the grounds that their sympathies for Likud had gone beyond the bounds of what was strictly necessary. In addition, the papers predicted similar changes in the lay leadership of
AIPAC and the election of a Labor sympathizer as the next chairperson of the Conference of Presidents.

While these reports proved to be unfounded, Yitzhak Rabin did make clear that his election signaled a lessened role for American Jewry in Israeli-American relations. Rabin paid a visit to President Bush in August, and the new Israeli leader's flexible position on the issue of settlements provided the occasion for the president to announce, at long last, his support for the loan guarantees for Israel. But the prime minister also used his American stay to criticize Jewish leadership. Both in a private session with AIPAC leaders and at a public meeting with the Conference of Presidents, Rabin sharply condemned the American Jewish strategy that he felt had mishandled the loan guarantees in 1991 and evoked administration animosity in the bargain. Those who heard him at the public meeting were taken aback both by his angry tone and his insistence that Israel would make its own policy and convey it directly to the U.S. government. Israel no longer wanted to use the American Jewish community as an intermediary. “Rabin and Pro-Israel Group Off to Testy Start,” was the headline in the New York Times. On September 7, speaking by satellite to B'nai B'rith International's biennial convention, Rabin tried to mitigate the damage by explaining that he was upset with only “one organization”—obviously AIPAC—and that he actually admired “the devotion” of the American Jewish community to Israel.

Even more harmful to AIPAC than Rabin's criticism was a blow inflicted by its own president, David Steiner. Eager to impress a potential donor with the magnitude of the organization's clout, Steiner said, in a taped phone conversation, that AIPAC was negotiating with the Clinton campaign over who would serve as secretary of state in a Clinton administration, and that he, Steiner, had personally convinced Secretary of State Baker to approve a $1-billion strategic cooperation agreement with Israel. The tape recording was made public on November 4—the day after Clinton was elected president—and Steiner immediately resigned, admitting he had made up the stories to impress the donor. On November 22, Steven Grossman was named as his successor. Since Grossman, a Massachusetts businessman, was an active Democrat as well as a prominent supporter of territorial compromise by Israel, the appointment was widely interpreted as a strategic move by the pro-Israel lobby to establish better relations with the new governments in Washington and Jerusalem.

American Jews and the Zionist Movement

The World Zionist Congress—the first of whose meetings in 1897 marked the start of the movement that led, 50 years later, to the creation of a Jewish state—met in Israel in the summer of 1992, just as it had every fifth year, even after the establishment of the State of Israel. Shorn of its mission as the political expression of world Jewry by the coming of the state, its major role now was selecting the leadership of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), which in turn selects half of
The officials of the Jewish Agency, the other half of whom are designated by Diaspora fund-raisers, who are chiefly affiliated with local federations. Influence over the Jewish Agency means control over dollars: the agency had a $730-million budget, allocated to it by the United Jewish Appeal (UJA), to be used for the absorption of immigrants in Israel. In the 1987 elections for American delegates to the World Zionist Congress, two new parties, those affiliated with the Reform and Conservative streams in American Judaism, made major gains at the expense of such mainstream Zionist groups as the Zionist Organization of America and Hadassah, the women’s Zionist organization. The 1987 result was widely interpreted as a protest against the Orthodox establishment in Israel and as a mandate for religious pluralism there.

In preparation for the 1992 congress, the mainstream American groups proposed choosing the American delegates through an electoral college that would reflect the proportionate strength of the various factions in the previous congress, rather than through direct election by all members of Zionist organizations. While the ostensible reason for shelving a popular vote was to save the more than $1 million that had been spent to run the 1987 election, ARZA, the Zionist group affiliated with Reform, viewed the electoral college plan as a stratagem to block further gains it thought it would make in a democratic election.

Angry charges were exchanged by both sides. When the plan for an electoral college was upheld by the Zionist Supreme Court, ARZA expressed its continuing dissatisfaction with the status quo by pushing for the election of Reform rabbi Richard Hirsch to replace Simcha Dinitz as chairman of the WZO and the Jewish Agency. At the congress, in July, Hirsch offered to drop his candidacy if Dinitz would agree to direct elections for the next congress, so that the WZO might reflect “the real strength of the various religious streams in the Diaspora.” Dinitz refused, the vote was taken, and Dinitz won 382–101.

The fireworks over ARZA’s challenge obscured a more fundamental change in American Zionism that found expression at this congress, namely, the American delegates’ preoccupation with the battle against assimilation in the United States. Rather than seeking to liquidate the Diaspora in classical Zionist fashion, or even seeking primarily to build American support for Israel in the traditional American Zionist way, the Americans now wanted the Jewish state to provide a Jewish anchor for their youth through cultural programs and trips to Israel. The presence at the congress of Seymour Reich, a former chairman of the Conference of Presidents, was especially noteworthy. Reich, who had made his mark in the Jewish community-relations field and had never before sought a leadership role in any strictly Zionist organization, was representing B’nai B’rith, which had never before sent delegates to a Zionist Congress. Reich spoke of the new challenge that he and American Zionism had to take on, saying, “It’s easier to fight anti-Semitism than to fight the problems of the Jewish family.”

In October the Jewish Agency Assembly meeting in Jerusalem pitted the Zionists of Israel and the Diaspora against the primarily American fund-raisers. Convinced
that the agency’s operation was hampered by bureaucratic duplication and partisan political patronage, the fund-raisers sought to save some $700,000 a year by eliminating several department chairmanships and having these departments run by the professionals already on staff. This aroused the ire of the Zionists, who charged that the wealthy fund-raisers were seeking to wrest control of Zionism from the broad mass of volunteers who constituted the rank and file of the Zionist movement in the Diaspora. A full-scale confrontation over the issue was avoided when both sides agreed to maintain the status quo pending further study.

**The Pollard Case Continued**

With a federal appeals court due to rule on Jonathan Pollard’s appeal of his life sentence for passing classified information to Israel, the campaign to secure his release picked up steam. Pollard’s supporters claimed that government prosecutors, in demanding the harshest possible sentence, had violated an agreement not to do so in return for a guilty plea. And the harsh prison term for Pollard, contrasted to shorter sentences meted out to others who spied for friendly countries, aroused suspicion that anti-Semitism might have played a role.

Emanating originally from the grassroots Jewish community rather than from Jewish organizations, the pro-Pollard movement had by early 1992 gained the support of several rabbinic bodies and other Jewish institutions. In February the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America became the first member organization of the Conference of Presidents to call for Pollard’s release. The major Jewish community-relations organizations, professing sympathy for Pollard’s personal plight but unconvinced that he was the victim of anti-Semitism, declined to get involved. Seventy-eight prominent American Jews and organizations did sign on to a friend-of-the-court brief for Pollard. Leading the campaign was Seymour Reich, immediate past president of the Conference of Presidents, who charged that “Pollard got a raw deal” and announced that “enough is enough.”

On March 22, a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia turned down Pollard’s appeal 2 to 1. Pollard’s supporters expressed bitterness. Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, who assisted in the preparation of Pollard’s case, claimed that, had the organized Jewish community mobilized behind Pollard, the decision might have gone the other way. And Reich went so far as to charge that the mainstream Jewish groups had discouraged Christian leaders from speaking up for Pollard. NJCRAC, the umbrella organization reflecting the views of the community-relations organizations, still held back from endorsing Pollard’s release. After the appeals-court ruling it issued a press release backing “full, open, and fair hearings, before appropriate tribunals, on the legitimate questions that have arisen in this case. We are aware that the judicial process has not run its course in this matter. We are encouraged that the process may still go forward, and we hope that following a review of the record, the U.S. Supreme Court will grant certiorari and accept this case for adjudication.”
Pollard's family and supporters organized events across the country to mobilize public opinion in favor of his release. They garnered an important ally in Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, who began speaking out for Pollard's release "only on humanitarian grounds" after an April 7 visit to his prison cell. A key aspect of the strategy to help Pollard was the involvement of prominent non-Jews, thereby making it less a purely Jewish issue and more a question of miscarriage of justice. Thus, a mass rally on the Upper East Side of Manhattan on June 22 that attracted 2,000 people featured addresses by Wiesel and the prominent Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson. At the event, Seymour Reich publicly castigated the major Jewish community-relations organizations for their failure to participate.

Despite the public campaign to free Pollard, on October 13 the Supreme Court declined to hear the appeal. The only hope now was a presidential pardon. And since President Bush was in the final weeks of a desperate effort to win reelection, there was speculation that the Bush campaign might favor such a pardon as a means to demonstrate the president's compassion and his sympathy with the Jewish community. On October 23, the New York Times published a full-page ad calling for Pollard's release, signed by 575 rabbis and 65 rabbinic organizations. Yet no pardon was forthcoming before the election.

After election day, when Bush was defeated by Bill Clinton, Pollard's champions asked both the outgoing and the incoming presidents for a pardon. Bush's December pardon of former secretary of defense Caspar Weinberger for withholding information from Congress added further impetus to their efforts. After all, it was none other than Weinberger who had asked the trial judge to treat Pollard severely on the grounds that the spy had caused incalculable harm to the nation. But 1992 ended with Pollard still in jail, with no prospect of freedom any time soon.

**Jewish Continuity**

The findings of the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey continued to vex American Jews. The news that over 50 percent of young Jews were marrying out of the faith, and that relatively few of the offspring of such marriages were raised as Jews, generated wide-ranging and sometimes acrimonious debate—and considerable coverage in the general and Jewish media—about strategies to strengthen American Jewish identity and thereby secure the Jewish future.

Writing in *Moment* magazine (August), Barry Kosmin, the demographer who led the team that conducted the survey, put the findings into historical perspective: "In a society where religion is an individual attribute, and more Jews regard themselves as members of a cultural group (72 percent) than as members of a religious group (47 percent), the boundaries of the Jewish population have become permeable." He compared the situation to the pre-Christian Roman Empire, with its "free marketplace of religious ideas" and the relative freedom of Jews to live their lives as they saw fit. Kosmin pointed to one optimistic finding of his survey, that over 70 percent of American Jews said that being Jewish was important in their lives. But he offered
no suggestion as to how that vague sentiment might be actualized, how the Jewish community could reach "some of America's most sophisticated citizens and one of its most attractive consumer markets."

A front-page story in the New York Times (October 18) by religion editor Peter Steinfels focused on the threat that intermarriage posed to Jewish survival and the efforts of the Jewish community to reach out to intermarried couples. Reform congregations, noted Steinfels, had long been committed to such inclusionary activities, and most of the almost 600 programs around the country geared to intermarrieds were under Reform auspices. The only question remaining, for Reform, was one of degree: to what extent should non-Jewish spouses of Jews participate in Jewish religious life? "Can non-Jewish parents recite blessings or honor the Torah during a child's bar or bat mitzvah? Can non-Jews hold synagogue offices or vote on important issues?" were among the specific issues they raised.

Steinfels also cited the opinions of the skeptics. Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice-president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, challenged the proponents of programs for the intermarried, asking, "Where are the great successes of outreach after more than a decade?" Dr. Steven Bayme, director of the American Jewish Committee's Jewish communal affairs department, decried the tendency to accept the fact of intermarriage as an inevitable aspect of living in an open society. He suggested that if the opposition to intermarriage collapsed totally, the rate of such marriages would soar beyond 90 percent. Though endorsing carefully targeted programs to intermarried families that showed some interest in Jewishness, both Bayme and Epstein rejected the participation of non-Jews in the synagogue.

During the year, a number of new studies of the American Jewish community provided more reasons for concern besides the narrow issue of intermarriage. Two of these were surveys published by the American Jewish Committee. Organizational Affiliation of American Jews: A Research Report, which surveyed the affiliation patterns of a national sample of 1,114 Jews, found that although 70 percent were affiliated in some way with the Jewish community, the Jewish connection had little effect on their everyday lives: the majority did no volunteer work, attended no meetings, and contributed little money. Jewish affiliation, then, could be regarded as wide but rather shallow. The High Cost of Jewish Living, which analyzed the expenses incurred in living a Jewish life in the Philadelphia area, suggested that dues for synagogues and Jewish community centers and the fees for Jewish schools and summer camps were so high as to discourage affiliation. The report concluded by asking, "Is living Jewishly beyond the reach of a significant segment of American Jewry? Has exclusion because of cost led to alienation from the Jewish community and Jewish causes?" The response of leaders in other communities to the study indicated that the problem was not unique to Philadelphia.

A demographic study of the nation's most important Jewish community provided some cause for concern: New York City Jewry was slowly shrinking. Considered the most solidly Jewish metropolis in the nation, with the highest levels of Jewish identification and the lowest intermarriage rate, New York Jewry was nevertheless
declining numerically. A population study conducted by the New York UJA-Federation showed a loss of 222,300 Jews since 1981, 13.5 percent of the Jewish population. Although this outflow was part of a larger population movement from the city—in which the rate of Jewish exodus was actually lower than that of other non-Hispanic whites—communal leaders took it seriously. The UJA-Federation convened a high-level strategic planning group to study the implications of the data for programming and fund-raising.

Concern about fund-raising was widespread throughout the Jewish community because of the new complexities posed by demographic changes. For some years it had been clear that wealthy Jews, not as intensely committed to Jewish causes as their counterparts in earlier generations, were giving more to nonsectarian causes than to Jewish philanthropies. This long-term trend, combined with the lingering economic recession, cut into the fund-raising of federations and other Jewish charities in 1992. Perhaps the hardest-hit community was Los Angeles, where severe cuts had to be made in allocations, and staff members of communal agencies—professional and well as clerical—were let go. Other communities, while not as desperate, also sought ways to cut costs. In this climate of fiscal stringency, the Forward (November 13) caused a stir of indignation by publishing the six-figure salaries—obtained from publicly available IRS filings—of the executive heads of ten major Jewish organizations.

Prof. Gary Tobin of Brandeis University, in a study commissioned by UJA, found that the national UJA-Federation system, though raising more money than ever before—indeed, as it turned out, more than any other American charity—was getting a steadily declining percentage of the Jewish philanthropic dollar. “There’s now more money being raised from Jews by non-Jewish causes,” he said, “and we must stop it.” Tobin urged federations to hire more fund-raising staff, give donors a heavier dose of “stroking,” and insist on higher levels of giving from those who could afford it.

Prof. Gerald Bubis—director of the School of Jewish Communal Service of the Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles—asserted in Moment magazine (December) that the fund-raising problem went far deeper. “Jewish philanthropy is in trouble,” he wrote, “and the worst is yet to come.” While the American Jewish community still placed Israel at the center of its fund-raising, he maintained, more and more American Jews had little or no emotional attachment to the Jewish state. Accompanying Bubis’s article were dramatic charts providing graphic evidence for his assertions. True enough, giving over the 1971–1991 period had climbed steadily upward. But when adjusted for inflation, there was actually a decline, if special campaigns like Operation Exodus were not included. And what of the future? Bubis noted that the few super-rich philanthropists devoted to the Jewish community were dying off, and that their successors were professionals, who, by the nature of their income, tend to give considerably less than the self-employed businessmen who were the mainstays of Jewish philanthropy in the past. Bubis warned that without creative new ideas for raising money, “there may well be a massive retrenchment of services when they are needed as never before.”
Making Jews More Jewish

Both those seeking chiefly to minimize the incidence of intermarriage and those seeking to improve the chances that intermarrying Jews would still identify as Jews and give to Jewish causes were agreed on one premise: that ways must be found to strengthen the Jewish identification of young people before marriage. Their search for strategies to maximize the prospects for Jewish continuity focused first on Jewish education.

From the teachers' standpoint, Jewish education was unlikely to improve unless the community put more resources into it. The annual conference of the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, held in August, heard bitter complaints of low salaries, few if any health plans or pensions, the consequent need to juggle two or even more jobs to make ends meet, and the lack of respect from students who knew that their teachers were not valued in the community.

Whether more money alone, in the absence of new approaches to using it, was likely to solve the problem, was questionable. Morton Mandel, a philanthropist eager to help raise the quality of Jewish education, had funded a 1990 study of American Jewish education, out of which came the Council for Initiatives in Jewish Education. The council had announced that in 1992 it would choose three "lead" communities to serve as models for others to follow. These communities would receive professional assistance from the Council of Jewish Federations, the Jewish Community Centers Association of North America, and the Jewish Educational Service of North America in formulating programs and seeking grants from foundations for innovative projects that might be replicated in other cities. On August 25, Atlanta, Baltimore, and Milwaukee were declared the winners.

Jewish educators were showing increased interest in the concept of "family education," that is, educating parents and children together as a unit, using Shabbat dinners, holiday activities, social events, and other functions to draw entire families into participation in Jewish religious and communal life. While most such initiatives targeted unaffiliated families, Torah Umesorah, a major national association of Orthodox Jewish day schools, adopted a similar parent-education program to deal with the new phenomenon of large numbers of unobservant and Jewishly uneducated parents sending their children to day schools.

Jewish life on the college campus also came in for scrutiny from those worried about Jewish continuity, as Jewish communal leaders saw from the examples of their own children and grandchildren the frequent erosion of Jewishness during the college years. While much had been written about anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist incidents on the campus, relatively little had been said about the loss of Jewish identity there. In early May, Hillel, the national Jewish student organization, discussed the problem at its National Leadership Conference in Washington. A task force set up to improve Hillel's effectiveness suggested broadening its function beyond the provision of religious services to encompass cultural and ethnic functions, which might draw Jewish students with no interest in synagogue services. Some worried, however, that turning Hillel into the equivalent of a black or His-
panic student organization could be perceived as giving a Jewish imprimatur to the multiculturalist agenda. Meanwhile, Hillel had to adjust to the drastic curtailment of funding from its parent organization, the financially strapped B'naï B'rith. It hoped to compensate by raising funds from federations to maintain and even enhance programming at colleges located in their areas, while shutting down chapters that were no longer viable.

Another result of the search for ways to inspire young Jews was the emergence in 1992 of a new genre of Jewish literature, the autobiographical essay setting forth what being Jewish means to the writer. Such statements demonstrate, first, the variety of ways in which people of different ages, backgrounds, and outlooks identify with their Jewishness, and second, the fact that one can live a fulfilling, successful life as part of American society without sacrificing Jewish identity. It is assumed that the reader—a college student, young adult, or simply an unaffiliated Jew—will identify with one or another of the essay writers as a Jewish role model and be inspired to live a more Jewish life.

Thus, the cover story of the December 1992 issue of *Moment* magazine was “Why Be Jewish?” It included accounts of the personal Jewish odysseys of nine famous and not-so-famous Jews, running the gamut from sociologist Samuel Heilman’s description of his Judaism as a “recurrent personal victory over oblivion,” to theologian Irving Greenberg’s assertion that Judaism “‘discovered’ and taught the world about the God behind nature, the author of the redemption plan,” to writer Hillel Halkin’s confessed inability to articulate a reason to be Jewish and his warning that “when you need reasons, you’re in trouble.”

The American Jewish Committee used the autobiographical approach for a series of advertisements on the op-ed page of the *New York Times* under the heading “What Being Jewish Means to Me.” The first, appearing on September 27, the eve of Rosh Hashanah, featured a photo of Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel along with a statement by him articulating the synthesis of Jewish particularism and general humanitarian concern that characterizes Judaism. “The mission of the Jewish people has never been to make the world more Jewish,” noted Wiesel, “but to make it more human.” The second AJCommittee ad appeared on December 6. In it, U.S. senator Joseph I. Lieberman of Connecticut, an observant Jew, explained how prayer, religious ritual, and an ethnic culture helped sustain him as he worked on Capitol Hill. Both ads, which urged readers to contact the committee for further information about Jewish life, elicited numerous letters and phone calls.

In this atmosphere of heightened anxiety over Jewish continuity, it came as no surprise that the 1992 General Assembly (GA) of the Council of Jewish Federations (CJF)—held in New York City, November 10-15—devoted a full day to the problem. Since the GA, which annually attracts around 3,000 Jewish communal volunteers and professionals, is the closest thing to a North American Jewish “parliament,” its agenda is generally an accurate barometer of the mood of the community.

“A full day on a single theme is very rare for a General Assembly,” noted CJF president Charles Goodman. “But Jewish identity and continuity is an issue of such
magnitude for the future of the North American Jewish community that it was clearly necessary... to provide an opportunity for a variety of approaches and for wide-ranging discussions." This was the first time that the General Assembly had ever been held in New York, and the planners took the availability of local talent into consideration when planning the program. After a November 12 morning plenary on "Building Renewed Jewish Communities and New Jewish Meaning: An Historic Challenge for the Federation Movement," the rest of the day was devoted to five forums, and then small-group dialogues and study sessions, on aspects of Jewish identity, led by rabbis and Judaic scholars from the New York area.

The major address at the plenary was delivered by Shoshana Cardin, the outgoing chairwoman of both the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the National Conference on Soviet Jewry. Coming as she did from the world of Jewish political activism, her expressed misgivings about overemphasis on such matters had a powerful impact. Cardin suggested that the organized Jewish community shift its emphasis to helping Jews identify as Jews. She challenged the delegates: "You in this room, your leaders, your peers, your co-workers, your colleagues, have agreed that this is in fact the priority." She urged federations to join forces with synagogues to implement Jewish outreach programs so that every Jew will "understand what it is to be Jewish" and no one "who defines himself or herself as a Jew" will feel excluded.

Perhaps Cardin's most controversial point was her proposal that Jewish knowledge be one of the criteria for the selection of Jewish leaders, in addition to organizational and financial know-how. Adding credibility to her argument was the knowledge that Cardin herself had recently accepted the chairmanship of CLAL, the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership, an organization dedicated to educating Jewish communal leaders Jewishly through the study of classic Jewish texts and analysis of their relevance to current concerns in the community.

This General Assembly's emphasis on Jewish continuity struck a positive chord among the participants, many of whom enjoyed the small-group Jewish study sessions so much that additional ones were improvised on the spot throughout the week. And President Chaim Herzog of Israel, addressing a plenary session at Radio City Music Hall, reinforced the message when he declared that Jewish education was the top priority for both Israeli and Diaspora Jews. "Your future and our future depends on it," he said. Yet despite the high level of enthusiasm, there were few concrete proposals for enhancing Jewish identification, a fact suggesting to some observers that the challenge of transmitting Jewish values and spirituality might not be amenable to the kinds of organizational and fund-raising strategies used so effectively by the Jewish community for political and philanthropic ends.

The one specific programmatic suggestion that drew considerable interest was the encouragement of trips to Israel by young Jews. Charles Bronfman described to the GA the work of his CRB Foundation in this area. After five years of research that cost $1.5 million, Bronfman could assert that "the Israel experience holds great promise for heightening awareness, strengthening identity, and making a significant
contribution to contemporary Jewish life, education, and Jewish continuity." Hoping to increase the number of North American Jewish teenagers who visit Israel from the current 8,000 a year to at least 50,000 by the end of the decade, the foundation, the United Jewish Appeal, and the Council of Jewish Federations had agreed to a pilot program providing grants to 12 local communities to help pay for the trips, as well as for advertising and new staff positions to run the programs, on condition that each local community put up three dollars for every one dollar it received in grants. Peter Geffen, the CRB Foundation official in charge of Israel programs, defined the aim clearly: to make a trip to Israel "a basic tenet of being a young Jewish person in this country."

A change in the CJF bylaws ensured that whatever steps it might eventually take to enhance Jewish continuity or deal with any other matter would reflect a broad consensus of the American Jewish leadership. Whereas CJF was previously run by a board of directors not clearly accountable to any specific constituency, the new system provided for a board of delegates representing each of the federations, with membership weighted according to the size of the community and its campaign. Observers suggested that the CJF was now the closest thing to a democratic national Jewish congress that American Jewry had ever had.

**Homosexuals in Jewish Life**

The issue of gay rights, so emotional and divisive in the general society, continued to stir debate in the Jewish community as well.

On January 19, the board of directors of the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot adopted a statement, "Homosexuality and Judaism: The Reconstructionist Position," that argued for an end to all distinctions between heterosexuals and homosexuals in Jewish life. This went beyond the Reform movement's position, which accepted homosexuals for the rabbinate while affirming the heterosexual ideal. Explaining the biblical abhorrence of homosexuality as a product of faulty premodern science, the Reconstructionist report asserted, instead, the contemporary idea that "homosexuality is a fundamental constituent of somebody's psychological makeup, not something that can be changed, not a segmented part of their life." Therefore, the Reconstructionists asserted, holiness can inhere in a same-sex relationship, just as it can between a man and a woman, and gays and lesbians, not just straights, can contribute to the strength of the Jewish family. The Reconstructionists also produced a workbook for synagogue programming that would "encourage gay and lesbian Jews to celebrate their unique life-cycle events" and introduce "the stories of gay and lesbian Jews into our people's history."

The Conservative movement was still plagued by this issue in 1992, caught in the tension between halakhic proscription and openness to change and unable to take any step beyond espousing "civil equality" for gays. As one rabbi put it, this was "the most emotion-laden issue" ever to come up, "even more so than the ordination of women." On the one hand, traditionalist forces, led by Rabbi Joel Roth, professor
of Talmud at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and incoming dean of its rabbinical school, maintained that the biblical condemnation of homosexuality remained in place no matter what modern science might say, and that the only way for gays to avoid sin was celibacy. On the other hand, members of a gay club at the seminary, as well as some gay rabbis and sympathizers, proclaimed their opposition by wearing lapel pins on which one triangle of a Jewish star was pink, the color of the badges homosexuals were forced to wear by the Nazis. The homosexual students—who would not have been accepted as students had they revealed their sexual orientation when applying for admission—complained that pressure to conform was so intense at JTS that some of them dated members of the opposite sex so as to avoid detection, and that two gays had been made so uncomfortable they left the school.

In March, a majority (13 out of 23) of the Rabbinical Assembly’s Committee on Law and Standards, which sets Conservative religious policy, voted to back Rabbi Roth’s reassertion of the traditional position. While homosexuals would be welcomed to participate in synagogues, schools, camps, and youth groups affiliated with the movement, no openly gay applicant would be admitted to the rabbinical or cantorial schools, and Conservative rabbis were prohibited from conducting “commitment ceremonies” for gay and lesbian couples. It was left up to individual rabbis to decide whether to hire homosexuals as teachers and youth leaders, and whether to grant them lay leadership positions and synagogue honors.

While a proposal to equalize the status of homosexuals in the movement received only the one vote of its sponsor on the committee, a third viewpoint, articulated by Rabbi Elliot Dorff, provost of the seminary’s University of Judaism in Los Angeles, garnered eight votes, and thereby, according to the rules of the Committee on Law and Standards, was also considered “adopted.” Dorff cited recent scientific evidence that homosexuality is an inborn trait and suggested that this takes it outside the biblical category of “abomination.” His plan called for maintaining the status quo pending further study of the broad issue of human sexuality by a new committee that reflected a wider spectrum of the movement’s constituency: JTS, the lay people active in the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, and the pulpit rabbis who constitute the Rabbinical Assembly.

Immediately, the United Synagogue executive vice-president, reflecting the predominant lay view that there were far more important issues facing the Conservative movement, and the chancellor of JTS, deploiring the blurring of lines between Conservative and Reform Judaism caused by the failure to articulate a single, unequivocal traditionalist stance, announced that their institutions would not participate. The supporters of the Dorff position insisted nevertheless that they would proceed with their new committee. Rabbi Gordon Tucker, leaving his post as dean of the JTS Rabbinical School, compared those unwilling to join in the search for new knowledge about sexuality to Galileo’s contemporaries who refused to look through his telescope. Eleven faculty members at JTS issued a public letter supporting the Dorff plan and denying that the accession of Joel Roth as dean of the rabbinical school signaled that only the traditionalist position was welcome at the
institution. Dorff, meanwhile, was delighted that his view had attained official recognition. "There is now a teshuvah (rabbinical response) on the books," he said, "that says engaging in homosexual acts is not toeva (abomination)."

The May convention of the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) made clear that, on the whole, Conservative rabbis were more open to gay rights than the movement's academicians or laity. The rabbis voted unanimously to implement the special committee suggested in the Dorff proposal. The RA also voted 64-50 to place rabbis in any congregation that requests one, "without consideration of the sexual orientation of its members," a matter that had never before been addressed officially by the movement. However, unwilling to assert authority on halakhic issues not within its purview, the RA appended a clause to the resolution declaring the decision void should the Committee on Law and Standards decide that it breached Jewish law.

The decision to allow placement of Conservative rabbis in predominantly gay synagogues came a bit too late for Congregation Beth Simchat Torah in New York City, whose 1,100 members made it the largest gay synagogue in the country. In March the synagogue chose Sharon Kleinbaum from among over 50 applicants as its first rabbi. An open lesbian, Kleinbaum was a graduate of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and a member of the Reform movement's Central Conference of American Rabbis. She responded to the considerable media attention that her appointment attracted—including an article and photo in the New York Times (March 29)—by declaring: "I am not a rabbi for any particular sexual orientation. I am a rabbi." She was officially installed in September.

The Orthodox response was blunt. Rabbi Binyamin Walfish, executive vice-president of the Rabbinical Council of America, condemned "the so-called rabbi of this so-called synagogue." Noting that Orthodoxy had room for homosexuals so long as "they stay in the closet," Walfish compared a gay synagogue to one established by "pork-eaters." And when the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council adopted a statement condemning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (UOJCA) abstained. Explaining that it opposed discrimination, the Orthodox group pointed out that Jewish law prohibited homosexual activity, "and we cannot join in a statement that could be misinterpreted to imply otherwise." Had the NJCRAC declaration not included support for an exemption for religious institutions, the Orthodox union would have exercised its veto and scuttled the decision.

**Denominational Developments**

**ORTHODOX JUDAISM**

As the Jewish movement least touched—though hardly unaffected—by the demographic ravages plaguing the rest of American Jewry, Orthodoxy spent much of its energy on the internal battle between its modern and its more traditionalist wings.
Dr. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University (YU), the flagship institute of modern Orthodoxy, declared at the national convention of the Rabbinical Council of America that the “entrenchment and fortress psychology” of the sectarian Orthodox “is a sign of weakness.” Declaring that only moderate Orthodoxy could serve as a bridge between the world of tradition and the other branches of Judaism, Lamm urged his audience not to allow themselves to be intimidated by the right. Ironically, it was Dr. Lamm who found himself accused by those in his own ideological camp of aiding and abetting the right.

At the beginning of 1992, the fate of Yeshiva University’s Bernard Revel Graduate School was still unclear. The only Orthodox-sponsored coed graduate school of Jewish studies in the United States, Revel was ordered in 1991 to end its degree-granting programs, which would be replaced by courses in “Jewish thought” that would lead to a certificate rather than a diploma. Though President Lamm, who made the decision, cited financial factors for the change, students, alumni, and many others in the modern Orthodox community argued that the loss of this recognized school, which utilized modern critical modes of scholarship, would signal a victory for sectarian Orthodoxy, which had always insisted on traditional, uncritical educational methodology and separate education for men and women. But peaceful student sit-ins and wide publicity brought results. According to Lamm, the outcry in opposition to the change brought forward donors willing to support the school, and now, for the first time, Revel would have its own board of directors to look after its fiscal health.

The next intra-Orthodox confrontation took place within the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), and this time the sectarians won. In 1991 an Orthodox “Roundtable” under the aegis of the RCA had suggested halakhically acceptable ways to reach out to intermarried Jews. In May 1992, a letter protesting the work of the roundtable was circulated, signed by 14 prominent talmudists at Yeshiva University. “We declare,” the letter concluded, “that intermarriage is anathema to the Jewish community and those who marry outside the faith have separated themselves from Hashem (God) and his people.” By September the pressure from the right was so great that the RCA issued a press release calling it “regretful” that the roundtable document, intended only for “internal discussion,” had created the impression that there had been any change in the organization’s opposition to “any generalized notion of alternative reactions in dealing with intermarriages. Any public impression of either substance or mood given by the paper that intermarriage is somehow mitigated in our time and place is unequivocally repudiated.”

Significant new research by Prof. Samuel Heilman, sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, suggested that those forces within Orthodoxy least willing to seek accommodation with the non-Orthodox were likely to grow with time. Comparing the attitudes of rabbis with those of rabbinical students, Heilman found that the students—the rabbis of the future—were far more hard-line in their attitudes toward the other denominations than those already in the pulpit. And in a newspaper article (Baltimore Jewish Times, October 2, 1992), Heilman theorized about the
sociological dynamic involved. As increasing numbers of the moderate Orthodox have entered the professions, he suggested, Jewish education has been taken over largely—by default—by the most insular elements of Orthodoxy, those who shun the outside world. Many of the children of the modernists, exposed to such educational influences, either turn to the right themselves, or else, feeling alienated, leave Orthodoxy completely, claimed Heilman.

LUBAVITCH MESSIANISM

On March 3, Chabad-Lubavitch Hassidim, who fervently believe in the imminent coming of the Messiah—who could very well be, they feel, the Lubavitcher Rebbe himself, Menachem Mendel Schneerson—were stunned by the news that their 89-year-old leader had suffered a stroke that paralyzed the right side of his body. His public appearances ceased as doctors treated him in his Crown Heights, Brooklyn, headquarters. Since the childless rabbi had apparently made no plans for the succession, there was much speculation about what would happen to the movement with his passing. His own followers, who prayed fervently for his recovery, refused to speculate, and, when pressed, suggested that the question was meaningless, since the Messiah was almost here. On May 19, the Rebbe was taken out-of-doors in a wheelchair for the first time since the stroke. His assistants said that he was able to read his mail but could not yet dictate replies.

Meanwhile, some Lubavitch leaders—sensing perhaps that, with an incapacitated leader and no successor, the movement had to demonstrate its continuing vitality—escalated the public messianic campaign. Glossy literature, full-page newspaper ads, billboards, subway posters, and loudspeakers on caravans of buses urged people to help the Rebbe get well and to bring the Messiah by studying Torah, giving charity, and performing good deeds. The great man's illness, they argued, was but a test of faith. Cooler heads among the Lubavitch leaders, fearful that this campaign could discredit the movement and hurt fund-raising, tried to calm things down. By April, two factions had coalesced: the radicals, led by Rabbi Shmuel Butman, openly stated that the Rebbe was the Messiah; the moderates, led by Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, would go no further than the position that the world must be made ready for the Messiah's arrival.

With the coming of fall, speculation centered on whether Rabbi Schneerson would be well enough to attend High Holy Day services. The faithful were overjoyed to see him appear—for an hour the first day of Rosh Hashanah and 90 minutes the second day—on a specially constructed balcony above the main Lubavitch synagogue. On Yom Kippur and each day of Sukkot, he made 90-minute appearances, and on the last two days of Sukkot his followers greeted him by singing "King Messiah." From then on, the song became a regular feature of Lubavitch gatherings whenever Rabbi Schneerson was seen. Rumors spread that the Rebbe had been seen making hand motions when he heard the song, which was interpreted by many as a sign that he was accepting the messianic mantle. Rabbi Krinsky and other moderates denied that it meant anything.
The role of gays and lesbians was not the only matter of concern for the Conservative movement in 1992. In June, severe financial constraints induced the Jewish Theological Seminary to stop funding over a third of the budget of the Masorti movement, the Israeli branch of Conservative Judaism. Masorti would now have to raise these funds directly in the United States. And in October, the Masorti-Conservative relationship underwent a different kind of strain when the Masorti Halakhah Committee declared that Conservative Jews in Israel may not ride to synagogue on the Sabbath—unlike American Conservative Jews, who had been allowed to ride to the synagogue by a ruling in 1950. The Masorti rabbis explained that, unlike the case in suburban America, very few Israelis do not live within walking distance of a synagogue. And as for Masorti Jews who do not live near Masorti congregations and do not want to patronize Orthodox synagogues, the committee went on, “people for whom Shabbat observance is important will move to another home in order to live close to the synagogue of their choice.” “Our job is not to justify lack of observance by our constituents,” declared Rabbi David Golinkin, chairman of the Halakhah Committee in Israel. This was the first halakhic dispute ever between American and Israeli Conservative authorities, and it was not even clear whether the Israelis had the right to go against the American precedent.

The impulse “not to justify lack of observance” was felt in American Conservative Judaism as well. In a hard-hitting address to the board of directors of the United Synagogue, Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the executive director, put the Conservative synagogues on notice that they could be expelled for not adhering to the standards of the movement. He specified those derelictions that could lead to ouster: not having a religious school that requires attendance six hours a week for five years prior to bar/bat mitzvah, accepting non-Jews as members, recognizing children of non-Jewish mothers as Jews, and public congregational desecration of the Sabbath. “We stand for something,” Epstein insisted, “and we have to become more committed to emphasizing that we do.”

One reason for the frustration of people like Epstein was the fact that many of the most observant Conservative Jews, angered at the decision to ordain women, had formed their own organization in 1983, which officially broke with the Conservative movement in 1990, and, calling itself the Union for Traditional Judaism (UTJ), set up the Institute of Traditional Judaism to train rabbis. In 1992 the UTJ—made up of 8,000 families and 350 rabbis—broadened its scope by incorporating the Fellowship of Traditional Orthodox Rabbis, an organization of between 50 and 100 modern Orthodox rabbis unhappy with the growing ascendancy of the Orthodox right wing. Rabbi Ronald Price, the UTJ executive vice-president, declared: “Through this agreement we have taken a major step toward unifying the traditional halakhic community and marshaling the resources available therein, to teach open-minded observant Judaism to the entire Jewish community.”
REFORM JUDAISM

The Reform movement in 1992 was primarily concerned with how to cope with the high intermarriage rate. Reform temples in many communities had considerable numbers of intermarried families as members, and the movement had a multi-pronged strategy to deal with the phenomenon. In February the Commission on Reform Jewish Outreach issued three publications on aspects of intermarriage. One, on outreach, stressed the importance of inculcating a sense of Jewish peoplehood among converts and children of intermarriage, who often conceive of Judaism only as a matter of faith. The second publication, on the role of the non-Jew in the synagogue, argued for the inclusion of non-Jewish spouses of Jews, so as to “draw them closer to us and involve them in Jewish life.” The third, on how to talk to adolescents about interdating and intermarriage, explained how to get teenagers to examine their own Jewish identity and thus “increase the likelihood that they will be advocates for Judaism in their lives.”

Intermarriage was also the main theme of the annual convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) in April. Keynote speaker Steven Bayme, director of Jewish communal affairs for the American Jewish Committee, challenged the Reform rabbis to dispel the image of Reform as “weak, watered-down” Judaism by speaking out against intermarriage and insisting on conversion of the non-Jewish spouse. Echoing Bayme, Rabbi Walter Jacob, the CCAR president, called for clear boundaries separating Jews from non-Jews. “Should a non-Jew be a member of a congregation?” he asked, and provided his own answer: “No.”

RECONSTRUCTIONIST JUDAISM

The major contribution to Jewish theology in 1992 came from the Reconstructionist movement. Rabbi Arthur Green’s Seek My Face, Speak My Name was the first serious attempt to arrive at a contemporary understanding of Judaism based not on rationalism, ethics, or Halakhah, but on the Jewish mystical tradition. Rabbi Green, who was serving as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College when he wrote the book, asserted that all the “events” recorded in the Bible were “metaphors for a truth whose depth reaches far beyond them.” He argued for a “nondualistic” worldview that would eliminate the traditional distinction between the material and the divine: “‘God’ and ‘world,’” wrote Green, “are different modes of the only Being there is.” He denied that God had any plan for the world or that God acted in history. Rather, God is experienced in “human intimacy,” care for the environment, and a respect for life that mandates vegetarianism. Revelation does not come from on high, but, like an artist’s inspiration, emerges from within the human soul. Green wrote: “I do not know a God who ‘commands’ specific religious behavior or forms of worship.” In his view, the messiah will be “the human self most fully open to the One, perhaps the human self that stands at the very far edge of transcending what we understand as ‘human’ altogether. . . .”
Although Green's views were his own, not those of the movement, they reflected a growing interest in mysticism in recent years, which coexisted, not always comfortably, with the naturalism and rationalism of Mordecai Kaplan, the movement's founder.

LAWRENCE GROSSMAN