Reorienting American Liberal Judaism for the Twentieth Century: Stephen S. Wise and the Early Years of the Jewish Institute of Religion

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REORIENTING AMERICAN LIBERAL JUDAISM
FOR THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
STEPHEN S. WISE AND THE EARLY YEARS OF THE
JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION

by

SHIRLEY IDELSON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2014
This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in History in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Reorienting American Liberal Judaism for the Twentieth Century:
Stephen S. Wise and the Early Years of the Jewish Institute of Religion
by Shirley Idelson

Advisor: Robert M. Seltzer

This study explores how Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and supporters from the Free Synagogue and elsewhere sought to reorient American liberal Judaism by establishing the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) in the early 1920s. They believed the leaders of the Reform movement at that time were reluctant to relinquish an outmoded approach that had lost relevance in light of a new demographic reality whereby over a million Eastern European Jews now living in New York were becoming the dominant presence in American Jewish life. The JIR founders attributed this to Reform’s having become insular, unresponsive to pressing social issues, overly concerned with respectability, and spiritually lifeless. Wise and his circle advanced a vision for liberal Judaism they considered to be more modern and American, more liberal and more deeply Jewish.

While they attempted to advance their vision for liberal Judaism on many fronts, they believed that critical to the task was creating a New York-based scholarly center capable of training a new kind of rabbi. This work describes the key individuals in addition to Wise who created the Institute, the international scholars who formed the first faculty, and the debates that ensued and obstacles encountered as the institution took shape.

From the outset, the founders determined that JIR would differ from existing schools
in significant ways. For example, prioritizing the “oneness of Israel,” JIR would include faculty and students representing a broad spectrum of belief, from Orthodox to non-Orthodox, and Zionist to non-Zionist. All students would enter with a bachelor’s degree, and in addition to studying traditional fields like Bible, history and Talmud, they would study modern Hebrew, social service and contemporary trends in Jewish education. In addition, through fieldwork, students would utilize the metropolitan area as a laboratory for learning how to serve American Jewry as inspiring, socially-engaged rabbis.

With these and other innovations, Wise and the founders believed JIR would point twentieth-century liberal Judaism in new directions. Though they did not succeed in all they set out to achieve, many aspects of the reorientation of American Jewish religious life they pursued remain with us today.
Acknowledgments

While working on this dissertation, I have lived in overlapping worlds of batei midrash, houses of study, and I am indebted to the many teachers from whom I have been privileged to learn. At the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, Robert Seltzer, my advisor, could not have been more kind while ever challenging me to raise the bar and sharpen my argument. I am grateful to my dissertation committee: Gerald Markowitz, my second reader, and Kathleen McCarthy, both of whom have guided me since my first year at the Graduate Center; Stephan Brumberg, who inspired me with his wisdom and wonderful spirit; and Mark Raider, who shared his knowledge of Stephen S. Wise and the American Zionist movement through many breakfast meetings in Cincinnati and New York, and who went the extra mile by generously traveling to New York in order to be present at my defense. I am also indebted to Thomas Kessner for his instruction in the Dissertation Seminar, and to Jeffrey Gurock for his participation on my orals committee, and his ongoing encouragement. The Graduate Center benefits from a diverse and strong student body, and I was fortunate to share the doctoral student path together with Gwynneth Malin, Thomas Hafer, Stan Mervis, Lauren Santangelo and Brian Smollett, who provided much-needed support and collegiality.

At Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion’s New York School, where I received my ordination and now serve as Dean, I am privileged to be part of a community devoted to scholarship, professionalism, and the highest ideals of Judaism. We are the beneficiaries of Stephen S. Wise and the protagonists of the story told here, and while Wise may not recognize certain aspects of contemporary life on campus—drumming in the Chapel, say, or interactive whiteboards in the classroom—I believe the devotion and work of our
faculty and students would make him proud.

Our president, Rabbi David Ellenson, has been a true mentor for me as both a rabbi and a scholar. David pushed me to complete this dissertation and gave me every form of support I needed in order to do so. His friendship has been his greatest gift to me. Likewise, I am grateful to Rabbis Norman Cohen and Aaron Panken for their generosity from the outset, and their encouragement throughout the process. I am fortunate to work with a team of colleagues who inspire me on a daily basis, including Rabbi Renni Altman who ably stepped in during my sabbatical, and all of my colleagues on the faculty, administration and staff who participated in the endeavor by helping me think through ideas, challenging me regarding process as well as content, and offering ongoing and meaningful support. Special thanks go to our library staff who continue to unearth JIR treasures and share them with me—Yoram Bitton and Tina Weiss, as well as our former librarian, Philip Miller. In addition, I am grateful to the Eastern Region Board of Overseers, and especially our Board’s co-chairs—Stephen S. Wise would have been fortunate to work with the likes of Margie Miller and Kevin Penn.

My research quickly led me to the American Jewish Archives, which houses the Jewish Institute of Religion collection and so much more. Rabbi Gary Zola welcomed me warmly, and Kevin Proffitt could not have been more gracious in orienting me to the archival materials. I am thankful, too, to Amanda Franey and Nathan Tallman for their research assistance.

I had the good fortune of participating in the Institute for Jewish Spirituality’s sixth rabbinic cohort, and benefited from the practices taught by their remarkable faculty as I tried to balance dissertation work with my deanship. I am thankful to Rabbi Dan Alexander for remaining my wise and steadfast hevruta partner after the IJS program concluded.

Throughout my life, close friendships have sustained me. During the dissertation-
writing years, Kathryn Conroy, Debbie Sachs Gabor, Sally Gottesman, Ellen Lippmann and Joyce Lyon provided valuable support at the most personal level. My work with Ruth Levine, who provided spiritual direction (though we did not call it that), has sustained me over these many years, as well.

I reserve my deepest gratitude for Alexis Kuhr, my partner of twenty-one years, to whom this dissertation is dedicated. Alexis, you bring joy to my life every day. I could not have done this without you, and I thank you.
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INTRODUCTION

This study explores how Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and a group of ardent supporters from the Free Synagogue and elsewhere established the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR) as part of a broad effort to reorient American liberal Judaism away from its nineteenth-century antecedents toward a new and different model necessitated, they felt, by dramatic changes taking place in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Stephen S. Wise is recognized as one of the outstanding Progressive and Zionist figures in American Jewish history, and by 1920 he had already established himself among the nation’s most prominent rabbis. In the early 1920s, Wise and the other founders of JIR believed the institutions of the Reform movement, based in Cincinnati and led by a coterie of middle- and upper-class German Jews, were reluctant to relinquish an outmoded approach to liberalizing Judaism that had lost its vibrancy and relevance in light of recent political and social changes in the United States, and a new demographic reality whereby over a million Eastern European Jews now living in New York were rapidly becoming the dominant presence in American Jewish life. Many if not a majority of these first- and second-generation American Jews no longer observed an Orthodox mode, but only a minority affiliated with Reform Judaism. The JIR founders attributed this lack of engagement to Reform’s having become insular, unresponsive to the most important social issues of the day, and spiritually lifeless. In its stead, Wise and his circle of like-minded Jews advanced a different vision for liberal Judaism—one that moved in directions they considered to be more modern and American, more liberal as that term was understood in their day, and more deeply and determinedly Jewish. They recognized the ways in which a conspicuous element in Protestantism had responded to changes in American culture, and they called for modern
American Judaism to change, as well. As a member of JIR's first graduating class later recalled, they aimed to “liberalize” and “Judaise” American liberal Judaism.¹

While Wise and his allies attempted to make real their vision for liberal Judaism on many different fronts, they believed that ultimately, in order to prevail in the struggle to define the ideological and intellectual contours of twentieth-century American Jewish communal identity, they needed to establish a well-respected scholarly center capable of training rabbis. Recognizing that the foremost intellectual centers in the liberal Jewish world were the seminaries in Europe and the United States that advanced Wissenschaft des Judentums, the scientific study of Judaism, Wise set out to create a seminary in this mold but with a broader approach oriented not only to academic study but also to the professional development of a new kind of rabbi. Located on the physical premises of the Free Synagogue, in the city where the largest Jewish community in the world now resided, he hoped that JIR would reinvigorate the American rabbinate with leaders capable of revivifying American liberal Judaism and furthering a spiritual renaissance in American Jewish life.

The creation of JIR fit the historical pattern in American theological education described by James Fraser in Schooling the Preachers, wherein most American seminaries emerged not out of consensus and cooperation with older institutions, but in response to crises in understanding over the nature of ministry and belief. By the early twenties Wise already had a decades-long history of conflict with the Reform elite, and on two occasions, after publicly challenging their most powerful establishments, he had successfully launched counter-institutions to promote his own more democratic vision. In 1907 Wise rejected a call to assume the pulpit of New York's Congregation Emanu-El and, emphasizing the importance of the freedom of the pulpit, leveraged the conflict to create the Free Synagogue;

¹ Philip Bernstein, baccalaureate address at the Jewish Institute of Religion, June 5, 1942. Box 6, folder 2, Jewish Institute of Religion Records 1920-1961. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter, JIR Records). “Greater love hath no man for his people than Dr. Wise feels for Israel. No more prophetic voice has been raised in our time than that of Dr. Wise thundering against injustice. He has liberalized and at the same time Judaised liberal Judaism,” Bernstein said.
similarly, in 1918 he defied the American Jewish Committee also in part over the issue of free expression, and founded the more democratic American Jewish Congress. In both cases, in confronting an older Jewish elite, Wise put himself forward as spokesman for the laboring masses of Jewish immigrants who, if poor, nonetheless now represented potentially the most significant force in American Judaism. With the founding of JIR, he would do this once again.

To be sure, Wise shared much with Reform ideology, particularly its unmitigated rejection of *halakhic* authority.² The Free Synagogue was a dues-paying member of the Reform movement, and Wise admired the early Reformers, including Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise,³ the movement’s first successful institution builder, who in 1873 founded the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), which would become the congregational arm of Reform Judaism, and two years later, the Hebrew Union College (HUC), which would become the seminary of the Reform movement. Stephen S. Wise did not graduate from Hebrew Union College; nonetheless, on the limited continuum of American Judaism available in the early twenties, Reform offered the approach closest to his own—and perhaps for this reason, he reserved his sharpest critique for what these Cincinnati-based institutions of Reform had become. The College and Union were not responding effectively to contemporary expressions of Jewish identity and new demands on synagogue life and the rabbinate, he believed; they rejected Zionism and disregarded the Hebrew renaissance; they seemed to turn a blind eye to recent developments in American Protestant seminary education and the professionalization taking place in the Protestant ministry; and, Wise believed, they were unconscionably reluctant to come to the aid of Jews in need at home and abroad when doing so entailed overt criticism of a narrow but influential circle of American Jewish philanthropists and the institutions they funded.

² *Halakhic* authority refers to the binding nature of traditional Jewish law.
³ No relation to Stephen S. Wise.
Citing several of these concerns as his rationale, in establishing JIR Wise once again made use of conflict with the Reform establishment in order to justify the need for a new educational institution that would train rabbis to advance the kind of liberal Judaism he believed the Eastern European immigrants and their children, as well as socially conscious “uptown” Jews, could embrace. He believed many of these Jews, who may have found Conservative Judaism overly-focused on ritual but Reform decorous and off-putting, could still be attracted to synagogue life if only it were made socially relevant, personally accessible, spiritually inspiring, and reflective of the Jewish values they held dear, including political progressivism and Zionism. Who could shape this form of Judaism? Certainly not the faculty and administration of HUC or the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), Wise believed; in his view, no seminary in America trained rabbis who could inspire his followers with a liberal Judaism that affirmed their values and addressed their concerns; that was the problem, and JIR, by filling that gap and educating a new kind of rabbi—a modern, American liberal rabbi who, like Wise, addressed their political and social concerns, and advanced a Judaism in which they could see themselves—would offer the solution.

Achieving this required an innovative approach to rabbinical training and a new model that would challenge the educational, denominational and political orientation held by the leaders of the other American Jewish seminaries. From the outset, the founders determined that JIR would differ from those schools in significant ways. Most important, Wise sought to create a seminary that prioritized what he called the “oneness of Israel,” and thereby, unlike HUC and JTS, would include faculty and students who collectively spanned a broad religious and political spectrum, from Orthodox to non-Orthodox, for example, and

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The Institute, Wise hoped, would identify and attract top scholars from the United States, Europe and Palestine, and would maintain strong ties with the European seminaries as well as with leading Jewish scholars in Palestine. At the same time, by locating JIR in New York City, Wise aimed to provide opportunities for students to engage with the most complex Jewish community in the world, and to benefit from the city's universities and Jewish libraries, particularly those of the New York Public Library and JTS. The admissions requirements would be different; whereas HUC and JTS enrolled high school and college students, JIR would admit only candidates who had already earned a bachelor’s degree, in the hope that older students might be more capable of focused and advanced study, and more professionally suitable for the rabbinate. With these and other innovations, Wise believed JIR would meet the needs of twentieth-century American liberal Jewry—the broad swath of the population who embraced a non-*halakhic* approach to Jewish religious and cultural life—in ways no seminary to date had.

An in-depth history of the Jewish Institute of Religion has not yet been written. The most significant work on the subject to date is Michael A. Meyer's chapter “*Kelal Yisrael: The Jewish Institute of Religion*” in *Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: At One Hundred Years*, edited by Samuel E. Karff and published in 1976, which provides an overview of the school’s history; in addition, prior to the merger with Hebrew Union College, Edward I. Kiev, the Institute’s Chief Librarian, and John J. Tepfer, an alumnus and member of the faculty, summarized the school’s history in an article published in the *American Jewish Yearbook* in 1948. While Jack Wertheimer has edited several volumes devoted to the history of the Jewish Theological Seminary, and Jeffrey Gurock has written extensively on the

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5 *News Bulletin of the Jewish Institute of Religion* 1, no. 1 (October 1929). Jewish Institute of Religion Nearprint Box 2, Nearprint Special Topics. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, OH (hereafter, JIR Nearprint Box 2). The Bulletin reads, "The Jewish Institute of Religion is not a reform college or a conservative seminary, an orthodox Yeshivah or a Zionist or Anti-Zionist training school. It aims to lift Jewish culture and the study of Judaism above movements and divisions, and strives to permit students impartially to study the values in all and slowly to formulate their own ideologies."
history of Yeshiva University, aside from Meyer’s chapter and the article by Tepfer and Kiev, little has been written on JIR’s history. This study, drawn primarily from archival material, aims to fill that gap by exploring the school's earliest and most formative years, when Wise and the founders consciously shaped a governing board, faculty, and curriculum in accord with their desire to redirect twentieth century liberal Judaism.

Chapter 1 places the creation of JIR in its historical context. As they shaped their vision for the Institute, Wise and his associates responded not only to the demographic, religious, political and social changes American Jewry was experiencing in this period; they also took into consideration recent developments in European and American seminary education, and in higher education more generally. They drew lessons from the Emanu-El Theological Seminary, a failed nineteenth-century attempt at creating a liberal Jewish seminary in New York, and from Berlin’s Hochschule fur die Wissenschaft des Judentums; they took notice, too, of contemporary practices at university-affiliated seminaries in the United States including Harvard Divinity School and Union Theological Seminary. Overall, though, they remained focused on their goal of creating a seminary that reflected the particular spirit and values of Wise and the Free Synagogue.

Chapter 2 traces the founders’ plans and preliminary steps toward opening the Institute. First, they created a summer school to gauge interest in the endeavor. After that proved successful, they proceeded to organize a board, assemble the nucleus of a faculty, and recruit students. As they moved forward, they encountered increasing opposition, most vociferously from the Reform movement, but also from Conservative quarters, including their neighbors at the Jewish Theological Seminary located uptown not far from the Free Synagogue. This opposition revealed the extent to which the established American Jewish seminaries, and the movements with which they were affiliated, perceived JIR as a threat to
their institutions and ideologies, and in the case of the Reform movement, even sought to prevent the Institute from coming into existence.

Chapter 3 explores how, in the early twenties, Wise and the founders tried to realize the vision they had articulated for a new kind of American rabbinical school, incorporating educational methodologies modeled after Protestant seminary training and shaping a curriculum designed to provide students with the tools they felt were required to create the liberal Jewish renaissance they aimed to promote. The Institute continued to face opposition from without, but increasingly internal challenges and even rancor also threatened to undermine the cohesiveness of the school. Neither the board nor the faculty, for example, could reach consensus on the fundamental purpose of JIR: scholarship for its own sake, or professional training? Nonetheless, the Institute continued to attract Jewish scholars from Europe, Palestine and the United States interested in joining the faculty, and JIR strengthened its presence in New York as a center of liberal Jewish intellectual life.

Chapter 4 focuses on the student body and fundraising. Regarding the students, areas of exploration include the Institute’s strategies for recruitment, the composition of the first class, the placement system through which students served congregations across the greater New York area, and the views and experiences of the students themselves. While the first eight issues of the *Jewish Institute Quarterly*, a student publication that began in 1924, reveal an undercurrent of negativity regarding the lack of spiritual vitality in American Jewish life, and the materialism and violence endemic in western culture more broadly, overall they express an idealistic and hopeful view of twentieth-century American liberal Judaism that in many ways reflected the original vision of Wise and the founders. The students hardly developed their ideas in a cloistered environment; some had direct experiences of war and immigration, and most came from families struggling to achieve economic stability in the American industrial economy. Few were wealthy, and a majority had to earn their livelihood.
while attending JIR as full-time students. They received no stipend from the school, but neither did they pay tuition.

The second section of this chapter focuses on the ramifications for the Institute of this tuition-free policy; with no possibility of student-generated revenue, Wise turned to other funding sources in order to place the Institute on secure financial footing. Unable to rely on a broad dues-paying congregational base, like the one that supported HUC, and unable, too, to turn to American Jewry’s philanthropic elite, as JTS had, from the outset JIR depended largely on the Free Synagogue for all of its material needs, including its property, operating budget and more. However, the limitations of this model quickly became apparent: synagogues, even during periods of prosperity, face an ongoing challenge of sustainability, relying entirely as they do on the contributions of their own membership; the costs of running a seminary with a full-time permanent faculty are much higher. As generous as the Free Synagogue was, Wise needed to find other sources of revenue, which proved challenging from the outset.

The early history of JIR represents a determinative episode in the development of twentieth-century American liberal Judaism until now largely ignored. The Institute emerged as a result of the willingness of Wise and his associates to come into conflict with the Reform liberals of their day by creating a seminary that promised to train a new cadre of rabbis in a strikingly different mold. The story to be told in this work illuminates related areas of American Jewish history, too, particularly the early intersection of seminary education and the growth of Jewish studies in secular higher education; the struggles of unaffiliated religious institutions to find a place for themselves in the overall contours of American Jewish life; Jewish political progressivism and Zionism; and, Jewish philanthropy and communal funding structures.
When Stephen S. Wise and his allies decided to reshape American Jewish seminary education by establishing the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1922, they hoped to effect change far beyond the school’s premises on West 68th Street. How they utilized the Institute to point twentieth-century American liberal Judaism in new directions is the subject of this study.
CHAPTER ONE: SETTING THE STAGE

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing through today, in order to address American Jewry’s varied and evolving need for religious leadership, a handful of men and women took it upon themselves to establish institutions for the training of rabbis. In the early 1920s, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, the lay leadership of the Free Synagogue, and a small number of Wise’s allies became the newest cadre who set out to build an American Jewish seminary, which they named the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR).

The founders of JIR sought to create what they regarded to be the first truly modern, liberal American Jewish seminary—one that accounted for changes the American Jewish community was experiencing during the first quarter of the twentieth century demographically, religiously, politically and socially. They believed no existing rabbinical school had yet adapted to this new reality. As innovative as they hoped to be, however, Wise and his associates were hardly the first American Jews determined to shape a modern American liberal Judaism. The architects of the Reform movement in the nineteenth century, coming from a different milieu and addressing a different set of conditions, not only modernized and liberalized the American Judaism of their time, but created an enduring institutional structure that decades later continued to sustain their religious approach in Jewish communities nationwide. Understanding the move to establish JIR requires a historical appreciation of these nineteenth-century efforts, for in many ways Wise, the Free Synagogue and their allies positioned their endeavor as a direct challenge to the Reform institutional structure and religious approach in place at the time.
American Reform Judaism evolved out of the experience of Jewish immigrants who came to the United States in the middle decades of the nineteenth century from Central Europe, and settled in communities in the American North, South and West (still primarily east of the Mississippi, with the exception of St. Louis and San Francisco). Experiencing for the first time full citizenship in a state that lacked state-sponsored anti-Semitic legislation restricting Jewish life, these immigrants were able to put the battle for emancipation behind them, and to face, instead, a new task: utilizing their rights to advance socially and economically in a largely Protestant society where anti-Semitic practices, though not state-sponsored, nonetheless barred them from many of the social and economic realms where they sought entry. In response, some of these immigrants and their children chose to abandon their Jewish heritage in order to assimilate into the mainstream culture.

Early Reformers responded by creating an approach to Jewish life that facilitated Americanization while concurrently preserving Judaism, if in a new form. To diminish the clash between traditional practices and modern American ways of living, and to facilitate Jewish acculturation into non-Jewish society, they drew selectively on the ideology and innovation developed by their predecessors in Germany where, earlier in the century, Reformers had liberalized synagogue life and Jewish practice by rejecting the divine authority of Jewish canonical texts and introducing a voluntaristic approach to law and ritual. However, whereas the German movement focused on scholarly disputes related to Wissenschaft des Judentums, the “scientific study of Judaism,” and rabbinical debates in which leading Reformers argued ideology and platform, the early American Reformers took a more pragmatic approach. Lay leaders in cities throughout the country created American expressions of Judaism based in many ways on mainstream middle-class Protestant
sensibilities, building synagogues, for example, that resembled Protestant churches in architecture, seating, liturgical forms and music. Similarly, seeking to gain respectability in the eyes of their non-Jewish neighbors, they wore no garb that distinguished them from the broader citizenry.\textsuperscript{6}

In 1840, about fifteen thousand Jews lived in the United States, and synagogues beginning to implement reforms existed in Charleston, Baltimore and New York. Those numbers increased due to immigration in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1848 and 1849 in Europe, and by the eve of the Civil War, American Jewry had grown to 150,000.\textsuperscript{7} During this period, new Reform congregations emerged in large and small cities around the country, including, for example, Albany and Philadelphia in the east, and Cincinnati, Louisville and Chicago in the west.

On the whole, this immigrant generation benefited from the economic opportunities of early industrialization in the United States, and a significant number made their way into the middle class through low- to mid-level commerce or small-scale manufacturing, often in the burgeoning clothing industry. A few achieved national renown for their success in business, such as Levi Strauss and Lyman Bloomingdale, and there were those, a tiny elite, who entered the American upper class through banking and finance, including Joseph Seligman, Emanuel and Mayer Lehman, and Jacob Schiff. Of those who acquired wealth, some shared the early Reformers’ desire to preserve Judaism in the United States, as well as a belief that Jewish respectability played a critical role in diminishing the nation’s pervasive anti-Semitism. These individuals often became the financial backers of Reform congregations across the country, and eventually of the movement as a whole.


At mid-century, while lay leaders in cities and towns across the country organized Jewish life locally, a small group of immigrant rabbis set out to provide leadership at the national level. Most prominent among them was Bohemian-born Isaac Mayer Wise, who came to the United States in 1846 and served for eight years as rabbi in Albany, New York before moving in 1854 to assume the pulpit of Congregation Bene Yeshurun in Cincinnati, the largest city in the west and home to a Jewish community of 2,500.8 From there, he began a decades-long effort to unite American Jewry, working with others including, especially, his friend Max Lilienthal, a fellow German-born rabbi with a more intellectual bent, who became a colleague of Wise’s in Cincinnati when the city’s Congregation Bene Israel hired him in 1855. From the outset, in their efforts to shape an ideology as well as an institutional structure that might serve all of American Jewry, Wise and Lilienthal, as moderate Reformers, faced opposition from more radical Reformers in the East, on one end of the religious spectrum, and traditionalists, on the other. Eventually, out of much ideological debate, but with attention, too, to lay leaders’ and financial backers’ desire to integrate the Jewish community into the economic and social life of the nation, nineteenth-century Reform developed a unique Jewish framework that eliminated traditional notions of Jewish nationhood, and focused instead almost exclusively on theology. So, for example, like their predecessors at the Hamburg synagogue, they rejected liturgical references to exile and the messianic hope that Jews scattered around the world would one day unite and return to the Land of Israel, which could be construed as subverting Americanization; rather, they emphasized universalist concerns, and the role Judaism could play in advancing the welfare of all humanity.

8 Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 241-242. Wise’s years in Albany were tumultuous; he began at Beth El where, with the support of a segment of the congregation, he introduced several reforms including a mixed choir and confirmation. However, after numerous disputes related to his views on a range of matters, in 1850 he was dismissed. Soon thereafter, together with a faction of Beth El, he created Anshe Emeth, a Reform congregation.
While Lilienthal played a greater role developing Reform thought, Isaac Mayer Wise focused on institution-building, devoting the latter part of his life to organizing a national structure that could sustain the two elements he deemed critical to the future of American Jewish life: congregations and rabbis.\(^9\) After decades of struggle to amass the financial resources he needed while also overcoming ideological opposition, in the 1870s he finally began to achieve success with the creation of two national institutions. In 1873 Wise established the Union for American Hebrew Congregations, a national organization for congregations across the country, and two years later, with the financial support of the Union, he opened the Hebrew Union College, a seminary dedicated to the training of American rabbis (described in greater detail below). Both institutions, national in scope, were based in Cincinnati, where Wise and Lilienthal lived and could oversee their daily operations, working in concert with their lay leadership. Indeed, though the UAHC drew its funding for the College from congregations across the country, the governing boards of both organizations, and their decision-making processes, were controlled by their Cincinnati members, supporters of Wise whom he enlisted mainly from two local congregations, his own Bene Yeshurun and Lilienthal’s Bene Israel.\(^10\)

With a federation of congregations now in place, as well as a rabbinical school dedicated to supporting the religious life of the American Jewish community in its entirety, Isaac Mayer Wise hoped to add one more element to the institutional structure he had established, a national rabbinical assembly. Just as he planned for the UAHC and HUC to serve all American Jewry, moderate and radical Reform as well as traditionalist, he hoped the rabbinical assembly would also be broadly representative. As Michael Meyer writes, though Wise was a Reformer, “he was determined above all else to establish a strong and united

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\(^9\) Isaac Mayer Wise had meager training and may not have earned a rabbinical degree. Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 239.

Judaism in America,” and he demonstrated a willingness to be quite flexible practically as well as philosophically in order to achieve this. Nonetheless, maintaining such unity proved impossible, and by 1889, when Isaac Mayer Wise finally succeeded in creating the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the tripartite structure he once dreamed would serve all of American Jewry had become associated with Reform Judaism alone, and drew its strongest loyalty from Wise’s own base of moderate Reform congregations and HUC-ordained rabbis in the Midwest and South.

At the time of the founding of the Hebrew Union College in 1875, Cincinnati’s twenty thousand Jews formed a community that, though small in comparison to the Jewish communities of European cities like Warsaw, Odessa and Lodz, was among the largest in the United States. Little could Isaac Mayer Wise or his colleagues have known that this would soon change, as vast forces in the last decades of the nineteenth century were about to forever alter the nation, and the American Jewish community in particular.

Religious Progressivism and the Christian Social Gospel at the Turn of the Century

Approximately two million Eastern European Jews entered the United States between the early 1880s and 1924, when the National Origins Act closed off further immigration. Primarily from Russia, Austria-Hungary and Romania, and often fleeing anti-Semitic persecution and poverty, these Jews arrived in the port cities of a nation experiencing rapid industrialization and urbanization. Many of these new immigrants found themselves trapped in impoverished conditions, working in sweatshops and living in the squalid tenements of northern cities. Likewise, across the nation, other immigrants, African Americans and native-born poor whites were suffering economically as well, working in factories, on the railroads or in mines, and living in abject conditions either in urban areas or in the rural south.

Industrialization fueled economic growth, but monopolistic business practices and

government corruption also escalated. City machines like Tammany Hall in New York exercised power, Jim Crow segregation replaced many of the South’s Reconstruction-period advances for African Americans, and as hostilities between labor and capital intensified, labor strikes became prevalent, often met by violent corporate and government crackdowns.

In response to the rise in extreme wealth and poverty, over time, a multi-faceted critique of unregulated capitalism began to emerge across the political spectrum from Progressivism to socialism. Reformers focused on improving factory conditions, strengthening the rights of labor, creating greater efficiency in government and business, gaining women’s suffrage, and replacing political machines with “good government.” In addition, they created settlement houses and social welfare programs in an effort to help immigrants adjust to their new environs and participate in a process of Americanization that, in the view of many Progressives, demanded shedding aspects of their native cultures in order to blend into what came to be called the nation’s melting pot. Indeed, accurately or not, critics would later identify “social control” as a motivation of these white middle-class Protestant reformers intent on shaping the rest of America in their image.

The Social Gospel movement emerged in this late nineteenth-century maelstrom, and expressed a liberal Protestant voice within Progressivism. After its demise following World War I, this movement, too, became subject to charges of chauvinism, class bias, and of failing to address the root causes of political and economic injustice, as in Reinhold Niebuhr’s analysis in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932). In their time, however, mainline Protestantism embraced the religious framework the movement’s leading thinkers and activists offered for ameliorating the harmful outcomes of laissez-faire capitalism plaguing the nation. Social Gospel ministers, settlement house workers, social workers and labor leaders wanted to turn local churches into sites of activism, and successfully pressed mainstream churches at the national level to embrace demands like higher wages, ending the
seven-day work week, and legislative protections for women and children, many of which were included in the “Social Creed of Churches” adopted by some of the nation’s largest denominations including the Methodists, Northern Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists between 1908-1911.12

Overall, the movement aimed to Christianize society in order to create a democratic and just “kingdom of God,” through economic reform and evangelization. Ministers including Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch and others asserted an inextricable link between personal salvation and social salvation, and called for “applied Christianity,” a term Washington Gladden coined in 1887 in reference to the application of religious ethics to contemporary social and economic issues. The movement spanned a broad range of political viewpoints, evidenced by the fact that while conservative denominations adopted the Social Creed, some of the movement’s leading figures belonged to the political left. Harry Ward, for example, a professor at Union Theological Seminary, embraced socialism and supported the Bolshevik Revolution,13 and Walter Rauschenbusch promoted Christian democratic socialism.14 “To apply the ethical principles of Jesus Christ so that our industrial relationships may be humanized, our economic system moralized, justice pervade legislation, and the State grown into a true commonwealth—we band together as Christian Socialists,” Rauschenbusch wrote in his monthly newspaper For the Right in 1895.15 To bring about the kingdom of God, he said, the teachings of Jesus called upon Christians to engage directly with political and

13 Ibid., 78-80.
14 Ibid., 96.
economic issues, and to fight poverty, inequality in property relations, and all forms of violence in the world.16

“Despite its faults…the social gospel movement produced a greater progressive religious legacy than any generation before or after it,” Gary Dorrien writes. “The notion that Christianity has a social mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of equality, freedom, and community was something new in Christian history. Nineteenth-century evangelicalism was rich in abolitionist and temperance convictions, and sometimes, feminist ones, but it had no theology of social salvation. Until the social gospel, no Christian movement did.”17

Gladden and Rauschenbusch both died in 1918, as World War I was coming to an end in Europe. By this time, American war enthusiasm and a rise in Protestant fundamentalism had drowned out the Social Gospel’s calls for peace, social justice and economic equality. The progressive wing of Protestantism endured in the most liberal seminaries, but by the War’s end, the movement’s peak years were over.18 Now, with the United States becoming a world power, domestic politics turned increasingly conservative, and the Social Gospel movement together with Progressives across the country found themselves on the defensive, encountering Red scares like the Palmer Raids, and a rise in the kind of hateful rhetoric espoused by Henry Ford in his editorials in the Dearborn Independent, and by groups like the Ku Klux Klan, which experienced a nationwide resurgence in the early 1920s.

**The Changing Complexion of American Jewry**

Though the American Jewish community shared in the nation’s crises and had additional troubles both at home and in Europe and Palestine, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the country, many of its liberal voices at this time were hardly stifled. This was

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17 Ibid., 60.
18 Ibid., 104
due, in large part, to the exponential growth and new-found political strength of New York’s Jewish community, where immigration from Eastern Europe had transformed a city that contained roughly 80,000 Jews in 1880 into the largest Jewish community in the world, with a population in 1920 of more than 1.6 million Jews, mostly from Russia and Poland.\textsuperscript{19}

In the aftermath of the War, a growing portion of the families of these immigrants, many of whom entered the country with nothing more than the bags they could carry, were now experiencing a modicum of upward mobility and moving out of the dense Lower East Side into the working- and middle-class neighborhoods of second settlement in northern Manhattan and the outer boroughs. Many, no doubt, knew of Henry Ford’s anti-Semitism, the rejuvenated Ku Klux Klan and the Palmer Raids, and an overall rise across the nation in anti-Semitism, Protestant fundamentalism and growing antipathy toward leftist organizations and the labor movement. However, though these Jews represented a target for much of this backlash, within their own milieu—the synagogue centers of Washington Heights, say, or the socialist Workmen’s Circle meetings in Brooklyn—they had no need to constrain themselves in deference to the non-Jewish world. Rather, as Deborah Dash Moore has shown, these neighborhoods, where Jews lived in high concentration, teemed with Jewish life, and a wide variety of religious, social, political, and cultural expression. These New York Jews worried far less than their American Jewish predecessors did about Jewish respectability in the eyes of others, for on a daily basis, in their work, schooling and social lives, a preponderance of the people with whom they engaged most were fellow Jews. Indeed, the anti-Semitic restrictions that reinforced this residential pattern of concentrated dwelling served to strengthen ethnic ties, and the values and commitments of the Jews who shared them.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{19} New York City’s Jewish population grew as follows: 60,000 in 1870; 80,000 in 1880; 580,000 in 1900; 1,100,000 in 1910; and, 1,643,000 in 1920, at which point Jews represented approximately 29% of the city’s total population. \textit{Encyclopedia Judaica}, s.v. “New York City.”

Religiously, New York Jewry now included a wide variety of practice and belief. The small but wealthy German Jewish community, considered “uptown Jews,” remained strong and for the most part affiliated with Reform Judaism, which had several congregations in the city including Congregation Emanu-El, Central Synagogue, Temple Israel, Congregation Rodeph Sholom and the Free Synagogue. The Sephardic community, two centuries earlier the dominating force in New York Jewish life, now made up a fraction of the population, based at their longtime congregational home Shearith Israel, also known as the Spanish Portuguese Synagogue.

The religious diversity of the Eastern European Jewish immigrants ranged from Orthodox groups seeking to recreate in the United States the life they knew in Europe, to socialists who abandoned religion entirely. Traditionalist religious life fluctuated on a continuum of belief and practice from rigid to highly flexible regarding halakhah, bringing forth what came to be called Conservative Judaism. On the less traditional side, among first- and second-generation immigrants whose families had distanced themselves from halakhic Judaism, and whose religious approach bore little resemblance even to the slightly more liberal Conservative Judaism, the main alternative was Reform Judaism. However, though their rejection of halakhic Judaism cohered with Reform’s non-legalistic approach to Jewish practice, and an increasing number did join Reform congregations, in other ways the outlook of these Eastern European Jews existed in tension with the worldview of the German Jewish, Cincinnati-centered movement. A few Reform congregations rejected that worldview, most especially Stephen S. Wise’s Free Synagogue, which attempted to reach out to these non-halakhic, staunchly Zionist and politically left-of-center Eastern European Jews.

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with an activist form of Judaism that represented a social and political challenge to the lawyers and businessmen who dominated the institutions of Reform Judaism.

As a result, those institutions, which Isaac Mayer Wise intended at the time of their founding in the 1870s to serve the entire the American Jewish community, now represented just one perspective among many. Shortly after the onset of the mass immigration, it became clear that no single institution could meet the religious needs of the American Jewish community, particularly the training of rabbis. After HUC ordained its first class of rabbis in 1883, a group of traditional Jews who regarded HUC’s approach to Judaism and rabbinical training too radical set out to establish the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), which opened in New York in 1887 and would become the center of the Conservative movement; and soon after that, in 1898, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America came into being. By the turn of the century, the ground was paved for the three major religious movements that would soon dominate American Jewish life.

Not all Jewish communal life centered around the synagogue, and Eastern European Jews across the religious and political spectrum tended to value a strong Jewish cultural life that they expressed publicly in myriad ways. Some located their social lives at the Jewish community center, for example, and for many, Yiddish culture was the pillar of their Jewish identity; they read Yiddish newspapers, they created and consumed Yiddish literature, theater and music, and they conducted their political as well as their social lives in Yiddish. A small but historically significant number participated in what they regarded to be a national Hebrew renaissance, publishing and reading Hebrew periodicals and literature, speaking modern Hebrew in the home and with one another, celebrating in music and dance the renewal of Jewish life in Palestine, and in some but not all cases, linking this renaissance to the politics of the Zionist movement.

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Support for Zionism, too, distinguished these Eastern European Jews from the
dominant American Jewish institutions they encountered upon arrival in the United States. At
the turn of the century the Reform movement, on the whole, opposed Zionism, seeing Jewish
nationalism as the antithesis of ethical monotheism and a threat to Americanization;
traditionalists also opposed Zionism, believing no political movement should supplant the
role of the messiah in gathering Jewish exiles into Israel. By contrast, for many of the new
immigrants Zionism represented the highest aspirations of the Jewish people to escape the
ghetto and two millennia as an oppressed minority in Christian countries, by reestablishing a
free and independent homeland in Palestine. Within the Zionist movement, an increasingly
sharp debate pitted idealists—mostly but not exclusively European—seeking to create a
utopian society in Palestine, against a largely-American contingent who, though idealistic as
well, took a more pragmatic and philanthropic approach focused on establishing the
infrastructure needed to create a secure refuge in Palestine for Jews fleeing persecution. As
the fledgling American movement began to grow rapidly in the second decade of the century,
particularly after the Balfour Declaration in 1917 in which the British Government expressed
support for Zionist aspirations, this debate internal to the movement reflected a struggle not
just over European versus American ideology but over power to direct the movement.²³ The
American Zionist camp led by Louis Brandeis, who beginning in 1914 directed the Zionist
Organization of America working closely with Stephen S. Wise and Julian W. Mack, found
itself embattled on two fronts—with the German Jewish establishment which continued to
resist Zionism, on one; and, on the other, with the more nationalist, *aliyah*-oriented arm of the
American Zionist movement led by Louis Lipsky in alliance with Chaim Weizman, which

had the support of many Russian immigrants. In 1921, as the latter dispute became increasingly bitter, Brandeis resigned from the ZOA’s presidency, and Lipsky took over.

An additional feature distinguishing the Eastern European Jewish immigrant community within the broader American Jewish community related to class and class politics. Though most German Jews did not fit the stereotype of ultra-wealthy, and many had come to America just as poor as the newer immigrants, by the early twentieth century overall they had become economically stable if not well-to-do, and conservative politically. In contrast, many of the Eastern European Jews, upon arrival in the United States, earned their livelihood as low-paid workers in the Lower East Side garment industry. Some of these workers came to the US already involved in socialist, communist or anarchist activity; others became politicized by their experience in New York's sweatshops, and joined one arm or another of the American labor movement. The Jewish left included labor Zionists as well as non-Zionists, notably members of the Workmen’s Circle which celebrated diasporan Jewish ethnicity. Still other Jewish immigrants did not support the radical politics of their kin, including many who found opportunity within the garment industry to climb their way out of low-wage jobs into positions of management or other professions. Indeed, a majority of these Eastern European Jews, seeking economic security, soon formed an emerging middle class, and some rose higher, becoming industrialists and bankers. As a result, problems in the economy that created deep divisions within American society created, as well, significant conflict within the Jewish community, which lived very much a part of and not apart from that economy.

With different approaches to Jewish religious and cultural expression, nationalism, and class politics, the German Jewish base of the Reform movement and the Eastern European first-generation immigrant communities in New York gravitated toward separate

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24 *Aliyah*, meaning “ascent” in Hebrew, in Zionist terminology refers to a Jew’s leaving the diaspora to settle in the Land of Israel.
spheres, most evident in residential patterns. In the period following the Civil War, many German Jews lived in the southern wards of the Lower East Side, but by 1890, in response to the influx of Russian Jewish immigrants, a majority of the German Jews in this area had left for the northern wards that spanned Rivington Street to Fourteenth Street—and in the ensuing decade, as tenement housing took over that area, many of these German Jews headed further north to the east side of Manhattan between 50th and 90th Streets, with some of the most wealthy moving to Harlem or to homes near Central Park on Manhattan’s west side.\(^{25}\)

The relocation of German Jewish synagogues followed this residential shift. Beginning in 1860, many of the German Jewish congregations that originated on the Lower East Side moved north to Manhattan’s east side above 42nd Street, including Shearith Israel, Temple Emanu-El, Ahavath Chesed (known as the Central Synagogue), Anshe Chesed (which in the 1870s merged with Adas Jeshurun to form Temple Beth El, located at Fifth Avenue and 76th Street), and B’nai Jeshurun (which was located at Madison Avenue and 65th Street from 1884 until 1918, when it moved to its present location on West 88th Street and West End Avenue). In 1900, fourteen synagogues served the affluent Jews of the Yorkville neighborhood alone, half of them either Reform or Conservative.\(^{26}\)

Meanwhile, as Reform and Conservative congregations abandoned the crowded Lower East Side, Orthodox congregations flourished there, with an estimated 252 in existence in 1902, and 418 in 1917. Most of these congregations were small neighborhood establishments; only about a fifth of them had their own building, and even fewer employed a rabbi. The downtown synagogues of greatest stature during this period included Beth Hamidrash Hagadol on Norfolk Street, the Kalvarier Sons of Israel on Pike Street, the First Hungarian Congregation Ohab Zedek on Norfolk Street and the First Roumanian Congregation Shaarei Shomayim on Rivington Street; all were Orthodox. Roughly ninety

\(^{25}\) Encyclopedia Judaica, s.v. “New York City.”  
\(^{26}\) Ibid.
percent of the 784 permanent and 343 temporary synagogues existing in New York City (including all boroughs) in 1917 were Orthodox and Yiddish-speaking, and had little to do with Reform or Conservative Judaism. Indeed, when Reform and Conservative Jewish institutions attempted to gain support in the immigrant community, the Orthodox reacted by creating organizations like Young Israel, intended to resist the liberal Judaism, radicalism and secularism that threatened to pull the younger generation away from the Orthodox fold.

Still, despite the cultural, religious and class differences that separated the Eastern European and German Jewish communities at this time, the divide was not unsurpassable, if only because Jews of different backgrounds shared an understanding of the challenges facing the entire Jewish community, and a desire to mobilize in response to these challenges at all institutional levels. While divisions between the gradually crystallizing Reform, Conservative and Orthodox movements appeared to be deepening, a common agenda—relief efforts in Europe, support for the Yishuv in Palestine, fighting anti-Semitism at home and abroad, and intensifying efforts to provide youth with a Jewish education—continued to bind them together, alongside Jewish organizations like the American Jewish Committee (1906); the New York Kehillah (1908); the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (1914); the American Jewish Congress (1918); and, many others. In this way the American Jewish community, though rife with internal conflict, retained more than a semblance of cohesion.

This sense of cohesion allowed for great fluidity within American Jewish life, nowhere more so than in New York where new religious and cultural forms of expression proliferated. While some Jews congregated with fellow landsmen to pray in tiny shuls on the Lower East Side, others became what would later be called “Modern Orthodox;” those more liberal in outlook gravitated toward the emerging Conservative movement or Reform Judaism, while still others left Jewish religious life entirely, joining the Ethical Culture

27 Ibid.
Society, or the Jewish Labor Bund, or choosing to have no institutional affiliation at all. In order for the various constituencies who shared a Jewish communal agenda to work together effectively, given their differences in belief and practice, they had to allow room for multiple viewpoints to coexist alongside one another. Several intellectual organs were created to promote Jewish thought, including the *Menorah Journal*, established by Henry Hurwitz in 1915 to stimulate interest in Jewish culture and ideals through the publication of articles on a range of Jewish themes. Horace Kallen, who together with Hurwitz had founded the Menorah Society when they were students at Harvard in 1906, published regularly in *Menorah*, where he promoted his idea of cultural pluralism, which countered the standard Progressive trope that Americanization required the jettisoning of cultural identity. Indeed, the entirety of American Jewish experience at this time seemed to fly in the face of the melting pot ideal. Within the community, American Jews demonstrated a capacity to celebrate their Jewish identity in ways that were anything but uniform, while still looking out for their own, domestically and abroad; at the same time, just as they aligned themselves with fellow Jews without assuming a uniform point of view, so too, those who participated in Jewish life embraced their American identity without feeling a need to shed their cultural distinctiveness in order to blend into broader society.

Within the more established institutional structures, certain new expressions of Jewish religious life defied the status quo, including Mordecai M. Kaplan's Society for the Advancement of Judaism (SAJ). By the time Kaplan established the SAJ in 1922, he had been moving steadily leftward religiously for many years. The son of an Orthodox rabbi who moved his family from Lithuania to New York, Kaplan in his youth attended the Etz Chaim Yeshiva and then continued his studies at JTS and the City College of New York, concurrently pursuing rabbinical ordination and his bachelor’s degree; he then attended

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Columbia where he studied with Felix Adler among others, and earned his doctorate in Philosophy. Kaplan launched his rabbinical career at Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun (KJ), and while serving as the congregation’s rabbi, he joined the faculty of JTS, where in 1909 Solomon Schechter appointed him to direct its Teachers Institute located downtown on Stuyvesant Street. In 1918, Kaplan left KJ to become the founding rabbi of the Jewish Center which, like KJ, was Orthodox at the time.

Increasingly critical of both Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, in 1920 Kaplan made public his appraisal of contemporary Jewish life in a talk before a group of rabbis and lay leaders in New York that the Menorah Journal published as “A Program for the Reconstruction of Judaism.” Decrying the spiritual poverty of American Judaism, Kaplan criticized Orthodoxy for its insistence on the infallibility of the Written and Oral Law, and accused Conservative Judaism of fostering cynical contempt for all spiritual values. Reform was no better, according to Kaplan—its “anemic platitudes,” negation of Judaism, and denial of the national aspirations of the Jewish people threatened to erase Jewish life in its entirety. Declaring existing Jewish religious organizations “dead,” Kaplan called not for a new party in Judaism, but for a revitalized Judaism that embraced the spiritual Zionism of Ahad Ha’am, the Hebraization of Jewish education, and Jewish communal life governed by the prophetic principles of justice.

As word of Kaplan’s sweeping indictment spread, the Jewish Center as well as JTS came under pressure from the Orthodox community to fire the renegade rabbi. Neither institution did, and in the immediate aftermath of the article’s publication Kaplan also refused to resign; however, less than two years later, he left the Jewish Center and, while remaining at the Teachers Institute, founded the SAJ in order to advance his ideas.

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29 The JTS Teachers Institute was located at 34 Stuyvesant Street, at the time part of the Lower East Side (today it is considered part of Manhattan’s East Village). American Jewish Year Book 24 (1922-1923): 239.
Just as Kaplan and his supporters at the SAJ articulated a serious critique of Conservative as well as Orthodox Judaism, so too the Free Synagogue founders of JIR issued a multifaceted critique of Reform Judaism; at the same time, despite pronounced tensions and at times outright conflicts between these maverick synagogues and their parent organizations, each remained within the institutional framework of an already established movement. The Free Synagogue paid its dues to the UAHC like every other Reform congregation, and the SAJ, which in the fall of 1923 during its first year of existence formally affiliated with Conservative Judaism, regularly sent delegates to United Synagogue and raised funds for the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. As a result, in both cases, divisions were held in check; a movement would not devour its own, particularly when it received valuable funding from its rebellious affiliate, and the American Jewish community remained sufficiently fluid to enable the Free Synagogue and the SAJ to thrive at the margins.

**Rabbinical Training and Jewish Scholarship in Europe and the United States**

**European Jewish Seminaries**

Because the Jews are a "text-centered" community, Moshe Halbertal writes, authority in the Jewish community rests in the texts themselves, and in the interpreters who interact with them. In the nineteenth century, with the development of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, a new kind of European institution of Jewish learning—the modern rabbinical seminary, as distinct from the *yeshivah*—became the central site for the scientific interpretation of Jewish texts. These seminaries, which trained men for careers in *Wissenschaft* scholarship as well as the rabbinate (requiring students to earn a Ph.D. from a secular university prior to ordination), became ideologically-defined loci of power in the Jewish community and, as a result, oft-

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At the turn of the twentieth century, the modern Jewish seminary was still a relatively recent phenomenon, dating back less than one hundred years to 1829 when the first, the Istituto Convitto Rabbinico (later called the Collegio Rabbinico Italiano), was established in Padua, Italy. Soon thereafter, other Jewish seminaries were attempted in Metz, France and in Yonkers, New York but, like the Istituto, these failed; the oldest modern seminary still in existence in 1922 was the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau, founded in 1854 by Zacharias Frankel to promote historical-positive Judaism. Other European seminaries included Jews' College, founded in London in 1855; the Israeliitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt, founded in Vienna in 1862; the Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums, founded in Berlin with a Reform orientation in 1872; the Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest, founded in 1877; and, the Neo-Orthodox Rabbiner-Seminar für das Orthdoxe Judentum, founded in Berlin in 1873. Of these, the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau and Berlin’s Hochschule had the strongest influence on the non-Orthodox rabbinate in the United States.

At the time of the founding of JIR, all of these institutions were struggling with the economic crisis that befell Europe in the aftermath of the First World War. Though these seminaries continued to boast top scholars on their faculties, many (though by no means all) of these scholars by 1922 were hoping to leave Europe, and sought positions that would gain them entry into either the United States or Palestine. At the same time, a number of these scholars, and some of these seminaries, too, were selling their libraries to institutions in the United States.

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US. Given the devastation so many European Jewish intellectual centers had already suffered and their continued deterioration, and sometimes out of economic desperation, they shipped their books and manuscripts to American institutions eager to build their Judaica collections. Those scholars seeking a teaching position in the United States inevitably looked to the American Jewish seminaries, for unless their field was Semitics, no secular college or university offered the possibility of a full-time appointment. Virtually the only sources of employment on American soil for these scholars were Hebrew Union College, serving the Reform movement; the Jewish Theological Seminary, serving Conservative Judaism; and, the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), established in 1896 (later to come under the auspices of Yeshiva University) to train modern Orthodox rabbis.

The movement of scholars reveals the shifting center of Jewish intellectual life from the Old World to New World. Though this shift eastward accelerated as crises in Europe worsened, from the late nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century the exchange between Europe and the US was by no means one-way. A large percentage of faculty in the American Jewish seminaries, European- as well as American-born, trained in Europe, as did a good number of American rabbis—among them, Stephen S. Wise, who studied in 1892 under Adolph Jellinek in Vienna. As a result of this cross-Atlantic exchange, when European Jewish scholars sought entry into the United States or Palestine toward the end of that period, an international network of scholars and rabbis was available to help them.

**American Jewish Seminaries**

The number of American scholars and rabbis at the turn of the century who had studied in Europe bears out the fact that in the mid-late nineteenth century, the US offered many fewer options for study than did Europe, where Jewish communities across the

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continent supported traditional as well as a handful of modern institutions for higher Jewish learning. By contrast, in the US prior to 1870, with fewer than 200,000 American Jews scattered in small communities across the nation, the challenge of creating even a single enduring Jewish seminary or institution for higher education proved insurmountable. Those who made the earliest attempts at establishing centers of this kind had to grapple with enormous financial, ideological and organizational challenges. Of these, three proved instructive for later generations: Zion College in Cincinnati, the Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association in New York, and Maimonides College in Philadelphia.40

Isaac Mayer Wise created Zion College in 1855 to be the nation's first Jewish institution of higher learning. Had all gone according to plan, the College would have prepared men for rabbinic ordination, while also offering a range of secular subjects for students not intending to enter the rabbinate. Initially all went well, as Wise raised funds from local businessmen in Cincinnati, and organized associations in cities across the country to support the endeavor. However, it appears he soon misstepped, by opening the school without consulting many members of these associations who, miffed, withdrew their support and abandoned the endeavor. When the Panic of 1857 hit shortly thereafter, Wise lost the financial support of his remaining Cincinnati base, and after just a year, Zion College closed its doors.41

By contrast, an attempt to found a seminary by New York City's Temple Emanu-El made greater headway.42 In the early 1860s, the synagogue’s rabbi, Samuel Adler, together with the lay leadership, took it upon themselves to establish what they hoped would become the first rabbinical school in the United States. They formed the Temple Emanu-El

40 Little has been written on Sampson Simson’s efforts to create a Jewish Theological Seminary and Scientific Institute in Yonkers, New York, perhaps because Simson died in 1857, before he could devote much energy to the project. See Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism*, 236.
Theological Association for this purpose, but before they could begin their work the Civil War intervened, and the project was put on hold. Eager to move ahead, as soon as they received word that General Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox, they resumed their efforts, recording the following in the Association’s minutes of April 1865:

The devastation of the unhappy strife which raged with fearful terror for so long a time in our Country being with the aid of Providence brought to an end, they could not prove their thankfulness to the Almighty better than by starting an Institution devoted to the education of young men to the Jewish Pulpit in order to promulgate to the whole world the beauty of His teachings.43

Though the Emanu-El Theological Seminary faired better than Zion College, it still took twelve years to get off the ground. Despite the Association’s efforts, for the first few years they could neither recruit students nor attract the support of other congregations. Wondering if the prospective seminary’s identification with Temple Emanu-El was limiting their chances for success—perhaps other congregations had no interest in embracing a single synagogue’s project—they changed the school’s name to the American Hebrew College, to no avail. Finally, in 1877, with the help of leading eastern Reformers like David Einhorn, the financial support of the congregation, and the enthusiastic consent of their new rabbi, Gustav Gottheil, to serve as the school’s superintendent, they opened the seminary.44

By then, however, another American seminary had come into existence—Isaac Mayer Wise’s second effort, the newly-established Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, where in the fall of 1875 classes had commenced fully a year and a half ahead of Temple Emanu-El’s seminary. Whereas the New York seminary received virtually all its support from a single congregation, HUC had a much broader base in the form of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, which Wise had created in 1873 for the sole purpose of funding the rabbinical school. As noted earlier, the UAHC, though ostensibly a national organization, was largely

Cincinnati-based and, at the time of its founding, excluded the eastern Reformers. The Cincinnati businessmen who dominated the boards of both the UAHC and HUC, regarding the newly formed New York school as a competitor, opposed its creation and initially withheld any form of support. Soon, however, in response to increasing pressure on the UAHC to bring the Eastern Reformers into its fold, the Union agreed to do so, and to provide half the New York school’s budget under the condition that Emanu-El’s school be not a full-fledged rabbinical school but a preparatory department for HUC. Gottheil reluctantly agreed, and in February of 1877 the Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association opened its preparatory program, which grew to include at least thirty students.\(^45\)

Though the UAHC contributed funds to the Emanu-El school, tensions did not entirely dissipate; in 1885, for example, when Emanu-El paid for two students to study at the Lehranstalt and the Hochschule in Germany, Isaac Mayer Wise criticized the congregation for not sending the students to HUC; in response, Gottheil claimed the students were too advanced for study at the College.

That year, the Emanu-El school closed. While this dispute may have been a factor, lacking a full seminary program sealed the school’s fate, for as a New York-based preparatory department that required continued study at the College in Cincinnati, it attracted neither students nor donors.

In contrast to Zion College and Congregation Emanu-El’s a seminary, Maimonides College emerged not from the efforts of German Jews, but from the Sephardi community of Philadelphia, under the leadership of Rabbi Isaac Leeser. Committed to traditional Judaism, Leeser's aim was to create a seminary that would train rabbis in Sephardi religious practice. However, Leeser died just four months after the College opened in 1867, and though

Maimonides College survived longer than Zion College, after just six years it too closed its doors, due to a lack of students as well as funding.\textsuperscript{46}

Though Zion College, the Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association, and Maimonides College were all short-lived, it would be mistaken to consider them failures; to the contrary, these three historical chapters proved pivotal for those who later succeeded in creating seminaries that exist to this day. According to Michael Meyer, Isaac Mayer Wise learned from the Zion College experience "that a rabbinical seminary was the more necessary and feasible project," rather than a Jewish institution of general higher learning, and "such a seminary could only be supported by a preexisting union of congregations brought into being specifically for that purpose."\textsuperscript{47} The lesson for Temple Emanu-El may have been similar: when members of the board of trustees in 1902 resolved to take control of the failing Jewish Theological Seminary, they did so with unparalleled focus, leadership, and funding.\textsuperscript{48} Finally, several of the founders of Maimonides College played pivotal roles in the much more successful founding of both the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1886, and the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in 1896.

As we have seen, only one institution with staying power emerged, and that was Isaac Mayer Wise’s Hebrew Union College. None of the factors that impeded Wise earlier hindered him this time: he had broad financial support, and put in place a structure that gave a wide base of congregations some measure of control over the fate of the College. Wise successfully aligned the College with the needs of congregations across the country seeking the services of American-born and American-trained rabbis, and as a result, whereas Zion College, the Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association, and Maimonides College

\textsuperscript{47} Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 16.
\textsuperscript{48} Though the new board attempted to persuade congregational supporters that they would have real representation in decision-making processes, the Seminary’s new governance structure was hardly democratic. Scult, “Schechter’s Seminary,” 53.
all failed to capture the imagination of American Jewry, Hebrew Union College garnered the backing it needed to become the nation’s first enduring rabbinical school.

Basing the curriculum largely on the German seminary model, Isaac Mayer Wise initially intended Hebrew Union College to be a non-partisan seminary that would train American rabbis to serve the entire American Jewish community, including all congregations regardless of where they fell on the ideological spectrum ranging from radical Reform to Orthodox.\textsuperscript{49} This inclusive vision collapsed in 1883, however, on the occasion of HUC’s first ordination, when the notorious \textit{treyfa} banquet created a scandal in the American Jewish press, and provided an excuse for traditionalists to leave the UAHC, abandon the College, and begin planning a seminary of their own. That process culminated with the opening of the Jewish Theological Seminary three years later, to serve New York’s growing population of English-speaking traditional Jews.

Had the ordination luncheon been kosher, might the traditionalists have preserved an alliance with the College?\textsuperscript{50} And would that have been better for the American Jewish community? It is unlikely that, even showing the greatest sensitivity toward his Orthodox colleagues, Isaac Mayer Wise could have sustained a College serving the entirety of late nineteenth-century American Jewry. Fundamental disagreements over \textit{halakhic} observance, scientific study of sacred texts, and the authority of the Talmud would have, at some point, come to the fore, forcing either an unlikely compromise in principle on the part of the Reform or the Orthodox, or a split. The Einhorn and Leeser camps, two factions at opposite ends of the religious spectrum, could not have sustained agreement over the College’s destiny. The 1883 \textit{treyfa} banquet walk-out created a sensational and colorful event the media could


exploit; but had it not taken place, battles over the HUC’s presidency, board membership, curriculum and faculty appointments were inevitable. Nineteenth-century American Jewry may have been pre-denominational, but despite Wise’s lofty vision, religious unity proved an unattainable goal. The split enabled Reform as well as Orthodox Jews to establish separate institutions based on radically different sets of principles. Reformers had a clear constituency amongst German-American Jews; less clear, in 1883, was the fate of the Orthodox, and the future for Sephardi Jews—an elite but diminishing subset of the Orthodox—was even less clear.

If the *trayfa* banquet provoked the initial rupture, the Reform rabbis’ Pittsburgh Platform in 1885 formalized it. Reacting to its perceived radicalism, a group of Orthodox and Conservative leaders in New York, under the leadership of Sabato Morais and Henry Pereira Mendes, both of whom had been involved with Maimonides College, organized the Jewish Theological Seminary, which opened in 1886 on Lexington Avenue at 59th Street, and offered a curriculum based largely on that of the Breslau seminary. Initial funding for JTS came primarily from a few members of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York, augmented with an additional set of small gifts. JTS would promote modern "scientific" scholarship in conjunction with traditional Jewish observance and, as in the case of HUC initially, its founders hoped their institution would be inclusive, representing the broadest spectrum of American Jewry—excluding, in this case, the Reform. Thus the faculty of JTS included Orthodox Jews like Rabbis Sabato Morais, Henry P. Mendes, Henry W. Schneebberger and Bernard Drachman, but it also included non-traditional Jews like Rabbis Marcus Jastrow, David Davidson, Joshua Joffe, and Alexander Kohut. But even this less inclusive model could not remain intact, and just as the challenge to HUC came from

51 JTS was originally located at 736 Lexington Avenue. *American Jewish Year Book* 1 (1899-1900), 58.
52 Ellenson and Bycel, “A Seminary of Sacred Learning,” 528.
Orthodox rabbis who refused to be part of an institution that included a strong Reform contingent, so too did the challenge to JTS come from the rightwing of the religious spectrum, namely a segment of immigrant Jews in lower Manhattan who pressed not for modern scholarship but for replication in America of the traditional European yeshivah model of learning.\textsuperscript{53}

To that end, in the same year JTS was founded, a group of Orthodox Jews with a very different position established a boys’ heder downtown called Yeshiva Etz Chaim, located in the Mariampol Synagogue at 44 East Broadway.\textsuperscript{54} Whereas JTS, situated further uptown at Lexington and 59\textsuperscript{th} Street, aimed to ordain university-educated, English-speaking rabbis who could promote Americanization while preserving Jewish tradition, the founders of Etz Chaim opposed modernization and instead sought to replicate the Lithuanian yeshiva system on the Lower East Side.\textsuperscript{55} Here, students studied full-time, spending most of the day learning Talmud and Jewish law, and only in the late afternoons engaging in secular study mandated by the state.\textsuperscript{56} The founders of Etz Chaim, too, however, encountered a major challenge when it became apparent over the course of the yeshiva’s first decade that an increasing number of its graduates were turning to the more liberal JTS for rabbinical training, including Mordecai Kaplan, who enrolled at the Seminary in 1893.\textsuperscript{57} It was in order to provide an Orthodox alternative to JTS that in 1896 the Etz Chaim leadership created the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary.

In his essay, "Yeshiva Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary," Jeffrey Gurock describes the growing tension between JTS and RIETS. Though RIETS’ Certificate of

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\textsuperscript{55} Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Yeshiva Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary," 475.


\textsuperscript{57} Jeffrey S. Gurock, “Yeshiva Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary,” 479.
Incorporation included among its stated purposes the provision of training for the "Hebrew Orthodox Ministry," initially the seminary offered no practical training. Some RIETS students pressured the administration to add this to the curriculum, and to incorporate English and secular studies, as well; at the same time, many began leaving to attend JTS, and in 1904 in an unsuccessful effort to stem this tide, the Union of Orthodox Rabbis issued a writ of excommunication against the Seminary.

For his part, Cyrus Adler, president of JTS, did not always welcome the RIETS students, whose lack of secular learning posed a challenge for the Seminary. To accommodate these students, JTS developed a preparatory program; nonetheless, a significant number failed to earn their degree. In the meantime, in the face of declining enrollment, RIETS gradually yielded to student demands by Americanizing its mission and curriculum. This process culminated in 1915 when Etz Chaim and RIETS merged and established a Rabbinical College. Dr. Bernard Revel, president of the merged school, now worked to make RIETS competitive with JTS in training rabbis, while preserving a traditional yeshiva approach to Jewish learning.

By this time, JTS had become a very different institution—according to historian Mel Scult, an entirely separate institution, unrelated except in name to the original JTS created in 1887. In a 1902 reorganization, Mel Scult argues, Jacob Schiff, Louis Marshall, Mayer Sulzberger and Cyrus Adler led a coup to transform the financially failing Seminary into a brand new institution under new leadership.

It seems Schiff and Marshall initially had another idea in mind—a merger of HUC with JTS, that would have entailed HUC’s relocating to New York. They called for this in the Jewish press in late spring of 1900 when, following the death of Isaac Mayer Wise,

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58 Ibid.
60 Gurock, “Yeshiva Students at the Jewish Theological Seminary,” 486-487.
61 Scult, “Schechter’s Seminary,” 47-56.
prominent Jewish communal leaders were debating the future of the College as well as that of JTS, which had begun to languish following the death of its president, Sabato Morais, three years earlier. In light of the fact that both schools now lacked permanent heads, and both were in need of financial support, the American Hebrew launched a symposium entitled “One Institution for Rearing Rabbis? Shall Our Theological Colleges Unite—Is it Possible, Is It Desirable?”

For many years gentlemen prominent in communal affairs in this country have believed that instead of two weak institutions for teaching rabbis, the Jews should have one strong one. The energy and money wasted in conducting two where one might be made to answer the purpose better, has been time and again discussed by them. Events of the past few years have strengthened them in their views. Not only are laymen included among those who have believed thus, but many rabbis whose scholarship is generally admitted, have held these view also.62

Without endorsing one view or the other, the editors invited select Reform and Conservative leaders to discuss whether or not HUC should relocate to New York in order to merge with JTS. They opened the debate with a letter from Jacob Schiff, who supported the idea.

At the very moment of the recent home-going of the sainted Rev. Dr. Isaac M. Wise, it occurred to me that the moment had arrived when efforts should be made to unite the two struggling institutions, which, each in its present condition, could not and does not do justice to the great cause which both institutions should serve. It does not appear to me that a seminary for the education of Jewish Rabbis need necessarily to be either under orthodox influence or reform management, especially not in this country, with its constant shifting movements, and where the orthodox Jew of to-day is to-morrow found in the reform camp. To me it is not a question of whether orthodoxy or reform should be sustained and perpetuated, the question much near to me is, how can Judaism be maintained as an active force in the daily life of our people, so that they may not become swamped by materialism and indifference, as is seriously threatened. In a serious effort for this maintenance of Judaism, the orthodox and reform Jews can, should and must join hands, and in no way can they better do this, than by the joining in the creation of a strong institution, from which sincere, earnest and capable men shall become graduated—true Jews, who shall be able to be teachers, leaders and missionaries among our people.63

63 Ibid.
Schiff went on to bemoan the fact that, with few exceptions, the College had failed to produce rabbis of prominence, despite American Jewry’s urgent need of great teachers and influential leaders, in light of “grave dangers which threaten the spiritual life of the present and the rising generation of our co-religionists.” Recognizing HUC’s local importance to Cincinnati, Schiff argued that, nevertheless, in order for the College to have a greater future it must be located in an academic center where local resources and wealth can be used in its favor, and where knowledgeable men will come for reasons other than rabbinical training. Urging HUC not to let “local pride alone influence you,” Schiff asked that the College consider moving to New York or any place where conditions will ensure its becoming “the seat of Jewish learning from which American Israel shall be able to draw teachers who shall be leaders, and ministers who shall be missionaries in the highest sense of the word.”64

Louis Marshall, then chairman of the campaign to raise a $500,000 I. M. Wise Endowment for HUC, supported a merger, as well, assuring readers that two different religious approaches could easily be taught in one seminary. “Just as in the study of political science, the principles of monarchical and republican forms of government, the policies of the free-trader and of the protectionist, the views of the bimetalist and of the monometalist, are taught in the same college, so, likewise the contrasted doctrines of the orthodox and of the reformed [sic] Jews may be elucidated, and developed, possibly by different professors, but yet in the same seminary.” He supported fusing the two schools, further, because:

By consolidation, two financially feeble institutions can be developed into one strong body, and because, united, much can be accomplished that cannot be done by a house divided against itself. The best Jewish scholarship could then be enlisted toward the advancement of our cause. The interests of all classes of Jews throughout the country would be concentrated. There would exist none of the excuses for indifference which now obtain. There would not be that waste of energy and of money which the continuance of the two schools, where one would be ample to meet all requirements, would entail. There would be unity in matters of essential importance, where now

64 Ibid.
there is discord. Every dictate of reason and of sentiment favors consolidation. Naught but unworthy personal prejudices can stand in its way.⁶⁵

In the symposium that followed, the American Hebrew published letters from faculty members at HUC and JTS, prominent rabbis, and lay leaders, offering a range of Orthodox, Conservative and Reform perspectives. In general, those who favored the merger believed a single strong institution located in New York made sense financially, and would best serve American Jewry, and they expressed little concern about a single seminary representing different viewpoints. Rather, they complained about the quality of the rabbis HUC was currently producing, and argued that a merged seminary located in proximity to the city’s universities and libraries would provide the higher-level scholarly training necessary for rabbis to garner the respect of contemporary world Jewry. Among those who opposed a merger, including Reform as well as Orthodox Jews, some believed mixing “the oil of orthodoxy with the water of reform” was impossible; others on both sides feared the amalgamation would water down sacred principles and lead to complete indifference “in this age of pallid, anaemic [sic] religiousness.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid.
⁶⁶ Among those who opposed the merger idea were Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Jews. Joseph Jacobs, a leading Orthodox rabbi in New York, argued that because the approaches of JTS and HUC were antithetical to one another, they could not be offered under one roof. “Whether it is possible to combine the oil of orthodoxy with the water of reform seems to me somewhat doubtful. Of course in essence there is but one Judaism, yet in certain aspects there can be irreconcilable differences of opinion on certain important subjects, such as the higher criticism of the Bible, the validity of the Oral Law, the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures and the like,” Jacobs wrote. “It is scarcely for a Theological College as such, to pursue a policy of non-committal on such fundamental issues, and while this is so, there seems to be room for at least two institutions presenting, if I may say so, the black and the white sides of the shield of Jewish truth (each calls the other side black).” Jacobs added another argument for preserving the two schools. “You cannot have teachers unless careers are open to them, and the larger the number of careers, the more competition and the better teachers.” (May 25, 1900.)

Isaac Bernheim, an HUC Governor, opposed the idea from the opposite end of the religious spectrum. “I cannot conceive how Rabbis could be educated in the same institution to lead both camps. The Cincinnati college will continue to be the exponent of modern Judaism,” he wrote. “If the Orthodox school would join with it, it must of necessity give way to the forces that gave the UAHC birth, and that will continue to pervade its being.” (American Hebrew, May 25, 1900.)

Max Heller, a graduate of the College and a Reform rabbi in New Orleans, believed an Orthodox presence would negatively impact the Reform seminary. “We want no Zionswachter to
impose kosher living upon unconvinced students. We need in an American rabbinical college such German Lehrfreiheit, and Lernfreiheit as Dr. Wise had accustomed his pupils to. No consistent orthodox would ever support a college for the training of rabbis in which modern Bible criticism was taught scientifically; and it ought to be taught,” Heller wrote. “A hybrid college would, in this age of pallid, anaemic religiousness, be another step in the march towards complete indifference…let there be healthy and mutually respectful rivalry—the Hebrew Union College needs it; it can not do its best without it. Let but our Russian brother come into his share of wealth and culture; he will make your seminary one pole of Jewish enthusiasm and scholarship; while our college in the meantime will grow to vie in fervor and learning with its younger colleague, to teach it the spirit of freedom itself as warmly loyal to the cause of Judaism.” (American Hebrew, June 1, 1900.)

Two men claimed to take offense at the very idea of a merger. Rudolph Grossman, a Reform rabbi in New York and a graduate of the College referred to Isaac Mayer Wise when he wrote, “it would be poorly honoring his memory to consider now the question of transferring the College to another city and of changing the entire plan of that institution, which he builded and to which he gave such splendid efforts.” (American Hebrew, June 1, 1900.) Similarly, Sabato Morais’ son Henry Morais dismissed the merger possibility, writing of his father, “his actual purpose had been and would always be, to offset the mischief and destruction plain to every eye, as the result of the Cincinnati college, and those that emanated from its midst.” (American Hebrew, June 8, 1900.)

Cyrus Adler, president of JTS, dismissed the matter as “a waste of time” and “within the realm of the busybody.” Nonetheless, he made clear his opposition, suggesting that the amalgamation “might result in the production of a body of graduates absolutely devoid of positive convictions and virility.” (American Hebrew, June 1, 1900.)

By contrast, Bernard Drachman, a member of the JTS faculty, lent the idea lukewarm support in theory, but argued it was entirely impractical for the time being. “Are the two armies, so long engaged in theologic warfare, ready not only to make a truce but even to coalesce into one host, to march under one flag and obey the orders of the same commander-in-chief, his generals and captains? Perhaps! ’Twere a consummation devoutly to be wished,” he wrote. “The supporters of the Hebrew Union College will still desire ‘advanced’ and ‘progressive’ Judaism, while those who uphold the Seminary will continue to wish that it adhere to its principles…and remain ‘faithful to ancestral tradition, the Mosaic law and the interpretations of the Sages.’ To those who suggest the instruction could be non-partisan, leaving the student free to join any school of Judaism he might prefer, Drachman denied such an approach could seriously be upheld. “Colorless theological instruction is not possible nor would it be desirably if it were.” (American Hebrew, June 1, 1900.)

Maurice Harris, of New York’s Temple Israel (Reform), proposed a partial union. While the two schools should remain separate, were they to exist in the same city, he said, they could teach their differences of conviction separately, while sharing the instruction of non-controversial material such as language—Hebrew, Chaldaic, Arabic and Assyrian, as well as philosophy, poetry and medieval literature. In addition, practical skills including “preaching (homiletics), communal duty, clerical responsibility and uplifting of the people—here is common ground,” he wrote. (American Hebrew, June 1, 1900)

A few contributors to the symposium heartily endorsed the merger idea, including Simon Wolf, chairman of the Board of Delegates and a leader in B’nai B’rith, as well as Gotthard Deutsch, a faculty member at HUC. “I unhesitatingly say yes,” Deutsch wrote. “There is no doubt but that one college can supply the needs of the American Jewish pulpit…a combination of forces would result in better educational facilities for the students of theology.” Regarding matters of dogma, he pointed out areas of agreement between the two streams of Judaism, and concluded, “our differences in theology are a very small matter.” (American Hebrew, May 25, 1900.)

The symposium concluded with a submission by an anonymous editorial writer who used the pseudonym Emanu-El. After acknowledging the services rendered to HUC by the people of Cincinnati, and the offense they might take by any suggestion to relocate the College, Emanu-El called for just that. Bemoaning the unlearned rabbinate the College had ostensibly produced, the
Not surprisingly, the leadership at JTS and the UAHC opposed the idea, unwilling to compromise ideologically, and unwilling, as well, to cede control of their respective institutions. The Cincinnati-based lay leadership of HUC also refused to consider moving the school to New York, and neither the Board of Governors nor the UAHC included any discussion of the idea in their minutes.\(^6^7\) Schiff and Marshall—themselves Reform Jews and prominent leaders of New York’s Temple Emanu-El—abandoned the merger idea, and instead invested their resources in taking over JTS and remaking it into a new Conservative institution. Working in secret and unbeknownst to the board and faculty of JTS, they incorporated a new school with a slightly different name—the Jewish Theological Seminary of America—and obtained a charter from the State of New York. The reorganization took control away from rabbis and congregational representatives on the former JTS board who had, in the eyes of Schiff and Marshall, let the institution fail; henceforth, the Conservative seminary would be controlled by a wealthy and powerful group of Reform Jews, including

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editorialist argued that only “modern” rabbis with a high level of Jewish scholarship could now attain the respect of either educated American Jewry or of the broader Jewish world. “The scholarship of the pulpit should rank as high as that of the pew,” the editorialist wrote, and the College “should be more than a mere training school for officiating ministers—and at that ministers who can only officiate in America.” Complaining that HUC-trained rabbis “have been trained as veritable sectarians…who are strangers outside the limited camp of reformers,” Emanu-El asserted “we must radically proceed to make the American Rabbi a Rabbi, a scholar and teacher whose high title shall be recognized and respected where ever he goes…we have enough officiating ministers—now let us have successors to Wise, Einhorn, Lilienthal, Hirsch and Adler—successors to the builders, to the architects, not to the journeymen stonemasons! The chasm between oriental and occidental Judaism cannot be bridged by English prayers but by Jewish scholarship!”

Emanu-El opposed a merger of HUC with any other institution, but demanded that it relocate. “If Cincinnati, in the judgment of others, can supply the high demands of scholarship, if its university is not a petty, local school, where our students are confined to certain courses because none others are offered; if the Semitic department of the college is better than that of Columbia or John Hopkins \([\text{sic}]\), if our students, aside from their faculty, are in touch with all that can and must inspire them to an appreciation of their responsibilities not as American ministers exclusively but as RABBIS IN ISRAEL, regardless of geographical limitations; if its libraries are complete,—well, then, we have been very foolish; but if what we have stated is true then we demand a peaceful discussion of the question we have submitted, relying upon our affluent brethren to back up the contention with gold coin. Because, whether in Cincinnati or elsewhere the Isaac M. Wise Memorial Fund must be organized as a lasting monument to the man who fashioned the destiny of American Judaism!” (American Hebrew, June 29, 1900.)

\(^6^7\) Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 51.
Marshall as well as Congregation Emanue-El’s Daniel and Simon Guggenheim, Leonard Lewisohn and Felix Warburg, who together contributed a generous endowment in order to place the new Jewish Theological Seminary of America on solid financial footing.68

Despite their Reform affiliation, however, the intent of these Jews was never to make JTSA a liberal or Reform seminary; rather, JTSA would remain a Conservative institution promoting an Americanized form of halakhic Judaism, albeit more flexible than RIETS regarding traditional Jewish practice. To lead the new Jewish Theological Seminary of America as president, they enlisted the renowned British scholar Solomon Schechter. Under Schechter, the Conservative seminary attracted first- and second-generation immigrant Jews attempting to integrate traditional Judaism with Americanization, just as Marshall and Schiff had hoped. Though created by Reform Jews, JTS prohibited study of the Torah according to the “higher biblical criticism” of the day, and individual freedom of religious practice and belief were not permitted—rather, a high level of halakhic observance was required of all faculty and students.

Why did these Reform Jews devote their time, energy and money to saving JTS, an institution dedicated, in no small part, to battling the forces of Reform in America? Historians including Michael Meyer, Naomi Cohen, Mel Scult, Jonathan Sarna and Karla Goldman have written on the subject and posited a range of explanations. Most likely, Marshall and Schiff believed it was critical that a strong rabbinical school be based in New York. As noted earlier, after the deaths of both Isaac Mayer Wise and Sabato Morais at the turn of the century, they had hoped to merge HUC with JTS, but that effort failed.69 They believed that the training HUC provided, grounded as it was in the principles of Reform which reflected the orientation of much of German-American Jewry, did not appeal to New York's growing

69 Marshall would later support a merger of JTS and RIETS. See Gurock, "An Orthodox Conspiracy Theory," 250.
Eastern European Jewish immigrant population. They feared that without effective rabbinic leadership, an increasing number of these immigrants and their children would turn either to political radicalism or to religious indifference. In establishing the new JTSA, Marshall and Schiff hoped to create a generation of rabbis grounded in secular as well as Jewish learning who could provide for the immigrant community a path toward Americanization while preserving a strong commitment to Jewish culture—even if that commitment would likely be expressed in Jewish terms quite different from those to which the membership of Temple Emanu-El subscribed.

Soon after the JTSA reorganization, HUC’s Board of Governors, concerned that the nation’s leading Reform philanthropists had invested so substantially in JTSA while HUC’s current fundraising campaign floundered, selected as their new president Kaufmann Kohler, a noted scholar and radical Reformer (and David Einhorn’s son-in-law), and rabbi of Temple Beth El in Manhattan. Kohler assumed the presidency in February 1903; according to Michael Meyer, the HUC board hoped Kohler’s scholarly reputation and access to New York donors, as well as his progressivism, might enable the College to compete effectively with the newly reorganized Seminary.70

When analyzing the JTS takeover by Reform Jews, one wonders if this story may have played out differently had the Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary Association succeeded in creating a rabbinical school in New York in the late nineteenth century. Might not Marshall and Schiff have directed their money there? Alternatively, what if HUC and JTS had merged in 1900? Most likely, HUC-JTS would not have attracted Orthodox Etz Chaim alumni, who would have been left with RIETS as their only seminary option. Reform Judaism might have developed in a different direction, perhaps more traditionalist, perhaps more connected to the Eastern European immigrant community, perhaps even more Zionist.

Such a seminary may have attracted the young Stephen S. Wise, fresh out of Columbia College in 1892 and intent upon becoming a rabbi—but he had no such option. Michael Meyer describes the path Wise chose instead: In order to stay in New York City and pursue a doctorate at Columbia University in Semitics working with Professor Richard Gottheil (the son of Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, mentioned above), Wise obtained permission from Isaac Mayer Wise to enroll in absentia at HUC during the academic year 1892-93, completing the required coursework independently while remaining in New York. Dissatisfied with this approach after just a short time, however, the younger Wise withdrew from HUC and traveled to Europe in the summer of 1893, where he received private ordination from Rabbi Adolf Jellinek, chief rabbi of Vienna renowned for his preaching. He returned to New York to continue his doctoral studies at Columbia and, the following spring, became assistant rabbi at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun.  

After attempting an arrangement with HUC, Stephen S. Wise opted out of the American seminary system during his student years because he decided no school existed that could meet his needs; almost thirty years later, he created the school he might have attended as a young man in New York: the Jewish Institute of Religion. From the outset, JIR's founders saw HUC as their main competitor.

**Religion in American Education**

**Jews and American Higher Education**

From their inception, American Jewish seminaries have been directly impacted by the changing nature of Jewish participation in the broader world of academe. In 1855, when few Jews taught in American colleges, and virtually no Jewish subject matter was offered except in service to Christian scholarship (Biblical Hebrew, for example), Isaac Mayer Wise tried

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but failed to create a Jewish college for the study of secular as well as religious subjects.\footnote{Nearly a century later, that dream would become real with the establishment of Brandeis University.} In the decades that immediately followed Zion College’s collapse, however, a narrow opening for Jewish scholarship emerged in a handful of elite American educational institutions with the creation of Semitics departments. Though Semitics mainly included areas like Assyriology, Babylonian and Akkadian, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century some of these departments also began to offer courses covering Jewish topics such as Rabbinics and medieval Jewish literature, taught by rabbis and Jewish scholars. In many cases, local Jewish communities provided the funding for these appointments, which included, for example, Max Margolis, William Popper and Jacob Voorsanger at the University of California; Emil G. Hirsch at the University of Chicago; Felix Adler briefly at Cornell; Cyrus Adler, Caspar Levias and William Rosenau at Johns Hopkins; Abram S. Isaacs at New York University; Max Heller at Tulane; Morris Jastrow at the University of Pennsylvania; and, Joseph Levy at Temple.\footnote{Paul Ritterband and Harold S. Wechsler, \textit{Jewish Learning in American Universities: The First Century} (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 60-67.} In 1887, New York’s Temple Emanu-El established a Chair of Rabbinic Literature at Columbia University, where Richard Gottheil, the rabbi’s son, was designated as its first occupant; four years later, the congregation augmented the Chair’s resources by donating the large library of Judaica it had acquired in 1871 when the Theological Seminary Association was still intent on creating a seminary (later, in 1909, when Columbia’s Chief Librarian decided to return the library to Emanu-El because it was too "theological", the Emanu-El Board directed the University to give it to the Jewish Theological Seminary, instead, where it remains today). Members of Temple Emanu-El made donations elsewhere, too: at the turn of the century Jacob Schiff established a
Semitics chair at Harvard, where he also founded a Semitics Museum,\(^74\) and in 1913 Adolph Lewisohn gave his library of German books to the City College of New York.\(^75\)

After World War I, the Semitics movement declined, and growing institutional anti-Semitism within American universities coupled with a lack of Jewish donors interested in funding Jewish scholarship meant, paradoxically, that despite a steady increase in Jewish student enrollment in American institutions of higher education, opportunities for Jewish learning there contracted. Most Jewish philanthropists at this time directed their gifts to relief efforts for the Jewish communities of Europe and Palestine, or for the immigrant community at home; the two notable exceptions who did endow chairs in Jewish learning at Harvard and Columbia in the mid-late nineteen-twenties (described below) created significant precedents in American academe.

These developments in secular higher education impacted the American Jewish seminaries in two areas: philanthropic giving and library acquisitions. When Semitics departments were ascendant, seminaries had to compete with them for Jewish financial support and library collections—this was especially the case for HUC, as Reform Jews like Jacob Schiff, who in 1903 endowed the Semitic Museum at Harvard, showed a particular interest in funding scholarship that depicted Judaism as a universalist tradition; later, as Jewish Studies slowly began to develop in the second quarter of the twentieth century, the seminaries would have to compete not only for funds and books, but for faculty and students, as well.\(^76\) Beginning in the early nineteen-twenties, HUC and JTS ceased to be the only institutions of higher learning where a Jewish student could study his (or her, in a very few cases) heritage, for a small number of universities were beginning to offer this opportunity in a limited way, as well. Eventually, as Jewish Studies grew, the rabbinate would cease to be

\(^74\) Ibid., 101-107.
\(^76\) Ritterband and Wechsler, Jewish Learning in American Universities, 102, 74.
the sole career option for a liberal Jew interested in pursuing a career in Jewish scholarship; becoming a professor in a Jewish academic discipline became a less remote possibility, as well.

Still, in 1922 if a young American Jew fresh out of college wanted to pursue a career in Jewish scholarship, outside American university Semitics departments, the options for advanced study in the United States were virtually nil; at the same time, the path earlier generations had taken—studying in a European university and perhaps at one of the Wissenschaft Jewish seminaries, too, a path Judah Magnes took, for example—was becoming increasingly fraught, due to the postwar economic crisis in Europe and rising anti-Semitism.

If, by contrast, a young non-Orthodox American Jewish male wanted to become a rabbi, he had several routes available. He could study in Europe, either in one of the seminaries or privately as an apprentice, though the postwar crisis made rabbinical study in Europe, too, less viable. He could do the same in the United States, studying either at HUC or JTS, or pursuing private semikhah, as did Louis Newman, whom Stephen Wise together with his colleague Martin Meyer ordained in 1918. To be sure, the percentage of rabbis in the United States with some formal training had increased markedly since the mid-nineteenth century when Isaac Mayer Wise discovered that no American rabbis had formal training; now, though it remained the case that many practicing rabbis lacked training, most young men interested in the rabbinate understood they would need to complete a course of study in one of the seminaries in order to enter the profession.

**Protestant Seminary Training in the United States**

The creation of JIR must also be seen in the context of American Protestant seminary education, both in relation to the early history of seminaries in the United States, as well as contemporaneous developments. Wise embraced a number of trends unfolding among Christian seminaries in the United States, particularly those that were nondenominational and
either based in universities, such as the divinity schools at Harvard and Yale, or university-affiliated, such as Union Theological Seminary which had a formal relationship with Columbia.

From the seventeenth through the first half of the nineteenth century, most American colleges were established under religious auspices, and many included as part of their mission the training of Protestant clergy. Protestant ministers often had a strong presence on their boards, and many received funding from the churches or denominations they served. Once the very earliest seminaries were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, new seminaries generally emerged out of doctrinal splits over matters of faith and ministry, as did Andover Theological Seminary when its founders broke with Harvard in 1807 over the teaching of Unitarianism, and Oberlin Collegiate Institute (later Oberlin Theological Seminary) when abolitionist students broke away from Cincinnati’s Lane Theological Seminary in 1835. The establishment of JIR would fit within this American tradition, for its founders too diverged ideologically from the leaders of the existing Jewish seminaries, and sought to create a new kind of rabbinical training and, ultimately, a new kind of rabbi.

American higher education existed not only in service to organized religion, however, but also to the economic and professional needs of the country, and its role included training an educated class the nation needed in order for the economy to prosper. With the industrial revolution in the mid-late nineteenth century, many American colleges broadened the education they provided in order to prepare professionals who could meet the direct and ancillary needs of American business. As schools shifted their focus away from ministerial training, businessmen gradually came to dominate college boards rather than clergy, and the religious dimension of the curriculum, previously core to the mission of these schools,

became increasingly confined to Semitics departments and, in those institutions that were becoming universities, to divinity schools. Once funding from private wealth surpassed church and denominational funding, the original religious affiliation of these schools—Baptist, say, or Methodist—ceased to have much relevance beyond historical tradition. Some universities, in relegating the training of clergy to their newly formed divinity schools, decided on a non-denominational approach whereby divinity students of all Protestant affiliations could receive the same training, and then, after completing the requirements to earn a Masters in Divinity degree, seek ordination from the particular church they planned to serve.

It was in this late nineteenth-century period when the modern view of academic freedom began to take hold in newly-established American universities. Richard Hofstadter and Walter P. Metzger, in their 1955 work, *The Development of Academic Freedom in the United States*, describe how American universities took their inspiration from German universities’ *lehrfreiheit* (the right to teach freely) but, in part in response to the Darwinian debates that cost some scholars their teaching positions, developed a broader approach to academic freedom that included not only the right to free expression in teaching and scholarship, but also the right to freely participate in political activity beyond the academic sphere. In the turbulent 1890s and beyond, however, the principle meant little unless it was put into practice, and faculty on the right as well as the left were not always granted the protection their institutions promised.78

Conflicts over academic freedom were not limited to American universities; seminaries, too, experienced similar disputes. Union Theological Seminary, for example, found one of its own professors, Charles Briggs, put on trial in 1891 by the Presbyterian Church for rejecting the notion of Biblical infallibility. After two years, the Church dismissed

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him from the ministry and withdrew its monetary support from Union; in response, Union broke off entirely from the Church and became an independent school promoting free theological inquiry, where Briggs continued to teach until 1913.79

In this period, too, certain leading American Protestants attempted to form an alliance between the emerging modern research university and theological education. William Rainey Harper, for example, the Semitics scholar and Baptist minister who served as the first president of the University of Chicago, established an ecumenical Protestant divinity school as the university’s first professional school. Harper hoped the divinity school would professionalize the clergy and train ministers who could effectively Protestantize the nation.80 Similar non-denominational university-based divinity schools were created at Harvard and Yale.

In the early twentieth century, these seminaries, along with Union, which established cooperative agreements with New York University and Columbia, and a few other theological schools that were also non-denominational, became home to the liberal wing of Protestantism, and intellectual centers for the Social Gospel movement where faculty promoted what they understood to be a biblical vision of peace and justice, and prophetic critique of industrial capitalism (as noted above). They also began approaching the training of clergy in new ways, which Robert Lincoln Kelly, a progressive Quaker, Dewey-influenced educator, minister, and former president of Earlham College, discussed these in his 1924 article, “Tendencies in Theological Education.” Boards were being organized in accord with the secular university model, whereby the board, rather than the president, had full control over management of the institution, Kelly reported, in sharp contrast to nineteenth-century seminaries where presidents ruled with complete authority; following the move toward

professionalization in the fields of medicine and law, these university-affiliated seminaries were now providing graduate-level training only, and they offered course credit within their respective universities; and, students were now required to complete a dissertation in order to earn their degree. In an effort to raise educational standards, these schools began recruiting students from across the United States and, where financially possible, offering fellowships for study in Europe; they required faculty to engage in current scholarship; they raised their academic expectations of students; and, as professional schools, they added a practical component to the curriculum in order to provide students with the knowledge, skills and training they would need to function effectively in the modern ministry.\(^81\)

Kelly also described a discernible liberalizing trend. Early American Protestant seminaries had commonly required their faculty, often ministers in the church to which the seminary belonged, to take a pledge at the time of their hiring, sometimes in an impressive school ceremony, that they would teach only the doctrines of their particular church, and refrain from teaching all other doctrines. As a further measure to prevent the expression of non-doctrinal ideas, Kelly noted, sometimes entering students were also required to pledge not to propagate any dissenting opinions.\(^82\) By contrast, in the early nineteen-twenties, seminaries based in universities including Chicago, Yale and Harvard were moving in a very different direction. They taught religious subject matter according to the same methods of critical investigation applied in secular learning and, no longer requiring adherence to particular doctrines or practices, they provided academic and religious freedom to their faculties, who increasingly represented a broad range of points of view on theological and social questions; similarly, by welcoming students of various denominational affiliations and theological beliefs, they cultivated a kind of Christian religious cosmopolitanism. This is not

\(^{82}\) Ibid., 20.
to say that issues of academic freedom suddenly vanished; they did not. But with the shift toward non-denominationalism, those conflicts that did emerge in the university-based divinity schools no longer concerned doctrinal belief or the higher criticism, as they did in the nineteenth century; rather, they usually related to politics, and arose when a university administration or board challenged a faculty member’s espousal of socialism or pacifism.

The expression in these divinity schools of socialism and pacifism, in particular, is indicative of another liberalizing trend of which they were a part. Several divinity schools employed a small number of faculty who espoused leftist politics, including Jerome Davis at Yale and George Coe at Union.83 The impact these faculty had can be seen in curricular changes including the supplementing of traditional subjects with courses in “practical theology,” such as "Modern Problems of the City" and "The Church in the Industrial City,” in which students were required to develop Christian interpretations of the modern problems of democracy and science. In addition, divinity schools began to require fieldwork training in local churches, intended to provide students with the opportunity to try out their ideas and build their skills by working in these communities under faculty supervision.84

As Kelly put it, the faculty at university-based non-denominational seminaries, not content “to be but onlookers in the struggle of men for social justice and human understanding,” sought “to discover how democracy may be Christian in terms of political

83 Jerome Davis, a labor organizer who spent the war years working with Bolshevik leaders in Russia directing the YMCA’s activities there, subsequently earned his Ph.D. in Sociology at Columbia in 1922, and taught at Dartmouth for two years before joining the faculty of the Yale Divinity School, where he continued his labor activism. Judith Ann Schiff, “Firing the Firebrand,” Yale Alumni Magazine 68, no. 5 (2005), accessed August 6, 2013, http://archives.yalealumnimagazine.com/issues/2005_05/old_yale.html.

84 George Coe, who as an undergraduate at the University of Rochester in the mid-1880s was a classmate of Walter Rauschenbusch’s, earned his Ph.D. in Philosophy at Boston University in 1891 and taught at Northwestern University and then, from 1909-1922, at Union Theological Seminary, where he advocated the Social Gospel and became a pioneer in the modernization of Christian religious education. In 1922, Coe left Union to teach at Columbia Teachers College for five years. Later in life he abandoned Social Gospel liberalism and became a Marxist. Helen Allen Archibald, “George Albert Coe: Theorist for Religious Education in the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1975).

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and social life.” They believed seminary men should lead in the Christian democratization of mankind by creating centers of intellectual and ethical power. “They recognize the moral obligation to be intelligent,” he wrote. “They seek to know the truth by whatever method obtained, and they encourage their students to proclaim the truth even if it ‘rob the altar of its sacrifices and the priest of his mysteries.’”

By no means did these changes pertain to all American seminaries; those that valued modernization implemented the more radical changes, whereas more traditional schools, such as Princeton Theological Seminary, offered in 1924 a curriculum virtually identical to their 1872 curriculum. Nor were these issues limited to seminary education. Academic freedom, for example, had become highly contested during and after the First World War, when several universities clamped down on faculty expressing socialism or pacifism. Horace Kallen, who shared a friendship with Stephen S. Wise, was forced to resign his instructorship in Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin in 1918, due to his support for the rights of pacifists. Shortly thereafter, he moved to New York and, his commitment to promoting intellectual freedom and expression only deeper, helped create the New School for Social Research.

The founders of JIR would adopt many of the innovations now underway at the university-based divinity schools and in pioneering institutions like the New School. In so doing they would differentiate the Institute from HUC and JTS, neither of which at this time followed suit in most areas. In particular, the non-denominational approach, professionalization, and liberalizing of the curriculum that now characterized divinity schools at universities like Harvard and Yale, would serve as a model for JIR: the Institute, too, would provide graduate-level training only, and offer fieldwork opportunities in

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85 Ibid., 30-31, 34.
86 Ibid., 28.
metropolitan-area synagogues intended to serve as laboratories where students could gain practical experience trying out their ideas and building their skills; JIR would be open to a range of religious perspectives, and not only refrained from requiring adherence to any particular doctrine, but espoused academic and religious freedom as foundational principles; and, not unlike the approach Jerome Davis brought to Yale, JIR would teach students to interpret traditional Jewish teachings in relation to the social, political and scientific concerns and problems of contemporary society.

Although the founders of JIR rarely cited these developments in Protestant university-affiliated seminary education, Wise had regular contact with divinity school faculty members at Harvard, Yale, and other Protestant seminaries, and he frequently brought them to guest lecture at JIR. He was aware of their approach, and he applied it in fundamental ways to the Jewish Institute of Religion.

**The Emergence of Stephen S. Wise and the Free Synagogue**

**Wise’s Education and Early Career**

Wise shared the view that many of these developments were “modern” and “American,” and he adopted the university-affiliated seminary model with the hope of creating modern American rabbis, which he believed neither HUC nor JTS, and certainly not RIETS, were doing. In many ways, he and the founders of JIR felt he, better than anyone else, represented the model rabbi fit to serve twentieth-century American Jewry. To understand the motivations behind the creation of JIR, it is important to understand the rabbinate Stephen S. Wise created for himself.

Rebellious spirit that Wise had in many ways, he also remained loyal to his own family’s evolving tradition. Descended from a distinguished rabbinic lineage, Wise followed the career path of his grandfather, Joseph Hirsch Weisz, who became the chief rabbi of Erlau in Hungary in 1840, and of his father, Aaron Wise, a rabbi as well. While Weisz was one of
the leading adversaries of religious reform in Pest, his son Aaron, by contrast, moved from orthodoxy toward liberalism over the course of his rabbinical career. As a young man, Aaron learned Hebrew with his father, and then studied for the rabbinate at the Orthodox seminary in Eisenstadt led by Azriel Hildesheimer, who later founded the Rabbiner Seminar Für Das Orthodoxe Judenthum. After marrying Sabine de Fischer Farkashazy in 1870, Aaron Wise worked briefly for his father-in-law’s porcelain business, until he helped organize a workers strike in protest of poor conditions in the factory. Soon thereafter, just a month after the birth of Stephen, his second child, Aaron left for the United States, where he pursued a rabbinical career, first at Congregation Beth Elohim in Brooklyn, and then at Congregation Rodeph Sholom in Manhattan. A year after arriving in the United States, he brought over his wife and children.88

Aaron Wise raised his family speaking German in the home, and the Hungarian family associated with the Reform Jews of Rodeph Sholom, which whom they shared a language and social standing; however, the father also cultivated in his children an appreciation for the concept of Jewish peoplehood, and in spirit and politics they identified, too, with the newly-arriving Eastern European immigrants filling the crowded tenements downtown on the Lower East Side. In 1886 Aaron Wise helped found the Jewish Theological Seminary, and he belonged to a small circle of proto-Zionist rabbis that included Temple Emanu-El’s Gustav Gottheil. Perhaps due to his father’s influence, beginning at a young age Stephen Wise felt drawn toward the downtown Jews, rather than toward the Reform “old guard” by then ensconced uptown. Aaron Wise’s ideological flexibility and ability to work with colleagues across a broad spectrum of belief may also have informed his son’s commitments, particularly his prioritization of Jewish peoplehood over any particular theological perspective.

Wise earned his BA at City College, and then pursued the rabbinate, first \textit{in abstentia} at HUC, and then through private study with Jellenik in Vienna. After returning to New York in the summer of 1893, Wise continued his doctoral studies at Columbia and, the following spring, as noted above, became assistant rabbi at Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, then located at Madison Avenue and 65\textsuperscript{th} Street.\textsuperscript{89} B’nai Jeshurun had joined the exodus of congregations from the UAHC that followed the \textit{treyfa} banquet a decade earlier and, though not Orthodox, the congregation still took a more traditional approach to Judaism than did its Reform neighbors on the Upper East Side, such as Congregation Rodeph Sholom and Temple Emanu-El.

In 1898, Wise experienced a life-changing event when he attended the Second Zionist Congress; there, moved by Theodor Herzl, he became a lifelong Zionist who, like Herzl, viewed the movement as a means of rescue for a Jewish people that had suffered for millennia under anti-Semitic persecution. Believing that with a state, the Jewish people would no longer be powerless and could live as a healthy nation like the other nation states of the world, Wise identified with political rather than cultural Zionism.\textsuperscript{90}

Soon thereafter, Wise married Louise Waterman, a rebellious young woman from a highly-educated, wealthy German Jewish family. When her parents fiercely opposed her marrying the Hungarian-born Zionist rabbi, she refused to bow to their pressure. Similarly, ever strong-willed, she also refused to compromise her secular humanist views to accommodate her husband; Waterman belonged to Felix Adler’s Ethical Culture movement, through which she taught art in New York’s settlement houses. Unlike her parents, her new husband seemed to have no objection to her charting her own course.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} Urofsky, \textit{A Voice that Spoke for Justice}, 10; and \textit{American Jewish Year Book} 1 (1899-1900), 195.\textsuperscript{90} Urofsky, \textit{A Voice that Spoke for Justice}, 22-23.\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 27.
After Wise defended his dissertation, the translation of an ethical treatise of the eleventh-century Jewish philosopher and poet Solomon ibn Gabirol, the couple headed west to Portland, Oregon where in 1900 Wise became the rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel. While Beth Israel affiliated with the Reform movement, the membership practiced a more traditional Judaism, as had been the case at B’nai Jeshurun. In his brief career in Portland, Wise demonstrated his capacity to build new organizations and his early commitment to civic involvement and the Progressive causes he would champion throughout his life. In his installation sermon he allied himself with the Social Gospel, and he regularly incorporated into his preaching the works of Gladden, Rauschenbusch and other liberal Protestant thinkers. He also, in his installation sermon, stated his sole condition in accepting the position. “This pulpit must be free,” he said, and repeated, “this pulpit must be free.” Neither Wise nor his father had ever been silenced by the congregations they served, Melvin Urofsky notes, but at this time it was not uncommon for Jewish as well as non-Jewish clergy to experience censorship, particularly those inclined toward taking stances on social and economic issues that might challenge the views of wealthy congregants. The congregation supported Wise’s independence and, following his lead, shifted from right-wing Conservative practice to a full embrace of Reform. They also did not deter him from public engagement in Progressive causes, though not all congregants were pleased with his activism. Utilizing the pulpit as his base, Wise attacked the gambling and liquor interests, supported women’s suffrage and union rights, promoted interfaith dialogue, participated in the Oregon State Conference of Charities and Corrections, helped found the Peoples’ Forum of Oregon, and serving on the Board of Child Labor Commissioners for the State of Oregon.

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92 Scholars have debated whether or not Wise hired a ghostwriter to complete his dissertation. Urofsky describes the debate and concludes, based on letters he examined between Wise and Gottheil, that Wise did write the dissertation. Ibid., 12-14, 38.
93 Ibid., 40, 44.
94 Ibid., 36-37.
95 Ibid., 40-43.
For all that he achieved in Portland, however, the well-known story of his return to New York would forever overshadow these accomplishments. Adept at public relations, Wise may have wanted it that way. In 1906, when the Board of Trustees of Congregation Emanu-El, home to the wealthiest and most elite German Reform Jews in the country, invited Wise to consider a call to their pulpit, Wise staged a public rejection of the appointment that gained him national attention. He told the board he had but one stipulation regarding the position: “If I am to accept a call to the pulpit of Temple Emanu-El, I do so with the understanding that I am to be free, and that my pulpit is not to be muzzled.”96 His commitment to freedom of the pulpit made it impossible for him to submit his sermons to the Emanu-El board for approval, he said, or even to acknowledge they had a right to such review, whether or not they intended to use it.

Louis Marshall, then secretary to the Board, insisted that indeed the Board did maintain that right. “The pulpit shall always be subject to and under the control of the board of trustees,” Marshall told Wise, adding in subsequent correspondence, “the logical consequence of a conflict of irreconcilable views between the rabbi and the board of trustees is that one or the other must give way. Naturally, it must the rabbi. It goes without saying, therefore, that at such a juncture he should have the privilege of resigning. His failure to exercise that option necessarily implies an acquiescence by him in the views of the board of trustees.”97

Wise, finding deplorable the notion that the rabbi, having devoted his life to the study of religion and morals, must subject his sermons to revision by the board, published an Open Letter to the Members of Temple Emanu-El of New York calling for the pulpit to be free. “The chief office of the minister,” Wise wrote, “is not to represent the views of the congregation,  

97 Ibid.
but to proclaim the truth as he sees it. How can he serve a congregation as a teacher save as he quickens the minds of his hearers by the vitality and independence of his utterances? But how can a man be vital and independent and helpful, if he be tethered and muzzled? A free pulpit, worthily filled, must command respect and influence; a pulpit that is not free, howsoever filled, is sure to be without potency and honor.”

The conflict that ensued captured headlines in the *New York Times* and throughout the Jewish press, and enabled Wise to make his next move with national coverage.

**The Free Synagogue**

Having publicly eschewed the pulpit at Congregation Emanu-El and broadcasting to the Jewish world and beyond his argument with Marshall and his refusal to be subject to the editorial control of the wealthy members of Emanu-El’s board, Wise nonetheless moved back to New York. On the last Sunday in January, 1907, at Times Square’s Hudson Theater, whose owner provided the space at no cost, he led a morning Jewish service and preached on “What Is a Free Synagogue?” The setting was unusual and the congregation more so, consisting of “Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Jews, avowed atheists and free thinkers, socialists and single taxers. A few were wealthy but many were poor.” There, Wise announced his intent to found a Free Synagogue.

We, its founders wish to be not less Jewish but more Jewish in the highest and noblest sense of the term...the Free Synagogue will be Jewish, loyally, unswervingly, uncompromisingly Jewish in its ideals, in its free and democratic organization, in its free and unmuzzled pulpit, in its free and unhampered presentation of Jewish teachings.

What is a Free Synagogue? A synagogue without pews or pew system, the token and symbol of church or synagogue or synagogue-proprietorship on the part of the holder; a synagogue supported not by fixed dues and assessments and methods of taxation, but solely by voluntary contributions, with membership free and open to contributors

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98 Ibid.
100 Voss, *Rabbi and Minister*, 17.
on equal terms, a synagogue on which membership and office-holding shall be free and open to women equally with, and upon the same terms as, men.

The Free Synagogue is to have a free pulpit. A pulpit that is not free cannot in the nature of things be the seat of the truth-seeker.

The Free Synagogue, as its name implies, is to stand for Judaism living, free to grow, to develop, to evolve. That Judaism is undergoing the process of constant evolution was the conviction and the inspiration of the great leaders of the Jewish reformation in the last century…

The recognition of social justice as the supreme aim of the church will determine the character of the philanthropic effort of the Free Synagogue, which will, as far as possible, be not alleviative but remedial, not corrective but constructive, not palliative but preventive. Not charity but social service, building upon the rock of social justice, will be the watch-word of the Free Synagogue…

This became the first of six Sunday morning addresses Wise delivered at the Hudson Theater on West 47th Street, in which he outlined his plans for the Free Synagogue and addressed a variety of other issues. While rapidly developing a following of Eastern European Jews and others who were moved by his powerful oratory and shared his commitments to progressive reform, Zionism, and religious life grounded in the notion of Jewish peoplehood, Wise also brought together a small group of influential men and women willing to lend their financial support to make his vision real. For the next two months, he successfully focused on fundraising for the new synagogue. Henry Morgenthau, Sr. made a gift of $5,000 and agreed to become acting chairman when the congregation formally organized in April, and several members of Congregation Emanu-El contributed gifts of $10,000 each, including Jacob Schiff, Adolf Lewisohn and James Speyer. Other uptown Jews lent their support as well, including Abram I. Elkus, Oscar S. and Nathan Strauss, Charles M. Bloch and Esther Heyman. In general, philanthropists who gravitated toward Wise shared either his Zionism or his Progressivism, or both; likely, the Emanu-El members

101 “From the First Address by Dr. Wise (Preliminary to the Founding of the Free Synagogue, April, 1907). Box 5, folder 8, Stephen S. Wise Collection.
102 Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 61.
103 Ibid., 62.
who came forward had different motivations in doing so. Schiff, especially, had created a model of philanthropy decidedly not based on advancing only his own personal approach to Judaism and politics; rather, he generously supported multiple causes that benefited many different constituencies within the Jewish community. He was particularly interested in promoting American Jewish life that took a middle path between Orthodoxy and secularism, and the Free Synagogue’s approach fell within that continuum.

After unanimously selecting Wise to serve as rabbi, the congregation set out to open a religious school and to find an uptown meeting place more appropriate than the Hudson Theater. They quickly prioritized opening a downtown branch, and just over a month after Wise’s first Hudson Theater service, the congregation began renting the Clinton Hall auditorium on the Lower East Side, where Wise led Friday evening services and a Sunday evening forum on social problems. While the uptown crowd gravitated toward Wise because of his interpretation of political and secular events and his great preaching, Urofsky writes, “the residents of the ghetto wanted to see how Jewish he was.” Despite the vehement opposition of traditionalists in the immigrant community, Wise passed the test, regularly drawing crowds that climbed from 250 to 500-600 over the course of the downtown branch’s ten-year existence.

While Wise’s success displeased the Orthodox, it also riled certain Reform leaders whose approach Wise criticized regularly. Wise’s relative outsider status within the Reform movement may have made it easier for him to expose what he perceived to be the failure of the old guard to recognize and respond to changes taking place outside the movement; after all, his father, a prominent rabbi in New York, had associated little with Reform rabbis, and Wise himself, at a young age, had turned down an opportunity to study at HUC in favor of

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105 Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 63-64.
pursuing an independent path into the rabbinate. Since then, he had aired his differences with the movement from an ever-more public platform.

Now, calling Congregation Emanu-El “an urban gateway to a suburban cemetery,” Wise promoted his plan to create a new kind of synagogue, one he hoped would be vibrant and participatory. The Free Synagogue, rejecting all trappings that called attention to social status, would center instead around three areas of work: religious, educational, and social service.¹⁰⁶ Henry Morgenthau, Sr., who became the congregation’s first president, summarized its ethos: "The Free Synagogue is to be free and democratic in its organization," he said. "It is to be pewless and dueless."¹⁰⁷ Not only would the synagogue abandon the custom of seating members based on their financial contributions, but it would also not discriminate against those holding unpopular views. “The pulpit of the synagogue shall be free, so that he who stands therein shall be free to speak the truth as he sees it on all religious and moral problems,” Wise said.¹⁰⁸ At the same time, despite Wise’s criticisms of Reform, the Free Synagogue would affiliate with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the movement’s congregational organization.¹⁰⁹

In October of 1907 they opened a religious school, and with membership growing rapidly, a few months later the executive committee moved Sunday morning services out of the Hudson Theater and into the Universalist Church of Eternal Hope on West 81st Street, where large crowds came to hear him preach.¹¹⁰ In order to expose the congregation to a

¹⁰⁶ Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 65.
¹⁰⁹ Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 61.
¹¹⁰ The majority of Reform congregations in the United States did not hold Sunday morning services, but the practice did spread to approximately three dozen synagogues. These synagogues did not observe the sabbath on Sunday; rather, they used a weekday liturgy, "giving prominence to a lengthy sermon or lecture and lending the occasion an ambience that was more homiletical or academic than celebratory." See Meyer, Response to Modernity, 290.
broad range of viewpoints, Wise also began sharing the Free Synagogue pulpit with guest preachers, a practice he would continue throughout his career.

By October 1910, the Free Synagogue’s membership exceeded five hundred, and that year they moved High Holy Day and Sunday morning services to Carnegie Hall, where Wise regularly drew over a thousand people. Later, when the synagogue began broadcasting the services on WNBC radio in the twenties, he would reach a far larger national audience. In 1911, the Free Synagogue purchased several brownstones on West 68th Street where they established their permanent home; still, though the congregation now had their own sanctuary, Wise continued to hold High Holy Day and Sunday morning services at Carnegie Hall in order to accommodate the broadest audience.

Beyond the Free Synagogue’s refusal to charge dues and commitment to free expression, a distinguishing feature of the congregation, beginning with its inception in 1907, was its Social Service Department, devoted to aiding poor and working-class Jews on the Lower East Side. The first of its kind in a synagogue, the Department was housed initially at Bellevue Hospital before it came to share quarters with the synagogue on 68th Street. To direct the Department Wise hired Rabbi Sidney Goldstein, a graduate of HUC, who oversaw the training of volunteers and the provision of services. The Social Service Department grew, and engaged congregants in a range of activities including the provision of medical social work at Bellevue and Lebanon hospitals; making and donating clothes for the poor; running two summer camps for economically disadvantaged youth; and running the Free Synagogue Child Adoption Committee, founded by Louise Waterman Wise, the city’s first adoption agency to place Jewish orphans in homes rather than asylums. With so many activities taking

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111 Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 65.
place, Goldstein conducted a lecture series for congregants in order to keep them current regarding the overall Social Service program.\textsuperscript{112}

When he created the Free Synagogue in the immediate aftermath of the Emanu-El controversy, Wise proclaimed the new synagogue "liberal in creed," which appears to have referred to the congregation’s welcoming Jews and non-Jews in the pews, and speaking without constraint from the pulpit; making no distinction in membership classification based on wealth; and, engaging directly in social service. Later Wise and others used the term "radical Judaism" to characterize the Free Synagogue's approach, which it shared with just a small number of other rabbis and synagogues in the United States, most especially with Emil G. Hirsch and his Congregation Sinai in Chicago.\textsuperscript{113}

In important ways, this model resembled less the Reform synagogues that existed at the time, than the Ethical Culture Society that Felix Adler founded in the late nineteenth century. Adler preceded Wise by decades in rejecting what became known as “classical” Reform Judaism, describing its rite and ritual as spiritually deficient, and the movement's statements about building a just world as empty rhetoric unsupported by deed.\textsuperscript{114} Indeed Adler, too, as a young man had publicly challenged Emanu-El, when his own father Samuel Adler served as the congregation's rabbi. In 1874, at just 23 years old, the rebellious son preached a sermon from his father's pulpit in which he made no mention of God, provocatively putting an end to the congregation's (and his father's) efforts to cultivate him as their protégé. In founding Ethical Culture, Adler universalized Jewish ethical values and

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 70-71.

\textsuperscript{113} Julian Mack was among those who identified with the term. “Reform or radical Judaism as represented by Sinai and the Free Synagogue has always seemed to me to need just such an institute of religion as you purpose establishing, something different from both the Theological Seminary and the Hebrew Union College,” Mack wrote to Wise in March 1922. “The appeal will be to a smaller number of students. There will be no rivalry, I am sure, except the rivalry of excellent performance.” Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, March 4, 1922. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{114} See Benny Kraut, \textit{From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Evolution of Felix Adler} (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1979).
dispensed with Jewish particularism, in its place creating a movement that prized intellectual engagement, and expressed universal ethics through education and social justice work.

Wise had some aspects of the Ethical Culture model in mind when he created the Free Synagogue, for in his first public address in 1907 articulating his vision for the Free Synagogue, he explained explicitly how the Free Synagogue would differ from Ethical Culture. Perhaps he knew that many of those who assembled that day to hear him in the Hudson Theater on West 47th Street, also regularly joined the crowds who turned out Sundays to hear Felix Adler's sermons at Carnegie Hall.

Like Ethical Culture, Wise said, the Free Synagogue would be democratic, socially conscious and active, as well as free. Unlike Ethical Culture, however, the Free Synagogue would be an emphatically Jewish society. “For I am a Jew, a Jewish teacher,” Wise said. This would be true at the Free Synagogue even in the realm of social service, an area Adler had shaped for Ethical Culture out of his commitment to universalism. For Wise, by contrast, incorporating social service into the life of the synagogue stemmed not from universal ethics, but out of the Jewish prophetic tradition. Wise, born a generation after Adler, had ideological models for this particularist approach to ethics Adler lacked, most notably Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism.

Applying a distinctly Jewish approach to Social Service not only set the congregation apart from Ethical Culture; it also differentiated Wise and the new synagogue from the Reform movement. Hoping to make liberal Judaism more responsive to the moral and social problems of his day, Wise criticized Reform for not taking seriously the eighth plank of the Pittsburgh Platform “to solve on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society,” which Emil

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Hirsch, now Wise’s staunch supporter, had drafted in 1885. In his own rabbinate, Wise continuously brought contemporary issues to the attention of his congregation.\textsuperscript{116}

The Free Synagogue also differed from most Reform synagogues in New York at the time by actively reaching out to downtown Jewry. To be sure, most of its membership did not live on the Lower East Side; rather, overall, the congregation comprised primarily middle-class Jews of either Eastern European or German background, as well as a sizable group of elite German Jewish members, including Richard Gottheil and Alexander Kohut who, like Henry Morgenthau, Sr., provided financial backing.\textsuperscript{117} It was in this milieu, not downtown, where Wise felt most at home, and he agreed with Gottheil who told him that, though much work remained to be done for the immigrants, “uptown needs whatever influence you can bring to bear more than downtown does.”\textsuperscript{118} Still, the congregation involved a wider and diverse base than most Reform congregations had. “If one wanted to identify a lodestar in his religious thought, it would have to be the unity of the Jewish people,” Urofsky writes. “To found a new synagogue that catered only to one faction of New York Jewry would violate a cardinal tenet of his faith; the Free Synagogue not only had to be free and open, it had to reach out to the community.” They did this primarily through the activities of the downtown branch, and through the public speaking of their rabbi who, over the years, became a familiar voice regularly addressing the Lower East Side’s Yiddish-speaking crowd at rallies and events.

As the Free Synagogue grew, Wise and the membership began to think about shaping Jewish life beyond their own congregation by building a “Free Synagogue movement.” To that end, following the migration pattern of upwardly-mobile Jews leaving the congestion of downtown for middle-class neighborhoods and cities in and around the New York area, they

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{117} Morgenthau served as president until 1919, when he resigned in anger over a meeting Wise held with Woodrow Wilson promoting Zionist concerns. Morgenthau at this time opposed Zionism, though he had earlier been sympathetic to the movement. Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 60-61.
established satellite synagogues in the Bronx (1914), Washington Heights (1917), Flushing (1918), and Newark (1920), and they planned to create more. Though they aspired for the movement to one day become national in scope, they did not seek to create a new denomination to compete with Reform or Conservative Judaism. Like the original Free Synagogue, all of the satellite congregations belonged to the UAHC, many of their lay leaders were active in the Reform movement, and their rabbis were graduates of HUC. They sought not to opt out of nor to change the congregationally-based structure of Reform Judaism, but to infuse it with the “Free Synagogue spirit.” They worked for change from within, sustaining their affiliation with Reform Judaism while advancing their own new and different congregational and rabbinical model.

Just as he had in Portland, Wise utilized the pulpit as his base for an activist rabbinate, and in the years following the establishment of the Free Synagogue, he demonstrated a singular capacity for leadership in a wide range of causes within the Jewish community, and beyond. After the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, for example, he took a prominent role fighting for greater factory safety standards and, together with Jane Addams, successfully urged President Taft to instate a Commission on Industrial Relations. He opposed child labor, defended union rights, continued his support for women’s suffrage, and discussed racial inequality in his sermons at a time when few clergy did. He also challenged Tammany corruption and, to much criticism, he endorsed reformist candidates in municipal as well as state and national elections. Like many Progressives, in 1912 Wise left the Republican party and publicly cast his support for Woodrow Wilson, with whom he had recently established a personal relationship that would grow during Wilson’s presidency.120

Wise achieved all of this while continuing to fulfill his clerical responsibilities at the Free Synagogue. His political work surely pulled him away from the congregation, but Wise’s national prominence also raised the synagogue’s public profile while attracting a steady stream of influential speakers with whom Wise continued to share the pulpit, both at 68th Street and Carnegie Hall. From his base at the Free Synagogue, Wise built friendships and alliances with an astounding array of intellectuals, political leaders, and clergy including Progressive reformers, labor leaders, and politicians; Columbia, Yale and Union faculty, and founders of the New School; Zionist leaders; and, rabbis from across the country and visiting from abroad, too.

As much as Stephen S. Wise could inspire, he could also infuriate. While he maintained cordial relationships with many of his opponents, including Louis Marshall and Jacob Schiff, others would have little to do with him. The German-born American banker Felix Warburg, for example, a leader of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (and married to Schiff’s daughter Frieda), was not the only member of the Jewish philanthropic elite who eschewed Wise.121 In order to galvanize his base, Wise often depicted the leaders of the American Jewish Committee and the institutions of Reform Judaism as foils in his oratory—and in doing so, he made enemies. When these men tried to induce others to shun Wise and his many undertakings, Wise had to maneuver around the opposition, and usually turned to his influential friends for help.

Wise created a rabbinate that fit no European mold. Given his distance from Jewish law and practice, he hardly had any interest in serving as a posek or dayan, one who dispenses legal opinions based on traditional codes; at the same time, though he had pretentions to Wissenschaft, and recognized the importance of scholarship for those in positions of Jewish religious leadership, he chose not to dedicate his time here, either. Rather,

seizing the opportunity America’s uniquely open society presented, Stephen S. Wise became far more engaged as a public spokesman for American Jewry in secular liberal politics and intellectual life than any European rabbi could ever have dreamed possible at this time.

The rabbinate he created resembled no previous American rabbinate, either, though it had roots in the work of the nineteenth-century eastern radical Reform rabbis who preceded him. David Einhorn and Gustav Gottheil, for example, spoke out against slavery, the major social justice issue of their day, and took steps to modernize Reform Judaism, including efforts to create a liberal rabbinical seminary in New York, which the more moderate leadership of the Cincinnati-based Reform movement opposed. However, neither Einhorn nor Gottheil oriented their public persona outward to the broader world beyond the Jewish community, and neither made the battle for social justice central to their rabbinate.122

If there was one man in the United States whose rabbinate served as an inspiration for Stephen S. Wise, it was Emil Hirsch, Einhorn’s son-in-law and brother-in-law to Kaufmann Kohler. A generation older than Wise but also inspired by the Social Gospel, Hirsch used his pulpit at Chicago Sinai Congregation to champion the battles being waged by the Progressive movement, working closely with Jewish clubwomen to create educational, healthcare, recreational and other social welfare services for Chicago’s immigrant population, and working, too, with Jane Addams, Grace Abbott and other prominent leaders on a variety of causes including racial equality, and opposition to federal legislation restricting

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122 Regarding Einhorn’s support for abolition, see Robert F. Southard, “The Debate on Slavery: David Einhorn and the Jewish Political Turn,” American Jewish Archives Journal 64, nos. 1 and 2 (2012): 138. Gottheil preached against slavery while serving his congregation in Manchester, England, before he arrived in the United States. His son Richard Gottheil wrote, “The slavery question, which was agitating the minds and hearts of the North Americans, had also taken hold of large sections of English public opinion—notwithstanding the fact that it was the English themselves who had committed the first wrong in bringing the negroes from the African continent and selling them into slavery in the islands and on the continent of North America. So strong had the feeling become that my Father felt called upon to preach two sermons on the subject ‘Moses versus Slavery’—which the Synagogue authorities thought worth while to have printed and distributed widely. This was in the year 1862.” Richard Gottheil, The Life of Gustav Gottheil: Memoir of a Priest In Israel (Williamsport, PA: The Bayard Press, 1936), 16.
immigration. Hirsch, not only an activist but also a scholar and editor of the weekly *Reform Advocate*, was recognized as one of the preeminent figures providing intellectual inspiration for Reform Judaism in the turn-of-the-century period; at the same time, though not a Zionist, he also challenged the Reform movement, particularly in the area of social justice where he frequently demanded stronger action. For all of these reasons, Wise admired Hirsch, and consulted with him regularly.

As important as Einhorn, Gottheil and Hirsch were to Wise, in defining the broad contours of his rabbinate he also looked beyond his rabbinical predecessors and contemporaries to the American tradition of reform-oriented Protestant ministers. As Mark Raider writes, “Wise’s strategy owed its credibility to the venerable American tradition of religious dissent and grassroots politics, which flourished in the era preceding his own under the iconic spiritual stewardship of Henry Ward Beecher and Theodore Parker. He was also a keen observer of William Jennings Bryan on the American scene, Zvi Hirsch Masliansky on the Jewish scene, and others whose populist blend of preaching, political activism, and religious idealism held sway at the turn of the century.” Wise’s rabbinate became defined by his charismatic preaching at Carnegie Hall, in synagogues and at mass meetings downtown and across the country; political activism in the Zionist movement and on behalf of progressive causes, including the rights of labor and women’s suffrage; and, his religious idealism, which centered not on theological or ritual matters but on a commitment to Jewish peoplehood and what he professed to be the prophetic tradition of social justice. In his passion, he launched fiery criticism at those he believed impeded progress, particularly the rich and powerful, and in that milieu especially, he made a fair share of enemies. More frequently, however, with that same passion he expressed affection for his friends and

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colleagues, and attracted countless admirers around the country, including many young people. Some of these teens, second-generation Americans attempting to integrate their Jewishness with their American identity in ways their immigrant parents could not, found inspiration in Wise’s synthesis and sought to emulate him.

**National Leadership: Zionism and the American Jewish Congress**

When war broke out in Europe in the summer of 1914, as armies traversed the eastern front, they wreaked havoc and destruction on the Jewish communities of Galicia and Poland, and in other parts of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, too; though these battles were far removed from Palestine, the war also threatened the precarious economy of the Yishuv, which lost access to the European markets on which it relied. While the American Jewish Committee galvanized aid for European Jewry, the American Zionist movement addressed the needs of the Yishuv. Far less organized than the Committee and with only meager resources, the Federation of American Zionists, in order to respond effectively to the urgency of the situation, needed new leadership. Louis D. Brandeis, who for several years had been attempting to reorganize the American Zionist movement, agreed to take over, and as noted above, he enlisted Wise and Julian Mack to serve alongside him, with the aid, too, of Felix Frankfurter, Nathan Straus, Jr., Henrietta Szold, and a few others. In 1918, Brandeis became president of the new Zionist Organization of America, and Wise served with him as vice president until 1921, when both men and their allies resigned amidst bitter divisions. Wise remained one of Brandeis’s closest and most active allies in the movement.

For Wise, while lending support to the Yishuv in wartime posed no dilemma, taking a stance on United States involvement in the war was another matter. As an outspoken pacifist he had long opposed militarism, and in the summer of 1914, together with John Haynes Holmes, Lillian Wald, Jane Addams and others, he helped create the Anti-Preparedness

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125 Urofsky, *A Voice that Spoke for Justice*, 120.
Committee, which soon turned into a broad antiwar coalition called the American Union against Militarism. 126 However, as the war escalated in Europe, Wise came to view American engagement as inevitable, and in April 1917 when Wilson abandoned neutrality, Wise dismayed many of his friends in the peace movement by supporting the American war effort. Though the stance cost him his friendship with Addams and likely a few others, his allegiance to Wilson benefited the Zionist movement in a significant way later that year when Wise and Brandeis successfully urged the President to approve a proposed British statement supporting efforts to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine, enabling the British to proceed with issuing the Balfour Declaration. 127

Soon thereafter, in another victory for the Zionist movement, Wise finally succeeded in the effort he had waged for several years to establish a democratically elected alternative to the non-Zionist American Jewish Committee. The American Jewish Congress, created in 1918 despite the resistance of powerful Committee leaders including Louis Marshall and Jacob Schiff, sought to protect Jewish rights in the United States and abroad, promote cultural pluralism in the United States, and support the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. The Congress included a far more diverse constituency than did the Committee, and the fact that Wise, its founder and president, had succeeded in bringing so many disparate groups together reflected the breadth of his national base. By this time, Stephen S. Wise had become the most renowned rabbi in America.

**Wise’s Critique of Reform Judaism and His Call for a New Seminary**

At the start of the nineteen-twenties, Wise cast his ambition even further. With the Free Synagogue movement spreading, albeit thus far through just a handful of satellite congregations scattered around the New York metropolitan area, Wise now began calling for

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126 Ibid., 135.
127 Ibid., 146.
a major reorientation of liberal Judaism. Sounding in many ways like the Social Gospel ministers who had called for fundamental change in American Protestantism a generation earlier, Wise identified the crisis he saw in contemporary Reform Judaism. His sermons and correspondence at this time reveal the following as central components of his critique:

1. Reform had a class problem. Originally a movement of the lower-middle classes, the movement now failed to touch the lives of the poor. “A religion cannot be limited to one social economic class without an entailment of grave moral and spiritual consequences,” he said. “And liberal Judaism almost exclusively became a religion of the rich and well-to-do, though by these it must in fairness be added most generously commended to the poor.”

2. Reform had a spiritual problem. Having begun as a rationalist revolt, liberal Judaism now failed to move its followers with a vision of God, and as a religion of the well-to-do, it now failed to urge social justice and righteousness with prophetic power. Indeed, the gravest danger for liberal Judaism lay in Reform’s disconnectedness from the needs and concerns of the populace. “It is become increasingly out of touch,” Wise said. “At the periphery of Jewish life rather than at its inmost core.”

3. Finally, Reform had a leadership problem. Whereas the daring and militant pioneers of Reform—Geiger and Holdheim, Einhorn and Adler, Hirsch and Isaac Mayer Wise—“nobly and passionately strove to realize the prophetic ideals of Israel,” their successors had grown false and faithless, and “ lamely follow the leaders of yesterday.” Rather than surpassing their predecessors, men now occupying Reform pulpits only halt, falter, and “hesitatingly follow where others nobly led,” Wise said. “Who can imagine these

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129 Ibid., 5.
130 Ibid., 6.
pseudo-Liberals of today waging a real battle for Liberalism such as was waged by them
whom they feign to follow?"¹³¹

Liberal Judaism today...must heed the lesson of the hour: Israel needs an awakening,
Israel needs a renaissance, Israel needs a genuine spiritual and moral reformation, not
that a handful of the elect in the Jewish cathedrals may be pleased, nor yet that the
Jewish masses may be flattered, but in order that truth may be served, in order that we
may have a restoration and a revitalization of the finest things in the life of Israel.¹³²

Wise spelled out the elements of the awakening for which he called: a) a rebirth of
Israel’s vision of God; b) a reemphasis on the sovereignty of righteousness in the universe,
and a reaffirmation of Israel’s prophetic insistence on social justice and social righteousness
here and now;¹³³ c) recognition of the oneness of Israel, broad enough to enfold a multitude
of divergent types;¹³⁴ and, to achieve all of this, d) leaders capable of acting with fearless
initiative, rather than fearful imitation.¹³⁵ Notably, he placed far greater import on the latter
three elements, rather than on the first—a humanist, Wise had little real interest in theology.

Who dared assume this noble task? Wise and the lay leadership of the Free
Synagogue in 1920 hoped that among Wise’s young followers some might be inspired to
follow in his path. They knew the need for Jewish religious leadership extended beyond their
own partisan interests at this time, for putting aside the lofty rhetoric of renaissance and
reformation, as well as their own ambitions for expansion, a nationwide shortage of rabbis
had made it difficult for any of the already-existing congregations in the New York
metropolitan to secure an eligible rabbi, never mind one infused with faith and fearlessness.
The challenge for Wise and his lay leadership was even greater, for they sought a particular
kind of rabbi—one who shared their vision and could spread the “Free Synagogue spirit” by
founding and leading similar synagogues across the country.

¹³² Ibid., 21.
¹³³ Ibid., 6.
¹³⁴ Ibid., 21.
¹³⁵ Ibid., 9.
Here they had a problem, for no American rabbinical school at this time shared that spirit, nor had any inclination to foster it. JTS and RIETS required an adherence to *halakhah* incompatible with the Free Synagogue model, and though HUC trained liberal rabbis, the College defined the term quite differently. Kaufmann Kohler, Isaac Mayer Wise’s successor as president of HUC, in his embrace of universalism rejected peoplehood as a basis for Jewish identity, and remained antagonistic toward any conception of Jewish nationalism, especially Zionism.¹³⁶ Far more concerned about theological matters to which Stephen Wise paid little attention, Kohler frowned upon the Eastern European immigrants’ left-leaning political activism, and unlike Wise, rarely challenged the political orientation of the wealthy Reform Jewish elite. True, not everyone at the College agreed with Kohler, and a growing number of HUC students of Eastern European background gravitated toward Wise’s concept of American liberal Judaism, as had Sidney Goldstein and some of the College’s graduates now serving the Free Synagogue satellite synagogues. Indeed, in 1920, with Kohler approaching retirement, and given the changes taking place in the American Jewish community, some hoped the College might soon embrace a new approach by selecting a president with a fresh outlook.

For the time being, however, training did not exist for the kind of rabbi the Free Synagogue sought, nor did any seminary have the capacity to provide it, due to constraints imposed by history and ideology. Aware, however, that existing Jewish seminaries in Europe and the United States offered certain aspects of the model they sought, as did the leading non-denominational university-based American Protestant divinity schools, Wise and the lay leadership decided to resolve the situation by drawing broadly from the best, most modern and professional practices in place, and to create an American Jewish seminary of their own.

CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDING

Having shaped a unique rabbinate that enabled Wise to promote his particular synthesis of Jewish and American values not only within his own congregation but far beyond, reaching to the highest levels of American Jewry’s communal organizations and the nation’s political life, Wise now desired to extend the model he created to the American rabbinate writ large. By attempting to establish a new seminary as the means of advancing his worldview, Wise acted in the American tradition established a century earlier by the founders of seminaries like Andover and Oberlin, which emerged out of conflict over the nature of ministry and faith; at the same time, seeking to shape a new kind of American rabbinate for twentieth-century American Jewry, he carried forth the legacy of nineteenth-century eastern radical rabbis like David Einhorn and Gustav Gottheil. As he moved ahead, he brought an awareness of the new approaches to clergy training unfolding in university-affiliated divinity schools and seminaries, and he brought, too, an appreciation for the historical development of Jewish seminary education. Wise held an emotional and ideological attachment to two Jewish seminaries in particular, the Hochschule in Berlin, now approaching its quintennial anniversary, and the defunct Emanu-El Theological Seminary. Wise looked to both schools as practical models that provided him with a sense of historical continuity as he embarked upon the creation of the Jewish Institute of Religion.

The Hochschule, where his friend and confidante Emil Hirsch had studied along with many other prominent European and American rabbis and scholars, stood out among the European seminaries that most inspired Wise. Of greatest interest to him as he charted the course of JIR was the fact that this school in Berlin, like an increasing number of American university divinity schools, remained unaffiliated with any denomination, welcomed all points of view, and cultivated in students not a single overriding ideological approach that
had the imprimatur of the institution, but the skills and knowledge they would need to
determine belief and practice independently for themselves.

Wise also recalled the establishment and subsequent travails of the Emanu-El
Theological Seminary, the earlier attempt to create a liberal rabbinical school in New York.
For Wise, this nineteenth-century endeavor represented a cautionary tale, for he believed the
eastern radical reformers’ post-Civil War venture failed in large part because of the
opposition of Hebrew Union College. When Wise enlisted Richard Gottheil to help him
found the new seminary, the two men together determined not to let the forces that had
impeded Richard’s father thwart their own success. Since advising Wise on his doctoral
dissertation, Gottheil had become a close friend, and sharing similar outlooks including
support for Zionism, the two had fought many skirmishes together within that increasingly
fractious movement. Now they prepared for a new conflict, for Wise knew that establishing
JIR would trigger a second round of battle between the Reform movement’s leadership at
HUC and the UAHC in Cincinnati, on the one hand, and a new generation of eastern radicals
on the other.

The content of the disagreement had antecedents in the nineteenth-century battle, but
differed, too, for now Wise brought a twentieth-century agenda that confronted the old
Reform guard with new challenges. Wise’s approach to liberal Judaism challenged Reform
ideology with Zionism and calls for a national Jewish renaissance; a desire to wrest
institutional power out of the hands of the German Jewish elite in order to give the Eastern
European Jewish immigrant population increased control over the American Jewish
communal agenda; and, the application of “prophetic Judaism” to the industrial economy
through reform efforts aimed at improving the economic and social welfare of the poor and
working classes. When such reform prioritized working conditions and wages above
corporate profits, it came at the expense of the wealthiest members of society, including those
leading Jewish philanthropists who Wise believed still sought to dictate American Jewish communal priorities.

The conflict was real, and the stakes were high. Should the Reform movement oppose the new school, it could attempt to galvanize not only the College but the UAHC’s network of congregations nationwide to prevent JIR from coming into being. JIR, on the other hand, was starting from scratch. Opening a new school required a board, faculty and students, and assembling these required time, energy and money. If the outcome of such a battle depended solely on resources at hand—human, financial and political—JIR did not stand much of a chance. Yet Wise and the Free Synagogue envisioned their effort in the context of building a movement. The lay leadership of the Free Synagogue hoped to bring the Free Synagogue spirit to aspiring rabbis who, following their ordination, would spread the model to congregations across the nation. They would proceed gradually, one step at a time, starting locally. New York, having become the international locus of twentieth-century Jewish intellectual and religious life, was also Wise’s hometown, and he knew how to tap its resources. Surely, Wise was among the best-positioned rabbis to establish a center for liberal rabbinical training in Gotham.

The group attempted to proceed in an orderly fashion. At the same time, with little in place at the start, they also knew that if all the essential rubrics were going to coalesce, they would have to work on multiple fronts concurrently. Within a short period of time beginning in the spring of 1920, and with Wise exercising a strong hand in every realm, they set out to establish a summer school, explore cooperation with the Reform movement, assemble a board, create a budget, pursue incorporation in the State of New York, raise funds, begin to identify potential faculty and students, and create a physical home for the seminary.
Getting Started

Summer School 1920

In the summer of 1920, Wise and the lay leadership of the Free Synagogue took a major step toward creating the Jewish Institute of Religion by offering a Summer School for Rabbis and Rabbinical Students. Consciously attempting to assess interest in the endeavor while trying out their ideas for training rabbis in the spirit of the Free Synagogue, through the Summer School they experimented with a new and different approach to rabbinical training, reflecting Wise's own approach to the rabbinate as well as the priorities of the Free Synagogue.

The eight rabbinical students and fourteen ordained rabbis who participated must have quickly realized that rather than enrolling in a school separate and apart from its sponsoring synagogue, they had embarked upon an immersion in the values and experience of the Free Synagogue itself. Two Free Synagogue trustees, Charles E. Bloch, Chairman of the Council of Free Synagogues, and Israel Thurman, Chairman of the Committee on Summer School for Rabbis and Rabbinical Students, opened the program with introductory addresses, and members of the synagogue board subsequently feted participants at four luncheons where students had an opportunity to meet the laity of the Free Synagogue. The heads of the Free Synagogue satellite congregations in the Bronx, Washington Heights and Flushing also addressed the students, conveying the message they hoped participants would carry back to their own communities.¹³⁷

The students, who came from as far as Iowa and Texas, took four courses: Making of the Hebrew Scriptures with Max Margolis of Dropsie College; Early Christianity and Judaism with J. Foakes Jackson of Union Theological Seminary; Synagogue and Social Service with Goldstein, the Free Synagogue's Associate Rabbi and director of the Social

Service Department; and, *Practical Problems of Jewish Ministry* with Wise. Goldstein introduced the students to Jewish Social Service by meeting first in the classroom to study different aspects of organizational and synagogue leadership, and then, in order to provide first-hand exposure to the problems plaguing New York’s Jewish community, leading them on site visits to a variety of social service agencies and organizations throughout the city, where they had the opportunity to speak with the chief executive of each. In addition, students attended lectures, and met with local congregational rabbis.

The prospectus reveals that the organizers were explicit in their goal of advancing the Free Synagogue’s particular approach. The 1920 students had an opportunity to study the principles, methods and ideals of the Free Synagogue, the prospectus said, and to become "infected with the spirit of our organization." The experience "proved a revelation to many students and served to open their minds to the various ways in which Jewish life expresses itself, to the new and vaster problems that are developing and to the unsuspected factors and forces in American Jewish life." Whether or not the students would have agreed with this statement, it reveals the goals of the organizers, who wanted to engage them with the full variety of contemporary religious, social, educational and economic expressions of Jewish life in greater New York. The prospectus also claimed students reported gaining practical skills they needed that their seminary training did not provide. "Many of them have come, through their association with us, to have a conception of the place of the minister in the modern Jewish community, and the function of the synagogue in modern social life."

In its report that fall, the Free Synagogue leadership resolved not only to repeat the Summer School in 1921, but to move forward in creating the new seminary. With rabbinic and lay leadership, the beginnings of a faculty and curriculum, and early success in attracting

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138 Summer School for Rabbis and Rabbinical Students, Prospectus 1921. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
students, they now had a foundation on which to build, and they set out to do so immediately.\footnote{The Report read, "The time cannot be far off when we shall feel compelled to organize a Jewish School of Religion in which men will be adequately prepared for efficient ministry to the Jewish people." Ibid.}

Was There a Need?

In November, a Special Committee of the Free Synagogue convened "to consider the desirability and practicability of organizing an institute for the training of rabbis." Rabbis Stephen S. Wise and Sidney E. Goldstein attended, along with members of the Free Synagogue’s lay leadership, including trustees Joshua Bloch, Walter S. Hilborn, Israel N. Thurman, and Frederick Guggenheimer.\footnote{Rabbis Stephen S. Wise and Sidney E. Goldstein attended, as well as lay leaders Joshua Bloch, Walter S. Hilborn, Julius Fohs, Israel N. Thurman, D. K. Moses, and Frederick Guggenheimer (committee members Lee Frankel and Henry Ittleson were absent). Minutes of a meeting of the Special Committee appointed to consider the desirability and the practicability of organizing an institute for the training of Rabbis, held at the Free Synagogue House, Nov 2, 1920. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.}

Was there any need for a new institution for the training of rabbis in America, they asked, and if so, could that need be met by the Free Synagogue? In the first documented minutes of the Board of Trustees of the Jewish Institute of Religion, the committee stated their arguments for creating the new school:\footnote{Minutes of a meeting of the Special Committee appointed to consider the desirability and the practicability of organizing an institute for the training of Rabbis, held at the Free Synagogue House, Nov 2, 1920. Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Trustees Committees, Vol. I: November 2, 1920-May 24, 1932 (hereafter, JIR Board Minutes). These minutes are kept in the Klau Library at the Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion’s New York School.}

1) HUC had outgrown its usefulness, and no longer attracted the finest prospects;

2) The students that HUC did attract were poorly trained to fill the pulpits of "forward-looking, progressive American Congregations;"

3) If the Free Synagogue ideal of "a vital Jewish Faith in America" was to be realized, the time had come to develop a new group of men with a different type of training;
4) Unlike those entering HUC, these men must be college graduates or the equivalent before being admitted into the professional school;

5) To properly train rabbis, the rabbinate as a profession must be placed upon the same plane as other professions such as medicine or law;

6) The "old practice of granting subsidies as a bait to prospective Rabbis" must end; the new school would charge tuition without providing subsidies, though it would make scholarships available for men unable to pay, and it would also systematically procure employment for students in need of earning their own living.\textsuperscript{143}

The committee believed this new plan would elevate the rabbinate as a profession and, determined to move ahead, they appointed a Finance Committee with the task of assembling a rudimentary budget they hoped would cover all necessary costs of a full-blown seminary.\textsuperscript{144} Looking ahead and assuming that the Institute would pay rent to the Free Synagogue for the use of its real estate, and that administrative and staffing costs, aside from faculty salaries, might be shared with the Synagogue, in November 1920 the committee anticipated the following annual expenditures, totaling roughly $40,000-$50,000.\textsuperscript{145}

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<td>Administration (secretary, printing, sundries):</td>
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\textit{Summer School 1921}

Next, they planned a second iteration of the Summer School, to be held in July 1921 and this time under the direction of Goldstein, together with one of the synagogue's founders, Israel Thurman, who chaired the Summer School committee. Thurman, an attorney who had worked with Margaret Sanger in the women's suffrage movement and with Louis Brandeis in

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{144} The Finance Committee included Kaufman, Kaufmann, Thurman, Wasserman, and Falk. Ibid.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
the Zionist movement, also served on the Executive Board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. He brought other Free Synagogue leaders onto the Summer School committee, including Charles Bloch (Chairman, Council of Free Synagogues), Hon. Abram Elkus (President of the Free Synagogue), the presidents of the Free Synagogues of Flushing, Newark, the Bronx and Washington Heights, and seven others, including four who would also become founders of JIR.146

The committee aimed for the Summer School to meet the needs of two different constituencies—seminary students seeking educational opportunities not available to them in their rabbinical courses of study, and practicing rabbis in smaller cities who during the year had no access to training of any kind, and were interested in gaining tools to better serve their communities. Compared to 1920, the Summer Session in 1921 enrolled more students at less cost, thanks to a significant reduction in scholarship aid.147 Whereas 22 students participated in 1920, the following summer 29 students attended, though only 22 of the 29 enrolled full-time; the full-time students included seven from the junior and senior classes of HUC, and four rabbis practicing in the active ministry.

The Summer School of 1921 offered more courses and lectures than in 1920, and the preponderance of left-leaning scholars and experts reflects Goldstein’s strong involvement. In addition to directing the program, Goldstein taught The Synagogue and Industrial Programs, which focused on the role of rabbis and congregations in current labor conflicts, and repeated his course, The Synagogue and Social Service, which again included lectures as well as fieldwork. He also offered two addresses on "Religion and Psychotherapy."148

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146 Summer School for Rabbis and Rabbinical Students, Prospectus 1921. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
147 In 1920, the Free Synagogue distributed nineteen scholarships and ran the Summer School at a cost of $2,776; by contrast, in 1921 they awarded only nine scholarships of one hundred dollars each to those who otherwise would have been unable to attend, and spent $1,526. The Committee took pride in the reduction in expenditures and noted, "even though we gave 10 fewer scholarships, we had larger and better attendance." Report Summer School 1921. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
148 Ibid.
Again, the faculty included two leading Christian scholars: William Worrell, Professor at Hartford Theological Seminary and former Director of the American School of Archaeology in Palestine, who taught *Bible Backgrounds: Bible Lands and Bible Peoples*; and, Charles Foster Kent, Professor of Biblical Literature at Yale University. Kent taught *The Social Principles of the Prophets and Jesus*.

Kent’s course achieved two aims Wise had for the curriculum—it exposed students to contemporary Christian thought, and it reinforced the importance of linking religious experience to the social issues of the day. Using as its title that of Kent’s recent book, the course presented the Hebrew prophets and Jesus as teachers and reformers whose approach to the social and political conditions of their time could be applied to many social problems of the present. “These social principles furnish the only satisfactory solution of our present political, social and individual problems,” read the course description. “It is vitally important, therefore, that the religious and social leaders of today thoroughly grasp these principles that they may interpret them anew to the men and women who are shaping our modern civilization.”

While Kent provided a scholarly perspective on the Bible and social reform, the speakers Goldstein brought in to share their practical experience represented an array of the most activist, progressive clergy in the country. The Summer Session featured addresses by five Christian ministers, among them Wise’s good friend Rev. Dr. John Haynes Holmes, well-known for his socialist and pacifist views, his rejection of Protestant denominationalism and withdrawal in 1918 from the American Unitarian Association in which until then he had played a prominent role, and his leadership of New York’s Community Church (formerly the Messiah Church). They included, too, Percy Grant, minister of New York’s Episcopalian...

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149 Ibid. Soon thereafter, in 1922, Kent would found the National Council of Schools of Religion, which focused on relations between churches and universities.
Church of the Ascension, also known for his support of socialism and labor activism; and, Bishop Francis McConnell of Pittsburgh, a Methodist labor and peace activist.

Other speakers included Julius Drachsler of Smith College, a leader in the growing field of Jewish social work; Rabbi Bill Fineshriber of Memphis, an outspoken supporter of women's suffrage and equal rights for African Americans; and, Dr. John L. Elliott of the Society for Ethical Culture, a founder of the NAACP and civil rights leader.

A roundtable conference addressed practical synagogue life and social service, focusing on subjects including immigration, the Jewish delinquent, care for the Jewish sick, religious education, synagogue organization and administration, and mental health in the Jewish community.150 Again the program required fieldwork in the afternoons, including site visits to Jewish institutions and agencies where students met with the executive officers.

The great disappointment of 1921 was Wise's inability to teach, due to illness. He had been scheduled to offer Practical Problems of the Ministry, but only managed to attend the first luncheon where he addressed the students, and to send a message read at the summer session’s closing meeting.

The Free Synagogue’s two summer sessions preceding the official opening of JIR in October 1922 provided participants with an approach to rabbinical training different from any that had come before, either in the United States or Europe, and established a number of components that would soon become essential to the Institute’s program of study. The teaching of classical texts from a Wissenschaft perspective, of course, was not new, but comprised only a small part of the program in 1920 and even less in 1921. This may have been because the stated aim of the summer schools was to expose students to coursework and experiences they lacked at their own seminaries, but there may have been other reasons for

150 Rabbi Louis Newman spoke on the Religious School Curriculum, and Rabbi J. Max Weis addressed Theories of Religious Education. Frederick L. Guggenheimer, a lay leader at the Free Synagogue, discussed synagogue sources of income, budget-making, departments of work, and organization of committees. Jacob Goldberg, PhD spoke on immigration, “the Jewish delinquent,” and “the care of the Jewish sick.” Ibid.
the gap, as well. During this formative period, Wise relied primarily on Goldstein and his synagogue’s lay leadership to plan the endeavor, and while they were well-connected in progressive and Zionist circles, they lacked a broader set of contacts in the world of Jewish scholarship. In addition, enlisting Jewish faculty for the summer schools would likely have entailed recruiting at JTS or HUC, which together had the largest supply of Jewish faculty in the United States; knowing that approaching these faculty members might provoke a negative response from their schools’ leaders, perhaps Wise felt doing so was premature.

For multiple reasons, then, the Summer Sessions emphasized social service and interfaith study, as well as practical rabbinics. Over the course of the two summers, liberal Christian scholars taught Christian subject matter; activist clergy spoke about their experiences in Progressive politics working on issues such as industrial reform, suffrage and civil rights; Jewish social workers discussed synagogue-based social service, and conducted site visits to agencies across the city; Goldstein offered courses in psychology and psychotherapy; congregational rabbis taught practical rabbinics; metropolitan Jewish agencies offered fieldwork experiences; and, visiting faculty from Harvard and Yale, Dropsie College, Hartford Theological Seminary and Union Theological Seminary addressed the student body on topics within their discipline.

Virtually every aspect of the summer curricula signaled a departure in rabbinical training. Though Social Gospel thinkers had a strong foothold in the more liberal Protestant seminaries at the time, they had no presence in any rabbinical school, and nothing resembling Goldstein’s approach to social service had ever been part of the training of eastern or western European rabbis, nor of Sephardic rabbis, nor did it have a central place in the curriculum at HUC or JTS. In Europe and North Africa, where the largest Jewish communities lived in societies that did not separate church from state, such training may have made little sense as rabbis had no publicly recognized voice in the broader body politic. But even in the United
States, where Protestant ministers had been involved with social reform for over a century, it was the rare rabbi who spoke out on divisive political issues; in that regard, Wise and Emil Hirsch had been in the minority. Counteracting the American rabbinate’s reticence around social critique and engagement was a primary motivation for Wise and the Free Synagogue in creating the new school.

In the fall of 1921, the committee decided that in order to plan for the Summer School of 1922, they would ask rabbis in small communities what courses would be most helpful and with whom they would like to study, so the curriculum could best meet the desires of the students themselves. At the same time, they scheduled four general courses for all students, including Psychology of Religious Education (with George Coe) and Comparative Study of Religion (with George Foote Moore of Harvard), and hoped to offer additional electives in Pedagogy, Religious Education, Synagogue and Social Service, Jewish Community Study, and Religion and Psychotherapy. They planned to bring back Grant, Holmes, Elliot, and Fineshriber to meet with the students, as well as others who could teach from their experience in the rabbinate.

At this point, they decided to add courses in Bible and Rabbinic Literature, too—critical areas in laying the groundwork for a new seminary. However, offering these courses, together with Jewish history, philosophy and liturgy, required Jewish scholars and more significant funding.

**Negotiations with UAHC**

In May 1921, while preparing the second session of the Summer School and continuing to lay the groundwork for the opening of the new Institute, the Free Synagogue sent a letter informing the UAHC Executive Board of their plan to establish the Jewish Institute of Religion. As a member congregation of the Reform movement, the Free Synagogue wanted its parent organization to understand that it was taking this action in light
of several considerations. The communiqué, though brief, reveals the JIR founders’ earliest views on how they hoped the new school would reorient American liberal Judaism.

1. JIR, by virtue of its location in New York, would ensure that liberal Judaism flourished in the largest Jewish community in the world.

Demographics: Wise and the founders believed that in order for American liberal Judaism to thrive in the twentieth century, New York needed to become the seat of a liberal seminary. Changes in Jewish demography and geography since the establishment of HUC in 1875 figured prominently in their thinking: With the mass immigration of Eastern European Jewry to the United States, the Jewish population of the United States had increased ten-fold in the nearly fifty years since HUC's founding in 1875, and the number of adherents to liberal Judaism had grown accordingly. The metropolitan area now held the largest concentration of Jews in the world and the largest Jewish community in history, including five times more than all of American Jewry in 1875, and one-tenth of world Jewry. With no liberal Jewish seminary in the hub of world Jewry, they believed, liberal Judaism could not take root there and blossom.

Based on the experience of other Jewish communities, past as well as present, they had a case. Historically, among European cities that did have a high concentration of Jews, those most influential in shaping Jewish life—Vienna, Warsaw and Berlin, for example—also held centers of Jewish learning. This was true elsewhere in earlier periods, as well. “No Jewish community in history has ever thrived without a great academy, a bet midrash gavohah, at its center,” writes historian David Ellenson.151 Now, however, the landscape was shifting. With conditions in Europe deteriorating, and New York's Jewish community rapidly becoming a significant force in global Jewry, Wise believed growing power brought new

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responsibility. This responsibility included the creation of an intellectual center and rabbincical school that would serve American Jewry in a new way, based on the Free Synagogue values.

Anticipating the Reform establishment’s claim that one liberal seminary sufficed, the Free Synagogue argued that, in light of these demographic changes, no single institution could adequately train all the rabbis needed to serve the country's liberal synagogues, as borne out by the considerable number of large congregations currently unable to hire a rabbi, and even more small communities that had never been able to do so.

_Educational, religious, cultural and social resources:_ With its base in New York, not only would the school serve the institutions of American Jewry, but by virtue of geographic access, its neighboring institutions—leading universities and libraries, Jewish as well as secular—would serve the school. In New York, students could use the great collections of the New York Public Library and JTS, for example, while engaging on a daily basis with the vibrant religious and cultural life of the city.

Educating rabbis to serve modern American Jewry required exposure not only to the community’s intellectual life, the founders believed, but also to its synagogues, defense organizations, and social service agencies. In this regard, New York offered training opportunities and laboratory practice that could not be replicated in smaller cities. There, through contact with a broad swath of American Jews, and with the communal leaders and institutions helping to meet their needs, students would gain exposure to the Jewish community’s intractable issues and problems, and learn from experts to speak in a relevant way to contemporary Jewish experience.

2. **JIR would provide American liberal Jewry with a professional rabbinate, scholarly and capable of social ministry:** Access to these resources—scholarly as well as practical—would help JIR professionalize the rabbinate, the founders believed, just as
American graduate schools were professionalizing other fields. In addition, professionalization entailed two new approaches to American rabbinical training: limiting study to the graduate level only, and augmenting an academic curriculum that had grown out of the German *Wissenschaft* tradition with an emphasis on practical training unprecedented in other Jewish seminaries.

**Graduate study only:** In this new era, students of Jewish seminaries ought to be college and university graduates rather than high school and elementary school “lads,” the Free Synagogue argued. Older and more educated men could devote themselves exclusively to their rabbinical studies, in keeping with the practice of graduate-level professional schools and modern theological schools of other faiths.

To achieve this, JIR would offer graduate training only. HUC, by contrast, accepted boys as young as fourteen to enter the preparatory program, educating them for a full eight years through high school and then college while the students concurrently attended the University of Cincinnati. Many HUC graduates became rabbis at the age of twenty-two, in Wise's view still immature and ill-equipped to lead. By establishing the bachelor’s degree as a prerequisite for enrollment, JIR would not only raise the minimum age of its students, but would ensure that its student body entered with a secular undergraduate education and, in theory at least, the ability to pursue serious study. These older, more mature and more educated men had thus far proven difficult to recruit for the rabbinate, the Free Synagogue claimed, reluctant to study at a seminary that included high school students. JIR would have greater success attracting them by adopting the graduate-school model that law schools and medical schools had already begun instituting.

**Practical training:** A professional rabbinate now required expertise in the areas of religious pedagogy and social service, the founders said, and through practical training in the synagogues and agencies in the metropolitan area, as well as contact with the schools of
social work in New York, students would gain an understanding of the problems facing the Jewish community that would enable them to serve effectively.

This approach reflected the Free Synagogue’s view that American liberal Judaism mandated engagement with, rather than aloofness from, the most difficult social and economic issues of the day. Wise believed this would distinguish JIR from the institutions of Reform which, as “a religion of the rich and well-to-do,” had become overly reticent to get involved in issues plaguing the industrial economy, such as factory worker conditions, child labor and tenement housing. Throughout his career, as he championed a variety of progressive causes, Wise repeatedly accused the movement of failing to live up to the values of social justice expressed in the eighth plank of the Pittsburgh Platform, and of bowing too passively before the influence of the wealthy. In that spirit, the JIR founders now proposed a new and uniquely American approach to rabbinical training that linked religious leadership with political activism in the tradition of reform-oriented ministry of abolitionists like Charles Grandison Finney and Henry Ward Beecher, Social Gospel theologians Walter Rauschenbusch and Washington Gladden, and contemporary dissident clergy like Wise's close friend John Haynes Holmes. No American rabbi epitomized this model more than Wise himself; in founding JIR, the Free Synagogue hoped to create a new generation of rabbis in the image of their own.

3. JIR would model a freer American liberal Judaism: For Wise, few principles mattered more than “freedom.” His commitment to freedom of the pulpit, as noted above, dated long before the establishment of JIR, going back at least as early as 1907 when he made this issue central in his public battle with the trustees of Congregation Emanu-El, turning down the pulpit ostensibly because the board insisted on the right to preview and editorially control his sermons, and then leveraging the issue to establish the Free Synagogue.

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He promoted freedom of expression, as well, when he founded the American Jewish Congress, which he hoped would give voice to the many different constituencies the American Jewish Committee refused to recognize. Now, in relation to seminary training, Wise once again elevated the principle, declaring that JIR would honor academic freedom. This, like the calls for a liberal seminary in New York and for a new kind of training that would professionalize the rabbinate, also represented a challenge to HUC, for Wise and other critics believed the College had a record of stifling the expression of viewpoints of which Kaufmann Kohler, its president, did not approve, particularly socialism and Zionism. Though the founders never incorporated support for Zionism or a critique of capitalism into the fundamental mission of JIR, they did insist that the Institute be liberal enough to contain these—and anyone who knew Wise and the political inclinations of many of the Free Synagogue laity could be sure that at JIR Zionism and socialism would be freely discussed. Indeed, given the 1921 Summer School’s guest speakers, including John Haynes Holmes and Percy Grant, it is likely socialism had already been openly addressed in the classroom.

While challenging the Reform movement in each of these areas, the Free Synagogue assured the UAHC that they did not seek to compete. “We look forward to your approval of our plans and most earnestly invite your co-operation in their working out,” they said.\textsuperscript{153} The UAHC Executive Board quickly appointed a special committee to confer with the Free Synagogue, but Wise’s illness delayed the discussion that summer, and then in the fall, Elkus and some of the Cincinnati men became ill as well.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{153} Letter from Free Synagogue Committee to UAHC Executive Board, May, 1921, included in Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, Appendix C, 21. Jewish Institute of Religion Nearprint Box 1, Nearprint Special Topics. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter, JIR Nearprint Box 1).

\textsuperscript{154} Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, p. 3. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
Finally, on December 22, 1921, the Free Synagogue committee, chaired by Lee Frankel, met with representatives from the UAHC, including Daniel Hays, Chairman of the Board; Ludwig Vogelstein, a member of the Executive Committee; and, two others. The meeting, though characterized by “entire cordiality and good will,” made no headway toward cooperation. Arguing against the necessity of a new rabbinical seminary, the UAHC representatives tried to dissuade the Free Synagogue from opening the Institute; rather than exploring possibilities for cooperation, the two groups debated the need for creating a new seminary at all. The JIR committee reiterated their conviction that such an institution should be founded in New York City for all the reasons stated in their earlier letter, emphasizing the shortage of rabbis in the United States and arguing that the establishment of this new seminary would not harm HUC. Such a notion, they said, was "wholly out of keeping with the spirit that has governed Jewish affairs during the past century, indeed for many centuries," and they pointed to Europe where within seventy-five years at least four rabbinical institutions had been founded in Germany and Austro-Hungary, and never had one of these institutions sought to avert the rise of another. Making it clear they planned to move ahead despite the UAHC’s opposition, they announced that they already had approximately fifteen applicants for admission, and would open in October 1922 under the Honorary Presidency of Dr. Emil G. Hirsch, Rabbi of Temple Sinai, Chicago, and the Presidency of Dr. Stephen S. Wise.

The committees agreed to meet again in March; perhaps then they might reach an agreement regarding cooperation. Wise came away from the meeting believing "the understanding was definitely and amicably reached that our institute is to be and to go on,

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155 The Free Synagogue Committee included Abram I. Elkus, President of Free Synagogue; Lee K. Frankel, Chairman of Committee; and members Julian W. Mack, Charles E. Bloch, Herbert M. Kaufman, Walter S. Hilborn, Israel N. Thurman, and Frederick L. Guggenheimer. The two additional members on the UAHC Committee were Ben Altsheimer and Rabbi Polak. Author has been unable to identify Polak’s first name. Ibid.
156 They were referring to the seminaries in Breslau, Berlin, Vienna and Budapest. Ibid.
157 Ibid.
and that the thing to consider is not to avert its rise but how to bring about relations of cordiality and comradeship between the two organizations.” In a letter apprising Hirsch of the proceedings, he expressed hope that the UAHC leadership would act with wisdom and conciliatoriness, and would agree to bring JIR under its auspices while making it possible for Wise to raise money for both schools, which Wise would do under the condition that he maintain his freedom to work with Hirsch to shape the new school. "Some sort of merger may even be attempted," Wise wrote. "We have asked the Union for some support, but that support must not be conditioned by our submerging within the Union or our dependence upon the College and the Union."\(^{158}\)

That winter, the proposal for a new institute to train rabbis in New York City became a subject of debate in the Jewish press, where supporters as well as antagonists published editorials. Dr. Leo M. Franklin, rabbi of Congregation Beth El in Detroit, Michigan, HUC '92 and former president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) as well as the HUC Alumni Association, for example, published a long editorial opposing the creation of JIR, saying Hebrew Union College trained rabbis well, and the new school would hurt HUC by drawing away donors.\(^ {159}\) Wise wrote a lengthy response, providing a lens into his thinking at the time. Addressing the matter of fundraising first, he explained that Franklin and many others mistakenly believed that American Jewry designated a fixed sum of money for educational, social and philanthropic purposes so that any expenditure on Jewish life had to be deducted from this total, leaving less overall. Wise did not take this zero-sum approach. "The truth is that we do not draw upon limited sources but that needs create sources," Wise

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\(^{159}\) “Dr. Franklin’s Life Was One of Service,” J. Dorsey Callaghan, *Detroit Free Press*, Detroit, MI, August 9, 1948. JIR Press Clipping Book, JIR Records.
wrote, "and I often find that giving to one institution leads to generosity to parallel institutions."^{160}

Wise elaborated on the fact that far more pulpits existed than rabbis to fill them. The shortage had driven up rabbinic salaries, and now scores of Jewish congregations could not afford the considerable sum needed to hire "even the youngest and most immature men" just graduating from HUC, while these new rabbis could reject half a dozen pulpits before consenting to accept the one deemed best adapted to their gifts, abilities, and tastes. "I shall not be satisfied until I help to make it possible for every congregation in America to secure a Jewish teacher and preacher for itself," he wrote.^{161}

Agreeing with Franklin's characterization of HUC's work as honorable and necessary, Wise insisted the creation of JIR should not be viewed as a critique of HUC. "Our founding of the JIR...is no more in disparagement of the HUC or an attempt to compete with it than the founding of new colleges and universities in different sections of the country constitutes competition with the older colleges and universities," he wrote, and restated the need for a school in the demographic, intellectual and cultural center of American Jewry, and for a different kind of student body who would create a professional rabbinate. He reiterated his respect for HUC, and said the Free Synagogue entered the field aiming only to be friendly and helpful. "Who knows," he said, "but that it may be given to us in some senses to be serviceable to the College by the very spirit and methods which are to obtain in the Jewish Institute of Religion."^{162}

To Rabbi Louis Grossman, an HUC alumnus (Class of 1884) and faculty member at the College, Wise wrote similarly, emphasizing that his aim was not to compete with the College but to help it. Since 1909 Grossmann had run HUC’s Teachers Institute in

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^{162} Ibid.
Cincinnati, and in recent years had come to believe the College should have a branch in New York. In a proposal he submitted to the Board of Governors in 1921, he argued that HUC could no longer conduct itself as a cloistered, provincial school; an academic institution needed to be in constant and intimate touch with “the life of the people,” and with a presence in New York, the College could play a stronger role in Americanizing the immigrants. Wise’s private correspondence with Grossmann included an element of critique of the institution from which Grossman was about to retire, as well as Wise's hope that JIR would ultimately change the nature of rabbinical training in the US. "We shall set up standards to which other Seminaries in America will ultimately be bound to repair," he wrote.

Finally, regarding the UAHC's request that the Free Synagogue refrain from moving forward, Wise indicated the recent appointment of Julian Morgenstern as HUC's new president made further delay impossible. Just two weeks earlier, in November 1921, Morgenstern had been selected to serve for a year as Acting President, in preparation for Kaufmann Kohler’s retirement. Wise found it unlikely that Morgenstern, a protégé of Kohler’s, would initiate the changes Wise believed necessary, rather than preserving the status quo. “Had Cincinnati chosen a great person as leader, I might have put everything aside and waited a few years,” Wise told Grossmann. "But the new regime makes it the more compelling that we inaugurate this work and appeal to a new group of men in America to come into the ministry and help to give them their start in the call that is yours and mine.”

Meanwhile, in February, after razing six dwellings on 68th Street just west of Central Park, the Free Synagogue began construction of a five-story structure that would house the Institute along with the Free Synagogue’s religious school, child adoption bureau and other

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165 Ibid.
activities. Wise told the *New York Times* construction of the synagogue house would cost $250,000, of which $170,000 had already been raised.\(^{166}\)

At the second meeting of the Free Synagogue Committee and representatives of the UAHC, which took place on March 8, 1922 and this time included HUC’s new Acting President, the UAHC committee asked the Free Synagogue committee to outline possible plans for cooperation. Given the Union’s sole focus in December on preventing JIR from opening, Lee Frankel asked at this meeting if the UAHC was genuinely amenable to cooperation. According to a report issued by the JIR group later, Morgenstern assured them that that his committee’s participation in the meeting indicated the UAHC's willingness to consider a plan, though they would ultimately have to bring it to their Executive Board and the HUC Board of Governors for consideration at their upcoming June meeting. On the basis of Morgenstern's reply to Frankel, the JIR group seems to have regarded cooperation as a genuine possibility.\(^{167}\)

Wise outlined a proposal, and the Free Synagogue committee agreed to frame it in greater detail for submission to the UAHC. Internally, it appears the Free Synagogue committee was divided; while most of the committee supported some kind of cooperation, one voice of dissent is recorded in the minutes of the various discussions that ensued. Israel Thurman, a leading member of the Free Synagogue since he helped found it in 1907, as well as an active lay leader of the UAHC, argued that JIR should be an entirely autonomous institution under the aegis solely of the Free Synagogue, having nothing to do with any other organization.\(^{168}\)

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\(^{167}\) Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, p. 5. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{168}\) Minutes, Dinner Meeting of Committee on Jewish Institute of Religion [n.d., circa 1921]. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
Despite Thurman’s objections, two weeks later, the Free Synagogue presented a “Basis for Discussion” to the New York contingent of the UAHC committee. Most of the proposal addressed matters of organizational structure: JIR, established by the Free Synagogue, would become an activity of the UAHC, co-ordinate with Hebrew Union College; at the same time, the Institute would remain independent and autonomous, and no arrangement or agreement of any kind could qualify its independence or limit its autonomy. The JIR Board, created by the Free Synagogue, would remain a self-perpetuating body and would include no more than twenty percent of its number appointed or elected representatives of the UAHC; at the same time, JIR and HUC could, if both chose to do so, have an interchange of professors, students and course credits. In the area of fundraising, the UAHC would provide JIR a minimum of $45,000 per year for three years, after which the Institute’s budgetary needs would be reevaluated; in return, Wise and JIR’s officers would place themselves at the disposal of the UAHC in order to raise funds for HUC as well as JIR, crediting all funds they secured to a joint College and Institute Fund.169

Reports following this meeting conflicted. According to members of the Free Synagogue committee, the UAHC representatives received the proposal positively, and in fairness to the Free Synagogue, offered to seek approval from the UAHC’s Executive Committee by April 15, just a few weeks away. Since the previous May, the Synagogue had held off on fundraising, pending these negotiations, and Wise now had plans to travel to Europe in early June to secure faculty for the Institute. If Wise was going to help fundraise for both the Institute and the College, per the proposal, he would need to begin scheduling

engagements immediately; alternatively, should the Union reject the proposal, then he urgently needed to start fundraising for the Institute alone.170

Charles Shohl, President of the UAHC, however, reported no such amicable discussion. Rather, he said, the Free Synagogue issued an ultimatum at the meeting, threatening that if the UAHC did not provide a rapid response, then Stephen S. Wise would immediately tour the West, targeting HUC’s supporters in order to raise money for his proposed New York school.171 Elkus, on behalf of the Free Synagogue committee, denied any such ultimatum was issued, and offered to send representatives to meet directly with the UAHC Executive Committee. The UAHC declined; rather, the matter would be taken up in an informal conference with just the President and Vice-President of the Union, they said.

While awaiting a response from the UAHC, the Free Synagogue group renamed itself the Committee on the Jewish Institute of Religion, and seeking to expand its membership, Wise turned to a few strategically selected allies from the various circles where he held influence.172 In addition to Richard Gottheil, most important among them were Julian Mack, a federal judge in Chicago who together with Wise worked closely with Louis Brandeis in the American Zionist movement, and who served on the Harvard College Board of Overseers; the scholar and Jewish librarian George Kohut, son of the Talmudist Alexander Kohut who helped found JTS and taught there; and, Emil Hirsch of Chicago. Hirsch, as noted above, saw himself and his congregation fully in sync with the values Wise and the Free Synagogue

170 Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, p. 6. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
171 Ibid., 7.
172 Attendance at the Committee’s first dinner meeting included Stephen S. Wise, Sidney E. Goldstein, Julian W. Mack, Mollie Fels, Bertha Guggenheimer, Louise Waterman Wise, Susan Goldstein, Edmund I. Kaufmann, Herbert M. Kaufmann, Armand Baer, Richard Gottheil, Maurice Harris, Max Weis, Charles Bloch, Walter S. Hilborn, Frederick Guggenheimer and Israel N. Thurman. Mack was selected chair. [Note Bertha Guggenheimer’s husband was Max Guggenheimer of Lynchburg, died 1912; Frederick Guggenheimer appears not to be related.] Minutes, Dinner Meeting of Committee on Jewish Institute of Religion, n.d. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
espoused, and he was also a member of the original University of Chicago faculty, where his close friend William Rainey Harper had appointed him as professor of Oriental languages and literature.\footnote{Mary Ruth Yoe, “Edward Hirsch Levi.” University of Chicago Magazine, accessed July 8, 2013, \url{http://magazine.uchicago.edu/0004/features/levi2.html}.} Wise hoped Hirsch would serve as Honorary President of the Institute, and made it clear he did not regard the role as purely titular. Wise consulted with Hirsch on a host of JIR-related questions, and hoped the Chicago rabbi would, when possible, lecture at the Institute as Visiting Professor in Theology. “It will be great for you to have disciples in teaching of a really liberal Judaism,” Wise told Hirsch.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Emil G. Hirsch, Jan 25, 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.} For the time being, Wise assumed the title Acting President.

Upon joining the committee, Mack, a member of Hirsch’s Chicago Sinai Congregation, expressed his enthusiasm for the endeavor. “Reform or radical Judaism as represented by Sinai and the Free Synagogue has always seemed to me to need just such an institute of religion as you purpose establishing,” he wrote, and then made clear his top priority. “What we want in the rabbinate, in addition to the broad and liberal point of view, is the soundest scholarship—a scholarship that fits the student for active service as well as for the scholarly life.”\footnote{Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, March 4, 1922. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.} For Mack, a curriculum focused on interfaith study and social service would not suffice, and Gottheil, the only professional academic on the committee, likely agreed. It was for this reason that Wise and the Committee enlisted Mack and Gottheil, for they recognized the need to now turn their attention to assembling a faculty who could teach traditional subjects like Bible, Rabbinic Literature, History and Philosophy, and thereby prepare rabbis for the scholarly life.

At its first meeting, on March 26, 1922, the newly named committee reaffirmed their commitment to moving ahead with the establishment of the Jewish Institute of Religion. They took up the practical matters of determining mission, organization, faculty, budget,
admissions policies, recruitment methods, and curriculum. They spelled out, for example, a preliminary plan to recruit students: Wise, as director of the school at least for the first year or two, would make a tour of American universities in order to attract into the rabbinate a group of young college students who might otherwise never consider the profession. Anticipating they could run the Institute on a budget of $30,000, of which the Free Synagogue would contribute $10,000, they planned to raise the balance by appeal to friends of the Free Synagogue movement throughout the country.\(^\text{176}\) Within the next few months, they would begin procuring pledges, publicly aiming to raise a total of $50,000 per year, and providing they could secure the annual budget of $30,000 for the first three to five years, they would open the school in September 1922.\(^\text{177}\)

Their minutes convey confidence. Not only did they assert a need for such an institute, they cited an urgent and insistent demand for it, and claimed no organization or group of men was better prepared or qualified to establish it than the Free Synagogue, given its past achievements and ideals for the future.

Meanwhile, Wise’s private correspondence reveals that during the very months when the Free Synagogue was negotiating for JIR’s inclusion under the auspices of the UAHC, he had begun articulating a new approach to the school’s scope and mission that would likely only further provoke the leadership of the Reform movement. Reflecting the democratic sensibility that led Wise repeatedly to challenge the dominant Reform paradigm, and resembling the approach of Berlin’s Hochschule, it became a fourth component of his vision for how the Institute would alter the course of American liberal Judaism.

\(^\text{176}\) JIR Board Minutes, March 26, 1922.
\(^\text{177}\) The following attended the March 26, 1922 dinner meeting: Armand Baer, Charles Bloch, Joseph and Mollie Fels, Walter S. Hilborn, Rabbi Sidney E. and Susan Goldstein, Prof. Richard Gottheil, Frederick L. Guggenheimer, Bertha Guggenheimer, Rabbi Maurice Harris, Herbert M. Kaufmann, Hon. Julian Mack, Israel N. Thurman, Rabbi J. Max Weis, and Rabbi Stephen S. and Louise Waterman Wise. Ibid.
4. JIR would model an American liberal Judaism that transcended sectarian difference: Though Wise had long dreamed of opening a seminary, only in 1921 did he begin to articulate, at first tentatively, the idea of making JIR home to teachers and students representing a broad range of viewpoints including those more conservative or less Zionist than his own. Despite the negotiations underway with the Reform movement, Wise became increasingly interested in establishing ideological independence for JIR, rather than alignment with Reform or any other movement or viewpoint. "I am not sure that we shall limit the work and make it an institute for the training of men for the Liberal Jewish ministry," he wrote to Louis Grossmann. "I wonder…if it would not be a finer thing to let young men come to us whether Zionist, non-Zionist or anti-Zionist, whether Liberal, conservative or orthodox, and help them to prepare for the ministry, and then when they have had their training let them choose the way they shall go. I somehow feel that this plan will appeal to you, for as we grow older we see how fatuous and impermanent are the labels we have magnified in the past."\(^1\) Soon thereafter, he told Mack that JIR would be liberal, but not ideologically monolithic—rather, "liberal enough to welcome and respect men whether reform or orthodox Zionist or anti-Zionist."\(^2\) Mack’s support for the school only grew; the non-aligned approach at the very least made room for, and perhaps expressed, the radical Judaism Mack associated with Chicago Sinai and the Free Synagogue.

Wise also consulted with Hirsch. “Would you approve of the plan of training men for the ministry without using adjectives, whether liberal or orthodox or conservative?” Wise asked Hirsch. “It would in a sense work itself out, for I suppose orthodox men would not come to us, but would it not be better for men to come and make their choice after they have been with us and have come to understand. It would seem to me we could do a much more catholic and in some senses Jewish work if we were to follow this procedure. We would not

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\(^1\) Stephen S. Wise to Louis Grossman, December 12, 1921. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records.
of course conform to the things that the conservative or orthodox might expect of us, but excepting for that would it not be a fine and big thing to make it possible for conservative men to come and to be taught?”  

Hirsch, too, expressed enthusiasm for the idea. On the occasion of the Free Synagogue’s fifteenth anniversary, Hirsch, who had fallen gravely ill that winter, wrote a note in shaky handwriting to Wise’s congregation rejoicing in their achievements, and linking their spirit to his hopes for the Jewish Institute of Religion. The Free Synagogue brought his own Chicago Sinai out of loneliness and solitude, he wrote; the two congregations were sisters, with shared high aims and convictions—and those convictions, including freedom of thought and expression, would lie at the heart of JIR:

I have in mind a school which will encourage independence of thought in its student. We shall subscribe to no doctrine unless approved by our own searching, probing into the original Jewish sources. We want our men to have a deeper understanding of the social outlook. That after all is Judaism's message and Religion’s function. Humanize! I remember the Hochschule in Berlin. Geiger on the faculty with Cassel, Levi, Steinthal, a representation of every opinion only bound together by the love and passion for truth. We students were not asked to accept but we were helped to think and to search independently.

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181 Emil G. Hirsch to Stephen S. Wise, n.d. [ca 1922]. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records. In addition, Hirsch wrote, “Our pulpits are free…we have no dogma. Every Jew has the right and duty to think out for himself the fundamentals of his philosophy of conduct.

“Spinoza was excommunicated. But mind you by whom? By men who had been influenced by the spirit unJewish of the Spanish inquisition. Had Spinoza merely thought and not in conduct ignored Rabbinic dietary legislation, his enemies would not have dared stigmatize him a heretic. We know that many of his propositions are the echo of the positions announced by Kreskas and Maimonides. These were not expelled.

“Freedom of thought on theology is the birthright of the Jew. Some of our great theologians occasionally are pleased to overlook this. They scent in every phrase not of their coining the odor of agnosticism and atheism. I could name some of this holy company who have every reason to draw attention to our uncanonical theology because their own is anything but orthodox.

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“But freedom as Sinai and you understand is also freedom to discuss the distracting problems of our social conditions. Our Prophets certainly have pointed the way. It is this freedom which is denied by many to the pulpit. We claim it as our obligation would we be worthy of the successorship to Isaiah and Amos. Your progress, a tribute to the rare abilities and ardor of your leader, but also is a ringing response which the old Jewish cry for justice found in your hearts.
While for Hirsch non-alignment represented freedom and independence of thought, for Wise it meant more. In “Liberal Judaism,” the sermon he delivered at the Free Synagogue a year earlier, he had emphasized “the oneness of Israel,” and urged unity across “a multitude of divergent types.”¹⁸² Unlike Hirsch, Wise was a Zionist and, perhaps ironically, his desire to include non-Zionists stemmed from the belief at the heart of his Zionism that the bond Jews shared transcended their differences. Thus, in his largest Jewish commitments he prioritized Jewish national unity over any kind of sectarianism, and called upon Jews across the globe to take responsibility for one another regardless of distinction. As Urofsky notes, this meant uptown Jews were responsible for downtown Jews, American Jews were responsible for European Jews, and all Jews were responsible for the Jews of Palestine.¹⁸³ This value undergirded his work at the Free Synagogue, the American Jewish Congress, the Zionist Organization of America, and the various global Jewish relief efforts he either led or joined. He held this view not despite his progressivism, but as a manifestation of it—and once he decided that the Jewish Institute of Religion would be sufficiently “liberal in spirit” to encompass the oneness of Israel, this became the single most important aspect of the school for him, and a matter on which he refused to compromise.

HUC, by contrast, largely shunned Jewish nationalism and notions of Jewish ethnicity, though not to the extent of Ethical Culture, which denied it entirely. Early German reformers had created a conceptual framework that enabled Jews to identify as fully German in nationality and Jewish in religion, and nineteenth-century Reformers in the United States adapted this view to American life, in part out of concern that Jewish nationalism might be

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¹⁸³ Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 60.
perceived as anti-American. For men like Kaufmann Kohler, belief—theology, and more—determined Jewish identity; as a result, the viewpoints of faculty and students at times underwent scrutiny. By 1922, though the College’s leadership had yet to challenge this perspective, much of American Jewry no longer held it.

While Wise and the Free Synagogue committee moved ahead with plans to open the Institute, the UAHC’s Daniel Hays travelled to Cincinnati where, with no official meetings scheduled, he informally convened as many members of the UAHC’s Executive Board and HUC’s Board of Governors as he could assemble. Fifteen men met to review the negotiations and the Free Synagogue’s recent proposal. Hays explained how his committee had tried to dissuade the Free Synagogue from establishing the Jewish Institute of Religion, and then the conference of fifteen reviewed the Free Synagogue’s proposal for cooperation; in short order, they rejected it in its entirety.

Hays wrote to Frankel explaining the unanimous decision: HUC provided adequate training, a distinguished faculty and an ideal location. In addition, given the large financial investment already made in college buildings, a library and soon a dormitory, the result of many years of painstaking effort and sacrifice, Hays said, HUC had an "inalienable claim" on the allegiance of every alumnus, every UAHC congregation, and every man in the liberal Jewish ministry. For these reasons, the committee of fifteen had determined that the best interest of American Judaism would be served not by founding a new institution, but by uniting all efforts and strengthening present support for the historical institution, Hebrew Union College.¹⁸⁴

While the committee of fifteen rejected the entire proposal for cooperation, they expressed a particularly strong objection to the JIR group's insistence on remaining

¹⁸⁴ Daniel P. Hays, Chairman, UAHC to Lee K. Frankel, Chairman, Free Synagogue Committee, April 6, 1922. In Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, Appendix A, 14. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
independent. Should the establishment of another institution for the training of rabbis ever become necessary in the future, Hays wrote, in order for it to become "an activity of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations," it would have to be under the control of the UAHC, which included more than two hundred congregations. Under no circumstances would total authority be handed over, in perpetuity no less, to a single congregation. Hays concluded by informing Frankel that the committee of fifteen would report their recommendation to the UAHC Executive Board at its regular meeting in June.

Up to this point in the negotiations, official correspondence remained cordial. That was about to change.

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On April 11, Charles Shohl, UAHC president, sent a letter to rabbis across the country warning of Wise's plans. Accurately but pejoratively describing Wise as one who frequently found fault with the Hebrew Union College and expressed discontent with the UAHC, Shohl warned that support for the new school would lead to "our undoing." Shohl painted a stark picture of the Free Synagogue’s proposal, saying Wise wanted the UAHC to take his new rabbinical college under its wing, and provide it a minimum of $45,000 annually while allowing it to remain altogether independent of the Union. In return, Shohl wrote, Wise would give the Union twenty percent representation on the Board, and he "promises to raise money." Shohl accused Wise of issuing an ultimatum, threatening that if the UAHC did not deliver a decision within fifteen days, he would immediately set out on a tour of the West to raise money for his proposed college.186

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185 Ibid.
186 "He (or the Chairman of his committee) insists upon an answer in fifteen days, or Dr. Wise will immediately set out upon a tour of the West to raise money for the support of the proposed college in New York," Shohl wrote. Charles Shohl to rabbis serving UAHC congregations, April 11, 1922. In Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, Appendix B, 17. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
Shohl then issued, if indirectly, his own dictate to rabbis serving UAHC congregations. \(^{187}\) "As far as we are concerned, we are content to have Dr. Wise set out immediately for all the money he can get," Shohl wrote. "We realize that the field is limited and that Dr. Wise's success may mean diminished revenue for the Hebrew Union College but we refuse to be thrown into a panic. We have resources which cannot be minimized or overlooked. We have two hundred graduates who will not suffer the institution founded by Dr. Isaac M. Wise of sainted memory to fail. We have the support of every man in the Liberal Jewish ministry. We have 241 congregations belonging to the Union who will not lend themselves to our undoing. We face the issue with equanimity, awaiting the judgment of our rabbis and congregations." \(^ {188}\)

Shohl's sounding the alarm to all Reform rabbis in America (except Wise and Goldstein, who apparently did not receive it) infuriated Wise, who wrote Hirsch immediately, explaining that he had requested—not demanded—an early answer so he could either travel for both institutions or else be free to secure funds for JIR. The UAHC committee had amicably agreed to an April 15 deadline for the Union to render a decision. "Now the charge is that we are trying to undo and destroy the influence of the College, so that the appeal to every rabbi is to withhold support from our plan," Wise wrote. The JIR group would need "to remove the impression that the Union is trying to spread--namely, that we are doing a dishonorable thing." We will demand that Shohl repudiate his false and foul statement, Wise said. \(^ {189}\)

Wise and the JIR committee responded publicly in the form of an *Open Letter to the President of the UAHC from a Committee of Free Synagogue*, a pamphlet they distributed broadly which included the Shohl and Hays letters documenting the Free Synagogue’s

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\(^{187}\) Ibid.

\(^{188}\) Ibid.

negotiations with the UAHC, and their response to Shohl's "calumnious attack on Wise."\textsuperscript{190} Recognizing that the UAHC had not yet acted on the recommendation of the committee of fifteen, they demanded an opportunity to meet with the Union’s Executive Committee in order to present the facts prior to the rendering of a decision. In reviewing the history of the negotiations since they began in May 1921, the \textit{Open Letter} maintained the JIR group had made every effort to cooperate. At the most recent meeting of the two groups, their proposal had been received as largely acceptable and even admirable, and "there was not the slightest intimation in the course of our last conference that the plan in its entirety or in any of its details was unfriendly or antagonistic either to the Hebrew Union College or to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations."\textsuperscript{191} The \textit{Open Letter} reminded readers that the Free Synagogue belonged to the UAHC and three of its rabbis were HUC graduates. Accusing Shohl of rejecting in a "most unfriendly spirit" the JIR proposal and telling rabbis across the US there was no basis for discussion, the JIR group demanded that the Executive Board address Shohl's statement against a UAHC member synagogue.\textsuperscript{192}

The \textit{Open Letter} resembled in form and content another \textit{Open Letter} Wise had crafted fifteen years earlier, when he rejected the Emanu-El pulpit and published his charges against the Reform aristocracy as part of an effort to elicit support for his Free Synagogue idea. Once again, out of conflict with the Reform leadership, he mobilized support for his own endeavor. His longtime ally John Haynes Holmes suggested the fervency of opposition to Wise testified to his effectiveness. “Your opponents are stirred because they see the seriousness of the competition your institute will offer, and they know you are doing what they should and would have done if they had the courage and vision,” Holmes told Wise. “Tragedy such noble labor and sacrifice you are doing is met with antagonism of your own people…but you

\textsuperscript{190} Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, p. 3. JIR Nearprint Box 1.  
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 6.  
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid.
must be used to it, and must get comfort from whole-hearted support of the Free
Synagogue.”

Holmes commiserated with Wise in part because he, too, had recently come
under attack for his recent book critiquing the Unitarian church structure in ways that
resembled Wise’s critique of Reform and Orthodox Judaism. “It is getting awful slams from
the denominational papers, some vicious,” Holmes told Wise. “Proof that my case against the
whole sectarian system is sound.”

In a sense, Wise too had challenged the sectarian system, and Shohl and others
responded with a vengeance. Despite distribution of the Open Letter, for JIR the damage had
been done. Hirsch, after receiving the JIR pamphlet, praised its content and spirit but
despaired that it had come too late. “I doubt whether it will move the Cincinnati folks to
repentance,” he wrote Wise. “They have done the mischief…judging my own Congregation
which, like all others, was flooded by these Cincinnati communications, they have succeeded
in prejudicing the minds of even my closest friends against our proposed institute.

“From all sides I hear the question,” Hirsch added. “Why must we have two schools;
isn't one enough?”

Some of Wise's contemporaries felt academic freedom had become the determinative
issue precluding any possibility of true cooperation between HUC and JIR. Rabbi Max
Heller, an alumnus of the College who supported cooperation, tried to convince Shohl and
Alfred Cohen to lend their encouragement to JIR, which he believed would benefit Reform
Judaism, and not to break off negotiations. At the same time, he urged Wise not to give up on
the possibility of cooperation. “Your fear of Union control is natural, remembering their
record of intolerance as against Zionism and socialism,” Heller said. “Still, an understanding

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194 In 1918 Holmes resigned from the American Unitarian Association over its support for the war,
and he later attempted but failed to convince his congregation to leave the denomination and become
an independent church. Ibid.; Voss, Rabbi and Minister, 152 and 157; and John Haynes Holmes, The
Future of this Church (1918). Project Gutenberg, accessed July 8, 2013,
can, I believe, be reached to safeguard completely, not only academic freedom, but the needed measure of independence."  

David Fichman, Executive Director of the Jewish Charitable and Educational Federation of New Orleans, believed the College’s opposition to socialist views, and perhaps Wise’s openness to them, lay at the heart of the conflict. "It was a foregone conclusion the Union would not accept your proposition,” he wrote Wise. “After all is said and done, the Hebrew Union College stands for a definite viewpoint in relation to the present social-economic situation. The Institute necessarily stands for an almost diametrically opposed view. I know of no Organisation today that is large enough, and liberal enough, to be able to contain within itself, and to sponsor two Institutions whose aims and policies differ as much as the aims and policies of the H.U.C. and the Institute. Until the Institute is willing to hold up as a fundamental ideal of life the sacred rights of [private] property, it is rather too much to expect that the Union would look with anything but disfavor upon it."  

Once the President of the UAHC urged congregations across the country to withhold support from JIR, and Wise and the Free Synagogue determined to proceed regardless, the battle lines were drawn. Beyond seeking an opportunity to present their case before the UAHC Executive Board, and a public retraction of Shohl's "calumnious and false innuendoes,” the JIR committee did not ask for more. Accepting as final the recommendation of the UAHC's committee of fifteen against any form of cooperation, they would proceed with establishing the Jewish Institute of Religion as an independent rabbinical school under the sole auspices of the Free Synagogue in New York City. Wise set out immediately to fundraise in a variety of cities beyond the New York area. On the west coast, he established a

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197 "Personally, I do not see how it could have been possible for you and the Union to work out any feasible scheme of co-operation,” Fichman wrote. David Fichman to Stephen S. Wise, April 17, 1922. Box 9, folder 9, JIR Records.  
198 Open Letter to the President of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations from Committee of Free Synagogue on the Jewish Institute of Religion, April 20, 1922, p. 9. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
San Francisco Committee to support the new school, led by his friend Rabbi Louis Newman, whose appeal for contributions read, “May we not count on your help in this great constructive work on behalf of American Judaism?”

The JIR committee selected Julian Mack and Lee Frankel to represent the Institute at the June HUC and UAHC Board meetings in Cincinnati. With a few weeks remaining, Mack and Frankel insisted that Wise immediately raise $45,000, arguing that only by demonstrating they already had all the funds necessary to open JIR would they be able to speak from a position of strength. "I must work like a Trojan in the next ten days in order to raise that amount," Wise told Hirsch, and with the support of the Free Synagogue lay leadership, as we will see, he did.

Meanwhile, JIR came under public fire again from Cincinnati, this time from within the College. Stepping down after two decades as president, Kaufmann Kohler, so long the subject of Stephen Wise’s criticism, utilized his farewell sermon to lash out at the new seminary in New York. Celebrating the College’s achievements uniting and centralizing the forces of progressive Jewry, Kohler took aim at JIR’s non-aligned approach. The Institute, he envisioned, would be “just colorless and non-descript enough to suit certain classes of men in a Free Synagogue, or of a Hochschule of the University type which would be so broad and all-inclusive in its character as to give equal place to all religious systems and shades of thought, and whose professors should represent all possible stand-points, however diametrically opposed to each other. And out of such an Institute Rabbis, preachers and

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199 The brochure used for JIR’s appeal for contributions read, "May we not count on your help in this great constructive work on behalf of American Judaism?" and listed the following members of the San Francisco Committee: John C. Altman, Louis Bloch, Leon Juda, Daniel E. Koshland, I. Irving Lipsitch, Henry L. Mayer, Rabbi Louis I. Newman, Rabbi Jacob Nieto, John I. Walter, and Emil S. Wangenheim. The brochure urged readers to sign an enclosed subscription blank and send it to the Committee, care of Rabbi Louis I. Newman. Jewish Institute of Religion: A School of Training for the Ministry, Research and Community Service. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

teachers are to emanate who are to mould character and inspire reverence for God and things
godly!

“The Hebrew Union College need not fear competition,” he concluded, for with fifty
years of tradition, congregational support, a faculty, and dormitories under construction, and
under God’s Providence, it would remain “the center and watch-tower of American Reform
Judaism, safe and secure for all time.”

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Mack arrived in Cincinnati optimistic. He recognized at this point the two seminaries
would share neither finances nor trustees, but he believed cooperation in the form of
exchanging professors, students and credits might still be feasible.

He made his presentation before the UAHC and HUC Boards at 2pm in the afternoon
on June 11, 1922. Speaking dispassionately, he explained that the JIR group had been
motivated to negotiate with the UAHC not out of fiscal concern but, rather, hoping that joint
fundraising would elicit more funding from untapped sources, to their mutual benefit. The
past month alone had demonstrated that such sources existed, he said, for still lacking a
faculty or curriculum, JIR had received contributions amounting to $30,500 per year for three
years, plus additional pledges of $17,000 per year, and twenty to twenty-five prospective
students already wanted to enroll.

Mack then addressed the seriousness of Shohl’s charge, and insisted that had the
UAHC committee expressed their displeasure with the JIR proposal for cooperation when the
two groups met, the Free Synagogue would have withdrawn it at once and asked the UAHC

201 Farewell Sermon delivered by Kaufmann Kohler on May 27, 1922. Hebrew Union College
Monthly 8, no. 8 (1922): 226.
202 Telegram from Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, June 12, 1922. Box 25, folder 13, JIR
Records.
203 Telegram from Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, June 11, 1922. Box 25, folder 13, JIR
Records.
204 Mack told Wise he spoke in a “very low and earnest tone, without the slightest excitement or
bitterness, but I put the conduct of the President clearly and strongly.” Julian W. Mack to Stephen S.
representatives for alternative suggestions. The UAHC committee should not have conveyed satisfaction with the proposal if, in fact, they were not satisfied.

Shohl responded apologetically. Regarding his letter to rabbis across the country, the board members seemed split, with some expressing support and others opposition. Mack had the impression that, while some of the Cincinnati men would have been willing to launch an offensive even stronger than Shohl’s, others, including Julius Rosenwald, A. Leo Weil, Hays and Altheimer disapproved of the President’s letter.

The meeting lasted late into the afternoon, and Mack felt the board members paid him close attention. In the end, he decided against requesting a resolution condemning Shohl, and perhaps to avoid further division, the Board took no action either approving or condemning the letter. Both Hays and Altheimer stated clearly that the JIR committee had acted above board and would in no way be subject to censure. In the same spirit, Mack urged continued discussions, and expressed hope for a large measure of cooperation not only between JIR and HUC, but also with JTS.205

Wise expressed pleasure upon learning what transpired. The UAHC Board’s decision not to approve their President’s epistolary assault, and to allow for discussions to continue, he claimed, represented a victory for the fledgling new school.206

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Did the JIR founders genuinely believe the UAHC would grant its imprimatur and shared revenue to a school they knew would compete with HUC, while allowing their most vocal antagonist, Stephen S. Wise, complete autonomy to run it? Did they believe they should make a genuine effort at cooperation, despite unlikely odds of success?

205 Ibid.

206 Wise wrote to Herbert M. Kaufman, “I know you will share my joy…they have not approved of Shohl’s letter. They could not repudiate him explicitly, but they do the next best thing,—namely, take no notice of him, and reaffirm the Hays resolution which was not objectionable from their point of view, and what is more, they provide for a continuance of the Conference Committee. We have acted decently and honorably toward them and I think we have met with a great reward.” Stephen S. Wise to Herbert M. Kaufman, June 12, 1922. Box 22, folder 16, JIR Records.
Perhaps, rather than pursuing a genuine effort at cooperation, the Free Synagogue entered into these negotiations more calculatingly, anticipating the Reform movement’s rebuff and creating evidence that demonstrated their willingness to cooperate and their moral high ground. If so, this would not have been the first time Wise exploited a public display of self-righteousness, David against Goliath, in order to set the stage for the creation of a new institution that would challenge the Reform Jewish elite. Indeed, in a gambit similar to Wise’s 1907 maneuver leveraging his rejection of the Temple Emanu-El offer in order to create the Free Synagogue, the JIR founders, by participating in these negotiations, brought their endeavor greater publicity, and ultimately triggered a rebuff that enabled them to claim a collaborative spirit while launching JIR with the independence they demanded.

It is difficult to imagine circumstances under which the Reform movement could have accepted the Free Synagogue's proposal. Despite HUC's financial need, Wise's offer to fundraise for both schools could not alleviate the fear that ultimately JIR would cause a diminishment in HUC’s revenue. In addition, the Free Synagogue's proposal challenged the movement's authority by offering the UAHC little representation on the JIR board, and no power to control the destiny of the school. Even some of Wise’s friends found the Free Synagogue proposal unreasonable. "I do not, after some consideration, see how the Union could accept the offer of your committee," James Heller wrote to Wise, "which practically asks that they support the Institute without having any jurisdiction over it."\[^{207}\]

Max Heller, too, objected. "Frankly...I was surprised at you and your friends placing before the Union a plan which called for so large an appropriation and promised to return so small a measure of control," he wrote. Still, Heller did not agree with the UAHC’s claim that one seminary sufficed for Reform Judaism; over the course of the next two decades, he said, so many children of the Orthodox would become Reform that at least one additional Reform

\[^{207}\text{James G. Heller to Stephen S. Wise, May 3, 1922. Box 19, folder 3, JIR Records.}\]
seminary would urgently be needed. Apparently he told Shohl that while the UAHC could not accept the Free Synagogue proposal, they should have continued negotiating; ultimately, Heller hoped to see both institutions working harmoniously on behalf of American Reform Judaism.²⁰⁸

Still, why did the UAHC and HUC object so strongly to the creation of a new school in New York that they were willing to wage a national battle to withhold all support from it? As Wise argued, neither the Jewish seminaries of Europe nor most of the colleges and universities proliferating in the United States resorted to such hostile measures to stymie the creation of peer institutions. By contrast, from the outset the UAHC did take measures to prevent JIR from coming into existence, participating in negotiations solely to dissuade the Free Synagogue from moving forward and then, without acknowledging any of the Free Synagogue's arguments regarding the changing nature of twentieth-century American liberal Judaism, and the consequent need for a new approach to rabbinical training, resolutely maintaining that no need existed for change because HUC did the job ably, thanks to an infrastructure in which the American Jewish community had, for nearly fifty years, invested heavily.

Clearly the UAHC feared the New York school would bring financial harm to HUC by diverting philanthropic resources away from the College. Shohl's letter to rabbis across the country portrayed JIR as a threat the Reform movement could not abide. Hostilities may have been exacerbated by the fact that the majority of the UAHC Executive Board and HUC Board of Governors at this time lived in Cincinnati, and likely felt personally invested in preserving the College not only as a valuable Reform resource, but also as a valuable local resource. Still, might it not have been beneficial for the UAHC to have its own affiliated rabbinical school in New York at this time?

²⁰⁸ Max Heller to Stephen S. Wise, April 28, 1922. Box 18, folder 15, JIR Records.
Had the Free Synagogue and the UAHC seen eye to eye on issues of greatest import, they may have put aside their material concerns in order to achieve mutual benefit from close cooperation. The Reform movement could have gained either its own affiliate or an ally in the heart of New York's thriving Jewish community, and JIR could have avoided UAHC-generated resistance in congregations across the country.  

The conflict unfolding between JIR and the Reform movement in these negotiations concerned, however, more than funding, infrastructure, and location; on the issue of greatest importance to both institutions—the future of American liberal Judaism—they did not agree. With two very different visions pitted against one another, each institution regarded the other not as an opportunity but a threat.

Up to this point HUC, as the intellectual center that trained most of the American Reform rabbinate, had dominated the shaping of American liberal Judaism in accord with the vision of its founder, Isaac Mayer Wise, and his successor, HUC’s second president, Kaufmann Kohler.

Now, by calling for a seminary in the heart of New York’s exploding Jewish population, rather than in the Jewish hinterlands; a professionalized rabbinate more learned, mature and capable of engaging in “social ministry;” and, a freer approach to American liberal Judaism unconstrained theologically or politically—JIR posed a direct challenge to the Reform movement’s vision for American liberal Judaism and, more immediately, to HUC’s monopoly of liberal rabbinical training.

For that reason, the Reform movement responded with immediate and sharp opposition. The movement had expressed no similar resistance two decades earlier when members of its own Congregation Emanu-El of the City of New York invested extraordinary

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209 The UAHC did establish an arm in New York City in 1923, a year after the creation of JIR, with the opening of the UAHC Teachers College. The Teachers College ran independent of HUC. See Lauren L. Veit, “The Hebrew Union College School for Teachers in New York City (1923-1932) in Historical Perspective” (MARE thesis, HUC-JIR, 1991).
financial resources in remaking the Jewish Theological Seminary of America; nor did the movement resist in 1896 when the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) was created to serve American Orthodox Jewry.\textsuperscript{210} Neither JTSA nor RIETS had a stake in the future of American liberal Judaism; JIR did.

Harmonious relations, therefore, were not to be, and given that over the course of the negotiations, neither the Free Synagogue nor the UAHC demonstrated any willingness to compromise, most likely neither had any hope or even desire to reach an agreement. Given the American Jewish landscape of 1922, quite different from that of 1875, the Reform movement leadership must have recognized that Stephen S. Wise already had stature, and so potentially could JIR. JIR promised to create a very different kind of rabbi, promoting values that conflicted in significant ways with HUC’s; if the movement could not prevent the school from coming into existence, American Jews seeking a meaningful expression of liberal Judaism within as well as outside the Reform movement might find their competitor—its president, students and eventually alumni—more compelling.

Given recent trends, both within the United States and globally, this possibility may have appeared quite real to both sides of the dispute. In the US, anti-Semitism was on the rise, fueled by the recent Red Scare that had aroused fear of so-called Jewish radicals, and now increasingly manifest in restrictions that blocked Jews from entering certain schools, professions, residential areas, and even the country as a whole, due to recent passage of the Immigration Act of 1921; meanwhile, ever since the British issued the Balfour Declaration in 1917, American Jewish support for the Zionist movement had grown exponentially. In addition, perhaps influenced by the labor movement and more radical Jewish groups, or simply by the cosmopolitanism of daily life in the cities where they lived, the new generation

\textsuperscript{210} See “Co-operation or Antagonism Not the Only Alternative,” \textit{Kansas City Jewish Chronicle}, Kansas City, MO, April 28, 1922. This article describes failure of negotiations between HUC and JIR, recalls the turn-of-the-century call for HUC to move to New York and merge with JTS following the death of Isaac Mayer Wise, and urges an end to current hostilities. Free Synagogue Scrapbook, Box 9, JIR Records.
of American Jews overwhelmingly embraced secular liberal politics. Far less concerned about manners and respectability than earlier generations, elements of twentieth-century American Jewry showed a greater willingness to speak and act publicly, motivated by Jewish interests—and if they sought rabbis who would do the same, they were likely to turn to the ilk of Stephen S. Wise.

As a result, for Wise, though elements of this conflict echoed his experience in 1907 when he also incurred the wrath of the Reform elite, it differed significantly. Then, those he antagonized had little concern that his new congregation, which had no material resources and met in a theater, would pose a threat to the wealthiest congregation in the world. No one, therefore, actively opposed the creation of the Free Synagogue. Now, however, that synagogue had become a growing movement of Free Synagogues. Now, his antagonists recognized that were JIR to succeed—and with Wise at the helm, its chances were strong—it would not only jeopardize support for HUC and draw students and faculty away from the College, but it might impact the future direction of the movement as a whole.211

The ensuing battle would test the mettle of the movement, and the potential for growth in the first half of the twentieth century of an independent, synagogue-based liberal Jewish seminary. In the short run, the UAHC and HUC continued to do what they could to impede the JIR committee’s progress. "Everywhere the Cincinnatians are at work belittling you and the Institute," Hirsch told Wise. "They argue and not without effect that the institute never will become real."

211 Whether or not the UAHC was aware of this, Wise had long-term plans for JIR graduates to create new congregations across the country that might compete with their neighboring Reform congregations. Wise explained this to Hirsch: "Do not be disturbed about the things that may be said," he wrote, referring to JIR's antagonists in the Reform movement. "You and I together will do a work that shall count in American Israel. A friend wrote to me the other day, whose judgment you respect, that the same tendency which moves the Union to resent the establishment of another school moves the graduates of the HUC to object to a second reform congregation in every community. Thus Detroit with one hundred thousand Jews has one reform congregation, as is the case in Buffalo, Albany, Washington, Cleveland, etc; all cities in which there ought to be two or three. The men we graduate will go through the country and organize congregations if we give them the opportunity to prepare themselves." Stephen S. Wise to Emil Hirsch, June 14 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.
But Wise had secured the funding he needed to proceed. He and the JIR committee continued methodically, putting all the necessary pieces in place so the school could open in October. They now narrowed their focus to incorporation, building the board, and hiring faculty. In addition, while awaiting word regarding Hirsch’s health, Wise began to consider other suitable candidates for the presidency.

**Assembling a Board**

In forming the board, Wise and his associates from the Free Synagogue assembled a group of individuals who represented an intricate network of associations and access to power in the Jewish world as well as prominent progressive political circles at the city, state and federal levels. Most of JIR’s first trustees shared Wise’s religious as well as political commitments, had experience building other institutions or organizations (in many cases alongside Wise), and kept company in elite religious, political or scholarly milieus. Several were connected to leading American universities, and at least a third were established philanthropists who had the capacity for significant charitable giving, though not on the scale Louis Marshall contributed to JTS, or Julius Rosenwald to HUC. The board included several founding members and executive officers of the Free Synagogue; a preponderance of Zionist activists; rabbis as well as lay leaders involved in a range of Jewish welfare causes in New York and beyond; several HUC and UAHC board members, and others firmly rooted within the Reform movement; long-time progressive era reformers, including a number of attorneys and judges; one professional Jewish scholar; and, two individuals dedicated to the promotion of Jewish learning through publishing, library preservation and support for educational institutions.

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Wise reported on the success of a recent appeal he, Mack, Frankel made for funds, and indicated that the Institute now had over $30,000 per year for its first three years, including the appropriate from the Free Synagogue, with the promise of an additional $17,000 per year “if I don't secure the money throughout the country as I know I will. Before we begin our work, we have more than covered our budget, which incidentally is half as large as the budget of the HUC after forty-eight years.” Stephen S. Wise to Emil Hirsch, June 14 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.
Gottheil, Mack and Kohut continued to serve as Wise’s inner circle, helping him strategize in many areas, most particularly in building a faculty; Kohut consulted closely with Wise on establishing a library and scholarly press for the Institute, as well. Lee K. Frankel, a leading social worker in New York City who had directed the United Hebrew Charities, continued to play a leading role in Jewish communal affairs, and belonged to the Brandeis circle of the Zionist movement, became JIR’s first board chair.\textsuperscript{213} Other active members included Abram I. Elkus, a progressive attorney who had succeeded Henry Morgenthau, Sr. both as Ambassador to Ottoman Turkey prior to the War, and in 1919 as president of the congregation;\textsuperscript{214} and, Charles E. Bloch, a founder of the Free Synagogue and president of Bloch Publishing Company, the oldest Jewish publishing company in the country, which his father Edward H. Bloch had founded in Cincinnati in 1854, together with Isaac Mayer Wise. The company, now based in New York, housed the largest Judaica bookstore in the United States.\textsuperscript{215}

The four women on JIR’s board of 22 were possibly the first to serve on a rabbinical school board anywhere; in 1922, no female belonged to the 33-member Board of Governors of Hebrew Union College.\textsuperscript{216} That being said, though these women regularly attended meetings, rarely did the minutes record their contribution to the discussions. More is known about Mollie Fels, Bertha Guggenheimer and Louise Waterman Wise, than Mrs. Edward

\textsuperscript{213} "Describes Plight of 7,000,000 Jews; Dr. Frankel Says More Than 4,000,000 in Europe Must Start Life Anew," \textit{New York Times}, August 27, 1922; "Dr. Lee K. Frankel Dies on a Tour: Second Vice President of the Metropolitan Life Stricken While in Paris," \textit{New York Times}, July 26, 1931; and "1,000 at Funeral for Dr. Frankel; Felix A. Warburg Praises His Charitable Work Among the Jews," \textit{New York Times}, August 7, 1931.


\textsuperscript{216} "Jewish National Organizations in the United States," \textit{American Jewish Year Book} 24 (1923-1924), 290.
Katzinger. Fels and Guggenheimer were both Zionists and widowed philanthropists who supported Jewish settlement in Palestine, and Fels, in addition, contributed to a wide range of progressive causes in the United States including labor rights, racial equality, suffrage, Henry George’s single tax, and prison reform. Guggenheimer contributed the Institute’s first major gift, a $25,000 endowed Guggenheimer Fellowship fund to send a student to study in Palestine each year.

Because the renown of Louise Waterman Wise’s husband far surpassed her own, she became known best as the wife of Stephen S. Wise; however, her accomplishments independent of her husband’s placed her among leading Progressives of her generation. Born in New York City to wealthy German Jews, she received an elite education that her parents hoped would prepare her for an aristocratic life. Instead, in the 1890s she met Felix Adler, and through his Ethical Culture Society began her charitable work teaching art in the city’s settlement houses. In 1900 she married Stephen S. Wise—despite her parents’ objections to his Hungarian lineage, lack of wealth, and poor career choice—and in 1900, once the couple settled in Portland, she continued her work, which included establishing a Free Nurses’ Association. After returning to New York in 1907, Louise Waterman Wise increased her activity, in 1912 helping Henrietta Szold found Hadassah, and in 1916 establishing the Child Adoption Agency of the Free Synagogue under the auspices of the Social Service Department, as noted above. An immense undertaking and the first of its kind, the Agency identified, located and gained custody of thousands of Jewish orphans, and then placed them

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217 Thus far author has been unable to locate Mrs. Edward Katzinger’s first name.
with Jewish families across the United States. In the 1920s, while pursuing her interests in painting and the translation of French literature, she remained involved in child welfare work and support for the Zionist movement.

These were just some of the more influential charter members of the JIR board Wise was assembling. Others included Rabbi Maurice Harris of Temple Israel in New York, and Rabbi Gerson Levi of Temple Isaiah-Israel in Chicago (son-in-law of Emil Hirsch); philanthropists Leon Falk of Pittsburgh, Edmund Kaufmann of Pennsylvania, and Herbert Kaufman of New York; and, attorneys Frederick Guggenheimer (executive secretary of the Free Synagogue), Walter S. Hilborn, and Israel N. Thurman, another founder of the Free Synagogue.

In many ways, this group formed an exemplary board. The rabbis, judges, scholars, communal leaders and philanthropists lent the upstart rabbinical seminary not only legitimacy but also significant stature in the many different arenas where it would have to prove its viability. The Reform rabbis and lay leaders could help organize much-needed support for the Institute amongst their colleagues in the movement, particularly in the areas of fundraising, student recruitment, and public relations. The educators and those engaged with universities and Jewish scholarly institutions in Europe as well as the US could utilize their connections to identify and enlist top scholars to serve as faculty at the Institute. The attorneys could help with issues of incorporation, chartering and accreditation. The philanthropists could provide the funds needed to get the institution off the ground, and the officers and board members of the Free Synagogue, who played perhaps the most critical role on the founding JIR board, could lend the Institute space, provide substantial funding out of the synagogue's coffers, and

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220 Eventually the Agency became independent of the Free Synagogue and, renamed Louise Waterman Services, it served children and families of all backgrounds as the largest adoption agency in New York City until it formally dissolved in 2010.

authorize their two rabbis—not only Wise but also Goldstein—to devote substantial time and
energy to the Institute. Wise, in particular, would soon need to travel for lengthy periods in
order to fundraise for JIR and recruit faculty.

This group differed substantially from HUC’s Board of Governors, the composition
of which, at the time of JIR’s founding, had not changed significantly in decades. About half
of the membership consisted of Cincinnatians, mainly conservative German-Jewish
businessmen together with a handful of attorneys and politicians, and while the remaining
members included prominent rabbis from around the country, and at least one active and
wealthy Zionist, these men had little to do with running the school; the Cincinnati men were
in charge. Two of the Cincinnatians had national stature: Alfred M. Cohen, who became
chairman in 1917, was a prominent lawyer and local bank president active whose political
career had taken him from the Cincinnati City Council to the Ohio State Senate, and who was
active at the highest levels in B’nai B’rith; and, David Philipson, the rabbi of Bene Israel, a
graduate of the College who served on the faculty from 1888-1906 as a professor of
homiletics, and subsequently continued to lecture at the College on the history of Reform
Judaism. Philipson likely held the most influence on the HUC board, according to Michael
Meyer.

Overall, in scholarly acumen, and professional as well as political stature, JIR’s
newly-formed board was more distinguished than Hebrew Union College’s Board of
Governors. They shared Wise's vision, and brought substantial resources they were willing to
contribute to position the Jewish Institute of Religion for success. Yet, in one critical way this

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amalgamation of internationally-recognized leaders in progressive reform, Jewish welfare work, Zionism, law, education and philanthropy faced a challenge the HUC’s Board of Governors did not: raising substantial sums of money. Having failed to garner the support of the UAHC, notwithstanding Wise’s claims to the contrary, they would now have to compete with the Reform movement for philanthropic dollars. In so doing, they were at a clear disadvantage, for the primary function of the UAHC, from its founding in 1873, was to collect dues from member congregations around the country to support the College; the system worked, and as a result, the College’s Board of Governors conducted no fundraising at all, relying entirely on the UAHC to provide its fiscal budget. In the spring of 1922, despite the recent critique Wise and the founders of JIR had launched against the College, HUC maintained the strong reputation it had built over three decades among Reform Jews across the nation, and it continued to hold their allegiance. With congregations now under strict orders from the president of the UAHC to demonstrate their loyalty to the College by withholding support for the Jewish Institute of Religion, the JIR board would have to develop an alternate funding plan to sustain the school over the coming years. Unfortunately for the Institute, the wealth of its supporters nowhere near approached the scale of funding that HUC received from the UAHC or, for that matter, that JTS received from individual donors like Louis Marshall and Jacob Schiff.

Nonetheless, in June 1922, JIR’s Board could rest assured that Wise had secured the minimum amount necessary to open the school in October. With the money in place, they now faced more pressing challenges, chief among them assembling a faculty—for as impressive as the board may have been, the Institute’s reputation in the Jewish world would rest almost entirely on the scholars they could entice to West 68th Street. Wise, long aware of this, had begun identifying and reaching out to potential American faculty members as early

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as the fall of 1921; now, he would cast a wider net by visiting the major European centers of
Wissenschaft, while attempting to finalize arrangements with those American scholars who
had already expressed interest.

Assembling a Faculty

With the Wissenschaft des Judentums movement that emerged in Germany in the
nineteenth century, Michael Meyer writes, a new elite—critical scholars rather than Torah
scholars—seized the right to interpret texts, sometimes radically.\footnote{Meyer, “Two Persistent Tensions,” 110.} When Stephen S. Wise
began assembling a faculty for the Jewish Institute of Religion, he turned to contemporary
European and American scholars who were part of this new elite, for he recognized that in
order for JIR to garner the power and prestige necessary to be regarded by Jewish communal
leadership as an equal alongside HUC, JTS and the liberal seminaries of Europe—and in
order to be taken seriously in the battle to shape the destiny of American liberal Judaism—the
Institute would first have to become a world-class center for Wissenschaft des Judentums.

In keeping with his vision of JIR as a school where all viewpoints would be welcome,
Wise set no ideological or religious stipulations that prospective faculty would need to
satisfy. Rather, he made scholarly reputation the primary determining factor as he considered
candidates from London, Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, and Frankfurt, as well as Baltimore, New
York and Boston. For JIR's permanent faculty, Wise hoped to recruit an intellectual cavalry
of eight to ten of the most highly regarded Jewish scholars in the world who would bring JIR
the recognition it needed to enter the seminary field as a full-fledged contender.

However, here too he envisioned a model that he believed would differ from HUC
and JTS, not in the quality of the faculty’s scholarship but in their approach to teaching.
There were two sides within the Wissenschaft movement, according to Meyer, those who
regarded the critical approach to Jewish texts as a religious endeavor aimed at serving the
Jewish faith versus those who saw critical inquiry as an end in itself. Wise, like European seminary founders Zacharias Frankel and Abraham Geiger, saw Wissenschaft as a means to awaken a Jewish spiritual renaissance, and he claimed that the other seminaries had abdicated this responsibility by promoting an approach to Jewish scholarship overly detailed, clinical, and ultimately deadening to the spirit of Judaism. "Have not Cincinnati and the Seminary here been ruined by the Teutonically-minded leaders, Schechter, Wise, Kohler and all the rest?" Wise wrote to Gottheil in April 1921.

Therefore, while Wise regarded a stellar scholarly record as the sine qua non for JIR's permanent faculty, he did not consider a man's publication record alone. He sought top-notch Wissenschaft scholars who could also inspire a new generation of rabbis, instilling in them not only the knowledge they would need to serve the Jewish people effectively, but also the love of Jewish learning they would need to awaken that same passion in others, as some of Wise’s own mentors—men like Adolph Jellinek and Thomas Davidson—had inspired him. He insisted that JIR faculty care about more than research alone; he also required that they have the desire and capability to teach the young, secularly-educated first- or second-generation immigrants who would comprise most of the school’s student body. He realized from the start that not everyone he recruited would join his permanent full-time faculty; rather, intentionally, he invited most of his first teachers to serve in residence at JIR for just a semester or two, so he could evaluate them before making a long-term commitment.

By the fall of 1921 Wise had begun the task of recruiting teachers for JIR. As a first step, he surveyed the faculty at the major institutions in the United States, Europe and Palestine that engaged men in Wissenschaft Jewish scholarship. These included what he referred to as “the five seminaries in Europe's German-speaking lands” (two in Berlin, and

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228 Stephen S. Wise to Louis Grossmann, December 12, 1921. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records.
one each in Vienna, Budapest, and Breslau); Jews' College in London; HUC and JTS; Dropsie College in Philadelphia; Hebrew teachers institutes in the United States and Palestine; and, the Semitics Departments of major universities in Europe and the United States. He looked as well at a handful of independent scholars working outside these frameworks. Though the *Wissenschaft* movement in general by this time had produced an impressive number of Jewish historians and philologists, in 1921 no European or American colleges or universities had yet appointed any full-time faculty in Jewish scholarly fields outside of Semitics, such as history or philosophy. True, Bernard Revel was in the process of creating Yeshiva College, Judah Magnes and Chaim Weizmann had begun the work of founding Hebrew University, and Wise's friend Louis Newman was making the case for a Jewish "Menorah University"—but none of these had yet come to fruition.\(^{229}\) As Wise set out in 1921 to recruit faculty for JIR, the Jewish scholars he sought had few opportunities for employment outside the seminaries.

Wise enlisted his longtime allies Julian Mack and Richard Gottheil to help with the search.\(^{230}\) Mack brought his experience and contacts in the Jewish world gained through his involvement (together with Wise) in the Brandeis circle of the Zionist movement, and through his work in academe as a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers; Gottheil, who had decades of experience teaching Semitics at Columbia, advised Wise on scholars in the field as well as academic protocol regarding the hiring and retention of faculty.

The three considered only prominent Jewish scholars who had published original work and made advancements in their field of study. Once they identified potential

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\(^{229}\) Hebrew University opened in 1925; Newman's idea came to fruition with the establishment of Brandeis University in 1948. Jewish Studies, however, did not extend into secular universities on a significant scale until the late 1960s.

candidates, Wise shared with the JIR committee the men under consideration, including between ten and fifteen Europeans and Americans working at other institutions who would have to be enticed to join the nascent seminary.\footnote{The Committee identified the following scholars for consideration: Harry Austryn Wolfson (Philosophy, Harvard University); Max Leopold Margolis, (Biblical Philology, Dropsie College); Raphael Mahler (History, teaching in Jewish secondary schools in Poland); Israel Efros, (Philosophy and Hebrew poetry, and director, Baltimore Hebrew College); Jacob Mann (Jewish History, Hebrew College in Baltimore in 1920, and then Hebrew Union College c. 1921); Ismar Elbogen (Liturgy, the Hochschule in Berlin); Felix Perles (Koenigsberg); George Foot Moore (Bible and History, Harvard University); Richard Gottheil (Semitics, Columbia University); Israel Abrahams (Rabbinic Literature, Cambridge University); and, Mordecai Kaplan (Midrash and Philosophy, Jewish Theological Seminary of America). Minutes, Dinner Meeting of Committee on Jewish Institute of Religion, ca 1921. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.} By winter of 1922, Wise began to narrow down the list and prepared to begin negotiations with some of his top American choices. He held off on negotiating with any of the Europeans, however, until he could have an opportunity to meet them in person—regardless of their scholarly reputation, in particular he wanted to make sure he did not recreate what he perceived to be the dominating and overly stiff presence German scholars had at HUC and JTS, which he thought would be an impediment to JIR’s mandate to inspire in students a love of Judaism and Jewish learning. "I don't want German scholars but Jewish teachers," he said.\footnote{"The difficulty is that I won't have any man without meeting him face to face and getting something of what I conceive to be his reactions to men,” Wise wrote. Stephen S. Wise to Louis Grossmann, December 12 1921. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records.}

**Mordecai M. Kaplan**

If there was one man Stephen S. Wise wanted most to join the JIR faculty, it was Mordecai M. Kaplan, one of the most prominent and controversial figures in the New York Jewish community, whom Wise had known for many years and considered perhaps the greatest figure JIR could attain. In their critique of American Judaism the two men, though of very different backgrounds, had much in common, sharing a desire to revitalize Judaism through religious, cultural and political renaissance. Both men had supported Zionism almost from the inception of the modern movement, when few rabbis did; each of them spoke out on controversial political issues such as women’s suffrage and the rights of labor, even when
doing so entailed alienating the more conservative leadership of American Jewry, including the philanthropic elite; and, in imagining a new, more vital form of American Judaism, they each sought to create not a new religious denomination or institutional structure, but the nucleus of a movement experimenting with grassroots change—the Free Synagogue movement, in Wise’s case, and the Society for Jewish Renascence in 1919 followed in 1922 by the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, in Kaplan’s case. A Wise-Kaplan collaboration had great potential, for the men held one another in high regard, and recognized they had different strengths. As Mel Scult, Kaplan’s biographer, has argued, Wise excelled at social activism and organizing institutions, whereas Kaplan made his mark as a theologian, philosopher and teacher. They shared similar goals, and “the combination of Kaplan the thinker and Wise the activist would have been formidable.”

The two men had begun discussing Kaplan’s involvement with the new seminary in 1920, when Wise was in the earliest stage of assembling the Institute’s founding committee. At that time, Wise invited Kaplan to co-organize the Institute with him and, according to Kaplan’s diary, promised that Kaplan would be given charge of it. Wise made the overture recalling that a decade earlier Kaplan had shared his unhappiness at JTS, and his interest in possibly joining the Free Synagogue movement. Ultimately Kaplan did not join the movement; he preferred to socialize with acculturated Orthodox Jews and, though intellectually he may have been comfortable at the Free Synagogue, religiously he likely would not have experienced an approach to prayer and personal practice that in any way resembled his own. Nonetheless, in 1920 Wise thought Kaplan might join the Institute, for while the Free Synagogue movement “was definitely a radical, liberal Jewish movement,”

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233 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 268.
Wise told Kaplan, that would be untrue of the Jewish Institute of Religion. Kaplan, however, declined the offer.

Now Wise reached out a second time. Kaplan, still director of the Teachers Institute at JTS, had just opened the Society for the Advancement of Judaism on 86th Street as a new means to express his ideas about Jewish life, which did not cohere with any of the existing movements. Kaplan had in recent years articulated a scathing critique of Orthodoxy as well as Conservative and Reform Judaism, and Wise believed that he was now being marginalized in the New York Jewish community, and particularly at JTS, where Cyrus Adler and a majority of the faculty opposed his views. Hoping Kaplan might be tempted to join JIR if he could have a role commensurate with his stature, Wise broached the possibility first in a tentative way and then, emboldened, in March he invited Kaplan to offer a course during JIR's first academic year. Recognizing Kaplan's busy schedule, Wise suggested he deliver the course in just six lectures, perhaps based on the Saturday afternoon addresses Kaplan was delivering at the time at the SAJ. Kaplan, however, again declined, informing Wise that, after corresponding with Cyrus Adler about the idea, he could not pursue it.

Wise remained hopeful, nonetheless, and designated Richard Gottheil to lead the effort to continue to woo Kaplan. In May, Kaplan agreed to attend a meeting with Gottheil, Maurice Harris of Temple Israel, and Israel Thurman. The JIR men attempted to convince Kaplan of the importance of his joining the Institute, and Kaplan now seemed inclined to accept, Gottheil reported to Wise, were it not for certain practical concerns. In particular,

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235 Memo of meeting held in Stephen S. Wise’s study with Wise, Julian W. Mack, Mordecai M. Kaplan, and George Alexander Kohut on January 3, 1927. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records. The memo describes earlier discussions, but misattributes their dates (Wise first invited Kaplan to join the Institute in 1920, not 1921 as the memo states; and, Mack’s steamship conversation with Kaplan took place in 1923, not 1924 as the memo states).
236 Ibid.; and, Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 269.
Kaplan worried about the impact his association with JIR would have among his friends who had "gone through the fire" with him, and had given him the financial backing to carry out his vision at the Teachers Institute. As the majority of Kaplan's supporters were conservative in their religious practice, Kaplan worried they might look askance at his allying himself with an institution like the Free Synagogue that had so "wide an outlook." Gottheil attempted to alleviate Kaplan's concern by assuring him that not everyone at JIR was affiliated with the Free Synagogue, including core supporters like himself and Harris, and Kaplan agreed to give the matter further consideration. As a next step, Gottheil advised Wise, they should invite Kaplan's key associates to meet with the JIR trustees, in order to demonstrate that JIR "is constructive in its tendencies rather than destructive."  

For Kaplan, the experience of being wooed by the JIR men must have stood in marked contrast to the hostility he was encountering elsewhere. "I am in the center of a four-cornered fight,” he recorded in his diary on May 1.

At one corner the orthodox abuse me and the Teachers Institute as turning out heretics and non-observant teachers. At the second corner are the Hebraists who claim that we send out men and women who are totally ignorant of Hebrew and Hebrew literature and only good for what they term “religious schools of the Yahudeim.” At the third corner the members of the faculty of the Institute who resent any kind of religious emphasis as being ecclesiastical and would have the Institute turned into a school for Jewish nationalism. And, finally, Adler and the Trustees who want the Teachers Institute to give public school teachers a few lessons in religion and ethics and lessons in translating its order prayer. That is their idea of the type of teachers we ought to train.  

Recognizing this embattlement, Wise promised Kaplan JIR would provide what he lacked at JTS—the joy of teaching in freedom, the appreciation and cooperation of his students and colleagues, and a voice in determining the direction of the school. "I did not lightly offer him the post," Wise wrote to Solomon Goldman, a close friend of Kaplan’s. "I

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was ready and am still ready to let him prepare a statement of the purposes of the institute. He
and you and I are very nearly of one mind. There is no fundamental or unbridgable gulf
between us. We are bent upon doing the same thing.”

A few days later, however, Kaplan declined the offer, saying he feared that were he to
abandon the Teachers Institute now, despite its success it would go to pieces. When Gottheil
told Kaplan he could direct the Institute and teach at JIR, Kaplan responded plainly,
according to Gottheil, "this would not be permitted by the authorities of the Jewish
Theological Seminary, and especially not by Dr. Cyrus Adler, with whom he has spoken
about the matter.” Kaplan seemed extremely sorry, Gottheil said, and gave the distinct
impression that his refusal was temporary, and that he hoped within a year or two to be able
to take the JIR position.

Kaplan explained his reasoning, which concerned the two institutions about which he
cared most—the newly-established Society for the Advancement of Judaism and the
Teachers’ Institute. He worried that joining JIR would brand him as “extremely radical” and
“heterodox” and might jeopardize the future of the SAJ, and he worried, too, that if he left the
Teachers Institute its function would be reduced to Sunday school teacher training. At the
same time Kaplan also castigated himself for not doing what he knew he “ought to do to be
of greatest service to the Jewish cause,” blaming his weak will, fear and indecision. “Will I
have the courage to cross the Rubicon of my career?” Kaplan asked himself.

Meanwhile, Wise expressed regret and told Kaplan he was making the wrong
decision. "I am not thinking of your gain in a low sense, but I am thinking of the opportunity
I would have coveted bringing to you," Wise wrote, "namely, teaching under the most

244 Ibid.
245 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 269.
favoring auspices…in the spirit of freedom of cooperation and of eager appreciation. The Institute would have welcomed your service.\textsuperscript{246}

\textit{Max Margolis}

Other faculty negotiations failed that spring, for different reasons. Wise reached out to Max Margolis, for example, who also worked under Adler, as Professor of Biblical Philology at Dropsie College. As with other prospective faculty, Wise wanted to be sure Margolis would be willing to devote time to teaching and not only to research. "I know you respect him as a scholar," Wise explained to Hirsch, "but we ought to try to get men who are teachers and who can be a real influence in the lives of the younger men.\textsuperscript{247}

Margolis expressed interest and entered into negotiations, but fearful that speaking with the JIR men would result in the loss of his job, he insisted that all discussions be kept confidential. He knew how dangerous sparring with a seminary head could be, for he was already the veteran of an earlier conflict that had uprooted his life. In the 1890s, as a young scholar with a graduate degree from Columbia (where, like Wise, he completed his dissertation under the guidance of Richard Gottheil), he taught Hebrew and Semitic languages for five years at HUC, where he enjoyed a collegial relationship with the president, Isaac Mayer Wise. He left the College for a position in Semitics at the University of California at Berkeley in 1899, but in 1905 HUC’s new president, Kaufmann Kohler, successfully recruited him back to return to the College as Professor of Hebrew Exegesis. This time, however, Margolis’ stay in Cincinnati proved disastrous, as he clashed repeatedly with Kohler over a number of issues, including the content of the curriculum, his right to teach how and what he wanted, and his political views. When Kohler learned that Margolis was teaching a Zionist interpretation of the prophets—in opposition to Reform’s universalist

\textsuperscript{246} Stephen S. Wise to Mordecai M. Kaplan, May 31, 1922. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records. Over the course of the twenties, three separate sets of negotiations took place. Kaplan’s biographer, Mel Scult, has described these.
interpretation—he reassigned Margolis’ courses in prophetic literature to another faculty member, justifying the action by citing the limits of academic freedom. Amidst the ensuing discord, Margolis resigned in March of 1907.\(^{248}\) He spent the next year in Europe conducting research and working with the Zionist movement, and upon returning the US he became secretary of the Jewish Publication Society’s editorial board for the proposed new English translation of the Bible, eventually becoming editor-in-chief of the project. The next year, he accepted an appointment as Professor of Biblical Philology at the new Dropsie College, where he still worked in the spring of 1922 when his negotiations with the Institute began.\(^{249}\) This time he intended to take every measure to avoid conflict with his president, Cyrus Adler, who headed Dropsie as well as JTS; he made sure, for example, that all JIR correspondence went not to his office at Dropsie, but to his home address in Germantown.\(^{250}\)

Ultimately, neither Adler’s opposition nor Margolis’ caution ended the negotiations—rather, Margolis simply set his terms too high. In response to his demand for a salary of $10,000 (significantly higher than JIR faculty received at the time), the title Dean of the Faculty, a lifetime appointment, and a pension of $5,000 for his wife should she survive him, the hiring committee of Frankel, Mack and Kaufmann refused even to offer a counter-proposal.\(^{251}\) Instead, Wise, who still sought Margolis’ involvement, offered him a position on the board, assuring him a unanimous election.\(^{252}\)

Margolis met with Mack in June, hurt at not receiving an offer, and frightened about the consequences of negotiating with the JIR men. “The specific thing he wanted to talk over with me was the danger of even hinting to Adler his becoming Trustee or lecturer,” Mack told Wise. “I told him that I would have a talk with Adler without mentioning him, bringing


\(^{251}\) Richard Gottheil to Steven S. Wise, May 27, 1922. Box 16, folder 18, JIR Records.

\(^{252}\) Julian W. Mack to Max L. Margolis, June 20, 1922. Box 26, folder 6, JIR Records.
up only the Kaplan matter, and in that way sound Adler out. I appreciated fully the possibility that his own position would be endangered if Adler felt that he was even considering any connection with us.”

**Harry Austryn Wolfson and Nissan Touroff**

In June, as Mack prepared to present the case for JIR before the UAHC board in Cincinnati, Wise finalized arrangements for his trip to recruit faculty in Europe and Palestine. He corresponded with Ismar Elbogen of the Hochschule, who compiled a list of scholars for Wise to meet that summer in Berlin, Breslau and Vienna, and he designated Goldstein with the task of continuing negotiations with scholars in the United States in his absence. Among those under consideration were Harry Austryn Wolfson of Harvard, Nissan Touroff, former director of the Hebrew school system in Palestine and now dean of Boston’s Hebrew Teachers College, and Emil Hirsch, whom Wise hoped would teach "Fundamental Religious Conceptions" in the fall, assuming he recovered from his illness.

Of these Americans, the foremost scholar was Wolfson. Born in Russia, he had studied as a youth at the seminary in Slobodka before his family immigrated in 1903 to New York, where he attended the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Seminary. He then moved into secular academe, and earned both his bachelors degree and his doctorate at Harvard. After he completed his doctorate in 1915, Harvard appointed him to teach Jewish Literature and Philosophy. Wolfson’s area of expertise was medieval Jewish philosophy, but he also had an extraordinary breadth of knowledge in Jewish thought and literature.

Wise’s interest in Wolfson dates as early as the fall of 1921, when he sought Horace Kallen’s opinion on Wolfson’s appropriateness for JIR. Kallen provided a strong recommendation, emphasizing Wolfson’s scholarship as well as his support for the Jewish students at Harvard who gravitated toward him in times of crisis, academic as well as

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personal; Harvard’s administration, aware of this, also turned to Wolfson regularly regarding matters related to the Jewish student population. From Kallen’s perspective, this sympathy for students was requisite for all teachers, but in Wolfson it combined with “absolute scientific devotion to the truth, the mastery of method, and the prodigious learning in all fields Jewish—from Talmudic to contemporary social problems.”

The only deficiencies Kallen saw in Wolfson related to his social awkwardness, and these could be ameliorated. Ultimately, Kallen wholeheartedly recommended Wolfson for JIR. “I do not know of a young man of so solid attainment and rich promise, both as scholar and teacher, in the field of Hebrew and cognate learning,” he said. Wolfson had no desire to leave Harvard, but agreed to serve as a visiting professor at JIR during the opening fall semester on a reduced schedule, commuting from Boston.

Touroff, a fellow Bostonian whom Wolfson recommended, was hired to head the Department of Modern Hebrew Literature and Language, and to do what he could to develop a Department of Religious Education. Though he planned to join JIR full-time, initially he would teach Thursdays and Fridays every other week, alternating with Wolfson, until he could find a substitute to cover his responsibilities in Boston.

Touroff had high hopes for JIR, and eagerly anticipated devoting himself to building a major “Spiritual Centre” in the largest Jewish community in the world. He would call it “Yavneh,” he wrote Wise in Hebrew, referring to the center of Jewish learning Yohanan ben Zakai founded during the destruction of the Second Temple. Touroff planned to teach his courses in Jewish Education *ivrît b’ivrît*—utilizing Hebrew as a living tongue—through classroom instruction conducted solely in Hebrew.

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256 “A fear of women, an immense shyness, and a gaucheire in adaptation and utterance,” Kallen told Wise. Ibid.
257 Ibid.
258 Harry A. Wolfson to Stephen S. Wise, June 4, 1922. Box 38, folder 6, JIR Records.
259 Excerpts of minutes of JIR faculty meeting, July 17, 1922. Box 38, folder 6, JIR Records.
Meanwhile, the news from Hirsch remained grim. His health continued to fail, and he could assume no teaching commitments at this time.

On June 13, Wise set sail for Europe. He took with him Elbogen’s list of potential faculty, and a plan to interview each of the Europeans in person. Wary of hiring scholars away from their current employment when he could not yet predict their appropriateness for JIR, he refrained from offering anyone a full-time teaching post until he could observe them for at least a semester. In the case of each candidate, Wise wanted to be sure "he is the man to do our kind of work."

"I know it savor[s] of the trial method," Wise wrote to Emil Hirsch, "but it's a serious matter to ask men to come from another country unless one is quite sure one can offer him a life place." 262

Hirsch warned Wise that the damage “the Cincinnatians” had recently inflicted in the court of public opinion had not been limited to the shores of the United States; they had spread across the Atlantic, too. "You'll find the Europeans under this prejudice," 263 he told Wise. Sure enough, as Wise optimistically set out for Europe, the field of battle shifted there as well.

**Hostilities Follow Wise to Europe**

Wise began his trip just two days after Mack's meeting with the UAHC and HUC boards in Cincinnati, and immediately upon disembarking in London, he discovered that word of the storm that had erupted over his plans to open JIR had, indeed, spread through a network of Jewish scholars and communal leaders across the continent. The anger of those

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261 Wise asked Hirsch to write a short note in German that Wise could take with him, meant as evidence for Hirsch’s friends and admirers of his support and involvement with JIR; however, no evidence of such a letter exists. Stephen S. Wise to Emil G. Hirsch, May 17, 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records; and, Stephen S. Wise to Sidney E. Goldstein, June 22, 1922. Box 16, folder 15, JIR Records.


intent upon stopping the creation of JIR reached Europe before Wise did, and many of the men with whom he planned to meet had already been influenced by hostile editorials in the American Jewish press, some of which Wise had not even seen.

Within hours after arriving in London, Wise met with Israel Abrahams, the liberal Jewish theologian and reader in Talmudic and rabbinic literature who had succeeded Solomon Schechter at Cambridge in 1902 when Schechter was appointed president of JTS. Abrahams, who in correspondence with Wise had agreed to teach for a semester in the coming year, indicated that his close colleague Claude Montefiore, a co-founder with Abrahams of British Liberal Judaism whom Wise highly respected, was "quite ruffled" when he learned Abrahams had accepted the invitation to teach at JIR. “It appears that Montefiore indulged in the unwisdom of paying attention to an Editorial or statement in the ‘American Israelite,’” Wise concluded.264

Wise hoped he could bring Montefiore to his point of view, and soon thereafter Montefiore did help him develop a faculty recruitment strategy based on Elbogen’s list. Montefiore spoke highly of Elbogen, and recommended pursuing him, as well as Michael Guttmann, professor of Talmud and halachah at the Breslau seminary, who Montefiore said would be the best man for Talmud. Montefiore also recommended several scholars for Wise to meet in Vienna, Samuel Krauss and Avigdor Aptovitzer, both of whom were teaching at the Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt, and an additional Talmudist, Chaim Tchernowitz, a religious Zionist who had founded a rabbinical college in Odessa before studying at western European universities. As for London's scholars, Montefiore saw no possibility for JIR beyond Abrahams, given the Orthodoxy of all the others.

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“Evidently Berlin, Breslau and Vienna are to be my objectives,” Wise wrote Goldstein.265

By the end of June, a string of successful negotiations eclipsed the year’s earlier disappointments, and Wise began amassing commitments on both sides of the Atlantic. Abrahams planned to come for the second term, and two Christian scholars had agreed to teach on a visiting basis: R. Travers Herford, a British Unitarian minister and scholar of rabbinical literature, and Kirsopp Lake, a New Testament scholar at Harvard, who would teach the Origins of Christianity.

From London Wise headed to Paris, where he hoped to meet with the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow, living in Berlin at the time. "He seems to be without a Chair and it would be a tremendous thing to bring him to America," Wise wrote to Hirsch, "even if we could not keep him."266 It does not appear Wise met with Dubnow, however, and with no additional appointments he left Paris and headed for Berlin, Breslau, Budapest, and then Vienna—with an excursion to Palestine, as well, where his friend Judah Magnes, a longtime ally in Zionist and New York Jewish affairs, was also attempting to change the map of Jewish scholarship, through the creation of a Jewish university in Jerusalem.

Wise kept Goldstein, Hirsch and Mack apprised of his European negotiations, and Goldstein and Mack sent reports regarding negotiations taking place in the US. At the end of June, Mack sent word of the failed talks with Margolis, but the news grew brighter two weeks later when Goldstein informed Wise that he had finalized arrangements with Touroff. Goldstein could hardly contain his excitement about the coalescing faculty, especially the European scholars Wise had engaged. They will undoubtedly bring prestige and power to the Institute, Goldstein wrote, and he hoped Wise could persuade the best of them to stay.

Acknowledging it would take several years to build a permanent faculty, Goldstein felt that

ultimately the most substantial work of the Institute would be done not by visiting lecturers but by men who chose to work with the students from day to day, and year to year.\textsuperscript{267}

Wise was feeling optimistic, too, particularly after meeting with Elbogen at the Hochschule in Berlin. Wise proposed to Elbogen that JIR and the Hochschule enter into a special arrangement whereby the Hochschule would provide JIR a visiting professor annually, precluding the necessity in the future of JIR issuing invitations to individual Hochschule faculty members each year. In exchange, JIR would pay the Hochschule one thousand dollars annually.\textsuperscript{268} Wise did want to retain permanent faculty and he looked to the Hochschule for these as well, but in addition, despite Goldstein’s concern about the limited effect of visiting faculty, Wise believed the students would benefit from an arrangement that provided them, through the rotation of faculty, contact with the foremost Jewish scholars of Europe. Just as Wolfson would be teaching the first semester, Abrahams of Cambridge the second, and Travers Herford of London the third—Wise hoped men from the Hochschule would teach regularly in a visiting capacity, and he invited Elbogen to be the first.\textsuperscript{269}

Initially Elbogen refused to commit, concerned about his responsibilities running the Hochschule, and the fact that his wife did not want to leave Germany. Eventually, however, later in the summer, he answered Wise in the affirmative. By then, Felix Perles, a rabbi and biblical scholar in Koenigsberg, had also agreed. Elated, Wise shared with Mack his high hopes, particularly for Elbogen. "He and Perles (they are coming together) are the two outstanding Jewish scholars of the continent, having a place in Bible and Jewish history comparable to that of Ginzberg in Talmud," Wise wrote Mack, referring to Louis Ginzberg, the great Talmudist at JTS. "Elbogen is such a rare being that I am definitely resolved to give up the presidency of the institute to him if we can altogether move him to come to America

\textsuperscript{267} Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, July 21, 1922. Box 16, folder 15, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid.
and stay with us." Similarly, to Elbogen Wise wrote, "I warn you now that we shall do everything in our power to keep you in America, for you are the one man to be the head of the JIR, and the leadership and presidency will be yours if by any means you can be persuaded to accept the post." Wise recognized the possibility, however, that Elbogen's wife's ties to Germany might stymie a permanent stay.

By the time Wise reached Vienna, where he intended to meet with Krauss and Chajes, he had already secured Touroff, Wolfson, Elbogen and Perles for the first term, Abrahams for spring, a number of additional American scholars for spring and summer, and a young librarian, Joshua Bloch. Wise regretted he could not meet with the Florentine biblical scholar Umberto Cassuto, whom he also hoped to be able to bring as a visiting lecturer in two or three years, but overall he was thrilled. Writing to Charles Bloch from Vienna, he rejoiced over his successes thus far. In the year ahead, he would be able to try out several different teachers before making any commitments, and in addition, with finalization of the Hochschule arrangement pending, he anticipated hiring a member of their faculty annually, beginning with Elbogen.

I cannot tell you how happy I am over the fact that I have gotten every man I set out to secure, namely, Abrahams, Elbogen and Perles. True, we haven’t the men for good and all, but I don’t know that I would want any one of them for good and all. I think our plan is a much wiser one—to try a great number of men and then to endeavor to keep as permanent teachers the different men whom we find most suitable. Perles is a tremendous scholar but I have lost my heart for Elbogen. If I were thirty years younger, I would say that I was daft about him. He is one of the dearest, finest men I have ever met. If he were willing to stay with us, he would be the president of the J.I.R. You will all feel about him just as I do. He has such beauty of character and I know what he has done in Berlin.

Wise realized he needed to be careful about extending more invitations. In part, he wanted to wait until Elbogen had a chance to survey the situation himself, so the Institute

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could benefit from his "ripe experience and wise judgment." More importantly, however, he began to worry about finances. As Wise contemplated meeting Krauss in Vienna, he questioned whether or not he should continue hiring. Having already committed about $35,000—the total annual budget—he knew he should not spend more than $40,000 in the first year.

"I am just a little disturbed about the budget," Wise told Charles Bloch. "Not really disturbed, that is hardly the word, but a little ‘nervus.’" Listing all the faculty and staff hired so far, Wise said JIR now had enough faculty for the first year, had practically secured Wolfson, Touroff and Bloch permanently, and would likely keep Elbogen and Perles, too, if they lived up to expectations. He planned to move slowly on Krauss, as expenses were accumulating. He needed two thousand dollars immediately in order to buy Elbogen and Perles steamer tickets and to cover their other travel and living expenses, and he had already spent a good deal on furniture and books for the new school. Nonetheless, he intended to move forward. He instructed Charles Bloch that when Elbogen and Perles arrive at Quarantine, one or two JIR men should meet them, and as many as possible should greet them when they reach the Wharf.

Goldstein, writing to Wise from New York, could not contain his excitement regarding the arrangement with the Hochschule which, he said, would give Wise an opportunity to test out the best men in Europe, and would re-awaken in America an interest in

275 Wise also expressed concern about the conflict in which Mack was involved at Harvard over President Lowell’s imposing an admissions quota on Jews. Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, August 3, 1922. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
276 "As I see things, including the remuneration of Wolfson, Abrahams, Perles, Elbogen, Touroff, Block, and the special lecturers, Moore, Lake, Herford, secretarial and registrar expenses, I think we are already committed up to $35,000, so I am going to move slowly in the matter of getting Krauss in Vienna," Wise wrote. Stephen S. Wise to Charles Bloch, August 3, 1922. Box 3, folder 13, JIR Records.
277 Ibid.
Jewish learning—and more. Not only would JIR stimulate Jewish thought, life and culture, Goldstein wrote, "the Institute will have a large part in shaping the new stage of Judaism that must emerge out of the present moral and spiritual collapse and chaos.

"If you will only guard your health and conserve your strength," Goldstein wrote, “the Institute will mean the resurrection of the spiritual life of Israel in America.”

Despite his concern about over-committing JIR's budget before the school even opened, Wise continued hiring faculty, including Krauss and Ludwig Blau, a talmudist at the Budapest seminary, and not stopping there, he took under consideration an additional possibility, Julian Oberman, professor of Semitics at the University of Hamburg—though his concern about finances continued to gnaw. "I am still in a quandary about Oberman," Wise wrote Goldstein. "Everyone praises him. His work on Ghazali is a really big and important thing, and still I hesitate, wondering whether we are not going to be top-heavy in the matter of teachers, and also whether we are not over committing ourselves in the way of expenditures."

He decided to let the matter rest until he could see what unfolded in the fall after the opening of the Institute.

An Attempt to Torpedo the Hochschule Arrangement

Shortly before returning to the US from Europe, Wise received an alarming letter from Elbogen summoning him back to Berlin. "Not for my sake I ask you to come," wrote Elbogen, “It is for the Kuratorium of the Hochschule where the difficulties lie.” According to Elbogen, during the preceding week, he had received a visit by Rabbi Samuel Schulman, who had heard about the proposed arrangement for cooperation between the Hochschule and JIR. Schulman occupied the pulpit of New York City’s Temple Beth El, where decades earlier he

280 Ibid.
had worked alongside Kaufmann Kohler before succeeding him when Kohler assumed the presidency of HUC. A former president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and now head of the Association of Reform Rabbis, an organization he had recently founded, Schulman was also a graduate of the Hochschule. "All of a sudden, he felt his debt of gratitude towards his Alma mater," Elbogen told Wise, “and held it his duty to inform the Kuratorium about the evil the Hochschule was going to do to American Jewry as a whole and to Reform Judaism especially.” According to Elbogen, Schulman impressed the Hochschule governors, particularly its chairman, Albert Mosse. "Poor old Mosse says that he can't agree to the contract unless he has seen you and received further information from you personally," Elbogen told Wise, and urged him to come immediately. If Wise delayed the journey, the arrangement would not be approved.

Wise learned that Schulman, after visiting the Hochschule in August and discovering the arrangement Elbogen had worked out with Wise, had warned the Kuratorium that Felix Warburg and Cyrus Adler, who controlled the Joint Distribution Committee, were entirely opposed to JIR and to Stephen S. Wise. Whether or not he made a direct threat, Schulman, who worked with Adler on the distribution of funds, had frightened the Kuratorium with the idea that Warburg and Adler would withdraw JDC funding from the Hochschule as punishment, should the German seminary cooperate with the Jewish Institute of Religion.


284 Schulman was, indeed, concerned about his alma mater, and apparently Vogelstein was involved in the matter as well. On May 24, 1922 Schulman urged Cyrus Adler to do “what Mr. Vogelstein asked of you,” namely, to have the JDC appropriate $5,000 to the Hochschule, as it had apparently done recently for the Breslau Seminary. “Our Hochschule is struggling,” Schulman wrote, adding that he had already personally contributed as large a sum as he could. “I needed not tell you how Jewish scholars are suffering, what a sad plight they are all in. Please do what you can for my Alma Mater.” Samuel Schulman to Cyrus Adler, May 24, 1922. Folder 205, Records of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of the Years 1921-1932, JDC NY Archives.

Adler responded to Schulman within a few days, and explained that funding for European religious and educational institutions like the Hochschule was in a state of flux. In recent years, these
Once again, Wise needed to galvanize a rapid public response. He immediately cabled the JIR contingent in New York to inform them Schulman had threatened to withdraw Joint Distribution Committee funding for the Hochschule unless it abandoned all support for JIR. In response, he had demanded and secured a suspension of the Hochschule agreement until the charges were disproved.285 In a second cable sent August 25, he said a further meeting with Elbogen and Hochschule Executives had become necessary due to "Schulman's slanderous intrigues."286

In New York, Mack enlisted supporters to sign a statement he cabled to Elbogen to share with the Hochschule Kuratorium. After expressing pleasure that Elbogen and Perles would be teaching at JIR in the fall, the cable read:

Dr. Stephen Wise president is endorsed and supported by large group in American Israel including Oscar Strauss, Abram Elkus, Emil Hirsch, Justice Brandeis, Adolph Lewisohn, Nathan Straus, Mrs. Joseph Fels, Prof. Gottheil. Fifty thousand dollars per year guaranteed for first three years, and future positively assured. One quarter million dollars building being erected. Over twenty-five students already registered. Institute will greatly strengthen liberal Judaism. Does not aim to rival but to cooperate in every way possible with Cincinnati and other seminaries. Dr. Wise a commanding influence in American Israel and leader in every liberal movement in American life, having confidence of Jews and non-Jews. We rejoice over and heartily welcome cooperation with Hochschule signed Dr. Lee Frankel and Judge Julian Mack.287

institutions had been supported by three separate committees—the American Jewish Relief Committee (headed by wealthy Reform Jews including Marshall, Schiff and Warburg), the Central Committee for the Relief of Jews Suffering through the War (an Orthodox group), and the People’s Relief Committee (a socialist group)—who split the allocation of funds. In May 1922, the AJRC had sent the Hochschule $1,500, but the school had requested an additional $2,000. Vogelstein, also involved with the JDC, had suggested an appropriation of $5,000, while a member of the JDC in Germany had suggested $10,000. On behalf of the AJRC, Judah Magnes would be visiting the institutions of higher learning in Germany and elsewhere that summer, in order to ascertain their needs.

Adler believed the Jews of Berlin had a great deal of wealth but were indisposed to part with it, and instead relied too heavily on American Jewry for support of their institutions. He advised Schulman to look into this in his upcoming trip to Germany. Cyrus Adler to Samuel Schulman, May 29, 1922. Folder 205, Records of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee of the Years 1921-1932, JDC NY Archives.

287 Cable from Julian W. Mack and Lee Frankel to Ismar Elbogen, August 26, 1922. Box 19, folder 15, JIR Records.
Mack enlisted Louis Brandeis to send a similar cable assuring the Hochschule that Wise had earned and deserved his complete confidence, thanks to his devotion and leadership in every Jewish and liberal cause.\(^{288}\)

Meanwhile Wise addressed Schulman’s threats in a response he sent directly to Mosse. Regarding Schulman’s warning that Warburg and Adler would withdraw JDC support if the Hochschule cooperated with JIR, Wise asked if Schulman, who knew nothing of the arrangement until his arrival in Berlin, had been authorized by the JDC to assess the merits and needs of the Hochschule, and to discuss the proposed arrangement with JIR. If Schulman did have this authorization, was he empowered to threaten the Hochschule with punitive measures on behalf of the JDC? Such a threat, if authorized, would profoundly dishonor American Israel and its representatives in whose name Schulman purported to speak, Wise said.\(^{289}\)

Wise addressed an additional charge Schulman apparently made, related to Wise’s attitude toward Germany in light of his support for US involvement in the war. Wise assured Mosse he had an interest in the well-being of the German people, which would remain intact regardless of the outcome of the Hochschule negotiations.\(^{290}\) At the same time, he objected to the insinuation. "I have merely to say that, as an American citizen, I must decline to discuss my attitude towards my country's affairs in relation to its foreign policies," Wise wrote, "even as I have no doubt, you would resent a corresponding inquiry on my part touching your attitude towards your country in relation to its foreign policies."

Unless the Hochschule wanted to proceed with the arrangement, Wise called for negotiations to be discontinued until the matter could be clarified. At the same time, he

\(^{288}\) Cable from Louis D. Brandeis to Ismar Elbogen, August 26, 1922. Box 19, folder 15, JIR Records.
\(^{289}\) Stephen S. Wise to Albert Mosse, August 29, 1922. Box 19, folder 15, JIR Records.
\(^{290}\) Ibid.
insisted that the German seminary grant Elbogen a leave of absence from October through January, as his teaching at JIR had already been agreed upon and publicly announced.\textsuperscript{291}

Elbogen and Perles did teach at JIR in the fall, but the formal arrangement never materialized.

\textit{Analysis}

During the spring and summer of 1922, of all the tasks in which Wise and the founders of JIR engaged as they prepared to open the new school—including negotiating with the Reform movement over possible affiliation with the UAHC, fundraising, recruiting students, and appointing the physical space where the school would be housed—none held greater importance than consolidating the faculty. Neither movement affiliation nor money, real estate or students would give the school the power and prestige it required to be recognized in the Jewish community as a site of rigorous Jewish learning and a catalyst for innovation; ultimately, in order for the Institute to be taken seriously, Wise needed to secure the most renowned faculty he could possibly gather. Wise needed intellectual firepower, and he got it.

Working to Wise's advantage were the “push factors” in post-war Europe. In particular, amidst economic crisis, the rabbinical seminaries he approached were suffering from a lack of funds, and many of their scholars, lacking any possibility of finding additional work in secular European universities, were eager to emigrate to the United States or Palestine. The war, and their continued economic deterioration in its aftermath, influenced many Jewish scholars in the twenties to emigrate to England, the United States or Palestine.\textsuperscript{292} This was not the case for everyone—Abrahams, for example, was unlikely to join JIR permanently due to his commitments in England. Elbogen, on the other hand,

\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{292} See Ritterband and Wechsler, \textit{Jewish Learning in American Universities: The First Century}, passim.
seemed a strong candidate for the full-time faculty, and possibly even for the presidency, but Elbogen’s family ties to Berlin and professional responsibilities at the Hochschule made him reluctant to leave. Otherwise, it appears that many, including Perles, Blau and Obermann, were open to the idea of moving permanently to the United States in order to pursue their scholarship. Tchernowitz, by contrast, had plans to move to Palestine, but would stop on the way in New York and agreed to teach briefly at JIR. The Institute provided an exit strategy for a number of these scholars, who managed to enter the United States despite recent legislation restricting entry, notably the Immigration Restriction Act of 1921. Calls within the US for even greater limits on European immigration may have made some of these scholars anxious to act as quickly as possible.

The limited opportunities for Jewish scholars within the United States at this time worked to Wise's advantage, as well. Because secular universities rarely recognized Jewish fields outside of Semitics, men seeking faculty positions in areas like Talmud and Jewish history could look only to the American Jewish seminaries or Dropsie College for employment. The creation of a new seminary represented an important new opening for these scholars, particularly given Wise’s refusal to impose ideological constraints or strictures on speech, thought or practice.

However, working against Wise in Europe as well as the United States was the hostility the Reform and Conservative movements aimed at JIR and anyone associated with the new school. Still coalescing (Conservative Judaism, especially), these movements, rather than welcoming the fledgling JIR as complementary to their efforts to develop higher Jewish learning in the United States, perceived the Institute as a threat. They galvanized whatever resources they could in order to impede its progress on every front, and showed a willingness to use coercive measures in order to wage battle.
Wise encountered these obstacles as early as the spring of 1921 when he and his associates tried to recruit Mordecai Kaplan to join the JIR faculty. On the one hand, Kaplan feared his followers, more religiously conservative than the Free Synagogue membership, would cease to support him if he made this move, and the Teachers Institute would collapse. But Kaplan made it clear, too, that even if he were able to hold on to his supporters, Cyrus Adler had explicitly informed him that were he to join the JIR faculty, he would not be allowed to remain at JTS. As compelling as the JIR vision may have been to Kaplan—and given the degree to which he engaged in serious negotiations with Wise, it seems he did find it intriguing—Kaplan proved unwilling to incur the opposition he would encounter from his left flank of supporters, as well as from Adler to his right. Mack encountered similar concerns from Margolis, who implored Mack not to leak a word to Adler about his interest in teaching at JIR.

Reform opposition to JIR also impeded Wise's efforts to assemble a faculty. His trip to Europe ended up bracketed by conflict—beginning with Montefiore's concerns triggered by anti-JIR editorials in the American Israelite, and ending with the Hochschule's fear that a faculty exchange with JIR would lead Adler and Warburg to withdraw critical JDC funding. Wise repeatedly had to counter efforts by leaders in the Reform and Conservative movements who hoped that by stymying cooperation with JIR, they could prevent the Institute from coming into existence.

Wise and his associates fought back with the resources they could muster. By means of Hirsch’s German-language letter of introduction and Mack's cable to the Hochschule citing the support of major figures like Louis Brandeis and Nathan Strauss, for example, the JIR founders attempted to counter resistance by focusing on the positive contribution the new Institute would make to American Jewry. Though critical of the major institutions of Reform and Conservative Judaism, they made a strategic decision to refrain from censuring others,
emphasizing instead the school’s mission and their desire to cooperate. Of course, most knew Wise and his key backers represented the leftwing of American liberal Judaism, and the leadership of the Reform and Conservative movements surely recognized, even if the JIR founders held their tongues, that JIR aimed to challenge their ideological dominance, and to liberalize liberal Judaism.

Wise's desire to establish a faculty exchange with the Hochschule, in particular, represented a new challenge to the authority of the Reform and Conservative movements. More than any other existing institution of Jewish higher learning, the Hochschule served as a model for JIR, for in its training of rabbis as well as scholars, it embraced a liberal spirit but endorsed no single theology or political ideology. The Hochschule’s lack of affiliation with any movement may have been due, in part, to the fact that Reform Judaism in Germany remained an intellectual and religious outlook lacking institutional structure. The Hochschule’s faculty comprised a diverse group in terms of Jewish affiliation, belief and practice, and the school promoted freedom of inquiry unfettered by ideological imperatives, an approach Emil Hirsch, an alumnus, celebrated and endorsed for JIR in the note cited above. Perhaps Wise felt a personal connection to the school where a number of important figures in his life had studied, though he trained privately with Adolph Jellenik in Vienna, and his father studied at Azriel Hildesheimer’s Orthodox seminary in Berlin. Wise’s desire to connect with the Hochschule may also have reflected the admiration he felt for Elbogen, whom he hoped might one day lead JIR as president.293

Ultimately, however, while Wise did strive to gather an impressive array of scholars, he was not trying to create a research institution. Rather, he sought teachers who could inspire his young, mainly Eastern European first- and second-generation American-educated

293 See Wise’s 1922 handwritten diary. He was especially impressed by the Hochschule, the Breslau seminary, and Vienna's seminary under Chajes' leadership. Box 7, folder 1, Stephen S. Wise Collection.
students to become troops in his struggle to reorient American liberal Judaism. Wise did not expect that most JIR students would become professional scholars but that they would invigorate Jewish life as rabbis serving congregations across the country. Goldstein expressed it well: by stimulating Jewish thought, life, and culture and by reawakening in America an interest in Jewish learning, JIR would lead the way out of the current moral and spiritual malaise, into a new stage of Judaism. To achieve this, the Institute required not *Wissenschaftlich* researchers but involved teachers who could provide students with the tools and inspiration necessary to create nothing short of a renaissance in American liberal Judaism.

By the end of the summer of 1922, Wise had what he set out to procure—a faculty distinguished in the world of *Wissenschaft* scholarship. Given the press coverage he garnered in doing so, his adversaries at HUC and JTS could not fail to notice. Granted, Elbogen, Perles and Wolfson were not permanent faculty; first, Wise needed to "try them out." But their presence at the new liberal seminary in New York suddenly made JIR an institution other seminaries had to take seriously.

In his drive to quickly assemble these luminaries onto the JIR faculty, Wise faced a serious issue: he had overcommitted the school's budget. Saddled with major financial expenditures, he needed to resume fundraising immediately. Thanks to Shohl's widely-distributed letter the previous spring, and ongoing attacks in the Jewish press coming mainly from the Reform movement, he would now face resistance among Reform Jews in particular, who might otherwise have opened their pocketbooks to him.

In addition, the Institute still needed students. Who would risk enrolling at a nascent seminary lacking the comfort of HUC’s dormitories with their new gymnasium and swimming pool, and the security of the College’s student stipends? Who would enroll in a seminary unaffiliated with any movement and sponsored by just a single synagogue, when
they could attend nearby JTS, which had the solid backing of the most prominent and established Conservative as well as Reform Jews in America? Who would choose to sit in the classes of these visiting scholars, just off the boat from Europe? Would JIR students differ at all from the students at the other seminaries?

**Student Recruitment**

JIR may have sought a faculty comparable in many ways to faculty at the other Jewish seminaries, but not so when it came to recruiting a student body. The founders hoped that, as a graduate school, the Institute would attract older and more mature students who had already proven their ability to succeed academically, and who had acquired in their undergraduate education the knowledge and skills necessary to think and write analytically.294 These factors meant the faculty’s approach to instruction at JIR had to differ from the approach at JTS and HUC which, because they did not require the undergraduate degree until the point of graduation from the rabbinical program, had students as young as fourteen or fifteen years old who had never taken a college-level course.

Restricting JIR to graduate training served Wise's larger aim to professionalize the rabbinate, as noted above, and it served Wise's goal, too, of Americanizing the rabbinate, in at least two ways. Having earned an undergraduate degree already, all incoming students would be conversant not just in English but in topics commonly taught in American colleges; in addition, they likely would have attained a level of acculturation, for even students still new to the American landscape would have gained familiarity with American customs and ideas during their undergraduate study. To be sure, Wise’s notion of Americanization differed from the approach taken by some of his progressive allies in the settlement house

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294 Wise told Mack, “Our appeal to college graduates with secular education behind them, and ready in New York for concentrated intensive graduate work under outstanding teachers for rabbinate….no one institution can train all men needed in Jewish ministry, no one institution can appeal to or cover all sections of Jewish population geographical social religious especially viewing needs of large Jewish influx with East European background in adjustment to American life.” Cable from Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, n.d. [ca.1922]. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
movement who, as noted above, expected immigrants to discard aspects of their ethnicity in order to blend in with the rest of the American populace. Wise, who embraced Kallen’s idea of cultural pluralism, wanted not to weaken but, rather, to strengthen Jewish ethnicity in America. In Wise’s view, Jewish ethnic identity, rather than conflicting with American democratic values, expressed those values—and he wanted JIR to produce rabbis who embraced both.

Wise sought to distinguish JIR from HUC in an additional way. In Wise's view, HUC lured young men to study at the school with the promise of financial stipends. Regarding this as "bait", Wise insisted on "no system of subsidies, pensions, bounties, allowances or other schnorrerei." 295

As early as 1920, the founders began shaping a publicity plan, with guidance from board member Charles Bloch who, through his experience in publishing, knew the world of popular Jewish advertising. That his father had worked closely with Isaac Mayer Wise decades earlier did not deter Bloch the younger from developing an ambitious publicity strategy for JIR to compete with HUC. Chairing the board’s Committee on Publicity, Bloch proposed three strategies for student recruitment: publishing a bulletin about the Institute, which included information regarding the school’s faculty; sending Wise to visit colleges and universities, and meet with Jewish student groups; and, advertising in the Jewish press, especially in the Menorah Journal, a magazine for Jewish college students. 296

In a certain sense, in the rapidly expanding marketplace of 1920s America, rabbinical schools were becoming one more product; counting JIR, young men now had three non-Orthodox American rabbinical schools from which to choose. Advertisements would help set JIR apart, but they also posed several challenges. First, Wise and the board had to agree on appropriate promotional language. Then, they needed to distribute the copy strategically, in

296 JIR Board Minutes, November 2, 1920.
order to best reach an audience that would yield applicants. Finally, of course, they had to find the money to pay the bills.

Not everyone appreciated the consumerist approach; Emil Hirsch, for example, in 1921 when he still planned to serve as honorary president of JIR, urged Wise not to publish an advertisement Wise had run by him for approval. “It is ‘Marktschreirich,’” Hirsch wrote, and "smacks too much of 'Department Store'." If, regardless, the school planned to go ahead with the ad, he demanded that his name be removed, or at the very least, "delete my tail of Ds they are of no consequence. I “never travel on them.” Wise went ahead with the ad, removing all degrees and titles; instead, he featured the Institute’s new building, departments of study, and teaching staff. By contrast, HUC’s ad emphasized the College’s history as the oldest rabbinical school in the United States, its beautifully-situated spacious grounds facing the University of Cincinnati, and its library, housing over 40,000 volumes of Hebraica and Judaica. JTS also boasted a “commodious building” and a library holding 57,077 books and 1,828 manuscripts, a synagogue where students were expected to deliver sermons, and its Teachers’ Institute.

In accord with Bloch’s plan, the Institute also produced a bulletin in 1922 which they sent to American Jewish university students, and Wise agreed to speak at universities across the country, with the aim of inspiring students to enter the rabbinate. Wise considered these campus visits enormously important in moving men to choose the ministry, and tried to conduct speaking tours regularly. He also wanted members of the faculty to do the same, and in his 1922 negotiations with Harry Wolfson, Wise expressed the hope that Wolfson would enlist Harvard students for JIR from his classes there. For the most part, however, as

298 Emil G. Hirsch (unsigned; probably from Sidney E. Goldstein), August 5, 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.
299 Ibid.
in the case of fundraising, student recruitment depended almost entirely on Wise, who had the capacity to inspire young men like no one else. Many a JIR student enrolled primarily as a result of hearing Wise speak, or meeting him in person.

With substantially over a million eastern European Jews living in New York City, many of them young Jewish men and women attending college, the pool of potential candidates from which JIR could draw was essentially limitless. Wise never doubted JIR’s ability to attract students and, indeed, it appears enrolling the first entering class required little effort.  

In January 1922, Wise reported the Institute had received about a dozen applications having taken few steps to recruit, and the following September the Menorah ad generated nine more inquiries. After the start of the school year, Wise reported an enrollment of twenty students.

According to JIR’s first advertisement, the school offered programs in ministry and communal work for men and women. Though initially JIR accepted men only, Wise hoped women would enroll as well, perhaps along the lines of the Hochschule model where women attended classes, though they were not eligible to become rabbis. Optimistically, Wise claimed the only impediment to the admission of women at the time of the founding was a

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302 Wise updated Hirsch on progress related student recruitment: “About a dozen men have applied for admission…that number seems excellent, viewing the fact that I have made no attempt to secure them. That I mean to do a little later after we shall have made our first announcement of plans. As you know, no man is to be admitted to the Institute who is not a graduate of an American university or a school of equal standing in European lands. In other words, we are trying to get maturer men and I should say that the average man coming to us will be twenty-two or twenty-three years. I do not foresee much difficulty in the matter of securing students. I think they will come to us. The project is being discussed a great deal in Eastern universities, and I think it will not be very long before we shall be able steadily to draw some of the better, stronger young men from different colleges and universities throughout the land.” Stephen S. Wise to Emil G. Hirsch, January 25, 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.


lack of proper housing arrangements, which ostensibly could be worked out within one or two years.\textsuperscript{305}

From the start, while Wise kept in mind employment prospects for graduates, he did not limit the size of the student body to correlate with anticipated pulpit positions available. Rather, he believed the American Jewish community needed more rabbis as well as more congregations. He claimed to have been “besieged” for over a decade by requests from communities within a radius of 500 miles of New York, “to supply men for the leadership of their congregations and community life. During those years the two seminaries jointly graduated between ten and twenty men yearly—I think that twenty was rarely, if ever, exceeded.”\textsuperscript{306} He also continued to urge the creation of new congregations in cities that had just one, and of course he hoped JIR graduates would usher some of these into a national Free Synagogue movement.

**Conclusion**

Over the course of two years, from 1920-1922, Wise took all the steps necessary to found the Jewish Institute of Religion. He worked together with Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein and the lay leadership of the Free Synagogue, as well as a group of prominent Jewish communal leaders, scholars and philanthropists to establish a summer school, build a board, identify potential faculty members, recruit students, outline a budget and begin fundraising. Determined that the seminary would be independent and open to a broad spectrum of religious and political expression, this group nonetheless sought the support of the Reform movement, through negotiations with the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. However, the UAHC, founded in 1875 largely to support the Hebrew Union College in

\textsuperscript{305} Wise told Bloch that as soon as he returned from Europe, they needed to consider the matter of admitting women to JIR very carefully. “I think we shall have to content ourselves for a time with a pronouncement to the effect that women will be admitted in a year or two, just as soon as satisfactory arrangements can be made in respect to housing, etc.” Stephen S. Wise to Charles Bloch, August 3, 1922. Box 3, folder 13, JIR Records.

Cincinnati, opposed the creation of a new seminary in New York City and refused to lend JIR support.

Several factors led Wise and the other founders of JIR to move ahead in establishing the new seminary. In the aftermath of the First World War, many of the Jewish communities of Europe were in a state of crisis, and financially unable to sustain their great institutions of Jewish learning, including a number of the seminaries built in the nineteenth century; as a result, responsibility for creating and sustaining Jewish scholarship was shifting to the large and increasingly affluent American Jewish community. In addition, by 1922 Jewish demographics in the United States had shifted markedly from the time of the HUC's founding. New York now held the largest Jewish community in the world, and Cincinnati’s Jewish community had become among the smallest of large US cities. Finally, Wise and the other founders envisioned a new kind of rabbinical school. The school they hoped to establish in many ways had more in common with university-based Protestant seminaries like those located at Harvard and Yale, than it did with Hebrew Union College or the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. JIR would operate at the graduate level only; the school would be governed by the principles of academic as well as religious freedom; students would learn practical skills of the rabbinate by using New York City synagogues and other Jewish communal organizations as a laboratory; they would engage in interfaith dialogue with leading Protestant theologians; and, a fundamental component of their learning would include the application of the teachings of Jewish tradition to the more challenging social and political issues of the day.

In this way, the founders hoped, JIR would safeguard American liberal Judaism while also reorienting it. Through its location in New York, the Institute would ensure that the next generation of rabbis knew firsthand the vibrancy of Jewish life thriving at the heart of American Jewry, and could foster a liberal spirit within it; through advanced study and
practical training, the Institute would create a professionalized rabbinate positioned to seek justice in accord with Judaism’s prophetic tradition, and reform, in accord with an American tradition of ministry; JIR rabbis would know and promote free expression, too—on the pulpit, in academe, and writ broadly throughout American Jewish life; and, they would advance an American liberal Judaism that elevated the unity of the Jewish people as a whole over any particular group or concept of Judaism—all toward the goal of revitalization, and cultivating an intellectual and spiritual resurrection of Jewish life in America.
CHAPTER THREE: PRESIDENCY, BOARD, FACULTY, AND CURRICULUM

By opening day, Wise and the other founders of JIR had articulated the philosophical underpinnings of the school, similar in some but not all respects to the ideals that undergirded the Free Synagogue, and a lofty set of promises as to what JIR would achieve. Now came the test. High-minded ideals and an ambitious plan would mean little unless JIR became a fully operating school, and the time had come for critical decisions regarding the presidency, the board’s vision for the school, the composition of the faculty and content of the curriculum, recruitment of students, and—given the Institute’s institutional independence and lack of major donors—a plan for achieving financial sustainability.

Wise and his close confidante Richard Gottheil were acutely aware that previous attempts to create a liberal seminary in New York had failed, including—as noted above—the effort by Gottheil’s father, Rabbi Gustav Gottheil, to establish the Temple Emanu-El Theological Seminary, which never went beyond a preparatory school, and lasted just a few years before closing. While preparing to donate to the Institute a collection of theology books from his father’s library in October 1923, Richard Gottheil reflected on his father’s struggle:

It might not be amiss for us in this connection to recall the attempt that my father made to establish just such an Institute as you have founded. In all that has been said, I have not heard his name mentioned; and yet you know as well as I do what he had in mind and how, indeed, a faculty had been established and that some of us attended courses under the members of that faculty and occupied in later years positions of trust.

You will remember also that the furtherance of the scheme my father had in mind was made impossible by the action of our Cincinnati friends, and that at their solicitations he gave up that which he had commenced. You know how he was - a man of peace and unwilling to throw down the gauntlet of strife, especially in matters religious. I do think, however, that some notice of the fact that your success is the culmination of an unsuccessful attempt commenced some thirty years ago should be made. Do you not think that I am right?

They knew a second attempt to establish a liberal seminary in New York had failed, as well, despite the backing of the wealthiest and most influential Jews in America. Even Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall could not effect the merger of HUC and JTS for which they called following the death of Isaac Mayer Wise at the turn of the century, when the Cincinnati-based UAHC refused even to acknowledge the idea in their board discussions. Had this merger taken place, the landscape of American rabbinical seminaries would likely have developed much differently, and New York may have become the seat of a liberal seminary two decades earlier. Instead, Schiff and Marshall focused their efforts on reorganizing JTS, without any intention, despite their Reform affiliation, of making it a liberal seminary. For the ensuing two decades, none existed in the largest Jewish community in the world.

Now, Wise and his associates intended to change that. As they moved forward cognizant of the past, they understood that just as Gustav Gottheil met resistance in 1877, as did Schiff and Marshall in 1900, the founders of JIR, too, would encounter opposition.

**Opening Day**

On the morning of October 6, 1922, after more than two years of planning, JIR’s first academic year commenced. With construction still underway on the Free Synagogue House being built on West 68th Street, students and faculty made their way to temporary quarters at Temple Israel on West 91st Street, where they gathered on the roof of the synagogue for opening day. Temple Israel’s Rabbi Maurice Harris, whose involvement with the Institute dated back to the earliest organizational meetings in 1921, had agreed to lend the school space until construction was complete.\(^{308}\)

Temple Israel had not been Wise’s first choice—initially he approached Temple Bnai Jeshurun, the congregation where he had launched his rabbinical career in 1893 and served

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until departing for Portland in 1900. To his chagrin, however, B’nai Jeshurun’s Rabbi Israel Goldstein did not accede to Wise’s request for temporary housing; rather, Goldstein insisted on asking the board “whether it would be proper for a Conservative Congregation, which pledges its unqualified loyalty and support to the Jewish Theological Seminary and to the United Synagogue of America, to house the Jewish Institute of Religion.”

Wise, taking offense and preferring not to risk further rejection, instead turned to Harris at Temple Israel. Harris, having already lent his support to Wise in organizing the Institute, proved willing to risk approbation by his own Reform movement and immediately made space available.

By now, the wary response Wise received when he requested temporary classroom space from the Conservative congregation he once served could not have come as a surprise. In the preceding year, the leadership of Reform as well as Conservative Judaism had already impeded Wise in his efforts to establish the school. They did not share the Free Synagogue’s ideology, which was far more liberal regarding halakhic practice than Conservative Judaism, more left-leaning politically than Reform Judaism, and more Jewishly nationalistic than either movement. Wise’s critique of both movements over the previous decade did not help garner their cooperation, nor did it endear him to their leaders, many of whom viewed him antagonistically. Finally, neither HUC nor JTS welcomed increased competition for resources, either human or material, including faculty and students, funding, Jewish books and manuscripts, and rabbinical job placements for students and graduates. Wise may have rejected a zero sum approach to assets in the Jewish community, but the Reform and Conservative leadership did not.

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309 Israel Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, October 4, 1922. Box 16, folder 14, JIR Records.
310 Dinner meeting of Committee on Jewish Institute of Religion, n.d. [ca. 1921]. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
Presidency

In October, with Hirsch still terribly ill, Wise delayed JIR’s opening exercises, hoping the Honorary President would be able to participate at a later date. Hirsch’s health only continued to deteriorate, however, and a month later, recognizing the ailing rabbi lacked sufficient strength to make the trip to New York, Wise realized Hirsch would not be able to fulfill even minimal ceremonial functions for the school. Wise continued to correspond with Hirsch, and now raised the issue of the presidency itself.311

Indicating he did not want to serve long in the role of President overseeing the daily operations of the school, Wise asked Hirsch’s view on potential candidates and shared some of his own. His initial enthusiasm for Elbogen had waned, for Wise came to realize that the German was too little in touch with American affairs to serve effectively as President.312 Elbogen, in fact, agreed, and making clear his commitment to return to the Hochschule, he urged Wise to select an American.

Wise, however, had his mind on another European—Israel Abrahams of Cambridge, who Wise thought might agree to serve as president for a term of three to five years.313 Abrahams, though not a radical like Hirsch, cohered with the JIR ideal in a different way. Though a leader of Liberal Judaism in England, Abrahams was seen by many as, foremost, a Jew without label, capable even in his liberalism of defending traditional Judaism.314 That he had succeeded Solomon Schechter at Cambridge when Schechter left to assume the presidency of JTS provided a historical resonance Wise no doubt appreciated, as he considered Abrahams for the JIR presidency. Like Hirsch, Abrahams was not a Zionist, though he did participate in the movement to modernize Hebrew, and Wise regarded him as a

312 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, December 18, 1922.
creator of Jewish renaissance. For all of these reasons, Wise believed Abrahams would serve
JIR well as president.

Emil Hirsch died on January 7, 1923, midway through JIR’s first academic year, and
Wise lost a powerful confidante, ally, friend and partner in building the Institute. Soon
after, the Board rejected Abrahams as a candidate for the presidency. Lacking any other
viable possibility, Wise agreed to continue to serve, without remuneration, as Acting
President. He hoped the right man would soon emerge to assume the responsibility.

Competing Visions of the Board

Given the diverse professions represented on the board, it is not surprising that
members differed regarding their priorities for the school. Some emphasized fiscal prudence
over risk-taking, for example, and others focused primarily on publications and building a
library. The most significant difference pertained to the very mission of JIR—its function,
rather than its form or ethos. All shared Wise's commitment to academic and religious
freedom of expression, scientific study of traditional texts and, to a certain degree, social
engagement. All agreed that the Institute would train rabbis, and most agreed, more
particularly, that the Institute would produce a new kind of rabbi in the model of Stephen S.
Wise. JIR graduates, they hoped, would revitalize American Judaism by serving
congregations including Reform, Conservative and Orthodox, and by establishing new
congregations, too, some of which they hoped would join the Free Synagogue movement.

However, several members of the board had additional and competing aims for JIR,
two of which garnered serious consideration, despite the fact that they were, to some degree,
at odds with one another. The first entailed becoming a center for Jewish scholarship, which

316 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, February 16, 1923.
317 “The Synagogue has been from the beginning ready to share, and more than share my own service
with the Institute which, of course, I serve, and will throughout my life serve, without one penny of
remuneration. My one compensation is the privilege of providing two scholarships, bearing my
mother’s and my wife’s names,” Wise said in the 1926 Annual. “The History of the Institute: An
Interview with Dr. Wise,” The Annual, 1926, pp. 34-35. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
would have required prioritizing research above areas like social service, homiletics and fieldwork; the second entailed training Jewish social workers alongside rabbis, a task that would have made JIR primarily a vocational school, rather than a research center. Wise showed flexibility in the face of these competing visions for the school, and appears to have been open to a range of possibilities.

**Center for Scholarship**

Several of the board’s most influential members pressed for JIR to become a center for advanced Jewish learning. In light of the crisis unfolding in Europe, board members including Mack, Gottheil and Kohut knew they were witnessing a seismic shift taking place in the Jewish world, not just demographically but culturally, as well. With the relative eclipse of the great European centers of learning, they believed the most important task JIR could take on would be to establish in the United States a center for Jewish scholarship matching the caliber of the European institutions now in rapid decline, but with a decidedly American cast. In the summer of 1922, when Wise so effectively recruited European faculty from the seminaries in Berlin, Vienna and Budapest, this contingent of the board saw great promise in a distinctly scholarly future for the Institute.

Julian Mack hoped this focus would not only further Jewish scholarship in and of itself, but also ensure that JIR created a learned American rabbinate. Prior to the school’s opening, Mack spelled out for Wise what he saw as the Institute’s two most important aspects. “In addition to the broad and liberal point of view, is the soundest scholarship—a scholarship, however, that fits the student for active service as well as for the scholarly life.” Therefore, he hoped, the Institute would maintain the highest academic standards.

Mack, Gottheil and Kohut focused almost entirely on this idea, in various ways. Mack and Gottheil (and Wolfson, too) advised Wise on contemporary American university

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standards related to faculty pay, sabbaticals, and pension. Mack secured an appointment for Wise on the board of Harvard’s Semitics program, and Gottheil enlisted Wise and other JIR faculty to teach courses at Columbia. Kohut helped Wise bring European scholars to lecture at JIR, funded the publication of their addresses, and advised Wise on other matters related to the Institute’s press. Gottheil had a particular vision for JIR—recognizing a trend toward university-affiliated divinity schools at some of the best schools in the country, he hoped JIR might one day serve a similar capacity for Columbia. Gottheil also pressed Wise to allow faculty a generous amount of time to conduct research, in order for JIR to fully develop as a scholarly center.

Training Jewish Social Workers

For a brief period in 1923, a different contingent of the Board, mainly those representing the lay leadership of the Free Synagogue, considered a proposal that would have involved JIR in the training of Jewish social workers. This contingent saw Social Service as the key element that distinguished the Free Synagogue from other congregations, and as such, critical to the ideal that JIR was meant to embody. Just as Rabbi Sidney Goldstein oversaw the Social Service Department at the Free Synagogue, from the earliest stage of planning for JIR this group agreed Goldstein should oversee a Social Service Department at the Institute as well, in cooperation with other experts in the field.319

Some JIR founders, Lee Frankel especially, were engaged not just in the Free Synagogue's own Social Service efforts, but also in broader discussions taking place among Jewish social workers in New York regarding the need not only for greater professionalization of the field, but also for specialized training for those preparing to work in the Jewish community. The field of social work had changed substantially over preceding

319 Wise told Homer Folke, “We have recently founded the Jewish Institute of Religion, a School for the Training of Men for a liberal and socialized Ministry. Dr. Goldstein is my associate in the work, and from the very beginning we are stressing training for social work, given for present by Dr. Goldstein, in which work, however, he will later have the cooperation of other experts.” Stephen S. Wise to Homer Folke, March 2, 1923. Box 9, folder 3, JIR Records.
decades, in large part due to the efforts of progressive reformers to respond to the mass immigration. Within the Jewish community, small philanthropic agencies had grown into large multi-functional organizations with paid professionals responsible for coordinating the provision services as well as fundraising. These agencies, though intended to meet communal needs with greater efficiency, were not always well-received by the people they aimed to serve, and not infrequently, the immigrant population perceived their staff as condescending, ignorant and dismissive of their culture and traditions. Some leaders in the field believed that tensions could be alleviated if social workers were prepared with a better understanding of Judaism and the immigrant community’s Jewish life. One plan for “The Training of Jewish Communal Workers,” put forth by Julius Drachsler, a City College Sociology professor who had helped found the Kehillah’s Bureau of Jewish Social Research (BJSR), entailed a partnership between nonsectarian schools of social work and Jewish institutions. The nonsectarian schools would train students in the fundamentals of the field, while Jewish institutions provided courses in Jewish history and related topics, as well as opportunities for fieldwork in Jewish agencies. Frankel believed JIR might have a role to play in this endeavor.

However, a minority group of social workers opposed Drachsler’s plan, and instead advocated for the creation of an exclusively Jewish school of social work. Ludwig B. Bernstein of the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Orphan Asylum, and the first director of the BJSR, shared that view, and in the winter of 1923 he submitted to Wise a proposal for JIR to house "an out-and-out Jewish Training School.” Under Jewish auspices, the social work

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321 Drachsler served as the Bureau’s assistant executive director, and then directed a training program for communal workers at the Jewish Welfare Board before joining the faculty at City College in 1922. He died from tuberculosis in 1927 at the age of 37. “Julius Drachsler, Sociologist, Dead,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1927.
and Jewish coursework would be “organically interrelated,” taught by the most competent
lecturers in any given subject, Jewish or non-Jewish.\footnote{Ludwig B. Bernstein to Stephen S. Wise, March 23, 1923. Box3, folder 8, JIR Records.}

Bernstein hoped the school would become part of JIR. "Only under such auspices will
the Training School for Jewish Social Service be an independent organization, independent
financially, independent in its policies, independent in its professional point of view and,
what is quite as important, independent of the small financial coterie who, at the present time,
desire to dominate anything and everything in Jewish life in America,” he explained.\footnote{Ibid.}

In April of 1923, Bernstein told Wise he planned to submit a formal request at the upcoming
National Conference of Jewish Social Work that JIR undertake "the auspices, patronage and
support of an out and out Jewish Training School for Social Service."\footnote{Ludwig B. Bernstein to Stephen S. Wise, April 3, 1923. Box 3, folder 8, JIR Records.}

Wise appears to have been amenable to Bernstein’s proposal, but others on the JIR
board were not.\footnote{Wise told Bernstein, “I am sorry to say that Judge Mack and Dr. Frankel are entirely opposed to
the proposal to tie up the School for Social Workers with the Jewish Institute of Religion. On the
other hand, I do not yet see daylight and would like to have your thought with regard to the
possibilities, which I conceive to be tremendous.” Stephen S. Wise to Ludwig B. Bernstein, May 2,
1923. Box 3, folder 8, JIR Records.}

Predictably, Mack opposed the proposal, which might have diverted JIR
from the scholarly focus he sought; for a different set of reasons, Frankel, who had been
involved with social work training and with Jewish social work since the turn of the century
when he headed the United Hebrew Charities of New York City, opposed it as well.\footnote{Wise told Bernstein, “I am sorry to say that Judge Mack and Dr. Frankel are entirely opposed to
the proposal to tie up the School for Social Workers with the Jewish Institute of Religion. On the
other hand, I do not yet see daylight and would like to have your thought with regard to the
possibilities, which I conceive to be tremendous.” Stephen S. Wise to Ludwig B. Bernstein, May 2,
1923. Box 3, folder 8, JIR Records; and, Solomon Lowenstein, “Dr. Lee K. Frankel 1867-1931,”
American Jewish Year Book 34 (1932-1933): 121, 125.} In

addition to preferring that JIR collaborate with nonsectarian social work schools rather than
run its own independent training program, Frankel likely knew that the majority of Jewish social workers lacked enthusiasm for Bernstein’s proposal for a JIR-run school.\(^\text{328}\)

In agreement that Jewish social workers required an understanding of issues in contemporary Jewish life, Wise, Frankel and Goldstein appear to have endorsed the substance of Drachsler’s proposal: The New York School for Social Work would teach the fundamental principles of social work and provide general training courses, and JIR would teach Jewish social workers to address the particular set of social problems that were afflicting the Jewish community, including, possibly, the high rate of deserting husbands, the difficulty of placing orphaned Jewish children in Jewish homes, and intergenerational conflict between first-generation immigrants and their rapidly Americanizing children.\(^\text{329}\)

This idea paralleled the approach Samson Benderly had pioneered at the Bureau of Jewish Education where, in an effort to professionalize the field of Jewish education, he encouraged his young cadre of Jewish teachers—affectionately known as the “Benderly boys”—to augment their coursework at Columbia's Teachers College with studies at the Teachers Institute at JTS under the direction of Mordecai Kaplan, where they could receive a solid grounding in Jewish learning.\(^\text{330}\)

The JIR Board discussed both the Bernstein and the Drachsler proposals, but the minutes record no attempt to bring the matter to any kind of resolution. Wise, it seems, remained open to a range of possibilities. Clearly his primary aim was to train rabbis in the spirit of the Free Synagogue, and he was committed, too, to creating a world-class center for Jewish scholarship. However, he was also open to training Jewish social workers, and he saw

\(^\text{328}\) Ludwig B. Bernstein to Stephen S. Wise, May 9, 1923. Box 3, folder 8, JIR Records.

\(^\text{329}\) Lee K. Frankel to Stephen S. Wise, April 4, 1923; and Stephen S. Wise to Lee K. Frankel, April 6, 1923. Box 11, folder 7, JIR Records.

\(^\text{330}\) Both Solomon Schechter, president of JTS, and Mordecai Kaplan were disappointed that Benderly tended to steer the graduates of his preparatory program toward doctoral study at Columbia’s Teachers College, rather than toward rabbinical training at the Jewish Theological Seminary. See Jonathan B. Krasner, *The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2011), 76-77.
none of these purposes as mutually exclusive or at odds with one another. Perhaps because of Wise's flexibility, and out of loyalty to the overall endeavor, board members never divided in a significant way over these differences; rather than forcing a single vision to prevail, the trustees promoted their personal priorities, without impeding others from doing the same.

Language in the New York State Senate Act to incorporate JIR reflects this openness regarding the purpose of the Institute. Because incorporation gave the Institute the authority necessary to issue state-recognized degrees, doing so was a critical step in launching the new school. For help with navigating the process, the founders turned to State Senator Nathan Straus, Jr., a Free Synagogue member and Honorary Secretary of JIR, who agreed to introduce the appropriate legislation in April of 1923.³³¹ The Act described JIR's purpose:

- to train, in liberal spirit, men and women for the Jewish ministry, research and community service; to study scientifically Jewish literature, history and religious experience, and to make available to the general public a constructive knowledge of Judaism, its spiritual and social ideals, its history and outlook and its contribution to the world's progress; to advance Jewish scholarship; to establish and maintain a library and to educate and train rabbis and teachers.³³²

After the bill passed, Wise sent a note to his friend Governor Al Smith urging him to authorize it. “I shall be glad to hear in the near future that you have signed the Bill,” Wise wrote, and suggested he would express his appreciation "by awarding to you the degree of Doctor of Hebrew Literature or giving you the title of Rabbi in addition to all your other titles."³³³ When Governor Smith signed the bill on May 22, 1923, the Trustees gained the power to award the degrees of Rabbi, Master of Hebrew Literature, Bachelor of Hebrew

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³³¹ The Jewish Institute of Religion: A School of Training for the Ministry, Research and Community Service. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
³³² “An Act to incorporate the Jewish Institute of Religion,” New York State Senate, April 11, 1923. Box 5, folder 1, JIR Records.
Literature, Doctor of Hebrew Literature and Doctor of Jewish Theology, and to award diplomas as well as certificates of proficiency to persons qualified to teach Hebrew.\footnote{Telegram from George R. Vannamee, Secretary to the Governor, to Stephen S. Wise, May 23, 1923. Box 5, folder 1, JIR Records.; and, “An Act to incorporate the Jewish Institute of Religion,” New York State Senate, April 11, 1923. Box 5, folder 1, JIR Records.}

In the fall of 1924, Drachsler found the support he needed among New York’s Jewish social workers to move ahead with his plan, and in 1925, he and others opened a Training School for Jewish Social Work, where Frankel served as a member of the board and vice-president.\footnote{Solomon Lowenstein, “Dr. Lee K. Frankel 1867-1931,” \textit{American Jewish Year Book} 34 (1932-1933): 126.} With a separate institution now dedicated to providing Jewish education for social workers, JIR lost all impetus to proceed in this direction.

\textbf{Faculty}

We might write of the great teachers that came across the Atlantic to share with them their wisdom and learning. The fact that those students were so very few in number did not matter to these men who left larger schools and better-equipped institutions to participate in the great adventure.

\hspace{1cm}Morton Berman, 1926 graduation program\footnote{“The Graduating Class,” Morton B. Berman, \textit{The Annual}, 1926, p. 30. JIR Nearprint Box 1.}

The most important step Wise and the board could take to establish JIR as a seminary that would carry out their vision was to assemble a faculty reflecting that vision and capable of implementing it. Only by hiring a diverse faculty, for example, could Wise and the Board create a school unfettered and unparochial in outlook, that exposed students to a wide range of ideas related to contemporary Jewish life. Diversity in viewpoint, however, could not substitute for expertise and, like any rabbinical school, JIR needed scholars who could cover each of the areas of study deemed necessary in the training of rabbis.

In the traditional fields of Jewish learning, Wise prioritized hiring men of the strongest scholarly reputation. While doing so advanced Mack’s vision of JIR as an international center for higher Jewish learning, Wise was also being strategic, for he
recognized that, ultimately, the academic reputation of the Institute would be the single most important factor determining its power and prestige in the Jewish community. In disciplines like Bible, rabbinics and history, JIR aimed not to stand apart from the other Jewish seminaries, but at the very least to match the quality of their offerings. While the amount of coursework in any particular area varied from seminary to seminary (JTS, for example, taught more Talmud than either HUC or JIR), and the approach to subject matter varied, too (JTS did not teach higher biblical criticism) all three seminaries taught virtually the same set of Jewish fields of study, with the goal of covering the Jewish literary canon, including its legal, narrative and philosophic texts, as well as Jewish history.

Nonetheless, in two respects, the composition of JIR’s faculty stood apart from that of their counterparts at the other American seminaries at this time. The first pertained to the faculty’s complexion in terms of ideological diversity. Over the course of the early 1920s, Wise recruited an international mix of scholars to teach at 68th Street, including men from Berlin, Frankfurt, Vienna, Odessa, London and Jerusalem, as well as Cambridge, Massachusetts and Cincinnati, Ohio. While the Institute likely employed more faculty of Eastern European background than did HUC, more significantly, JIR’s faculty represented a different ideological spectrum of belief. In accord with the school’s founding vision, the Institute’s faculty included Zionists and non-Zionists, conservatives and liberals. On the one hand, the diversity made real Emil Hirsch’s dream of an American-style Hochschule; on the other hand, the mix was not entirely unbiased. Compared to JTS and HUC, a preponderance of JIR faculty were supportive of Jewish nationalism, for example—and for the first time in an American Jewish seminary, Zionist faculty, and left-leaning faculty as well, did not have to exercise caution in expressing their convictions, lest they rankle the administration and board. As a result, unlike Moses Buttenwieser and Abraham Cronbach at the College, and Kaplan at the Seminary, JIR faculty expressed themselves without compunction and without
ramification, relying to some degree on the school’s commitment to academic and religious freedom, but also, in the case of the majority, confident they faced little risk expressing views they knew cohered with those of JIR’s president and board.

The second quality that distinguished the JIR faculty at this time pertained not to the scholars who taught traditional subjects like Bible or Jewish history, but to those whom Wise and the board brought to the Institute to teach religious pedagogy, social service, and liberal Protestant thought. Wise was eager to enlist leading innovators in each of these fields—the modernizers of his day—and in this regard, too, his selection of JIR faculty would break new ground in rabbinical education.

Since the turn of the century, each of these fields had changed dramatically, modernizing in response to broad societal changes within and outside the American Jewish community, and heavily influenced by Progressivism. Leaders in social work and Jewish education had professionalized their fields, for example, by shifting responsibility for the provision of services away from a loose network of untrained, part-time volunteers to a more organized cadre of paid, full-time professionals, many of whom, like the Institute’s Lee Frankel and Sidney Goldstein, were active within the Progressive movement. In certain respects, the field of Jewish education had undergone even greater change, thanks in large measure to the efforts of Samson Benderly, director of New York’s Bureau of Jewish Education, who together with his protégés, were promoting a community-run (rather than synagogue-based) system of Jewish education that utilized Dewey-inspired progressive pedagogy to advance cultural Zionism, modern Hebrew, and the strengthening of American-Jewish identity.337 Liberal Protestant thought, too, had changed a great deal over the previous two decades, in ways manifest most clearly in the Social Gospel movement. As noted above, in the conservative aftermath of the war, Liberal Protestant thought increasingly found its

home in some of the non-denominational divinity schools affiliated with universities like Yale and Harvard. There, activist faculty like Yale’s Jerome Davis extended their teaching beyond the classroom, taking students to visit factories, prisons and other sites, and attempting to enlist them in various battles for reform.  

Since Wise could not be sure the faculty he recruited for the first academic year would succeed or desire to stay at the Institute, even after the school opened he continued searching for new teachers. For instructors in the traditional fields of learning, Wise repeatedly turned to the centers of Jewish Wissenschaft in Europe, the handful of university Semitics departments and Jewish academic institutions in the United States, and the informal network of independent and emerging scholars that existed across Europe, the US and Palestine. Ultimately, for coverage of these traditional subjects, he assembled a mix of full-time and visiting European and American scholars. Inevitably, relations with some of the institutions these scholars left behind became fraught, for varying reasons. There was little the European seminaries could do to prevent the depletion of their faculties; American institutions, likewise, did not appreciate Stephen S. Wise and his upstart seminary poaching their faculty, but they had a greater capacity to resist.

When it came to the more practical fields, Wise had no need for Wissenschaft scholars; rather, he sought idealistic and effective leaders who could transmit to the students their passions as well as their skills. To find them, he turned to eastern cities in the United States and to the Yishuv in Palestine. In the area of pedagogy, Wise eyed Benderly’s circle, centered in New York but extending to other American cities and strongly linked with the Zionist movement, and during the first year of JIR’s existence, Wise successfully reached out to some of its most accomplished leaders. Social service, so central to the Free Synagogue ideal, would hold a prominent place in the curriculum, and no one had more experience in

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synagogue-based social service than Wise’s colleague, Sidney Goldstein. Regarding men who could teach liberal Protestant thought, Wise never intended for them to become members of the permanent faculty, but wanted to be sure they had an ongoing and visible presence at the school. Every year he invited at least one scholar from a leading Protestant divinity school to offer a course on some aspect of Christianity.

**European Scholars**

Instead of gathering around me a group of men, and saying, "This is the Faculty," I went abroad before the founding of the Institute, and invited a group of men to come over for a half year, or a year at a time, and act as visiting members of the Faculty…In the first four years of the life of the Institute, the Board of Trustees and I have brought to this country a most distinguished galaxy of Jewish scholars…

Wise, 1926 graduation program

That no institution in the US produced American Jewish scholars of the highest European caliber was Mack and Gottheil's point in urging that JIR become a scholarly center of the quality of the Hochschule. Their investment in this aspect of the mission may explain why Mack and Gottheil each took an active role in recruiting faculty, conducting negotiations, and determining policy regarding faculty compensation, sabbaticals, pension, and other matters. Given the high ranking scholars they pursued, and their willingness to go to lengths to make JIR a home for these scholars, Mack and Gottheil clearly had every intention of creating an enduring and prestigious intellectual center for American Jewry.

As noted earlier, when Wise travelled through Europe in the summer of 1922 to recruit JIR’s first faculty, he was characteristically ambitious, and rather than cutting his trip short after he successfully retained a sufficient number for JIR’s first academic year, he continued to hire, ultimately putting the Institute’s already-unstable financial footing at greater risk. However, in another way Wise proved cautious, for though he did extend more

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offers than he had funds to cover, not one of the offers extended beyond the academic year 1922-23; to a man, the European scholars received temporary visiting appointments for just one or two semesters. Wise wanted to “try out” these scholars; before making a long-term commitment to anyone, he wanted to determine which men proved not only to be excellent scholars but also effective teachers who could inspire their students. In addition, he did not take lightly the responsibility of pulling a man away from his professional base in Europe and bringing him to America to teach in a brand new school lacking any guarantee of a secure future.

The approach worked through the early twenties; though eager to experience the flourishing of Jewish life in New York, which contrasted so greatly with the desperate situation of certain Jewish communities in Europe, some of the scholars Wise invited preferred a visiting appointment, and either shared the desire to assess the experience before making a long-term commitment, or knew they wanted to return to Europe at the conclusion of their stint teaching at JIR. Some returned to Europe despite Wise’s pleas that they stay; others, for whom increasing pressure to leave Europe augmented the pull to teach at JIR, would have stayed if offered a permanent position. In JIR’s first year, the European scholars Wise brought to New York included Ismar Elbogen, Felix Perles and Ludwig Blau in the fall semester, and Israel Abrahams and Julian Obermann in the spring. Together the group, which included leaders of three of Europe’s most prominent institutions of Jewish higher learning, represented an elite stratum in the world of Jewish scholarship.340

Wise planned a celebratory greeting for Elbogen and Perles in New York, meeting them personally at quarantine, and arranging for a group of faculty and board members to have pier tickets so they could accompany the scholars as they took their first steps into the

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340 Elbogen unofficially directed the Hochschule; Blau served as rector of the Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest; and Abrahams, reader in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature at the University of Cambridge, was recognized as the leader of the liberal Jewish movement in England.
city. Their arrival to teach at JIR caught the attention of the Jewish press. A reporter from the *American Hebrew*, after interviewing Elbogen and Perles, described them as "old world but by no means old school," and "modern thinkers in every sense of the word." The men recounted the woeful plight of German Jews and German Jewish congregational life, the decline of countless Jewish organizations that before the war had been the backbone of the community, and the demoralization that had set in after the calamitous toppling of exchange rates.341

Elbogen and Perles, probably answering a reporter’s question, made it clear they were not concerned that Wise’s plan to bring professors from the European seminaries to America, even temporarily, would jeopardize the already vulnerable institutions. Far from wreaking havoc with the faculty of the various schools, Elbogen and Perles said, the seminaries regarded Wise’s initiative as promising a “welcome infusion of fresh and highly beneficial elements,” an opportunity to bring the American perspective into organizations that otherwise were “practically doomed to stagnation.” They wished only that more European scholars could have the opportunity to teach and lecture in American Jewish institutions of learning. “Both Professor Elbogen and Dr. Perles look upon America as the source whence Jewish culture must henceforth emanate. Europe, they hold, is hopelessly beyond resuscitation, culturally and otherwise,” the article reported.

"Europe is dead," Perles told the *American Hebrew*. America, he said, whether she wants to or not, is to be the little child that shall lead and inspire whatever may be salvaged from the wreckage of the European debacle.342

Indeed, that was just the role Wise hoped JIR would play—the young and tenuous seminary shaping the future of American liberal Judaism. To achieve this, JIR needed to


342 Ibid.

JIR Box No. 1 Nearprint, Special TopicsDSC_0133.pdf
become a visible contender amongst the leading American institutions of Jewish higher learning, and no one knew better how to steer publicity to his own ends than the Institute’s acting president. Not content to let Elbogen and Perles spend the year quietly teaching a small number of students and pursuing their scholarship, Wise opened their courses to rabbis, seminarians, students at Teachers’ Institutes, religious school teachers and other qualified individuals; in addition, he enlisted them for a host of public events. Elbogen delivered a series of public evening lectures on Jewish history that the Institute advertised widely, including the Yiddish press and university Semitics Departments, and in December Wise invited over one hundred of New York’s Jewish philanthropic and intellectual elite to attend a dinner honoring Elbogen and Perles at the Fifth Avenue home of Ludwig Lewisohn. The invitation list included Louis Marshall, the faculties of JTS and Union Theological Seminary, Daniel P. Hays, Ludwig Vogelstein, Israel Goldstein, David De Sola Pool and many others; those who attended heard George Foot Moore of Harvard and Mordecai Kaplan, who had just established the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, address the significance of Jewish scholarship in America.

In the spring of 1923, Israel Abrahams and Julian Obermann arrived. Whereas Abrahams was a leading light in British liberal Judaism, Obermann, unlike most of the Europeans who taught at JIR, did not play a significant role in Jewish communal life, and lacked rabbinical training as well as a connection to any seminary. Born in Warsaw, he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Vienna in 1915, and began teaching Semitic languages and literature at the University of Hamburg, where he remained until joining JIR that spring as a professor of Bible and Semitic Philology. At the time he had recently received high

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343 Elbogen’s courses included “Development of Jewish Liturgy,” “An Introduction to the Study of Judaism,” “Jewish Historical Sources,” and “Historical Problems of the Talmud.” Perles taught “Critical Study of Psalms and Prophets,” “History of the Jewish Religion from the Babylonian Exile to the Close of the Talmud” (in German), and “Introduction to the Old Testament Literature,” including the Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphia. Ibid.

344 Faculty meeting minutes, September 25, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
praise for his work on the philosophy of Al-Ghazali, which he published in 1921. Richard Gottheil, whose field of expertise overlapped with Obermann’s, was overjoyed at JIR’s coup in securing Obermann, a true German academic, onto the faculty.

Issues arose quickly that spring, however, as soon as Obermann began negotiating with Wise for a longer stay at JIR. He sought a unique arrangement that would have set him apart from other faculty, with more time allotted for scholarship, and less for teaching. He also wanted a formal connection with one of the major universities in the New York area, similar to an arrangement Wise was working out for Harry Wolfson at Harvard. Initially Obermann had the support of several key board members; Gottheil reminded Wise that in order to “keep the right men” the Institute had to provide plenty of time for research, and Kohut, who in 1915 had donated his father’s library to Yale and remained a significant donor to the university, took Obermann there to meet with officials, who proposed an arrangement similar to the plan underway for Wolfson. By this time Wise and members of the JIR board were growing wary of Obermann’s demands and machinations, and refused to approve the Yale proposal, offering Obermann instead a position exclusively at JIR as Professor of Comparative Religion and Philology. Obermann accepted, but over the ensuing year, Wise and Gottheil became convinced that his new plan was to use JIR simply as a point of entree onto the Columbia faculty. Their suspicions were confirmed when Obermann told Gottheil that he wanted his JIR salary sent to Columbia so he could have an appointment there. He would, he assured Gottheil, continue to teach at JIR for nothing. “I was dumbfounded,” Gottheil wrote Wise, adding it would be “derogatory to the dignity of JIR to lend itself to any

346 The Alexander Kohut Memorial Collection of Judaica was the university’s first major gift of Judaica, and included many rare works. Kohut also financed the publication of works by Yale faculty, and in later years created a Kohut Book Fund at the Yale Library, and a Kohut Publication Fund at the Yale Graduate School. He bequested to the university 950 volumes of his private library. Leon Nemoy, “George Alexander Kohut,” The Yale University Library Gazette, 9, no. 4 (April 1935), 96.
347 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24, 1923.
such devious policy”—not to mention the fact that the trustees at Columbia would never agree.

Discontent with Obermann spread. “Is there some way we can get German scholarship without German scholars?” Goldstein asked in exasperation.348

Abrahams, on the other hand, proved most cooperative, not only in his teaching but also in his willingness to draw on his decades of experience at Cambridge in order to guide Wise in building a strong academic institution, and to freely offer his opinion on issues as they arose. When Wise, for example, discussed with the faculty the question of bringing a new Visiting Professor for a semester in 1923-24, they debated the relative merits of the Zionist poet from Odessa, Hayim Nahman Bialik, and the Russian historian Simon Dubnow, both of whom were now living in Berlin. Abrahams felt that either man would bring prestige to the Institute, though he had a slight preference for Bialik. The faculty, based in part on Abrahams’ counsel, recommended to the board that either Dubnow or Bialik be invited for one or the other semester in 1923-24.349 Though neither came to the Institute that year, just two years later Bialik would accept the Institute’s first honorary degree and deliver a memorable address in Hebrew at the Institute’s first graduation ceremony in 1926.350

*Five Seminary Fund*

Securing scholars from the European seminaries was not the only way Wise hoped to establish a central role for JIR in the global network of Jewish institutions of higher learning. During the fall of 1922, troubled by the devastation he had encountered in his travels through Europe the previous summer, and in response, too, to Schulman’s threat in August to withdraw funding from the Hochschule at the sign of any support from that institution for JIR, Wise decided to raise money for what he referred to as "the five seminaries of German-

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349 Faculty meeting minutes, April 11, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
350 Claude G. Montefiore, the British Jewish scholar, received an honorary degree that year, as well. “Chaim Nachman Bialik receives Degree of Doctor of Hebrew Literature from Jewish Institute of Religion,” *New Palestine*, May 28, 1926. Free Synagogue Scrapbook, Box 9, JIR Records.
These included the Hochschule and the Rabbiner Seminar in Berlin; the Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt of Vienna; the Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest; and the Jewish Theological Seminary of Breslau. Though a portion of the funding appears to have come from the Free Synagogue, Wise coordinated this aid under the auspices of JIR, thereby linking the fledgling American rabbinical seminary with its European predecessors. Wise felt the American Jewish seminaries should take responsibility for supporting their peer institutions in need; in addition, angry about the JDC’s coercive tactics the previous summer, he sought to diminish the JDC’s control over the seminaries as their sole source of aid.

In order to proceed in the most informed way possible, Wise needed to know the extent of American Jewish aid currently being sent to the seminaries, and he recognized that Cyrus Adler, as head of the Joint Distribution Committee, likely had the greatest access to that information. Wise’s poor relationship with Adler precluded his reaching out directly, however, so Wise resorted to a familiar strategy—he found an emissary to make the contact. In this case, Wise’s friend Jacob Billikopf, executive director of the Federation of Jewish Charities of Philadelphia, agreed to help. Billikopf, who was conducting his own investigation of conditions in Eastern Europe for the United Jewish Campaign, requested that Adler send him the information Wise needed, and when he received a comprehensive report from Adler in early January 1923, he forwarded it to Wise. The JDC had only taken charge of disbursing funds for educational institutions in Europe nine months earlier, Adler told Billikopf, and he explained the roles of the three separate committees that previously had overseen this work—the Central Committee aided Europe’s yeshivot and Talmud Torahs, the Peoples Committee supported workers institutions, and the American Jewish Relief Committee provided funding to other organizations.

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351 See Wise’s 1922 handwritten diary, passim. Box 7, folder 1, JIR Records.
The seminaries received no appropriation from either the Peoples Committee or the Central Committee, apparently, because “the Peoples Committee had no interest in religion and the Central Committee did not regard the Seminaries as orthodox enough.” The AJRC had, however, made appropriations at one time to Hildesheimer’s Orthodox Seminary in Berlin, to the seminaries in Budapest and Vienna, and during the summer of 1922, to the Conservative seminary in Breslau, and to the Hochschule in Berlin on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. More recently, after the JDC took charge of disbursing funding to the educational institutions, Adler had deployed Judah Magnes to Europe to investigate conditions, and upon return Magnes had submitted a request to the JDC for $40,000 disbursed over two years to the Orthodox Hildesheimer Seminary, the liberal Lehranstalt, and the conservative seminary in Breslau.\footnote{Cyrus Adler to Jacob Billikopf, January 2, 1923. Box 3, folder 9, JIR Records.}

After considering Adler’s JDC report, in April 1923 Wise spelled out his own plan to Lee Frankel, chairman of the JIR board. He would establish a fund of five thousand dollars to be raised annually and divided equally between the five seminaries of German-speaking lands.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Lee K. Frankel, April 12, 1923. Box 11, folder 7, JIR Records.} Wise included the Hochschule, though he was still angry about the August incident, not only at Schulman for making what he now understood to be an unauthorized threat (Cyrus Adler had subsequently told Mack that Schulman did not have the authority to represent the JDC in any such negotiations), but also with the leadership of the Berlin seminary for not questioning the uncorroborated word of Schulman.\footnote{Ibid.} “I have had no further negotiation with the Hochschule,” Wise told Frankel, except to secure the five seminary fund.\footnote{Wise told Frankel, “I have had no further negotiation with the Hochschule since then excepting insofar as you may recall I have secured a fund of five thousand dollars, contributed in part by the Synagogue through the Institute, which has been divided in equal amounts of one thousand dollars between the five Jewish Theological Seminaries in German-speaking lands.” Ibid.} Nonetheless, a month later, when JIR received a letter from the Curatorium of the Hochschule offering to enter into an arrangement with JIR for the exchange of professors, the
very idea that had triggered the conflict back in August, the JIR executive committee agreed to respond with appreciation rather than resentment. Wise valued the Hochschule connection, for reasons altruistic as well as self-serving.

Meanwhile, despite Wise’s initial success bringing European scholars to JIR, at the conclusion of the 22-23 academic year he proved unable to retain most of them on the full-time faculty. He had been particularly excited about retaining Elbogen and Abrahams, but much to his dismay, they chose to return to their respective European institutions, as did Perles and Blau. The effort to recruit additional visiting faculty for the 1923-24 academic year had to resume immediately, and Mack agreed to travel to Europe that summer in order to meet with a new set of scholars, resume discussions with the Hochschule about establishing a regular rotation of visiting faculty, and move forward the Five Seminary Fund idea.

Mack’s trip proved productive, as indicated by the report he issued to the JIR board in October following his return. Regarding JIR’s Five Seminary Fund, having visited some of the institutions it supported, Mack now proposed securing it by establishing an endowment of $50,000-100,000. Wise, however, rejected that goal and reverted to his original plan of sending one thousand dollars annually to each of the seminaries, and possibly sending a bit more to the Hochschule, with whom he still hoped JIR would have a special relationship.

Perhaps Wise—despite his commitment to the European seminaries, and despite his rejection

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356 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24, 1923.
357 Abrahams died just three years later. Elbogen declined to stay in the United States out of his commitment to the Hochschule and because his wife wanted to remain in Berlin. Roughly fifteen years later JIR, JTS, HUC and Dropsie rescued him from Nazi Germany and created a research professorship for him, but by then Wise considered Elbogen a broken man unable to carry on any teaching duties. Perles remained in Konigsberg where, in 1924, he was appointed Honorary Professor of Post-Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic at Konigsberg University, the first post in this field at a German university. He died in 1933. Blau continued serving as rector of the Rabbinical Seminary of Budapest until his retirement in 1932; he died in 1936. See "Felix Perles, 1874-1933," Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook 26 (1981): 170; and Tamás Turán, “Blau, Lajos.” YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, accessed July 9, 2013, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Blau_Lajos.
358 Mack’s efforts on behalf of the Institute during that trip began while he was still on the steamship heading across the Atlantic to Europe. When he discovered Mordecai Kaplan was a fellow passenger on board, Mack initiated a significant discussion with his shipmate about joining the faculty of JIR. Radiogram from Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, June 25, 1923. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
of zero-sum thinking when it came to fundraising—could not sanction creating an endowment for the European seminaries when he thus far had none in place to support the Institute,

Still, Wise claimed he wanted to diminish the European seminaries' dependence on the JDC by shifting responsibility for their support to the American seminaries, which he deemed more appropriate. Dependence on the JDC had become demeaning, he said, as evidenced by the politics of the previous summer. However, complaining that Cincinnati moved too slowly to provide the urgent response the situation now required, he failed to invite HUC or JTS to join the project and, instead, simply began sending checks directly from JIR to the Europeans. Perhaps he assumed, given his experience over the past year with the Reform and Conservative movements, that neither HUC nor JTS were likely to cooperate on any project either he or JIR initiated. Nonetheless, JIR’s annual gift of $1,000 to each European seminary could hardly reduce their dependence on the JDC.

In November of 1923, the CCAR put forth its own proposal to create a $50,000–$100,000 capital fund for the European seminaries, to be kept intact until their situation improved, and William Rosenau, chair of the CCAR committee in charge of this, solicited Wise for a contribution. In response, Wise proposed that a committee consisting of Louis Marshall, Lee Frankel, Cyrus Adler and Judge Abraham K. Cohen create a plan together for raising the money. Thinking this multi-institutional effort might ultimately take the place of the current JIR arrangement, he authorized Frankel to pursue the idea with Marshall.\footnote{JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, November 28, 1923.} It is not clear what came of the proposal, but throughout the twenties Wise continued to aid the seminaries of Europe, from 1922 through much of the decade sending an annual contribution of one thousand dollars from JIR to each.
Meanwhile, Mack succeeded in recruiting more European scholars to teach at JIR. Over the course of his visit he resumed discussions with Elbogen and Abrahams, and he met, as well, with a crop of new possibilities. Though Elbogen remained reluctant to leave Germany, the Hochschule did want to continue its relationship with JIR, and two more of their scholars, Julius Guttmann and Harry Torczyner, were interested in visiting faculty positions. In addition, Reuben Levy of Oxford wanted to teach at the Institute for at least a semester, and Zevi Perez Chajes, Chief Rabbi of Vienna, agreed to visit the United States unofficially—not under the auspices of JIR—to see the Institute and to consider the possibility of becoming its only Orthodox faculty member. Arthur Marmorstein, by contrast, declined, fearing that if he taught at JIR even for a semester, Jews’ College, the Orthodox-dominated London school where he lectured, would dismiss him.\(^{360}\)

In part as a result of Mack's trip, and in part due to negotiations Wise had begun the previous summer, in the academic year 1923-24 four Europeans taught at JIR: for all his discontent, Julian Obermann remained for a second year; Reuben Levy arrived in the fall and Julius Guttman in the spring; and, planning to spend just a brief time at the Institute, Chaim Tchernowitz arrived from Odessa. The Talmud scholar and Hebrew author known as “Rav Tzair,” brought a traditional background as well as university training, and had founded a yeshivah in Odessa, where he was a member of Bialik’s circle and active in Zionist and Jewish affairs. He was on his way to Palestine where he planned to head the Department of Talmud at Magnes’ new university, and Elbogen urged Wise to hire him to teach a short course of lectures in part so he could be reimbursed for his travel expenses. Some faculty were reluctant to hire him for so brief a period but, in need of a strong Talmud teacher, they consented.\(^{361}\) In August 1923 Wise wrote Chajes in Vienna that Tschernowitz had been given a chair in Talmud and would likely stay at JIR for awhile, and in October, Wise expressed the

\(^{360}\) JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, October 18, 1923.
\(^{361}\) Faculty meeting minutes, March 26, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
hope that Tschernowitz would stay more than a year, since "the university at Jerusalem is still a matter of the future." That spring Tschernowitz agreed to extend his stay further.

The arrangement Wise desired to engage a visiting professor from the Hochschule on an annual basis never did materialize. After Elbogen’s stint teaching in 1922-23 and Guttman’s in 1923-24, no other Hochschule faculty came, and Wise invited only a few Europeans from elsewhere. Perhaps, as the full-time JIR faculty began to coalesce, there was no need for more; perhaps as the budget tightened, Wise could not justify the costs of hiring faculty who required steamship fare, housing and furnishings in addition to their pay; perhaps Goldstein’s wariness of “German scholars” had become widespread; the tighter immigration restrictions enacted in the US beginning in May 1924 may have been a factor as well.

Nonetheless, Wise continued to keep his eye on the scholars of Europe, possibly applying greater scrutiny as he invited just a few more to cross the Atlantic in order to teach. In the academic year 1924-25, he brought back the known elder statesman Israel Abrahams, whose second time teaching at JIR would be his last, for he died later that year.

By contrast, in the academic year 1925-26, Wise took a chance on two youthful scholars. Until now, he had recruited mainly mid-career scholars in their late forties, with a few younger men in their mid-thirties, notably Obermann and Levy. But this year Wise learned of two European historians in their twenties who appeared to have great promise—Cecil Roth of Oxford, just twenty four years old, and Salo Baron of Vienna, not much older. Too young to have established reputations, both men were practicing a new methodology that would come to be called social history. Roth taught in the fall but then departed, upset over

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some dispute with Wise. Soon thereafter, Baron arrived for the spring semester, thanks to a recommendation from Chajes, who in addition to serving as the city’s chief rabbi, also directed the Hebrew Paedogogium where Baron taught.

Baron never forgot the welcome he received upon entering the United States for the first time:

I still recall the cold evening in January, when arriving in New York harbor too late to disembark, I received through the steward a note from George Kohut, who had together with another member of the Faculty waited for many hours at the open pier to welcome me upon my arrival. Although personally still a stranger, I was a guest of the Institute and consequently, in his eyes also his personal guest. I shall never forget him standing on the other side of the gangplank, waving his hands and shouting my name, lest I feel alone and unbefriended in this strange and overwhelming city. It was also in his, and his mother’s home, that I have learned world famed American hospitality at its best. To his loving kindness and steady encouragement I owe it, just as much as to the hearty reception on the part of my colleagues and students of the Institute, that my difficult first term of instruction turned out to be one of great and thrilling adventure.

Baron made an equally strong impression on Wise and the JIR faculty. With earned doctorates in philosophy, political science and law from the University of Vienna, as well as rabbinic ordination from Vienna’s Israelitisch-Theologische Lehranstalt, by the time he arrived he had already published two books challenging Heinrich Graetz’ approach to Jewish history. Although he could lecture in five different languages, as a Zionist, he preferred teaching in Hebrew. At the conclusion of the spring semester, Wise hired Baron onto JIR’s permanent faculty.

Daniel Greene hypothesizes that Wise offered Roth a full-time appointment but Roth rejected it. Michael Meyer says Wise did not bring Roth onto the full-time faculty because he lacked rabbinic ordination. Following his departure from JIR, Roth published several articles in the Menorah Journal critiquing the way seminaries taught Jewish history from a religiously ideological perspective, and calling for instruction in Jewish history to be moved from the seminary to the secular university. Daniel Greene, The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 122.

Salo W. Baron’s address in memory of George Alexander Kohut, January 25, 1934. Box 24, folder 1, JIR Records.
The European university approach to teaching and learning differed from the American one in that the European faculty tended to expect a higher degree of independence and a greater capacity for advanced work on the part of the students. They were disappointed to discover that, though JIR students held bachelor's degrees and were ostensibly capable of graduate work in secular studies, most had little to no background in the academic study of Judaism, which was not taught in American colleges or universities. In general, students with more traditional backgrounds entered with a stronger knowledge of Hebrew, and possibly with experience in yeshivah-style text study, but little experience with a Wissenschaft approach; by contrast, those who excelled in their secular undergraduate studies tended to bring a paucity of Jewish knowledge and could barely read Hebrew. As a result, in the Institute’s early years, accomplished Jewish scholars faced the confounding task of teaching graduate students the most rudimentary skills. The European faculty, accustomed to conducting high-level seminars, were particularly distraught; having to devote more time in the classroom diminished their ability to advance their own research. Board members like Mack and Gottheil sympathized, and favored maximizing the time and resources JIR allocated to faculty research, which they regarded as critical in order for the Institute to become a true center of scholarship; the students, however, expected American-style classroom teaching, and required introductory courses in every subject including Hebrew.

Though Wise focused primarily on scholarly reputation in his initial selection of European faculty, in accord with his original intent, once they arrived at Institute he assessed them largely on their ability to teach and inspire the students. In so doing he prioritized the seminary aspect of JIR, and he had no patience for faculty who placed their own scholarly interests above student learning. He also refused to retain faculty whose poor spoken-English impeded their ability to communicate effectively with the students. This proved to be a
concern regarding Guttman, for example, who preferred to lecture in German because of his limited English.366

**Americans and a Palestinian**

As accomplished as these European scholars were, Wise understood that they could advance the mission of the Institute only in limited ways: with their arrival, the school immediately acquired international stature, and students gained exposure to some of the world’s leaders in *Wissenschaft des Judentums*; however, despite the *American Hebrew*’s characterization of Elbogen and Perles as “modern thinkers,” these men brought little understanding of contemporary American Jewish life, and no ability to prepare students with the professional skills they would need to serve American Jewry as rabbis. In addition, given the European emphasis on independent learning and reluctance to work closely with students, Wise found that, for the most part, he could not rely on the European faculty to inspire the students on a personal level. In search of role models for the students, Wise turned to the circle of Jewish scholars in the United States and Palestine, and to practicing rabbis in the New York area. He also turned to Christian scholars and ministers who could offer coursework in comparative religion and contemporary issues in the Protestant ministry.

**Harry Austryn Wolfson**

A top priority for Wise was enlisting Harry Wolfson onto the full-time faculty to teach history through the lens of Jewish philosophy and literature. Wolfson had agreed to teach minimally as a visiting professor during the Institute’s first year, and over the course of that year Wise pursued the possibility of securing him on a permanent basis. Working

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366 Wise wrote to Guttmann in Berlin, prior to his travels to New York to teach in the spring semester of 1924, “I take it for granted that you are working hard on your English, which, alas, constitutes almost the only medium between a teacher and the students of the Institute. Tchernowitz, in one course, is using what we call congress German, but it were better if he could lecture in English. We must have you give one course in German, so that you may have the fullest opportunity of self-expression, without being burdened by the difficulties of an alien tongue, but, for the most part, please understand that your lecturing must be done in English.” Stephen S. Wise to Julius Guttmann, November 9, 1923. Box 17, folder 11, JIR Records.
alongside Wise in this effort were Julian Mack, who utilized his position as a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers, and George Foot Moore, a Christian biblical scholar on the Harvard faculty who lent his support to the establishment of JIR in this and a variety of other ways.

These were tumultuous times for Jews at Harvard. Its president, A. Lawrence Lowell, had recently proposed a quota system in Jewish student admissions, triggering a nationwide debate. Wolfson, whose current contract at Harvard was set to end at the conclusion of the 1923-24 academic year, clearly wanted to retain his position but worried that his future at the university was not secure. Though he expressed a willingness to teaching at JIR, he refused to make any commitment to the Institute without receiving as well a promise from Harvard that the university would retain him on the faculty. His linking the JIR appointment to a renewal at Harvard left Wise and others on the board less than enthusiastic; though passionate about Jewish scholarship, Wolfson did not have the same concern for rabbinical training, and Wise believed he could get a scholar of equal caliber who might be a better fit. Mack countered, however, arguing on behalf of Wolfson and explaining that he was a man of naiveté whose lack of enthusiasm for JIR stemmed from his loyalty to Harvard, which had provided for him since his youth. Kohut also supported retaining Wolfson, and they decided to proceed.

Since Wolfson had agreed to teach at JIR only if he could retain his connection to the University, Wise and Mack put forward a proposal to Harvard, and in late spring 1923 Mack successfully conducted the negotiations on JIR’s behalf. JIR would appoint Wolfson as full professor beginning in the fall of the 1923-24 academic year, and as part of the arrangement, the Institute would lend Wolfson to Harvard for a semester annually, paying his full compensation so Harvard would have to contribute nothing. JIR tendered Wolfson’s services

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367 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, January 17, 1923.
368 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, April 2, 1923.
happily, Wise and Mack wrote, “in recognition of the interest of Harvard in the Hebrew language and in Semitics from its very earliest day.”

According to the arrangement, Harvard agreed that during the one year remaining in Wolfson’s current contract, the university would cover $3,500 of Wolfson’s compensation and JIR would cover $1,500, and beginning in 1924-25 and in the years to follow, Harvard would renew Wolfson on an annual basis, and JIR would take full responsibility for his salary. Wise scheduled Wolfson to teach his first semester at the Institute in the spring of 1924.

In preparation for his work at JIR, at Wise’s request, Wolfson undertook an investigation of the curricula at leading divinity schools in the United States, reviewing their catalogues in consultation with Moore. All seemed to be proceeding on track until the following October, when Wolfson triggered Wise’s suspicions once again. To Wise’s surprise, Wolfson asked if he would be needed at JIR that spring. Yes, Wise said, and he reiterated the plan—Wolfson would teach at JIR in the second term. Wolfson assured Wise he would request a leave of absence from Harvard in order to do so, and after much delay he submitted his course information for the JIR catalogue, indicating he would teach Hebrew philosophic texts as well as Jewish history. Wise, however, became increasingly concerned that Wolfson’s interests seemed to lie entirely with Harvard. He was contributing little to the Institute, not cooperating with the staff, and given the fact that the Institute was essentially donating Wolfson’s services to Harvard, Wise questioned the merit of proceeding with the

369 “The Jewish Institute of Religion is ready to accept these conditions, and pursuant thereto to tender to Harvard University the services of Professor Wolfson in the fields in which he has been active at Harvard, for a semester in each academic year, without compensation by the University, the Institute paying him his full compensation as Professor,” Wise wrote. Stephen S. Wise to the President and Fellows of Harvard College, April 5, 1923. Box 40, folder 2, JIR Records.
370 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24 1923.
arrangement. Mack attempted to reassure Wise and the board that the misunderstandings were not serious, and all would work out once Wolfson actually started teaching in New York.375

In January 1924, Wolfson informed Wise that Lowell had approved his leave of absence, and for a brief period once again all appeared to be proceeding smoothly, until Wolfson informed Wise he could not arrive at the start of the semester.376 After Wise arranged for Louis Newman to temporarily cover his classes, Wolfson complained about his teaching schedule, demanding that it be changed; then, Wolfson further postponed the start of his teaching, so Wise had to extend the arrangement with Newman. The situation continued to deteriorate when, just a week prior to a dinner Wise had planned in honor of Wolfson and Guttmann, Wolfson cabled to say he could not attend. “I cannot do things in a hurry with all my desire to attend the dinner it will be impossible for me to make it I hope it will come off successfully without my presence,” the cable read.377 By the time Wolfson did begin teaching, Wise’s initial enthusiasm had worn thin. Nonetheless, Wise seemed pleased to have Wolfson on the faculty, and consulted him regularly regarding curricular and other academic matters.

The following winter, in January 1925, Hebrew Union College offered Wolfson its chair in Jewish Philosophy, recently left vacant following the death of David Neumark. As Wolfson weighed the pros and cons of accepting the position, he confided in Mack. In his view, HUC had a well-balanced faculty with clearly defined fields; institutional backing that offered greater security; and, more funds available for publication as well as salary. By contrast, JIR offered the benefits of New York; the ability to remain at Harvard; and, a greater sense of personal freedom. Wolfson believed JIR had done a great service to the

375 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, November 28, 1923.
377 Cable from Harry A. Wolfson to Stephen S. Wise, February 9, 1924. Box 40, folder 2, JIR Records.
cause of Jewish education by introducing a model that others, including HUC, were now ready to adopt. In light of this, Wolfson suggested that HUC, with four openings on the faculty, held tremendous potential, whereas JIR already needed great reform in order to fulfill its original promise.\textsuperscript{378}

Having laid out this analysis, Wolfson then said none of it mattered; he felt equally about Cincinnati and New York. He worried primarily about his security, and he lived in constant fear of the future. “As I see it, the Institute, like my former instructorship, but on a larger scale, is being fed from hand to mouth by generous friends,” he told Mack. “What would happen if the attention of the generous friends should someday be diverted elsewhere? How would the faculty be taken care of?”\textsuperscript{379}

Wise and the board chose not to issue a counteroffer to Wolfson, who nonetheless declined the chair at HUC in order to remain at JIR and Harvard. Delighted that Wolfson chose JIR over HUC, Wise considered publicizing the news, since rumors had spread about Wolfson going to Cincinnati; at the same time, more privately, Wise expressed disappointment in the Harvard professor who, for a second year in a row, had failed to show up to teach his JIR classes at the beginning of the spring semester.\textsuperscript{380} This time Wolfson claimed he needed to complete his fall grading. “If I understood him aright, there are no classes at Harvard this week, and, if he have only blue, green or purple books to correct, that might be done in New York,” Wise told Mack, Wolfson’s chief supporter.\textsuperscript{381}

Soon thereafter, the arrangement collapsed. In late spring 1925, Lucius Littauer, a Harvard alumnus and member of New York's Congregation Emanu-El, established at Harvard the first chair in Jewish Studies in the United States. Littauer designated Wolfson as

\textsuperscript{378} Harry A. Wolfson to Julian W. Mack, January 16, 1925. Box 25, folder 14, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{379} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{380} Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, February 3, 1925. Box 25, folder 14, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{381} Ibid.
the recipient, and without conducting a search, Harvard announced Harry Austryn Wolfson as holder of the Nathan Littauer Chair in Jewish Literature and Philosophy.³⁸²

No longer did Wolfson have reason to worry about his job security, and no longer would the Institute pay his Harvard salary in order to retain him half-time on 68th Street. Holding the most prestigious endowed academic appointment for a Jewish scholar in the nation’s history, Wolfson resigned from JIR.

Sidney E. Goldstein

The most vocal and active practitioner on the JIR faculty was Sidney E. Goldstein, Associate Rabbi at the Free Synagogue, whom Wise enlisted to direct the Institute’s Social Service Department, the first of its kind in any American Jewish seminary. A native of Texas, Goldstein attended the University of Cincinnati and HUC, and when JIR opened he became the first HUC-ordained rabbi to serve on the full-time faculty. Like Margolis, Goldstein too had run afoul of the HUC administration, though not as a faculty member, but as a student. In 1905, feeling that HUC lacked adequate concern for social justice, Goldstein preached a sermon on socialism entitled “Let my people go in order that they may serve Me,” in which he urged his congregants to devote themselves to freeing the millions of poor working people suffering under the hand of US corporations. In response, Kaufman Kohler, president, offered a spontaneous prayer—may God save the congregation from this heresy.³⁸³

Upon ordination, Goldstein moved to New York City where initially he took up social work rather than assuming a pulpit, serving for two years as Assistant Superintendent at Mount Sinai Hospital. In 1907, an article Goldstein had written caught the eye of Stephen S. Wise, who invited the young rabbi to work with him at the Free Synagogue he had just founded. At the Free Synagogue, Wise told Goldstein, contemporary social problems

³⁸³ Urofsky, A Voice that Spoke for Justice, 68.
demanded not just philanthropy but real engagement by the congregation.\textsuperscript{384} Goldstein, drawn to the synagogue’s support for progressive causes and commitment to the spirit of “socialized ministry” developing in liberal Protestant circles, joined forces with Wise. As the Free Synagogue’s Director of Social Service he pioneered a new model for synagogue engagement, described earlier, that entailed congregants running a variety of projects across and outside the city.

Now, as director of JIR’s Social Service Department, Goldstein would teach the Free Synagogue approach to a new generation of rabbis, through courses such as “Social Problems, the Synagogue and Social Service,” “The Hospital and Social Service” and “The School and Social Service,” in which he introduced theory as well as practice, bringing in leaders from Jewish agencies around New York who could share the methods they found most effective in addressing the issues plaguing the city’s Jewish community.

Goldstein also developed an expertise in pastoral care, and introduced students to developing research in fields including marriage and sexuality, psychology and mental illness, and alcohol abuse.\textsuperscript{385}

Goldstein expressed high hopes for the Institute. Imbued with Wise’s spirit, he believed JIR would create “a reconstruction of our spiritual life and the vision through which Israel is to be redeemed” and, further, it would help Jewry bring about the redemption of humanity. Soon, he believed, all of American Jewry would offer Wise the same loyalty and support that those who knew him best felt deeply and gave gladly.\textsuperscript{386}

Additional Practitioners

Wise brought additional practitioners onto the faculty during this period, including several who shared his strong commitments to a more activist liberal Judaism and to Zionism.

\textsuperscript{384} Urofsky, \textit{A Voice that Spoke for Justice}, 69.
\textsuperscript{385} Goldstein worked in the early years with Dr. Jacob A. Goldberg whose area of expertise was working with "the insane." \textit{The Annual}, 1926, p. 18. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
\textsuperscript{386} Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, November 17, 1922. Box 16, folder 15, JIR Records.
Harry Lewis shared Goldstein’s social service ethos. Born and educated in England, Lewis at the time of JIR’s founding served as Chaplain of New York City, working primarily in the municipal prison system. While he continued to work in that capacity, Lewis joined the Institute during its first year as school chaplain. Lewis had a scholarly side, as well, and had published a number of works, including "Targum on Isaiah" (in Hebrew), "Jews in London," and “Liberal Judaism and Social Service.” Reputed to be a gentle and kind man, he quickly earned the affection of the students, and soon Wise promoted him.

Zionism was a particularly strong commitment of those in the field of Jewish education whom Wise hired to teach pedagogy and Hebrew. This was certainly true of Touroff, the educator from Boston whom Wise enlisted to head the Department of Modern Hebrew Literature and Language while developing a Department of Religious Education—however, to Wise’s regret, toward the end of the Institute’s first year Touroff realized he could not sustain the commute from Boston, and would not be able to join the faculty on a permanent basis for two more years. Still, he agreed to teach in the 1923 Summer School, where he offered “Principles of Jewish Education,” which explored the “problematic” separation of religion and nationalism in Jewish Education, as well as “The Hebrew Language in Jewish Education,” which focused on the role of “the living language of Jewish culture” in Jewish religion and nationalism.

A year later Wise hired Isaac Berkson, one of the “Benderly Boys” the Zionist educator Samson Benderly had taken under his wing at the Bureau of Jewish Education. A native New Yorker who earned his BA at City College and his doctorate at Columbia, Berkson brought experience in the field, and an innovative approach he was eager to share with the JIR students. A trained psychologist and educator, Berkson had served in several

387 The Annual, 1926, p. 10. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
388 JIR Board Minutes, April 2, 1923.
389 JIR Summer Session 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
leadership roles at the BJE and had taught at Columbia until 1921, when he moved to Europe and Palestine for two years. Known for his "Theories of Americanization" (1920), which had a strong influence on students at Columbia as well as JIR, in 1924 he began lecturing at the Institute on principles of Jewish education, while also teaching modern Jewish History at the Training School for Jewish Social Work.390

The same year Wise brought Berkson to JIR (1924-25), he also appointed on a visiting basis another Zionist faculty member, David Yellin, of Palestine. A native of Jerusalem, where he had devoted his career to the field of education and now served as principal of the Hebrew Teachers' College, Yellin became JIR's first Palestinian faculty member. A leading figure in the movement to revive the Hebrew language, he had helped create the Jewish National Library, compiled a Hebrew dictionary, and published several textbooks on Hebrew instruction while also devoting himself to political leadership in the Yishuv.391 While serving as a visiting professor at JIR in 1925, Yellin also lectured at Columbia University on Hebrew and Arabic literature, and then returned to Palestine to begin teaching at the newly inaugurated Institute for Jewish Studies at Magnes' university in Jerusalem.392

Another Zionist on the faculty was Abraham Binder, whom Wise hired to serve both as the Free Synagogue’s music director, and head of the Institute’s Department of Jewish Music. A composer and choral director trained at Columbia and the New York College of Music, Binder had a particular interest in what he called the national music of the Jewish people.393

391 The Jewish National Library would eventually be housed at the Hebrew University.
392 *The Annual*, 1926, p. 17. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
Recruiting Faculty from JTS and Dropsie College

Unlike Harvard and Yale, HUC and JTS showed no interest in cooperating with JIR in the area of faculty hiring, and Wise tread cautiously in relation to these institutions, which were predisposed against JIR. Indeed, just as Marmorstein had feared that spending a semester at the Institute as a visiting professor would lead to his dismissal from Jews’ College, faculty working under Cyrus Adler and Julian Morgenstern who had an interest in joining JIR in any capacity—teaching a summer school course, visiting and leading a discussion with the students, or more seriously exploring with Wise and the board the possibility of joining the full-time faculty—expressed a similar concern that doing so could cost them their job.

This concern had already arisen in the case of Kaplan who, as noted above, reported during negotiations in the spring of 1922 that Adler refused to allow him to teach even a six-session class at JIR. Though nothing came of the pre-founding negotiations, Wise and Kaplan remained friendly, and in the fall Kaplan agreed to attend the dinner honoring Perles and Elbogen, though initially he declined Wise’s invitation to speak.³⁹⁴ Wise, who had lined up Moore of Harvard and Arthur Cushman McGiffert of UTS to speak as well, urged Kaplan to reconsider. "You are the one man of the Seminary whom it is possible for me with self-respect to invite."³⁹⁵ Kaplan agreed, but when he rose to deliver his remarks at the dinner, he apparently forgot what he had planned to say. Reflecting on his failure, he wondered if the incident was a blessing in disguise. “It will once and for all teach me to recognize my limitations, and stop the negotiations between Wise and myself which have done me spiritually more harm than good.”³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ "Scholarship has unfortunately been with me nothing more than a suppressed wish," Kaplan wrote. "Let those to whom it has been a fulfilled desire speak in its behalf." Mordecai M. Kaplan to Stephen S. Wise, November 21, 1922. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.
³⁹⁶ Mel Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 270.
Nonetheless, Kaplan and Wise continued to enjoy a collegial relationship. When Wise
asked Kaplan to share with him confidentially information regarding JTS faculty salaries, for
example, Kaplan obliged.\footnote{Kaplan was paid $6,000 and he believed Ginzberg, Marx and Davidson were paid the same. Hyamson received $2,000 and Kaplan did not know what Levine and Finkelstein were paid. "Adler told me more than once that, had the Seminary been better situated financially, I would have long ago received an increase. I presume the same holds true of the other members of the faculty who find it hard to make ends meet on their present income." Mordecai M. Kaplan to Stephen S. Wise, January 25, 1923. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.} The words at the top of the SAJ letterhead on which Kaplan sent his response could only have reinforced for Wise their shared mission: "Dedicated to the interpretation and advancement of Israel's Torah, to the restoration of Israel's Ancient Land, and to the establishment of universal Freedom, Justice and Peace."\footnote{Ibid.}

In February, Wise invited Kaplan to teach a summer course on Psychology of the Jewish Religion, alongside Herford and Wolfson who would also be teaching in the summer session.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Mordecai M. Kaplan, February 23, 1923. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.} This time, Wise directly encountered the impact of Adler's opposition to JIR. "I regret that I cannot accept your kind invitation," Kaplan wrote. "I have learned that, as matters stand at present, both the authorities of the Seminary and my colleagues on the faculty would interpret my participation in the work of the JIR as an act of disloyalty to the Seminary."\footnote{Mordecai M. Kaplan to Stephen S. Wise, March 4, 1923. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.}

Kaplan’s ambivalence, however, remained, as did Wise’s desire to win his heart for the Institute. Yet another opportunity for negotiation emerged to the surprise of all, when the following July, Mack and Kaplan found themselves on the same steamer crossing the Atlantic to Europe, where Mack would be meeting with prospective JIR faculty and Kaplan planned to attend the Zionist Congress. Mack asked Kaplan point blank if he was still interested in joining the JIR faculty. Afraid of missing this chance to finally be freed from the
“hostile atmosphere of the Seminary,” Kaplan answered affirmatively. Mack cabled Wise, who immediately offered Kaplan a chair in Religious Education and Homiletics.401

When Kaplan returned to the US, as Scult reports, he learned of correspondence published in *The Light of Israel*, in which a critic urged Adler to dismiss Kaplan, calling him "a menace who teaches false doctrines" and "pernicious" instruction.402 Adler, rather than defending his faculty member, minimized Kaplan’s role at the Seminary as a mere homiletics instructor, and appeared ready to fire him. The prospect of joining an institution where his views were welcome became more enticing for Kaplan, and he continued the negotiations with JIR.403 While fourteen months earlier in response to Wise's initial offer he had not been ready to give up his position at the Seminary, Kaplan now told Wise, over the last few months he had grown willing, provided they work out the details. Kaplan wanted to teach the psychology of religion and the interpretation of Bible and Midrash, rather than religious education and homiletics, and Wise agreed immediately.404

Wise’s heart sang. Though he had been reluctant to meet again with Kaplan, now, with all that in the past, what mattered was that he was joining JIR.405 “I welcome you with all my heart for I believe that your coming will greatly strengthen the Institute and because I believe you will have what you have not had for a number of years--namely, a real opportunity to utter yourself with entire freedom and in the midst of a wholly congenial and free atmosphere of young men. I look upon you as a teacher and inspirer of youth and it is my

401 Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 270.
403 Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 270.
404 “I have been ready the last few months to consider an offer from you,” Kaplan told Wise. Mordecai M. Kaplan to Stephen S. Wise, July 1, 1923. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.
405 “You may recall that from the beginning,—nearly two years ago,—I had invited you and urged you to become co-founder of the Jewish Institute of Religion. I understood your viewpoint, and I respected it,” Wise told Kaplan. Since then, “I was somewhat reluctant to see you because every time we met I felt I had hurt you by pressing you unduly to ally yourself with the Institute and its work. I felt it was a tremendous problem for you.” Stephen S. Wise to Mordecai M. Kaplan, July 26, 1923. Box 22, folder 11, JIR Records.
heart's desire to give you every opportunity to get into closest touch with the young men who are become the students of the Institute.

“The men get a great deal,—perhaps too much,—of analytical commentary upon the Bible. I want them to have from you what not a few of them have asked for," Wise wrote, "namely, a spiritual interpretation of the Bible such as I know you are fitted to give them." Wise hoped in time Kaplan would join him in visiting universities across the country to help recruit young men for the Institute. Kaplan expressed his gratitude to Wise, writing in August 1923, “it is just such whole-souled friendship that I have missed, and that I have been longing for in all the years of my work at the Seminary.”

Then, once again, Kaplan balked. According to Scult, he heard that lecturers at the Institute were rotated on and off the faculty without permanent appointments; in addition, Samson Benderley urged him not to join JIR, but to resign from JTS and start a new party that was neither Orthodox nor Reform. Kaplan decided to take Benderly’s advice, and shared his plans with Wise, even showing him the letter of resignation he planned to submit to Adler.

However, once again, at the behest of SAJ board members Kaplan chose not to resign. Instead, he wrote Adler challenging the claim that he did little more at the Seminary than teach students to assemble sermons. In response, Adler explained that his main objective had been to make it clear in The Light of Israel that Kaplan’s theological views did not represent those of the Seminary. Acknowledging his deep disagreements with Kaplan, Adler then raised the issue of academic freedom. He believed in academic freedom, he said, but he

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406 Ibid.
408 Scult, Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century, 271.
questioned how far it applied in a seminary, where faith, tradition and even prejudice had a rightful place.  

Wise later conjectured that Kaplan withdrew his acceptance because the heads of the Society for the Advancement of Judaism urged him to do so. Still, relations between Kaplan and Wise remained cordial, and when Blau suddenly resigned in the fall of 1923, Kaplan agreed to cover his courses in Midrash until the arrival of Blau’s replacement. Perhaps Adler allowed this in an effort to give Kaplan a bit more latitude, given his clear ambivalence about remaining at the Seminary.

Kaplan’s ambivalence endured.  

**Recruiting Faculty from HUC**

While Cyrus Adler’s antipathy toward JIR cast a shadow over these 1923 negotiations with Kaplan (and, earlier, with Margolis in the spring of 1922), the same could not be said of negotiations between JIR and Henry Slonimsky, a faculty member at HUC—for, whereas both Kaplan and Margolis valued their ties with Adler and the institutions they served under his direction, Slonimsky appeared perfectly willing to cut his ties with the College and its head, Julian Morgenstern. In this case, Wise was the one urging caution in negotiations and wary of doing anything that might further chill already icy relations with Cincinnati. For Slonimsky, who felt no ambivalence about coming to JIR and held reasonable expectations regarding his compensation package, working out an arrangement proved relatively simple. Yet, as discrete as Wise was in discussions with Kaplan and Margolis, he was all the more cautious in Slonimsky's case and did everything possible to prevent any semblance of poaching an HUC faculty member.

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409 Scult, *Judaism Faces the Twentieth Century*, 271.
411 Negotiations would resume once again in late 1926.
Slonimsky until now had led a somewhat nomadic life. Born in Russia, he came to the US in 1890 as a child of six, and attended the Philadelphia public schools. After studying at Haverford for one year, he transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, where he remained for two years until, feeling “intellectually constrained by Philadelphia,” Slonimsky made a sudden move to Berlin. A year later he moved to Marburg, where in 1905 he pursued graduate study in philosophy at the University of Marburg, working under the philosopher Hermann Cohen. In 1912 Slonimsky earned his PhD at Marburg, and moved to Paris, where he met Ezra Pound and became a member of his circle. Soon thereafter, in the spring of 1912, he moved to London where he developed a lifelong friendship with the poets Aldington and H.D.412

Upon returning to the US, Slonimsky began teaching, first as Lecturer in Philosophy at Columbia in 1914-15, then for six years as Instructor and Associate in Philosophy at Johns Hopkins where, like Margolis, Slonimsky became a veteran of divisive school politics. For Slonimsky, the issue pertained to his leftist politics and particularly his pacifism, which led him to run afoul of the university administration during World War I, and ultimately to submit his resignation.413 Jacob Billikopf, director of the Federation of Jewish Charities in Philadelphia who often advised Wise on matters related to fundraising, later told Wise that when Johns Hopkins accepted Slonimsky’s resignation, “a thousand students signed a

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petition clamoring for his retention…he was extraordinarily popular and had a wonderful hold on the student body.  

From Baltimore, Slonimsky took a position running a Jewish settlement house in Cincinnati, where HUC invited him to deliver a course of lectures. Soon thereafter, in the spring of 1921, the College appointed him full-time as Professor of Jewish Education and Ethics.

However, as had been the case in Philadelphia years earlier, Slonimsky found the atmosphere in Cincinnati stifling, and lacking the intellectual stimulation he enjoyed, he craved returning East. This, at least, was the report Albert M. Greenfield, a high school classmate of Slonimsky’s, passed on to Billikopf, who shared it with Wise. Greenfield had “a fabulous income” and was prepared to underwrite a salary for Slonimsky at JIR, Billikopf added, if Wise felt he would be of use on the faculty. Billikopf, assuming Slonimsky had asked Greenfield to subvent the position, urged Wise to consider the possibility. Not only would JIR gain a faculty member at no expense, but the donor, who for now was solely concerned with helping his friend, might over time take a deeper interest in the Institute.

Wise immediately expressed interest in the idea, but insisted on keeping negotiations quiet. “Even though universities have the habit of calling men from one Faculty to another, we naturally are chary of doing anything that may seem to be unfraternal in relation to Cincinnati,” he told Billikopf.

That summer Slonimsky shared with Billikopf his discontent with HUC and the Reform movement: Jews were growing rich “by none too fastidious methods,” he said, and as a highly visible ethnic group, they were becoming the target of deepening resentment among

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414 “He could not get along with the head of the department, Prof. Lovejoy,” Billikopf told Wise.” Jacob Billikopf to Stephen S. Wise, January 29, 1923. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.

415 Ibid.


417 Jacob Billikopf to Stephen S. Wise, January 29, 1923. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.

418 Stephen S. Wise to Jacob Billikopf, April 3, 1923. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.
the general population. Yet, he despaired, they were too “empty and hollow” to be able to offer moral resistance. Now, in attempting to move forward, American Jewry had a stark choice to make. “If it be the Isaac M. Wise tradition we are lost, doomed to contempt from without and misery within,” Slonimsky wrote. “If it be the Bialik-Achad Haam tradition, we can stand up before God and man.”

Perhaps Slonimsky’s hyperbole stemmed from nostalgia for the East, and frustration with his midwestern surroundings, which did not suit him.

At this early stage Wise chose to keep negotiations unofficial and in Billikopf’s hands rather than reaching out to Slonimsky himself, citing “the delicacy of relations which has obtained—as far as any obtain—between the other seminaries and ourselves.”

As a next step, in the summer of 1923 Slonimsky visited JIR and met with a group of Goldstein’s summer session students. Apparently all went well—the students enjoyed the meeting, though when Goldstein attempted to persuade Slonimsky to meet with them again, he refused, saying it would lead to too many embarrassing misunderstandings with Cincinnati. “He is less of an echo and more of a real voice than most of the men we have with us at present,” Goldstein told Wise. “He has a charming and genuinely religious personality and ought to be a member of the staff of the Institute.”

Slonimsky told Wise he had given HUC his word that he would stay another year, but then he wanted to leave.

Six months later, in January, Slonimsky met Wise in New York. Kohler had recently given Slonimsky’s course in theology to another faculty member with views more consistent with the president’s. “I am not happy at Cincinnati,” Wise recorded Slonimsky saying. “I do not belong to their guild. I have no complaint to make, but I am not at home there. They suspect me. They dread me as a radical, and, above all, as a nationalist. No one is happy or

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419 Henry Slonimsky to Jacob Billikopf, July 17, 1923. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.
420 Stephen S. Wise to Jacob Billikopf, January 22, 1924. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.
421 Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, July 10, 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
doing his best at Cincinnati. There is no real freedom there. They are bigoted as a result of their dogmatism. They are not alive. You are. The Institute is. One feels the breath of freedom within your Institute. I am ready to come to you if you still wish to have me. By this time, Wise had Greenfield’s commitment to pay Slonimsky’s salary, but to protect JIR, Slonimsky wanted no invitation to be extended until he submitted his resignation to HUC, which—if Wise agreed to hire him—he planned to do immediately.

Lee Frankel and Edmund Kaufmann worried about the repercussions of recruiting a faculty member from HUC, but at this point Wise no longer saw any reason to be cautious, and urged against being “governed by this fear or hesitation.” In late February, HUC’s Board of Governors accepted Slonimsky’s resignation, and in March Wise announced his appointment to JIR as Professor of Ethics and the Philosophy of Religion. Students in Cincinnati did not receive the news well and, like those at Johns Hopkins years earlier, petitioned the Board and faculty, and Slonimsky himself, to reconsider. A student editorial in the HUC Monthly of May 1924 included the following:

Though he was with us for but a comparatively brief period, he has influenced us profoundly. To attempt to phrase a description of his colorful personality would indeed be presumptuous. We are grateful for the impress of his singular character. If there is any one preeminent quality which has endeared him to us, it is that surpassing honesty of intellect which drives directly and fearlessly to the heart and essence of truth; which refuses to flee to the cover of that familiar theological refuge-cave known as ‘Inscrutable Wisdom.’ Dr. Slonimsky recognizes that the skeptical attitude, far from being the symptom of a diseased brain, is the symbol of a healthy mind at work—’that doubt is the primary requisite of faith….’ He fostered within us a world-inclusive sympathy, a Weltschmerz, which embraces the travails of all men. He loves and lives for Judaism, not a mixed-breed or sectarian Judaism, but Judaism as an ethic and a modus vivendi. The overpowering mastery of his presence in the classroom; the logic, the lucidity and the sincerity with which he presented his subject must always

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422 Memo of meeting of Stephen S. Wise with Henry Slonimsky, January 29, 1924. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.
423 Wise recalled that recently Frankel and Bloch had been at a dinner for New York supporters of HUC, where the speeches included repeated references to cooperating with “all” seminaries—yet, though Revel’s Orthodox Yeshiva was mentioned, not a single reference was made to JIR. “Since we are dealt with as if we were non-extant,” Wise told Mack, “I do not feel that we are under any special obligation to regard the amenities which are not even binding upon institutions that are in friendly relationships to each other.” Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, January 29, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
remain vivid in the minds of his students. The breadth and depth of his culture will live on with those of us who are fortunate to know him intimately.424

Slonimsky joined the JIR faculty in the fall of 1924, and quickly took on additional responsibilities, serving as faculty representative to the Board of Trustees, for example, and co-teaching a course with Wise at Columbia to cover for Gottheil, who was on sabbatical. A year later, with the support of JIR’s faculty and board, Wise appointed Slonimsky Dean.425

When Slonimsky came to JIR, he joined other politically outspoken Americans on the faculty, particularly in the fields of Education and Social Service. “These subjects are usually neglected in theological schools,” Slonimsky would write later, citing the danger of treating them “in a milk-and-water, hortatory fashion.”426 JIR sought men in these fields who had devoted themselves not only to the study of social and communal problems, but also to finding practical ways of addressing those problems, particularly in urban life.

Librarian

In addition to teaching faculty, Wise needed a librarian. Though he had no intention of competing with the two outstanding Jewish collections that existed locally at JTS and the New York Public Library, Wise nonetheless wanted a serious scholar to occupy the position and oversee acquisitions.427 As early as January 1922 the nucleus of the collection was already established, through purchase of the library of Marcus Brann of Breslau, who had succeeded Heinrich Graetz at the Jewish Theological Seminary there, combined with the donation Wise made to the Institution of his private collection. Soon after, Gerson Levi sent the books and manuscripts of his father-in-law, Emil Hirsch, and Kohut contributed part of his father’s collection, along with duplicates from the Yale University Library where he had

425 At this point Slonimsky’s nomadic journey ended, as he remained on the JIR faculty until 1952. His wife died soon after they moved from Cincinnati to New York.
426 Henry Slonimsky, “The Jewish Institute of Religion,” The Jewish Education News 1, no. 9 (June 1926). JIR Nearprint Box 1.
donated most of his father’s collection in 1915, and a number of Hebrew manuscripts from
the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in his own possession. Over the ensuing months and
years, JIR would acquire additional private collections, often from American rabbis such as
Samuel Mendelsohn of Wilmington, North Carolina, whose personal library Gottheil helped
secure for JIR in 1922.

In the summer of 1922, Wise hired Joshua Bloch, a young scholar becoming widely-
published on the Peshitta and higher biblical criticism, as the Institute’s part-time librarian.
Born in Lithuania in 1890, Bloch had immigrated to the US and attended HUC and the
University of Cincinnati, as well as Columbia University and JTS, before earning his PhD at
New York University. When early in 1922 the University of Texas in Austin offered him a
professorship, which also entailed working with the school’s Menorah and B’nai B’rith
groups, Bloch gave the position serious consideration, for though he preferred to remain in
New York, he also needed more income than he could earn through his current employment
at Bloch Publishing. Wise decided to make a counter-offer, for he recognized Bloch would
make an excellent librarian and, given his growing reputation as a scholar, he could also
teach Biblical Literature. Particularly pleased that Bloch enjoyed the confidence of young
rabbis in New York who consulted him frequently, Wise assured the faculty that his

428 Kohut later told Louis Grossmann he regretted giving his library to Yale, and urged Grossmann to
donate his book collection to JIR. “My own library, the bulk of which as you know went to Yale,
dwindles into insignificance in comparison. I now regret that I made it over to that university as a gift
as I could have made a far better disposition of it from the point of view of practical utilization. It is
for this reason that I make bold to urge you to consider the suggestion I wish to make to you: The
Jewish Institute of Religion, recently founded…is anxious to acquire a well selected working
library…it has occurred to me quite spontaneously in the course of my writing to you that you would
be receptive to the idea of parting with your library since your health has been so impaired as to make
close application to study practically impossible.” Alexander Kohut to Louis Grossmann, April 25,
1923. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records.
429 Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science, s.v. “Seminary Libraries;” and Stephen S. Wise
to Richard Gottheil, December 12, 1922; and, MMBOT, Executive Committee minutes, December
18, 1922. Box 16, folder 18, JIR Records.
430 “Dr. Joshua Bloch, Rabbi, Author, 67, Chief of Jewish Division of Public Library Until 1956
Nearprint Box 1.
association with the Institute would “strengthen their faith in our movement,” and in July Bloch agreed to an arrangement that entailed part-time work at Bloch Publishing as well as JIR.\footnote{Excerpt from Faculty Meeting minutes, July 13, 1922. Box 3, folder 14, JIR Records.}

That the Institute needed its own library for JIR students was confirmed for Wise in the early fall, just weeks after opening day. It seems Elbogen had begun to make use of the JTS library, under the impression that Alexander Marx, the librarian there, had agreed to open the facility to JIR’s teaching staff and student body. Hoping this was the case, Wise wrote Marx to thank him for this “academic hospitality.”\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Alexander Marx, November 11, 1922. Box 22, folder 3, JIR Records.} Marx’s response, however, was less than hospitable. While JTS welcomed Elbogen’s use of the library, he told Wise, and the Reading Room and facilities were open to all serious students, those not connected to JTS could not borrow books without special permission from the Librarian—which Marx did not suggest would be forthcoming.\footnote{Alexander Marx to Stephen S. Wise, November 16, 1922. Box 22, folder 3, JIR Records.}

The following summer, Wise arranged for Bloch to travel to Europe to spend two thousand dollars on books, providing him with book lists the faculty had compiled, and instructing him to cable for permission from the board should an extraordinary opportunity arise that entailed spending more.\footnote{JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24, 1923.} Meanwhile, Wise agreed to continue the shared arrangement with Bloch Publishing Company for another year, and to provide Bloch with a Library Assistant, Ralph Marcus, who had grown up in the Free Synagogue and was now studying at the Institute.\footnote{JIR Board Minutes, Administration Committee, June 9, 1923.}

On the morning of October 2, 1923 the New York Jewish scholarly community suffered a major loss when Abraham Solomon Freidus, who had built the Jewish Room of the New York Public Library, died suddenly of a heart attack at the foot of the Library stairs on his way to work. A well-known figure in New York’s scholarly and cultural world, at his
funeral the next day many of the city’s Jewish scholars and writers eulogized him. Wise immediately offered to lend Joshua Bloch to the NYPL until its director, Edwin Anderson, could make permanent arrangements for a successor to Freidus. Bloch, familiar with the Division, agreed to serve temporarily, and Anderson promised he would not impose on the Institute’s generosity. Anxious to hire a scholar who would continue to develop the Division into an important force in American Jewish culture, and eager to make the Jews of New York proud, Anderson turned to Wise, among others, for guidance.

In mid-November, Wise and Gottheil met with Anderson to discuss possible candidates. Anderson shared the suggestions Marx and Adler at JTS had made, and then Wise put forth his own: Hebrew Union College’s Adolph Oko had transformed an insignificant collection at the College into a great library, and had the force of personality to turn the Division into a major Jewish cultural center. Wise urged Anderson to bring Oko to New York for an interview, and suggested that perhaps if hired, Oko could also help supervise the JIR library in its beginnings. They discussed Bloch, as well. Wise spoke of his earnestness and competence, but as he was not yet a major scholar, none of the men felt sure he could accomplish the task.

Two weeks later, Anderson told Wise that Oko and Bloch were both under consideration for the position. Wise again recommended Oko, and recognizing the NYPL might not be able to pay him an adequate salary, offered to supplement Oko’s income with part-time work directing the JIR library.

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In the meantime, Kohut agreed to run the library at the Institute in Bloch’s absence. Books were flowing in—Gottheil was about to donate about a hundred and fifty volumes from his late father’s library, and Gerson Levi was shipping several cases of books from the late Emil Hirsch’s library. These gifts were critical, for the Institute had little money to build its collection. When the seminary in Vienna offered to sell its duplicates, for example, the JIR board could not warrant the expenditure in light of the tight budget.439

Pleased with Bloch, who had quickly fixed some of Freidus’ omissions and straightened out the NYPL holdings, Anderson within just a few months decided to appoint him Chief of the Jewish Division. Expressing his appreciation to Wise, Anderson said he would not have proceeded thus had Wise not assured him he had no objections. “I should feel very much chagrined if we appeared to be annexing a loan without your full consent,” he wrote. When he asked that Bloch be freed of his JIR responsibilities as quickly as possible, Wise, who had hoped Bloch could retain both posts, agreed.440

With the JIR position now open, the JIR board discussed reaching out to Oko in Cincinnati. Not everyone believed the Institute’s library required a librarian of Oko’s stature; Mack felt that if JIR’s library were comparable to JTS’s or HUC’s, Oko would be ideal, but since that was not the case, the Institute ought to prioritize hiring teachers. Frankel suggested a compromise—engage Oko as Librarian, and have him lecture during his first year in order to test his teaching ability.441 The board agreed, but when Mack reached out to Oko, he demanded a salary of $9,000. JIR could not meet this, Oko refused to back down, and the negotiations ended.

For the time being, Kohut would continue to oversee the library, with young Ralph Marcus in the position of Assistant Librarian.

439 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, November 28, 1923.
441 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, March 18, 1924.
Non-Resident Lecturers and Speakers

Part of Wise’s vision entailed projecting JIR into the center of Jewish life, and creating a lively intellectual hub where notable figures would feel at home, and students, faculty and the general public could engage with a wide range of contemporary thinkers, secular as well as religious, Jewish as well as non-Jewish. To that end, Wise regularly invited scholars, rabbis and ministers, and prominent communal leaders such as Felix Adler and Louis Brandeis to speak at the school either during the day with the faculty and students, or in the evening through the Institute’s lecture series for the general public. He also brought them in to teach, either in the summer school or during the year in extension courses on subjects related, for example, to Jewish history or Hebrew language. Though some visitors, no doubt, had only a limited opportunity to make an impression on students, others had a sufficiently sustained presence to achieve a greater impact. Philip Bernstein ’26 recalled that while he was a student at the Institute, John Haynes Holmes as well as Felix Adler became important mentors for him.

Opportunities for major lectures at the Institute included the school’s annual opening and closing ceremonies where, at the faculty’s request and with the board’s approval, Wise invited speakers of national or international stature.

Christians Scholars and Ministers

Beginning with the summer schools that preceded the school's founding and continuing through the early twenties, Wise invited to serve as visiting faculty Christian scholars who, in his view, rejected longstanding anti-Semitic treatment of Jewish as well as Christian subject matter, generally related to the biblical or rabbinic periods. For example, to teach in the opening fall semester, he retained George Foot Moore and Kersop Lake, both of Harvard, and

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442 Faculty Meeting minutes, December 28, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
that spring he proposed a category called “non-resident faculty,” to include scholars who might offer a course from time to time, and invited F. J. Foakes-Jackson of Union Theological Seminary, Kirsopp Lake of the Harvard Divinity School, and R. Travers Herford, a prominent British Unitarian minister with an expertise in rabbinic literature. 444 “We want the students of the Institute to sit under fair-minded and learned Christian teachers,” Wise told Jackson in the spring of 1922. 445 In ensuing years he brought Moore repeatedly, as well as David Gordon Lyon, also of Harvard, and others. 446

After designating Herford as the chief lecturer in the Summer School of 1923, Wise alerted the Jewish press and urged prominent coverage of Herford’s arrival, hoping to introduce the British scholar to his American Jewish and Christian colleagues. 447 “A sympathetic and impartial friend of Jew and Judaism,” Wise wrote for the American Hebrew, Herford “stands out as the vindicator of Pharisaism and the Pharisees.” 448 Wise also arranged a welcome luncheon for Herford, just as he had for Elbogen and Perles, and had Frankel invite New York’s Jewish elite, including Oscar and Simon Straus, Louis Marshall, Irving and Arthur Lehman, and others. 449

Wise brought to the Institute prominent ministers, as well, including seminary leaders such as Willard Learoyd Sperry, dean of Harvard Divinity School, and clergy active in progressive causes. Sometimes the students had input. Wise told Holmes in April of 1925,

446 Henry Slonimsky, “The Jewish Institute of Religion,” The Jewish Education News 1, no. 9 (June 1926). JIR Nearprint Box 1.
449 Though Marshall could not attend, he wrote Frankel, “Ever since I first read his noble defense of pharisaism (I have since re-read it several times) I have entertained the hope of meeting him and of expressing my admiration and recognition for his scholarship...and above all his sense of justice and his devotion to truth.” Louis Marshall to Lee K. Frankel, August 2, 1923, and luncheon invitation list, July 29, 1923. Box 19, folder 6, JIR Records.
“My boys are…beseeching me to get you to come and meet with them. Won't you?” A few days later, Wise wrote Holmes again to share the students’ delight that Holmes had agreed, and their preference that rather than speaking on ‘Can Jews and Christians Worship Together,’ which they had already heard, they wanted him to address the question, ‘Is the Ministry Worth While and What Makes It Worth While?’

**Rabbis and Other Jewish Leaders**

Wise also involved local rabbis and Jewish communal leaders in the life of the school, as guest speakers and, on occasion, as instructors for some of the more practical subjects. During the first year, in addition to arranging public lectures by visiting faculty Elbogen and Perles, Wise invited Reuben Brainin, the Zionist and Hebrew literary historian, to speak on the significance of modern Hebrew literature, as well as Hirsch Chajes of Vienna. In the 1923-24 academic year, Rabbi Israel Goldstein addressed the situation of the Jews in Germany, and Rabbi Gerson Levi shared with the students a critique of the Social Gospel thinker Walter Rauschenbach.

Students also benefited from the Free Synagogue’s active lecture programs, which included the prominent leaders Wise invited to speak at the Carnegie Hall Sunday morning service he led, as well as those invited by the Women’s Organization, who tended to bring more politically leftwing speakers. At times, guest preachers addressed the students at Saturday afternoon services held at the Synagogue, such as Rabbi Gerson Levi, who delivered a sermon in September 1924 on divergent pressures in the American Jewish community that impeded meaningful religious experience. On the one hand, young American

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452 Faculty Meeting minutes, October 8, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
Jews were enticed to climb upward in social and economic status, he said; at the same time, others, including some of the JIR students, were being pulled leftward, toward socialism. “The social has become the consecrating word; the social worker the real messenger of the divine. But the social alone is not adequate,” he said. “Social justices, social graces are not always ethical virtues…the complete materialistic working out of wage and time, of work and play, may leave man no higher at the end than at the beginning.” True, real religion reaches God through service to one’s fellow man; at the same time, materialistic economics aside, individuals also need religious experience and values in order to find fulfillment, and ascend in the upward climb toward God.\textsuperscript{454}

A number of local rabbis supported the Institute from the start. Nathan Krass, Central Synagogue’s rabbi at the time of JIR’s founding and beginning in 1923 at Congregation Emanu-El, taught Homiletics.\textsuperscript{455} Maurice Harris of Temple Israel served on JIR’s board.\textsuperscript{456} Louis Newman, Wise’s former assistant at the Free Synagogue whom Wise and Rabbi Martin Meyer privately ordained in 1918,\textsuperscript{457} helped with fundraising and with the course Wise taught at Columbia in the fall of 1924 while Gottheil was on sabbatical.\textsuperscript{458} At the time, Gottheil hoped this kind of collaboration might serve as an entrée for JIR to become Columbia's divinity school. J. Max Weis, rabbi of the Washington Heights Free Synagogue and an HUC-ordained rabbi, taught at the Institute as well.\textsuperscript{459}

One area of practical rabbinics proved a particular challenge. Who would teach homiletics? That is, who would have the hubris to teach preaching under the watchful eye of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, one of the great orators in the nation and the American rabbinate? To provide instruction in preaching as well as Midrash, during JIR’s first year Wise engaged Joel

\textsuperscript{454} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{455} The Annual, 1926, p. 14. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
\textsuperscript{456} Ibid., 16.
\textsuperscript{457} Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 142.
\textsuperscript{458} The course was "Jewish Factors in Civilization." JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, February 27, 1924.
Blau, an HUC graduate and rabbi of New York's Temple Peni-El. Blau set out optimistic and excited about the potential of the Institute; soon, however, he began to complain about his compensation and status, and Wise expressed misgivings about his teaching of Homiletics. Blau wanted students to imitate his own homiletical style, Wise felt, and he informed Blau that Homiletics could not be taught such that practically every sermon preached by a member of the student body appeared to imitate the mannerisms of the Homiletics teacher. "I am not trying to mould the Institute in my own image, and I do not propose to permit the students to be moulded after the image of one member of the Faculty," Wise told Blau. “One Blau may be admirable, but a hundred little imitations of Blau would be undesirable, as they are quite unthinkable."  

The Homiletics instructor understood the issue differently. Frustrated at not receiving a full-time appointment, Blau accused Wise of discriminating against him because of his conservative political views. Wise denied this but tensions grew, and after two years of teaching, when Blau requested a more prestigious appointment as well as a raise, Wise assigned his Homiletics course to another instructor. At that point, in September 1924, Blau quit.

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462 Ibid.
463 Blau wrote Wise, “I hereby tender my resignation from the position I held in your Institute from the day of its opening two years ago. My reason is what I must regard as your unfair treatment of me: particularly, your refusal, despite my qualifications and service to the Institute, to give me a commensurate standing in faculty. Your crowning injury is that you have taken the Homiletical work out of my hands, without previous consultation with me, without subsequent notification…courtesy demanded that this be undertaken only after talking the matter over with me. At all events, I deem it impossible, in the circumstances, to continue my work at the Jewish Institute of Religion. In severing my connection with it, however, I do so as a friend. I will always be ready, within the limits of my power, to promote its interests." Joel Blau to Stephen S. Wise, September 25, 1924. Box 3, folder 11, JIR Records.
Curriculum

By the fall of 1924, JIR’s faculty began to stabilize as many of the Europeans including Elbogen, Perles, Abrahams, Blau and others had already come and gone, either by their own volition or because Wise deemed them not a good fit. Wise took pride in the mix of scholars he had succeeded in attracting in the first two years of the Institute’s existence, from Germany, Austria, Hungary, England, Russia, Palestine as well as the United States. Updating Louis Grossmann on the faculty situation, Wise said he now had Obermann (a great scholar, but an "unusual teacher") and Reuben Levy of Oxford in Bible, "Rav Zair" in Talmud, Isaac Kandel of Columbia’s Teachers College in education, and David Yellin, "the outstanding Jew of Palestine, a rare Hebraist and Arabist." With Blau's resignation, JIR even had Mordecai Kaplan temporarily on staff, filling Blau’s place in Midrash for a brief interim. Slonimsky, Wise said, was "making himself loved," and Harry Lewis, chaplain, had proven to be an unusually effective teacher. Rabbi Nathan Krass of Central Synagogue and Wise were now teaching homiletics together, and no doubt mindful of his criticism of Blau, Wise added "I promise you we shall not try to duplicate our inimitable selves--for God knows one Krass is enough and one Stephen Wise is more than enough." Goldstein was building a Social Service curriculum, and at least one Christian scholar taught each semester, as well. Wise never stopped looking for faculty—he considered Leo Baeck that fall, for example, but the schedule was so full, he decided against, and deferred to the following year some of the men he already had engaged, including Lyon and Jackson.

The high spiritedness of Wise’s report may have had as much to do with Wise’s perception that a tumultuous period of faculty discord was possibly, finally, drawing to a close, as with his optimism regarding the positive traits of the group now coalescing. For, as successful as Wise had been attracting these scholars to 68th Street, the battles that ensued

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during the period 1922-24 exposed the faculty’s disappointment in the quality of their students, and frustration with one another.

One of the few women students enrolled at the Institute, Irma Lindheim, recalled the situation later. “After the first year, the Institute became a seething mass of internal politics. Dr. Blau favored the homiletically inclined and became Obermann’s bitter enemy. Blau poisoned Wolfsohn [sic] against Obermann before he came to the Institute as a teacher and the whole thing came to a head in the first battle over the curriculum.

“I remember it as if it were yesterday,” she wrote. “I used to hear all sides. It was in the development of the curriculum that the fundamental differences between the way the Institute had been planned on paper and the way it later developed, first appeared.”

At the Institute’s first faculty meeting, held just after the opening day of classes in October 1922, the faculty approved a new name for JIR: Beit Hamidrash leChochmat Yisrael. Blau had requested that a Hebrew name for JIR be designated, and the appellation captured well his vision for JIR as a force for the conservation of Jewish tradition. More evocative than the charter’s description of JIR as “a School of Training for the Jewish Ministry, Research, and Community Service,” this name provided a Hebrew identity, while simultaneously placing the Institute within a traditional framework of Jewish learning as well as a modern one: the beit midrash, or house of study, dating back to the early rabbinic period had been the locus of traditional Torah study within synagogues and yeshivot, where Jewish men studied classical texts, particularly Talmud, codes and commentaries, as a religious enterprise; on the other hand, among contemporary Eastern European Jews the term chochmat yisrael, literally “the wisdom of Israel,” had become a broad term of reference for modern scholarship of the kind produced by Wissenschaft des Judentums.

466 Faculty Meeting minutes, October 11, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
That approval of the name did not indicate consensus regarding its implications for
the JIR curriculum became evident in ensuing years as the faculty debated fundamental
questions regarding the nature of this supposed *beit midrash*. Blau may have sought a center
for traditional learning, but others shared the desire of Gottheil and Mack for JIR to become a
center for high level *Wissenschaft* scholarship, and still others prioritized practical rabbinical
training. The faculty differed, too, over the precise content of *chochmat yisrael*—should the
curriculum place primary emphasis on Jewish literature in the traditional sense, modern
theoretical approaches to the study of religion, or the professional skills necessary in the
contemporary American rabbinate?

Finally, what educational method would work best? As early as the fall of 1922, as
soon as the faculty encountered actual students in their classrooms and realized their
strengths and, more acutely, their weaknesses, disagreements flared over learning and
teaching modalities, as well as admissions and graduation requirements.

*Beit Midrash, Wissenschaftlich Center or Seminary*

Prior to the school’s opening, the founding board made few determinations regarding
the curriculum, intentionally leaving it to the faculty. The 1921 Free Synagogue Committee
outlined only a rudimentary plan: the course of study would entail three years of graduate-
level coursework, during which students would not be allowed to take on additional
employment or university studies in order that they devote themselves fully to completing
their JIR requirements, which included academics as well as practical work in the ministry.\(^{467}\)

By opening day, the faculty had fleshed out a plan for the students' first two years of
study. Courses included subject matter customarily offered at all Jewish seminaries, as well
as coursework new to rabbinical training. Like HUC and JTS, the Institute offered Bible,
history, Talmud, homiletics, and the Aramaic necessary for comprehension of rabbinic texts.

\(^{467}\) Dinner Meeting of Committee on Jewish Institute of Religion minutes, n.d. [ca. 1921]. Box 11,
folder 11, JIR Records.
Innovations included instruction in modern Hebrew, and the Institute’s particular approach to religious education and social service. According to the original curriculum, students in their first year took Hebrew, Biblical Literature, Medieval Literature, History, Religion, Synagogue Religious Education, and Social Service; in the second year they took Psalms, Talmud, Midrash, Aramaic and Homiletics; in their third year, they would prepare for final exams and write a thesis.\(^{468}\) Initially the faculty stipulated that thesis subjects had to pertain to *Judische Wissenschaft*; later, after much discussion, they acceded to Goldstein’s outlook for the school and permitted students to write on contemporary issues as well, as long as the subject matter related to “a phase of Jewish science or life.”\(^{469}\) The faculty refrained from articulating additional policies related to credits, residency, Chapel attendance, comprehensive exams required for graduation, and other matters until they had a chance to implement the curriculum with the first class of students. In the process, their competing philosophies and visions emerged with greater clarity.

**Attendance**

Within the very first weeks of school, they encountered a major disciplinary problem: students were arriving late to classes, and some were skipping them entirely.

The founders had assumed that JIR, by virtue of being a graduate school only, would attract a more mature lot and that the students, given their older age and higher education, would be capable of independent learning that required little supervision. But in October and November of 1922, poor attendance became the focus of faculty meetings, and the topic remained on the agenda for the duration of the academic year. Wise and Goldstein agreed to


\(^{469}\) Faculty Meeting minutes, November 2, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
speak with the students, and henceforth bells rang in the new building to mark the calling and dismissal of classes throughout the day.\footnote{Faculty Meeting minutes, October 18, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.}

The more contentious issue pertained to taking roll, which raised a philosophical question that would recur in other discussions over the course of the year. Most faculty supported a policy allowing a maximum of three unexcused absences for a student in any one course, and agreed to keep a daily record of attendance.\footnote{Faculty Meeting minutes, November 2, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.} When, despite this, the attendance problem persisted, the faculty decided that instead of taking attendance in each class, a general roll should be called before the daily morning Chapel service, and any student exceeding three absences during one term would receive a letter inquiring if he should be withdrawn.\footnote{Faculty Meeting minutes, November 16 and December 21, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.} By May, however, some faculty saw this system as overly strict, and began to balk. Obermann, in particular, opposed obligatory attendance, for if a graduate student did not feel obligated to attend class and get the maximum out of his studies, he believed no exercise of authority could superimpose such a commitment. "Our aim should not be to discipline the men," he said, "but to show them the way to science and research." Blau rejected Obermann’s call for dropping attendance requirements, and voiced the frustration they all felt—the students demonstrated a decidedly youthful attitude toward their work. While most of the faculty preferred a liberal system, they worried that too much latitude would only encourage irregular attendance. After considering a variety of options including taking roll in every class, issuing monthly reports on student attendance, requiring the worst offenders to face the whole faculty, and introducing surprise written exams, they agreed to pursue a system that combined student self-government with faculty calling roll, and deferred major changes until they could consult with the students.\footnote{Faculty Meeting minutes, May 24, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.} At the same time, in part to ensure better attendance, but also to provide the students more intimate contact with their
professors, the faculty asked Wise and Goldstein to meet individually with each student and to use their best judgment in assigning advisors.\textsuperscript{474}

In the spring semester, Harry Lewis raised a related concern regarding poor Chapel attendance—in this case, however, maturity and age could hardly be cited as a factor, as the laxity was not just on the part of the students but the faculty, as well. The Institute held services at 8:45am daily before the start of classes during the week, and shabbat services every Saturday morning.\textsuperscript{475} When Lewis complained about faculty negligence in abiding by the master schedule that listed the dates each member was assigned to attend, Wise suggested that Lewis speak with faculty members individually, probably trying to head off a mass rebellion against mandatory Chapel. Not all of the teaching staff, after all, had joined JIR out of an interest in synagogue life.\textsuperscript{476}

\textit{Faculty Debate the Curriculum}

Why they did join JIR, and just what they hoped the Institute would become, became the central theme in debates over the curriculum that ensued through the early twenties.\textsuperscript{477} The most significant question for the faculty (as for the board) centered on JIR’s core mission: was it a center for Wissenschaft scholarship, a rabbinical seminary, or a professional school? Advocates on all sides considered their vision vital to the future of American liberal Judaism, for neither a center devoted to high-level scholarship nor a seminary yet existed in the United States that embraced Zionism and called for a Hebrew renaissance—the elements

\textsuperscript{474} A year later, faculty had mixed reviews of the faculty advisory system. Lewis described his meetings with advisees as "slack time;" Levy said the men talked off point; Goldstein said they were unprepared for conferences and still clinging to the spirit of their vacation. Only Obermann felt the experiment had been successful. Ever the proponent for independent learning on the part of the students, he said some of his men had accomplished more during the break between Dec 21 and mid-January than they had during whole term. He felt the spirit of independence this work gave them was invaluable, in that it gave the men a feeling they were approaching the level of the faculty in their method of work. Faculty Meeting minutes, January 14, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{475} When the Institute first opened, they held a weekly 4pm shabbat afternoon service, but by December they changed that to a morning service. Faculty Meeting minutes, October 18, 1922 and December 21, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{476} Faculty Meeting minutes, November 2, 1922 and March 4, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{477} These debates continued into the 1930s.
so many JIR faculty, European as well as American, believed critical to reawakening Jewish life in the United States and Palestine.

Not surprisingly, the scholars—most visiting from Europe, but not all—promoted a Hochschule-like center for learning; by contrast, the practitioners—mainly American—promoted the Free Synagogue vision for a new kind of rabbinical school that in their view, unlike HUC and JTS, would focus on serving the needs of twentieth-century American Jewry.

Israel Abrahams took perhaps the most extreme stance among those advocating that JIR become a center for Jewish scholarship. The Institute must not be reduced to “a specialized training college,” he said, and urged abandoning the narrow idea of rabbinical training for something far more expansive—an institute for Jewish learning open to all who shared an interest in studying Judaism. This approach would attract the strongest candidates, he said, and once enrolled, they should be encouraged to choose among various professions. “Men who are thrown together only with those who are after the same vocation get into a rut and it has narrowing effects,” he told the faculty.478

Perles countered, arguing that such an institute for Jewish learning, aimed toward the lay public, would not generate the high level of academic coursework Abrahams sought. The Institute already offered plenty of Extension Courses which provided an opportunity for Jewish study to anyone interested, he said, but out of necessity, they tended to be popular in nature.479

Sidney Goldstein took a position diametrically opposed to Abrahams. Recognizing that the outcome of the debate would have implications on the selection of future faculty members, Goldstein stressed the importance of pedagogy as opposed to scholarship. The East

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478 Faculty Meeting minutes, February 2, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
479 JIR offered extension courses to the public through the late twenties, in some ways fulfilling Abrahams’ hope that the Institute would provide Jewish education not just to rabbinical students but to the broader community.
already had two research institutions, he told Wise—Dropsie College and JTS—and they filled a need JIR could not as long as the Institute lacked a significant library. JIR could, however, serve a different purpose. “What is needed now in the East is a teaching institution,” Goldstein told Wise, “in which men can be trained not primarily for research but for the Jewish ministry and religious education and community service.”

As he had when the board disputed the mission of JIR, Wise proved open and flexible in relation to the faculty’s disagreement. Rather than seeing these views as mutually exclusive, he hoped the curriculum could serve both visions—the establishment of a scholarly center, but not at the expense of that which had motivated him from the beginning, the dream of transforming American rabbinical training. During JIR's first year, when certain faculty wanted to structure the curriculum to meet the needs of men interested in *Judische Wissenschaft* rather than the active ministry, he lent his support; at the same time, he also insisted that the practical training of rabbis (and social workers, too) required the participation of experts in the field—practitioners who had little in common with the *Wissenschaft* scholars he had imported from Europe, but who could teach about industrial relations or child welfare. In later years he would work closely with Sidney Goldstein to develop a program that would give the students the practical skills he believed American rabbis required. Wise successfully negotiated the tension by sanctioning each of the competing visions, reflected not in Blau’s *beit midrash*, but in the full name the school used

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481 According to minutes from the faculty meeting held in late December 1922, “Dr. Wise brought up the question of arranging the curriculum to provide for men who were interested in Jüdische Wissenschaft, rather than the active ministry. It was the concensus of opinion that this should be made one of the aims of the curriculum.” Faculty Meeting minutes, December 28, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
483 In October 1925, Wise and Goldstein convened a group of leaders from academe, the law, and the labor movement to consider how to “help men in the JIR to understand social and industrial problems which they will be called upon to face.” The group included Paul Kellogg, A.J. Muste, Julian W. Mack, Jerome Davis, Benjamin N. Cardozo, Horace Kallen. City Club meeting minutes, October 31, 1925. Box 6, folder 10, JIR Records.
at the time: *The Jewish Institute of Religion: A School of Training for the Ministry, Research and Community Service.*

**What Is “Chochmat Yisrael”?**

At the conclusion of the first semester, in January 1923, the faculty engaged in a heated debate over the extent to which Jewish literacy versus practical skills should be emphasized in the curriculum. Sidney Goldstein took the opening gambit by proposing that the curriculum as a whole, based on a traditional Jewish seminary curriculum rather than modern scientific principles and methods, did not reflect a coherent and integrated course of study but, instead, an attempt to incorporate piecemeal the wishes of the heads of JIR's various departments. Arguing that in its current form it placed far too great an emphasis on Jewish literature, which took up nearly half the school's instruction (52 hours out of a total of 120), he proposed a five-pronged call for change. First, he said, more time should be given to subjects necessary to equip men for serviceable ministry in the Jewish community—that is, to material they will actually use in their work. Secondly, since few students had yet studied religion in an academic framework, more time should be spent on the psychology of religion, the history of religion, and comparative religion. Thirdly, Goldstein wanted more time devoted to teaching the subject of education—students need training in the field of educational psychology, the principles and methods of pedagogy, lesson-planning, and curriculum-building. Fourth, more time should be given to the study of social problems, Jewish and non-Jewish, that students will inevitably confront in their communities, and they must become familiar with the solutions they may be called upon to implement. Finally, Goldstein argued that more time should be given to history; Jewish texts, by contrast, should

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The keeper of the minutes noted that, after much discussion, the committee hoped ultimately to have a JIR “where students can pursue irrelevant subjects.” The secretary’s characterization of subject matter unrelated to vocational training as "irrelevant" may have reflected the view of those on the faculty who, in contrast to Abrahams and others, prioritized the practical training students would need in order to minister to American Jewry. The question of how to balance scholarly material with practical skills training became the subject of lengthy debate amongst the faculty. Faculty Meeting minutes, January 4, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
be treated as source material, and intensive study should focus only on selected passages rather than the canon in its great breadth.

Not surprisingly, Goldstein’s call for change elicited strong reactions from other faculty. Elbogen agreed that JIR must abandon the traditional model of seminary training in favor of a new, more theoretical approach. However, he said, Goldstein failed to take into consideration the fact that while students came to JIR having already studied secular subjects like history, psychology and philosophy, by contrast, they brought virtually no background in Hebrew literature. Further, they could easily learn psychology and social service from textbooks, whereas they lacked the basic skills required to master topics in Jewish literature like Hebrew and Midrash. Therefore, in a direct challenge to Goldstein, he argued that JIR’s curriculum offered too little instruction in Jewish literature, rather than too much.

Joshua Bloch, too, sought greater emphasis on Hebrew literature, warning that if the Institute stressed the theory of religion and neglected Hebrew literature, its catalogue would resemble the catalogues of non-Jewish seminaries. If the students needed a stronger background in secular studies, they should take up this up in their leisure time. Other faculty quickly dismissed Bloch’s suggestion as inadvisable—the students had no leisure time.

While Goldstein proposed combining professional training with the study of contemporary theory, and Elbogen and Bloch preferred helping students to master Hebrew literature, Lewis and Blau took yet a different approach. Lewis identified two areas of focus most important for the students: knowledge of Hebrew, and knowledge of "what religion is." Lewis valued meaning; it was useless to study the problems of religion expressed a thousand years ago, he said, without understanding the significance of religion today. Should JIR teach Jewish history without regard for its deeper meaning, Lewis said, students would surely be

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485 Others despaired that, despite their university training, the students still lacked a sound secular background.
486 Others despaired that, despite their university training, the students still lacked a sound secular background.
dissatisfied and the school risked losing them. Though critical of the detached approach to study taken by other faculty, Lewis shared in the consensus that learning Jewish history required a working knowledge of the sources, and thus a working knowledge of Hebrew.

Helping the students find not just academic or practical meaning in the coursework, but religious meaning as well, also suited Blau. However, whereas Lewis made the case from a liberal Jewish perspective, Blau spoke as a traditional Jew who wanted JIR to become "a force for conservatism.” The curriculum should be based on tradition, he said, with an emphasis on "race knowledge and race memories."

In the debate over whether or not the faculty should teach psychology of religion and philosophy, and to what degree their focus should remain on instilling in students a thorough knowledge of Hebrew literature, Touroff's view that “knowledge of things Jewish must come before interpretation” ultimately prevailed. Jewish text study superseded theory. The curriculum, however, remained in flux, and many a faculty member continued to bemoan the students' lack of preparedness.

Once again, Wise took a characteristically flexible approach. JIR must be a school for the conservation and magnifying of Jewish learning, he said, but the men must also be adequately equipped to go out and serve the Jewish ministry. Further, he encouraged the faculty to view the curriculum as an experiment, to be left in a fluid state and subject to future modification. Just as he incorporated the faculty’s competing visions into the official name of the school, in the curriculum debate, too, Wise embraced their diverse viewpoints. JIR should teach traditional Jewish texts, he believed, with an eye toward their "magnification" and contemporary explication; at the same time, he defended the importance of teaching the practical skills Goldstein deemed critical.
Teaching Modalities

Collectively, the scholars and rabbis who comprised the JIR faculty in this period had experienced virtually every form of Jewish education available in Europe, the US and Palestine in the early twentieth century, including private study under the tutelage of a rabbi, traditional yeshivah learning, European and American seminary training (liberal as well as Orthodox), Wissenschaft research in the German and British university systems, as well as doctoral work in the American university system. Given the range of models of Jewish learning and scholarly training the faculty brought, it is hardly surprising that they disagreed over the best teaching modality for JIR.

Some questions posed less of a challenge than others. How many years of study should the Institute require for graduation? Should students with little background complete a preparatory year working on basic skills before beginning the program, and should advanced students be able to accelerate their studies? Could the faculty require summer coursework?

The deepest divide emerged in a debate over the relative merits of the German university model versus the American one, and in questions specific to certain disciplines, particularly Hebrew, homiletics and Social Service, including related topics pertaining to contemporary problems in modern Jewish life, the industrial economy, and ministry.

The first major change entailed lengthening the program, which the faculty began discussing at the end of the first semester when, after reviewing the offerings of each department, the possibility of requiring four rather than three years of study was raised as a way to address the problem of an overcrowded curriculum in which students were expected to complete 120 hours of coursework in three years.\(^\text{487}\) Wise said three of the best students now enrolled had expressed a willingness to devote an extra year to the work. Goldstein

\(^{487}\) Faculty Meeting minutes, December 28, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
favored making the fourth year optional, but few agreed. In response to a suggestion that they add eighteen weeks to the academic calendar by requiring students to attend three six-week summer sessions over the course of their tenure at the Institute, the majority of faculty objected, agreeing that the students, nearly all of whom were self-supporting—unlike the students at HUC who could depend on school stipends—needed to earn income each summer. In the fall of 1924, after much discussion, the board approved the faculty’s unanimous recommendation to change the length of the program from three to four years. They also considered adding a preparatory year, for even with the four-year term of study, they felt many students needed a year of study prior to beginning their work in the regular curriculum. Wise, however, rejected the idea. "JIR must remain outstandingly a graduate school," he said.488

While lengthening the program, the faculty also attempted to cut down the heavy courseload students carried, concerned that, over the course of each semester, the students were attending so many classes they were unable to complete all their assignments properly.489 A number of students, for their part, had voluntarily taken on additional coursework at other institutions, and faculty worried this impeded their JIR work.490 However, when the faculty attempted to place a cap of fifteen on the total number of credits students could take at one time, the students petitioned for greater flexibility. The faculty, still concerned about overload, compromised by raising the cap to sixteen credits per term, allowing no deviation except by permission of Wise and the faculty Committee on Schedules.491

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488 Faculty Meeting minutes, September 14, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
489 Faculty Meeting minutes, October 11, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
490 Faculty Meeting minutes, March 25, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
491 Faculty Meeting minutes, April 23, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
Grading also became an issue. Initially, most faculty preferred grading papers either Satisfactory or Unsatisfactory. By the spring of the first year, however, some were recommending more nuanced grading. When Joshua Bloch reported that the pass/fail system of grading had been abandoned by most graduate schools, the faculty agreed to adopt a four-grade model whereby A = over 90; B = over 80; C = over 70; and, D = failure. The next fall, the faculty further distinguishing between levels of academic proficiency by dividing the students into three groups: Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced.

*The German Model versus the American Model*

While the faculty resolved these matters with relative ease, they could not agree on pedagogy. Those advocating a European seminar model whereby students conducted much of their research independently fought sharply with those who preferred an American model that entailed significant classroom teaching combined with close supervision of the students.

The argument, which embroiled the faculty in April and May of 1923, emerged out of concern they all shared over the students’ unpreparedness for serious graduate-level study. The students’ ignorance, immaturity, inability to conduct research, and lack of skills in Hebrew alarmed the faculty, some of whom were also troubled by the students’ questioning of religious faith. Grouping by level helped, but still, as Wise told Gottheil, in the first year the faculty had to do spade work, “making the men grind pretty hard at more or less elementary things until they are thoroughly prepared to do advanced work.”

*To Cultivate Pure Scholarship or Religious Development*

Obermann initiated the debate by reading a paper on his impressions of JIR at a faculty meeting in April, in which he described the students as full of enthusiasm but sadly in want of adequate preparation. Only by instituting a seminar system in which the students

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492 Faculty Meeting minutes, January 22, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
493 Faculty Meeting minutes, April 8, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
494 Faculty Meeting minutes, September 12, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
learned how to work independently under the direction of an instructor could the faculty bring “young men with profound ignorance to a real and sound knowledge.” Obermann had already been pressing for a reduction in faculty teaching and more independent study on the part of the students, and he and Abrahams believed the American academic year, due to its excessive length, made it impossible for faculty and students to devote sufficient time to real study outside the formal schedule. Wise, however, made his view clear; American students differed from Europeans, and the European system that provided mainly coaching and tutorial assistance would not be feasible at JIR. Obermann did not relent, and continued to press for the German university model. While few faculty disagreed with his pessimistic assessment of the students, his proposal triggered a full-scale debate about how best to train twentieth-century American rabbis.

Some critiqued the German approach as strictly scientific, intellectual and technical. If they teach students in this way, asked Rabbi Maurice Harris, how could the faculty ever touch upon the question of the faith?

Others believed rabbinical students could learn little of significance to their training until they mastered Hebrew and interpretive text skills. Given their rudimentary level of knowledge in both areas, Israel Abrahams proposed immediate implementation of a two-tiered approach whereby the Institute would retain instructors to help students acquire a thorough grounding in elementary Hebrew and other subjects in their first two years, and then, in their final two years, students could work at a more advanced level in a seminar system under the guidance of the faculty.

Wolfson agreed about the need for elementary work but, he said, rather than leaving the teaching to others, the Institute’s faculty should offer survey courses in areas like Jewish literature and history, about which even students well-prepared in Hebrew and Talmud knew

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496 Faculty Meeting minutes, April 20, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
497 Faculty Meeting minutes, March 26, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
little. Wolfson described “a certain kind of dualism” in the minds of the students, who had well-formed ideas regarding historical issues unrelated to Judaism, but when it came to Jewish history, their understanding derived from legend rather than fact. Drawing on his experience at Harvard, he described two kinds of students who take Semitics courses—those who had attended Sunday School and those who fled from it. Those who attended believed they knew the course content already; the others had no interest. He observed a similar dynamic at JIR and argued that, in fact, all students regardless of background required at the very least an introductory course of lectures, readings and exams in each department. These surveys would prove essential for students wishing to pursue further study in a particular area, as well as for those whose interests lay elsewhere but still required a broad understanding of the field. Wolfson opposed the highly independent approach; rather, he said, each survey course should include specific weekly reading assignments, regular exams, and meetings with the instructor. Wolfson, the Institute’s most distinguished scholar, took a position diametrically opposed to Obermann’s; the top faculty members from each department should teach these introductory courses, Wolfson argued, where they could provide critical training for the students in independent research and writing.

In addition, Wolfson proposed a varied curriculum that required students to gain breadth prior to specializing in a particular field. He suggested JIR adopt Harvard’s approach whereby students spent approximately twelve hours in class, combined with a minimum of twenty-four additional hours in preparation each week. In light of this extensive time commitment, Harvard students were prohibited from taking on any work beyond their actual studies, and Wolfson advised that JIR enforce a similar policy, pointing out that in American universities, graduate students with outside jobs were required to extend the amount of time they took to earn their degrees.498

498 Faculty Meeting minutes, April 20, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
Wise objected to the last stipulation, noting again that at JIR students were almost entirely self-supporting; otherwise, he seemed to favor Wolfson’s approach, and he agreed to work with Goldstein and Wolfson on revising the curriculum for the 1923-24 academic year. In the meantime, with Touroff about to take a temporary leave from the Institute, Obermann agreed to teach an elementary course in Hebrew to students who had requested it after finding Harry Lewis' course in Maimonides too advanced.499 Abrahams, still concerned about the students' inadequate knowledge, urged the faculty to assign summer reading that would help students prepare for their coursework the following year, and the faculty, recognizing that preparatory work should begin even prior to enrollment, instituted a plan to provide applicants for admission, too, with guidance for summer study.500

At the same time, perhaps as a reminder that not all students were cause for despair, the faculty recommended the establishment of two fellowships for advanced students in the senior class interested in devoting their last year at JIR to concentrated research.501

_Six Months Later: Vacation Debates_

When the faculty reconvened at the start of the 1923-24 academic year, many issues remained unresolved, and the debate over independent versus highly-structured learning continued. In December, Obermann proposed a mid-year class recess of four to five weeks in which students would be expected to conduct their own research. Wise, unable to attend the meeting in person, sent a memo describing the suggestion as admirable and perhaps feasible in the future, but "too daring an innovation for an institution as young as JIR.” Instead, Wise recommended a mid-winter recess of three weeks, including one week for vacation and two

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499 Ibid.
500 Wise continued to urge students to use the summer for academic work. The following year he discouraged students from accepting positions in boys’ camps where for two months they could do little real study; rather, given they had few summers of leisure and study remaining before their graduation, he urged them to attend summer school or to do independent work. Louis Newman urged the faculty to be more directive by giving each student a specific theme to study over the summer. Faculty Meeting minutes, January 14, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
501 Faculty Meeting minutes, May 4, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
for research and exams. The shorter recess would enable the Institute to begin and end the spring semester earlier, which faculty hoped might prevent a decline in the quality of student work they had observed toward the end of the previous May.

Obermann objected, insisting students needed adequate time for independent work. The faculty again discussed various possibilities, until Blau expressed his opposition to the whole idea of giving students time for research. Though ideal, he said, "the human material in JIR was too poor to allow the faculty to adopt this method." Give the students a week for vacation, he said, and then require that they return to class. Lewis and Goldstein, too, considered an extended period for research pointless, since students lacked the capacity as well as the commitment to doing serious scholarly work. Lewis, ever the chaplain, offered a corrective to Blau’s critique of the students. The material was “undeveloped,” he said, rather than “poor.”

In light of the faculty’s strikingly low regard for the students, Irma Lindheim’s recollection of tensions in the classroom illuminates some of the issues. She, too, was highly critical of the young men who sat beside her as “regular” students en route to becoming rabbis, in contrast to those like her, whose “special student” status meant the rabbinate was not an option.

“I remember a man named Goldberg who had studied for many years before coming to the Institute,” Lindheim wrote. “He had a homiletical interpretation for everything in the Bible and refused to be bound by anything as exact as philology. It was perfectly obvious to me that he did not come to the Institute to learn, but to sit through a few years and then get a degree with all its benefits. I mention him particularly, as he symbolized a whole group who had Yeshivah training, knew everything before they came to the Institute, and only came so that they could supplement their knowledge with a lucrative diploma. Obermann became a subject of their persecution…he was hated by those who knew Hebrew and the Bible so
much better than he that they were unable to pass his examinations. In self defense at not passing, they spread malicious slanders about his qualities as teacher and man.”

Obermann insisted that his students needed more leisure to absorb the vast amount of material he had been giving them, and warned that if the faculty did not expect the students to work independently, they would always remain passive learners. Is it not the responsibility of their teachers to make sure they can handle texts on their own, he asked. Should not the modern system of education lead students to work independently?

Louis Newman worked out a compromise, whereby students would be given the choice of taking an exam or writing a paper during the brief vacation period. The faculty agreed to a schedule, and Obermann once again found himself a minority of one whose ideas, though respected by Wise and other faculty, could gain no traction.

Curricular Innovation

While the faculty wrestled with these methodological issues during JIR’s first two years, the Institute also broke new ground as the first Jewish seminary to make central in its curriculum modern Hebrew, social service, religious education and comparative religion. Each of these areas posed challenges, perhaps because JIR could not look to other seminaries for a workable model. They had to invent their own.

Hebrew

JIR became the first American rabbinical program to give modern Hebrew a central place in the curriculum from its inception, to conduct graduate courses in modern Hebrew, and to hire a senior educator dedicated primarily to Hebrew instruction rather than requiring faculty in all fields to supplement teaching within their discipline with six or seven hours

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503 Faculty Meeting minutes, December 5, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
teaching Hebrew. To be sure, centers for the Hebraist movement existed in the various Hebrew colleges springing up around the country, in Tarbut schools in Poland and the Baltic states, in the Yishuv, of course—and, not far from JIR, at Kaplan’s Teachers Institute at JTS, where teachers and students, fervently Zionist, saw Hebrew as the key to revitalizing Jewish life in the United States and beyond. In this regard, JIR and Kaplan’s Teachers Institute, led by two men who each took inspiration from Ahad Ha’am and Bialik, shared the same ethos. However, the Teachers Institute was an outpost of the Hebraism movement housed by JTS but at odds with the JTS administration and faculty. Even the housing JTS provided the Teachers Institute on the Lower East Side at the Hebrew Technical Institute distanced it from the rabbinical school, which was based on the Seminary’s main campus adjacent to Columbia University and Union Theological Seminary. As Alan Mintz explains, the JTS rabbinical school regarded Hebrew as the primary medium of rabbinic tradition and the language of classical Jewish texts and, as such, requisite for any literate worshiping Jew; however, neither Adler nor most faculty endorsed the Hebraist movement’s view of Hebrew as the most significant cultural force in twentieth-century Judaism. As a result, unlike the Teachers Institute, the rabbinical school at JTS did not teach spoken Hebrew; the Seminary’s rabbinical training emphasized, rather, the importance of Americanized spoken-English, and the skills of preaching.

JIR demanded Americanized spoken-English of its students, too, and prioritized homiletical training—but modern Hebrew instruction fell in a different category, a crucial one, as it advanced two of the founders’ central goals, that of creating a renaissance in American Jewish life, as well as shaping an American liberal Judaism that transcended

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505 HUC required faculty to supplement their teaching by providing six or seven hours of Hebrew instruction. JIR Board Minutes, Committee on Faculty, January 8, 1924.
507 Ibid., 85-86.
508 Ibid., 102.
sectarian differences. For the Hebraist movement, and the JIR faculty and students who were part of it, Hebrew was the vehicle that would bring about that renaissance and achieve Jewish unity.

In enlisting onto the faculty Nissan Touroff, dean of the Hebrew Teachers’ College in Boston, Wise established a connection between the Institute and the Hebraist movement, and ensured that an experienced educator would shape the Hebrew curriculum. Though in 1922-23 Touroff commuted from Boston, and the next year he took a leave of absence, still unable to relinquish his responsibilities there, Touroff played an important role in shaping the original curriculum. Introducing Hebrew instruction *ivrit b’ivrit*, through classes conducted exclusively in Hebrew, he instituted a practice that had contemporary significance within the Hebrew renaissance movement, and which other Institute faculty from a variety of disciplines would emulate.

While the faculty shared the commitment to Hebrew, the subject nonetheless engendered a great deal of discussion as they debated pedagogy, and the required level of proficiency. At Touroff’s recommendation, they agreed from the outset that Hebrew would be taught using the Sephardic pronunciation to be in harmony with modern Hebrew, and they embraced the *ivrit b’ivrit* methodology. Blau promised to donate a Hebrew typewriter, which would enable the school to produce its own teaching materials, and the simplest matters were resolved.

As with other subject areas, however, the faculty still needed to determine how many hours of class each week they should devote to language instruction, and what, more specifically, that instruction should entail. Initially, Touroff offered Hebrew composition and grammar, and students practiced sight-reading Biblical and Mishnaic texts. By the spring

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509 According to the September 1922 class schedule, first-year students took five hours of Hebrew with Touroff and Blau; Biblical Literature with Bloch; Talmud (Mishna) with Lewis; History with Elbogen; Social Service (presumably with Goldstein, but not listed); extra afternoon courses including
of 1923, however, the faculty recognized that most students needed more instruction, and the following year they instituted intensive work in elementary Hebrew for the incoming class, and increased Hebrew instruction for second-year students. With the changes, the curriculum now required four hours per week of Hebrew, more time than it allotted to Talmud, Midrash, Bible, or Religion.

With the arrival of David Yellin in the fall of 1924, the Institute once again had a leading figure in the Hebrew renaissance lecturing *ivrit b’ivrit*, this time on topics including Bible, grammar and medieval Hebrew poetry. Soon, however, faculty balked at the amount of classroom time devoted to Hebrew instruction. Wolfson complained that students were getting "an overdose" of language courses, at the expense of other subjects; more than all this Hebrew, he argued, first-year students who would soon be studying Talmud, ethics and other disciplines needed a general survey of the philosophical development of Judaism, his own field.

Whether faculty felt too little time was spent on Hebrew instruction, or—like Wolfson—too much, on the whole they agreed that JIR graduates required a reasonable degree of Hebrew fluency; how to achieve that remained the challenge. They continually

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Einleitung zur Wissenschaft des Judenthums with Elbogen; Liturgy with Elbogen; and, Introduction to Biblical Literature with Perles.

Students at the second-year level took three hours of Hebrew, including one hour of Aramaic; Psalms with Perles; Talmud with Elbogen; History with Elbogen; Religion with Perle; and, Midrash and Homiletics. Students were prohibited from taking courses elsewhere unless they had faculty approval and the courses fit with the JIR curriculum.

Students at the third-year level took three hours of Hebrew; Biblical Literature; Talmud; History with Elbogen; Religion with Perles; and, Midrash and Homiletics. Faculty teaching schedule, September 27, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

Faculty Meeting minutes, March 7, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

Hebrew was not the only area where admissions requirements changed over time. The faculty realized they also needed to assess each new applicant’s English ability and knowledge of history. In the early twenties, the faculty decided that the school’s catalogue should instruct prospective students to take courses in history, philosophy and social sciences while still undergraduates. At the same time, they doubted this strategy to raise the knowledge level of incoming students would prove effective, given that most students decided to attend JIR only in the second term of their senior year in college. In order to ensure that students had the requisite knowledge, the faculty would have to alter the Institute’s course offerings, but they continued to have difficulty reaching consensus on the necessary curricular changes. Faculty Meeting minutes, March 25, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

Kiev and Tepfer, “Jewish Institute of Religion,” 95.
tried different approaches, including raising the Hebrew admissions requirement—initially, applicants were asked only to translate a few Hebrew texts from the Bible and Mishna, but by 1924 applicants also had to demonstrate competence in Hebrew grammar. With Touroff’s taking leave at the end of the first academic year, the Institute temporarily dropped teaching Hebrew as a living tongue; to Touroff’s dismay, Obermann, who took over instruction, instead taught the language as a philological exercise, in accord with biblical scholarship. Despite various attempts to provide just the right instruction, the problem endured, and at the end of the 1924-25 academic year, the faculty held yet another lengthy discussion on the challenges of teaching Hebrew. Determining clear and reasonable expectations regarding the teaching of Hebrew, and the proficiency expected of JIR graduates, proved elusive.

**Social Service**

Social service training also played a crucial role in the JIR curriculum, central as it was, like Hebrew, to the school’s mission. Just as the Free Synagogue ethos demanded actively engaging the congregation in addressing social problems, so too did JIR demand such engagement on the part of students. At the time of the school’s founding, two possibilities for social service training came under consideration. The primary plan reflected the Free Synagogue vision for a socially-engaged American rabbinate modeled after Stephen S. Wise, capable of organizing the Jewish community to respond effectively to the most pressing issues of the day; to achieve this, Goldstein’s department would teach rabbinical students the theory and practical skills of social service. As noted above, a second notion had also been put forth at the request of Drachsler and leaders in the field of social work seeking an institution that could provide Jewish learning to Jewish social workers.

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513 Faculty Meeting minutes, September 12, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.  
514 Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, July 18, 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.  
515 Faculty Meeting minutes, March 25, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
For Wise and Goldstein, social service training linked the Institute with “socialized religion,” a left-leaning movement led by some of Wise’s political allies in the ministry, including John Haynes Holmes. Holmes explained socialized religion in his famous sermon of 1918, “On the Future of this Church,” in which he urged his congregation to leave the Unitarian movement and become independent of any existing Christian denomination. The spirit of socialized religion, he said, came from Theodore Parker, “the supreme prophet of applied Christianity in our time,” but it only came alive through actual application of Christian thought to contemporary social problems. Holmes described how the ideas of Henry George, Henry Lloyd and Walter Rauschenbusch inspired him to spend several years in a “prolonged plunge into the waters of socialism,” until he finally converted to social radicalism. For Holmes, now, religion was not “a testimony to theological truth but a crusade for social change.” The more interested he became in social change, the less concerned he was with denominational welfare—so he created a new concept of church organization in which the unit of fellowship was the local church alone, in relation to the broader community; the center of life and allegiance for Holmes would never again be the denomination, he said, but “the cry of present day human need.”

Wise and Goldstein, who had also devoted much of their ministry to social reform, used the term “socialized” selectively. Holmes had explicitly linked “socialized religion” with his own socialist convictions; neither Wise nor Goldstein identified as socialists, though they worked in alliance with socialist organizations at times, particularly in relation to labor issues. When Wise and Goldstein used the terms “socialized” or “social service” they referred not specifically to socialism but to the broader movement for social reform to which they each were deeply connected; at the same time, when using this language they tended to leave further interpretation to the listener, as Wise did in his 1920/21 sermon on Liberal

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Judaism. “The religion of Israel is religion not only socialized but socializing,” Wise said, “touching life at every point and seeking to socialize the order in which we live.”

In a spring 1923 letter to Homer Folks, Chairman of the National Conference of Social Work, Wise described JIR as a school training men “for a liberal and socialized Ministry” (italics added). This language contradicted his commitment to keep JIR non-aligned with any single perspective; either he was revealing his true hope for a “socialized” JIR or, more likely, bending the truth to pique this social reformer’s interest in the Institute. “From the very beginning we are stressing training for social work,” Wise continued, adding that Goldstein would be doing the teaching at present, and would later draw on the cooperation of other experts. Wise hoped Folks would spread word about the Institute within his social work circles. However, soon thereafter, once Drachsler and his colleagues began creating their own Training School for Jewish Social Work in 1924, JIR’s outreach to social workers ended and the Institute’s Social Service Department focused on rabbinical training alone.

Goldstein unabashedly used some of his courses to promote not only the model of the Free Synagogue’s Social Service Department, but leftwing activism, as well. This is

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520 In an address to the CCAR in 1932, Goldstein described JIR’s four-year Social Service curriculum, and elaborated on his commitment to creating a social service department in every synagogue. “We must socialize religion...and religionize social work,” he said, and explained the importance of engaging congregants firsthand in service to achieve this. “When they come face to face with the consequences of our economic system and feel the pressure of social injustice on every hand, social justice comes to mean to them not an abstract principle, nor a theme for sermons, but a concrete fact and a consuming passion. When men and women grow restless in the midst of misery, when they begin to feel a determination to right the wrongs of social life, when they become centers of indignation and wrath, the citadel of social injustice cannot long stand in social life.” Goldstein described how this approach turns the synagogue into a religious center for service to society. “The social service department becomes the medium through which the social teachings of the school, the social message of the pulpit, and the social preachments of our prophets are translated into practice...communion with God is the central religious experience, the very soul of religion.
apparent, for example, in descriptions of two of the earliest courses he offered, during the 1921 Summer Session:

The Synagogue and Industrial Programs: This Course will consider the relation of the Rabbi and the Synagogue to the developing crisis in our industrial life. It will deal among others with the following themes: the place and function of industry in modern social organization; the defects in our industrial organization that lead to injustices and the responsibility that religious groups should feel and assume for the correction and reorganization of industrial life; the preparation of the Rabbi so that he can discuss industrial questions with expertness and authority; the position and power of the Congregation, many of whose members are employers and associated with groups involved in the present struggle. It is planned also to review the programs of Manufacturers Associations, and Labor Groups; and to discuss other documents that bear upon the question: What form of industrial organization promotes and realizes the Jewish ideal of social justice?

The Synagogue and Social Service: This Course will consist of lectures and fieldwork. The lectures will consider the social function of the Synagogue in modern times; the organization and administration of a Social Service Department in the Synagogue; social service in the Religious School and the development of the City of Justice; the means of socially educating the members of the Congregation; the relation of the Synagogue to other agencies and community life.\(^{521}\)

Just prior to the Institute’s opening, in August 1922, together with others from the Free Synagogue, Goldstein traveled to West Virginia in response to violent labor conflicts in the coal mines there.\(^{522}\) After meeting with workers and investigating conditions in the mines, he organized an appeal at the Free Synagogue to raise money to purchase food for the

Communion in the Jewish faith is a challenge to become a prophet of social justice and to protest against the social evils of our time…once this interpretation of religion grips the soul of man religion is filled with purpose and power and becomes the most real of all realities.”

Addressing the social ills and economic depression gripping the nation, Goldstein called upon synagogues to fight prejudice and take an active part in shaping the new social order. “The conflict today is not between religion and science but between the social ideals of religion and the evils of the social order,” he said. “In this conflict the synagogue must take its stand. This is the supreme task of the synagogue today...to be the prophet and protagonist of a new order that is fair and strong and just.” “Make Synagogue Center of Jewish Life, Dr. Goldstein Declares at Convention of Central Conference,” *News Bulletin of the Jewish Institute of Religion* 4, no. 2 (November-December 1932). JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{521}\) Summer School for Rabbis and Rabbinical Students Prospectus 1921. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{522}\) Regarding Goldstein’s appeal on behalf of the West Virginia Miners, Wise told Bloch, “I believe that we have done a good job, I mean as a synagogue, that we have rendered a real service to this cause of social progress and industrial reconciliation, and I am very proud of the part that S.E.G. has had therein.” Stephen S. Wise to Charles Bloch, August 3, 1922. Box 3, folder 13, JIR Records.
miners’ families living in tent colonies.\(^{523}\) If he returned passionate about sharing his experience and outlook with the first class of students at JIR that fall, the faculty may have tempered his enthusiasm. For, though the curriculum initially called for students to take two hours of social service each week, in early October they cut Goldstein’s time with the students in half.\(^{524}\) Goldstein unhappily made do with the change, and over the course of the early twenties continued to teach courses like those described above, augmented with speakers on topics from prison reform to settlement houses.\(^{525}\) The young Goldstein who preached on socialism at HUC in 1905 probably could never have imagined that he might teach “Critical Study of Social Programmes” in an American rabbinical seminary, as he did in JIR’s 1923 Summer Session. The course examined the social programs of the ancient world, and drew from these to study and critique current Catholic, Protestant and Jewish programs, as well as those of the American Federation of Labor, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, and the British Labor Party. The course presupposed a knowledge of sociology, political science, economics and social psychology, and concluded with an attempt to derive from the historical studies an outline for a constructive social program for the twentieth century.\(^{526}\)

*Problems in Jewish Life*

In addition to Goldstein's coursework in Social Service, Wise met with students on Friday afternoons to teach “Problems of the Jewish Ministry,” in which he addressed the different aspects of pulpit work, including preaching, serving the Jewish community, and engaging with broader society. The course description reveals his own association with “socialized religion”: He would examine the rabbi’s role as social worker, participating in


\(^{524}\) Faculty Meeting minutes, October 8, 1922 and October 11, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

\(^{525}\) Bruno Lasker to Stephen S. Wise, June 22, 1923; Sidney S. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, July 9, 1923; and Paul Kellogg to Stephen S. Wise, June 19, 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.

\(^{526}\) Jewish Institute of Religion Summer Session 1923 Announcement and Courses. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
community efforts and “religionizing and Judaizing social ideals and social effort;” and, as “interpreter of Jewish life and thought to the world, his responsibilities, his opportunities, the place of the rabbi in American Israel.”

Philip Bernstein recalled Wise’s influence on the students, and how he expressed confidence in them in ways that many of the faculty, despairing of the students’ abilities, did not. “From the moment we entered the Institute he insisted upon absolute freedom for teacher and student alike,” Bernstein said, “and although undoubtedly hoping that most of the graduates would share his views, said and meant that he would be happy if the men would not agree with him.” More than that, Wise impressed students with his personal qualities—“his genuineness, his essential sweetness, his charitableness of spirit and of purse,” Bernstein said. Students revered Wise, “the most generous of men.”

Unfortunately for the students, Wise frequently needed to leave town. Given that the course subject matter could have been taught by a local congregational rabbi, the faculty discussed at length the possibility of hiring a substitute. In the end, however, they did not. A key aim of the course was to provide an opportunity for Wise and the students to become more intimately acquainted, they said; Wise agreed, and promised to keep his travel schedule on Fridays to a minimum.

527 The full course description read, “The major problems of the rabbi within and without the congregation are to be dealt with: the rabbi in the pulpit, the rabbi as preacher, sermon content and sermon spirit; the rabbi in relation to community life, Jewish and general, and the service of the rabbi in relating the congregation to community welfare and Jewish needs and aspirations outside of the immediate community; the rabbi as social worker; the motives of the rabbi in participating in community effort, in religionizing and Judaizing social ideals and social effort; the rabbi as interpreter of Jewish life and thought to the world, his responsibilities, his opportunities, the place of the rabbi in American Israel.” Jewish Institute of Religion Summer Session 1923 Announcement and Courses. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
528 Philip Bernstein, baccalaureate address at the Jewish Institute of Religion, June 5, 1942. Box 6, folder 2, JIR Records.
529 Faculty Meeting minutes, February 2, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
Religious Education

In the field of religious education, JIR also introduced a new method, by incorporating Samson Benderly’s approach into rabbinical training. In a sense, Benderly, a close friend of Mordecai Kaplan’s and beneficiary of the philanthropic largesse of Jacob Schiff, aimed to do for American Jewish education what Wise hoped JIR would accomplish for American rabbinical training—modernize it, Americanize it and infuse it with a love for Jewish peoplehood, Hebrew language, and Zionism. During the early twenties, two of three instructors in the field of religious education were “Benderly boys,” Nissan Touroff and Isaac Berkson.

In Touroff’s case, Benderly’s influence can be seen in his devotion to teaching *ivrit b’ivrit*, an approach Benderly championed. Wise also had Touroff teach Principles of Jewish Education in the 1923 Summer Session, where his lectures revealed his passion for Zionism as well as Hebrew. In “Religion and Nationalism in Jewish Education,” for example, Touroff rejected the possibility of separating religion from nationalism in Judaism, and discussed the implications of this viewpoint in Jewish education; in “The Hebrew Language in Jewish Education,” he spoke on the place of Hebrew, “the living language of Jewish culture,” in Jewish religious and national life.

During Touroff’s leave of absence, the Institute’s lack of instruction in the field of Jewish education alarmed Goldstein, who urged the faculty to create a Department of Religious Education. Few JIR students had ever taken courses in psychology, and none had any training in the principles of pedagogy and methods of teaching, Goldstein said. The

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531 In the late twenties and early thirties, Benderly taught at JIR. “The Jewish Institute of Religion,” by Henry Slonimsky, in *The Jewish Education News* 1, no. 9 (June, 1926). JIR Nearprint Box 1; and Isaac B. Berkson’s curriculum vitae. Box 3, folder 7, JIR Records.

532 Jewish Institute of Religion Summer Session 1923 Announcement and Courses. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
Institute needed to offer these courses immediately, for JIR students were already teaching in metropolitan-area schools, unequipped with the skills they needed for classroom instruction, and for the organizational and administrative work they were doing as well. Goldstein called specifically for a department in religious education, for JIR students could take courses in Educational Psychology, Principles of Pedagogy, and Methods of Presentation at Columbia's nearby Teachers College or at the NYU School of Education. Unlike the Teachers’ Institute at JTS, which existed apart from the rabbinical school and enrolled few rabbinical students, and unlike HUC’s new Teachers Institute which the College opened in New York in 1923, JIR’s Department of Religious Education would be fully integrated into the rabbinical program.

Comparative Religion

Wise and certain members of the board, especially Richard Gottheil, believed that JIR should also offer courses in comparative religion, and in the early years these courses became a regular feature in the curriculum. 533 Most dealt with some aspect of Christianity, though in the 1923 Summer Session, Obermann taught a course on Judaism and Islam which focused on the influence of Judaism in the formation of Islam, and the reciprocal influence of Islamic theology on Jewish thought and belief, with a focus on “Saadia, Jehuda Halevi, Bachja, and Maimuni.” 534

Discussion of comparative religion is notably absent in the minutes of JIR faculty meetings, probably due, in part, to the fact that the prominent Christian scholars who taught and lectured regularly on a part-time basis at the Institute did not attend faculty meetings. Without representation on the faculty body that held responsibility for oversight of the

534 Jewish Institute of Religion Summer Session 1923 Announcement and Courses. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
curriculum, those who taught comparative religion lacked the opportunity to protect and expand their area, which seemed to shrink over the course of the twenties.

Cooperation with HUC and Other Schools

Interested in cooperating on curricular matters with HUC, in November 1923 the board authorized Lee Frankel, chair, to meet with Julian Morgenstern, HUC’s president, to discuss a set of suggestions pertaining to credits, faculty and students. JIR hoped to establish cooperation with HUC in three areas: exchange of student credits between the two schools; a system for exchanging faculty; and, an openness on the part of both institutions to students transferring between them, so that a student could begin a course of study at JIR and complete it at HUC, or vice versa.\(^{535}\)

Morgenstern declared such a plan out of the question, Frankel subsequently reported. Because the length of the two institutions’ courses of study differed by four years—HUC requiring eight years of study, and JIR just four—they shared no parity, Morgenstern said; JIR had no faculty, he claimed (according to Frankel), and therefore no exchange was possible; and, because JIR ostensibly had no faculty, HUC could not grant credit to students for work completed at JIR. Frankel attempted to correct Morgenstern regarding the number of professors at JIR, he said, and expressed hope that the two schools could put the past behind them and move forward in a spirit of goodwill and fellowship. Morgenstern, too, said he hoped a better spirit would prevail in the future, and suggested that one day perhaps the two schools would be under the aegis of the UAHC; for the time being, however, he said nothing could be done.\(^{536}\)

JIR students had plenty of options, nonetheless, if they chose to augment their studies by attending other academic institutions. Ralph Marcus, for example, while taking courses at

\(^{535}\) Faculty Meeting minutes, November 8, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.

\(^{536}\) JIR Board Minutes, memo from Chairman regarding conversation with Julian Morgenstern, November 5, 1923.
JIR, also studied under Wolfson at Harvard and Gottheil at Columbia, where he ultimately earned his PhD. Philip Bernstein studied with John Dewey at Columbia Teachers College, and several students took courses at the New School for Social Research. In these ways and more, notwithstanding JTS’s refusal to grant library privileges to JIR students, they benefited from access to the New York area’s Jewish and scholarly resources, as the founders hoped they would.

**Conclusion**

By bringing to the Institute this diverse group of scholars, rabbis, ministers and communal leaders, Wise created for the students and faculty a means to engage with a broad range of ideas. He also connected them, and the Institute as a whole, to leading academic and religious institutions including the Hochschule and other seminaries of Europe; Union, General and Hartford theological seminaries and the divinity schools at Harvard and Yale; the international Zionist movement, the American labor movement, and progressive Protestant networks; and, synagogues and churches around the country, as well as the Ethical Culture Society.

In terms of the overall goal to ensure that liberal Judaism thrived in New York and engaged with the educational, religious and cultural resources the city had to offer, Wise and his colleagues used all the funds at their disposal to secure a reputable faculty consisting of scholars and practitioners who they hoped could collectively offer the breadth of knowledge seminary training required. In addition, drawing upon his and the board’s broad social and political network, Wise brought to 68th Street nationally-recognized Christian and Jewish clergy and communal leaders, with the aim of infusing the Institute with intellectual vibrancy at little financial cost.

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In establishing this center in New York, the Institute faced challenges, however. Cultural differences made it difficult for some of the German scholars to make a home for themselves in this American institution; in some cases, the gap in language and culture, including in the area of academic protocol, proved insurmountable. Divergent expectations around students’ ability to learn independently and the faculty’s commitment to classroom teaching left a pervasive sense of disappointment.

JIR, like its peer institutions, faced the challenge of competing in the free-market economy of American academe. True, the Jewish scholars the Institute sought to attract and retain had few professional options in 1920s America; nonetheless, when positions did open, faculty were enticed by the promise of greater time, prestige, money and academic freedom. At times this worked to JIR’s advantage, as in the case of Slonimsky; at times it did not, as in the case of Obermann, who constantly pined for a position at one of the prestigious secular universities, such as Columbia or Yale, and the case of Wolfson, who essentially used JIR to secure his place at Harvard.\textsuperscript{538} In the case of Kaplan, whose ambivalence proved difficult for Wise, the greater suffering seemed to be his own, as revealed in his diaries where he repeatedly berated himself for his indecision.

Two of the nation’s most prestigious positions—the Littauer Chair at Harvard, and Chief of the Jewish Division at the New York Public Library—went to Wise’s tiny band of scholars on 68\textsuperscript{th} Street. This attested to his ability to scope out talent, as well as his inability to retain it.

In order to professionalize the American rabbinate, Wise secured scholars and practitioners with the capacity to teach at an advanced level; however, whether or not the young men who attended JIR could meet the standards the founders and faculty expected of

\textsuperscript{538} Obermann also at this time asked Wise to get him an appointment at Harvard so he could hold Wolfson’s place while Wolfson was at JIR. Obermann eventually secured an appointment at Yale. Faculty meeting minutes, January 8, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
them would depend on the students’ own abilities, as well as the professional opportunities available to them.

Did the early JIR model a freer American liberal Judaism, as Wise hoped it would? For professors who had already endured battles over academic freedom at other institutions, including Margolis, Slonimsky and Kaplan, the issue was hardly hypothetical, and JIR was seen as offering a refuge where they could speak and act freely. Margolis and Kaplan chose to remain where they were, but in the course of their negotiations with JIR, their fear of Adler was palpable.

Wise appears to have invited particular guest speakers to demonstrate JIR’s openness, such as Horace Kallen, whom years earlier HUC had prohibited from speaking despite an invitation from students to do so. Yet, though apparently committed to free expression, Wise did not assemble quite as diverse a faculty as he initially intended. Within a short time, 68th Street became home to a largely Zionist, politically progressive, and religiously liberal contingent of scholars. To be sure, not all fell neatly into these categories; but at least one who did not, Blau, felt Wise treated him poorly because of his conservative views. While JIR did promote academic freedom, perhaps more notable in this regard, the Institute provided a site where students and faculty on the left side of the political spectrum, and committed to Zionism, could speak without constraint and with greater institutional support than the Institute’s sister institutions—HUC and JTS—made possible at this time.

This being the case, though Wise sought to model an American liberal Judaism that elevated Jewish peoplehood over sectarian difference, by bringing together a faculty who largely shared this goal, he effectively promoted it but did not, in practice, test it.

Now, having appointed a critical mass of full-time faculty, Wise no longer needed to assess the teaching abilities and suitability of a constant rotation of visiting scholars; rather,

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moving forward, he needed to minimize further impermanency, and focus on retaining those he valued. In doing so, he would have to continue fending off other institutions interested in luring away members of his teaching staff, and he had to minimize discord amongst the current faculty. They may have agreed on large issues like Zionism, for the most part, but on more local matters, particularly related to the curriculum, the faculty’s views appeared to be so divergent that at one point in April 1923, Wise wondered if perhaps something should be done to “harmonize” them.\textsuperscript{540} The divide between old world scholars and new world practitioners, in particular, revealed tensions over matters far beyond the quality of homiletics instruction. Just as the board held a variety of visions for JIR, so too did the faculty, and their competing assumptions and goals became increasingly evident in the debates that ensued.

Ultimately, the students themselves determined, to a large degree, the nature of the \textit{beit midrash} the Institute would become, as well as the content of the curriculum. Though older and perhaps more mature than rabbinical students at HUC and JTS, JIR students apparently did not impress the faculty with either their maturity or their capacity for high-level Jewish study. Faculty members like Obermann and Wolfson, who perhaps hoped to mentor future scholars as they had been mentored at the University of Vienna and Harvard, respectively, quickly realized the futility of any such expectation. The students may have been keenly intelligent and capable of graduate work in the secular fields where they had prior training, but when it came to areas of Jewish study, they lacked elementary knowledge. The faculty would have to begin by teaching, quite literally, the \textit{alef bet}. The possibility that JIR would produce world-class scholars seemed remote.

Nonetheless, the faculty shaped an innovative curriculum aligned with the overall goals the founders set out for the Institute. Modern Hebrew and the Zionist valence with which Touroff and Yellin taught religious education oriented the student body toward a national

\textsuperscript{540} Faculty Meeting minutes, April 9, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
idea of Jewish peoplehood, rather than toward a particular theological approach. Goldstein’s courses in Social Service, and Wise’s weekly gathering with students to discuss contemporary issues in the American rabbinate, ensured that students had an awareness of problems in the New York metropolitan area and in the Jewish world beyond, and that they gained exposure to various strategies rabbis and other communal leaders were utilizing to address those problems. Comparative religion, too, taught by Christian scholars, must have broadened the students’ perspectives and fostered the intellectual openness and free exchange of ideas so central to JIR’s ethos.

By 1924, Wise had solidified the board, retained a permanent faculty while continuing to bring in a mix of additional scholars and practitioners on a visiting basis, and pioneered a new kind of curriculum in rabbinical training. The Institute was on its way to graduating its first class of rabbis. They may not have been a scholarly lot, but they were passionate, idealistic and eager to serve.
CHAPTER FOUR: STUDENTS AND FUNDRAISING

JIR’s opening in New York heightened competition between the existing American Jewish seminaries. Whereas JTS and HUC drew on different religious constituencies and did not pose a substantial threat to one another, JIR competed directly with each of them: in the East, young people aspiring to the rabbinate now had a viable alternative to JTS; and, across the country, Reform and liberal Jews now had an alternative to HUC, as well. In order to attract applicants, all three seminaries resorted to marketing; anxious about recruitment, the board at JIR made this a priority, despite Wise’s confidence that the Institute would have no trouble enrolling students.

What drew applicants to risk attending a new seminary where virtually everything including the faculty, curriculum, finances and even physical space were in flux? For some, and possibly for many, the opportunity to train for the rabbinate under the direction of Stephen S. Wise overrode these uncertainties; no matter what shape the Institute eventually took, with Wise at its center, they wanted to be part of it.

Philip Bernstein, a member of the first graduating class, recalled how Wise’s powerful personality drew him to enroll. He had finished college and returned home in order to help his ill father with the family business. That year, after deciding he wanted to enter the rabbinate, he met with a representative from either HUC or JTS (he declined to say which), who seemed to suggest that the rabbinate required “saintliness, piety, goodness, sweetness and light.” The more the man spoke, the less Bernstein could imagine himself fitting in well at this school. Later that spring he met Wise in Syracuse. “The first thing he did,” Bernstein said, “was to reproach me for not accepting the cigar offered by the president of the local temple.” Wise told him it was his policy always to accept cigars, and to turn them over to the local rabbi. “At once I sensed an ethic, an idealism, an inspiration that were irresistible,”
Bernstein joked. “This was the beginning of a long and uplifting process of instruction.” The
playfulness Bernstein described runs through many other student accounts; Wise had an easy
and joyful way with young people, and Bernstein was not the only one who, upon meeting
Wise for the first time, turned his life around to follow the charismatic leader.\footnote{541}

**Student Recruitment**

**Publications and Advertising**

In the early twenties, the JIR board continued to implement the publicity strategies
Charles Bloch had outlined prior to the school’s opening. The Institute published a bulletin
annually, and distributed it together with letters of invitation and the course schedule to the
heads and registrars of seminaries and colleges, students at JTS and other local seminaries
and teachers institutes, the *agudathim*, the New School of Social Research, and to rabbis in
the field.\footnote{542} The approach reflects JIR's openness to recruiting students from many different
backgrounds, including the Orthodox associated with the *agudathim*, Conservative Jews at
JTS and, students at the New School, who were likely far more liberal in many respects. The
Institute invited all to take courses at JIR, and welcomed their application for admission too,
though those seeking to transfer from other seminaries had to present a Certificate of
Honorary Dismissal.\footnote{543}

JIR sent promotional materials to JTS and HUC, and received announcements from the
competition, as well. In fall 1924, Wise received a brochure promoting HUC’s new Summer
Course of Study which, like JIR’s summer school, invited rabbis to participate regardless of
movement affiliation. The College’s summer school differed from JIR’s, however,

\footnote{541} Philip Bernstein, baccalaureate address at the Jewish Institute of Religion, June 5, 1942. Box 6,
folder 2, JIR Records.
\footnote{542} Jeffrey Gurock surmised that the “*agudathim*” mentioned here probably referred to Agudath ha-
Rabbanim, i.e. the Union of Orthodox Rabbis, which served the rightwing Orthodox movement in the
United States at the time, and included many of the yeshiva heads then teaching at the Rabbi Isaac
Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS). Jeffrey Gurock, e-mail message to author, July 18, 2013.
\footnote{543} Faculty meeting minutes, November 2, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
emphasizing instead coursework for ordained rabbis interested in studying for the Doctor of Divinity degree, and for religious school teachers pursuing further training.

In tone, HUC’s publicity took a different tack as well. JIR advertisements included minimal text listing only the Institute’s faculty and departments, contact information and a picture of the building on West 68th Street. HUC’s, by contrast, included more prose and took a less somber tone. Leisure, not just study, awaited participants in the summer school—having recently completed construction on a new dormitory and gymnasium, the College promised opportunities not just for coursework, but also “pleasant and stimulating recreation, vacation relaxation and pleasure.”

Noting that HUC and JTS both had publicity bureaus, Wise convinced the board to hire a publicist to compile and place articles about the Institute in the press all year round. Billikopf felt this would help with fundraising. “I am firmly convinced that six months' or a year's intelligent and persistent publicity, without the least reference to any possible campaign, will create for the Institute an atmosphere which will be worth later tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars,” he told Wise. JIR hired the information service Billikopf recommended, and in the spring of 1924, publicity increased as newspapers like the Jewish Tribune began running articles featuring JIR that the Institute placed.

Wise’s broadcast on WNBC of the Carnegie Hall service he led each Sunday morning, and the Free Synagogue’s broadcast of programs aired by Goldstein and the

545 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, Nov 28, 1923; and, Executive Committee, Dec 26, 1923.
547 Billikopf thanked Herman Berstein, Editor of the Jewish Tribune, for dedicating an issue to JIR. “This issue is great from every point of view!” Billikopf wrote. “The publicity value is enormous.” Jacob Billikopf to Herman Bernstein, March 20, 1924. Box 3, folder 9, JIR Records.
congregation’s music director, Abraham Binder, helped spread the word about JIR, as well.\textsuperscript{548}

\textit{Campus Visits}

While Wise initially planned to visit colleges and universities across the country to recruit for the Institute, and though he did travel extensively in the early twenties for JIR, he ended up dedicating most of his trips almost entirely to fundraising. Faculty stepped in to help. Richard Gottheil, for example, met with ZBT members and other students at Columbia, and provided the names of Jewish students for JIR’s mailing list.\textsuperscript{549}

In JIR’s third year, Wise realized he needed help. He had made a successful visit to Harvard to meet with the Jewish students there, but scheduling it had been difficult, and it only took place after multiple cancellations due to weather and other events. The same year, he had to turn down an invitation to meet with students at the University of Illinois’ Hillel in Champagne, again due to schedule limitations. In that case, a local rabbi and friend of the Institute took his place, but, without an intensive outreach effort to meet and remain in touch with college students, he believed JIR was losing many good candidates.\textsuperscript{550} To redress this, he proposed that Slonimsky, representing the Institute, spend a semester traveling to colleges and universities around the country to meet with and recruit Jewish students. Slonimsky, who had just spoken at Princeton, would be ideal, he felt, for the philosopher had a wonderful way with students.\textsuperscript{551} Smaller theological schools sent men around regularly to “drum up trade,” Wolfson said, and other faculty agreed that if Slonimsky spoke mainly on Jewish issues there

\textsuperscript{548} In the later 1920s, Abraham Binder had an hour-long program on synagogue music, and Sidney Goldstein aired programs on social issues on the socialist-leaning station WEVD. Wise’s Sunday addresses aired on WEAF and associated stations. \textit{The Free Synagogue Weekly Bulletin}, February 26, March 19 and 26, 1929. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{549} Richard Gottheil to Stephen S. Wise, November 26, 1923, and, Richard Gottheil to Mildred Blout, March 12, 1924. Box 16, folder 18, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{550} Stephen S. Wise to Benjamin Frankel, November 18, 1924. Box 3, folder 16, JIR Records.

\textsuperscript{551} JIR Board Minutes, March 25, 1925 and April 14, 1925.
could be no objection.\textsuperscript{552} The board expressed concern about the cost of the endeavor, however, and Slonimsky said he loathed the idea of spending so much time away from teaching, though he would do so at the board’s request.\textsuperscript{553}

The board appointed a committee, headed by Charles Bloch, to explore other ways the Institute could reach college students.\textsuperscript{554}

\textbf{Admissions}

As early as 1920, Goldstein reported twelve definite applicants for admission, plus others who had expressed interest, and throughout the early twenties, Wise and the faculty repeatedly expressed satisfaction with the number of applications they received.\textsuperscript{555} Applicants came from varied backgrounds. Some were born in the US but a significant number were immigrants; most lived in the New York area, but some came from distant places in the United States and abroad, including Vienna and Palestine; most were recent college graduates, but a few were older.\textsuperscript{556} Prior to JIR’s opening, prospective applicants interviewed with members of the board; beginning in the fall of 1922, the admissions committee consisted of Wise and a small group of faculty.\textsuperscript{557} Institute staff had to remind applicants that the pre-matriculation requirement of an earned bachelor’s degree was non-negotiable,\textsuperscript{558} and rabbis, too, sometimes needed the reminder, as when a Rabbi Friedman of Syracuse wrote to Wise in June 1923 to call his attention to an extraordinary child of eleven, Moses Finkelstein, who Friedman believed was prepared to enter the "College Institute;" Wise agreed to meet not

\textsuperscript{552} Faculty meeting minutes, April 23, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{553} Slonimsky did visit college campuses to speak about the Institute, but it is unclear if he stepped away from teaching for an entire semester in order to do so. JIR Board Minutes, April 14, 1925.
\textsuperscript{554} JIR Board Minutes, December 23, 1925.
\textsuperscript{555} JIR Board Minutes, special committee appointed to consider desirability and practicability of organizing an institute for the training of rabbis, November 2, 1920. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{557} JIR Board Minutes, special committee appointed to consider desirability and practicability of organizing an institute for the training of rabbis, November 2, 1920. Box 11, folder 11, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{558} Faculty meeting minutes, October 11, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
with the child but with his parents.\footnote{Administrative Committee minutes, June 9, 1923. Box 9, folder 1, JIR Records.} To be sure, children of eleven were still a few years shy of being eligible for admission even into the high school programs at HUC and JTS, and a long way away from entering JIR. Perhaps some applicants interpreted the Institute’s entrance requirements loosely, because early in the first academic year the faculty created a formal application requiring documentation of earned academic degrees and, where appropriate, credits earned at other seminaries.

**Educational Background**

While, predictably, a preponderance of applicants attended City College, a significant number were graduates of other schools, including Cooper Union and JTS, as well as more elite colleges and universities like Yale and Harvard. Some came from a traditional upbringing, and brought Jewish learning they had acquired through study at home or in a yeshivah. Others had little to no Jewish education. Five years after the opening of JIR, during a faculty debate regarding problems in the curriculum, Ralph Marcus described two distinct groups of men who considered enrolling at JIR: College graduates who as children had attended Hebrew schools where they received a thorough Hebrew training, but who were not advanced in terms of secular study; and, college graduates with no Hebrew training who otherwise were quite capable of graduate-level study. The divide posed a challenge for admissions, for prospective students in the first group were uninterested in the elementary Hebrew and introductory courses that formed a substantial component of the curriculum, and as a result were reluctant to attend; however, instituting a higher Hebrew requirement, which might have enticed this group to enroll, would also have created another problem, for it would have precluded some of the school’s best students from being admitted.\footnote{In later years, the faculty wrestled this problem explicitly. Extract of minutes of Faculty Meeting re: Curriculum, December 22, 1927. Box 6, folder 10, JIR Records.}
Not all applicants fit into Marcus’s summary categories, and a number of students did bring a mix of traditional Jewish learning combined with secular university training. David Bronstein, for example, who in June 1923 wrote Wise regarding his interest in studying at JIR, described his background. He had a BA from Texas Christian University (1917), and an MA from the University of Chicago (1918), where he had also completed most of the requirements for the PhD in History; at the same time, he also had “Lithuanian *beth-midrash* training,” and had studied at the University of Chicago's Divinity School under the guidance of Emil Hirsch, who taught there.⁵⁶¹ Wise encouraged Bronstein to attend, but there is no evidence he did.

*Students Moving from Orthodox to Conservative to Liberal and Beyond*

Reflecting the religious trajectory of much of American Jewry during this period, it appears many of the men drawn to JIR were in flux and, regardless of their starting point, moving toward greater religious liberalism. Applicants who had been raised in traditional Eastern European religious households were leaving *halakhic* practice behind and adopting a non-legalistic approach to daily Jewish living. Goldstein described one such applicant, Abraham Dubin, in a report to Wise during the summer of 1923. Dubin had begun his studies at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, and then moved to Kaplan’s Teachers Institute at JTS. Now applying to JIR, it appeared he was “going through spiritual development from orthodoxy to conservatism and from conservatism to liberalism.”⁵⁶² Another applicant, Morton Berman, a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Yale, had attended JTS for one year prior to applying to the Institute. “He finds the religious life in this institution too narrow, and the social programme altogether too restricted,” Wise told Mack.⁵⁶³

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⁵⁶¹ Stephen S. Wise to David Bronstein, June 7, 1923, and David Bronstein to Stephen S. Wise, June 21, 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.
Students who did not come from traditional backgrounds also seemed to be moving left. Some were cultural Zionists and others were involved with Progressive causes. Likely the strongest factor drawing these young men to JIR was the inspiration they drew from the public image of Stephen S. Wise, who modeled the possibility that progressivism, Jewish nationalism and religious life could coexist.

**Rabbis Seeking Formal Training**

At this time, though seminary training for rabbis was becoming the norm, many rabbis serving in pulpits across the US, and abroad too, still lacked formal training—as was the case for Wise. During the Institute’s first year, several of these rabbis inquired about the possibility of attending.

Harry Jacobs, for example, who served a congregation in Trenton, explained to Wise that as a young man he had studied with his father, a graduate of the Rabbinical Seminary of Hungary, but the only formal training he received was in law, and he now would like to pursue further study. He was considering entering JIR while continuing to serve his congregation or, alternatively, studying in Palestine. Wise offered him the possibility of attending the Institute as a Special Student, and encouraged him, if he preferred to go abroad, to study at a seminary in Berlin or Vienna, or with Abrahams in Cambridge. Ultimately, Jacobs chose not to continue his studies; nonetheless, he had no difficulty advancing his career. Shortly after writing Wise he took a post at a synagogue in New Rochelle, where Wise spoke at his installation in the fall of 1923.564

Other rabbis did attend classes at JIR. Rabbi David Gross began as an auditor, and then requested permission to become a regular student; the faculty agreed, and offered him credit for the courses he had already attended, as long as he could pass the final

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Later that year, in June 1923, Wise received a letter from Dr. Emanuel Jack, the Commissioner of Americanization in Little Rock, Arkansas. Jack had attended HUC for seven years, but left without graduating and took a pulpit in Pueblo, Colorado. He claimed to have his bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees and, having now served in the ministry for twelve years (perhaps concurrent with his work as State Commissioner), at age 35 he still lacked "the degree of Rabbi which I am most eager to hold." With considerable experience in the field of Social Service, and a willingness to come to New York for JIR's Summer Session, he sought advice from Wise regarding his ability to qualify for a rabbinical degree. No record suggests Jack enrolled at JIR.\footnote{Faculty meeting minutes, April 9, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.}

**International Applicants**

In the fall, Rev. Nathaniel Jacobs, twenty eight years old and the minister at the Bradford Synagogue of British Jews, wrote to Wise expressing his interest in attending JIR, and requesting copies of faculty lectures and student notes that he might be able to read in the meantime.\footnote{Emanuel J. Jack to Stephen S. Wise, June 1, 1923. Box 37, folder 1, JIR Records.} Wise responded encouragingly, and indicated that Jacobs' letter had moved him to consider the possibility of arranging extension work through correspondence, so that JIR could be serviceable to men abroad.\footnote{Nathaniel Jacobs to Stephen S. Wise, June 19, 1923. Box 21, folder 12, JIR Records.} In letters he and Wise continued to exchange the following year, Jacobs explained that as a young Anglo-Jewish Reformer, he hoped the Institute's “great and noble work” would benefit not only American Israel but also world Jewry. Though he praised the work of Montefiore and Israel I. Mattuck, senior minister at London's Liberal Synagogue, he complained that Reform was misunderstood and in perilous condition in England where, for example, even though women were now permitted to sit in the main section of liberal synagogues, due to the power of custom, few did.

\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Nathaniel Jacobs, June 29, 1923. Box 21, folder 12, JIR Records.}
Wise explained that JIR did not train men only for the “Reformed” ministry, and reiterated the Institute’s commitment to presenting Orthodox, liberal, radical, Zionist and non-Zionist interpretations with an expectation that students would develop their own views. Then, while acknowledging that the United States offered greater employment opportunities, Wise challenged the young rabbi.

“Will you have the moral right to leave England,” Wise wrote, “where adequate men in the Jewish ministry, and particularly in the Liberal Jewish Ministry are even scarcer than in American Judaism?” Encouraging Jacobs not to abandon his congregation at Bradford, Wise suggested that if he stayed, he could still earn a Master's degree in England, or even take a year of study at JIR. However, if Jacobs was resolved to come to the US, Wise assured him he could study at JIR while working at a pulpit in or near New York, as all the older students were doing in order to earn the income they needed to pursue their studies. Soon thereafter, Jacobs married and chose not to enroll at JIR.

With enactment of the Immigration Act of 1924, Wise began to receive inquiries from candidates abroad unsure of how to proceed in the face of restrictions on entering the United States. One such candidate wrote to Wise from Palestine during the 1924-25 academic year. Benjamin Hoffseyer, born in Russia, had attended London University before moving to Palestine and continuing his studies at the Hebrew College there. Given the American quota restrictions, Hoffseyer could not enter the US unless he had a letter of acceptance. Wise consulted with Mack, asking if he should simply turn the young man down, or reach out to Judah Magnes and ask that he interview the applicant and then report on his secular as well as

569 Stephen S. Wise to Nathaniel Jacobs, June 19, 1924. Box 21, folder 12, JIR Records.
570 Jacobs wrote in the fall of 1924 to say he had married and would like to settle in the US where he could lead a moderate sized congregation, though he would need an income to support himself and his wife. Jacobs did not enroll at JIR, but continued to correspond with Wise. In 1928 he became Minister at United Congregation of Israelites, Jamaica, B.M.I. Stephen S. Wise to Nathaniel Jacobs, October 31, 1924, and Nathaniel Jacobs to Stephen S. Wise, March 8, 1928. Box 21, folder 12, JIR Records.
Jewish qualifications for admission. Mack instructed Wise to let Magnes interview the young man, and if Magnes recommended him, to grant the acceptance. Hoffseyer was admitted, and graduated with the class of 1926.

**Women**

While Wise was in Europe recruiting faculty in August 1922, the question of enrolling women at JIR was on his mind, and on others’ as well. By this time, nineteen American Protestant denominations ordained women, including the Congregationalists, Universalists, Unitarians and the Baptist General Conference, for example, but not a single Jewish seminary in Europe or the United States ordained women. It appeared, however, that might soon change, for the Central Conference of American Rabbis, at their recent meeting in Cape May in July, had voted 56-11 to no longer deny women the privilege of ordination.

For the preceding two years, faculty at HUC had been debating the issue, raised initially by Martha Neumark, a student at the College who, with the strong backing of her father David Neumark, professor of philosophy, was pressing for women’s right to ordination. In 1921 Kaufmann Kohler appointed a committee of board members and faculty to study the issue, and in their final report, which had the support of four out of six of the committee members, they declared that the College should not begin ordaining women for practical considerations, though in principle they saw no reason the College should preclude the possibility. Two members objected strenuously, however, including Jacob Lauterbach, the College’s influential professor of Talmud. HUC’s Board of Governors then invited the full faculty to consider the matter and, despite Lauterbach’s appointment to head the process, in March 1922 the faculty voted in favor of women’s ordination. Again, Lauterbach dissented strongly, providing a lengthy responsum explaining why the ordination of women

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575 Ibid., 65.
was antithetical to Jewish tradition, and warning of schism in the Jewish community. The Governors then decided to canvass alumni, and in July the matter came before the CCAR, where prior to voting, rabbis on both sides debated the issue. With the CCAR’s endorsement of women’s ordination, by August Martha Neumark had every reason to believe that, upon completion of her studies at the College, she would be ordained as the first woman rabbi, for the only step that remained was for the Board of Governors to accept the CCAR’s recommendation.  

Wise felt the matter required careful consideration immediately upon his return to New York. "We shall have to content ourselves for a time with a pronouncement to the effect that women will be admitted in a year or two," he wrote Charles Bloch from Vienna, "just as soon as satisfactory arrangements can be made in respect to housing, etc." 

Wise knew the question was not hypothetical for JIR. Three women would be participating in classes on opening day as “special students”—neither regular students enrolled in the rabbinical program, nor auditors—and at least one of them wanted to become a rabbi. Irma Lindheim, born into an assimilated German Jewish family in New York and the niece of board member Bertha Guggenheimer, was a fighter in more ways than one. In 1917, at age 31 this heiress and mother of four enlisted for active service in the Motor Corps of America and rose to the rank of first lieutenant. Soon thereafter she discovered Zionism, and dedicated her life to the cause. As chair of the Seventh Zionist District, she demonstrated her leadership working in collaboration with Henrietta Szold, Julian Mack, and others, and in that capacity, drawing upon her father’s inheritance, she created an educational and cultural center for Hadassah, and worked with Mordecai Kaplan to plan its programs.

576 Ibid., 67.  
577 Ibid., 71.  
After the War, however, she and her husband Norvin Lindheim encountered trouble. Because his firm did business with German companies, the United States military had questioned his loyalty and barred him from armed service; in 1920, after being charged with conspiring to defraud the United States, he was convicted and sent to prison. Meanwhile, the Hadassah center Irma Lindheim had established failed to gain stable financial footing despite the organization’s rising membership and successful fundraising, and it closed in 1921. At that point, with her husband still serving his prison sentence, Lindheim decided to step away from Zionist work in order to study Judaism. When she asked Wise if she could enroll at JIR, he responded enthusiastically. Lindheim rented a studio apartment a block from the Institute, and prepared to focus on her studies, which would include coursework at Columbia’s Teachers College, as well.

A few months later, the momentum toward the ordination of women, which the CCAR had accelerated over the summer with the Cape May vote, suddenly collapsed when, in February 1923, HUC’s Board of Governors decided against accepting the CCAR decision. HUC would not ordain women after all, and Martha Neumark would not become a rabbi.

Lindheim decided to move the issue forward at JIR by petitioning the faculty to change her status and admit her as a regular student in the rabbinical program. Later, she said she knew this was “monumental” even for Wise, who had fought hard for the rights of women, including suffrage.

At their February meeting, in response to Lindheim’s petition, the faculty considered the question of admitting women. The minutes indicate "all present" clearly understood that it was not against the principles of JIR to admit women students; their concern focused not on

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581 Ibid., 71.

582 Ibid., 74.
theory but practice. Abrahams, who at the same meeting urged that the school not become a "specialized training college for rabbis" but an institute of Jewish learning, said admitting women would add to the burden of establishing JIR. Goldstein, perhaps the most politically liberal member of the faculty, expressed hope that in time it would be possible to admit women in all departments—at present, however, he opposed admitting women, either as regular or special students. There was already a lack of seriousness among the students, he said, and he wanted the Institute to cultivate a more severe atmosphere, which could more easily be done without women around. The faculty shared a consensus that the school lacked the proper facilities for women, such as dormitories, and the matter should be postponed for about two years. In the meantime, they agreed, the three women already "members of the Institute," including Lindheim, would be permitted to remain. Beyond that, however, women would only be admitted as auditors to the Extension Courses.\(^{583}\)

Lindheim continued to press the issue. The faculty revisited the matter in March, and again at their May meeting, where they reversed their earlier vote and unanimously recommended that "women be admitted to the Institute upon the same basis as men, and that the conditions of admission, residence and graduation be applicable to women in the same

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\(^{583}\) According to the February 1923 faculty meeting minutes, “The question of admitting women as regular students to the Institute was considered at length. This matter was brought up for consideration as a result of a request from Mrs. Lindheim to be permitted to become a regular student. It was the concensus of opinion that in view of the lack of proper facilities, such as dormitories, etc. for women, that the matter should be disposed of for about two years. It was clearly understood by all those present that it was not against the principles of the Institute to admit women students but as Dr. Abrahams pointed out, it might add to the burden of the founding of the Institute. While Dr. Goldstein expressed the hope that in time it might be possible to admit women in all departments of the work, he was strongly opposed to admitting women at present as either regular or special students. He felt there was a lack of seriousness among the students and would like to cultivate a more severe atmosphere. This he felt could be done easier without women than with them. It was therefore decided that for the time being women can only be admitted as auditor to the Extension Courses, but to permit the three women already members of the Institute to remain.” Faculty meeting minutes, February 2, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
way in which they are applied to the men.” Perhaps reflecting some nervousness about the decision, they urged the exercise of caution in the selection of students.  

The Institute’s 1923 charter was revised to include in its mission the training of “men and women for the Jewish ministry.” However, despite the Institute’s purposeful publicity strategy, Wise appears to have made no announcement to the Jewish press regarding the potentially momentous change. Indeed, ultimately, the faculty vote proved inconsequential, for in the decade that followed, despite a handful of requests Wise received from women seeking to study at the Institute, JIR failed to implement any change in policy, and never again did the faculty formally revisit the broader issue of women’s status at the Institute.

Competition

Did JIR increase the number of American rabbis in the United States during the 1920s, or did it simply draw from a pool of candidates who otherwise would have attended HUC or JTS? Likely, it did both. Despite the diversity of the Institute’s applicant pool, overall, most students came from the East and were far too liberal religiously to attend JTS. Some may have attended HUC had they not had the option of studying under Wise in New York, but it seems reasonable to assume that for a portion of those who adhered to some halakhic practice, or to Zionist or left-leaning politics, and who came from New York, HUC under Julian Morgenstern’s presidency did not appeal. Without JIR, these students may have chosen a livelihood other than the rabbinate, perhaps attending Kaplan’s Teachers’ Institute and entering the field of Jewish education, instead.

In its first years, JIR drew students currently studying at JTS, such as Abraham Dubin who transferred to the Institute in 1923, and its growing applicant pool probably included men who would otherwise have applied to one of the pre-existing seminaries. At the same time

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584 Faculty meeting minutes, March 7 1923 and May 4, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records. The March 1923 faculty meeting minutes read, “A further discussion of the question of admitting women students to the Institute then took place.”

585 Women would not enter the rabbinate until 1972, when the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion ordained Sally Priesand. See Nadell, Women Who Would Be Rabbis, passim.
time, JTS and HUC successfully competed for some of JIR’s prospects. For example, in February 1923, Bernard Zeiger, a young graduate of the University of Michigan currently studying at the School for Social Work in New York, wrote to Wise expressing his interest in entering the rabbinate with the aim of eventually going into social service. Wise intended to consult Horace Kallen about the young man's fitness for JIR; no record indicates whether or not Wise did, or if Zeiger applied to JIR. Regardless, Zeiger chose to attend HUC, where he graduated in 1929.

HUC, in the competitive spirit the seminaries shared, may have taken an additional step to minimize JIR’s impact on the College’s students and alumni, by prohibiting them from attending JIR’s 1923 summer session, which the Institute again opened to students and rabbis regardless of movement affiliation—Wise had that impression, at least. In July, Wise wrote Mack in Paris to update him on a number of Institute matters. Regarding the summer session, he reported it was going only fairly well. “I say fairly well because you know we are under the ban of Cincinnati and none of the men have really come.” Three or four attended for a few days, he said, but none enrolled as regular students. In contrast, the Institute’s previous Summer School enrolled twenty to thirty HUC graduates. “Until we reach an understanding with Cincinnati we shall have to omit the Summer Session,” Wise concluded, unless perhaps in the future the Institute could provide living quarters for fifteen to twenty students.

Students in the First Class

In its first year, the Institute’s student body included about twenty-five regular students as well as a considerable number of “special students” taking classes for credit but not enrolled in the rabbinical program. Because students entered at various academic levels,

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586 Faculty meeting minutes, February 2, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
JIR began with three classes, including a section for some of the older students. Not all of the ten students who were ordained in 1926 as members of the Institute’s first graduating class entered that first year; several enrolled later with advanced standing.

The student body during the Institute’s earliest years represented in several ways the diversity of American Jewry at the start of the 1920s. Half were born abroad, in places including Poland, Russia and Austria. One, Zwi Anderman, had already received rabbinical and doctoral training at the Israelitisch Theologische Lehrenstalt in Vienna, and another, Benjamin Hoffseyer, had studied extensively in Palestine and London before coming to JIR.

Of those born in the US, interestingly, not one member of the first graduating class was a native of New York City—rather, their birthplaces included Baltimore, Rochester, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, and even Guthrie, Oklahoma.Religiously, several appear to have been moving along the trajectory from orthodoxy to liberalism that Goldstein described; two, for example, Abraham Dubin and Morris Rose, in their youths had attended the Orthodox Jacob Joseph School, earned their undergraduate degrees at the City College of New York, and subsequently studied with Mordecai Kaplan at the JTS Teachers Institute, though prior to doing so, Dubin first enrolled at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshivah. At the same time, several students came from more secular backgrounds, with little Jewish education but

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588 “And America Shall Lead Them: An Interview with Professor Ismar Elbogen and Dr. Felix Perles, The Jewish Institute of Religion Scope of Work Outlined,” The American Hebrew, October 20, 1922, p. 608. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
590 JIR did not admit all applicants, and not all admitted applicants chose to attend. In addition, not all who attended the Institute qualified to graduate—the faculty explicitly warned applicants upon acceptance that admission did not guarantee graduation, and this turned out to be the case for a number of students who either dropped out or were dismissed. Such was the case for Maurice Teschner who, during his very first semester at JIR in the fall of 1922, misrepresented his standing at the Institute by claiming he was a senior. After speaking with him, Wise and Goldstein determined that his remaining a student at JIR was not in the best interests of the Institute, due to his "lack of plasticity, independent manner" and the serious problem he created at the beginning of his tenure as a student. They urged Teschner to pursue a secular education, and he left the Institute. Faculty meeting minutes, December 21, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
degrees from American universities including Yale, University of California, New York University, Syracuse University, and even Cooper Institute of Technology. Two, Max Meyer and Morris Rose, had studied previously at New York University Law School, and Meyer had spent several years as principal of New York’s Hebrew Orphan Asylum School before enrolling at the Institute.\(^{591}\)

Some of these students brought a left-leaning political orientation and were likely attracted by Wise and his involvement in progressive politics, and perhaps, too, by the social service component of the Institute's mission. A number of students, both European and American, were Zionists, and similarly, were likely attracted to JIR due to Wise's leadership in the Zionist movement and the school's openness to Jewish nationalism.

**Other Students of Note—Regular, Special and Auditing**

Not all students who enrolled in the early years graduated; the school refused to ordain women, as discussed earlier, and others failed to complete their studies for a variety of reasons. Nonetheless, some of those who would not graduate had a strong presence at the school. Notably, among the “special students” in the first class, Irma Lindheim was not the only woman with an impressive set of credentials; her classmate Dora Askowith, for example, had a more substantial academic record than any other student at the Institute with the possible exception of Zwi Anderman. Born in 1884 in Kovno, Askowith immigrated to Boston as a child, attended Barnard College where she graduated with honors, and then earned her MA and PhD in History at Columbia. She now taught history in New York public high schools, and lectured in Jewish fields at Hunter College, where she also advocated for Jewish students and organized Hunter’s Menorah Society.\(^{592}\) A Zionist active in Jewish communal affairs, she had served on Hadassah’s early Central Committee, and in 1917 became national director of the Women’s Organization of the American Jewish Congress,

\(^{591}\) *The Annual*, 1926, p. 27. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{592}\) Pamela Nadell, *Women Who Would be Rabbis*, 76.
where she worked closely with Louise Waterman Wise. Askowith also had a record fighting
for women’s suffrage and greater rights for Jewish women, though unlike Lindheim, as a
student at JIR, she planned to pursue an academic career, not the rabbinate. 593

Ralph Marcus, too, planned on an academic career. Born in San Francisco, he grew
up in New York, where his family belonged to the Free Synagogue. The son of a a talmud
scholar, Marcus earned his BA at Columbia, and while taking classes at JIR he concurrently
studied in the doctoral programs at Columbia and Harvard, with Richard Gottheil and Harry
Wolfson, respectively, focusing on Hellenistic Judaism and law in the apocrypha. 594

For a brief period, Wise’s son James Waterman Wise attended the Institute. While a
student, in 1924 he published a book, Liberalizing Liberal Judaism which, as discussed
below, received a harsh critique in the Jewish Institute Quarterly by fellow student Philip
Bernstein, who felt Wise’s universalism went too far. Wise ultimately decided against
becoming a rabbi and shortly before he was to graduate with the first class in 1926, he
withdrew. 595

A tragic turn of events took the life of one student, Bernard Turner, who had graduated
from City College in 1922 and briefly taught high school history before enrolling at JIR.
While a student at the Institute, he attended classes and worked at the Hebrew Orphan
Asylum, but in August of 1924 his body was found off Steeplechase Pier in Coney Island.
The New York Times reported that, as a result of hard application to study and teaching, he
had recently had a nervous breakdown, and apparently he committed suicide. 596

593 Ibid., 77.
3, Ralph Marcus Memorial Issue (July, 1957): 143-144; and “Guide to the Ralph Marcus Papers
1934-1949.” University of Chicago Library, accessed July 10, 2013,
http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/src/findaids/view.php?eadid=ICU.SPCL.MARCUSRALPH#idp50
269168.
595 James Waterman Wise remained politically active and began editing Opinion, a journal published
by the American Jewish Congress. Urofsky, A Voice That Spoke for Justice, 230-231.
596 “Finds Student’s Body, Life Guard Recovers It Off the Steeplechase Pier at Coney,” New York
Times, August 16, 1924.
**Academic Placement of Students**

At the beginning of the school year, the American faculty members joined Wise and Goldstein at the Synagogue House to administer exams to the new students, in order to and to place them into one of three levels from beginning to advanced, with those receiving advanced placement entering in the equivalent of the program's second or third year. They evaluated the students' ability to read and translate Biblical Hebrew, their familiarity with Mishnah, their knowledge of Jewish history, and their comprehension of modern Hebrew. They also noted which students required improvement in their spoken English, and in some cases they noted previous involvement with Jewish communal life. Wise seemed pleased with the incoming class, though rather than crowing about their academic qualifications, he touted them as “a good and earnest band.”

**Enrollment**

By the start of the second academic year, the Institute’s enrollment increased to about thirty-five, including regular as well as “special students,” and auditors; that number would climb to near fifty by the fall of 1924, and by the end of the academic year 1924-25, the Institute was receiving a steady stream of applications. "If we admitted everybody we might have somewhere between fifty and a hundred students," Wise told Mack, "but of course we will not. I think we turn down two out of three, possibly three out of four." Applicants often spoke of their desire to study with Stephen S. Wise, and to be part of an institution he led, and many of those accepted brought a strong commitment either to Zionism

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597 Faculty administering the exams included Nathan Krass, Harry Lewis, Joshua Bloch, Nissan Touroff and J Max Weis. Faculty meeting minutes, October 6, 1922. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
599 Stephen S. Wise to Robert T. Herford, November 5, 1923. Box 19, folder 6, JIR Records; and Stephen S. Wise to Louis Grossmann, November 10, 1924. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records. In an interview published in *The Annual* of 1926, Wise said, “We began the first year with twelve men, and in the last three years the attendance has grown until today there are forty regular students, and a very considerable number of special students and auditors. And...the enrollment for the year 1926-27 promises to be very large.” *The Annual*, 1926, p. 36. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
or to American progressive politics; Anderman, for example, had been involved in the Zionist
movement dating back to his youth in the Ukraine, and Bernstein entered the Institute with a
deep commitment to pacifism.\footnote{Several students, including Parker and Rose, had studied at the New School for Social Research, which had recently been founded in 1919 by a group of pacifist scholars; in addition, some students took extra classes at the New School during their years at JIR.}

In order to ensure that students would be capable of handling the coursework at JIR, the faculty regularly reviewed requirements for admission. Initially the Institute identified a college degree as its sole requirement, but once the faculty began meeting prospective applicants, they quickly added the competencies mentioned above.\footnote{Faculty meeting minutes, September 12, 1924. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.} While those faculty who hoped JIR would become a center for Jewish scholarship sought students capable of advanced study in their fields, few of the students, with the exception perhaps of Anderman and Berman, had the requisite training to work with classical Jewish texts at a high level. Still, despite faculty complaints about students' lack of secular knowledge, for the most part, faculty were pleased with the intellectual caliber of those who gravitated to JIR. "If the general average continues to rise in this manner," Goldstein wrote Wise in the summer of 1923, referring to several new students, "I shall not feel so envious of the Johns Hopkins Medical and the Harvard Law."\footnote{Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, July 19, 1923. Box 16, folder 15, JIR Records.}

Overall, enrollment increased at a healthy pace, and Wise took pleasure in how the growing student body proved wrong JIR's early detractors. "You will remember that it was said a few years ago that men would not come to us," Wise wrote Louis Grossmann. "I was told, not very long ago, that Senator Alfred Cohen wagered, a few years ago, that the JIR would never open its doors." With nearly fifty students in JIR's current three classes outnumbering HUC's four upper classes, Wise added, "altogether, I think we face a most promising future."\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Louis Grossmann, November 10, 1924. Box 17, folder 9, JIR Records.}
The high application rate meant the JIR faculty could exercise discernment in a more selective admissions process. Their decisions would play a role in determining the composition of the future American rabbinate and, through that rabbinate, the course of American Judaism. More immediately, they would have an impact in the metropolitan area, where students with even the slightest Jewish background would quickly find themselves occupying pulpits at synagogues struggling with a national shortage of rabbis.

Field Placement

Student pulpits played an important role in the professional training JIR provided, in several ways. Field assignments were the school’s primary means of fulfilling its mission to engage students with Jewish cultural and religious life in the New York area, and with the Jewish community’s many issues, which the students would soon be called upon as rabbis to address. In addition to providing practical training, of equal if not greater importance to the students, pulpits also became a source of much-needed income. Unlike HUC, JIR granted students neither a living stipend nor full room and board, and while JIR did not charge tuition, most students had to rely on their pulpit work to cover their living expenses. The approach fostered independence and gave the students an experience anything but cloistered; however, it had a downside, too—work often competed with academics for the students' time, to the despair of the faculty, and students had little to no opportunity for leisure.  

By August 1922, Wise had secured placements for many of the students, and in the ensuing months the number of student weekly, weekend and High Holy Day pulpits increased. Located in and around New York City, on Long Island, and in more outlying areas like upstate New York and Pennsylvania, these congregations, whose geographic distribution

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The JIR’s policy regarding tuition and maintenance read, “No charge will be made for tuition; but students will be expected to maintain themselves during their period of study. In order that they may be enabled to do this, efforts will be made to place students in different communities to conduct weekend services, and in positions in the educational and social field. These positions ought to ensure students sufficient to cover cost of maintenance in New York.” Jewish Institute of Religion Preliminary Announcement 1923-1924, p. 11. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
reflected how the mobility of the New York Jewish community was beginning to extend beyond the city's outer boroughs, tended to be small and new, growing but not yet large enough or wealthy enough to hire a full-time rabbi. By employing a JIR student, they entered into a reciprocal relationship with the Institute—they received the services of a rabbi, albeit one in training, and in return, they played an important role in that student's education, while also helping him earn a livelihood so he could continue his studies. During the school’s first year of operation, Wise and Sidney Goldstein reached out to a variety of congregations urging them to consider hiring a student rabbi, and created a placement system in order to make the assignments. The system benefited the students as well as the congregations that hired them, and Wise soon began to plan ways the system could benefit JIR’s fundraising, as well.

Inevitably, reaching out to local congregations, especially those beyond the small Free Synagogue movement, entailed engaging with the Reform movement—perhaps not its central administrative bodies, but certainly its affiliated congregations in the New York metropolitan area, Connecticut, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. As the student body at JIR grew, Wise and Goldstein sought more field placements, and appealed to an ever greater number of congregations located too far from Cincinnati to benefit from the College's own program. These Reform congregations found themselves in an awkward position—many likely felt a strong loyalty to the College, which they sustained through the dues they paid annually to the UAHC, and hiring a JIR student implied supporting, if not directly, HUC's competitor. At the same time, they could not possibly hire an HUC student due to geography. Reform congregations in the eastern region that required weekly or weekend support from a rabbinical student who shared, at least to some degree, their liberal perspective had only one choice—JIR.
Wise knew that neither the College nor the UAHC, nor the CCAR for that matter, would be pleased by this incursion into their congregational base of support, for the ramifications over time could be serious. Congregations that benefited from the rabbinical services of JIR students might become favorably disposed toward the Institute, despite the Reform movement's ongoing disparagement of it. And in the near future, when these student rabbis became full-fledged rabbis and these congregations continued to grow, if the field placements worked out well, the likelihood would increase that these congregations might hire JIR alumni as their regular rabbis.

Wise and his associates continued to expand the orbit of congregations served by the Institute, fully aware of the implications for the Reform movement. "Our best card in forcing good terms…is our fine placement record and our continued threat to them in future placement," Slonimsky told Wise in February 1924. "That and that alone will force them to parley." He urged fortifying to the utmost "this ace card in our hands." He urged fortifying to the utmost "this ace card in our hands."  

Goldstein hoped to secure between ten and twenty-five pulpits for students by the end of the first academic year. In order to build the field placement system, he and Wise travelled to congregations around the area attempting to convince them to hire a student. In 1923, for example, Goldstein met with congregations north of New York City in White Plains, Glens Falls and Amsterdam. Each of these, as well as congregations in Danbury and Trenton, 

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607 In addition, anticipating the need JIR would soon have to place its graduates in Reform congregations as permanent rabbis, a process that would inevitably require involvement by the CCAR, Slonimsky proposed that Wise reach out to Abram Granison, who had until recently worked on placement with the CCAR, and was an ally of Wise. Granison could help bring greater JIR representation onto the CCAR Executive Committee and the Committee on Religious Activities, which played a central role in placement and from which he had recently been dropped. "He is close to you; he is quite astute; and membership on these committees, especially the last, is absolutely necessary for his successful functioning in the placement work," Slonimsky wrote. Henry Slonimsky to Stephen S. Wise, February 11, 1924. Box 9, folder 11, JIR Records.
608 Goldstein reported on extensive work he was doing organizing congregations in White Plains, Glens Falls and Amsterdam, New York, and spoke of the importance of arranging for students to serve these communities on an ongoing basis. He also proposed that the Institute hold a conference in the 1923-24 academic year for representatives from the various communities the Institute "is
agreed to serve as a weekend pulpit for the academic year 1923-24, while congregations in
smaller towns like Gloversville and New Castle hired students to lead High Holy Day
services only. The system grew rapidly, and by October 1923 all High Holy Day pulpits
(possibly fifteen) had expanded to become regular weekend positions. Students with weekend
positions generally lived in New York, and visited their congregations each Friday, returning
to the city on Sunday or Monday. By contrast, a student serving an “all week” pulpit lived in
the community where his pulpit was located, and during the week came into Manhattan to
attend classes at the Institute. For the most part, "all week" pulpits were located within the
city or nearby, in places like Yorkville, Borough Park, Flushing, Staten Island and Newark,
with some as far away as Poughkeepsie. Most weekend pulpits were further away, in places
like Amsterdam and Kingston, New York; Plainfield, New Jersey; Danbury, Connecticut;
and, by 1924, Easton and Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

As in any fieldwork program, students learned on the job—at least, that was the aim.
Philip Bernstein reflected on his first fieldwork experience in a baccalaureate sermon he
preached at the Institute two decades later. “I presume that our class experienced more and
learned less than any in the history of the Institute,” he said. “Without being able even to read
the Torah I was sent for the Holidays in the fall of 1922 to Newcastle, Pennsylvania where I
was soon preaching on this subject, ‘Jews of Newcastle, Wake Up.’

“It was fortunate for me,” he added, “that they did not.”

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609 For the academic year 1923-24, for example, Philip Bernstein, Morton Berman and Benjamin
Parker held weekend pulpit assignments in greater New York communities Amsterdam, Danbury and
White Plains, respectively. Two students who subsequently did not graduate, Jacob Ogle and Myron
Jacobs, served High Holy Day pulpits in Gloversville and New Castle, respectively. Sidney E.
610 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, November 28, 1923.
611 Ibid.; and Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, August 2, 1924. Box 16, folder 15, JIR
Records.
612 Philip Bernstein, baccalaureate address at the Jewish Institute of Religion, June 5, 1942. Box 6,
folder 2, JIR Records.
Initially Charles Bloch oversaw the placement system, but Wise and Goldstein always maintained a firm hand in the process, assigning students to particular congregations based on their own predilections.613 Concerned that the availability of student rabbis might hurt the market for ordained rabbis, they tried to avoid sending students to congregations considering hiring full-time rabbis. When, for example, Wise learned that a rabbi had applied for a position at a congregation in Trenton, he chose not to send a student there. "That would be encouraging in the most abominable way a system of competition," he told Harry Jacobs, who had recently left the position for a new one in New Rochelle.614 While the Institute attempted to regulate the system, at times students flouted the rules. When Wise heard about a student who lied about his salary while negotiating independently with a different congregation, Wise called for the student’s suspension, and the faculty agreed, pending an investigation.615

Wise and Goldstein also supervised the students' fieldwork, and Wise hoped to make an on-site visit to each congregation annually. In addition to visiting the congregations, he and Goldstein proposed that JIR together with the Free Synagogue convene a conference that would gather delegates from all congregations in the placement system to meet together with the students at 68th Street, in order to discuss issues arising in their work, as well as fundraising for the Institute.616

613 In August 1922 Wise wrote to Bloch from Vienna regarding “the matter of positions for the young men,” about which he was “a little troubled.” Recognizing he could do nothing to help while in Europe, he urged Bloch, don’t forget about my big son, who I think is quite ready to step in and take some place for the Holy Days.” Stephen S. Wise to Charles Bloch, August 3, 1922. Box 3, folder 13, JIR Records.
615 Wise reported accidentally discovering that a student already under contract to work with a congregation for the following year, had begun negotiating with a separate congregation and, in the course of that negotiation, had lied about his current salary. Wise described the student’s conduct as “most unethical,” and asked the faculty to approve suspending the student; the faculty agreed, pending an investigation to find out if the student was, indeed, at fault. Faculty meeting minutes, June 5, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
616 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, October 2, 1923.
From the start, JIR’s placement system included non-pulpit positions, as well. Through social service fellowships, some students worked at Bellevue Hospital or at one of the Free Synagogue’s uptown or downtown sites, and others helped Wise with the weekly service he led at Carnegie Hall. Wise was always on the lookout for additional placements. In May of 1923, for example, while urging Harry Lewis to devote a larger amount of time to the Institute, Wise proposed that Lewis give his prison chaplaincy work to a student. More significantly, Wise successfully secured funding to establish a position at Columbia University for Ben Goldstein, a member of the Class of 1926, who was able to turn his student placement into a full-time position after he graduated.

In the early twenties, some criticized American rabbinical seminary training for its lack of fieldwork training, presumably out of concern for professionalizing the field. When Horace Kallen reiterated this criticism in a talk he gave at JIR in 1925, Morton Berman objected, citing the Institute’s placement system. Publishing a fuller response in the Institute Quarterly, Berman defended JIR’s approach. Most students, he said, serve at least two years of rabbinical fieldwork in a small community “observing, analyzing, studying, serving as a medical student does under guidance of his professors at a hospital.” Kallen also appeared ignorant of “the experiments of our students in the divers [sic] forms of social service carried on under expert supervision,” he said. Opportunities for fieldwork steadily increased at JIR through the growing number of weekend and all-week pulpits, a fact in which Wise, Goldstein and the students took pride.

The same could not necessarily be said of the faculty, however, who grew increasingly concerned that students were spending far too much time working in their pulpits, at the expense of their academic work. They noted that some students excelled in

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617 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24, 1923.
their pulpits while producing mediocre academic work, though they also expressed pleasure upon hearing that academically-strong students like Philip Bernstein and Morton Berman were succeeding in their congregations. Despite their frustration, they understood the relation between the curriculum and the fieldwork experience, as became apparent when the director of the Free Synagogue’s Sunday school complained that JIR students were among the poorest teachers he had ever hired. Dismayed, Goldstein arranged for the students to receive instruction in practical classroom teaching.

The Jewish Institute Quarterly: “We Must Build Anew”

As the first students embarked upon their course of study at JIR, seismic forces across the globe were bringing unalterable change to Jewish life in Europe as well as the United States. Some students, particularly those from Europe, experienced the most devastating of these forces directly: violence and destruction during the World War, and economic crisis in its aftermath; illness and disease, including the influenza and tuberculosis epidemics; anti-Semitic violence and overt discrimination in Europe as well as the United States; and, beginning in 1924, the closing off of immigration from Europe into the US. American students, too, were witnessing great change within the Jewish community, though of a different nature. As young people devoting their lives to Jewish life, they were troubled by the rapid abandonment of Jewish identity and practice by many of their peers seeking to assimilate into mainstream American secular society, despite various Jewish agencies’ efforts to prevent this—and they were troubled, at the same time, by a growing anti-Semitism among groups and individuals who, like the president of Harvard, seemed determined to block or at least curtail Jews’ entry into the nation’s professional, educational and social institutions.

When the US government enacted the Immigration Act of 1924, closing the gates of immigration for most of Eastern European Jewry, some students wondered if the institutions

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619 Faculty meeting minutes, June 5, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
620 Faculty meeting minutes, April 23, 1925. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
that sustained immigrant life in New York, and the culture they fostered, may soon come to
an end. A majority of JIR students were either first- or second-generation Americans whose
families had benefited from the open immigration policies, and they well understood how the
immigrant experience defined American Jewish life as they knew it, particularly in New
York City.

Paradoxically, amidst global chaos and rising prejudice at home, unprecedented
possibility had also emerged for this new generation of American Jews as a result of a
number of factors, including the Balfour Declaration and subsequent growth of the Yishuv in
Palestine; the flourishing of Jewish cultural and religious organizations in New York, where
Zionism, the Hebrew renewal movement, landsmanshaftn, the Workmen’s Circle, and
Yiddish art, music and theater all co-existed; the city’s thriving intellectual life, too,
gravitating around individuals like Mordecai Kaplan, and expressed through literary organs
like the Menorah Journal; and, the increasing economic and geographic mobility of
American Jewry manifest in the steady migration of Jews leaving downtown for middle-class
communities in the outer ring of the city and beyond.

The founders of JIR had hoped that by virtue of being in New York, JIR students
would engage with the major institutions, issues and individuals shaping contemporary
Jewish life, and articles and essays students wrote at the time show that, indeed, JIR students
were attuned to many of the ideas, movements and cultural activities—Jewish as well as
secular, religious as well as political—percolating across the city. With Orthodox synagogues
abounding, and Conservative as well as Reform Judaism on the rise, they had exposure to a
broad continuum of Jewish religious life. The students were aware, too, of much happening at
the edges and beyond the synagogue world, from Kaplan's Jewish Center movement to the
schools and summer camps under the aegis of Samson Benderly's Board of Jewish Education.
Politically, some students identified with the city’s labor movement or allied themselves with Progressive causes that had enjoyed the longtime support of Stephen S. Wise.

All of this—the violence and destruction abroad, the social and political upheaval at home, and, too, the promise that abounded for American Jewry, had a profound impact on how students at the Institute thought about Judaism. Rather than curtailing their nationalist spirit, for example, the students' awareness of the pernicious side of European as well as American nationalism solidified their support for Jewish nationalism, and a number of students while attending JIR worked in the Zionist movement which, in the wake of the Balfour Declaration, was attracting greater support among American Jewry. Some also identified with the related movement to create a modern, spoken Hebrew language, centered not only in Palestine but in New York, as well; others first encountered adherents of that movement when they sat in the classes of Touroff, Yellin, Baron, and Berkson.

As the students debated the implications for Judaism of all that was unfolding around them, they were aware, too, of a largely inchoate segment of New York Jewry and by extension, American Jewry, not engaged with any of this, unconsumed by the grand ideas swirling through the culture. More concerned, instead, with combating whatever obstacles stood in the way of education and advancement, including anti-Semitic quotas in colleges and universities and discrimination in housing and the workplace, many of these Jews focused their efforts on attaining a comfortable standard of living for themselves and their children, rather than engaging in the ideological debates of the day.

**Student Writings**

How did living in this particular place and time impact the students at JIR? The *Jewish Institute Quarterly*, which students began publishing in the fall of 1924 provides a window into the ideas and passions that motivated members of the first few JIR classes. The categories of content of the Quarterly, and the many articles, editorials and reviews written
principally by members of the student body, and occasionally by members of the faculty, too, yield a glimpse into the students' mindset, and the concerns that mattered most to them. In keeping with the ecumenical spirit of the school, the Quarterly welcomed all points of view, seeking “free and untrammeled” interpretations of Jewish life and thought; at the same time, the journal reveals a shared, if multifaceted, sensibility on the part of the students who contributed. Only one quarter of the student body published articles in the Quarterly, but one of its student editors, John Tepfer, insisted in May 1925 that, overall, the students of JIR shared a definite point of view:

We are not bound by any rigid expression of Judaism, its theory or practice. Just as little are we Reformed [sic] as Orthodox. We do not have to use up our energies supporting ancient and perhaps crumbling walls. We do not have to spend ourselves holding the door against hostile and unholy forces—science or nationalism—trying to break into our sanctum. No! we throw the doors wide open and invite all to come in. If they take possession of our fields and applying newer processes make them more fertile, we all enjoy the more abundant crop. Let science, criticism, historical investigation shed what light they can upon our Judaism, and let us rather use our energies to assist in cultivating our field with all the newest appliances. And not merely as scholars shall we study ‘Judische Wissenschaft’ and produce scientific ‘tit-bits,’ but also as Jews interpret and practise that Jewish Life which emerges from the action of these new process, which emerges after free and fearless enquiry and researches, helped by the total machinery of our modern science and directed by our present-day ‘Weltanschauung.’

An analysis of student writings in the Quarterly between 1924-26 reveals that Tepfer's description of their shared viewpoint was apt. In his ambition and idealism, and in the importance he attributed to the student endeavor, Tepfer likely was emblematic of many of his classmates. The students of JIR sought to transform Judaism by contributing to a renaissance in Jewish life, and bringing Judaism's highest universal values to bear on creating change in the world. At times their language was grandiose and had a manifesto-like tone to it. More than a few believed their task, and the aim of liberal Judaism, was to save humanity

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from careening down a path toward destruction on which they feared the world seemed headed.

The students’ immediate challenge, Tepfer wrote, was to create ‘Liberal Judaism’ in the biggest and noblest sense, based on their collective thought and achievement—and then to “let loose upon Jewry this great new force.”622 They would do this first by setting down their own views on Jews and Judaism. Tepfer called upon the students to act with a sense of urgency—they needed to make their discoveries and draw their analyses now, while still students, for soon from the pulpit they would have to convince others that their interpretation of Judaism is “the highest expression of our entire modern life and thought.”

**Students Critique What They See**

The students’ desire to create a Jewish renaissance stemmed from a complicated set of factors. They thought more globally than any generation of young Jews preceding them, and they critiqued Jewish life broadly. On the one hand, equipped as they were with a secular undergraduate education, JIR students expressed their faith in science; likewise, in the tradition of the early Reformers, they sought a religious belief system that cohered with their rationalist training. At the same time, however, they did not want to dispense with what some called the mystical and the prophetic. They spoke romantically of the Jewish spirit, in the way of Ehad Ha’am, and their view of the prophetic entailed fighting for social and economic justice by challenging the powerful and standing up for the oppressed. They rejected the labels Reform (and Reformed), Orthodox or Conservative, and they rejected, too, what they regarded to be the values of Christian society. Their views of Judaism, Jewry and God stemmed from a critique of much of what they saw and experienced in the world around them.

*Orthodox Judaism*

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622 Ibid., 117.
Despite the school's professed openness to orthodoxy, none of the writings in the *Quarterly* indicate any attraction toward Orthodox Judaism. To the contrary, the students do not explore the role of *halakhah* or *mitzvot* in their lives or in their religious belief systems, nor do they grapple explicitly with contemporary Orthodox life in America. Rather, their negative associations with Orthodoxy emerge as a subtext. They refer to “primitive” or "ghetto" Judaism, which they associate with superstition, magic, and meaningless ritual like wearing *tefilin* or *tzitzit*, and which they critique as insular, disconnected from the essential truths of Judaism and cut off, too, from the great intellectual contributions of the broader culture.\(^{623}\)

*Reform Judaism*

In their rejection of *halakhic* Judaism and their commitment to creating a rationalist religion open to non-Jewish influences, the students were in sync with Reform Judaism—yet it was against Reform, with whom they perhaps had the greatest affinity, that they launched their more pointed critique. They sought, after all, to shape *liberal* Judaism, an endeavor that did not involve the Orthodox. In striving to liberalize liberal Judaism, the students of JIR would need either to change Reform Judaism, or to create something new.

The students’ critique of the Reform Judaism of their day had several different facets. In the *Quarterly*, their strongest criticism focused on what they perceived to be Reform's commitment to Judaism purely as a religion, without regard for culture and nationhood. Whereas students may have found the Orthodox too insular, many perceived Reform's emphasis on religious devotion as a strategy for assimilation. Morton Berman, for example, in a January 1925 editorial, condemned the UAHC declaration at its recent St. Louis Convention that the Union's function involved the fostering of Judaism exclusively as a

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religion. "Does the Union intend by this to eliminate from the Synagogue every other phase of Judaism?" he wrote. "Does the action imply that the liberal congregations regard Judaism as a religion and nothing else?" We cannot accept this, Berman wrote, for Judaism is much more than a creed or code of ethics, and more than the thirteen principles of Maimonides, a declaration of faith, or even a system of ethical principles. Rather, Judaism includes, too, a history and a culture, a worldview and a way of life. “Neither a Nicaean nor a St. Louisian Council can define the limits of a doctrine or belief,” he wrote.\(^\text{624}\)

A second critique of Reform focused on its aesthetics. Reform Judaism had become lifeless, students claimed, a result of its staid approach to form and lack of regard for the higher content and significance of Jewish teaching and practice. The liturgy, for example, had become “restricted and cut and dried,” David Alpert claimed, with the late Friday night service becoming the most important of the week, rather than the service Saturday morning (“impracticable”) or Sunday morning (“not winning enough new adherents”). Instead, he called for an approach to prayer more liturgically rich and beautiful than Union Prayer Book (UPB) allowed, to prevent the “dull, cold mumbling of words.” Prayers like Mogen Avoth, the Kiddush and Lecho Dodi should not be cast aside, he wrote, as is done in the UPB, and the full text of some abbreviated prayers, like the Nishmath, should be restored. “There is no lack of excellent prayers,” he wrote, “although just that is suggested by the want of freedom in the choice of prayers.” The UPB could also be used more effectively, he said, by not regarding any service program as fixed and final, to be repeated over and over, for “no value is gained in making the service completely standardized.”\(^\text{625}\) Sharing a service program he used at his own student pulpit, Congregation Beth Hasholom of Williamsport, Pennsylvania,

\(^{624}\) Morton B. Berman, “Editorial Comment: Judaism as a Religion,” *The Jewish Institute Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (March, 1925): 83-84.

\(^{625}\) David B. Alpert, “Types of Liturgy,” *The Jewish Institute Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (November 15, 1924): 5-6.
Alpert noted, “the experimenter draws widely on Hebrew sources for new prayers to insert into his programmes."

To further strengthen the Friday night service, Alpert began to include the reading of Torah, a practice customarily reserved for morning services. "This position is not a return to orthodox Judaism, and it does not go back to Ghetto Judaism," he wrote later that year. Given the Saturday morning service was "nigh impossible," no defense need be made for including in the Friday night service this most beautiful element of worship, which offers more for the eye and ear to seize upon, and more for the mind and heart to hold.626

A third refrain in the students' critique of Reform focused on excessive materialism, which they aimed most pointedly at the construction of palatial synagogues. In "Plain Living and High Thinking," Morton Berman claimed that a certain synagogue’s fundraising campaign to build a cathedral more magnificent than any other in the world had thrown the student body into confusion. Berman did not identify the implicated synagogue, but it was, no doubt, Congregation Emanu-El which the JIR men often referred to as the “cathedral,” and which had just announced plans to build a new sanctuary on a grand scale. Religion, still far from fulfilling its ultimate purpose, could hardly be free to turn its energy and resources to the building of monuments in stone, Berman wrote. "The artistic and the creative capacity of the Church belongs primarily to the human clay that awaits remoulding. There are countless orphans and widows, untold numbers of uneducated and unadjusted creatures, in whose interest the Church might bend its artistic effort. Must men live in hovels and worship in gilded cathedrals? Must children go to school in sheds and pray beneath domes that rival the starry heavens? Art, by all means! 'The beautiful and the useless,' to be sure! But first let light pour into the hearts of the needy, and beauty enter the lives of the mortal, before men turn to building monuments to the Immortal."

American Jewry

If Reform had become overly materialistic, some students wrote, it was reflecting the apathy and assimilationist tendencies of American Jewry more broadly. Interest in religious expression and faith had fallen into neglect, Henry Schorr observed in his review of Abraham Cronbach's *Prayers of the Jewish Advance*, and modern views of life and the universe had discredited for many the possibility of simple, abiding trust in an all-knowing, all-seeing, all-loving personal God. "As a result, we have given up praying," he wrote. "Genuine heartfelt prayer I mean—not the conventional, barely tolerated prayer of the professional clergy." In the face of what he called the contemporary sin of prayerlessness, Schorr found gratifying the HUC professor’s collection which offered the beautiful, personal prayers of a man who combined a modern scientific attitude toward life with a deeply religious soul. "Prof. Cronbach's work contributes…to the great task challenging modern Israel," he wrote, “reinterpreting the traditional festive celebrations as to make them once again uplifting and ennobling influences in Jewish life.”

Morton Berman, in his characteristically hyperbolic language, stated the case more forcefully. "Most Jews are too prosperous, too rich in worldly things to feel a lack of spiritual possessions," he wrote. "If religion were served on gold platters, most of American Jewry would spurn it," Berman wrote, for rather than seeking religion from the pulpits, American Jews primarily desired amusement. Like Schorr, Berman saw the task of the rabbi to reach these indifferent men and women, by conveying imperishable Jewish ideals in the language of the present era. For Berman, this meant in the terms of "science and machinery."

Similarly, Leo Reichel could not recall another time in history when the Jewish people had shown “such a heart-breaking indifference to our great heritage." Yet, he saw

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628 Ibid.
hopeful signs of change, "a restlessness, a fermentation among the intellectually and morally more alive elements of American Jewry. “A searching of the heart is going on among them,” he wrote. “Many of them, perhaps, for the first time in their life, discovered that somewhere in the subconsciousness of their soul there has ever been a longing and a desire to know better their own people, its history and its achievements.”

Western Culture in the Industrial Age

For some students, this critique of American Jewry applied as well to Western culture in the industrial age. Troubled by the destructive forces unleashed in the West at the onset of the twentieth century, particularly the war in Europe and the mass exploitation of workers, these students placed their faith in Judaism—reevaluated, reinterpreted, and expressed anew. And for all their critique of contemporary American expressions of Judaism, they also knew Judaism itself was under attack, in the form of anti-Semitism in Europe, and prejudice in the United States which they saw not only in the nation's immigration polices, but in education, employment, housing, and other arenas of American social and cultural life. JIR students had direct experience with much of this, and they wrote about it in the Quarterly. Irving M. Melam, for example, in "A Leaf from My Diary" told the story of Cossacks taking his family prisoner during the World War. They survived, but upon release and return to their town, they found that their home, shop and all their property had been destroyed, and they had to start life anew. "One thing only they preserved," he wrote. "Their indestructible spirit, their faith in God.”

James Waterman Wise submitted a fictional short story that depicted not the European experience but an American one. A Jewish musician is improbably offered the position of his dreams, in Wise’s account—conductor of the Chicago Symphony. The offer

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comes with a caveat, however: to accept the appointment, the musician must convert to Christianity. Ultimately, as enticing as the conductorship is, the musician turns it down, recognizing the absurdity of a demand that he become something he can never be. For the musician, Judaism has a racial component—he is a Jew just as he is a member of the white race. “And with the notes of the old song a racial feeling rose up in him, a feeling which flung defiance at any who wished him other than he was. How could he ever face his children if he deprived them of that race feeling that had built up his own life?”

Yet the story does not end with the musician turning down the offer; rather, he receives a second letter and upon opening it, he learns he has been invited to play at a great Jewish charity meeting. "Say in reply that I am uninterested in religious questions and that I do not wish to be affiliated with any religious movements," he instructs his secretary. "Now perhaps they won't bother me anymore." He returns to the piano, giving his full thought and heart "to the beauty which lay ready at his command.”

**“Revivifying” Liberal Judaism**

Despite this critique of the rigidity, emptiness and hypocrisy of Orthodox and Reform Judaism alike; of American Jewry’s materialism, apathy and desire for assimilation; and, of the violence in industrialized culture, the students found inspiration in the Jewish world. Turning to a variety of movements and thinkers who were calling for and creating renaissance in Jewish life, the students focused on three areas of Jewish revival, each multifaceted and together inextricably linked: culture, religious life, and politics.

Irma Lindheim captured the spirit in her call to the students to engage collectively in a reexamination and reformulation of Judaism's traditions and laws. “A Jew cannot live entirely as an individual and create Jewishly; he must live in contact with other Jews and together with them must translate Jewish values of past and present into the ways of actual

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life," she wrote in the first issue of the Quarterly, and announced a summer kallah (retreat, in Hebrew) to take place in the woods, where thinkers, scholars and artists would meet, as did the Amoraim in Babylon, to focus on the beauty and creative possibilities of Judaism. She invited all who wish to see “a revivified Judaism, a Judaism which translates its values into life, one which makes its field of worship the world and all of its activities its prayers, a Judaism which has communion, community and creation as its watchwords, a Judaism which is a process, constantly in flux and constantly adding to itself and to the environment through which it flows.

“If not now, when?” she cited Hillel, one of the sages of the Mishnah.

Culture

The embrace of a Jewish cultural renaissance centered around Zionism; the Hebrew renewal movement; reviving Jewish scholarship; Yiddish culture; and, more broadly, Jewish arts and literature including, perhaps most especially, theater and poetry.

Zionism

Zionism, and especially the cultural Zionism of Ahad Ha’am, appears in every issue of the Quarterly, and clearly captured the hearts and minds of many students. Ben Goldstein, for example, in his review of "Survival or Extinction," by Elisha Friedman, agreed with the writer that Zionism is the cure for all the many ills of the Jewish people, whether or not reestablishing the Jew in Palestine would spur anti-Semitism and further assimilation in the diaspora. Should Zionism eradicate anti-Semitism that results from the Jews' lack of a homeland, many would find relief; if, alternatively, it intensifies anti-Semitism, then Jews entrenched in their own land will better be able to defend themselves. Similarly, should Jews continue to assimilate even after the rebuilding of Palestine, then at least a core group will

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634 Ibid.
ensure the continuity of Jewish tradition and culture; alternatively, should Zionism stabilize and revitalize diaspora Jewry, then it will have succeeded in preventing the depletion of Judaism’s scant ranks.

A number of essays include calls for Zionist activism. James Waterman Wise, for example, urged his classmates to bring the United Palestine Appeal to their student congregations in order to help raise the goal of five million dollars for the Yishuv. "Palestine has with justice been called at once the task and the test of the Jewish people at this time," Wise wrote. “All should serve how they can the need of Israel's land, the cause of Israel's destiny."635

Faculty also expressed their Zionism in the Quarterly, including Abraham Binder, who submitted the score of A Song of the New Palestine, a musical piece he arranged after hearing it sung in 1925 by chulutzim in Kvutzah "Chavurath Ma-abar" in Petah Tikvah.636

In March 1926 the student editors devoted the Quarterly to Chaim Nachman Bialik, one of the Jewish Institute of Religion’s first two recipients of an honorary degree. The issue included tributes to Bialik by visiting faculty member Shalom Maximon, written in Hebrew, and by students Joshua Goldberg and Morton Berman.

"The prophet has come to America, to smug, complacent, self-sufficient American Jewry," Berman, editor of the Quarterly, wrote. Though Bialik’s visit to the US focused on raising money for Palestine, Berman said the great poet called for more from American Jewry than just material giving—they must set their hearts to the task of building Palestine.

American Jewry must have Kawvana before it shall be ready for this spiritual labor...the true intention in everyone's heart must be that Palestine may never become simply a last refuge for the homeless or a great asylum for the decrepit, how worthy these ends...but that Palestine may prove to be the realization of Israel's dream of a land where justice and love and peace prevail, and where it may be given to Israel to

create again more of the fruits of its now moribund spirit and genius. Without such intention America's gifts must remain as so many dollars and cents and not the true expression of divine generosity. To us the intention is more important than the gifts.

Bialik has come. We hope his presence will arouse American Jewry from its smugness and complacency. We hope his words will cut deep into its hardened heart and draw blood. If such a thing as a transfusion of spirit is possible, we pray that spiritless, soulless American Jewry may prevail upon Bialik to give to it some of his boundless, undying spirit.  

It appears JIR's Zionist spirit attracted commercial interest in 68th Street. A number of travel agencies specializing in trips to Palestine advertised in the back pages of the Quarterly,638 as did Hadoar ("the only Hebrew weekly in the United States"),639 the United Palestine Appeal,640 Keren Hayesod ("Help the Keren Hayesod Rebuild the Homeland!"),641 the Hitachduth Zeire Zion (inviting readers to attend a lecture and debate on Zionism and Jewish Religiousness featuring Chaim Greenberg and Shmarya Levin),642 and Palestine Products Co. ("The Fruits of Our Holy Land: candy from Tel Aviv, honey from Hederah, olive oil from Zichron Jacob, wine from Rothschild's cellars Rishon L'Zion, almonds from Rishon l'Zion, raisins—the only true Palestinian").643

Hebrew Renewal

The Hebrew language renewal movement also occupied an important place at JIR, and the first Quarterly editors, in a show of commitment, determined to include in each issue at least one article in Hebrew. David Yellen celebrated this in a Hebrew essay he contributed to the inaugural issue. Praising the editors for their decision to include reflections "in our

638 The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): back cover; and, The Jewish Institute Quarterly 2, no. 1 (November, 1925): inside front cover.
639 The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): inside back cover.
640 Full-page advertisement states, "The Supreme Task of American Israel in 1926, $5,000,000 for the United Palestine Appeal: For the Homeless Jewish Wanderer; For the Jew Returning to the Soil; For Immediate Jewish Relief; For the Ultimate Jewish Hope. Palestine: Give and Work for United Palestine Appeal; Stephen S. Wise, Chairman; Help the wanderer back to his own soil!" The Jewish Institute Quarterly 2, no. 2 (January, 1926): back cover.
641 The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): back cover.
642 The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 4 (May, 1925): inside back cover.
643 The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 3 (March, 1925): inside back cover.
national Hebrew language,” Yellin went on to explore the relationship between Jewish institutions of higher learning and the Hebrew College in Jerusalem.644

In his Hebrew essay “The Hebrew Language and the Modern Rabbinate,” student Joshua Goldberg asked whether or not rabbis really need to learn Hebrew and, if they do, what kind—Biblical, modern or other.645 Some argue rabbis need to know just enough Hebrew to be able to read the prayer service, he wrote, while others say rabbis must also be able to read the Tanach in its original tongue; still others believe, in addition to the liturgy and Tanach, rabbis must be able to read classical and modern commentaries in their original Hebrew, without having to resort to translations.

Rabbis required Hebrew in order to read all of these texts, so crucial in the development of Jewish thought, Goldberg acknowledged, but he demanded more. Rabbis must also be able to teach contemporary Hebrew literature, for two reasons: first, just as Hebrew literature from ancient times through the present represents the past development of Torah, the newest Hebrew literature is Torah, too. A spark from the prophets can be found in Bialik, he wrote, and a spark from the sages in Ahad Ha'am. When the students one day stand before their congregations as rabbis, they will be called upon to teach not only historical expressions of Torah, but also its latest incarnation as articulated by these contemporary Hebrew writers.646

In addition, as rabbis they will be required to explicate their own Torah, thought, and ideas—and they must do this based exclusively on Hebrew sources. “Not every Hebrew speaker is a prophet, nor is everyone who knows Hebrew a priest,” he wrote. "But rabbis

646 Ibid., 29.
require knowledge of the Hebrew language because it is the expressive tool of the Hebrew spirit.” All Hebrew ideas stemming from the scent of the Hebrew language will flourish.

For other students and faculty, as for Goldberg, the passion for the revival of Hebrew was fueled not by a longing for immersion in the texts of old, but by a desire to participate in the contemporary renaissance taking place in Jewish thought and culture across the globe. In this sense, they saw Hebrew as a tool for strengthening the unity of the Jewish people, and it was for this reason that Leo M. Reichel, himself an ardent Zionist, argued for separating Hebrew renewal from the Zionist movement. Part of the great promise of the Hebrew revival movement lay in its lack of affiliation with any particular religious or political perspective, he wrote in an article celebrating the work of the Histadruth Ivrit of the Alliance for the Spreading of the Knowledge of Hebrew Culture. In working to revitalize Jewish culture, the movement could potentially unite such divided groups as Orthodox and Reform Jewry, as well as religious and labor Zionists. Reichel's language, like Berman's, had a certain grandiosity:

On the bloodsoaked continent of Europe, in the Eastern part of it, a part of our people is heroically defending the Ner Tomid, the Sacred Fire, from being extinguished. Can it be said of us Jews living in America? Where are our institutions of learning worthy of their name, of the great tradition they have to uphold? Where is among us that interest and concern for things Jewish, in which our people stubbornly persisted through the ages? But we must not lose heart. There are signs indicating that our people here is eager to shake off from itself this unpardonable apathy. It is impossible that a fourth part of Israel shall degenerate and perish in the darkness! And it is the determination of the Histadruth Ivrit to kindle the Sacred Fire among our people in this country and be guardian over it.

For the duration of the Quarterly's existence, which extended from 1924-1930, its student editors included Hebrew language content in every issue, generally in the form of essays or poetry written by students or faculty.

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647 Ibid.
648 Goldberg added humorously "And if I do not speak the truth, then a curse upon me, and upon you mitnagdim, a blessing!" Ibid.
Jewish Scholarship in Palestine

As important as Hebrew was in creating a contemporary renaissance in Jewish life, so too, believed the editors of the *Quarterly*, was the revival of Jewish scholarship. For some, the two were inextricably linked in the effort to establish a university in Palestine. In November of 1924, just months before the opening of Hebrew University, David Yellin, in a Hebrew article in the *Quarterly*, issued an impassioned plea to the students of all Jewish seminaries in the diaspora to go to Jerusalem to study. In the Land of Israel, increasingly becoming the spiritual center for the Jewish people where many of the greatest Jewish scholars and writers were settling and Hebrew was becoming the language of daily life, he wrote, Jewish youth thirsty for learning could drink in the words of Jewish wisdom. In the place reminiscent of visionaries like Isaiah and Jeremiah, Jewish youth would come to understand "the spirit of our people, the spirit of our Torah, and the ideals of our prophets"—and, with the students’ participation, the spiritual influence of the land would only grow.

It was especially important that seminary students attend the newly-established Hebrew University, Yellin said. Devoting their most precious years to study, and preparing to give their lives to their people by becoming spiritual leaders, these students needed to cultivate a strong connection with the Jewish people's spiritual and material existence in the land. This connection was critical if they were to succeed in their efforts to revitalize the Jewish sentiment and learning.

Therefore, Yellin argued, the seminaries must make available to students the possibility of living and studying in Israel for a year, in fulfillment of one of the required years of study in their program. Soon, too, not just students but the seminaries' faculty will come to the university to study and to teach, he said, and in this way, the Jewish institutions of higher learning will together establish an eternal connection between Israel and the diaspora, and will participate in the revival of the Jewish people.
After Hebrew University opened, student Joshua Goldberg submitted a Hebrew article describing his thoughts upon reading in the newspapers that Dr. Chaim Weitzmann had laid the cornerstone on Mt. Scopus. In this remarkable unfolding of Jewish history, a blessing emerged from the depths of the heart of every Jew—the blessing “we have arrived.”† True, much political and economic work remained to be done, Goldberg said, but the ancient Israelites always built alters to God before constructing their own tents or houses, and the Jews returning from Babylonian exile, too, created a dwelling place for God before tending to their own dwellings.

"And here--a university!" Goldberg wrote. "A temple to science and Jewish wisdom precedes the material acquisitions!" Who would not want to attend? What Jew had not dreamed of studying Torah from the sages of Israel, or science from the geonim of our generation?

Yet, the Jewish scholars expected to stream to the university still remained in the diaspora, Goldberg despaired, and world Jewry continued to raise money for the "Pumbaditas of America," rather than sending support to the university, which struggled with just a small faculty teaching Jewish subjects. Goldberg blamed the leadership of the Zionist movement for not better mobilizing Jews to return.

Jewish Scholarship in the United States

JIR students and faculty hoped to create a renaissance in Jewish scholarship not in Israel alone, but also separate and apart from Zionism. The editors of the Quarterly demonstrated their commitment to this idea by including academic content in every issue, sometimes written by students and sometimes by faculty. Topics included, for example, "The Controversy in the Halakah Between the Schools of Shammai and Hillel," by Irving M. Melam; "The Difficulties of Translating the Talmud," "The Method of the Amoraim in

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Commenting on the Mishna," and "Spinosa on Judaism: Notes on the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus" by Moses Marcus; "Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament," by Myron W. Jacobs; and, "On the Conception of the ‘Ger’ in the Torah," by Gershon Tchernowitz.\(^{651}\)

Harry Austryn Wolfson addressed the relationship between scholarship and the Jewish renaissance perhaps most provocatively. In his essay, "How the Jews Will Reclaim Jesus," Wolfson explored what such a reclaiming might look like.\(^{652}\) Clearly the Jews would never accept Jesus as God or prophet, he said, for they would accept no man as such. Clearly, too, the Jews would not accept his teachings as law, for they accept no single man's teachings as law. Nonetheless, Wolfson said, it still bore asking why the Jews excluded Jesus' great teachings from the canon of Tannaitic literature, where they included such a broad range of other teachings. To explain, Wolfson claimed that the early Tannaitic literature, compiled from the period when Jesus lived, quoted by name only the heads of schools, and referred to other scholars collectively, as in Beit Hillel and Beit Shamai.

Looking to the future, however, Wolfson argued for “the Jewish acceptance of Jesus” through restoration of this literature to the canon.\(^{653}\) His interest lay not in any sort of Jewish evangelical piety, sentimental yearning for something missing in Judaism, or servile imitation of Christianity; he hoped, rather, to develop a more comprehensive scope of Jewish learning and Jewish literature, and to restore lost literary treasures.\(^{654}\)


\(^{652}\) Harry Austryn Wolfson, “How the Jews will Reclaim Jesus,” *The Jewish Institute Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (March, 1925): 68-71.

\(^{653}\) Ibid., 69.

\(^{654}\) Ibid., 70.
When with the revival of Jewish culture and Jewish learning under free and unhampered conditions in a Jewish environment, painstaking Jewish scholars, in an effort to reorganize and to reclassify our literary treasures, will come to compile anthologies of the wise sayings and inspiring teaching of our ancients, they will include among them the sermons and parables of Jesus the Nazarene, the Galilean rabbi who, like Philo and Josephus, has by force of historical circumstances been for centuries better known among non-Jews than among Jews.

In the future, readers of these Jewish anthologies will move seamlessly from Talmudic and Midrashic selections to the Gospels, Wolfson wrote, and the sayings of Jesus will comingle with the sayings of other rabbis—not as the teachings of a man meant to be worshipped, but among the maxims of the anonymous rabbis who expressed the national genius of the Jewish people, “for they all breathe the same spirit."

Wolfson’s call went beyond the restoration of a lost literature; he sought, too, a creative renewal of the original forms of Jewish expression. "Tired of the fettered forms of verse and the diffuse forms of prose, we shall write text-books of science in the style of the Mishnah, we shall compose works of erudition in the style of the Midrash, and we shall once more give expression to the great truths of life in the form of the Haggadah,” he wrote. Wolfson believed that this approach to contemporary scholarship and creative expression would bring about a great Jewish cultural renaissance.

Yiddish Culture

The call for cultural renewal extended beyond Hebrew, scholarship, and the Zionist enterprise. Students at JIR, many of whom likely grew up in Yiddish-speaking homes, attended the Yiddish theater and read the Yiddish press. In the pages of the Quarterly, beyond reviewing many of the plays they saw, the students asked larger questions about the religious significance of American Yiddish culture.

John Tepfer, for example, in a review of the Unser Theater’s production of "Barbed Wire," explored the spiritual dimensions of art. Acknowledging that most JIR men associated

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655 Ibid.
656 Ibid., 71.
"spirituality" with religion and religious conduct, Tepfer urged that they open their minds to the theater’s far broader view. A spiritual person reveres learning, thought and science, he wrote, and takes pleasure in these and in true art, which, unlike the average religious school curriculum, has the capacity to reawaken the Jewish spirit.

Theater can be one of the most effective tools for intellectual as well as moral education, Tepfer wrote, for the stage reflects the ideals and character of a people, and at the theater, one gets “a peep into the people's culture.” Perhaps, he posited, the Yiddish theater might serve as a far more effective and truly Jewish agency for education "than the so-called Jewish education served out in Sunday Schools and Temples”—for the theater, rather than forcing propaganda on viewers, presents works of art pulsating with the emotions of real life.  

The Yiddish press was another powerful force in the revitalization of Jewish culture, wrote Harry Kaplan, playing a particularly strong role in civic education and Americanization. But what of its future, he wondered, given the recent rules restricting immigration into the US. "Shall it continue to be a power in American Jewish life now that immigration has virtually ceased,” he asked, “or has it ceased to play its role with the departure of the immigrant Jew?"

Poetry and literature

The students did not limit themselves to reviewing the cultural work of others; they also produced their own, and the pages of the Quarterly regularly included student poetry and fiction. Ralph Marcus and Herbert Ivan Bloom submitted their work often, and others, including Irma Lindheim and James Waterman Wise, made occasional contributions. John

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Tepfer did not submit his own poetry, but as noted above, reflected on the power of art in Jewish spiritual experience.

The students' engagement with Yiddish as well as Hebrew culture in the Quarterly reflected their belief that a shared bond between all Jewry superseded the differences among them, and their understanding that Judaism extended beyond religion. By exploring a broad range of Jewish cultural expression, and contributing their own original work as well, the students felt they were participating in the revitalization of Judaism.

Religious Life

Whereas Ahad Ha’am may have been the dominant intellectual force prevailing on students at JIR in the realm of Jewish culture and Zionism, it seems that Mordecai Kaplan may have played a role in relation to their religious thinking. Kaplan shared Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism, but found it lacking regarding religious concerns.659 Like Ahad Ha’am, he regarded Judaism as far more than religion, and condemned the ossification of Jewish religious practice; unlike Ahad Ha'am, however, he refused to cede the religious dimension of Jewish life. Instead, by reevaluating and recreating Jewish religious thought and practice in ways compatible with modern science, and contextualized within a broad, cultural understanding of Judaism, Kaplan hoped to reconstruct Judaism in ways American Jewry would find meaningful. These ideas, and the term "reconstruction," which Kaplan introduced publicly in numerous articles in the Menorah Journal, appear repeatedly in student writings in the Quarterly, though often without any citation of Kaplan by name.660

660 As noted above, students in the fall of 1924 had the opportunity to study with Kaplan when he delivered six lectures in Midrash, following Blau’s resignation.
Kaplan was a spiritual pragmatist who mediated science for an intellectual audience, writes Nancy Fuchs. He rejected Orthodoxy as well as secularism, and embraced rationalism alongside religious faith. Mitchell Fisher, in his 1924 essay "A Reconstruction of Modern Religion," directly incorporated this aspect of Kaplan's thinking, including his terminology, without explicitly acknowledging Kaplan. Arguing that modern religion had failed to take into account the full import of scientific observation, Fisher blamed modern ministers who, though claiming to be rationalist, simply summon science to support their preconceived notions, while turning a blind eye to facts that might challenge these notions. "We must build anew," he wrote. "We cannot hope to retain the technique of a primitive people in an age of scientific mastery. A democratic age is suspicious of a God who is an absolute despot."

"Modern religion needs reconstruction," he continued, "we must reconstruct our old religious conceptions." While seeking to create a fully rational Judaism, Fisher, like other students, rejected secular ethical rationalism and instead called for the translation of Jewish religious experience into naturalistic terms. "We must cease to think of God as the source or supporter of life and begin to think of Him as our moral and aesthetic and mystic goal," he wrote. The term “God” should be used as an adjective denoting “the nobility and perfection to which man can and should aspire."

Despite his call for a more rational and naturalistic form of Judaism, Fisher also sought to cultivate the emotional and aesthetic character of religious life. Fisher wrote romantically of his hope for the new reconstructed Judaism. "It can gain the Mystic's immanence of the One from the scientific concept of man and flower and star as all springing

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663 Ibid., 8.
from the same cosmic stuff, from the same protons and electrons whirling and juggling. It can gain its moral idealism from the concept of God as the perfect character. It can gain its optimism and hope from a consideration of organic and social evolution, the drama of the slow rise of man through thousands of centuries of blood and sorrow into the power to control the world. Ghandi [sic] in India, Ahad Haam in Israel, are leading the way. Let us follow!"  

This approach reflected Kaplan's thinking at the time. It stood apart from Reform Judaism of that era which, while embracing science and rationalism, took little interest in the mystical, and remained invested in understanding Judaism as a religion rather than a national culture. It stood apart, too, from Conservative Judaism which, by contrast, took a circumscribed approach to the integration of science and religion, most evident in the Seminary's refusal to teach higher criticism of the Bible, and the openly hostile approach of many of its faculty to Kaplan's call for the reconstruction of Judaism.

Kaplan's new path appealed to students like Fisher who were dissatisfied with Reform as well as Conservative Judaism, and sought—in the spirit of their school, and in the spirit of Kaplan as well as Ahad Ha'am—a new model of Judaism that transcended denominational labels.

**Denominations**

Kaplan's embrace of religious and cultural heterogeneity cohered with the approach many JIR students took toward Jewish denominations, which they eschewed in favor of a vision of Jewish life undivided by the categories of Reform, Conservative and Orthodox. John Tepfer, for example, proposed in Hegelian terms the creation of a new form of Judaism through the synthesis of Reform and Orthodoxy. This was what Kaplan really sought, Tepfer said, in his call for reviving the Hebrew language, Jewish nationalism and Jewish

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664 Ibid.
scholarship. In his review of Kaplan's "A New Approach to the Problem of Judaism," Tepfer argued that Kaplan's term "religious civilization" blended the "religious" of Reform with the "civilization" of Orthodoxy. Kaplan, according to Tepfer, in embracing higher criticism and the breadth of cultural contributions civilization had to offer, rejected "primitive orthodoxy"; at the same time, he also rejected Reform which, in remaining purely a religion, had become disconnected with daily affairs and the physical as well as intellectual reality of Jewish life.

Tepfer regarded these oppositions—Reform and orthodoxy—as temporary only. Already, he said, orthodoxy was relinquishing those principles that constituted insurmountable obstacles to new interpretations and adaption to Western and "Ghetto-less" conditions; likewise, Reform was "liberalizing itself" in the direction of Orthodoxy. With the Reform-Orthodox synthesis coming into being, Tepfer asked, "is it so hard to conceive that in the near future Judaism will again be one under a guise foreshadowed by Kaplan?"

Tepfer presented a similar idea in an essay on Bahya Ibn Pequda and Spinoza, two early modern philosophers. Spinoza, the physicist and mathematician, represented for Tepfer the modern thinker interested in furthering science, who creates an epistemology in order to express his view of the truth. Bachya, in contrast, represented the religious enthusiast who

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665 In discussing Jewish nationalism, Fisher introduced a second area where Kaplan’s influence appears evident, this one in relation to the notion of Judaism as a civilization. For Jews like Kaplan and many at JIR, nationalism posed a dilemma. The secular liberalism to which they subscribed took a dim view of nationalism. Indeed, in a greeting the editor of The Nation contributed to the second issue of the Quarterly, Oswald Garrison Villard urged students to oppose with all their might "that narrow nationalism today among worst enemies of church and liberalism, chief danger to very existence of the whole human race!" The students knew the danger nationalism posed to minority groups subject to xenophobic violence and discrimination, which many of them had experienced directly, either in Europe or in the United States. Nonetheless, like Kaplan, most of the students identified as Zionists and supported the Jewish nationalist movement. Kaplan and others resolved the dilemma by drawing a distinction between what they regarded as two conflicting ideas of nationalism, the democratic and the anti-democratic. Kaplan embraced a democratic form of nationalism that thrived not on ethnic, racial or religious homogeneity, but on the kind of diversity that could be found in a global "Jewish civilization," encompassing Jews of many different nations. See Kaplan, The Greater Judaism in the Making, and Garrison Villard, “A Greeting,” The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): 34-35.

falls into ecstasy over prayerful words that awaken deep and powerful feelings. According to Tepfer, Spinoza expressed love of God through the pursuit of knowledge, whereas Bachya, the "hymn-singer and psalm-reciter," expressed it through self-abnegation; both, however, shared a common yearning. As prototypes—Spinoza representing Reform, and Bachya representing Orthodoxy—neither won Tepfer’s allegiance. "Who knows," he concluded, "whether Spinoza's interpretation has led to more good than Bachya's." 667

The students found support in this non-denominational approach from some of their faculty. Cecil Roth, for example, in the Israel Abrahams Memorial Issue of the Quarterly published in 1925, praised Abrahams, "one of the apostles of Liberal Judaism," for his unsurpassed support for traditional Judaism. Abrahams, Roth wrote, was a Liberal Jew "who could enjoy our Pharisaic delicacies, and could appreciate as few men could the music of the Torah-bells." 668 Roth set forth this Jewish nonpartisanship as an ideal to which he hoped his readers would aspire.

**God and Spirit**

In the realm of spiritual experience, too, students echoed aspects of Kaplan’s developing thought. Kaplan posited God not as a supernatural force in the universe, but as the power that enables human beings to strive for and attain self-fulfillment, and in this regard Philip Bernstein, struggling toward his own understanding, seemed to rely heavily on Kaplan's ideas. "I do not know how to define this word, spiritual," Bernstein wrote. "It has been terribly abused, but it seems to me that there is potentially in all of us a spirit that makes for the high and the good, a something that will not let us be content with ourselves as we are, or with conditions in the world as they are, a spirit that forever reaches out and on and beyond to heights we descry in vision, a power that struggles within us with our lower selves and constantly aspires toward a nobler, purer and more unselfish life."

Echoing Kaplan further, Bernstein said spiritual experience entails seeing the universe as a sacred whole rather than a disconnected series of causes and effects, and recognizing the spiritual worth of every human being.⁶⁶⁹ The implications for rabbis, he said, are significant—for if the spiritual is linked to aspiring toward the noble and pure, then the role of the spiritual leader confronted by injustice and oppression is not to mouth phrases or to compromise, explain, or excuse—but to speak truthfully and, with constancy, to steer people toward the ideal.⁶⁷⁰

Jacob Rudin described an intimate and personal experience of God, not in the context of fighting for justice, but in a setting where he was surrounded by suffering. Serving for the first time as a chaplain, he found himself in a hospital filled with nine hundred tuberculosis patients. Sitting by the bedside of a young man just seventeen years old, in an effort to provide comfort, Rudin read aloud from the Book of Psalms. Then, involuntarily, he reached out to the young man. Their hands clasped firmly, Bernstein wrote, "and I knew that God was between us."⁶⁷¹

Mitchell Fisher, too, articulated a Kaplanian view of God in his essay, "Religion, Nationality and Morals". Fisher, whose writing sometimes read like a socialist tract, described an ancient bond between "governing classes and priests" who used traditional morality to conserve their vested interests. The immorality of these priests often stood in the way of "the nobler ethical vision of the mystic and the prophet," and over centuries, due to reactionary priests who deemed ethical idealists and mass movements heretical, "the fatherhood of God has stood in the way of the brotherhood of man."

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⁶⁷⁰ Ibid.
In the industrial age, however, nationalism has replaced reactionary religion. Here, Fisher began to sound like Kaplan, for while he embraced Jewish nationalism, he warned against regarding the nation, any more than science, as an end in itself. The nation must not forget God, which Fisher understood to be, as Kaplan taught, the ethical perfection of man. The implications were clear. “You shall not march on so long as there is a single man who starves,” he wrote. “You shall not go forward so long as there is poverty, or disease, or misery, or loneliness.”

**Prophetic Judaism**

**Social and Economic Justice**

Fisher's linkage of Jewish nationalism, a naturalist understanding of God, and principles of social and economic justice was typical, not atypical, of student writings in the *Quarterly*, and even his tract-like rhetoric did not entirely stand apart. A number of students were clearly engaged with, or at least influenced by, the Jewish left—whether the labor movement, or socialist or communist circles. For Fisher and other students, the fight to make real their commitment to universal peace and justice found primary justification not in secular ideologies—socialism, for example, or the American democratic tradition—but in the prophetic teachings and experience particular to the people Israel. In Fisher's words, "the Prophetic voice is never hushed; there echo down the ages the voices of Moses and Isaiah and Amos calling to the nations to be faithful to Humanity."  

Samuel Teitelbaum, too, rooted his Judaism in the political and social ideals of the prophets, and saw “spiritual Zionism” as the supreme expression of these. Rejecting devotion to any form of might or power, Teitelbaum believed spiritual Zionism could only be realized

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673 Ibid.
674 Ibid.
through social righteousness, as the prophet Micah taught: Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly with thy God—and then, justice will roll down as waters.\(^{675}\)

Leo Reichel emphasized the uniqueness of the Jewish prophetic tradition, which he believed Western society urgently needed. In the post-war period, he said, many had grown tired of sheer materialism, and were now in search of a new system of values—the workers movements, in particular, were turning to “the Jewish ideal” and lending it strength. “It is the voice of the prophets of Israel demanding social justice that is now inspiring the toiling masses of the world in the fight for their share in happiness of the world,” he wrote. “It is the law as laid down by our law givers,” which “the Wise Men of the world must accept in order to ward off the dissolution of the whole Western civilization.”\(^{676}\)

Pacifism

Reichel’s fear of global destruction can be seen in several other essays in the Quarterly, particularly in those submitted by students and faculty who advocated pacifism.\(^{677}\) Joshua Goldberg contributed a two-part essay on war and peace in which he detailed how his experience serving on the British front during the World War was seared into his memory. In the first, "Why Peace?", he described the German bombing of a town; the Germans deliberately selected market day, in order to increase the likelihood of killing a large number of civilians. After the bombing, Goldberg discovered the body of a friend, an Australian dispatch rider, who had been struck by a bomb and killed while riding his motorcycle. "The two eyes are haunting me still," he wrote. "They stare at me whenever I think of


\(^{676}\) Leo M. Reichel, “The Histadruth Ivrith,” 109-112.

war…commanding me to raise my voice against such horrors." Though he later witnessed
greater brutality, Goldberg wrote, this sealed his hatred of human slaughter.678

In the second part, Goldberg recalled an incident that took place in 1916 in the town
of Irkutsk in Siberia. The Jews of the town had allowed a group of Austrian and German
Jewish prisoners from a nearby prison camp into their synagogue to celebrate Passover,
despite concerns of the local non-Jewish population. As they worshiped together, “friend and
enemy read in the same Torah, pronounced the same blessings and prayed in the same
language to the same God," Goldberg wrote. "Gaudy uniforms with different numbers of
buttons on them made them kill, maim, and hate one another. In this house of God how well
they were all united, praying in the same language: Thou shalt not kill!"679

Henry Slonimsky also contributed an essay on pacifism, which he saw as central to
the ethic of the prophets, who made Judaism “life-conserving, life-idealistic,” in contrast to
the “death-idealism” of religion of the west. Judaism’s powerful affirmation of life had
become unfashionable in the "impulsivistic, militaristic civilization in which we live,"
Slonimsky wrote, but like Fisher he believed that more than ever before, western society
needed the thoughts and mores of the Jewish people “if it is going to live at all."680

Other pacifists who wrote for the Quarterly included Herbert Bloom and Philip
Bernstein. Bloom affirmed the call put out by Ludwig Lewisohn, an American Zionist writer,
for Jews to express the ideal of peace and justice by refusing to join the military ranks of any
nation, or taking arms against any man.681 Bernstein, too, put forth a call for pacifism:

Shall the ministers join the diplomats and warriors in praising war as sometimes good,
or excusing it as occasionally necessary? War may be as sublime or inevitable as you
please. It may be glorious…every proposed method of abolishing war may have
proved a failure. But these do not affect the question.

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680 Henry Slonimsky, “A Word Towards the Reawakening of Interest in Jewish Ethics,” The Jewish
Institute Quarterly 1, no. 4 (May, 1925): 102-105.
681 Herbert I. Bloom, “Review: Israel, by Ludwig Lewisohn,” The Jewish Institute Quarterly 2, no. 2
It is my conviction and it amounts to a sort of faith with me, that the destruction of human life is the worst sin of which a human being can be capable. That is why I hate war. I hate it with every fibre of my being. And I believe it is the duty of the minister to proclaim the Brotherhood of Man and the laws of Love and Justice. These know no qualifications, they are as shining as the stars, as unalterable as the laws which hold the planets in their courses. With them war is always inconsistent…

This may be impracticable or unpatriotic but it is the only msg a minister of religion has the moral right to preach.

Any man who preaches less, who calls upon his God to bless an army that goes out to kill…is faithless to his God.682

Interfaith Understanding

A commitment to prophetic Judaism let some students to promote Christian-Jewish relations. Just as Wise included philo-Semitic Christian scholars on the JIR faculty, the students included them as well in the pages of the Quarterly, where scholars such as Rev. Samuel McCord Crothers, R. Travers Herford, and Frederick J. Foakes-Jackson submitted short pieces about the importance of cultivating understanding between religious groups.683 Crothers, for example, in "Walls or Roads," the abstract of a talk he delivered to the students at JIR, wrote hopefully that the old walls of partition between Christians and Jews were giving way to new lines of communication.684 Students echoed the theme, rejecting Jewish insularity in favor of engagement with the non-Jewish world around them. James Waterman Wise, in a critique of "You Gentiles" by Maurice Samuel, rejected Samuel’s view that a deep primordial divide existed between Jews and Gentiles,685 and Morton Berman, in his editorial “The Foundation for Peace," identified understanding as the foundation for peace, and praised the students of JIR and Union

Theological Seminary for laying a stone in that foundation by engaging in a recent dialogue together at UTS.686

Related, the subject of intermarriage arose several times in early issues of the Quarterly. Lewis Newman, Rabbi of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco and a close associate of Wise's, submitted a two-part scholarly essay on intermarriage between Jews and Christians during the Middle Ages,687 and a student, Samuel Teitelbaum, submitted an article arguing for "a saner attitude toward intermarriage." Teitelbaum began by citing two common anti-Semitic arguments regarding intermarriage—one celebrating intermarriage as a means to the complete assimilation of Jews into Christian society; and the second put forth by men like Charles W. Eliot, the anti-Semitic president of Harvard, who described intermarriage as "a state of things to be dreaded."688

"I cannot assent," Teitelbaum wrote of both approaches. Instead, he called for an end to the Jewish condemnation of intermarriage, which only created “outcast-martyrs,” and drove the intermarried away from the Jewish fold into Christian Science, Unitarianism, and other religions that celebrated individual freedom. In addition, echoing Kaplan, he insisted that Jews put to rest their claim to chosenness and to spiritual, moral and ethical superiority. Instead, he urged what he considered a far saner and less violent approach: just as the prophets chose universalism rather than segregation, he said—choosing his prophets selectively—likewise, Jews must not judge those who intermarry. Without ostracism and the resentment it created, Teitelbaum predicted, the intermarried would likely bring their families into the Jewish fold.689

686 Morton M. Berman, “Editorial Comment,” The Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 3 (March, 1925): 83-84.
689 Ibid., 35-37.
Universalism versus Particularism

Given the passionate views students held on various religious, cultural and political issues, and the Institute's commitment to free and open expression and critique, it is hardly surprising that signs of ideological tension emerge within the pages Quarterly. Certain commitments, likely more contentious at HUC and JTS, appear to have been nearly universal among JIR’s student body, such as Zionism in one form or another, and the revival of modern Hebrew. Other matters, however, did cause strain.

The area of greatest tension related to universalism versus particularism. Though the diverse politics of New York’s Jewish community no doubt pulled students at various times toward the right as well as the left, at JIR it seems the pull came more strongly from the left. In the Quarterly, at least, no students expressed attraction to either revisionist Zionism (nascent at the time) or Orthodox Judaism, but quite a few appear to have been dipping their toes in the waters of either socialism or secular humanism. Wise had no compunction inviting left-leaning communal leaders to address the students, a practice the student editors emulated occasionally, as when they included in the second issue of the Quarterly a greeting from Oswald Garrison Villard, the editor of The Nation; and in all likelihood, Philip Bernstein was not the only student drawn to aspects of Felix Adler’s Ethical Culture and John Haynes Holmes’ socialized ministry.

While some students appear to have been increasingly pulled in the direction of universalism and leftist politics, others felt the need to articulate a defense of Jewish particularism. The tension appeared overtly in a sharp critique Philip Bernstein wrote of fellow student James Waterman Wise's book, Liberalizing Liberal Judaism. "The author of this little book does not love Judaism," Bernstein wrote, “else he could not so serenely
Bernstein accused Wise of applying a vague and fashionable humanitarianism to liberal Judaism, and in the process leaving the Jewish God and mission by the roadside. Though Bernstein sympathized with Wise's goal to liberalize liberal Judaism (Bernstein held strong pacifist views, after all), he warned that removing the particular from Judaism in order to promote the universal would mean the end of Judaism. Not that this would necessarily trouble Wise, Bernstein said sharply, for he saw little indication that his classmate, who cared little for living Jewishly, would care at all about the end of Judaism.

Other students chose to argue not that the particular should trump the universal, but that the universalism inherent in Judaism, in fact, represented its uniqueness. Max Meyer, in his review of "The Genius of Israel" by Carleton Noyes, said those desiring to promote the universalism of the prophets without regard for the particular aspects of Jewish life accepted the fruit Judaism had to offer, but rejected the tree—for it was Israel, in its particularity, that had created the prophetic tradition. Like Bernstein, Meyer may have been responding to the universalistic themes in James Waterman Wise’s book. In doing so, he echoed another Kaplanian theme, for Kaplan had accused Reform of extracting universal ideals from particular Jewish forms, at the expense of the unique and beautiful ways Jews expressed those ideals in practice.

To some degree the JIR students must have enjoyed this sort of intellectual sparring, at least with those on the left. Why else would they publish the Villard article, which described religious life as corrupt? Villard claimed religion needed "a tonic dose of liberalism" to make it honest and free, to force it to practice what it preaches, and to place it above and beyond the reach of "paralyzing business and financial entanglements.” In his own

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691 Ibid.
693 Nancy Fuchs-Kreimer, “Seventy Years After Judaism as a Civilization,” 135.
tract-like language, Villard warned the students not to become "a parasitic group of
churchmen mumbling exquisite phrases for their bread and butter"; instead, he urged them to
create the "new minister" and "new pulpit." For better or worse, it seems the students, rather
than taking offense at the parody of clergy, shared the critique and welcomed the challenge.

Horace Kallen, too, prodded the students by maligning the clergy, calling them
"mercenary, selfish and indifferent," and suggesting that seminary education was trapped in
the past rather than focused on the practical skills needed to address problems of the present
and future. In Morton Berman’s response, he asked a rhetorical question—did Kallen mean to
imply that the past offers nothing of eternal significance? Surely that was not the case. The
task of seminaries, according to Berman, was not to escape the past, as Kallen suggested, but
to reevaluate its teachings in new ways to benefit the present. "We cannot speak for other
institutions," he added, "but we shall be partisan enough to say JIR has attempted to
accomplish this revaluation.

"Its task is not yet complete," he admitted.694

Irma Lindheim, who had failed to convince the faculty to accept women as “regular
students” (not withstanding their 1923 vote to do so) had to agree that JIR had thus far fallen
short of meeting the needs of the present, and in a review in the Quarterly of Marian
Spitzer’s 1924 book Who Would Be Free, she offered a counterpoint to the idealistic essays
of her younger male classmates. After describing the book's plot about a rebellious female
character who, in her attempt to break free of the convention of marriage, found herself
forced to choose either independence mitigated by loneliness, or companionship at the
expense of freedom,695 Lindheim, whose husband had only recently been released from

Jewish Institute Quarterly 1, no. 2 (January 15, 1925): 60-62.
prison,\textsuperscript{696} criticized the protagonist’s choice to reject marriage in favor of freedom. One wonders to what degree this JIR student who, though a millionaire, knew something about the price of rebellion and challenging convention, may have despaired. When Lindheim wrote this piece she likely had abandoned her hope to become a rabbi, for soon thereafter, she dropped out of JIR.

\textbf{Overall Student Sensibilities}

Writings in the Quarterly show that students were aware of and engaged with the major issues and concerns facing world Jewry, and current with at least some of the debates and cultural developments underway in American Jewish intellectual circles. Many of them believed the world was in crisis, and Judaism as well. In attempting to explain the roots of these crises, they put forth a critique that encompassed aspects of European and American Judaism, as well as secular society—and out of this critique, imbued not with despair but with hope and idealism, they presented their own basis for a Jewish renaissance. In this regard, they resembled the radical \textit{maskilim} of the 1860s and 1870s in Lithuania and Belorussia, whose embrace of ideological trends current in their time led them to a harsh critique of traditional Jewish religious life, on the one hand, and of the moderate \textit{Haskalah}, on the other. Like these radical \textit{maskilim}, the JIR students argued that the only way to prevent the disintegration of Judaism was by engaging with the material and spiritual needs of contemporary Jewry and, like their European forerunners, too, they assailed the rabbis of their day for failing to do this in any real or meaningful way.

Repeatedly, students expressed the sense that the world faced an imminent threat of total destruction. Aware of the unprecedented scale of devastation and death incurred in the recent World War, which some of the students witnessed firsthand, they were cognizant too

that, for a host of reasons, Jewish communities in Eastern Europe were suffering disproportionately in the war’s aftermath, caught in an economic crisis that fueled anti-Semitic and militant nationalist sentiment. The students recognized the dangers of militant nationalism more locally, as well, aware as they were of a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in America, and growing anti-Semitism of the kind being spewed by Henry Ford and the recently-revived Ku Klux Klan.

They saw danger elsewhere in American society, too, particularly in what some students regarded as a rampant materialism that was eroding genuine religious experience, and fostering complacency and a lack of principled engagement in the face of injustice. In part, their critique of secular society placed them not beyond the mainstream but in its margins, and ideologically in alliance with other countercultural religious and modernist intellectual movements that condemned materialism; at the same time, the language some used in their call for economic justice—including words like "exploitation" and "the masses"—associated them with leftist political groups. The students did, to varying degrees, involve themselves in secular movements, but they also set themselves apart from these groups. Concerned most with Jewish life, they launched their primary critique not at secular society but at Judaism as they had received and understood it.

Orthodox and Reform Judaism came under equally harsh critique. On the one hand, students impugned Orthodoxy for its meaningless ritual, and irrational, magical practices that flew in the face of reason and science; at the same time, they denounced Reform for its narrow definition of Judaism as a religion only, its disregard for Jewish cultural and national life, and, for some, its sterility, coldness and disinterest in fostering emotional or mystical religious experience.

The word "fettered" appears frequently in the students' critique, in relation to the shackles of the ghetto, the shackles of religion controlled by interests, and the shackles of
irrational thinking. Student writers believed that neither Orthodoxy nor Reform offered 
adequately the possibility of releasing these shackles for the freedom to think and practice 
according to their personal beliefs and values. Clergy, in particular—Orthodox as well as 
Reform—came under sharp criticism for hypocrisy, rigid ideas, and lack of courage when it came to speaking the truth and challenging injustice on the part of the powerful.

For all of these reasons, including crises external to Judaism as well as internal, the 
students believed Judaism was failing and had to be rescued.

The tragedy, and the hope as well, lay in the fact that the unique religious teachings of 
Judaism offered western civilization, as well as the Jewish people, the possibility of 
salvation. But Judaism needed to be reevaluated, unfettered, and in the terminology Mordecai 
Kaplan had already adopted, reconstructed. The students, perceiving a Judaism heretofore 
shrouded in darkness, sought to expose the tradition to the light of day, and with it all the 
contemporary ideas and cultural values that could make it relevant in modern society. As 
John Tepfer wrote:

We do not have to spend ourselves holding the door against hostile and unholy forces-
science or nationalism—trying to break into our sanctum. No! We throw the doors wide open and invite all to come in. If they take possession of our fields and applying newer processes make them more fertile, we all enjoy the more abundant crop. Let science, criticism, historical investigation shed what light they can upon our Judaism, and let us rather use our energies to assist in cultivating our field with all the newest appliances. And not merely as scholars shall we study ‘Judische Wissenschaft’ and produce scientific ‘tit-bits,’ but also as Jews interpret and practice that Jewish Life which emerges from the action of these new processes, which emerges after free and fearless enquiry and researches.697

In their call to create a renaissance in Jewish life, in the pages of the Quarterly during 
the first two years of JIR's existence, students spelled out some of the ideas and commitments 
they believed should provide its basis. Central to the endeavor was cultural renewal, 
particularly as understood through the lens of Ahad Ha'am and his philosophy of cultural 
Zionism. They saw no contradiction in their rejection of certain forms of nationalism while

embracing Jewish nationalism. The renewed use of the Hebrew language, in a modernized form, would also play a central role, as would a revitalized and creative approach to Jewish scholarship. Jewish culture, too, was critical—including high and low, the wide range of expression found in New York's contemporary Yiddish theater, and the original poetry and prose of JIR students themselves.

Religious belief and practice, too, was central to the students' vision. In this realm more than a few seem to have found inspiration in another Jewish thinker of eastern European origin but a thoroughly American education, Mordecai Kaplan. Like Kaplan, a number of students took a naturalist approach to God, while others sought to create religious life that, though fully in accord with science, did not abandon so-called mystical elements of Jewish practice and belief. Those students who addressed the denominational paradigm challenged it, finding the movements themselves unresponsive to the needs of contemporary Jewry, and the denominational model too balkanized. Rather, their suspicion of rigid thinking and their high estimation of free expression led them to value, at least conceptually, a model of Jewish peoplehood in which Jews of varying viewpoints and practices joined together in common purpose rather than breaking apart according to narrow interest.

Finally, central to the students' vision of Jewish renaissance was the call of prophetic Judaism to engage in the battle for social and economic justice. Though students wrote about this in florid and grandiose terms, their ideas at times buried in the rhetoric of leftist movements, they repeatedly cautioned against merely mouthing words without acting to make real these prophetic ideals. Here, Wise provided a model, ever articulating his political agenda and pursuing it with concrete action. The major political concern the students addressed was the battle to end economic exploitation of workers who found themselves at the bottom of the industrial economy. Students also spoke in prophetic terms of increasing interfaith understanding, which they attempted to foster by including in the pages of the
Quarterly articles by Christian scholars and ministers, by engaging with Christian students at other seminaries, and in at least one case, by urging a more liberal view toward intermarriage.

This realm of prophetic Judaism, where their particularist and universalist commitments sometimes collided, is where students at the Institute met their greatest challenge. For if JIR students were looking over their shoulder in any particular direction, concerned about how others might view them, it was not for the most part to the right—not to JTS or HUC, and certainly not the Orthodox world, either—but to the left, where many of them were active in various political causes. Those who found prophetic Judaism most compelling, over and above Ahad Ha'am's cultural Zionism, say, or Kaplanian naturalistic religiosity, were most susceptible to external forces pulling them away from the religious endeavor. Some JIR students gravitated toward the left, but still embraced a particularist Judaism that set them apart from others who shared their commitment to social justice and global understanding. That the editors included in the pages of the Quarterly the voices of prominent individuals on the secular left, like Villard and Kallen, who were surely critical of many of the students’ religious choices, suggests they welcomed the debate.

What would the students do with their vision? John Tepfer recognized the students ultimately would have to test their revaluation of Judaism by taking the product of their intellectual and religious labor to the pulpit, where they would face the task of inspiring followers to sign on to their new Judaism. At present, in preparation for the challenge ahead, they needed to learn. "We who have to convince others that Judaism as we see it is the highest expression of our entire modern life and thought, must first with the facilities offered by the Institute, find this expression for ourselves," he wrote.698

698 Ibid.
Fundraising

"Dr. Wise, will you forgive me if I ask you, how have you been able to do all these things without funds?" "Well, the fact is that I have not been able to do it without funds, but I happen to have gotten the funds that were needed."

As “the facilities offered by the Institute” continued to grow, Wise monitored the fiscal situation. He had a sound understanding of budgetary issues, and JIR had many. For the school to function, the operating budget needed to cover the expenses of faculty, secretarial and janitorial salaries; property rental or purchase, and building maintenance; library accessions; and, publications and advertising. Though the Free Synagogue shared some of these expenses, the school’s budget nonetheless increased each year through the early twenties, beginning in 1922-23 at $35,000; in 1923-24 it almost doubled, to $65,000; in 1924-25 it grew to $70,000; and by 1924-25 it had climbed to approximately $100,000. To meet these costs, throughout this period Wise devoted a significant amount of time on the road fundraising. He regularly enlisted members of the board, faculty and friends like Jacob Billikopf, who had an expertise in the field of fundraising, to identify prospects and strategize methods for raising money.

Initial Situation and Plan

Prior to JIR’s opening in 1922, two models of funding American Jewish seminaries existed: the UAHC’s broad network of dues-paying member congregations covered HUC’s costs, and JTS relied on a handful of wealthy Jewish philanthropists, including Jacob Schiff and Louis Marshall, who created a Seminary endowment fund. That the orthodox-leaning Seminary would not exist without the support of Congregation Emanu-El’s leading Reform donors vexed Wise who, purely in terms of halakhic practice, had far more in common with the Emanu-El group than did the leadership of JTS. Regardless, neither the HUC nor the JTS model could work for the Institute, which lacked the College’s widespread congregational

699 The Annual, 1926, p. 36. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
700 Ibid.
base, as well as the support JTS received from the Jewish philanthropic elite. JIR would have to create a new funding structure.

In doing so, two factors weighed in the school’s favor. First, the Institute did have a strong base, albeit more limited than HUC’s or JTS’s, thanks to the lay leadership and members of the Free Synagogue who unsparingly contributed all manner of resources. Without these, JIR could not have existed; as a synagogue-sponsored seminary from its inception, JIR relied on the Free Synagogue for its lifeblood. Second, in Stephen S. Wise the school had at its helm a rabbi of national stature and widespread popularity who had successfully galvanized support for his causes many times before. For his followers across the country, the Institute’s mission to create more rabbis like Wise would surely be compelling. Given his track record, and with Wise now devoting his oratory, political skills and energy to building the Institute, the founders hoped, supporters nationwide would begin contributing generously.

The founders recognized, however, that a strong future for the Institute was by no means assured, and a number of significant obstacles threatened to impede successful fundraising. Wise may have been the school’s strongest asset, but he had enemies, too, particularly in the wealthy German Jewish circles that were the source of most American Jewish philanthropy at the time, where, for some, Wise was persona non grata. In addition, as inspiring as the JIR vision may have been to Wise’s following, the school would have to compete with many other compelling causes vying for Jewish support, including the desperate and uncontroversial need to send relief to the European Jewish communities suffering in the aftermath of the war. It could not help that the Joint Distribution Committee and United Palestine Appeal, as well as HUC and JTS, and even the Free Synagogue, were all conducting ambitious fundraising campaigns at this time. Finally, the Reform and Conservative movements’ animosity toward the Institute continued unabated. Already, the
president of the Reform movement had sent a letter to all its rabbis urging them not to back JIR, and Adler at JTS had indicated that he, too, frowned upon support for the Institute within his own ranks. The Institute would somehow have to overcome or circumvent this hostility in order to successfully attract new donors.

Over the course of the Institute’s early years, the founders identified three sources of revenue: the Free Synagogue, which from the start provided budget, real estate, rabbinic staff, and lay leadership; individual donors; and, the congregations where JIR students served.

**The Free Synagogue**

The Jewish Institute of Religion, Wise said, was the child of the Free Synagogue. The familial image is apt, for the relationship between the synagogue and the seminary resembled a parent-child relationship in many ways. They shared a powerful and lasting bond, and hopes for a bright and sustainable future; at the same time, despite Wise's initial success in fundraising for JIR, not long after the school opened, tensions between the two institutions began to develop, particularly around the Institute’s dependence on the synagogue for finances and real estate.

At the outset, when Wise and the founders began in 1920 to conceptualize a funding plan for the Institute, the congregation pledged a contribution of $15,000 annually during each of the Institute’s first three years, to serve as the financial nucleus for the school. In so doing, they altered the landscape of American Jewish philanthropy—first, by introducing a new seminary funding model, for none other in Europe or the United States had ever been sponsored by a single synagogue; and second, as the *American Hebrew* reported in 1922, by donating possibly the largest gift an American synagogue had ever made to any endeavor. The gift entailed more than funds, in fact; in addition, in order to meet the needs of the new school, the congregation embarked upon a major construction project costing over half a million dollars to build the Synagogue House where the Institute would be located, with
facilities including a Chapel, the Hirsch Library, classrooms, administrative offices and recreational facilities; and, too, the Synagogue lent its most valuable human asset, agreeing from the start to share Wise with the Institute, enabling him—though with no extra remuneration—to take on yet another major project apart from his synagogue responsibilities. They permitted Goldstein, too, to devote his time to the Institute.  

*Amalgamated Synagogue*

Not long after the opening of the Institute, Wise came up with a plan to enlarge the Synagogue and increase its financial capacity to support the Institute. In the spring of 1923, when Rabbi Nathan Krass of Central Synagogue announced he would be stepping down in order to assume the pulpit at Congregation Emanu-El, Wise proposed that the Free Synagogue and Central Synagogue merge, in order to create a much larger “amalgamated synagogue.” The new synagogue would be called the Central Free Synagogue, and at first Wise would divide his time between their separate locales, until eventually the consolidated congregation could build a single great sanctuary with the capacity to seat three or four thousand people. Ironically, the critic of “cathedral” Judaism harbored little doubt that this grand structure would be a step forward for American Israel. In order to increase revenue for JIR, Wise proposed that the amalgamated synagogue contribute $25,000 annually to the Institute for the first three to five years, at least thirty thousand more than the Free Synagogue's initial three-year commitment. Based on JIR’s budget at the time, this would leave little more than the same sum—$25,000—for the Institute to raise throughout the rest of the country.  

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701 In 1922, *The American Hebrew* estimated the cost of construction at “more than $400,000.” In *The Annual* of 1926, Wise reported the cost as “more than half a million.” *The Annual*, 1926, p. 34; and, “And America Shall Lead Them: An Interview with Professor Ismar Elbogen and Dr. Felix Perles, The Jewish Institute of Religion Scope of Work Outlined,” *The American Hebrew*, October 20, 1922, p. 608. JIR Nearprint Box 1.  
Wise shared the idea with his lay leadership. Edmund Kaufmann, treasurer of the JIR board, worried that if the merger took place, neither congregation would benefit from Wise’s services fully. His words of consolation reveal his motivation for contributing financially to JIR. “The only hope that we will have for the future is that the JIR may turn out many Stephen Wises to preach,” he wrote, “who will be fearless enough to tell the truth, and to keep the pulpit free from that influence which seems to dominate so many of our pulpits today.”

For roughly two years, the two synagogues negotiated a possible merger, but failed to produce an agreement. In March of 1925, Wise reported to Louis Grossmann that the Free Synagogue had “cut loose” from Central Synagogue, and he explained to Gerson Levi that Central Synagogue had been unwilling support the construction of a $2.5 million dollar edifice necessary to house the merged congregation, and that conducting separate services in two different sites was too difficult. With the collapse of this plan went the possibility of an amalgamated synagogue contributing $25,000 annually to JIR.

Real Estate

In the winter of 1923 Wise still had reason to feel optimistic about finances: fundraising was proceeding apace; the synagogue merger and its increased subsidy for JIR appeared likely; and, in January JIR paid off the debt it owed on the construction of the Synagogue House.

To celebrate, the Free Synagogue leadership considered creating a chair in honor of Wise; Wise, however, wanted the Synagogue to make available more real estate, instead. The Free Synagogue owned three adjacent buildings on West 68th Street, which the board

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706 JIR Board Minutes, addition to Executive Committee meeting, January 30, 1924.
had just decided to quickly sell, for the congregation still owed $100,000 on the recently-completed Synagogue House construction, and could no longer carry the financial burden. If JIR did not purchase the buildings immediately, the Synagogue would put them on the market and sell them to the highest bidder.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, May 8, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.}

In April, just back from several fundraising tours in the East and South, Wise met with the JIR board to discuss the proposition.\footnote{JIR Board Minutes, April 20, 1924.} Believing JIR’s finances to be sound, he urged moving ahead with purchase of the buildings, which he hoped to convert into a student dormitory.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, May 8, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.} Not everyone on the board supported purchasing the property, however; notably, Kaufmann, the treasurer, did not. Wise tried to convince him that, since JIR had about fifty thousand dollars in cash on hand, and the Synagogue was struggling to maintain the three houses while paying off the new construction, it stood to reason that JIR should unburden the Synagogue by making the purchase.\footnote{Ibid.} Kaufmann remained unconvinced, but the board moved ahead with the purchase over his objections. In May 1924 the two institutions reached an agreement: JIR would acquire the buildings from the Free Synagogue at a cost of $110,000, paying fifty thousand in cash and taking a sixty thousand dollar mortgage from the Synagogue.\footnote{These were the houses located at 32, 34 and 36 West 68th Street. Stephen S. Wise to Edmund I. Kaufmann, June 14, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.} Jubilant that the houses would now belong to JIR, Wise anticipated the “great and glorious day” when a student hall would be built.

Kaufmann, however, replied soberly. "I don't know what your ideas are regarding a student hall," he wrote. "Would not it be well to consider seriously a sinking fund which could be used to carry the institute through some lean year?"\footnote{Edmund I. Kaufmann to Stephen S. Wise, June 5, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.}

"You are quite right about the need of a sinking fund to carry us through the lean years," Wise replied. "At present we have nothing, no such income fund at all, and if the lean..."
years should come, we would be very hard hit. How happy I would be if something could be done, towards that end!”

Wise did not dare begin construction on a student hall, having just spent fifty thousand dollars in cash and taken out a sixty thousand dollar mortgage, but Kaufmann likely found little relief, for Wise now began planning a much greater purchase. As soon as possible, he hoped JIR would purchase the Synagogue House, which JIR now rented from the Free Synagogue for ten thousand dollars annually, and which Wise estimated would cost the Institute roughly $500,000. It is unlikely, too, that Kaufmann took pleasure the following October when Wise purchased for JIR another building on 68th Street. In this case, at least, Wise made the purchase with personal funds—seventeen thousand dollars he received for serving as executor to the Heyman estate; nonetheless, though the cash on hand came from Wise’s own pocket, acquiring the building entailed an additional twenty-thousand-dollar mortgage for the Institute. Perhaps Wise was feeling flush, for the Heyman estate had just left the Institute over $150,000, the largest contribution received to date, which Wise earmarked for building the student hall.

Kaufmann, unable to enforce the fiscal restraint he sought at the institutional level, made a personal recommendation to Wise, urging him not to forget to create his own nest egg in preparation for old age.

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713 Stephen S. Wise to Edmund I. Kaufmann, June 14, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
714 Ibid.
715 “Won’t you send me your congratulations upon the fact that we have gotten #48 West 68th Street? I am paying for it with the fee I got as executor of the Heyman estate, which is about $17,000.00, leaving a mortgage of $20,000.00,” Wise wrote. Stephen S. Wise to Edmund I. Kaufmann, October 15, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
717 “It was just wonderful of you to have given your executor’s fee of $17,000.00 toward buying the property, but I would feel much better if you occasionally would remember that when you grow old, you should have a nest egg sufficiently large enough to carry on your charities and permit you and your family to travel as much as you like,” Kaufmann wrote. Edmund I. Kaufmann to Stephen S. Wise, October 24, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
Greater Need for Funds

While the Free Synagogue provided everything JIR required to get off the ground—budget, space, lay leadership, and the time and energy of their rabbis—the synagogue neither intended nor had the capacity to be the school's sole funder. The Stephen S. Wise Chair never came into being; instead, with the congregation struggling to maintain its property holdings while paying off the costs of constructing the Synagogue House for JIR, the Institute purchased the houses on 68th Street, thereby relieving some of the Free Synagogue's financial burden.

However, in doing so, JIR simply assumed that burden, assuming it rather than eliminating it. Prior to these purchases, Wise had been concerned about strain on the budget due to the rapid hiring of a large number of faculty, many of whom required, in addition to their salaries, payment for steamship tickets back and forth from Europe and other travel and housing expenses. Now, just as he had refused to allow financial constraints to limit his retaining top scholars from Europe, Palestine and the United States, so too did he refuse to allow financial constraints to impede his desire to increase the property holdings of the Institute. As a result, during its first two years of existence, JIR's financial commitments grew exponentially. Over the course of six months between May and October 1924, the Institute took on at least eighty thousand dollars in mortgage debt to pay for property the school did not need. True, expenses were offset in June of 1924 with the good news that the Heyman estate would infuse a significant sum into the budget that year.

Still, the Institute needed more funding, and a strategy to raise it.

Soliciting Individual Donors

To create such a strategy had always been the plan; no one assumed the Free Synagogue would carry the school's entire financial burden. According to the Institute’s original budget, in addition to the fifteen thousand dollars JIR would receive annually from
the Synagogue during the first three years, Wise would need to raise tens of thousands of
dollars more on an annual basis from other contributors. He planned to solicit the founders of
the school individually, and to reach out to prospective donors across the country. While he
knew this would be difficult initially, given that few Jews had heard of the Institute, Wise
believed that over time, once the Institute had proven its right to exist, giving would increase
and fundraising would get easier.\(^718\) His positive outlook shaped his approach to spending as
well as fundraising. In May 1922, for example, when Wise set out for Europe to recruit
faculty with less than a third in hand of the amount the Institute would require for operation
in the upcoming academic year, he expressed concern to Kaufmann about encumbering
significant expenses prior to raising the money—but he also conveyed his optimism. “It is a
pretty serious matter for us to undertake commitments that will involve an expense of thirty
thousand without the money being in sight," he wrote, "but I feel that it will come in because
it will not be long before the Jews of America will appreciate the importance of what we are
doing.”\(^719\)

In order to reach those Jews, Wise worked with board members and confidantes to
devise various approaches to fundraising. In the Institute’s earliest years, Wise turned to
Jacob Billikopf, director of the Federation of Jewish Charities in Philadelphia and longtime
friend. For political reasons related to his own work, Billikopf turned down Wise's invitation
to serve on JIR's board, but he generously shared his expertise in fundraising with Wise
behind the scenes. Billikopf was a master fundraiser who, in his prior position as executive
director of the American Jewish Relief Committee, had raised twenty million dollars in aid
for European Jews displaced after the World War.\(^720\) He knew American Jewry's major
philanthropists, had a keen sense of who would be willing to give, and in several cases

\(^720\) “Jacob Billikopf Papers, Manuscript Collection No. 13.” Finding aid at the American Jewish
Archives, Cincinnati, OH. Accessed August 16, 2013,
http://americanjewisharchives.org/collections/ms0013/.
offered to solicit them personally. He advised Wise on expanding his board, and helped make
inroads amongst potential donors in Philadelphia's Jewish community.

The most effective strategy was also the most labor intensive: working in consultation
with key supporters, Wise traveled throughout the country introducing prospective donors to
the mission of JIR and its latest developments. He tried a variety of approaches, asking the
wealthiest prospects to name endowed professorships, creating a circle of medium-level
donors, and establishing a subscription system whereby individuals could participate at any
level.

*Major Gifts*

The largest gift JIR received from an individual donor in its earliest years came from
Bertha Guggenheimer, a passionate Zionist and friend of Irma Lindheim’s, who donated
twenty-five thousand dollars in May 1922 to establish an endowment fund, eventually to be
designated for a graduate fellowship in Palestine.\(^221\) Two years later, the Institute received
more than $150,000 from the Heyman estate.\(^222\) In scale, however, these gifts were
exceptional, and Wise lamented the fact that for the most part, JIR did not have access to the
wealthiest Jewish philanthropists. "If only we had a dozen Aunt Berthas to see us thru our
present difficult days, I would sleep a little more soundly and dream a little more joyously,"
Wise wrote to Guggenheimer, "but I thank the Lord for one, and do not despair."\(^223\)

For the most part, Wise worked with donors who lacked either the will or the means
to contribute a five- or six-figure gift, but were nonetheless interested in providing some
support to the Institute. Having fundraised for the Zionist movement and on behalf of
international Jewish relief, and for secular progressive causes as well, Wise had a national
base of allies and supporters. Support for a liberal Jewish seminary would inspire only a

\(^{221}\) "And America Shall Lead Them: An Interview with Professor Ismar Elbogen and Dr. Felix Perles, *The American Hebrew*, October 20, 1922; and Jewish Institute of Religion Scope of Work Outlined," *The Annual*, 1926, p. 36. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{222}\) *The Annual*, 1926, p. 36. JIR Nearprint Box 1.

\(^{223}\) Stephen S. Wise to Bertha Guggenheimer, January 31, 1924. Box 17, folder 19, JIR Records.
fraction of this base, however, so Wise had to rely heavily on the JIR board, as well as rabbis and other Jewish leaders in the field, to introduce him to new prospects in cities across the country.

Billikopf played this role effectively, for example, when he brokered the arrangement that funded Henry Slonimsky’s appointment at JIR. As noted above, during the academic year 1923-24, Slonimsky, unhappy at HUC, became interested in teaching at JIR. Billikopf put Wise in touch with Albert Greenfield, a Philadelphia philanthropist who had attended high school with Slonimsky, and whose Zionism and liberal political views inclined him favorably toward Wise. Billikopf, in introducing Greenfield to JIR, shared Wise's "magnificent" eulogy for Samuel Gompers, in which Wise described how Judaism provided Gompers spiritual encouragement for his labor activism. "Do you know of any other outstanding Jew in America who has Wise's moral courage to say the things to which he gives expression?" Billikopf wrote. Then, encouraging Greenfield to serve on the JIR board, he added, "It is because the Institute of Religion has such a man as Wise for its leaders [sic] that I am so tremendously interested in it."724

Ultimately Greenfield would contribute to the Institute in a variety of ways, but initially his goal was simply to place his friend Slonimsky on the faculty, and in the spring of 1924 he gave JIR five-thousand dollars to make this possible. When Slonimsky joined JIR in the fall of 1924, it was thanks not only to Albert Greenfield's gift, but to Billikopf’s help arranging it.

Endowed Professorships

Wise knew that Greenfield’s short-term gift could soon become a financial liability for the school, when the money ran out and JIR had to assume the cost of Slonimsky’s appointment. In an attempt to head off the problem, Wise, in his note of thanks to Greenfield,

724 Jacob Billikopf to Albert M. Greenfield, December 19, 1924. Box 17, folder 3, JIR Records.
asked for his help convening a Philadelphia group who might take over payment of Slonimsky's salary in perpetuity. This was not the first time Wise attempted to secure permanent funding for a faculty chair. A year earlier when he attended the memorial service for Emil Hirsch, he hoped friends of the renowned rabbi in Chicago would establish an Emil Hirsch Chair in Comparative Religion, but it never materialized, and neither was Wise able to endow Slonimsky’s position. Recognizing endowed chairs as the single best way to ensure long-term funding for the faculty, Wise persisted. In the spring of 1925 he solicited members of Pittsburgh’s Rodef Shalom Congregation to establish a J. Leonard Levy chair in memory of their deceased rabbi, and in Boston he appealed for a chair in memory of Charles William Eliot, the Harvard president who, unlike his successor, A. Lawrence Lowell, opposed a Jewish quota system. Neither of these chairs took shape, either.

Reaching Prospective Donors

While Wise failed to establish faculty chairs, or to create an endowment of any kind, he did succeed in raising annual funds for the Institute, though never enough to put the school on solid footing and relieve him of the pressure to raise more. Typical of Wise's most successful approach was a dinner Albert Greenfield agreed to host (after much cajoling from Wise) about a year after underwriting Slonimsky's appointment. Greenfield, together with Billikopf and JIR board member Walter Hagedorn, another Philadelphian, invited twenty to thirty prospective donors to a gathering where Wise and Lee Frankel, another native Philadelphian, spoke about the Institute. Wise wanted the opportunity "to present our case, to tell of the urgency of the need, the significance of our programme and the worth whileness [sic] of our task," and promised Greenfield he would not make an outright appeal for funds. Nonetheless, Greenfield was reluctant to arrange the event; even without a direct solicitation, it had clear fundraising goals that he considered at cross-purposes with the Philadelphia...
Jewish Federation’s campaign, which would soon entail soliciting the same group. Only after Wise agreed to speak at the Federation’s opening campaign event did the Philadelphian pull the JIR dinner together. Greenfield had no regrets, and later attributed Wise’s address on the opening night of the campaign as "one of the most vital factors that made the drive the most successful ever conducted in Philadelphia; over $1,600,000 was raised." The JIR event, too, proved effective, yielding nothing on the scale of the Federation's campaign, but several thousand dollars for the Institute.

Wise took a similar approach wherever he could, and over the course of JIR's first two years he addressed gatherings in Pittsburgh, Boston, Albany, Uniontown, New Orleans, Montgomery, Shreveport, Mobile and elsewhere. Always, he needed a local man to connect him to prospects. "When shall we get your friends in Cleveland, Detroit and Indianapolis, to undertake something like the same thing?" he asked Edmund Kaufmann, who had promised to convene such meetings as early as May 1921. Relying on friends, colleagues and board members for help in every location, again and again Wise rehearsed the case for JIR—the urgency of the need, the significance of the program, and the worthwhileness of the task.

He was often successful. On his trip to the South in the spring of 1924, a man in Montgomery made a five-year pledge to contribute one thousand dollars annually, and a man in Shreveport made a similar pledge to send four thousand dollars annually. He did not do as well as he had hoped in New Orleans, where Chaim Weitzmann arrived on the same train for his own fundraising mission ("half of the Jewish delegation at the railroad station awaited me, but for once the democratic masses awaited another," Wise told Mack), but Wise did raise two thousand dollars there. "I can see now that I can get the quarter of a million or three

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728 Stephen S. Wise to Edmund I. Kaufmann, Mar 11, 1925. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
hundred thousand per year that we shall need for the first five years," Wise told Mack, "if I go to enough communities."\textsuperscript{729}

\textit{Broadening the Base}

Wise’s optimism was belied by a race he could hardly run fast enough; if the figures he shared with Mack were accurate, in just two years JIR’s budget had grown significantly. This one-man fundraising operation could not possibly travel to enough communities, nor meet personally with enough donors to raise close to what the Institute now needed, especially as supporters with the capacity to donate thousands of dollars or more were few and far between.

As Wise and the board sought other ways to broaden JIR's base, they focused on a new group of potential donors—those who would give modestly if asked, without requiring any personal contact from Wise. Edmund Kaufmann explained why these donors were particularly important: as beneficial as the large gifts were, the school would be more financially secure if it had a broad base of modest supporters rather than being beholden to a few large-scale donors. "I realize that thousand dollars subscribers now would be the road of least resistance, but am sure that hundred dollar subscribers would work out better for us,” Kaufmann told Wise, “for the reason that we could replace a hundred dollar subscriber much easier than we could one for a thousand dollars.”\textsuperscript{730}

In order to create this base, during the school's first year Wise and the board devised an annual subscription system, whereby supporters could fill out a form designating the level of their gift, and send in cash or a check that connected them in some official way to the Institute. Those who gave between ten and twenty-five dollars became "members" for the year; "patrons" gave between twenty-five and one hundred dollars; and, "founders" gave over

\textsuperscript{729} Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, April 7, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
\textsuperscript{730} Edmund I. Kaufmann to Stephen S. Wise, May 6, 1921. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
one hundred dollars. Over time they experimented with the levels; in 1925, for example, Wise tried to create a circle of about fifty to one hundred donors who agreed to give between one- and five-thousand dollars annually; he achieved some success, but no permanent group ever coalesced.

Wise occasionally appealed to the audience who attended his weekly Sunday morning services at Carnegie Hall, passing the collection plate for a particular JIR-related project. At the end of the first academic year, for example, Wise announced one Sunday morning that the collection would be split between the Dr. Alexander Kohut Publication Fund and a prize for the best student essay on Biblical Archaeology. Though not an effective long-term strategy, at this mass gathering Wise like few others could mobilize a rapid collection of funds when needed immediately.

Challenges

Despite his skills in fundraising, when it came to soliciting gifts for JIR Wise encountered challenges at every turn. First, there was the overall clamorous nature of American Jewish fundraising, and the fact that many of JIR's prospective donors were solicited for virtually every other Jewish cause, many of which Wise supported, too. And, as noted above, some of the most prominent Jewish philanthropists in America Wise could not approach at all. After decades criticizing the powerful and wealthy men behind America’s major Jewish institutions, Wise, though adored by many, also had a slew of adversaries, including elite philanthropists like Felix Warburg who would have nothing to do with him, due either to personal animus or political antagonism from battles of the past, or both. When Wise did have to reach out to this circle, he often did so via an emissary. In the fall of 1924, for example, he held a luncheon honoring Hirsch Chajes, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna then

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732 Stephen S. Wise to Bertha Guggenheimer, February 24, 1925. Box 17, folder 19, JIR Records.
733 The prize was called the Dr. Adolph Huebsch Prize. Faculty meeting minutes, May 4, 1923. Box 9, folder 7, JIR Records.
visiting New York. Wise wanted national Jewish leaders to attend, including Louis Marshall and Felix Warburg. Rather than hosting the gathering at JIR or the Free Synagogue, he held this one at the Lawyers Club in Manhattan and, aware that if he were listed as co-host Warburg and others would likely refuse to attend, he had Mack issue the invitations.\(^\text{734}\)

In fundraising for JIR, these challenges converged, for of the many causes vying for dollars in the Jewish community, the Institute's greatest competitor was HUC, and given Wise's long-expressed disdain for the College, and the conflagration between the Free Synagogue Committee and the UAHC at the time of JIR's founding, Wise's relationship with the College remained at a nadir. As a result, he frequently ran into problems with supporters of HUC, alumni as well as donors. Shohl, in his letter to American rabbis, had urged the withholding of all manner of support from the Institute, and many followed suit. Wise needed to assess allegiance to HUC in every community where he fundraised. Through years of working with the CCAR, Wise had a general sense of his supporters and foes—those rabbis pushing the Conference toward greater support for Zionism were more likely to favor efforts for JIR—but not all who agreed with him on political issues were willing to incur the wrath of HUC, and some who did not agree with him on many issues lent their support nonetheless, either because they resented the College's attempt to strangle the Institute at birth, or because they agreed the time had come to establish a liberal seminary in New York.

Edmund Kaufmann was one of those whose anger at the College’s treatment of JIR impelled him to support the New York school. In a spring 1922 letter informing the UAHC of his decision to divert most of his former support for the College to JIR, he challenged the Reform movement’s refusal to cooperate with the Institute. Were they trying to punish Wise, he asked, or did they believe there should be one college alone in the nation, to be located in

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\(^{734}\) Wise’s secretary told Mack’s secretary that “the invitations should be sent out by Judge Mack, and not by the Judge and Dr. Wise—he thinks some of the guests wouldn’t come if he were named as one of the joint hosts.” Stephen S. Wise’s secretary (likely Mildred Blout) to Miss Roloff, December 10, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records (author is unable to identify Roloff’s first name).
Cincinnati "throughout the ages"? Did they deem Wise unfit to prepare young college graduates for the ministry? “His courage is the courage of a Roosevelt,” Kaufmann wrote. "No individual nor any group will be big enough to stop his work. The Jewish Institute of Religion shall be built, its budget will be assured by thousands of our people, who are liberal thinkers and courageous enough to give as they think.”735

Others felt differently, and Kaufmann’s thousands did not materialize; Wise knew most HUC supporters did not view him positively, and he preferred not to solicit current supporters of the College. When Kaufmann offered to generate a list of leading philanthropists in the larger cities, Wise proposed a different approach. "The so-called leading men of the larger cities are, for the most part, committed to the Hebrew Union College and they are exactly the people whom I do not wish to ask for help. I would much rather ask those people who are doing nothing in the matter of religious education and the training of men for the Jewish ministry."736 Reaching out to new donors tested Wise's view that fundraising in the Jewish community need not be an either/or affair, though he took that approach more out of necessity than virtue. Some HUC alumni actively tried to keep him out of their communities. In 1924, for example, Wise canceled his plan to fundraise in Atlanta because, he told Mack, Rabbi David Marx of The Temple, the city's largest Reform synagogue, "shooed me away.”737

Publicly, both Wise and the leadership of HUC claimed no conflict existed. When Moses Greenbaum declined an invitation from Wise to join the JIR Board, citing his current membership on the Board of Governors of the College, Wise urged him to reconsider. He could serve in both capacities, Wise said, for the institutions were neither competitors nor

735 Edmund I. Kaufmann to the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, April 26, 1922. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
737 Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, April 7, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
rivals, and perhaps sharing a board member would engender a spirit of understanding and comradeship. Greenbaum accepted Wise's invitation.\footnote{Stephen S. Wise to Moses E. Greenbaum, March 14, 1924. Box 17, folder 2, JIR Records.}

Leaders at the Union took the same approach, publicly claiming they harbored no animus toward Wise or the Institute. "Inasmuch as it is established, we wish it abundant success," Shohl announced.\footnote{In so doing, Wise told Bertha Guggenheimer, Shohl inadvertently provided Wise a truthful basis for claiming that the College no longer opposed the Institute in his own fundraising efforts, “otherwise they would not and could not wish abundant success.” Stephen S. Wise to Bertha Guggenheimer, January 24, 1922. Box 17, folder 19, JIR Records.} Tensions remained high between the two institutions, however, and cooperation impossible.

By no means was the College JIR’s only competitor, and Wise, who was concurrently fundraising for multiple causes, understood the ways in which a myriad of communal organizations were always chasing after Jewish dollars. Whether in behalf of the United Palestine Appeal, the Federation of Jewish Charities in Philadelphia, the Joint Distribution Committee, or a local synagogue, one campaign or another was always underway. As a result, donors had to weigh their priorities, and often found themselves in the awkward position of having to turn down a friend or respected colleague. To avoid this, many JIR donors refused to solicit friends. When Wise asked Bertha Guggenheimer to convene a group of "worthwhile Jews" in her home of Lynchburg, Virginia, for example, she declined, saying the few in town were focused on rebuilding the local synagogue.\footnote{Bertha Guggenheimer to Stephen S. Wise, February 3, 1924. Box 17, folder 19, JIR Records.} Similarly, Edmund Kaufmann refused to fundraise in his own congregation, deferring vaguely to a time when construction on a new synagogue would be complete.\footnote{Edumund I. Kaufmann to Stephen S. Wise, March 26, 1923. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.} Billikopf urged Wise to speak to prospective donors about JIR without engaging in direct solicitation, which could backfire if donors felt he was trying to steer funds away from other organizations; this was the case when Wise spoke in Philadelphia at a Locust Club luncheon just hours before a community-
wide campaign dinner for the Jewish Theological Seminary. “You have no idea how many campaigns we are having in town at this time and how many are being projected," Billikopf told Wise, "the Refugee, the Ort, the Jewish Welfare Board, and 100's other [sic] things which You help perpetrate on our sadly abused rich friends." Billikopf’s joke suggesting that Wise was partly to blame was, in a sense, true—few worked harder than Wise to raise money for so many different causes. Yet even he expressed frustration with a tendency in the Jewish community to give only to matters "shriekingly urgent."

During Wise's trip to the South, he encountered yet another competitor for Jewish money, this one in the world of secular higher education. While in New Orleans, Wise met with Samuel Zemurray, a successful businessman who made his fortune growing bananas on plantations in Central American and selling them in the US market. Apparently Weizmann, visiting the city at the same time, met with him, as well. Mesmerized by the British Zionist leader, Zemurray gave Weizmann $25,000 in cash plus $25,000 in purchased Palestinian land, while he gave JIR just a thousand dollars, though he seemed open to giving more in the future ("as far as I could awaken him from the Weitzmann trance,” Wise told Mack). All of this pales, however, in relation to the gifts he had just given neighboring Tulane University, where the once poor Russian Jewish immigrant, soon to become the largest shareholder in the United Fruit Company, donated $150,000 to support the library and other projects.

Finally, Wise had to confront his own limitations as the primary fundraiser for the Institute; when his health failed, and it did on a regular basis, fundraising slowed to a halt.

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743 Jacob Billikopf to Stephen S. Wise, November 23, 1924. Box 3, folder 9, JIR Records.
745 See Rich Cohen, The Fish that Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America’s Banana King (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012). Following this meeting with Weizmann in 1922, Zemurray became a longtime supporter of the Zionist movement and, eventually, the State of Israel.
746 Stephen S. Wise to Julian W. Mack, April 7, 1924. Box 25, folder 13, JIR Records.
As Wise grappled with the various challenges of raising money from individuals, he and Goldstein began to consider creating a congregational organization to support JIR. Though Wise focused most of his fundraising efforts soliciting wealthy individuals, he also recognized the stability the Institute might gain if it had broad congregational support. For all his criticism of the Reform movement, he had to be aware of the benefits of its congregational-based funding structure, which provided nearly one-hundred percent of the College’s budget. In fact, that structure was perhaps the single largest impediment he faced as he attempted to build broad-based support for JIR, for in the most general sense, the most likely supporters of JIR were liberal, synagogue-attending Jews who had an appreciation for rabbis and a vested interest in their training; most of these Jews, however, belonged to Reform congregations and through their dues to the UAHC, most of which went to directly to the College, they were already supporting one rabbinical school and hardly eager to send money to another. For that reason, a broad appeal to congregations across the country would not work; instead, Wise focused on two groups of synagogues that had a more intimate connection with JIR.

The first encompassed those that belonged to the Free Synagogue movement, located in places like Flushing, Newark, Washington Heights and Jamaica, and led by rabbis loyal to Wise.747 Manhattan’s Free Synagogue—the center of the movement—hoped that one day its building on 68th Street would serve as national headquarters for a movement that carried its spirit and values to Jewish communities around the country. While the Free Synagogues did belong to the UAHC, they also hoped to challenge the Reform movement, which Wise

believed held a monopoly on synagogues in many sizable urban Jewish communities. In cities where just one Reform synagogue existed, he observed, that congregation often used its sway to effectively prevent the establishment of new congregations. “The same tendency which moves the Union to resent the establishment of another school moves the graduates of the HUC to object to a second reform congregation in every community,” Wise wrote Hirsch. “Thus Detroit with one hundred thousand Jews has one reform congregation, as is the case in Buffalo, Albany, Washington, Cleveland, etc; all cities in which there ought to be two or three.” Wise hoped JIR alumni would establish satellite congregations in these cities and thereby break the Reform monopoly. In the long run, this would also break what he perceived to be HUC’s monopoly on rabbinic placement, increase the demand for rabbis, and open the field to more JIR graduates.

In response to the JIR appeal, the existing Free Synagogues sent what support they could. In 1922-23, for example, Flushing pledged five thousand dollars annually for five years; Newark contributed a one-time five hundred dollars; Washington Heights pledged five hundred dollars annually; and, Jamaica paid two-thousand dollars to hire a student, and pledged one-thousand dollars annually, in exchange for supervision of the synagogue by Wise and Goldstein. Clearly they supported the school; equally evident, however, the Jews of Flushing and Newark had nowhere near the philanthropic capacity of Manhattan’s Free Synagogue. Beyond the mother ship, the so-called Free Synagogue movement held little promise of substantial giving for the foreseeable future.

As a second possibility, Wise and Goldstein looked to the students' congregational field placements, hoping they too might generate financial support for the Institute, for they shared a unique relationship with JIR, as well. Receiving the services of a student,

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749 “The men we graduate will go through the country and organize congregations if we give them the opportunity to prepare themselves,” Wise wrote. Stephen S. Wise to Emil G. Hirsch, June 14, 1922. Box 19, folder 14, JIR Records.
750 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24 1923.
congregations benefited firsthand from the new seminary, and as congregants got to know their student rabbi, they came to learn more about the Institute. Hoping this might incline them philanthropically, in 1922-23 Wise and Goldstein began soliciting these student pulpits for financial contributions, and in November of 1923, Wise reported that the plan was working well. Temple Sinai of Brooklyn, for example, had sent $523 and pledged a similar amount for the next five years, and Temple Peni El in Harlem and a congregation in Borough Park had just begun campaigns for JIR. Still, in order to build greater support, the Institute needed to cultivate its relationship with these congregations. Wise and Goldstein would supervise the students' pulpit work, they decided, and Wise would visit each congregation annually. In addition, Goldstein proposed they host a conference in 1923-24 where representatives of these congregations could meet the leaders of JIR and the Free Synagogue, and with the student body, as well.

As Goldstein continued bringing more New York area congregations into the fieldwork system, aiming for ten to twenty-five new placements, Wise proposed establishing a fund that the student pulpits, specifically, would be asked to maintain. Though Wise argued that congregations might be willing to make larger pledges if they set the fund aside as an endowment for the Institute, the board rejected the idea, deferring any plan for an endowment to a later date. The budget had already grown to fifty thousand dollars, which included ten thousand dollars in annual rent to the Free Synagogue; given the urgent need to cover these costs, Wise was instructed to direct all current donations to meeting JIR's immediate expenses.

Meanwhile, Goldstein proceeded to plan the conference for congregational representatives, which would include a day of meetings and close with dinner and a

751 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, November 28, 1923.
752 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, October 2, 1923.
753 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, May 24, 1923.
fundraising appeal. Ideally, the gathering would enable participants to share their experiences and discuss common problems, stimulate their interest in the Free Synagogue movement and JIR, and help them feel part of something larger. In an internal memorandum, Goldstein spelled out an ambitious hope. “Such a conference undoubtedly would grow in importance from year to year and perhaps form the beginning of a National Organization upon which the Institute could rest with security.”

It took Goldstein more than four years before he could successfully bring the conference to fruition, which he finally did with the help of the Institute’s first rabbinical alumni, who attended together with their congregational representatives. There, the discussion of creating a national organization of congregations to support JIR continued.

**Expenses Outpace Revenue**

Having made major expenditures hiring faculty prior to the Institute’s opening, and purchasing real estate shortly thereafter, Wise from the outset worried about how he would sustain the Institute financially. Though he enlisted others to help, he and the board saw the fundraising responsibility as primarily his, and by the winter of 1924 he was devoting much of his time to raising money, not only in New York but throughout the country. Contributions for the most part came in only slowly, but he remained—or at least pretended to remain—optimistic. “I am perfectly sure we shall easily get through the year with a surplus, and with a goodly part of the third year’s budget pledged or in hand,” he told Kaufmann.

Rather than improving, however, the fiscal situation worsened as expenses continually outpaced revenue. As enrollment grew, Wise hired more faculty, publication and

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754 JIR Board Minutes, Executive Committee, October 2, 1923.
755 Executive Committee Minutes, Memorandum - S.S.W., n.d. Box 9, folder 1, JIR Records.
756 JIR Board Minutes, May 29, 1928.
757 Wise thanked Kaufmann for his gift of one thousand dollars, and wrote, “So much of my time goes toward the getting of funds, which are coming in slowly, but things are moving.” Stephen S. Wise to Edmund Kaufmann, January 14, 1924. Box 22, folder 14, JIR Records.
advertising costs increased, and building maintenance expenses rose. Wise, recognizing the Institute had only half the funds needed for the remainder of the year, increased the amount of time he spent traveling for the purpose of fundraising, but despite some success, he could not reverse the trend toward deficit. By the fall, Wise informed Chajes that while he still hoped the Viennese scholar would visit the United States, the Institute could not incur the cost of bringing him, as they had originally discussed. “The Institute has been under a terrific financial strain, owing to the appointment of several new members on the Faculty, and some unexpected expenses,” Wise told Chajes, “which have so reduced the budget for the ensuing scholastic year as to make it imperative that we retrench in every possible quarter.”

**Conclusion**

The fiscal challenge was growing, but so too was the Institute—and with its initial success came greater opportunity to secure the funding required to make it sustainable. Wise and the founders had turned their idea for a non-aligned seminary in the heart of New York City into reality. With its international faculty and graduate-level student body, its mission to sustain vibrant intellectual life encompassing a broad range of views, and its commitment to engaging students in the life of the world’s largest Jewish community, the Institute attracted students as well as supporters around the country. Most were either Zionists or Jewish progressives who admired Wise, and wanted to create a new generation of rabbis who would share his commitments.

Wise’s primary base remained the Free Synagogue, and despite the financial challenges it faced, and the inevitable tensions that developed as the two institutions

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758 Wise told Moses Greenbaum in November 1923 that the Institute needed a budget of $50-60,000 for the year, of which about two-thirds had already been pledged. A year later, in October 1924, Wise told Greenbaum that the budget had increased, due to an expanding student body, a growing faculty, and increased activities. Stephen S. Wise to Moses E. Greenbaum, November 9, 1923 and October 21, 1924. Box 17, folder 2, JIR Records.

759 Stephen S. Wise to Hirsch Chajes, October 20, 1924. Box 5, folder 2, JIR Records.
attempted to share their resources, the Free Synagogue’s leadership remained committed to supporting the Institute in every way possible. For members of the Free Synagogue, Wise’s politics were not necessarily the principal motivating factor in their lending support. Here, unlike Wise’s national base, congregants had personal relationships with Wise. He was their rabbi, who challenged them from the pulpit but also tended to them pastorally, officiating at their celebrations and helping them through periods of grief and loss. They hoped to create more rabbis like him, and they gave generously of the financial and human capital they had in order to cover the expenses necessary for the Institute to endure.

At the same time, the Institute faced obstacles. The hostility directed at the Institute by the Reform leadership did not dissipate, and while it did become less overt, the UAHC and HUC effectively discouraged congregations as well as individuals from lending JIR their support. Wise could not turn to the philanthropic elite, due in part to his critique of Reform, his Zionism and his leftwing politics; nor could he yet galvanize a congregational base to contribute anywhere near as much as the UAHC raised for the College. Perhaps that would change over time, he hoped, once JIR alumni had an opportunity to establish themselves professionally in congregations where they might cultivate greater support for the Institute; for the time being however, congregational funding remained limited to the fledgling Free Synagogue movement where, beyond Manhattan’s flagship congregation, resources were few. Meanwhile, everywhere, many different Jewish causes, some quite urgent, competed for the same funding the Institute required.

In that regard, quietly, on the horizon, a new competitor had emerged, still largely undetected but already having had an impact on JIR. In the spring of 1924 Samuel Zemurray, despite his ardent support for Zionism, chose to give the majority of his philanthropy to Tulane University. Less than a year later, Lucius Littauer’s magnanimous gift to Harvard enabled Harry Wolfson to leave the Institute for an endowed chair at the university he loved,
Donating wealth to secular institutions of higher learning had become a path to respectability for moguls like Rockefeller and Carnegie, and in the mid-1920s for the first time a miniscule number of Jews turned their giving in that direction, as well. In Littauer’s case, doing so had a direct impact on JIR and, more broadly, in the world of Jewish scholarship. By funding a chair in Jewish Studies at Harvard, Littauer made it possible for Harry Wolfson to leave the seminary world behind him, and to pursue his research secure in the home of a secular university. Jewish scholars, until now, never had this opportunity; other universities and donors took notice, as did faculty at the Institute. Students, too, would experience the impact; though Ralph Marcus decided to earn his doctorate from Columbia after studying during this period with Wolfson at Harvard as well as with Gottheil at Columbia, future young scholars would gravitate to the institutions that housed the faculty and resources they needed to establish their careers. Indeed, Columbia would soon follow suit, hiring another JIR professor, Salo Baron, to occupy the nation’s first university chair in Jewish history.

In Stephen Wise’s generation, non-Orthodox American Jews interested in serious Jewish learning either went to Europe to pursue their academic studies in one of the Jewish seminaries and perhaps at a neighboring university, as well, or, for the most part, they attended either HUC or JTS. In the mid-twenties, soon after the Jewish Institute of Religion established itself as a third non-Orthodox seminary on the American Jewish landscape, a small number of other doors began opening at American institutions of higher learning. If HUC and JTS represented JIR’s major rivals in 1922, just a few years later, ever so slowly, secular universities began entering the competition for Jewish donors, faculty and students.

760 When Wise approached Mack about the possibility of soliciting Littauer for JIR, Mack steered him away; Littauer had more contributions to make at Harvard, and before asking him to support JIR as well, Mack planned to raise from him funding for the New School for Social Research. Julian W. Mack to Stephen S. Wise, December 28, 1927. Box 25, folder 14, JIR Records.

761 Soon, thanks to other Jewish funders following Littauer’s lead, additional faculty members at JIR would seek and obtain positions at secular universities, as well.
True, in creating full-fledged chairs in Jewish Studies, Harvard and Columbia would remain exceptions among their peer institutions until after the Second World War; still, the impact their support for higher Jewish learning would eventually have on all American Jewish seminaries, thanks to the generosity of Jewish donors who chose to direct their gifts toward secular institutions, was experienced at JIR in its earliest years.
CONCLUSION

The Jewish Reformation must heed the lesson of the hour, it must not rest upon the victories of another day, it must be more than an echo of almost forgotten battles and triumphs, it must be vital and meaningful and purposeful, and statesmanlike; it must be filled anew by the spirit of God. Hearkening unto the call of the prophets, it must resume its journey unto the mountain-tops.

Stephen S. Wise, “Liberal Judaism” sermon 1920/21

From the outset, Wise and the founders of the Jewish Institute of Religion shaped their goals for JIR based not only on their philosophical commitments—to the oneness of Israel, for example, the prophetic values of Judaism, and religious and academic freedom—but also in relation to what they perceived to be the critical needs of American liberal Judaism in their time. Highly aware of demographic changes in the American Jewish community and developments in higher education, they set out to create an institution they believed more relevant to early twenties American Jewish life than that which had been created a half century earlier. The Institute’s ability in its earliest years to attract a critical mass of faculty, students and supporters demonstrated that in some important ways their assessment was accurate. Scholars in Europe, the United States and Palestine found attractive the possibility of joining a non-aligned Wissenschaftlich seminary in New York under the direction of Stephen S. Wise, and a substantial number accepted Wise’s invitation to teach. While they brought diverse religious and political perspectives, most shared Wise’s commitment to Zionism, Hebraism and social progressivism, and they shaped a curriculum that reflected those priorities. The Institute attracted a board, as well, consisting of men and women influential in these movements who generously lent support in the form of expertise, social and professional entree, time and money. Figures like Julian Mack, George Alexander Kohut

and Richard Gottheil, in particular, provided the Institute access to an international circle of Jewish scholars, and credibility therein. Serious students, too, were attracted to the Institute and, as evidenced by their writing in the *Institute Quarterly*, they appear to have been thoughtful and idealistic, notwithstanding the usual complaints of some faculty.

By the mid-twenties, Wise and the founders had shaped the contours of the Institute ideologically and in practice, and in doing so, determined the school’s overall course for the years ahead. Key structural components—board, faculty, students, curriculum, building and funding—were now in place; at the same time, even as the school continued to grow, certain elements of the founding vision failed to materialize. Some proved expendable, like the early idea of training Jewish social workers, which never took hold; other, more critical aspects of the initial plan, however, also failed to gain traction.

Based on the findings of this study, what follows is an assessment of factors that contributed to the school’s early success; an analysis of the founders’ most important failures; and, a reflection on the school’s overall impact during this early period.

**Internal Factors Contributing to the School’s Success**

**Stephen S. Wise**

JIR came into being because Stephen S. Wise had the idea, and the determination and know-how to make it real. Whereas others during this period, namely Marshall and Schiff, had called for a consolidation of rabbinical schools in New York, none but Wise sought to add a brand new non-Orthodox seminary to the American Jewish landscape. By no means, however, did he achieve this single-handedly; rather, in order to generate support for the new school, at every step he utilized his connections in the different spheres where he was active, from the progressive segment of New York’s uptown Jewish elite, to the Zionist and left-leaning Yiddish-speaking immigrant population downtown, to the small international circle
of liberal rabbis and Jewish scholars he had cultivated over the years, and even to the halls of the State Senate and Governor’s Mansion.

Wise also utilized conflict to further his goals. Publicly as well as privately he incessantly criticized the Reform movement and other mainstream American Jewish institutions, inevitably incurring the ire of their leadership, which he then put to strategic use, repeatedly leveraging opposition in order to galvanize greater support for his own endeavors. In his youth, Wise had been an outsider to the movement—he was not raised Reform, and he did not attend Hebrew Union College—and he almost seemed to revel in this status when men like Julian Morgenstern, Cyrus Adler and Felix Warburg, for example, made it clear they wanted nothing to do with him; depicting himself as a thorn in the side of the powerful, Wise knew how to inspire a devoted following who took pleasure in supporting this David who dared challenge the Jewish community’s Goliaths.

As an institution-builder Wise acted audaciously. From the start, with few major donors, no full-time faculty, and a handful of students, the Institute had to compete with two well-established seminaries, the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, already in existence nearly fifty years, and locus of support of all Reform congregations across the country; and, New York’s Jewish Theological Seminary, which had the backing of the most powerful Jews in the nation, including Louis Marshall, chairman of the board. In order to establish the Institute’s credentials as a leading center for Jewish scholarship in the same league as HUC and JTS, in the summer of 1922 Wise took a material risk by overspending the meager budget he had in order to recruit a faculty of respected European and American scholars. Doing so enabled the school to implement a curriculum that included Jewish subject matter central to any rabbinical training program—Bible, rabbinics, liturgy, Jewish history and philosophy, for example—while drawing the attention of the national press, secular and more
especially Jewish. This cast JIR onto a national stage, giving the school the prominence it needed to attract new donors and students.

The signal attraction at JIR, to be sure, remained Wise himself, in 1922 among the most prominent, well-connected rabbis in America, whose charisma attracted a broad swath of followers. From the circle of colleagues with whom he had been working in the Zionist movement and American Jewish Congress for decades, Wise drew JIR’s most influential and effective board members, including Mack, Gottheil and Kohut. He also attracted admirers through his presence on the pulpit at the Free Synagogue, his Sunday morning sermons at Carnegie Hall, and his public speaking on behalf of a variety of Jewish and Progressive causes in New York and around the country. The constellation of followers who enlisted in the JIR endeavor as board members, faculty, students and donors did so because they found Wise compelling; that this group did not share a uniform perspective became evident in disagreements over matters as fundamental as the primary mission of the school. In the face of divergent viewpoints and competing priorities, Wise proved flexible, and rather than privileging one constituency over another, he often lent credence to various opposing views; as a result, a diverse group remained involved with the Institute for years, demonstrating a marked sense of loyalty to its president.

The Vision

Notwithstanding Wise’s personal magnetism, the board members, faculty, students and donors who shaped JIR during these early years did so because they subscribed to the values he articulated. Wise tapped into feelings and ideas that had great valence at this time, but had yet to gain purchase in the two existing non-Orthodox American Jewish seminaries. Support for Zionism among first- and second-generation Eastern European immigrants had intensified, for example, in the aftermath of the Balfour Declaration; and, related, the
movement to revive the Hebrew language was spreading, with bases in New York and Boston.

JIR’s lack of affiliation with any particular religious movement also reflected a current trend, in this case among some of the nation’s leading university-affiliated Protestant seminaries, which had detached themselves from their denominational origins for an ecumenical Protestant approach. A number of these, most especially Yale, Union and Chicago, had also already incorporated an approach to seminary training that entailed courses in social service and utilizing their urban surroundings as a laboratory where students could learn the skills of ministry. These divinity schools required incoming students to have a bachelor’s degree, and they promised their students and faculty academic freedom.

Neither HUC nor JTS had moved in this direction. The College originated long before these ideas had gained traction in any American institution, and had yet to relinquish many of its nineteenth-century features. JTS, too, resisted these changes—the Seminary, after all, genuinely stood for a deliberate, conservative approach. To be sure, in attempting to create a seminary that reflected the values of the new American Jewish demographic, the JIR founders were not burdened by the legacy and practices of a decades-old institution; they could start with a clean slate and develop their plan based solely on the current complexion of the American Jewish community, its interests and needs.

A Base

The Jewish Institute of Religion would not have come into existence had the Free Synagogue not embraced the task of establishing a rabbinical school as a means to spread the Free Synagogue movement. Its values influenced JIR’s founding mission, and throughout the Institute’s history, the Free Synagogue served as the school’s base and lifeline, providing financial backing, real estate, rabbinic staff, lay leadership, and on occasion, even a few students. JIR’s dependence on the largesse of its single synagogue sponsor cannot be
overstated; without the Free Synagogue’s resources, the school could neither have materialized nor survived.

**External Factors Contributing to the School’s Success**

**Migration of Jewish Scholars**

Wise was able to assemble an international teaching staff rapidly in part due to the anguishing circumstances many European scholars hoped to escape in the early twenties. With Jewish communities suffering economic collapse in the wake of World War I, and pressure mounting in the United States to limit immigration by further narrowing the quotas imposed in the Emergency Immigration Restriction Act of 1921, a number of scholars in the *Wissenschaftlich* seminaries—including the Hochschule, with whom Wise hoped to develop a faculty exchange—sought to emigrate to the United States. However, with increasing anti-Semitism in American academe, and an absence of positions in Jewish studies outside the area of Semitics, colleges and universities in the United States offered little to no opportunity for employment. During the period between the Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924, JIR was one of few American institutions hiring Jewish scholars. Not all sought entry, of course—some hoped to join the Jewish university Judah Magnes was establishing in Palestine, for example; still, Wise had his pick of top scholars across the globe. In making his selections, he benefited from the guidance of Kohut and Gottheil.

**Shortage of American Rabbis**

Just as Wise had little difficulty attracting faculty to the Institute, neither did he have trouble attracting students. From the start, Wise cited the shortage of rabbis in the United States as part of the rationale for creating the new seminary, and this factor too contributed to JIR’s early success. With Jewish communities growing in many parts of the country, rabbinical training at JIR offered a path to gainful employment, and over the course of the
decade, as young men from around the country and occasionally from abroad applied in numbers that increased annually, enrollment grew and admissions became more competitive.

The shortage of rabbis helped the Institute not only in the area of admissions and recruitment; in addition, because the need for rabbis outweighed the available supply, JIR had no difficulty enlisting congregations in the greater New York area to provide student pulpits where JIR men could apprentice for the High Holy Days and in many cases serve regularly on weekends throughout the year. These pulpits represented an indicator that American Jewry, and particularly congregational leaders, regarded the new seminary as a legitimate training ground and source for their future rabbis. This was borne out in 1926 when the school’s first graduates entered the market, and had no trouble securing full-time congregational positions not just in New York but across the country.

Wise believed that there was a shortage not only of rabbis, but of congregations as well, and he hoped graduates would create new synagogues in cities across the nation, ideally adding to the network of Free Synagogues. Indeed, the number of Reform synagogues in the United States did grow during this period, but it appears most JIR graduates in the twenties, rather than starting new synagogues, took positions in those already established. Their employment followed the demographic trends of the American Jewish community in terms of population movement away from the most densely-populated neighborhoods of the city, to the outer boroughs and eventually into suburban communities beyond the city’s borders, in Long Island, Westchester and points north, as well as New Jersey and Connecticut. In addition, students and alumni served in Jewish communities in the towns and cities of industrial regions like upstate New York and western Pennsylvania, and a few graduates went further afield, to Arkansas, New Mexico, Iowa and elsewhere in the United States. The growth of Jewish communities in virtually all of these geographic areas, and the propensity of this generation of Jews to support synagogues where they lived and to hire rabbis to lead
them, lent credence to JIR’s *raison d’etre*, and the Institute did not fail to promote this aspect of its success. The Institute’s first *News Bulletin*, published in October 1930, listed all current JIR rabbinical and student placements, and boasted that since its founding in 1922, “the Jewish Institute of Religion has already become a powerful force in American Jewish life through the service that is being rendered by its graduates and students to American Jewry.”

**What Failed to Emerge**

Despite the Institute’s success in recruiting faculty and students, and in providing congregational fieldwork opportunities and eventually placing its graduates in full-time positions, at no time in the twenties was JIR’s success assured. Challenges existed in two areas, especially: the effort to establish a center for *Wissenschaft* scholarship; and, the effort to create a sustainable funding structure. In addition, the Institute failed to implement the faculty’s decision in 1923 to admit women as regular students, and it failed, too, to put in place a mechanism for presidential succession.

**Center for Wissenschaft Scholarship**

Several factors impeded the Institute from becoming the great center for Jewish scholarship of which Julian Mack, Richard Gottheil and George Kohut initially dreamed. Though the school’s advertisements in *The Menorah Journal* and elsewhere touted training not only for “the ministry” and “community service” but also for “research,” it appears the majority of students who enrolled sought professional training for the rabbinate, while just a few intended to pursue scholarly careers. Most students entered JIR with only a rudimentary knowledge of Judaism, and many had little to no experience studying Jewish texts and often barely knew Hebrew, although a few came from traditional homes, either in Europe or the United States, and had a yeshiva background. Though the latter may have had a stronger

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763 “Pulpits Occupied by Jewish Institute of Religion Alumni and Students,” *News Bulletin of the Jewish Institute of Religion*, 1, no. 1 (October 1930).
grasp of Hebrew and Aramaic, and greater familiarity with traditional Jewish texts, neither type arrived at JIR prepared for doctoral-level research in Jewish fields. That entering students had already earned a bachelor’s degree meant little in this regard; as undergraduates at American colleges and universities, they had little to no opportunity to explore Jewish scholarly interests. In the twenties, only two students stood out as exceptions: John Tepfer ’27, who studied at Hebrew University on the Guggenheimer Fellowship following his graduation from JIR, and Ralph Marcus, who studied at JIR as well as Harvard, before completing his doctorate at Columbia. Both men pursued careers in Jewish scholarship.\textsuperscript{764}

In addition, the professional orientation of the curriculum deterred students from pursuing rigorous advanced-level scholarship, which students understood had little to do with the requirements for a successful career in the American rabbinate. Whereas the role of rabbi in pre-modern communities entailed mastery of a wide variety of Jewish texts, including especially Talmud and codes, in twentieth-century America non-Orthodox congregational rabbis served in synagogues in much the same way Protestant clergy served in liberal American churches—not as erudite scholars or masters of a literary or legal tradition, but as pastors, conductors of liturgy, officiants at religious ceremonies, and communal leaders and representatives. Students who entered JIR, though unprepared for high-level study, did have the capacity to hone the professional skills they would find most useful as congregational rabbis. In addition, many sought to model themselves after Stephen S. Wise, who performed all the above-mentioned roles, as well as that of a public figure engaged in politics rooted in Jewish values. In preparation for the work they envisioned performing after graduation in congregations or elsewhere in the Jewish community, few students devoted their time at JIR

\textsuperscript{764} A few years later John Tepfer joined the Institute’s faculty to teach Talmud. Ralph Marcus, too, joined the JIR faculty, teaching Semitic Philology until 1943 when he moved to the University of Chicago.
to rigorous academic study. Neither did Wise in his own rabbinate, though he respected the scholarship of others.

As a result, the scholars Wise brought to the Institute in the early twenties from European seminaries and universities expressed disappointment, for they had come expecting to work with advanced-level students. That JIR had raised the bar among American Jewish seminaries in its entrance requirements seemed to promise a highly-trained student body. When these faculty members entered the classroom, however, they discovered that most of the college graduates seated before them lacked even an elementary knowledge of the subject matter.\(^{765}\)

In addition, though some of the faculty and board hoped JIR would fund scholarly publications, the Institute had limited means to do so. Wise had ambitious goals for an Institute Press, which received virtually all its support from a single donor, George Kohut. Over the course of the decade, the Press issued only a handful of publications, mainly pamphlets based on scholarly talks delivered at the Institute. JIR also lacked the funds necessary for book publication, and its faculty received little financial support for research.

Wise almost immediately began to have difficulty retaining his faculty, a problem that grew more serious over time. While opportunities for Jewish scholars in Europe were diminishing, a few were opening in a handful of leading institutions in the United States. When Jewish immigration into the US came to a halt in 1924, those institutions turned to JIR and recruited Wise’s faculty, enticing a number of them with lucrative offers to leave the Institute. In 1924 the New York Public Library hired JIR’s librarian, Joshua Bloch, to run its Jewish Division; Harvard created for Harry A. Wolfson the first chair in Jewish Studies in the United States in 1924, paid for by Lucius Littauer; and, in 1929, Columbia created for Salo

\(^{765}\) As a result, as one alumnus recalled, “We just weren’t ready for what Wise had in store for us. He brought us such teachers as Israel Abrahams, Felix Perles, Ismar Elbogen, Julius Guttmann, Julian Obermann, Henry Slonimsky, Salo Baron, Hirsch Perez Chajes, David Yellin, Harry Wolfson, Mordecai Kaplan, George Foot Moore—and what we needed was aleph bes!” Cited in Meyer, “A Centennial History,” 152.
Baron the first chair in Jewish History, paid for by Nathan L. Miller. With immigration closed, and few American institutions yet producing high-caliber Jewish scholars, JIR suffered real loss as a result of these departures; yet, it is unlikely they could have been prevented. Given the Jewish Institute of Religion’s precarious financial state, Wise could not match the salaries these men were promised; and, even had this been possible, likely no seminary could have competed with the prestige and resources of the NYPL, Harvard and Columbia.

**Sustainable Funding Model**

Despite a lack of solid and reliable funding throughout the early twenties, Wise continued to build the school’s infrastructure, hiring faculty and making other sizeable expenditures. Unlike HUC, JIR had no congregational dues system on which to rely, nor any donors with the financial capacity of the philanthropists who supported JTS. With little ability to generate revenue, Wise and the board had to apply all gifts they did receive to cover immediate costs; as a result, they were never able to build an endowment.

It was not for lack of trying that JIR failed to replicate the funding models its competitors utilized. Over the course of the twenties, for example, Wise and his colleagues at the Institute repeatedly attempted to create an association of congregations that would provide monetary support for the Institute. Hoping for the participation of those who had benefited most directly from the school, they targeted congregations that had hired the Institute’s students or, later, its alumni. However, the Institute never succeeded in building a strong multi-congregational base. Two obstacles impeded their success: the UAHC’s public attacks on JIR; and, the reluctance of Reform congregations already paying dues to the UAHC to contribute funds to a second seminary. Perhaps these reinforced one another—the UAHC’s offensive against JIR through editorials and letters in Jewish newspapers, as well as

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The early loss of Bloch, Wolfson and Baron preceded later departures by Isaac Berkson, Julian Obermann, Shalom Spiegel and others.
more aggressive tactics like Shohl’s early missive to all Reform congregations in the country urging that they withhold support from JIR, provided individuals as well as congregations with an excuse for refusing Wise’s appeal for funds. In withholding their giving, they demonstrated loyalty to the institutions of Reform of which they had long been a part.

While a handful of congregations did contribute to JIR—mainly those served by the school’s alumni, beginning in the late twenties—the most successful fundraising strategy was Wise’s soliciting individual donors; not counting the Free Synagogue, these donors represented the largest source of income for the Institute, and without them JIR may not have survived. Wise relentlessly beseeched friends and colleagues across the country for names of potential donors, and in every major city he visited, he tried to meet new prospects. His passion for the school, as well as his charm and persuasiveness, made him a highly successful fundraiser. However, the funds he raised were limited by the financial capacity of the donors with whom he met. While many of these men and women were “people of means,” they were not generally members of the nation’s wealthiest Jewish class. Wise had antagonized people like Louis Marshall, Jacob Schiff, and Felix Warburg, building his own reputation by positioning himself in opposition to them; he could hardly turn to that elite now and expect much support.

After the Crash of 1929, the backing of this elite would become crucial not only to JTS but also to HUC, which may not have survived had the philanthropist Julius Rosenwald not come forward with financial backing. In the twenties, Wise had been able to sustain JIR through fundraising with a modest circle of donors, but during the Depression those donors could no longer give. Lacking the support of the philanthropic elite who still had significant means, the school’s financial status sank to bare subsistence level.

That JIR continued to exist without a sustainable funding structure was a tribute to Wise’s efforts to keep the Institute alive in the face of increasingly urgent requirements that
he devote himself to the fight against anti-Semitism in Europe, to relief and rescue efforts for European Jewry, and to support for the Zionist movement and the embattled Yishuv in Palestine. Despite the critical role he played nationally and internationally in each of these efforts; despite his responsibilities as the senior rabbi of the Free Synagogue; and, despite faculty members like Slonimsky and Goldstein who worked assiduously to keep JIR functioning—Wise retained sole fundraising responsibility for the school.

In this regard, the school’s utter dependence on its founder and President was a profound vulnerability. His efforts may have seemed heroic, but all too much depended on a single individual; without Wise, the meager flow of income coming into the Institute would have come to an end.

**Admission of Women as Regular Students**

Following the faculty’s decision in 1923 to admit women into JIR as regular rather than “special” students, and thereby to award them the rabbinical degree upon completion of all course requirements, Wise and the faculty had an opportunity to transform the heretofore all-male rabbinate. At least one student, Irma Lindheim, aspired to enter the rabbinate, and another, Dora Askowith, had academic credentials and skills, as well as professional experience, that would likely have put her at the top of her class and positioned her for success. Indeed, both women had already demonstrated leadership in Jewish communal affairs, and likely would have continued to do so in a rabbinical capacity, had they been allowed.

True, just as JIR did not demonstrate the courage needed to lead this change, neither did HUC, where in 1923 the faculty also endorsed the admission of women, only to see their decision overturned by the College’s conservative Board of Governors. Though there is no knowing whether the JIR board would have done the same in similar circumstances, it seems
reasonable to conclude that such a board-initiated reversal was less likely, given the number of leading Progressive voices, male as well as female, amongst the Institute’s trustees.

However, the question of admitting women never reached the JIR board for discussion, according to its minutes. Instead, Wise and his colleagues found reasons not to implement a decision they seemed to support philosophically. Today, their stated reasons ring hollow—that women like Lindheim and Askowith would be a “distraction” to JIR’s young male students seems doubtful, as does the notion that the Institute’s inability to provide adequate housing arrangements in any way pertained to the situation of these adult, independent women.

Rather, of the many issues Wise and his colleagues faced, opening the rabbinate to women ranked low as a priority. Perhaps even those who expressed their philosophical support for the change were ambivalent enough to prefer that no action be taken. Meanwhile, as Pamela Nadell argues, individual women who sought to enter the rabbinate at this time lacked any sort of collective support, and no matter how extraordinary they may have been, they could not, as solitary agents of change, open this door.767

**Presidential Succession**

Throughout this period, Wise insisted on the title Acting President, and said he wanted to relinquish the position as soon as a proper successor could be found. Initially, he and the board hoped he would direct the school for only the first year or two, and in the early twenties Wise pursued several possible candidates, including Emil Hirsch and Israel Abrahams. “Alas, neither of these Titans was destined to become the banner bearer of the

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767 As Pamela Nadell has documented, the only woman to receive a rabbinical degree prior to the Second World War was Regina Jonas, who received her diploma from the Hochschule in 1935. Working primarily in Berlin, Jonas functioned as a rabbi, with an emphasis on pastoral work, until she was deported to Theresienstadt in 1942. There, she continued to preach and counsel her fellow prisoners until October 12, 1944 when she was taken to Auschwitz and killed. Elisa Klapheck, "Regina Jonas.” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women's Archive, accessed on July 30, 2013, http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jonas-regina; and, Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis.*
Institute,” Wise told the graduating class of 1927 in his commencement address. That year, the board acknowledged that finding a suitable candidate with the requisite scholarly credentials, liberal Jewish perspective, and stature within the Jewish community had proven impossible, and they insisted that Wise drop the “acting” in his title. 768 Wise explained the situation to those assembled at the graduation ceremony:

“I am chosen as ‘locum tenens’—the Board of Trustees knows that, understanding perfectly well that I am to vacate this place…whenever the Board of Trustees and I are agreed that another shall be chosen to fill, not occupy, it. I almost wish that one of these young men seated before me may become my successor. But if I say that, you may believe or may assume that I want to hold the place inordinately long. So I do not say that one of these young men shall become my immediate successor, but a successor, among them shall be found successors, just as the Presidency of the Hebrew Union College is now filled by one of its distinguished graduates.” 769

Whether or not Wise was willing to cede control of JIR is difficult to assess; while on many occasions he claimed to seek a successor, he held onto the presidency, made all major decisions and maintained close oversight of the Institute until the end of his life.

Impact

Given the internal and external factors working against the Institute, and despite the Institute’s failure to become either a center for Wissenschaft scholarship or a training school for Jewish social workers, JIR in its earliest years introduced innovations in rabbinical training that would have important repercussions. Wise and the founders hoped these innovations in training would produce a new kind of American rabbi, better fit to meet the demands of twentieth-century American Jewry, and they hoped that by changing the

768 JIR Board Minutes, March 26, 1922.
769 Second Annual Commencement Address by Dr. Stephen S. Wise, May 25, 1927. Box 5, folder 10, JIR Records.
rabbinate, they would reorient American liberal Judaism in the direction Wise articulated in his sermon “Liberal Judaism” and in the ways the founders spelled out in their earliest negotiations with the UAHC.

**Innovations in Twentieth-Century Rabbinical Training**

*“Oneness of Israel”*

In his effort to recruit faculty, Wise combed the European seminaries for scholars who would fit well into what he hoped would be a New York school that resembled Berlin’s Hochschule in many ways. He initially selected men based on their scholarly reputation, though he realized soon that he would also have to take into consideration their ability to teach effectively and connect personally with the students. In prioritizing these criteria, Wise took a different approach than the other seminaries, where some degree of allegiance to a particular ideological framework was expected. To be sure, both HUC and JTS had faculty who challenged the dominant viewpoint, including Kaplan at JTS, but at neither school did they feel welcome. Kaplan spoke of a silent hostility directed at him, and Slonimsky complained of not being "in the guild." Welcoming the diversity of views achieved two goals for JIR: first, and more importantly, it elevated the principle of “the oneness of Israel,” the term Wise used in his 1920 sermon, over ideological division. In so doing, JIR did not transcend ideology, but enacted it; diverse faculty members from Germany, Austria, Hungary, England, Russia, Palestine and the United States created a tangible representation of the ideal of international Jewish unity.

Secondly, by sanctifying academic and religious freedom at JIR, Wise created a model that more closely resembled a twentieth-century institution of higher learning than a nineteenth-century seminary. Academic freedom as a value was becoming widely accepted in American academe, and the lack of free expression had been one of Wise’s major criticisms.

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770 Memo of an interview between Stephen S. Wise and Henry Slonimsky, January 29, 1924. Box 34, folder 1, JIR Records.
of HUC as well as JTS. He brought Horace Kallen to speak at JIR, no doubt remembering how Kohler had prohibited Kallen from delivering an address at the College years earlier, and he emphasized the promise of free expression in his failed attempt to entice Kaplan to leave JTS and join the JIR faculty.

JIR demonstrated its commitment to the idea of “oneness” in additional ways. Wise created the Five Seminary Fund to support the European seminaries based not on shared ideology—some were Orthodox or Conservative—but on the view that the unity of Israel transcended difference, and that Jews shared a responsibility for one another. Wise paid close attention to conditions in Europe, and several JIR faculty members in the 1920s toured the devastated communities of Eastern Europe with the intention of raising awareness amongst American Jewry. Nonetheless, neither he nor anyone else could know at the time that conditions would only become far more dire for the Jewish scholars in Berlin, Budapest and Vienna who received support from the Fund. JIR’s aid to the European seminaries preceded the extraordinary efforts of HUC, JTS and JIR in the 1930s to rescue as many European Jewish scholars as possible, including Ismar Elbogen, who chose to return to the Hochschule in Berlin rather than remaining on the JIR faculty after his visit in 1922-23. Ultimately, the Nazis destroyed all five of the European Jewish seminaries that received aid in the 1920s from Wise’s fund.

The same principle that motivated Wise to support the five seminaries also led him to make JIR the first American Jewish seminary hospitable to Zionists on its board, faculty, and in the student body. JIR became the first American Jewish seminary to teach rabbinical students modern Hebrew ivrit b’ivrit, to make central in its curriculum the Hebrew literature of Zionist writers such as Ahad Ha’am, Bialik and others, and to send a graduate to study in Palestine each year.771

771 Bertha Guggenheimer made this possible by establishing the Guggenheimer Fellowship.
Contemporary Practices

Under the impression that the teaching at HUC and JTS had become sterile and spiritless, Wise aimed to set JIR apart by embracing John Dewey’s philosophy of education, which he felt cohered with a traditional Jewish approach wherein the purpose of teaching entailed not merely conveying information, but awakening in students a passion for Judaism and enabling them to find personal meaning in Jewish learning. In keeping with this, Wise sought instructors who could do more than simply help students learn data and master skills, and the JIR faculty—albeit after much debate—placed an emphasis on the importance of classroom teaching, rejecting the German university model’s reliance on more solitary, independent learning experiences.

In addition, Wise worked with Gottheil, Mack and Wolfson, who had a strong knowledge of academic protocol from their experiences at Columbia and Harvard, to bring to JIR a university model regarding faculty pay, pension and sabbaticals. The Board sought to make JIR the first Jewish seminary to institute sabbaticals for faculty, driven in part by Mack and Gottheil’s desire to support the advancement of scholarship. “We will only get the right men if we give them plenty of time for research,” Gottheil told Wise in 1923. The Board set

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A decade later, at the JIR 1932 Opening Exercises Mordecai M. Kaplan spoke about the confluence of Dewey’s philosophy and Jewish tradition, saying “Our Sages long ago anticipated John Dewey in his emphasis upon the pragmatic aspect of all study. The well known principle enunciated in Abot, ‘not study, but action is the important thing,’ is expressed in a multitude of dicta throughout the rabbinic literature. Unless the Jewish heritage can continue to function as a commitment and as an impelling drive to transform environment and condition men’s inner life and their relation to one another, there is no place for the rabbinic calling.” “Rabbis Must Make Judaism Vital, Dr. Kaplan Declares in Address at Opening Exercises,” *News Bulletin of the Jewish Institute of Religion*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (September-October, 1932), 2. JIR Nearprint Box 2.

773 The Board’s Committee on Faculty recorded in their January 1924 minutes that JIR “hopes to institute the Sabbatical year, something which the Committee believes has not yet been done in any Jewish theological institution, and it is the hope of the Committee that JIR will grant full pay to a teacher on Sabbatical leave of absence.” JIR Board Minutes, Committee on Faculty, January 8, 1924.
salary and pension rates with the aim of making them at least comparable to HUC, JTS, and UTS.

Wise created informal relationships with a number of elite universities, as well, and several Protestant seminaries in the New York metropolitan area. Gottheil and Mack played key roles in connecting JIR with Columbia and Harvard, respectively, where they each explored possibilities for greater collaboration. In 1924, Gottheil arranged for JIR faculty to teach a course on "Jewish Factors in Civilization" at Columbia during his sabbatical, gained entry for Wise in Columbia's faculty club, and urged all JIR faculty to join the Association of University Professors. At this time the university's Jewish students were petitioning the administration for a course in Jewish history; Gottheil wanted JIR faculty members to teach, hoping that ultimately JIR might become “the Jewish side of Columbia's scholastic work,” just as Protestant divinity schools were playing a similar role at secular universities like Harvard, Yale and Chicago. It was, Gottheil knew, a long shot. "Is there any hope?" Gottheil wrote Wise. "Or am I looking beyond our times?" Such an arrangement never transpired. At Harvard, Mack had modest success when he oversaw negotiations for a joint Harvard-JIR appointment for Wolfson, though that arrangement, too, did not endure, ending when Wolfson received Harvard’s Littauer Chair.

**Progressivism**

In assembling its faculty, JIR created a progressive rabbinical school unlike any of its predecessors. Perhaps most notable in this regard, JIR introduced instruction in the theory and practice of social service. Echoing the ways in which nineteenth-century American evangelicals trained seminarians to lead social and political reform movements, this aspect of JIR's training also had a more modern cast. Reflecting Progressivism’s approach to problem-

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775 Richard Gottheil to Stephen S. Wise, August 5, 1924. Box 16, folder 18, JIR Records.
solving based on expertise gleaned through study, Sidney Goldstein and the speakers he brought to the Institute focused on the problems of industrial society and methodological approaches to solutions. Whereas the nineteenth-century evangelical approach had produced fiery oratory to galvanize abolitionists to fight slavery, the social service approach was more heady, methodological, and “scientific,” in keeping with the current American trend in higher education—and until the establishment of JIR, non-existent in rabbinical training.

To be sure, Goldstein's approach was hardly politically neutral. The man who preached a sermon sympathetic to socialism when he was a student at HUC in 1905 remained committed to Progressive causes of all kinds, and he and Wise brought the leading lights of American liberalism to speak with the students on a regular basis. And while the faculty did include some with a conservative bent—notably Tschernowitz and Blau—many more were active in liberal causes, including, of course, Wise himself, as well as Slonimsky who had encountered problems in his earlier career due to his pacifism. JIR stood out from HUC and JTS at this time in fostering rather than discouraging this sort of activism.

Finally, the school's mission to present diverse perspectives without endorsing any single ideology further differentiated it from both JTS and HUC, which were devoted to the transmission of Conservative and Reform ideology, respectively. JIR’s elevation of academic and religious freedom above ideological uniformity reflected the priorities of Stephen S. Wise. In 1926, recalling the founding of the Institute, Wise wrote, “the time had come for the establishment of a school of Jewish learning without labels, without partisanship—a school in which it would not be necessary, nor even possible for men at the beginning of the period of years of study to declare their affiliation with one or another wing or group in Jewish life. As far as it is at all necessary for a man to utter the shibboleth of reform, or orthodoxy, or conservatism, this should so be done—if at all—after a man has gone to the sources of Jewish life and history—not before. That viewpoint was fraught, I saw, with far-reaching, and, in
truth, high consequences. It meant that within the school to be founded there must be absolute freedom for teacher and student alike; no proscription against a man because he was one thing or was not another thing.\textsuperscript{776}

That being said, according to the original mission of JIR, the founders intended for the school to promote a “liberal spirit.” This desire motivated Mack, for example, to press Wolfson to serve as a JIR faculty representative at the opening of Hebrew University. Mack felt strongly that JIR should foster "the liberal spirit that some of us want to see prevail over there."\textsuperscript{777} Similarly, in order to expose students to multiple viewpoints, Wise invited a steady stream of visiting scholars to the Institute to teach, offer lecture series, and to receive honorary degrees, including prominent Jewish figures like Claude Montefiore and Judah Magnes, Christian scholars like George Foote Moore and William F. Albright, notables in American intellectual life like Horace Kallen; scholars from Palestine and Europe; communal leaders and activists like Jacob Billikopf, and more. Though speakers presented a range of views, they tended toward the left, and unlike HUC or JTS, JIR showed a notable openness in the 1920s to providing speaking opportunities to socialists and pacifists. Gender diversity did not exist; virtually all visiting lecturers were male.\textsuperscript{778}

\textbf{Redirecting American Liberal Judaism}

The long-range impact of the Jewish Institute of Religion must be assessed in light of the founders’ overall goal to redirect twentieth-century American liberal Judaism through the creation of a center for Jewish scholarship and rabbinical training. JIR resembled existing American Jewish institutions of higher learning in its commitment to \textit{Wissenschaft des Judentums}, but otherwise differed in important ways. At the heart of the rationale for the new school lay a sharp critique of Reform Judaism, the most prevalent form of liberal Judaism in

\textsuperscript{776} \textit{The Annual}, 1926, p. 33. JIR Nearprint Box 1.
\textsuperscript{778} In 1930, JIR awarded an honorary degree to Henrietta Szold, founder and president of Hadassah, and Zionist leader. Szold was the first woman to receive an honorary degree, or any degree at all, from the Institute.
America at the time, which the founders of JIR considered out-of-date and disconnected from the concerns of the 3.3 million Jews now living in the United States.\(^779\) JIR was to bring a fresh set of commitments to rabbinical training in order to achieve “the resurrection of the spiritual life of Israel in America,”\(^780\) as Goldstein wrote to Wise in the summer of 1922. These commitments included, as detailed above, the “oneness of Israel” rather than a specific theological perspective; the importance of modern Hebrew language and culture, particularly in relation to the Zionist and Hebraist movements; the expression of prophetic Jewish values not only in party platforms and sermons but, of greater importance, in practice through political activism and social service; and, the professionalization of rabbinical training and the rabbinate.

In 1922, this ethos represented a challenge to the existing seminaries and the Reform movement, whose leaders considered Stephen S. Wise a radical, and who resisted the establishment of JIR and refused to cooperate with the new school even as, in their own institutions, a growing minority shared and expressed these same commitments.

Despite opposition from the Reform as well as the Conservative movements, the JIR founders did create a viable rabbinical school. After six years of planning and implementing the vision first articulated in 1920, in May 1926, the Institute graduated its inaugural class and, through its new alumni, began to influence the American rabbinate. The students who had debated their visions for American Judaism in the Institute Quarterly now faced the task John Tepfer anticipated—impacting their views from the pulpit with the hope of inspiring American Jewry to participate in a renaissance in Jewish life.\(^781\) The Institute launched the career of every member of its first graduating class either through placement in a bona fide rabbinical position in the American Jewish community or, in one case, by underwriting


\(^{780}\) Sidney E. Goldstein to Stephen S. Wise, August 4, 1922. Box 16, folder 15, JIR Records.

advanced study at the Hebrew University in Palestine with the financial support of JIR’s Guggenheimer Fellowship. Whether or not the JIR faculty and curriculum had adequately prepared these young men for this work would soon become evident.

For the most part, Wise’s amalgamation of liberal religion, Jewish nationalism, and social and economic progressivism seems to have prevailed amongst the school’s alumni, many of whom came to the Institute attracted to Wise, and most of whom remained devoted to him. Though the Free Synagogue movement grew only slightly and eventually lost coherence as a self-conscious movement in the mid-late 1920s, JIR alumni imbued with its values occupied a growing number of pulpits, mainly Reform, in synagogues across the country. Just as these rabbis brought their ideological commitments into their congregations, they brought the practical training they received at the Institute, as well, particularly through Sidney Goldstein’s Social Service Department.

As these rabbis also began to fill the ranks of rabbinical associations, it can be argued that the overall trajectory of American liberal Judaism changed. The area of greatest impact proved to be the Reform rabbinate, where the vast majority of JIR alumni served, though in accord with the founders’ vision, a few JIR graduates also served in the Conservative and Orthodox rabbinates. These rabbis influenced the various Jewish and clergy organizations they joined, most significantly the CCAR, where a JIR contingent coalesced into a sizable minority presence. Tensions grew within the CCAR as the issues that divided HUC and JIR now divided two groups of alumni, each loyal to their “home” institutional and ideological model. Over the course of a decade, the growing number of JIR-trained rabbis in the CCAR became a vocal and somewhat cantankerous minority in an organization heretofore dominated almost exclusively by HUC alumni. Just as JIR had challenged HUC’s model on ideological and practical grounds, so too did JIR alumni press a similar critique within the CCAR, breaking down any semblance of unanimity around issues that in the early twenties
seemed to garner general consensus there. In 1920, for example, the CCAR had rejected the Balfour Declaration’s characterization of Palestine as a national home for the Jewish people as well as, more broadly, the conception of Jewish nationhood.\textsuperscript{782} Few Reform rabbis supported Zionism or the idea of Jewish peoplehood; few put forth a liberal Judaism that embraced the Eastern European Jews and their movements for economic and social justice; and, fewer still took the distinctly American approach to ministry acting as public agents for political change.

By 1937, the orientation of the Reform rabbinate had changed dramatically. That year, just over a decade after JIR ordained its first class, the CCAR issued the Columbus Platform endorsing as guiding principles of Reform Judaism the notion that “Judaism is the historical religious experience of the Jewish people;” the obligation of all Jewry to aid in the upbuilding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine “by endeavoring to make it not only a haven of refuge for the oppressed but also a center of Jewish culture and spiritual life;” the application of Jewish teachings “to the economic order, to industry and commerce, and to national and international affairs” in order to attain a just society and the elimination “of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife;” and, to the same end, “the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish,” safeguarding children against exploitation and championing “the cause of all who work and of their right to an adequate standard of living, as prior to the rights of property.” In short, with the Columbus Platform, Wise’s vision was no longer considered radical; it had prevailed.

To what extent can we affirm that JIR alumni specifically impelled the ideological shifts that led to the CCAR’s endorsement of Zionism and commitment to engage in political

\textsuperscript{782} Meyer, “Response to Modernity,” 326.
and economic issues on behalf of the working class? The CCAR’s embrace of Zionism came in large part as a response to events transpiring internationally. By the late thirties, the Zionist movement was building up the Yishuv in Palestine, and its importance in light of the rise in violent state-sponsored anti-Semitism in Europe had grown immeasurably for world Jewry. Similarly, the CCAR’s increased support for the rights of labor grew amidst New Deal legislation and a growing industrial union movement most evident in the rapid growth of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).783

Still, many in the CCAR during this period—and many amongst the UAHC leadership—remained adamantly opposed to Zionism and the left-leaning sentiments of the Columbus Platform and other CCAR resolutions. In a divided Conference, the pressure JIR alumni applied played a crucial role in shifting the CCAR’s ideological platform. In the early thirties, when the CCAR together with the other institutions of Reform Judaism still opposed Zionism, the Conference’s JIR minority worked hard to sway opinion toward support for the movement. For example, in 1930, Meyer reports, JIR graduates successfully overcame opposition to the printing of the Zionist anthem Hatikvah in the revised Union Hymnal, and in 1931 they pushed through a resolution mandating inclusion of all five of the anthem’s verses. Throughout the thirties, Wise and his rabbinic protégés believed the CCAR leadership excluded JIR graduates from key positions in the Conference; in response, whenever attending CCAR gatherings, the JIR men held separate meetings to strategize how best to move their agenda forward. By 1935, Meyer reports, about half of all Reform rabbis supported some form of Zionism, and anti-Zionists ceased to control the platform. In a compromise resolution passed that year, the CCAR took a neutral stance and left it to individual members to support or oppose the movement—and just two years later the Zionists

783 This support was not entirely new in the 1930s. Even before the Depression, Michael Meyer writes, the Central Conference of American Rabbis came close to espousing socialism, and held investors accountable for ethical conduct in business. One CCAR resolution read, “unrestrained and unlimited exercise of the right of private ownership without regard for social results is morally untenable.” Ibid., 310.
prevailed with passage of the Columbus Platform. Similarly, many in the JIR contingent brought to their own congregations the activist approach to addressing social problems they first encountered in the school’s Social Service Department and at the Free Synagogue under the direction of Sidney Goldstein, and the model spread as need increased during the Depression.

In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Stephen S. Wise was the most conspicuous American rabbi to emphasize the “oneness of Israel” rather than religious faith in the narrow sense as the basis for Jewish social cohesion, and to advocate for the political liberalization of liberal Judaism. He utilized the Jewish Institute of Religion as an instrument to move this agenda forward, working in alliance with the Institute’s faculty, board, students and alumni. As a result, the CCAR in the twenties and thirties came to embrace these views once anathema in the American Reform movement. True, the JIR contingent did not hold exclusive claim to these perspectives; a small number of faculty at HUC shared them as well, as did a growing number of HUC students and rabbinical alumni over the course of the twenties and early thirties. However, as late as the mid-thirties the leadership of the institutions of Reform remained unconvinced of the need to redirect liberal Judaism in these ways; in relation to that leadership’s reluctance, the JIR alumni constituted a powerful opposition force that hastened change.

The policy positions of non-Orthodox American Jewish organizations outside the Reform movement also shifted in ways that reflected the JIR vision. The American Jewish Committee, for example, with a growing commitment to the idea of Jewish peoplehood, and in response to world events, increased its support for Zionism; it also shifted its stance on domestic issues, and became far more outspoken in supporting civil rights and the rights of minorities in general. Meanwhile synagogues across the country began to incorporate

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784 Ibid., 327.
instruction in modern Hebrew language and culture into their religious school curricula, and to organize support for the growing *Yishuv* in Palestine.

In retrospect, by the late 1930s the Jewish Institute of Religion could be seen as a harbinger of the direction in which American liberal Judaism would move overall in the twentieth century. The changes for which Stephen S. Wise and those involved with the establishment of JIR pushed were underway. While external factors beyond their control played a role, to be sure, this reorientation came about to a significant degree due to the efforts of the JIR-trained rabbis themselves.
APPENDIX

CONGREGATIONS SERVED BY JIR STUDENTS AND ALUMNI THROUGH 1930

By 1930, thirty 46 congregations in the US were served on the HHDs by grads and students of JIR.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rabbis</th>
<th>Congregations Served by Graduates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David B. Alpert</td>
<td>Brith Shalom, Easton, Pennsylvania</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philip S. Bernstein</td>
<td>Brith Kodesh, Rochester, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herbert I. Bloom</td>
<td>Congregation Albert, Albuquerque, New Mexico</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maurice J. Bloom</td>
<td>Temple Beth Jacob, Newburgh, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isadore Breslau</td>
<td>Temple Israel, Waterbury, Connecticut</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jacob X. Cohen</td>
<td>Assistant Rabbi, Free Synagogue, New York, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham Dubin</td>
<td>Temple Beth-El, Cedarhurst, Long Island, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victor Eppstein</td>
<td>United Hebrew Congregation, Centro-Macabeo, Havana, Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ephraim Fischoff</td>
<td>Temple of the Covenant, New York</td>
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<td>Mitchell S. Fisher</td>
<td>Rodeph Shalom, New York</td>
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<td>Joshua L. Goldberg</td>
<td>Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin B. Goldstein</td>
<td>Congregation Beth-Or, Montgomery, Alabama</td>
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<td>Abram Goodman</td>
<td>Jewish Community Center, White Plains, New York</td>
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<td>Maurice Arthur Hirshberg</td>
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<td>Benjamin Hoffseyer</td>
<td>Anshei Geulah, Brooklyn, New York</td>
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<td>Harry Kaplan</td>
<td>Society Ansha Amonim, Pittsfield, Massachusetts</td>
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<td>Abraham L. Martin</td>
<td>Congregation B’nai Israel, Bridgeport, Connecticut</td>
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<td>Max Meyer</td>
<td>Free Synagogue, Flushing, New York</td>
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<td>Leo M. Reichel</td>
<td>Sunnyside Jewish Center, Sunnyside, New York</td>
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<td>Morris M. Rose</td>
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<td>Jacob P. Rudin</td>
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<td>Henry A. Schorr</td>
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<td>Samuel Teitelbaum</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Tepfer</td>
<td>B’nai El, Brooklyn, New York</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Congregations Served by Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isador Aaron</td>
<td>Sinai Congregation, Brooklyn, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albert G. Baum</td>
<td>Temple Israel, Amsterdam, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel Berman</td>
<td>Congregation Emanu-El, Saranac, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Habas</td>
<td>Washington Heights Synagogue, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nathaniel Keller</td>
<td>Beth Shalom, New York City, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marcus Kramer</td>
<td>Assistant, Jewish Center, Coney Island, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>A. Lincoln Krohn</td>
<td>Temple Shalom, Plainfield, New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adolph J. Lasker</td>
<td>Temple Emanuel, Lynbrook, New York</td>
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<th>Students</th>
<th>Congregations Served during Holy Days</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aaron Lefkowitz</td>
<td>Temple Emanuel, Kingston, New York</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Perlman</td>
<td>Floral Park, Long Island, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Max Macoby</td>
<td>Free Synagogue, Pelham, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leo Schwarz</td>
<td>Vassar Temple, Poughkeepsie, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Albert M. Shulman</td>
<td>Congregation Beth-El, Glens Falls, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin Shultz</td>
<td>Temple Emanuel, Englewood, New Jersey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morris Breslaw</td>
<td>Honesdale Congregation, Honesdale, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ezra Gotthelf</td>
<td>Gloversville Center, Gloversville, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham Haselkorn</td>
<td>Jewish Community, Danbury, Connecticut</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bertrand Polanski</td>
<td>Congregation Beth El, Poughkeepsie, New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samuel M. Segal</td>
<td>Junior Council of Ahabat Chesed, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leo Shubow</td>
<td>Laurelton, New York</td>
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