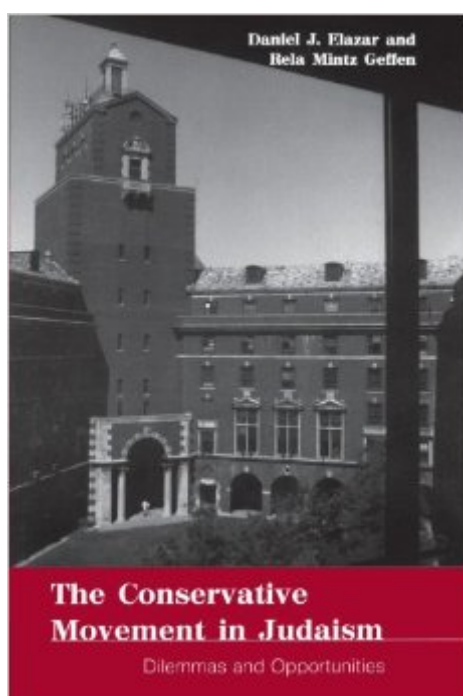# The Conservative Movement In Judaism: Dilemmas And Opportunities (Suny Series In American Jewish Society In The 1990s) (Suny Series, American Jewish Society In The 1990s)

Synopsis

Illustrates how the American Conservative Movement in Judaism can continue to prosper amidst ideological and institutional challenges. Viewing the Conservative Movement at a turning point, this book analyzes the problems facing the religious movement with the largest synagogue membership in the American Jewish community and outlines a plan of action for the future. Elazar and Geffen suggest: clarifying ideology, mission, and purpose, finding the right balance between traditionalists and advocates of change, unifying movement institutions in a cooperative effort, staunching the decline of membership to the left, recapturing the loyalty of lapsed adherents, closing the gap in observance between the laity and the standard bearers of the movement, developing the Movement in Israel and world-wide, and strengthening ties with Jewish federations and other Jewish communal bodies. The authors propose that the Conservative Movement's remedying of these problems will benefit not just American, but all world Jewry. "This book should be a welcome addition to every Jewish household. In addition to the detailed discussion of the Conservative Movement, the authors provide an in-depth analysis of current American Jewish identities" -Nitza Druyan, Hofstra University

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The most interesting things about this book were not the suggestions (which were probably more interesting for Conservative rabbis, congregational officials, etc. than for me) but the impressive collection of data and the authors' speculation about why the Conservative movement has lost ground.One especially interesting table addressed denominational changes among Jews,

categorizing Jews both by the denominations they were raised in and by the denominations they now choose.As of 1990, 89% of Orthodox Jews were brought up Orthodox; only 11% came to Orthodoxy from other denominations. (By contrast, only 55-60% of Conservative and Reform Jews were born in their denominations).If I read the book's data tables correctly, only 23% of the people who were born Orthodox stayed Orthodox; most have become Conservative or Reform. Conservative Jews have a 60% retention rate, and Reform Jews have an 80% retention rate. Conservative Jews who "defect" to other denominations usually move left instead of right: only 0.5% of born Conservatives are now Orthodox, while 27% are now Reform and the rest have no denominational affiliation or are Reconstructionist.Of course, the authors were using data that is now 15 years old; I wonder if more recent figures are available. (A second edition of this book would be nice, taking into account the 2000 National Jewish Population Survey; for example, the growth of Orthodox outreach may have increased defections to Orthodoxy).The authors speculate that the decline of Conservative membership has in large part been due to factors beyond anyone's control, such as:*The decline of the nuclear family and in particular of American Jewish birth rates.

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