an almost religious love of America as the promised land. Confident about their future in the United States, they objected to efforts to revive Jewish nationalism."

Isaac Mayer Wise believed that Zionism was merely a reaction to the persecution of the Jews in Eastern Europe and was certain that the progress of political emancipation would demonstrate its folly. He believed deeply in the universal mission of the Jews to be a "light unto the nations," to disseminate the message of ethical monotheism and human brotherhood among the nations, not to be "a people apart." He dismissed Zionism as a mere aberration.

In 1898, the Central Conference of American Rabbis adopted a resolution disapproving of any attempt to establish a Jewish state. The resolution declared: "Zion was a precious possession of the past...as such it is a holy memory, but it is not our hope of the future. America is our Zion."

The issuance of the Balfour Declaration convinced some Reform rabbis of the necessity to take strong measures to fight Zionism. Rabbi Louis Grossman, the president of the CCAR, reacted to this document by reaffirming the standard Reform viewpoint and by reiterating Reform's opposition to the "idea that Palestine should be considered the homeland of the Jews," because "Jews in the U.S. were an integral part of the American Nation."

Universalism Modified

Slowly Reform Judaism began to change, to modify its universalism and move in the direction of accommodating both traditional practices and Jewish nationalism. In 1947, Nelson Glueck succeeded Julian Morgenstern, a committed advocate of the Classical Reform opposition to nationalism, as president of Hebrew Union College. *In A History Of The Jews In America,* Howard N. Sachar notes that, "He moved with alacrity in opening branches of the College in Los Angeles and Jerusalem. At his initiative, all rabbinical candidates were obliged to spend a year at the Jerusalem branch. The shift in emphasis reflected the changing sociology of the Reformers, as of American Jewry altogether. Abandoning its early fixation with prophetic universalism, Reform from the late 1930s on reflected the impact of the European catastrophe and Zionism." They tended, he declared, "increasingly to envisage Judaism in its older, ethnic context."

In the years since the end of World War II, Reform Judaism moved steadily away from its own tradition of universalism and back in the direction of an ethno-centric religion which often appears to worship the "Jewish people" or the state of Israel, rather than God, the very approach to religion which the original reformers found so antithetical to the genuine prophetic vision of Judaism.

Writing in *Issues* (Winter/Spring 1990), Professor Klaus Herrmann lamented these changes: "When the Independence Day of the State of Israel becomes a holy day in the Reform-Jewish calendar; when Reform-Jewish education is essentially little more than the propagandizing of our children and congregations, brainwashing them to regard the State of Israel as their genuine 'homeland'; when our future rabbis are subjected to compulsory indoctrination at the Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem" the very essence of Reform Judaism has been destroyed. Indeed, all of the references to the "Return of the Jews to Zion" which were eliminated from the original Reform prayerbooks have now been re-introduced.

Reform Judaism And Zionism

In Miami, in 1997, the CCAR adopted a new platform calling clearly for the intertwining of Reform Judaism and Zionism. It declared that Jews constitute a people with "innumerable ties" to the State of Israel, and that Israel "serves uniquely as the spiritual focal point of World Jewry." Now, in the May 1999 declaration of principles, American Reform Jews are actually encouraged to abandon the United States and move permanently to Israel.

Recent trends in Reform Judaism indicate a move away not only from the universal to the ethnocentric view of Judaism but also a move away from the various changes the reformers made in traditional Jewish practice, changes which they hoped would make Judaism relevant to the modern world and, in addition, would enable Jews to remain committed to their religious faith as well as to their lives in the larger society.

The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 declared that, "The Mosaic legislation was binding in ancient times in Palestine, but today its moral laws alone are binding. Ceremonies that elevate our lives are to be accepted, but others can be rejected. The Mosaic and Rabbinical laws which regulate diet, priestly purity, and dress, originated in past ages and with ideas foreign to our present life. Their observance in our day is apt to obstruct rather than to elevate the modern spirit."

Classical Reform Judaism was genuinely an indigenous creation of the combination of American democracy and Jewish idealism. It understood that the great contribution of Jews and Judaism to the world is something far different from the narrow goals sought by those who would set Jews apart, either in a state of their own or in narrow religious ghettos of the spirit, which would make of Jews what Herzl called a "normal" people. To become "normal" is, of course, to abandon the unique Jewish role set forth by the prophets and by the architects of Reform Judaism.

Jewish Contribution

In his best-selling book, *The Gifts Of The Jews,* Thomas Cahill understands far better than many Jewish commentators exactly what the Jewish contribution to the world has been. He writes: "Because of their unique belief—monotheism—the Jews were able to give us the Great Whole, a unified universe that makes sense and that, because of its evident superiority as a worldview, completely overwhelms the warring and contradictory phenomenon of polytheism. They gave us the Conscience of the West, and the belief that this God who is One is not the God of outward show but the still, small voice of conscience, the God of compassion, the God who 'will be there,' the God who cares about each of his creatures, especially the human beings he created 'in his own image,' and that he insists we do the same. Even the gradual universalization of Jewish ideas, hinted at in the story of Ruth...was foreseen by Joel, the late prophet who probably rose after the return from Babylon: 'And it shall come to pass afterward that I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people see visions. Even on slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my spirit.'"

Cahill declares that, "The Jews gave us the Outside and the Inside—our outlook and our inner life. We can hardly get up in the morning or cross the street without being Jewish. We dream Jewish dreams and hope Jewish hopes. Most of our best words, in fact—adventure, surprise, unique, individual, person, vocation, time, history, future, progress, spirit, faith, hope and justice—are gifts of the Jews."

The Jewish tradition, as the reformers understood, was not static. Much of the Bible reflected an ancient worldview of tribal gods which were not the unique Jewish contribution to religion, but a holdover from the past. Thus, in the Book of Joshua, God commanded the Israelites to put all Canaanites, even children, to the sword. In the Psalms the poet regularly urges God to effect the brutal destruction of the poet's enemies. This is hardly the god of the Prophets.

Evolving Consciousness

"The story the Hebrew Bible has to tell," notes Thomas Cahill, "is the story of evolving consciousness, a consciousness that went through many stages of development and that, like all living things, sometimes grew slowly and at other times in great spurts. We can, however, believe that the experience on which the story is based is inspired—that the evolution of Jewish consciousness, taking place as it did over so many centuries, was animated and kept warm by the breath of God...But however miraculous Jewish survival may be, the greater miracle is surely that the Jews developed a whole new way of experiencing reality, the only alternative to all ancient worldviews and all ancient religions. If one is ever to find the spirit of God in human affairs, one must find it here...Humanity's most extravagant dreams are articulated by the Jewish prophets. In Isaiah's vision, true faith is no longer confined to one nation but 'all the nations' stream to the House of YHWH 'that he may teach us his ways' and that we may learn to 'beat our swords into plowshares.' All who share this outrageous dream of universal brotherhood, peace and justice, who dream the dreams and see the visions of the great prophets, must bring themselves to contemplate the possibility that without God there is no justice."

In response to the recent steps within Reform Judaism to move back in the direction of Orthodoxy and an ethno-centric religion, there is some indication of a rebellion among Reform Jews who continue to adhere to the vision of the original reformers.

Discussing the original draft of the new statement of Reform principles, Rabbi Robert N. Seltzer, professor of Jewish history at Hunter College of the City University of New York, wrote in *Reform Judaism* that it "fails to convey the distinctive ongoing contribution of Reform to modern Judaism, a sifting through the tradition, choosing practices that are consistent with the canons of rational thought or the best of modern knowledge and the hard-won place of Jews and Judaism at the center of modern Western society."

Platform Not Outdated

Rabbi Seltzer declared that the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform "is not outdated. In the modern spirit of tolerance, it acknowledges the legitimacy of all religions and especially the 'providential mission' of Christianity and Islam. In the Jewish philosophical spirit, it insists on the purity of the Jewish 'God-idea' and the progressive nature of a Judaism 'ever striving to be in accord with the postulates of Judaism.'"

Orthodox Jews, on the other hand, have welcomed Reform's willingness to turn its back on its own traditions. President Norman Lamm of Yeshiva University, for example, said of the changes in the Reform movement that, "They have come a long way and that journey is to be applauded."

The spiritual head of the Orthodox Agudath Israel of America, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, also praised the new Reform platform. In the Aguda magazine, *The Jewish Observer,* he writes that the new Reform principles represent an "historic" beginning, a "new stirring in the hearts of Jews, and part of a "quest for truth and the search for meaningful Jewishness." The *Forward* (July 30, 1999), notes that, "The Perlow statement is important because Agudath Israel and the Reform movement have been at loggerheads for almost 20 years on a variety of issues, from the Reform movement's adoption of patrilineal descent to its drive for religious pluralism in Israel." By adopting its new principles, Perlow declared, "Certainly Reform is publicly admitting its failures."

Turmoil In Religion

In this century there has been much turmoil in a variety of religious communities. Roman Catholics abandoned the Latin Mass in an effort to bring religion closer to the people, and the Vatican has apologized for various forms of persecution engaged in by the church in previous eras. Many Protestant churches have abandoned their male-only clergy and welcomed women to the priestly function. Churches of all denominations have attempted to turn their backs on the willingness of their groups, in the past, to embrace slavery, or segregation, or anti-semitism. These efforts are, in large measure, attempts to reconcile the principles of faith with man's continuing experience in a complex and ever-changing world. Reform Judaism may be unique in that its changes represent a return to the very ideas and practices the original reformers rejected so vehemently. Implicitly, it is a rejection of America itself, since it urges Reform Jews to abandon their country and emigrate to Israel, a country in which Reform Judaism is scorned and in which Reform rabbis cannot perform conversions, marriages or funerals. It is a retrogression from an expansive universal faith in God who is the God of all men, of every race and nation, to a tribal God, one to whom primitive man looked to help him conquer his enemies and to bestow power and prosperity to his particular group.

Acceptance of the new principles by the CCAR in a vote of 324-68 does not end the debate. Rabbis are now expected to organize meetings and study sessions to translate them into concrete terms. Members of the clergy and congregants will be invited to write commentaries, and it is from these that the meaning of the principles will take shape.

Which Path To Take

At the dawn of the 21st century, American Reform Jews must decide which path to take. Do they want to advance in the spirit of the original reformers who had faith in America's free and open society and proclaimed an expansive religious faith drawn from the prophetic vision of a moral and ethical world for all men and women, whatever their individual identities might be. Or, on the other hand, do they want Reform Judaism to move back to a more narrow, eth-