



## **Synagogues in a Time of Change: Fragmentation and Diversity in Jewish Religious Movements**

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# Synagogues in a Time of Change: Fragmentation and Diversity in Jewish Religious Movements

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The synagogue remains a central institution in Jewish life as a place of study, worship, and assembly, but each day brings word of a new challenging development within each of the larger movements to which synagogues belong—Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist. Jewish religious communities today share a number of challenges, from the increase in secular or unaffiliated Jews to emerging Jewish spiritual communities forming outside the synagogue. There has never been a more compelling need for a wide-ranging discussion of the diverse issues facing American Judaism.

Brought together by Zachary I. Heller, associate director of the National Center for Jewish Policy Studies, and an editorial team which included Rabbis David Gordis, Hayim Herring, and Sanford Seltzer, twenty of the leading Jewish thinkers—rabbis, scholars, authors, professors, activists, and experts in the study of the American synagogue—have contributed to this comprehensive collection of essays. Each writer brings unique expertise and perspective in describing the development of contemporary religious movements (denominations) in American Judaism, their interrelationships and tensions, and their prospects for the future. Their combined voices create a timely discussion of the many urgent issues bearing down on American synagogues.

Contributors to *Synagogues in a Time of Change* take on the changing dynamics of synagogue life, its organization into movements, and the organic changes taking place that are causing those movements to lose their coherence and strength, both internally and as an attractive force for seekers of Jewish religious tradition and expression. They address the current fiscal issues that face the movement organizations and the broader questions of their future stability as well as their significance and continued relevance to individual congregations. Ultimately, the book is a catalyst for personal reflection and public discussion on the past, present and future of the American synagogue.

The issues faced by Judaism in America are not unique to Jewish religious movements. Many of the issues facing synagogues will be familiar to those of all faiths. Indeed, the book includes an essay by Rodney L. Petersen of the Boston Theological Institute on denominationalism, nondenominationalism, and postdenominationalism in American Christian communities that helps us see these parallels. Religious groups of all kinds will find reflections of common struggles that can provide a vehicle for constructive conversations about their own pressing issues.

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