

Gordon Coster—LIFE

NEW SYNAGOGUE IN ST. LOUIS*
Even the old ones are filling up.

Eastern Europe (e.g., Berlin, Breslau, Vienna) were being wiped out of existence, and 2) the massacre of 6,000,000 European Jews was leaving U.S. Jewry, by simple default, the central Jewish community in the world. Jewish Theological Seminary has grown to meet those challenges as swiftly as possible. It now has 1,000 students enrolled in its four-year courses.

Zion Trouble. In exchanging the life of a teacher for that of an administrator, Finkelstein was true to one of the deepest currents of his faith. For Judaism is a this-worldly rather than an other-worldly religion; its basis is action rather than dogma. Obedience to the Law is far more important than belief. For the Law is truth set forth in terms of action.

As an administrator, a prominent citizen of the Jewish community, Finkelstein was bound to come to grips with Zionism. As a student, he had been attracted by it. But as he grew older, and the political preoccupations of the movement became clearer to him, his zeal for the establishment of a Jewish state began to cool.

The short-lived independence that Judas Maccabaeus ripped from the dying body of the Hellenistic Empire in the 2nd Century B.C. seemed to Finkelstein one of the great failures in Jewish history; so, he felt, would be a modern state established by force. Moreover, if U.S. Jews put as much effort into getting D.P.s admitted to the U.S. as they put into Zionism, he thought, a home could be found in the New World for all the dispossessed Jews of Europe.

By the time the Jews began their actual military struggle for Palestine, Louis Finkelstein was definitely a non-Zionist—a stand which looked to Zionists like anti-Zionism. At least one large contributor to

the seminary tore up his usual check. Some of the faculty deeply resented Finkelstein's attitude, and when he refused to let the students sing the Israel national anthem at commencement in 1945, on the ground that a political song has no place at a religious ceremony, the seminary nearly split apart.

Today, now that the issue has simmered down, Finkelstein feels that perhaps he was mistaken, and that the State of Israel may turn out to be a good thing, after all. Relations between the seminary and Israel are now cordial, and Finkelstein will do his best to keep them so.

Isaiah's Meaning? This week, the directors of the seminary announced that Dr. Finkelstein will assume a new post as chancellor, and that his presidential duties will be taken over by a three-man team of two vice chancellors and the seminary provost. Louis Finkelstein hopes the arrangement will give him more time for scholarship, for writing and for travel. But most of all, he hopes it means more time to work for a renaissance of spiritual Judaism in U.S. life.

The auguries of such a renaissance are on all sides, he is sure. "It is not just a transient phenomenon. I predict that within 25 years the vast majority of the five million Jews in this country will have returned to their faith and will be keeping the Sabbath.

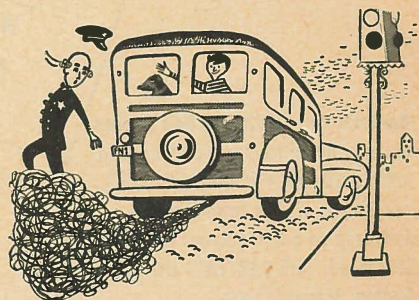
"I say 25 years, because the change will come mainly through the young people. Many of the fathers I know can't understand what has happened to their children. A friend of mine who is a very successful industrialist is still amazed by the fact that his son is turning into a brilliant theologian; just a short time ago, I talked to

* Temple B'nai Amoona.



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