

Reconstructionist Judaism

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Reconstructionist Judaism

As the Jewish people moved into the 20th century, they found it hard to identify themselves with the birth of their four-thousand year old faith. Along with temporal distance from the Israelites, the Jews were at a spiritual distance. A changing world brought forth evolution in modern modes of living and ways of life; many Jewish leaders seized the reins and called for the evolution of Judaism as well. Movements with the goal "to concentrate and give organizational form to the elements of strength within all sections of American Judaism..." (Raphael 185) were championed in an effort to revitalize the Jewish community. In the mid-twentieth century, Mordecai M. Kaplan founded the Reconstructionist movement in modern Judaism, redefining the age-old religion as a self-conscious religion, divorced from previous conceptions of abstract [universals](#) about God and man. The goal of his reconstructed Judaism was "salvation as a [fulfillment](#) in which man as individual and man as race are inextricably bound together, and which has to be consummated on this earth." (Kaplan 234).

Kaplan was primarily concerned with Jews yearning for other-worldly salvation and the detriment it was causing this world.

“...The element of genuine human goodness and of sincere desire to increase the measure of happiness and self-fulfillment for all men... might [yield](#) what he is so badly in need of—something to live for, something to strive for as a Jew” (Kaplan 30).

Desire for self-fulfillment is a key concept for Kaplan, as it stands as the motivation behind a person’s actions. Kaplan’s concern is the shift of the focus of self-fulfillment from this world to another. “The faith in other-worldly salvation may just be viewed as an ...

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...s and consequent moral injury to himself. But if he accepts his destiny, then his salvation must include finding his affiliation with his people a stimulus to his highest mental, moral and spiritual powers” (Kaplan 33).

The road for the Jew is a long, hard, tumultuous journey, but it does not lack the reward of salvation at its end. Mordecai M. Kaplan wanted to bring this salvation back to earth and give it back to the longstanding tradition of Judaism.

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