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A Critique of the Historical Presuppositions of Reconstructionism

by

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of the requirements for the
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and Ordination.

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Digest

Reconstructionists define Judaism as the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. In early Reconstructionist writings, Jews are called a nation. Nation is a cultural concept with no political or geographical connotations. People was later substituted for nation to avoid ambiguity. The bonds of peoplehood are land, language, literature, art, law, custom, religion, common history, common interests and a common destiny. These bonds in their totality form the Jewish civilization. Jews in America must live in two civilizations, of which the Jewish is secondary.

Religious truths are universal. Religions differ only in their sancta. Judaism is not a universal religion because it interprets universal truths in terms of the experience of the Jewish people.

Reconstructionists generally redefine the terms they use in order to make them applicable to the Jewish people.

The two basic Reconstructionist propositions are: Judaism was, is, and ought to be a civilization; Jews were, are, and ought to be a people. When Reconstructionists use the present tense, they usually are expressing an aspiration rather than a reality.

From the Second Commonwealth to 1789, Judaism was a universal religion. Jews were the people of God. All ^{the} ~~these~~ bonds in/Reconstructionist definition of peoplehood were religious. Reconstructionists maintain that whatever was strictly religious was not part of Jewish religion ~~but~~ of Jewish civilization. This is incorrect.

Zionism arose as a reaction to Anti-Semitism in an age of nationalism. Zionism is the exact opposite of Pharisaic universalism.

Reconstructionists assume that what makes one Jewish is that one is part of the Jewish people and partakes of the Jewish civilization. Today a Jew is what society recognizes as such. Judaism is whatever Jews want it to be. Now, the only bond of peoplehood is a common fate.

Reconstructionists misinterpret Jewish history because they are interested in history only as it contributes to Jewish survival.

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Preface

With the publication of Judaism as a Civilization in 1934, a new philosophy of Judaism presented itself for serious consideration on the part of American Jews. Since that time, Dr. Mordecai M. Kaplan and those who adhered to his point of view have produced many stimulating and challenging books and articles. Reconstructionism has gained a foothold on the American Jewish scene and has succeeded on capturing the imagination of many American Jews.

No less important than the staunch adherents of Reconstructionism have been those who have repeatedly or occasionally challenged either the whole or various aspects of its philosophy. In the long run, perhaps the greatest merit of Reconstructionism will have been its catalytic effect in stirring up some interest and concern for the present condition of Jewish life and for the status of the Jew in the modern world. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Reconstructionist philosophy, one must certainly take it into account in any serious reckoning with what has been consistently called "the Jewish problem."

The catalytic effect, which Reconstructionism has had on Jewish thought, was modestly envisaged, or at least earnestly hoped for, by Dr. Kaplan in his preface to Judaism as a Civilization. "The lack of controversial writing about Judaism, especially in English, does not mean that there is inward peace in Israel; it betokens the peace of stagnation. This spiritual stagnation in America must be disturbed, and

if some of the views expressed in this book will produce the slightest ripple in American-Jewish thinking, the book will have served a useful purpose."¹

The philosophy of Reconstructionism has been criticized on many different counts. It was accused of reducing Judaism to a secular culture. Its concept of an organic Jewish community was declared by some to be impractical and by others undesirable. Its reinterpretation of the God idea was said to be inadequate and even "un-Jewish." The need and the value of living in two civilizations was questioned. The looseness of the definitions of its primary concepts was attacked. The theory of culturalism pluralism was declared to be inoperative on the practical level. Its attitude toward law and ritual was considered heretical by Orthodoxy and unnecessary by Reform. Its method of reinterpreting the past was said to be of questionable value.

These criticisms of Reconstructionism have been limited almost entirely to a philosophical and practical appraisal. The purpose of this thesis is to view Reconstructionism from an entirely different point of view—from the point of view of Jewish history. How accurately does Reconstructionism interpret Jewish history, and to the extent that its interpretation is inaccurate, what underlying causes account for this inability to arrive at a true estimate of the past?

At this point it may be asked, what effect does a misinterpretation of history have on the validity of a philosophy? Insofar as history is used to confirm or justify

philosophical premises, the failure to understand the past invalidates the premises. Thus, if the concept that Judaism ought to be a civilization is based on the fact that Judaism has always been a civilization, then clearly, if it can be shown that Judaism was never a civilization, the "ought" is invalidated.

History serves not only to justify but also to confirm philosophical premises. Thus, if one maintains that Judaism ought to be a civilization, it is much easier to persuade people to accept this concept if it can be shown that Judaism has always been a civilization. All that is now required is that Jews remain true to their historic past. On the other hand, if Judaism has never been a civilization, reasons have to be supplied as to why it should want to become one and thereby negate what it always was.

In any philosophical system, there are basically two kinds of statements--statements of fact and statements of value. That Judaism was or is a civilization is a statement of fact, which can be proved true or false. That Judaism ought to be a civilization is a value judgment. The two are interrelated in that the latter is often confirmed and justified by the former.

I.H.F.

The Philosophy of Reconstructionism

Reconstructionism: A Definition

Milton Steinberg once summed up the basic elements of Reconstructionist philosophy as follows: "At core and in essence, Reconstructionism is a definition. It declares Judaism to be the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people. In this formula....every word counts both as a negation and an affirmation. 'Evolving' denies the static Judaism of Neo-orthodoxy and insists on the unremitting legitimacy and desirability of the new in Jewish affairs. 'Religious' rejects the secularisms of race, nationalism, culture and, on an unreflective level, of mindless, purposeless, Torahless and Godless Jewish sociality. Contrariwise it requires some form of theistic commitment as a central element in Jewish living. 'Civilization' repudiates the truncated Judaism of old-line Reform and also of contemporary Jewish escapists, which by limiting Jewishness to faith alone, hopes to make it slight in scope and significance. At the same time, it demands the nurturing of all the variegated aspects of Jewish experience and aspiration. Finally, 'Jewish people' breaks the procrusteanism which allows only one form for Jewish group life, affirming against it the possibility of diversity within each setting and also setting to setting--nationhood for Israel, for example, and a religio-cultural character in America, a cultural attachment for one American Jew, religious for a second--and yet insisting simultaneously on a unity and reciprocity among Jews and Jewries more fundamental than

theological formulations, cultural differences or social and political status."²

An intensive analysis of the terms of this definition, with their implications, will yield a more or less complete picture of Reconstructionism.

Nation, Nationhood, Nationality, and Nationalism

Reconstructionists maintain that the Jews are a people and that what unites Jews should be called peoplehood. The use of the terms "people" and "peoplehood" represent a change in Reconstructionist terminology, for in early Reconstructionist writings, the terms "nation" and "nationhood" were used. This change in terminology did not correspond to any change in ideology, for what was formerly assumed to be true of Jews as a nation is now assumed to be true of Jews as a people.

At least as early as 1944, the terms "people" and "peoplehood" were used in Reconstructionist literature. "Jews outside of Palestine will be citizens or 'nationals' of the countries in which they dwell. This does not mean that outside Palestine, Jews will be members only of a religious community--Americans or Frenchmen or Englishmen of the Mosaic faith. They will still be members of the Jewish people, of a historic people, the product not only of a geography but of a history. (The word 'nationality' might be used in contrast to 'nation'). Peoplehood connotes more than religion; it connotes a common language, a common literature, historic memories, common hopes and aspirations, a link with a land, as well as a common religion. Being a

member of the Jewish people or nationality and a citizen of the American nation are in no way inconsistent...."³

The terms "people" and "peoplehood" are seen here in an early stage of their usage, even though the concept involved is fully developed. From the parenthetical remark as well as from the expression "Jewish people or nationality", it is clear that the term "people" has not been definitely adopted. Nationality is offered as an alternative designation for people, but it was the latter term which Reconstructionist writers found most acceptable.

A year later, in 1945, Milton Steinberg is still defending the use of the term "nation", but, after due consideration, deems it advisable for the sake of clarity to drop the term. After pointing out that "nation" can legitimately be used in its non-political significance, and, therefore, is applicable to Jews, he concludes by saying, "Try as one will, specify reservations as one may, 'nation' for most Americans, Jews or non-Jews, has inescapable connotations of political sovereignty and citizenship. To employ it is to invite confusion. It would be wiser to look for some other word suitable not only to Jewries abroad but to the one at home."⁴ The most suitable word, Steinberg maintains, is "people."

The term "people", as well as "peoplehood", is used in all subsequent Reconstructionist literature, and the former usage of "nation" and "nationhood" is repudiated. Thus Kaplan writes that, "the Jews of the Diaspora are obviously not a nation in the accepted sense of the term

today; neither are they a race, nor a religious communion...
 that which unites all Jews "is" peoplehood."⁵ In the same
 vein, an editorial repudiates the word "nationhood."
 "Events of the last few years have rendered the concept of
 nationhood, as applied to world Jewry, irrelevant and
 anachronistic, even from the standpoint of the most ardent
 Zionist."⁶

One wonders what events are referred to. Since
 the editorial was written after the establishment of the
 State of Israel, presumably this is the event. However,
 the term "nation", as we shall see, was applicable to world
 Jewry neither before nor after the establishment of the
 State of Israel. Perhaps the fact that Israel was now a
 nation brought home to Reconstructionists the absurdity of a
 position which labelled both the State of Israel and world
 Jewry a nation.

An understanding of the way that the terms "nation",
 "nationhood", "nationality", and "nationalism" were once used
 by Reconstructionists is essential to illustrate the
 inappropriateness and looseness, which is characteristic of
 Reconstructionist terminology as a whole. In Judaism As a
 Civilization, Kaplan offers the following definitions:

"The term 'nationhood' is used in these chapters to denote
 a form of associated life, 'nation' or 'nationality' the
group which is held together by that form of associated life,
 and 'nationalism' the national idea which approves that form
 of associated life."⁷ As applied to Jews, we find that Jews
 are a nation or nationality. The terms are here used

synonymously. Nationhood is what unites them and nationalism is the ideology which sanctions this unity.

When these terms came under scrutiny at a subsequent Reconstructionist Summer Conference, a distinction was made between nation and nationality. "Nation should be regarded as the name applied to any group that has almost all of the characteristics commonly implied in that term; nationality should refer to any group which is striving to be a nation."⁸ Nationhood is now redefined to include this distinction.

"Nationhood should refer to those bonds of unity which make a group either a nationality or a nation."⁹ According to this new concept of nationality, Jews in Israel were a nationality whereas world Jewry was a nation.

It is significant that the notes to the Conference also stated that "attention has been called....to the fact that the Supreme Court of the United States, when using the term nation always refers to a group which occupies a definite geographical area."¹⁰ Perhaps this was one of the considerations which eventually led to the abandonment of the term nation as applying to Jews. What is important here is not that the Supreme Court differed with the Reconstructionists over the proper use of the term nation but that the Reconstructionists took a term with more or less definite signification and by eliminating an essential element made it apply to Jews. It is also worth pointing out that whereas formerly Reconstructionists saw no purpose in distinguishing between nation and nationality, now that a nation was emerging in Israel it was convenient to make such

a distinction. One wonders whether convenience is a proper cause for making subtle distinctions in terminology.

In what sense did Reconstructionists consider the Jews a nation? Kaplan quotes two definitions of the term "nation", one by Alfred Zimmerman, the other by Renan. "A nation is 'a body of people united by a corporate sentiment of peculiar intensity, intimacy, and dignity, related to a definite home--country.'¹¹ "A nation is a spiritual principle made by two things--the one in the present, the other in the past: the one the possession in common of a rich bequest of memories; the other a present sense of agreement, a desire to live together, a will to make effective the heritage received as an undivided unity.' It is in that sense that the Jews must insist they are a nation, and it is in that sense also that they should regard the nationhood of the people to whom they are united by the bond of citizenship."¹² To what extent even these limited definitions of "nation" can be applied to Jews is a matter which could be disputed, but this much is clear. Kaplan's concept of the nation is completely devoid of any political connotations.

Reconstructionists feel justified in overlooking the political aspect of nationhood because they employ another term in which this aspect is taken into consideration. "It is important," Eisenstein writes, "to distinguish between the nation and the state. The state is the administrative unit; the nation is the cultural unit, deriving its character from the possession of a language, a history, a land, and the

sense, among its people, of a common future and mutual responsibility."¹³

To Reconstructionists, then, Jews do not form a state-nation but a cultural nation. "When a people that is scattered and is without a central state to keep it together, is so constituted that its various fragments recognize and abide by a common code of law and way of life, it is not a state-nation but a cultural nation. If the term 'nation' is used to denote a people that is governed by a central state, then 'nationality' would be an apt term for a people that is governed by a common code of law or any other instrument of cultural life. From that point of view, the Jews have been throughout the greater part of their history not a nation but a nationality."¹⁴ Jews are a cultural nation more appropriately called a nationality.

The looseness of the way in which the terms "nation" and "nationality" are used, is now apparent. Nationality is employed as the equivalent of nation, as a nation in the making, as a substitute for nation, and as a cultural nation. It is probable that the last two designations of the term "nationality" are one and the same. When Reconstructionists substituted the term "nationality" for "nation", the substitution was one of words only. The content remained the same. Jews were a cultural nation, whether they were called a nation or a nationality.

Yet another meaning of the term "nationality" is indicated by the fact that Reconstructionists often refer to the Jews as a "minority nationality" in Central and Eastern

Europe.

The term "nation" is used as denoting a cultural entity only, despite the fact that Reconstructionists were fully aware that this is not what the term actually meant. Kaplan admits that, as commonly understood, "a nation is a group whose members are united by a central state, and who, as a consequence of that central state, are related to one another in a manner that affects their conduct and happiness..... In that sense, the Jews were a nation only during the first commonwealth."¹⁵ Reconstructionists were also aware that the term nation in reference to Jews is not used "in precisely the same sense" as it is with reference to "Germany, France, or the United States.... When we Zionists speak of the Jews as constituting a nation we have in mind that the basis of Jewish affiliation is not the voluntary association of individuals for some specific purpose....but an identification with a particular ethnic group or community into which the Jew is born, a group with historic memories, common present interests, and a common will to continue living its group life under the best conditions it can obtain for itself."¹⁶

Kaplan later acknowledges, although inadvertently, that he had not been using the term "nation" in its accepted sense, for he writes that "Jews must now transform themselves into an amphibious society, partly a nation in the accepted sense of the term, living in its own land (emphasis mine) where it can achieve the full measure of nationhood, and partly a people which can integrate itself with other

nations in other lands without losing its own individuality."¹⁷

Like the terms "nation" and "nationality", the term "nationalism" is also used in an unorthodox manner.

According to Kaplan, nationalism is the ideology which sanctions the group known as the nation. Since nationalism applies to the Jews who are said to constitute a nation, it must be interpreted as a force for the good. However, Kaplan cannot overlook the fact that "all nations nowadays in their relations to one another are selfish, imperialistic and predatory."¹⁸ The same sentiment is repeatedly expressed.

"It is hardly necessary to labor the point that nationalism can be, and has been, put to the most vicious uses."¹⁹

"The political set up of the modern nation....is an instrument of exploitation."²⁰ But these statements are countered by

others which endeavor to show that there is nothing wrong with nationalism per se. It is merely the perversion of nationalism, as manifested by all modern states, which is an evil force. "Perversion of modern nationhood should not blind us to the truth that basically it intends to serve the individual."²¹

"The particularistic aspect of national cultures is an incidental phase, a reaction to the hostility displayed by other groups."²²

"Nationalism need not necessarily connote militarism.... There is a Jewish attitude toward nationalism that is creative, wholesome and peaceful. It is an ethical and religious nationalism."²³

"Jews must be prepared not only to foster their nationhood but to see in nationhood as such, whether it be their own or that of any other people, the call of the spirit."²⁴

Thus, Reconstructionists consider nationalism to be a spiritual concept leading to man's salvation. But this spiritual conception of nationalism must be recognized for what it is--a pious hope rather than a true picture of reality. "The doctrine of national sovereignty," writes Eugene Kohn, "as effectively maintained by most modern states, implies that there is no higher law thanⁿ the will of the nation itself. The danger of this kind of nationalism (emphasis mine) to the peace of the world is obvious."²⁵

But what other kind of nationalism exists? Look where you may, the only kind of nationalism that we know of is described in the above statement. Any other kind of nationalism is merely a pious dream.

This abuse of the term nationalism was recognized by Mordecai Grossman, who wrote that "the Reconstructionist definition of nationalism is based, not on the ways nations actually function, but on the way it is wished they should function..... Exclusiveness of spirit, imperialism, and war are written off as perversions of nationalism. In its essence, we are assured, nationalism is a humanizing, civilizing force. To be human in the largest possible sense is to participate in the life of the most inclusive human group, which is the nation."²⁶

The Reconstructionist attitude toward nationalism, as ideally conceived, is totally incompatible with the concept of nationalism, as concretely realized. In fact, one might say that ideal nationalism is a contradiction in terms. For nationalism, which demands "the subordination

of all trans-state interests....to the economic and political interests of the state"²⁷ can in no sense be considered ideal. This is tacitly recognized in the following statement: "The future of civilization demands not the dissolution of unique national units but their subordination to a transcending loyalty, an international world order."²⁸ But such a situation would in no way be compatible with nationalism. Internationalism, which is conceived in terms of depriving nations of their sovereignty, is the very antithesis of nationalism.

The above analysis indicates that the terms "nation", "nationhood", "nationality", and "nationalism", when applied to world Jewry are replete with difficulties and invite confusion. Recognizing this, Reconstructionists substitute for them the terms "people" and "peoplehood." "Nation", "nationhood", and "nationalism" are now applied to the State of Israel, whereas "nationality" --though previously much used and much abused--has largely fallen into disuse.

People and Peoplehood

Whereas "nation" was too definite a concept to apply to world Jewry, the term "people", from the Reconstructionist point of view, had the opposite disadvantage of being too general. Although Kaplan acknowledges that "the term 'people' when applied to a group has hitherto meant little more than a conglomeration of human beings"²⁹, he goes on to say that "we shall have to fill the term 'people' with new content.... What shall the concept 'people' denote for us?

It should mean to us a succession of generations united by a common history and culture which originated in a particular land, and permeated by a sense of destiny...."³⁰

A more complete picture of what Reconstructionists mean by the terms "people" and "peoplehood" can be ascertained from the following definitions: "A people is a body of persons who partake together in a social past and its heritage, a present and its problems, a future and its aspirations. To outsiders it appears as a distinct identifiable historic entity. Viewed from within, it is marked by a sense of kinship and shared interest among its members."³¹ "Jewish peoplehood is based on historical continuity, language, literature, and art, law, mores, and folkways, and attains its consummation in religion. In a world of free cultural mobility, the unity of the Jewish people can no longer be based on uniformity of belief and practice. It must be based on common interests, common historical memories and a sense of common destiny."³²

"Peoplehood, as we use the term (emphasis mine), therefore includes not merely a mutuality of responsibility among members who adhere to a specific faith but also includes historical and geographical realities which must be woven into the pattern of their personal and communal life."³³

Since peoplehood is what unites a people and since these bonds of unity may vary with circumstances, what is meant by peoplehood "depends on what actually, in any particular era, happens to be the recognized basis of homogeneity. Thus in the ancient kingdom of Israel and

Judah, peoplehood consisted mainly of land, government and cult; in the Babylonian exile, of race and religion; in the Second Commonwealth, of land, law, religion, and custom; in the Middle Ages, of religion, law and community life. But in all these epochs, whatever constituted the basis of homogeneity was felt to constitute the peoplehood of the Jews."³⁴

It is obvious from the preceding that Reconstructionists have indeed infused new content into the terms "people" and "peoplehood." From the Reconstructionist standpoint, the necessity of such a procedure is dictated by the fact that what had formerly been described by the term "nation" must now be described by the term "people." Both words were meant to convey the same basic content, as can easily be observed by a comparison of how Reconstructionists define the two terms.

That Reconstructionists should redefine a term to suit their own purpose is understandable even though one may question both the validity and the necessity of the redefinition. However, Reconstructionist criticism of others who use the term "people" in its commonly accepted but vague sense is hardly justified. Kaplan writes, "Although Reform had come to accept the idea of the common peoplehood of all Jews, the implications of that acceptance are fully grasped only by a limited number of Reform Jews."³⁵ It is perhaps unnecessary to state that the "implications" of peoplehood, which Kaplan refers to, are implications only from the Reconstructionist redefinition of the term. The reason that only "a limited number of Reform Jews" fully

grasp these implications is undoubtedly due to the fact that they were not implied when the term "people" was used in the Columbus Platform.

Although "people" is so defined to leave out everyone except Jews--it is a definition made to order--Kaplan sometimes maintains that "we are not the only group in the world that is entitled to use that name. The term 'people'....may indeed be applied to Christianity and the entire Moslem world. What is Christianity if not a 'people' whose history and culture are rooted in Palestine? That is why the Christian Holy Places in Palestine mean so much to the Church."³⁶ This position is in direct contradiction to other statements to the effect that Jews constitute "a unique sociological form."³⁷ Kaplan writes that the "cultural conception of nationhood"--or in accordance with the new terminology, "peoplehood"--is "at present represented only by the Jews."³⁸

Peoplehood, like nationhood previously, is a cultural concept; and yet, it seems to have certain political overtones, since membership in the United Nations is sought for Jews on the basis of their peoplehood. "World Jewry should unite as a people, and apply to the United Nations Assembly for recognition of its claim to peoplehood.... That Iraq should be represented in the Council of the Nations, while we Jews who play a role in the world's affairs, not only as individuals but as a group, should not have their corporate existence recognized is an unconscionable wrong."³⁹

It is difficult to reconcile application for membership in the United Nations with the concept of the Jewish people as "an abstraction"⁴⁰--a concept also found in Reconstructionist writings. Thus Eisenstein maintains that "the Knesset Yisrael, the Israel of dreams, is what we believe about ourselves and what we dream for ourselves. It is the ideal Israel that actually never was, but is always becoming ⁴¹ (emphasis mine)"

The State of Israel and the Organic Jewish Community

The creation of the State of Israel necessitated some statement concerning its relationship to Jews in the Diaspora. As long as there was only a Yishuv in Palestine, the relationship between Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora was clearly defined by the Reconstructionist concept of Jewish peoplehood. According to this concept, Jews throughout the world constituted one indivisible people held together by common bonds.

After the establishment of the State of Israel, Reconstructionists generally maintained that Diaspora Jewry had a relationship not to the State of Israel but to the Jewish population of that State. Although this seems to be the basic Reconstructionist position, it is countered by statements in which a relationship to the State per se is clearly contemplated. "Because we are a unique people, not to be catalogued, the relations between Israel and the Diaspora will also be unique, unlike the relations between

any other country (emphasis mine) and its kinsfolk, citizens⁴² of other lands."

Similarly, with regard to whether or not the State of Israel is a Jewish State, two contradictory positions are maintained. Kaplan writes that "although Jews constitute a majority of the people in Israel, and Israel is therefore often spoken of as a Jewish state, that is about as accurate as calling the United States of America a Christian republic or an Anglo-Saxon republic."⁴³ On the other hand, he says that the "nucleus (of Jewish civilization) is the Jewish state."⁴⁴

Whatever position is taken with regard to the two points just discussed, Reconstructionists, in general, maintain that the mere existence of the State of Israel has a beneficial psychological influence on diaspora Jewry. It would tend "to normalize the psychology of the Jew in a way similar to the normalizing of the Irish state on the Irish people everywhere."⁴⁵ One wonders how similar the two situations are, since both Jewish peoplehood and the contemplated relations between Israel and the Diaspora are unique. One also wonders how it would tend to "normalize the psychology of the Jew" since Jews are still left with an anomalous relationship and an anomalous status.

Reconstructionists regard the State of Israel, or more probably in this case, the Jewish community in Israel, as essential to the survival of Judaism. This follows from^{the} proposition that Judaism is a civilization, and, consequently,

required a spiritual center. "It is a fundamental truth," Kaplan writes, "that it is impossible for a people to be united through a civilization unless there is a nucleus of that civilization which will continue to create new values. That nucleus is the Jewish state."⁴⁶ Israel thus has a very vital part to play in the preservation of Judaism--so vital, in fact, that "without Palestine, there would be no need to reconstruct Jewish life. Jewish life would be lacking such basic content as only Palestine can supply."⁴⁷

However central the role of Israel may be, the diaspora also plays a very important role in Jewish life. Without a planned program of reconstruction of Jewish life as it exists in the diaspora, Palestine will lack the stimulus to recreate the elements of religion, law, and education in the Jewish civilization."⁴⁸

The concept of Jewish peoplehood, as applied to American Jewry, means that Jews should organize themselves into voluntarist organic Jewish communities. The purpose of such communities is twofold: first, "to enable the Jew to experience the reality of Jewish fellowship" and to make him aware that the Jewish people is not "a mere name"⁴⁹; secondly, to provide the necessary structure on which to build a Jewish life "rich in content and creative of values."⁵⁰

If the Reconstructionist concept of peoplehood is granted, then certainly some form of an organized Jewish

community is called for. What kind of community do Reconstructionists envisage? Reconstructionists look forward to "a community with civil laws and civil courts all its own, with an autonomous 'general will' sufficiently persuasive and powerful to fashion the conscience of individual Jews and to control their outer conduct; a community which 'must at least make a serious attempt to accomplish what, under normal conditions, a nation ought to do for its citizens in the spirit of justice and peace.'" ⁵¹

The concept of organic Jewish community, here outlined by a critic of Reconstructionism, has given rise to the charge that Reconstructionists advocate importing to America the East-European Kehillah. Although Kaplan's inspiration undoubtedly derives from Dubnow's concept of minority community rights, that concept had to be greatly modified to adapt to it the American environment. Eisenstein writes, "The modern kehillah must differ from that of earlier generations by constituting a voluntary, rather than an imposed, organization.... Another important difference is the absence of segregation.... No one wants to ghettoize the Jews." ⁵¹ In the same vein, Kaplan writes that the organic Jewish community should be "held together by a sense of mutual responsibility on the part of all who belong to it." ⁵² Thus, the community should be both democratic and voluntarist.

Although Kaplan repeatedly states that the community should be democratic, one may question whether the term democratic is appropriate. Kaplan writes, "Only the kind of

an organic community that the Jews were in the past, that the Catholic Church still is, or that communist Russia is trying to be confers status and human dignity on those who are identified with it."⁵³ None of the communities mentioned in this statement was or is democratic. The Catholic Church and Communist Russia are clearly authoritarian in Structure. As far as the medieval Jewish community is concerned, it was held together by an authoritarian code administered in an authoritarian manner.

The use of the term voluntarist in reference to the organic Jewish community is also open to question. Kaplan comes close to admitting the coercive nature of the proposed community in the following statement: "To whatever degree Judaism is to be lived in the diaspora, the element of social efficacy must supplement its ethical principles and precepts, and translate them into law or jurisprudence. This is no plea for coercion in the form of social ostracism or excommunication. Yet some means of approval and disapproval is necessary to lend efficacy to standards."⁵⁴ But what means other than social ostracism, no matter how mild or severe, is conceivable? Perhaps, a financial penalty would be imposed on recalcitrants, but if they refuse to pay, the only recourse would be to social ostracism.

Civilization and Culture

In Reconstructionist thought, Jewish peoplehood and Judaism--defined as a religious civilization--are two sides

of the same coin. Jewish peoplehood is what unites Jews, and what unites Jews is the Jewish civilization. And that^{is}/why Reconstructionists define peoplehood in the same terms as they define civilization. The Jewish people is united by certain bonds and these bonds, in their totality, compose Judaism or the Jewish civilization.

If one compares the following definitions of "civilization" with those given for "peoplehood", the point will be made obvious. A civilization is "the cluster of a people's language, literature, laws, social institutions, folkways, morals and religion."⁵⁵

As applied to Judaism, this means that "Judaism includes the nexus of a history, literature, language, social organization, folk sanctions, standards of conduct, social and spiritual ideals, esthetic values, which in their totality form a civilization."⁵⁶

"Judaism is the ensemble of the following organically interrelated elements of culture: a feeling of belonging to a historic and indivisible people, rootage in a common land, a continuing history, a living language and literature, and common mores, laws and arts, with religion as the integrating and soul-giving factor of all those elements."⁵⁷

When Reconstructionists maintain that Judaism is a religious civilization, they mean to convey the idea that, although religion may be the most important element in Judaism, Judaism is more than a mere religion. The term "civilization", then, describes more accurately the true nature of Judaism. As a consequence of this, the term "civilization" has certain advantages over the term

"religion." Kaplan writes, "The advantage of a category like 'civilization' as descriptive of Jewish life is that it suggests the basis and material for interaction among the most divergent elements of Jewry, by reason of the large consensus of Jewish interests and purposes which it connotes."⁵⁸ Judaism, understood as a civilization thus provides an overall frame in which both the religious and secular elements in Jewry can find a place. On the other hand, if Judaism is thought of as a religion, a secular Jew is a contradiction in terms. He has no place in Jewish life. One wonders, however, whether the Reconstructionist attitude toward Jewish secularism is in reality any more inclusive, since it regards "irreligion among Jews" as a "phase of Jewish maladjustment."⁵⁹

A second advantage of the term "civilization" is that it can explain the presence in Judaism of "non-understandable conventions",⁶⁰ which are expected in a civilization but completely out of place in a rational religion. What is meant by a "non-understandable convention" is not quite clear. It probably refers to a convention, the origin of which is non-rational. If this is what it means, then one must point to the obvious fact that most religious ceremonies, even of rational religions, are non-rational in origin.

If Judaism is a civilization, it has a third advantage in that it does not have to justify itself to the world. Other philosophies of Judaism find their rationale

in some kind of a mission, but Judaism as a civilization needs none of this, for "as long as the will to live continues in a group that group deserves life."⁶¹ "There is something ultimate about the will-to-civilize which carries its own justification. If we deny to any group the right to transmit its language, its experiences, its sancta, its beliefs and its desiderata, we rob all its members of the elementary right to exercise their most human, as distinct from subhuman, function--that of eliciting the humanity inherent in the child."⁶²

It is questionable whether the will-to-civilize is any more ultimate than the will-to-religion, for according to Kaplan's own definition, religion is the most important element in a civilization. If civilization as a whole can be characterized as ultimate, then certainly its most important element also deserves to be so characterized.

The fact that the religious philosophies of Judaism have used either the doctrine of the chosen people, or its counterpart, the doctrine of the mission, to justify the existence of Judaism does not mean that a modern religion must justify itself. The fact of the matter is that even Reconstructionism has sought to justify the existence of Jews as a distinct group. "At present we Jews are content to abide by the ethical standards of the majority population.... If we wish to foster Jewish group solidarity, we must live up to a higher ethical standard than the average. No other justification for our remaining an identifiable minority will avail."⁶³ But why is any

justification necessary, since Judaism as a civilization allegedly requires no justification?

If Judaism is a civilization, Jews in America must live in two Civilizations, the American and the Jewish. Of the two, the American civilization is primary and the Jewish secondary. Living in two civilizations presents the Jew with a spiritual challenge to "blend the two into a new creation."⁶⁴

Reconstructionists maintain that Christians, as well as Jews, have to live in two civilizations. For according to Reconstructionism, Christians have to live in their own religious civilization in addition to living in the American civilization, which is "secular-nationalist, politically, economically and to a major degree culturally."⁶⁵ However, the analogy drawn here between Jews and Christians, Judaism and Christianity, is very misleading. "Christianity desires to fashion national civilizations the world over in its own image; Judaism, as Reconstructionists conceive it, requires the setting up of a Jewish national civilization alongside the national civilizations of different countries. To a Christian, loyalty to a universal human society supplements loyalty to his native land; to the Reconstructionists, loyalty to another particular nation (or people) supplements the Jew's loyalty to his native land."⁶⁶

It seems that Reconstructionists themselves are not wholeheartedly convinced of the validity of this analogy. They do not really believe that Christians in the United States live in two civilizations, for if they did, they would have to admit that Jews in Israel also live in two

civilizations--the Jewish religious civilization and the secular-nationalist Israeli civilization. But Reconstructionists do not say this. On the contrary, if a Jew "wants to live as a Jew only, and to be free of the need of reckoning with the civilization of any other people, he will have to go to Palestine."⁶⁷ Now, if the Jew in Israel lives in one civilization only, then the Christian in the United States also lives in one only. According to this position, Jews would be the only people in America who live in two civilizations.

That Christians in America live in one civilization only would also follow from the fact that Kaplan regards English civilization as being "largely religio-national.... religious on the basis of Israel's experience and national on the basis of the experience of the English people. The same is true of every modern civilization, whether Christian or Mohammedan."⁶⁸ What is true of "every modern civilization" is presumably also true of American civilization. This would mean that American civilization is religio-national, rather than secular-national, as previously indicated. If American civilization is religio-national, then Christianity is part of that civilization and not a separate civilization. Christians in America consequently live in but one civilization.

Only if Reconstructionists maintain--contrary to the statements just quoted--that the Jewish civilization is as different from the Israeli as the Christian is from the American or the English, does it follow that Jews in Israel,

as well as Christians in America, live in two civilizations. Then, the basic difference between living as a Jew in Israel and living as a Jew in America would be that the Israeli civilization confirms and strengthens the Jewish, in the same way that the American civilization provides a favorable environment for the Christian.

Although Kaplan calls Judaism a civilization, Jewish civilization is unlike any other modern civilization because in Judaism, "the religious and the national coincide."⁶⁹ By this he means that both the religious and folk elements of Jewish civilization are native to the Jewish people. Although all other modern civilizations are religio-national, the religious element is not indigenous.

Despite Kaplan's assertion that Jewish civilization differs from all modern civilizations, he also says that the Hindu and Far Eastern civilizations are like the Jewish "in deriving both the religious and the national sanctions from one and the same historic background and that altogether its own."⁷⁰ But Jewish civilization also differs greatly from Hindu civilization in that the latter is limited to a particular geographical area whereas the former is scattered throughout the world. One is forced to conclude that Jewish civilization is unlike any other civilization and that perhaps the term is inappropriately applied to Judaism.

Whether Jewish civilization is sui generis or whether Christians in America live in one or two civilizations, Reconstructionists consistently maintain that American Jews must live in two civilizations. Critics of

Reconstructionism have often questioned the practicability of living in two civilizations. They claim that "life in two civilizations, a primary and a secondary, means for the average person, because of time expended in preparation for and in earning a livelihood, simply a duplication of certain forms of expression, such as language...."⁷¹

Furthermore, since the two civilizations are in a sense competing for the time and energy of the individual, the secondary civilization is bound to be the loser. If this be the case, of what avail is it to call Judaism a civilization?

Reconstructionists look upon a civilization as "a complete and self-contained entity."⁷² Each civilization is sharply differentiated from every other. "Reconstructionists deny the reality of civilization and affirm only the reality of civilizations. Just as humanity is divided into nations, so civilization is divided into civilizations, one for each nation."⁷³ It is questionable whether the close cultural cooperation which Reconstructionism advocates is compatible with this concept of civilization. Furthermore, "the qualities of organic wholeness and self-sufficiency Reconstructionists attribute to all civilizations are characteristic only of the culture of primitive tribes cut off from outside contacts. In a world made interdependent by science and technology, there can be no organic, self-sustaining, self-sufficient cultures and civilizations. The growing reality is not civilizations

but Civilization. Along with the 'transferable' elements, everything else, including social institutions, religious ideas, art motifs and literary patterns, is now transferred from nation to nation. To strive to preserve the integrity of a national civilization in contemporary times is to attempt to perpetuate a transient cultural lag."⁷⁴

The term civilization, as used in Reconstructionist literature, is open to one additional criticism. What Kaplan calls civilization, anthropologists call culture. "To anthropologists culture is the inclusive term denoting the unique heritage of a group; to Reconstructionists the inclusive term denoting the same entity is civilization. In Reconstructionist usage culture has a restricted meaning, denoting the literary, artistic, intellectual and spiritual aspects of a group's total heritage or civilization. Reconstructionists employ the term 'Jewish civilization' to emphasize that Judaism is more than a culture in this restricted sense, that it includes in addition an inherited way of social life, with a community, social institutions, and laws."⁷⁵

Kaplan's reason for preferring "civilization" rather than "culture" is that "in recent scientific usage, culture is virtually synonymous with civilization, but in popular parlance it has a much more limited meaning."⁷⁶ Although it is true that in common usage culture is entirely "non-material", in scientific usage civilization generally includes many cultures.

Basic to the philosophy of Reconstructionism is the theory of cultural pluralism, the underlying postulate of which is that America is not a melting pot but rather an orchestra composed of many parts. In support of this theory Kaplan marshals the aid of "outstanding anthropologists" who "advocate that minority groups be permitted to foster their cultural integrity. They maintain that a program of 'accommodation', rather than 'assimilation', advances both majority and minority interests without essential loss to either."⁷⁸

Cultural pluralism is looked upon as a "moral and spiritual right."⁷⁹ Reconstructionists "believe that those who are different (not Anglo-Saxon) have....the right....to make for the survival of their distinctive ethnic and religious civilization, so that it will contribute not once but recurrently to the whole...."⁸⁰ Actually, what Reconstructionists seem to want is not only the right to cultural differentiation but official sanction for it. "Real Americanism should mean an active encouragement of cultural diversity."⁸¹

With respect to the possibility of cultural minorities surviving in the American environment, it has been pointed out that "despite changes in the American conception of minorities it is doubtful whether tolerance or even an appreciation of minorities is sufficient to enable them to maintain their identity apart from the soil of that society which gave them birth and sustenance. On the strength of cultural attributes alone, whether it be in terms of

language, literature, music, art, or folkways, there is no likelihood for American Jewry to survive much longer than any other ethnic culture. The validity of Jewish survival in America must needs rest upon factors other than purely cultural, namely those of a religious character. What distinguishes Jewry and Judaism from Scandinavian, German, Irish, Italian, Polish and other minorities is its additional religious quality--for Judaism is a religious civilization, with all the power for persistence characteristic of other religious groups.⁸² Kaplan also is aware that culture alone is not enough to insure survival, for he writes, "What the secularists cannot understand is that the entire character of Jewish civilization, as well as the particular character of American democracy, is bound to make any cultural minority, which is not religiously motivated, into a superfluous nuisance."⁸³

It is clear from the foregoing that Reconstructionists believe that only a religiously oriented culture can survive in America. But if this is so, why the emphasis on cultural pluralism? If the culture which Reconstructionists want to preserve and create is religious, would not this be sanctioned by the generally accepted theory of religious pluralism?

Religion

In its attitude toward religion as well as in its general philosophic approach, Reconstructionists have followed the naturalist school of thought. Supernaturalistic

assumptions and beliefs are often criticized as being out of keeping with modern scientific thought. Reconstructionism "calls for nothing less than an approach to the religious interpretation of life with the same unbiased empirical attitude as that which constitutes the spirit of science, that spirit which regards truth not as something absolute and final, but as an active process of the mind whereby error is gradually eliminated. A conflict between science and religion is possible only when we assume that knowledge of God originates not from our understanding of the universe and of human life, but from some supernatural revelation which is entirely⁸⁴ extraneous to the natural powers of the human mind."

Many modern people assume that religion must be supernatural, and since they cannot accept the supernaturalistic assumptions, they have been estranged from their historical religion. "The initial and hardest step," Kaplan writes, "in the process of religious readjustment at the present time is to grow accustomed to the idea that it is possible to have religion without subscribing to the⁸⁵ to the supernatural character of its origins." "To the modern man, religion can no longer be a matter of entering⁸⁶ into relationship with the supernatural."

In order for religion to play a vital role in life, a religious ideology must be evolved which is "consistent with the highest in modern thought and capable of eliciting⁸⁷ the best in modern man." Religion, to be vital, must be presented "in terms of modern day experience and

aspirations."⁸⁸

As a corollary of its rejection of supernaturalism, Reconstructionism also rejects the idea that any particular religion has a monopoly on truth. All religions must not only be tolerated but must be recognized as having a legitimate right to existence. "The ethics of group relations.....must assume the right of religions other than our own to permanent existence."⁸⁹ Eisenstein attributes the root cause of inter-faith hostility to "the contention of each of the three major religious groups that it is the sole possessor of the truth. Each religion is, by its very nature, exclusive of all the rest. Each group assumes that there can be only one true or legitimate religion--its own."⁹⁰

Basic religious truths are universal and it is only in the way a religion concretizes these truths that differentiates it from all other religions. Thus, according to Kaplan, there are universal religious truths, there has not yet been created a universal religion, for "a universal religion ought to show no preference for the heroes of any one particular people. It ought to contain a sort of pantheon to which heroes of all nationalities should be admitted."⁹¹ Perhaps the Bahai religion would approach what Kaplan means by a universal religion. At any rate, Christianity, Mohamedanism, and Judaism are not universal in Kaplan's sense of the term. Judaism is not universal because it interprets universal religious truths in the light of the experience of the Jewish people and applies the

practical consequences of these truths to present day Jewish needs. The particularity of a religion is not "due to the profession of some truth or teaching that is necessarily denied by the religion of some other group, but to the fact that the experiences, upon which the particular religion is based, and in terms of which its liturgical forms are expressed, are peculiar to the group professing that religion."⁹²

The particularity of a religion is expressed in "its different constellations of sancta. Each religion has its own objects, persons, places, and events that are deemed holy, or occupy a place of supreme value in the collective consciousness of its adherents."⁹³

In the light of this attitude, loyalty to the Jewish religion cannot be based on any consideration of its being "the best of all religions."⁹⁴ Loyalty must stem from the fact that it is our religion, "the only religion we have, an inseparable part of our collective personality as a people."⁹⁵

Kaplan defines religion as consisting of "sancta, the attitude toward life that they imply and the specific observances that they inspire."⁹⁶ It is difficult to reconcile this definition with his assertion that "in the matter of religion, there is more in common between the orthodox Jew and the orthodox Christian, than there is between the liberal and the orthodox either in the Jewish or in the Christian group."⁹⁷ Only if religion is limited to intellectual attitudes, does this assertion make sense. For with regard to "sancta....and the specific observances

they inspire", there is clearly more in common between members of a particular religion.

Kaplan's definition of religion, quoted above, seems to imply that the religious element in a civilization, or in Judaism, is something distinct from the cultural and social elements. This is confirmed by the fact that Reconstruction-

ists often refer to Judaism as "a trinity of peoplehood,
culture, and religion."⁹⁸

The same thought is also expressed in the following statement: "To be a good Jew, one has to be a Jew socially, culturally, and religiously. To be a Jew,

religiously, means to believe in God."⁹⁹ But when we

consider that Kaplan also defines religion as "the sum of all....ways in which the God idea functions pragmatically

in the civilization of a people",¹⁰⁰ it is obvious that religion is not a distinct element. Rather is it something

which is all persuasive, for clearly the God idea can manifest itself in cultural and social, as well as religious, activities. That the religious includes the cultural and and social is also indicated in the following statements:

"From the standpoint of the Religious-Cultural program, whatever helps to produce creative social interaction among Jews rightly belongs to the category of Jewish religion, because it contributes to the salvation of the Jew. Hence, a movement like spiritual Zionism, the purpose of which is to keep the Jews united and creative, is entitled to a place in the Jewish religion."¹⁰¹

"Were the actual facts concerning religion considered, it would be realized that religious freedom means essentially the right of any group

within the nation to maintain its social solidarity and the cultural institutions with which its life is intertwined."¹⁰² Thus, Reconstructionists use the term religion to indicate both a specific element in Judaism and an all pervasive element.

Whatever place religion may have within a civilization, Kaplan maintains that religion is basically group or folk religion. In his emphasis on the primary importance of the group, he follows "a school of sociologists, associated with the names of Levy-Bruhl and Durkheim, which attempts to understand all the phenomena of present-day culture from a study of civilizations of primitive peoples.. these sociologists conclude, religion is nothing but the manner in which the group consciousness of the tribe is expressed. What is important to the tribe is 'sacred' to it."¹⁰³ This is essentially Kaplan's position.

Although "religion always constituted an integral part of a civilization",¹⁰⁴ religion has now been separated from civilization. However, "the divorce of religion from modern civilization should be viewed as temporary. The next step will find each civilization once again identified with religion, though it will be a different type of religion from that of the past."¹⁰⁵ Kaplan seems to maintain that because folk religion served the needs of primitive society, it can also serve the needs of modern society. What is found in primitive society ought to be found in modern society.

The Jewish religion is a folk or group religion. This means that Jews in the diaspora have two folk religions. "An important corollary of this analysis of folk religion is that those who live in two civilizations will tend to give adherence to two folk religions. This is as it should be."¹⁰⁶

The concept of folk religion implies that "one's people will always constitute one's chief source of salvation, and therefore one's chief medium of religion."¹⁰⁷ "To accept folk religion will be to realize the truth that the basis of individuality and character is supplied not by the world at large with its multitudinous culture, but by the section of mankind which constitutes one's particular folk."¹⁰⁸

In criticism of Kaplan's entire position on religion as folk religion, it is perhaps needless to point out that "the highest form of religious universalism has cut across the lines of Volksgeist."¹⁰⁹ "The replacement of the group-element by the ethical element is the mark of all higher religions."¹¹⁰

Kaplan's emphasis on folk religion places him in a precarious position with regard to personal religion. Since folk religion "is not likely to transcend the limitations of folk morality, personal religion, with its element of universalism, will therefore have to act as a check and corrective.... Folk religion necessarily moves on the plane of popular intelligence and crowd emotions."¹¹¹ If folk religion always operates on such a low level, why

should anyone want to reinstate it? Would it not be better to try to develop personal religion?

God, Creativity, and Evil

Although Reconstructionists generally follow the naturalist school of thought, there are several notable instances where Reconstructionists are not in accord with the naturalist tradition. This is especially true with respect to Kaplan's concept of God, creativity, and evil.

While Reconstructionism is not committed to any particular concept of God, the movement is usually associated with the one propounded by Kaplan, who defines God as the power that makes for salvation.¹¹² Belief in God is belief that "the world is so constituted as to possess the resources necessary to enable man to fulfill himself as a human being, and that man is so constituted as to possess the abilities that enable him to utilize those resources for his self-fulfillment."¹¹³ In brief, belief in God is belief that the universe guarantees salvation.

Kaplan feels that his God-idea is objective in that it can be validated by the pragmatic test. Thus he writes that "there is no reason why a conception of God should be less objective than any other conception that is based on experience. There is a way of checking its validity. It must not only harmonize with other elements in our experience but must lend to them even greater unity and meaning than they derive from the arts and sciences.

The power to help us orient ourselves to life, to elicit the best of which we are capable and to render us immune to the worst that may befall us is the pragmatic test to validate a conception of God."¹¹⁴

However, most naturalists would deny that the pragmatic test is a sufficient test for validating a God concept, for the pragmatic test is clearly a test of usefulness, not of the truth. William James statement that "truth is that which works" is, as everyone knows, one of the weakest and most ambiguous points in his philosophy. A God concept to be objective must be validated by evidence. Naturalists would, therefore, insist that Kaplan's God concept is "if not untenable, then at least not warranted by a candid appraisal of nature and its forces.... There is no evidence at all that nature is so constituted that it guarantees salvation."¹¹⁵

Kaplan sometimes maintains that his God concept is not a matter of evidence but of faith. In this case, his God concept "would be, in the eyes of most naturalists, as unreliable as most traditional religious doctrines. Naturalists would find both Kaplan and traditional religionists non-rational, and insist that it is as hazardous to assert that the striving for salvation is inherent in nature as to assert that it is the working of a supernatural entity. That same Humian-Kantian revolution which drew the bounds of human knowledge and excluded man's knowledge of supernatural hypotheses would also exclude speculative naturalistic hypotheses as to the eventual outcome of

nature."¹¹⁶

The concept of creativity, as found in Kaplan's writings, would also encounter objections from naturalists. Kaplan writes that "creativity, or the continuous emergence of aspects of life not prepared for or determined by the past, constitutes the most divine phase of reality."¹¹⁷

This point of view is similar to that propounded by Henri Bergson in his book Creative Evolution. Bergson maintains that the Darwinian hypothesis of natural selection could not explain certain facts of animal life. These facts are said to be the result of the *elan vital*, a creative force in the universe. But neither Bergson nor anyone else has been able to show instances of creativity "not prepared for or determined by the past." Furthermore, it must be pointed out that although there are gaps in the Darwinian hypothesis, as well as in other scientific hypotheses, positioning an *elan vital* or a principle of creativity does not explain anything, but merely gives a name to our ignorance. A consistent naturalistic approach would have to maintain that explanation involves showing causal relations.

Naturalists would also object to Kaplan's concept of evil as "the chance of invasion of sheer purposelessness."¹¹⁸ or as "chaos still uninvaded by the creative energy, sheer chance unconquered by will and intelligence."¹¹⁹ Although the traditional concept of God as the creator of both good and evil is somewhat paradoxical in the traditional setting, Kaplan's substitute is even less satisfactory. When Kaplan refers to evil, he means those forces in the universe which

thwart man in his endeavor to achieve salvation. But these forces are subject to the same "laws of nature" as those other forces which aid man in his eternal quest. Kaplan's position is absolutely untenable unless it can be shown that there are such things as chance, chaos, and creative energy, in the sense that he uses these terms.

The Functional Method of Reinterpretation

If Jewish religion is to be made relevant to modern life, the past must be reinterpreted. "The task of reinterpretation consists first in selecting from among the ideational and practical consequences of the traditional values those which are spiritually significant for our day, and then in turning those consequences into modes of thought and conduct."¹²⁰ The tradition is not something to be rejected or accepted but something to be utilized "as a symbol for a spiritual desideratum in the present."¹²¹

In the past, reinterpretation was an unconscious process, but this method can suit us no longer, because it is too slow and because radical modifications are necessary.

The process of reinterpretation, which Kaplan suggests, "consists in disengaging from the traditional content those elements in it which answer permanent postulates of human nature, and in integrating them into our own ideology...." They need not necessarily be such as the ancients would have been able to articulate, but they should have psychological kinship with what the ancients did articulate."¹²²

A few examples will illustrate the functional method of interpretation. In traditional Judaism, there was a belief in the world to come. "Interpreted functionally, the traditional conception of the world to come expresses man's discontent with the things as they are and his yearnings for the things as they ought to be."¹²³

The covenant idea is reinterpreted as follows: "If we regard God as the Life of the universe, the Power that evokes personality in men and nations, then the sense of the nation's responsibility for contributing creatively to human welfare and progress in the light of its own best experience becomes the modern equivalent of the covenant¹²⁴ idea."

"Belief in God....can function in our day exactly as the belief in God has always functioned; it can function as an affirmation that life has value. It implies, as the God idea has always implied,....the assumption that reality is so constituted as to endorse and guarantee the realization¹²⁵ in man of that which is of greatest value to him".

The Reconstructionist Interpretation of Jewish History-- A Critique

Peoplehood and Civilization

The two basic concepts of Reconstructionism are peoplehood and civilization. Jews are a people by virtue of their civilization. The bonds of Jewish peoplehood are land, language, literature, art, law, mores, folkways, religion, a common history, common interests, and a common destiny. All these bonds in their totality form the Jewish civilization.

As has been pointed out, the concepts of peoplehood and civilization are applied somewhat differently to Jews and Judaism than they are applied to any other people or civilization. No other group is a people in quite the same sense that Jews are, and no other civilization is quite like the Jewish civilization.

Reconstructionists describe Judaism as a civilization in contradistinction to those who say it is a religion and those who maintain that it is a secular culture. The question which must be asked at this point is, does the term civilization, rather than the terms religion and secular culture, more adequately describe what Judaism was in the past and what it is today?

The problem with peoplehood is somewhat different. Since most Jews would undoubtedly say that Jews were and are a people, the question becomes one of determining to what extent the Reconstructionist definition of peoplehood applied or applies to Jews. To phrase it differently, in what sense was or is the term people applicable to Jews?

The Reconstructionist interpretation of the Jewish past and of the Jewish present, as well as its hopes for the Jewish future may be summed up in two simple propositions. Judaism was, is, and ought to be a civilization. Jews were, are, and ought to be a people. In Reconstructionist literature one can find statements to confirm each part of these two propositions. The following examples will illustrate this point: "Judaism is but one of a number of unique national civilizations guiding humanity toward its spiritual destiny. It has functioned as a civilization throughout its career, and it is only in that capacity that it can function ¹²⁶ in the future." "The entire civilization by which the ¹²⁷ Jewish people lived had to be accounted as the will of God." "It (Reconstructionism) declares Judaism to be the evolving ¹²⁸ religious civilization of the Jewish people." "Jewish ¹²⁹ civilization is today an aspiration rather than a reality." In the Second Commonwealth, Jewish "peoplehood consisted mainly of....land, law, religion and custom; in the Middle Ages of religion, law, and community life." ¹³⁰ "The Jews ¹³¹ are a people." ^a "We dare not remain/nameless and faceless mass. We must become a people, a K'lal Yisrael, determined to enrich our new status with cultural, moral, and spiritual content of the highest order." ¹³² (emphases mine). We must "raise the present status of the Jews from a disintegrated ¹³³ mass of individuals into an organic unity."

With respect to the use of the term civilization in the above statements, it is clear that Reconstructionists affirm that Judaism was a civilization in the past. But it

is not quite so clear as ^{to} whether Judaism is a civilization at present. Although Reconstructionists repeatedly state that Judaism is a civilization, they also maintain that this statement represents an aspiration rather than a reality. Now this appears to be an outright contradiction, for if Judaism is only aspiring to be a civilization, it is not now a civilization. But if it is not a contradiction, it must be that when Reconstructionists say that Judaism is a civilization they really mean that it has the potentialities for becoming one and that these potentialities should be developed. But if this is what Reconstructionists do mean, they are not properly using the verb "to be". At any rate, Reconstructionists have never attempted a factual demonstration to show that Judaism is now a civilization.

The situation with the use of the term people is the same except for one complicating factor. Most Jews would find nothing wrong in applying the term people to Jews, either in the past, the present, or the future, but when people is so used, it is not the Reconstructionist definition of people that is intended. Thus, even those who are not Reconstructionists would probably admit that Jews were, are, and will remain a people. But when examining the statements quoted above, it must be borne in mind that Reconstructionists have infused the term people with new content and that, therefore, it does not mean the same thing as is ordinarily meant when the word is used.

As with the term civilization, so with the term people. Reconstructionists affirm that Jews were a people

in the past (in the Reconstructionist sense of the word). When the reference is to the present, the meaning is not clear. For although Reconstructionists maintain that the Jews are now a people (again in their sense of the word), they also maintain that at present Jews are "a disintegrated and fragmented mass of individuals", which is certainly not a people as Reconstructionists use the term. Now either this is a contradiction or Reconstructionists are misusing the verb "to be". As with the concept civilization, Reconstructionists have never attempted to prove that Jews are now a people in their sense of the word.

In the above section, it has been shown that Reconstructionist statements concerning what Jews and Judaism are at present, really refer to what Reconstruction-^{When}ists would like them to be in the future. /Reconstructionists use the terms "is" and "are", they are not using them correctly. Consequently, the basic Reconstructionist position seems to be that Jews were once a people and ought to become one again; and as a corollary of this, that Jews are not now a people in the Reconstructionist sense of the word, nor is Judaism now a civilization. That this is actually the Reconstructionist position is certainly confirmed by references such as the following: Jews today lack "a folk spirit",¹³⁴ "do not feel a sense of "oneness with all preceding generations of the Jewish people,"¹³⁵ and "are¹³⁶ culturally almost completely assimilated."

Reconstructionist statements about the future, although arguable from a philosophic point of view, will not

be dealt with in this thesis. However, it must be borne in mind that the force of the "ought" in Reconstructionist philosophy depends to a large extent on the validity of the "was". It is in order to examine the validity of Reconstructionist assertions about Jews and Judaism in the past that we now turn to a study of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Jewish Commonwealth.

The Second Commonwealth

During this period, Jews were called by three names--race, nation, and people. These names were not used indiscriminately. The term race was applied to Jews during the time of Ezra and it was a term which included all Jews. Ezra's ban on intermarriage was basically racial in character since he wanted to keep the "holy seed" pure.

With the rise of Pharisaism and the subsequent emphasis on proselytism, the term race was no longer applicable to all Jews. Proselytes were not of the same ancestry as those who were born Jews. This was particularly true after John Hyrcanus forcibly converted the Idumeans and after the Adiabenes accepted Judaism. These peoples became Jews but could not claim descent from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and were, therefore, not of the Jewish race.

The period of the Second Commonwealth found many Jews living outside of Judea. The term nation was applied only to those Jews who lived in Judea, and the term people was used when referring to all Jews.

Both the Greeks and the Romans recognized that there

was a difference between a people that occupied a particular geographical area and a people at large. The former was called *ethnos* and *natio* (nation), while the latter was called *laos* and *populus* (people).

In the Septuagint, as well as in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, *ethnos* was applied to non-Jews, whereas *laos* was applied to Jews. This distinction is later found in rabbinic literature where *בן* refers to Jews and *גוי* to non-Jews. The use of *laos* and *בן* was meant to convey the idea that Jews were the people of God. Although a part of the Jews was still a nation, the term nation could obviously not embrace all Jews. The significance of the terms *laos* and *בן* is that they were transnational. Jews, then, during the Second Commonwealth were a transnational people. What they had in common, what made them a people, was Judaism.

The term Judaism is first found in the Fourth Book of Maccabees and in the Epitome of the Second Book. Both these books were composed in the city of Antioch, which would seem to indicate that the term was a creation of the diaspora. Consequently, it could have no political connotations. Diaspora Jews would never have applied such a term to themselves in a political sense, for they considered themselves citizens of the city or country in which they happened to dwell and were often called by the name of their city or country. The Jews of Antioch were called Antiochians, those in Babylonia Babylonians, those in Alexandria,
 137 Alexandrians. Jews in the Roman Empire were called

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Roman citizens. It is obvious that the Jewish state did not exercise any political power over the Jews of the diaspora, since diaspora Jews did not generally participate in the revolt of 70 and those who did fought against the Jews of Judea.

Judaism, then, came to refer only to the religion of the Jewish people. Also, the term Judeans, although originally applied only to the Jews of Judea, had by the time the Temple was destroyed, received a religious connotation. This is indicated by the fact that, although it was the custom of the Roman Emperor to add the name of a conquered nation to the title of Imperator, neither Vespasian nor Titus was called Judaicus. Furthermore, after the destruction of the Temple, official Roman documents addressed to the Jews of Judea omit the term nation, whereas formerly it had always been used.

Pharisaic Judaism and the Rise of Christianity

The diaspora and the encouragement of proselytism were the two main factors which led the Pharisees to a new conception of Judaism. The old ideas that Jews were a race or that they were united by a common history could no longer apply. Jews were now united by religion, by a spiritual unity. Judaism was a universal religion, the God of Israel was a universal God, and Jews were the people of God, not bound to any particular land. Universalism made room for the proselytes, while freeing Judaism from attachment to a particular land made room for the diaspora.

This new conception of Judaism is particularly evident in the attitude of the Pharisees toward proselytes. Anyone who accepted Judaism became a Jew. He was permitted to marry Jewish women and, most important of all, was obligated to recite in his prayers, "God our God and God of our fathers." Since the proselyte was not physically descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it would seem strange at first that they should be obligated to pray in the name of "the God of our fathers." But although they were not physically descended from Abraham, they were considered to be spiritual descendants.¹³⁹ The same position with regard to Christians is maintained by Paul in his Epistles.

The fact that religion was now the basis of affiliation with the Jewish people necessitated a new approach to Jewish history. The most obvious example of this is the complete disinterest of the Pharisees in the historical aspect of Hanukah. But Hanukah was not the only festival that lost its historical significance. In connection with Passover, for example, the physical exodus from Egypt was deemphasized and the spiritual redemption of the Jews was stressed. The name was changed from the festival of unleavened bread, which represented the physical Exodus, to Passover, which commemorated how the Jews were saved from the plague God had inflicted on the Egyptians. The same is true of the other festivals. The Pharisees emphasized the religious significance and ignored the historical.

The struggle of Pharisaic Judaism with Paulinian Christianity necessitated a change in Jewish nomenclature. Jews became known as "Israel", "Knesset Israel" or "Am Israel", and Judea was called the "Land of Israel". This was due to the fact that Paul maintained that the Christians were the true Israel, the chosen people. The reason that the word "Israel" was so important was that God had always been called the God of Israel, and, therefore, the word carried with it theological connotations only.

Reconstructionists completely misinterpret the use of the term Knesset Israel. Kaplan writes, "Israel was to the Rabbis an ecclesia, Knesset Yisrael. This fact has misled some present-day Jewish thinkers into believing that rabbinism altogether denied the nationhood of the Jewish people, or considered it of secondary importance. The barest acquaintance, however, with rabbinic writings should disabuse one of such an error. We may question the logical consistency of a tradition (~~rabbinic~~) which considered salvation in the other world as the principle purpose for which Israel was called into being, and yet insisted that Israel must remain a nation held together by the same kind of physical bonds as any other nation. But whether consistent or not, it is an incontestable fact that there is not the slightest hint anywhere in rabbinic literature that Eres Yisrael, the holy tongue or messianic government can be omitted from the program of Israel's future."¹⁴⁰ This passage shows a complete misunderstanding of Pharisaism

and the changes that it wrought in Judaism. The key idea in Pharisaism was to dissociate Judaism from a particular land and a particular nation. The reason that the term Knesset Israel was used was because the term Israel had only theological connotations. For this same reason, it was first adopted by Christianity. The inconsistency which Kaplan sees in Pharisaic Judaism is not there at all, as a correct interpretation of Pharisaism indicates. And the "incontestable fact" that Kaplan points to--namely, that the Land of Israel, the holy tongue, and messianic government cannot be omitted from Israel's future--is indeed an "incontestable fact" but not in the sense that Kaplan understands it. As will be shown, each of these incontestable facts has religious implications only.

The early Christians understood clearly the nature of Pharisaic Judaism. They knew that it was not a religion confined to one nation but that it was universal. We therefore find that the Gospels and the Book of Acts always use the term *laos* when referring to Jews. Later, when Christianity came into power, the Church regarded the Jews as a nation in order to deny that Judaism was universal and to affirm that it was the religion of a particular people. When the Church called the Jews a nation they meant to associate the Jews with a particular land and to indicate that the Jews were a particular people. Throughout the Middle Ages Jews called themselves either *am* or *hoy*. The term nation was subsequently adopted by them because of the influence of the Church.

That Judaism was nothing more than a religion in the period of the Second Commonwealth and in the Middle Ages is indicated by the fact that if a Jew converted to Christianity, he ceased being a Jew in the eyes of the Church. The only reason used to justify persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages was religious.

Language and Land

Two of the essential elements of peoplehood, as Reconstructionists use the term are language and land. During the period of the Second Commonwealth Jews had neither in common. Jews in Judea and Babylonia spoke Aramaic, while Jews in the Hellenistic cities spoke Greek. In the medieval period Jews spoke the language of the country in which they lived or a dialect of that language mixed with Hebrew phrases.

When Reconstructionists talk about language, they do not refer to the language Jews usually spoke but to Hebrew. Hebrew is one of the bonds which makes the Jews a people, and it is a cultural bond. What Reconstructionists seem to forget is that to the Pharisees Hebrew was the holy tongue. Certainly, it was a bond of unity among Jews, but it was only as the holy language--the language in which their religion was expressed--that it was cultivated. Hebrew, then, was a religious bond and derived its *raison d'etre* from religion.

A people or a civilization must have a land, and for Jews that land is the Land of Israel. With regard to

the role that the land of Israel has played in Jewish history, Kaplan writes, "Jews in all lands wanted to be a nation in their own land."¹⁴¹ "It does not need a practiced eye to discern the hope for the recovery of Palestine in every move and turn of Jewish life and thought since the destruction of the Second Commonwealth."¹⁴² "Even when the belief in a return was countered by all actualities it colored the Jews' entire social and religious conduct, and constituted their principal hope during the incessant persecution endured in the diaspora."¹⁴³ "Since the Torah makes Israel's relationship to the land its principle motif, it is hard to conceive how the Jews could contemplate their functioning as a group apart from the land."¹⁴⁴ "Jews conceived their salvation in terms both national and individual."¹⁴⁵

These quotes indicate that Kaplan believes 1) that Judaism is inconceivable without the Land, 2) that Jews fervently hoped for a return to the Land, and 3) that the return to the Land is in some sense "national". All these statements are true but only to an extent. The Land of Israel certainly played an important role in medieval Jewish ideology but it is significant that this role was purely religious. The Land of Israel had strictly a religious value, since it was believed that "consummate purity and absolute holiness could be achieved only in Eretz Yisrael."¹⁴⁶ While the Temple was in existence, diaspora Jews sent their sacrifices and gifts to the Holy City. But they did all this, because in so doing they were performing religious acts.

As has been pointed out, diaspora Jews did not participate in the revolt of 70, because the land had only a religious significance to them. Even Yehudah Halevi went to Israel only because it was a Holy Land. When Jews thought of the return, they conceived it in purely religious terms and this involved, among other things, a restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem together with its religious cult. The Jews of the diaspora never relinquished their religious attachment to the Land, but this attachment was strictly religious.

That Jews fervently prayed for a return to the Land is incontestable but this return again was conceived in purely religious terms. The Messiah would gather the Jews from the four corners of the world back to the Land by means of supernatural forces, and there the Jews would be ruled by a scion of the House of David. David was not viewed as a king but rather as a religious model. If someone denounced God or denied that the Torah was divine but maintained that he loved the land, such a person would be looked upon as a traitor and heretic.

In what sense was the return "national"? Since it was only Jews who would be taken back to Israel, we might imagine that this was a "national" idea. Furthermore, since "after the destruction of the Temple there were no more mass conversions to Judaism, the Jewish religion always remained the heritage of one particular people. Those who accepted Judaism were only a small fraction of the Jewish people and were mixed in the leaven of the Jewish people." ¹⁴⁷ Thus,

by dint of historical circumstances, Judaism remained essentially the religion of one people. But the important thing to bear in mind is that a Jew was a Jew not because he belonged to a particular people or nation but because he was a member of a religious community. The test of loyalty to the group was religious affirmation and the acceptance of a religious covenant. The sign of that covenant was circumcision. Anyone who did not accept the religious basis of the Jewish group would have no place in the restoration.

Medieval Jewish Religion

Reconstructionists recognize the true character of medieval Judaism but do not fully comprehend it. They are cognizant of the fact that "in the past, the Jewish tradition spoke entirely in terms of religion",¹⁴⁸ that Judaism was conceived of as "the supernaturally revealed religion of the Jewish people."¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, they are aware that in the Middle Ages, "religion was....coextensive with life" and "all-embracing".¹⁵⁰ "Every mode of social behavior, every form of conduct which answered to the expectation of fellow-Jews, fell under the category of divine command."¹⁵¹

With regard to creativity, which is so much emphasized by Reconstructionists, Kaplan writes that "it was regarded as belonging to the domain reserved for gods or heroes. The greatest works of art were achieved not with the purpose of giving full vent to man's creative

urge, that would have been considered presumption. All works of art were entirely subordinated to the worship of God."¹⁵²

Now if everything is subsumed under religion, in the Medieval period, as Reconstructionists admit, how is it that they refuse to concede that Judaism was a religion only and not a civilization? The reason is due to the fact that they do recognize that everything was subordinated to religion. "All of what we might call today the secular aspects of life was part of the Jew's religious pattern."¹⁵³

Reconstructionists maintain that when religion ceased to be the all-embracing phenomenon that it once was, these so-called secular aspects of Judaism emerged in their own right and, therefore, should be treated as part of Judaism irrespective of their connection with religion. It is well to point out here that the distinction between religious and secular is a modern distinction and that the so-called non-religious or secular elements of Judaism formerly derived their justification solely from the religious.

In this connection, Kaplan writes that "it was not.... a religion in the usual sense of the term, that constituted their bond of unity, though the worship of the same God of Israel, no doubt, contributed to that unity. It was rather the Torah which functioned as a common code of law and way of life. The Torah was fundamentally not a means of bringing each individual Jew into relationship with God, but of regulating the relationship of Jew to Jew, so that all Jews might together constitute the people of God."¹⁵⁴

When Kaplan says that what united Jews was not "religion in the usual sense of the term", what he is actually is saying is that he does not consider some laws in the Torah as being religious. This is understandable because Kaplan does not accept the Torah as the revealed law of God. But the Jews of the Medieval period did so accept it. And, therefore, whatever is contained in the Torah is, from their point of view, religious. Whether one refrained from committing adultery or from eating shellfish, one's reason for so acting was based on religious sanctions.

Furthermore, it does not really matter what purpose the Torah served or whether it was primarily concerned with the Jew's relationship to God or to his fellow Jew. It does not matter because whatever the Torah commanded was looked upon as the will of God and, consequently, was a religious commandment regardless of how we would like to classify it.

In the Middle Ages, then, art was religious art, music religious music, literature religious literature, and law religious law. We may not today consider everything that was subsumed under religion to be religious, but at the same time, we cannot properly apply the term secular to any aspect of medieval Jewish religion.

Emancipation

From the preceding, it is clear that the sole bond of unity among Jews prior to the French Revolution was religion. Jews believed that they were the people of God and that Judaism was a revealed religion.

The French Revolution resulted in the granting of citizenship to Jews. Citizenship meant that Jews were to be considered loyal members of the nation in which they resided and that they were different from their fellow Christians only in religion. French Jews and German Jews had only religion in common.

Reconstructionists often lament the fact that "everywhere the price for emancipation was the surrender of Jewish cultural autonomy. Everywhere it was expected of Jews that they lose their identity as a distinct people."¹⁵⁵ This is unfortunate, Reconstructionists maintain, because social and cultural autonomy are necessary for the preservation of Jewish civilization. Without autonomy, there can be only a truncated Judaism. This attitude is completely devoid of historical basis. No matter where Jews lived in the ancient world, they were always considered as citizens of the city in which they lived. They were granted a certain amount of autonomy, it is true, but this autonomy was granted on religious grounds and the Jewish group was held together by religious sanctions. In medieval times, the same principle held. This is obvious from the fact that when Jews were not persecuted, e.g. in Moslem Spain or in Venice in the early sixteenth century, Jews participated

in the culture of their environment. They differed from Christians only with respect to religion.

If the nature of Jews and Judaism in the modern world is to be properly understood, it is first necessary to attain a true estimate of the much maligned Assembly of the Jewish Notables and the Napoleonic Sanhedrin. In response to questions submitted by Napoleon, these bodies clearly defined what they thought was the true nature of Judaism. Reconstructionists maintain that the Sanhedrin completely erred in its appraisal of Judaism. "Jewish nationalism", writes David Polis, "which is the hope for the restoration of a Jewish state in Palestine, was never challenged by any Jewish authority until the French Revolution and Napoleon's Sanhedrin, by whose fiat Israel ceased to be a nation and became a sect."¹⁵⁶ The reason that Jewish nationalism was never challenged before the French Revolution is obvious. Neither Jewish nationalism nor any other nationalism had yet come into existence. With respect to the latter part of the above statement, it must be pointed out again that Jews were considered a nation only by the Church, which did not use the word with its nineteenth century meaning. Jews did not consider themselves a nation but a people of God.

Reconstructionists also affirm that the Sanhedrin gave its answers "virtually under duress."¹⁵⁷ No proof is given to support this statement, and the evidence that is available contradicts it. The members of the Sanhedrin stated, "We declare that we do not form a national body and

we are happy to have the advantage to be incorporated in this great nation."¹⁵⁸ This statement, as well as the whole tenor of their answers, disproves the contention that these answers were made under duress.

The Assembly of Jewish Notables proclaimed the following with regard to the Jew's relationship to France and to his fellow Jews in other countries. "'In the eyes of the Jews, Frenchmen are brothers and not strangers."¹⁵⁹ "'The love of country is in the hearts of the Jews, a sentiment so natural, and so powerful and so consonant with the religious opinion that a French Jew considers himself in England as among strangers although he may be among Jews; and the case is the same with English Jews in France.' The Notables further declared, 'To such a pitch was the sentiment among them that, during the last war French Jews were seen fighting desperately against other Jews--the subjects of countries then at war with France.'¹⁶⁰"

"Lipmann Cerf-Berr, in his speech at the opening of the Assembly, said, 'Let there be no longer distinction between Alsatian, Portuguese or German Jews (since they are now all part of the French Empire). Scattered on the face of the globe we form only one people, worshipping the same God adhering religiously to the obedience which our law commands towards the power under whose protection we live.'¹⁶¹"

The position taken by the Notables was shortly afterwards affirmed by the Sanhedrin. This position may be summed up as follows: Jews owe loyalty to France. They differ from other Frenchmen only in religion. The basis of

unity among Jews in different countries is that they all worship the same God. In making these affirmations, both the Assembly and the Sanhedrin correctly interpreted the nature of Jews and Judaism.

Reconstructionists criticize their position on the grounds that it "called for the renunciation of the unity of the Jewish people and for its fragmentation into religious communities, divided by their respective national affiliations. It implied the surrender of the age old hope of a return to their ancestral land."¹⁶² None of the statements here is correct. The Jews had been since the time of the Second Commonwealth fragmentized into religious communities. The Assembly and the Sanhedrin only affirmed a reality. They did not, as is charged, renounce the unity of the Jewish people, but on the contrary, maintained that the Jews were one people united by religion. With regard to the restoration, it was looked upon as a religious belief, in no way inconsistent with loyalty to France. The restoration would come about as the result of God's intervention in the affairs of man. When the Reform movement gave up the idea of restoration, they gave up a religious idea--transforming it into another religious idea, that of the Messianic Age. This reinterpretation proceeded along much the same lines as the Reconstructionist interpretation of the God idea or of the doctrine of the chosen people.

Zionism

The term nation was applied to those Jews during the period of the Second Commonwealth who lived in Judea. After the destruction of the Temple, the Romans no longer called the Jews a nation as they had previously but a people. Jews thought of themselves as a universal people and the early Christians agreed to this designation for the Jews.

During the second and third centuries, the Christians reapplied the term nation to the Jews. Origin¹⁶³ refers to Jews as a "peculiar nation", which was a translation of *עם* *am*. By this designation the Church meant to convey the idea that Jews were a particular people descended from the inhabitants of Judea and, therefore, could not be a universal people. That this is all that was meant is indicated by the fact that before the French Revolution, a Jew could cease being a Jew by accepting Christianity. It was only his religion that made him Jewish.

Because of the dominating influence of the Church during the Middle Ages, all Christians "looked upon the Jews as a nation. Luther as well as Reischlin referred to the Jews as a nation. Shakespeare, in his Merchant of Venice, had Shylock use the words 'He scorned my nation.' Lessing likewise applied the term nation to the Jews. Thus the Christians, whether hostile or favorable to the Jews, owing to the influence of the Church looked upon them as a nation."¹⁶⁴

Jews were also influenced by the Church and soon applied the term nation to themselves. Mendelssohn refers

to the "Jewish nation" in his Jerusalem. When employed by the Church in reference to Jews, nation was a term of reproach. Jews accepted this designation and translated the word ~~for~~ as nation.

Because Jews had been called a nation by the Church during the Middle Ages and because Jews sometimes called themselves a nation, the problem arose during and after the French Revolution as to what kind of a group the Jews were. If they were a nation, they could not be admitted to citizenship, but if they were a religious group like the Catholics and Protestants, they could. This problem was first discussed by Christians at the Constitutional Assembly. Within the Assembly "there were two distinct groups with widely divergent views. The reactionary group, which could not reconcile itself to the revolutionary trend of the French people but was ready to accept some reforms, maintained that the Jews were a nation and, therefore, should not enjoy the privileges of citizenship like the French people, but that they should be protected by the State as human beings. Those of the liberal group held that the Jews constituted a religious group and not a nation, and therefore should be granted equal rights with the rest of the French people, and should enjoy the same privileges as the members of other faiths, Catholics and Protestants."¹⁶⁵

The question whether Jews were a nation or a religious community raged all through the nineteenth century, and to some extent is still a problem today. Reactionary Christians

consistently maintained that Jews were a nation, while liberal Christians said they were a religious community.

The status of religious community was adopted by only a small number of Jews, mainly those living in France and Germany. The reason for this was not, as Reconstructionists contend, that only a few Jews could be duped into believing that Judaism was a religion, but rather because the tide of reaction set in before emancipation reached Eastern Europe where the majority of Jews lived. Consequently, the Jews in Eastern Europe were never given a chance to decide whether or not Jews were a religious community. They were never given the opportunity of having equal rights.

The rise of Zionist philosophy has its roots in the Emancipation. Had the Emancipation succeeded in Western and Central Europe and permeated Eastern Europe, it is highly improbable that Jews would ever have seriously considered that they were a nation. Both Hess and Herzl arrived at their concept of Jewish nationalism because emancipation had failed. Pinsker came to practically the same conclusions because emancipation never reached Russia. These three men had two things in common, which are seldom pointed out. First, before adopting Jewish nationalism, their primary interest was not in Jews or Judaism. Secondly, they all wrote their classic works immediately after a period of reaction or after an extraordinary incident of persecution of Jews.

Hess did not receive a good Jewish education and "was at first very much absorbed in Hegelianism, Socialism,

and Communism."¹⁶⁶ Pinsker was an active participant in the movement for the Russification of the Jews. Herzl in his youth had no interest in the Jewish people. Hess wrote Rome and Jerusalem after the Damascus Affair in 1840, and the failure of the revolts of 1848. Pinsker wrote his Auto-Emancipation after the pogroms of 1881. Herzl wrote his Jewish State after the Dreyfus Affair.

The philosophy of Zionism cannot be derived from the Jewish tradition. It was a philosophy imbued with nineteenth century nationalism and arose as a result of anti-Semitism. The driving force behind Zionism was not traditional Jewish messianism. Although Hess wanted the new Jewish State to be in Palestine, Herzl did not necessarily want Palestine, and Pinsker preferred another land.

It is well at this point to reiterate a warning which Reconstructionists give about the influence of anti-Semitism on the Jew's conception of himself. An editorial runs as follows: "Herzl, like Ahad Ha-Am, drew our attention to the fact that, in the diaspora, the Jew's own views about themselves are influenced by anti-Semites. In the beginning of his introduction he points out that 'even Jews faithfully repeat the cry of anti-Semites' and warns about 'unjust accusations' which may 'weaken our self-knowledge.' This warning against adopting anti-Jewish conceptions about Jews is assuredly as timely today as it was fifty years ago."¹⁶⁷ It is this very warning which neither Herzl, the Zionists, nor the Reconstructionists have heeded. For it was the Christian reactionaries of the

nineteenth century who said the Jews were a nation. Since the Jew was part of the Jewish nation, he could not be part of any other nation. Since the Jew was a Jewish national, he could not be a French or German citizen. He must be regarded as an alien. It was this cry of the anti-Semites on which Herzl based his philosophy.

Reconstructionists wholeheartedly support Zionism but in their historical appraisal of the movement they often grievously err. Eugene Kohn writes, "It is therefore apparent that those Zionists who feel that Zionism should be the modern expression of the loyalty^{of} Jews to Jewish history and Jewish destiny, and who wish to keep the Jewish people in the main stream of that historic development which is Judaism, must accept the Reconstructionist thesis that Judaism is the religious civilization of the Jewish people...."¹⁶⁸ Kohn speaks of Zionism as an expression of the modern Jews loyalty to Jewish history, and of a desire to keep the Jewish people in the "main stream." If any stream can be considered the "main stream" in Judaism, it is certainly the Pharisaic point of view which shaped almost two thousand years of Jewish history. Zionism has no relationship to Pharisaic Judaism. On the contrary, after the destruction of the Temple the Pharisees did their best to dissociate Judaism from the land of Judea. The only connection between Jews and the Land in Pharisaic ideology is religious. Zionism can in no way express the Jew's loyalty to his history because that history leaves no room for Zionism.

No greater misunderstanding of Jewish history can be found than in the following passage: "Zionism is in origin and present motivation closely associated with the Jewish religion. After all, Zionism has its sources in the utterance of the prophets. It was supported by the teachings of great rabbis and sages throughout the long sweep of Jewish history. All these alike conceived Israel in terms of nationhood. All these alike looked forward to a reconstruction of the Jewish people in its own land. Certainly, our non-Zionists would not charge Jeremiah and Johanan ben Zakkai and Judah Halevi with being secularists..¹⁶⁹"

Although Reconstructionists admit that Zionists "transformed the traditional idea of redemption by means of miraculous intervention into the concept of national selfredemption",¹⁷⁰ they also maintain that "neither Herzl's analysis of the Jewish question nor his proposal for its "solution" was new. The idea of restoring the Jewish state may be found....in Jewish prayers, in the Messianic movements, and in other nationalistic manifestations of the "pre-Zionist" period."¹⁷¹ In the first quote it is admitted that Zionism is something different from messianism. In the second it is assumed that Herzl's solution was heralded in traditional Judaism.

Jews and Judaism Today

Although Jews were always in a sense beyond categorization, at least until the French Revolution, one could describe what a Jew was and what he believed. Since

the French Revolution, a new type of Jew has appeared which makes any term, other than a very vague term, inapplicable to Jews as a whole. This new type may be called the non-religious Jew, for his affiliation with Jews and Judaism is based on something other than religion. He is either a culturalist, a Zionist, or a marginal Jew, i.e., a Jew who is recognized as a Jew by society but has no Jewish affiliations or interests. If Judaism is merely a religion, how can we account for Jews who will have nothing to do with Jewish religion? Reconstructionists assume that what makes them Jews is that they are part of the Jewish people and partake of a common civilization, which is cultural and social as well as religious.

On the eve of the French Revolution Judaism was a religion, pure and simple. Why did the character of Judaism change in the eyes of some Jews? The answer is to be found in the new type of anti-Jewish feeling which manifested itself in the nineteenth century. Whereas formerly a Jew could redeem himself by becoming a Christian--there was nothing inherently bad about a Jew, now the Jew was considered irredeemable. "His origin.... condemned him to an inferiority which no effort on his part can possibly alter."¹⁷² There was nothing he could do about it and there was no way to extricate himself from this situation. He could not become a Christian and yet could not assimilate because he was said to have Jewish blood or to be tainted by the Jewish nationality. No matter what he did, he would always be identified as a Jew.

Now, suppose a Jew could not accept the Jewish religion. He was still a Jew because his society said he was. There were several paths that such a Jew could take and actually did take. He could become a marginal Jew, almost assimilated, and with no Jewish connections. He could become a Zionist and either go to Palestine to start a new life or work toward that goal for other Jews. He could become a culturalist, interested only in Jewish culture--a culture purely religious in medieval times, but in modern times most of this culture would be considered non-religious. Jews took all three of these paths, but it must be borne in mind that the great determinant in all three was the judgment of society.

Because society would not permit Jews who rejected Jewish religion to become assimilated, the phenomenon of secular Jews and secular Judaism arose. Today a person is a Jew if either he or his society recognizes him as such. Judaism now means religion for Jewish religionists, culture for Jewish culturalists, nationalism for Zionists, and civilization for Reconstructionists. Judaism is what it once was--a religion, or it is whatever Jews want to think it is.

Jews are often called a people, indicating that there are certain bonds which unite them. The above analysis indicates that the only bond which unites Jews today is a common fate. What happens to Jews in one place may happen to Jews elsewhere. All Jews are in the same boat or are likely to be in the same boat.

Why Reconstructionism Misinterprets Jewish History

Although the basic concepts of Reconstructionism are peoplehood and civilization, the key word for an understanding of Reconstructionism is survival. Reconstructionists want Jews to survive. "Prejudice in favor of Jewish survival" should be "a prerequisite to taking up studies for the rabbinic calling."¹⁷³ So important is survival that the only Jews who would be read out of the Jewish community would be Jews who refused to accept it. "The only limitation to which that right (to think for themselves) should be subject, if they want to remain Jews, is at least an unqualified acceptance of Jewish survival."¹⁷⁴

But why should Jews survive? Reconstructionists do not accept the religious rationale of the chosen people or the doctrine of the mission. Is there any justification for Jewish survival? Reconstructionists would answer that no rationale is needed. "As a civilization, Judaism possesses the prerogative of being justly an end in itself."¹⁷⁵ "Jewish life is a unique way of experience, it needs no further justification."¹⁷⁶ But granted that Judaism does not need to justify itself, why should it survive? Who is interested in Jewish survival? To whom has Reconstructionism appealed? Reconstructionism serves as a philosophy for rabbis, Jewish social workers, Jewish center leaders, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal workers. It is a philosophy which requires only an acceptance of Jewish survival, and those to whom Reconstructionism has appealed have a vital interest in Jewish survival. These people can no longer

accept traditional Jewish theology or are not interested in it, but they are interested in Jewish life because they are personally involved, economically, socially, and psychologically. Reconstructionism supplies these people with a modern philosophy--a philosophy which is acceptable to them.

In order to survive, Jews must have status and they must be known by a name which gives status. Hence, Kaplan first chose the term nation and, when this term was no longer usable, he substituted the term people. Although a name is important, more is needed than a name to give status. Jews must be united and the Jewish people must become a living reality. Therefore, Jews should organize themselves on the local level into organic Jewish communities and on the international level into an international people which would seek representation in the United Nations.

However, organization is not enough either. To survive, Judaism must be made worthwhile. Its civilization^{must} be developed, for otherwise it will fail to get the Jew's loyalty. Judaism must become creative, but it cannot be creative without a spiritual and cultural center, where Jews are in the majority. Therefore, Jews must support Zionism.

Jews must be considered a people and Judaism a civilization because these terms can include all Jews. It is not fair for religionists to monopolize the word Judaism.

With this philosophy in mind, Reconstructionists

approach Jewish history, but they are not interested in history per se. They are interested in history only insofar as it supports Jewish survival. Reconstructionists do not look at the past with the purpose of understanding it. Rather do they look to history to bolster their philosophy. And this is basically why Reconstructionists can see a nation where there is only a people of God, a nationalism where there is only a religious messianism, and a civilization where there is only a religion.

Notes

All articles and editorials unless otherwise noted are from "The Reconstructionist", The Reconstructionist Press, New York.

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