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THE TEMPER OF RECONSTRUCTIONISM

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Twenty years have elapsed since the publication of Mordecai M. Kaplan's classic presentation of the Reconstructionist ideology in his *Judaism As a Civilization*. In the context of tricentenary evaluations, the two decades of Reconstructionist activity appears a rather recent arrival. Nevertheless, during the past twenty years, American Jewry has witnessed an amazingly prolific outpour of religious literature by Dr. Kaplan and his associates, Ira Eisenstein, Eugene Kohn, Jack J. Cohen, and the late Milton Steinberg among others.

Stimulated by the publication of its bi-weekly magazine, *The Reconstructionist* (1934), and the subsequent formation of the Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation (1940), this group of dedicated men pioneered in the creation of a whole body of creative religious literature: A new *Hagadah* (1942), a thought-provoking essay, "Toward a Guide to Ritual Usage" (1942), a reconstructed Sabbath Prayer Book (1945), followed by a High Holiday Prayer Book (1948), a host of pamphlets, study aids, syllabi, cantatas, and last year the first publication by the new Reconstructionist Press (1953) of Eugene Kohn's *Religion and Humanity*. However, Reconstructionism remains "in every essential feature the creation of a single thinker."¹ Many of Dr. Kaplan's major concepts have been absorbed into the basic vocabulary of contemporary Jewish thinking, frequently without benefit of "b'shem omro". The anonymity of the source of many of these seminal ideas has encouraged the association of Reconstructionism exclusively with the unadopted aspects of its program. This in turn has led to the caricature of its platform as contentious, that which ever denies.

Not everything labelled "Reconstructionist" is subject for polemic or meant to be unique or novel. Much of its provocative genius lies in its skillful resurrection of problems and attitudes prematurely pronounced dead or lazily relegated to partisan affiliates of other ideologies or movements.

It is exceedingly difficult to single out the basic philosophic trait of Reconstructionism. Its orientation has been variously assigned to naturalism, pragmatism, idealism, humanism, experimentalism. This variety of philosophic characterization, resulting in the critics cry against Kaplan's "pragmatism" alongside critique of his "intellectualism", is due in large measure to the eclectic character of Kaplan's synoptic approach.

Theology

Above all, organicity, an almost Spinozistic passion for unity and integration, characterizes most correctly the dominant temper of Reconstructionist thinking. This unified view of the universe finds its most recent theological expression in Kaplan's identification of God, the

¹ Milton Steinberg, *A Partisan Guide to Judaism*, Bobbs-Merrill, New York, 1945, p. 174.

Power that makes for salvation, with the "cosmic process of organicity which, in sub-human creatures, synthesizes individuation and interaction on an unconscious level, and in men, on a conscious level."²

Based upon a temperate naturalism, Reconstructionism has from the start, reacted with discomfort to the theologically orthodox approach which appears to rupture the universe into unbridgeable realms of natural and supernatural phenomena. Reconstructionist holism seeks a more comprehensive interpretation of reality in which events achieve relatedness; and it welcomes a continuity of inquiry which is not paralyzed by the supernaturalist's indignation whenever religious sancta are made subject to examination. The perspective of a single, unbifurcated universe of natural events, Reconstructionism insists, needs not blur the empirical distinctions of "higher" and "lower" values of existence. But "higher" values have natural histories and do not require the mystification of ad hoc supernatural explanation which makes of religion "a refuge of ignorance."

God and the world, God and man, live in one world. God is not the estranged, "totally other" of rekindled neo-orthodoxy, dwelling with "cosmic snobbishness" beyond man's reach. The approach to an understanding of God is through God's highest creature, endowed with His image. The beginning of the knowledge of God is the knowledge of man, his aspirations and dreams and needs. In this regard, Reconstructionist theology accepts man's ego-involved predicament as a blessing, not as an obstacle in man's urge to reach out and touch the face of God. Unless the anthropocentrism of our theology is made conscious, our fallibility will be disguised for indisputable revelation. To speak the word of God without knowing it is man who speaks, is to attempt jumping 'out of one's very own skin.

One of the discomforts with Kaplan's theology may be attributed to his disconcert with the traditional methods of talking God into existence through professional arguments. Assuming an unfathomable and ineffable Deity, super-naturalists yet seek "the proof" in a worn logic which either begs the question (e.g., cosmological, ontological, ex gradibus) or demands an anxious leap from partial analogy (e.g., teleological). Kaplan's initial theological question is not, "How can I prove that God exists" but "what do I want my God-idea to be like". "What will I worship, and for what values will I be willing to lay my life down" is prior, in Kaplan's approach to theology, to the search for proof of an assumed revelation. In Wei-man's language, our task is "so to formulate the idea of God that the question of God's existence becomes a dead issue".³ While God cannot be pointed to and thereby exhausted, He is still in this world and knowable. We must seek Divinity not however as one seeks material substance but through the predicates attributed to God. We learn of God through discovery of Goodness and Holiness which are then properly ascribed to Divinity.

The critics protest: if God be conceived as a "power which endorses what we believe ought to be and that guarantees that it will be,"⁴ is not God a mere intra-psychoic projection, an hypostatized image of the human self? Milton Steinberg states it bluntly. "Does God really exist or is He only man's notion? Is there anything objective which corresponds to the subjective conception?"⁵ And Jacob Agus regards Kaplan's theological position as anomalous since "the 'force of life' which causes plants to grow and flowers to bloom is not divine in itself, but when human beings are around that 'force' of a sudden, becomes a part

² M. Kaplan, "What is our Human Destiny?" *Judaism*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July, 1953, p. 199.

³ Henry Weiman, et al., *Is There a God?* Willet, Clark & Co., 1932, p. 276.

⁴ M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, Jewish Reconstructionist Formation, New York, 1947, p. 324; italics mine.

⁵ Milton Steinberg, "Theological Problems of the Hour," *ibid.*, p. 380.

of God".⁶ The criticism is not entirely unanticipated. To appreciate Kaplan's position we must look at the God-idea afresh. God is not an isolable object which may be given ostensive definition. God is witnessed in Process, in the context of the constant transactions which take place between man and the compulsive forces in the environment; divinity is discovered in the interaction between man's needs, wants, ideals, and the possibilities for their this-worldly fulfillment. God, then, is not a humanistic "work" of human imagination and will" (Dewey), but remains as real as "a stone-wall or a toothache".⁷ Men's ideals may be made of whimsy and caprice, but they will soon crumble when placed before the teeth of obstinate reality. Man, if he is to live creatively, must adjust himself to the compulsive factors of life which often disregard his will. The universe is not as flexible nor human aspirations as quickly assured for man to live unconscious of Powers "operating in ways over and above the plans and purposes of men, bringing forth values men cannot foresee and often developing connections of mutual support and mutual meaning in spite of or contrary to the efforts of men".⁸

Neither must the universe be accepted quietistically as in aesthetic naturalism. Much of what was once considered hostile, unalterable fact has been turned into an instrument for man's advancement. God is discovered neither through a passive reception of Revelation plunging down through the heavens nor through shallow humanism granted theological poetic license. Constant changes in man's ideals and the modification of the energies of the environment is the lot of man's struggle to utter God's name more clearly. In his creative responses to the obdurate demands of his self and his environment, man experiences "the force of a controlling datum. . . (an) awareness of an ordered cosmos, in which we, and all whom we recognize as human are presented with conditions which must be met and laws which must be obeyed as a prerequisite to our salvation or human self-fulfilment".⁹ The proper study of man and his quest for this worldly salvation (soter-ics) turns out to be the ground of Kaplan's empirical theology. In this sense the "nearer we get to knowing the actual conditions essential to genuine salvation, the truer is bound to be our concept of God".¹⁰

There is much faith in Kaplan's concept of a universe which is an organic totality, conditioning man's choice, yet responsive to his efforts. In Kaplan's soterics there is a faith-presupposition that each event somehow carries within it its own natural and ideal realization. The world is congenial to the human quest for stable and secure elements which illumine man's life. Belief in such Power "predisposing man to his ultimate good" is frankly not "a reasoned faith but a willed faith".¹¹ It plays the role of a pragmatic working hypothesis, as indispensable to human progress as the principles of induction or the uniformity of nature are for the scientist, and as undogmatic as both.

But, Kaplan's critics demand: "Can a belief so provisional and tentative support a faith to die for?" If this alone be the criterion of true faith, the critics' argument stands unopposed. Kaplan's religious temper will certainly not test truth "with the sacrifice of (man's life... or by staking the lives of all the generations".¹²

⁶ Jacob Agus, *Modern Philosophies of Judaism*, Behrman, New York, 1941, p. 309.

⁷ Henry Wieman, *The Wrestle of Religion with Truth*, MacMillan, New York, 1929, p. 2.

⁸ Weiman & Wieman, *The Normative Psychology of Religion*, Thomas Y. Crowell, New York, 1935, p. 5.

⁹ M. M. Kaplan, "Towards a Philosophy of Cultural Integration" in *Approaches to Group Understanding*, ed. Bryson et al, Harper & Bros., New York, 1947, p. 612.

¹⁰ M. M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, MacMillan Co., New York, 1948, p. 175.

¹¹ M. M. Kaplan, *The Future of the American Jew*, *ibid*, p. 182.

¹² Will Heiberg, Quoting from Rosenzweig in the former's *Judaism and Modern Man*, Farrar, Strauss and Young, New York, 1952, p. 36.

But the value of a religion which inhibits man from such fanatic zeal is not negligible. And it is questionable whether the ability to call upon men to sacrifice their lives and their society is to be valued greater than the restraint which undogmatic faith places upon man.

The faith in Powers which are said to "endorse what we believe ought to be and that guarantee that it will" and which make cosmos out of chaos raises query as to the metaphysical status of these forces. Granted our interactional view of Divinity in Process, are the nonhuman forces purposive, conscious agents for human salvation? Or, as the question is put more often, is Kaplan's God personal?

In regard to the problem of the Powers consciousness, the answer must be predicated upon Kaplan's concept of God viewed not isolated but within the context of the natural order; with man taken seriously as a "partner with God," created with an aspect of divinity. "Insofar as consciousness and purpose are indispensable to man's salvation, they are veritable manifestations of God as the Power that makes for salvation".¹³ Here again is illustrated Kaplan's theological method of inverting the place of the subject with that of its predicate.

But may not the criticism be turned about? Is not the ascription of consciousness or personality a most blatant form of anthropomorphism? And does not the supernaturalist when put to test to explain his concept of God as "Mind," "Spirit," or "Person," invariably take cover behind the Maimonidean apologia of negative attributes- Wieman pursues the counter attack. He insists that eliminating "personality" from God makes religion more truly theocentric since the attribution of personality to God is argued either on the anthropocentric grounds that without it "man can find no satisfaction of his needs" or that "personality is the highest form of existence that we know".¹⁴

Many critics have questioned: is Kaplan's God-idea Jewish; is his concept-of salvation Jewish? Few arguments are felt to be as devastating as those doubting the "Jewishness" of an ideology or characterizing it as "Chukas Ha-Goi" (the way of the non-Jew). "How fantastic," writes Agus, "to compare the living God of Israel with the name given to those processes and relationships that make for human welfare".¹⁵

Despite the emotive charge behind the outcry, the history of Jewish thought itself testifies to the fact that the Aristotelianism of Maimonides, the neo-Platonism of Gabirol, the Hegelian spirit of Krochmal, the Kantianism of Cohen, or the existentialism of Rosenzweig and Buber, were all challenged as to their Jewishness. Yet, whom do we call upon to exhibit Jewish theology or philosophy if not these?

Judaism is what Jews believe and practice, and the test of the Jewishness of an idea remains ultimately its acceptance by Jews. Kaplan, like many Jewish theologians in their own day, attempts to reconcile and integrate the inherited tradition with the worthwhile spirit of the contemporary environment and this method of "non-imitative assimilation" has traditionally enriched Judaism.

II

Worship and Ritual

For Reconstructionists, theology and the domain of worship are interdependent. Therefore, they are especially sensitive to the question: can one pray to an impersonal God? "There are," David Polish writes, "anxieties which man cannot share with man, not even with a

¹³ M. M. Kaplan, "Know How to Answer," *The Reconstructionist*, Vol. XIX, No. 14, Nov. 20, 1953, p. 31.

¹⁴ Wieman et al, *Contemporary American Theology*, Vol. I, Round Table Press,

¹⁵ Agus, op. cit., p. 313. p. 346, 349.

cosmic process, but only with the Living Compassionate God..."¹⁶ And Abraham Joshua Heschel adds forcefully: "If God is a what, a power, the sum total of values, how could we pray to it? An 'I' does not pray to an 'it'. Unless therefore, God is at least as real as my own self; unless I am sure that God has at least as much life as I do, how could I pray?"¹⁷ It is not entirely clear whether the critics are attacking the intellectual competence of Kaplan's God-idea or are doubting its ability to be psychologically satisfying. And it is of vast importance to the direction of our efforts to know which is the problem to solve.

But precisely what is meant by this "Thou" which is appealed to in traditionalist prayer? It would appear that those theological traditionalists who presumably do conceive of God as "totally other" relapse into an idea of God built upon the attributes of man. It may be questioned whether God is to be compared to man in terms of a difference of degree: man is a person, God is a person; man is living, God is living. Or is God a being really different in kind from man? If the usage of "Thou" emerges out of man's urge to personalize his relations with Divine forces, then it may be a profound, poetic expression. But the need to so address a "Thou", no matter how deeply experienced, is no argument for the existence of the "Thou" as personality. Nothing is wrong with the poetic "Thou" but its reification. Buber, for example, possesses the poetic religious sensitivity to gaze at a mountain or a tree and call it "Thou"; but for anyone therefore to ascribe consciousness or personality to the inanimate object would be to revert to primitive animism.

Reconstructionism's problem with regard to prayer is not an intellectual one but a pragmatic one; a matter of psychology, not truth or logic. Nor is it a question of actually being able to translate the allegedly dispassionate intellectualistic theology of Dr. Kaplan's into the language of prayer, once distinction is drawn between analysis of the God-idea and belief in God. Admittedly, the semantics of theology is not that of worship. The supernaturalist's conception of God when read through the "Guide" or the "Summa" is at least as dry and intellectualistic. The Reconstructionist prayer book does not sound the analytic language of its theological treatises.

The serious pragmatic problem which does face the group is two-fold. Will men be willing to pray though the love expressed be not required from above, and the reverence shown not heard and weighed in the balance of Divine decision?

And if men do come to pray, does it demand too great a mental dexterity from them to shift from the special language and symbolism of prayer to the sophistication and literal exactitude of theology? Is it too strenuous a task to "daven" "Thou" and think "It"?

Who will utter prayer knowing "it will prevent 'no misfortune'"? Once told it will "relieve some sorrow by expressing it," does not the entire act of devotion appear contrived, almost self-deceptive. Told that prayer "may cultivate hope and resignation",¹⁸ does the telling suffice and will not the worshiper halt in his prayer inhibited? Reconstructionism has these challenges to face. To be sure, the mounting pressures from ritual disuse and abandonment of prayer, has in recent years challenged the traditionalist as well. But his problem is more one of intellectual justification than pragmatics.

Reinterpreting Ritual

To the traditionalist, the community of worship is not only prior to the community of belief, but the two are ripped asunder as if each is of no consequence to the other. He has cultivated a

¹⁶ David Polish, "Current Trends in Jewish Theology," - CCAR Yearbook, Vol. LXIII, 1953, p. 419.

¹⁷ Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Prayer," R. A. Proceedings, Vol. XVII, 1953, p. 162.

¹⁸ All quotations are from Santayana's Reason in Religion.

begrudging theological liberalism: "Think as you please, as long as you keep the mitzvos intact!" And when rationale is required to be offered up to a recalcitrant people who have rejected the simplicity of the argument from authoritarian scripture and rabbinic judgment, theology is invoked as a handmaiden to ritual practice. Rationale is multiplied and even contradictory vindications for observance accepted – all to restore ritual status quo ante. The traditionalist appears blinded to the fact that change in rationale will invariably produce change in observance – if only in the degree, intensity, and manner of its performance.

Pragmatically, the neo-orthodox method proves abortive since either the change in rationale is unreflected in the mode of ritual behavior or the rationale lacks profundity in appreciating the radical change in religious orientation of the modern Jew.

Some of the most theologically neo-orthodox write nostalgic poetry about the choreography of ritual without ever feeling the pressure of the tefilin against the naked arm, the smell of "besamim", the glimpse of a havdolah candle, the taste of Kiddush wine, or the sound of zmiros. Talking about ritual has proven more inspiring and uplifting than the practice of ritual itself. Say much and do little.

The organic approach of Reconstructionism is distrustful of such ad hoc rationale, conjured up to exorcise the demons of Sabbath apathy or sporadic synagogue attendance. Such piecemeal "taka-noth," at best, postpone the issue, lulling the Jewish world into a false security that something is being done. Reconstructionism interprets the meaning of ritual disuse as symptomatic of more than mere lay lethargy or rabbinic indolence. It is seen as symptomatic of a deeper discontent with the irrelevance of the rationale and the unconvincing theology which mean to vindicate observance. Not that the layman seeks out convenience or is incapable of sacrifice, but that the inconvenience and sacrifice does not seem to him worthwhile.

Viewing the sinking forms of worship, traditionalism has caught upon the straw of "transvaluation". "Transvaluation consists in ascribing meanings to the traditional content of a religious or social heritage, which could neither have been contemplated nor implied by the authors of that content."¹⁹

Reconstructionist "re-valuation", as opposed to "transvaluation" seeks a genuine and complete re-appraisal of content and form not alone in the light of tradition, but by contemporary standards of truth, beauty, and the good. It means adopting in practice the practical implications of the position which acknowledge ritual sancta as "subject to the laws and limitations of the human mind and spirit".²⁰

One of the employed modes of "transvaluation" is the liberal use of metaphor and symbol in the treatment of religious ideology. Whether in Bible homiletics or explanation of practiced liturgy, resort is made to the mythification of theological doctrine. The theological issue of the resurrection of the dead, the God who "returns souls to dead corpses" is poeticized away into the ambidextrous "restoration of life to mortal creatures" or "called to everlasting life"; and the concept of "immortality" is confounded with the distinctive notion of "resurrection" through subtler translation. References to the restoration of Temple sacrifices on its ancient site are prayed for — but only as historical allusion, or punned with as meaning the sacrifice of work (i.e., avodah) or service of philanthropy. Liturgical pieces reciting the hope that the "shoot shall come forth from the House of Jesse," are chanted with vocal flourish by the Cantor, but left loosely interpreted. Is this "shoot" a personal Messiah, the symbol of a

¹⁹ M. M. Kaplan, *The Meaning of God*, The Jewish Reconstructionist Foundation, New York, 1947, p. 3.

²⁰ M. M. Kaplan, "Unity in Diversity in the Conservative Movement", *United Synagogue of America*, New York, 1947, p. 14.

messianic people, or the poetic expression of a messianic era to be gained through mankind's efforts?

The flexibility of symbol or poetry is apparently to be used as an instrument to dodge religious controversy. Prayer stands as a half-way house between poetic eloquence and dogma: the prayer flabby enough to substitute literary phrases for uncertain ideological conviction whenever the going is too rough. The slipperiness of symbolism applied to liturgical theology is panacea for the timid. For the sake of "continuity" of worship, the past is sanctified as eternal; for the sake of "change," only the verbalized rationale is altered. Moreover, in many cases, re-interpretation of ritual has become more compelling than the form and content of the ritual themselves. Ritual has become verbalized and, as a consequence, the re-interpretations have produced not more devoted practice of ritual but an inspirational metalanguage of rite and ceremony, transformed into a satisfying end-in-itself.

Reconstructionism's' own traditionalism is evident in its recognition of the indispensability of ritual for religious expression. To transmit a religious heritage without the peculiar ritual idiom of its people is as hopeless as the "attempt to speak without speaking any particular language" (Santayana). Abstract religious ideology needs the intimacy and warmth of everyday ritual enactment.

But neither orthodoxy's stringent ritual legalism, relevant in a different age and social climate, nor classic reform's ritual anti-nomianism could appreciate the natural piety of ritual. With the former, the charm of reverent devotion is lost behind the authoritarian imperative; and, with the latter, the ethical convictions of man stand strained beneath the directionless "intention of the good heart".

Reconstructionism has attempted a third alternative: the development of an autonomous, self-legislating standard of ritual behavior which in time will naturally converge into group patterns. No one questions the values of shared ritual experience, but no one should confuse the privacy of religious commitment with the method of civic jurisprudence. The personal involvement between man and God cannot tolerate ritual as law heteronomously administered. The decision to observe ultimately must come from within, without coercion. Religious voluntarism is an acknowledgment of fact. "There is no law and there is no Beth Din". Each community, each synagogue, must therefore after study and research with its spiritual advisers, adopt for itself minimum standards and guides for ritual and ethical behavior. The self-imposed discipline of social groups then becomes more natural and effective than the pronouncements of "issur and heter" from rabbinic bodies. The community must gain respect for itself before it can gain respect for law. Many forms of ritual practices will be transferred to the area of public sanction. In that sense "some minimum cessation from work on the Sabbath and Festivals, observance of the rite of circumcision, and the Jewish validation of marriage should constitute part of Jewish civil law".²¹

The critics have raised the cry of "hef-keruth". Yet anarchy does not exist because of the sanction of ritual experimentation, but is an inheritance of an unbending orthodoxy. There are, it cannot be denied, many who have exploited Reconstructionist liberalism as justification of their own ritual "hefke-ruth." But to condemn Reconstructionist ideology because of what some insincere do with it is no saner than the judgment of traditionalism solely on the merits of some of its congregants' behavior.

²¹ M. M. Kaplan, "Unity in Diversity in the Conservative Movement", op. cit., p. 16.

Rejected, in Reconstructionist thinking, is the indiscriminate adoration of the past. There is no reason for the apostate's rationalization that he cannot find enough in Judaism. For if he "fails to find that kind of stimulus in his Jewish affiliation, the only rational thing for him to do is to reconstruct the conditions of Jewish life with a view' to supplying the incentive that it lacks."²²

This sanction to change is not to be taken lightly. The shift from a set of beliefs inherited to an awareness of wants to be met encourages a religious activism which frustrates the worn excuse of those who contend that Judaism is a matter of "all or nothing at all" and thereby hopelessly static.

The temper of Reconstructionism calls for a large degree of self-reliance and demands a deep concern with Jewish living. The individual must call upon his inner religious and intellectual resources. His freedom unquestionably implies the kind of responsibility which is frightening. He is forever challenged by the Grand Inquisitor's cynical taunt, "Didst thou forget that man prefers peace and even death to freedom of choice in the knowledge of good and evil? Nothing is more seductive than his freedom of conscience, but nothing is a greater cause of his suffering."

III

Peoplehood and Community

In consonance with Reconstructionism's organic grasp of things, Judaism is not treated in isolation from the other civilizations with which it co-exists. In the case of the American Jew, Reconstructionist thinkers have been most candid in recognizing the ancillary character of Judaism to that of the dominant American civilization. Such frankness admits the pointlessness of maintaining an over-reaching aspirational level for the American Jew in utter conflict with the obstinate pressures placed upon a religio-cultural minority by the environment of an overwhelming majority. At best Judaism in America may flourish as "secondary to the general American civilization... an additional supplementary tradition."²³ The primacy of Jewish civilizational life in America, piously preached, is pretentious. The American Jew cannot go back to the autonomous ghetto, even if he so desired. He lives inescapably in two civilizations and one, the American, is patently and quite naturally dominant.

As Judaism cannot be analyzed in a vacuum, so Jewish peoplehood cannot be evaluated out of context. Thus, Kaplan's philosophic sense of organicity and his naturalistic disposition compels him to reject the traditionalist and reformist notion of Jewry as abnormally separate, sociologically inexplicable, a divinely chosen "trans-empirical pheno-menon".²⁴ Jews are not "totally others". The spiritual ghettoization of the Jew, conceived of as transcendently gifted with exclusive religious genius, is not only empirically questionable but of dubious psychologic value for Jewish morale. For it may well strain Jewish expectancy to the breaking point, producing ethnic guilt feelings when natural individual or group failings occur. "The nation of Priests" frequently leads a people to easy disillusionment. No matter how "chosenness" is twisted to appear as involving special obligations, at times incurring penalty, it retains the character of the favorite superior child who "should know better". The

²² M. M. Kaplan, *Judaism in Transition*, Behrman's, New York, 1941, p. 33.

²³ Milton Steinberg, *A Believing Jew*, Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1951, p. 97.

²⁴ Vid., Ludwig Lewisohn's "transcendent separateness" of the Jewish people and Herberg's "supernatural community." Lewisohn, *The American Jew*, Farrar, Strauss and Young, New York, 1950, p. 26. Will Herberg, *Judaism and Modern Man*, Farrar, Strauss and Young, New York, 1952, p. 271.

uniqueness of Jewish religious doctrine, perverted into the mysterious Divine election of a people, is naturally susceptible to an interpretation of "racial exclusiveness".²⁵

For the organicist, the pieces must all fit together. Within Jewish life itself, the fragments of Jewish experience, multiple and at times pulling in opposite directions, appear to fit together and resolve their apparent contradictions in an organic whole, the organic Jewish community. This unit will reflect organizationally the civilizational complex of Judaism. The parochial elements are to be transcended, overcome in the comprehensive view of Judaism as a religious civilization; and each isolated expression of Jewishness is to be embraced as an aspect of the whole.

This perspective recommends itself on pragmatic grounds' as well. Incontrovertible pluralism demands a widened criterion of Jewishness. Existent diversity of Jewish identification compels an appreciation of civilizational Judaism.

The aftermath of the emancipation witnessed a spectrum of Jewish marks of affiliation so extended as to break any narrowly restricting definition of a Jew. Unless a Jew is considered as one who considers himself as such, Jewry shrivels into a fossilized decadent remnant. Re-constructionism's minimalist definition, however, is no endorsement of normative minimalist Jewish behavior, but a refusal to concede a priori to the "yiush" of parochial definition.²⁶ The organic Jewish community must find place for every segment of the Jewish population. Kaplan feels that the synagogue regrettably has today lost the prestige and power to serve as the all-inclusive community. The factionalism of religious movements and the increased complexity of Jewish life has lost for the synagogue its unifying strength. No single synagogue movement can hope to meet the diversity of temperament and ideology within the body of Israel. While each group claims to be the sum of Judaism, each can be regarded only as its part. Neo-orthodoxy still fights an' obstinate rearguard battle, oblivious to the implications of the emancipation; reform falters yet between an etherealized notion of the "spiritual community" and a hesitant return to older nationalist traditions; conservatism, once promised as a movement in transition, is now frozen into middle road permanence; so long accustomed to lean on orthodox and reform crutches, it appears frightened to stand afloat on its own two feet.

Despite this analysis, Kaplan confides that "the incentive, the rationale, and the leadership necessary to make our functional and purposive organizations into an instrument of Jewish survival must all come from the Jews who are affiliated with the synagogue."²⁷ However, Kaplan's position with respect to the organic Jewish community abounds in practical problems:

(a) If the synagogue has lost its primacy, in what sense is American Jewry to be considered a religio-cultural group which should be "analogous 'to that of the Roman Catholic Church minus its authoritarianism".²⁸

(b) How is the synagogue to regain Kaplan's endorsed centrality, and Judaism "religious" civilizational character, if Kaplan's proposed organic community is to be democratically organized while the non-synagogue organizations clearly outnumber and outvote her?

²⁵ See, Karl Stern, *The Pillar of Fire*, Harcourt-Brace, 1951, N. Y., pp. 172-3.

²⁶ See Robert Gordis' critique of Reconstructionist minimalism in "Towards a Creative Jewish Community," R. A. Proceedings, 1949, p. 321.

²⁷ M. M. Kaplan, "A University of Judaism," United Synagogue of America, 1936, p. 7.

²⁸ M. M. Kaplan, *The suture of the American Jew*, op. cit., p. 121.

(c) The "synagogue center" is proposed by Kaplan, alongside his endorsed Jewish Community center. Are they not naturally turned into competitive agents? Is the community Center not compelled to become an organized body for the service of secular Jewry, serving only a segment of the population, thus foresaking its organic character; or is the "synagogue center" not encouraged to abandon its religious ideology for the sake of a more watered down catholicity?

None of these three questions can be lightly answered. One thing remains dear. Whether with or without the structure of an organic Jewish community, the synagogue must regain its centrality and primacy in Jewish life, and to that end answer the social, cultural, and recreational needs of the community along with its more narrowly defined religious needs. If it yet hopes to unite American Jewry, it must transform itself into a far more comprehensive institution and seek to embrace more than "the remnant."

IV

The Future of Reconstructionism

"A movement is endangered when it does not create a body: and a body is endangered when it ceases to grow".²⁹ Reconstructionism has suffered from indecision as to which of the alternative actions would least endanger the effectiveness of its philosophy and programme. A minority has toyed with the notion of establishing a separate movement, untied to mother institutions. This group deems naive the hopes of those who see a bodiless ideology sustained in organizational limbo.

The majority of Reconstructionist leaders, with Kaplan as their chiefest ally, point to the inherent contradiction of setting up a partisan movement without abandonment of Reconstructionism's critique of divisive denominationalism. Not only would Reconstructionism's proudly held trans-sectarianism prove a mockery, but its entire spirit of independent thinking may be suspended. Self-perpetuity is not the sole criterion of ideological success. Ideologies institutionalized, more often than not, degenerate into tawdry apologia and crush originality through institutional discipline. Movements are audience conscious, and popularization too frequently entails sterile compromise.

As long as Reconstructionism can function freely among the existent religious groups, it will in all likelihood never break away, to set up a separatist movement. As more and more of its concepts penetrate into traditional circles, and as time tempers the initial shock of its earlier presentation, the weaker will appear the arguments for its independent competitive existence.

However, Reconstructionism contains within itself other forms of indecision. For some of its leaders and followers, Reconstructionism is too timid, flirting carelessly with supernaturalist semantics like "cosmic urge" and "transnatural and superfactual" values. This group is disturbed by what it feels to be retreating concession to supernaturalist thinking. For example, the treatment by Kaplan of the democratic values of individual responsibility, the dignity of the individual, and equality of ideals gained "through sound intuition" from "some transcendent Source", and considered "super-empirical values" may be cited.³⁰

²⁹ Herbert W. Schneider, *Religion in the Twentieth Century*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, p. 22.

³⁰ See M. M. Kaplan's "The Place of Religion in Democracy" in the *Review of Religion*, p. 179, 181, January 1948, and his *Future of the American Jew*, *ibid*, p. 183.

Yet others seek to restrain the strong humanist tendency which in its violent reaction to neo-orthodoxy's exaggerated concern with man's "sinful pride" neglects, even on naturalist grounds, to deal fairly with the problem of man's self-glorification and idolatrous temptations.

In the religious world around it, Reconstructionism finds itself in a similarly awkward position. It is no easy stand to warn both against the "more than" of supernaturalism and the "nothing but" of reductive naturalism.

These internal problems pale somewhat in the face of Reconstructionism's concern with the generally loosened grip of theological liberalism over the thinking men in our contemporary society.

The return to the orthodoxies is general, and Reconstructionism shares the fate, of all religious liberalism. As such it may at best take comfort in the pendulum theory which points to the regularity of cyclical swings in religious inclinations. The flourishing liberalism of social gospel (1900-1920) held sway until displaced by the reaction of disillusionment and cynicism following the war (1920-35). The frustration and insecurity of new wars prolonged the Barthian brooding over man's sin. Perhaps the melancholy dirge of "crisis theology" is but one more instance of the "puffs of zeitgeist".

But Reconstructionism, if it is to remain a viable school of thought, cannot rest content with soporific theories of this ilk. It must recognize its incontrovertible appeal to the struggling "twice-born": those who had experienced orthodoxy and rejected it, together with all things Jewish; those who now feel the need to return but to a tradition nourished by a thoroughgoing intellectual modernity. The voyage home is however, uncharted. "In sum, those who look to Judaism in its present state to provide them with a ready-made scheme of salvation in this world, or in the next, are bound to be disappointed. The Jew will have to save Judaism before Judaism will be in a position to save the Jew. The Jew is so circumstanced now that the only way he can achieve salvation is by replenishing the 'wells of salvation' which have run dry. He must rediscover, reinterpret and reconstruct the civilization of his people."³¹

³¹ M. M. Kaplan, *Judaism As a Civilization*, MacMillan Co., New York, 1914, pp. 521-22.