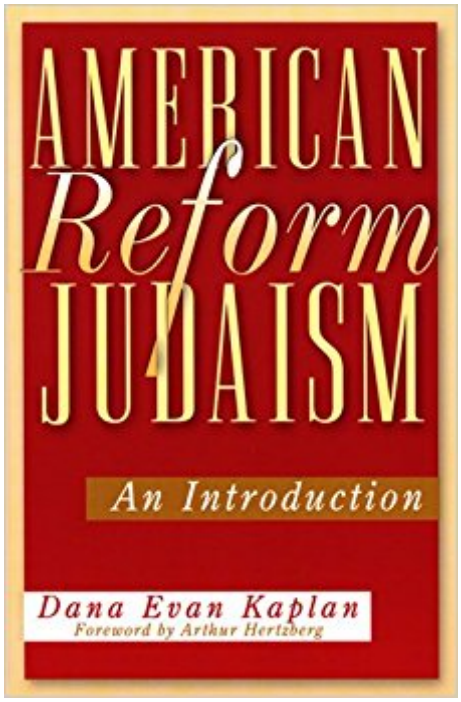
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American Reform Judaism: An Introduction



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Synopsis

The only comprehensive and up-to-date look at Reform Judaism, this book analyzes the forces currently challenging the Reform movement, now the largest Jewish denomination in the United States.To distinguish itself from Orthodox and Conservative Judaism, the Reform movement tries to be an egalitarian, open, and innovative version of the faith true to the spirit of the tradition but nonetheless fully compatible with modern secular life. Promoting itself in this way, Reform Judaism has been tremendously successful in recruiting a variety of peopleÃ¢â ¬â •intermarried families, feminists, gays and lesbians, and interracial families among othersÃ¢â ¬â •who resist more traditional forms of worship.As an unintended result of this success, the movement now struggles with an identity crisis brought on by its liberal theology, which teaches that each Jew is free to practice Judaism more or less as he or she pleases. In the absence of the authority that comes from a theology based on a commanding, all-powerful God, can Reform Judaism continue to thrive? Can it be broadly inclusive and still be uniquely and authentically Jewish?Taking this question as his point of departure, Dana Evan Kaplan provides a broad overview of the American Reform movement and its history, theology, and politics.Ã Â He then takes a hard look at the challenges the movement faces as it attempts to reinvent itself in the new millennium.Ã Â In so doing, Kaplan gives the reader a sense of where Reform Judaism has come from, where it stands on the major issues, and where it may be going.Addressing the issues that have confronted the movementÃ¢â ¬â •including the ordination of women, acceptance of homosexuality, the problem of assimilation, the question of rabbinic officiation at intermarriages, the struggle for acceptance in Israel, and Jewish education and othersÃ¢â ¬â •Kaplan sheds light on the connection between Reform ideology and cultural realities. He unflinchingly, yet optimistically, assesses the movementÃ¢â ¬â„¢s future and cautions that stormy weather may be ahead.Ã Â Ã Â

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Customer Reviews

A rabbi and a scholar, Kaplan combines his impressive background with diligent research and strong opinions to produce this lively account of Reform Judaism. Starting with history, he traces the roots of this denomination in Germany, but his emphasis is clearly on its development and current status in America. Kaplan examines the theology of Reform Judaism, stressing the do-it-yourself attitude that originally rejected Jewish tradition in favor of serving the needs of contemporary Jews. This approach, known as Classical Reform, has recently given way to increasingly successful efforts to restore traditional beliefs and practices. However, conflicts have arisen, not only with advocates of Classical Reform, but also with the liberal positions held by some leaders of the Reform movement. The latter have embraced ordination of women, acceptance of gays and lesbians and a degree of proselytizing, especially among the non-Jewish spouses in inter-marriages. According to Kaplan, these departures from Reform tradition contradict the simultaneous return to tradition, arguing that "Reform is moving in two directions at the same time." He concludes that "the Reform movement... is going to have to develop a coherent, effective strategy for reconciling autonomy and authority." While Kaplan’s presentation focuses on Reform Judaism, his astute reasoning has value for all religious groups that struggle with maintaining their established beliefs in the face of the demands and challenges posed by modernity. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Kaplan’s three stated goals are to provide a general introduction to the American Reform movement, describe the social and religious forces that impact Reform Judaism, and argue that Reform Judaism’s liberal theology makes it difficult to create the type of committed religious community that can perpetuate that commitment from generation to generation. Beginning with an overview of the Reform movement from its origins in nineteenth-century Europe to today, then outlining its basic beliefs and practices, Kaplan traces the evolution of Reform theology and describes the Reform revolution of the 1990s, the changes in synagogue services, and the struggle for recognition in the State of Israel. Kaplan also chronicles the challenges in Reform Jewish education, the efforts to deal with the problem of intermarriage, the struggle for women’s equality, the acceptance of gays and lesbians, and the battle over the movement’s future. An expansive

examination of the religion. George CohenCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

An informative introduction to the American Reform Movement in Judaism. I really enjoyed reading about the history of Reform in America and how they have come back to performing more rituals while still maintaining a firm social justice stance.

This is another thorough and passionate volume by Rabbi Dana Kaplan. Read this and understand the challenges--and promises--of Judaism this century.

I knew Rabbi Kaplan while we were teenage co-counselors at Camp Laurelwood in North Madison, CT many years ago. He was coming to grips with his Judaism at that point, reading books like "The Source," and I enjoyed debates/discussions on a range of topics related to religon and Judaica. Honestly, I initially read the book to be polite, but ended up enjoying it far more than most books I choose on my own. Dana’s book is written in an easy-to-read style, with lots of interesting stories. It focuses on how the Reform movement shifted over the past 20 years or so to try to become more dynamic. Part of the analysis is based on the sociological works of Rodney Stark, a researcher from the University of Washington who specializes in the sociology of religion. Stark has argued that religious groups that are too flexible do not do well. You have to have a fairly high contrast with the general society in order to attract people to your religious group. In the book, Rabbi Kaplan suggests that there is something to the argument that the Reform movement should become a bit stricter. Not too strict, but a little bit stricter. In order to do that, we need a more coherent theology. Not everyone agrees with him -- Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the presidentt of the Union for Reform Judaism, argues in the afterword that it’s more important to get people doing Jewish things and the theology will come later.The book covers all of the hot button issues of the last 15 years -- women’s rights, gay marriage, intermarriage, the fight over the 1999 Pittsburgh platform, and so forth.It is not a how-to manual. It focuses on what Reform Judaism believes in and how the movement has gone about implementing its beliefs. It does not go point by point and say Reform Jews do this, Reform Jews do not do that, etc.It has gotten a fair amount of attention in scholarly and Jewish worlds. I understand that a few years ago, Judaism journal ran a whole symposium on the book. They had an Orthodox, Conservative, a Reform, a humanist, a Jewish renewal, and so forth each talk about the book. It was a very interesting symposium, which you can download on Rabbi Kaplan’s webpage.The book had special meaning for me in another way. As I sense is the case with many

reformed Jews, I am at a transition of sorts on my religion. Do I believe in G-d? Is Judaism dissipating into nothingness due to assimilation into the greater society? Is it better to be more flexible/open or less? Dana's book moved my thinking along.Overall, I thoroughly enjoyed the book, happy I took "the road less traveled" in reading it.

Rabbi, professor and multi-published author Dana Evan Kaplan has taken on the feat of describing the myriad of facets that shape Reform Judaism in America, including its relatively short history, distinct and indistinct theology, worship evolution, Israeli endeavors, educational philosophies, mixed marriage outlooks, efforts to facilitate women's equality, acceptance of gays and lesbians, and future directions and issues. This well-crafted fabric of points is sewn together with the thread that Reform Judaism in America is inherently in a constant state of flux. What is more, he does all this in little more than 250 pages. Dana Kaplan's American Reform Judaism is very thought-provoking and, therefore, well worth reading.

described in the editorial reviews, which means it is a pretty good read for someone who is not very knowledgeable but is probably less useful for readers more familiar with Reform.One thing that I liked: Kaplan's willingness to note that some of the Reform movement's current problems are identical to those that Reform rabbis were complaining about as early as the 1880s; evidently, there is something about liberal religion that leads to a large but apathetic membership.One thing that I wish Kaplan had put in: more primary source material - perhaps in the form of an appendix with the text of the Reform platforms, etc. that Kaplan writes about.

Rabbi Kaplan has written a very interesting, thoughtful sociological overview of post-World War II American Judaism.He has interwoven an analysis of well-known historical figures with Jews of the specific time periods, creating a very realistic and thought-provoking account of American Judaism.I would highly reccommend this book!

This book provides a readable and comprehensive overview of Reform Judaism's origins, development, and challenges. The Reform movement has changed a lot in the past few decades. For someone trying to understand those changes, this is an outstanding place to start.

Dana Kaplan has written a phenomenal and unique book that opens up the world of American Reform Judaism. This book is the only one of its kind, and is great resource for Reform Jews and

those who might be converting to and interested in learning about Judaism. We are all in debt to Professor Kaplan.

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