

A Peaceful Vision of the State of Israel in the Statements of Jewish Reconstructionists

**Pokojowa wizja państwa Izrael w wypowiedziach
żydowskich rekonstrukcjonistów**

Waldemar Szczerbiński

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, Poland

szczer@amu.edu.pl

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2946-7352>

Abstract: The article presents both the postulates of the founder of Jewish Reconstructionism, Mordecai M. Kaplan, and the statements of contemporary Jewish Reconstructionists in relation to “Eretz Yisrael” in the context of the current war in the Holy Land. The aim of the article is to present Kaplan’s vision of peace and to find answers to the following questions: “How was it possible, and how is it possible, to build and maintain a Jewish state in peaceful conditions? What is the attitude of Reconstructionists toward the ongoing war? What initiatives are undertaken by Reconstructionists to restore and maintain peace in the Holy Land?” The analytical method allowed us to trace Kaplan’s work and to distinguish his main theses in the context of the discussed topic. The use of the comparative method, on the other hand, made it possible to notice the similarities and differences between Kaplan and contemporary Jewish Reconstructionists. The basic conclusion can be expressed as follows: without the egalitarianism (national, cultural, and religious) proposed by Reconstructionists, it is impossible to maintain peace in the Holy Land.

Keywords: war; peace; Israel; Jews; Judaism; reconstructionism; Mordecai M. Kaplan

Abstrakt: Artykuł przedstawia zarówno postulaty Mordecaia M. Kaplana – założyciela rekonstrukcjonizmu żydowskiego, jak i wypowiedzi współczesnych rekonstrukcjonistów żydowskich w odniesieniu do „Erec Yisrael”, w kontekście obecnej wojny na terenie Ziemi Świętej. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie pokojowej wizji Kaplana oraz odnalezienie odpowiedzi na pytania: jak było i jest możliwe zbudowanie oraz funkcjonowanie żydowskiego państwa w warunkach pokojowych?; jaki jest stosunek rekonstrukcjonistów do trwającej

wojny?; jakie inicjatywy są podejmowane przez rekonstrukcjonistów, aby przywrócić i utrzymać pokój w Ziemi Świętej? Metoda analityczna pozwoliła prześledzić twórczość Kaplana i wyodrębnić jego główne tezy w kontekście omawianego tematu. Zastosowanie natomiast metody porównawczej umożliwiło dostrzeżenie podobieństw i różnic między Kaplanem, a współczesnymi rekonstrukcjonistami żydowskimi. Podstawowy wniosek można wyrazić w następujący sposób: bez proponowanego przez rekonstrukcjonistów egalitaryzmu (narodowego, kulturowego, religijnego) niemożliwe jest utrzymanie pokoju w Ziemi Świętej.

Słowa kluczowe: wojna; pokój; Izrael; Żydzi; judaizm; rekonstrukcjonizm; Mordecai M. Kaplan

Introduction

There is a belief, rightly or wrongly, that American Jews have a huge influence on what is happening in Israel. Among them are both Zionists and anti-Zionists, as well as secular and religious individuals. They differ in many ways. However, all of them have some attitude towards the Jewish state, its creation, functioning and the ongoing war. Among them we find Jewish Reconstructionists, who see themselves as yet another branch of Judaism. It is not only Judaism in America, but it can be called American Judaism. Unlike other religious groups (Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative) that arose in Europe, Reconstructionist Judaism emerged and is developing most dynamically in the United States. And in this sense we can say that it is American Judaism. Those who, on the one hand, were unable to come to terms with the vision of the reformers, and on the other hand, with the unyielding attitude of the neo-Orthodox, turned to this denomination. There are even voices that Reconstructionism is the only proposal that has a chance to reconcile modern Jewish culture with the contemporary Jewish religion and Jewish secularism with the religious heritage of past generations.

The creator of this trend is Mordecai M. Kaplan,¹ who is considered one of the most important contemporary Jewish thinkers. It was he, guided by pragmatism, functionalism and naturalism, who reconstructed traditional Judaism. The primary goal of Kaplan and his followers was to make Judaism a living reality acceptable to the modern Jew. This desire was accompanied by the conviction that traditional Judaism was dying out and was unable to meet the challenges of today. To understand any of Kaplan's statements, one must always remember the assumptions on which Reconstructionism is based.²

¹ On Kaplan's life and work, see more broadly: Encyclopedia Judaica 1971, 751–753; Scult 1991, 3–13; Hertzberg 1981, XIX–XXXV; Eisenstein 1963, 253–279.

² For an extensive presentation of Jewish Reconstructionism see: Encyclopedia Judaica 1971, 1615–1617; Kaplan, 1967; Kaplan 1981; Alpert and Staub 2000; Schulweis 1988, 755–759; Eisen 1998, 216–241; Szczerbiński 2007.

It is the youngest and most controversial trend in Judaism. As the founder of Reconstructionism, Kaplan was convinced that Jews coming out of isolation must reconcile the achievements of science with their own heritage. Hence the necessity to compare what the Jew knows with what he believes. Kaplan never rejected tradition, much less religion. He only wanted to reconstruct it. As he wrote: "Not timelessness, but appropriateness in time is a desideratum. Religion is necessarily rooted in the soil of tradition, but its life depends on its ability to sprout new plants in the light of our own day" (Kaplan 1962, 39).

The founder of Reconstructionism devoted much energy and time to redefining and interpreting Judaism as a growing religious civilization. Kaplan argues that "the future of Judaism demands that all teaching and practical activity be based on the assumption that the Jewish religion exists for the Jewish people, and not the Jewish people for the Jewish religion" (Kaplan 1981, XIV). This thesis – in the opinion of Kaplan himself – is a Copernican revolution in the understanding of Judaism. Judaism is therefore to be understood as a developing civilization, as an expression of the life that the Jews have lived and still live. Religion is only one of the elements of this life, the specificity of this civilization, but not its cause. Reconstructionism firmly rejects both the mythological and metaphysical types of religion. Myth is based on superstition and supernaturalism, while metaphysics focuses on theories and abstract reality. Instead, Kaplan proposes a scientific religion, a religious humanism of sorts, that is not interested in "providing a metaphysical conception of God, but in explaining what we mean by belief in God" (Kaplan 1958, 26).

The revolutionary character of the reconstruction approach lies not in the use of naturalism, but in the humanistic interpretation of personal salvation. The search for divinity in this world entails the discovery of what is divine in oneself, and what leads to the fullness of humanity. The goal of religion became man, not God. Anthropocentrism expressed in this way treats divinity instrumentally, as a tool to achieve salvation, i.e. self-fulfillment here and now. Concern for salvation comes down to achieving the fullness of humanity.

Kaplan was guided by the ambitious and noble goal of saving Judaism for future generations. He believed that the Jewish religion was an essential element of Jewish civilization, but not in its current form. He postulated its reconstruction, not liquidation. Paradoxically, however, defending it from annihilation and total secularization, he desacralized Judaism.

In contemporary theological thought, there is a constant discourse between the supporters of exclusivism and religious inclusivism. Jewish supporters of inclusivism, among whom we include the Reconstructionists, build their theology on the basis of egalitarianism, which proclaims the inherent equality of all people and recognizes the principle of equality as the basis for resolving all theological problems. In the Jewish environment, such a problem is the idea of

the Chosen People, because the chosen people are at odds with the universally accepted equality of every man, every nation, every religion. This principle also applies to the State of Israel, where everyone should be treated equally, regardless of racial, gender, political, cultural and religious differences. Such an approach has a huge impact on the understanding of the idea of peace and on the postulated conditions of peace.

Kaplan understood in his own way the “highest goal” of human existence. That goal is to help create a community that will nurture individuals motivated by what he called the sense of active moral responsibility. “For us Jews”, he wrote, “there can be no higher purpose than to reflect the art of living, individually and collectively, so as to contribute to the intellectual, moral, and spiritual progress of mankind. The type of religion which we Jews as a people and humanity as a whole desperately need as a means of survival must take such a form as to enable moral responsibility in action” (Kaplan 1964, 294). In Kaplan’s view, this kind of religion would help humanity free itself from the three illusions that threaten it in modern times: the illusion of collectivism, the illusion of inflexible individualism, the illusion of the immutability of human nature (Goldsmith 1990, 22).

Reconstructionists always emphasize that the sense of moral responsibility of the individual is insufficient. If humanity is to survive, the entire group (in this case, all Jews) should submit their lives to conscience and shape them in accordance with moral responsibility. Kaplan added that the Jewish religion is “the only religion of mankind, which, from its very inception, has been based on the on-going history of a people in its relation to mankind” (Kaplan 1964, 310). For this reason, the Jews, who have always strived to become instruments for the development of better people and a better world, must now re-read this goal and express it concretely. “The Jewish people are obliged to spread such faith in God as can stimulate man to create a social order based on freedom, peace and love [...]. The purpose of Jewish existence is to form the people in the image of God. The meaning of Jewish existence is to fuel in ourselves the sense of being Jews and to awaken in the rest of the world a sense of moral responsibility in action” (Kaplan 1964, 313, 318). Such a goal and such a meaning are to motivate Jews to rebuild the Jewish community, to reinterpret Judaism, to creatively develop religious traditions, to reconstruct the historical way of Jewish life.

Kaplan as a supporter of Zionism

As early as 1934, even before the establishment of the modern Jewish state, Kaplan published his foundational work, *Judaism as a Civilization*. It was in this book that he explained the need for the creation (restoration) of the State of Israel, where Jewish civilization could fully develop. It is here that the founder

of Reconstructionism makes himself known as a supporter of Zionism, based on the idea of peace. The Zionism proclaimed by Kaplan can be called moderate or conjugal, the opposite of which is alternative Zionism. Why? First, he disagreed with those who claimed that the only place for Jewish civilization to develop was Palestine, and therefore all Jews should return to the place where this civilization was born. On the contrary, he believed that the existence of the diaspora was still necessary and justified. Second, he did not accept the position that Palestine should belong only to Jews. He was convinced that there was also a place for non-Jews in this land, especially for those who had already settled it.

Kaplan's starting point was his unshakable conviction that the land of Israel is a constitutive element of Jewish identity. Judaism, he argued, has always considered Israel's existence and destiny in terms of a collective existence tied to a particular land. Nothing in traditional Judaism suggests that Israel should function in the world as a landless nation. Kaplan believes that any idea that the Jews should be transformed into a religious organization that would completely bypass Palestine from its calculations must ultimately lead to a complete break with the Jewish past. "Whatever the religious philosophy or program of action of such an organization may be, it would not be Judaism" (Kaplan 1981, 264).

According to the founder of Reconstructionism, "a nation is a group of people united by a collective sentiment of particular intensity, intimacy and dignity, associated with a particular homeland" (Kaplan 1981, 264). The Jewish people have always been very aware of their connection to the land in which they developed their national life. He did not accept this relationship by accident, like most nations. Kaplan reminds us that, unlike other ancient peoples, the Jews never considered themselves an indigenous people. They always remembered that they had come to a particular country from another place and that it was only in that particular country that they began to function as a nation. If we were to review the books of the Bible, says Kaplan, we would constantly encounter a tendency to define Israel's trials and apostasies, its failures and hopes, in terms of its relationship to the land. "The Torah, which embodies the teachings of earlier prophets and enjoys precedence among the sacred scriptures of the Jewish people, must be considered the most significant in the shaping of Judaism. Since the Torah makes Israel's relationship with the land its primary motive, it is difficult to see how Jews could consider themselves functioning as a group separate from the land" (Kaplan 1981, 267).

According to Kaplan, nothing has changed in rabbinic Judaism in this regard. The rabbis clung to the national prerogatives of land, language, and group autonomy with such unwavering tenacity that any conception of a denationalized Israel becomes a deliberate undermining and rejection of the past. After the destruction of the Second Temple, Palestinian rabbis even tried to ban emigration from Palestine. The priest explains that they went so far as to state "that

only he who dwells in the Land of Israel can be considered to have God; and he who lives elsewhere is as if he had no God" (Kaplan 1981, 269).

The expulsion of the Jews from their land and their dispersion is explained by Kaplan as follows. God scattered Israel among other nations so that they might be given the opportunity to become proselytes. In Kaplan's view, this means that the temporary suspension of Israel's life as a nation in its own land can only be explained by the assumption that God wanted others besides Israel to enjoy the benefits of salvation. But, he continues, "once this is achieved, Israel would resume its national life on its land" (Kaplan 1981, 269).

In the opinion of the founder of Reconstructionism, a colossal mistake was made during the exile, which has its repercussions to this day. The Jewish leaders themselves deliberately renounced all Jewish claims to their own land and recognized that Judaism could flourish without it. Meanwhile, as Kaplan insists, their position was based on the fictitious assumption that Judaism was only a religion, and not a civilization in which religion is only one of its elements. Kaplan has no doubt that this is one of the grave mistakes in Jewish history. "This error needs to be fixed. The Jews need to explain their position to themselves and to the world. They cannot consider themselves liberated until they are granted the opportunity to nurture and develop their historical civilization. This means that for Jews, no progressive collective life is possible anywhere without the establishment of a national home in Palestine" (Kaplan 1981, 273).

If Judaism continues to be vital and creative, it should reclaim the only medium that is necessary and appropriate for any civilization – its own land. The conclusion for Kaplan is obvious. "Palestine is the only land that can provide such an environment for Jewish civilization" (Kaplan 1981, 273). This does not mean, however, that there is no place for the Jews outside Palestine, and that the sense of life in the Diaspora has been exhausted. Those who live in the Diaspora live in two civilizations at the same time and need a reality where Jewish civilization is of primary importance and naturally residing in the place where it was born. Kaplan states emphatically: "Judaism is unlikely to survive, either as a secondary civilization or as a primary civilization, unless it develops as a primary civilization in Palestine. It is clear that Palestine can only accommodate a limited number of Jews. However, a sufficiently large Jewish community must be able to lead a full, normal and creative life there. By enriching the cultural and spiritual content of Judaism, Jews in the Diaspora will feel like members of a minority that has a motivation, an idea, and a purpose" (Kaplan 1981, 273–274). In outlining the possibilities of modern Jews who live in two civilizations, Kaplan was aware that Jewish civilization can only develop fully in a society in which it is of primary importance. He was convinced that the Zionist efforts to restore the Jewish presence in the land of Israel were crucial to the Jewish future (Alpert and Staub 2000).

Kaplan, however, differed from cultural Zionism in one important respect. While he agreed with Ahad Ha'am that Israeli culture would be the center of Jewish revival, he believed that Jewish communities in the Diaspora should influence and also be influenced by this center. Therefore, he rejected the views of political Zionists who denied life in the Diaspora (shelilit hagolah). He argued that Israel was not the only place where Judaism could thrive.

As we can see, Kaplan's question was not whether the Jewish state should be created – this is obvious to him – but how it should be created and how it should function. He was aware that people from other cultures and religions lived on this land, for whom Palestine became home. Therefore, he advocated the idea of the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews in one land, realizing that only in this way would it be possible to maintain peace. This is confirmed by his words: "In entering into a covenant with the Jewish people, the nations were not ignorant of the existence of a Gentile population in Palestine, nor did they disregard their legitimate claims and interests. In the first promise made in the Balfour Declaration, these claims and interests were carefully secured; and the mandate for Palestine contained extensive provisions against any possible violation of the rights of the non-Jewish population" (Kaplan 1981, 277).

Interestingly, Kaplan was convinced that the establishment of a Jewish state would be good not only for the Jews themselves, but also for all others living in the land and for the world in general. The Judaism he proposes, the development of Jewish civilization in Israel and in the Diaspora, are not so much to serve the Jews, but are to contribute to the development of humanity. "If Judaism succeeds in spreading its wings in the country of its origin and developing into a modern civilization, it will certainly enrich the life of humanity with new social and religious values. By re-demonstrating the reality and power of spiritual values, the sovereignty of righteousness – as the revelation of divinity in man – and the method by which nationality can exalt human individuality, Judaism will contribute to the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. Then the Jew will have both the right and the means to stand before the world as the possessor of a noble mission" (Kaplan 1981, 279). The realization of this mission will become impossible without concern for peace in the world, especially in the Holy Land.

An idea of peace in the thought of M. Kaplan

Kaplan identifies peace with equality, which in turn is an example of absolute justice. Peace as a divine attribute means "long-lasting" and "forgiveness of sin". This attribute contains the sum of all the virtues and the unity of human nature. The Messiah is called the "Prince of Peace". For the Reconstructionist, who treats God and the Messiah impersonally, this means that peace is the

culmination and expression of the self-cultivation of both the human individual and humanity as a whole. When the priest says that peace is “the face of God” and that the consequences of peace are as it were the “other side” of God, he is referring to God as the sum total of all the aspirations and desires of human nature and the nature of the world. He develops this thought in the following way: “Peace is the divine attribute of perfection and the lofty ideal of human ethics. That God «makes peace» means that peace combined with truth is the supreme goal of human life. He develops this thought in the following way: Peace is the divine attribute of perfection and the lofty ideal of human ethics. That God «makes peace» means that peace combined with truth is the supreme goal of human life. Contrary to Heraclitus’ teaching that war is the source of everything, the Jewish religion presents peace as their source and goal. God represents the harmonization of ethics and nature” (Kaplan 1964, 248).

Although the pursuit of peace, the concern for peace takes place on several levels, it begins with inner peace, which is the result of ordered love. It is “through peace that love is liberated and directed to the noblest task of man, which is self-improvement, which is inner peace. Inner peace is the satisfaction that comes from the awareness of divine providence” (Kaplan 1964, 249). Kaplan reminds us that many of the Jewish Sages, who were mere artisans or odd workers, as well as our people as a whole, even in the most hopeless periods of their history, found contentment and peace in the study of the Torah. Their inner peace did not depend on material security, but on the soothing of the mind. It was rooted in an awareness of the historical significance of Judaism to humanity. Kaplan emphasizes that “neither piety nor observance of the laws could keep alive the effort that gave rise to this inner peace” (Kaplan 1964, 249).

Messianism and peace are correlated, with messianism being the bond that unites the present humanity with the humanity of an ideal future. Achieving peace, first in ourselves and then in the external world, creates an inner unity that enables us to experience the unity of God. In Kaplan’s view, “inner peace restrains our wild passions, but it does not hinder our noble feelings. To achieve such peace, we must learn to distinguish between emotions that have the power to integrate and those that lead to disintegration” (Kaplan 1964, 249).

The founder of reconstructionism notes that psychology and ethics have not yet dealt with the question of whether hatred is a primal disposition or an abnormal transformation of some other impulse. What is certain for him, however, is that the religious teachings on virtue are aimed at combating hatred. There is no other way. The pursuit of peace leads to the elimination of hatred. Kaplan admits that many religious precepts forbid hatred. In his opinion, “this is not enough, however. We need to know how to overcome hatred. This answer is given in the Talmudic term: «baseless hatred». This should be interpreted to mean that hatred as such is unfounded, that the very fact that one man hates another is irrational.

Hatred is an illusion based on ignorance and misunderstanding" (Kaplan 1964, 249). For his own inner peace, man needs the certainty that not only individual hatred, but also national hatred will be eliminated from civilized consciousness. As we read: "Greed and envy are real, but hatred is an illusion. We should not rely on «historical wisdom» which claims that hatred is an innate human impulse and part of the cosmic order. Bacteria fight for existence, but they don't hate each other like humans do. It is important not only to emphasize the need for peace, but also to unmask the insane image of hatred" (Kaplan 1964, 250).

Extremely important for our reflections is the thesis of Kaplan that "pessimism is a mystical doctrine opposed to reason and faith in God" (Kaplan 1964, 251). In his opinion, monotheism and messianism are expressed in optimism, in faith in the possibility of peace. The belief in the pursuit of peace as the meaning of history is an indisputable religious duty for every reconstructionist. Kaplan points to two inner signs of peace: sympathy and joy. He justifies this as follows. "Since sympathy is only a form of sensitivity, religion uses it as an instrument of peace and love for one's neighbor. This love, in its purest form, is reflected in the human face and brings tears, just like sadness. Sympathy acts as a correction of harsh justice. This is implied in the saying, «Judge each one according to the scale of merit». The pursuit of peace evokes compassion that is higher than justice. In personal relationships, the pursuit of peace is the basis of mutual reconciliation between people and reconciliation with oneself. The second sign of peace is joy... Empathizing with the experience of a noble deed proves the power and authenticity of peace. Man's longing for good leads to peace" (Kaplan 1964, 251).

Kaplan has no doubt that of all the virtues, the pursuit of peace comes to the fore. Peace is the goal of human life, to which all other goals are secondary. In his reflection on peace, he even says that peace "is the spirit of holiness. He is the Messiah" (Kaplan 1964, 251). Kaplan repeatedly reminds us that the Jewish religion excludes hatred and revenge. The Jew's unwavering faith in a better future for humanity gave him inner peace. "Messianism is and always will remain the foundation of Jewish consciousness" (Kaplan 1964, 251). In light of Kaplan's statements above, it seems that waging war to achieve some short-term goals is unacceptable and morally reprehensible. Peace is always the overriding goal.

The attitude of contemporary Jewish Reconstructionists to the current war in Israel

It is worth asking ourselves whether and to what extent contemporary reconstructionists implement Kaplan's message? Is their idea of a Jewish state based on egalitarianism and peace a continuation of Kaplan's views? Identification

with this movement is possible on two levels. Firstly, being a reconstructionist today can be evidenced by the very fact of belonging to a community and participation in reconstructionist organizations. Second, it is necessary to adapt the way of thinking to that of the founder of Reconstructionism, Mordechai Kaplan. Kaplan's early followers were primarily interested in an intellectual approach to Jewish life. Today, the Reconstructionist environment is dominated by spirituality, which focuses primarily on the personal relationship of each person with God.

Kaplan was a supporter of the evolutionary nature of Jewish civilization. He assumed that Judaism would change and new meanings would arise in each generation. Reconstructionism is therefore based on the acceptance of constant change. Kaplan also provided the means by which these changes (reconstructions) can be made, which he called "reevaluation". Transvaluation was Kaplan's term meaning to give new meanings to Jewish concepts and practices that were inherently not meaningful or attractive to a given generation. However, he was also of the opinion that some of these concepts were no longer ethical or feasible. Such ideas, like the idea of election, cannot be over-evaluated and must be rejected altogether. It follows that even the views of Kaplan himself can and should evolve, including those of Zionism and peace. This is the starting point for contemporary reconstructionists.

Rebecca Alpert explains how and why the Reconstructionist stance has changed with regard to Jewish life in the birthplace of Judaism (*Reconstructionism without Zionism* 2024). In the early twentieth century, Zionism was not very popular among American Jews, but it was Kaplan who was one of those American Jewish thinkers who embraced the idea of a national home in Palestine relatively early. Kaplan saw the creation of Jewish settlements in Palestine as an opportunity to revive Jewish culture, language, literature and art. This process, he believed, was to revive Jewish civilization. He saw the creation of a homeland in Palestine as part of his larger project – to reconceptualize nationalism as an ethical community. Kaplan's ultimate dream was to recreate a supranational Jewish people that would be a model of a different kind of world: one based not on territorially sovereign or ethnically sovereign states, but on a diverse society based on ethics and the coexistence of multiple cultures.

Unlike Herzl and his followers, Kaplan's Zionism did not focus on gathering Jews to protect them from persecution, but on part of his plan to revive Jewish civilization. Kaplan strongly disagreed with the concept of political Zionists sh'lilit ha-galut (the negation of the diaspora) and the idea that all Jews should live together in a single ethno-national territory based on ethno-cultural uniformity. Kaplan proposed the creation of a new model of ethical statehood that would be based on supranational reciprocity. He was not interested in a sovereign Jewish nation that was like other nations, but he believed that the new concept of

nationality would transform the sovereign nations of the world and make American democracy effective for all its citizens through this example of stateless nationality exemplified by the Jewish people. He also took care that the Jewish home in Palestine was a place where the claims and interests of the non-Jewish population were guaranteed and carefully protected. The founder of Reconstructionism was convinced that the vision he outlined was a guarantee of a peaceful uprising and peaceful survival of the new phenomenon on the territory of Palestine.

It is clear that Kaplan's Zionism became irrelevant and obsolete after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. It was Zionism in opposition to Zionism, which was based on the model of statehood. Kaplan's later writings made it clear that in his vision, the establishment of a state was not the goal of Zionism, but only the first step in promoting a transnational people, which was its ultimate goal. As Rabbi David Teutsch noted, "The Israel of our reality is often in shocking tension with the Zionism of our dreams" (Teutsch 1998, 50).

But in Reconstructionist circles, as in the wider Jewish community, Kaplan's dream of a worldwide Jewish nationality outside the established state was abandoned. Today's Zionism is just a slogan for what Israel's founders proclaimed: support for a sovereign state. Rebecca Alpert's reflection is as follows: "But in Reconstructionist circles, as in the wider Jewish community, Kaplan's dream of worldwide Jewish nationhood beyond the established state has been put aside. Zionism today is only a code word for what Israel's founders proclaimed it to be: support for the sovereign state. As Reconstructionists we must accept this reality as part of our belief that concepts and words evolve based on the needs and values of contemporary Jews. But the process of evolving also demands that we analyze whether this definition of Zionism meets our highest values. Does this transvaluing work, or must we reject the term?" (*Reconstructionism without Zionism* 2024).

Rabbi Deborah Waxman, president of Reconstructing Judaism, stated: „My vision for the Reconstructionist movement includes committing and recommitting to communicating across differences with respect and humility, and with recognition that relationship is a path to holiness".³ Many Jewish Reconstructionists belong to the "Peace Bloc", which is made up of many local, regional, and national groups seeking to express support for Israel's security, concern for civilian lives in Gaza, and the re-emergence of two states in the future to end the war. For modern reconstructives, as for Kaplan before him, the pursuit of peace is the overriding goal. Their care and compassion extend equally to both Israelis and Palestinians. Hence the following words: "We also know that no true justice and accountability can take place during a war where so many

³ Waxman said these words in the context of encouraging people to participate in the march for Israel, as part of the so-called "Block for Peace" (Waxman 2023).

innocent civilians are caught in the crossfire. Therefore, in order to protect the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians, we call for an immediate stop to the killing and for immediate release of all hostages [...]. Reconstructing Judaism is a Zionist movement that supports a two-state solution, as well as safety and justice for Israelis and Palestinians. The organization champions dialogue and nuance and opens a wide tent to a range of perspectives" (Waxman 2023).

Jewish Reconstructionism is not a monolith. It brings together both Zionists, non-Zionists and even anti-Zionists. The ongoing war intensified discussions and polemics in the Jewish community. In the Reconstructionist circle, many Jews feel confused and lost. They are looking for their own version of Zionism, which would be a guarantee of peace. A perfect example of this kind of confusion is the following confession: "Today I believe that to uphold Reconstructionist values I must stand, as a Jew, in solidarity with Palestinians and work with Jewish Voice for Peace to support non-violent Palestinian tactics of Boycott, Divestment and Sanction that, we hope, will persuade Israel to end the occupation. In the current climate in the Jewish world that makes me an anti-Zionist. But in my mind, it makes me, finally, a Zionist who is working for the Zion that Kaplan envisioned" (*Reconstructionism without Zionism* 2024).

To sum up, the Zionism proposed by Kaplan was inextricably linked with the idea of peace. Palestine, he believed, was to be home both to the Jews who had once been expelled from the land and to the non-Jews who had lived in the land for centuries. He rejected all theological, philosophical and political views that questioned anthropological and sociological egalitarianism. Political Zionism has shattered Kaplan's dreams and has been the cause of constant strife and the present war. Modern reconstructionists generally accept the current reality (the existence of a Jewish state), but at the same time they are looking for a solution that would end disputes and war. Some return to the idea of one multinational, multicultural and multi-religious state, in which every man could preserve and develop his identity in the sense of freedom and justice. Others postulate the creation of two states from scratch: Palestine and Israel, which will coexist in peaceful conditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alpert, Rebecca T. and Jacob J. Staub. 2000. *Exploring Judaism. A Rekonstructionist Approach*, Elkins Park: The Reconstructionist Press.

Eisen, Arnold M. 1998. *Rethinking Modern Judaism*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

Eisenstein, Ira. 1963. "Mordecai M. Kaplan." In: *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Simon Noveck, 253–279. Clinton: The B'nai B'rith Department of Adult Jewish Education.

Goldsmith, Emanuel S. 1990. "Kaplan and the Retrieval of the Haskalah." In: *The American Judaism of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, edited by Emanuel S. Goldsmith, Mel Scult and Robert M. Seltzer, 19–34. New York – London 1990: New York University Press.

Hertzberg, Arthur. 1981. "Introduction to the 1981 Edition." In: *Judaism as a Civilization*, edited by Mordecai M. Kaplan, XIX-XXXV. Philadelphia – New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America Reconstructionist Press.

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1981. *Judaism as a Civilization. Toward a Reconstruction of American-Jewish Life*. Philadelphia – New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America Reconstructionist Press.

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1958. *Judaism without Supernaturalism*, New York: Reconstructionist Press.

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1962. *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, New York: Wayne State University Press.

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1964. *Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence*, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication of America.

Kaplan, Mordecai M. 1967. *The Future of the American Jew*, New York: Reconstructionist Press.

„Kaplan Mordecai”. 1971. In: *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 10, 751–753. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House LTD.

Reconstructionism without Zionism: A Guest Post by Rabbi Rebecca Alpert. Accessed: 14.10.2024. <https://rabbibrant.com/2017/01/18/reconstructionism-without-zionism-a-guest-post-by-rabbi-rebecca-alpert/>

„Reconstructionism”. 1971. In: *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 13, 1615–1617. Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House LTD.

Schulweis, Harold M. 1988. "Reconstructionism." In: *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, edited by Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, 755–759. New York: Scribner.

Scult, Mel. 1991. "Mordecai M. Kaplan: His Life." In: *Dynamic Judaism. The Essential Writings of Mordecai M. Kaplan*, edited by Emanuel S. Goldsmith and Mel Scult, 3–13 New York: Fordham University Press and The Reconstructionist Press.

Szczerbiński, Waldemar. 2007. *Postulat nie-osobowego Boga. Rekonstrukcjonizm wyzwaniem dla teizmu żydowskiego*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.

Teutsch, David. 1988. „Israel and the Diaspora: A Reconstructionist Reconsideration of Zionism.” The Reconstructionist” 2: 48–54.

Waxman, Dov. 2023. *Talking About Israel During Wartime? Here's One Reconstructionist Model*. Accessed: 07.12.2023. <https://www.reconstructingjudaism.org/news/talking-about-israel-during-wartime-heres-one-reconstructionist-model/>.

WALDEMAR SZCZERBIŃSKI – Ph.D., Professor at UAM, member of the Senate of Adam Mickiewicz University, employed at the Department of Philosophy and Dialogue at the Faculty of Theology of the Adam Mickiewicz University. He deals with Jewish theology and philosophy. Main research interests: attitudes of Jews towards other nations, cultures and religions, transformation of Judaism and the problem of Jewish identity in modern times, Catholic-Judaic and Polish-Jewish dialogue.