

The Two Kaplans

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1. Kaplan The Philosopher

All that one needs to know about God is how His existence validates the yearning for salvation and conveys a sense of its being rooted in the ground of reality.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 85

Just as the magnetic needle is the source of our knowledge of the earth's magnetism, so is man's salvational behavior the source of our knowledge about God . . . (this requires) no blind leap into the dark.

- Questions Jews Ask: Reconstructionist Answers, 1956, pages 80, 88

We must reckon with a trans-natural spiritual agent, a Creative Power.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 74

If in our hearts we were totally unlike [the ideal moral vision we project for ourselves], we should not even regard it as an ideal. This is the image of God in us . . . (this will enable us to) experience the reality of God as the Power that saves us from sin.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 105

The spiritual insights of men are not fortuitous, but are clues to the ultimate nature of mankind and the world, a manifestation or revelation of a universal Spirit of which the human soul is a part.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 538

Thinking of God as a process rather than an entity in no way tends to make Him less real...the soul-process too is superfactual, superexperiential and transnatural.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 183

Jewish religion maintains the eventual triumph of justice over brute force as the very essence of faith in God.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 43

The world is not characterless, it acts with a uniformity that gives meaning to its existence . . . The salvation for which man strives is to live in rapport with that meaning.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 461

Transnaturalism is that extension of naturalism which takes into account much that mechanistic or materialistic or positivistic science is incapable of dealing with.

Transnaturalism reaches out into the domain where mind, personality, purpose, ideals, values and meanings dwell.

- Judaism without Supernaturalism, 1958, page 10

Life is not aimless and futile, not a mere play of blind and meaningless forces, but the manifestation of spiritual purpose, the unfolding of a plan for human cooperation and brotherhood.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 538

The quality of *bitahon*, of confidence in God, of willingness to commit oneself to Him, whatever the vicissitudes of life may have in store . . . is largely the product of the ability to see in nature the evidence of all-pervading friendliness to man.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 64

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2. Kaplan the Spiritual Pragmatist

God, if not assumed, is the most impossible of conclusions.

- Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, 1937, page 27

There is nothing in logic to prove that there must necessarily exist the means of fulfilling human needs.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 260

To find life in the present worth living, men must have faith in the future. The ultimate in human tragedy is not suffering or even death, but hopelessness. This is the true meaning of damnation . . . It is the function of religion to save men from this hell.

- Basic Values in Jewish Religion, 1957, page 23

Men have attained to a profound and satisfying faith in God through experience rather than through reason.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 260

God must not be merely held as an idea; He must be felt as a presence.

- Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, 1937

It is the business of religion not to give a metaphysical conception of God but to make clear what we mean by the belief in God . . . the difference that belief makes in human conduct.

- Judaism without Supernaturalism, 1958, page 27

The God idea is not the reasoned allocation of chaos, cruelty, pain and death in some neat logical scheme. It is the passionate refusal of every atom in the human being to be terrified by these ogres.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 330

God as the Power that makes for salvation is not intended to be a "rational" explanation of what we mean by "God." It is meant to be a rational method of indicating where to look for that . . . incomprehensible mystery we name God.

- Diary, April 28, 1956

Without the actual awareness of His presence, experienced as beatitude and inner illumination, we are likely to be content with the humanistic interpretation of life. . . Without the conviction, born of the heart rather than the mind, that the world contains all that is necessary for human salvation, the assumptions necessary for ethical living remain cold hypotheses lacking all dynamic power. . . The dynamic of ethical action is the spirit of worship, the feeling that we are in God and God is in us. . . It is only this emotional reaction to life that can make humanity itself mean more to us than a “disease of the agglutinated dust.”

- Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion, 1937

The power to 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.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 317

The highest aim of each human life is to seek God . . . If any experience . . . of our inner life is thought (to be) the Divine Presence . . . it must lead . . . to the exercise of justice and love. If it fails to do that, we merely delude ourselves in believing that it is God we are aware of.

- Diary, Feb 11, 1914

Philosophers (have) a boundless intellectual appetite. Religionists have always been satisfied with the modest fare of faith.

- Future of the American Jew, 1948, page 243

The advantage of utilizing traditional concepts is that they carry with them the accumulated momentum and emotional drive of man’s previous efforts to attain greater spiritual power.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 386

Reevaluation of spiritual values is the conservation of spiritual energy.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 388

A people does not offer itself to an individual as an instrument of salvation in the same way as a system of philosophy usually does, by appealing to his reason to accept certain general principles or abstract truths. It always comes to him with a story about itself which he is made to feel is in a deeper and truer sense his story than the experiences which are confined to his person.

- Judaism as a Civilization, 1934, page 519

Diary Entries, Mel Scult, Communings of the Spirit: The Journals of Mordecai M. Kaplan 1913-1934 (with gratitude to Mel Scult for additional diary entries)