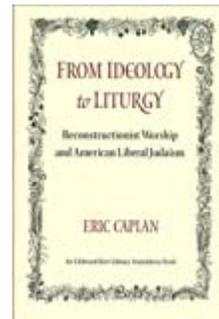


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Eric Caplan. *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism.* Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2002. 413 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87820-450-2.



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If one wants to obtain a clear insight into where the religious convictions of each of the more liberal denominational groupings in American or European Judaism lie, certainly a readily available resource is its prayerbook. Since the beginnings of prayerbook reform in the nineteenth century, theological views receive their most practical and visible expression in liturgical form. With his *From Ideology to Liturgy: Reconstructionist Worship and American Liberal Judaism*, Professor Eric Caplan, Director of the Jewish Teacher Training Program at McGill University, Montreal, helps towards disclosing where Reconstructionism has been in the past and is currently through a close examination of its worship. The volume traces the evolution of the Reconstructionist liturgy from its beginnings in the founder Mordecai M. Kaplan's religious thought and its expression in the movement's first-stage Sabbath, High Holy Day, Festival, and Daily prayerbooks, through its prolific second-stage *Kol Haneshamah* series of the 1990s. Much time is spent on comparing the various Reconstructionist prayer texts with those of contemporary Reform, Conservative, and Jewish Renewal branches of Judaism. Among the book's strong points are the many valuable documented personal interviews with the creators of the Reconstructionist rite, yielding eye-opening perspectives. Students of current-day Jewish liturgy and editors of prayerbooks-in-the-making without doubt stand to gain from reading this book.

Despite the book's title and the fact the author places the primary focus on the Reconstructionist liturgy—and, secondarily, on the rites of the other streams, or branches, of American Judaism—the author can't be classified, in the strictest sense, either a liturgiologist or a trained theologian. *From Ideology to Liturgy's* chief value lies, rather, in its description of the inner workings of a creative process and a sociology of a religion.

A scholar in Jewish liturgy has to have, however, more than a nodding acquaintance with how the ancient Rabbis defined its parameters and its contents. S/he would need to be at home with the earlier recensions of the *Siddur*, the multiplicity of medieval poetic expansions, the mystical spinoffs, and the untold numbers of regional and local *minhagim* (of which the Sephardic and the Ashkenazic are just two), let alone the numerous latter-day adaptations. S/he would be no less conversant, for starters, in the critical works of Leopold Zunz, Ismar Elbogen, Daniel Goldschmidt, Joseph Heinemann, Jakob J. Petuchowski, Lawrence Hoffman, and Stefan Reif. It goes without saying, mastery of the Hebrew language is a *sine qua non*. These are, after all, among the basic tools of liturgiology as an academic discipline.

One of the author's primary methods here was to compare the Reconstructionist liturgical efforts from the *Sabbath Prayer Book* (1945) to the *Kol Haneshamah* se-

ries (1989-99) with contemporaneous prayerbooks of the non-Orthodox religious expressions of American Judaism, without, however, ever really contextualizing them within the overall historical, theological, and textual evolution of the prayerbook. The result is the work's certain uni-dimensional quality and a regrettable pervasive lack of precision and the cropping up of many factual errors.

Let me itemize examples of imprecise language and outright mistakes that bedevil this volume, so that (1) they aren't repeated and thus perpetuated with disastrous long-term consequences, and (2) we might underscore those portions that are indeed creditable and even useful.

* A newcomer or the occasional attendee at Jewish worship is apt to be discomfited by the different types of *Kaddish* recited/chanted in the course of a service. The Conservative *Siddur Sim Shalom* (1989 and 1998) offers a guide to the perplexed in its introduction and explains, with admirable simplicity and brevity, the differences. Hence, to say, as Caplan does, that the Rabbis' *Kaddish* (*Qaddish de-Rabbanan*) is chanted after the *Birkhot Ha-Shahar* (p. 82) is not very helpful, especially since, according to the traditional norm, it is expressly recited only after perusing or studying passages from the *Mishnah*, *Gemara*, and/or *Midrash*. Nor it is correct to assert that the Full *Qaddish* is said before the *Shaharit 'Amidah* when no *Kaddish*, of any kind, is then customarily called for.

* Caplan more than once alludes to the "frequent repetition" (pp. 78-79, 109) of the phrase "spread over the tabernacle of peace" in the traditional *hashkivenu* prayer, as if it were a vexation, without realizing the Talmudic principle behind it: *me'eyn chatimah samukh la-chatimah*, viz, the summary of a blessing, appears in its penultimate sentence and is forthwith paraphrased in its closing benedictory formula (*chatimah*) (e.g., "May all Israel, sanctifying Your Name, rest thereon [the Sabbath]. Blessed are You, O Eternal, who sanctifies the Sabbath"). The classical *hashkivenu*, both in its Ashkenazic and Sephardic wordings, is simply adhering to the rules.

* The explanation for the removal of the Hebrew word for Satan in the *hashkivenu* prayer (p. 239) is muddled. The *Sephardim* (and the *Hasidim* too) leave out the term—along with the "enemy, plague, sword, famine and anguish"—only on Sabbath and *yom tov*, so as to be stress- and worry-free, as it were, on the day of rest. Otherwise Satan is back in.

* Similar carelessness insinuates itself in a heedless remark (p. 213) about the reinstatement of "the traditional text of *Hashkivenu* for Friday nights" in *Kol Haneshamah*. On the contrary, the prayerbook editors removed the regulation Ashkenazic one to make way for the pacificatory—hence, entirely Shabbat-friendly—Sephardic version! In point of fact, contrary to Caplan's mistaken generalization (p. 307), the American Reform *Gates of Prayer*—and *Gates of Repentance*, for that matter—is not without strong evidence of Sephardic influence, as the *hashkivenu*, again, in Service IV is none other than the Sephardic one, two decades before *Kol Haneshamah* appeared on the scene.

* It would have been well-advised for the author to take a saturation course in Sephardic worship and spend some time, additionally, with the latter-day followers of the Ba'al Shem Tov. He would have in no time learned that Shlomo Carlebach's musical rendition of *ve-ha'er 'eyneynu* (p. 239) is based only indirectly on the Sephardic version, via the Lurianic-based Hasidic prayerbook, which at the core is a conflation of the Ashkenazic and Sephardic rites—indeed, a "union prayerbook"!

* The incidental remarks (p. 206) about the Sephardic *tal* and *geshem* in *Kol Haneshamah* just aren't so! What appears in the 1994 Sabbath and Festival Reconstructionist prayerbook constitutes only a small portion of the rather elaborate (and gorgeous) *tiqqun tal* (*geshem*) in the Sephardic ritual, which is not all a matter of "metaphor" in its petition for dew/rain. Incidentally, Mordecai M. Kaplan was not responsible for the composition of the fine naturalistic payyetic replacements in the 1958 *Festival Prayer Book*. The writer of many of early Reconstructionism's English prayers, Eugene Kohn, wrote the pleasing English verse; and the *Genizah*-scholar and librarian Joseph Marcus furnished the highly allusive Hebrew paraphrase in the style of a *piyyut*, which can be said to be even lovelier than the English!

* Caplan would also have discovered, meanwhile, that the predilection of premier-liturgist-of-Reconstructionism Mordecai M. Kaplan for *sim shalom* as the last *'Amidah* benediction for all services stems from Sephardic procedure in this regard.

* Parenthetically, it might be noted that the remarks regarding the textual readjustment of the *sim shalom* prayer (p. 197) are inaccurate and misleading. It is true that the older generation of Reconstructionist prayerbooks appropriated the emendation from Isaac M. Wise's *Minhag Amerika* (1857 edition). In adding the word *ba-olam* to the beginning of prayer, as did the Conserva-

tives, *Kol Haneshamah* was not borrowing from them alone. It still kept the inclusive Wisean formula, however misspelled (leaving out the *dagesh* where necessary), for the ending (*le-varekh et 'amekha* [sic!] *yisrael ve-et kol ha-amim* [sic!] *be-rov 'oz ve-shalom. Barukh ... 'oseh ha-shalom*). The *chatimah* (the benedictory conclusion) here is not “as in [the current Conservative] *Siddur Sim Shalom*” (p. 198).

* It is good to see that the transliteration of the Hebrew in Latin characters adheres to the scholarly standard. A check with the Hebrew text would have shown, however, that neither Rosh Hashannah nor Hannukah (p. 249) has a *dagesh* in the *nun*. On the other hand, *tikanta* (p. 62) does have one in its *kaf*, as does *ribon ha-olamim* (p. 70) in its *bet*, *pitum* [*ha-qetoret*] (p. 116) in its *tet* and *ve-lo netato* in its second *tav*. The weekday poetical insert *el barukh gadol de'ah* (pp. 75, 76, 204) suffers from a mispronunciation: *gadol* should be *gedol*, because, grammatically, the adjective is a construct.

* Improper terminology turns up from time to time. The name for the special *'Amidah* addition on the afternoon of *Tish' ah be-Av*, between Benedictions XIV and XV, is not *menahem tsiyon* (p. 333), but *nachem*. It closes with *barukh ... menachem tsiyyon u-voneh yerushalayim*.

* To declare the inclusion of Psalms 95-99, 92, and 93, and *lekhah dodi* Friday evenings, as being “in conformity with rabbinic custom” (p. 299) will undoubtedly startle those long under the impression that this section (*Qabalat Shabbat*) emanated from the intentional Lurianic community in sixteenth-century *Tsefat* rather than having been shaped during the days of the Talmudic Sages!

* Another illustration of terminological obfuscation are the remarks made on page 313. *Barukh eloheynu she-bera'anu* [and not *she-bara'nu*] *li-khevodo* by no means comes under the classification of a *piyyut*! It is part and parcel of the *Qedushah de-Sidra*, historically linked with Torah study and exposition.

It is dismally clear that a knowledge in the nineteenth-century precedents for the textual changes in the Reform and Reconstructionist manuals of worship is lacking. I will mention only a few, so as not to burden the reader.

* The practice of replacing the Orthodox scriptural lesson for Yom Kippur morning (Leviticus 18, dealing with the laws of consanguinity) with the pronouncedly ethical chapter 19 (“Holy shall you be...”) goes all the way back to the overwhelming majority of the nineteenth-

century German and American Liberal High Holy Day prayerbooks, a practice that continues up to the present day in Progressive *machzorim*.

* Supplanting the traditional closing verse of the *'al ha-nissim* prayer in the *'Amidah* for Purim, “and they hanged him [Haman] and his sons upon the gallows” (Esther 9:25), with a non-malevolent “And the Jews had light and joy, gladness and honor” (ibid., 8:16) (p. 208) was not, it must be pointed out, first thought of by the Reconstructionists. For his *Seder Avodah* (1951) left-leaning Conservative Rabbi Max D. Klein was relying on his European antecedents, such as the Liberal *Gebetbuch fuer die neue Synagoge* in Berlin (1927) and an extraordinary collaborative effort, the famed and meteoric *Einheitsgebetbuch* (1929), in opting for the buoyant Esther 8:16 passage.

* The ever-troublesome-for-Liberals Benediction XII in the daily *'Amidah* is referred to most cursorily (p. 211). There is an evident scant awareness of how much discussion the benediction—a malediction, really, against heretics, apostates, and traitors—provoked in the nineteenth century and of how sundrily (and rather creatively) it has been handled in the European and American non-Orthodox siddurim. Jakob J. Petuchowski provided an invaluable listing of the modern *variae lectiones* of the adapted *vela-malshinim* prayer in his out-of-print and still-irreplaceable *European Prayerbook Reform* (1968), pages 223-225.

* Another gap in historical knowledge (p. 75 and elsewhere) is shown as regards the inclusion/omission of the *Qedushah de-Yotser* in the first of the benedictions in the *Shema* complex. As Ismar Elbogen tells us, this *qedushah* is a product of the *Merkavah* mystics from the Gaonic period. So too are the alphabetic acrostics *el adon 'al kol ha-ma'asim* and *barukh gedol de'ah* Caplan speaks of. It could well be that Mordecai M. Kaplan retained these passages not only for their lyrical appeal but also for the familiar rhythms of the traditional *nusach*. When these passages were dislodged from the 1951 Reconstructionist *Festival Prayer Book*, one might entertain the speculation that the editors by then were better informed as to their origin in a later, post-Talmudic age—ergo, dispensable. No doubt their dismissal was prompted by considerations of length and duration of a yom tov service. It is of more than passing interest that the official American Reform liturgy, basing itself originally on David Einhorn's *Olath Tamid* (1858)—itself harking back to Leopold Zunz's stratification and periodization of the benediction—has always used the putative pre-Gaonic reading of the benediction, similar to the 1951 Reconstructionist *Festival Prayer*

Book's (as well as the 1963 *Daily Prayer Book's*). Furthermore, as Elbogen spells it out, the penultimate insert in the same benediction, "O cause a new light to shine upon Zion" (p. 113) with its unmistakable eschatological overtones, was subject to diverse rulings from the days of the *Geonim* through the height of the Middle Ages.

* To flatly call the distinguished 1946 Conservative *Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book* the "Silverman prayerbook" (p. 325 and elsewhere) is both imprecise and unfair. It was prepared by a joint commission of the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue "on the basis of a manuscript submitted by Rabbi Morris Silverman, Editor of the Commission." An earlier model for this *sid-dur* was, as a matter of fact, Silverman's own *Sabbath and Festival Services* (1938). In the 1946 rite, the learned introduction, a fair number of the readings and prayers (in Hebrew and in English), and two of the supplementary notes were penned by Robert Gordis. It is true, as the index of sources attests, a goodly number of the materials were either composed or translated by Silverman. It is no less true that others too made their creditable contributions, like Louis Ginzberg, Simon Greenberg, Abraham J. Heschel, Jacob Kohn, Israel H. Levinthal, Nina Salaman, Solomon Schechter, and Israel Zangwill. It is therefore only meet and right to refer to this excellent and elegant 1946 rite by its proper full name: *The Sabbath and Festival Prayer Book*.

* Contrary to what Caplan says on page 301, *The Union Prayer Book* has always proudly borne the Hebrew designation on its title page: *Seder Tefillot Yisrael*.

* Moreover, the claim (p. 107) that Reform Judaism liturgically rejects outright the notion of divine revelation must be seriously qualified. Every edition of the standard American Reform prayerbook, bearing the imprint of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, from *The Union Prayer Book* to *The Gates of Prayer*, has without exception embraced the texts of *ahavah rabbah* and *ahavat 'olam* before the *Shema*, proof positive that, however divergently it may interpret Revelation and Torah, the Reform movement does see them as inescapable components of Jewish religious conviction. Incidentally, until 1940, all editions of *The Union Prayer Book* contained ve-

zot ha-torah promptly after the scroll was taken out of the ark, a usage recalling the Sephardic custom (by way of the pioneering 1819 Hamburg Temple Prayerbook) of elevating the Torah before the reading. The 1940 substitution, "Let us declare the greatness of our God and render honor unto the Torah" and "Praised be He who in His holiness has given the Torah unto Israel," certainly do not, it must be admitted, as such imply a wholesale rejection of a concept of Revelation.

As it is admittedly disheartening and wearisome to be continually pointing out errors of the types listed above, I will stop at this point and move for a very brief moment to the theological front.

* The lively discussion "Should God be addressed" (pp. 275-278) demonstrates, as an example, a singular lack of theological awareness or sophistication on the part of either the discussants or the reporter. It amazes one that not once in this context is Martin Buber mentioned or considered, he who devoted a lifetime to teaching us about the different ways of knowing relationally, as in the "I-thou" and "I-it" contexts and in their manifold ramifications. Undeniably well-intentioned as the discussants are, they are missing the boat in talking about God in the third person, oblivious of access to God as "the Eternal Thou." As a reader of contemporary Jewish theology, Caplan should have taken note of this fact.

What of value can be found then in Caplan's volume? First, the use of the interview, in person, by telephone, and by e-mail, does lend revealing insight into the thinking of those responsible for creation of the Reconstructionist prayerbook from the 1940s through the 1960s and of the cutting-edge *Kol Haneshamah* series from the 1990s. It is an approach which does partake of the journalistic and the anecdotal, but combined with responsible, diligent scholarship, it has the potential of proving a very valuable tool. Even more illuminating is Caplan's unmatched detailed description of the interface and cross-fertilization between the Reconstructionism of today and the Jewish Renewal movement (pp. 346-366) which clearly bears watching, both for the future development of Judaism in North America and for the new liturgies that will assuredly emerge.

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