

Year of Reconstructionism

Israel Texts

11-21-21

The first issue of The Reconstructionist contains an extensive statement of purpose by the full editorial board, including Mordecai Kaplan, that deals with Zionism:

We consider the establishment of Palestine indispensable to the life of Judaism in the diaspora. We seek to enable Jewish civilization so to root itself in the soil of Palestine as to make of that land the cultural center for Israel's intellectual and spiritual rebirth. We oppose any attempt to render Palestine the object of imperialist aims or the victim of private profit-seeking. We endorse every effort to reward the establishment of a cooperative commonwealth in Palestine based upon social justice and social cooperation.[\[4\]](#)

Unlike many Zionists, Reconstructionists did not see the goal of Zionism as creating a Jewish nation to which everyone would move. Reconstructionists have always seen the Diaspora Jewish communities in general, and the one in the United States in particular, as playing a vital role in Jewish life. In the words of influential educator and editorial board member Samuel Dinin in The Reconstructionist:

We must drive home the realization to Jews the world over that Palestine and the Diaspora are joint partners in a common endeavor. One without the other, one to the exclusion of the other, one at the expense of the other, will lead to the demoralization of both. What we are trying to do is not to establish one kind of life in the Diaspora and another in Palestine. We are trying to establish a new type of Jewish life for Palestine and the Diaspora. The richness and the vitality of this new life will depend upon the extent to which both are interdependent, and sustain each other. Just as much as Palestine is the affair and the creation of the Diaspora, so Palestine must realize that the Diaspora is its affair too.[\[5\]](#)

THE ARAB POPULATION

From the outset of Aliya to Palestine, the question of how to relate to the Arab population that was already there was central. The Reconstructionist commitment was to buying land and settling on it, not taking any land by force. Reconstructionist leaders argued that the Jewish nationalism of the halutzim (pioneers) could provide a model to the downtrodden Arab population dominated by an Arab upper class for developing an Arab nationalism that would help the downtrodden come into their own, and that the two nationalisms could co-exist.

We must make the Arab masses understand that the political ambitions of Arab nationalism can be realized in the vast territories in the east where the bulk of Arabs reside, but that in Palestine, Arab nationalism, like Jewish nationalism, must be so adapted as to make possible the peaceful cooperation of two national groups.[\[8\]](#)

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The Reconstructionist, 15.7, May 13, 1949.

Jewish nationalism and the existence of a Jewish state are not ends in themselves. The full meaning of Zionism is to be found in the assertion of values and the revitalization of the Jewish people.

The State of Israel does not coincide with the Jewish People, neither is it co-extensive with the whole of Jewry. We Jews have to maintain our historic position that a state is not the supreme form of human association. Only those who are actively united for the furtherance of universal freedom, justice and peace, whether they be few or many, constitute the supreme form of human association.

In 1988 the RRA plenum passed a resolution that is indicative of this direction:

The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association expresses its support for those elements in the Israeli population and government which believe that direct negotiations with the representatives of the Palestinian people are imperative if the conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, and the Arab states is to be resolved peacefully and justly. We believe that participation in a peace process such as has been suggested by the United States during Secretary of State Shultz's recent trip to the Middle East is less of a threat to Israel than the continued control of the territories and of the over one million Palestinians therein.

We recognize that Israel has the ultimate responsibility to make decisions regarding her security. Yet we express our conviction that Israel's security is ultimately dependent on the achievement of a negotiated resolution rather than on perpetual control of the territories. We further believe that the unique partnership between Israel and the North American Jewish community mandates that we share our concerns with Israel, and that we do so out of love and respect for Israel as the Jewish homeland.

In 2000, the JRF responded to the Second Intifada in this way:

At this time, we reaffirm the JRF Resolution on Israel, which states, in part: "We call for a just and lasting peace that will protect Israel's right to a secure existence and that will also fulfill the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. Such a peace will require Palestinian leaders and heads of Arab governments at long last to acknowledge Israel as a permanent state in the region and to renounce all violence directed against the Jewish homeland." We therefore urge the Palestinian leadership to halt the violence and return to the negotiating table. We also urge Israel to address the legitimate social and economic grievances of its Arab citizens, as well as to pursue negotiations and an end to the cycle of violence with the Palestinian people.