

By GILA WERTHEIMER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

TODAY, WE LIVE IN A SOCIETY that tolerates difference, advocates pluralism, refrains from judging others, promotes personal achievement, admires individualism and questions authority.

All are positive aspects of our lives and of the freedom we cherish. We would likely be hard pressed to choose to give up even one of these attributes.

But can there be too much of a good thing? Sometimes, yes — and a new book argues that this is a challenge presently being faced by Reform Judaism.

The New Reform Judaism: Challenges and Reflections by Rabbi DANA EVAN KAPLAN (Jewish Publication Society/University of Nebraska Press, 367 pp., \$39.95) posits that the widely embracing pluralism that is a hallmark of the denomination is what makes it difficult to create a Reform theology.

Thus fundamental questions become particularly problematic to answer:

- What is Reform Judaism?
- What do Reform Jews believe?
- How do Reform Jews act?

Limitless flexibility, coupled with an individual's freedom to choose what and how much to observe, can hinder the development of a coherent set of principles and beliefs to

guide an adherent of the movement.

As Rabbi Kaplan notes:

"The very mention of the words 'requirement' and 'obligatory' send many Reform Jews screaming to the hills."

No religious requirements or obligations often serve as a kind of default definition of Reform Judaism.

Rabbi Kaplan's own Jewish background is a decidedly mixed bag, running a gamut from Reform to Orthodox and back to Reform.

His parents, who affiliated with Reform temples, sent him and his sister to a modern Orthodox day school in Manhattan.

He is a graduate of the Orthodox Yeshiva University, with rabbinic ordination from the Reform He-

brew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and a PhD in history from Tel Aviv University.

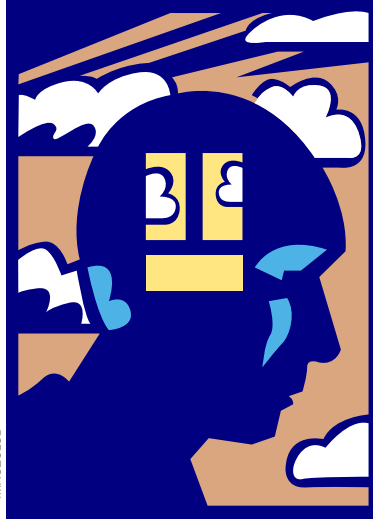
Rabbi Kaplan, 53, has been rabbi of United Congregation of Israelites in Kingston, Jamaica, since 2011. He has written extensively on American Judaism and Reform Judaism.

TAKING IT as an unstated guiding principle, Rabbi Kaplan assumes that in order to know where one is headed one needs to know where one has been. So with each theme or issue he addresses, he describes the background and development of the Reform movement.

The result for a reader is a valuable understanding of the beginnings of the movement in Germany some 200 years ago, how and why it changed, its transition to America and its evolution to our own day.

The "most radical decision [of the early Reformers] was to reject the binding nature of Jewish law ... none of the beliefs or practices would be obliga-

tory," writes Rabbi Kaplan. It is a decision that has



remained at the heart of the Reform movement,

A challenge to Reform Judaism

even as the approach to ritual and observance has fluctuated.

The development of the

American Reform movement began around the mid-19th century, with German-Jewish immigration to this country. Institutions were developed, religious positions set out, differences were aired.

With regularity, the pendulum swung to the left, to the right, back towards the center as the movement defined and re-defined itself.

It also became involved in political and social issues, positions that were accelerated during two world wars.

After World War II, the Reform movement grew rapidly. In 1940 there were 265 Reform congregations; in 1955, there were 520. Social justice came to be a defining element during the 1950s and '60s and beyond, as expansion of the movement continued — 791 congregations, encompassing some 1.3 million members, in 1978.

But numbers did not tell the full story.

The movement itself was foundering, and prominent leaders such as Rabbi ALEXANDER SCHINDLER and Rabbi ALFRED GOTTSCHALK introduced changes that

further broke with tradition, including patrilineal descent and the rabbinic ordination of women.

So the movement has continued its reforming beginnings, continually seeking to find a balance between theology and practice, spirituality and belief, ethics and action, all within the framework of Judaism, a system that, according to Reform, is itself changing. It's a tall order.

In *The New Reform Judaism*, Rabbi Kaplan looks the challenges to the Reform movement today squarely in the eye, and presents his analysis and his suggestions. They will likely not be acceptable to many Reform Jews, but what he offers is a bold, exciting way forward that at the same time, presents its own challenges to the movement.

His conclusions may inspire a renewed dedication to the movement:

"While finding room for these many perspectives, Reform Judaism should focus on what the nineteenth-century reformers called ethical monotheism, the idea that there is one and only one God, and that God demands ethical behavior..."

"Can we make our faith both emotionally intense and intellectually honest at the same time? That is the central challenge for

PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 8



BOOK MARKS

ANOTHER SIDE OF THE NEWS



By DANIEL PIPES
MIDDLE EAST FORUM

EXACTLY ONE CENTURY AGO, the renowned British writer G. K. CHESTERTON (1874-1936) — called by his admirers the greatest writer and thinker of the 20th Century — published a curious novel titled *The Flying Inn*.

On the cusp of World War I, he imagined the Ottoman Empire conquering Great Britain and imposing Shari'a law.

Chesterton rides this implausible scenario as a vehicle to ridicule progressivism — that same arrogant, "scientific," top-down, and leftist approach to government that characterizes the Age of Obama.

While Conservatives did not escape his criticism, in *The Flying Inn* it was progressives whose failings Chesterton mordantly exposed ("The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes," he later wrote).

Along the way, Chesterton's vision of an Islamized sceptered isle has arresting features deserving celebration on its centenary.

CHESTERTON tells of a war in which "the greatest of the Turkish warriors, the terrifying OMAN PASHA, equally famous for his courage in war and his cruelty in peace" wins a famous victory over British forces, leading to the occupation of England,

to Turks taking over the constabulary, and the growing influence of an "eminent Turkish mystic," one MISYSRA AMMON, who argues for such Islamic customs as not eating pork, prohibiting representative images, taking one's shoes off at the front door, and practicing polygyny.

A prescient 1914 vision of Islamic London

But the most prominent Islamic custom, and the one around which *The Flying Inn* revolves, is Oman Pasha's decree for the destruction of vineyards and the banishment of alcohol.

Lord PHILIP IVYWOOD, an eager, progressive *dhimmi* adept of Ammon, passed in 1909 a prohibition of alcohol which allowed only minor exceptions: buildings with inn signs outside them (pending their universal disappearance) and two famous watering holes for (of course) members of parliament, Claridge's Hotel and the Criterion Bar.

Otherwise, pubs served lemonade, tea and other of

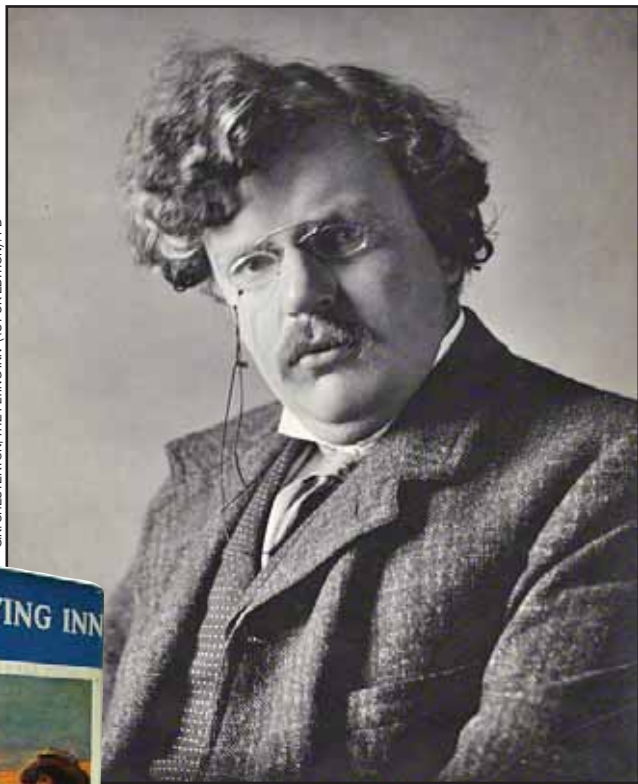
what Chesterton dubs "Saracen drinks."

Taking advantage of the former loophole, a valiant Irish sailor and an English publican roll through the countryside carrying with them the sign of "The Old Ship" pub, a giant keg of rum, and a great drum of cheddar cheese.

Their bacchanalian exploits, and Lord Ivywood's growing fury, make up the bulk of this fantasy novel, culminating in an English revolt against Ivywood, against the fez-wearing Turkish police force, and their totalitarian ways.

Hating "the fact of being crushed by the weapons of men brown and yellow ... had made the English what they had not been for centuries." Their heroic insurgency leaves Oman Pasha dead "with his face toward Mecca" and

pubs reopening.



G.K. CHESTERTON, THE FLYING INN (IST UK EDITION) PD

G.K. CHESTERTON, PORTRAIT BY E.H. MILLS, 1889 / NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY PD



pubs reopening.

ALTHOUGH A CHALLENGE to read, this overdrawn narrative uncannily anticipates the Left-Islamist alliance of our times, a phenomenon otherwise nearly invisible until the 1980s.

Anticipating GEORGE GALLOWAY and CARLOS THE JACKAL, the lefty Ivywood called Islam a "great religion" and a "religion of progress."

Lord Ivywood even appeals for full unity between Christianity and Islam, to be called "Chrislam" (a term actually in use in 2014), while a trendy parson wants St. Paul's Cathedral to sport "some sort of

double emblem ... combining cross and crescent."

We learn, amusingly, that Ivywood wrote a biog-



AD FOR G.K. CHESTERTON'S THE FLYING INN / CHICAGO TRIBUNE (JUN. 24, 1914)

raphy of the tyrannical Ottoman sultan ABDUL HAMID

II for the Progressive Potentates series, anticipating (among other books) PATRICK SEALE's puff biography of HAFEZ AL-ASSAD.

Today's Left finds excuses for female genital mutilation and Ivywood abandoned Western girls abducted to Turkish harems on the grounds that "there should be no new disturbance of whatever amicable or domestic ties have been formed."

Echoing today's progressives, he argued that Turkish women enjoy "the highest freedom" while belittling the lot of their British counterparts.

Likewise, Chesterton anticipated other themes then non-existent and now in full bloom.

Ivywood speculated about our own day: in "a century or two to come," he said, "we may see the cause of peace, of science and of reform everywhere supported by Islam."

In this spirit, he advocated "Asia in Europe," something that Muslim immigration has achieved in our day.

The Turkish mystic Ammon promulgated "some fad about English civilization having been founded by the Turks [and] seemed to think that Englishmen would soon return to this

way of thinking."

Indeed, it's banal in 2014 to hear Islamists declaim how Muslims reached the Americas in the 10th Century and that Islam had a leading role in

the writing of the U.S. Constitution.

The Flying Inn memorably sketches out a preliminary, wild, and weird picture of Islam in Great Britain, one far more real these days than when long ago published in a very different era. □

BookMarks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Reform Jews. ... This may mean moving away from the Reform movement's current focus on pluralism and looking more toward building a committed core. ...

"We Reform Jews believe that God gave us the Torah and that the Torah contains timeless religious truths of tremendous importance, not only to Jews but to the entire world. Every time we study Torah and incorporate its lessons into our lives, we are participating in the process of bringing God's revelation to us. That is Reform Judaism's mission". □



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