

Jewish Religious Responses to Modernity

Wissenschaft der Judentums - Society for the Scientific Study of Judaism
Origins in Europe as a response to the Emancipation and Enlightenment.

Reform Judaism

- Accommodate Judaism to western European culture and religious patterns.
- Practical innovations: service in vernacular; organ music in synagogue; religious garb.
- Definition of Judaism in primarily religious/ethical terms.
- De-emphasis of Judaism as separate national/cultural community.
- Emphasis on moral/de-emphasis on ritual commandments; Halakha not binding: relaxing of dietary and ritual laws.

(Neo) – Orthodoxy

- Response to Reform.
- Belief in divine verbal revelation of the Torah (both Written and Oral)
- Binding character of Halakha in ritual sphere.
- Emphasize ritual commandments: dietary laws, Sabbath observance.
- Maintenance of Hebrew as language of prayer.
- Integrate economically and politically, but retain cultural distinctiveness.

(Distinguish modern Orthodoxy from Hasidic Judaism(s), which is an Eastern European religious development.)

Conservative (Post-Historical Judaism)

- Middle ground between Reform and Orthodoxy.
- Maintain tradition but embrace change.
- Centrality of Hebrew, dietary laws and Sabbath observance.
- Emphasize Judaism as a cultural and not only religious tradition.

Reconstructionism (America 1920s... on)

- Integrate democracy, pluralism and egalitarian traditions into Judaism.
- Outgrowth from Conservative Movement, but umbrella for all three denominations.
- Non-supernaturalist understanding of God and revelation: not, "God gave Torah to Israel" but "Israel, in its quest for God, creates Torah."
- Non-authoritarian approach to Halakha: a vote but not a veto.
- First Bat Mitzvah; decision to ordain women from the beginning of the founding of the college.
- Take tradition seriously but not literally.
- Judaism is: "the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people."