

Platforms and Prayerbooks: An Introduction to Contemporary Reform Jewish Thought

This workshop will explore the dynamics between the various statements of belief and Prayerbooks that the American Reform Movement has created over the last 200 years. The program will draw excerpts from the recently published book *Platforms and Prayerbooks: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism*, edited by Dana Evan Kaplan and published by Rowman and Littlefield of Lanham, Maryland.

Part I: A PowerPoint presentation on *Platforms and Prayerbooks: the Reform Theological Enterprise at Work* will be used. American Jews have been debating theory and practice in the context of a broader American religious context for about 200 years. We will look at how American Reform Jews have sought to understand Judaism as a modern religion, shifting the focus of attention of mitzvot to the universal foundations of the faith. The Reform theological enterprise is nothing short of an attempt to justify the continued existence of the Jewish community in America. This presentation will try to combine fascinating historical information with enlightening insights on how belief and prayer is likely to influence our religion in the coming years. We will include discussion of new liturgy, including *The Open Door*, a Hagaddah edited by Rabbi Sue Levi Elwell.

Refreshment Break—20 minutes

Part II: We will move into a number of small groups and look at a series of texts taken from *Platforms and Prayerbooks*. Each group will look at a different set of texts dealing with a specific subject. A number of discussion questions will be provided to help stimulate interaction.

Part III: We will return to the central group and discuss some of the ideas raised in the textual study. The moderators will bring a number of central thematic ideas into the discussion of the specific texts. We hope that the program will be show aspects of the theology and liturgy of the American Reform Movement that are more obscure but of high interest. At the same time, we want to show the degree of continuity as well as the degree of radical change that has occurred.