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Zvi Jonathan Kaplan, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea? French Jewry and the Problem of Church and State*. Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 2009. viii + 140 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$19.95 (hb). ISBN-10: 1930675615

Review by Julie Kalman, University of New South Wales.

Kaplan's book *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* makes an interesting contribution to recent scholarship that looks to explore the way French Jewry engaged with key debates and movements in the nineteenth century.<sup>[1]</sup> One debate that was of particular relevance to the Jewish community during this period was the changing relationship between Church and State, and Kaplan seeks to write the Jewish community into the history of this particular discussion.

As France's newly emancipated Jewish community made its way through the nineteenth century, it was forced to navigate a way for itself in the stormy seas that were the shifting relationship between Church and State. Kaplan's title reveals the fascinating dilemma that Jews faced in the Church-State debate; that is, that while leftist anticlericals were generally more sympathetic to Judaism, anticlericalism remained an unacceptable position for the Jewish community, right up to separation. How did French Jewry respond to this? Kaplan examines Jewish attitudes through the mouthpieces of Jewish leadership, that is, Consistorial discussions, and the two main Jewish community journals: the relatively liberal *Archives israélites*, founded in 1840, and the more conservative *Univers israélite*, founded in 1844. His work covers the period from the Revolution to the 1905 law of separation, and through four chronological chapters, Kaplan explores key moments and issues that reveal the shifting position of Jewish leadership. The unique organization of French Jewry speaks well to this study: the consistorial model meant that French Judaism was highly centralized and standardized. The community did not divide into various denominations, and as Kaplan puts it, French Judaism "was neither radically reformed nor stagnant." (p. 41). Kaplan depicts the Consistory as seeking to maintain a strong central control, fearing the consequences of the dissolution of French Judaism. In this way, throughout the book, Kaplan traces parallel paths, as the Consistory sought to navigate a middle way both within French Judaism, and within France.

In chapter one, Kaplan traces the changes in status of France's three dominant religions, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism, between 1789 and 1848. In particular, he looks at the de-incorporation of the Jewish community (everything as citizens, nothing as a nation, in Clermont-Tonnerre's immortal words), to its re-incorporation by Napoleon, under the Consistorial system. He uses the issue of clandestine marriage to examine the way the consistories had to manage areas where French and Jewish law might come into conflict. The journey of France's Jews through the Revolution and the Napoleonic era is well-covered ground, but the context in which Kaplan re-tells it --that is, the general relationship between the State and its major religions-- makes it fresh and brings new interest.

Chapter two covers the four intense years of the Second Republic. Throughout this brief but significant period, while public debate framed a battle between Catholicism and radical socialism, all Consistory spokesmen sought to present moderate Republicanism as a middle way. In this chapter, Kaplan looks at the rise of Catholic influence under Louis-Napoleon, the rejection of Samuel Cahen for a teaching post in philosophy at a school in the Vendée, the rise of the Party of Order, and the increasing presence of Catholicism in the public sphere, including the involvement of Montalembert and Falloux in encouraging the liberty of education. Kaplan argues that the experience of the activity of a Church hierarchy given relatively free reign brought the Consistory to reconsider the value of a close relationship between Church and State.

Chapter three charts the vicissitudes of changing regimes between 1852 and 1882, and the efforts of the community to continue to ally itself with voices of moderation. Kaplan takes us through the naturalization of Algerian Jewry and the challenge of marriage customs that did not comply with French law, to the Franco-Prussian war, the anti-clericalism of the Commune, and the need to negotiate a new place with regard to the regime, while French society generally became more polarized in its distinction between clericalism and secularism. Again, rather than declare itself for or against one or the other pole, French Jewry sought to chart a middle path. Thus in its opposition to initial drafts of the Ferry education reforms, the Consistory did not object to the reforms as a whole, but sought to set out their concerns by referring to certain specific concerns, responding, with, what Kaplan argues, was characteristic pragmatism and moderation (p. 83).

The final, fourth chapter brings us up to 1905. Here Kaplan charts the community's response to the challenge of growing radicalism in the anticlerical camp. Consistorial leaders moved between associating with Catholics (against secularization of burial plots), to having to negotiate accommodation with radical anticlericals, who turned out to be their greatest allies in the Dreyfus Affair. Throughout all of this, Kaplan argues, their actions were determined by the desire to plot a cautious path, responding in each case in terms of what was deemed to be best for French Judaism.

It is fair observation, I hope, rather than a criticism, to say that the tale Kaplan tells is not a momentous one. The modest length of the book is telling. So is the fact that, on occasion, there is a sense that Kaplan is looking for a story that is not necessarily there. For example, in Chapter 2, Kaplan describes the writings of Alexandre ben-Baruch Créhange, an Orthodox rabbi in Paris, who sought to challenge the "religious monopoly" of the Consistory (p.42). Kaplan looks to tie Créhange's call for universal suffrage in the community to his broader discussion on the place of Judaism in the Church-State relationship. He has Créhange "cleverly focusing" on the suffrage discussion, rather than on the question of separation (p. 44), but at the same time we are not told that this was a deliberate policy on the part of Créhange. This does tend to detract from the discussion, and rather than seek to squeeze this tale to fit, it might have been more profitable to think this episode through as one intra-communal discussion on what the community should be, in the context of broader discussions on what religion should be in France.

Overall, however, Kaplan's book takes us in an important direction, in that it is the latest chapter in the writing of French Jewry into mainstream French history.

## NOTES

[1] See, for example, Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred Bonds of Solidarity: The Rise of Jewish Internationalism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Julie Kalman  
University of New South Wales  
[j.kalman@unsw.edu.au](mailto:j.kalman@unsw.edu.au)

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