



Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800-2001 (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

Marc Saperstein

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Wartime sermons reveal how Jews perceive themselves in relation to the majority society and how Jewish and national values are reconciled when the fate of a nation is at stake. They also illustrate how rabbis guide their communities through the challenges of their times. The sermons reproduced here were delivered by American and British rabbis from across the Jewish spectrum - Orthodox to Liberal, Ashkenazi and Sephardi - from the Napoleonic Wars to the attacks of 9/11. Each sermon is prefaced by a comprehensive introduction explaining the context in which it was delivered. Detailed notes explain allusions unfamiliar to a present-day readership and draw comparisons where appropriate to similar passages in contemporary newspapers and other sermons. A general introduction surveys more broadly the distinctive elements of modern Jewish preaching - the new preaching occasions bound up with the history of the countries in which Jews were living; new modes for the dissemination of the sermons (printed pamphlets and the Jewish and general press), and the emergence of women's voices from the pulpit. It also surveys the distinctive themes of modern Jewish sermons, including responses to Jewish suffering, social justice, eulogies for national leaders, Zionism, and war. What Jewish religious leaders said to their congregations when their countries went to war (or in some cases, were considering going to war) raises questions of central significance for both modern Jewish history and religious thinking in the civic context. What evidence do these sermons present concerning the degree of patriotism felt by Jews? Where and when do we find examples of dissent from the policies taken by their governments, or explicit criticism? What theological problems are raised by the preachers in the context of unprecedented and unimagined destruction, and how do they respond to these problems? How is the enemy presented in these texts; how is the problem of Jews fighting and killing other Jews addressed? Are the preachers functioning to articulate traditions that challenge the consensus of the moment, or as instruments of social control serving the needs of governments looking for unquestioning support by their citizenry? In all these areas, this book makes an important contribution to American- and Anglo-Jewish history of this period while also making available a collection of mostly unknown Jewish texts produced at dramatic moments of the past two centuries. *** "Probably the world's greatest expert on Jewish homilectics from the medieval period onwards . . . wide-ranging preface . . . Following a magisterial introduction come the sermons, each one introduced, explained, and discussed as well as sensitively and helpfully annotated. The selections are acute and the sermons themselves potent and highly readable." www.Middleburgh.co.uk

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