

Summary of Prof. Freddy Raphaël's speech Breisach, Blue House, 30th April 2008

Out of many famous Jewish representatives our speaker chose two outstanding personalities from the Alsace, which were, at their time, very successful.

During the 16th century the Alsace was a melting pot for many cultural transformations such as: the humanism, the Reformation and the Counter Reformation. This was a restless period of change. It was the time, when Luther published his 95 thesis. The big confrontation between Catholicism and reformation started all over Europe with many bloody conflicts. They took place in different regions and of course the Jews were guilty for whatever happened during this period. And there was a man at the right time in the right place. It was:

a) Jossel (Joseph, Josselmann) of Rosheim (1478-1554)

He was called "der Regierer" – the great advocate ("shtadlan") of the German Jews during the reigns of the emperors Maximilian I and Charles V. He worked for the welfare of his co-religionists, and probably was instrumental in thwarting the hostile plans of many anti-Semites. In 1510 he was made by the Jewish communities of lower Alsace their "parnas u-manhig" (sworn guide and leader). As such he had "to keep his eyes open in special care of the community" and possessed the right to issue enactments for the Jews of his district. On the other hand, he had to defend individuals and communities against oppression, and, if necessary, to appeal to the government and to the emperor. During the peasants' war in 1525 Jossel succeeded in protecting the Alsatian Jews against oppression and in inducing the army of the peasants, already drawn up at the gates of Rosheim, to leave the town in peace.

Jossel of Rosheim was not only a great advocate, but also an outstanding scholar. He belonged to the most illustrious Rabbis of his time. His thinking was inspired not only by Ashkenazi but also by Sephardim, cabbalistic wisdom. With this knowledge, he influenced his Alsatian communities in a very specific manner. Mysticism and rationalism created an open-minded Jewish society. He was also in non Jewish circles a very distinguished and respected savant. His advice was appreciated by humanists, politicians, theologians etc. Jossel was also a blessed dialectician; thus it is not astonishing, that he succeeded successfully to defend his Judaism in many disputations against people like Calvin, Luther and others. He died 1554 in Rosheim.

b) As his second example, our speaker chose perhaps the most famous French historian of the 20th century: **Marc Leopold Benjamin Bloch (1886 – 1944)**. Marc Bloch was a very exceptional personality. He grew up in a very open-minded, Jewish, bourgeois family. His father, Gustave Bloch, was professor for ancient history. The atmosphere in their home was sustained by a religious tradi-

tion, where Jewish practices and secular habits were a matter of fact. It goes without saying, that mutual esteem, respect, trust and frankness were connected with a democratic thinking, which led to correctness and fairness. Therefore it was not amazing, that Marc Bloch identified the French humanistic ideals of liberty, equality and self-responsibility not only in the principles in the French Republic but also in Judaism.

Prof. Raphaël points out that it was this symbiosis between religion and state, which determined the thinking and doing of Marc Bloch during his entire life. This attitude is called "**Franco-Judaism**". And this term describes integration where the majority of the French society accepts the Jews as a minority. (As you know, assimilation demands the fully giving up of its own identity).

The concept "Franco-Judaism" can be tracked back to the French Revolution. In 1791 the Jews received their political and civil rights. Many Jews were integrated, some assimilated. They all became French citizens. Some became bourgeois and were free to practise all professions. They were able to develop and become men of science, scholars, politicians, military experts etc. Unfortunately anti-Semitism started to show its ugly face again after 1830.

Bloch had studied the "Affaire Dreyfus¹", which took place in 1894. He was shocked and deeply affected. Marc Bloch recognized that only a democratic republic could really guarantee human rights. He was obsessed of the vision that only an entity giving "legalité" could also assure "égalité"! When the First World War broke out (1914) France was in danger. For Marc Bloch it was absolutely natural, that he had to fight in order to save "his" republic. After the war he became Professor at the University of Strasbourg (1919). Again, when France was invaded in the 2WW, he joined the "resistance" and fought against fascism. He was caught by the Nazis and then executed near Lyon on the 16th June 1944.

Marc Bloch was a man, who fought with all his might, for his ideals, which are represented in his concept of Franco-Judaism!

R. Mil, April 2008

¹ He was a descendant of Katharina Zivi, the sister of Ischu Joseph Zivi and daughter of Paul Zivi