Kyle Jantzen

Nazi Racism, American Anti-Semitism, and Christian Duty

U.S. Mainline Protestant Responses to the Jewish Refugee Crisis of 1938

Upon seizing power in the winter of 1933, Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist movement began implementing their longstanding plans to oppress Germany's Jews. Economic boycotts, bureaucratic purges, and educational prohibitions marked the first wave of anti-Semitic persecution. In 1935, social segregation dominated, through laws which stripped German Jews of citizenship and prohibited them from having sexual relations with so-called Aryan Germans. By 1938, Jews had largely been driven from the German economy, barred from professional life, and stigmatized in society. This Nazi pre-war victimization of Jews culminated in the *Polenaktion* of October 27–29, 1938, and the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 9–10, 1938.¹

Scholars have criticized the North American Protestant response to the Nazi regime and its persecution of Jews. According to one well-known study, apathy ruled the day, and “no sustained universal outcry on behalf of the beleaguered refugees ever erupted from [...] the Christian [...] rank and file.”² Frederick K. Wentz surveyed Protestant journals and their response to the rise of Nazism and to the Nazi assault on Christianity. He found liberal journals to have been the most eager among these periodicals to do battle against Nazism, corresponding to their interest in social justice and hatred of totalitarianism. The largest segment of Protestants in the center included those concerned chiefly with religious

1 See Hermann Graml, *Reichskristallnacht: Antisemitismus und Judenverfolgung im Dritten Reich* (Munich: DTV, 1998), 9–37; Walter Pehle, November 1938: From ‘Kristallnacht’ to Genocide (New York: Berg, 1990); Martin Gilbert, *Kristallnacht: Prelude to Destruction* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2006).

2 Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933–1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982), 51 and 284. See also Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?: Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight during the Nazi Era* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1997), 128, 131; Haim Genizi, *The Holocaust, Israel and Canadian Protestant Churches* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) (which deals primarily with the postwar era); and Norman Erwin, “Hitler's Assault on Civilization: Antisemitism and English Canada's Response to Kristallnacht,” in *Violence, Memory, and History: Western Perceptions of Kristallnacht*, eds. Colin McCullough and Nathan Wilson (New York: Routledge, 2015): 108–29.

liberty and the well-being of the German churches, and less likely to fight Nazism directly. Least likely to oppose Nazism were the fundamentalists and millenarians, who condemned many modern developments, among which Nazism was only one.³ In Frederick Ira Murphy's dissertation, entitled "The American Christian Press and Pre-War Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939," the author contended that the churches had been alarmed about the rise of Nazism (except for its anti-communism), critical of Hitler himself, and equivocal about Jews. Christians had denounced attacks like the Kristallnacht pogrom and rejected blatant anti-Semitism, but accepted Hitler's need to solve a "Jewish problem" and subscribed to prejudicial stereotypes about Jews and their relationship to both capitalism and communism. As for the refugee situation, "attempts to arouse the average American Christian to act to help Christian refugees from Germany had little success," Murphy argued.⁴

Two important studies have assessed the responses of the U.S. religious press to the plight of the Jews under Nazi rule. William Nawyn analyzed the periodical literature of Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and Congregationalists. He found that liberal Protestants combined theological latitudinarianism and a commitment to Western notions of human dignity to encourage support for Jews and Judaism, while conservatives held three contradictory ideas in tension: the belief that Jews were responsible for the death of Christ; the conviction that Jews were a chosen people of God, the source of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of Christianity; and the view that Jews were a people to be evangelized.⁵ Nawyn concluded that, even if liberals were more likely than conservatives to advocate for Jews, none of the leading denominations did much of practical value, such as raising significant funds in aid of Jewish refugees. Rather, the leading Protestant denominational publications "ignored, or perhaps failed to recognize the true nature of, the Jewish problem in Germany and the full implications of the Nazi racial policies."⁶ Of note, Nawyn did recognize that the mainline Protestant church press had been attentive to the Nazi persecution of Jews and the consequent Jewish refugee crisis of the later 1930s, but

3 Frederick K. Wentz, "American Protestant Journals and the Nazi Religious Assault," *Church History* 23: 4 (1954): 321–38, and Wentz, "The Reaction of the Religious Press in America to the Emergence of Nazism" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1954).

4 Frederick Ira Murphy, "The American Christian Press and Pre-War Hitler's Germany, 1933–1939" (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1970), 353.

5 William E. Nawyn, *American Protestantism's Response to Germany's Jews and Refugees 1933–1941* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981), 34–5. Nawyn examines not only the press but also various Protestant ecclesial sources.

6 *Ibid.*, 46.

added that even these matters “were not, in general, of continuing and paramount concern.”⁷

The historian Robert Ross was even sharper in his critique of the Protestant churches and their publications, characterizing the American religious response to the Nazi persecution and extermination of the Jews as *silence* – the silence of “the failure of information to persuade,” of “the failure of concerted effort,” and of “the failure of modest actions.”⁸ Curiously juxtaposed to this negative assessment was Ross’s recognition that Protestant journalists and commentators had written widely on the Nazi persecution of the Jews, and that U.S. Protestants had been quite active on behalf of Jews, donating money, organizing rallies, writing protests, commissioning delegations to Germany, petitioning President Roosevelt, the U.S. State Department, and Congress, establishing denominational and interdenominational committees, cooperating periodically with Jewish organizations, and organizing prayer rallies. But after listing all of these activities, Ross dismissed them on the grounds that they had neither deterred Hitler from persecuting Jews nor convinced the U.S. government to intervene in German domestic affairs. Yet, not only was Ross’s evaluation naïve about the potential of U.S. Protestant church leaders to influence either Hitler or Roosevelt, it concentrated on what Christians and churches had *not* done. Left aside was any analysis of how Protestants understood and interpreted Hitler, Jews, and Judaism, or what actions they had proposed that either the U.S. churches or the U.S. government should have undertaken.⁹

Haim Genizi, for his part, tackled the specific question of American apathy towards *Christian* refugees from Nazism, many of whom were Jews or “non-Aryans” according to the Nazi Nuremberg Laws, even if Christians by religious choice. Genizi noted the efforts of the Federal Council of Churches and other mainline voices to rouse American Protestants to aid refugees, but argued that agencies like the American Committee for Christian German Refugees and dozens of other organizations were basically unable to generate support from either Christian individuals or church bodies. In fact, Jewish organizations provided most of the early funding for the American Committee for Christian German Refugees.¹⁰

7 Ibid., 59–60.

8 Robert W. Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 286–8.

9 Ibid., 287–8.

10 Haim Genizi, *American Apathy: The Plight of Christian Refugees from Nazism* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1983), 112–14. See also Genizi, “American Interfaith Cooperation on Behalf of Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1945,” *American Jewish History* 70:3 (1981): 347–61.

Scholars have continued to reassess U.S. and Canadian Protestant attitudes and actions concerning Jews and Judaism during the Nazi era. For example, various recent studies have discussed the significant protests of American Christians just after the Nazi seizure of power and also, most notably, in the wake of the November 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom.¹¹

Examining the convoluted history of evangelical-Jewish relations, Yaakov S. Ariel has mostly agreed with Nawyn that conservative evangelicals found themselves caught between competing ideas. They strongly condemned Nazi anti-Jewish policies and viewed Nazi ideology as “a rebellion against God and a distortion of Christian theology and values.”¹² True to their convictions about salvation in Jesus Christ, they also worked to evangelize Jews, expressing particular concern for “non-Aryan” Christians caught in Hitler’s persecution. Nevertheless, evangelicals remained under the influence of traditional antipathy towards Jews and Judaism, and were quick to blame Jews for apostasy and conspiracy. They uncritically accepted *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as genuine descriptions of Jewish behavior and intentions throughout the 1930s, only abandoning this view as the Nazi persecution of the Jews deepened.¹³ More negatively, Caitlin Carenen has argued that mainline Protestants – convinced of their cultural pre-eminence – were largely intolerant of Jews (and Catholics) in the interwar period. Christian cultural power and rising nationalism fed a growing anti-Semitism.

See also Peter Ludlow, “The Refugee Problem in the 1930s: The Failures and Successes of Protestant Relief Programmes,” *English Historical Review* 90, no. 356 (1975): 564–603.

11 Victoria J. Barnett, “Christian and Jewish Interfaith Efforts During the Holocaust: The Ecumenical Context,” in *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht*, ed. Maria Mazzenga (New York: Palgrave, 2009): 13–29; Kyle Jantzen, “‘The Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man’: Mainline American Protestants and the Kristallnacht Pogrom,” in Mazzenga, ed., *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht*, 31–55; Maria Mazzenga, “Toward an American Catholic Response to the Holocaust: Catholic Americanism and Kristallnacht,” in Mazzenga, ed., *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht*, 85–110; Patrick J. Hayes, “American Catholics Respond to Kristallnacht: New Refugee Policy and the Plight of Non-Aryans,” in Mazzenga, ed., *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht*, 111–44; Barnett, “Track Two Diplomacy, 1933–1939: International Responses from Catholics, Jews, and Ecumenical Protestants to Events in Nazi Germany,” *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 27:1 (2014): 76–86; Kyle Jantzen and Jonathan Durance, “Our Jewish Brethren: Christian Responses to Kristallnacht in Canadian Mass Media,” in *Crisis and Credibility in the Jewish-Christian World: Remembering Franklin Littell. The Fortieth Annual Scholars’ Conference on the Holocaust and the Churches*, special issue of *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46:4 (2011): 537–48.

12 Yaakov S. Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 98. See also idem, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes Towards Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865–1945* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991).

13 Ibid., 121, 142–52.

Among fundamentalists, some, like Gerald Winrod's *Defenders of the Christian Faith*, participated in this anti-Semitism and stoked fears of Jewish conspiracies. Others, though, stressed the importance of Jews in Christian eschatology and urged kindness towards them. Particularly after the Kristallnacht pogrom, Carenen claims, sympathy for Jews increased among both liberal and conservative Protestants, as did support for Jewish emigration to Palestine, though *not* to the United States.¹⁴

In contrast to the aforementioned emphasis on what U.S. Protestants failed to do in response to Nazism and the Holocaust, this chapter will examine how they perceived Hitler, Nazism, and the persecution of Germany's Jews in the pre-war era, and what kinds of responses, if any, they proposed. Basing my inquiry on examples from prominent Protestant publications,¹⁵ I argue five interrelated

14 Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 1–47. Alongside Ariel and Carenen, David Rausch defended fundamentalist journalist Arno C. Gaebelin's reporting on the plight of Jews in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust, arguing it was both anti-Nazi and pro-Zionist. More recently, Timothy Padgett has assessed Gaebelin and his magazine, *Our Hope*, alongside other conservative publications like *Moody Monthly* and *Christian Herald*, finding a mixture of sympathy for and criticism of Nazi Germany, concern about anti-Semitism, calls to evangelize Jews, worries about Nazi attacks on Christianity, and interest in Zionism and its relationship to Christian eschatology. Matthew Bowman argued much the same thing, noting that fundamentalist Protestants remained politically marginalized since the Scopes trial in the 1920s, but followed events in Europe closely, condemning Hitler and searching for eschatological clues in the turmoil surrounding the Jews. Finally, Timothy Weber contended that conservative, premillennialist Christians lined up politically as allies of the Jews, for eschatological reasons, and religiously as enemies of the Jews, because of the Jewish rejection of Christ. David A. Rausch, "Our Hope: An American Fundamentalist Journal and the Holocaust, 1937–1945," *Fides et Historia* 12:2 (1980): 89–103; idem, *Arno C. Gaebelin, 1861–1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1983); Timothy Padgett, "Warmongers?: Continuity and Complexity in Evangelical Discourse on United States Foreign Policy" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2016), 28–70; Matthew Bowman, "Persecution, Prophecy, and the Fundamentalist Reconstruction of Germany, 1933–1940," in Mazzenga, ed., *American Religious Responses to Kristallnacht*, 183–204; and Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

15 Evidence for this study will be drawn from the following periodicals: *Advance*, a liberal Congregational weekly published in Boston and long edited by the clergyman William E. Gilroy; *Christendom*, a liberal quarterly published in Chicago, edited by Charles Clayton Morrison of *The Christian Century* and enlivened by writers connected with the FCC and the American Sections of the World Conference on Faith and Order and the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work; *The Churchman*, a liberal Episcopal biweekly published in New York and long edited by Guy Emery Shipley; *The Living Church*, a high-church Episcopal weekly edited by Clifford P. Morehouse and published in Milwaukee, WI; *The Presbyterian*, a conservative weekly edited by Dr. Stewart M. Robinson and published in Philadelphia; and *Zion's Herald*, a conservative Meth-

points: 1) that mainline Protestant spokespersons viewed Nazism with great foreboding, sensing crisis in the air; 2) that they were *primarily* concerned with the Nazi persecution of *Christians*; 3) that they *also* cared about the persecution of Jews; 4) that they both condemned *and* perpetuated forms of anti-Semitism in the United States; and 5) that, above all, they understood the challenge of Nazism in terms of a cosmic battle between Christianity and irreligion – a battle liberals and conservatives understood somewhat differently from one another, as I will show.

Sense of Crisis

First and foremost, what is most striking about the U.S. mainline Protestant periodicals in 1938 is their projection of a sense of crisis. The demagoguery of Hitler, the brutality of his Nazi regime, the dangers of anti-Semitism in Europe and America, and the breakdown of the international order combined to cast a dark shadow over the church press in this study. Here a striking example can be found in a single issue of the Congregational weekly *Advance*, from February 1, 1938. Arthur E. Holt, Congregational church leader and Professor of Christian Social Ethics in Chicago, opened the discussion by lamenting the decline and indeed absence of democracy in the non-Western world and in much of Europe, on account of the rise of communism, fascism, and National Socialism. Next, Henry Smith Leiper, missionary, member of the Federal Council of Churches, and Executive Secretary of the American Section of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, worried about racism in America, Bolshevism in Europe, and “the manifold evils which threaten even civilization itself.” In this regard, he quoted a commonwealth political leader who declared that politics was failing and “the world is drifting towards catastrophe.” Finally, Alfred Schmalz, Congregationalist minister and prominent Christian social activist, asserted that German grievances relating to the Treaty of Versailles had produced Hitler and Nazism. Given similar resentments in Italy and Japan, international tensions were rising, and Schmalz predicted that the outcome of the “economic conflict between the world’s great imperialistic powers,” if not checked, would be “*world war*.”¹⁶ Other articles throughout 1938 bemoaned “a world in the grip of violence

odist weekly published in Boston and edited for over two decades by Lewis Oliver Hartman, who would go on to win election as the American Bishop of the Methodist Church in 1944.

16 Arthur E. Holt, “Shall Protestantism Implement Democracy?” *Advance* (February 1, 1938): 57–8; Henry Smith Leiper, “The State of the Church,” *Advance* (February 1, 1938): 62; Alfred Schmalz, “Peaceful Change – The Alternative to War,” *Advance* (February 1, 1938): 63.

and the threat of war,” “the impression of a strange, demonic, and dangerous power” in Nazi Germany, the “death” of the League of Nations, and the fact that “everyone expects war, many expect it soon.”¹⁷ In the wake of the Munich Agreement, which handed the Czech Sudetenland to Hitler, Guy Emery Shipler, editor of *The Churchman*, an Episcopal biweekly, noted the “moral bankruptcy of Hitler” and described the German *Führer* as a “psychopathic individual.” Two weeks later, he wondered how “anyone [...] should place any trust in Hitler’s word,” adding that eventually people would understand that both Hitler and Mussolini were “but ranting pygmies.”¹⁸ That same week, Clifford Phelps Morehouse, editor of *The Living Church*, another Episcopal publication, averred that “The main issue is still whether or not the totalitarian heresy is to dominate the world.” He went on to describe totalitarianism (whether Nazism, Fascism, or Communism) as “a denial of the individual worth and dignity of man [...] the negation of the liberty for which our forefathers fought and [...] a philosophy of blood and hate as opposed to a religion of mercy and love.”¹⁹ News reports and editorials such as these filled the pages of mainline Protestant periodicals, attesting to the dismay with which U.S. Protestant spokespersons – many of them prominent church leaders – viewed the expansion and exercise of Nazi power in the prewar period.

Attacks on Christianity

In their response to Hitler and Nazism, writers and editors in the mainline Protestant periodicals analyzed in this chapter zeroed in most often on the grave danger to Christianity posed by Nazism and the many attacks against Christians and churches, particularly in Germany. In January 1938, *Advance* reported that Hitler had jailed 1300 pastors between 1934 and 1937. Two months later, the editor William E. Gilroy brooded about various totalitarian threats to religion. “In Russia, Germany and Italy, alike,” he wrote, “the Christian is under the heel of

17 William E. Gilroy, “The Editorial Outlook,” *Advance* (April 1, 1938): 156; Henry Smith Leiper, “The State of the Church,” *Advance* (June 1, 1938): 253; Hubert C. Herring, “The State of the Nation,” *Advance* (November 1, 1938): 496.

18 Guy Emery Shipler, “Editorial,” *The Churchman* (October 1, 1938): 7–8; Guy Emery Shipler, “Editorial,” *The Churchman* (October 15, 1938): 7–9.

19 Clifford Phelps Morehouse, “The Situation in Europe,” *The Living Church* (October 19, 1938): 374.

pagan dictatorships that flout the Christian faith and idealism and run roughshod over the Christian conscience and the Christian will.”²⁰

The Churchman also offered regular reports on anti-Christian policies and events in Germany. In March 1938 alone, articles and editorials called the Nazi religious program “neo-pagan” and praised Confessing Church pastor Martin Niemöller as “a champion of religious liberty,” claimed that Niemöller’s arrest was a sign that he had inspired fear among the Nazis, and drew attention to the fact that many other clergy were also in prison or forbidden to preach.²¹ The plight of the German churches was broadcast throughout the year in terms that are well encapsulated in the title of an article that came out in November: “Caesar Presses His Claims in the Reich: The Trappings Change, But the Plot is the Same.” Attempts to Nazify the Sermon on the Mount and rewrite John’s gospel were depicted as an effort “to bring Christianity into conformity with Nazi nationalism – that absurd and abominable compound of ‘race, blood and soil.’” The article’s main point was that “The central force in the drive to destroy the Christianity of Germany is in the mind and personality of Hitler. He is the chosen and idolized leader of those who hate the church. He himself has ordered the illegal and violent repression of those who have dared to speak the truth.”²²

Among the most energetic Christian writers commenting on Nazi attacks against Christianity was Henry Smith Leiper, who wrote for several publications. Reporting on the German church scene at the close of 1938 for *The Living Church*, Leiper noted a “clear intention” among National Socialists “to liquidate any Church which does not show itself entirely in agreement with the proposal that it prostitute itself unqualifiedly to the ‘positive Christianity’ of Mr. Hitler and Mr. Rosenberg.” He documented the steady progress towards the subjugation and corruption of the Church “so that it may become merely the ecclesiastical arm of the [Nazi] revolution.” In support of this, he claimed the arrest of over 10,000 Christian leaders and “the destruction of the Church educational system,” which would, in turn, he asserted, corrupt the future leadership of the church. The banning of Bible teaching in schools, the charging of clergy who prayed for peace with treason, and the cutting off of the pay of oppositional clergy were just some of the other measures cited by Leiper as evidence of a full-

20 Henry Smith Leiper, “The State of the Church,” *Advance* (January 1, 1938): 13, 26; William E. Gilroy, “The Editorial Outlook,” *Advance* (March 1, 1938): 108–10.

21 “Democracy: Dodd Describes Nazism at CLID Annual Meeting,” *The Churchman* (March 1, 1938): 18; Guy Emery Shippler, “Editorial,” *The Churchman* (March 15, 1938): 7.

22 Henry Smith Leiper, “Caesar Presses His Claims in the Reich: The Trappings Change, But the Plot is the Same,” *The Living Church* (November 1, 1938): 12–3.

scale offensive against Christianity in Germany.²³ Many of his fellow writers and editors in these U.S. Protestant periodicals analyzed in this chapter concurred with this assessment, sounding a collective alarm regarding the danger for the Church.

Concern for Jewish Refugees

Though U.S. Protestant spokespersons were primarily concerned with Nazism's impact on the Christian churches of Germany, the plight of Jews did not escape the notice of at least some members of the church press in this study. By 1938, the Jewish refugee crisis had reached a critical level. Between 1933 and the outbreak of war in September 1939, roughly 282,000 of the 523,000 German Jews abandoned their homeland and found refuge abroad, in the United States, Palestine, Great Britain and other Commonwealth countries, Central and South America – even China and Japan.²⁴ By 1938, Hitler was ratcheting up international tensions through his annexation of Austria in March, his demand for Sudeten Czech territory in the spring and summer, and his occupation of vital Czechoslovak territory in October. This too spurred Jewish emigration. No fewer than 117,000 of the 174,000 Jews in Austria departed between the German annexation in March 1938 and the beginning of war in September 1939.²⁵ And although 85,000 Jewish refugees reached the United States during this eighteen-month period, many more tried and failed: no fewer than 300,000 Jews applied for the 27,000 visas available under the U.S. immigration quota system.²⁶

At first, the mainline periodicals here analyzed were fairly tepid in their response to the refugee crisis. One early article by Hubert C. Herring of *Advance* thanking President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Cordell Hull for proposing an international meeting at Evian-les-Bains, France, where Herring believed “that international action [would] be taken to provide refuge for German and Austrian refugees from Adolf Hitler.” He added that, “The United States, the rich-

²³ Henry Smith Leiper, “Discusses Churches’ Situation in Germany,” *The Living Church* (December 28, 1938): 699 and 712.

²⁴ “German Jewish Refugees, 1933–1939,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005468> (July 2, 2016).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ “Refugees,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005139> (July 2, 2016).

est nation, can afford to drop the bars and let substantial numbers in. Let us urge that this will be done.”²⁷

While *Advance* had little else to say about the matter, *The Churchman* advocated strongly on behalf of Jews, covering closely the Nazi persecution and consequent Jewish refugee crisis. On January 1, 1938, in an article entitled, “Anti-Semitism: 24 Christian Faiths Sympathize with Jews,” editor Guy Emery Shipler reported on a statement by the Episcopalian Home Missions Council, remarking on the growth of “exaggerated nationalism” and explaining how “the rise of anti-Semitism in many lands has cast a pall of gloom over the Jews of the world.” The report went on to reject anti-Semitism, demand its eradication in North America, and call upon Christians to recognize their special obligation to the Jews.²⁸

What is striking about the discourse on Jewish persecution in *The Churchman*, however, was how often it was linked to Christian persecution. Shipler’s editorial writing is an excellent case in point. In an editorial from April 1, 1938, Shipler introduced a discussion of Hitler, Jews, and Christians with a quotation from Hanns Kerrl, the Nazi Minister for Religious Affairs: “A new authority has arisen as to what Christ and Christianity are – Adolf Hitler.” Shipler explained how “neighbor” had come to mean “blood brother” under Nazi rule, resulting in “such heart-breaking misery that decent people are nauseated as they are forced to confess that Adolf Hitler is technically a human being.” He then applied his critique of Nazi racial exclusivity to both Jews and Christians:

No one who is a follower of Jesus the Jew; no one in whose heart have sung the words of Paul the Jew echoing from the thirteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthian Christians; no one who has ever been really touched by the meaning of Christian love can feel anything but revulsion and horror at the monstrous reversion to the jungle represented by Hitler in his treatment of the Jews. Hitler hates Christianity with a maniac’s hatred, as he hates the Jew.²⁹

Similarly, in June, as Shipler discussed an American Jewish Congress (AJC) plan to work with Christian clergy to campaign jointly against anti-Semitism, he affirmed his opposition to anti-Semitism: “We will support every constructive effort made against anti-Semitism; our record on that score stands for anyone to read. We have fought against anti-Semitism and shall continue to do so.” Immediately thereafter, however, he proceeded to relabel the anti-Semitic attacks as a general

²⁷ Hubert C. Herring, “The State of the Nation,” *Advance* (May 1, 1938): 205.

²⁸ Guy Emery Shipler, “Anti-Semitism: 24 Christian Faiths Sympathize with Jews,” *The Churchman* (January 1, 1938): 20.

²⁹ Guy Emery Shipler, “Editorial,” *The Churchman* (April 1, 1938): 7.

human rights crisis affecting both Jews and Christians – no doubt not quite what the AJC had had in mind. He wrote:

As to the matter of Jewish persecution, we have long held the conviction that our Jewish friends would further their own cause more effectively if they would emphasize that persecution by such totalitarian states as Germany is a Christian as well as a Jewish problem. [...] The American public is still largely under the illusion that refugees from Germany are entirely Jewish [...] though thousands [of Christian refugees] have been forced to leave Germany and are without any means of livelihood. If we are to have a united front let it be not only against anti-Semitism but against persecution of both Jews and Christians.³⁰

Shipler's repeated reframing of the Jewish refugee crisis in this way is nowhere more forcefully demonstrated than in the November 1 issue of *The Churchman*. There, a letter to the editor from W. Russell Bowie of the American Committee for Christian German Refugees outlined the dual Jewish-Christian nature of the refugee crisis. Remarking that "the persecution of Christians is growing in extent and severity," Bowie explained how Germany's annexation of Austria had "greatly intensified the refugee problem, especially increasing the percentage of refugees who are 'non-Aryan' Christians." In support of this claim, Bowie cited American industrialist and diplomat Myron C. Taylor's statistics from the Evian Conference, claiming that, of the 660,000 people in Germany and Austria who needed to find homes in other countries, about 285,000 were Protestants, 75,000 Catholics, and 300,000 Jews.³¹ As Bowie clarified, the German refugee problem was not exclusively a Jewish problem. It "concerns every Christian throughout the world." Accordingly, Bowie asked clergy to set aside a Sunday offering or congregational benevolent funds to support the American Committee for Christian German Refugees, so they could assist Christians (most of whom, of course, would have been Jewish in terms of Nazi racial law) attempting to flee Hitler's Reich.³²

Just a few pages later, Shipler dedicated part of his multi-page editorial to affirming Bowie's letter and urging support for his organization. After reiterating the number of *Christians* displaced as refugees, Shipler pointed out that Hitler's seizure of the Sudetenland would only increase the refugee pressure: "Here, surely," he exhorted, "is a challenge to the generosity of the Christian church in the United States." Once more, he restated the refugee crisis as a Christian problem:

³⁰ Guy Emery Shipler, "A Jewish-Christian Cause," *The Churchman* (June 1, 1938): 8.

³¹ Taylor's estimates only included potential refugees who were under the age of 50.

³² W. Russell Bowie, "Victims of Nazism," *The Churchman* (November 1, 1938): 3.

Hundreds of thousands of our fellow-Christians are fleeing before Nazi brutality. It is impossible to exaggerate their suffering. They are victims of the ruthless philosophy of "race, blood and soil"; a philosophy which finds the religion of Jesus a stumbling block which must somehow, if possible, be eliminated. And let us make no mistake about it. The assault of the Nazi on Christianity is a carefully planned program of extermination; it has not stopped short of the fearful barbarism of the concentration camp and all the terrors of exile.³³

With that, using language we are more accustomed to hearing in the context of the subsequent events of the Holocaust, Shipler recapitulated Bowie's request for American churches to give generously to the American Committee of Christian German Refugees.

Shipler's linking of anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews to anti-Christianity and the suffering of Christian refugees typified U.S. mainline Protestant efforts to aid Jews. As Haim Genizi has shown, both Jewish and Christian leaders were reluctant to push the Roosevelt Administration to relax immigration quotas in order to save Jewish refugees, because they feared a public discussion would "let loose a flood of bitter, anti-alien and anti-Jewish agitation, which will intensify inter-group antagonism in the United States."³⁴ Rather, prominent Christian leaders tried to assist Jews in peril by repeatedly attempting to convince American Christians that the refugee crisis was as much a Christian problem as a Jewish one. The failure of this initiative betrays the fact that the broader Protestant public was far more likely to view Shipler's refugees through the lens of Nazi racial ideology – as Jews – than it was to see the refugees through the lens of Christian theology – as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Other Protestant publications were slower to enter the fray, but, like *The Churchman*, the Episcopal weekly *The Living Church* and the more conservative publications like *The Presbyterian* and *Zion's Herald* (Methodist) expressed clear sympathy for the plight of Jewish refugees, especially later in 1938, as conditions in Germany worsened. From time to time – though not often – Protestant sympathy also included the contemplation of Jewish immigration to Africa, Australia, or the United States itself.³⁵

33 Guy Emery Shipler, "Shall We Help the Persecuted?" *The Churchman* (November 1, 1938): 7–9.

34 Haim Genizi, "American Interfaith Cooperation on Behalf of Refugees from Nazism, 1933–1945," *American Jewish History* 70:3 (March 1981): 347–61.

35 In the case of *The Living Church*, for example, see "Prayer Day Sought by Federal Council," *The Living Church* (October 5, 1938): 332; "Nazi Oppression of Jewish Christians Creates Serious Problem for Lutherans Here," *The Living Church* (October 26, 1938): 429; "Churches Called to Fight Anti-Semitism," *The Living Church* (November 9, 1938): 486; "President Asked by Synod

Condemnation and Perpetuation of Anti-Semitism

One important obstacle to U.S. Protestant sympathy for Germany's Jews was the persistent prejudicial stream that ran through American society. Interestingly, Protestant commentators in the church press here analyzed interacted in different ways with the racism and anti-Semitism in U.S. society. It was not uncommon for editorials and articles in mainline Protestant publications to acknowledge, as did William E. Gilroy, the editor of *Advance*, that, "Our protest of Hitler's treatment of the Jews is partly ineffective because the Germans have been well publicized concerning our treatment of the Negro. [...] We cannot speak with the powerful and authoritative moral voice of a clear conscience or a clean record."³⁶ Gilroy went on to chastise his readers about their lack of love for minorities, proclaiming that "if God's love had been only for white, one-hundred-per-cent Americans there would be no gospel worth proclaiming."³⁷ Similarly, *The Churchman* featured condemnations of U.S. racism, such as a February 1, 1938, article which reprinted a Federal Council of Churches' message on race relations. In it, the FCC took issue with racism directed towards Mexicans, Orientals, and Blacks in the United States. "We in America have felt keenly and said much about the treatment of Jews in Germany," the text ran, adding that "Any real solution of race relations requires that each nation face its own problems. Before we in America can tell other nations what to do we must confront our own distressing situation. [...] Each national group has made a lasting contribution to our composite civilization." In particular, the FCC report singled out the "decidedly unchristian and unstatesmanlike" Oriental Exclusion Act, and asserted that "the churches cannot escape responsibility for such living conditions" as were endured by the "poor Mexicans" in their midst.³⁸

But if racism was an easy target for these Protestant writers and editors, anti-Semitism proved much more complicated. Like racism, anti-Semitism was widespread in U.S. society, and even when Americans were highly critical of the Hitler

to Help Jews," *The Living Church* (November 9, 1938): 492; "Terror Over Germany," *The Living Church* (November 23, 1938): 537–8; "Church Groups Hit Nazi Persecutions," *The Living Church* (November 23, 1938): 547, 557; "Church Groups Make Nation-Wide Protest," *The Living Church* (November 30, 1938): 581, 585; "The Future of German Jews," *The Living Church* (December 7, 1938): 596; William G. Peck, "By the Rivers of Babylon," *The Living Church* (December 14, 1938): 635–6.

³⁶ William E. Gilroy, "The Editorial Outlook," *Advance* (April 1, 1938): 156.

³⁷ William E. Gilroy, "The Editorial Outlook," *Advance* (November 1, 1938): 494.

³⁸ "Race Relations: Federal Council Issues Message for February 13," *The Churchman* (February 1, 1938): 21.

regime, they remained antipathetic towards Jews. Opinion polls confirmed this time and again. For instance, a Roper poll from April 1938 found that 48 percent of United States citizens surveyed believed that the persecution of Jews in Europe was at least partly the fault of the victims, while 10 percent felt it was entirely their fault.³⁹ In November 1938, just *after* the Kristallnacht pogrom, Roper polls found that one-third of respondents believed that hostility towards Jews in the United States was rising, with many blaming Jewish financial power, business practices, and avarice. Moreover, 77 percent opposed allowing more Jewish exiles from Germany into the United States, while 43 percent even opposed the U.S. government contributing “money to help Jewish and Catholic exiles from Germany settle in lands like Africa and South America.” And fully two-thirds of those surveyed rejected the proposed Wagner-Rogers Bill to permit refugee children from Germany to be allowed into the country. A few months later, in April 1939, almost 85 percent of Protestants and Catholics opposed increasing immigration quotas for European refugees. In fact, polls conducted throughout 1938 and 1939 discovered that 12 percent of the Americans surveyed consistently favored a campaign against Jews in America, while another poll taken in July 1939 found that 42 percent of Americans who were asked wanted either to take measures to prevent Jews from gaining too much economic power in America, or (less often) to deport them as fast as humanely possible.⁴⁰

While these members of the Protestant church press frequently criticized American anti-Semitism,⁴¹ their writers and editors often employed a confusing and contradictory discourse about Jews. For instance, in the summer of 1938, Frederick C. Grant perpetuated aspects of traditional Christian anti-Jewish rhetoric in an article he wrote for the journal *Christendom*, which was affiliated with the American Sections of the World Conference on Faith and Order and the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work. Discussing the place of Jews in Christian history, he presented the long history of the Jews as a series of crises, explaining how Jesus had offered the Jewish people a chance to become “the church, a people of God, mixed like leaven among the peoples of the earth, [...] the conscience of mankind.” This they refused. Grant continued:

³⁹ Hadley Cantril and Mildred Strunk, *Public Opinion 1935–1946* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 382–3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 382–3, 385, 1081, 1150.

⁴¹ For example, *Zion's Herald* repeatedly condemned the rise of fascist and anti-Semitic speech and groups in the United States, in articles like “Jersey City – Fascist Cell,” *Zion's Herald* (May 25, 1938): 676.

I do not bring charges against our brethren in the synagogue; but I cannot help feeling that the long tragedy of Israel's wanderings, the bitter persecution even unto this day, might have been averted had [...] 'the proposal of Jesus' been adopted rather than rejected by his own people.

While Grant was actually trying to use Judaism as an illustration for a lesson Christians needed to learn, his assessment of the Jewish condition shows how even liberal Protestants intent on acting with good will towards Jews could not quite refrain from placing part of the blame for Jewish suffering squarely on the victims themselves.⁴²

Although *The Churchman* was a strong opponent of anti-Semitism in both Europe and the United States, like *Christendom*, it too published material which reinforced traditional anti-Semitic stereotypes. In a case of supremely bad timing, Alfred Artyn Gross, a former cleric, published "Manners and Morals of Anti-Semitism: Why Do We Dislike Our Neighbors?" in the November 15 issue of *The Churchman*. In this extensive article on anti-Semitism in America, Gross argued that Hitler's persecution of Jews – he could not have known about the Kristallnacht pogrom when he wrote – reminded Americans of their own anti-Semitism problem. In an effort to explain contemporary rationalizations for anti-Semitism, however, Gross proceeded to discuss Jewish customs – ways of eating, drinking, and celebrating holidays – which he felt were different, but not immoral. Then, he turned to Jewish business practices. Here he did not entirely reject the ideas that Jews tended towards dishonesty or that they dominated the learned professions, but blamed Christians for putting Jews in these positions:

What about the responsibility the Christian world must face for making the Jews the sort of people they are? When did a long history of persecution create a people of consistently noble characters? Ought we not to exult in those Jews, who despite their handicaps, have achieved greatness of soul? [...] Undoubtedly there are unlovely Jews; it is doubtful that unloveliness is a Jewish monopoly.

Gross then brought up the old accusation that the Jews were the Christ-killers, rejecting it by arguing that first-century Jews acted as any mob might have, stirred up by "the priests and their satellites." Moreover, he objected to the conflation of first- and twentieth-century Jews: "To hold the Jews of 1938 responsible for the sins of the mob of the year 30 is repeating the mentality which brought about the tragedy of Calvary. The world misunderstood Jesus and thought him dangerous. It executed him. There have been Calvaries before and since."

42 Frederick C. Grant, "Our Basic Faith," *Christendom* 3:3 (Summer 1938): 340.

In the end, Gross put forward a hopeful solution: the cure for anti-Semitism “lies in the recognition of our common humanity.” As he wrote:

A man is no better and no worse than his neighbor because he views the eternal verities differently. He becomes better or worse as he translates his insights into action. [...] What is religion? Jesus tells us it is very simple: “Love God. Love your neighbor.” Jews fall within the category of neighbours. You can call anti-Semitism a denial to Jews of the status of neighbors. As anti-Semitism succeeds, religion must fail.

To be sure, writers such as Grant and Gross meant well, and sought vigorously to combat anti-Semitic stereotypes. Still, they themselves were unable to avoid these very prejudices in their own writing.

Such mixed responses were not limited to the liberal wing of mainline Protestantism. Take, for example, a guest article on “The Plight of the Jews” penned by Dr. Joseph Taylor Britan, co-publisher of *Israel My Glory*, for the fundamentalist Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, which appeared in the November 10, 1938, edition of *The Presbyterian*.⁴³ (This is another case of terrible timing. Published on the day of the Kristallnacht pogrom, the article was quite obviously written beforehand.) Britan’s assessment of the Jewish situation begins with compassion for Jews who had suffered persecution, even as it depicts them in a completely undifferentiated manner:

The Jew stands today in the center of the world’s stage. He is frequently in the headlines. What he does not only arouses the interest of the world, but what is done to him is no less important. He is still the man without a country [...]. Persecuted in many nations, deprived of almost every economic, social, cultural and political opportunity, many of the greatest scientists, merchants and professional men are driven from the land of their birth, their property is confiscated and they themselves are reduced to abject poverty and ruthless power.

Britan wrote dramatically of Jewish misery, in terms that both mirrored the Nazi racial image of Jews and grasped the Nazi intent to destroy European Jewry:

No one knows the number of suicides among this race which have followed their persecution in certain nations in Europe. No one knows the number of innocent men, women and children starved to death or killed by the hostile powers which are determined to remove all Jews from their midst. Reliable authorities have estimated that many millions have been starved and otherwise “liquidated” during recent years in two or three nations in Europe.

⁴³ Joseph Taylor Britan, “The Plight of the Jew,” *The Presbyterian* (November 10, 1938): 11–2. The quotations which follow are all taken from the article.

Thousands, if not millions, of Jews are today being driven from one country to another with no place whereon the soles of their feet may permanently rest.

For Britan, these developments were a “reversion to the terrible racial antipathies of the Dark Ages,” and he added that there was “every indication that it will continue.”

Britan goes on to meld philosemitic sentiment and a bid for support on the one hand, with prejudicial stereotypes and supersessionist theology on the other. Surveying the “alleged reasons” for the present-day persecution of the Jews, he observed that the Nazis believed Jews to be the leaders of the Communist movement, while others believed in a global conspiracy of Jews to establish a dictatorship. While he disparaged these ideas as false propaganda, he further opined that “The Word of God declares that the sufferings of Israel are His judgments for idolatry and for their rejection of His son and their own Messiah.” Immediately thereafter, though, Britan pivoted away from the implications of this condemnation: “This, however, gives no nation and no individual the Divine permission to persecute the Jew; and the penalties promised to those who do persecute the Jews are certain to be visited upon offending persons and nations.”

From there, Britan turned to the danger of anti-Semitism in the United States and the scapegoating of Jews in U.S. society. Yet even as he defended American Jews from stereotyping under the collective identities as communist or financier, he continued to draw on the very language of collective identity: “Even if it were discovered that all the leaders of Communism are Jews (a supposition contrary to fact), there still would be no reason to persecute the Jews as a race and make the truly patriotic and righteous members of the race to suffer for the economic and political sins of the Jew.”

At this point in the article, Britan returned to the “dire need of the Jew” in foreign lands and the “ungodly and un-Christian persecution of innocent Jewish men, women, and children over the face of the earth,” commenting that Americans “would surely rise as one man and demand the cessation of persecution [...] if the emotions and sympathies of the world had not been deadened by the diabolical deeds of the World War.”

Having diagnosed the ills of anti-Semitism and persecution, Britan turned to address the question of cure. First, he maintained, Christians should protest and work to educate Americans so that anti-Semitism “may find no place in American life.” Pastors, Bible teachers, and leaders were the key figures Britan claimed could erect “barriers against the evil tides of prejudice and persecution.” The second response Britan advanced, and the one he spent the most time discussing, was financial and spiritual support for Jewish missions. Enumerating different Philadelphia Presbyterian attempts to evangelize Jews, he observed both the

eager interest of Jews and their reluctance to convert, which he blamed on Jewish spiritual blindness – “For the veil is still over the eyes of many Jews [...]” – and centuries of prejudicial treatment at the hands of Christians. For Britan, the “278,000 Jews of Philadelphia” constituted “one of the most neglected mission fields for evangelistic work in the city,” important to undertake “if the powerful paganism of our day is to be met and our Christian institutions preserved.”

While American Christians were supposed to respond with protests against injustice, education for tolerance, and the evangelism of Jews at home, they were not to forget their responsibility to Jews in Europe. Like other Protestant writers, Britan reframed the suffering of Jews as the suffering of Christians and Jews: one and a half million “Hebrew Christians” in Europe required immediate aid, he specified, adding that British churches were already helping “Jews and Jewish Christians.” He quoted a Scottish churchman to argue that “the non-Aryan Christians of Germany are a problem side by side with the Jewish problem: or rather they are part of the problem, for no distinction is made on grounds of faith.” Jews, Briton declared, were “completely astounded” that Christians were not helping fellow Christians of Jewish origin, and deplored that “hardly any help has been forthcoming from Christian sources” to aid the tens and hundreds of thousands of non-Aryans who have never known of any other faith than Christianity, even as word from Germany was that these people “are slowly and inexorably being annihilated.” Britan closed with an appeal for money and prayer, invoking the words of Jesus from the Gospel of Matthew: “Inas much [sic] as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren (the Jews), ye have done it unto me.”

It is hard to guess the conclusions drawn by readers who made it to the end of Britan’s article. Would they have been swayed by the author’s passionate defense of Jews from anti-Semitic prejudice and persecution, or, rather, absorbed his many traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes, supersessionist theology, and calls for Jewish conversion? Difficult to categorize, this article illustrates how Protestant publications mirrored the internal tension within 1930s U.S. conservative Protestantism, both condemning and perpetuating anti-Semitism, and the way in which Protestant support for persecuted Jews always took place under the theological and socio-cultural shadows of the long history of Jewish-Protestant relations.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Among other examples of this mixture of positive and negative responses to Jews and Judaism in the context of Nazi persecution, see James C. Clark, “The Christian Church and the Jew,” *The Presbyterian* (September 15, 1938): 7–8.

The Cosmic Battle of Christianity and Irreligion

Finally, it must be said that although mainline Protestant leaders fought against anti-Semitism, decried the plight of German Jews, and worked to generate financial and practical support for Jewish (and Jewish-Christian) refugees, all of these concerns were subsumed by their broader preoccupation with the cosmic struggle between Christianity and irreligion, which emerged from a profound sense of crisis related to both global political turmoil and religious upheaval. In the Protestant church press analyzed in this chapter, this battle of good and evil took two forms: liberal and conservative.

On the liberal side, these Protestant writers and editors warned their readers about the forces of barbarism, totalitarianism, and war which threatened to destroy civilization, democracy, and freedom. Time and again, they reinforced the link between religion, specifically Christianity, and democracy and civilization. An attack on any one of these institutions was an attack on them all.

Arthur E. Holt captured this idea astutely in his article, “Shall Protestantism Implement Democracy?” published in *Advance* in February 1938:

It will remain for Protestantism to be the spiritual energizer of these democracies. Catholicism is not interested in the democratic process. [...] If the democracies of the world are to be spiritualized, energized, it will remain for the Protestant churches to carry on the task. There is an interplay between Protestantism on the one hand and the democratic governments on the other. [...] These two movements – democracy in political life and democracy in religious life – reinforce each other or die together. [...] Something terrible will happen to the world if the world gives up on the idea of living by persuasion, by social cohesion, by fellowship, by progress and by mutual exchange of ideas. That is essentially the philosophy, it seems to me, of democracy and Protestantism.⁴⁵

In the same issue, Henry Smith Leiper wrote,

Efforts to avert war have only been substitutes for religion. Peace must be grounded more deeply than upon anything that has as yet been tried. We must go down deeper. Only religion can save us. The churches must get on with their job. The responsibility rests with them. Religion is peace.⁴⁶

In August, T.W. Graham argued that Christianity elevated individual human worth, which was a significant contribution to the Greek idea of democracy.

⁴⁵ Arthur E. Holt, “Shall Protestantism Implement Democracy?” *Advance* (February 1, 1938): 57–8.

⁴⁶ Henry Smith Leiper, “The State of the Church,” *Advance* (February 1, 1938): 62.

“Are you concerned for the opportunity for the ordinary man to make judgments as to the common good?” he asked. “Then the world must be fashioned after the mind of the great democrat of the ages: Jesus Christ. Then we must set ourselves to drive war out of the world. Then must you give yourselves in every area of life to make democracy effective.”⁴⁷

If Jesus was Graham’s “great democrat of the ages,” Wilbur Larremore Caswell of *The Churchman* presented Paul as the originator of a great liberal tradition that carries on into the twentieth century!⁴⁸ And, as former U.S. ambassador to Germany William Dodd put it in a speech to the Church League for Industrial Democracy, “If we abandon democracy, we cannot help but abandon Christianity, and then we will go into another system which reminds one of the autocratic rule of the late Middle Ages where the government was everything and the individual counted for nothing.” Distressed, he described fascism as “the worst situation the world has ever known” and called on “Christians in democratic countries” to cooperate to save democracy, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press.⁴⁹

A letter to the editor on May 1st echoed these sentiments: “At first slowly, now suddenly and dramatically, the world, all who see and understand and hope for order and freedom and the survival of civilization, Christian, Jew and even non-believer, seems to look to the great religions of the world to save it from suicide.” After the failure of the League of Nations and its member governments to maintain world peace, the world looks to “Christian or religious concepts of right and wrong, of justice, freedom, peace and – our last and greatest hope – of human brotherhood.”⁵⁰

More apocalyptic still was Sturgis Lee Riddle’s September article entitled, “Civilization Takes Refuge in the Church,” in which he argued:

Now that self-sufficient humanism has run its course, sown its seed, now that science, un-directed by Immortal Mind, is loosing a new barbarism upon us, now that man’s five-century-old determination to live unto himself alone is turning the world again into a place of horror, the church of God is once more called upon to assume the trusteeship of civilization.⁵¹

47 T.W. Graham, “Democracy or War,” *Advance* (August 1, 1938): 365.

48 Wilbur Larremore Caswell, “New Orthodoxy and Old Liberalism: Liberalisms May Pass but Liberalism Never,” *The Churchman* (March 1, 1938): 14–5.

49 “Democracy: Dodd Describes Nazism at CLID Annual Meeting,” *The Churchman* (March 1, 1938): 18.

50 Robert R. Reed, “Hull or Hitler?” *The Churchman* (May 1, 1938): 4.

51 Sturgis Lee Riddle, “Civilization Takes Refuge in the Church,” *The Churchman* (September 1, 1938): 10–1.

If liberals tied the salvation of Western civilization to the strength of Christianity, conservatives honed in on apolitical Christian spiritual renewal and prayer as remedies for the world's ills. For example, in November 1938, *The Living Church* published a public address delivered by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Francis B. Sayre, in which the politician outlined the task of Christianity in the face of "the increasingly acute human need and the growing world problems which press in upon us from every side." After depicting the collapse of "old institutions, old beliefs, old standards," and "the "prodigious change [which] everywhere affects the very foundations of our life," Sayre urged Christians to "take stock of their own beliefs, to evaluate and formulate their own faith and, if theirs is to be a conquering faith, to reach some kind of agreement on a program for action."⁵² For Sayre, this program included faith in God rather than physical force; "the free giving of oneself to other people, irrespective of race, nation, or creed," rather than selfish "material acquisition;" and international human brotherhood rather than national rivalries. What was required was a return to "a revitalized and purified Christianity." Sayre propounded belief in the goodness and love of God at work in the world, and stated, "We believe that actually the world cannot function effectively until men learn to put Christ at the centre of their lives." In terms of a program of action, Sayre called for "a thoroughgoing loyalty to all mankind beyond the narrow confines of class, nation, or race." He went on to petition for the cessation of war, the creation of a just social order, and the elimination of "race, color, or creed discrimination." All of this, though, was an appeal for individual Christian belief and action, not a political buttressing of Western civilization by institutional Christianity.

Prayer as a response to the crises of totalitarianism and irreligion was a recurring theme in *The Living Church*. As a September article on "The Clouds of War" proclaimed: "It is a time for Christians of all nations to pray without ceasing – and to endeavor to raise up a truly Christian generation that may be able to build a better world than that of which the present generation has made such a mess."⁵³ And in mid-December, the editors printed "A Prayer for the Oppressed" from a minister in Colorado. It read:

O God, the Creator of men and of nations: we implore Thy fatherly care and protection in behalf of all Thy children everywhere who suffer persecution. In all their trials and tribulations be Thou their refuge and strength. Impart to them Thine own comfort and courage. Turn the hearts of the oppressors from evil to good. Stop the hands and convert the wills of

⁵² Francis B. Sayre, "Christianity Faces the World," *The Living Church* (November 16, 1938): 509–10.

⁵³ "The Clouds of War," *The Living Church* (September 7, 1938): 209.

those who would array brother against brother in racial strife. Restore to all men everywhere the blessing of religious freedom. Fill our hearts and inspire our minds with a desire firmly to establish peace and justice, liberty and fraternity, throughout the world; for His sake who suffered for all mankind, Thy Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.⁵⁴

Similar calls for individual spiritual renewal were to be found in *The Presbyterian*, where pleas for prayer also appeared. In a striking example, Dr. Mark A. Matthews, pastor of the largest Presbyterian church in the United States, asked readers, “Have You Forgotten How to Pray?” He warned of “a world on fire,” totalitarian attacks on liberty, individual rights, and democracy, and a coming war for “the preservation of liberty and the right to exist.” His response was this question: “Have we forgotten how to pray, why we should pray, and when we should pray?”⁵⁵

One week later, Arthur Burd McCormick reported on the many calls to prayer, prayer meetings, and intercession services which had recently taken place in response to the Czech Crisis and Munich Conference. In this context, he told of the request of a woman to her pastor that the ministerial association set aside its meeting to pray, and that churches around the city of Philadelphia be opened to prayer meetings. Within the hour, arrangements had been made, and even city hall and some schools stopped their work for prayer. “Things like this were going on all over the earth,” McCormick wrote. “Who dare say that those prayers had nothing to do with the settlement at the eleventh hour and fifty-ninth minute.”⁵⁶

For McCormick and others in the conservative wing of mainline Protestantism, spiritual renewal was key to combatting the evils of the current age. As he argued:

The only remnants of internationalism left in the world are to be found among the churches (including synagogues). This new emphasis on Aryanism, race, blood, nation; this new resort to brute force; this new policy of terrorism; this absolute denial of freedom, justice and love; this disregard of decency and common morality; this setting of governments outside of the idea of law – all this is a return on a world scale to the ruthlessness of the tribal clan or the cry of the wolfish pack. We have witnessed Mussolini’s contemptuous indifference to the Church. We have seen the Nazi attempt to create a pagan-Christian church which will give blind support to the government.

54 “A Prayer for the Oppressed,” *The Living Church* (December 14, 1938): 636.

55 Mark A. Matthews, “Have You Forgotten How to Pray?” *The Presbyterian* (October 6, 1938): 3, 6.

56 Arthur Burd McCormick, “The World As I See It,” *The Presbyterian* (October 13, 1938): 5.

Here McCormick gave examples of Nazi attacks on both Christians and Jews, and asked:

Is it not therefore evident that the time has come for all who believe in spiritual religion, for all who are opposed to totalitarianism, for all who prize their freedom to get together and present a common front against this new savagery that threatens the destruction of all we hold dear? Jews, Catholics and Protestants face a common foe: why not face it together? ⁵⁷

Other conservative appeals for spiritual renewal and devotional activity as the weapon with which to defeat the forces of irreligion appear in the Methodist weekly *Zion's Herald*. For instance, during Easter 1938, an article entitled, "Looking for the Resurrection" explored the meaning of the resurrection of Christ in the context of the modern totalitarian state. When dictatorships dominate the many domains of life, then "Jesus Christ, the living Jesus Christ, has once more been crucified and placed in a tomb whose entrance has been doubly sealed, lest He should escape and once more proclaim hope and freedom and faith to men." As the states make power their god, as they suppress human freedom, "the pagans are having their day." Observing the persecution of Christians in Germany, the author declares: "The scene is not new. Nero – Hitler; catacombs – prison camps; Colosseum – execution grounds. A different year, a few changes in costumes, another location – that is all. History is repeating itself."⁵⁸

Most conspicuous in this article, as in so many other cases, is not so much the emphasis on Christian suffering rather than Jewish suffering as the contest between the spiritual power of Christ over and against the paganism of totalitarianism. As the author continued,

There are signs that the tomb [...] is beginning to crack. There are evidences of newness of life [...] for the living Christ cannot be bound in the grave-clothes of pagan power. [...] [T]here is a flush in the east, and little streaks of light that proclaim the advent of a new day of love and righteousness. Be of good cheer. Christ shall rise again – here and now in this sin-distracted world.⁵⁹

Two months later, another article, entitled "Witness-Bearing – 1938," advised Christians how to participate in the spiritual subversion of totalitarian irreligion. Witness-bearing, the author counseled, must go beyond personal religious devotion. "In this twentieth century of confusion when men have gone so far astray in their wider relationships," the author called for witness-bearing right across the

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "Looking for the Resurrection," *Zion's Herald* (April 13, 1938): 464.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

world.⁶⁰ But what were Christians supposed to bear witness to? The answer: “First of all, to the sovereignty of God. This is not Hitler’s world, Mussolini’s world, the Mikado’s world, the politician’s world, the capitalist’s world, the labor leader’s world. It is God’s world. We are to do His will first, last, and always, and let consequences be what they will.” Next, Christians were to bear witness to the significance and purpose of life and to the supremacy of love, and to do so through the proclamation of the gospel. “Preach the word! Preach *the* word – not empty words.” And laypeople had a role too, to speak out, work in committees, pass resolutions, and “seek to put the principles of the gospel to work wherever you have the opportunity.”⁶¹

This was a spiritual renewal to defeat the forces of irreligion with spiritual weapons:

The church cannot and should not attempt to operate governments, settle economic problems, dictate labor policies, pose as an expert in the technique of industry, draw up trade agreements, point out in concrete detail all the proper relationships among the nations. The church’s business is to bear witness, to insist upon the application of gospel principles to all life. When it does this it lives in Christ; when it fails to do this it dies, though the empty forms of its organization may survive for years.⁶²

In another case, Charles M. Laymon, a prolific writer of biblical commentaries and practical theology, published in August 1938 an article about how pastors should preach apocalyptically. In times of wickedness, preachers ought to proclaim the breakthrough of a new work of God. This he applied to the present time, first noting the economic uncertainty in the United States, after which he turned to the international scene:

From press and radio come reports of even greater uncertainty abroad. The chess-game of European politics is being speeded up with dizzying rapidity. No one would predict with confidence the national boundary lines of Central Europe twelve months hence. This is the type of soil that grows apocalyptic thinking. Culture seems to have failed. Self-interest has cocained [sic] reason. Man is not sure he can trust himself, and less sure that he can trust his brother. If the world is to be saved, God alone can save it, and because He must, He will!⁶³

⁶⁰ “Witness-Bearing—1938,” *Zion’s Herald* (July 6, 1938): 868.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Charles M. Laymon, “Preaching and Apocalypse: Today’s Need for a Triumphant Faith,” *Zion’s Herald* (August 3, 1938): 991.

Laymon further explained the elements of what he called an apocalyptic spirit: a conviction of the purpose of history which will be realized in God's ultimate judgment, a sense of urgency, a greater sensitivity to "the reality of the 'Unseen,'" and a triumphant faith that God will ultimately win the day.⁶⁴

Later in the fall, in the wake of the Czech Crisis, *Zion's Herald* published an article entitled "The Four Horsemen" – another reference to the apocalypse, or the end of the world. In the article, however, the four horsemen refer to the four political leaders who negotiated the dismemberment of the Czechoslovak state. Decrying the Munich Agreement as a breaking of agreements and an abandonment of ethics, the writer interpreted the pact as a demonstration that:

[...] the only solution of the world's woes is the practice of Christianity. Not Communism with its shiftY ethics and appeal to force, not Naziism [sic] or Fascism with their sword-rattling and their blatant denial of morals, will save the world [...]. Turn away from Munich and look at Calvary. In the crucified Christ is the honest word of God, love, truth, integrity, peace, justice, which must prevail not through brute force but by example and persuasion. He can deliver this sin-sick world from destruction. He alone can do it. There is none beside.⁶⁵

Conclusion

In 1938, against the background of German racism, American anti-Semitism, and a growing Jewish refugee crisis, the writers and editors of the mainline Protestant church press examined in this chapter understood their Christian duty as a call to respond to a profound sense of crisis. Democracy, civilization, Christianity, and all religion were under attack from the forces of war, totalitarianism, racism, and paganism. Clergy writing in mainline church periodicals responded by naming the evils of war and totalitarianism, in particular the threat that Hitler and Nazi Germany posed to the civilized world. They also fought against anti-Semitism and tried to aid Jews, though not without slipping into the language of enduring anti-Jewish prejudices, and also not without reframing the persecution of Jews and the Jewish refugee crisis as the persecution of Christians and Jews, and the Christian and Jewish refugee crisis. Of paramount importance to these mainline Protestants, however, was the affirmation that it was Christianity, and Christianity alone, that had the power to rescue civilization, save democracy, and preserve the world from self-destruction.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 991–2.

⁶⁵ "The Four Horsemen," *Zion's Herald* (October 12, 1938): 1236.