

BAPTISTS AND THE HOLOCAUST

BY  
E. EARL JOINER

A RESEARCH PAPER PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL  
CONFERENCE ON “REMEMBERING FOR THE FUTURE,”

AT

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Baptists are now the largest Protestant group in America, 27,377,422 (1985). These together with Baptists in other countries around the world total 32,483,408, making Baptists a rather significant force in the modern world (Southern Baptist Handbook, hereafter shall be referred to as SBH, 1987). The major growth which put them in this position has occurred after the Holocaust, but it began much earlier.

Baptists began as a small persecuted minority of dissenters in England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Though they had some kinship with one of the radical wing of the Reformation, the Anabaptists, modern Baptists trace their ancestry to the early English Baptists and American Baptists who were the offspring of the early British Baptists. During their early history, Baptists were often persecuted and sometimes imprisoned in England and in America. When England passed the Edict of Toleration in 1689, some of the persecution ceased, but since most of the early colonies had established church systems Baptists and other minorities were still victims of many pressures, including the necessity of paying taxes to support the clergy of the established churches. Thus they were tolerated, but not really free.

Before the American Revolution, Roger Williams joined the small Baptist movement after being expelled from the Massachusetts Bay Colony and established Rhode Island, the first colony dedicated to religious freedom. When the Revolution came, the few Baptists in the American colonies were reluctant to fight England because of their gratitude to England for their guarantee of religious toleration. They finally decided to join the revolutionaries hoping to gain complete religious freedom.

After the Revolution, Baptists petitioned the first Continental Congress to include an article in the Constitution which guaranteed religious freedom for all. They did not succeed, but they continued to press their claims, and worked with others to bring into being the first amendment to the Constitution which states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

During and after the Revolution, the Baptist movement spread over the colonies on the eastern seaboard and grew in number, and were among the effective groups in relating to the pioneers in the great westward push.

By the time Hitler came to power in 1933, Baptists in America had grown from 1,125 in 1683, to 9,188,508 in 1933, and in the world they numbered 11,136,612 strong. By 1939 there were 4,949,174 Southern Baptists and 10,894,826 Baptists in the U. S., and in the world the number had reached 12,472,059 (SBH, 1940). In the early 1900s, moreover, Baptists in America particularly developed a strong sense of social responsibility. It is noteworthy that Walter Rauschenbusch, the well known prophet of the Social Gospel, who wrote during the early 1900s, was a Baptist. He gained wide fame with his publication of Christianity and the Social Crisis, in 1907. Despite the fact that Rauschenbusch adopted the critical study of the Bible associated with the names of German scholars like Schleiermacher, Ritschl and Harnack, he hated militarism, and with the rise of Germany before and during World War I, his popularity declined with the growing opposition to Germany in America.

Baptists however, continued to grow because Rauschenbusch, while he represented well the growing sense of social responsibility among Baptists, did not represent typical Baptist views in other ways (Robert T. Handy, ed., 1966).

The growth of Baptists from an important minority in the early colonial period to an influential and powerful group in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is reflected in the significant role they played in the prohibition movement. This movement led to the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment which became effective in 1920, and prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcohol as a beverage in the United States. Its repeal the same year Hitler came to power in 1933, may reflect the decline in Baptists' sense of social responsibility. It also paralleled the decline of the Social Gospel in America. It certainly reflected the widespread belief that prohibition was a failure. For Baptists as for other Protestants in America the passing of the prohibition amendment quite apart from the issue of alcohol, demonstrated the power that church groups could have when they reached consensus on an issue they considered important.

Baptists have shared with Jewish people three things which should have made them ready to identify with the Jewish people in their time of suffering during the rise of Nazism to the pinnacle of power, and during the Holocaust. First, they shared a common history of persecution, with the Jewish people suffering most in part because of their longer history. Second, they have shared with the Jewish community in taking the Hebrew Scriptures with great seriousness. Also they have shared with the Jewish people a sense of responsibility to obey God even at the risk of persecution. Third, they have shared a common commitment to religious freedom, and the separation of church and state. One would expect that these shared experiences and convictions along with Baptists' growing sense of social responsibility should have produced many expressions of sympathy for the sufferings of the Jews during the rise of Nazism and during the Holocaust itself.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the responses Baptists made to the plight of the Jews, and the contribution they made to the atmosphere in which much of the western world, including the Christian world, stood by and did little to prevent or stop the Holocaust.

### **THEIR AMBIVALENCE**

The question we examine here is how important did Baptists consider the issue of growing anti-Semitism in the rise of Nazism to be. The first answer appears to be that they were rather ambivalent. On the one hand, many Baptists, according to one study a majority of American Baptists, regarded the Jews as the chosen people of God. On the other hand, a significant minority of American Baptists have believed that the Jews were most responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus. The minority included 46% of American Baptists, 38% of Southern Baptists (Charles Glock et al., 1966)

This ambivalence made Baptists easily vulnerable to two extremes, tempted either to show favoritism to all Jews because they were Jews, or to show hostility to all Jews because of their perceived corporate guilt. It also produced a conditional attitude which distinguished between those Jews who were possible converts to Christianity and those who were not. Sometimes great kindness toward Jews is shown and commended to others that is calculated to lay the foundation for winning them to Christianity. In all fairness, however, it appears that in some cases the kindness was a genuine expression of caring and appreciation for others regardless of race or religion. On this positive note, for example Mrs. H. A. Hunt who published a column in the *Florida Baptist Witness*, on "The Jew," expressed keen appreciation in 1932 for Julius Rosenwald of Chicago, pointing out that he gave away four times as much as he left. She praised him for his self-denial and the good he did with his money. Further, she wrote: "Like the late Nathan Straus, his happiness lay in unselfishly serving others, and also like Mr. Straus, he belonged to the race that has given to America many other Philanthropists." (*Florida Baptist Witness*, hereafter shall be referred to as *Witness*, 1932). For several months in 1932 and 1934 Mrs. Hunt gave advice on proper Christian attitudes toward the Jews. She wrote that church officers should include in their prayers "a petition for the Jews and for Christians that they may manifest to the Jews a kind spirit and take a deeper interest in their spiritual welfare." (*Witness*, 1932). Further, she suggested that "A Christian friend of the Jews, when unfair remarks are made about them in his presence, uses the opportunity to defend them and give interesting information about them." (*Witness*, 1932). Mrs. Hunt also expressed keen interest in the

growing support in some circles of American government for the cause of Zionism. (*Witness*, 1933). Moreover, she expressed deep concern over the recent news of starving Jews in Poland.

However, the generous attitude of Mrs. Hunt toward the Jewish people seems not to be typical of Baptists in the 1930s, if we judge by their published writings. For example, Rev. and Mrs. Russell wrote in the *Witness* also in 1932 that "... the Jew still hates Christ and all who represent Him." (*Witness*, 1932). Such a strong negative statement of course may in part reflect the frustrations these missionaries were facing in Palestine at the time. Even so, the anti-Semitism seems obvious.

In some cases the ambivalence did not involve direct prejudice against the Jews, but rather gave support to the notion that some races were superior and others inferior. Such notions could not only be transferred from one race to another. At times racist and anti-racist views could be held by persons quite unconscious of the contradiction. A classic example is my professor of preaching, Dr. J. B. Weatherspoon, who wrote a review of *Applied Eugenics*, published by Popenoe and Johnson in 1918, and revised in 1934, and recommended the work as a thorough and dependable treatment of the subject. The book argues that some races are inferior to others (*Review and Expositor*, hereafter shall be referred to as *Review*, 1934). Ironically, a few years later, Dr. Weatherspoon, who served on the Social Service Commission for many years, played a significant role in getting forward looking reports passed by the Southern Baptist Convention which condemned racism (SBC, 1941, 1943). Did he change his views about racism, or did he believe that one could believe in the racial superiority of one race over another without being racist? In his case the answer is likely that he did not see any necessary connection between the ideas of racial superiority and discrimination. He was in fact opposed to all forms of racial discrimination. Even so, in the context of the academic world of the 1930s we cannot avoid the conclusion that he was among many who did not recognize the interrelatedness of belief in racial superiority and racism in the 1930s. By the 1940s, however, he and other Baptists learned the dangers of such racism from Hitler (SBC, 1944).

This ambivalence moreover, was widespread among Baptists, in Europe and in America, and though it was expressed in different ways it created a schism in the very soul of Baptists and also produced a number of other responses to the rise of Nazism that also contributed to the atmosphere which was partly responsible for the Holocaust.

## **FEAR**

The rise of Hitler struck fear in the hearts of many informed Baptists in Germany, Europe, and America. In 1934 in the year after Hitler came to power, the Baptist World Alliance met in Berlin, at the same time the Baptists in Germany were celebrating their 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of Baptist work in Germany. Baptists outside Germany were well aware of the political unrest there and some suggested that the leaders of the Baptist World Alliance change the meeting place to London. Having received assurance from the Germans of their safety and desiring to affirm strong support for German Baptists, the leaders decided to stick with the plan of meeting in Berlin. Even so, apprehension over the political situation in Germany kept many from attending. Despite that fact, the meeting in Berlin drew the largest attendance in the history of the Baptist World Alliance (*Review*, 1934). Even so, some who attended were fearful of their own safety and concerned for the freedom and well being of the German Baptists.

These Baptist leaders had heard talk also of the creation of one national church in Germany to which all denominations would be related. When they expressed their anxieties to the German authorities, Archbishop Ludwig Meuller invited a small group of leaders to his home and assured them that the free churches would continue to be free (*Review*, 1934).

These reassurances helped reduce the apprehensions of many of the delegates, but not all. Despite their claims to the contrary, John R. Sampey, President of Southern Baptist Seminary claimed he saw fear and apprehension in the eyes of the German Baptists who attended the Alliance meeting.

While everywhere the Baptists from other lands were treated with marked courtesy, some of us felt that our German Baptist brethren were uncertain and disturbed concerning their future. They talked little, but the atmosphere

seemed to some of us charged with uneasiness and fear... Our Baptist brethren in Germany face a very grave crisis. They will find it difficult to be loyal both to Hitler and the Lord Jesus. (*Western Recorder*, 1934).

Moreover, the discussion of the Report of the Commission on Nationalism by Paul Schmidt, a German Baptist, seems to this writer to betray his own fear that his approval of the report might get him in trouble with the German authorities, since the report warned of the dangers of nationalism. He claimed that the church could do nothing but condemn decadent nationalism, which he did not define, and teach healthy patriotism (Baptist World Alliance, hereafter shall be referred to as BWA, 1934).

Similarly, when German Baptist F. Fullbrandt, argued that if the churches are to be effective and useful they must cooperate, we wonder if that statement betrayed fear also (BWA, 1934).

### **PROTEST**

The third response of Baptists to the rise of Nazism and the maltreatment of the Jews in Germany was protest. The awareness of Baptist leaders in 1934 of racial discrimination in Germany and other places in the world was expressed in a resolution protesting religious oppression and racial discrimination against Jews and others (BWA, 1934). Narrow, unselfish nationalism was also condemned in the report of the Commission on Nationalism chaired by N. J. Nordstrom of Stockholm, Sweden. In condemning nationalism however, while he listed its dangers, including the threat to missions and to the peace and freedom of the church, he made no mention of the danger to the Jews (BWA, 1934).

In 1933, the Northern Baptist Convention adopted a mild resolution which deplored race hatred and discrimination in both the United States and Germany (BWA, 1934). In 1938, the General Council of the Northern Baptist Convention adopted a rare specific resolution which expressed deep concern for the suffering of many minorities, including the Jews of Germany. The resolution also requested President Roosevelt to call an international conference to deal with the refugee problem, and urged the government to preserve the tradition of the United States as a haven for the oppressed (Nawn, 1980).

When the American Christian Committee for German Refugees was organized in 1934 as an interdenominational effort to deal with the refugee problem created by Nazi racial policies, it sought to supplement Jewish efforts. The organization came to include people from Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths. Northern Baptists' efforts were a part of this group. In fact the group created a film featuring an address by a well known minister, Harry Emerson Fosdick, in Riverside Church to publicize the cause. When the film was shown at Riverside, it attracted 2,000 people. It attracted such wide publicity that the Nazis attacked the film, describing it as Jewish propaganda and an unfair attack on National Socialism. Unfortunately, the film was not very successful. In fact, the expenses of the committee sometimes consumed as much as 70% of the money raised. For example, in 1939, when a goal was set for \$600,000, only \$200,000 was raised. The committee therefore was always in financial difficulty, although it did receive a great boost in 1940 with a \$100,000 gift from the United Jewish Appeal (Nawn, 1980).

When the Baptist World Alliance met in Atlanta, Georgia in 1939, it turned out to be the largest Baptist gathering in history with 12,445 registered. In his presidential address George W. Truett stated that Baptists insist on religious liberty for all, including Jews, but he made no mention of their special plight at the time (BWA, 1939). In contrast to the fear and relief which dominated the minds of many Baptists assembling in Berlin five years earlier, and where the element of protest was very mild, by 1939 the growth of concern among Baptist leaders from around the world was strongly expressed by more statements of protest that came from several leaders. Again, however, some ambivalence was obvious. In his report of the five years between Berlin and Atlanta, J. H. Rushbrooke, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, reviewed the work of the Alliance in defending religious freedom and protesting religious repression in various countries, including Russia and Rumania, but he made no mention of the special plight of the Jews. He did take note of the fact that not all that the Baptists said in Berlin had been freely published, and that 18 months after 1934, German authorities suppressed further circulation of reports (BWA, 1939).

M. E. Aubrey of London, in an address entitled, "Christianity and the Totalitarian State," condemned the recent imprisonment of Martin Niemoeller, the removal of 100 German pastors from

office, and the forbidding of 40 ministers to preach, but he too failed to mention the terrible plight of the Jews (BWA, 1939). German Baptist Paul Schmidt, responded strongly to Aubrey in his address entitled, "Liberalism, Collectivism and the Baptists." He began by reporting that one Baptist speaker cannot speak for all. Otherwise he would have to take exception to the previous speaker's (Aubrey) remarks. He went on to say that many lacked a proper understanding of what the real situation was in Germany, decried the meddling in political affairs by the church, and argued that some kind of collectivism may be justified for a nation to be strong and progressive. He argued, moreover, that to disobey men in authority is all right only when "the witness of Christ as personal Lord is at stake." (BWA, 1939).

William A. Mueller, a native German Baptist who was then teaching in the United States, apparently took Schmidt's remarks as suggesting that as long as German ministers confined their work to witnessing to Jesus Christ as personal Lord, they were completely free. Mueller had recently traveled in his own native land again, however, and took issue with Schmidt. Mueller's recent visits in Germany convinced him that the earlier Baptist passion had declined, and that the German Baptists had easily accepted the view of the distinction between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world that blinded them to the fact that this world is still God's world. Thus, he protested the lack of a clear word from the Baptist people of Germany concerning the burning issue in their land—the issue of anti-Semitism. While they claimed to be free, he reported seeing in Stettin that summer an ordinance on the bulletin board of a Baptist church, forbidding the distribution of religious pamphlets in nearly 50 strategic streets and public squares in that city (BWA, 1939).

### **PRAISE AND SUPPORT FOR HITLER**

To this writer, the most surprising Baptist response to the rise of Nazism and the widespread anti-Semitism that went with it was the praise and support Hitler received and the hostility directed toward the Jews. The praise and support Hitler received and written expressions of hostility to the Jews were not always expressed together. Some gave verbal support and praise for Hitler without expressing anti-Semitism. Others gave expression to strong anti-Semitic statements without expressing support for Hitler. In some instances support and praise for Hitler was largely unrelated to the Jewish question, but was rather grounded in other factors. Examples will illustrate these varieties.

Mild expressions of support and appreciation were expressed by leaders of the Baptist World Alliance in 1934 when their initial fears were replaced by relief after being assured of their safety by the Nazi leaders. During the few days they were in Berlin, the delegates felt secure, and expressed confidence that the Baptists' of Germany would continue to enjoy their freedom (BWA, 1934). No one at this meeting could fail to note the strong support to Hitler and German National Socialism given by the German Baptist leaders who spoke at the meeting. Paul Schmidt, editor of *Warheitzeuge*, affirmed support for his government, and suggested that the reshaping of the nation was the task of the government, not the church (BWA, 1934).

German Baptist F. Fullbrandt was high in his praise of Hitler and National Socialism. He said that no one has opposed the flood of unbelief that was threatening the well being of Europe and the whole western world like Hitler and the National Socialists (BWA, 1934). He went on to say that Hitler had put the churches to shame in dealing with Bolshevism, and that Hitler was doing what the churches should have done long ago (BWA, 1934). What he thought that the churches should have done is not clear, but it is clear that he believed the Baptist churches of Germany should support Hitler.

After reflecting on their experiences in Berlin in 1934, at least two prominent American Baptist ministers made strong statements of admiration and support for Hitler. One was M. E. Dodd, president of the Southern Baptist Convention. In expressing support and praise for Hitler, Dodd explained that many sources he had consulted convinced him that the recent movements in Germany were not religious or racial, but political and economic. He wrote that since World War I, 200,000 Jews from Russia and other places had come to Germany, and that most of them were communist agitators against the government. Moreover, he reported that when the Germans discovered the Jews occupied positions of influence in government, education, and business, all out of proportion to their size, and used them to injure the German people and advance their own interests, the action taken by Hitler to change things was

appropriate. He reported that over 50% of the lawyers and teachers in Berlin were Jewish, though the Jews represented only 1% of the influential positions. Apparently, Dodd had read of the political rhetoric Hitler used to justify his actions and took them at face value. The lack of critical judgment in his statements of course may reflect some ignorance of the facts. It may also, however, reflect anti-Semitism (M. E. Dodd, 1934).

Similarly, John W. Bradbury, a Baptist pastor in Boston, Massachusetts, (U. S. A.) after returning from the 1934 session of the Baptist World Congress, wrote that it was great to be in a land where sex literature could not be sold, and where no gangster films filled with violence could be shown. With obvious satisfaction, he wrote that:

The new Germany has burned masses of corrupting magazines and books along with its bonfires of Jewish and communistic libraries... The New Germany is serious minded. It would be well for other nations to take seriously too. Ninety percent of the people are in back of Hitler... I traveled through many cities and never heard a single strain of jazz music. (John W. Bradbury, 1934).

It appears that in the 1930s support and praise for Hitler and the new Germany were related to three factors which are hard to separate. One was the element of anti-Semitism among Baptists which we have noted earlier. Another was the fear of communism with which the Jewish element in Europe in general and in Germany in particular was associated, at least in their minds. It is incredible in retrospect, that they accepted Hitler's simplistic justification of his actions so easily. A factor in their naiveté is that anti-Semitism, widespread in Europe and America, in secular and religious minds, together with a growing fear of communism blinded their insight. A third factor in the Baptist support for Hitler was the conservative sound of Hitler's stress on individual morality which was shared by many Baptists. The growth of conservative personal morality was accelerated by a conservative theology and ethics which was expressed in their revolt against theological liberalism and the social gospel. The social gospel which stressed changing society through political and economic means, prominent in American Christianity, was never taken seriously by most conservative Baptists, and lost ground in American Protestantism following World War I and the depression of 1929. The fear of communism however, increased, and Hitler was viewed in the early years by Baptists and others as a bulwark against communism (Charles F. Leek, 1934).

By 1939, when the Baptist World Alliance met in Atlanta, Georgia, the perception of Hitler by Baptists outside Germany was changing. German Baptists still defended Hitler and National Socialism, but in England and in America Baptist support for Hitler began to decline. Even so the most common reason for the change appears not to be a growing concern for the plight of the Jews, but the fear of the loss of freedom for the clergy in Germany. As we have noted, an exception here was William A. Mueller, who criticized his fellow Baptists in his native Germany for their blind support of Hitler and their blindness to the racial problem that was reaching serious proportions in Germany and in America. As we shall see, however, the voice of Mueller and the few others who spoke out in 1939 were lonely voices. They were in sharp contrast to the views of Charles F. Leek, who wrote in the *Alabama Baptist* that while he did not approve of Hitler's Jewish measures, the German Jews were not only responsible for their plight, but that the American Jews could expect similar treatment unless they change (Nawn, 1980).

### **SILENCE**

The most common Baptist response to Hitler's Germany and his repressive measures against the Jews, especially between the years 1933 and the early 1940s, was somewhere between the extremes of praise and protest. The most accurate word to describe this median seems to be silence. Their silence is especially surprising since in their early history they too were persecuted and harassed. Close examination of the situation of Baptist life in various countries, however, reveals a number of factors which make their silence at least partially understandable though hardly excusable. The first factor is particularly characteristic of the Baptists in Germany. Their first real freedom came with the rise of Nazism. Baptists in Germany were part of a free church group receiving no state support, stressing individual piety and

avoiding political involvement. From their beginning in Germany in 1834, they were harassed, persecuted, ostracized, fined and imprisoned periodically until the rise of Nazism. Like the Baptists of the early Puritan era in America who were reluctant to join the fight for the Revolution because of their gratitude to England for the edict of toleration, German Baptists were reluctant to criticize the Nazis who gave them the first freedom they had known (Robert D. Linder, 1971; David T. Priestly, 1971).

A second reason for the silence of German Baptists was that even though they fought in the courts and in legislature for recognition, they still respected the government because they believed it was of God. Despite persecution by Lutherans, they were still influenced by Luther's doctrine of two kingdoms, which distinguished between the work of God through the church and through the state. Their radical understanding of the separation of church and state made German Baptists even less inclined to get involved in criticism than the Lutherans (David T. Priestly, 1971).

Third, and closely related because of their non-involvement in political affairs, German Baptists were politically uneducated. Also because of their non-involvement position, they never took a position either of loyalty or opposition to the Nazi state (David T. Priestly, 1971).

Fourth, many Baptists in Germany and elsewhere were simply preoccupied with other things. Because of their small size and their silence, German Baptists were largely ignored by the government, and went about their business of evangelism. In fact, when Germany annexed other countries, the Baptists of Germany instead of criticizing the state authorities, view these events as providing them with new opportunities for evangelism. Contacts were therefore made with other Baptists in these countries. However, the German authorities soon restricted the activity of all church groups to Germany, and the continuation of the war soon brought all such activities to a halt (David T. Priestly, 1971).

Fifth, while only four German Baptist pastors belonged to the Nazi party, many lay persons and youth were active in party organizations. Near the end of the war, however, the German Baptists became increasingly aware of the danger of losing their freedom even in Germany. Some pastors attracted the attention of the police by praying for peace rather than a German victory. Such prayers were regarded as too political and the pastors were warned. A few spoke out in protest, but only three Baptist pastors went to prison. Because of their silence also the Baptists of Germany were never really tested. From their silence, it appears that they accepted the German government's explanation for its measures against the Jews (David T. Priestly, 1971).

Outside Germany, the most conspicuous examples of silence among Baptist were from the Southern Baptist Convention of the United States. In the Southern Baptist Convention, representing the largest group of American Baptists, the Convention itself offered no resolutions of protest concerning the treatment of the Jews in Germany from 1933 to 1941. Whether or not this silence was due to ignorance or indifference one may debate. Certainly information on the plight of the Jews was not only available; it was reported in the 1940 edition of the *Southern Baptist Handbook*, published by the Southern Baptist Convention. Here the Convention reprinted information from the *Watchman and Examiner*, reporting the number of Jews in Germany and Austria who had committed suicide (30,000), how many were in prisons or concentration camps (30,000), how many emigrated (330,000), how many had been murdered (13,000).

The reasons for their silence are somewhat similar to those of the German Baptists. For one thing, their focus on social ethics was so narrow, particularly in the period paralleling the rise of Hitler, that it ignored major issues of state morality, stressing instead such issues as smoking, drinking, gangster movies, and women wearing red lipstick. Another reason for their silence was their stress on evangelism. Southern Baptists stressed evangelism in such a way as to play down social issues. The criticism by F. M. McConnell, editor of *The Baptist Standard*, of the amount of attention given to social, economic, and political issues in the 1934 meeting of the Baptist World Alliance was typical of many Southern Baptists in attendance (William L. Allen, 1982). The silence of many Southern Baptists during the rise of Hitler and during the Holocaust may also have been due to the racism that has a long history among Southern Baptists. The racism of many Southern Baptists is well documented by Spain and Eighmy (Rufus Spain, 1961; John Lee Eighmy, 1972). Another factor in the silence of Baptists outside Germany was their belief that Hitler's measures were justified by his efforts to oppose Communism. A factor in the silence of

American Baptists generally may be their preoccupation with the suffering of Baptists in other places. An address by Ed. A. Bell, representative in Europe of the American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, illustrates this point. He noted at the 1947 meeting of the Baptist World Alliance that he had recently traveled extensively in Europe and note the extensive suffering of Baptists and others, but did not mention the suffering of the Jews (BWA, 1947). Similarly, according to Nawn, the Southern Baptist Convention was totally silent on the plight of the Jews from 1933 to 1941. However, the Convention called on the government to intercede with the Rumanian government on behalf of the Baptists being persecuted in that country (*Report From the Capitol* (1979; 1983). My own research supports the observation of Nawn.

In fact, the issue of anti-Semitism which is central to the tragedy of the Holocaust was largely ignored by many Southern Baptist writers until after the Eichmann trial in 1961. It was apparently easy for most Baptists to forget about the Holocaust for even after the Eichmann trial which attracted world wide attention, the Holocaust was still ignored in most Baptist publications. After the Eichmann trial there was a significant increase in the number of Baptist published articles about the Jews, which seemed to reflect a rethinking of attitudes toward the Jews at least among some Baptist writers. From 1961 to 1983, however, I did not find a single article among Southern Baptist journals and news periodicals with the term Holocaust in the title.

In addition to the facts already mentioned, it is possible that many Baptists did not know what was happening until it was too late to engage in any effective efforts. It also seems possible that some were confused by German propaganda and influenced by patriotism and the fear of Communism. Since America was attacked by the Japanese and ended up fighting in Africa, Europe and the Far East many of its people including Baptists and political leaders, were so taken up with the war effort as a whole, that they simply overlooked the special plight of the Jews.

### **CONFESSION OF FAILURE**

After many years of silence the Southern Baptist Convention, now the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, passed a resolution on prejudice, in which they disavowed anti-Semitism as erroneously inherent in Christianity (SBC, 1971). In 1972, the Convention passed a stronger resolution offered by B. Elmo Scoggin, which mentioned the Holocaust directly, confessed the failure of Southern Baptists to take a sufficiently vigorous stand against Hitler's measures against the Jews, and called for an end to anti-Semitism. The resolution also cited the fact that Baptists and Jews share a common heritage of persecution and suffering for conscience sake (SBC, 1972). Similarly, after agonizing for many years over their own silence during the Holocaust, the Evangelical Free Church Congregations in Germany drew up a statement at the Congress of European Baptist Federation held in Hamburg on August 2, 1984. In the statement they expressed shame and grief and the desire for divine forgiveness. They reported that some among them saw the truth about the Nazi regime, warned against it and protested the injustice, but lamented that the Baptists of Germany as a group did not ally themselves with the efforts of others in opposing Nazism. The statement ended with the expressed hope that Baptists might learn from this chapter in their history (*Christian Jewish Relations*, 1984). For reasons indicated in this paper, all Baptists need to confess their failures also and to join all Christians and Jews in learning from our mistakes and working together to prevent such a catastrophe as the Holocaust from recurring.

### **GROWTH OF CONCERN**

Two agencies related to the Southern Baptist Convention have expressed concern for the sufferings of Jews in recent years, however. One of these agencies was the Home Mission Board whose earlier expressions of concern for the Jews were related primarily to their interest in converting the Jews to Christianity. In the last few years, there appear to have been a shift of focus in which departments of the Home Mission Board worked closely with a number of Jewish agencies to increase mutual understanding and work together to reduce anti-Semitism.

The other Baptist agency that has expressed concern for the sufferings of the Jews was the Baptist Joint Committee of Public Affairs, organized in 1950 and supported by nine different Baptist groups in the United States. This organization is dedicated to the preservation of religious liberty and the separation

of church and state. The committee published the first article with the word Holocaust appearing in its title in 1983. (Of course one must remember that the term “Holocaust” as the descriptive term for the destruction of 6 million Jews became widely known only in recent years.) However, the Joint Committee had expressed concern for the Jewish victim of persecution from its earliest days (*Report From the Capitol*, 1963, 1979). In 1979, James E. Wood Jr., who served as Executive Director from 1972 until 1980, received the Isaiah Award from Rabbi Matthew Simon of the American Jewish Committee, in appreciation for the many expressions of concern for the Jewish victims of persecution in Europe (*Report From the Capitol*, 1979).

### **LEARNING SOME LESSONS**

In the last 20 years (1960-1980) Baptists have undergone a self-evaluation in their attitudes toward Judaism and have given increasing attention to the dangers of anti-Semitism and the need for better understanding between Christians and Jews. Perhaps this is one of the lessons we have learned. There are several others. A second lesson is that our own history of suffering from persecution and lack of religious freedom requires us to be particularly sensitive to preserving the need to preserve the freedom and rights of others. Otherwise we will break faith with our own history. We must take advantage of all opportunities to learn what is happening in our world and be ready to witness and act to prevent or stop injustices against any religious or ethnic groups.

Third, we need to learn that theological statements can have consequences we do not intend, and that we need to consider the ways our theological statements can affect others. Baptists and other Christians need to review their literature and to become acutely aware of the danger of broad generalizations about “the Jews,” particularly in the interpretations of the crucifixion of Jesus. All language and terms that might encourage or perpetuate anti-Semitism attitudes or actions should be carefully avoided.

Fourth, we need to be very wary of the relation of the church to the “powers that be,” which may or may not be ordained of God. To be too closely identified with the state involves the risk of being used and/or losing the power of protest. To be too distant from the actions of the state can result in losing all influence. Either extreme can result in religious groups being used or abused.

Baptists, other Christians and Jews should recognize the mutual right to live freely and witness to their faith without fear of unfair criticism or repressive actions. Baptists and Jews should work with other religious groups to free the world from all racial and religious repression, and thus prevent another Holocaust.

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