

Canadian Baptists and the Jewish Refugee Question of the 1930s

ROBERT R. SMALE

Recent events in the former Yugoslavia have again heightened awareness that the world has largely failed to learn the lessons of the Holocaust. Kosovo is the latest in an endless array of genocide, ethnic cleansing and refugee crises that have plagued the world since 1945. Governments around the world continue to utilize torture, arbitrary arrest, detention, forced exile, denial of freedom of conscience and genocide.

The continuation of both a lack of respect for the dignity and sanctity of life, and the flagrant violations of human rights constitutes is not only a major political and social issue but also a religious one. Religious institutions have a responsibility to speak out against such atrocities and to campaign for the cause of rights and freedoms. Due to their historic advocacy of liberty of conscience, and their own historical experience as nonconformists, who were victims of persecution, it might be reasonable to expect that Baptists would be at the forefront of any such campaign. To what extent, however, was this the case during the Jewish refugee crisis of the 1930s?

This paper examines this issue in light of the responses and actions of Canadian Baptists (Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec) to the predicament, plight and flight of Jews in Europe from 1933-1939. Did Baptists, who were once themselves a persecuted religious minority, speak out against atrocities being perpetuated on the Jews of Europe? How aware of these atrocities were they? What actions, if any, did they encourage their government to take? Was the response limited to a few prominent individuals or was it more widespread? Were there significant differences

in the responses of fundamentalist and liberal Baptists? Baptists were not always consistent in their application to others of the standard of human rights that they demanded for themselves, so, was this true of their reactions and responses to the Jewish question of the 1930s?

With the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Canada had all but barred its doors to the influx of further immigration. Years of public agitation, racial tension, nativism and xenophobic fears had persuaded the Canadian government throughout the 1920s to institute various regulations designed to control the influx of immigrants. Furthermore, without explicitly changing the Immigration Act, the government made several “administrative refinements” that were deliberately intended to prevent any further admission of Jews into Canada.¹ Consequently, racism, nativism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, so pervasive in Canada especially after World War One, had “found formal expression in revamped immigration regulations.”² With the onset of the Depression, the government tightened its restrictionist umbrella still further.³

Consequently, at a time when the Jews were seeking refuge from the Aryan Laws of Hitler’s Third Reich, the corresponding boycotts and acts of brutality that attended their implementation culminating in the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of 1938 and an ever mounting refugee crisis, the Canadian government, “as much in defense of a narrow notion of Canada as out of direct hostility to Jews,” erected barriers not only “against their full participation in community life,” but more importantly, given the growing crisis in Europe, their admission into Canada.

When it came to the subject of Jews and Judaism, Canadian Baptists were no better or worse in their stereotypical and racist views than any other Canadian Protestants. Like other Protestants of the day, they held to the same “general misconceptions and endemic ignorance of Jewish history and religion . . . as well as [to] certain anti-Judaic sectarian strains.”⁴ References to Jews as Christ “rejecters” and “killers” found their way into denominational literature. In 1933 the *Canadian Baptist* lamented:

But to read the shameful story
How the Jews abused their King,
How they killed the Lord of Glory,
Makes me angry when I sing.⁵

These attitudes towards Jews were found in both the liberal and the

fundamentalist strains of the denomination. Liberal or modernist Baptists tended to deal somewhat ambiguously with Jewish issues. On the one hand, Jews were praised for their “religious genius,” yet on the other hand, Jesus was revered as a Jew who had transcended Judaism with his “universal mind and heart.” “The Christian of any nation,” the *Canadian Baptist* asserted, “never thinks of him as a Jew. Jesus belongs to all nations and to all ages. He is the world’s centre.”⁶

Fundamentalists like the dogmatic and vociferous T.T. Shields of Jarvis Street Baptist Church in Toronto espoused the traditional fables and clichés about Jews in conjunction with typical evangelical appeals:

When Pilate said to the Jews of his day, “Will you crucify your King?” They said, “His blood be on us, and upon our children.” And it has been! Oh, it has been! The Jews have already reaped a terrible harvest whatever their future may be. Their isolation, their place in history, the fact that no nation can assimilate them, that there is no possibility of obliterating their distinctiveness, whether in Germany, or in France, or Italy, or Britain, or Canada or America . . . they stand out identified as the children of those who shed the blood of the Lord Jesus, and His blood has been upon them! The awful record of their sufferings from then until now attests the fact . . .⁷

While willing to affirm the Jewishness of Jesus,⁸ Shields, however, occasionally allowed anti-Jewish slurs to creep into his sermons: “Oh, but have you never heard the proverb, ‘Worth a Jew’s eye’? It means that a Jew can see money where nobody else can. That is the explanation of their searching around the garbage cans, picking up the world’s refuse – and getting rich on it.”⁹ The Baptists’ relationship with the Jewish community was, therefore, ambiguous at best.

As strong advocates and defenders of the principle of religious liberty, Baptists were apprehensive about the plans of the Nazi regime to construct a national Protestant church in Germany under the patronage of the state. As Dr. J.H. Rushbrooke, a leading figure in the Baptist World Alliance remarked, “it is impossible for them to accept any such relation with the State as would make them merely its dependents or tools.”¹⁰ The Nazis’ intention to foster a monolithic culture inside of Germany understandably aroused the suspicion of Canadian Baptists, as it reminded them all too well of their struggles against the Roman Catholic Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Consequently, it is not surprising that many Canadian Baptists were resolved in their opposition

to fascism, which for them was manifest in three forms – Italian, German, and Roman Catholic totalitarianism.¹¹

Baptist distrust of Hitler's intentions with respect to the Protestant churches in Germany also "alerted them to other aberrations in the new German Reich, particularly the Aryan laws and the persecution of the Jews."¹² As early as 6 April 1933, the *Canadian Baptist* recorded:

When the world in the Great War termed the German nation Huns, the great nation along the Rhine writhed under the insult. In the heat of warfare truth has a habit of becoming sadly twisted at times; in calmer days less passionate terms are employed. But if a fraction of the atrocities against Jews with which Germany is charged today be true, Hun is the only word that can be used to describe the Hitlerite Teutons. In fact, it may be that an apology is due the ancient barbarians, for apparently nothing to equal the cruelties of the modern attack on Jews in Germany has been seen since Bartholomew's day in France, and that other period when the Spanish Inquisition was in full flower. The entire world is horrified by the tales of barbarism, which are coming from Germany through devious channels; its like reading the story of the Armenian massacres again. One did not expect much better things from Turks, but Germany, the birthplace of Protestantism, is on a different plane surely. German Jews, from peasant to professor, are in their dark Gethsemane and the rest of the world stands powerless to interfere. In fact, the lot of the sufferers seems to become more desperate every time a foreign voice is lifted in protest.¹³

Such accounts of Jewish abuse in Germany in 1933 influenced the tone of Dr. M.F. McCutcheon's Presidential Address to the Convention that year. Speaking on "The Church's Task in the Modern World," President McCutcheon asserted:

If true to our faith every human life must be regarded as a reflex of divinity. Every act of wrong and injustice therefore, mars and defaces the image of God in man. "Oppression and exploitation are more than violations of social law. They are sacrilege and blasphemy." They thwart life – God's life in man. The religious man will not rest content with personal salvation. He will strive to bring about a social order which will issued to all men freedom for self-realization. He will weigh all social institutions in the balance of spiritual utility: "If found wanting, he will set about to reconstruct them, or, if need be,

to destroy them. His morality will be militant, and when necessary revolutionary” . . . This makes it clear that the “preaching of principles” is not enough. “A principle after all, is a poor ghost, unless expressed in concrete material.”¹⁴

The question of freedom and liberty, especially religious liberty, seems to have been of paramount concern to Baptists in 1933.¹⁵ Dr. J.H. Rushbrooke, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, commented that while there were elements of policy in the German government “which commanded the strong support of Baptists,” the Reich would “gain enormously if it adopts a policy of respect for the rights of the free evangelical communities.”¹⁶ Hitler’s suppression of free speech, freedom of the press, and spiritual liberty created the “unsettling conditions” that prevented the Baptist World Alliance from holding its fifth Conference in Berlin in 1933.

The Conference was eventually rescheduled and held in Berlin the following year. This decision fueled a fierce international debate in the Baptist community on the “suitability of this location,” and Canadian, British and American Baptists expressed deep reservations about whether they should attend.¹⁷ Canadian Baptists’ decision to send delegates was predicated on Hitler and his associates guarantee of freedom “of deliberation.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, the decision to go was the “subject of adverse criticism.” Canadian Baptists decided that such a Congress “can” and “should be held,” because a “definite and unmistakable testimony” to distinctive Baptist convictions could be accorded in a nation whose political regime acceded marginal regard for principles of religious liberty or democratic rights. Baptists also wanted to ensure that the decision to hold a Congress in Berlin in no way implied their “approval of anti-Semitism, or any weakening in their view of our Lord’s authority and of the Christian faith as supernatural and interracial . . .”¹⁹

Delegates to the Convention were obliged to listen to addresses promoting the virtues of the “new Germany;” nevertheless opposition to a number of Nazi policies was voiced, including Hitler’s oppression of the Jews.²⁰ The Baptist World Congress voiced their commitment “to the conviction that racial prejudice and national antagonism are entirely at variance with the Christian conscience and that Baptists everywhere should seek by every possible means to exemplify and promote good will and understanding among all peoples.”²¹ The Congress further held that racialism, with specific reference to anti-Semitism, was “unchristian.”²²

The Congress did allow the Nazis to achieve a kind of propaganda victory. The delegates were accorded the liberty they were promised at the Congress, but more importantly, some left Berlin convinced that Nazi atrocities toward the Jews were grossly exaggerated and perhaps in some way understandable if not justifiable. The *Canadian Baptist* report on “Berlin 1934” remarked:

It was revealed from many sources that the recent movements in Germany against the Jews were not religious or racial, but political and economic. Since the war some 200,000 Jews from Russia and other Eastern places had come into Germany. Most of these were Communist agitators against the government. The German Jews had also monopolized a majority of government, educational and economic positions . . . The German people resented this [control]. Naturally excesses occurred and irresponsible persons committed some atrocious deeds. But at the worst it was not one-tenth as bad as we had been made to believe. The new Government became the agent of adjustment of positions proportionate to population.²³

However, less than two years later, the *Canadian Baptist* reported that,

instead of hundreds of thousands of Eastern European Jews these official statistics reveal that between 1910 and 1925 the total number of Jewish immigrants into Germany and these immigrants included both Eastern and Western Jews – did not exceed 31,000. Between 1925 and 1933, 9,000 of them had left the country again. There were thus no more than a net of 22,000 foreign Jewish immigrants . . . among a population of 67,000,000. The devouring hordes are a myth.²⁴

The article pointed out that Jews neither had a “stranglehold nor a monopoly” upon the professions and that Nazi allegations in this regard were “completely unfounded.”²⁵

Canadian Baptists, it would appear, were well aware of the existence of concentration camps in Germany as early as 1933-34. In a letter reprinted from the *Manchester Guardian*, Rennie Smith compared his visit to Dachau concentration camp outside of Munich to his experience as a prisoner of war in Germany in World War One. Smith asserted that “I do not hesitate to say that even at the height of Prussian Jingoism . . . the humanities as between German jailer and British civilian prisoners were

on an incomparably higher level in 1914 than is the treatment of Germans by Germans in the concentration camp of 1933.”²⁶

By the mid-1930s many Canadian Baptists recognized the inherent dangers that totalitarianism, whether Communist or Fascist, represented to international peace and security, as well as their overtly anti-Semitic biases.²⁷ Many Baptists expressed utter amazement and repulsion at the remarks of Germany’s great military strategist of World War One, General Erich Lunendorff, that Christianity had been created for the special advancement of the Jews and that its one purpose was to “help the Jewish people to domination.” His call for the complete renunciation of Christianity convinced many Baptists of the utter paganism of Hitler’s Germany.²⁸ In an almost prophetic overtone, Lloyd M. Houlding warned Canadian Baptists that “we dare not close our eyes to the warnings prevalent in Fascism. It is true that Jews are building their ghettos in Germany to-day, and I venture to prophesy that it is equally true that the Christians will be building their catacombs, and twenty-five years from now there will be no Jews in Germany except in the ghettos and Christians except in the catacombs.”²⁹

While many Baptists were certainly aware and appalled at Hitler’s treatment of the Jews, totalitarianism’s (whether Fascism, Nazism or Communism) threat to religious liberty, democracy, and peace was the paramount concern of Baptists.³⁰ In fact, as Baptists gathered with other Protestants, Catholics and government officials at the public service to commemorate the eightieth anniversary of Holy Blossom Synagogue in Toronto in 1936, the *Canadian Baptist* remarked that the “anniversary itself was not the greatest thing,” but the fact that this diverse group could meet together, bringing “greetings to the Jewish people” and sharing the “joy of the festive occasion.” As the editor went on to remark,

the service reveals what is meant by British religious and civil liberty; the service so largely attended by Gentiles could not have been held in many lands to-day – lands where Jews are treated as outcasts and harried from pillar to post, or rather, to prison and poverty. In British domains the Jew has rights equal to all other citizens; his liberty and life are as sacred as any other man’s . . . The whole service was a tribute to British fair-mindedness and justice.³¹

One Baptist commentator, the Reverend R.G. Quiggin, even went so far as to see the events unfolding in Europe as part of some apocalyptic vision reminiscent of pre-war years, in which God would usher in a new

Christian age: “these violent dictatorships are not thwarting but fulfilling the will of God. They are but puppets in the hands of the Almighty.” The church, the writer stated, had been “too soft” and “persecution” would only serve to “purify” it. “We are witnessing not the twilight of Christianity, but the dawn of a more Christian age.” Then, in rhetoric characteristic of Baptists in the past, the writer asserted that, “Canada’s contribution to the somewhat new civilization of North America [was] the strength and purity of British institutions,” and that Baptists should march “shoulder to shoulder” with their “fellow Christians in a common effort to make Canada Christian.”³²

I will now compare the views of two leading Baptists of the period – one the volatile fundamentalist preacher of Jarvis Street Baptist Church, T.T. Shields, the other, a liberal-minded Baptist scholar and academic, Watson Kirkconnell. Given his own dictatorial tendencies, Shields initially held a certain fascination for the Fascist movements of Europe. He rejected the popular notion that Benito Mussolini, dictator of Italy, was the Anti-Christ: “To me, Mussolini is one of the world’s greatest benefactors, and has not the first mark of the AntiChrist about him. He is a fine business manager who has saved Italy from a revolution like that of Russia.”³³ Shields admiration for European Fascism, however, ended abruptly following the “Night of the Long Knives” in Germany and Italy’s rape of Ethiopia. Thereafter, Shields saw both Hitler and Mussolini as nothing more than international gangsters. He even suggested that a price should be put on Hitler’s head.³⁴

Having gained a reputation as an impassioned orator, Shields soon unleashed his fervor against Hitler and Nazi Germany. Hitler, Shields charged, was an “unspeakable criminal,” an “execrable murderer,” “the biggest liar and the ugliest human creature the devil ever produced,” the most “infamous deceiver and murderer of all time.” He was, Shields contended, the very embodiment of the Anti-Christ.³⁵ Germany, he charged, “as a nation had been the world’s greatest criminal since 1914,” “the plague spot of the world for several generations,” a greater menace to the moral health of the world than “Sodom and Gomorrah,” the breeding ground “for everything that is criminal to human interest and divine government,” and hence a “bandit” that needed to be hunted by the police.³⁶ Shields believed that “if the present tendency of European affairs continues it will produce a crisis” – namely a war.³⁷ As a result, he encouraged the Allied powers to take decisive action against Germany, including sending “an army of occupation into Germany at once to enforce

the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.”³⁸

Shields’ savage attacks against pacifism³⁹ afforded him another opportunity to attack his liberal enemies, especially those in the Baptist Convention, many of whom were strong advocates of disarmament and anti-war motions.⁴⁰ Shields blamed “modernist influences”⁴¹ for not only stripping Britain of her might, but also for the direction of her foreign policy, which sought to pacify and appease Hitler.⁴² Shields expressed utter disdain for British Prime Ministers who he felt were leading the Empire into the abyss.⁴³ Responding to the Munich Agreement, Shields vociferated,

. . . we lost a golden opportunity of breaking forever the power of Hitlerism and saving ourselves from the enormous burdens that now we must carry, by the utter un wisdom, the political and moral blindness of Premier Chamberlain. Surely there is no page in Britain’s history of which we have a deeper reason to be ashamed than that which has been written by those who have managed our foreign policy in the last few years.⁴⁴

Shields often expressed his opposition to racial and religious discrimination. Having read *Mein Kampf*, Shields condemned both its anti-Semitism and its anti-Christianity. He, likewise, dismissed the Aryan theories of the Nazis as being entirely unfounded.⁴⁵ The *Kristallnacht*, the infamous Nazi pogrom organized to terrorize the Jews on 9 November 1938, aroused an impassioned sermon from Shields entitled, “When Will the ‘Jews Enemy,’ the German Haman, Hang on the Gallows Prepared for Mordecai?”⁴⁶ While Shields noted that he could not condone the assassination of a German official in Paris by a Jewish student, such a tragedy did not warrant the persecution of a people for something for which they had no responsibility, namely, that they were born Jews.⁴⁷

Shields carried his polemic even farther;

. . . by remarking that THE ANTI-SEMITISM AND EXTREME RACIALISM OF OUR DAY ARE UTTERLY ANTI-CHRISTIAN, contrary to the spirit and genius of the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ . . . if you allow yourself to take up an attitude of antipathy toward any race, however loudly you may profess your orthodoxy, in attitude and spirit, you are positively anti-Christian . . . This whole notion of racial superiority is a fiction which flatters human vanity. I am by no means sure that the boasted “Aryan” purity of the blood that

flows in German veins can be absolutely demonstrated . . . Let us remember that the attitude represented by modern Germany and Italy, and a great many people in this country and in the United States – the anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic attitude is anti-Christian. It is not of God .

. . .⁴⁸

Shields held that the actions of the German government during the *Kristmallsnacht* demanded nothing less than a “universally prevailing indignation” of all peoples and all governments towards “Germany’s atrocious treatment of the Jews.”⁴⁹ He further expressed how “interesting,” “hopeful,” “encouraging” and “thankful” “we ought to be . . . though we are not Jews – to say the nations conferring together to see what can be done for the exiled Jew . . . May God support those who provide a place of refuge for people so terribly oppressed . . .”⁵⁰

Yet, in spite of his acrimonious rhetoric against Hitlerism, racism and anti-Semitism, Shields’ relationship with the Jewish community was ambiguous; he often allowed anti-Jewish (and some would argue anti-Semitic) slurs to enter his sermons. Shields had a reputation as a religious bigot.⁵¹ Viewed in this context, his charges against racism and prejudice are shallow at best.

Furthermore, unlike most of his fundamentalist associates, Shields was against Zionism and the restoration of Jews to Palestine.⁵² While Shields’ focus here may have been partially directed at another theological enemy of his – dispensationalists – in whose eschatology the restoration of the Jewish state was a significant step to ushering in the millennium, it nevertheless illustrates the ambiguity of his relationship with the Jewish community. Shields was horrified at the treatment of the Jews by the Nazis, but his hatred of Nazism had less to do with anti-Semitism and more to do with the imminent danger Hitlerism posed to the British Empire, its institutions and its values (especially religious liberty), that Shields dearly loved.

Unlike Shields, Watson Kirkconnell was not a clergyman, but an academic and a scholar. Kirkconnell and Shields strongly despised one another.⁵³ Kirkconnell, like Shields, possessed the ability, albeit in prose, to deliver scathing assaults against his enemies, especially communism.⁵⁴ But if Communism was the major focus of Kirkconnell’s wrath throughout much of the late 1940s and 1950s, Nazism bore the brunt of his onslaught during much of the 1930s and early 1940s. Noting that he had been the “first and only Canadian not merely to expose and denounce Hitler and Mussolini in Europe, but also to reveal in detail their intrigues against the

political life of Canada,” Kirkconnell warned that,

Naziism [sic], like Communism is a dynamic force that is world-wide in its activities, and no one who has even caught the perspective of its ‘global’ ambitions can forget for a moment the fate that awaits human liberties if the Brown Terror should ultimately prevail. The *national interest* of Canada surely includes the defeat of that revolutionary force which seeks to impose its brutal mastery, directly or indirectly, on all countries, including our own.⁵⁵

Yet, like so many others, Kirkconnell initially expressed some reluctance at expressing outright condemnation of Nazism. In a radio lecture delivered on 7 May 1939, Kirkconnell, then President of the Baptist Union of Western Canada, remarked, “in a wholesale condemnation of that regime (i.e., Nazis) and all its works, I am not prepared to join. It has done wonders in rehabilitating German industry, in giving new spirit to the youth of the country and in redressing many historic wrongs against the nation.”⁵⁶ While what Kirkconnell stated holds some truth, all this was accomplished under the guise of planning another war, and some of Germany’s industrial recovery in the 1930s was due more to the policies of previous government administrations than to Hitler’s. Nevertheless, to be fair to Kirkconnell, he also recognized

it has worked ruthlessly by cold pogrom and concentration camp to suppress and exterminate every opinion and party differing from the will of the National Socialist Worker’s Party. Towards the Jew in particular the regime has been brutal beyond description; but of the estimated million and a half victims of the police policies of the Third Reich fewer than fifty percent are Jews. Most of these are still in Germany, but subjected to such economic pressure as to make life increasingly impossible. Refuge abroad is imperative, yet the place of that refuge is still largely uncertain.⁵⁷

Kirkconnell was under no delusion about the impending fate of the Jews, and why it was imperative for them to escape from Germany. In this regard he expressed his utter annoyance at the Canadian government’s handling of the situation.⁵⁸

Kirkconnell was one of a handful of Christian leaders bold enough not merely to lament the treatment of Jews, but also to adopt an active pro-refugee stance. While deploring Hitler as “a savage tyrant whose insatiable

ambition will not stop short of world domination,” he asserted that Hitler had to be stopped.⁵⁹ He launched a bold attack against Nazi “reptilian propaganda,” which had “already insinuated itself into our national life” with its “anti-Semitic virus of race hatred being injected into our veins.”⁶⁰ The chief source of much of this propaganda was Bernhard Bott’s *Deutsche Zeitung fur Canada*, which Kirkconnell denounced as “morbid and fantastic.”⁶¹

But more than that, Kirkconnell actively supported the work of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution. As well, he served as a board member of the Committee on Jewish-Gentile Relations. Throughout this period he campaigned and urged the government to alter its policies on refugees so more victims of Nazi persecution could be admitted into Canada. His efforts did not cease with the outbreak of hostilities in 1939, even though by that point they were in vain. As Baptists became aware of the extent of Hitler’s homicidal anti-Semitism,⁶² Kirkconnell actively campaigned on behalf of the National Committee in an attempt to once again convince the government to alter its stand.⁶³

Throughout the 1930s, Canadian Baptists were kept abreast of the latest “accounts of the ill-treatment of Jews in Germany.”⁶⁴ Two events altered the tone and nature of Baptist responses to the plight of Jews in Germany. On 7 November 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a Polish Jewish student, assassinated Ernst vom Rath, a minor German embassy official in Paris. This assassination provided Reinhard Heydrich, Head of the SD, the pretext to order in retaliation the destruction of all Jewish places of worship both in Germany and Austria. In a period of approximately fifteen hours, bands of Nazi thugs systematically destroyed hundreds of synagogues and thousands of Jewish owned stores. In addition to countless arrests, Jews were forced to pay for the damages the Nazis claimed they had provoked. This amounted to one billion marks for the assassination of vom Rath and a further six million marks to cover the cost of the broken windows.⁶⁵ This incident and its aftermath fostered international outrage and unfavourable publicity for the Nazi regime.

The initial reaction of the *Canadian Baptist* was to a degree impertinent in its implying that Grynszpan was somehow responsible for the persecution of Jews in Germany in the wake of the assassination, when in reality the assault had long been planned. As the commentator in the *Canadian Baptist* remarked,

perhaps he thought he would be doing his people a fine service by the slaying, but, in reality, he has added immeasurably to their sad lot Probably his action will result in foreign Jews being driven from Germany – cast adrift in a friendless world once more. Hard has been the lot of the Hebrew the ages through; the brainless youth has made it infinitely more difficult for the race to live. Many people who had nothing to do with the deed . . . will have to suffer untold hardship because this Polish Jew killed an official of the Nazi regime.⁶⁶

Not all Baptists shared these sentiments. At least some Baptists were beginning to realize that indignation, sympathy and prayers were not enough – the plight of European Jews demanded action.⁶⁷

On 15 May 1939, the luxury liner *St. Louis* set sail from Hamburg with 907 “desperate German Jews” on board. These Jews considered themselves fortunate because they were escaping the horrors of Hitler’s Germany. Their fortune was to change upon reaching Havana, Cuba on 30 May 1939. The Cuban government refused to recognize their entrance visas and their desperate search to find admittance to another Latin-American country ended in failure. On 2 June, the ship departed Havana harbour, hoping that either Canada or the United States might grant them entrance. In the end, the ship was forced to return to Europe, where the governments of Great Britain, Belgium and Holland finally offered “temporary shelter,” because many would eventually “die in the gas chambers and crematoria of the Third Reich.”⁶⁸

In referring to this “voyage of the damned,” the *Canadian Baptist* lamented the plight of Jewish refugees.⁶⁹ This Jewish tragedy finally prompted the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec at its Golden Jubilee Convention to pass a resolution imploring the Canadian government to admit refugees.⁷⁰ Petitions were sent to the Department of Immigration urging the government to lower its barriers.⁷¹ And individuals, such as the former President of the Convention F.M. McCutcheon, urged the government to take action. In February 1940, the Social Service Board announced an essay writing contest; one of the four topics was “What Will the Church Offer the European Refugee in Canada?” Miss Marjorie Campbell won the contest with her essay entitled, “Canada’s Responsibility For European Refugees.”⁷² In the end, all the efforts were in vain. Not only did the Canadian government ignore them, but on 1 September 1939, war erupted in Europe, which ended any hope for Jews trying to escape. The appeals on the part of Baptist groups and individuals had simply come too late.

Throughout the 1930s, Canadian Baptists were well informed of the political situation in Europe and of Nazi policies towards Jews not only through their denominational papers but also through various religious organizations of which Baptists were members. Many Baptists expressed abhorrence at the utterly brutal and uncivilized actions Hitler and his supporters directed towards the Jews of Europe. Inevitably, Baptists began to question the ethics of the Canadian government (who had essentially barred Jewish admission), calling for a change in policy so that these victims of persecution might find refuge. While Canadian Baptists can certainly be commended for this, their reactions and responses to the treatment of Jews was as much motivated by a fear of losing religious liberty (especially for Baptists in Europe), as it was out of a genuine concern for Jews. Even as late as 1938, while noting that “European nations are harrying the Jews of their territories as if they were gangsters of the vilest types,” the *Canadian Baptist* asserted,

battles that were thought fought forever may have to be re-fought for the dearly purchased principle of religious liberty will not be surrendered without a struggle. Perhaps the Baptists, foremost fighters for this idea in the past, will be required again to gird on their arms and lead in making the world safe; someone apparently must undertake the task or liberty will perish from the earth.⁷³

Following the *Kristallnacht*, one Baptist commentator remarked: “the persecution of the Jews in Germany rightly rouses our indignation and protest, but what is happening now in Rumania and what has been happening to Baptists for the past ten years in Russia is just as bad.”⁷⁴ The writer is admonishing fellow Baptists to keep their focus primarily upon the sufferings of their religious brethren in Europe to ensure that religious liberty was preserved.

Evangelistic concerns also remained part of Baptist response to the refugee crisis. Hazel E.R. Bates admonished, “What is the Baptist Church as an organization doing to get the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the Jews of Canada and of the world?”⁷⁵ The *Canadian Baptist* carried a report in 1939 which graphically recounted the flight of a group of German Jewish refugees to Belgium. R.M. Stephens, who visited the camp at Merxplas, noted that

while much is being done for the moral and physical welfare of the refugees nothing is being done for their spiritual needs. Belgium is, of course, a Roman Catholic country, and there is a Roman Church on the premise, so that the matter is not an easy solution. The Jews,

moreover, are not especially attracted by this form of religion. Even if a colporteur, were allowed inside the camp, the refugees have no money to buy Gospel and Testaments. For the moment, therefore the most practical means of helping spiritually is to show them that not only Jews, but Christians also, sympathize with them in their troubles. Then, as opportunity offers, such as when personally visiting the camps, a Gospel and a kindly word may be given here and there.⁷⁶

This is not some kind of “afterthought,” as Davies and Nefsky⁷⁷ assert, but it reflects the traditional evangelistic concern of Baptists in believing that even in the midst of unimaginable horrors, the Jews’ greatest need was spiritual conversion.

The *Canadian Baptist* lamented the fate of the liner *St. Louis* and its Jewish passengers in 1939. It was this incident and the *Kristallnacht* that finally aroused the passions of Baptists enough that their Conventions adopted the following (or similar) resolution:

WHEREAS there is still needed, on a vast scale, amelioration of the lot of the refugees and potential refugees, whether Jewish or Gentile, in Europe: AND WHEREAS some steps already have been taken to provide sanctuary for certain of these refugees in Canada; NOW BE IT RESOLVED that this Baptist Convention do urge upon the proper governmental authorities the desirability of admitting to Canada of carefully selected individuals or groups of refugees, as being desirable, not only from humane and ethical standpoints, but also because such immigration should prove a valuable addition to our national economy, by introducing skilled workers and new arts, crafts and industries.⁷⁸

Canadian self-interest clouded the wording of this resolution. The grounds for the refugees’ admission to Canada would fundamentally rest on their ability to aid Canada economically. Yet, from the point of view of Frederick Blair, Deputy Minister of Immigration, “certain of their habits” made Jews unassimilable. Nor were they desirable from an ethical or humane standpoint. They were unsuitable to the immigration needs of Canada given the existing economic conditions of the 1930s. So while Baptists may have eventually petitioned their government to admit more Jewish refugees, that government ignored the petition at least partially on the basis of the criterion it set forth as terms of admission.

Clearly reticence did not characterize the response of Baptists,

whether fundamentalist or liberal, to the plight of European Jews in the years from 1933-1939. Nevertheless, while some Baptists were vociferant, as was the case with Kirkconnell and Shields, many remained indifferent. Furthermore, though events like *Kristallnacht* and the St. Louis had some traumatic effect upon Baptists, and served to heighten awareness of the horrors being experienced by Jews, neither was able to elicit a massive outcry from the rank and file. For Baptists who had themselves once been victims of persecution and refugees in search of asylum, this is indeed shameful.

Furthermore, Baptists had the opportunity to exact direct influence on the nation's refugee policy, because one of their own co-religionists, Frederick Charles Blair (a church elder) "as director of the Immigration Branch of the Department of Mines and Resources . . . made almost all of the decisions – no matter how small – concerning who got into Canada."⁷⁹ As the individual responsible for the enforcement of Canadian immigration policy, Blair "mirrored the increasingly anti-immigration spirit of his times." He believed that, given the present economic conditions, "people should be kept out of Canada instead of being let in."⁸⁰ Baptists must, therefore, reflect on the fact that when European Jewry "most needed a friend at the gate, they had an enemy; instead of the philo-Semite they required, they had an anti-Semite; instead of a humanitarian, they got a narrow-minded bureaucrat."⁸¹ Blair's utter "contempt for the Jews was boundless," yet his ideas were entirely compatible with those of the Canadian government, the public at large, and many members of his denomination. In the final analysis, responsibility for excluding Jews from Canada rests with Mackenzie King and his government. Nevertheless, it is disheartening to acknowledge that a religious man – a Baptist – was largely responsible for the implementation of that policy.

As advocates of religious liberty, Baptists in Canada have not consistently expressed a concern for human rights issues. Church ecclesiology sometimes hampered such support, while on other issues (e.g., temperance laws) offered no fundamental road blocks to denominational resolutions and actions. Nevertheless, Baptists' distinctive polity has meant that even when denominational resolutions are passed, their implementation (and their support) resides with each local congregation. Baptist involvement in broader social issues has therefore largely been dictated on the basis of (local) self interest or evangelistic concerns. As a result, Baptists have demonstrated not only an insensitivity to many issues, but also a larger pattern of inaction. The lack of a theological framework that not only permitted, but also demanded intervention on behalf of the interests of the oppressed, is ultimately what limited Baptist responses to

the plight of European Jews in the 1930s. While some prominent individuals spoke out against such oppression, like Kirkconnell and Shields, still others, like Blair, condoned it. Without large scale public support, it is highly unlikely that the Canadian government would have altered its refugee policy during the 1930s.

Endnotes

1. See I. Abella and H. Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Ltd., 1983), XII-XIII.
2. Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, XI.
3. Abella and Troper, "Canada and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-39," in *Twentieth Century Canada: A Reader* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1986), 258. Under PC 1957, only those immigrants with enough capital to allow themselves to establish and maintain farms were permitted access, while PC 659, banned all non-agricultural immigrants of non-British or non-American heritage.
4. Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches? Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight During the Nazi Era* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1998), 80; and "How Jews Regard Christ," *Canadian Baptist*, 4 January 1923, 7.
5. "Holy Ground," *Canadian Baptist*, 6 April 1933, 10; and Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?* 80.
6. "Why was Jesus a Jew?" *Canadian Baptist*, 14 December 1933, 6.
7. "Watching Jesus," *The Gospel Witness*, 06 July 1933, 4-5; and Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?* 80.
8. "When a Christian is Not a Christian," *The Gospel Witness*, 15 April 1937, 5.
9. "My Beloved is Mine and I am His," *The Gospel Witness and the Protestant Advocate*, preached 07 November 1937, 05 November 1953, 12-13.
10. "From Many Lands," *Canadian Baptist*, 29 June 1933, 11.
11. Robert R. Smale, "'The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness' or Verbal Bigotry – T.T.. Shields, The Gospel Witness and Roman Catholicism, 1922-1942," *Historical Papers: Canadian Society of Church History* (1997): 16; *The Gospel Witness*, 06 November 1940, 6; and *Canadian Baptist*, 05 April 1934, 4.

12. Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?* 81.
13. "Germany and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 6 April 1933, 3; "Ill Treatment of Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 27 April 1933; and "Barring the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 04 May 1933, 3; In 1933, forty delegates of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work met in the city of Novi Sad. The new German church organization sent five delegates to present the point of view of German Christianity under the Hitler regime. The other delegates of the Council vigorously protested against "the evil things that are taking place in Germany." The meeting created a split between the German and non-German delegates who withdrew from the meeting. Following a letter from the German delegation expressing their desire not only to remain in the Council, but exoneration for the German state and German church, the Stockholm Statement was re-affirmed as a basis for continued cooperation. The Council, however, "expressed the anxiety occasioned in all lands [due to] the ruthless persecution of the Jews, as well as the complete denial of freedom of thought and conscience by the Hitler Government." The persecution of the Jews by the Church was acknowledged as "the blackest page in the whole history of Christianity," something that all nations and all churches were in the past responsible. It was, however, believed that such evil had been "outlived." However, as Henry A. Atkinson, General Secretary of the Church Peace Union and Member of the Executive Committee of the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work added, "this latest outbreak of fanaticism and savagery, is all the harder to understand and cannot be excused or condoned, even on the grounds of a 'revolution in Germany'" ("German Jew Problem at Novi Sad," *Canadian Baptist*, 12 October 1933, 14).
14. *Canadian Baptist*, 19 October 1933, 5.
15. "Hitler and Jesus," *Canadian Baptist*, 15 February 1934, 3.
16. "From Many Lands," *Canadian Baptist*, 29 June 1933, 11.
17. *Canadian Baptist*, 05 April 1934, 3ff.
18. "The German authorities with full knowledge of the program have given the assurance of *volle Verhandlungsfreiheit*" (*Canadian Baptist*, 21 June 1934, 16).
19. *Canadian Baptist*, 18 January 1934, 15.
20. *Canadian Baptist*, 16 July 1934, 2; *Canadian Baptist*, 23 August 1934, 3; *Canadian Baptist*, 30 August 1934, 2-7; and *Canadian Baptist*, 06 September 1934, 3-5.
21. *Canadian Baptist*, 06 September 1934, 3.
22. *Canadian Baptist*, 06 September 1934, 3; *Canadian Baptist*, 16 August 1934, 7; and *Baptist Yearbook*, 1934, 215-216.

23. "Berlin 1934," *Canadian Baptist*, 06 September 1934, 3.
24. "Germany and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 20 February 1936, 15.
25. "Germany and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 20 February 1936, 15.
26. "Dismissal of Jews in Nazi Germany," *Canadian Baptist*, 12 April 1934, 14.
27. "Liberty Lives, in the Middle Road," *Canadian Baptist*, 13 October 1936, 3.
28. "Ousting Religion," *Canadian Baptist*, 02 May 1935, 2.
29. "Democracy and Religion," *Canadian Baptist*, 06 August 1936, 15.
30. "Democracy and Religion," *Canadian Baptist*, 06 August 1936; "Baptists and Religious Liberty," *Canadian Baptist*, 16 March 1938; *Canadian Baptist*, 16 November 1933, 2; "The Baptist Challenge of the Hour," *Canadian Baptist*, 8-15 July 1937; and "1936 Year of the Dictators," *Canadian Baptist*, 07 January 1937.
31. "When Jews and Gentiles Sit Together," *Canadian Baptist*, 29 October 1936, 3. The editor's comments about the so-called equality of Jews in British dominions was a slight exaggeration as they were subject to prejudice there as well. Two years later, this scenario was re-created when Holy Blossom dedicated its new Temple. Lord Tweedsmuir, Canada's Governor-General, delivered the address ("This Could Not Happen in Germany," *Canadian Baptist*, 02 June 1938, 22).
32. "Crisis and Challenge," *Canadian Baptist*, 28 October 1937, 7.
33. "The Truth About Mussolini," *The Gospel Witness*, 14 September 1933, 5; and David R. Elliott, "The Intellectual World of Canadian Fundamentalism, 1870-1970," Ph.D. diss., University of British Columbia, 1989, 159-60. Shields admiration for Mussolini seems to have stemmed from the religious liberty he appeared to grant to Protestant missions in Italy and his expression of admiration for the British constitution.
34. *The Gospel Witness*, 14 March, 1935, 3; Shields charged that he would be "ashamed of the flag" if the government gave into Mussolini with respect to Ethiopia (*The Gospel Witness*, 05 September 1935, 4).
35. *The Gospel Witness*, 12 March 1936, 3; *The Gospel Witness*, 17 March 1938, 1; *The Gospel Witness*, 27 October 1938, 7; and *The Gospel Witness*, 29 September 1938, 6.
36. "Menace of Pacifism," *The Gospel Witness*, 05 July 1934, 4-6; "What Will Happen to Germany," *The Gospel Witness*, 26 July 1934, 6-7; and *The Gospel Witness*, 12 March 1936, 2.

37. *The Gospel Witness*, 04 April 1935, 7; *The Gospel Witness*, 06 December 1934, 7; and *The Gospel Witness*, 12 March 1936, 2.
38. *The Gospel Witness*, 04 April 1935, 7.
39. *The Gospel Witness*, 12 March 1936, 1; *The Gospel Witness*, 05 September 1935; "The Perils of Pacifism," *The Gospel Witness*, 19 March 1936, 1; and *The Gospel Witness*, 12 March 1936, 1. Shields held that those whose sought to bring about peace through a reduction in arms were "the worst enemies of the Empire," and that citizens of the Empire would be forced to surrender their citizenship "if the counsel of the pacifists had prevailed" ("Saul and Jonathan," *The Gospel Witness*, 04 May 1933, 5-6; "The Menace of Pacifism," *The Gospel Witness*, 05 July 1934; *The Gospel Witness*, 05 September 1935, 3ff; and "Folly of Pacifism," *The Gospel Witness*, 21 May 1936, 5-6).
40. This battle had been raging since the 1920s when Shields broke ranks with the Convention and formed his own Baptist denomination.
41. Shields asserted that modernist impulses were responsible for the "ravings of Hitler and his Lieutenants [and] of a Germanized, Hitlerized religion," which he had predicted more than twenty-five years before, when she let "loose her poisonous philosophies that polluted the springs of learning in all the universities of the world" ("Answering By Fire," *The Gospel Witness*, 09 November 1933, 4).
42. "Canada's Duty in View of the World Menace of Hitlerism," *The Gospel Witness*, 22 September 1938, 4.
43. *The Gospel Witness*, 02 July 1936, 2.
44. "How God Provides for Refugees," *The Gospel Witness*, 24 November 1938, 3; "When Will 'the Jews' Enemy, the German Haman, Hang on the Gallows Prepared for Mordecai?" *The Gospel Witness*, 17 November 1938, 6; and "Amazing Credulity," *The Gospel Witness*, 09 February 1939, 2ff.
45. *The Gospel Witness*, 17 September 1936, 5; and "When Will 'the Jews' Enemy . . ." 4.
46. Davies and Nefsky note this sermon was delivered at Massey Hall, as the Jarvis Church had been recently damaged by fire, which many in the congregation felt was set by Nazi sympathizers (*How Silent Were the Churches?* 83).
47. "When Will 'the Jews' Enemy . . ." 6; see similar remarks in "How God Provides For the Refugees," *The Gospel Witness*, 24 November 1938, 3.
48. "When Will 'the Jews' Enemy . . ." 4-5.
49. "How God Provides for Refugees," *The Gospel Witness*, 24 November 1938, 3.

50. "How God Provides for Refugees," 5.
51. In one of his many attacks against Roman Catholics he asserted, "I do not trust them. Bigotry? All right. I will rest under the accusation. Intolerant? Very well, I am intolerant . . ." ("Shall Rome Be Permitted to Make a Spain of Canada?" *The Gospel Witness*, 21 July 1938, 8).
52. "Palestine and the Jews," *The Gospel Witness and the Protestant Advocate*, 10 February 1944, 5.
53. W. Kirkconnell, *A Slice of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), 196.
54. W. Kirkconnell, *The Red Foe of Faith* (n.p., n.d.), 2.
55. W. Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler* (Toronto: Oxford Press, 1939), 190. As he stated earlier in the book, "even more than Communism, Naziism (sic) is today a force seeking to dominate the world through revolution . . . The symbol of the Nazi world revolution is the concentration camp, the living grave of civil and religious liberty" (5-6).
56. W. Kirkconnell, "Canada and the Refugees," *Canadian Baptist*, 25 May 1939, 14.
57. Kirkconnell, "Canada and the Refugees," 4, 16.
58. Kirkconnell, "Canada and the Refugees," 14-16.
59. Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler*, 7.
60. Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler*, 189; and W. Kirkconnell, *Canadians All – A Primer of Canadian National Unity* (Ottawa: The Director of Public Information, 1941), 39-40.
61. Kirkconnell, *Canada, Europe and Hitler*, 123. See also his comments on concerning Hitler's racial theories and policies (10-11).
62. "They Were Not Just Foreigners," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 February 1943; and "Men and Affairs," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 July 1943.
63. W. Kirkconnell, "Canada and the Refugee Problem," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 January 1944, 2. See also his poem "Agony of Israel," which lamented the Jewish martyrdom in Europe and deplored the unwillingness of North America to accept other than a handful of Jewish refugees (*A Slice of Canada*, 273).

64. "Hitler and Jesus," *Canadian Baptist*, 15 February 1934; "Dr. Hoffman on Germany," *Canadian Baptist*, 14 March 1935; "Germany and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 20 February 1936; "Moose Jaw and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 December 1938; "Favorite Game of Europe is Baiting the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 14 April 1938; and "The Plight of Jewish Refugees," *Canadian Baptist*, 15 June 1939.
65. Louis L. Snyder, "Kristallnacht," *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (New York: Paragon House, 1976), 201.
66. Lewis F. Kipp, "I See in the Papers," *Canadian Baptist*, 17 November 1938, 2. The commentator was at least right in recognizing that the Jews were largely friendless in the world.
67. The resolution was put forth by the Baptist World Alliance at their Congress held in Atlanta, Georgia ("Baptist Alliance and Anti-Semitism," *Canadian Baptist*, 29 December 1938, 2).
68. Abella and Troper, "'The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere': Canada and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-39," in *Twentieth Century Canada: A Reader* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1986), 256.
69. "The Plight of Jewish Refugees," *Canadian Baptist*, 15 June 1939, 3.
70. *Baptist Yearbook*, 1939, 78. The Baptist Union of Western Canada and the United Baptist Convention of the Maritime Provinces passed similar resolutions ("Convention of the Baptist Union of Western Canada, 11-14 July 1939 – Broadway First Baptist Church," *Western Baptist*, October 1939, 7-8; and *The United Baptist Yearbook of the Maritime Provinces*, 02 September 1939, 19). Also the resolution passed by the Canadian National Council of the World Alliance for International Friendship endorsed by the Executive Committee of the Christian Social Council of Canada, *Canadian Baptist*, 20-27 July 1939, 13. Note the tone of the statement "we warn our Government that no nation can successfully prosecute a holy crusade today when its own hands are stained with the blood of the innocent, and when it puts considerations of trade above those of law, sworn obligation and international morality." The various Baptist Conventions continued to pass various refugee resolutions throughout the war (*Canadian Baptist*, 01 July 1940, 2; "Supporting Jews Claims," *Canadian Baptist*, 13 February 1944, 3; *Baptist Yearbook*, 1940, 362; *Baptist Yearbook*, 1941, 208; and "On Refugees and DPS," *Baptist Yearbook*, 1945/46, 54).
71. "Social Service Board Report – Golden Jubilee Convention," *Canadian Baptist*, 15 June 1939, 5.
72. "Baptist Social Service Board Essay Contest," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 February 1940, 5; and "Winners in Essay Contest," *Canadian Baptist*, 01 October 1940, 2.

73. "Baptists and Religious Liberty," *Canadian Baptist*, 10 March 1938, 5; and "Dr. Rushbrooke at Convention," *Canadian Baptist*, 30 June 1938, 4.
74. "Baptist Preacher Jailed in Romania," *Canadian Baptist*, 29 December 1938, 6; *Canadian Baptist*, 03 November 1938, 6; and E. Gill, "Romanian Baptists at Last Ditch," *Canadian Baptist*, 03 November 1938, 14.
75. "Baptists and the Jews," *Canadian Baptist*, 17 March 1938, 12.
76. R.M. Stephens, "In a Jewish Refugee Camp," *Canadian Baptist*, 16 March 1939, 11.
77. Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?* 91.
78. *Baptist Yearbook*, 1939, 78-79. See also the Social Services Board's Report calling for the admission of "good settlers" (*Baptist Yearbook*, 1939, 199-200).
79. Abella and Troper, "'The Line Must Be Drawn Somewhere': Canada and the Jewish Refugees," 258-259.
80. Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, 7.
81. Abella and Troper, *None Is Too Many*, 7.

