

# The Nazi Persecution of the Jews and Scottish Baptist Indignation

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As Hitler rose to power and the Nazis began to discriminate against Jews, Baptists around the globe responded in different ways. This article chronicles the responses of the Baptist Union of Scotland, who throughout the Holocaust era protested against the persecution of the Jews in Europe. Scottish Baptists had a sound grasp of the theological challenges Nazism posed for Christianity, and responded according to historical Baptist core convictions, such as soul freedom, individual liberty, separation of church and state, and the notion of personality. Articles published in *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* reflected Scottish Baptist concern and angst. The Social Service Committee and its chairperson, Rev. James Hair, took the lead in condemning the Nazi persecution of the Jews. However, such Scottish Baptist ‘indignation’ did not result in significant systemic assistance for Jewish victims and refugees.

## Key Words

Baptist Union of Scotland; Holocaust; Anti-Semitism; Nazism

## Introduction

Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of the German government on 30 January 1933.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, in the February 1933 issue of *The Scottish Baptist Magazine*, the Scottish Baptist College Principal, J. T. Forbes,<sup>2</sup> declared, ‘ethically, the world is growing beyond pure and simple nationalism’. Looking for a humanistic and harmonious ‘unity in variety’ amongst the peoples of the globe, Forbes denounced the ancient Jewish understanding of racial bifurcation (Jew versus Gentile), which was replaced by Christianity’s doctrine of humanity as ‘one family’:

To the Jews there were just two sorts of people in the world, themselves and the rest. Indelible race traits, and a perverted, misunderstood faith were the forces making the separation. Jews were really trustees to guard God’s truth and give it to the whole world. They clutched at privilege and forgot duty. Outsiders were

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<sup>1</sup> On Hitler’s rise to power, see Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 2008), pp. 23-44.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Talbot, ed., *A Distinctive People: A Thematic Study of Aspects of the Witness of Baptists in Scotland in the Twentieth Century* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2014), p. 58; and Thomas Stewart, ‘Our Theological Colleges (II) in Scotland’, *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 1, Issue 2 (1922), p. 67.

undesirable, were even hated and despised. Christ's coming changed all that. He found unity in the race, for God's image was in every man.<sup>3</sup>

According to Forbes, Christianity's notion of a political society 'submerges all divisions. The small matters and petty irritations which breed race hatred disappear in view of the majestic uniting powers.'<sup>4</sup> In contrast to the multi-national character of a Christian world order, the Jewish dream of a homeland was less noble. Forbes noted, 'Christ had no territory to give men, like the patrons of the Zionists who wished to settle them in Palestine or British East India.'<sup>5</sup>

### **The First Wave of Jewish Persecution (1933)**

Following the initial waves of anti-Semitic discrimination by Hitler's Nazi government in the spring of 1933, the Council of the Baptist Union of Scotland, on behalf of its 151 churches and 22,900 members,<sup>6</sup> felt compelled to express its 'indignation' that Jews were suffering persecution and to declare its support for Baptist core convictions. On 31 May 1933, in Edinburgh, Rev. James Hair, representing the Social Service Committee, presented a resolution to the eighty-four delegates, which passed without dissent:

The Council of the Baptist Union of Scotland place on record their indignation at the persecution of the Jews in Germany, their dismay at the action of governments in denying freedom and the full rights of citizenship to well-disposed subjects on the grounds of race or of religious or political beliefs and their abhorrence of all methods of repression and persecution. They declare their continued adherence to the principle of complete freedom of conscience and liberty of opinion and speech.<sup>7</sup>

In its annual report, the Social Service Committee considered the problems of Sunday shopping and unemployment, and then turned to the situation in Germany: 'The Committee has been deeply concerned at the menace to religious liberty involved in the persecution of the Jews in Germany under the Hitler regime.' It described the resolution quoted above as being concerned with the German Christian attacks against 'the historic Baptist tradition of liberty of conscience in religious matters' affecting the Church. Additionally, the committee desired to make plain its 'dismay at the

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<sup>3</sup> J. T. Forbes, 'The Christian World State', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (February 1933), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1934* (covering 1933), p. 61. For an overview of the Scottish Baptist Union during the time period of this paper, see Brian R. Talbot, ed., *A Distinctive People*, Chapter 4, 'Blessed Be the Tie that Binds: Scottish Baptists and their Relationships with other Baptist Churches, 1900 to 1945', pp. 80-98.

<sup>7</sup> 'Baptist Union of Scotland Quarterly Meetings', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (July 1933), p. 14; see also *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1934* (covering 1933), pp. 107-08.

violent and unscrupulous suppression of freedom of opinion in vogue in Germany at the present moment'. Most interestingly, the committee made a point of revealing that it had sent the resolution to 'the official heads of the Baptist Denomination in Germany' as a response to the perceived lack of expected protest from their German brethren about the troubling acts of the Nazis:

What was done by these brethren in the matter we do not know, but we can make a shrewd guess. Comments made by German Baptists on an article in the "Baptist Times" seem to point to the fact that the German Baptists are in ignorance of the excesses that we believe to have occurred, and share the belief of many good people in Germany that Hitlerism is the only alternative to Communism.<sup>8</sup>

### The Baptist World Alliance Congress in Berlin (1934)

The 1934 Social Service Committee report did not specifically mention the plight of German Jews, but it did admit that the committee was 'concerned with the conditions of things in Germany'. Their focus was on the German Church struggle: '...German Christians who are protesting against the action of those in authority are defending something which is vital to any true expression of the Christian Religion and are in need of our encouragement and our prayers'.<sup>9</sup> An editorial in *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* rejected the possibility of Fascism or Communism being an option for Scotland, and declared, 'Evangelical religion has never prospered under political dictatorship, nor is it prospering when such prevails to-day.'<sup>10</sup> The paper also reported on the Scottish Churches' Council discussion regarding the Aryan Paragraph's application to ecclesiastical affairs.<sup>11</sup>

The fifth Baptist World Congress was held in Berlin from 4 to 10 August 1934.<sup>12</sup> The selection of Berlin was controversial, but the tireless advocacy of the Alliance's General Secretary, J. H. Rushbrooke,<sup>13</sup> and the insistence of the German Baptists, wore down opposition.<sup>14</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* published a brief but positive initial assessment of the

<sup>8</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1934* (covering 1933), Social Service Committee, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1935* (covering 1934), Social Service Committee, p. 183.

<sup>10</sup> 'Freedom', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (July 1934), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> 'Report of the Scottish Churches' Council', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (July 1934), p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> See J. H. Rushbrooke, ed., *Fifth Baptist World Congress: Berlin, August 4-10, 1934* (London: Baptist World Alliance, 1934); Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich*, pp. 45-51; Lee B. Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2017), pp. 72-73, 90-92, 128-132, 398-414.

<sup>13</sup> On the life and ministry of J. H. Rushbrooke, see Ernest A. Payne, *James Henry Rushbrooke, 1870-1947: A Baptist Greatheart* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1954), and Bernard Green, *Tomorrow's Man: A Biography of James Henry Rushbrooke* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> Richard V. Pierard, 'The Baptist World Alliance: An Overview of Its History'. *Review and Expositor* Vol. 103 (2006), 719-720. See also Erich Geldbach's chapter on 'The Years of Anxiety and World War II' that covers the Berlin Congress and the Baptist World Alliance from a German-friendly perspective, in Richard V. Pierard, ed., *Baptists Together in Christ 1905-2005: A Hundred-Year History of the Baptist World Alliance* (Birmingham, AL: Samford University Press, 2005), pp. 74-99.

Congress and its German hosts. Refraining from specifically mentioning the Racialism resolution which denounced anti-Semitism,<sup>15</sup> the paper noted that ‘Resolutions and speeches were characterised by that liberty of utterance which is the pride and the heritage of Baptists the world over.’<sup>16</sup> A more detailed review was published in the October 1934 issue. Written by Scottish Baptist Union President James Macindoe and James Scott, the Jewish question received much deserved attention:

The Congress did not hesitate to express itself on such questions as Race, Disarmament, Church and State, and the mind of the Congress is embodied in the seven resolutions which were adopted. Regarding the Racial question, the Congress deplored and condemned as a violation of the law of God all racial animosity, and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward coloured people, or toward subject races in any part of the world.<sup>17</sup>

In his review of the Berlin Congress, published in *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* in June 1935, J. H. Rushbrooke led off with a nod to the headline grabbing aspects of the meeting — specifically, the resolutions:

What was the message of that Berlin Assembly? The newspapers naturally laid hold on exciting incidents. They told how in the capital city of Adolf Hitler the world parliament of a great religious communion representing all parts of the earth unanimously adopted a resolution condemning racial pride, not in general terms but with express reference to “oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews.” They told how these same Baptists had spoken out for world peace in an atmosphere of resurgent nationalism and military enthusiasm. They told how, precisely where the totalitarian State was seeking to control the Church. Baptists declared by resolution that the State possesses no such right and that the Church which submits to such a claim betrays its Lord.<sup>18</sup>

The global Baptist leader was most pleased that the ‘Roman Catholic Press paid generous tribute to what we said and did in Berlin, and the Jews have expressed their gratitude in the highest terms’. However, Rushbrooke’s remarks contained at least three curious omissions. First, he did not add that the Racialism resolution which condemned Nazi anti-Semitism also opposed discrimination against African-Americans and other races. The Jewish clause did receive the most attention in the world’s press, to be sure. Second, he did not mention that the plight of the German Jews continued to deteriorate in the course of the following months, indicating that the resolution did not impact Hitler’s agenda in any significant manner. Third, Rushbrooke refrained from specifically criticising the German Baptists, even as they were seeking accommodation and recognition from the German

<sup>15</sup> Rushbrooke, ed., *Fifth Baptist World Congress: Berlin, August 4-10, 1934*, Minutes, Item 163, p. 17, and Report of Commission No. 2 – ‘Racialism’, pp. 39-41.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Baptist World Congress’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (September 1934), p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> James Macindoe and James Scott, ‘Fifth Baptist World Congress’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (October 1934), p. 2. In an addendum to the main article, D. Merrick Walker, who organised the Scottish delegation, only had praise for the German hosts, both secular and Baptist.

<sup>18</sup> Rushbrooke, ‘The Fifth Baptist World Congress’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (June 1935), p. 5.

government as a legal and legitimate religious sect. He also deflected reports of German press censorship (specifically about the Racialism resolution), rhetorically asking, ‘is a religious conference ever fully reported in the secular press?’<sup>19</sup>

Even more startling was Rushbrooke’s view that the resolutions passed did ‘not represent the largest and lasting significance of Berlin’. Of greater significance were the Congress’ ‘theological, devotional and missionary themes’. Rushbrooke stated:

Where we touched political and social issues — and we did not shirk them — it was not in the spirit of mere politicians... We had not met to discuss public issues with an occasional and incidental reference to religion. We were there to testify to the faith that makes us Baptists...<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, he closed with his thanks that the Congress spoke ‘to the conscience of the world.’<sup>21</sup>

### **Kristallnacht and Scottish Baptist Indignation (1935-1938)**

After 1934, the Nazi campaign of persecution against the Jews entered into a more subtle phase, and the attention of the world lessened. In a sense, measures enacted against the German Jews were measured, and the legalistic routine simply became less newsworthy as it lost its sensationalism. The subsequent loss of indignation can be seen in the Scottish Baptist yearbooks and magazine.

Between 1935 and 1937, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* and the Scottish Baptist annual meetings did not specifically address the Nazi persecution of the Jews. In April 1935, James Hair published an article opposing the totalitarian nature of the Nazi Government, in light of the ongoing Church struggle. Siding with German Protestant Evangelicals, he saw the struggle primarily through the lens of religious liberty. The issue of the civil rights of Jews was not addressed.<sup>22</sup> After twenty-one years of service, Hair passed on the mantle of leadership of the Social Service Committee to Alexander Clark, pastor of the Motherwell Baptist Church.<sup>23</sup> The Committee energetically promoted a series of nine conferences, which focused on topics such as the cinema, unemployment, Sunday Sabbath observance, peace, and ecumenical relationships. The ongoing plight of the Jews was not highlighted.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in 1936, unemployment, the opening

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Rushbrooke, ‘The Fifth Baptist World Congress’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (June 1935), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> James Hair, ‘The Fight for Religious Liberty’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (April 1935), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Talbot, ed., *A Distinctive People*, p.107.

<sup>24</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1936* (covering 1935), Social Service Committee, pp. 180-81.

of shops on Sundays, marriage laws, and gambling received attention. Regarding European peace, the Committee did criticise Germany's occupation of the Rhineland.<sup>25</sup>

On 12 March 1938, Germany invaded Austria and then successfully annexed it, eliciting 'a shock of horror' from Scottish Baptists and the rest of the world. In its April 1938 issue, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* noted the impotence of 'the great democratic nations' who 'could have done nothing to arrest the onslaught of dictatorial might' and the 'flouting of international law'. The editor surmised that on a deeper level, Germany's aggression foretold the imminent 'eclipse of Christianity' in Europe, with the persecution of Jews as but one example:

But can the Europe of to-day be described as in any sense Christian? The growing lists of suicides in Austria, the cynical persecution of religious leaders, even after they have been acquitted of the major charges against them, the bitter persecution of the Jews, the hellish holocaust of Barcelona write Ichabod on a godless civilization. It is once more the hour and the power of darkness.<sup>26</sup>

The German Nazis' 'power of darkness' challenged the ethical and moral sensibilities of the entire world on the evening of 9 to 10 November 1938. On Kristallnacht — 'the Night of Broken Glass'— Jewish synagogues, shops, and homes were targeted in a country-wide wave of anti-Semitic rage. The global reaction was swift and almost universally appalled at the atrocities that Nazi-inspired mobs unleashed against Jewish citizens.

Prior to Kristallnacht, the Scottish Baptist Council, at its meeting on 21 September 1938 in Glasgow, passed a resolution expressing opposition to Rumanian persecution of Baptists, an ongoing core concern for Rushbrooke and the Baptist World Alliance. In response to the deteriorating political conditions on the continent, the Council also passed a resolution presented by the Social Service Committee which recommended that

where possible our churches unite with churches of other denominations in services of intercession; and where no such services are held that they arrange for special seasons of prayer.<sup>27</sup>

The 1938 Scottish Baptist Assembly took place from 24 to 27 October, well before Kristallnacht. The Social Service Committee portion of the Assembly was declared to be a business session, for the purpose of considering resolutions. After approving resolutions on temperance, marriage, and gambling, the Assembly approved a resolution on religious liberty, opposing 'the claim of the Totalitarian and Communistic

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<sup>25</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1937* (covering 1936), Social Service Committee and Appendices to the Report, pp. 177-82.

<sup>26</sup> 'The Rape of Austria', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (April 1938), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1939* (covering 1938), Council Report - September 21, 1938 at Glasgow (70 present), pp. 127-29.

Governments to set the State and its enactments above the citizens' loyalty to God'; it also criticised 'the persecution of earnest Christians, pastors and laymen, in Germany, Russia, and elsewhere'. The Nazi persecution of its Jewish population was not mentioned. A follow-up resolution was approving of the appeasement policies pursued by Great Britain at Munich, and expressed the naïve hope that, in the aftermath of the German takeover of Czechoslovakia, 'harsh and oppressive measures will be excluded'. They also dreamed that 'in the struggle of ideologies in Europe, the rights and liberties of minorities and individuals must be upheld and defended at all costs'.<sup>28</sup> The next day, the Social Service Committee praised Chamberlain and thanked God 'that war has been averted'. It repeated the need to protect the 'rights and liberties of minorities and individuals' and added, 'the only security against war and all of its horrors lies in the growth of unity between Christians in all lands, and a desire to live together by the grace of God, in increasing friendship'. Copies of the statement were sent to the press, to government officials and to Rushbrooke, so that through the Baptist World Alliance, 'it may be circulated, if possible, among Baptists in other lands'.<sup>29</sup>

It did not take long for Scottish Baptists to reconsider their enthusiasm for appeasement. The November 1938 issue of *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* gave voice to the growing sense of doubt and uncertainty many felt following the German conquest of Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, the paper justified Great Britain's policy of appeasement and sympathised with all those who 'had come to hold that anything is preferable to armed conflict'.<sup>30</sup>

However, following the horrors of Kristallnacht, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* expressed shock and dismay, reviving the sense of indignation first expressed by Scottish Baptists in 1933. Alluding to the relief felt by many just weeks earlier, when the Munich Agreement seemingly averted war (at the cost of Czechoslovakia's loss of independence), the paper railed against the Nazi-inspired attacks against innocent German Jews, while also confessing a sense of helplessness:

We had just begun to breathe freely after a crisis that almost precipitated another World Conflict, we were slowly becoming accustomed to the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, we were still beset by apprehension as to when and where the next rude blow would be struck at our sense of security when we were confronted with the spoliation and oppression of the German Jews in circumstances of harshness and cruelty that can only be matched in the records of the dark ages.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1939* (covering 1938), Assembly Report - October 26, 1938, pp. 158-61.

<sup>29</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1939* (covering 1938), Social Service Committee Report - 27 October 1938, pp. 165-66.

<sup>30</sup> 'Conflict of Opinion', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (November 1938), pp. 1-2. See also Talbot, ed., *A Distinctive People*, p. 90.

And, as in the other cases, the confusion of our minds, the courage to our sense of right, and the harrowing of our feelings were accentuated by our inability, in any effective way, to intervene.<sup>31</sup>

The editorial next recounted the sad historical plight of European Jews:

Persecuted, despoiled, killed in their thousands, the remnant driven from country to country, century after century, the Jews have been the Ishmaels of history, every man's hand against them. If in lands like our own, they had at last won toleration and equality of civic and political rights, they had won very little else. Even in this country, they remained a people apart, with whom we had little intercourse and less common understanding. If this was to some extent due to their religious isolation, and a national temper that was the result of their long unhappy lot, it was also the result of an aloofness on our part which made us heedless of any demand for interest and sympathy where they were concerned.<sup>32</sup>

The editorial's confessed historical lack of friendship between Christians and Jews,<sup>33</sup> however, could not prevent Scottish Baptists from expressing 'pity and indignation' at what had transpired during Kristallnacht's unleashing of violence and persecution:

Their sufferings in Germany these last weeks have touched the springs of our common humanity, and the public conscience has been stirred to pity and indignation. In the welter of conflicting interests, and the criss-cross of international bitterness and suspicion, it becomes harder and harder to do anything to help oppressed nations and peoples. We cannot have quiet of mind and conscience, however, until everything possible is said and done to impress the perpetrators with the intensity of the horror their doings have aroused in the breasts of people who still cling to the primal decencies of international behaviour. Nor can we rest until some strong effort is made to mitigate the sufferings of so many innocent people. Shylock's words, "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?...If you prick us, do we not bleed?...If you poison us, do we not die?" must have been recalled by many as the story of outrage upon outrage came across the wires.<sup>34</sup>

Scottish Baptist indignation did not abate as 1939 dawned. The terror of Kristallnacht questioned the reasonableness of support for the policy of appeasement. James Hair wrote:

World horror at the persecution of the Jews by Germany has increased in intensity and volume as the facts of the situation have become more widely and more fully known...The inhumanity of the pogrom has been made plain to the world in the pictures published of child-refugees landing in this country and elsewhere, fatherless and motherless as the result of this insensate decree. These, for the most part, seem to be the children of the better-off. What of the others who are huddled in concentration camps in No-Mans Lands that are their only refuge, in the Arctic

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<sup>31</sup> 'The Mailed Fist', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (December 1938), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> On the relationship between Jews and Baptists in Europe, see John H. Y. Briggs, general ed., *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 'Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust', pp. 15-16; and 'Jews and Judaism, Baptists and', pp. 275-78.

<sup>34</sup> 'The Mailed Fist', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (December 1938), p. 1.



weather conditions of the past week? A continuance of this, and the democratic nations will know what to expect, if, in one way or another, they fail to establish European "appeasement".<sup>35</sup>

Hair took comfort in the unity of dismay Scotland's Christian denominations expressed. Scottish Baptist indignation was shared by others, and he was pleased that they stood in solidarity with the Jewish community in Edinburgh:

The remarkable unity of spirit on this horror amongst all sections of the Church has been shown in many ways. The great meeting in Edinburgh, at which Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists took part, along with the head of the Jewish synagogue in the city, with two representatives of the Roman Catholic Church on the platform, revealed the widespread nature of the indignation and disgust which Hitler and his henchmen have aroused by this latest exhibition of the frenzied fury which is Nazism.<sup>36</sup>

In the same issue, Nazi anti-Semitism was placed in historical perspective in an article composed before Kristallnacht. Chronicling developments from 1933 to 1938 in three lengthy paragraphs, the plight of German Jews was detailed in an arresting manner. The opening paragraph offered statistics on the emigration of Jews from Germany to other parts of the world in response to Hitler's policies:

According to official statistics published 10<sup>th</sup> June, 1938, it will be thirty years before the last Jew has left Germany. This estimation refers only to "Jews by origin". The number of "non-Aryans" within the meaning of the Nuremberg laws is much greater, as the offspring of mixed marriages are included. Herr Hitler assumed power in February, 1933, and between then and March, 1936, about 100,000 Jews left Germany, about one-third of them going to Palestine; since 1936, however, the number of emigrants has noticeably decreased. In 1936, for example, only 21,000 Jews left Germany, 8,000 going to Palestine, 10,000 to overseas countries and 3,000 to various parts of Europe. In 1937 emigrants further slackened - only 15,000, of whom 4,000 went to Palestine. The decreasing flow of emigration points to the fact that foreign countries are reaching the limit of their willingness to receive Jewish refugees.<sup>37</sup>

The sinister nature of Nazi anti-Semitism, especially in regard to Austria, was then analysed. Scottish Baptists had a right to be indignant in the face of the 'systematic destruction' of the Jewish populations under Nazi rule:

Since 1933, the policy of the Reich towards the Jews has been that of emigration or annihilation, but some measure of decency was observed in enabling the Jews to prepare themselves for emigration. In Vienna and Austria generally, for a time, neither decency nor humanity checked the will to destroy. There have been several orgies of Jew-baiting, such as Europe has not known since the darkest days of the Middle Ages; a community once outstanding in intellect and culture is in danger of being turned into a community of beggars. When the Nazis invaded Austria

<sup>35</sup> James Hair, 'Spread of Religious Persecution', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (January 1939), p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> 'The Crime of being a Jew in Germany', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (January 1939), p. 16.

they at once forced masses of Jews and Jewesses to scrub streets and Nazi barracks, houses of wealthy Jews were ransacked. Jewish businesses were taken over arbitrarily by "Aryans". That period came to an end, the considered policy now is one of systematic destruction and the maintenance of panic for the whole Jewish population. Tens of thousands of Jews have been thrown out of employment; many important Jewish businesses have been confiscated or placed under an Aryan Commissar, under conditions which compel Jews to sign them away at any price.<sup>38</sup>

The conclusion left no doubt that Nazi anti-Semitism, if left unchecked, would culminate in the annihilation of the Jewish population in Europe:

The strength of Anti-Semitism in Germany may be estimated from a speech by Herr Julius Streicher on 26<sup>th</sup> June to some 200,000 Franconian peasants, in which he is reported to have said that anyone who still recognized the League of Nations was in league with the devil - that was, the Jews, and that the sun will not shine again for the peoples of the earth until the last Jew has died, that is, when the last bacillus of disease has gone.<sup>39</sup>

Scottish Baptists did not have the capacity to save the entire Jewish race, but in response to Kristallnacht their Council, at the urging of the Finance Committee, agreed to 'be associated with the appeal being sent out by the Scottish churches on behalf of non-Aryan Christian refugees from Germany and Central Europe' on 30 November 1938.<sup>40</sup>

## **World War, the Holocaust, and Scottish Baptist Indignation (1939-1947)**

In the months leading up to the outbreak of hostilities between the Axis and Allied powers, most religious leaders, including the Scottish Baptists, clung to the hope that war could be averted. In April 1939, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* acknowledged ongoing 'German aggression' and the need for 'freedom-loving nations of the world' to 'stop this movement toward world domination'. It hoped that the Christian witness might convince the Germans and Italians 'that, while nothing will be yielded to violence, understanding is possible by reasonable methods'.<sup>41</sup>

In his capacity as General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, Rushbrooke spoke at the Northern Baptist Convention's annual meeting in Los Angeles (which featured remarks by a Jewish Rabbi) on the 'European

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1940* (covering 1939), Digest of Minutes for the Council - November 30, 1938, p. 122; see also The Finance Committee Report - November 22, 1938, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> 'This Critical Hour', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (April 1939), p. 1.

situation: political and religious'.<sup>42</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Magazine's* report on the Baptist World Alliance's 1939 World Congress in Atlanta omitted the fact that the leading Rabbi of the city addressed the Baptist global family.<sup>43</sup> W. Holms Coats, Principal of the Baptist Theological College of Scotland since 1935,<sup>44</sup> did note that the Congress featured an admirable protest against Southern segregation: 'A special welcome was given to the negro delegates, whose presence on the platform along with their white brethren was something of a novelty in the Southern States.'<sup>45</sup> Rushbrooke sought to uphold the unity of the international Baptist movement, even as the division between the Axis and democratic nations deepened to the point of war. He recalled that 'when war seemed imminent' in 1938, he issued a non-political 'call to prayer to renounce the spirit of hate, to hold fast to our unity in Christ whatever may happen in the earthly sphere', and he was happy to share that the 'response was general and wonderful — and most significant was that of our German brethren'.<sup>46</sup> Rushbrooke did not mention that German Baptists did nothing to help Jews during Kristallnacht. Nevertheless, it was not possible to completely smooth over the political divide between Baptists. The paper admitted that a lively debate between the British Baptist Union's General Secretary, M. E. Aubrey,<sup>47</sup> and the German and Italian Baptists provided fireworks for attendees to behold:

On the whole the speeches were "safe" and unexciting; but on the last day the German delegates provided some relief by a courageous protest against what they considered misrepresentation of the position in Germany. Baptists, they said, were perfectly free to carry on their work; indeed, the Church was not oppressed in Nazi Germany except when it meddled with politics; and they strongly countered M. E. Aubrey's contention that democracy is the proper political expression of Christianity. That would mean, they said, that under any other form of government the Church must perish. This, of course, was not Mr. Aubrey's meaning at all;...<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J. H. Rushbrooke, 'The Northern Baptist Convention', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (August 1939), p. 11. See also the *Annual of the 1939 Northern Baptist Convention*, Agenda Schedule, pp. 60, 64, 155-56. The Northern Baptist Convention is now known as the American Baptist Churches USA. For a full treatment of the Northern Baptist Convention's responses to the Holocaust, see Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 141-252.

<sup>43</sup> J. H. Rushbrooke, ed., *Sixth Baptist World Congress Atlanta, GA July 22-28, 1939* (Atlanta, GA: The Baptist World Alliance, 1939), Minutes, Item 12, p. 3; see also Bernard Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich*, pp. 65-69; and Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 414-25.

<sup>44</sup> David W. Bebbington and David Ceri Jones, eds, *Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism in the United Kingdom during the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 281.

<sup>45</sup> W. Holms Coats, 'Atlanta', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (September 1939), p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>47</sup> M. E. Aubrey's ministerial career is reviewed in memoriam in the *1958 Baptist Union Handbook*, pp. 337-39. For a critical review of Aubrey's life and service, see W. M. S. West, 'The Young Mr Aubrey', *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 33 Issue 8 (1990), 351-63; 'The Reverend Secretary Aubrey Part I', *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 34 Issue 5 (1992), 199-213; 'The Reverend Secretary Aubrey Part II', *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 34 Issue 6 (1992), 263-81; and 'The Reverend Secretary Aubrey Part III', *Baptist Quarterly*, Volume 34 Issue 7 (1992), 320-36.

<sup>48</sup> Coats, 'Atlanta', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (September 1939), p. 3. See also Rushbrooke, ed., *Sixth Baptist World Congress Atlanta, GA July 22-28, 1939*, pp. 198-206; and Ernest A. Payne, *Baptists Speak*

On 10 September 1939, Rev. Dr R. J. Smithson, of Kirkcaldy, preached a sermon in support of Great Britain's entry into the war. War was justifiable because there '*is implacable war between the fundamental principles of Hitlerism and the fundamental principles of Christianity*'.<sup>49</sup> Smithson emphasised the 'antagonism' between Hitler and the German church, citing Niemöller's persecution as an example. On a philosophical level, he delineated three clear themes that pitted Christianity against Nazism.

First, the Nazi racial doctrine of Nordic superiority rejected Christianity's emphasis on the unity of humanity:

Nazi-ism is based on its theory of blood superiority to all the rest of mankind. The Nordic race — which, we are informed, comprises all who are of pure German blood — is the race whose destiny is supremacy among all races. Over against that is the basic principle of Christianity — the equality of all men before God, the Creator of all.<sup>50</sup>

Second, Smithson addressed the issue of Nazi anti-Semitism, claiming that the annihilation of Jewry was an objective of Nazi racial doctrine:

The world mission of Nazi-ism is to spread the Nordic race, to make the inferior races serfs and to exterminate the Jews. The world mission of Christianity is to bring all men into the Kingdom of God, elevating and educating the backward races in doing so.<sup>51</sup>

Third, Hitler's embrace of totalitarianism puts him at odds with the Baptist understanding of 'personality' — the belief that human beings, possessing a soul, are made in the image of God and therefore are of infinite value and worth. Smithson wrote:

In Nazi-ism man's worth is determined by his value to the State. Human personality is no more than a means to the State's ends. In Christianity the determining factor is what a man is worth to God. In the Nazi State the power of the State is absolute over the citizen's entire life. The only test for what a man may do, say, or think is, "Does it promote the welfare of the State?" In Christianity the will of the Living God is supreme over both the individual and the State. Men are to know that will and to do it. Out of that demand there spring the sacred right of conscience and the abiding imperatives of civil and religious liberty.<sup>52</sup>

In three clear points, Smithson summarised the global Baptist critique of Nazism and its persecution of the Jewish people (exempting, of course, the views of German and Italian Baptists). In response to the Nazi threat to the Christian worldview, he declared, 'Hitlerism must be destroyed', even while

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*to the World: A Description and Interpretation of the Sixth Baptist World Congress, Atlanta, 1939* (London: The Carey Press, 1939), pp. 36, 43.

<sup>49</sup> R. J. Smithson, 'The Battle is not Yours, but God's', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (October 1939), p. 4 (italics in original).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

stating that the German people were not the enemy and thus should not be the object of Scottish ‘ill-will or hatred’.<sup>53</sup>

At its 20 September 1939 meeting, the Scottish Baptist Council unanimously accepted a resolution from the Social Service Committee:

The Baptist Union of Scotland desires to express its profound sorrow at the outbreak of war between this country, Poland and France on the one hand, and Germany on the other. It recognises and is deeply grateful for sustained efforts directed by the Allies, and particularly by our national leaders, during the past years toward peace. It expresses deep sympathy with the Polish nation in its heroic stand against Nazi ill-faith, aggression and violence.<sup>54</sup>

The full Assembly passed the same resolution on 25 October 1939.<sup>55</sup> At the 1940 Assembly, in the aftermath of attacks on London in which the Baptist Church House was damaged, Scottish Baptist President Alexander Clark lamented, ‘Hitler is hailed as a Messiah sent for deliverance of the German people from dishonour, slavery, misery...The spiritual foundations of Western civilization have been undermined.’ In contrast to Nazism, Clark maintained, the Bible’s Messianic hope founded in the premise that Jesus was indeed the ‘King of the Jews’ promoted ‘a realised brotherhood among those who worshipped the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Where He holds sway, racial, national and class barriers fall.’ Accordingly, over and against all forms of totalitarianism, ‘as the Kingdom becomes a reality it will mean the charting of new courses in the sphere of human relationships — social, international, inter-racial’. Clark interpreted the rise of Communism, Fascism, and Nazism as a triune assault against Christianity. In particular, ‘in Germany the nation is god, and Hitler is his prophet’. Hitler was viewed as being at war with the Church; Christians, including Baptists,

have been banished into exile with its terrible hardships; others languish in concentration camps amid unspeakable horrors; the new pro-Nazi Government in Rumania has suppressed Baptists and other dissenters, and confiscated their church property.<sup>56</sup>

Despite Rushbrooke’s yearning for the Baptist family to remain united and in fellowship during the war,<sup>57</sup> the European Committee of the Scottish Baptist Union in 1941 had to admit that

almost complete silence has now fallen upon the activities of our brethren on the Continent, as each of the countries aided by British Baptists has come under the yoke of Hitler, and there is no direct communication with these lands. The Baltic

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1940* (covering 1939), Digest of Minutes for the Council - September 20, 1939, p. 126; see also *The Social Service Report - September 20, 1939*, p. 141.

<sup>55</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1940* (covering 1939), Minutes for the Assembly - October 25, 1939, p. 159.

<sup>56</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1941* (covering 1940), Presidential Address, pp. 154-64.

<sup>57</sup> J. H. Rushbrooke, ‘Baptist Co-operation Under War-time Conditions’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (September 1940), p. 7.

States, where work was developing in a remarkable way, are now under Nazi domination, after a brief experience of Soviet rule.<sup>58</sup>

As the world began to recognise the full extent of Hitler's determination to exterminate the Jewish race throughout Europe, Scottish Baptists once again expressed 'indignation' at the revelations of death camps. W. Holms Coats wrote:

All generous hearts, Christian and non-Christian alike, have been deeply stirred by the appalling revelations given in Parliament of the frightful excesses committed by the Nazis against the Jewish race. The scene in the House of Commons, when the whole Assembly stood in silence for a minute as a symbol of pity, sympathy and indignation, was one that will never be forgotten. Hitler's threat to exterminate the Jews, which the world received with incredulity, seems to be in process of cold-blooded and inhuman execution. It is right that solemn expression should be given to the determination of the United Nations that its perpetrators shall not escape condign retribution; but that alone brings no respite or comfort to the victims. The dreadful fact seems inescapable that there is little we can do about it just now: yet no effort should be spared to devise some means of bringing at least a measure of relief.<sup>59</sup>

Following the liberation of the concentration camps by Allied forces in the spring of 1945, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine's* readers read of the full extent of the horrible fate endured by Jewish victims under Hitler's Final Solution:

The indisputable evidence of Nazi brutality revealed by the capture of German concentration camps has filled the Allied armies with cold fury and the whole world with nausea. Any secret hopes that accounts of German barbarity had been exaggerated are thereby blown to the winds, for the reality is infinitely worse than any rumours. Torture, starvation, sadistic inhumanity to men, women and little children, carried out with fiendish ingenuity and cold-blooded callousness, now lie open before the horrified eyes of mankind. The prompt action of Parliament in sending out a delegation of M.P.s to see for themselves has forestalled any denial: and though the worst traces of bestiality had perforce been removed before their arrival, accounts already published of their reactions prepare us for a document that will make the worst stories of mediaeval cruelty and the Spanish Inquisition pale into insignificance.<sup>60</sup>

For Scottish Baptists, the evil unleashed by German Nazis raised an important existential and practical question: 'What is to be done with a people in whom such devilish atrocities are tolerated without any effective protest? We still believe that there are many good Germans: but they seem to have either been cowed or hypnotized into impotence.'<sup>61</sup> While excuses may be made for the population at large, what about leaders, including

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<sup>58</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1942* (covering 1941), European Committee Report, p. 176.

<sup>59</sup> W. Holms Coats, 'The Jewish Horror', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (January 1943), p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> 'The Concentration Camp Horror', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (May 1945), pp. 1-2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Baptist leaders who apparently either embraced Nazism or passively tolerated it? An editorial in *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* stated:

The problem for Christians is especially trying. The re-establishment of fellowship between the branches of the Christian Church sundered by war is obviously a desirable end; but one can agree with the argument of the Archbishop of York that there can be no fraternisation with German pastors till we know more of their attitude to the evil order which has been destroyed. We cannot yet enter into full Christian fellowship with pastors who have actively supported or defended the Nazi regime.<sup>62</sup>

By the end of 1945, attitudes toward German Baptists were beginning to soften. The European Committee of the Scottish Baptist Union ‘hoped that soon effective contacts will be established’ with Baptists on the Continent, and a resolution on religious liberty in a post-war world was approved.<sup>63</sup> In a report on M. E. Aubrey’s three week visit to Germany, it was noted that:

Berlin Baptists are anxious to re-establish relations with British and American Baptists. The churches are now the great hope of Germany; but they need wise, strong leadership and encouragement, for their hardships are great, and the way will be difficult. They have brought on themselves the judgment of despair; but despair cannot be the last word. They need hope, the right sort of hope. We must help them in every way open to us.<sup>64</sup>

At the Seventh World Congress in Copenhagen in 1947, German and Italian Baptist delegates were warmly welcomed back into fellowship.<sup>65</sup> Their re-integration into European Baptist fellowship and mission was complete by the time of the London Baptist World Alliance meetings in August 1948.<sup>66</sup>

## **The Jews and Palestine (1948)**

After Kristallnacht, Scottish Baptists paid brief attention to the Zionist movement and its implications for peace in Palestine. The Union’s Council approved the following resolution advanced by the Social Service Committee in February 1939:

The Social Service Committee of the Baptist Union of Scotland rejoices in the fact that the British Government has summoned a conference between the Arabs of Palestine and the Jews, and calls upon the members of our churches to be

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<sup>62</sup> ‘Fraternising with the Enemy’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (July 1945), pp. 1-2.

<sup>63</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1946* (covering 1945), European Committee Report and Resolution, p. 76.

<sup>64</sup> W. Holms Coats, ‘Rev. M. E. Aubrey in Germany’, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (January 1946), p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Walter O. Lewis, ed., *Seventh Baptist World Congress: Copenhagen, Denmark July 29 - August 3, 1947* (London: Baptist World Alliance, 1948); see Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 426-30.

<sup>66</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1949* (covering 1948), Baptist World Alliance Conference Report, pp. 137-39.

constant in prayer that wisdom may be given to all and a solution found which will be Christian in its basic principles.<sup>67</sup>

Following the establishment of the independent Jewish state of Israel in May 1948, *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* provided a balanced yet unsympathetic appraisal of the situation in the Middle East:

For twenty-eight years, at the sacrifice of many British lives and at the cost of many millions of pounds, Great Britain has sought to honour her stewardship as mandatory power over the troubled hills of Zion. Of recent years the claims and counter-claims of Arab nationalism and a political Zionism, alike fanatical in their militancy, have brought an impasse that forced our government to call "enough". Our administration ended with "the earnest hope that some compromise may yet be possible." The hour of Britain's official withdrawal has been marked by the proclamation of the new "State of Israel," the first independent Jewish State for 2,500 years. Within a few hours of its birth our newspapers carried the headlines, "Israel invaded on three fronts." Thus the position stands with the infant State called upon to fight for its existence against formidable odds. The repercussions are world-wide and already the cry is that peace is endangered. There is tragedy in the Middle East, perpetuated in the obstinate refusal of Jew and Arab to learn that unless they can live together amicably they will forfeit much more than the benefits British rule conferred upon them both.<sup>68</sup>

The first expression of concern for Jewish displaced persons and concentration camp survivors since 1945 was published in *The Scottish Baptist Magazine's* December 1948 issue. Commenting on the World Council of Churches meeting in Amsterdam, the paper noted that delegates were concerned about 'the Jews':

They number eleven millions, of whom some six are to be found in the United States. Palestine houses around seven hundred thousand; Great Britain approximately four hundred thousand. Displaced Jews are still gathered in many camps awaiting an opportunity to go elsewhere. For some, Palestine is but a stepping-stone to a larger freedom.<sup>69</sup>

Closer to home, the paper worried about prejudice displayed against people 'of other faiths and especially to Jewish Christians'. It insisted that Scottish Baptists remember their evangelical call to

witness to our faith and live before Israel with special earnestness and renewed passion. The Jew at our door must know that the promise of the Old Testament is fulfilled in the Christ.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *The Scottish Baptist Yearbook for 1940* (covering 1939), Digest of Minutes for the Council - February 22, 1939, p. 123; see also The Social Service Report - February 22, 1939, p. 140.

<sup>68</sup> 'The State of Israel', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (June 1948), p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> 'To the Jew First', *The Scottish Baptist Magazine* (December 1948), p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*



## **Concluding Observations**

Throughout the Nazi era, Scottish Baptists periodically expressed their indignation over Hitler's policy of persecuting and then exterminating the Jewish population of Germany and occupied Europe. Scottish Baptists had a sound grasp of the theological challenges Nazism posed for Christianity, and responded according to historical Baptist core convictions, such as soul freedom, individual liberty, separation of church and state, and the notion of personality. Additionally, they acted as loyal British subjects and, throughout the period, supported British policy on appeasement prior to the war, the entry of Great Britain and the Allies into conflict against the Axis powers, and on Palestine.

At the same time, Scottish Baptists confessed impotence regarding offering any effective response which might materially alleviate the suffering of Jewish victims. In this sense, Scottish Baptists acted as sympathetic bystanders. Like other Baptist national bodies, Scottish Baptists (perhaps prematurely) welcomed German and Italian Baptists back into fellowship, supported humanitarian assistance to Baptists impacted adversely by the war, and, in large part, ignored the plight of Jewish concentration camp survivors. Scottish Baptists, as a denomination, did not enthusiastically embrace the Zionist movement, and did not promote a viable alternative for post-war Jewish survival.

A generation later, at the 1984 European Baptist Federation's meeting, all of these issues resurfaced in a poignant manner. A new generation of German Baptist leaders offered 'a public confession of guilt' concerning the 'ideological temptations' of the Nazi era which led to the 'persecution and the mass extinction of the Jewish people'. Scottish Baptist Peter Barber joined England's David Russell in responding that since 'the burden of history lies heavily upon us...we join our fellow German Baptists in their earnest prayers, knowing that we also stand in need of the mercy and grace of God'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Green, *European Baptists and the Third Reich*, pp. 232-34; see also Bernard Green, *Crossing the Boundaries: A History of the European Baptist Federation* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1999), pp. 106-07.