Refugee Rabbis from Nazi Germany in America

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Digest: Refugee Rabbis from Nazi Germany in America

The Jewish population in Germany reached its zenith in the pre-war 1930s, a total of over half a million citizens. After Hitler's rise to power in 1933, a progression of anti-Jewish policies drove 300,000 of these German Jews to emigrate. Of the more than 200,000 who remained, almost 90% of them had perished by war's end in 1945. Restrictive American policies permitted few of these emigrants to come to the U.S.A. Nevertheless, about 130,000 German Jews did find haven in America, more than in any other single country of final settlement.

These refugees had considered themselves "good Germans," patriotic supporters of the homeland they had inhabited, in many cases, for hundreds of years. Only two decades before, their fathers, uncles, and grandfathers had fought for Germany in World War I, many of them family dying in defense of their homeland. The majority of German Jews had become acculturated—entrenched in the German middle class and represented among the economic and social elite. As a group, they appeared indispensable to the German economy that was still recovering from the ravages of World War I. At first they believed themselves immune from Hitler's radicalism, but they were Jews, and that became their defining identity to the murderous Third Reich.

With Adolf Hitler's ascension to power in 1933, a formal policy of persecution and emigration began to transform the German-Jewish experience. This organized

persecution of Germany's Jewish population reached fever pitch with 1938's November Pogrom. The ensuing mass exodus was interrupted when the Reich issued a decree totally banning emigration from Germany in the fall of 1941. "As the history of a Jewish group, the persecution, emigration, and acculturation of Jews from Nazi Germany form part of the history of the Holocaust, indeed of its first victims." All but about 20,000 of those remaining, who did not escape, ultimately perished in the Holocaust.

Building upon the influence of the German Jewish emigrants who had preceded them in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, refugees from Hitler's Germany made unique contributions to the American Jewish landscape. Of the 130,000 German-Jewish emigrants of this period, fewer than a hundred of them were rabbis. "They had survived, they came to believe, for a transcendent purpose, and albeit in utterly different ways, each worked to fulfill that purpose by strengthening and revitalizing American Jewish religious life." Many of these immigrant rabbis have been pivotal in shaping American Judaism.

This thesis focuses on three refugee rabbis, Rabbi Joseph Breuer, Rabbi Joachim Prinz, and Rabbi Manfred E. Swarsensky. Rabbis Breuer and Prinz represent minority German Jewish populations, from the far right to the far left of the ideological spectrum, respectively. Rabbi Swarsensky was a fairly typical Reform community rabbi in Berlin who remained a congregational rabbi in a Reform congregation in America. These three men had different personal backgrounds and experiences in Germany. They had varied views on Germany, Israel, and America. Each developed a vision of how Judaism did and

should evolve in response to the events of the 20th century, with the Holocaust providing a significant touchpoint. Sometimes their perspectives changed over time, with the unfolding of newer chapters in German and Jewish history, and for Rabbis Prinz and Swarsensky, after revisiting their homeland. In other ways, their vision remained constant, while the Jewish historical backdrop changed with the founding of the Modern State of Israel, the American Civil Rights movement, the rise of Communism, and the evolving demographics and ideologies of the world Jewish populations in the second half of the 20th century.

Their unique stories, from a singular period in history, continue to have much to offer us today—inspiration and insight kindled from the embers of their lost German past.

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Chapter 1: Introduction—The German Jewish Community Before 1938

German-Jewish history has origins that date back to the 4th and 11th centuries. The first documentary evidence of Jewish settlement in Germany and Central Europe dates to the year 321 C.E., with an edict from the Roman Emperor Constantine, which granted the Jews of Cologne on the Rhine legal access to civic positions. By the 11th century, luminaries of Bible and Talmudic commentary such as Rashi and his students had established themselves in the Rhineland region. These early settlements, however, were almost totally vacated during the 11th through 14th centuries. The Crusades, Black Death, and Expulsions had forced almost total migration eastward. It wasn't until the Chmielnicki massacres in the Ukraine during the mid-17th century that a Jewish community once again settled in Central Europe. Jewish tax collectors and money lenders had become easy targets for the peasant uprising, propelling the Jews out of Eastern Europe.

The Jewish communities of the late 17th century where largely poor, rural populations. These communities fell under the jurisdictions of local regimes, each of which had its own "Jewish Policy." In the century that followed, however, the economic potential of the Jews became realized by the rulers of the region. Because of the separation of political and religious realms, a certain religious tolerance created the opportunity for the Jews' economic development. Some of the emerging wealthy class became "Court Jews" in the late 17th, 18th, and into the 19th century. These were

agents of the various regional rulers, and they enjoyed special privileges and economic opportunities as purveyors of war goods and treasurers of the states where they lived.

Out of this period came the first elements of Jewish integration into German-speaking culture[1]. Expulsions ceased, and local secular authorities became more involved in the internal affairs of the Jewish community. There was less isolation in education, even among the rabbinic leadership, as educational institutions allowed Jews limited participation. The vast majority of Jews, however, remained faithful to the tenets of traditional Judaism, even as they slowly accommodated the outside world in everyday life and business.[2]

Jews had little influence or steady equality, though, until the Enlightenment and its reforms reshaped European society following the French Revolution. Enlightenment ideals sparked revolution across mid-19th century Europe. Revolutionaries fought against the institutions of absolute monarchy and landed voting rights, seeking universal suffrage, freedom of the press, and freedom of religion. Jews benefitted from this general call for voting rights for all male citizens regardless of race.

1812 marked the first formal government policy of extending citizenship rights to Jews. Civic equality in German-speaking Central Europe had been defined by specific local laws and policies prior to 1812. Following the path of French emancipation, Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia granted citizenship rights regardless of religion. In

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[1] Michael A. Meyer, Editor, and Michael Brenner, Assistant Editor. 4 vols. *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998). Volume 1, page 378.
[2] Ibid, 379

practice, thousands of territorial laws impacting Jews still remained between 1813 and 1848. German nationalism continued to repress Jews despite the 1812 edict, even in Prussia. But the process of formal emancipation of German Jews had begun.

Uniformity emerged out of the unsuccessful German Revolution of 1848. In December 1848 the Frankfurt parliament adopted the "Basic Rights for the German People," which proclaimed equal rights for all citizens. Despite the revolution's failure, the liberal pressure toward a constitutional monarchy brought emancipation into the realm of broader, regional politics. At the same time, however, anti-Semitic outbreaks accompanied revolutionary actions.[3] Peasant revolts included anti-Jewish "manifestations." Despite specific violent outbreaks against Jews, German sentiment of "brotherhood," coupled with the Jews' support for the revolution (including the willingness to die for the revolution) fostered a public opinion supporting the granting of political rights to Jews.[4] Germany's Jews saw the revolution and constitutional evolution as the beginning of their complete inclusion as citizens. Because other religious groups sought freedom of religion and rights, Jews could seek the same protections.

In the period between 1848 revolutions and unification of Germany in 1871, some revolutionary ideals rolled back in favor of REALPOLITIK, such as liberalism and democratic character. However, the universal rights to vote and to participate in a representative government remained. This provided equal access to public office and

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[3] Jehuda Reinharz. *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975), page 2.
[4] Ibid, 3

non-discrimination in civil and political rights based on religious beliefs or ethnicity. These developments were hailed by German Jews as almost Messianic in terms of full Jewish emancipation. Jews could now embrace—as Hermann Cohen famously termed—Germanism ("Deutschtum") as well as Judaism ("Judentum"). The 1869 constitution of National Assembly of Northern Confederation of German states included a platform of civil equality similar to the 1848 declaration. These provisions became the law of the unified Germany when the Reichstag of the North German Confederation passed it in July of 1869. The German Empire was formed under Bismarck in 1871, and the 1869 policy of legal equality was extended by federal law to the entire Kaiserreich.

This long-anticipated policy of religious equality was still incomplete, however. Some ambiguities maintained even up to 1918, such as the conflicting policies of German equality and of the preferred status of the Christian religion in terms of state institutions. For example, Germany's nature as a Christian state was not to be violated. Individuals were free to exercise their own religion, but it was still possible to exclude non-Christians from some judicial, administrative, and state offices. Such ambiguities were addressed by the various political institutions of the individual states. Tension remained, but the fundamental tenet of equality of citizens was now the law of the land. From emancipation to WWI, Germany's Jews enjoyed an almost unparalleled, steady increase in legal and civil rights, economic and educational opportunity, and

acculturation. At least on the surface, German Jews were largely becoming integrated into German society.

During the mid-to-late 19th century, Germany as a whole was evolving from an agrarian to an industrialized economy. Ironically, new civil rights and access to the wider society created a unique position going into the industrialization of Germany that created a German Jewry in many ways more successful in the new economy than the non-Jewish Germans whose rights had not needed to change. By the dawn of the German Empire, Germany's Jews were no longer marginal—they had become educated, secularized members of the middle class. Few existed on either extreme of the economic scale.[5] They migrated from the mostly small towns in Central Europe where they and their ancestors had first inhabited, becoming a metropolitan group. Over half were living in cities whose population exceeded 100,000. With this legal and economic transformation, the definition of Judaism, or "Jewishness," also changed. Previously, "Jew" was an ethnic or racial appellation. In the emancipated German Empire, Judaism was a religion.

A century before, Moses Mendelssohn had bridged the Jewish and German worlds with his German translation of the Hebrew Bible. His lifelong engagement with German intellectual society thus marked the ideological beginning of modern Jewish thought and culture in the late 18th century. Early Reformers of Jewish religious life were in direct conflict with the established orthodoxy in the early 19th century. By the

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[5] Meyer, Volume 3, 3

dawn of the empire the population had settled somewhat into a majority of liberal Jews whose Judaism became limited to private versus public life, much along the lines of Christian confessional identities. Religiously, only about 1 in 5 was observant. Many others had abandoned tradition in their personal lives or only maintained it in limited fashion or for the sake of older more observant relatives.

In "The Social Psychology of the Jews in Germany, 1900-1933,"[6] Gershom Scholem differentiates a number of different groups of German Jews in terms of shared "social psychology." First were "Germanized" Jews who either abandoned Judaism or lived on the fringes of Jewish self-identification.[7] Second were "Transitional Jews." These were wealthy Jews among the conspicuous elite[8]—perceived incorrectly to be representative of German Jews in general. They were completely assimilated, many on the way to baptism. They were mostly new or recently affluent, affiliated with and financially supportive of moderate liberals. They educated their children German-ly. The largest quantity was the broad Jewish liberal middle class—middle and small bourgeoisie.[9] Most members of this Jewish middle class self-identified with Judaism. However, they had mostly abandoned ritual expression of Judiasm, excluding differing commitments to the high holy days, Seder, Shabbat, and yahrzeits. Most retained bar mitzvah, but no Jewish education after it. Perhaps surprisingly, they still did not

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[6] Scholem, Gershom. "The Social Psychology of the Jews in Germany, 1900-1933," *Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis*. David Bronson ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universität, 1979)
[7] Ibid, 13
[8] Ibid, 15
[9] Ibid, 16

frequently enter mixed marriages, although these were more common than conversions.

Assimilation was not total, and in fact there was a revival in interest in Jewish history and culture, and a uniquely German Jewish school of thought blossomed, including such legends such as Heinrich Graetz, Martin Buber, and Leo Baeck, among others.[10] But the very opportunities afforded by emancipation had a damaging influence to German Jewry as well. Assimilation and intermarriage brought a decline in Jewish demographics by the early 20th century, with declining birth rates and steady out-conversion. These numbers were only made up by Eastern European Jews immigrating to the West.

The Orthodox minority within this population didn't share same "Deutschtum und Judentum" aspirations. Some were clearly influenced by modernity, such as Samson Raphael Hirsch and his followers, but they clung to a core "true" Judaism in terms of practice and ideology. They remained a distinct group within German Jewry. The "German-ness" of orthodox Jews was not very deep.[11] They never sought a fulfillment of emancipation's promise to become fully German, nor did they always participate with or cooperate with the national German-Jewish organizations, balking at the liberal majority and leadership. They maintained a particularist or nationalist identity. The orthodox leadership always hoped assimilated Jews would turn back, seeing in orthodoxy the only

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[10] Meyer, Volume 3, 3

[11] Mordechai Breuer, translated by Elizabeth Petuchowski. *Modernity within Tradition: The Social History of Orthodox Jewry in Imperial Germany*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 402.

hope for a Jewish future.[12] Sadly, "the decline in German national feelings did not necessarily lead to national Judaism."[13]

Orthodoxy never claimed more than 10 to 20 percent of German Jews. As reforms gained wider appeal, and secularization, orthodox numbers decreased. However, the "decline of orthodox Jewry arrested after 1870."[14] Although some defected to liberal and conservative communities, many rural, more-traditional Jews' migrated into cities from Eastern Europe.[15] They also sustained a higher birth rate than their more assimilated, liberal brethren. Therefore, the overall orthodox percentage remained fairly stable from emancipation into early 20th century.

Despite the earlier reforms of Samson Raphael Hirsch, the German Orthodox community at the turn of the century was "turning away from the Neo-Orthodox *weltanschauung* ("worldview") and form of life." There was general ambivalence over the proper impact of modernity onto orthodoxy. Hirsch's more Utopian ideas of Neo-orthodoxy would later come to fruition outside of the German Jewish milieu of which German-Jewish Orthodoxy itself 'remained an episode.'"[16] The Neo-orthodoxy legacy can be seen in the Modern Orthodoxy that evolved on American soil to the west, and in religious Zionist settlement. "Religious Zionism contained a requisite part of Hirsch's 'realizable utopianism.'"[17]

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[12] Ibid, 399
[13] Ibid, 400
[14] Ibid, 397
[15] Ibid, 397-398
[16] Ibid, 404
[17] Ibid

In his book *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893-1914,* Jehuda Reinharz identifies a number of paradoxes in German-Jewish existence after Emancipation.[18] After 1871 Jews did not believe there was now an obstacle between them and full access to and integration in German society.[19] Assimilation seemed a natural pathway to and by-product of total "integration."[20] Judaism was now their "religion," and not intended to be an obstacle to dedication to "Deutschtum."[21]

This faith in emancipation was seriously challenged by the organized antisemitism that emerged after the unification of Germany in 1871. They responded by reiterating their loyalty to Germany; when that did nothing, some German Jewish notables looked for new tools to challenge the anti-patriotic claims and the antisemitism behind them.[22] Still euphoric after 1871's emancipation, the German Jews dismissed this lingering antisemitism as aftershocks. But it continued, even to the point that ¼ million Germans petitioned Bismarck to repeal emancipation, and political parties formed with antisemitism as a central tenet.[23]

When the shock wore off and the German Jews could no longer dismiss antisemitism as temporary aberration from liberal ideal and emancipation, began

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[18] Jehuda Reinharz. *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893-1914.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1975).
[19] Ibid, 225
[20] Ibid, 226
[21] Ibid
[22] Ibid
[23] Sanford Ragins. *Jewish Responses to Antisemitism in Germany 1870-1914.* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1980). Xi.

organized response. But this response still had to be conceived in the context of the liberal ideal—defend liberalism, primarily through intellectual expression.[24]

Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, Central Verein, or "CV") was founded with the intention of opposing the rise of Antisemitism in the German Empire while maintaining patriotic commitment to the German Nation. It sought to unify German-Jewish citizens to fight for the Jews' rights as citizens and to combat rising antisemitism. At first, the CV walked a fine line not threatening Jewish assimilation while wanting to advocate for German-Jewish citizens' equal rights. They didn't want to draw attention to themselves as Jews. They began as a primarily social-welfare or philanthropic entity. They appealed to the state to defend threatened civil rights, and they didn't form separate Jewish political parties, instead choosing to influence the wider process.

German Jews' response to antisemitism was merely to defend the liberalism that was itself their only real political ally. A purely liberal, emancipated ideology failed to explain antisemitism. But the counter-propaganda efforts of the CV satisfied most of the German Jews who even desired to challenge antisemitism as Jews.[25] They did not address the greater question of this apparent failure of emancipation.

In response to antisemitism in the new Empire, organizations that emerged to speak for the interests of Jewish Germans desired not to cause the newly emancipated Jews to be segregated from fellow Germans. Jews wanted to demonstrate their loyal

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[24] Ibid, xii
[25] Ragins, 162

Germanism. The founders of the CV were among the generation that saw emancipation—fulfillment of their dream. Not deterred by antisemitism waves from the 1870s to the 1890s, they also saw it taper off in mid-1890s. This fueled their belief that full acceptance was at hand, and just a matter of time to be realized.[26] Their tools of choice to combat antisemitism were "dissemination of information, refutation of anti-Jewish slander, and occasional appeals to the courts."[27]

This large new organization of the Jewish community also became a key expression of Judaism in itself for the largely assimilated, secular German Jews. The CV was the largest and most powerful German-Jewish organization; it reflected the German Liberal *Weltanschauung* ("ideology," or "worldview"). Details of the ideology evolved over time, but it ultimately defined Jews as a RELIGIOUS community (*"Religionsgemeinschaft"*). Most of the CV's founders were ignorant of the Jewish values underlying their work, because they were loyal first and foremost to their identity as Germans. Thiers was a largely organizational identity as Jews as they shared no other overtly Jewish beliefs, behaviors, or observances. Yet they were proud that they had resisted the many temptations to convert and stood up to antisemitism.[28] The CV's exclusively Jewish membership also allowed Jews to practice the organization-building skills that had eluded them when they had been excluded from German institutional participation.[29]

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[26] Ibid, 226
[27] Ibid
[28] Ibid, 227
[29] Ibid

The CV's ideology of the liberal establishment was first challenged by the *Zionistische Vereinigung fur Deutschaland* (ZVfd)—Zionist Federation of Germany.[30] Founders of Germany's Zionist movement saw emancipation as a natural evolution of Diaspora life; however, they saw this emancipation as creating unwelcome negative consequences of assimilation. They rejected the *Religionsgemeinschaft* definition, connecting instead to a nationalist, ethnic identity (*"Volksgemeinschaft"*). Unlike the CV's stress on German nationality, the Zionist community claimed a unique Jewish ethnicity or peoplehood.

This Zionist view was not popular among the liberal Association of German Rabbis, who often did not wish to say that they had an ethnic tie to the eastern European Jews who had been thrust upon the community at the end of the 19th century. They sought to demonstrate to the German public that they had no ties outside Germany in terms of nationalist loyalties. This radical nationalism eventually tempered, and once the founders of ZVfD professed a modified political Zionism, the liberal establishment ended attacks on ZVfD. This Zionism operated solely through legal means and with the approval of the international community. Its adherents still participated fully in German life; primarily support of ZVfD was membership and fundraising.[31] These founders shared the same ideological faith in emancipation as the founders of the CV. "They might evaluate Deutschtum and Judentum differently, but the result was the same for both groups...a systematic world-view that anchored them in Germany and

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[30] Ibid, 228
[31] Ibid, 229

enabled them to see their Jewish identity as compatible with German culture."[32] Founders in both movements saw "that their personal destinies were in Germany (ibid)."

After the turn of the 20th century, a second generation of German Zionists changed this relative equilibrium between German and Jewish identity. These younger Zionists came after the hopeful culmination of emancipation in 1871. Although they were assimilated, just as their elders had been, they had experienced lingering antisemitism (230).These younger Zionists found the competing interests of Deutschtum and Judentum incompatible. They replaced their elders' passionate commitment to German nationalism with a total commitment to Judentum. Zionists had to decide between the two. The new Zionists were a tiny minority, and as such they were radicalized. Conflict with the mainstream was necessary. Internally the Zionists debated the role of emigration or other personal commitment to Palestine within German-Jewish consciousness. This was a shift in philosophy, and it served to "retire" the old leadership of the ZVfD.[33]

But even as this extreme Jewish nationalism developed, the majority of German Jews maintained fervent loyalty to Deutschtum. In 1912, this was evidenced by the almost total community celebration of 100th anniversary of edict of emancipation in 1812 by King Friedrich Wilhelm III. On the outside, everything seemed to be going well. Discrimination had abated and Jews become increasingly prominent in German society.

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[32] Ibid, 230
[33] Ibid, 231

Thus, the racial Zionists were a threat to their satisfactorily assimilated and patriotic German Jewish identities. Now CV proclaimed Deutschtum over Judentum. They declared a synthesis between two, with a preference for Deutschtum.[34]

But radical Zionism proved to be shallower than its members' underlying German patriotism. Debate over personal commitment to Palestine suspended until after the war in 1918. In 1914 German patriotism trumped either liberal or nationalist Jewish identity. The CV and ZVfD united in urging their members to defend the Fatherland against their international aggressors. With their new emancipation, German Jews were eager to demonstrate their fundamental Germanism. Everyone aligned patriotically behind the defense of the Fatherland in WWI.

According to Hans-Joachim Bieber, German antisemitism during this period defies simple causal explanation.[35] He describes a paradoxical relationship between German-Jews and their non-Jewish countrymen between 1880 and 1933. There was unprecedented quality and quantity of contact between the two, but also increasing alienation.[36] His view is that antisemitism in the early empire cannot be explained simply by the number of Jews mainstreaming in Germany or any other tension on social or economic or psychological fronts. Rather, antisemitism was a result of "the

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[34] Ibid, 233

[35] Hans-Joachim Bieber. "Anti-Semitism as a Reflection of Social, Economic and Political Tensions in Germany: 1880-1933." Jews and Germans from 1860 to 1933: The Problematic Symbiosis. David Bronson ed. (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universität, 1979).

[36] Ibid, 33

fundamental transformation of Germany between Bismarck and Hitler"[37] as a result of industrialization.

Professions that had thrived became challenged. Wealth and power that had been dispersed through military and agricultural success also concentrated in industrial leaders. The essence of the German economy was altered. Jews had historically been limited to professions such as credit and money-lending, and prohibited from artisanal and trade industry. Newly emancipated and free of pre-industrialized economic models, Jews enjoyed greater success as a result of industrialization. German middle class society suffered from the shift from older professions to those in industrial organizations. Loss—both real, perceived and feared—shaped their attitudes toward modernity and modernization. Jews were identified with the modernization due to an unsophisticated understanding of the sources of change and the ultimate beneficiaries of that change. Anti-modern foment following economic depression became inseparable from anti-Jewish foment. Additionally, political and financial leaders who themselves had little or no anti-Semitic inclination allowed and even capitalized upon the anti-Jewish sentiment to gain and maintain their own political power.[38] Yet despite the seeds of discontent taking root, Jewish-German integration peaked in the early decades of the 20th century.

BY WWI German Jews largely viewed themselves as Germans, albeit Germans with an enduring/lingering sense of Jewish identity. When WWI broke out patriotic

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[37] Ibid, 33-34
[38] Ibid, 33-46

fervor in service of their German homeland reached its apex, sometimes at the suppression of a particularistic Jewish interest. Germany's Jews flocked to the armed services to fight for their country, more than any other German ethnic group, with many dying in its service. WWI and Jews' patriotic passion peaked, yet the very hatreds that would spell almost total annihilation emerged as well, providing fertile ground for Hitler's National Socialism to sow its anti-Jewish agenda.

Antisemitism didn't go away even though it died down somewhat, subsumed into focus on the war. Claims of un-patriotism of Jewish soldiers led to the commissioning of a military census to "prove it." The German Military High Command census of October 1916 proved the opposite—Jews showed higher support than any other ethnic group within Germany, but the results were not publicized widely since they did not support the anti-Semitic claims.

Lulled into a false sense of security because of their own patriotism—10,000 Jews died and 35,000 were decorated for bravery in World War I—and belief in acculturation and the Weimar republic as natural antidotes to the antisemitism in the wake of WWI.[39] Defeat in WWI created an opportunity for renewed antisemitism that may have on its own died down.[40] After the war a parliamentary democracy had been established and the monarchy had been abolished. Jews had not called for this revolution, yet they were eager to express their emancipation by helping to build a new,

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[39] Howard M. Sachar. *The Course of Modern Jewish History*. Second Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
[40] Bieber, 51

Democratic Germany.[41] The nascent Weimar Republic failed to coordinate economic, social, and political policy to prevent a repeat of prewar and war-year economic malaise. Now the pace accelerated. The middle class was crushed under inflation and continued concentration of wealth among industrial minorities. The bitterness of the German middle class over their financial ruin was not limited to big business and banks that profited while their world crumbled. It extended to anyone they perceived to be the "authors" of this new political system, and Jews had been conspicuous in their emergence in this arena.[42]

The antisemitism of the early 1920s began as a reaction of "disgruntled" conservatives to the Weimar Republic's triumph.[43] "For these reasons anti Semitism offered itself as a focal point for all forms of pre- and post-revolutionary political and economic discontent. It increased from the beginning of 1919 onwards throughout the entire German right and manifested itself in 1923 at the height of inflation in a stream of attacks on the Jews in the right-wing press and in innumerable pamphlets, and moreover in scattered violent attacks on Jewish businesses and workshops."[44]

Former ruling class before the republic—big industrialists and big landowners—likewise hoped for a return to their political prominence after challenges such as trade unions and social "experts" had been mitigated. They "whitewashed" the good old days

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[41] Ibid, 53
[42] Ibid, 54
[43] Sachar, 512
[44] Bieber, 54-55

pre-revolution to curry the favor of the organizations of the middle class. As during the days of the Empire, antisemitism proved a useful tool to shore up this relationship.[45]

In 1924 the German economy improved. Had this recovery lasted longer the there might have been a reconciliation between old and new powers, adjustment by the people to the realities of modernization, and a firmer foundation of democracy built. But worldwide economic crisis in 1924 interrupted the potential for this reconciliation. The disenfranchised strata responded with panic and further social divisiveness, and the Weimar republic failed to respond effectively. In this wake, the NSDAP emerged with its message defining current struggles in terms of traditional concerns and prejudices.

Jews underestimated the danger of National Socialism. Through the 1920s the antisemitism did not seem any different from the relatively impact-less antisemitism of the Empire. At worst, they feared repeal of the emancipation laws that had opened the social and economic doors to the Jews. Even the Zionist minority could not imagine the ultimate impossibility of Jewish survival in Germany, and few thought of emigrating to Palestine or anywhere else.[46]

The Jews fought the deterioration of their standing in Germany with the legal and political remedies available. Sadly, they had few allies, and their attempts to fight within the system largely failed. The disenfranchised bourgeoisie and most of the middle class were unsympathetic. The industrialists and landowners benefited from the antisemitism Jews hoped to fight. The churches failed to distinguish themselves from

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[45] Ibid, 55
[46] Ibid, 59

the interests of these groups and harbored their own anti-Jewish religious beliefs. Communists took little interest in the fight against fascism that would restore the Jews, and the Jews were left with only their own resources with which to fight the tide that turned against them. Left wing liberals were sympathetic, but they no longer had the political and social base with which they entered the Weimar period.[47]

The obstacles to coexistence of Jews and non-Jews in mainstream German society had little to do with the "common life" they shared. It was more a function of economic, social, and political forces acting upon the groups. German political democracy was vulnerable without social and economic stability. Industrialization and social revolution were more than the forces of tolerance and emancipation could combat.[48] They fought for the democratic republic up until the end, but social and economic conditions to maintain democracy had deteriorated beyond repair. Despite the deteriorating status of the German Jew, once again adversity bred something of a Jewish renaissance. Weimar Germany's cultural development was successful, although brief. Brenner describes the evolution of Jewish identity after WWI as a quest for community. There was a changing self-definition within the Liberal majority from "a community of faith to a community of fate and common descent."[49] No longer defined solely as the religious community that came out of emancipation, organized institutions of Jewish living (*Gemeinde* vs *Gemeinschaft*) increased efforts on social welfare, culture,

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[47] Ibid, 60
[48] Ibid, 62
[49] Michael Brenner. *The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996. Page 6.

and education.[50] A renewed interest in Hebrew and Yiddish culture grew out of the imagined authenticity of Eastern European Jews' uniquely Jewish languages.[51] Franz Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus* was reimagined as a means to strengthen communal bonds and cultural expression, and then to offer comfort as they were excluded and forced "into cultural and social isolation."[52] Schocken publishing house's library of works was quite popular and became a literary source of consolation amid declining Jewish life in Germany. The *Kulturbund* provided jobs as Jewish artists were excluded from the German economy and offered audiences a haven from increasing hostility.[53]

These cultural entities were maintained in the early Nazi period. Michael Brenner writes that the segregation that came from a particular Jewish cultural expression suited early Nazi agenda. As long as it promoted segregation between Jew and non-Jew, it was allowed to flourish.[54] Weimar Jews, even those of this renaissance, had been integrated members of the broader German society. "After 1933, they were confined to a cultural ghetto and gradually excluded from all facets of German society."[55] "These Jewish cultural activities in Nazi Germany... were constructed on the solid foundation that had been created in the Weimar years—partly out of a profound hope for a fruitful German-Jewish coexistence, partly out of a deep fear of hatred's triumph."[56] Brenner concludes: oppression brought solidarity, but not creativity. The

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[50] Ibid, 7
[51] Ibid, 185
[52] Ibid, s214
[53] Ibid, 216
[54] Ibid, 213
[55] Ibid, 214
[56] Ibid

true creativity of exploring within a new framework of majority culture ended in with Weimar.[57]

From its inception the Nazi party's formal policies included the racial discrimination and antisemitism that would reach its horrific climax in the "final solution." The Nazi party arose out of the 1920 German Workers' Party, becoming the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). Their racist and nationalist agenda was explicit from its inception. In February 1920, the NSDAP published its "Twenty-Five Points." In this document, the party rejected the terms of the Versailles Treaty and called for the reunification of all German people. It sought to limit citizenship to fellow Germans ("*Volkgenosse*"), defined by having "German blood," irrespective of religion. It also recommended excluding Jews from public office, deporting non-citizens from the Reich, and banning East European Jews from immigration.

By the early 1930s, the NSDAP had navigated its way onto the national political scene. Still a minority party in the German government, the Nazis set about to consolidate their power. As Sachar describes in *The Course of Modern Jewish History*:

> Yet Hitler's assumption of power in 1933 was not the result of an irresistible revolutionary movement, nor even of a popular victory at the polls; the Nazi party lost two million votes in the 1932 election. Rather Hitler was 'jobbed' into office by backstairs intrigue. In January 1933 Chancellor Franz von Papen, alarmed at the inability of Germany's "srupulous" conservatives to deal

[57] Ibid, 219

> with the "Red menace," persuaded the senile old president, Field Marshal von Hindedburg, to offer the chancellorship to Hitler. They did not doubt for a moment that Hitler would remain their pliable puppet. There were few more calamitous misjudgments in European History."[58]

When Adolf Hitler was named Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Nazi policy quickly became German policy, thus beginning an organized campaign of Nazi terror against the Jews and other political enemies.[59] Individual acts of street violence against shops and businesses became a full-fledged boycott of Jewish professionals and retail interests.[60] This boycott of Jewish business was enforced by the SA—*Sturmabteilung*—storm troops who barricaded the entries. All the while, the Nazi party made a poor showing in the parliamentary elections of March 28.[61]

After the boycott the national Civil Service Law and other local regulations forced out what few Jews had moved into the public service sector into retirement. It also curtailed the practice of "non-Aryan" doctors, lawyers, and other self-employed professionals.[62]

Ideological support for racial policies combined with economic self-interest, thus propelling even more discrimination and persecution. The Reich Chamber of Culture was

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[58] Sachar, 510
[59] Meyer, Volume 4, 198
[60] Ibid, 199
[61] Ibid, 200
[62] Ibid, 201

formed at that time, which almost completely prevented Jewish writers and artist from working anywhere other than limited Jewish cultural institutions. Also in 1933 Jews became subject to school quotas, withdrawal of welfare support, and exclusion from social benefits such as loans and allowances for families. Formal polices restricted or prohibited Jewish citizenship, adoption of children, and interfaith marriages.[63] Despite these significant national laws, and others that would follow, much of the havoc to German Jews' lives was wrought by local-level practices such as control of public contracts and welfare distribution.[64]

The legal program of dismantling Jews' rights had big peaks and apparent lulls between major legislation.[65] This surface abatement allowed wishful thinking or false optimism of Jews who were waiting for the pendulum to swing back to the side of the equality and tolerance that had become the law of the land just a few decades before. But the discriminatory policy war continued.

Social and professional organizations began to "introduce the so-called Aryan paragraph" excluding Jews.[66] Private businesses and small towns began to post "restricted" signs and warnings to Jews "at own risk." There was ongoing vandalism to cemeteries, synagogues, and businesses.[67] About one in four Jewish businesses and succumbed to the forces against them and had closed or been sold by mid-1935. This was a boon to competitors who had been suffering from economic depression since the

[63] Ibid, 202
[64] Ibid, 203
[65] Ibid, 204
[66] Ibid, 205, 207
[67] Ibid, 206

end of WWI.[68] Social pressure rose against non-Jews who maintained financial or social contact--"Jew-Lovers." Nazi propaganda built the myth that intimacy between Jew and non-Jew would lead to "race defilement" ("*Rassenschande*").[69] Nebulous "popular anger" justified further exclusion. So-called "spontaneous" violence acted out prior to new legislative restrictions to lay the groundwork and create the perception of the need to further limit Jewish rights and access.[70]

On September 15, 1935 the Reichstag passed the Nuremburg laws that systematically denaturalized German Jewish citizens. The first law, The Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, prohibited marriages and extramarital intercourse between "Jews" (the name was now officially used in place of "non-Aryans") and "Germans" and also the employment of "German" females under forty-five in Jewish households. The second law, The Reich Citizenship Law, stripped persons not considered of German blood of their German citizenship and introduced a new distinction between "Reich citizens" and "nationals". The Nuremberg Laws by their general nature formalized the unofficial and particular measures taken against Jews up to 1935. The Nazi leaders made a point of stressing the consistency of this legislation with the Party program which demanded that Jews should be deprived of their rights as citizens. The laws were passed unanimously by the Reichstag, or German Parliament, in a special session held during a Nuremberg Rally.

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[68] Ibid, 207
[69] Ibid, 208
[70] Ibid, 209

"In April 1938...the Nazi government formally announced the sequestration of all remaining Jewish wealth above 5000 reichsmarks ($2000) per person....it was also decreed that those Jews who left the country would not be permitted to retrieve any of their holdings."[71]

"The [prior] events of 1933 triggered a creative response in Jewish organization life, cultural continuity, and the intelligence with which Jewish self-government undertook to cope with increasing persecution and vulgarity. His humanity protected the Jew at first from the shock of recognizing total evil. The Burning of the Synagogues, on November 9-10th, 1938, removed whatever psychological blinders had been left."[72]

The Jewish community retooled its organizational structure in response to the Nazi assumption of power in 1933. Key among these was the *Reichsvertretung*, based upon the regional communal organizations of the time. This representative body was intended to represent Jewish interests to the new regime.[73] The existing ideologically based organizations such as the CV were absent from this framework, however, and the newly conceived *Reichsvertretung* sought to bring the breadth of Jewish organizational life under one umbrella. While this broadened the organization's base, it also rendered it vulnerable to the infighting that plagued these populations, who represented differing age, political, and even geographic biases.[74] The *Reichsvertretung* was a Jewish invention, albeit along the lines of an apparently concurrent Nazi plan to organize the

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[71] Sachar, 517

[72] Herbert A. Strauss. *Gegenwart im Ruckblick: Festgabe fur die Judische Gemeinde zu Berlin 25 Jahre Nach dem Neubeginn*. (Heidelberg: L. Steihm, 1970). Page 319

[73] Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity*, 185

[74] Ibid, 186

Jews of Germany for the purpose of applying anti-Jewish policy.[75] At first, the group pursued the traditional approach of seeking dialogue with the Government; after immediate rejection, the tone shifted to one of protest.[76] Making the case that Jews were loyal Germans became moot with the Nuremburg laws in 1935, stripping Jews of their German citizenship.

The focus of the organized Jewish community ironically converged with the Nazi agenda in the earlier years of National Socialism. Emigration of Germany's Jews was a top priority. The Jewish community had a model of sustained financial support to émigrés. The Nazis' impoverishment of the Jews thwarted the quick emigration out of Germany.[77] International immigration policy likewise slowed the transfer of Germany's Jews out of the Third Reich. The demographics of emigration favored younger members, leaving an older populace behind in Germany, further burdening the limited resources of the Jewish community.[78]

In 1938 the Nazi government passed a law removing the legal status of the Jewish community organizations. The *Reichsvereinigung* appeared by 1939. Although many of the leadership ranks remained from the *Reichsvertretung*, the purpose was significantly different. This union functioned under Gestapo management. It was formed

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[75] Ibid
[76] Ibid, 187
[77] Ibid, 194
[78] ibid

to expedite the formal liquidation of German Jewry,[79] first via emigration, and then through deportation beginning in 1941.[80]

Throughout all these heart-wrenching challenges to mitigate Jewish suffering under deteriorating Nazi oppression, Leo Baeck provided singular leadership and rabbinic presence up until his own deportation in 1943.[81] The futility of continued Jewish existence was apparent; however, Baeck and the other leaders remained to provide as much comfort and protection in the process of deportation as possible. After 1943, the few remaining Jews in Germany were left to an uncertain fate as "illegals." They subsisted on support from occasionally sympathetic Germans such as families of Jews in mixed marriage, or other independent resources. Formal communal life in Germany had ended.[82]

A contemporary student of Jewish history would find many parallels between this community and American Jewry today. Germany's emancipated Jewry was so quintessentially German that the vast majority were almost imperceptibly Jewish. The Jews of Germany for the first time in history had been granted full civil rights—virtual equality with their non-Jewish brethren. That this community of over half a million would be decimated to a mere remnant of fewer than 20,000 in just a decade is unimaginable. It is a community that will never truly be restored in the land of its birth.

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[79] Ibid, 195
[80] Ibid
[81] Ibid, 196
[82] Ibid, 200

The Jewish community of Germany at the dawn of the 21st century derives from wholly different sources. Most of those who remained after WWII were displaced refugees of Eastern European origin. Today, there are approximately 200,000 Jews in Germany, primarily immigrants from the former Soviet Union (FSU), yet only about half of these are recognized by the Central Council of Jews in Germany (*Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*), due to their exclusively matrilineal policy of legitimate Jewish identity. The new immigrant Jews come from scant or nonexistent Jewish education, practice, culture. What cultural background remains is modeled on an Eastern European Jewish ideology and community. The great Liberal German Judaism no longer dominates the landscape, despite the successes of the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, including the establishment Abraham Geiger College, the first Reform seminary since the Nazi era. The tension between the orthodox leadership and liberal or assimilated populace is a central issue in the German Jewish community as we encounter the 21st century.

The German-Jewish legacy that grew out of emancipation in the late 19th century, which flourished within a largely tolerant German society during the early decades of the 20th century, simply is no more. The German Jews who escaped Nazi Germany transplanted their unique tradition to Israel and North America, with smaller pockets around the western world. This is the milieu into which the generations of refugee rabbis were born, out of which came many significant leaders of the American Jewish community of the late 20th century. The American Judaism of today has been thoroughly influenced by this unique, and now essentially extinct, German-Jewish

tradition. By the end of the 20th century many of the institutions of Jewish life and community in the U.S. had been shaped by the generation of these refugees from Nazi Germany. Their unique experience and perspective is thoroughly interwoven into the Jewish-American experience of the late 20th and early 21st century.

Chapter 2: Joseph Breuer—Faithful Disciple

Orthodox Jews never constituted more than about 10% of the post-emancipation German-Jewish community. Within, orthodoxy, however, Germany had proven a fertile landscape for innovation even among traditional Jewry. Rabbi Joseph Breuer was a leader of this German Orthodox community during the years leading up to the Holocaust, and its aftermath in America.

Rabbi Joseph Breuer was born in 1882 in Papa, Hungary, where his father, Solomon Breuer, was the Rabbi of the local community. In 1890, the Breuer family relocated to Frankfurt where Solomon Breuer had been chosen to succeed his famous father-in-law, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, as spiritual leader of the *Israelitische Religions-Gesellschaft* (IRG). Joseph Breuer was educated in the local yeshiva, the Torah *Lehranstalt*, which had been founded in 1893 by his father. He studied Philosophy and Political Economy at the Universities of Giessen and Strasbourg, receiving his PhD in 1905. In 1919 Joseph Breuer was appointed rabbi of Frankfurt's Klaus Synagogue. He married Rika Eisenmann of Antwerp, Belgium, in 1926, and they had 8 children, 3 sons and 5 daughters. When Joseph's father Solomon Breuer died in 1926, Joseph lost the election to succeed his father as rabbi of IRG. He was, however, appointed Rosh Yeshiva, which position he held until emigrating to the United States in 1939.

Shortly after the Nazi boycott in April 1933, Joseph Breuer was questioned by the Gestapo on charges of harboring communists at the Yeshiva.[83] Although successful at disproving this initial claim, thereafter Breuer sought a community outside Germany where he could safely relocate the yeshiva. In September of 1933 he accepted a position as rabbi in the small Jewish community of Fiume, Italy, where he would also be able to move the yeshiva. This was seen as a temporary solution, with the longer-term goal of moving the community to Eretz Israel.[84] Neither the short-term solution nor the ultimate plan to move to Israel, however, proved successful. Breuer and his students returned to Frankfurt in 1934, where Breuer began work to secure the means for his students to leave Germany.[85] The process of emigration reached a point of urgency after the November Pogrom of 1938. Joseph Breuer was among the many Jewish leaders who were detained by the Gestapo on November 10th, although he was among the fortunate ones who were released and allowed to return home the same day.

Joseph Breuer and most of his immediate family were able to secure visas to Belgium, birthplace of his wife Rika. In January of 1939, the Breuers left Belgium for New York, where they settled in the Washington Heights neighborhood that was to become the center of the Hirschian community that Breuer would faithfully reconstitute.

Breuer began to make a mark almost immediately. Shortly after his arrival in New York, Breuer was asked to lead a fledgling minyan of German-Jewish immigrants,

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[83] Kranzler and Landesman, 97-98.
[84] Kranzler and Landesman, 98.
[85] Kranzler and Landesman, 102.

which invitation he accepted. This group had functioned only as a Shabbat minyan due to lack of space, but Breuer is credited with quickly establishing a daily minyan in his own home. The story about his second Shabbat in America has become legend. He spent the day with the newly organized Washington Heights minyan, which had retained his services the previous Shabbat. After services, it is told, one of the members announced the meeting arrangements for the following Shabbat. Breuer was surprised to learn that they were not meeting for daily prayer. The group had been renting space from Yeshiva College, which was not available to the group during the week. Breuer rectified this omission by offering his own tiny, new home for this purpose. So even though they were crowded into only three and a half tiny rooms, it is told, the Breuer children who used their father's study as a bedroom each night woke at six a.m. each morning to tidy and prepare the space for the incoming minyan. This arrangement continued until the synagogue building was completed in the 1950s.[86]

Breuer and his family had arrived in America with no resources and no furniture, so Rebbetzin Breuer was charged with setting up a household completely from scratch with donations from other German-refugee community members. As Breuer's fledgling community was not large enough to offer their new Rav even a modest salary, the family was supported by the earnings of the Breuer children and their spouses.[87] Breuer did receive a small stipend teaching for a year after this arrival at a Brooklyn yeshiva catering to the German-Jewish refugee community, Mesifta Torah Vodaath. However,

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[86] Kranzler and Landesman, 117.
[87] Ibid, 114.

once his duties with the Washington Heights minyan had expanded with its growth in membership, Breuer discontinued this lone engagement outside his own community.[88]

Yeshiva College had provided the affidavits required for Joseph Breuer and his family to come to New York. However, through mutual agreement, Breuer never joined the faculty at Yeshiva.[89] Despite differing philosophies, especially regarding Zionism and support of the secularly governed land of Israel, Breuer owed Yeshiva College his services in exchange for these affidavits. He met early after his arrival with Yeshiva's president, Dr. Bernard Revel, to discuss a possible teaching position. Initially, Breuer side-stepped the ideological conflicts between himself and the college by suggesting that the rest of the school's faculty might have a problem with Breuer's appointment. The issue was tabled at that time, and Revel died only a few months after their meeting. The potential conflict was obviated as Revel's successor dropped the question of Breuer serving the Yeshiva College altogether.[90] Eventually, this institution became an ideological rival to Breuer's community within American Orthodoxy.

Already in his late fifties when he emigrated to America after Kristallnacht, one would not necessarily expect that Joseph Breuer would so effectively recreate the depth and breadth of Hirsch's ideal. Indeed, he not only single-mindedly reconstituted the essential elements present in the German kehillah, he furthered his grandfather's vision

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[88] Ibid, 116.
[89] Ibid, 115.
[90] Ibid, 115.

by extending educational and other institutions beyond what had been possible on German soil.

Rabbi Joseph Breuer recreated the Frankfurt kehillah of his father and grandfather on three levels: Symbolic, by keeping its name in the Hebrew; minhag, but maintaining the overwhelming majority of the liturgical features of the Frankfurt community; and organizationally, encompassing the "cradle to grave" scope of community structures. Like his famous grandfather's, Breuer's vision was for an autonomous, self-contained community, encompassing worship, education, and other needs separate from the wider Jewish community.

The Washington Heights neighborhood in New York was a destination for many German-Jewish refugees who established prayer communities often comprised of other members of their former German communities. Breuer's minyan, who became the core founders of his community, had many members who had formerly been associated with Frankfurt's IRG.[91] As the decision was made to recreate the Frankfurt kehillah on American soil, the community took the name *K'hal Adath Jeshurun (KAJ),* the same Hebrew name as the Frankfurt IRG. They adopted minhag Frankfurt in almost all liturgical expressions, with the few exceptions of introducing yizkor and kaddish after aleinu, which were common among the non-IRG members of the kehillah.[92] In the German style of synagogue decorum, KAJ members stood still during prayer. The

[91] Ibid, 117
[92] Ibid, 116.

nusach, niggunim, and trope followed IRG tradition, and they had a member choir that didn't do tefillah. The almemor was placed in the midst of the congregation, and the genders were separated by a trellis. Weddings were conducted in the synagogue, a practice more closely associated with Reform Judaism and its liberal peers.

Breuer initially avoided establishment of Kashrut supervision, because he disagreed with the right-leaning tendencies of other American orthodox groups. He likened this to the extremes in some orthodox circles that he had already resisted in Germany. Ultimately, though, KAJ created their own Kashrut supervision, but without narrowing the idea of "hechsher" to the ceremonial. Instead, Breuer's vision of kashrut also included financial and social behavior, such as treatment of workers, as well.

One of Breuer's most unique extensions, and enduring legacies, of Hirschian philosophy was this vision of "Kosher v'Yosher." In 1953 the Kehillah's leaders petitioned that they wished to sell only Glatt meat. Rav Breuer was concerned that that this might impose undue financial hardship since such meat was more expensive.[93] He wrote:

> Kosher is intimately related to Yosher. God in His Torah not only demands that Kashrus be observed thereby sanctifying our physical enjoyment; He also and perhaps more importantly insists on the sanctification of our social relationships. This requires the strict applications of justice and righteousness which avoid

[93] "What is Yosher? It's about Truth, not Business." http://www.kosherveyosher.com.au 2 Feb. 2009

> even the slightest trace of dishonesty in our business dealings and personal life. God in His Torah not only demands of us that we love our neighbour by concerning ourselves with his welfare and property but it further insists on conduct of uncompromised integrity, we must be Yosher, which includes the spirit of the Law, the ethical principle of honesty. It is only by this standard that we can rightfully hold the title of Yeshurun.[94]

This distinctive flavor, and the American milieu with its variety of Orthodox Jewries from across Europe, prompted some defense of the minhag. "German Jewishness," Breuer wrote, was not really different from any other true Jewishness. But "temperament and taste" have influenced "how the Mitzvoth are practiced" and the character of their institutions.[95] In "Our Tefilla B'Tzibur"[96] Breuer defends their Judaism and its niggunim and minhag (including choir) against "Chassiduth," while cursing Reform and Conservative. Breuer always preached that it was by Divine Will that Torah-true Judaism in the Western European tradition survived and was brought to America to continue to counter the liberal Jewish movements.

Where other German Jewish communities reorganized in America in the limited confessional form of a prayer group, Breuer sought to maintain the distinct kehillah group identity and "cradle to grave" infrastructure. Instead of relying on the resources in the local community, Breuer's kehillah systematically built the broad range of

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[94] Breuer, "Glatt Kosher—Glatt Yoshor," 63-64.
[95] Breuer, "Our Way," 9-16
[96] Ibid, 26-32

components that had distinguished the Austrittsgemeinde in Germany—education from youth to adulthood, mikveh, burial society and cemetery, kashrut supervision, rabbinic court, and rabbinical association.[97] Breuer focused initially on building a mikveh and then educational institutions such as the new Samson Raphael Hirsch Yeshivah and teacher's seminary for girls. These communal institutions were followed by Chevrah Kadishah burial societies and Kashrut supervision. Lower on the priority list was building a permanent synagogue home with its own dedicated building, an achievement not completed until 1952, well more than a decade after Breuer had arrived in America and established KAJ in Washington Heights.

Joseph Breuer's K'hal Adath Jeshurun became a reincarnated Frankfurt IRG, almost identically rebuilding the cradle-to-grave kehillah as his grandfather had developed it in Europe at the end of the 19th century. The KAJ community grew to become one of Washington Heights largest, making it a driving force in the community as a whole. This prompted some to misidentify the unique Hirschian kehillah as representative of the entire Washington Heights German community.[98]

In addition to the core services of worship, education, beit din, burial, kashrut, and mikveh, by the 1960s KAJ also encompassed multiple charitable functions such as a kosher senior citizens lunch program, "golden age" club for the elderly, and a free loan

[97] Kranzler and Landesman, 129.
[98] Lowenstein, 212.

society. It even offered its own Blue Cross-Blue Shield health plan.[99] In the words of Breuer's rabbinic partner and later successor, writing in a 1977 KAJ congregational bulletin, "The so-called Orthodox congregation which serves certain religious and social needs of its congregants...still does not become a kehillo unless it comprises all facets of Jewish communal life....The true kehillo is an independent entity and not beholden to any non-Torah authority..."[100] Samson Raphael Hirsch had led the neo-orthodox community to separate from the organized German Jewish community. This independence remained a core value of Breuer and his successors.

The Breuer kehillah succeeded in building a tremendous administrative machine, fueled mostly by dedicated volunteers, who nonetheless provided a very stable leadership for decades, including a president who was continually re-elected for almost 40 years.[101] This stability and organizational strength, lessons learned in their German incarnation, in part explain the success KAJ experienced maintaining a self-sufficient kehillah when other German Jewish groups who came from the model of German Jewish compulsory membership neither sought nor experienced such long-lived voluntary identification in the American Jewish milieu. The only other Jewish groups that successfully recreated independent communities in America, also characterized by a separatist ideology and approach, were the Chasidim.[102] Perhaps this explains the many attempts to harmonize these vastly different Jewish expressions along ideological

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[99] Lowenstein 213.
[100] As quoted in Lowenstein, 213.
[101] Lowenstein, 213-214.
[102] Ibid, 214-215.

underpinnings, and the unlikely common cause forged between German Hirschian Orthodox and Chassidic Orthodox communities in America.

The stages in the development of the KAJ educational system components provide interesting insight into the Breuer community's view of their American milieu in general, as well its other orthodox communities and institutions. On the one hand, an orthodox Jewry such as KAJ needed to offer a compelling alternative to the high-quality public schools around them, where there even existed a Jewish majority in the student bodies, in order to maintain the primary identity and Jewish instruction of their children. On the other hand, and in contrast to their overwhelmingly non-orthodox German Jewish context, KAJ in America also had to distinguish itself from the other available orthodox Jewish educational institutions and their ideologies that they found to conflict with elements of the Hirschian tradition. For example, KAJ focused instruction on Tanach as well as Talmud, where the other yeshivas had moved away from it.

Interestingly, the lack of government administration of and control over the organized Jewish community in America allowed KAJ to offer even more religious instruction than had been possible in Germany, where such non-secular studies were strictly limited by German law.[103] In Germany, Hirsch had enjoyed deep financial support from the very beginning of his establishment of his Austritt community, both from taxes and from generous support by the Rothschild family.[104] Breuer's initial educational

[103] Ibid, 131.
[104] Ibid, 132.

endeavor was an afterschool Talmud Torah. Although there was already a Jewish day school convenient to KAJ's Washington Heights community, Breuer chose not to encourage his members to send their children there. In America, Hirschian TIDE had many more battles to fight within orthodoxy and its numerous expressions in the New York immigrant communities. The religious Zionism of groups like Soloveitchick's was one deterrent. Another was instruction in the vernacular. Despite his own very limited English skills, Breuer felt strongly that the most effective way to instruct the children was in their most comfortable language, English, and not Hebrew, German, or Yiddish.[105] Additionally, despite the traditional instruction and practice within the walls of the other orthodox schools, Breuer felt that there was unacceptably high level of non-observance among the populations themselves. He chose to accept the necessary delay in urging a day school for KAJ's children until it was financially viable for them to open their own school.[106] This was not, in fact, possible until the 1940s.

Breuer's first attempt at a Hirschian day school was an unsuccessful high school established in 1944, Yeshiva R. Samson Raphael Hirsch (YRSRH), that survived only four years. Breuer envisioned a KAJ-supervised TIDE curriculum that nonetheless was open to non-KAJ orthodox students in the area, since they did not have the critical mass to support such an operation solely on the financial contribution of KAJ's student pool. The inner tensions in the orthodox community proved to be its downfall. Just as Breuer was

[105] Ibid, 133.
[106] Ibid, 134.

not invited to influence the instruction of other non-TIDE orthodox schools[107] he would not tolerate input on his curriculum from heads of other yeshivas, although he had invited some of them to be part of the planning process and looked for them to direct some of their own community members to enroll in his school. The Hirschian embrace of secular studies as an end in themselves, and not just a necessary accommodation to the American immigrant reality of the day, served to provoke opposition from other orthodox leaders who therefore diverted potential students from YSRSH.[108] However, Breuer proved more successful in establishing YSRSH's elementary program. Concurrent with the launch of the high school, YSRSH offered a first grade class, adding a grade each year, intended to provide a "feeder" population eventually for the high school that was going to rely on non-KAJ student enrollment to get off the ground.[109]

TIDE and Hirschian precedent were evident throughout the school. For example, Hirsch preferred hiring religious teachers for secular subjects. This was true integration of the TIDE concept—a teacher of science could do service to the secular discipline while still connecting that world to the world of Torah with commentary.[110] Adult education was also central to Breuer's KAJ. More than just lectures, Breuer's lessons spanned the range of religious expression—Talmud, Mishnah, Torah. He created a series

[107] Ibid, 134.
[108] Ibid, 135.
[109] Ibid, 136.
[110] Ibid, 138.

of letters sent to soldiers during WWII, offering encouragement and inspiration during their time in battle, and created a veteran's study group when they returned.[111]

Many unique aspects of the German orthodox experience seemed to contribute to their relative success at retaining their essential religious culture and identity in America. In Germany, the Frankfurt Austrittsgemeinde was a lone voluntary affiliation among the compulsory membership in the formal German Jewish community until forced by Nazi policy to merge in 1938. Unlike their mainstream counterparts, they were already accustomed to providing their own financial support, since they had seceded not only from the organized Jewish leadership but also from its tax-supported financial structure. Having the experience of a well-organized infrastructure in Germany, including not only political interests vis a vis the ruling authorities but also in establishing a broad range of schools and social services, gave the German communities a leg up in establishing similar organizations in America that the Eastern European refugees did not share.[112]

Also unlike their Eastern European counterparts, the German Jews who had settled in the area had stronger economic backgrounds due to their more-advanced educations and American-adaptable professions. Having lived in economic comfort and as free citizens in Germany, seeking to pursue the opportunities in America did not entail a complete cultural "overhaul," requiring less-faithful adherence to their

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[111] Ibid, 138.
[112] Ibid, 123.

community's orthodox customs or membership than had been their norm in Germany.[113] Demographically, they could afford relatively better housing, staving off "white flight" to the New York suburbs for decades longer than other immigrant communities. Almost oddly among immigrant communities, the previously affluent and acculturated German Jews often chose to remain somewhat aloof from American culture and society, finding it less advanced/more pedestrian than their own German experience.[114]

The centrality of the congregation and its associated services and institutions, as well as the stature of the university-trained rabbi who had direct contact with the rank-and-file members, also supported the successful transplantation of the Hirschian kehillah in America. Almost the only other group as successful in maintaining the bulk of their community's structure and lifestyle were the Chasidim of Eastern Europe. They shared the centrality of the rabbi in the Hirschian kehillah, as well as the "cradle to grave" breadth of services and institutions centered around their individual community and not dependent upon wider society.[115] Finally, the TIDE approach to traditional observance supported by and embracing modern life prevented some of the dilemma faced by other immigrant Jews. They already had a tradition of living their strict Judaism among an affluent secular community in which they were essentially equal to the non-Jewish majority. Thus, the TIDE approach allowed them to establish a similarly

[113] Ibid, 119
[114] Ibid, 121
[115] Ibid, 124

acculturated yet distinct and observant Jewish lifestyle in America, as they had in Germany.[116]

The Holocaust was obviously central to the fate of Joseph Breuer and his Washington Heights congregation. There are few of Breuer's published writings, however, that mention the Nazi chapter of German-Jewish history explicitly. In his essay "Our Tefilla B'Tzibur," Breuer's ultimate assessment of the Holocaust as a referendum on liberal Judaism is articulated—namely, that it was by Divine Will that "Torah-true" Judaism in the Western European tradition survived and was brought to America to continue to counter the liberal Jewish movements,[117] whom he compared to Hellenism and Karaism.[118] "We do not fear for the future of our Divine Judaism...[but] it is imperative upon orthodox rabbis and...institutions to refuse to join organizations" not exclusively orthodox.[119] In Breuer' view, there was a bigger difference between Orthodox and "non-Judaism" (Reform and Conservative) than between Catholic and Protestant.[120]

The survival of Breuer's "Torah-true" Judaism created an imperative for the generations to follow. He stated in an address on the anniversary of Kristallnacht in 1939, "We and our children have been saved from the holocaust through Divine grace which permitted us to find refuge and homestead in a free land. We must show

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[116] Ibid, 125
[117] Breuer, *A Time to Build,* Volume 1, 26-32
[118] Ibid, 23
[119] Ibid, 24
[120] Ibid

ourselves worthy of this merciful gift."[121] This mission endures in his reflections three decades later, "Let us not ask why the martyrs had to give up their lives; let us ask why God permitted us to survive?"[122] Today's Jews deserve to live only when we live "for those ideals for which they endured painful death."[123]

Careful reading, however, can distill a worldview strongly influenced by the Holocaust's history and specifically its impact on German Jewry. Breuer describes God as the rock of the Jewish People, contrasting the eternal salvation via Divine Will with "incredible suffering."[124] Holocaust can be read between the lines even as he calls for commitment to the totality of Divine Will. The limits of modern science and morality similarly echo the shadow of the Holocaust. "Have not the very scientific and technical achievements which have unlocked untold mysterious forces in God's creation placed threatening weapons in the hands of power-hungry world conquerors?"[125] Again, only Divine Will guarantees "the right of existence for all creations."[126]

Breuer's mission as keeper of the Hirschian legacy can be seen in parallel to the obligation of post-Holocaust Jews to honor their ancestors' ideals. "The dead live in our honoring their memory [light that is lit] that directs the silent admonition to the living to take care that the life of the departed should not be extinguished in their midst."[127]

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[121] Ibid, Volume 3, 47
[122] Ibid, Volume 1, 57
[123] Ibid, 58
[124] Ibid, Volume 1, 51-53
[125] Ibid, Volume 3, 42-43
[126] Ibid, 43
[127] Ibid, Volume 1, 62

Further, Breuer claims, "The educators of the child proclaim the sacred vow that this child will be reared in such a manner that he will dedicate his full adult strength toward the realization of this task."[128] Just as he was raised to fulfill the vision of his grandfather, Samson Raphael Hirsch, so too should the post-Holocaust generations live to honor the memory of those who perished for their ideals.

Breuer suffered a major heart attack in 1947, but he was not successful in convincing the board of KAJ that a second rabbi was not only necessary but also financial viable until 1957. His wife Rika had died in 1953, and the Teacher's Seminary for Women that Joseph Breuer founded was renamed in her memory. His plan to contract his duties began shortly after Rika died, and by early 1958 Breuer was able to bring Simon Schwab, a fellow refugee from Nazi Germany, to KAJ as his rabbinic partner. Beginning the path toward retirement in 1960, Joseph Breuer began the final contraction of his community duties, although he continued limited teaching and pastoral duties until his death in 1980.

Simon Schwab was a fellow Frankfurter and IRG member who had been serving a Baltimore community since his own arrival in America in 1936. As more and more of the members grew up as English speakers, Breuer's partner and later successor was in part chosen because he was able to preach in English. Breuer recognized the need to move the community discourse past his own limited English skills. This choice was defended strenuously along ideological lines. It was not to be considered "Reform" of the custom

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[128] Ibid

or pragmatic accommodation; rather, Torah was to be defended in the most effective way possible. If this meant a younger generation's new vernacular, English, then so be it. An authentic "German Jewishness" was still central to the community's mission. This character was accomplished not by name or nusach, but by a Hirschian emphasis on "torah im derech eretz (TIDE)," secular education and economic endeavors, and the subjugation of family and social life for divine will.

Despite sharing Breuer's Frankfurt origins, Schwab's ideology reflected the more traditional "Torah Only" outlook reflective of his training at the Lithuanian Seminary in Europe. Schwab was more facile with the English language, and this allowed KAJ to keep pace with the realities of their membership, for whom English was key to instruction and oratory.[129] But their ideologies did reflect small changes as a result of their differing educational backgrounds in Europe. Although he received his early education in the Hirsch *Realschule,* and intitial yeshiva training in Frankfurt, Schwab had been educated at the Eastern European yeshivas of Telshe and Mir. This influenced his approach to the extent of Talmud study in the school as well as the complete separation of the genders in the educational setting, less critical a priority to Breuer in the community's early development and limited resources.[130] Schwab provided a necessary bridge between the Hirschian kehillah and its more traditional orthodox neighbors and the yeshiva world.[131]

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[129] Ibid, 177.
[130] Ibid, 184.
[131] Ibid, 184.

Schwab was a dedicated proponent of Hirschian TIDE, yet he was more flexible in its public expression, allowing for it to be more palatable to the American orthodox right wing. [132] One example of this was the fact that Schwab was more comfortable with and involved in Agudah Yisrael. Breuer's connection to Agudah was more ambiguous, despite the fact that Breuer's own father had participated in its founding and his brother had been a leading voice in its development. Breuer drew a different line around participating in politics. Although a strong proponent of Agudah and its mission, Breuer declined any formal identification with the organization, seeking to remain independent of the politics of the time.[133]

Schwab's and Breuer's ideologies were clearly compatible and overwhelmingly overlapping, but the changes reflected in Schwab's influence became emblematic of the change in KAJ's communal identification and intra-orthodox relationships as it moved past the Breuer generation's founders. One essential approach did not change, however; the Hirschian community continued to embrace the secular but steer clear of Reformers.

The differences between Breuer and Schwab were subtle, but they did shape the direction of KAJ from Schwab's arrival to his leadership after Breuer died in 1980. Under the leadership of Schwab and his successors, KAJ become less Hirschian in its balance between the secular and tradition. These internal tensions only magnified after Breuer's

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[132] Ibid, 185.
[133] Ibid, 186.

and Schwab's tenures, and are best evidenced by the controversy at the 200th celebration, described below. Internal Orthodox politics continued to be one of the most significant differences experienced by Breuer and KAJ in America.

In Germany the IRG remained fiercely independent until it was forced to join with the wider Jewish community as a matter of Nazi policy in the wake of the November Pogrom of 1938. In America, however, the forces of change were less cataclysmic and more incremental. By the 1970s, demographics forced KAJ to begin to reconsider its pan-Jewish community participation. All though they had slowed demographic impact more so than other immigrant-founded communities, by the 1970s they had to recognize that some things had changed. They were not growing, and thereby not powerful enough to affect local policies that might influence their community's external forces, such as the building of public schools and other "non-Torah" entities in proximity to their neighborhoods. Likewise, they could not have easily moved and reconstituted themselves in a new area, as the founders had done in the 1930s, since the intense loyalty to and identification with the community and its leaders was not as established in the younger, more Americanized generation.[134] Internally, KAJ maintained faithfully the autonomous, comprehensive kehillah established by its architect, Samson Raphael Hirsch, more than 100 years before. Externally, however, it

[134] Lowenstein, 217.

completely retooled its participation in community-wide politics and activities to ensure its survival.[135]

The solution to their communal demographic crisis is quite surprising. The group founded on two continents on the principle of Austritt—complete separation from other groups its cooperation might indirectly appear to sanction--founded and led a Jewish Community Council of Washington Heights including member congregations from across the Orthodox spectrum, as well as Reform and Conservative temples. Demographic survival apparently overrode the "splendid isolation" of pure separatism. This astonishing shift in ideology was defended on the grounds that separatism was not a necessary ingredient if KAJ itself dominated the communal organization, a situation never possible, of course, in Germany, where they were a tiny minority of the wider population.[136] The Jewish Community Council, including its Breuer representatives and leadership, even met on the grounds of a Reform temple![137]

If one can say that "Austritt" has changed its definition on American soil, so too is TIDE under evolution in the decades past Breuer and Schwab. The conflict between a pure Hirschian world view and subsequent generations' movement rightward was in stark evidence in June 2008. At the 200th anniversary of Samson Raphael Hirsch's birth, current KAJ rabbi Yisroel Mendel made a shocking statement against the TIDE tradition, declaring that TIDE was not viable without the guidance of its original author. Mendel

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[135] Ibid, 219.
[136] Ibid, 216-217
[137] Ibid, 219

stated that only Hirsch himself could legitimately discern the permissible from the prohibited, which was necessary for proper application of TIDE. Absent this, today's Jews needed to be guided the Torah leaders of today. This declaration prompted the abrupt resignation of KAJ's longtime president, Dr. Eric Erlbach. But the conflict did not end with Mendel's controversial statement. Later in the celebration, Hirsch's great-great-grandson (Joseph Breuer's grandson), Samson Bechhofer, decried the school's movement away from its Hirschian roots, comparing it to the Torah-only school of Aharon Kotler in the famed Haredi community of Lakewood, New Jersey. This prompted an angry exit from the event from Mendel.[138]

"From his youngest years until his petirah, Rav Joseph Breuer saw his life's work as the perpetuation of the legacy of his grandfather and father. He would prove to be its staunchest advocate, vociferously battling those who would corrupt Torah im Derech Eretz, by attempting to use the ideology as a basis for a lifestyle that insisted on less than total compliance with halachah. At the same time, he strenuously defended its validity as a path open to all, refuting the opinions of those who portrayed it as a hora'as sha'ah, a temporary relaxation of rules permissible for one small group during one specific period."[139]

Rabbi Joseph Breuer systematically ensured the continuation of his grandfather's kehillah in America. With a stable leadership, directly tied to the Germany that had been

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[138] Resnick
[139] Kranzler and Landesman, 80

its foundation, KAJ's unique cradle-to-grave community structure lasted for many decades, longer than most distinctively German-Jewish communities. But its fidelity to a vision created in a different time and place perhaps doomed KAJ's core mission to an eventual obsolescence. As both leadership and membership became more like the other orthodox populations in America—with their closer ties to the "Torah only" perspective of the Yeshiva world, and without a shared German cultural context—the essentially Hirschian flavor of Breuer's KAJ eventually diluted.

Chapter 3: Joachim Prinz—Renegade Rabbi

Joachim Prinz was born in Burkhardsdorf, Upper Silesia. Owner of the town's general store, his father, Joseph was a stern and distant parent despite Prinz'sintelligence and achievement. His mother Nani Berg on the other hand was warm and affectionate to all three of her sons—Joachim and his older brothers Kurt and Hans. Like many German Jewish families, even in smaller cities, both of Joachim Prinz'sparents were well educated and from families that had lived in Germany for centuries. In contrast to the community-centered life of the majority of German Jewish families, the Prinzs were the only Jews in their town of 900 people. In 1910 the family moved to Oppeln, the regional capital. In contrast to the exclusively gentile Burkhardsdorf, Oppeln had a substantial and affluent Jewish Community. In their new town, Joseph Prinz bought a dry goods store and the family enjoyed great financial success.

In 1915, only months before Joachim's Bar Mitzvah celebration, his mother died in childbirth leaving the three boys and newborn sister Dorothea under the care of their father. In 1916 Joseph remarried and Joachim became estranged from his father and traditional Jewish practice. His commitment to Judaism was revitalized upon encountering a charismatic community leader who piqued his interest in Jewish communal involvement. Only a year later, Prinz joined the Blau Weiss, a Zionist youth movement that represented the perspective of only a small percentage of Germany's

Jewish population. Subsequently, Prinz became a follower of Theodor Herzl. As a result of his involvement in the Jewish community, Prinz decided to become a rabbi, much to the disappointment of his father.

Before pursuing his rabbinic education, Prinz completed his secular studies. By the age of 21 he had received a doctorate of philosophy with a minor in art history from the University of Giessen. From this point, his adulthood followed a smooth path: he was ordained at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau and married Lucie Horovitz, the daughter of one of his professors. In 1926 he took the pulpit at Friedenstempel as the youngest ordained rabbi to serve in Berlin. He won renown through his oratory talents and ability to discuss Judaism in a compelling and accessible manner. At the same time, his outspoken nature and charismatic style created difficulties for him in his career. Sadly, Prinz's personal life met with recurring tragedy. In 1931 his wife, like his mother, died giving birth to a daughter, who was named Lucie in her memory. Like his father, he remarried soon after. With his second wife Hilde Goldschmidt, son Michael safely joined the family in 1933, followed by daughter Deborah in 1952.

Prinz'sstyle was both informal and sophisticated, with great intelligence. A strong sense of entitlement to make his own voice heard helped Prinz became a controversial pulpit figure in Berlin. At odds with the conservative leaders of the Berlin Jewish community, Prinz was one of the first Jewish voices to call out to the community regarding the potential danger emerging in Germany. In 1931, long before Hitler's election as chancellor, Prinz feared National Socialism's power and urged emigration.

Familiar with Antisemitism from his upbringing in rural Germany, Prinz saw Germany as a powder keg of anti-Jewish hate and feared the violence that would ensue were it to be ignited.

In 1933 Prinz wrote *Wir Juden*, in which he put forth his ideas of Jewish nationhood. In this piece, Prinz argued that through the centuries of Jewish wandering and struggle, the Jewish people have never found the freedom for which they yearned. Contrary to the ideas of the majority of his coreligionists, Rabbi Prinz promoted a Zionism based on a nationalistic understanding of the Jewish peoplehood. This was in conflict with the majority of the 'Germans of Jewish faith' who understood German to be their nationality and Judaism to be their religion. When Rabbi Prinz spoke publicly of the Jewish people as a nation, encouraging German Jews to support a Jewish homeland, the Jewish community that made every effort to assert their claim to German nationality was infuriated. This "enlightened" population feared that Prinz's words would prevent Christian Germany from identifying the 'Germans of Jewish faith' as true Germans. "It is difficult to describe my despair when I spoke to our people and found not merely complete rejection of my ideas, but an angry outcry against the kind of nonsense they thought I was talking."[140] Coincidentally, Prinz merely echoed the sentiment of mainstream Germany: the Jews were a people unto themselves and were not "true" Germans.

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[140] Autobiography, 95

A second generation of German Zionism emerged as the rights of Jews were strategically and progressively eliminated by government decree. The precarious position of Jews in Germany that Prinz had labored to convey became tragically clear in their new lives under Hitler. As racial antisemitism denied Germany's Jews their claim to German identity as well as humanity, a Zionism that communicated the pride and strength of the Jewish 'nation' became popular. While the majority of German Jewry thought that Prinz's earlier Zionist rhetoric threatened their status in Germany, there was a sudden and stark realization that Germany had always understood Jews as a separate people. While Jewish identity was seen as a cause for shame according to Nazi ideology, the second generation of German Zionists took up the flag that Prinz had hoisted years ago and held up Jewish peoplehood as a source of pride. At this point, emigration to Palestine was no longer the fulfillment of a national dream of autonomy and fulfillment of a Biblical promise; emigration was a hope for survival. In this sense, Zionism in the late 1930s and early 1940s served as an antidote to the hopelessness imposed on the Jews of Germany.

In 1935 Prinz'semployment in the Berlin Jewish Community was discontinued and he spent the next two years speaking across Eastern Europe and serving as the political editor of *Israelitisches Familienblatt*. During this time, he began work for the Hebrew University and was active in fundraising and lecturing on their behalf throughout Europe. Prinz joined fellow Zionist visionaries at the 1935 Zionist Congress in Lucerne. It was there that he made the acquaintance of Rabbi Stephen Wise, who was

to become an important figure in his life in America. In 1936 he drew significant attention to himself by conducting High Holy Day Services in Beethoven Hall for the Zionist community.

Prinz was a source of irritation not only for the authorities of the Jewish community but also for the government of Germany. Despite harassment and arrests by the Gestapo, Prinz continued to preach his straightforward, controversial messages about Zionism and emigration. After a visit to the United States through an invitation from Rabbi Wise, he emigrated from Germany in 1937. He was heralded out by a large "farewell" event that was reportedly attended by Adolf Eichmann.

Upon his arrival in the US, Prinz began lecturing in order to raise funds for the United Palestine Appeal. While there were many strong Zionist leaders in America, the spirit of isolationism was a strong influence on Jewish community leaders. Just as the rabbis of Berlin rebuked Prinz for his failure to perform his duties properly, his cynical perspectives and his public discussion of Jewish Nationhood, Prinz met criticism on this side of the sea for his warnings about the threat towards European Jewry and his demand for America's investment in Israel and attention towards Europe. "It was quite clear to me that we were about to enter a second world war, but no one believed me."[141] In particular, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver of Cleveland accused Prinz of espousing rhetoric that was not sufficiently appreciative of his new nation. In a letter to Stephen Wise, Silver wrote that Prinz needed to be "optimistic about the Jewish future or leave

[141] Ibid, 208

the country."[142] But, Wise's support encouraged Prinz to continue to speak critically instead of in "false slogans that tried to lull the Jewish people into false confidence in a future that simply did not exist."[143]

While Prinz enjoyed his life as a lecturer, he found himself without financial resources and accepted an invitation to serve as the rabbi at Temple B'nai Abraham in Newark, New Jersey. Beginning the role in 1939, Prinz served the nearly bankrupt community that was housed in an enormous building with a school, social center, gymnasium, spectacular sanctuary and only 300 member families. Accompanied by the talented cantor Abraham Shapiro, and later Max Helfman as music director, Prinz's compelling sermons drew large crowds to Sabbath services, just as they had in Berlin. Prinz also committed to re-energizing the educational system and made it a priority to build relationships between the congregation and other faith groups. "It helped me greatly that I had come to a congregation whose leadership understood that congregations, Jewish or Christian, could not afford to live on an island of their own parochial solemnity, but had to be active in building the community at large as well as the Jewish community."[144]

Prinz's achievement reached beyond the walls of his own congregation after he ran the campaign for the United Jewish Appeal. In 1945 he was successful in raising nearly $1 million for displaced Jews in Europe. This accomplishment was even more

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[142] Ibid, 209
[143] Ibid
[144] Ibid, 222

remarkable for the fact that he was the first and only rabbi to take on this duty. Prinz reflected that he was successful, in part, because "I was able to arouse their enthusiasm, promising them a Jewish state soon [after the end of the war] and stressing that the displaced persons following the end of the war would be the major problem that required Jewish concern....At the end of the campaign I...was considered the great hero of the community...I was now not merely the rabbi of a congregation but a spiritual leader of the entire community."[145] In some ways his success in this realm reflects the German model of his early career, where rabbis were not congregation-specific.

Prinz gained national and international influence as the chairman of the World Jewish Congress. Throughout his career he served in many other high-level positions, as the president of the American Jewish Congress (from 1958-1966) and as the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. He served as a director for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and was a major force as a representative of the Jewish community to the wider world.

Despite the influence and respect that he held in the Jewish community in America, his outspokenness and controversial perspectives roused the ire of his peers on this continent, as it had in his homeland. Not the least of these was his rejection of traditional Zionism upon the founding of the Jewish State in 1948. When world Jewry united under the flag of Israel, Prinz declared the beginning of a new kind of Zionism,

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[145] Ibid, 226

focused on America's leadership in the Diaspora and on the close relationship between Diaspora communities and the people of Israel.

Prinz deeply valued the empowerment of individuals and creation of authentic relationships across communities. He found himself called to action by the American Civil Rights Movement. Through his involvement in the American Jewish Congress, he created close relationships with religious leaders in the African American community and participated in many protests and demonstrations. As one of its organizers, Prinz received the honor of speaking during the March on Washington in 1963. Presenting a warning on the dangers of silence his words directly preceded his friend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

Prinz continued to author books throughout his years in the rabbinate, in addition to his earlier writings in Germany and editing a number of prayer books. In his last years as its senior rabbi, he helped his synagogue build and move to a new home in Livingston, New Jersey. At its center was a sanctuary without stained glass windows, another of his lifelong radical departures from convention. In 1977 Prinz retired from B'nai Abraham, after which he spent over a decade with his wife Hilde in the New Jersey countryside so very similar to the German village of his youth. Joachim Prinz died on September 30, 1988, survived by his wife, three children, and a cousin of Hilde's they adopted after she had lost her own family in the Holocaust.

Rabbi Joachim Prinz often spoke of the differences between Germany and America. He addressed the two cultures, societies, political discourse, and the function of a Rabbi in a German Jewish community of the early 20th century.

In his autobiography, Prinz shared that he didn't feel at home in America, a nation with a comparatively short Jewish history, versus Germany, a 1600-year-old Jewish community.[146] But chief among the differences Prinz encountered was the nature of the rabbinate. "I had success [in Germany], but I knew my success had something to do with the fact that I had strong convictions and that I had made my convictions the basis of the program of the congregation."[147] "The pulpit was a forum; the synagogue was not a church but a house of assembly for the Jewish people...I rejected [the norms of solemnity in sermons and services] and placed squarely before my people my own concept of an all-embracing, universal Judaism that acknowledged the existence of the Jewish people as well as the relevance of the Jewish faith."[148]

In contrast, Prinz found the American Jewish community lacking the capacity and interest for the same sophisticated analysis of developments in Germany. "They were very disappointed when I did not tell them stories of bloody persecutions, of murder in the streets, but rather tried to analyze the political problems that lay behind all those extraordinary events."[149] Prinz became a self-appointed vehicle through which the American Jewish community could come to understand the gravity of the European

[146] Autobiography, 201
[147] Ibid, 213
[148] Ibid
[149] Ibid, 202

situation. "I watched the tragic events in Europe with growing anxiety, while the people with whom I was dealing belittled Hitler's successes and were certain that he would be defeated soon. I was always amazed at the naivete or ignorance of the vast majority of the American people. They simply had no ability to judge the realities that faced the world."[150] Prinz utilized his public influence to help realize the full potential of religion as a vehicle for social change as he envisioned it. "My pulpit became more and more a political forum, although some people may not have liked it that way....Unless religion became the guardian of decency and morality in the community and in the country, it had no right to exist."[151] Prinz adapted to his new milieu, harnessing the most effective tools for the change he believed was necessary. In this vein he learned the different style of American oratory—which had to be "at the level of the audience, not that of the lecturer."[152]

Prinz described himself as "puzzled by America itself," in contrast to a Germany he saw it more as a genuine melting pot that "absorbed those who had immigrated into that country to such an extent that they were no longer distinguishable, [versus America] in which nationalities had endured for many generations""[153] He cited as an example a speech to an Italian-American audience he had witnessed. They sang Italian the national anthem, then American. "In any European country such a demonstration of

[150] Ibid, 223
[151] Ibid, 225
[152] Ibid, 203
[153] Ibid, 210

loyalty to the 'old country' would have been considered high treason."[154] These differences, however, were not all negative. Not only was the American Jewish community young, but it was completely new, different from European predecessors. Prinz noted that Jews had "embarked on a new adventure in Jewish history...America [was] a remarkable experiment unequaled in the world...a great and not merely powerful nation with national instincts that were the result of a combination of many backgrounds and civilizations."[155]

Just as his life had begun in Europe and was continued on American soil, so too he saw Judaism. In 1940, he wrote, the war in Europe and Hitler's policies would decimate if not extinguish European Jewry. "A war that will probably end with both a victor and loser defeated and incapacitated will leave America in the unique position of a country that has inherited a great culture and is integrating it into its own ways of life."[156] This encompassed both the Reforms and scientific advancement of Germany's Jewish community, as well as the Eastern European tradition, which Prinz carefully included as "the cradle of Jewish learning."[157] This inheritance came with great responsibility, a challenge Prinz did not necessarily see America ready to assume. "It is therefore no exaggeration to say that American Jewry will have to carry on a work for which tradition and history have not equipped us."

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[154] Ibid

[155] Ibid, 202 and 210

[156] Prinz, Joachim. "The Future of a Great Idea," Sermon, 1940, Temple B'nai Abraham. Joachim Prinz Papers. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

[157] Ibid

The chief obstacle in this task, according to Prinz, was the very freedom that allowed Jews to live so successfully and safely as members of the wider American society. "We...will have to prove that Judaism can exist without the whip of persecution."[158] As he experienced first-hand in Germany, assimilation and integration had eroded the core of Jewish identity of Germany's Jews. The rise of antisemitism after WWI and the rapid Nazi dismantling of Jews' citizenship rights had provoked a renaissance of Jewish culture among the population that had tried so diligently to become authentically German. The demographic forces of assimilation, intermarriage, and out-conversion had already drawn the viability of the German Jewish community into question. It was persecution that caused Jews to rededicate themselves to their Jewish heritage and its expressions.

Prinz's approach to Jewish survival centered around a few core ideas, much of which was articulated in his early writings and referenced throughout his career in the face of the day's challenges. First, he saw a need for Jews to be educated fully in their traditions in their historical context, a sentiment reflected in his earlier books, *Juedische Geschichte* and *Wir Juden*.

The Jewish problem of the twentieth century is not merely a political one; Theodor Herzl's analysis is therefore no longer fully valid. Antisemitism is not the major propelling force in this Jewish decision. Truer to fact is Martin Buber's description: "What a Jew marooned on an island considers to be his Jewishness: this is indeed the

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[158] Ibid

Jewish problem." Against the caricatures of self-hatred, against the ugliness of spiritual and emotional ghettoization, against the vulgarization of Jewish life, against the psychopathic cowardice and indignities of false assimilation, we call for the free decision of the American Jew to affirm himself as a Jew, to become a free citizen in a free society. History has presented us with many significant challenges; we must not fail to meet them. The time has come for us to implement our convictions, to translate into actuality our image of the Jew: the Jew who is rooted in the heritage and historic' memory of his people, who is integrated into his people here and everywhere, who is fully integrated into a free America, where he can and must work toward the fulfillment of the American Dream.[159]

Second, Prinz felt Jews needed to understand and accept the high ideals derived from this tradition, namely justice and equality for all. Both of these were considered against a backdrop of dignity and integrity. "Proud of the great tradition [of the past]...we are looking forward to a still greater future. If we take our task seriously, we will pursue a policy of sincerity in all our services, religious, cultural and social. We will consider ourselves servants of a great cause that can only be saved in the sacred sincerity that is...bent on but one task: the future of a great idea."[160]

The founding of the State of Israel in 1948 united a large segment of world Jewry in a celebration of Jewish nationalism. Consistent with his oppositional nature, it was at

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[159] Joachim Prinz, "Education is Answer," American Jewish Congress Presidential Address (http://www.joachimprinz.com/quotes.htm)

[160] Prinz, Joachim, "The Future of a Great Idea"

this time that Prinz again raised his voice to challenge his coreligionists. He asserted that political Zionism had its place in history, but after the establishment of the State, the Diaspora community needed to abandon that mission and commit themselves to what he referred to as a "New Zionism." This Zionism did not stand on a platform of Jewish nationalism, but rather on the establishment of an appropriate and mutually beneficial relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

In this cry for a "New Zionism," Prinz made no call for aliyah, rather he appealed to the Jews of America to take on a new kind of leadership. Because the goals of Zionism had changed, he asserted that the meaning and methods had to change as well. As what he referred to as the 'American Jewish Credo' he asserted, "Jewish survival is inseparably linked with the survival of democracy, equality and human welfare..."[161] Supporting these values was the obligation of American Jewry. The goal of the 'old Zionism' was to establish a state in the historic land of the Jewish people; Prinz's proposal for "New Zionism" was that it would compel Jews of the Diaspora to create meaningful and substantial relationships with the land and the people of the Jewish State. Sending money to the land to support its inhabitants and their study had been a responsibility of the Diaspora community for centuries; Prinz called for them to connect on a human to human level with Israel. He charged American Jewry to lead the way:

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[161] Spiegel, Irving, "New Jewish Group is Proposed by Prinz to Replace Zionist Unit." Nytimes.com, 20 Jan. 1961. 2 Feb. 2009

"Zionism is dead, but it left to the Jewish people a rich inheritance. It is for us to gather it up, to live on it wisely and to add our own strength. The most fundamental statements of the Zionist credo must now be enunciated with new emphasis to make them the cornerstones of a new Jewish involvement which will have the strength and the grandeur needed to attract people. The most fundamental concept is that of peoplehood itself. 'We are a people, one people' must now be translated into American terms. We live as citizens of a great pluralistic society which forces no deceit, no masquerade upon us, which speaks of us as a people as they speak of the Danes, the Irish, and all the others. Our peoplehood here is a fact of life. Of American life and of Jewish life. We are one people. We are part of that which is left after Hitler's mass murder of the millions. This concept has translated itself into terms of real, political action. This, too, is part of the Zionist heritage. Jews meet at international gatherings on equal footing. They consult with one another on problems of Jewish concern. They act for one another. No Jewish program can be developed without reckoning with the greatest and most modern factor in Jewish life, the existence of the State of Israel. Little thought is given to the possibility of an economically independent Israel. It will be a great day for Israel. It will, however, be a tragic day for American Jewry. Not only has our American Jewish life been geared to fundraising for Israel, but our relationship to the new State is defined in such terms. But the day of independence will come, and we will be completely unprepared for it. There are still very large groups among us who need a Jewish

> national program. If a new movement could be made possible by a merger of the World Zionist Organization with the World Jewish Congress, steps should be taken forthwith. It will take time to overcome personal aspiration and ambitions. But if nothing is done, the Zionist movement will die ingloriously by sheer attrition. The time to act is now. [162]

Prinz discussed the role of Israel for a post-Holocaust Jewish world in his 1962 work, *Dilemma of the Modern Jew.*[163] Here he discussed the origins of modern Jewish life, how Zionism responded to lingering antisemitism, the meaning of Israel's becoming a modern state, and its implications for American Jewish life and identity—Jewish survival as a foundation for Jewish pride. "Zionism is the reaction of the Jewish intellectuals to the failure of Emancipation."[164] According to Prinz, Israel's existence wiped out a burden of unearned guilt upon a people, giving them new hope, and a new image of a Jew. He considered American Jewry and its uniqueness is history. According to Prinz, American Jews, especially youth, needed Israel to truly discover themselves. Modern conditions seemed to speak against the survival of the Jewish people; however, he still believed in the possibility of a new kind of survival. "Judaism must and can—after so many centuries of blood and tears—become a proud and mature way of life."[165] In simple terms, Prinz concluded that Jews needed Israel, especially American Jews of the 20th century.

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[162] Zionism is Dead: Long Live the Jewish People (http://www.joachimprinz.com/quotes.htm)
[163] Prinz, Joachim, *The Dilemma of the Modern Jew*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962
[164] Ibid, 67
[165] Ibid

Prinz maintained a relationship to Germany after World War Two, often providing continued critique of his homeland. When Prinz visited Berlin in 1956, he found the German Jewish prognosis poor. Addressing a Berlin congregational audience, he boldly declared that he found "no future in the preservation of the Jewish community in Berlin."[166] Not only did he turn down an invitation to return to the reconstituted Berlin and serve as its rabbi, he said, "I will not urge anyone to come here...It seems that Hitler's dream of a Germany without Jews will yet come true."[167] In 1959, he held, "the leaders of postwar Germany were men of good will."[168] But on the level of the populace, Prinz felt, antisemitism had not yet succumbed to the moral superiority of democracy.

After a spate of synagogue desecrations in early 1960, Prinz challenged the German people "to face the truth of their Nazi past....change [their] attitude of 'forgive and forget' to 'remember and live it down.'"[169] Foreshadowing the "silence" in Germany metaphor that would be the centerpiece of this speech in the 1963 March on Washington, Prinz urged continued attention to the realities of the Nazi period, "To silence those who want to remind the German people of what the Hitler era meant is to silence the conscience that is the only hope for a German democracy."[170] What was needed, he put forth, was to sober up a Germany drunk on post-war economic success on a level not imagined, and focus them instead on the ethical demands of society. "It is

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[166] "Jewish Life in Berlin Held to Lack a Future." Nytimes.com, 22 Jul. 1956. 2 Feb. 2009.
[167] Ibid
[168] Prinz, *Current Biography*, 33
[169] Gruson, Sydney. "A 'Moral Rebirth' Asked in Germany." Nytimes.com, 31 Jan. 1960. 2 Feb. 2009.
[170] Ibid

this moral rebirth on the part of the German people as a whole which the world awaits."[171]

His warnings demonstrated his concern that the failures of democracy under Weimar would repeat in the new German democracy. He clearly was warning against another incomplete conversion of Germany to a democratic ideal. Having met with non-Jewish German civic and religious leaders, he reported pessimism. Democracy in Germany, to Prinz's mind, was being stopped by the obstacles of lingering antisemitism, bolstered by a generation of apolitical and skeptical younger Germans.[172]

Rather than being "anaesthetized" by democratic political slogans in Germany, Prinz urged people to understand the limit to which German had actually democratized after WWII. On the elite level of politicians, academicians, and even some business leaders, Prinz saw a more highly evolved commitment to democracy. But this was far too surface a reality to address the future threat of oppression and return to Nazi ideology, "if one goes to the small towns, sits around the tables at the beer gardens and talks to the man in the street, one is driven into a mood of desperation."[173] Without this full democratization of the populace, democracy would "remain only a governmental system," and Germany would not achieve the needed "sense of civility" necessary for the proper "civic courage and indeed the participation of the people" in state affairs.[174]

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[171] Ibid
[172] Ibid
[173] Joachim Prinz, "Germans have not changed," Hadassah Magazine, Vol. 48, No. 8, April 1967.
[174] Ibid

Given Rabbi Prinz's willingness to stand outside the fold, it is no surprise that his interactions with communities of faith were sometimes ahead of their times and often controversial. His reputation as a renegade might lead one to believe that he would be unwilling to cooperate with other religious leaders or to empower the masses to make their voices heard: such an inference would be erroneous. Prinz's consistent willingness to resist all precedent allowed him to develop methods of community leadership that became the paradigm of congregational empowerment.

In another controversial address to the Jewish people, several years before his famous rejection of traditional Zionism, Prinz warns American Jewry of a danger threatening their very existence. Just as Prinz was one of the first major leaders to warn the community about the dangers of Hitler's regime, so too was Prinz one of the first Jewish leaders to address the problem of Jewish continuity in America in such a frank manner.

Again agitating the mainstream Jewish population, Prinz warns that life in America is too good. As he addresses a United Jewish Congress assembly, he identifies the current threat, he exclaiming, "...the Jewish people have entered a completely new era in history. Jewish communities in the free world no longer fear that they might be physically wiped out. But it is precisely this enjoyment of liberty and the successful

integration of Jewish communities that pose today's central problem of the Jewish people."[175]

As a Rabbi, a community leader and an outspoken voice in the community Prinz proposes some potential solutions. He asserts, "One of the things that Jews need is education about values, culture and history." This addresses both the crisis of assimilation and the search for a new meaning behind Zionism.[176] At this point in his career, Jewish survival is no longer contingent upon nationalism; rather, it is about creating identity and fulfilling a purpose.

Exhibiting a liberal approach to the rabbinate and religion Prinz does not present faith, prayer or observance as a means of resisting assimilation. However, connection to the tales and traditions of the past can concretize identity while driving the Jewish individual towards greater action. It is Prinz's theology more than anything else that describes the purpose of religion and the role that faith should play for humanity. In a speech marking the anniversary of Thomas Edison's birth, Prinz's words exemplify the call to action that serves as the backbone of his rabbinate. He refers the audience to Psalm 115 confidently, as he presents what he refers to as the "truth about human existence." He teaches, "'The Heavens are the Heavens of God, but the Earth He has given to mankind.' What we need is a clear concept of God who wants people to do

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[175] "Assimilation Cited as Threat to Jews." Nytimes.com, 8 Sep. 1958. 2 Feb. 2009.

[176] Spiegel, Irving, "New Jewish Group is Proposed by Prinz to Replace Zionist Unit." Nytimes.com, 20 Jan. 1961. 2 Feb. 2009

something."[177] It is "action" that he suggests as the hope for the future as well as the raison d'etre of mankind.

Willing to break taboos and offer critical or challenging charges, Prinz speaks against one of the conditions that he holds responsible for the atrocities of the Holocaust. Perhaps reflecting on the power of his interfaith encounter whispered under the din of SS drills, Prinz demands that the voices of faith need to be lifted up together. In criticism of interfaith programs that promote tolerance and brief interactions, Prinz addresses a crowd of clergy during "brotherhood week" and makes a demand to think towards unity. Explaining what was lacking from interfaith efforts of the past, Prinz presents the following argument: "If we know that all the religions of the world are bound together by a common destiny... merely placing some emphasis on a common 'heritage' is not enough."[178] Continuing along in vein, Prinz suggests, "What we wish is not to tolerate each other but to accept each other..."[179]

From this perspective, he demands that the leaders of faith community consider themselves as "united" and "all in the same boat." Consistent with his theology of action, Prinz demands of the clergy to relate to each other as 'Brothers' and recognize that the fate of humanity is truly intertwined. Recognizing the difficulty and importance of the task, he asserts that this effort must be made on a daily basis, rather than one

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[177] Joachim Prinz, "God of Action." Joachim Prinz Papers. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

[178] Joachim Prinz, "The Right to be Different." Joachim Prinz Papers. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

[179] Ibid

week a year. In the language of religious leadership, Prinz calls the effort towards mutual understanding, respect and cooperation the "Translation of a religious ideal into the reality of everyday living."[180] While the act of translation is challenging, the essential Jewish value that Prinz presents to this group of clergy is that theology is the motivation for action, not the end unto itself. The call to unite for a common cause is a demand to engage religion as a tool in creating universal right.

From this idea of mutual connection and the need for action one can derive Prinz's core accusations against Nazi Germany. In a blunt fashion, Prinz holds the Church accountable for its complicity during the murder of Europe's Jewish communities. Prinz suggests that centuries of blaming Jews for deicide numbed the Christian leaders to the violation of Christian ideals of peace and love. The same leaders that demand that their congregants "love their enemies" allowed the Jews to be killed with only a few key opponents speaking up. Of all the crimes committed in the Holocaust, Prinz blames the majority of the world's population for committing the sin of silence. The role of religion, according to Prinz is to give people courage to speak out. In a sermon on the potential of humanity, he proclaims, "What we need is not helpless and hopeless dependence of people upon God, but the idea of the dependence of God upon His people."[181] Prinz's assertion that God depends on the actions of the masses and not

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[180] Ibid

[181] Joachim Prinz, "The Human Potential." Joachim Prinz Papers. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati Campus of the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion.

just the leaders reinforces his claim that democracy is a prerequisite for interfaith dialogue.

The criticism of Germany in the years leading up to WWII was that the democracy present was a glaze, and it did not exist on the level of the people. Prinz emphasizes that democracy is in its essence, about equality on a human level. While faith can support the materialization of a just world, all the practitioners of faith need to be connected in order to fulfill the destiny of humankind. This ideal destiny, to Prinz was dependant on the requisite brotherhood between peoples, and the active engagement of the masses in pursuing the right and the good. The successful engagement of these two qualities of a society can be seen exemplified in Prinz's engagement in the Civil Rights movement.

While many rabbis during his era made names for themselves for their efforts in the Civil Rights movement, the effort to realize "universal values" stood at the heart of Prinz's rabbinate. As a founding chairman of the March on Washington, Prinz recognized the connectedness of his fate with the fate of all American citizens. Through close relationships with other religious leaders of multiple faiths, the true essence of democracy was recognized. The power of the March on Washington was not simply that leaders of different communities joined together in common cause; as the will of the people was spoken in one voice the very goal of democracy was realized. The people's footsteps were driven, in many cases by their desire to worship a God who "desires action."

This image of the united voice of the American people speaking against the status quo with courage is the actualization of Prinz's'messianic' vision. As a total inversion of Hitler's totalitarian regime, the March on Washington was a result of democracy, as opposed to the "Putsch" that caused German soldiers to goosestep through the streets of Munich. Hitler muted the people, while Prinz united people of faith to break the deafening silence of complicity.

Chapter 4: Manfred E. Swarsensky—Master Bridge Builder

Rabbi Manfred Eric Swarsensky was born on October 22, 1906, in the northeastern rural community of Marienfleiss, Germany. As with many Jews of the time, Swarsensky's family traced its German history in Pomerania back many generations. He received a classical German education, with an emphasis in the humanities, attending gymnasium in nearby Stargard after completing his primary education in Marienfleiss. In 1925 Swarsensky matriculated to the University of Berlin, also attending a university in Bavaria, Wurzburg for two semesters. He received a PhD in 1929. He received his rabbinical training at the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* ("Hochschule"), being ordained in 1932. Although very young to go immediately into a large community pulpit, Swarsensky was named as one of dozen or so community rabbis in Berlin on the recommendation of his teacher and mentor, Leo Baeck. He held this position until his imprisonment in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp after the November Pogrom of 1938.

Swarsensky's reflections give voice to the refrain heard from so many of Germany's Jews of that time; they could not fathom a circumstance under which Hitler could be anything but an aberration in a post-Emancipation Germany. It was only after years of successive legal restrictions and increasing violence upon German Jews that the masses concluded that emigration was the only alternative. They overcame their innate

spirit of German identity and patriotism to prepare to leave their once-beloved homeland.

Nazi persecution reached a crescendo in November 1938, for Swarsensky as for the wider community. But even after his imprisonment in Sachsenhausen, and after he accepted release with a promise to emigrate out of fear for his very life, Swarsensky was unable to desist his activity as a rabbi on the German model. The exodus of rabbis had accelerated since the November Pogrom, and Swarsensky couldn't abandon his mission to serve the Jewish community in Berlin. "I was determined to remain in Germany as long as the majority of the Jews still were there."[182] This required subterfuge with the German authorities, who had released him on the condition that he would leave Germany immediately. Swarsensky had to produce ongoing evidence that he was actively seeking a way to emigrate. The Gestapo required him to report daily to their office to stand at attention for an hour and to answer questions about his efforts to leave as promised. Emigration came only when he had no other choice, having learned that there was a pending order to "reunite me with those destined to die at Sachsenhausen."[183] Swarsensky reluctantly accepted affidavits from communities in Amsterdam and London, which got him out of Germany and on the path that eventually brought him to America, where he lived and worked for the remaining 42 years of his life.

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[182] Letter, 1939
[183] Ibid

In published interviews, sermons and writings, Swarsensky chose to share very little of the horrific details of the Holocaust, including his own 3-month internment. Yet the select, acutely poignant stories he told clearly spoke to an un-articulated depth of personal knowledge and experience: Storm troopers played football with the heads of babies....A woman survivor of Auschwitz...had been assigned the task of throwing bodies of people who had been killed by poison gas into the crematoria to be burned. One day she came upon the bodies of her own two young daughters, 12 and 14 years old.[184] In Sachsenhausen he was offered and declined early release once, not wishing to jump ahead of other prisoners due first for release. However, as he grew ever-more certain of his personal peril, he accepted a second offer of release and resigned himself to inevitable emigration from Germany.

Recounting his arrival in America, Swarsensky relates that America had always been his preferred destination, even though opportunities via other European countries were to become available sooner. In part this was because his brother had preceded him there. But Swarsensky also spoke of his particular sense that America's democratic tradition was "most congenial to my own way of thinking and living."[185] Swarsensky was successful in joining his brother in Chicago in July 1939. In 1941 his father died in Germany, and his mother joined the brothers in America within that same year.

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[184] "Beyond Auschwitz—Building Bridges," *Intimates and Ultimates*, 26
[185] "Manfred Swarsensky: Oral History Transcript"

Shortly after his arrival in 1939, Swarsensky was in the reassuring position of considering multiple offers to take a pulpit as an Assistant or Associate to an established American rabbi. Yet despite his reluctance to inflict his youth and local inexperience on a congregation as a solo practitioner, a start-up community in Madison, Wisconsin was able to convince Swarsensky to join them as their founding rabbi. Previously served only by an orthodox synagogue since an early Reform congregation had become defunct, a new group of Madison Jews sought to establish a Reform temple in the university town. Having met Swarsensky at a speech he gave in Madison, the founding members felt confident that his intellectual strength and personal character would overcome any temporary cultural limitations. From these humble beginnings, Rabbi Swarsensky's Congregation Beth El grew to be Madison's largest synagogue, and was known as the community with the highest percentage of professors among their membership of any in America.

Swarsensky married Ida Weiner of Chicago in 1952, and they had two children, daughter Sharon and son David. Madison became the family's permanent home, with Swarsensky's professional interests focused on the local Madison and Wisconsin communities. He had begun his young career as a community rabbi in Berlin, offering the local victims of Nazi oppression what solace and encouragement their Jewish faith could provide under such rapidly changing realities. In America, Swarsensky grew to be a beloved, enduring spiritual force in his adopted hometown as well.

Of his published writings, most date from the latter part of his career. Many tread common ground for rabbis predominantly serving in a congregational setting—choosing good over evil, e.g. But as one reads Swarsensky's elegant prose, his stories become more poignant when considered against the backdrop of his personal story. His style lends intellectual authority beyond the title of Rabbi, befitting a man of his advanced education, to his preaching, and he repeatedly chose to speak of his enduring faith in the potential of man to bring holiness and redemption to the world. The Holocaust and his experiences in Nazi Germany were often a reference point in his sermons—sometimes clearly explicit, and sometimes in the guise of Haman, Pharaoh, or another oppressive figure in Jewish history and tradition. Throughout his life and career as a Madison rabbi and teacher, the German-Jewish experience of the 1930s was a key element to his identity and contribution to his community through his work.

Upon his initial arrival in the United States, he had begun the process of interacting with leaders of other faith communities. In personal correspondence, he described his delight at being instantly welcomed into the local ministers group, declaring. "This is all very good and essential for the penetration of the American spirit."[186] Living in constant gratitude for survival, Swarsensky understood the years that were granted to him after his escape from Germany as a divine gift, to be used as a "bridge builder."

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[186] Letter, 1939

Swarsensky knew that much of the hatred against Jews found in his native Europe was the result of the prejudice of ignorance, discrimination and lack of communication. Swarsensky became a legend in the area of interfaith activities. He initiated, sponsored, and was involved in ecumenical organizations and causes all over south-central Wisconsin. What he worked to achieve in this new country of freedom was a deep and meaningful relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. Comfortable with the shared language of faith communities, Swarsensky believed that a better world could only emerge out of commitment to the statutes and the spirit of one's own religion in concert with those of other faiths.

Rabbi Swarsensky distinguished himself as a leader in interfaith activities in Madison and the greater Wisconsin community. He was a well-known and in-demand speaker for both Jewish and non-Jewish civic and religious organizations. His work received many academic and humanitarian awards. In 1967, he received an award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews for his contribution to interfaith understanding, and for several years he chaired the influential Inter-faith Dialogue Committee of Madison Area Clergymen. He was a member of the Equal Rights Commission, Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, and served on the boards of the United Way, Red Cross, Dane County Mental Health Association, and Madison General Hospital, whose doctor-clergy committee he headed. His Jewish affiliations included the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the Madison Jewish Community Council, and the Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning. He was the

moving force behind Madison's program to settle Holocaust survivors after they left Displaced Persons Camps.

In 1971 Rabbi Swarsensky was awarded an honorary degree of Doctor of Divinity from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati. He also received honorary degrees from Edgewood College and the University of Wisconsin. His publications include books in German, numerous articles in scholarly journals and encyclopedias, as well as a history of the Madison Jewish Community - *From Generation to Generation*[187]. Swarsensky served Beth El until his retirement in 1976. Upon retirement, he accepted a professorship in Religious Studies created for him at Edgewood College, a local Catholic institution. He taught there until his death in 1981.

Although Swarsensky's first years in the United States were spent as an underpaid congregational rabbi, Swarsensky eventually found himself in a position in Madison Wisconsin that afforded him opportunities to fulfill his professional goals. The young Swarsensky faced many challenges as a result of the differences between Germany and America. In his correspondences with a fellow Berliner, he shared some of the initial challenges that he faced upon his arrival in America. In a letter penned in 1939, Swarsensky sarcastically bemoans, "The Americans allow me to work off my gratefulness for having been liberated."[188] The young rabbi's disillusionment is captured in this wry yet grieving account, "As a child I believed that the water of the Rhine was

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[187] Swarsensky, Manfred. *From Generation to Generation: The Story of the Madison Jewish Community, 1851-1955* (Madison, 1955)

[188] Letter, 1939

wine, and that in America the dollars grow on trees. I am either in the wrong America, or, because I have been here only a short time, I have not yet found the right trees."[189]

He describes the landscape of Madison as resembling his Pomeranian childhood home. While the landscape reminded him of the best of Germany, he was concerned by the isolationist attitude of the Midwest and often found himself alone in his concern about events occurring "over there." As Madison had a strong population of German Jews, Swarsensky felt the tension created by the presence of German Christians, many of whom he referred to as "Friends of Hitler."[190]

His youth and hesitance in speaking English were not the only impediments that he encountered in the process of immigration. Sometimes the obstacles were the expectations of the Americans he encountered once he came. Because of the German Reform tradition of dressing in the style of the times, Swarsensky did not resemble other European immigrant rabbis who wore sidelocks, beards and covered heads. He explains, "When I got to New York, the immigration officer didn't believe that I was a rabbi. This idiot thought a rabbi had to have a long frock coat and a beard. He put me for three days into Ellis Island. I was called before a judge to prove that I was ordained and all this sort of thing."[191]

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[189] Ibid
[190] Ibid
[191] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"

While his style of dress was accepted by his Midwest communities, he had to adjust to the changes in liturgical style and music. When he returned from a trip to Germany over 20 years after his escape, he was sentimental about the style of worship and most of all the music that defined the worship of his early life. Cultural differences aside, Swarsensky and other highly educated rabbis were reticent to serve communities that were not familiar with the high culture that was so valued by German society. Fortunately, Swarsensky found himself in one of the cultural and intellectual centers in the Midwest, and enjoyed being surrounded by a Jewish community that shared his interest in the intellect and his high level of education.

The members of the synagogue exceeded Swarsensky's expectations, but the role of the synagogue and the responsibilities of the American rabbis stood in stark contrast to the model with which Swarsensky had been familiar. Over time, he adjusted to the American style of synagogue, replete with a 1500-capacity hall, two stages, a pool and gymnasium. In a description of German Jewish communal structure to an audience of Americans, he pointedly identifies the structural differences. In referring to his service in the Berlin community, he clarifies, "I say 'community' not congregation because a clergyman in Germany served the total community of his religious persuasion, not just a single congregation."[192] (Baeck, 56) Over time, Swarsensky adjusted to the expectation that he would serve just one congregation, while bringing a unique German attitude towards his rabbinate. His service of congregation Congregation Emanu-El in nearby

[192] "A Saint in our Time," *Intimates and Ultimates*, 56

Waukesha that continued almost until his death indicated his continued sense of obligation to serve the entire community. His commitment left such a significant impression that the sanctuary was dedicated to his honor after renovations. This connection indicates that he maintained his German understanding that community was designated by geography and not by affiliation.

The worship style, too, was a disconnect from his Berlin experiences, although he clearly understood Prinzregentenstrasse and Fasanenstrasse Synagogues to be special among temples, as Berlin was a center of German Jewish innovation and style. His disapproval of the casual approach of Americans to style is evident in his famous statement: "Reform without a hat—not exactly my style."[193] While presentation and decorum were central to German Reform services, Swarsensky's perception of American Reform was in line with his views about Americans as a whole. In the aforementioned document, Swarsensky offered honest reflection on his perception of American Jews. He laments, "Like the rest of the Americans, they are superficial and live mostly for relaxation and fun. They regard Judaism and religion also from that standpoint." His perception of American Judaism in general became more sympathetic as he became increasingly acclimated to the cultural norms; his criticism of American society was lingered throughout his career. In a document marking his retirement, Swarsensky presents his perspective on faith in America. He confesses that he thinks America's true religion is "devotion to passions and possessions. The real values by which we live are

[193] Letter, 1939

neither Jewish nor Christian, or anything. "[194] He includes himself in this evaluation admitting his participation in American materialism.

Despite profound ambivalence, Swarsensky accepted an offer in 1970 to return to Germany with a delegation of former refugees invited to celebrate 25 years of Berlin's reconstituted, post-WWII Jewish community. He enjoyed the remnants of his German experiences, such as melodies by Lewandowski in the Shabbat worship services during his visit. Upon his return, however, he reflected, "Physically, I did come home to Berlin but, in a deeper psychological and spiritual sense, I did not come home. I could not come home. In the very city where I knew every important edifice and landmark...I felt like a stranger, a visitor at best. Not only the passage of years had come between the city and me but also the unrelieved memory of the horrors of the past."[195] The Germany he referred to as "The Rock Whence You Were Hewn" lived only in his memories, their impact in shaping his American life, and their inspiration for what would become the fullest expression of his life's work.

In his reassuring presentations on his 1970 trip, Swarsensky reports that the government was vigilant about protecting Jewish interests and that school children did not report any experiences of antisemitism. In a letter to a fellow German-born Jew, he shares, "Some question the future of the [German Jewish] community. However, it certainly has a present. The relationship with the authorities is very good. The latter do

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[194] Ibid
[195] "You Can't Go Home Again," *Intimates and Ultimates*, 11-12

everything in their power to make the Jews welcome and accepted."[196] Swarsensky attributes this relative peace to the correction of several to which he attributes responsibility for the horrors of the Holocaust. Blaming the economic situation and the insufficient commitment to democracy, Swarsensky explains that Germany of the Holocaust has experienced significant repair and healing. This was no coincidence, as the curing of Germany was a high priority. "We must not push the German down further. We must help to humanize them... as soon as possible so that they can eventually join the community of nations." Swarsensky explains that part of what made the Holocaust possible was the government sponsorship, New Germany therefore had hope as Democracy became increasingly successful.

After this first trip back to his first homeland, Swarsensky was able to observe German culture through the perspective of his American world view. One of his main criticisms of America was that it was unrooted; to the opposite extreme, Swarsensky feared that Germany had been overly rooted in its pagan origins and its custom of authoritarian rule. He reflected back on his own childhood experiences and held them up in comparison to contemporary American and nationalistic German youth culture. Describing a classroom he visited in America, "I noticed also, to my amazement, how children in public schools...debate issues—which is totally taken for granted. We never

[196] Letter, 1971

did this."[197] It was this blind patriotism that Swarsensky criticizes, and again, he doesn't excuse his own community for this kind of unquestioning loyalty.

He asserts that his experience as a Jewish immigrant is not unique, but rather representative of the American Jewish experience. To Swarsensky, he could have an authentic American national identity in addition to his Jewish identity. Sadly, he explains that the failure of Germany's democracy deprived Jewish citizens of that land benefiting from the German identity that was essential to their self-definition. Upon landing in America after his 1970 trip to Germany, he confesses, "I am glad to be back. We no longer fit into the old environment."[198] Although he reports that the Germany he saw had recovered from the madness of WWII, his feeling of national identity outweighed his cultural connection.

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[197] Ibid

[198] Letter, 1971

Swarsensky reflected in his writings about the differences in the German-Jewish communal system and his own heritage and identity as a German. In his retirement address, he wrote of his enduring bond to "the land in which for hundreds of years my ancestors lived, died, and lie buried; the land whose language is my mother tongue and whose music, literature, and art are part of my cultural inheritance."[199] Swarsensky's Germanism was more than a superficial cultural orientation. Rather, he credited his classical education with deeply influencing his character as well as his intellect. "I had no idea how greatly my early exposure to the world of religion and the humanities would assist me in later years. Not only has it broadened my intellectual horizon, but it has also given me inner strength in the darkest hours of my life." [200]

For Swarsensky, Germany held a uniquely special place in Jewish history. "It was in Germany that Judaism experienced its westernization and that Jews went through the process of entering into Western culture and society....It was here that modern interpretations of Judaism were born....It was here that a Jewish community was developed: the unified, integrated, organized Jewish community which is without parallel anywhere in the world."[201] This unparalleled historical episode was manifest in the Berlin of Swarsensky's education and early career. "In the days before Hitler....[Berlin was] strong and proud, reverent of tradition yet modern in the best sense of the word...with monumental cathedral-like synagogues, religious and Hebrew

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[199] Ibid, 191
[200] Ibid, 190
[201] "You Can't Go Home Again," *Intimates and Ultimates*, 18

schools, hospitals, old age homes, youth movements, newspapers, theaters, theological seminaries, and secular academies of Jewish learning." [202]

Swarsensky recollects that the common German Jewish patriotism ran deep for him as a child in a rural German community. He explains his sense of civic obligation, "I thought it was a great thing that a person could serve the fatherland in the army during peacetime. This everybody did and nobody questioned it."[203] Although Swarsensky wholeheartedly embraced his adopted homeland after leaving Germany, he clung to his sense of German roots with an ideologically fueled fervor. "If with all that Hitler destroyed I would have let him also kill the memories of my childhood and youth and the well-springs of my cultural heritage, I would have helped him to win a posthumous victory. I could not and I will not let him destroy my roots." [204]

Swarsensky never criticized his fellow German-Jewish citizens and their underestimation of Hitler's potential. He placed himself within the mainstream, sharing their abiding German identity and their corresponding faith that their homeland would always embrace them as citizens:

"Germany's Jews could not possibly believe, any more than any one of us here could, that virtually from day to the next they would lose their rights as citizens; that they would be reduced to the status of pariahs; that they could be deprived of the

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[202] Ibid, 19
[203] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present." The Capital Times 24 May 1976, 15
[204] "The Rock Whence You Were Hewn...." *Intimates and Ultimates*, 192

sources of their livelihood, their possessions, their freedom; that their lives could be taken away for no other reason than their being Jews; and that overnight the darkest Middle Ages would have returned. Unexpected and unforeseen, the wild fury of a tornado devasted [sic] what generations and generations had built."[205]

In discussion of the holocaust, Swarsensky noted a tendency to blame the victims for staying in Germany, and for not fighting back. He replied to both statements emotionally, "Like most Germans, I personally believed that this darn thing is going to blow over....There were very few who left then...First of all, I wouldn't leave, either. This was my land. I was born here. Who the devil was Hitler to kick me out? Nobody could anticipate that this whole thing was going to happen...Why didn't the Jews fight back?' That's the greatest baloney. It's as if a gangster came in here. What would you do? Fight back? You couldn't fight back." [206]

While the thrust of Swarsensky's later career was forgiveness and reconciliation, his analysis of the Holocaust and antisemitism carries astute criticism of the failures of German society and culture. With his advanced education, Swarsensky was intimately acquainted with the academic methods and intellectualism that arose from as a result of the enlightenment and was available to the Jewish community as a result of emancipation. Swarsensky and his colleagues absorbed the 19th century liberalism that fostered hope for progress and celebrated human potential. In the 20th century, he

[205] "You Can't Go Home Again," 14
[206] "The Educated Heart," Commencement Address: University of Wisconsin. Madison, 26 May 1979, 15

witnessed its failure in Germany as efficiency, mechanization and soulless science hijacked the western vision of total civilization.

Swarsensky does not attribute the horrors of the Holocaust to this perversion of the intellectual ideal; rather, he presents a position that the decimation of European Jewry during WWII was a unique historical phenomenon, emerging as the product of a combination of tragic circumstances. Recounting the German Jewish understanding of Hitler as he rose to power, Swarsensky explains that the majority of the community saw him as a "megalomaniac." In a forward statement, Swarsensky asserts, "Few understood the dynamic and demoniac character of the Nazi movement...[just like] the British, the French, and the Americas."[207] During this time, Swarsensky faults the bystanders, explaining that the world was silent, and Germany's Social Democratic and Communist citizens did not resist. Holding the world responsible, he insists, "It is a total misconception to believe that the Holocaust was merely an encounter between Nazis and Jews and that the rest of the mankind had nothing to do with it."[208] Despite the passion behind these remarks, Swarsensky's approach to the Holocaust is primarily one of forgiveness. His lifelong dedication to building bridges instead of walls and accepting a hand reached out in reconciliation allowed him as a religious person to live a life of gratitude and compassion. In a quintessential Swarsensky statement, he humbly

[207] "A Saint in our Time," 60
[208] "Beyond Auschwitz - Building Bridges," 28

explains, "being angry is just a way of sitting in judgment on the world and who am I to be the world's judge?"[209]

Rather, according to Swarsensky, the Holocaust occurred as a result of several factors that peaked in Germany after WWI. The first of these was timing: the defeat during WWI left the Germans with a mentality of anger and betrayal. Swarsensky explains that the defeat was attributed to "the stabbing in the back by the Western powers—and the Jews, naturally, were thrown in for good measure."[210] The Jews were imagined as the quintessential interloper, and their proximity and relative vulnerability therefore made them a prime target for hostility and blame. In painful contrast, the suffering experienced by German society after the war sent eyes searching for a scapegoat, and the Jews were assigned that role for a variety of tragic ideological, and religious reasons.

In his description of a Germany primed to follow the totalitarian reign of Hitler, Swarsensky references Germany's national mythology and primitive religion of 'blood and soil.' Because the ideas of sanguine purity and Fatherland remained central to the self-concept of the German people, Hitler was able to engage these symbols in his rhetoric of hate. Out of the commitment to animalistic ideas of humanity, Hitler introduced a hatred of Judaism as a religion of conscience, which restricts the autonomy of man through ethics and rules. According to Swarsensky's analysis, its strict moral and

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[209] Wineke, William R. "Rabbi Swarsensky: A Symbol of Tolerance." *Wisconsin State Journal* circa Jun. 1976. The Manfred E. Swarsensky Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society Library-Archives.

[210] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"

ethical standards are the "deepest reason why [Hitler] has this fierce hatred, not of Jews, but of Judaism."[211]

Secondly, the collapse of the economy as a result of reparations imposed upon Germany after the war created a deep despair. The economic rejuvenation that occurred as a result of Hitler's construction of a new German war machine fueled the economy. However, according to Swarsensky, most of German society could not imagine that Hitler was building for war when creating jobs in construction and manufacturing.

One of the final historical factors that Swarsensky suggests as a cause of the rise of Hitler is Germany's unsuccessful and incomplete democratization. Describing the Germany Hitler conquered, he states, "[In 1929] the feeble Weimar Republic...was about to collapse. The great majority of the German people, who lacked experience in democratic self-rule, had never accepted the Weimar constitution....[After the Kaiserreich] they never ceased longing for an authoritarian regime....The German nation was looking for a savior....[Hitler] persuaded a whole nation to follow him."[212] In Swarsensky's assessment, the nation was only nominally democratic, while the majority of the people did not accept the dissolution of the monarchy. Swarsensky explained,

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[211] Ibid

[212] "A Saint in our Time," 59

Germans...liked authoritative government. Hitler gave the German people back what they had missed for 14 years."[213]

While these were the reasons for Hitler's rise to power, there were other factors that placed the Jews of Europe in peril.[214] Swarsensky explicitly identifies the unique and horrifying effects of the animalistic desire for lawlessness that resulted as a result of the Nazi regime. Random violence against Jews tragically permeates the landscape of Jewish history, and wars throughout history have led to massive casualties. Yet Swarsensky, like many historians and theologians, saw unique horror and significance in the strategic brutality of the Holocaust.

Swarsensky explains the distinctive elements of Germany's destruction of Europe's Jewish community. He states, "...compared with [other] godless acts of sadism, the Holocaust stands out as an event unparalleled in the annals of history. Never before had there been a program of systematic, government-organized genocide which resulted in the dehumanization, torture, and killing of six million human beings of whom one million were children under 14."[215] Considering the Holocaust in the light of government imposed anti-Semitic laws of the past including the Spanish inquisition, the crusades and the medieval ghettoization, Swarsensky is clear and explicit as to their differences, specifying, "[The 'final solution'] was to murder every single Jew. Medieval rulers who put Jews behind ghetto walls said: 'The Jew has no right to live among us.'

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[213] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"
[214] Ibid
[215] "Beyond Auschwitz - Building Bridges," 25

The Nazis said: 'The Jew has no right to live.' It was the first time in history that a state had arrogated to itself the right to decide whether or not a whole people had the right to live."[216]

These efforts to totally annihilate the Jewish people, which eventually crippled the German war machine, grew out of the combination of several unique elements of German culture that tragically intersected in the first few decades of the 20th Century. With great belief in the power of faith, Swarsensky presents the only plausible explanation of how a Christian country such as Germany could accept Hitler. From his perspective, the Christians of Germany were in many cases not completely Christian. About the majority of German society Swarsensky explains, "...they were poorly converted. They always had a hankering back to the old Teutonic-pagan religion."[217] From this perspective, the cruel violence and the attraction to lawlessness was endemic to Germany Culture. About the Nazi rise to power Swarsensky once said, "National Socialism was not a revolution but a revival. One part of this revival of the Pagan myths of blood and soil was antisemitism....The Holocaust was the result of the indoctrination of a nation with the belief in the demonic character of Jews and the climax of one thousand years of teaching contempt for Judaism"[218]

While Swarsensky attributes the specific brand of Nazi violence to a paganism that overshadowed Germany's Christianity, he holds the church responsible for its role

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[216] Ibid
[217] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"
[218] "A Saint in our Time," 60

in establishing hostility towards Jews. Swarsensky recognizes that the holocaust was in some ways the final effect of the theological antisemitism that was propagated by the church and taught in German schools. Accusations of deicide have historically been recognized as one of the central justifications for discrimination and violence against Jewish communities for millennia and the Nazi violence was no exception. While Swarsensky does not condemn the church directly for its role in fuelling hatred against Jews, he is careful to assert, "Neither social nor political reasons caused this latent antisemitism which Hitler could easily exploit."[219] While Hitler preyed on the fears and hopes of the German people, Swarsensky holds the church responsible for the pervasive dislike of the Jewish people.

In some of his public addresses, Swarsensky is critical of the church for not creating sufficient counter-pressure to prevent hateful violence from sweeping across Europe. Swarsensky holds that authentic Christians would have interceded on behalf of the Jews. Additionally, he holds the church responsible for creating the sparks and fanning the flames of antisemitism. According to Swarsensky, the destruction of European Jewry was in some ways an inevitable outgrowth of the anti-Jewish hatred professed in the Christian scriptures. He asserts, "[The Holocaust] was the culmination of 1,900 years of indoctrinating the psyche of Western man with contempt for Jews and

[219] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"

Judaism. Hitler was no innovator. He merely exploited and brought to their final conclusion the teachings of ecclesiastical and political leaders before him."[220]

While the Nazi hatred of the legality of Judaism played a role in the rhetoric of hate, Swarsensky holds Christian culture in Germany partially responsible. He asserts that German antisemitism "was theological, a religious antisemitism."[221] As a matter of comparison, Swarsensky explains, "The antisemitism [in America] is [primarily] envy, it's social snobbishness, it's the dislike of the unlike."[222] The hatred of the Jew in Europe was a direct outgrowth of scriptures composed to differentiate the early Christian from the Jew in the eyes of Rome. Swarsensky explains the accusations of deicide as resulting in a "Pauline hatred of the people...a guilt that cannot be forgiven."[223]

Christian faith created the hatred of Jews, but Swarsensky felt it was a mutation of post-enlightenment intellectualism that allowed for the mechanization of genocide. In a commencement address titled "The Educated Heart," Swarsensky recounts that even decades after WWII, "people are still asking in amazement: How was it possible that the German nation which produced individuals who were celebrated for their intellectual expression in virtually every field of culture...actively supported or silently condoned the most heinous crimes against humanity the world has ever seen?"[224] While intellectualism and animalistic destruction are polar opposites, Swarsensky explained

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[220] "Beyond Auschwitz - Building Bridges," 26
[221] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"
[222] Ibid
[223] Ibid
[224] "The Educated Heart," 13

that in part, Hitler happened because of changes in the intellectual culture in Germany at the dawn of the 20th century. Knowledge was no longer pursued for its own sake. Academic study was made into an end in itself. It was this perversion that lead to the dehumanization of higher education. This, according to Swarsensky is the reason why "men of learning were willing to prostitute their scholarship and permit science to assist a madman in making his murder machine run with the highest efficiency."[225] This is the general sentiment behind his statement, "It is possible to be educated and yet to be uncivilized, to be learned and yet to be inhumane."[226] He asserts that...[Logical thinking without a moral component]..."is bound to grow into a global holocaust unless striving for intellectual excellence is wedded to an equally persistent striving for moral excellence."[227] While the roots of religious antisemitism were ancient, the problem of knowledge without morals was a modern creation. In his words, the dehumanization of education is one of the greatest perils of our time."[228] From Swarsensky's perspective, this was a peril that could never have been predicted.

While Democratic government represented one kind of progress, Swarsensky believed that ideal society was one in which people of all faiths related to each other in the very terms and interests of their faiths. One of Swarsensky's greatest criticisms of Germany therefore was its lack of interfaith connection. Swarsensky praises his mentor, Leo Baeck, for his rare interfaith efforts. "In a country in which ecumenical dialogue was

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[225] Ibid
[226] Ibid
[227] Ibid, 13-14
[228] Ibid, 14

unknown and Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism lived in almost total isolation, Baeck was virtually the sole interpreter of Judaism to educated non-Jews, both theologians and laymen."[229] However, Swarsensky does not excuse the church for its inaction, nor does he assert that the church desired such connection with the Jewish community. Perhaps suggesting that the Christian establishment was satisfied with an impersonal and dehumanized perception of Jews, he explains that German antisemitism "was theological, a religious antisemitism...neither social nor political reasons caused this latent antisemitism which Hitler could easily exploit."[230] He thus asserts that religion in Germany failed to serve its essential function, which is to sensitize people to the humanity of the other, or as Swarsensky so eloquently asserts, to unite the brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.[231]

About this deficit in German society, Swarsensky asserts, "In the land from which I had come, cooperation among faiths was virtually unknown. High walls surrounded the communities of faith. Few dared to look over these walls history had built. And when they did, they never saw individuals but theological abstractions to fit their pre-conceived ideas, namely: infidels, heretics, and non-believers, rather than people who, though differing in theology, were deserving of respect."[232]

Swarsensky explains that in America, because its culture is less differentiated and the silos are not so distinct, people of faith are more able to unite in pursuit of

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[229] "A Saint in our Time." *Intimates and Ultimates*, 58
[230] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"
[231] *From Generation to Generation,* 47
[232] Ibid

higher moral ground. This view of America is juxtaposed against the failure of faith in the homeland that he left behind. He explains, "[In Germany] religion was neither the conscience of the individual nor that of society."[233] In direct comparison, he presents the following argument, "America is different...here we have gradually come to understand that religion, true to its historic roots and to its traditional mission, need not build walls to keep out the stranger; but that it rather ought to build bridges over which to walk to meet our brother."[234]

It was this national identity that Swarsensky explains to be unique in Jewish history. Regarding Jewish hope for America, Swarsensky expounds, "descendents of the people that has been called 'the veteran of history,' they are convinced that America is different from any other land they have known in their long history of wandering. America, they feel, is home not only in the physical sense, but also in the spiritual sense.[235] It is this spiritual sense to which Swarsensky refers in his grateful explanation of the role of America in his life. He states, "America has saved not only my body but also my soul. It has restored my faith in the promise of life and in the goodness of people."[236] This gratitude for survival was not attributed to God nor to his brother who sponsored his travel; rather, it was the land itself that had saved and healed him.

America, to Swarsensky, was not just the land that saved his life and his soul. America was more than the home of Democracy and a place where all people were

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[233] Ibid
[234] Ibid
[235] Ibid, 46
[236] Ibid, 46

promised life and liberty. Swarsensky's America was a place of healing and reconciliation, a land in which universal values could be recognized, celebrated and actualized. In assessing the nature of communities of faith in Germany, he mourned the lack of connection across religious boundaries, which he cited as one of the reasons for German Christians' failure to see the humanity in the victims of the Nazi ideology.

He had no illusions that America was perfect, but his hatred of communism allowed him sometimes to hold his adopted home up on a pedestal. Swarsensky states, "Our nation has many faults and has made grave, even tragic mistakes...But by comparison with the rest of the world, the spirit of America is a thousand times more humane than the spirit of [the world's oppressors—Khomeni, Afghanistan, etc.]."[237] While Swarsensky understands Germany from a perspective of forgiveness, America holds for him an elevated, almost messianic, role. He charged America to a role of leadership, asserting "...the world, is crying for spiritual guidance and moral instruction....The saints of the future will be the men and women who patiently, faithfully, and hopefully will make the America of the future a paradigm of human living and a beacon of hope for the world."[238] Despite his forgiveness and hope for his native Germany, America held a near religious significance. Just as he felt calling as a result of his survival, he seemed to assert that America too must make the most of her time, to make a positive impact on the whole world. Overcoming his culture shock upon first

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[237] "An Eye for an Eye?" *Intimates and Ultimates*, 118-119
[238] "The Rock Whence You Were Hewn...." 193

arriving to America, and though he continues to feel connected to the uniquely German formality, in his later career, he sees himself as thoroughly American.

Having asserted that an ancient paganism was at the heart of Nazi hate and violence, Swarsensky calls attention to the dangers of lapsing in observance of Judaeo-Christian ethics. He explains, "The gravest danger to present-day society is reverting to the moral and spiritual Paganism of our pre-Judaic and pre-Christian past."[239] In this way, Swarsensky is clear to unite Christians and Jews in the common effort to elevate man to his highest ethical level in order to eliminate ignorance. Believing in the necessity of faith to govern the actions of man, he presents, the following argument in Christian terms, "so long as the Kingdom of God is not here, mankind will need codes of law for the adjudication of differences...In spite of this tragic involvement, our ultimate goal must not be abandoned: to free the world from the scourge of war....To believe that war settles anything is a supreme superstition. Wars must be abolished, or they will abolish us."[240] Addressing the shared role of Christians and Jews united in creating a new world order, he interprets the Holocaust as a clarion call. In order to assert his reading of the lessons of the Holocaust he preaches,—"Let this be clearly understood: The Holocaust is no proof that the symbiosis of Jews and non-Jews in the world is an impossible dream. The horror of the Hitler era does not prove that Jews were wrong in their aspiration for civic equality. It only proves that Fascism and its twin brother, Communism, are dead wrong. Democracy is still mankind's and the Jew's last and only

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[239] "The Rock Whence You Were Hewn...." 191
[240] "An Eye for an Eye?" 117

hope."[241] Despite the pain that he suffered, he lives by the rule that forgiveness is the ultimate goal and retaliation is never a solution. His efforts in the interfaith community in his hometown showed his interest in cooperation as clearly as his willingness to return to Germany in 1970 in a gesture of reapproachment.

Just as he saw the Holocaust as a historically unique event, He understood the post-holocaust era to be a unique time in history, a time in which mankind can see with plain sight the dangers of social divisions and ignorance. In a sermon on the biblical concept of *lex talionis*, he proclaims, "The time has come to search for newer ways of thinking and acting. Only on the day when we have grown mature enough to understand that all who live on the face of the earth are bound together into one great family, will we have come closer to what the ancients called 'God's Kingdom on Earth.'"[242] Swarsensky did hold the Christian community of Germany responsible for their silence, and blamed the Churches' anti-Jewish rhetoric for the accumulated hatred of the Jewish people. Swarsensky, like Prinz, believed that compassion for the other can only come from a state of 'brotherhood'. In Swarsensky's own terms the future of humanity depends on the union brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God.[243] Swarsensky believed that the means of ensuring that the world could be protected from mankind's potential for destruction could derive from the interfaith connections that could grow on the fertile land governed by democracy.

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[241] Ibid
[242] Ibid, 119
[243] *From Generation to Generation,* 47

Swarsensky's concern for the failure of religious cooperation exists on a micro scale in his concern for the efficacy of his Judaism in the lives of his own coreligionists. Regarding the understanding of Judaism as a nationality and not a faith, Swarsensky offered a serious warning. Out of concern, he predicted, "A Judaism of secular culture and ethnicism is ultimately doomed to wither under the impact of the powerful forces of acculturation and assimilation."[244]

The community he had served in Germany, as well as his community in Madison, were both religiously liberal. Swarsensky is clear to emphasize that liberal faith need be taken seriously as a valid and full-fledged form of practice. His efforts to convince fellow Jews of the importance of a serious approach towards Reform practice were not aimed at isolated Orthodox communities, such as that of Breuer, but rather the population of his own community. Swarsensky honors the founders of Beth El in Madison by recalling, "They were in search of an interpretation of Judaism cut to the soul of our faith and to the soil of our country. Liberal Judaism was to them not an emasculated form of Jewish Orthodoxy, but rather an interpretation that takes Jewish tradition seriously rather than literally. It is a Judaism that discerns between the lasting and the ephemeral and the essential and the non-essential in our heritage."[245]

Along the same vein of reinforcing the idea of commandedness and obligation as essential components of the Liberal Jewish experience, Swarsensky posits that all Jews

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[244] "Seek Ye Me and Live," *Intimates and Ultimates*, 163
[245] Ibid, 164

are responsible to express our faith in God by fighting for justice. "To help advance peace with justice will forever remain the mission of the Synagogue."[246] For Swarsensky, his mission to pursue justice often took him out of his own community and into Church communities, therefore following through on his own faith commitment.

Just as Swarsensky was vocal about the need for interfaith interaction in communities, so too was he explicit about the role of faith in his own life. He shares, in intimate detail from his own suffering; "In the darkest moments of my life I have been sustained by faith in God....Even when He seemed to be hiding His Face, I have trusted Him. Without such trust, I would have lost my faith in man and in the worth of life....Biblical tradition has inspired my belief that man can find his deep fulfillment in this world only as a witness and servant of God, and as a brother showing compassion and loving kindness to his fellow men."[247] The lesson that Swarsensky communicates is universally one of hope and faith. Swarsensky speaks from his personal experience as a holocaust survivor and from the shared narrative of the Jewish people: "It is easy to give up hope and to succumb to cynicism. As a believer, I cannot afford this escape. For 4,000 years Jews have led an existence which has defied logic and natural law. They have lived and survived in spite of everything. The first article of their faith has been Al Yityaesh (never despair)."[248] By engaging the image of the eternal Jew, Swarsensky

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[246] Ibid, 165
[247] "The Rock Whence You Were Hewn...." 190
[248] "Beyond Auschwitz - Building Bridges," 29

attributes Jewish survival not to divine interaction or the excellence of law or culture, but to the Jewish will to survive.

In his frequent lectures for Christian audiences, he spoke of the meaning of Jewish suffering to the world audience. From a Christian perspective, Jewish suffering has been historically understood as a punishment for the refusal to accept Christian doctrine. In the wake of the Holocaust, Swarsensky is insistent on explaining that the suffering of the Jews is not a result of their own actions, but is a reflection of the failure of humanity.

In terms relevant to his Christian audience, Swarsensky explained, "Crucifixion and Resurrection is the perennial theme of Jewish existence, death and rebirth of a people. Jewish suffering can be understood only as vicarious suffering, suffering for the sins of the world. Jewish fate is the barometer of the moral level of the world....this unconquerable people has testified again in our century that tragedy can be transmuted into triumph, despair into hope, and death into life."[249] He held the position that as Jews suffer, so too does the ultimate morality of the human experience.

One might ask how Swarsensky could manage to distance himself from his own suffering and loss and contextualize Jewish suffering from a global perspective. In response to the Holocaust, and the question of forgiveness of the German people, after

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[249] Ibid

such "naked evil" and "utter human depravity"[250] Swarsensky asserted that his own healing could only result through the elevation of his character through willingness to rise above the crimes of recent history. He explained that he would never forget the atrocities of Germany's crimes against his people, but in words infused with compassion and gentleness he patiently taught, "I can and will stretch out my hand and grasp the hand stretched out to me in reconciliation. I do believe in reconciliation in this as in other situations. The purpose of our Holocaust commemoration is not to sow seeds of animosity against present-day Germany. To hold children accountable for the sins of their fathers is contrary to our moral convictions. Hatred, unending hatred, is not the seed bed from which redemption can grow....Human beings must at long last become human and humane. To endure, mankind needs to build bridges, not walls; bridges between race and race, bridges between nation and nation, and bridges between the creature and his Creator, the Father of us all."[251]

Rabbi Manfred Erich Swarsensky died on November 10, 1981, the 43rd anniversary of Kristallnacht. As was noted in Swarsensky's obituary,[252] he was a "master bridge-builder," and his legacy endured in the interfaith tradition of Madison and the wider Wisconsin communities. Edgewood College published an anthology of Swarsensky's addresses, *Intimates and Ultimates*[253], shortly after his death. He was a

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[250] Ibid, 27
[251] Ibid, 30-31
[252] "Swarsensky Looks at Past, Present"
[253] Swarsensky, Manfred E. *Intimates and Ultimates: A Selection of Addresses by Rabbi Manfred E. Swarsensky.* Madison: Edgewood College, 1981

pioneer in building relationships among all faiths, and his words were cherished by the Christians who encountered him as well as his fellow Jews.

Chapter 5: Epilogue—Reflections on the German Jewish Legacy in America

Liberal rabbis like Swarsensky and Prinz had found America to be a fundamentally different congregational milieu from the state-sponsored German religious communities. This difference had tremendous impact on the role of the rabbi, his accountability to a congregational board, and the funding of the community, including rabbis' compensation. A liberal German rabbi seeking employment had to adapt to the challenges, and opportunities, of an American rabbinate.

Breuer and his community, however, were somewhat immune from a need to adapt, largely due to the nature of Austritt and what it meant in terms of organizational structure of the Hirschian communities in both countries. But transplanting this organism—intrinsically German—on American soil created an internal force by which the pure Hirschian customs developed in Germany took on the flavor and nuance of non-German orthodoxies, which provided the true context for KAJ in America. The adaptation was able to be postponed, because of the unique vision and support of the early leaders of the Breuer kehillah, but adaptation still became inevitable. While it can never be known what would have happened to KAJ on German soil without the Nazis, it is likely that any evolution of the Hirschian community would have followed a different path than the one that developed in America.

The chief proponents of TIDE and the Hirschian ideal have staunchly defended it against the Torah-only camp's claim that it was only a horah-at sha'ah— a temporary relaxation of rules permissible for one small group during one specific period. However, the context in which true Hirschian Austritt functioned—first, in Germany in the early 20th century, and then again in Washington Heights during the post-WWII decades—was largely a time-bound phenomenon. Even if the KAJ leadership had not tempered application of the TIDE approach with some Torah-only or yeshiva-model flavor, it can be argued that the full kehillah form would be relegated to the status of an historical phenomenon in its original, classical manifestation.

Breuer was successful in recreating the Frankfurt kehillah in Washington Heights, almost brick by ideological brick. They were successful in staving off the demographic changes longer than most immigrant communities, retaining and or recruiting younger members, leading to a lower average age. Yet that transplant did not ultimately fully retain its distinct form after a few decades. Austritt and TIDE faced ever-increasing pressure to evolve. The community most successful at reestablishing itself faithful to its namesake was in fact the community that would prove least viable in the American milieu. The notion of "splendid isolation" was in fact a fallacy—part and parcel of "Austritt" was the context from which the community chose to separate. Although TIDE does not need to be relegated to the halachic category of "horah-at sha'ah"— KAJ and the Hirschian ideal of a distinctive, viable, and vibrant isolation became inseparable from the very time and place that created it.

Prinz was in many ways a polar opposite to Breuer. Ideologically, his early Zionism and enduring Liberalism put him far leftward of Breuer's orthodoxy, among the furthest right of all German Jewish communities. But his individualism also provided the fullest contrast to Breuer's self-styled role. Like his father before him, Joseph Breuer sought only to maintain a vision defined by his grandfather—fidelity was the highest ideal, not innovation. Prinz remained an iconoclast and innovator throughout his life and career—sometimes seeming to contradict his own ideologies with the passage of time. In Germany, Zionism was the antidote to antisemitism; Jewish peoplehood would correct the doomed German patriotism early 20th century Jews felt to a fatherland that would never fully return the favor. In America, especially during the early years and his work for Israel, Prinz remained virtually silent on why he had chosen to come to America when he left Germany under Nazism's threat instead of the Jewish homeland that had been central to his Jewish identity since his youth in the Blau Weiss. This was one of many seeming contradictions within this complex man.

Like Swarsensky, interfaith dialogue and the democracy that bolstered it became central to Prinz's view of the mission and opportunity of Judaism. In Germany, Prinz's moments of contact between rabbi and church leaders became the stuff of legends. In America, this vision extended beyond the role of dialogue in ensuring Jewish survival; democracy's free exchange of ideas, even among faith groups, became the vehicle to repair the world—from the Civil Rights Movement, to anti-war protests, to stemming the oppressive tide of Communism.

Throughout his life and career, Prinz took up the mantle of gadfly. He criticized his own Jewish community for their ignorance of self and society that left them vulnerable to a perpetual threat of persecution. He challenged the institutions around him to move past parochial concerns that would doom their people to conflict and struggle. The nexus of Prinz's message to the world was the pulpit. He saw his rabbinate as both means and obligation—Prinz brought the concerns of the world to his congregation, and he spoke to the world through the voice of a rabbi whose congregation was the community far beyond his own.

As an early national leader in the American Civil Rights Movement, Prinz had perhaps the widest impact of the rabbis discussed in this thesis. In contrast, Swarsensky's impact could be said to be the deepest. Although a remarkable man, Swarsensky's rabbinate was the most normative of the three—he was a mainstream community Rabbi in Berlin, and he was a dedicated congregational rabbi in Madison, whose audience rarely extended beyond the Wisconsin-area region. Breuer's success was in resisting change from his grandfather's legacy; Prinz's mission was to shock and inform an inadequately schooled populace. Swarsensky, on the other hand, was a builder. The lessons learned from the absence of interfaith dialogue became the blueprint for a future of cooperation across boundaries of faith and community. He founded institutions and advocated a worldview that would ensure that the failures of Germany and its Jewish community would not be repeated on American soil. Although the experiences that shaped this vision were different from those of many liberal rabbis

in late-20th century America, Swarsensky's commitment to social justice was in concert with the values and development of the American Reform movement of which he was a member. He saw his heart and mind as forever German, yet he built a relationship with America and her democracy that became just as deeply held. And throughout it all, Swarsensky clung to the faith he credited with his salvation and survival through one of the darkest chapters of human and Jewish history.

Each of these men brought a piece of "their" Germany with them. Those German Jewish remnants both informed and served as a lens to the American milieu that became their only remaining ideological home. Elements of the distinctive German Jewish perspective survived in America while the German Judaism that gave them life approached its denouement. The demise of such a pivotal ideological revolution is a regrettable loss to history. At the same time, however, it can be said that American Judaism became richer, more vibrant, and more authentically modern because of this German contribution. The original German Jewish experience in modernity is largely extinct, but the legacy of the enlightened Jewish religious response to modernity endures.

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