The Holocaust and the Message of Hope in Rabbinic Homilies, 1933–1942

Maura Hope Linzer

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination

Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion

May 2012

Referee: Rabbi Gary P. Zola

Abstract

This thesis examines homilies delivered by four Reform rabbis in the United States — David Philipson, Julian Feibelman, Max Nussbaum, and Harold Saperstein—from 1933 through 1942. It documents how their definitions of hope and their calls to action changed in relation to the deteriorating circumstances of European Jewry. As well, these four rabbis represent different generations, locales, backgrounds, and ideologies that influenced the messages they delivered to their congregants. They struggled to preach sermons that both met the needs of their members and maintained the integrity of their own beliefs. After providing biographical sketches of each of the rabbis, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s, their sermons are considered within the historical context in which they were given.

The thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter studies the sermons of Rabbis David Philipson and Harold Saperstein between the years 1933 and 1938 as they struggled to cope with news of the worsening situation in Germany. The second chapter covers the early war years from 1939 to1942 and analyzes the sermons of Harold Saperstein, Max Nussbaum, and Julian Feibelman. Variations in these homilies are largely the result of the individual background and ideologies of the rabbi. The most striking observation is the lack of calls to political or military action, which stands in contrast to the personal actions of the rabbis themselves.

Acknowledgments

Only the learning that is enjoyed will be learned well.

--B. Talmud

To my mentor, Rabbi Gary P. Zola:

Thank you for your guidance and support throughout this journey. During my time at Hebrew Union College, I have enjoyed studying with you, working together, and learning from you. Your passion for Jewish history is a source of inspiration.

To my mentor, Dr. Dana Herman:

Thank you for the countless hours that you spent mentoring me and encouraging me to finish my work on the thesis. Your kindness and patience has been a source of strength to me when I doubted myself. Thank you for your encouragement.

To my Family:

Thank you for encouraging and supporting me throughout this process, especially on those days when I did not feel up to writing. To my father, I am grateful to you for reading every paper that I have written since elementary school—this is true unconditional love. To my mother, thank you for imparting to me your passion for Judaism. To my husband, Liad, I am grateful for the support you have given throughout this adventure that has been both pregnancy and thesis.

Table of Contents

Introduction

> May the time not be far distant, O God, when thy name shall be worshipped o'er all the earth, when unbelief shall disappear and error be no more. We fervently hope and pray that the day will come upon which all men will invoke Thy name, corruption and evil make way for the purity of goodness, superstition no longer enslave the minds of men nor idolatry blind their eyes to the truth, all inhabitants of this globe perceive that before Thee alone every knee must bend and every tongue do homage. O may all Thy children, created in Thy image, recognize that they are brethren, having one Father; then will the prejudices that still separate man from man and the religious differences that divide in hatred what should be joined in love be no more known, and all men, one in spirit, one in humanity, be united before thee.
>
> --David Philipson, 1891
>
> *Aleinu* prayer in *Services for Sabbath and Holidays*[1]

The *Aleinu* prayer contains the Jewish people's eternal hope for an age of perfection when all peoples will unite, regardless of their differences, into one spirit, under God. Despite a history of persecution, this hope for a better day has been a part of the Jewish consciousness through every generation. However, no one could have anticipated the unparalleled suffering that European Jewry would endure during the Nazi era.

While geographically removed from the suffering of their coreligionists, American Jews were bound to European Jewry through familial, cultural, and religious ties. During the inter-war years, second generation American Jews actively acculturated to their surroundings. While

[1] David Philipson, *Services for Sabbath and Holidays* (Cincinnati: The Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., 1891), 12–13.

many of these Jews were in the process of entering the American middle class, they retained their commitment to Judaism along primarily ethnic lines. With a striking decrease in synagogue attendance and religious observance, rabbis and community leaders tried to revitalize the synagogue.[2] At the same time, nativism, xenophobia, and antisemitism were very much a part of the American fabric.[3] Historian Hasia Diner has pointed out that while antisemitism never reached the same heights in America as it did in Europe it likely played a role in Jews' decisions about work, leisure, and residence.[4] It is in such a setting that American Jewry struggled to organize, respond, support, and process the immense suffering of European Jewry at the hands of the Nazis from 1933 through the war period.

Rabbinic sermons offer one particular view of this tumultuous period and provide an opportunity to examine what messages American Jewish rabbinic leadership—in this case, Reform rabbis—were presenting to their congregants. Historian Marc Saperstein has been particularly interested in the role of the rabbi's sermon during periods of conflict as a micro-study of broader trends. He writes that contemporary primary sources, such as the sermon, are unique windows into history because they "take us back to a unique moment in the past with all its ambiguities and uncertainties, when the future was as opaque to everyone as the future is to us today."[5]

Jewish suffering has always been a topic covered by rabbis in their pulpit sermons. During periods of persecution and chaos, it was expected that the rabbis would offer comforting words that reassured their listeners to not lose faith.[6] Although the years immediately preceding

---

[2] Jonathan Krasner, "America Jews Between the Wars," My Jewish Learning, accessed February 2, 2012, http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Modern_History/1914-1948/American_Jewry_Between_the_Wars.shtml.
[3] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 214.
[4] Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 214.
[5] Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800–2001* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008), ix.
[6] Ibid., 38.

World War II were outside the scope of Saperstein's anthology, their examination here offers an opportunity to look at how messages in rabbinic sermons changed throughout a longer period of Nazi oppression. This paper will analyze Reform rabbinic homilies from 1933 to 1942, focusing on four significant American Reform rabbis who preached during the early 1930s and the early war years: David Philipson, Julian Feibelman, Max Nussbaum, and Harold Saperstein. These rabbis represent different generations, geographical locations, experiences, and ideas.

The presence of hope paired with a call to action can be found in the sermons of all four rabbis. Despite this commonality, though, the overall message of a given sermon and the style in which it was delivered varied from rabbi to rabbi and demonstrated the power of each individual religious leader to inspire and reassure his congregants. While these sermons partly reflect the rabbi's personal interests, desires, and ideological orientation, it must be remembered that they are also a window to a rabbi's life at a discrete moment in time. With regard to sermons during World War II, Saperstein made "one of the most startling discoveries…the consistently anti-interventionalist position taken in the American Jewish pulpit during this time."[7] Studying the sermons of these four rabbis has led to a similar conclusion—rabbis, in their sermons made relatively less demanding requests from their congregants throughout the years in question that stood in sharp contradistinction to the bold actions of the rabbis in their personal lives. These rabbis then—as rabbis continue to do today—struggled to write and deliver sermons that met the needs of their congregants, while at the same time conveying a message that they, as religious leaders, felt compelled to preach. These tensions are highlighted in the gap between the words preached by the rabbis and their own individual actions. With this in mind, it is necessary to understand these sermons within the historical and biographical context in which they were written and delivered by these American Jewish leaders.

[7] Ibid., 390.

This study is divided into two chapters. The first chapter addresses messages of hope and calls to action during the pre-war period and the rise of Nazism (1933–1938), and the second chapter will address hopeful messages delivered during the war years through America's entry into World War II (1939–1942). The year 1939 was thought to be an effective dividing place for the two chapters as Germany's entry and occupation of Poland in 1939 denotes a shift in the nature of the conflict to an international level. The first chapter is arranged chronologically and broken down into subsections by years determined both by the development of major events in Nazi Germany and shifts in sermons from those specific years. Due to limitations of the sermon collections, the first chapter deals exclusively with the sermons of David Philipson and Harold Saperstein. Because only two rabbis' sermons are detailed in this chapter it is possible to identify themes that arise and commonality within a chronological structure. Additionally, the first chapter's chronological organization also highlights the connection between the development of events in Germany and the resultant responses of the rabbis. As American Jewry continued to be discouraged by the declining situation of European Jewry, the first chapter argues that there is a clear relationship between sermons' messages of hope and the development of events in Germany—as the years progress, these messages and calls to action are delivered with ever increasing urgency. The second chapter is organized topically by rabbi and includes sermons of three rabbis, Harold Saperstein, Max Nussbaum, and Julian Feibelman. Organizing this chapter by preacher allows us to focus on internal patterns and thematic differences of each rabbi. Such an analysis would not have been possible using a chronological organization considering the vast number of sermons covered in this chapter. The second chapter argues that internal changes within the messages of the rabbis are influenced more by the individual style and personality of the rabbis than by developing events in Europe.

Research Methodology

Sermons of all four rabbis are preserved at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (hereafter AJA) in Cincinnati, Ohio. A list was compiled of Reform rabbis who lived during the period in question and whose sermon collections were available. After using existent finding aids to explore the titles and topics of sermons for each rabbi and at the advice of the staff at the AJA, a list of rabbis was targeted for further research. Ultimately four rabbis—David Philipson , Julian Feibelman, Max Nussbaum, and Harold Saperstein—were chosen for further research as they had sermons relevant to the subject matter, and they represented four distinct personalities, geographic locations, generations, and experiences.

Each rabbi's sermon collection had limitations. David Philipson's topically-relevant sermons were available only for the years 1933 and 1934. Almost all of Julian Feibelman's collection consisted of sermons in note form only. Prior to 1940, all of Max Nussbaum's sermons were in German. Finally, Harold Saperstein's collection was so vast that due to time limitations, only his High Holiday sermons were evaluated. Additionally, Saperstein was deployed as a military chaplain from 1943 until 1946 and therefore no sermons were available during these years. Due to these archival constraints, the time period for this study was restricted to 1933–1942. Overall, the decision to begin the investigation of sermons in January 1933 followed what many historians and organizations, including Yad Vashem,[8] consider as the historiograhic beginning of anti-Jewish policy in Germany. As early as 1933, violence in the form of individual acts of brutality against Jews became a part of daily life in Germany.[9] The sermons under investigation end in 1942 because of the limitations of archival material available.

[8] Ibid., 113.
[9] Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 13.

The specific topic was not selected during initial research; rather, the researcher analyzed sermons from the period written by numerous rabbis and looked for common themes and ideas that reoccurred in the sermons of various rabbis. After considering numerous other themes, messages of hope were selected as the theme for further analysis because of their prevalence in sermons during the Nazi era and the dynamic nature of the topic throughout the period. Hope was accessed by explicit declarations of hope for the future made by the rabbi or by his implicit suggestion, such as the Jewish people have survived traumatic periods in the past and they will continue to do so. A call for action was qualified as a direct imperative to perform a specific action or a suggestion made by the rabbi about how to modify the Jewish situation domestically or in Europe in order to insure a future for Judaism. The presence or absence of hope and a call to action were noted in every sermon, analyzed in the context of the way in which they were presented, and attempts made to understand the motivations behind the words of the rabbis.

As previously asserted, one cannot understand the broader context in which the sermon was situated without an adequate understanding of the life of the rabbis and their particular ideological orientations and actions during the 1930s and 1940s. What follows is an in-depth look at the lives of the rabbis—their upbringing, education, organizational involvement, and noteworthy accomplishments. The information that follows will provide an adequate groundwork upon which to begin analyzing their sermons in the first chapter. The biographical information is divided by rabbi, and appears in chronological order of their birth in order to highlight generational differences.

David Philipson

David Philipson was born in Wabash, Indiana in 1862, but his family later moved to Columbus, Ohio. In 1875, Isaac M. Wise, a prolific rabbi and founder of the Reform seminary, Hebrew Union College, wrote a letter to a friend, Joseph Philipson, David's father, informing him of his intention to open Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.[10] David's father, Joseph Philipson, had been a Jewish teacher in Sandusky, Ohio and through this venue David's father had come to meet Isaac M. Wise.[11] At the time, David Philipson was only thirteen years old, however, it was decided that upon his completion of grammar school he would enroll at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati.[12]

This letter from Wise drastically changed the course of David Philipson's life. In fact, prior to receiving this letter from Wise, no one had considered that Philipson's education might advance past grammar school. There had not been a single Jewish child in Columbus who went to high school. After much discussion, Philipson's mother asked the young Philipson what he would like to do after grammar school. He responded, "I like books." That seemed to be a clear enough indication that he would like to continue his studies.[13] In 1883, Philipson graduated in the first class of Hebrew Union College, while he simultaneously earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Cincinnati.[14]

Upon graduation, Philipson taught briefly at Hebrew Union College before accepting a congregational position at Har Sinai Congregation of Baltimore, where he served for four years. After this brief experience as a congregational rabbi, Philipson returned to the world of

[10] "Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers," American Jewish Archives, accessed on January 24, 2012, http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/Philipson.htm.
[11] David Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew* (Cincinnati: John G. Kidd and Sons, 1941), 1.
[12] "Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers."
[13] Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew,* 1.
[14] "Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers."

academia, serving for two years at Johns Hopkins University, where he did post-graduate work in the field of Assyriology and Semitic languages. In 1888, Philipson took a position as the rabbi at Bene Israel, now Rockdale Temple of Cincinnati, where he served for fifty years until his retirement in 1938. While serving as a rabbi, he also taught at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati and served on its board of governors. During his illustrious career, Philipson received numerous degrees and honorary degrees—a D.D. degree from Hebrew Union College (1886), and honorary LL.D. degree from the University of Cincinnati (1941) and from Lincoln Memorial University (1922), a D.H.L. degree from the Hebrew Union College (1925), and an honorary D.D. degree conferred by the Jewish Institute of Religion, in New York (1938).[15]

Outside of congregational life and the classroom, Philipson was a leader, distinguished author, and passionate advocate. In 1885 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Philipson participated in the formulation of the *Principles of Reform Judaism*, known as the Pittsburgh Platform[16] that represented the values espoused by Classical Reform Judaism.[17] Adherents to Classical Reform Judaism define their philosophy in the following manner, "Classical Reform Judaism is an approach to Judaism that emphasizes reason, personal autonomy, social justice, and humanitarian religious values."[18] Philipson was regarded as a representative of Classical Reform Judaism, and therefore understanding the *Principles of Reform Judaism* is central to understanding the ideological orientation of Philipson.

According to Michael Meyer, noted historian of Reform Judaism, this gathering of nineteen rabbis that occurred in Pittsburgh, "must be understood as an attempt to lay down a set of defining and definitive principles which would distinguish Reform Judaism from a wholly

---

[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] "What is Classical (or Liberal) Reform Judaism?" Chicago Sinai Congregation, accessed on January 25, 2012, http://www.chicagosinai.org/liberal_reform_judaism/what_is_classical_reform.cfm.
[18] "What is Classical (or Liberal) Reform Judaism?"

nonsectarian universalism on the one hand and from more traditional expressions of Judaism on the other."[19] The document itself suggested the supremacy of Judaism and the need to continue Judaism as a separate religion, not to be consumed by ethical culture in general. "At the same time it established Reform Judaism, not on the basis of biblical or rabbinical law, but on a conception of God and morality anchored in, but also departing from, the text which first reflected it."[20]

Additionally, within the Reform movement, Philipson was instrumental in the founding of the Central Conference of American Reform Rabbis (CCAR) in 1889.[21] The CCAR is a significant rabbinic organization both because of its size and its continued tenure. Its prominence has allowed the organization to be an important voice for the Jewish community, both domestically and internationally. The CCAR prides itself on making substantial contributions to the Jewish community and the Reform movement by promoting excellence in Reform Rabbis, building unity within the movement, and making Judaism accessible and relevant to both contemporary life and the future. [22] Not only was Philipson a founding member, but he also served as the organization's president from 1907 until 1909. Outside of his avid involvement in the CCAR, Philipson was a member of the board of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, "director of the Associated Charities of Cincinnati," a founding member and vice-president of the American Jewish Historical Society, and a part of the American Jewish Committee.[23]

---

[19] Michael A Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 265.
[20] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 269.
[21] "A Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers."
[22] "About the CCAR," Central Conference of American Rabbis, accessed January 25, 2012, http://www.ccarnet.org/about-us/.
[23] "A Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers."

Aside from his involvement in Jewish organizational life, Rabbi David Philipson was also a historian. Noted historian Jacob Rader Marcus remarked that although Philipson was not a professionally trained historian, he nevertheless "became a competent student and did creditable work."[24] More specifically, "He [Philipson] never studied American Jewish history. He lived it—and survived it. His knowledge of the life of his people in this land—and it was an extensive knowledge –was not gained through systematic, purposeful reading or studying. It was a process of 'recalling.'[25] With such an orientation, he is remembered for the following notable works: *The Reform Movement in Judaism*, *The Jew in English Fiction.* He edited *The Letters of Rebecca Gratz and Selected Writings of Isaac M. Wise.* Due to his mastery of various languages, Semitics in particular, Philipson was a part of the board of translators of the Jewish Publication Society for the translation of the Holy Scriptures of 1916. Additionally, he translated *Reminiscences of Isaac M. Wise* (1901, 1945). Finally, in 1941, Philipson penned his autobiography, *My Life as an American Jew*.

Philipson's ideological position reflected his commitment to the values of Classical Reform Judaism. Also, he was passionate about Americanism. Philipson felt incredibly comfortable among Christian colleagues. He said, "Unlike many of co-religionists, I never felt any difference in the non-Jews with whom I have been thrown in contact. I feel altogether at home with them."[26] Such sentiments had its roots in Philipson's strong sense of universalism. Hand in hand with this love of his homeland and its culture came a rejection of nationalism in all forms, Zionism in particular. Zionism, then, was viewed as an obstacle to this universalism.

---

[24] Jacob Rader Marcus, "Dr. David Philipson's Place in American Jewish Historiography," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 3 (1951): 28.
[25] Ibid., 30.
[26] Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew*, 467.

In 1935, when Philipson attended a meeting of the CCAR in Chicago, the central issue of discussion was Zionism. Philipson's autobiography recounted the events of that conference, which demonstrate his rejection of Zionism. A resolution was proposed which would in a way reverse the position of the Pittsburgh Platform,[27] which stated categorically that the reformers of 1885 "expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish state."[28] The proposed resolution would take a new position. Previous CCAR resolutions that were adopted, had opposed Zionism, and it was felt that these earlier resolutions no longer reflected the sentiments of a significant portion of the CCAR membership. The authors of the new resolution felt that one's acceptance or rejection of Zionism should be at the individual discretion of each member of the Conference. Therefore the new resolution proposed that the CCAR no longer take an official position on Zionism, be it for or against, thereby leaving each individual member free to endorse or reject the Zionist program. The final point of the resolution stated that in addition to the aforementioned changes in Zionists thinking within the CCAR, the organization will cooperate in the building of Palestine, the growing Jewish community there, and the challenges that continue to arise—economic, religious, and cultural. [29]

Philipson, along with the president and others, rejected the resolution and questioned the scandalous nature surrounding the details of how the commission, which wrote the resolution, had come about. The proponents of the resolution, including some who had originally been "non-Zionists," argued that Zionist question could no longer come up for discussion, because the resolution that passed had officially taken a neutral position. However, Philipson was skeptical

---

[27] Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew*, 464.
[28] "Pittsburgh Platform," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed on January 27, 2012, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pittsburgh_program.html.
[29] Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew*, 464.

and criticized the resolution. He believed that the changes included in the resolution really represented a change in thinking about Zionism and not a neutral position. He said, "But I am not fooling myself. The conference has reversed the position held during the forty-six years of its existence. Officially it has been opposed to Zionism; now it is declared neutral."[30]

Due to the limited historical context of this paper from 1933-1942, understanding Philipson's life during this critical time period is of particular importance. In addition to Philipson's role as a congregational rabbi in Cincinnati until 1938, he was involved in both community organizations and had clear ideological positions on issues aside from Americanism and Zionism that were espoused in his sermons. What follows is a brief summary of his involvement and activities from 1933 until 1938 with particular attention to events in his life related to Germany.

In the section of Philipson's autobiography entitled "1933–1934," he mentioned his outrage at the treatment of Jews in Germany by non-Jews. Philipson discussed the debate over whether or not those outside of Germany should protest against the situation in Europe. Those opposed to such protests, according to Philipson, believed that Germany would only torment the Jews more when word of such public protests reached them. Philipson noted that there was a group in Cincinnati who called for a collective meeting of the Jewish community to address the current situation for their brethren in Germany. In response to such a proposal, Philipson said, "I opposed this group might and main. I felt that if a mass meeting was to be held, it should be a meeting of citizens generally."[31] This example highlighted his commitment to Americanism and his rejection of Jewish nationalism.

[30] Ibid., 465.
[31] Ibid., 446.

Philipson was not a man imbued purely with ideals. For instance, he followed through on his word, and was a participant in this mass, interfaith meeting in Cincinnati. When Philipson had the opportunity to address the crowd, he read sections of a letter written by a woman, an eye-witness to the events of Black Saturday, April 1, 1933, the day the Nazis designated for a boycott of the Jews throughout Germany. The meeting resulted in an outcry from those present against the atrocities the Nazis were committing. This condemnation was sent in writing to the German ambassador to be sent to the government in Germany. Philipson stated:

> Neither this resolution or protest nor the scores of similar resolutions adopted throughout the country had any effect in changing the barbarous policy of the German government. The situation of the Jews in that cursed land has gone from bad to worse. It grew constantly clearer that the situation was hopeless and that the thugs who had the reins of the government in hand would be satisfied with nothing less than the liquidation of the Jews of the country.[32]

Philipson also addressed other organizations as a speaker on the topic of the Jewish situation in Germany.

During the same time period, Philipson was also an outspoken opponent of a secularist outlook. He believed that secular nationalism, which was increasingly taking hold in America, partially in response to Nazi Germany, was dangerous.[33] Philipson openly rejected any form of Jewish nationalism, be it religious or secular. In 1935, Philipson rejected the idea of the formation of the American Jewish Congress, which was largely under the leadership of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise. Wise had been encouraging the formation of this body to think over the problems impacting the world Jewish community and to be recognized as *the* official voice of

[32] Ibid., 446–447.
[33] Ibid., 456.

the world Jewish community. Philipson was against such a body; since so many international Jewish organizations had refused to participate in such an organization, Philipson did not think it could actually be representative of the entire world Jewish community, and therefore the organization was not capable of fulfilling its founding principles. Additionally, he believed that this organization was an attempt to supersede long-standing Jewish organizations, which had and continue to meet the needs of the Jewish community. Furthermore, his American-centered orientation led him to believe that his national interests were represented by the governing bodies of the United States of America, and therefore there was no need for national Jewish interests to be spoken for because he did not believe in the concept of Jewish nationhood.[34] This debate will be discussed in depth in the first chapter.

In 1936, the standing committee of International Peace at the CCAR convention was debating the issue of pacifism. According to Philipson, the committee declared that pacifism was a Jewish view, and Philipson thought its position was unjustifiably extreme. He felt this was in fact not a Jewish view, if one looks at Jewish history and Jewish military involvement throughout that time. Philipson added, "I...am a lover of peace, but I am not a pacifist so long as our country must be defended against the aggressions of an invading force."[35] In response to the proposed resolution, Philipson was a part of a group which issued a statement that said they were greatly disturbed by the statements of the committee.[36]

In 1936 when Franklin D. Roosevelt was running for a second term as president, Philipson spoke out against those who discussed the notion of a Jewish vote; a concept which Philipson did not think existed. He said, "time and again I have declared that there is no such thing as a Jewish vote, and I make that same declaration again here and now. From my point of

[34] Ibid., 470–471.
[35] Ibid., 472.
[36] Ibid., 473.

view, the distinctiveness of Jews lies in their religious affiliation and not in any particularistic Jewish political outlook."[37] Such an outlook is completely in line with Classical Jewish ideology, which stressed Judaism as a religion and not a nation.

In 1937, Philipson attended at symposium on the topic of anti-Semitism that was held at the Biennial Convention of the UAHC. He noted that this gathering was the most well attended meeting of the convention, although he disagreed with having an entire evening dedicated to the topic. One leader stood up and gave a very pessimistic, defeatist speech about anti-Semitism, according to Philipson. In response to his opponent's charged words, Philipson gave the closing response. He spoke about an optimistic future and a message of hope. He said that following his speech, a sign of relief seemed to be breathed by many present.[38] A similar message of hope can be found in his sermons delivered in 1933-1934.

Additionally, while attending the fiftieth anniversary of Har Sinai congregation of Baltimore, Philipson was startled to learn of the ideological changes that the congregation had undergone since he served there. The congregation, under the leadership of the present rabbi, endorsed political Zionism, which Philipson staunchly rejected. Despite his awareness of the position of the rabbi, Philipson gave an address to the congregation with blatant and purely universalistic tones, much to the chagrin of the current rabbi. Reflecting upon this experience, Philipson said, "I frequently regret that I have lived to see the changes. Nationalism is the world's greatest curse today. In its German phase of Hitlerism and its Italian garb of Mussoliniism it is the underminer of peace and comity among the nations. A reflection of this German and Italian extreme nationalism is found in Jewish nationalism or political Zionism."[39] This was an incredibly provocative statement by Philipson, drawing parallelism between Nazism

[37] Ibid., 474–475.
[38] Ibid., 477.
[39] Ibid., 479.

and Zionism. Rabbi David Philipson was married to Ella Meyer Hollander, who died in 1940. Philipson himself died in 1949, while participating at a CCAR convention, an organization that meant a great deal to him. [40]

Julian Feibelman

Rabbi Julian Feibelman was born in Jackson, Mississippi in 1897. Reared in the south, he graduated with an undergraduate degree from Millsaps College of Jackson in 1918, after which he enrolled in the United States Army during World War I. [41] Although never deployed abroad, he served his military duty in Mississippi at Camp Shelby for 15 months.[42] After being discharged, Feibelman began law school at University of Mississippi, but soon after enrolling decided to pursue a career as a rabbi. He studied at Hebrew Union College and was ordained in 1926.[43] Immediately upon graduation, Feibelman began serving as an assistant rabbi at Congregation Keneseth Israel of Philadephia, where he worked for ten years. During this time Feibelman cultivated his pastoral rabbinate, which he described as "more or less a part of [his] being."[44] Simultaneously while serving as a congregational rabbi, Feibelman earned an MA and a PhD at the University of Pennsylvania[45](Penn) and his dissertation was entitled *A Social and Economic Study of the Jewish Community of New Orleans.*[46] Additionally, he received an

[40] "Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers."
[41] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers," American Jewish Archives, accessed on January 24, 2012, http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/Feibelma.htm.
[42] Berkley Kalin, Interview with Julian Feibelman (November 8, 1968), MS 94, box 28, folder 12, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 1.
[43] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[44] Kalin, Interview, 10.
[45] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[46] Kalin, Interview, 8.

honorary Doctorate of Law in 1946 from Millsaps and a Doctor of Divinity from Hebrew Union College in 1955.[47]

Feibelman's activities during the 1930s and war years are very important for this study. Feibelman was in Philadelphia until 1936, when he returned home to the south and took a position as rabbi at Temple Sinai of New Orleans, where he served for thirty-one years.[48] In his book *The Making of a Rabbi*, Feibelman devoted a great deal of his time from 1933–1936, discussing the political nature of his time in Philadelphia and the complex relationship with the senior rabbi. He recalled that during his tenure in Philadelphia he was fortunate enough to meet many significant personalities—John Haynes Holmes, a close friend of Steven S. Wise[49] and the founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the American Civil Liberties Union,[50] Rabbi Steven S. Wise, Albert Einstein, and Adolph Ochs.[51] Feibelman served on community boards, studied at Penn, supervised the supplemental school at the synagogue, preached, and travelled to speak.[52]

Beginning in 1936, Feibelman began his work in New Orleans. This is when, in his book, Feibelman first began to address the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Europe, with the first mention of Nazi Germany occurring in November 1938. Feibelman was asked to serve as chairman of a meeting, at which General Smedley Butler, a distinguished Quaker and a career military officer, was asked to speak. Feibelman noted that the audience was comprised of those sympathetic to the National Council for the Prevention of War,[53] an organization with roots in

---

[47] Ibid., 8.
[48] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[49] Justine Wise Polier and James Waterman Wise, ed., *The Personal Letters of Stephen Wise* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956), vii.
[50] "John Haynes Holmes," Unitarian Universalist Association, accessed on March 4, http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/johnhaynesholmes.html.
[51] Julian B. Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi* (New York: Vintage Press, 1980) 303–309.
[52] Ibid., 315–316.
[53] Ibid., 347.

the 1920s that aimed for the creation of laws to settle international conflicts in the place of war.[54] Following the event, Feibelman received copies of letter correspondence between significant members of the New Orleans community mentioning Feibelman's outspokenness against Fascism, but criticizing his lack of effort to denounce communism. While Feibleman's position on communism is outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that already by 1938 Feibelman was drawing attention in the New Orleans community as an outspoken voice against Nazi Germany.[55]

This voice only continued to grow stronger as speculation about America's entrance into the war increased. In September 1939, Feibelman was invited to speak at the Institute for Human Relations held at Williams College. The topic of the Institute was 'The World We Want to Live In." While there a local preacher took ill, and Feibelman was asked to fill in as the preacher. His address was considered the keynote of the institute, and many of the members of the Institute were present in the audience. Feibelman said:

> The world we want must be ethical in its structure. Conscience, humanity, and human feeling must be a part of it. We can no longer live in a world without restraint...We have seen the most distinguished scientists exiled. The latest of great discoveries, the radio, become a vehicle for lies, propaganda and tyranny...The test of civilization is: how do the strong treat the weak, the proud the humble, rich the poor. And how do the mighty treat the gentle, the great—the small?[56]

---

[54] "Records of National Council for Prevention of War," Swarthmore College Peace Collection, accessed on March 4, 2012, http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG001-025/dg023NCPW/HistoricalIntroduction.htm.
[55] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 347–351.
[56] Ibid., 359–360.

The implicit reference to Nazi Germany was undeniable. Ironically and dramatically, on the last afternoon of the conference, Nazi Germany entered Poland. Feibelman reflected, "Everyone was sobered and grave sensing that the world was on the eve of another great war."[57]

In his book, Feibelman recalled the attack on Pearl Harbor and the role of the city of New Orleans in helping the military. As Feibelman was serving as the editor of New Orleans' *The Jewish Ledger,* he was a prominent voice in the community during the war years.[58]

His articles were often times controversial, yet thought provoking. However, Feibelman stated that his editorials were more of an exhaust valve for himself, rather than written to influence anyone in particular. However, the range of reader responses indicated that his paper was widely read and very influential. On one particular occasion, Feibelman critiqued Rabbi Stephen Wise's decision to issue a statement to the U. S. State Department about the atrocities facing the Jewish community in Europe. Feibelman commented in his editorial that such a statement would have been more forceful if it had been issued by the State Department itself and not by a rabbi. Such a critique came under serious fire from rabbis as far north as New York, as it was interpreted by some as a critique on American efforts to publicize the suffering of European Jewry.[59] The critique of Rabbi Stephen S. Wise went so far that Wise himself wrote a response to Feibelman in which Wise informed him that the State Department had in fact requested him to speak about the situation of European Jewry. In response Wise criticized:

> [Y]ou are more interested in protocol and fears of exaggeration than you are concerned about the infamous shame of Jewish mass murder in Hitler-Europe. I am sorry for you. I pity you. I consider your attitude disgraceful in every sense. Instead of lifting your finger to help your people, you traduce one who has sought

[57] Ibid., 361.
[58] Ibid., 364–365.
[59] Ibid., 389–391.

to do everything within his strength in order to touch the conscience of the American people...[60]

Feibleman's congregation took part in the war effort, by opening its doors to assist and entertain soldiers.[61] At age forty-five, Feibelman tried to enlist as a military chaplain, but he was denied entry due to his age. Instead, the Unites States military encouraged Feibleman to help out as much as he could on the home front, an endeavor that Feibelman took seriously. In 1943, Feibelman requested and was accepted for the summer as a field director of the American Red Cross in New Orleans. After leaving active service in the Red Cross field camps, Feibleman became chairman of the Camp and Field Committee and eventually chairman of the House Service Committee.[62] Additionally, in April of 1942, Feibleman also accepted an invitation from the executive secretary of the National War Labor Board in Washington asking him to help settle labor disputes in the community as they came up.[63]

The topic of Zionism continued to be a topic of conversation during the war years. Feibelman was asked to join the American Council for Judaism. Currently, the American Council of Judaism founded in 1942 describes itself as an organization that takes great pride in the American Jewish experience and understands Judaism to be a religion rather than an ethnicity or people.[64] Historically this organization was a movement associated with anti-nationalist tendencies and anti-Zionist ideology. However, Feibelman described his affiliation with the organization in the following manner: "I could understand their hope and aspiration, but I did not want to see a little nation in the midst of hostile neighbors. I had always considered myself a

[60] Ibid., 392.
[61] Ibid., 373.
[62] Ibid., 374–375.
[63] Ibid., 375.
[64] "The American Council for Judaism Principles," The American Council for Judaism, accessed on February 1, 2012, http://www.acjna.org/acjna/about_principles.aspx.

non-Zionist, not an anti-Zionist. I wanted to see a homeland, a place where every Jew, who wanted it, could go and live in peace with his neighbors, the Arabs."[65] Feibelman rejected nationalism, claiming that "no people were superior; however, some might be older, more cultured and perhaps more civilized and hard working. These, as well as all peoples, [*sic*] were entitled to a safe and secure home and protection for their way of life."[66] When discussing the American Council of Judaism, Feibelman said, "I was sympathetic to the attitude, because I had never been a nationalist. I remained in the Council until the state of Israel was established, and then I said, 'You don't argue with history.' Then I got out."[67] In addition to leaving the Council, Feibelman also encouraged others to abandon their anti-Zionist positions, because it was turning people away from the synagogue at a time when rabbis should be struggling to attract congregants.[68]

In 1943, Feibleman served as a confidential informant to the Office of War information in Washington, as he knew well the thoughts and sentiments of those in the South.[69] Initially, Feibelman provided information that he gleaned from being a part of the local city and community, expressing the opinions and attitudes of those around him. In general, the Office of War was interested in the broader community picture, and not in the ideas of specific persons.[70]

The war years also bought about a change in theology and orientation. World War II caused Feibelman to re-evaluate his understanding of God as the source of peace. He said, "It was not that I did not ardently hope that the Nazi machine would be toppled and crushed from the earth, but I felt that unconditional surrender was the ultimate in destruction. I had the

---

[65] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 384.
[66] Ibid., 385.
[67] Kalin, Interview, 13.
[68] Kalin, Interview, 14.
[69] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 398.
[70] Ibid., 398.

confident conviction that desolation of an entire continent was more than was necessary."[71] Feibelman began to question his prayer for peace, believing that God does not make peace; rather it must be established between men. Feibelman's prayers did not cease, but rather changed their content, instead he asked God to help move men to abide by God's laws.[72] Feibelman's theology throughout the war was that God gives humanity the free will to choose their behavior, and the ability to reject God's laws, but in the end all must answer to God.[73] In 1947 after the war had ended, the Council on Anti-Semitism was organized in Seeligsburg, Switzerland[74] by the National Conference of Christians and Jews[75] and Feibelman served as a delegate.

Outside of congregational life, Feibelman was very passionate about relations between Jews and Christians as well as those between whites and blacks, as evidenced by his participation in the National Conference of Christians and Jews.[76] Reflecting back on Temple Sinai and their policies toward racial diversity, Feibelman said, "throughout the years I have been proud that Temple Sinai was open, always, not only to the Negroes who came to services, which they did rather sparsely, but were always welcome—but to the meetings and gatherings which were well established in our Temple which was always integrated."[77] Integration was so important to Feibelman that he was responsible for organizing the first meeting on integration in New Orleans in 1949. Feibelman extended an invitation to Dr. Ralph Bunche, the Director of the United

---

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 400.
[74] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 343.
[75] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[76] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 340.
[77] Kalin, Interview, 2.

Nations Trusteeship Division, to use Temple Sinai to speak after he was prohibited from speaking at an auditorium in the city, presumably because he was African-American.[78]

Also, Feibelman's congregation participated in "Operation Understanding," which was a program that was run during a visit from Archbishop Cody,[79]that appears to have occurred in 1964. This program involved all churches and many synagogues being open to inter-faith guests. Temple Sinai participated in this event, and there were three designated Sundays when the synagogue participated, and on one occasion the archbishop even visited. On this occasion there were some 8,000 Christian visitors at the synagogue.[80]

Because of Feibelman's commitment to interfaith relations, he was invited to Notre Dame Seminary. Historically the seminary would not have invited a rabbi to speak on their campus, with a question and answer session, however the campus had begun to open up. His visit to the seminary was followed up by a visit to Temple Sinai by the students, where they received instruction on Judaism.[81]

Aside from interfaith relations, Feibelman was very active in other causes. He served as the president of the following organizations: the Louisiana Society for Mental Health, the Louisiana Association for Mental Hygiene, the Family Service Society, the Rotary Club and the Alumni Association of the Hebrew Union College. Feibelman served as an executive board member of the following organizations: the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the New Orleans Urban League, the Boy Scouts of America, the Foreign Policy Association, the Veterans Information Center, the Jewish Federation and the Jewish Community Center. Feibelman was a member of editorial board of the Jewish Publication Society. Finally, he also taught world

[78] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[79] Kalin, Interview, 2.
[80] Ibid., 2.
[81] Ibid.

religions at Tulane University and served as the Religious Director of the Southwestern Division of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. [82]

Feibelman's communal contributions did not go unrecognized. Feibelman received the Weiss Award from the National Conference of Christians and Jews in 1967, the Torch of Liberty Award from the Anti-Defamation League in 1974, the Annual Medal for Distinguished Service from St. Mary's Dominican College in 1967 and the Times-Picayune Loving Cup Award in 1968. He was also recognized for his commitment to the Boy Scouts and Goodwill Industries. [83] In 1938 Feibelman married his beloved wife, Mary Anne Fellman and they had one son, Julian, Jr. His incredibly productive life came to an end in October of 1980 at eighty three years old, after completing his autobiography, *The Making of a Rabbi.*[84]

Max Nussbaum

Max Nussbaum was born Moshe Nussbaum in Suceava, Bukovina, which was at the time still a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and after World War I became the North-east corner of Romania. Most Jews of Bukovina considered themselves as more "European" than other parts of Eastern Europe. Jewish life in Bukovina was open to modern trends—Zionism and other secularist tendencies.[85] It was in this environment that Nussbaum grew and explored Judaism. Growing up in a very observant home, one of Nussbaum's earliest memories was his father rising daily at three in the morning to study Talmud before going to synagogue. At the age of three, Nussbaum was enrolled in *heder (religious school).* Despite his father's strict Jewish observances, Nussbaum recalled that his father was quite worldly, speaking both German and

[82] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Lewis M. Barth and Ruth Nussbaum, *Max Nussbaum: From Berlin to Hollywood, A Mid-Century Vision* (Malibu: Joseph Simon/Pangloss Press, 1993) 7.

Yiddish with the works of Goethe and Scholler on the same bookshelf as the Talmud. Nussbaum's father Josef was the community *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) and the family generally struggled to make ends meet. [86]

Nussbaum refused to just accept his traditional upbringing and instead began to push the boundaries of orthodoxy from a very early age. In his early teen years, Nussbaum, with the help of his mother, purchased a western suit so that he would be able to attend the social events of numerous Jewish youth organizations. Next, Nussbaum strongly desired to attend the public high school, but this did not meet his father's approval, who believed that secular curriculum would pull the young Nussbaum away from Judaism. After climbing onto the roof of his house, writing lamenting poetry, and going on a hunger strike, his father finally capitulated to the persuasiveness of his mother, Rachel. He began in the public high school in Suceava and was involved in the Zionist youth group there, before transferring to the nearby town of Stroginetz to attend a very well known high school that paired intensive language courses alongside Jewish subjects. By this time, Moshe began to go by Max.[87]

Nussbaum returned home to Suceava to take his high school completion exam and remained there for a brief time. In 1927, he wrote a letter to his sister in which he described their hometown as a religiously stifling place, lacking adequate culture. From Suceava, Nussbaum left for his first semester at the University of Cernauti, where he studied philosophy. During this time Nussbaum participated in an amateur theater company and wrote for *Moledet*, a local periodical. With the support of his father, Nussbaum left Cernauti after one semester for Germany to pursue rabbinic studies. In 1928, Nussbaum began his rabbinical studies at the Jewish Theological Seminary and simultaneously enrolled in the University of Breslau, as was

[86] Ibid., 8.
[87] Ibid., 8–9.

required of all rabbinical students. This seminary, founded in 1854 by Zacharia Frankel, was the first modern institution to train rabbis. Nussbaum received *semicha* in 1933, which authorized him to serve as a rabbi and religious teacher.[88]

In Breslau, Nussbaum blossomed both religiously and culturally. Nussbaum's dual enrollment at the University of Breslau allowed him to study modern German, Russian, French, and European literature. In addition to studying, Nussbaum gained an expertise in European and Jewish theater, was broadcast on the radio as a theater critic, and began lecturing. As a requirement of his seminary, Nussbaum completed his doctorate in 1933[89] on "Kantianism and Marxism in the Social Philosophy of Max Adler."[90] It has been noted that Nussbaum's decision to write on a contemporary thinker was both significant and bold because it thrust his ideas into contemporary debates in intellectual thought occurring throughout Europe.[91]

While in Breslau, Nussbaum, an avowed Zionist, was exposed to major Zionist activity, which further fueled the flames of his passion. There Nussbaum heard Vladimir Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor for the first time. Although Nussbaum had a great appreciation for Jabotinsky, he nevertheless was opposed to his rightist position. During this time, Nussbaum believed that there was a need for a new generation of rabbis committed to Zionism, capable of inspiring the younger generation to dream of a Jewish homeland.[92]

It was finally time for Nussbaum's rabbinical career to blossom. Nussbaum moved to Berlin in 1934 to serve as a rabbi—the only young rabbi of East European descent. During the early 1930s, life for the Jews of Germany became increasingly trying. This was all the more

---

[88] Ibid., 9–10.
[89] Ibid., 10–11.
[90] "Finding Aid to the Max Nussbaum," American Jewish Archives, accessed on Feb 12, 2012, http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/MaxNussbaum.htm.
[91] Barth, *Max Nussbaum*, 11.
[92] Ibid., 10

evident in Berlin, the German capital. Nussbaum's own ideology was greatly influenced by the plight of the Jewish people, whose fate was inextricable bound to his while serving as their rabbi. These events led Nussbaum to embrace liberalism further. After the fact, Nussbaum wrote essays describing life under Nazism, entitled "How Jews Live in Germany Today," "Ministry Under Stress," and "Zionism Under Hitler." Nussbaum served the Berlin Jewish community in the capacity of rabbi until 1934–1936, until he was appointed to the esteemed position of Community Rabbi, a post which he served from 1934–1940.[93]

Although Nussbaum was very busy with rabbinic responsibilities as he was one of the few rabbis who remained in Berlin, he still found time to be involved in activities outside of congregational life. He was active in a group called *Judische Kulturbund in Deutschland,*[94] an organization that became more important as it attempted to fill the cultural gap for Jews who prohibited from attending public events. He served as both a speaker and critique of theater.[95] The theater served Nussbaum well, as he was introduced to his future wife, Ruth Offenstadt-Toby, a German Jewish national, at the opera in 1935, when Jews were still allowed to attend public cultural events. Offenstadt-Toby studied English and Romance languages at the Universities of Geneva and Berlin, until Jews were prohibited from university study. Offenstadt-Toby then pursued a career as a writer and translator. In the summer of 1938, they were first married civilly in Amsterdam, where Offenstadt-Toby was living, before returning to Berlin on Nussbaum's Romanian passport. A week later the couple was married by the Rabbi Leo Baeck in a Jewish ceremony in Berlin.[96]

---

[93] Ibid., 11–12.
[94] This organization functioned from 1933 until 1942 and offered theater and musical presentations to the Jewish community, which was socially important for the Jewish community after the Nazis prohibited them from attending public cultural affairs.
[95] Barth, *Max Nussbaum*, 12.
[96] Ibid., 12.

Although there were harsh restrictions on the Jewish community, Nussbaum nevertheless managed to continue his Zionist activities. Nussbaum managed to receive permission to travel abroad for Zionist purposes. In London Nussbaum met with Chaim Weizmann and informed him of the rapidly declining situation of German Jewry. Weizmann also introduced Nussbaum to Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, a man who would have a great impact on the life of Nussbaum. Wise would eventually arrange for him to escape Nazi Germany to America, to take a pulpit at Temple Israel in Hollywood, and support Nussbaum's Zionist activities.[97]

Nussbaum's decision to leave Germany and travel to America was emotionally challenging, physically dangerous, and ultimately became a foundational event in his life. Nussbaum and his wife left Berlin at the end of July 1940 for New York via Lisbon. Because of bureaucracy, the American Embassy denied a visa for Ruth's parents and her daughter. Regardless, Nussbaum and his wife knew that they had to leave Germany when they had the opportunity, and they were confident that they would eventually be able to bring them over later. Thankfully, Nussbaum and his wife were eventually able to bring his wife's parents and daughter to America. The community of Muskogee, Oklahoma, which would serve as Nussbaum's first pulpit, gave the guarantees that saved their lives. Hannah, his wife's daughter, finally arrived followed by her parents via Cuba. Tragically, Nussbaum was unable to rescue his own parents, whom he never saw again. In October of 1941 the entire Jewish community of Suceava was deported to Transnistria.[98] The trip to Sagorod, which was incredibly difficult on the Jews lasted until early 1942, led his parents to die of cold, starvation, and typhoid. Nussbaum learned of their fate via an announcement of the Red Cross. Despite physically leaving Germany, Nussbaum never forgot his beloved Berlin Jewish community. While still in Lisbon, after a

[97] Ibid., 13.
[98] For more information on the fate of the Jews in Transnistria between 1941–1944, see the following website: http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/c/carmelly-felicia/killing-fields-transnistria.html

harrowing journey, Nussbaum sent a letter to the leadership of Berlin, in the hope of assisting those who might undertake a similar passage. His letter detailed the specifics of his journey, problems they had encountered, and costs associated with such a trip. [99]

Once in America, Nussbaum began a process of advocating on behalf of European Jewry. Much to Nussbaum's surprise, he and his wife were not only greeted by friends upon their arrival in New York, but also swarmed by reporters who wanted first-hand accounts of the situation in Germany. Only two weeks after making such a momentous journey, Rabbi Wise, through a connection with Arthur Sulzberger of the *New York Times,* arranged for the Nussbaum to travel to Washington, DC. There they met with Henry Morgenthau, then Secretary of the Treasury under Roosevelt's administration and told him about the current situation in Germany. Nussbaum used this meeting to advocate on behalf of Jews who were trying to escape but found themselves unable because of bureaucratic restrictions. Nussbaum's best example was his wife's own daughter and parents. From here Nussbaum began his new life in America as a pulpit rabbi.[100]

Even once Nussbaum began pulpit life at Beth Ahaba Temple of Muskogee, Oklahoma, he never stopped advocating for European Jewry. In addition to his efforts to learn English, Nussbaum became actively involved in the American Jewish community. From the very beginning of his career in America, Nussbaum travelled extensively, spreading the word about the situation of the Jews in Germany and imparting his own personal feeling that the war against Nazism was a religious one. [101]

Even relocating continents, cultures, and languages could not stifle Nussbaum's love of academics. In 1941–1942 during Nussbaum's second year in America, he was invited by the

---

[99] Barth, *Max Nussbaum*, 13–15.
[100] Ibid., 14.
[101] Ibid.

School of Religion at the State University of Norman to serve on its faculty. He served as director of the Department of Hebrew Language and Literature and was a lecturer of Western and German philosophy. Nussbaum strove to fit in to the university campus attending sporting events and picnics, while also committing to the needs of Jewish students. Nussbaum founded a center for Jewish students on campus—the Jewish Student's Center at the State University, a forerunner of the Hillel organization. Eventually, Nussbaum was installed as the first local director of a Hillel by Abram Sachar.[102]

From Oklahoma, Nussbaum took a position at Temple Israel of Hollywood after being recommended by Sachar and Rabbi Wise in 1942. Temple Israel was in need of a rabbi because their current rabbi, Morton Bauman, was serving as a military chaplain. In September of 1942, Nussbaum wrote the following to his wife who was still with the family in Muskogee, "I had lunch with a member of the Board, who afterwards took me on a ride through Hollywood...It must be one of the spots on search which God designed and created during one of his most inspiring dreams..."[103] This new congregation was very different from Nussbaum's previous congregation. Temple Israel was founded by people who worked in the film industry, largely producers, in 1927. This young congregation had deliberately chosen Nussbaum to serve as their rabbi because of Nussbaum's path of religious development—observant upbringing and scientific study of Judaism in an academic manner. Additionally, the community was strongly drawn to Nussbaum's pre-war Western political liberalism and cultural imagination tempered by his consciousness of the tragedy of the Jewish people in Europe. Nussbaum went on to serve as the rabbi of Temple Israel for over thirty years. During this time he had significant contact with

[102] Ibid.
[103] Ibid., 15.

many stars and even officiated at their lifecycle events. Nussbaum socialized from time to time with the social elite of Hollywood.[104]

Nussbaum believed that his greatest rabbinic task was to be active in shaping his own American Jewish experience and that of his people. He believed that there were numerous ideological aspects that he considered essential: appreciation of American democracy, Jewish peoplehood, a commitment to Zionism and connectedness to the traditions of Western Europe and Rabbinic Jewish culture, albeit through a liberal lens. Additionally, having first experienced segregation when he arrived to America, he spoke out against racial segregation. He called Martin Luther King's work Zionism in black. He urged the American Jews community to re-envision themselves in light of the Black and Chicano movements as an ethno-religious group. Nussbaum used his pulpit as a place to send clear political messages. He publically defended the State of Israel and praised the courageous Israeli people. He actively criticized the US's policy in the Middle East when he perceived their actions as short-comings and at the same time freely criticized the actions of Israeli leadership when he disagreed. [105]

Nussbaum was very active in the American Reform movement. He regularly spoke at conferences of the UAHC. He also served on the Administrative board, which became the Board of Overseers, the body responsible for the establishment of the Los Angeles campus of Hebrew Union College. Outside of the movement, Nussbaum was very interested in the principles of Reconstructionism. He even invited Mordecai Kaplan to Temple Israel and allowed them to establish a Reconstructionist group within the congregation. Nussbaum was published in the national Reconstructionist publication.[106]

---

[104] Ibid., 16.
[105] Ibid., 17–18.
[106] Ibid., 18.

Although the East coast was the central hub for Jewish life in America, Nussbaum did not allow his geographical distance to prevent him from being an active player in American Jewish life. By 1946, only a few years after his arrival to America, Nussbaum had already been elected national vice-president of the American Jewish Congress. Nussbaum was also a member of the first United Jewish Appeal delegation to Palestine, active in the World Jewish Congress, and by 1962 was president of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA).[107] The ZOA was founded in 1897 and is the oldest pro-Israel organization in America. Often considered an organization with a right-leaning orientation, they aim to provide education to the following groups: the public, elected officials, media, and college/high school students. They intend to provide education on "relentless Arab war against Israel."[108] This was an incredibly important position that Nussbaum held. Organizations actively pursued him to leave his congregational rabbinate in favor of an organizational position, but that was not the route that Nussbaum desired.[109]

Historians who have studied Max Nussbaum have declared the 1960s as his golden age. In addition to the incredibly prestigious leadership positions mentioned, Nussbaum was also invited to Germany in the summer of 1965 by the Federal Republic of Germany, after they established relations with Israel. In 1968 Nussbaum visited Japan, Hong Kong, Bangkok, New Delhi, Bombay, and Iran as a representative of the World Jewish Congress, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and the World Union for Progressive Judaism. During these visits he met with leadership in these Jewish communities and lectured. Nussbaum also received the following honors and awards: a Doctor of Literature Degree (1961) conferred by Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognitive Learning, the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanities Award (1968),

---

[107] Ibid., 19.
[108] "What is the ZOA," Zionist Organization of America, accessed on February 14, 2012, http://www.zoa.org/content/about_us.asp.
[109] Barth, 19.

and along with his wife the Brandeis Ward of the Zionist Organization of America (1969). Finally, in 1964 Nussbaum and his wife were invited to dine at the White House with the visiting Prime Minister of Israel, Levi Eshkol.[110] Nussbaum died in mid-July 1974 of a heart attack in his home, surrounded by his loved ones. Although Nussbaum achieved many things during his lifetime, he was never fully able to comprehend how he had managed to escape Hilter's hell when his family, friends, and so many of his people were unable. This was a question with which he struggled his entire life.[111]

Harold Saperstein

Rabbi Harold Saperstein was born in Troy, New York in 1910 and was the grandson of Rabbi Hyman Lasker, a prominent Orthodox Rabbi in Troy. Graduating from Cornell University in 1931,[112] Saperstein was ordained from the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1935.[113] During his time at Jewish Institute of Religion, Rabbi Saperstein was mentored very closely by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise.[114] In 1933 while still a student, Saperstein began serving as a student rabbi at Temple Emanu-El of Lynbrook, Long Island.[115] Following ordination, he continued to serve this congregation as their rabbi for some forty-seven years. During his tenure the congregational membership grew drastically from only eighty-eight families to some 1,000 member families at its height.[116] During his career, he also served as an interim rabbi at the following locations:

---

[110] Ibid., 20–22.
[111] Ibid., 22–23.
[112] "Finding Aid to the Harold I. Saperstein Papers. 1930–1998," American Jewish Archives, accessed on January 24, 2012, http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/ms0718.html.
[113] Marc Saperstein, "A Spiritually Powerful Sect of Judaism: Two Sermons on the Dead Sea Scrolls by Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 61(2009): 145.
[114] Harold Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), xiii.
[115] Marc Saperstein, "A Spiritually Powerful Sect," 145.
[116] Harold Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit*, xv.

West London Synagogue of British Jews, Central Synagogue of New York, and Rodeph Shalom of New York.[117]

For the purpose of this study it is important to know about the thoughts and actions of Rabbi Harold Saperstein during the early 1930s and throughout the war years. Saperstein had long preached the message of pacifism, although such a message was not always welcomed by his congregants. According to one historian, Deborah Dash Moore, his pacifistic attitude was most likely the result of his early memories of the destruction caused by World War I and the toll that it took on the Jews of Europe. His attitude against war flourished in his youth, and when he graduated from Cornell in 1931, he was devotedly committed to resolving international conflicts through peaceful means. Reluctantly during the high holidays of 1940, Saperstein was forced to face the grim outlook of the situation in Europe, and came to the realization that peace on Hitler's terms was not peace and that sometimes there are more important things than peace.[118] For Saperstein, this change in orientation showed his flexibility and openness to respond the reality of the world in which he lived and not to be trapped in the realm of ideals.

Looking backward just one year, in 1939 Saperstein took a three month trip visiting the Jewish communities of Poland, Rumania, Egypt, and Palestine and was a delegate to the World Zionist Congress in Geneva, held in August. Writing home from Danzig in July, Saperstein predicted that a war was imminent. Saperstein returned in September of 1939 just as the army of the third Reich entered Poland. With his own eyes, he had seen swarms of Nazis and SS and the ruins of a beautiful synagogue that had been destroyed by the hands of Nazi perpetrators. This experience was a particularly powerful one for Saperstein.[119]

---

[117] "A Finding Aid to the Harold Saperstein Papers."
[118] Deborah Dash Moore, *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 16–17.
[119] Ibid., 1.

Outside of congregational life, Saperstein served as a military chaplain in the United States Army, being deployed in Europe from 1943 to 1946. His time spent in Europe was a particularly powerful event in his life, as evidenced by sermons upon his return home. He trained in a military chaplaincy program organized by the Army at Harvard University, and then served domestically at Fort Banks, Massachusetts.[120] Finally in the spring of 1944, Saperstein was deployed abroad to serve in Italy. There, he served alongside the 2nd Replacement Depot, whose military function was to provide combat replacement to units stationed on the front lines. This unit was transferred from Italy then to France, and eventually to Germany. In addition to giving pastoral care to soldiers of various faiths during this difficult time, Saperstein was also active in saving many vestiges of the Jewish community of Worms.[121]

The time that Saperstein spent deployed was a particularly powerful and life changing experience for him. During his time in the service, he catered to the needs of not only the Jewish soldiers, but he also spent significant time negotiating Jewish practice among the various Jewish chaplaincies whose personal practice greatly different from one another. However Reform chaplains were more prevalent than any other Jewish denomination in the army in World War II, as almost half of all chaplains commissioned were Reform.[122] One particularly moving experience as a chaplain that Saperstein recalled had occurred in late 1944. When a group of Jewish men would leave for the front lines, they would meet with the rabbi for a few moments. Saperstein noted that while this was usually particularly moving, by 1944 it had become routine and lost much of its meaning to him. Once in 1944, he gathered a group of Jewish men, barely enough for a *minyan*, and he instructed them to pause for silent prayer, as one man's voice

[120] "A Finding Aid to the Harold Saperstein Papers."
[121] Ibid.
[122] Moore, *GI Jews,* 129.

whispered aloud, "O God, watch over me and bring me back safe to my father and mother."[123] The raw sincerity and commonality with others' individual prayers made this moment incredibly moving for all present.[124]

In addition to religiously moving moments, Saperstein's service was also filled with other trying times. The experience of liberating France was particularly overwhelming for him. After traveling down a road lined with French nationals welcoming the American troops, Saperstein had a starling realization. It became clear to him that liberty was justification for war. Such a notion stood in contradistinction to his previously held pacifist views. However, his positive orientation to the war after liberating France in September of 1944 was tempered by new information that he continued to absorb as the war wound to a close. One morning while drinking coffee at a café in Grenoble, a place frequented by Jewish refugees, he asked Jewish refugees to share stories about the war, eager to learn more about Jewish experience. He learned that the Vichy French Police had in fact perpetrated violence against Jews. This new information stood in stark contrast to his memory of the Frenchmen welcoming the Americans as liberators.

He also learned that the records of the French resistance were not recording people as Jews, and were rewriting history as if the French Jews had not given their life in defense of their homeland. Upon liberation, when one French resistance member had reported to the prefecture to receive financial aid and told the authorities that he was a Jew, the official asked when he planned to leave France. This was after serving the country and being wounded in action. His conversations with Jewish refugees led to the conclusion that there was no hope for a future of Jews in France. This all was incredibly depressing for Saperstein.[125]

---

[123] Ibid., 145.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid., 204–205.

These experiences and the full realization of the Nazi killing machine, led Saperstein and many others to desire revenge on the Nazis. Saperstein found himself contemplating stealing Germany property, specifically while living in a requisitioned house. He initially took pictures hanging in a baby's room, thinking that he could use them in his own baby's room back in America. However as he thought about his son being raised in a room with stolen artwork, he was repulsed. In the end, Saperstein returned the artwork. In a letter that he wrote home to his wife, he said that he has found himself capable because of these feelings of revenge and the ability to do things he never imagined of which he would have been capable.[126] The experience of serving in the war left an indelible mark on Saperstein.

Outside of his congregational and wartime roles, Saperstein was particularly active in and passionate for many Jewish causes. He served in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the congregational body of the Reform movement in America as a "circuit rider."[127] The principle of a circuit rider was that rather than a preacher being geographically bound to a congregation, select charismatic orators would instead travel to many different periphery communities hoping to inspire Jews wherever circuit riders found them.[128] Saperstein then would travel to various communities in an effort to inspire fellow coreligionists throughout the country.[129]

Additionally, Saperstein served as a representative or delegate in many capacities. Saperstein was a delegate to the World Union for Progressive Judaism conferences and also served on its board for a number of years. Saperstein was very passionate about Zionism. His commitment to the creation of a Jewish state led him to serve as a delegate to the World Zionist

---

[126] Ibid., 220.
[127] "Finding Aid to the Harold Saperstein Papers."
[128] Eric Yoffie, "A Shabbat Morning Sermon," (sermon presented at the Small Congregations Conference, Colorado Springs , Colorado, April 21, 2001), http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/yoffie/archive/small/.
[129] The UAHC modeled there circuit riders from the Methodist model.

Congress in Geneva and to travel numerous times to Israel. Saperstein died in 2001 leaving behind his wife, daughter, and two sons, prominent American rabbis who continue to carry on his legacy of greatness.[130]

[130] "Finding Aid to the Harold Saperstein Papers."

Chapter 1: Hope, 1933–1938

Jewish preaching has always responded to the needs of the local community and beginning in the seventeenth century, the pulpit began to address Jewish suffering beyond communal borders.[1] Increased communication in the nineteenth century between local Jewish communities and those abroad led to feelings of unity and identification with Jewish communities overseas. Resultant feelings of Jewish peoplehood and a growing sense of communal responsibility led more and more rabbis to respond to the struggles of Jews in other lands with sermons from the pulpit. Upon hearing of cases of antisemitism and violence directed at Jews, emotions in the Jewish community were particularly high.[2] Such a state of communal arousal demanded an appropriate response from the rabbi, often through the medium of a sermon.

In the twentieth century, as word of the deteriorating situation of German Jewry reached America, Reform rabbis responded. Historically during a period of turmoil, rabbis would often provide words of guidance and comfort to congregants, paired with messages of inspiration and faith. Such messages of hope were often accompanied by a call for practical action in assisting Jews in need.[3] Reform rabbis provided messages of hope—hope that increasing antisemitism would end, hope that good will triumph over evil, and ultimately hope that the Jewish people will survive this tragedy as they have done throughout their history. The type of hope and the source of hope may vary from sermon to sermon and preacher to preacher, but the presence of hope throughout the sermons from 1933–1938 remains consistent. Increases in the presence of messages of hope appear to be directly connected to the arrival of new information from Europe

[1] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War*, 37–38.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

about the worsening situation of German Jewry (i.e. Hitler becoming chancellor, establishment of the Nuremberg laws, etc). Therefore, the sermons will be discussed in chronological order, first tracing the significant event in German history and then the corresponding rabbinic response.

This chapter will investigate responsive sermons written by Reform rabbis from the years 1933–1938, from the rise of Nazism to just before the beginning of World War II. The sermons presented in this chapter will be from rabbis David Philipson, and Harold Saperstein. As Philipson retired from his congregational position in 1938, the majority of his Holocaust era sermons were written in the period 1933–1934. Sermons by Max Nussbaum and Julian Feibelman will figure prominently into the next chapter, which will cover sermons delivered during the war years. Max Nussbaum's sermons prior to 1940 are entirely in German and Julian Feibelman's sermons from the years 1933–1938, as they are preserved in the archives, largely consist of illegible sermon notes.

Sources of Information from Germany in the 1930s

In order to show a connection between developing historical events in Germany and the corresponding response of some American Reform rabbis, one must first establish that there were lines of communication between Germany and the American Jewish community that enabled American Jewry to learn about events developing overseas. It is likely that American Jews received word of Jewish suffering in Germany and Europe via numerous sources—news agencies, international Jewish networks, and more informal networks, such as friends and family.

The newspaper was one major source of information to the American Jewish community of the events transpiring in Europe. Although the press covered the earliest events of 1933 in

Germany, it began focusing explicit attention on the deteriorating situation of the Jews in Germany in March of that year.[4] However, there were problems in reports coming out of Germany, despite the regular articles in newspapers across the country in both small and large cities. As historian Deborah Lipstadt points out, challenges to reporting from Germany included: questions of truthfulness of reports, conflicting counter reports from German authorities, and difficulties for foreign press reporting from Germany.[5] Despite such challenges, historian Laurel Leff argues that enough information reached the Allies and Jewish organizations that a diligent reader of the *New York Times* would have known what was happening to Europe's Jewish community as it happened.[6]

It is likely that Reform Jewish leadership, rabbis, and many congregants would have fallen into the category of "diligent readers" of the press, and therefore, would have been aware of developments in Germany as they transpired. Additionally, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, the publisher of the *New York Times*, the most influential newspaper in American discourse, was himself a member of the executive committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the congregational arm of the Reform movement[7] and from a German background, which would have oriented himself toward the situation of German Jews. Moreover, his role would have given him greater access to information of the deteriorating situation of his coreligionists in Germany.[8] Even if he was reluctant for political reasons to print such stories in his newspaper, it is likely that he may have shared information received about the suffering of German Jewry with other Jewish leaders in his community.

---

[4] Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 14.
[5] Ibid., 18–20.
[6] Laurel Leff, *Buried by the Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.
[7] Ibid., 12, 23.
[8] Ibid., 12.

As the Reform movement was a historically German creation, its members remained attentive to the needs of their Jewish brethren in Germany.[9] This would have led them to be even closer readers of the press. For instance, there were some 250,000 German Jewish immigrants to America by World War I.[10] Many of these newly arriving Jews added strength to the Reform community in America.[11] The connection of German-Americans to the Reform movement continued and in 1933, many Reform Jews still had a disproportionate amount of family in Germany. As a result of these familial connections in Germany, Reform Jews would have been particularly aware of events in Germany.

Furthermore, Jewish networks were an invaluable source of information about events around the world. As early as the mid-1920s the Jewish community was already monitoring developments in Germany and Eastern Europe. For example, in 1926, the American Jewish Committee (AJC) assigned Jacob Landau, the director of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA), to survey antisemitism in Europe. His research revealed increasing antisemitism in Germany and Poland.[12] By 1930, the American Jewish Committee had called a conference to discuss the September 1930 elections, which lead to the publication of a report by Morris Waldman entitled, "The Anti-Semitic Menace in Germany."[13] Additionally, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), an organization concerned with Diaspora Jewry, which has historically been governed by the principle that all Jews have a responsibility for one another,[14] had stationed permanent representatives throughout Europe. JDC's Berlin office closely monitored the developments of the Jewish community. Already in March of 1933, the chairman of the JDC

[9] Meyer, *Response to Modernity,* 313.
[10] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 66.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Gulie Ne'eman Arad, *America, Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2000), 80.
[13] Ibid., 88.
[14] "About JDC," American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, accessed on March 1, 2012, www.jdc.org/about-jdc.aspx?s=header.

campaign returned to America, reporting that the situation of the Jews in Germany was hopeless.[15] Leaders of the American Jewish community continued to observe the situation in Germany, as Americans continued to travel to Europe prior to the war's outbreak. Leadership within the Reform movement, including Stephen Wise and Julian Morgenstern, remained vigilant to events in Germany and spoke and acted on behalf of the Jews of Europe.[16] Without a doubt, through both formal and informal avenues, American Jewish leaders in general and leadership of the Reform Jewish community, in particular, were aware of the events developing in Germany as they transpired.

Hope in the Beginning: 1933

When Hitler came to power in 1933, the situation of German Jews began to deteriorate with the implementation of anti-Jewish policy including the dismissal of "non-Aryans" from government jobs, a general boycott of Jewish-owned businesses, burning of books written by Jews and those considered anti-Nazis, prohibiting Jews from owning land, barring Jewish lawyers and judges from their positions, preventing Jewish doctors from treating "Aryan" patients, and prohibiting the production of kosher meat.[17] By this time, David Philipson had already been serving as the rabbi at Bene Israel of Cincinnati for some 45 years. Philipson understood that the situation of the Jews in Germany was cause for concern. Already in 1933, Philipson reported that the situation of Germany Jewry was garnering attention from American Jews.[18] In that same year as information of developments in Germany was reaching Philipson

[15] Arad, *America Its Jews,* 110.
[16] Stephen Wise, *Challenging Years* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1949), 234; Meyer, *Response to Modernity,* 297.
[17] *Echoes and Reflections: A Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust* (Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Yad Vashem, 2005), 114.
[18] Philipson, *My Life as an American* Jew, 446.

quickly, he tried to determine the proper practical response to the Nazi treatment of German Jews. After receiving a letter from an eye-witness regarding the book burnings,[19] Philipson responded with a sermon, noting his shock at how things had progressed in Germany and condemning these actions.[20] Philipson also read this letter at an interfaith meeting intended to assess and discuss the developing problems in Germany. The resolutions reached at this meeting were sent to the acting German ambassador to be passed on to his government. Nothing came of these resolutions and Philipson was keenly aware of the deteriorating situation of Germany Jewry. This led Philipson to claim that "the situation was hopeless and that the thugs who had the reigns of the government in hand would be satisfied with nothing less than the liquidation of the Jewish of the country."[21]

Despite such a declaration of hopelessness, Philipson responded to the events in Germany through the medium of a sermon, often with a hopeful message.[22] It is likely that his sermon "The Song of Hope" given in 1933 (month unspecified) was also a response to the challenges being confronted by German Jewry. A message of hope was not an unfamiliar theme for Philipson. He had written words of hope in a New Year's issue statement developed by the local inter-faith community earlier that year.[23] It is possible that the message of hope in Philipson's sermon, "The Song of Hope," was a continuation of the message of hope that he had written for the New Year or perhaps it was a new call for hope in light of the developments of 1933 in Germany.

---

[19] Ibid.
[20] David Philipson, "The Burning of the Books," n.d., MS 35, box 4, folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[21] Philipson, *My Life as an American Jew*, 446–447.
[22] "Love and Hatred (Atonement Eve)," September, 18 1934, MS 35, box 4, folder 11, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; David Philipson, "Racial Fallacies," n.d., MS 35, box 5, folder 5, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; David Philipson, "The Religious Protest in Germany," November 18, 1934, MS 35, box 5, folder 5, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[23] Ibid., 445.

As evidenced by the title, "The Song of Hope," Philipson felt a need to address the apparent distress of the congregation directly. Although leaders such as Nahum Goldman, the future president of the World Jewish Congress, reported from Berlin in 1933 that "no immediate dangers are in sight" for the German Jewish community and publications such as the *Christian Science Monitor* assured its readership that Germany was a "heaven on earth,"[24] Philipson, nevertheless, most likely felt a need to respond to the panic that word of Jewish suffering had brought to his congregants. Having served the congregation for such a long period, one can assume that Philipson would have had his hand on the pulse of the community, and his response would attempt to meet the needs of his congregants.

Philipson began his Shabbat sermon "The Song of Hope,"—delivered on a Sunday, not uncommon in a classical reform congregation—by addressing the power of hope. His introduction begins with the Greek legend of Pandora's Box that taught that after all of the gifts of the gods had escaped, hope was saved. Philipson argues, "Were it not for the hopes which spring eternally in the human breast the burdens of existence would be unbearable. The better time is always coming. The ideals lead us on. Humanity is on the march towards finer and better things."[25] Ascribing to the belief that society progresses as time passes, Philipson firmly believed that the situation would improve.

Although not explicitly stated, it is reasonable to assume that when Philipson spoke of hope he was referring to the situation of the Jewish community in Germany. Immediately after speaking about optimism and pessimism, Philipson turns to the historical suffering of the Jewish

[24] Arad, *America Its Jews*, 111–112.
[25] David Philipson, "The Song of Hope," 1933. MS 35, box 5, folder 6, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

people. Looking back on the history of Jewish suffering and their continued perseverance and survival is a common theme found in hope sermons during this period.[26] Philipson stated:

> Possibly no more striking in the instance of the tremendous influence exercised by the quality of hope is furnished anywhere than by what is known as the Passover hope among the Jews. No people has passed through more gruesome experiences than did the Jews for centuries. Driven from pillar to post, persecuted, mobbed, pogromed and murdered during decades and centuries in all European lands they were enabled to endure because of the hope instilled by the faith which found constant expression in the words of the Psalmist, "the Lord is with me, I shall not fear."[27]

Philipson suggested that the situation in Germany was not a cause solely for despair, but for faith and hope as well because the situation, as he saw it, was not unlike other challenges that Jews had faced throughout history. Philipson concluded his sermon in an unabashedly hopeful manner, "humanity's future is based in hope; when all is said, we have no possession equal to hope; the finest name that we can give to our earthly habitation is to call it the place of hope."[28]

In 1933, Philipson presented another sermon, "Can We Still Hope?" that had almost exactly the same theme of hope as the sermon previously discussed. Much of this sermon was verbatim what was included in the previous sermon. The sermon is undated except for the note that it was delivered on Passover morning. Despite its lack of date it was most likely that the sermon "Can We Still Hope?" was written in 1933 and after the previous one "The Song of Hope." While the former sermon implicitly referred to the situation of the Jews in Germany, the latter explicitly mentioned the decline of Jewish life in Germany while often using the exact

---

[26] Arad, *America, Its Jews,* 123.
[27] Philipson, "The Song of Hope."
[28] Ibid.

same phrases and descriptions. Philipson's inclusion of explicit references to Nazism were most likely the result of more information having reached both the rabbi and congregants about declining conditions of Jewish life in Germany.

The arrival of such news and the resultant outcry among congregants would have necessitated a response from the rabbi. The sermon "Can We Still Hope?" speaks of the heartless cruelty of Hitler, signifying that Philipson had knowledge of events in Germany.[29] The first sermon's title was a declaration "The Song of Hope," suggesting that there was hope, whereas the second sermon's title "Can We Still Hope?" was an inquiry, as if he was now unsure of the answer. "Can We Still Hope?" seemed to be a response to those in the congregation who may have heard Philipson's message of hope delivered in the first sermon and now might question whether one can still hope in light of the fact that the situation in Germany appeared to be getting worse.

The historian, Gulie Ne'eman Arad, has described the Passover holiday in 1933 as an occasion in which Jewish redemption was contemplated across America.[30] For instance, one editorial that appeared in the *American Hebrew*, mentioned Hitler as one in a series of tyrants that the Jewish people had encountered and the editorial ended with a note of faith that this too will eventually end.[31] Philipson's sermon of hope could be seen within this discourse occurring in the larger American Jewish community.

In "Can We Still Hope?" Philipson reassured his congregants with an increasing pressure that they can hope, despite the fact that the situation of the Jews in Germany was not improving. He began with the same comparison found in his other sermon, of an optimist who hopes, versus a pessimist who despairs. He continued with the same sentence as he had used previously, which

[29] David Philipson, "Can We Still Hope?," n.d., MS 35, box 4, folder 3, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[30] Arad, *America, Its Jews*, 123.
[31] Ibid., 123.

detailed the historical suffering of the Jews and their continued faith. He continued, "Our Passover hope today is for the gradual disappearance of all hatreds and enmities, of all bigotry and fanaticism, of all inhumanity and intolerance. This is the dominant feature still of our Passover celebration."[32]

Philipson then raised the question that he most likely believed was on everyone's mind, "Can our German co-religionists sound that note of hope in these darkest days that possibly have ever befallen them?"[33] Philipson responded with a sense of urgency by tracing the chapters of suffering of Jews in Germany and the irony that suffering in Germany seemed a thing of the past for the Jewish community, who were free and loyal citizens. Philipson argued that Hitler's systematic cruelty cannot really be compared to any previous suffering of the Jewish people. He said that German Jewry face ruin and annihilation. He spoke of the harsh reality that Passover for them [German Jews] was a mournful period and that their future depended upon rallying the indignant public for help. Philipson ended his address with a practical suggestion—if the world expressed dissatisfaction with the suffering of the Jews and their treatment at the hands of the Nazis, then "...even Hitler and his minions will have to pay heed. An isolated [G]ermany is a ruined Germany. God grant that these madmen who are controlling the destiny of the Reich may soon be brought to their sense. That is our present Passover hope."[34] In this way, Philipson's hope was bound up in a call to action—that the world (he mentions the United States and England, specifically) need to hold Hitler accountable for his actions. Philipson hoped that the world would intercede. This was the source of his hope.

---

[32] Philipson, "Can We Still Hope?,"
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.

Hope 1934: Can this Suffering Last?

The year 1934 was one of false hopes for the Jewish community. In the early summer, German Jewry doubted whether Hitler's rule would continue due to internal political strife surrounding his military forces and because of severe economic hardships.[35] Jewish leaders in America were hopeful that the situation of German Jewry would improve.[36] Despite their hope for improved conditions, the vice-president of the American Jewish Congress and editor of a Yiddish newspaper *Der Tag* returned from a trip in Germany and published a report that the Jews of Germany had no other option than to emigrate.[37] Hopes of improvement began to wane when in August German president Paul von Hindenburg died and Hitler became Führer. In mid-August, the German people voted to approve Hitler's new powers by an overwhelming 90% majority vote.[38] Such a vote of confidence might be understood by American Jewry as an end to the hope that the German people will intercede.

Harold Saperstein, representing a new younger generation of Reform Jewish leadership, began serving at Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook (New York) while he was still a rabbinical student. Saperstein's uncle, Rabbi Adolph J. Lasker (1898–1933), had served there since 1929. When Lasker became ill, Saperstein substituted for his uncle, and upon his death, became the part-time rabbi of the congregation.[39] Temple Emanu-el had about seventy member families in 1934, mostly representing the middle to upper-middle class. The congregation's founding

[35] Arad, *America, Its Jews*, 177.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 179.
[38] "Holocaust Timeline," The History Place, accessed on February 28, 2012, www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html.
[39] *50th Anniversary Book,* nearprint of Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

members had grown up in traditional households and broke away in adulthood by choosing to affiliate with the Reform movement.[40]

In the congregation's *50th Anniversary Book*, Saperstein is remembered by the congregation as a young spiritual leader, filled with enthusiasm, who garnered immense respect and affection of his congregants.[41] One of Saperstein's greatest contributions was his preaching. In preparation for sermons, Saperstein read a variety of sources—newspapers, periodicals, and books in various languages.[42] Therefore, one can reasonably assume that Saperstein would have been following the events in Germany in 1934.

One of Saperstein's messages from the pulpit in 1934 was similar to that of Philipson's in 1933, in that it included both a message of hope and a call for action. However, unlike Philipson, Saperstein did not believe that the way to improve the situation of German Jewry was to call on foreign nations to advocate on their behalf. Instead, Saperstein called on the Jewish people to unite forces and defend their coreligionists abroad. The idea of the Jewish people coming together to create a democratic body to advocate on their own behalf was not uniquely the idea of Saperstein, but rather was likely passed on to Saperstein by his mentor, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise.

Saperstein was deeply inspired by his mentor's ideas. As mentioned in the introduction, Saperstein was particularly close to Wise during his time as a student at the Jewish Institute of Religion.[43] For a significant amount of time and particularly during the years in question, Wise served as the president of the American Jewish Congress.[44] Wise felt that for too long in Jewish history, the Jewish people had depended upon intermediaries to represent Jewish interests to non-

[40] Saperstein, "A Spiritually Powerful Sect," 145.
[41] *50th Anniversary Book.*
[42] Saperstein, "A Spiritually Powerful Sect of Judaism," 145.
[43] Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit*, xiii.
[44] Wise, *Challenging Years*, 202.

Jewish oppressors and that tradition had carried over to America. Wise believed, "A number of wealthy and influential individuals occupied themselves with problems of philanthropy and relief and constituted themselves the spokesmen and representatives of the [American] Jewish community whenever occasion required."[45] However, as masses of eastern European Jews arrived to America, they had no power to challenge issues which greatly affected them, and by 1910 the rumblings of discontent had continued to grow louder. According to Wise, the outbreak of World War I caused democratic stirrings among American Jews and they were poised to face the needs of Jews that resulted from the war—the needs of Jews in other countries, the threat to Jewish life in Eastern and central Europe, and the hope that Palestine would become a Jewish land.[46] The solution to the issue of adequate representation for all segments of the American Jewish community and the answer to the challenges that the world Jewish community faced, was, according to Wise and others, the creation of a democratic Jewish body, the American Jewish Congress (AJC). Their dream finally became a reality, as the first AJC convened in December of 1918, although not without resistance from certain segments of the Jewish community.[47]

At the first conference, a resolution was adopted calling for a similar representative body in other countries in the hope that a World Jewish Congress (WJC) would be convened.[48] Like the idea of the AJC, the creation of a World Jewish Congress did not appeal to everyone. According to Wise, those who rejected the creation of a WJC did so because they did not have faith in the capacity of the Jewish people to manage their own affairs in a democratic way. Wise also argued that some of these American Jews were afraid that their loyalty to America might be

[45] Ibid., 203.
[46] Ibid., 202–203.
[47] Ibid., 206.
[48] Ibid., 207.

questioned if they were to protest on behalf of Jews abroad and convene with Jews of other nations.[49] However, those who did not support the founding of a World Jewish Congress in 1934 provided other reasons for their dissenting opinions. Many long-standing American Jewish Organizations, such as B'nai B'rith, American Jewish Committee, etc., rejected the idea of World Jewish Congress based on the premise that the Jewish people did not constitute a national entity.[50] Therefore there was no need for an elected body to represent a group of people who did not exist. Additionally, many of these groups also failed to endorse the creation of the WJC because of its pro-Zionist sympathies and because they believed that "it attacked the goals and values of Emancipation."[51] Finally, as suggested by Wise, others rejected its creation because it created a problem of dual loyalty—to the Jewish collective and the home nation.[52]

It was in the face of such opposition in 1934 that Saperstein spoke to his congregants in a High Holiday sermon called "Past and Future," addressing both the presence of hope in the face of the suffering of Jews in Germany and the need for the creation of a World Jewish Congress. It is important to note that a High Holiday sermon may be considered a special category of sermon—one aimed at reaching the most people, since the highest annual attendance normally

---

[49] Ibid., 261–262.
[50] Menahem Kaufman, *An Ambiguous Partnership: Non Zionists and Zionists in America, 1939–1948* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1991), 47.
[51] Ibid., 74.
[52] Ibid. In 1936, Philipson and his Board of Trustees at Bene Israel Congregation sent the following response to Stephen S. Wise regarding his request to send congregational representatives to a conference in Washington to select seventy American Jewish delegates to serve as representatives to the World Jewish Congress. "Many reasons have led us to this conclusion, among which two particularly may be mentioned. First, as has already been well stated, the plan to organize a World Jewish Congress aims 'to supplant tried agencies which have one notable service for the Jews of the world and which enjoy the respect and confidence of both the general and Jewish public, and to endeavor to take their direction out of the capable hands in which they are, or, if this does not succeed to bring about a confusion which could weaken these existing agencies and replace them by an organization which would be without means or power to carry into effect the plans which have been and are continuing to be set up, and which have been of great benefit to the Jews in those countries in which such benefits are so urgently required.' And secondly, we cannot but dissent in principle from any plan to hold a World Jewish Congress based, as this is, upon the conception of Jewish nationhood. As Americans we find our national representation in the Congress of the United Sates, and not in a Jewish congress, whether defined as 'American Jewish Congress' or 'World Jewish Congress." Philipson, *My Life,* 470.

occurs during this time. These sermons tend to be more thought-out than regular weekly sermons.

Saperstein felt an increased sense of urgency when he told his congregants in his High Holiday sermon, "Past and Future," that hope did exist for the Jews of Europe, but that the Jewish community needed to re-evaluate the ways in which they have addressed increasing antisemitism that has been spreading throughout the world. Like his mentor, Stephen Wise, Saperstein believed that hope lay in the ability of the Jewish community to advocate and stand up for themselves. He urged his congregants:

> The old hope that the progress of civilization would bring about the day when Jew hatred would disappear and when all men would live together as brothers is now but a vain delusion. We know now that we can't expect the Jewish problem to be solved merely by forgetting that we are Jewish. We realize at last that our only hope for safety and survival lies not in the minimizing our Jewishness but in strengthening it. Here too we must face the future with courage. Here too we must try new methods and experiment with new institutions. A World Jewish Congress is such a new solution.[53]

Saperstein firmly believed that this reorganization of the world Jewry into a World Jewish Congress was the only effective way for the Jewish community to be guarantors of their own hope.

Other rabbis also used the High Holidays of 1934 as an opportunity to preach messages of hope about the situation of European Jewry. For example, Philipson was also urgently preaching messages about the deteriorating situation in Germany. Moreover, Philipson noted the special nature of a High Holiday sermon and of the rabbi's ability to select from an endless array

[53] Harold Saperstein, "Past and Future," 1934, MS 718, box 5, folder 6, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

of topics. Nevertheless, he told his listeners, he felt compelled to speak about the immense hatred in Germany. He wrote:

> It goes without saying that the climax to these disheartening phenomena has been reached in Naziland. There hatred is the sign wherewith to conquer. Songs of hate are being constantly chanted. A rising tide of inhuman action has engulfed the people of that country.[54]

Philipson and Saperstein's usage of the High Holiday sermon of 1934 to encourage hope and action appears to be a part of a broader discourse from the *bima* during that year.

Hope 1935–1936: The Unimaginable

In 1935, the social environment in Germany drastically changed and the status of Jews decreased in ways that had previously been unimaginable. The Reichstag adopted the Nuremberg Laws that effectively removed citizenship from German Jews.[55] Reports of the passage of Nuremberg Laws in September of 1935 made major press in America, including *Newsweek.* It is important to note, however, that the American press underestimated the far-reaching implications of the new laws and in the fall of 1935 it was distracted by Mussolini's threatened war against Ethiopia.[56] Nevertheless, as previously argued, those who were motivated to know about the events transpiring in Germany had access to timely information.

As Hitler was passing the Nuremberg Laws, the world's countries were preparing for the 1936 Olympics. Berlin had been chosen as the site for the Olympic Games by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1931 as an attempt to honor the new German democracy. The

---

[54] Philipson, "Love and Hatred."
[55] *Echoes and Reflections*, 114. Marriage and sexual relations between Jews and "Aryans" were criminalized. German females under forty-five years of age were barred from being employed by Jews. Finally, Jews were forbidden to wave the flag of the Reich or display the flag's colors
[56] Robert H. Abzug, *America Views the Holocaust 1933–1945* (Boston: Bedford, 1999), 55–56.

IOC suddenly found itself embarrassed by racial restrictions being placed on Jewish athletes and harassment of African American and other non-white participants. The IOC pressured the Nazi party for assurances that Jews and other "non-Aryans" could train and compete as equals at the games. Regardless of the fact that the IOC did receive official promises from Germany that equality would be observed, many Jewish and Catholic organizations, as well as the media, led by the *New York Times*, urged a boycott of the games.[57] Ultimately two of the three American members of the IOC led the effort for participation in the games despite the fact that a Gallup poll taken in March of 1935 showed that some 43% of Americans favored a boycott of the games.[58] In response to the international pressure put on Nazi Germany, antisemitic propaganda was relaxed and downplayed around the time of the Olympic Games to avoid criticism from foreigners.[59] The widespread discussion surrounding America's participation in the Games broadened Americans' knowledge of the conditions in Germany. This was the first time that there was sustained debate in America about the events occurring in Nazi Germany.[60]

In 1936, Saperstein once again used his High Holiday pulpit as an opportunity to provide words of hope. Saperstein's message of hope in 1934, which instructed congregants that the Jews could be the masters of their own future, was clarified and qualified in his Rosh Hashanah sermon of 1936, "The Jew on Trial." Historically, it is also important to note that the dream of a World Jewish Congress that Saperstein had presented in 1934 as the answer to Jewish suffering and the promise of hope had been fulfilled only a month prior.[61]

---

[57] Ibid., 60–61.
[58] Ibid.
[59] *Echoes and Reflections*, 114.
[60] Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief*, 74–79.
[61] "About the WJC," World Jewish Congress, accessed on February 17, 2012, http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about.

It is under such circumstances that Saperstein's Rosh Hashanah sermon of 1936 was written and delivered. With ever-increasing urgency Saperstein presented the harsh reality of the current situation of the Jew, on trial before the world. Saperstein noted that Jews throughout history had failed to be unified. Saperstein argued that, "(I)f we are to survive in this world of hate and bitterness we must forget those petty differences which vitiate our strength and join in constructive effort."[62] One could argue that this was an attempt by Saperstein to garner support and encourage unity for the newly created World Jewish Congress. Saperstein explained that the position of the Jew throughout history has always been a difficult one, saying "we have been made the target for every vile accusation," despite the fact that the Jewish people have given the world democracy, prophetic teachings, and social justice.[63] It is important to note that Saperstein was pointing to a dichotomy between the significant contributions that the Jewish people have made to society in contrast to the way in which they were being treated. The reference to the Jewish people as the producers of prophetic teachings and social justice would have been understood in the 1930s within the context of the Social Gospel movement that was popularized in America in both American Protestantism and Reform Judaism. Jewish Social Gospel can be understood as a movement aimed at creating a just and perfect world.[64]

Despite such contributions, Saperstein presented the harsh reality of the state of the Jewish people throughout the world and their current position in Europe:

> Are we a nation of Shylocks that seeks its pound of flesh. What has the world given to the Jew. It has confronted him with hate and persecution and heaped upon him abuse and ridicule. It has spat into his face and spilled his blood. And

[62] Harold Saperstein, "The Jew on Trial" (Rosh Hashanah), 1936, MS 718, box 5, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Darren Kleinberg, "Reform Judaism and the Jewish 'Social Gospel,'" *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (2009): 150–165.

what has the Jew given to the world. In the very lands where he has suffered most he has poured out his genius for the upbuilding of national life and culture. The world has given him hate and he has answered with love. The world has given persecution and he has answered with service.[65]

Nevertheless, Saperstein holds on to his hope for peace. He concludes his Rosh Hashanah address in the following manner:

> Let this New Year's day bring us the strength and courage to be loyal to our standards, despite threats, despite condemnation, despite... Dark though the dawn of this New Year may be, let us find hope in the words of the poet James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) —
>
> > Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne
> > Yet that scaffold says the future, and behind the dim unknown
> > Standth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.[66]

Hope 1938: America?

By 1938 the situation for German Jewry was dire. The Reich Supreme Court had declared that being a Jew was grounds for being fired from a job. Jews had the names Israel or Sarah added to their official identification papers[67] and passports were invalidated.[68] Jews were forbidden from attending cultural functions and prohibited from owning phones or drivers' licenses. Some 30,000 Jews, many of them prominent leaders of the Jewish community, were sent to concentration camps. However, many of these early prisoners were permitted to leave the

[65] Saperstein, "The Jew on Trial."
[66] Ibid.
[67] *Echoes and Reflections*, 114.
[68] "1938--The Fateful Year," Yad Vashem, http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/01/crucial_year.asp, accessed on March 1, 2012.

camp, provided that they could secure the proper paperwork for emigration. By the end of the year, all Jewish stores were forced to close and Jews had strict curfews.[69]

Two other significant events took place in 1938 that garnered much media attention in America. First, when Hitler annexed Austria on March 12, 1938, approximately 185,000 Jews came under Nazi control. Americans were shocked to read about the brutal manner in which the Jews of Vienna were treated.[70] Nazis, almost from the very beginning of annexation, began beatings, roundups, confiscation, and other forms of harassment.[71] Then on March 25, President Roosevelt invited thirty-two nations to send representatives to a conference in Evian, France. This meeting was scheduled to convene in July to discuss the refugee crisis. As the historian, Gulie Ne'eman Arad suggested, the outcome of the conference was explicitly spelled out on the invitation—"No country would be expected to receive greater number of immigrants than is permitting by its existing legislation."[72] *Newsweek* reported back on the result of the conference—"Most governments represented acted promptly by slamming their doors against Jewish refugees."[73] Regardless of the outcome, many Americans, Stephen Wise included, were quick to laud the president for his swift action.[74]

The other significant event that occurred on November 9–10, 1938 was Krishtallnacht, the night of broken glass. This antisemitic event was planned by Nazi leadership and was led by Joseph Goebbels, the minister of propaganda. During this horrific pogrom, some 90 Jews were murdered, more than 1,400 synagogues across Germany were burned, and Jewish business were destroyed and plundered. As if the atrocities committed against the Jewish community were not

---

[69] *Echoes and Reflections*, 114.
[70] Arad, *America, Its Jews,* 196.
[71] Abzug, *America Views the Holocaust*, 71.
[72] Arad, *America, Its Jews*, 196.
[73] Ibid., 196.
[74] Ibid.

enough, the Jewish community was forced to pay compensation for the damages.[75] Word of the events of Krishtallnacht spread to America so quickly, through American Press and via personal letters,[76] that even the German ambassador to Washington in November of 1938 issued a statement, which noted the sudden shift in America's perception of Germany.[77]

As the situation of the Jews continued to deteriorate, Saperstein nevertheless continued to use his High Holyday pulpit to preach words of hope. In his Rosh Hashanah sermon of 1938, entitled "Climbing Heights," that was delivered after the Evian Conference but before Krishtallnacht, Saperstein spoke of the power of faith and worship at synagogue to raise oneself up from the depth of despair. Having recently returned from a trip to Mexico, Saperstein referred to his experience exploring two volcanic mountains, which according to native legend, had taken on the personification of gods. Drawing a comparison, Saperstein urged his congregants that the High Holidays of the Jewish calendar are also mountains, "raising their towering peaks above the level of our daily life, dominating the spiritual topography of our existence."[78]

Although the sermon, "Climbing Heights," does not explicitly refer to the despair caused by the worsening situation in Germany, from its dating and content one can implicitly infer its topical connection. Similar to Philipson's sermons in 1933, Saperstein went through a historical timeline of Jewish suffering from Jewish life in the medieval Ghetto, where Jews were "forced to wear the yellow badge –to bear a daily burden of insult and scorn," to 12th century crusades to the 17th century Czimielnitzki massacres, and even Eastern European Ghetto life, referring to life

[75] "1938-"The Fateful Year."
[76] Abzug, *America Views the Holocaust*, 72–74.
[77] "Reactions to Kristallnacht in the United States," Shoah Resource Center of Yad Vashem, http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203320.pdf, accessed on March 4, 2012.
[78] Harold Saperstein, "Climbing Heights" (Rosh Hashanah), 1938 MS 718, box 5, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

in the Pale of Settlement.[79] His chronology ended with 1938, suggesting Jews' history of suffering continued. Saperstein argued that through all of these dark periods in history it was the Jewish spirit, the knowledge of being chosen, and not feeling self-pity that allowed the Jewish people to overcome these challenges and "to rise above life."[80] The implicit suggestion was that the same lessons can be applied to the suffering of the Jewish people in the present.

Focusing on a more contemporary example that might inspire the congregants, Saperstein argued that a similar powerful process of commitment to faith/ideals is occurring in the land of Palestine—"their life itself is the achievement of an ideal."[81] Saperstein lauded the pioneers of the Jewish homeland in the following way: Not only are they building a home for themselves. They are building a homeland for Israel. And it is that conviction which strengthens them to carry on dauntlessly, in the face of seemingly overwhelming discouragements...[82] Saperstein even described one detail in great depth, the community of Maaleh haHamisha, in which five Jewish pioneers were ambushed and shot. A traumatic incident that may have caused others to flee, in fact inspired these pioneers to build their permanent homes at this site.[83] Saperstein then urged his congregants to re-evaluate their priorities and encouraged them to attend services regularly and to have faith in God, however they may conceive of the divine. Saperstein makes the sermon applicable to both those who might despair because of the situation of the Jews in Europe, as suggested by the aforementioned timeline, and those Jews who may simply be in a rough place. Such an appeal was most likely an effort to make sure that the message of the High Holiday sermon, hope and faith, was universally applicable and relatable. Strikingly the promise

[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.

of hope is no longer the World Jewish Congress, but now the hope is faith in God, principles, embodied through the synagogue:

> It is the synagogue which holds before us the picture of a world, cleansed from the diseases of hatred and strife—in which human beings released from the shackles of economic, political and intellectual slavery may rise to their full moral stature—it is the synagogue which holds up to man the ideal of Israel, the priest people, eternal guardians of the light of the divine law.[84]

One could suggest that the American Jewish community was in need of a new source of hope, since the World Jewish Congress had not been able to alleviate the suffering of the German Jews and prevent the annexation of Austria, or the deportation of Jews. Therefore Saperstein's message shifted to personalized message relatable to all of his congregants. Perhaps hope could be found in faith in God—just as God had sustained the Jewish people in the past, so would God sustain the Jewish people in the present or perhaps faith could be found in the rebuilding of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, where ideals were firmly clung to, even in the face of despair. Saperstein was aware that the Jewish community needed a renewed sense of hope.

Conclusion

The sermons of Philipson and Saperstein between the years 1933–1938 directly responded to the unfolding events in Germany. As the rabbis and their congregants became aware of the suffering of German Jewry, the rabbis responded with messages of hope and calls for action. Calls for action ranged from Philipson's suggestion that other nations hold Germany accountable for their actions to Saperstein's suggestion call for the creation of a World Jewish Congress, increased involvement at the synagogue, charity for Jews in need, and the continued efforts for

[84] Ibid.

the building of a Jewish state. From 1933–1938 the sense of urgency in the rabbis' messages continued to increase, despite the fact that it was not always clear to American Jewry that things were getting progressively worse Just as rabbis have done throughout Jewish history, these rabbis struggled to meet the congregants' spiritual needs in face of the great Jewish suffering and to instill a message of hope, despite the current reality.

Chapter 2: Hope, The Early War Years: 1939–1942

As the situation of European Jewry showed no signs of improvement in 1939 and Germany entered Poland in September of that year beginning World War II, Reform rabbis in America struggled to meet the spiritual needs of their congregants, though America had yet to enter the war. Through the medium of the sermon, they encouraged their congregants not to give up hope and faith in God, despite the new range of practical and theological questions that this period raised. Despite the inherent challenges, Rabbis Harold Saperstein, Max Nussbaum, and Julian Feibleman attempted to push their congregants in different ways to encourage hope for the future of Judaism and instill faith in God. Each, in his own style, tried to address the deteriorating situation in Europe and the meaning of such a catastrophe for American Jewry. The messages of the rabbis largely reflected a balance of who they were as people and the needs of their congregants.

This chapter is organized by rabbi as this format best allows one to highlight of changes within a specific rabbis' message throughout the period and any shift in intended audience. Rabbi Saperstein struggled during this period with how to inspire his unengaged congregants to recommit to Judaism, at a time when he believed that American Jewry represented the future of Judaism. One can also see that throughout this time period that his sense of hope, at time, wavers, only to be reinvigorated after America entered into the war. Rabbi Nussbaum's sermon takes an unexpected turn for a rabbi who was a rabbinic presence in Berlin until 1940. Instead of an anticipated heightened sense of urgency and a call to political or military action on behalf of European Jewry, he instead used his words to explain the roots of Nazism as a religious war. Finally, Julian Feibelman presented a model for action, while his intended audience changed throughout the period from a specific demographic of his congregations to the entirety of

American Jewry. Despite these differences, each Rabbi struggled to suggest actions that they thought would ensure Judaism and meet the emotional needs of American Jewry.

Harold Saperstein

By the High Holidays of 1939, Harold Saperstein had been serving as the rabbi of Lynbrook, NY for five years and had often delivered sermons on Nazism and the horrendous situation of the Jews of Europe. The High Holidays of 1939 were overshadowed by the outbreak of the war and many American rabbis conceived of the outbreak of another catastrophic war among civilized European nations as failure of humane values.[1] Having recently returned home from a three month trip through Europe and Palestine in September of1939, where Saperstein had visited the Jewish communities of Poland, Rumania, Egypt and Palestine, he especially was attuned to the situation of world Jewry. During his trip, Saperstein knew that the war was inevitable and he was bothered by the presence of Nazi storm troopers throughout Europe and the destruction of Jewish institutions that he had witnessed himself.[2] The impact of the war was devastating to this avowed pacifist.[3]

Very shortly after his return to America, Saperstein delivered a sermon "Unconquered" to his congregants, who had received word of the events of Kristallnacht and the outbreak of the war. His sense of urgency of message was tangible and powerful. The message was no longer simply one of hope, as suggested in his High Holiday sermon in 1938, but now it was paired with a new call for action. In this sermon, Saperstein clarified the source of his hope, which was based upon his own first-hand account in Europe. He declared to his congregants, "this morning

[1] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching*, 389.
[2] Moore, *GI Jews*, 16–17.
[3] Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit*, 68.

I intend to discuss the Jewish situation in this hour of crisis."[4] He informed his congregation that the current situation of the Jews was different from other tragedies that the Jewish people had faced—this is suffering of the Jewish people and the world's doors are closed to their immigration.[5]

Saperstein shared his own personal experience of individuals whom he had met and images of Nazis patrolling the streets. He likely included these stories as a way to personalize the suffering of German Jews, who might have seemed a faceless multitude to his congregants and to arouse concern and interest from those who may have been unengaged with the developments in Europe. Additionally, the opportunity to share his own anxiety and stress over the deteriorating situation of the Jews was probably cathartic. The possibility that Saperstein might have been concerned about American apathy concerning the outbreak of the war was not unfounded. As one historian put it, "once he [Saperstein] walked down the gangplank onto a Manhattan west-side pier [after returning from his trip], he entered a world far removed from the violence of Europe and the Middle East."[6] In 1939, American Jewry enjoyed the luxury of physical security and could ignore the political developments in Europe if they desired.[7] Therefore, Saperstein's usage of personal narratives from his trip may have been particularly appropriate and moving to inspire a congregation of listeners to be attentive to the events in Europe.

Saperstein shared a powerful interaction that occurred on a train ride to Danzig. He recalled seeing an older man on the train, although he did not speak to him. As Saperstein

---

[4] Harold Saperstein, "Unconquered (Rosh Hashanah)," 1939 MS 718, box 5, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[5] Moore, *GI Jews*, 2. The comment referring to the world being closed to immigration is clearly a reference to the lack of resolution reached at the 1938 Evian Conference in regard to Jewish immigration and Saperstein's dissatisfaction with the result.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

disembarked from the train, he did not know where to go, and he was incredibly overwhelmed by the storm troopers, who surrounded him. He recalled that he turned to the older man for help, telling him that he was an American tourist. Suddenly, Saperstein asked the man if he was Jewish. The man did not immediately respond, probably pausing to question the identity of the man making the inquiry. Eventually the man confirmed Saperstein's suspicions that he was in fact Jewish, and from there, Saperstein and his new acquaintance began to tour Danzig together. This man shared his heart-wrenching story with Saperstein about how happy he had previously been with his wife, his house, and his job managing a famous German press company. Now, his wife had died, his home was lost, and he had been forced out of his job. He was poor and alone.[8] This story provided listeners with a personal story and likely left them feeling some of the suffering of the German Jewry.

After he made an appeal to the emotions of his listeners, Saperstein called for specific actions to guarantee hope for European Jewry. According to his prescribed plan, in addition to giving charity to the suffering Jews, his congregants "must have a positive program."[9] His suggested program was one of hope. Saperstein urged that, "the Jewish people have never yielded to the counsel of despair—they have never permitted tragedy to become the totality of Judaism—they have insisted on marching forward despite everything."[10] Saperstein's plan for how to move ahead included the building up of Palestine as a homeland for the Jews. He believed that one designated homeland for the Jews was necessary, in addition to having centers for Jewish life all over the world. The other area for advancement was the strengthening of Jewish life. He boldly proclaimed:

---

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

> There is no room for any more *parvah* [italics mine] Jews. Either you're *milchig* [italics mine] or you['re] *fleishig* [italics mine]. Remember this, that enemies can take everything away from us except two things—our faith and our hope—our faith in the ultimate triumph of right and our hope for a better future. Without these we are lost. With these we are unconquerable.[11]

In one last ditch effort to inspire hope among his congregants, Saperstein told of the hope that those suffering in Europe have, despite their current reality. He shared the story of an opera that he saw in Cracow. It was a play based on the revolt of Bar Kochba, however the ending had been altered. Instead of the play ending as a tale of tragic defeat with Bar Kochba committing suicide, Rabbi Akiba appeared, refused to escape, and instead gave his all to the revolt. His final words in the play were: "They will strike you but they cannot destroy you. We shall be as the stars of the heavens. The Jewish people will live."[12] Saperstein believed if those who are suffering daily in Europe can still hope, how can American Jews not do the same? Saperstein's final charge to his listeners summarized his entire inspirational message:

> Israel is shattered. But its spirit must remain firm. And while at any moment other things may triumph in the final analysis of the spirit which triumphs in history. The spirit of Israel is eternal. With God's help, it will march on, as it has, through the centuries, unconquered.[13]

Saperstein's message had increased urgency and yet was still one of hope, faith in God, and a call to action on behalf of suffering European Jewry. Together Saperstein hoped that this combination might ensure a future for Jewish life.

---

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

Soon after this Rosh Hashanah message, Saperstein delivered a Yom Kippur address, "The Best in Us," in which he spoke of the power of the individual spirit to rise above when a situation necessitates it.[14] The sermon began with an anecdote about a poor, old man, who walked into a music shop with the intention of selling a worn violin. The store clerk had just rejected the attempt of the old man to sell his violin when a stranger walked into the store and upon seeing the old violin, lit up. The man took the violin in his hands and began to play a beautiful song. He then announced, "I am Paganini[15] and that violin is a Stradivarius."[16] From this story, Saperstein builds a bridge to the rest of his Yom Kippur sermon, in the following manner:

> The violin seemed ordinary. But the touch of the master drew from it the potential beauty and power that was hidden within it. And so it is with most of us. We go through the year occupied in our daily tasks—so busy making a living that we are little concerned about spiritual welfare[.] In fact, some of us pride ourselves on the ability to get along without religion.[17]

Saperstein's Yom Kippur sermon continued by giving examples of people who had risen to the challenge, such as inmates at a prison where Saperstein served as a chaplain and a children's home for at-risk boys. Looking at ordinary people, Saperstein pointed out that often regular people get distracted from what is truly important in life. Saperstein noted that if there ever was a time to rise to the occasion it is now. Saperstein stressed that Jewish values embodied in the words of Jonah that are read on Yom Kippur,[18] are "tragically needed in the world if ever

---

[14] Harold Saperstein, "The Best in Us" (Yom Kippur), 1939 MS 718, box 5, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[15] Niccolo Paganini (1782–1840) was a renowned Italian composer and violinist.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] This is a reference to Jonah 1:9. When Jonah is asked about his native country and people (Jonah 1:8), he responds "I am a Hebrew," he replied. "I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land" (Jonah 1:9).

those moving words of the prayer are to be fulfilled when wickedness shall vanish like smoke for the reign of evil shall have passed away from the earth."[19]

Saperstein delved further into the situation of the Jews in Europe by stating that the war would put the Jewish ideals of human brotherhood and love to the test. He viewed the war as a tragic necessity, but felt that it should not become an accepted part of life. Saperstein stated, "the Jew, like every other human being, must at times become the victim of war—but he must never permit himself to become the victim of the war spirit. He must fight in self-defense when necessary—but he must never forget the mission of Israel is peace."[20] He concluded his sermon with the following prayer:

> Let the Yom Kippur recall us to the ideals of our people. No matter how they [may] be shaken by the events of the hour—no matter how much it may seem that they have been defeated, we must not yield. Either Hitler is right in his philosophy of life—or we are right in ours. We cannot both be right. If [we] take over his philosophy we have lost the very thing we are fighting for. Love, brotherhood, righteousness, justice, peace, freedom those ideals of our prophets represented the best that is in our Jewish heritage. Let us strive to be worthy of this best. Let us now on this Yom Kippur dedicate ourselves to their fulfillment. Amen.[21]

This Yom Kippur sermon was fairly typical of Saperstein's other High Holiday sermons, combining a hopeful message with a call to action. However, the hopeful nature in his High Holiday sermons of 1939 may be seen as more noteworthy in that he continued to retain his hopeful tone despite experiencing Nazi antisemitism firsthand in Europe.

---

[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

While Saperstein's sermons from 1934 through his is High Holiday sermons of 1939 all contained a call to action, the type of actions he encouraged changed in 1938. It seems likely that this change in the thinking initially began as word spread about the implementation of the Nuremberg Laws in 1938 and the deteriorating situation of European Jewry and continued with Saperstein's personal encounter with Europe in 1939. Prior to 1938, Saperstein's calls to action were directed to the Jewish people in general and in 1938 his message shifted from the Jewish nation to his individual congregants. This new focus continued through his 1939 and 1940 High Holiday sermons. During Rosh Hashanah of 1939 he called on his congregants to have a positive outlook of hope; during Yom Kippur he asked his congregants to live by Jewish ideals, regardless of how the rest of the world may be living.

Delivered on Kol Nidre of 1940, the annual Yom Kippur appeal for funds "The Wanderer" prescribed the unique responsibilities placed upon the shoulders of American Jews as European Jewry fell. For the first time, it seemed as if Saperstein's hope for European Jewry begins to falter, as he argued that American Jews were the future of Judaism. The sermon began with a story about an editor of a Polish antisemitic daily paper who was compiling a number of articles dealing with Jews. However, "the last, which came from Kovno, told of a group of Jewish music lovers who had organized the first Jewish opera. And the caption which he placed over this article was 'And the Jew Sings.' To this newspaperman, there was something mysterious about the vitality of this strange people who sing in the midst of affliction."[22] Saperstein then went on to discuss the sorrow bound up in the tragic memory of the Kol Nidre prayer. He pointed out that this year it is no different as "Jews usher in Yom Kippur in synagogues in every land,--what new tales of shattered lives and tortured souls its throbbing,

[22] Harold Saperstein, "The Wanderer" (Yom Kippur), 1940 MS 718, box 5, folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

sobbing tones must have told."[23] However, despite the history of the wandering Jew, oppressed in every generation, one's religious heritage could never be taken from him. With all of the events that had transpired in Europe, Saperstein shared the harsh reality with his congregants that "today America has become the standard bearer of Jewish life...Today we the Jews of America more than all of the Jews of the world have the responsibility of safeguarding our heritage. It is a sacred obligation."[24]

For a rabbi delivering a sermon there is always a balance between the messages that the rabbi believes should be delivered and what the congregants want or need to hear. The rationale behind Saperstein's message that American Jewry has now become *the* guarantor of Jewish heritage is an incredibly powerful message that Saperstein must have put great thought into before delivering. Although the final solution did not begin until 1942 and reports of mass killings did not reach the American or Yiddish press until July of 1941,[25] by January of 1940 stories concerning Jews who were being deported to the Lublin district were reported in *Forverts*, the oldest and largest Jewish press in America. One article written by a man who had managed to escape these horrors told of people being buried alive and existence of mass graves filled with those dying of starvation.[26] It is difficult to know if Saperstein's suggestion that there may not be hope for European Jewry in 1940 was based upon information he was receiving and/or hearing from Europe, his own fear and anticipation about the declining situation of European Jewry, or an attempt on his part to invigorate his congregants to recommit to Judaism. Perhaps he hoped that such a message would rouse his congregants from their complacency. It is

---

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] David S. Wyman, *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 20.
[26] Yosef Gorny, *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939–1945* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 80–83.

likely that all three of these possibilities were motivating factors in his Kol Nidre message of 1940. He shared his frank concern with his congregants: I sometimes think my friends, that as Jews, too many of us are meanwhilers.[27] At heart we are loyal. But instead of living our convictions we embalm them for a future that never comes.[28]

The bright glimmer of hope which always burned so strong in Saperstein's previous sermons seemed to flicker. He says, "but sometime, my friends, it may be too late. For while we are meanwhiling, life goes by and the world moves on. Jewish values were not created by meanwhilers—they c[a]nnot be preserved by meanwhilers."[29] Saperstein was clearly responding to the shift of synagogues moving to the periphery of American Jewish life,[30] as the "second generation" of American Jews underwent a process of acculturation, where Jewish identity was constructed along primarily ethnic lines.[31] This address was not simply a persuasive attempt to elicit monies from uncommitted Jews during a High Holiday appeal, but rather served as a wake-up call to America Jewry that now, more than ever, the future of the Jewish people lay in their hands. Saperstein seemed to suggest that hope was no longer simply an idea that abstractly existed out there in the world, but rather that hope and the future of Judaism lay in the hands of American Jews.

It is apparent that Saperstein's call to his congregants to recommit themselves to Jewish life was unsuccessful by the topic of his High Holiday sermon given in either 1941 or 1942. The exact dating of the sermon is unclear. Saperstein's sermon "Our Real Dangers" took a more aggressive approach to his discontent and fear that American Jewry was failing to do its part to

---

[27] The term "meanwhile" is a reference to a novel referred to earlier in his sermon about the perfect world waiting to be ushered in if only people would act.
[28] Saperstein, "The Wanderer."
[29] Ibid.
[30] Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 304.
[31] Krasner, "American Jews Between the Wars."

preserve Judaism. He began his sermon by mentioning that despite a history of oppression, no one has ever been able to destroy the Jewish people, and from each challenge the "we [Jewish people] have emerged strengthened in our determination to go on."[32] He explains the resilience of the Jewish spirit in the following manner:

> If I said the other day the Rabbinical phrase—*Serefat Neshamah, veguf Kayam* [italics mine]—the soul was consumed but the body remained described so many of the nations of the earth—the Jew, we may say that, by and large, the formula can be reversed—*Serefat guf* [italics mine]—the body was consumed, when the Jew was hounded and harassed, beaten and broken, *uneshama keyemes* [italics mine]—but the soul endured—the Jewish will to live, the Jewish faith in ultimate redemption—remained indestructible. And the reports we get from beleaguered Jewish communities abroad, from the Jews of Europe and Palestine indicate that the same thing will be true again. The smoke of the battle will clear, and the Jew will still be there, bleeding perhaps from a hundred wounds, but still proclaiming his faith in God, still laboring to lay the foundations of a homeland which would exemplify the ancient ideals which our people taught to the world. The great European Jewish communities of the pre-war period may be broken up, never again to be rebuilt. Fear not. Though scattered to the four ends of the earths, the Jews will carry on. The achievements of the Jewish people in Palestine may be wiped out. Do not despair. They will return again as they did after the Babylonian exile, as they did in the time of Herzl.[33]

---

[32] Harold Saperstein, "Our Real Dangers" 1941 or 1942, MS 718, box 5, folder 8, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[33] Ibid.

Saperstein believed that the greatest threat to Jewish survival is not from without, but from within. Saperstein characterized Judaism laying upon the altar for sacrifice, and American Jews unwillingness to accept the burden of Jewish tradition and ensure its survival. He believed that the greatest dangers to Judaism's survival are the lack of knowledge, courage, and faith among American Jewry. Saperstein believed that knowledge of the Bible and the historic experience of the Jews is a source of strength and instills "the conviction that our [Jewish] survival is worthwhile."[34] However, most people have closed this book. He laments, "Today Jewish learning is the exclusive monopoly of the Rabbi. This is no foundation of Jewish survival."

> Speaking of the lack of courage of American Jewry, Saperstein preached, Under the barrage of anti-semitic attacks many Jews are succumbing to hysteria. It is bad enough to make the mistake the Jews of Germany did before Hitler came to power. They ridiculed the attack against the Jew as an aberration on the lunatic fringe of society. They were convinced that it couldn't happen there. But it is just as bad to sin in the opposite extreme and permit fear to paralyze our normal reaction and responses.[35]

His sermon went on to discuss Jewish people who were afraid to reproduce because of antisemitism, those afraid to accept political positions, and those who accept a position of self-loathing to appease antisemites. Saperstein was most likely responding to a sharp rise in antisemitism in America that peaked during the inter-war period. Schools, camps, universities, clubs and places of employment often restricted Jewish participation or instituted quotas. Business magnates such as Henry Ford and leading radio personalities such as Father Charles

[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid.

Coughlin publically attacked Jews and questioned their loyalty to America.[36] Under such circumstances it was natural that American Jewry would shirk from public life in fear; however, Saperstein warned that such actions would put the future of Judaism in jeopardy.

Saperstein described the third and most dangerous risk to the survival of Judaism as a lack of faith. He argued that without faith, there is nothing left "to fall back upon." Saperstein blamed Hitler for turning Jews away from Judaism. He confronted the first theological question that had arisen in this paper "How can you believe in a God who permits things like this to happen....Never before have so many people questioned our whole basis of faith."[37] Saperstein responded to such real questions by arguing that:

> Events have not proved the bankruptcy of faith[.] History and progress have never moved straight forward. There have always been whirlpools and eddies in its stream. We fall backward only to move forward again. Religion still holds the banner of man's undying ideals. The words of the prophets of old still ring on today—truer and more triumphant than ever. They proclaim the values which make our struggle worth-while and set forth the goals towards which we must strive when the war is over and humanity returns to sanity.[38]

The preserved sermon ends short of the conclusion; however, it is likely that Saperstein would have concluded with a positive note of hope—if the younger generation can overcome their lack of knowledge, courage, and faith, they can become the guarantors of Judaism for the world.

---

[36] Jonathan D. Sarna and Jonathan Golden, "The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Antisemitism and Assimilation," National Humanities Center, accessed on April 2, 2012, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm.
[37] Saperstein, "Our Real Dangers."
[38] Ibid.

Saperstein's sermons continued to deal with the responsibilities of American Jews to preserve Judaism's future. According to Saperstein, hope lay in their hands. His sermon, "Our Real Dangers," was the first sermon to address theological questions that arose from learning about the immense suffering of European Jewry. After America entered the war in December 1941, theological questions continued to challenge American Jews as the war was now affecting them directly. A sermon delivered in 1940 by Jacob Rudin,[39] a student of Stephen S. Wise, captured the theological challenges facing his congregants—"Where is God in this blackout of humanity? How can he permit this savagery to come to pass? How can He allow the destruction of little children, of cities, and of homes, to go on unchecked?"[40] No congregation was left untouched by the war, and Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook, NY, where Saperstein served, was no exception. Over a hundred of the Temple's members served in the various branches of the armed forces and in all areas of the war. Some the members' children never returned. Back at home, the Temple took a leading part in the war effort, supporting civilian endeavors and making its facilities available to the community whenever needed.[41] It is natural that a congregation that was so involved would have theological questions that Saperstein attempted to address through the vehicle of a sermon.

Delivered in 1942 after America's entry into the war Saperstein's sermon, "Out of the Depths," dealt with the need for faith among those in the congregation. He wrote, "and on this wartime Yom Kippur, when the hearts of all of us are weary and troubled, those words (Out of the depths do I call unto Thee, O God) are truly the keynote of our prayers. For it is ever in time

[39] Jacob Rudin (1902–1982) served as the rabbi at the Stephen S. Wise Free Synagogue and Temple Beth El of Great Neck and assistant to the president at the Jewish Institute of Religion.
[40] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War*, 45.
[41] Harold I. Saperstein, *Dedication Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook, New York 1958,* nearprint of Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook, NY, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

of trouble that man feels most deeply the need for God."[42] Saperstein noted that psalms calling out for God made the most sense during war. He argued that when all else had failed, one can find strength, security, and hope only in God. He compared his congregants to a plane, whose lights have gone out and the safety of the occupants depends upon the radio beam that guides it home. Saperstein preached, "All of us are like that plane alone in the darkness. All that we too have to follow is the beam—the beam of our faith. It is the same faith which has sustained the Jewish people through 4000 years of history—when the nights were long and the days all too short. Our very safety demands that we do not lose that beam."[43] Saperstein believed that faith was a weapon of war, and the responsibility of those on the home front. He preached that spiritual ammunition was as important as modern warfare. As Saperstein believed that religion was the central issue of the war, he thought that the religion had to be strengthened at home. He told his congregants, "the Temple is your assignment in this war. What are you going to do about it?"[44]

This sermon, one of Saperstein's last High Holiday sermons before being deployed to Europe as a military chaplain, showed his firm belief in faith not only as a mechanism for hope, but as a religious and civic duty. Although Saperstein showed signs of wavering hope and faith during the year or two leading up to the war, as he questioned his congregants' ability to insure Judaism for the future generations, his faith and hope was reinvigorated once America entered the war. Saperstein was always searching for answers to the situation in Europe and was committed to the notion of hope through this entire period. His sermons were inspirational and he consistently tried to push his congregants to better themselves, recommit to Judaism, and maintain their faith in spite of the suffering of European Jewry.

---

[42] Harold Saperstein, "Out of the Depths" (Kol Nidre) 1942, MS 718, box 5, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.

Max Nussbaum

Max Nussbaum offered a different perspective than the other rabbis being explored in this study as he was in Germany from 1933 to 1939. One might expect that Nussbaum would feel an even greater sense of urgency than other rabbis who were geographically removed from Europe during the pre-war years. Nussbaum, who came to America in the summer of 1940, maintained strong ties to Germany as his parents and in-laws were still in Europe and he felt a great connection to the Berlin community where he had served as a rabbi in the years leading up to the war. Therefore, Nussbaum may have been more attentive to the developments in Europe than other rabbis included in this study. It was likely that in 1941, the year in which Nussbaum's sermon was delivered, he as well as other Americans would have been aware that Polish Jews were being deported by the thousands to the Warsaw ghetto. Additionally, Nussbaum would have known that in both the Warsaw and Lodz ghetto Jews were starving to death by the thousands. In 1941, Germany began to occupy Belgium, invaded Yugoslavia and Greece, and signed a cooperation agreement with Turkey, indicating that Nazi influence continued to spread at an alarming rate.[45] Under such circumstances, the presence of hope in his sermons is particularly significant.

Having arrived from Europe to America shortly after the war broke out, Nussbaum immediately took to advocating on behalf of European Jewry while simultaneously serving a pulpit. For example, only two weeks after his arrival in America, Arthur Sulzberger of the *New York Times* arranged for Nussbaum and his wife met with Henry Morgenthau, Roosevelt's Secretary of Treasury, to discuss the situation of European Jewry.[46] Although location is not specified, it is likely that Nussbaum would have presented the sermon, "Europe To-day As a

[45] "Chronology of Jewish Persecution: 1941," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed on April 3, 2012, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Chronology_1941.html.
[46] Barth, *Max Nussbaum*, 14.

Religious Problem" to his congregants at Beth Ahaba Temple of Muskogee, Oklahoma in 1941 or during one of his many advocacy trips meeting with American and Jewish leadership. Because of his strong connection to Germany and his awareness of developments in Europe, one would have anticipated that a sermon of his would have focused on the topic of the increasing suffering of European Jewry. However, Nussbaum's sermon discussed the failure of the German Church to provide an adequate religion to the German youth. Nussbaum argued that the void left by the lack of religious doctrine created a prime breeding ground for Nazism. Although most of this sermon was about the roots of Nazism, it does end on a hopeful note, which is significant because of the personal experience of Nussbaum prior to 1941. Perhaps Nussbaum chose to focus his sermon on the socio-religious nature of Hitlerism because of his own personal interest in social theory as demonstrated by his doctoral dissertation on the topic of "Kantianism and Marxism in the Social Philosophy of Max Adler."[47]

Nussbaum began his sermon with an explanation of what it means to be European, in the past verses the present. He described pre-1933 Europe as a cultured society with roots in Jewish prophetic teachings, where the government was ruled by public opinion. He spoke about the rich cultural influences of Bacon and Shakespeare, Descartes, Goethe and many others. For Nussbaum, Europe, pre-1933, represented "the highest ideals of humanity."[48] This characterization stood in contradistinction to Nussbaum's understanding of Europe in the present. Nussbaum said that most of his listeners will think about Europe as "a warred continent, tormented by Hitler and ruled by National Socialism."[49] Nussbaum agreed that Europe is all of these things, but also more complex than a political ideology. He argued that the Europe of

[47] "Finding Aid to the Max Nussbaum."
[48] Max Nussbaum, "Europe To-day as a Religious Problem," 1941, MS 705, box 3, folder 7, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[49] Ibid.

today is a religion, which he referred to as the "Brown Religion," understood as a Hitlerization of religion.[50]

Nussbaum went on to explain how this religion could have developed. He believed that following World War I, there was a large wave of anti-religiosity. Following a war where so many lives had been lost, for what seemed in vein, the younger generation returned home with a desire to live life to its very fullest, "to enjoy it with all their senses."[51] Nussbaum argued that such an existence, one of just living, cannot be sustained because sooner or later arises a need for religion. According to Nussbaum, these moments in history should be closely watched by organized religion in order to conquer hearts of those in search of religion. For "if religion does not do it, any mysticism may come in and do the job."[52] For instance, the German Church did not succeed in bringing the youth who strayed following the war back into the fold. Hitler was keenly aware of this shortcoming; therefore, he "made his national-socialism not a political system, but a religious doctrine, with a pseudo-mystical background and allegedly religious ideas of soil, blood, race, sword, heroism, holyness of leadership...Hitler Himself."[53] In this way, Hitler took advantage of an opportunity.

Nussbaum argued that Hitler developed a systematic way of infusing every aspect of human life with the religion of National Socialism, with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as its bible. He shared with his congregants that whether it is receiving a copy of this "holy scripture" on one's wedding day or national-socialistic songs replacing traditional church hymns, Hitler was indoctrinating his religion to his countrymen through every avenue. This new religion was meant not only to replace traditional organized religion, but to supersede it. The new religious

[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

hierarchy consisted of Hitler, the Nazi leadership, the Nazi party, the German "master-race" and finally on the bottom the "slave nations." No space remained for God.[54]

At the end of his sermon, Nussbaum completed the comparison that he began at the beginning of the sermon by describing the Europe of today:

> A large concentration-camp, surrounded by barbed wire from without and ruled by the religion of hatred from within; a concentration camp that locks in millions of enslaved people and governed by the commandments of Brown Religion: torture, pains, torment, and death. Europe once was a continent of human culture. Europe to-day is the jail of brown bestiality. Europe once represented the confession of humanity. It is to-day the home of the religion of hatred. And so it comes that the war of our days is a religious war. This is the true meaning of the present days' struggle.[55]

This was a depressing conclusion to his sermon and might leave the listener wondering: was it possible that this religion really has the possibility to supersede the other organized religions that have sustained humanity for countless generations? After all that Hitler had accomplished, acknowledged by Nussbaum himself, who witnessed the atrocities with his own eyes, the listener may be left with the follow conclusion Nazism *is* the present reality and perhaps "the truth" for all eternity. As if Nussbaum could sense the downward spiraling nature of his message, he concluded with a hopeful note—"And we know: the genuine religions will prevail!"[56]

Unlike others who paired messages of hope with a practical call to action, Nussbaum's concluding message included only a hopeful note that organized religions will eventually

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

triumph over Hitler's new religion. However, one could argue that practical actions were presented in an implicit manner. Understanding the paradigm that exists was essential for the implicit suggestion of a solution. Youth were in need of a religion, organized religions missed their opportunity to fill this void, and Hitler saw the opportunity and created his own religion to fill this space. The solution was clear—do away with National Socialism and replace it with the other organized religions (e.g. Christianity and Judaism), which espouse more productive values than hate. However clear this theoretical model was to its listeners, Nussbaum did not suggest a way in which such a goal can be achieved. This was the missing piece. Perhaps having lived in Germany and watching people try to resist this paradigm had taught Nussbaum that it was not up to the individual—resistance must be at a higher level, organized level. One can make such a suggestion based upon Nussbaum's continued attempts at speaking about the situation in Germany and his view that the confrontation with Nazism was a religious war.[57] Therefore, this war could only be ended by a confrontation with other religions.

Julian Feibelman

When World War II broke out, Julian Feibelman was serving as the rabbi at Temple Sinai of New Orleans.[58] Feibelman had been with the community since 1936, and by 1938 was known as an outspoken voice against Nazism.[59] In the 1939 Report of the President of Congregation Temple Sinai, Feibelman is described in the following manner, "the respect and affection which he has engendered, the spiritual uplift that he has continually endeavored to foster, and which he himself has so well exemplified, are entitled to more than a passing comment."[60] Feibelman's

[57] Barth, *Max Nussbaum*, 14.
[58] "Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers."
[59] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 347–351.
[60] *The Report of the President of 1939*, nearprint of Temple Sinai of New Orleans, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

sermon collection includes notes rather than full, written sermons. Feibelman gave three sermons from 1939–1940 which are germane to the topic at hand. These sermons will be presented in chronological order to facilitate and analyze changes or patterns that developed over time. The first two sermons suggested a practical method for action, while the last sermon tried to encourage action in general, as opposed to indifference. Looking at the sermons chronologically also highlights the change intended audience from specific individuals, to a broader concept of the individual, and finally to the collective.

The first sermon, entitled "The Business Man in War Time," was delivered on December 1, 1939. It included a practical call to action for businessmen as well as an implicit message of hope. Feibelman's choice to dedicate a Friday night Shabbat sermon to the topic indicates that his congregation was composed of a significant number of influential businessmen who he believed needed to hear a sermon on ethical business practices in times of war. The congregational President's report of that year suggests that the congregation did include such prominent members of the business community: "I know there are many members who, without depriving themselves, or even making the slightest sacrifice, could contribute more liberally to the Temple, and inasmuch as our dues are fixed purely on an honor basis, I hope that they will consider the matter in this spirit, and will find it a source of satisfaction voluntarily to revise their dues upward."[61] The sermon addressed the changes that war caused to one's life and the inherent responsibilities of an ethical business person during wartime. Feibelman believed that every business person was affected by the war either positively or negatively. Feibelman noted that the biggest wartime business in the world was armaments, and that there would not be "war

[61]Ibid.

without this business."[62] He proceeded to provide a guide for how to maintain ethical business practice during war. First, he urged his congregants to "let [their] conscience into the picture," meanings that one should let the horrible inhumane nature of war trouble one's conscience.[63] Feibelman believed that if one's conscience cannot see a problem, than the trouble certainly cannot be solved. Next, he instructed his listeners to stop business dealings with "the aggressors," as such actions only helped opponents grow stronger. Additionally, he advised them to avoid business dealings that were known to be high-risk industries, such as oil. He also encouraged his listeners to only consume the amount of goods absolutely necessary. He called upon his congregants to help realize a set of ethical standards for business practices. Feibelman believed that even laws are not capable of impacting ethical business practices, and therefore he placed the responsibility in the hands of his congregants, those personally engaged in business.[64]

This sermon presented an explicit moral imperative to observe ethical business practices and an implicit hope that the future lay in the hands of the congregants. As is common in Feibelman's sermons, he gave very specific instructions for how to achieve the goal that he desired. For instance, instead of merely telling his congregants that as good and ethical Jews they should conduct their business practices in an ethical manner, he laid out a model of behavior. The implicit understanding of such a call to action was that ultimately, the state of the world in general, and business practices during war time, in particular, are in their hands. Such a message presents an implicit one of hope making his congregants active players in their future. He implicitly suggested that by reducing unethical business practices, such as selling to the

[62] Julian B. Feibelman, "The Business Man in War Time," December 1, 1939, MS 94, box 14, folder 2, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

aggressors, the conflict might be contained. His pattern of giving instructions for self-reliant solutions to the crisis continued in his next Shabbat sermon analyzed, delivered two weeks later.

On December 15, 1939 Feibelman gave a sermon entitled "Being an Individual in These Times" in which he addressed the unique situation of a generation growing up under a cloud of war. He argued that this generation had been taught a very important lesson—there is "no such thing as [an] individual."[65] Feibelman asserted that this collectivist identity had led everyone's destinies to be bound together. Despite this collective identity, he pointed out that the worst consequences of the war rested upon the shoulders of the individual—business woes, etc. Feibelman suggested that despite the suffering of the individual for the benefit of the nation, the individual nevertheless can cope with the adversity by following a number of practical suggestions. The proposed course of action involved (1) practicing spiritual self-discipline (i.e. not giving into hating others and continuing to observe ethics) (2) holding fast to precious things (i.e. saving the good), (3) retaining an escape avenue (i.e. music, art), (4) helping others (i.e. those being victimized), and (5) finding allies of faith, courage, and hope.[66]

Point five—the triad of faith, courage, and hope—will be explored in greater detail as it is particularly relevant to this study. Feibelman encouraged faith in the ultimate good of people. He looked back on history noting that good had always survived, and so too must it now. He believed that dictators triumph for a time and perish, but in the end good reigns supreme. He continued with "courage to ride the world of scourge war."[67] Feibelman elaborated that there had been numerous evils in the world, but that these too eventually disappeared. Although Feibelman felt that war was the greatest evil, he nevertheless was optimistic that through courage

[65] Julian B. Feibelman, "Being an Individual in These Times," December 15, 1939, MS 94, box 14, folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

and determination war could be obliterated. Finally, Feibelman was very hopeful that "soon all men may be free."[68] He urged his congregants to never give up hope, teaching that America was the greatest doctrine. Speaking of America Feibelman said, "it is not selfish, not nationalistic, it is altruistic, democratic, brotherly. [It gives] every man rights, exact[s] responsibility."[69] Feibelman described the promise of America as a light in the darkness.[70]

Feibelman, like Saperstein, preached a message of hope with a practical call to action. Again, Feibelman prescribed a step-by-step method for how to cope with challenges facing both the individual and the nation and encouraged his listeners not to give up faith that good would win out in the end. Despite the similarities between Feibelman and Saperstein's messages of hope, Feibelman seems to dedicate the most time and attention to the emotional needs of his congregants. This is most likely the result of his keen awareness to pastoral care and its centrality to his rabbinate.[71] One of the most significant aspects of pastoral care is validating the emotions of one who is receiving pastoral care. Feibelman, keenly aware of the importance of validation, was likely to have dedicated a substantial portion of his sermon to validating the feelings of his listeners because he understood this validation would make them more responsive to his message of hope and instructions for how to care for the self during those trying times. Additionally, his patriotism and his rejection of Zionism and other competing movements were typical of his political orientation, characterized by his involvement in the American Council for Judaism.[72]

Feibelman's third sermon, "Bills of Rights—for Responsible Citizens," was delivered nearly one month after the previous two, on January 5, 1940. Both Feibelman's regular

---

[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Kalin, Interview, 10.
[72] See Chapter 1for more information.

commitment to the topic of the war, as demonstrated by his frequent editorials on the topic in the local Jewish press[73]and German's treatment of the Jewish community in his weekly sermons, demonstrated that he was receiving regular information from Europe or regularly was reading about the topic. For instance, in this sermon he mentioned the deteriorating situation of Jewry "East of [the] Rhine" at the hands not of persecutors but of fiends and the active concentration of Jews in Lublin.[74] The Jewish community of Lublin in 1939 made up over thirty percent of the population of the city. In September 1939 the Germans entered Lublin, and by November of that year, the Nazis had begun the resettlement of Jews from other areas of Lublin into a specific section of the city known as Jewish Town and Old Town.[75] In this sermon, Feibelman spoke of the responsibility of Americans to no longer be indifferent to the suffering going on, and their responsibility to insure democracy, as it is not a God-given right simply by living as responsible citizens. He begins by offering a biblical framework, discussing Samuel "urg[ing] the people not to change [their] form of government" to a monarchy, but that God would heed their request and allow Samuel to anoint Saul as king of Israel.[76] Interestingly enough this sermon of Feibelman's and Saperstein's "The Best in Us" were two of the only sermons analyzed to use a Biblical text. During the modern period, the use of exegesis in the sermon, which once was central began to take a peripheral role, or disappeared altogether, as the exegetical impulse sharply decreased.[77] It is worthwhile to note that the use of Biblical texts were not altogether abandoned, but rather used as a platform upon which to build a topically-based sermon that might be loosely related to

---

[73] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 364–365.
[74] Julian B. Feibelman, "Bill of Rights for Responsible Citizens," January 5, 1940, MS 94, box 14, folder 1, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[75] After it was decided that the Lublin district would become a "Jewish reservation" where Jews from other areas of the Reich's control would be located, thousands of Jews were forcibly relocated to Lublin between December 1939 and February of 1940. For more information refer to "Lublin: Occupation and the Ghetto," Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team, accessed on March 31, 2012, http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/ghettos/lublin.html.
[76] Feibelman, "Bill of Rights for Responsible Citizens."
[77] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War 1800–2001*, 2.

the textual piece introduced.[78] This was exactly the method used by Feibelman, employing a Biblical verse to discuss the responsibilities of a citizen in a democracy.

Feibelman's sermon first constructed the grounds upon which to discuss the obligations of an American. After tracing the roots of American "progress" from a monarchy through the American Revolution and eventually to democracy, he asked his congregants if they can appreciate the gifts of liberty, including its rights and privileges. He then proceeded to draw a parallel to European Jewry, saying, without American freedom and equality the, "dream of European Jews [would] never [have been] realized. The parallel continued with additional powerful questions, "can we [Americans] realize what is happening in Europe today? What it means to be in America [and] not in Europe?"[79] Feibelman answers his own moving questions succinctly and poignantly, "we cannot."

Feibelman's sermon notes do not specify whether he was contrasting life in America verses life in Europe in general or the position of Jews in American to that in Europe in particular. It seemed reasonable that he was attempting to show the vast chasm between both worlds. However even if Feibelman, a proud American who believed strongly in its tenets of freedom and equality, only intended to draw a parallel between life in America and Europe, his listeners, vigilant of the suffering of Jews in Europe, would have likely understood the comparison within both frameworks, national and religious.

Although Feibelman explains to his listeners that they could not understand what life was like in Europe, he nevertheless offered his own reconstruction. It appears that he was specifically talking about Jewish life in Europe when he mentions the situation in Lublin and the terror for Jews who live east of the Rhine. It was unclear whether he was talking about

[78] Ibid, 2.
[79] Ibid.

Europeans under occupation or more specifically Jewish Europeans when Feibelman spoke about the complete void of civil rights and even that one's meal was dependent upon another's mercy. He reminded his congregants that Europeans were "accomplished and cultured people [who] had rights," the right "to be indifferent, callous."[80] Ironically, the cruelest reality was that these people "no longer [have the] right to be indifferent" and the "sin of Europe's irresponsibly is showing now." Feibelman's prayer was that, "when we [Americans or American Jews] see indifference among Jews and others—I pray we may not have to pay [the price of indifference]."[81] Feibelman broke indifference into three categories—religious obligations, civil responsibilities, and voting.[82] Feibelman noted that he saw indifference among Jews today, which he deemed unacceptable. He believed that one should only have democracy if one deserves and preserves it.

Feibelman's third sermon in the series seems to depart somewhat from his first two in that it does not provide a step-by-step call to action. Instead this third sermon plays on the heartstrings of his listeners by emphasizing that their lives were not so different from European Jews, before Europe became indifferent. He pressed his congregants to abandon indifference and take action. He gave two main categories for action—religious and civic. He asserted that the suffering of European Jewry is the result of inaction, and implicitly he suggested that something similar could happen in America too, if the people remain indifferent. Such an implicit suggestion is embodied in his concluding caveat that democracy was not God given, therefore it could disappear at any time, as according to Feibelman, a "responsible government

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] The reference to voting most likely refers to the American presidential election fought between Franklin D. Roosevelt and Wendell Willkie.

lasts so long as people are responsible."[83] In this sermon, hope is implicit and was bound up in action. Through the action, as opposed to indifference, Americans can be the guarantors of their own hope. Feibelman noted that when he spoke to his congregation during the war years, "I tried constantly to preach on themes that would bolster faith and refresh our eternal optimism in the darkness of night and uphold hope and trust in the 'ultimate decency of things."[84]

Although all of Feibelman's sermons were hopeful in nature and addressed the emotional needs of the congregants, each sermon has a very clear audience that broadens throughout the series. Feibelman's first sermon was aimed specifically at one segment of his congregation—individual businessmen, who may be taking advantage of the war to engage in unethical business practices. He therefore prescribed how to avoid such actions. His second sermon revealed the struggle of the individual and the collective that arises during a war. This sermon was directed at the congregation as a whole, while at the same time it attempted to meet the needs of every individual present by detailing how every individual may maintain faith, hope, and courage. Finally, Feibelman's third sermon addressed the entire American collective, urging congregants to realize the gift of democracy and act to insure its perpetuation. In this way the intended audience of his sermons shifted in a little over a month from the individual to the collective nation. Such a change from an individualist focus to a collectivist one is not uncommon during times of national distress. In 1940 Americans, still harboring residual trauma from World War I, were increasingly fearful that they would be drawn back into another war.

Conclusion

The sermons delivered by Rabbis Saperstein, Nussbaum, and Feibelman between 1939 and 1942 all embodied messages of hope and practical calls for action. Each rabbi provided

[83] Ibid.
[84] Feibelman, *The Making of a Rabbi*, 399.

drastically different messages and prescribed different actions. The topics that they chose to address in their sermons depended both on their congregation's needs as well as their own personal orientation and styles. Saperstein shifted to focus on the role of individual Americans as *the* keepers of Jewish tradition—calling his congregants back to the traditions and faith. He also dealt with the difficult theological repercussions of the declining situation of European Jewry and America's entrance into another war. Nussbaum approached the topic of Nazism from a perspective completely unexpected based upon his own personal experiences in Europe prior to arriving in America. He chose to address the situation in 1941 from an intellectual perspective rather from an urgent emotional one. Finally, Julian Feibelman's sermons attempted to provide a step-by-step guide for how to behave during this period, while never compromising his faith in God. Feibelman's audience shifted from the specific businessmen in his congregation, to the individual, and finally to the American collective.

What became clear from exploring these sermons from this period was that the rabbis were struggling to address the evolving needs of their congregants. The rabbis were speaking to masses that were unengaged with congregational life and the rabbis were attempted to encourage them to action. The answers that the rabbis provided and their prescribed calls to action were more likely a reflection of the individual rabbi than any other outside influence. At a time when congregants demanded answers to theological questions, sought out a hopeful message about their coreligionists future in Europe, and desperately wanted reassurance about the overarching fear that they too will be drawn into a war, the rabbis struggled to provide their best answers. These sermons represent their best attempts. Their own personal concerns and doubts also penetrate the sermons as they struggle with these same issues on a personal level. This is one of

the gifts of the sermon as a primary source, a glimpse, even if an obscured one, into American Jewish life during this period.

Conclusion

The sermons of David Philipson, Julian Feibelman, Max Nussbaum, and Harold Saperstein provided a unique window into Jewish life in America from the years 1933 to1942. Regardless of their geographic location, tenure at their respective congregations, or their personal contact with people in Europe during the period, each rabbi found a way of confronting the deteriorating situation in Europe through the medium of a sermon. Their messages of hope were often paired with calls for action. Points of departure between the various rabbis' messages largely resulted from differences in the individual's beliefs, experiences, and ideologies.

The first chapter focused on the relationship between the messages of hope in the sermons and calls to action during the pre-war period, tracing their connection within the timeline of developing events in Germany. Information regarding the deterioration of Jewish life in Germany was reaching the rabbis regularly. An analysis of the sermons of Rabbis Philipson and Saperstein demonstrated the variety of calls to action—ranging from Philipson's call on other nations to hold Germany accountable for their actions to Saperstein's support for the creation of a World Jewish Congress. Additionally as the rabbis' fears that the situation in Europe would continue to deteriorate, the rabbis' messages were delivered with increased urgency from 1933–1938. Such urgency translated into renewed calls for hope and different calls for action.

The second chapter discussed messages of hope and accompanying calls to action during the war years, 1939–1942. This chapter focused on changes that occurred within the messages of Rabbis Saperstein, Nussbaum, and Feibelman during this period. Saperstein's message of hope began to shift in 1938 with his delivery of the sermon, "The Jew of Trial," focusing more on the obligations of the individual and less on the promise that the Jewish collective offered,

namely in the creation of a World Jewish Congress. This refocusing on the responsibilities of individual Jews, in general and each American Jew, in particular, was a pattern that continued until 1942 when Saperstein returned to the promise of the potential of collective action and responsibility following America's entry into the war. Additionally, Saperstein addressed theological questions that he and his congregants were facing as the dire news from Europe continued to reach them. For a brief period of time, Saperstein's hope began to fade only to be reignited by renewed hope and patriotism upon America's entry into the war. This was one of the strongest examples of the interplay between the historical context and the rabbis' ideology and experience. It seems that in 1942, despite previous doubts about the future of Jewry and his pacifist commitments expressed in previous sermons, Saperstein may have been swept up in the national wave of patriotism and nationalism causing renewed optimism.

While only one sermon of Rabbi Max Nussbaum is presented in this chapter, the content of his sermon is not necessarily what the reader might expect. As Nussbaum was himself a leader of the Berlin Jewish community until 1940 and witnessed first-hand the decline of Germany Jewry, one might anticipate that a sermon of his delivered in 1941 would be an emotional, urgent appeal to take some form of action. However, this is not the type of sermon that Nussbaum delivered. Instead, Nussbaum gave a more "academic" style sermon, explaining to his congregants the socio-religious context in which Hitler was able to rise to power and continue his rule over the German populace. His decision to deliver such a sermon showed that the individual interest of the rabbis and their own style was very influential in determining the direction of a sermon. In this case, Nussbaum's sermon was influenced greatly by his intellectual interested in socio-economic topics.

Finally, Rabbi Julian Feibelman's sermons provided instructions for his congregants on how to cope with the disheartening situation in Europe. Throughout the three sermons analyzed, his audience drastically changed from the specific businessmen in his congregation, to the individual, and finally to the American collective. Additionally, Feibelman's sermons, more than any other rabbis, addressed the emotional needs of his congregants, reflecting his interests in pastoral care. In this case the rabbi's own orientation dictated the style and message of the sermon.

After analyzing the sermons of these specific rabbis, a few generalizations can be drawn. First, major differences in the messages of the rabbis and their calls to action are more a reflection of their individual interests and styles than any other outside component. Additionally, it is striking that in all of the rabbis' calls to action during the Nazi era, there is neither a demand made upon the congregants to become involved in political advocacy on behalf their coreligionist nor any encouragement toward military action. However it is worthwhile to note that Saperstein had encouraged a policy of boycott of German goods in his Rosh Hashanah Sermon of 1934.[1] As mentioned in the introduction, historian Marc Saperstein pointed out that American sermons delivered during World War II consistently were anti-interventionalist.[2] Investigation of these four rabbis led to the same conclusion that there were relatively passive demands made upon the congregants throughout the Nazi period.

Although the lack of encouragement for political or military action is a significant finding on its own, it stands all the more in stark contrast to the personal actions of the rabbis. These rabbis, in their personal lives, were meeting with American policy makers, writing articles criticizing American political actions in the Jewish press, and volunteering to serve in the

[1] Saperstein, "The Call to Battle," in *Witness from the Pulpit*, 37–43.
[2] Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War*, 390.

military and Red Cross, and yet they chose not pass this message of large-scale action on to their congregants through a sermon.

The natural question is why would there be such a substantial gap between the individual actions of the rabbis and the messages to their congregants. When rabbis prepare a sermon, they are always weighing their own personal agenda against the needs of the congregation. Perhaps the rabbis spoke in more controlled words to the congregants to meet their needs, while modeling their passion for more substantial actions. As one Conservative rabbi pointed out in a *New York Times* article, "The American Jew, like his fellow-citizen of other faiths, is fortunate that he finds himself in an ark of safety, thousands of miles removed from the devastating flood of misery and destruction."[3] Therefore the congregants might not have been in the same place as the rabbis, ready for extreme action on behalf of their brethren. At the same time, American Jewry was arising from an interwar period characterized by antisemitism.[4] Therefore, it is not unlikely that regular American Jews on the street, struggling to negotiate the newly achieved middle class, would not have been in a place in American society where they felt comfortable speaking as Jews on behalf of their brethren. They possibly believed that such actions would only serve to increase antisemitism and cause their American patriotism to be called in question. This societal complexity for American Jewry would have been something of which the congregational rabbis would have been aware. In this light, it is logical that the rabbis would have encouraged actions from their congregants, but only at the individual and congregational level.

This study provided an opportunity to understand, at a micro-level, the role of the American Reform rabbinic sermon during the Nazi era. Although generalizations may be made regarding the message and the function of the rabbi during this period in America, a more

[3] Israel H. Leventhal in Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War*, 391–392.
[4] Sarna, *American Judaism*, 214.

exhaustive study could provide a more nuanced understanding of how the messages changed during the war years. Studying a broader range of rabbis would allow one to fill in gaps that exist in this study, such as rabbis from the Midwest and the years 1942 through 1945. It might also be interesting to compare the messages of rabbis from various movements, as the conclusions might likely be similar. Despite the challenges of such a study, this research project served to open up a new window in the discourse of American Jewish Holocaust studies in general and the study of war time sermons in particular. This was a trying period for world Jewry and the rabbis, unable to foresee the destruction of European Jewry, did their best in a discrete moment in history to provide comfort and faith to a community in turmoil.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Feibelman, Julian B. MS 94. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

_____. *The Making of a Rabbi.* New York: Vintage Press, 1980.

Kalin, Berkley. Interview with Julian Feibelman. November 8, 1968. MS 94, box 28, folder 12. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

Nearprint of Temple Emanu-el of Lynbrook. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

Nearprint of Temple Sinai. Of New Orleans. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

Nussbaum, Max. MS 705. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

Phillipson, David. MS 35. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

_____. *Services for Sabbath and Holidays.* Cincinnati: The Bloch Publishing and Printing Co., 1891.

Saperstein, Harold I. MS 718. American Jewish Archives. Cincinnati, OH.

_____. *Witness from the Pulpit.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000.

Wise, Stephen. *Challenging Years.* New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1949.

Secondary Sources

"1938--The Fateful Year." Yad Vashem. Accessed on March 1, 2012. http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/holocaust/about/01/crucial_year.asp.

"About the CCAR." Central Conference of American Rabbis. Accessed January 25, 2012. http://www.ccarnet.org/about-us/.

"About JDC." American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Accessed on March 1, 2012. www.jdc.org/about-jdc.aspx?s=header.

"About the WJC." World Jewish Congress. Accessed on February 17, 2012. http://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/about.

"The American Council for Judaism Principles." The American Council for Judaism. Accessed on February 1, 2012. http://www.acjna.org/acjna/about_principles.aspx.

Arad, Gulie Ne'eman. *America Its Jews, and the Rise of Nazism.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Abzug, Robert H. *America Views the Holocaust 1933–1945.* Boston: Bedford, 1999.

Barth, Lewis M and Ruth Nussbaum. ed. *Max Nussbaum: From Berlin to Hollywood.* Malibu: Joseph Simon/Pangloss Press, 1994.

"Chronology of Jewish Persecution: 1941." Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed on April 3, 2012. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Chronology_1941.html.

Dash Moore, Deborah. *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Diner, Hasia R. *The Jews of the United States.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

Echoes and Reflections: A Multimedia Curriculum on the Holocaust. Anti-Defamation League, USC Shoah Foundation Institute, Yad Vashem, 2005.

"Finding Aid to the David Philipson Papers." American Jewish Archives. Accessed on January 24, 2012. http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/Philipso.htm.

"Finding Aid to the Harold I. Saperstein Papers. 1930–1998." American Jewish Archives. Accessed on January 24, 2012. http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/ms0718.html.

"Finding Aid to the Julian Feibelman Papers." American Jewish Archives. Accessed on January 24, 2012. http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/Feibelma.htm.

"Finding Aid to the Max Nussbaum Papers." American Jewish Archives. Accessed on February 12, 2012. http://americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/MaxNussbaum.htm.

Gorny, Yosef. *The Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1939–1945.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

"Holocaust Timeline." The History Place. Accessed on February 28, 2012. www.historyplace.com/worldwar2/holocaust/timeline.html.

"John Haynes Holmes." Unitarian Universalist Association. Accessed on March 4. http://www25.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/johnhaynesholmes.html.

Kaufman, Menahem. *An Ambiguous Partnership: Non Zionists and Zionists in America, 1939–1948*. Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1991.

Kleinberg, Darren. "Reform Judaism and the Jewish 'Social Gospel'." *CCAR Journal: The Reform Jewish Quarterly* (2009).

Krasner, Jonathan. "American Jews Between the Wars." My Jewish Learning. Accessed on February 2, 2012. http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Modern_History/1914-1948/American_Jewry_Between_the_Wars.shtml.

Leff, Laurel. *Buried by the Times.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lipstadt, Deborah E. *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933–1945.* New York: The Free Press, 1986.

Meyer, Michael A. *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988.

Marcus, Jacob Rader. "Dr. David Philipson's Place in American Jewish Historiography." *American Jewish Archives Journal* 3 (1951): 28.

"Pittsburgh Platform." Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed on January 27, 2012. http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/pittsburgh_program.html.

Polier, Justine Wise and James Waterman Wise, eds. *The Personal Letters of Stephen Wise.* Boston: The Beacon Press, 1956.

Reactions to Kristallnacht in the United States." Shoah Resource Center of Yad Vashem. Accessed on March 4, 2012. http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%203320.pdf.

"Records of National Council for Prevention of War." Swarthmore College Peace Collection. Accessed on March 4, 2012. http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/DG001-025/dg023NCPW/HistoricalIntroduction.htm.

Saperstein, Marc. "A Spiritually Powerful Sect of Judaism: Two Sermons on the Dead Sea Scrolls by Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein." *American Jewish Archives Journal* 61 (2009).

_____. *Jewish Preaching in Times of War.* Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008.

Sarna, Jonathan D. *American Judaism.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Sarna, Jonathan D. and Jonathan Golden. "The American Jewish Experience in the Twentieth Century: Antisemitism and Assimilation." National Humanities Center.

Accessed on April 2, 2012.

http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/twenty/tkeyinfo/jewishexp.htm.

"What is Classical (or Liberal) Reform Judaism?" Chicago Sinai Congregation. Accessed on January 25, 2012.

http://www.chicagosinai.org/liberal_reform_judaism/what_is_classical_reform.cfm.

"What is the ZOA." Zionist Organization of America. Accessed on February 14, 2012.

http://www.zoa.org/content/about_us.asp.

Wyman, David S. *Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1984.

Eric Yoffie, Eric. "A Shabbat Morning Sermon," Sermon presented at the Small Congregations Conference. Colorado Springs, Colorado. April 21, 2001.

http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/yoffie/archive/small/.