

**“Keep your eyes upon the Jew!”:
Jews and Nazis in the Context of Christian and
Missionary Alliance Eschatology**

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Scholars have regularly lamented the weakness of North American responses to the Holocaust¹ – not least those of the churches.² This article explores the complex of attitudes, theologies, and convictions of one North American conservative evangelical Protestant church body – the Christian and Missionary Alliance – towards Jews subject to Nazi persecution and extermination.

The Christian and Missionary Alliance

By way of background, Albert Benjamin Simpson, a native of Prince Edward Island, founded the Christian and Missionary Alliance in New York in 1887. The Alliance began as two organizations: the Christian Alliance, focussed on spiritual renewal in the Holiness tradition, and the Evangelical Missionary Alliance, dedicated to mobilizing Christians for foreign missionary work. Based on a growing constituency in both Canada and the United States, Simpson and other Alliance leaders published periodical, evangelistic, and devotional literature, prepared personnel in its Missionary Training Institute, and sent missionaries around the globe. Alliance theology revolved around the fourfold gospel, centred on the person of Jesus Christ as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.³ This last element – the belief in the premillennial return of Christ as

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Coming King – shaped its eschatology and its view of the Jews, both important to this study.⁴

The movement's chief periodical was *The Alliance Weekly*, a "Bible-teaching, spiritual, missionary magazine."⁵ Our analysis of Alliance views on Jews during the Nazi era is based chiefly on reportage, editorials, exegetical writings, letters, and advertisements from over 500 issues published between 1933 and 1945. In that time, *The Alliance Weekly* was very much the mouthpiece of the denomination, since its editor, Harry M. Shuman, was also the denominational president and head of the Missionary Training Institute, and the associate editor, John A. Macmillan, was a Canadian pastor who had led an outreach to Chinese and Jewish communities in Toronto, served as a missionary field director in the Philippines, and taught as a professor of missions at the Missionary Training Institute.

Alliance Views on Jews

In ways that correspond to other studies of conservative Christianity during the 1930s and 1940s, we argue that the Alliance response to Jewish persecution before and during the Holocaust was comprised of various contradictory convictions – four in particular: first, that Jews were a chosen people of God, the source of Jesus Christ, and the foundation of Christianity; second, that Jews were largely responsible for the death of Jesus Christ, and thus stood under the ongoing judgment of God, though *also* under the protecting hand of God (Jews might be punished – made destitute, even – but they would not be destroyed because they served as a sign of God's faithfulness); third, that Jews were a spiritually lost people who required evangelization (consequently, missions were established in both Palestine – especially Jerusalem – and in North America – especially New York); and fourth, that the Jews held a special place in God's plan for the *eschaton* – the end times.

Members of the Alliance adhered to a premillennial, dispensationalist eschatology. That is, they believed that the world would ultimately deteriorate into sin, corruption, violence, and evil, until falling completely under the satanic rule of the Antichrist. Christians would be raptured – caught up in the air and taken to heaven. Jews and unbelievers would remain on the earth, undergoing an intense period of tribulation, through which the Jews would return to the Promised Land, return to God (through salvation in Christ), and play an integral role in the "end times,"

when Jesus would return to defeat Satan and establish his millennial kingdom on earth.

Often, several or even all four of these ideas appear mixed together, as in a short piece from *The Alliance Weekly* of 13 January 1934, which captures the persecution, protection, judgment, and salvation of the Jews envisioned by the Alliance. Ever since the first century destruction of Jerusalem, it asserted:

the Jews have been set up on high as a visible, incontrovertible, and overwhelming evidence of the truth and faithfulness of Jehovah. The cruelties they have undergone have been enormous; the slavery to which they have been subjected is incredible. Yet the lands that have been their greatest oppressors have themselves passed away, and a divine favor has rested upon those nations that have offered their lands as a haven. Keep your eyes upon the Jew! God has not finally cast away His chosen people.⁶

The author went on to quote a passage from Romans to assert that Israel had been “blinded” but would eventually be “saved.” So, to repeat, we see the Alliance vision of the Jews during the 1930s and 1940s as a chosen people, judged, punished, preserved, unjustly persecuted by some, sheltered by others, spiritually lost for the present, but eventually destined for salvation.

Seven Topics

With these contradictory Alliance understandings of the Jews in mind, we would like to outline briefly how they came to bear on seven topics: 1) international crisis, 2) political extremism, 3) antisemitism, 4) Jewish persecution, 5) Jewish refugees, 6) Jewish missions, and finally 7) Alliance eschatology. Though we will offer just a few brief examples in support of these points, there are dozens of similar texts scattered throughout *The Alliance Weekly*.

International Crisis

Because writers in *The Alliance Weekly* were always looking ahead towards the end times and observing conditions in their contemporary

world through the lens of prophesy about how, when, and where God might be bringing the present age to a close, their attention was invariably drawn to two prominent issues: the contemporary turmoil of European politics, which they saw as a precursor to the period of tribulation, and the Jewish refugee crisis, which they viewed as stirrings towards the promised restoration of a Jewish homeland. As the editors put it, “Israel . . . is God’s clock.”⁷

Themes of contemporary crisis related to Alliance eschatology appear regularly throughout the magazine – in advertisements, in exegetical articles, in Sunday school lessons, in editorials, and in current events reportage. Alliance Christians believed that, “although ‘God’s in His heaven,’ all is very far from being ‘right with the world.’”⁸ Neither social reform movements nor even missionary activity could prevent the world’s decline. The world was under judgement and could only be set right by God himself. World leaders were, “led unknowingly to perform the purposes foreknown to God . . . creation moves steadily forward to the end for which it was destined.”⁹ Readers, as L.H. Ziemer put it, were to “note the handwriting of God on the wall of time.”¹⁰

In 1933 and 1934 alone, article titles like “In Time of Peace” (March 1933), “Facing War” (October 1933), “This Darkening World” (November 1933), and “Prophetic Date Setting” (February 1934) capture the Alliance expectation of international political conflict leading to an eventual Battle of Armageddon and of Jewish displacement and the consequent refugee crisis leading to the return of Jews to the Promised Land.¹¹ Simply put, these ideas are both fundamental to and ubiquitous in *The Alliance Weekly*.

Political Extremism

As they monitored international political developments, the writers and editors of *The Alliance Weekly* regularly inveighed against the rise of totalitarian ideologies – communism, fascism, and Nazism – and against dictators like Mussolini and Hitler. As the leading Alliance writer A. W. Tozer wrote in September 1937:

Fascism . . . preaches the sovereignty of the state, and secures by force and cruelty absolute dominion over the bodies and souls of its subjects. It stands at the opposite pole from Christianity in that it destroys the value of the individual. The Fascist state is totalitarian,

which is to say that nothing can exist apart from the state, and nothing can exist which the state does not control. This applies to religion, and as far as it can be enforced, to the very conscience of the individual. The principles of Fascism and those of Christianity are mutually exclusive and cannot exist together.¹²

As Tozer explained, “in Germany Fascism has taken its worst and most openly anti-Christian form. In an effort to get rid of the Jew, the Nazis have been compelled to reject the Bible, and along with the Bible has gone the Christian religion,” as Germany turned back to the neo-paganism of “the one-eyed Odin of Norse mythology” and “Siegfried, the redeemer-god of the Teutonic Valhalla.”

Elsewhere, one finds descriptions of German society under “mass hypnotism” and “nationalism gone mad.” Indeed, “with this attitude Christianity cannot coexist,” declared the editors, as they described German nationalism and state idolatry as a precursor to the idolatry of the Antichrist.¹³ As missionary, pastor, and hymnist Alfred Cookman Snead put it, Hitler was one of the “followers of Satan upon the earth” who had “usurped authority.”¹⁴ The editors and writers of *The Alliance Weekly* regularly asserted that dictators and their politically extreme movements were linked to the powers of darkness bringing destruction into the world.

Antisemitism

Similarly, the editors and writers of *The Alliance Weekly* were highly critical of antisemitism and appealed to Christians to conduct themselves irenically as they interacted with Jews. Antisemitism was periodically acknowledged as a problem inherent to Christianity. In 1934, both associate editor John A. Macmillan and Dr. John Stuart Conning condemned *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as “forged and false” and “a forgery” circulated by “agitators in various lands . . . even in America.”¹⁵

Conning’s article is particularly interesting. Two extended passages capture his tone:

After nineteen centuries of Christian history, Christianity has found no way to slay the dragon of hatred against Christ’s own people. In lands nominally Christian in Europe today, outbreaks against the Jews are of frequent occurrence. Particularly distressing has been the plague of

antisemitism that is now sweeping over Germany in which one of the foremost Jewish communities of the world has been plunged into a vortex of economic and cultural disaster. Stung to the quick by the charge of blame for the world war and the dire consequences that have followed, the Hitlerite movement has found in the Jews a scapegoat upon which to cast all the odium for all the evils which have befallen Germany. Restrictive legislation, worse by far than that which flung its blight over the Russian Pale at the close of the nineteenth century, has driven tens of thousands of Jews, men, women, and innocent children, into a wilderness of racial isolation that dooms them to destitution and despair . . .

The Jewish problem is essentially a Christian problem, for it is primarily a human problem. Jews are just folks like ourselves, men and women for whom Christ died, just as He died for you and me. It is a sorry spectacle that faces us in this twentieth century when we see Jews pilloried by blind fanaticism for the sole crime of belonging to the race of Jesus. The duty of the Christian church is clear. It must rebuke racial prejudice; but it must do more, to must create Christian attitudes towards the Jews. In no other way can the faith of Christ be commended to His own people. This is a time of crisis for the Jews; it is also a time of testing for Christians.¹⁶

Other articles, such as “The Vine Tree” (1934), “A Threefold Curse” (1935), “The Jew and the Church: A Call to Penitence and Prayer” (1935), and “Kindness to Israel” (1938) run along similar lines.¹⁷

At the same time, it must be noted, some writers, including Joseph R. Lewek, the Superintendent of the New York Jewish Mission, also believed that antisemitism, though sinful, was being used by God to drive Jews to Palestine, hastening the coming of the end times. One 1934 article lamented that, “the spirit of anti-Semitism is on the increase. Israel is suffering bitter persecution in various parts of the world,” but then added that, “it is interesting to note that the number of Jewish immigrants entering Palestine has increased from 3,841 in 1932 to 14,905 in the first eight months of 1933 . . . Christ will not come until He has completed His program of gathering out a people for His name from ‘every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation’ (Rev. 5:9).”¹⁸

Jewish Persecution

Amid the flood of prophetic writings about the rise of dictators, the prospect of violence and war, and the return of the Jews to Israel, *The Alliance Weekly* regularly reported on the actual contemporary persecution of the Jews. In April 1933 – note the date – Alliance Publication Secretary D. J. Fant authored a report entitled “Jewish Persecutions,” which laid out very clearly the new developments in Germany:

Persecution of the Jews in Germany under the Nazis has aroused a storm of protests in this country. If the newspaper reports are true, all Jews in Germany have been summarily discharged from government offices, Jewish judges have been expelled, Jewish lawyers driven out of the courts, Jewish business places boycotted and forced to close, and there have been numberless and widespread acts of physical terror and bodily harm. It is feared that a scheme of widespread slaughter is being prepared, and so intense is the hatred against the Jew that has been incited, that at the first shot such fury would overcome most of the people that we should witness a massacre and pogrom such as the world has seldom seen.¹⁹

Importantly, though, in *The Alliance Weekly*, Jewish persecution was always interpreted through the lens of dispensational theology and never through the lens of humanitarian concern, even as European Jews suffered under hatred and violence and even as the international refugee crisis grew:

It has been the sad lot of the Jewish People to endure persecution throughout the centuries. Their sufferings at the siege of Jerusalem were without parallel, but it was only the inauguration of an epoch when they should be set upon their world-wide journeyings – extinct as a nation – homeless, friendless, forlorn.

For eighteen centuries they have been hounded from pillar to post; nominal Christians have outdone Caesar in their efforts to destroy the race.²⁰

But why had they been persecuted so, how had they survived, and why had their ancient enemies from Egypt and Assyria to Babylon and

Rome long since disappeared? For Fant, the sole explanation was that “God has been with them, and He has miraculously preserved them amid many sorrows for His divine purposes. Serious indeed will be the consequences upon any nation that raises its hands against God’s chosen people of Israel.”²¹

Indeed, Alliance Christians believed that the persecution of the Jews and Jewish suffering were inextricably linked to Christian eschatology. Jews, living under divine judgment for rejecting Christ *as well as* under God’s preserving grace, would suffer greatly, but eventually be restored to Israel and restored to God through faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

It is important to note that Alliance dispensational theology made space for very serious Jewish suffering indeed – not suffering Alliance theologians wished upon the Jews, but suffering they believed was part of God’s divine plan. As the editors described in an article responding to unrest in Palestine, the prophesy in the Gospel of Matthew included a future siege of Jerusalem and the “abomination of desolation,” some sort of revelation of the Antichrist in the coming temple of Jerusalem. They wrote:

Then will open the period of “great tribulation, such as was not from the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be” (Mat. 24:21). That awful era will include the time known as “Jacob’s Trouble,” when the last and fearful persecutor of Israel will be revealed – a man of whom all haters of the Jews from Antiochus Epiphanes (the madman) to Hitler are feeble foreshadowings. Jacob “shall be saved out of it,” says the Word of God. Let every true Christian pray unceasingly for the hastening of the fulfilment of God’s perfect plan for Israel and the world.²²

After the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938, *The Alliance Weekly* published a stinging rebuke of the Hitler regime, in which the editors castigated the Nazi state for the “insensate fury” of the pogrom, and for deliberately fostering a “mob spirit.” With reference to the Matthew 25 description of Christ’s judgment, they declared Germany a “goat nation” that would be condemned by God.²³

In 1939, as the Jewish refugee crisis worsened, the magazine began covering Jewish suffering more and more frequently. For example, in February and March 1939, the magazine reported that the Dominican

Republic might serve as a haven for Jews; that foreign Jews in Italy would have to leave on account of new antisemitic laws; that a request had been sent to *The Alliance Weekly* for financial aid for persecuted Jews; that 800 Jewish children had arrived in England under a British evacuation plan; that Greek Jews enjoyed the same privileges as Greek natives and were not suffering discrimination; that thirty-two countries were working through the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees and hoping to effect the emigration of 400,000 German Jews; and that Berlin Jews were being deported at the rate of 100 per day.²⁴

As the war progressed, *The Alliance Weekly* periodically reported the extent of Jewish suffering and death at the hands of the Nazis. In June 1940, the editors noted that, of the nine million Jews in Europe, “less than one million are still living normal lives.”²⁵ In July 1940, *The Alliance Weekly* discussed the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee’s attempts to foster Jewish emigration from Nazi Europe. It observed that, “after the invasion of Poland conditions became exceedingly painful. The border between Poland and Lithuania became a ‘no-man’s land’ for the Jews who were unable to move either way.”²⁶ In January 1941, it reproduced estimates that 90,000 refugees from Nazi Europe had found their way to Palestine since 1933 and documentation that “of the 650,000 Jews who lived in Germany in 1933, 200,000 have fled from Germany, 30,000 are in concentration camps, 20,000 have committed suicide, 8,000 have been murdered, and 90,000 have died.”²⁷ In March 1941, it reported the construction of a walled ghetto in Warsaw, within which “all of Warsaw’s 300,000 Jews are forced to live, being absolutely prohibited from leaving the ghetto and entering other parts of the city.” It added that, “an increase in disease, already widespread, is foreseen.”²⁸ In June 1943, *The Alliance Weekly* explained how hundreds of rabbis had met in Jerusalem “to mourn for the million Jews who have been murdered by the Germans.”²⁹ And in September 1943, it produced a detailed report of “Israel’s Sufferings”:

No previous time in earth’s history has witnessed such barbarities against the Jew, though there have been many “pogroms” and many times of special hate. To the twentieth century has been reserved, up to the present, the ignominy of absolute bestiality practiced by a professedly civilized nation against those who were entirely helpless before it.

Of some 5,000,000 of Jews who have disappeared from countries under Nazi domination, 3,030,050 have perished during the four years of war, while 1,800,000 have been evacuated into the interior of the Soviet Union, and about 180,000 have been able to emigrate. Some 3,300,000 still exist in ghettos and concentration camps. All but about 5,000 of the more than half million Jews in Germany, at the time of Hitler's accession to power, have been disposed of. Perhaps 75,000 German Jews are still alive in Poland and the still occupied Soviet territory, while some 10,000 are in France, Belgium and Holland, awaiting deportation to the East. Official German figures admit that thirty per cent of such deportees die en route, while conditions at the points of destination are deliberately designed to make survival impossible for long.³⁰

All this amounted to a serious acknowledgment that the Nazi slaughter of the Jews far exceeded other episodes of suffering in Jewish history.

Jewish Missions

But the response to Jewish suffering and annihilation did *not* eventuate in calls for humanitarian aid, government intervention, or increased Jewish immigration to North America. Rather, Alliance leaders believed the most important response was to redouble their efforts to evangelize Jews – to share with them their hope of salvation from the coming destruction through faith in Jesus Christ. This is evident in the content of *The Alliance Weekly*. Between 1939 and 1941, there occurred a marked increase in articles, reports, testimonies, and advertisements for Jewish missions. As a November 1939 article put it:

the hearts of the chosen people are more open and receptive to the Word of God and the gospel message today than ever before. The terrific persecutions in Europe, the troubles in Palestine, and the ever-increasing antisemitism throughout the world, have softened their hearts and made them long for security and rest of soul. Such conditions constitute an urgent call for a great forward movement of prayer and effort on the part of Christian people to reach the Jews with the gospel and the Word of God. In answer to a mighty volume of believing prayer, and in response to an army of consecrated Christians placing God's Word in the hands of the Jews, might it not

be possible that large numbers of them may speedily be born again into the Kingdom of God?³¹

As a result, there were campaigns to print copies of the New Testament for Jews, along with regular advertisements to support one of several missions to the Jews, both in New York and in Palestine.³² And there were numerous reports about missionary work among Jewish refugees in Shanghai, where missionaries offered comfort, companionship, Bible studies, and outreach services, and celebrated a series of conversions and baptisms.³³

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the basis for Jewish mission was consistently expressed in *The Alliance Weekly* as a combination of four motivations: (1) their generic spiritual “lostness” and the necessity of their salvation through Jesus Christ; (2) the Christian debt to Jews and Judaism, the source of Christianity and the Bible; (3) the future role of Jews in the end times; and (4) the present opportunity to reach Jews, given their plight and consequent receptivity to conversion.

Alliance Eschatology

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it would be difficult to overstate the role of Christian eschatology – the premillennial dispensationalism of the Christian and Missionary Alliance – in this story. During the war years, *The Alliance Weekly* printed dozens and dozens of prophetic articles purporting to explain the meaning of world events in the light of Scripture, with titles such as “The Divine Chart of the Ages” (June 1940), “Christ’s Return and World Problems” (July 1940), and “Signs of the Times” (August 1942).³⁴ The fate of the Jews was very much in the centre of this eschatology.

One example among many is missionary and Bible institute professor Arthur Petrie’s September 1940 article “Among the Myrtle Trees,” a prophetic interpretation of Zechariah 1:8. Without unfolding his speculative exegesis, it laid out Israel’s low estate and Christ Jesus’s mission to comfort and encourage the Jews – his zeal and jealousy for them, his readiness to avenge them and to make war on their behalf. While “the ruling world power decreed the destruction of the entire Jewish nation . . . divine providence intervened, and the nation was saved.” Looking forward into the future, Petrie declared that God continued to keep watch

over the Jews, “stands among His downtrodden Jewish people, [and] we may rest assured is carrying on the government of the world with all their Bible promised interests in view, and is shaping history to bring about His Second Advent.”³⁵

Conclusion

In *The Alliance Weekly*, leading spokesmen for the Christian and Missionary Alliance published widely on the Jews, but because their premillennial dispensational theology produced such a powerful eschatology, their tendency was to essentialize and spiritualize Jews. Over and over, these writers and editors, many of whom held executive positions within the denomination and pastoral positions within Alliance churches, expressed contradictory understandings of Jews that they held in tension with one another. They understood Jews as the people of God, the ones who rejected Christ, the nation under judgment, the people preserved by God, the ones who suffer persecution and who would suffer worse in the time to come, the people who would return to Israel, and the people whose covenant with God would one day be renewed as they would be saved through Jesus Christ.

On the one hand, the writers and editors of *The Alliance Weekly* rejected antisemitism. Many of them devoted their lives in mission to Jews, and did that out of love and concern, not hatred. On the other hand, however, the power of the eschatological lens through which they viewed the Jews absolutely blinded them to the obvious humanitarian needs of Jews suffering and dying across Europe. *Not once* did we find evidence in *The Alliance Weekly* of any Alliance initiative to collect money or gather aid for Jewish refugees, apart from donations regularly solicited for Jewish missions. Moreover, *not once* did we find evidence in *The Alliance Weekly* of any Alliance initiative to engage directly in refugee work or to call on the government to intervene for Jews or to accept new refugees from Europe. Rather, the Alliance spiritualized Jewish suffering and remained passive to the political crises and cataclysm of the Second World War and Holocaust, seeing in Jews only the unfolding of God’s plan to use the destruction of the earth to inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

Endnotes

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