

2020

Chosen People Ministries and the fog of war

Alan M. Shore

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jmjs>



Part of the [European History Commons](#), [History of Christianity Commons](#), and the [Missions and World Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shore, Alan M. (2020) "Chosen People Ministries and the fog of war," *Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies*: Vol. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/jmjs/vol3/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Charles Feinberg Center at Digital Commons @ Biola. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Messianic Jewish Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Biola. For more information, please contact university.archives@biola.edu.



Chosen People Ministries and the Fog of War

Alan M. Shore

INTRODUCTION

As the title of my paper indicates, this research seeks to explore the activities of the American Board of Missions to the Jews (ABMJ), as Chosen People Ministries was known during the years under examination, namely World War II and its aftermath, including the declaration of Jewish statehood.

In order to bring coherency to this picture, I want to introduce my presentation by placing the priorities and activities of the ABMJ during this time in a number of contexts: the extent of the presence of the ABMJ in Europe at this time, the challenges it faced to remain true to the its priority of Jewish evangelism, while at the same time acting to render practical aid to desperate Jews in their immediate spheres of influence and elsewhere, and



finally, what specific actions they took.

As the persecution of the Jews in Europe initiated by the Nazis began literally in the first weeks of Hitler's rule, quite naturally, influential American Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee and the Joint Distribution Committee among others were deeply concerned, although somewhat at a loss as to how to formulate a coherent response. Agreement regarding strategy and concerted action was hampered by the simple fact that the spectrum of Judaism and Jewish ideological commitment in America was simply too broad to achieve consensus. This lack of unity remained a factor in the American Jewish response to Hitler's depredations before and throughout the decade in question.

The pre-war developments in Germany posed a different challenge to the American churches. In some cases, the Jewish situation exposed the uglier prejudices against Jews that had burrowed so deeply into many sectors of the dominant Christian culture. But the rise of Hitlerism and its attendant virulence toward the Jews also had the effect of stirring sympathetic Christian leaders and members of their flocks to come alongside Jews in an unprecedented manner. Thrust into new proximity and pitted against a common foe, Jews and Christians had an opportunity to inspect one another more closely than they had ever done. In so doing, they achieved, in some cases, a degree of rapport that had previously been absent in their relations in the midst of the existing social order.

With the notable exception of the durable, pre-existing relationship of Jewish and Christian Zionists, apart from occasional friendships between influential Jewish and Christian individuals, what we today call interfaith relations did not exist in the lexicon of American religious thought before the 1920s. Prior to that time, there were no official movements specifically

constituted for the purpose of fostering positive inter-religious discourse between Jews and Christians on the basis of mutual religious esteem. One of the most important side effects that the ascendance of Nazi power had on Jewish and Christian leadership in America was that it challenged it not only to respond to the brutalities being visited upon Jews in Europe, but also to break new ground in forming closer, more respectful ties. However, up until that time, the language of mutual religious recognition had not yet truly developed a vocabulary.

The groundwork, however, had already been laid. As early as 1919, Alfred Williams Anthony, chairman of the Federal Council of Churches, in a letter to Reform Rabbi Leo Franklin, president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, expressed the desire for Jews and Christians to foster relations upon a footing of greater reciprocity.¹ As well, early efforts to promote positive inter-religious relations were not initiated solely by Christians. Throughout the 1920s, Reform Rabbi Isaac Landman, editor of the influential *American Hebrew*, advocated closer Jewish-Christian interaction. It was evident that an attitude of new openness from both sides was in the air.

The Protestant establishment, specifically from impetus generated by the growing influence of the Federal Council of Churches, matched Jewish efforts to further inter-religious relations. Propelled by the participation of Christian luminaries such as Bishop Francis J. McConnell of the Methodist Episcopal Church and theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, the FCC's prestige was enhanced further by the endorsement of Theodore Roosevelt, Charles Evans Hughes and other prominent public figures. The energetic efforts of the FCC resulted in the 1924 formation of its Committee on Good Will Between Jews and

1 Jonathan J. Golden, “From Cooperation to Confrontation: The Rise and Fall of the Synagogue Council of America,” (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 2008), 39.



Christians. Heartened by the Committee's avowed commitment to improvement of Jewish-Christian relations, B'nai B'rith contributed \$6,000 to its annual budget.²

Many Jews were skeptical, however. There was the concerning matter of Christian proselytizing. It was well known to Jewish leaders that the FCC supported missionary efforts directed toward their people, which had in recent decades escalated as a result of the massive migration of over two million Jews to America from Eastern Europe, beginning around 1880. As Dr. Yaakov Ariel has noted in his wonderfully written *The Evangelization of the Chosen People*, by 1910, there were 45 Christian evangelical missionary organizations in the United States whose focus was to evangelize Jewish people, many of whom were immigrants, by employing the tools of publications, public meetings and practical aid.³ The ABMJ may be said to be first among equals, or else close to it.

Moreover, in his article, "The Evangelist at Our Door: The American Jewish Response to Christian Missionaries, 1880-1920," Ariel explores a number of facets of the Jewish response to Jewish evangelism and those who responded to its message. He notes that they mostly directed their complaints at Jewish converts who had become engaged in evangelization work. Jews reacted much more negatively toward Jewish converts involved in proselytizing than toward non-Jewish missionaries. He writes, "Gentiles could be expected to evangelize Jews, but Jewish missionaries were seen as traitors twice over. Not only had they defected from the Jewish camp, but they had also joined the enemies in their struggle to destroy the Jewish faith and Jewish

² Matthew Hedstrom, *The Rise of Liberal Religion: Book Culture and American Spirituality in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 147.

³ Yaakov S. Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 22-23.

national existence. They were bound to be villains.”⁴

Conscious of these pressures, Jewish leaders were adamant in their demand that if good will was truly the goal of a Christian approach to their community, then Jewish participation in any form of inter-religious dialogue was contingent upon the understanding that proselytizing was off the table.⁵ Despite repeated assurances that it would be, some Jewish leaders continued to be skeptical of the FCC’s motives and remained aloof. As Ariel further observes, “The aggressive missionary enterprises left their mark on Jewish perceptions of Christian attitudes toward Jews. Many in the Jewish immigrant community became suspicious of Christian charitable, welfare, or educational enterprises and at times were convinced that any Christian willingness to show goodwill toward the Jews was motivated by a hidden missionary agenda.”⁶

In short, although Jewish leaders often expressed contempt toward evangelists and what they considered to be the misguided Jews they were able to dupe, the efforts of Jewish evangelists clearly got under their skin for a number of reasons. But as Ariel further notes, “The idea that some converts might have been persuaded by the Christian message and had embraced Christianity after much thought and inner struggle was a possibility their fellow Jews were often unable to countenance. That the missionaries perceived themselves as sincere friends of

4 Yaakov Ariel, “The Evangelist at Our Door: The American Jewish Response to Christian Missionaries, 1880-1920,” n.d., 146.

5 In an editorial published in March 1931, B’nai B’rith criticized John Mott’s public commitment to Jewish evangelism, asserting that it is incompatible with the objectives of the goodwill movement. *B’nai B’rith Magazine*. 45 (1931): 190, cited in Benny Kraut, “A Wary Collaboration – Jews, Catholics and the Goodwill Movement” in William R. Hutchison, *Between the Times: The Travail of the Protestant Establishment in America, 1900-1960* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 228 note 31.

6 Ariel, “The Evangelist at Our Door: The American Jewish Response to Christian Missionaries, 1880-1920,” 149.



the Jews and saw their work as a manifestation of goodwill were concepts many Jews could not understand.”⁷

It was a concept that some Protestants were beginning to lose sight of as well. The matter of Christian evangelism toward Jews and the obstacle it presented to Jewish-Christian relations was also a bone of contention among Protestant churches, albeit for a different reason. While Jews were naturally suspicious of hidden missionary agendas in the goodwill movement, some of the more conservative figures under the umbrella of the more generally theologically liberal FCC were deeply troubled by the implication that the ground rules for inter-religious dialogue required Christians to lay down their tracts and cease to carry out what they perceived as their religious duty to bring Jewish people (among others in general) to faith in the claims of the Gospel. Conrad Hoffman, director of the FCC’s International Missionary Council’s Committee on the Christian Approach to the Jews, and others like him, viewed such a move as a portent that would not only undermine Jewish evangelism, but would also have a greater unwholesome effect on the church’s larger commitment to world evangelism generally.⁸

Hoffman was a highly influential figure who proved to be not only a staunch advocate of Jewish evangelism, but one who also worked tirelessly in the 1930s to rally support to help Christians of Jewish background leave Germany.⁹ Serving at the same time as Secretary of the Presbyterian Board of National Missions, Hoffman also oversaw that denomination’s work among the

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁸ Hoffman’s commitment to Jewish evangelism did not preclude friendly relations with prominent Jewish figures. During the war, he began and maintained a friendship with Sholem Asch that would come to include John Mott. Asch’s controversial views on Jewish-Christian relations and his best-selling New Testament historical fiction contributed doubtlessly to the spark of attraction.

⁹ Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People*, 128–129.

Jewish community.¹⁰ As early as 1933, he began to publicize the rise of antisemitism in Poland, including a firsthand account “What I saw in Poland” that was published as the lead article in the June, 1933, issue of the Protestant interdenominational *The Missionary Review of the World*.

Hoffman was also painfully conscious of the harmful effects of Christian antisemitism. In his pamphlet “The Jews Today: A Call to Christian Action,” published in 1941, he makes the case against antisemitism from three directions. First, he condemns it as being antithetical to authentic Christian teachings. Next, Hoffman emphasizes what he characterizes as the underlying kinship that exists between Christianity and Judaism, asserting that, “The Christian approach to the Jew must embody full respect and gratitude for Judaism.”¹¹ Finally, most importantly from his standpoint, Hoffman urges Christians to reject antisemitism because it impedes Jewish evangelism. For him, Christian antisemitism’s most pernicious effect is that it causes Jews to turn a deaf ear to the Gospel. Despite the ill feeling he knew his views were bound to stir up, he believed that to exclude the Jews from the church’s Great Commission was a variety of antisemitism in and of itself.¹²

The rifts between liberals and conservatives in the FCC on this issue only widened. At last, weary of struggling with more

10 Conrad Hoffman, *The Jews Today a Call to Christian Action* (New York: Friendship Press, 1900), 2.

11 *Ibid.*, 54.

12 Perhaps Hoffman was somewhat reassured by a letter he received on June 3, 1936, from Reform Rabbi Morris Lazaron, a member of the National Conference of Jews and Christians. Reflecting on the subject of evangelization, Lazaron wrote, “I can see no reason, however, why if conversionist activities are conducted in the proper ways - that is without the temptation of candy and play and enticements of all sorts calculated to lure the immature - I say I can see no reason why anyone should demand that you cease such activities. I personally feel that I should like to spread my Judaism to the four corners of the earth...I do not see why either of us should not offer what we have for healing, inspiration and peace.” MS-71 Box 4 Folder 11 Lazaron-Hoffman Correspondence.



conservative elements in its own coalition that were suspicious of the goodwill enterprise in any event, leading members of the Committee on Good Will decided in 1927 to act independently of the FCC to join forces with willing Jewish leaders to form the National Conference of Jews and Christians. In the end, they prioritized placing Jewish-Christian relations on what they believed to be more productive footing. Whatever their convictions may have been regarding the Great Commission, they were clear-eyed enough to see that if they were to make the relational progress they sought with their Jewish counterparts, they must be able to convince them that as far as establishing inter-religious cooperation, their goals lay where they said they did. This they attempted to do with many soothing words.

If Hoffman was troubled by what he perceived as the prospect of a distancing among influential Protestants from the task of Jewish evangelism, one can only think what this must have meant to Jewish evangelistic ministries such as the ABMJ, which viewed the terms of the interfaith project as a betrayal not only of Jewish evangelism but of the Gospel itself. One need look no further than the lead article of *The Chosen People* in January, 1933. Departing from the usual format of the magazine, Joseph Cohn preempted Leopold's usual introductory piece and led off with an unusually lengthy editorial that excoriates the stance of FCC, the goodwill movement. He names names – the names of people who throughout the 1930s and 40s would be prominent in Jewish-Christian efforts to publicly and vociferously denounce Hitler and the Nazis in a mainly fruitless effort to alter the course of events for the Jews in Europe. He writes,

For the Church of Christ has been betrayed; and betrayed in the house of those who profess to be her friends," singling out former president Rev. S. Parkes Cadman, D. D, writer of a widely read syndicated newspaper column entitled

“Everyday Questions,” in which column, Cohn asserts Parkes had repeatedly and frankly asserted that he is opposed to “proselyting” as well as then FCC President, the well-known Bishop Francis J. McConnell, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, whom Cohn roundly condemns for his attempts at interfaith amity at the expense of Cohn’s understanding of the true Gospel message.¹³

Cohn goes on to cite an article which appeared in the *B’nai B’rith Magazine* of March, 1931, which he characterizes as nothing less than a betrayal. The article is entitled “Are Christian Missions Menacing Judaism?” by Rev. Everett R. Clinchy, Secretary, Committee of Good Will between Jews and Christians, Federal Council of Churches of Christian America, another stellar name in the mainline Protestant church.

Clinchy writes, “But why does the Christian missionary feel compelled to approach the Jews? The Christian missionary to the Jew has the conviction (sometimes bordering, on the pathological) that he has the only way of salvation. Does the Good Will movement prepare the way for proselyting? Just the opposite.”¹⁴

Cohn goes on at some length, clearly agitated, at what he is deeply convinced is a turn toward the theological wilderness with frightful ramifications.

It hardly needs to be said that organizations such as the ABMJ, whose missionary focus confirmed mainstream Judaism’s worst fears, were shut out of participation in the interfaith enterprise. Shunned by Jewish leadership and seen as a hindrance by Christians eager to find common ground with Jewish representatives, Jewish-Christians and their missions were viewed as an unwelcome, destabilizing and disruptive

13 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4, (January, 1933), 3.

14 Everett Clinchy, “Are Christian Missions Menacing Judaism?” *B’Nai B’Rith Magazine* (March, 1931), 192.



force. With the backing of the churches and other Christian institutions that supported them, organizations such as the ABMJ would have to define a role for themselves as the desperation of the plight of European Jewry intensified.

THE ABMJ AND ITS ALLIES

Looking back at the ABMJ history, it is plain to see that from the moment the young Leopold Cohn entered the Dewitt Memorial Church building on Rivington St. that operated as a mission to Jews under the auspices of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, what became Chosen People Ministries was integrally connected to the churches and Christian learning institutions in synch with the project of Jewish evangelism. This was the stream of Christianity, embodied by Presbyterians such as Conrad Hoffman and others who shared his evangelistic viewpoint, from which Cohn derived support. Starting with his own education, this tradition influenced not only his theology, once he was established in the new world, but the theological principles upon which Chosen People Ministries rests up to this day.

It is a given that without the partnership of such Christians, their churches and the learning institutions that they spawned, Chosen People Ministries would have been hard-pressed, to say the least, to carry out the truly impressive program of expansion that Dr. Glaser has described under the leadership of Joseph Hoffman Cohn that brings us to and through the Nazi era. It is also true that Joseph's expanding network of contacts among church sponsored missions already established in Europe would prove especially valuable during the fraught times beginning with the rise of Hitler.

I turn now to the how and when the ABMJ crossed the

Atlantic and migrated, so to speak, in a reverse direction, from America back to Europe.

THE ABMJ IN EUROPE

One might say that the presence of Chosen People Ministries began to be established in Europe even before there were any workers on the scene. Just as the Yiddish language had proven such a potent international vehicle for the dissemination of so many varieties of Jewish ideology, so it was that copies of the Mission’s Yiddish newspaper, *The Shepherd of Israel*, began find its way into the hands of Jewish people in Europe. As early as 1923, the Mission began circulating reports of Jewish faith decisions that came about as a result. Although *The Shepherd of Israel* was being distributed by various other agencies and individuals in Palestine, Great Britain, Germany, Russia, and elsewhere in Europe, it was not until 1932 that Simon Assur, a Lithuanian Jew, was taken on as a staff member to begin a work in Kovno, distributing *The Shepherd of Israel*. *The Shepherd of Israel* was also instrumental in works that were undertaken in Russia and Latvia although these works were tragically cut short. *The Shepherd of Israel* was also an instrument of choice for Frank Boothby, who used it in his “Gospel Gate” ministry in Jerusalem and who became a member of the ABMJ staff in 1933. About the work in Palestine and the emergent State of Israel, more will be said later.

The February, 1934 issue of *The Chosen People* newsletter reports:

We can never speak too highly of the incalculable influence of the little Yiddish paper *The Shepherd of Israel*, which now is in its 16th year of service for the Lord Jesus Christ. A summary of its world distribution would include France,



England, China, Austria, Palestine, Czecho-Slovakia, Australia, Latvia, Denmark, Roumania, Canada, Poland, Sweden, Scotland, Bulgaria, Turkey. Forty different Mission stations are included in these statistical summaries, and the number of papers sent to these various Missions total anywhere from 25 to 2000 copies a month.¹⁵

In July of 1934, Joseph traveled to London to attend the Triennial Conference of the International Hebrew Christian Alliance, founded in Hamburg in 1925. His purpose was to enlarge his network of contacts among Europe's leaders in the movement. While there, he was awakened to the increasingly dangerous situation of the Jews and determined to expand the Mission's presence in Europe with a large-scale relief effort to aid Jews attempting to flee from Europe while this was still possible as the storm clouds gathered.

Hebrew Christians had a particular vulnerability. Organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee considered them Christians and therefore not Jewish any longer and as such ineligible for aid. The Christian community, by and large, did not attend to them. Therefore, as they fell between the two stools, as it were, they were without institutional shelter.

Cohn made two consequential contacts in London at that meeting. The first was Pastor Arnold Frank, a founding member of the IHCA and a leading Jewish evangelical leader in Germany whose Jewish mission operated under the auspices of the Irish Presbyterian Church. That contact would lead to Cohn to Frank's able assistant, Herbert Singer, another Jewish believer who had been discipled by Frank in 1909 and had served under him from that time, who joined the ABMJ staff in 1937, and by 1940 had taken charge of the Mission's Jewish Refugee Relief work. By that time, Frank's work had come under attack by the Nazis and

¹⁵ *The Chosen People*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 5, (February, 1934), 5.

Frank, at the age of 80, was hauled off for a mercifully brief stay at a concentration camp. Happily, Frank survive the war and would live to the age of 106 when he passed away in 1965.

The second contact Cohn made in London was with Moses Gitlin, who had come to faith and been baptized through the ministry of Leopold Cohn and had been educated, with the Mission’s help, at Moody Bible Institute. Gitlin and Joseph Cohn had maintained contact over the years and Cohn was able to bring him on staff in 1934 and open a branch in Poland. There, in Warsaw, the Mission made provision for a seven-room apartment, where Gitlin would train other Jewish evangelists to send out to the field. As the November, 1934 *The Chosen People* issue reports,

Now we present Brother Gitlin to our readers; many of you already know about him from the splendid reports that were published in past years... and you will rejoice that he has finally come, as a dove, to his original home, and now is one of us, a co-worker and a fellow servant...¹⁶

The work in Poland was cut tragically short, especially in light of the progress that the Gitlins were able to produce in a relatively short time. Amid glowing reports of well attended meetings in Warsaw, including the establishment of a Messianic congregation, and a wide-ranging ministry in other parts of Poland, after 1936 political pressure and increasingly violent antisemitic attacks stifled the ministry in the crib, in a manner of speaking. The Gitlins departed Poland in July of 1939 and although another faithful couple, Jacob and Leah Goren, heroically strove to continue the work throughout the war and eventually went on to minister in Jerusalem, the war destroyed the mission’s Polish outreach.

Cohn’s vision for expansion in Europe didn’t stop there. In

16 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XL, No. 2, (November, 1934), 6.



1935, he met with Henri Vincent, a Baptist pastor in Paris whose secretary, a highly literate Jewish woman named Marie Solomon, offered to translate *The Shepherd of Israel* into French – and thus was born *l'Berger d'Israel*. That contact led to another Jewish believer, Andre Frankel, who was taken on as a missionary. The Paris work would prove to be of enormous importance, as we shall come to, as the situation of the Jews continued to deteriorate as the war approached.

There is absolutely no doubt that Joseph Cohn's desire to expand the work in Europe was fueled by the urgency he felt on behalf of Jewish refugees. While in Germany that summer of 1935 he was able to observe first-hand the growing desperation of the thousands of German Jews who were fleeing to France. As the situation worsened, board minutes of the end of the following year note Joseph's concern for the overseas work and linked it directly with refugee relief. The board responded by allocating the sum of \$15,000 to be disbursed during the following year.

There are still a few more chess pieces to place on the board of continental Europe that fill out the picture of the ABMJ's readiness to respond as it was able to what was ahead. One is Otto Samuel, a Jewish believer who had a short-lived ministry in Nazi Germany until he was forced to flee to Belgium, where he established a soup kitchen in Brussels that fed a hundred Jewish refugees each day while also ministering to their spiritual needs as he could. Arrested and interned as the Nazis invaded and occupied Belgium, Samuel was incarcerated in the Spanish Pyrenees and was later moved to an internment camp in France. He endured horrific conditions until he was at last released in 1941 and was able to reach America.

Another is Emanuel Lichtenstein, the grandson of Rabbi Ignatz Lichtenstein of Tápíószele, Hungary, who was also a committed believer and the author of numerous books, articles

and tracts, including *An Appeal to the Jewish People*. After having been convinced of the Gospel after reading the New Testament, he was quoted as saying, “I looked for thorns and I gathered roses.” Growing up under the tutelage of his grandfather, it is perhaps not surprising that young Emanuel began to follow in his footsteps. Finding himself in Vienna after having been displaced by Nazi terror, Emanuel met Joseph in 1936, when Cohn brought him onto the staff. Of his time in Vienna, Joseph reported,

The brethren in Vienna cannot express enough gratitude to us, that we have in this way contributed a worker to help them in their efforts to reach the Jews of that city. Vienna at the present time has many thousands of poor desperate Jews that have escaped from Germany, and are in a state of starvation and suffering beyond the power of language to describe. I visited in some of their homes last summer, and was deeply touched with the unspeakable poverty and need. We are so thankful that we have been able to send not only the salary for Mr. Lichtenstein to Vienna each month, but we also have sent extra money for relief work to the most needy of these cases, and with strict limitations that our money shall be used exclusively for helping such Jews as are known to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.¹⁷

CRISIS AND CHALLENGES UNDER NAZI PERSECUTION

Before I go into some further specifics about the kinds of relief work that was done, I want to pause a moment to discuss the challenges that faced not only the ABMJ, but every other Jewish agency that wanted to respond to the unfolding horrors of the 30s and 40s. In addition to formidable task of raising resources came the questions of to whom should aid be directed and how was it

¹⁷ *The Chosen People*, Vol. LVIII, No. 3, (December, 1937), 14.



to be distributed. I just finished reading a collection of articles assembled in a book, the JDC at 100, which commemorated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Joint Distribution Committee in 1914. In fact, Dr. Zhava Glaser contributed a very fine piece which was a comparative study of the Jewish refugee communities that managed to find a foothold in Shanghai and Cuba.

Some of the recurring themes in those essays dealing with the Nazi era is the scarcity of resources, the difficulty of getting those resources to where they were most needed and the internal strife among various factions who vied for what they thought should be their fair share. Another pattern that emerged was a growing concern that donations were a trust should be approached with the most responsible stewardship possible, and the related questions of who qualified for help and what criteria should define that. Certainly, in the case of the JDC, as I mentioned earlier, Jewish identity was a must, although there were inevitably exceptions to the rule along the way. But the rationale was that the JDC, by definition was a Jewish helping agency. This is what their donors expected them to be.

In light of that, I want to look a bit at the constraints the ABMJ operated under in terms of the offer of practical aid. Some things they shared in common with other Jewish aid efforts, such as the awareness of the urgency of the situation, the reality of scarce resources, the desire to use them wisely and narrowing the focus, at least to some extent, by prioritizing who was to be helped. And just as the JDC rationalized that other agencies were there to help non-Jews and that helping Jews seemed to be no one's else's priority, and that "taking care of our own" is a well-recognized Jewish value, it became the priority of the ABMJ. Even more, given the unique position of Jewish believers, Cohn was determined not only to give toward the neediest cases, but also with the strict guideline

that money should be used exclusively to help Jewish believers. We know that that exclusivity did not last, could not last, but the reason for its emphasis is worth noting.

First of all, as I stated earlier, Jewish believers were in many eyes neither fish nor fowl and had even fewer options than regular Jews. But there is a wider issue that bears upon the foundational principles of evangelical missiology. It is the relationship, made especially relevant in these circumstances, between the work of evangelism and the rendering of practical aid. With regard to Jewish missions, this question is taking place in the particularly anxious moment in American religious history I alluded to earlier and the context of larger battles having to do with the priorities of the church itself. The work of the Great Commission, once seen as a given, was now perceived to be under attack. And one unfortunate, perhaps unintended consequence of this, was a growing bifurcation in some quarters between evangelism and the work of practical assistance. If the growing Social Gospel movement in America that emanated from the liberal wing and which some perceived as coming at the expense of the saving of souls, privileging “Deed” over “Word,” the mission-minded and donors who supported them were perhaps in danger of over-reaction by falling into the opposite error of neglecting the good works enjoined by the Gospel in their zeal to uphold the authoritative power of the Scriptures.

This issue came to the fore in the ABMJ world around 1934, when the idea to purchase land for a colony in Israel or elsewhere for Jewish believers was bruited about the membership of the IHCA, only to founder on the reluctance of some members to use funds raised for evangelism for other than that designated purpose. To no avail Sir Leon Levison, then president, argued, “The bogey that money is only to be used for evangelizing is all wrong. We cannot get money to bring people to Christ...and let them die.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Harold A Sevenser, *A Rabbi's Vision: A Century of Proclaiming Messiah*;



WARTIME ACTIVITIES OF THE ABMJ

With the invasion of Poland by Germany from the west and Russia from the east in September, 1939, the dense fog of war soon descended on larger part of the world's Jewish population. Almost six years and six million Jewish deaths later, the remnant of European Jewish civilization would emerge in tatters, never to recover the depth and beauty of its former cultural heritage. From the earliest moments of the onset of this calamity, the ABMJ strove mightily to do what it could to rescue and preserve Jewish lives.

With a history of kindergardens, medical clinics and educational programs deeply ingrained in its culture from the very beginning, the ABMJ was able to plot a course amid these conflicts, with only the condition that practical aid must be accompanied by a Gospel witness. As Cohn concisely phrased it,

It may be important to stress here once more, that we are not a relief agency, nor a Refugee Society. Ours is a God-commissioned work of presenting the message of Salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, and this we do in season and out. Refugee relief we use only as a means to a vital end — the salvation of men and women. Frankly, we are not interested in relief work for its own sake.¹⁹

Having said that, it is of vital importance to remember that in these harrowing years, not only did the ABMJ attempt to nourish souls, but to meet the needs of the bodies they inhabited as best it could. With a presence now established in Poland, Paris and Vienna and a man in place in Brussels, the ABMJ braced to meet the challenge of the influx of fleeing refugees and the

A History of Chosen People Ministries, Inc. (Charlotte, NC: Chosen People Ministries, Inc., 1994), 186.

¹⁹ *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 1, (October, 1939), 5.

tightening vise of Nazi occupation. They ministered as they were able, for as long as they were able, both before the war and in some instances even after the commencement of World War II virtually cut off European Jewry from even the most basic forms of assistance. The following reports, disseminated through *The Chosen People*, offer accounts that retain their immediacy to this day and offer a glimpse of the small victories the ABMJ was able to achieve at this time and beyond, even in the deteriorating circumstances:

Despite Hitler’s annexation of Austria in March of 1938 and the resulting intensification of Jewish persecution, Immanuel Lichtenstein was able to continue his work, at least for a time. The November 1939 issue of *The Chosen People* reports,

In spite of the war conditions in Germany, the Nazis have left unmolested the work in which we have a share, in Vienna, of old Austria. The Jewish Mission with which we are affiliated there, is maintained by the brethren of the Swedish Missionary Society, ...The Director of the Vienna Mission told me how Mr. Lichtenstein had endeared himself to those poor Jews, hundreds and thousands of them, and how he had been able to organize by means of a staff of twelve volunteer workers, a beautifully systematized program of visitation, relief, employment-seeking, refugee emigration, hospital care, and many other activities incident to looking after what is really an overwhelming task...the problems presented and the tasks involved are truly overwhelming.²⁰

Lichtenstein’s persevered as long as he was able. Less than two years later, *the Chosen People* reported that, as the Nazi deportations of Jews continued,

Our friends are asked especially to pray for our missionary in Vienna, Rev. Emanuel Lichtenstein, for the numerous other missionaries with whom he was associated there and

20 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, (November, 1939), 8-9.



for the many hundreds of Jewish Christians who flocked to the Mission of Seegasse (a Jewish section) as a shelter in the hour of terror. We are doing our utmost to get Mr. Lichtenstein out of Vienna and to transfer him to some South American port such as Buenos Aires where he can continue as our missionary.²¹

Lichtenstein's rescue was accomplished, and he did indeed go on to service in Buenos Aires and America.

The years 1939 to 1941 were busy years for the ABMJ's ministries in Europe as it sought to meet the rapidly expanding needs of Europe's increasingly desperate Jews. In 1939, Cohn reports,

When we were in Paris last summer, we eagerly seized an opportunity which the Lord clearly presented to us. A dear Christian woman, a member of the Eglise Evangelique where our Paris Branch is located, and of which Pastor Henri Vincent is the presiding head, found herself a widow, and possessed of a chateau some 300 miles south of Paris. The grounds are spacious, and make a beautiful picture. She said to our workers in Paris, "Here I am a widow with a comfortable home and no occupation to keep me busy, and I do want to serve the Lord. If you can use the property as a Home for some of the dear children of your Jewish Christian refugees, you are welcome to it, and I will further devote my own time and strength to help in such a work." Cohn goes on to say, "We now have twelve children in the Home, and they are a happy lot, far removed from the heartaches and burning memories of the cruelties and sufferings heaped upon their helpless bodies and souls because of Nazi evictions. The parents are in Paris being looked after by our workers..."²²

The following month, Cohn wrote in an unmistakably heartfelt manner about the destitute refugee Jews in Europe,

21 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLVI, No. 6, (March, 1941), 10.

22 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 3, (December, 1939), 7.

We have been traveling down a one-way street. And that street has led us with an ever-increasing intensity to widen and then widen again, our every effort to bring relief to hungry stomachs as well as to hungry hearts. And in God's mercy we have been allowed to do both. And so we took up correspondence with our missionary staffs in Brussels, Paris and Vienna, and beginning with November 15th we authorized in each city the establishing of a Soup Kitchen, or a Food Depot. The plan is to have a simple but substantial noon day meal, perhaps a bowl of beef stew and then some bread and coffee. After the meal there will be a regular Gospel service, with testimonies following, for the one is to feed the body, while the other feeds the immortal soul.²³

In addition to some of the direct ministry Cohn references at this time, we can also note requests that came from him from some far-flung places where the ABMJ had no direct presence at all. As the January, 1940, issue of *The Chosen People* reports,

From Bolivia also came the Macedonian call. Here too, refugee Jews from Central Europe have come, desperately seeking to find a place of shelter in a world which wants them not. So, there came to us an SOS call from our friends of the Bolivian Indian Mission asking for immediate grants of tracts in Yiddish, Gospels and New Testaments. And we were so happy to be able to respond without delay, just as we responded previously to similar calls from Shanghai, from Mexico, from Iceland and from many other quarters of the earth where Jews have trekked to- find a place upon which to set their feet.²⁴

As well, as escape from Europe became an ever-increasing matter of life and death, the ABMJ became more politically involved. For example, the ABMJ issued a call to its readership to volunteer to provide “Affidavits of Support.”

23 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, (January, 1940), 10.

24 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, (January, 1940), 9.



We are besieged from Europe with pitiful letters asking that we provide Affidavits of Support so as to enable destitute Jewish refugees to come to America. An Affidavit of Support is a form which any one in America can sign and in which the signer agrees to be responsible for the support of the family for whom he is signing the Affidavit, guaranteeing that the family will not become dependent upon the United States Government. We will also give you our Mission guarantee that any such families that will come over because of your affidavit will be cared for by the Mission and that you will be protected by us against any possible claims.²⁵

With the doors of Europe slammed shut, the ABMJ was forced to place its emphasis upon the refugees that had somehow escaped, especially those who had managed to make it to America.

1942-1945:

AWARENESS AND REALIZATION

The question of when the murderous intentions of the Nazis became widely known in America is bound up with other controversies including Roosevelt's policies, the actions of the State Department, other culpable parties and a multitude of other factors. However, although a more focused picture of the scope of catastrophe could not be determined until after the Allied victory, many dreadful facts had begun to emerge long before the war's conclusion. As early as August 1942, word of the "Final Solution" reached Rabbi Stephen Wise, President of the American Jewish Congress. At that time, uncertain of the reliability of the facts, Wise chose not to publicize what information he had received at the behest of Under-Secretary of

25 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLVI, No. 2, (November, 1940), 12.

State, Sumner Welles.²⁶ However, in the ensuing months, upon confirmation that hundreds of thousands and finally millions of Jews had perished, the realization dawned this was a catastrophe that so far outstripped previous calamities in the lengthy narrative of Jewish suffering that it defied description. Even as American Jews clung to the hope that something could be done to rescue their remnant, they began to realize that a way of life that they or their parents or grandparents had known had already been irretrievably altered and was in danger of complete extinction.

By 1943, it was well established that at least two million Jews had already perished in Europe. The question was what could or would be done to salvage the lives of the rest. The ABMJ experienced the same sense of helplessness that had descended over other deeply concerned Jewish organizations as the unfolding horrors engulfed European Jewry as the question “What Can Be Done” reverberated over and over. The answer turned out to be, precious little. As Cohn wrote,

And from the saddest depths of our heart we can only answer the dear child of God, this is the most important thing you can do—pray! For the moment nothing material can be done; there is no possible way to get money into the hands of these miserable victims of demon hate; there is no way whereby we can rescue even one family from the clutches of Hitler’s maw...²⁷

Of course, amid the carnage, some Jews did survive, depending on time, place and other factors known and unknowable. For example, thousands of young Jewish men in Germany who were able to pass as non-Jews were able to join the army and thus to hide in plain sight. In Germany, marriage to a non-Jew upped the

26 Yehuda Bauer, “The Holocaust, America, and American Jewry,” *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* VI no.1 (2012): 65.

27 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLVIII, No. 7, (April, 1943), 9.



chances for survival. Although the Nuremberg laws set out strict outlines to prevent Jewish and non-Jewish weddings, the Nazis were reluctant to impose forced separations in the case of already existing marriages for fear of the effect of such a policy upon civilian morale. Of course, such restraint did not apply to Jews beyond Germany who fell into the Nazi net.

Did being a Jewish believer help? Certainly, there were assimilated, professing German Christian churchgoers who met the Nazis criteria to be labeled Jewish who somehow survived, but I see nothing to support the claim that their church membership, in and of itself, protected them. On the other hand, as we have seen, Jewish believers who resisted assimilation placed themselves in a no man's land where their needs were ignored by conventional Jewish and Christian helping agencies alike. As such, they were, if anything, more vulnerable.

ABMJ staff members risked their lives in their heroic efforts to continue to operate throughout the Nazi terror, under the threat of death, along with the Jews among whom they sought to minister. As we have seen, Emanuel Lichtenstein escaped from Austria and Arnold Frank also survived the war. So did his assistant, Otto Samuel. Released in 1941, he suffered severe psychological consequences as a result of his experiences and left the mission shortly thereafter. Herbert Singer, another Jewish believer who thrived under the mentorship of Arnold Frank also survived, answering a summons from Joseph Cohen to relocate with his family to America to assist Cohn there. However, his brother, Fritz, and other family members were overwhelmed by the Nazi terror and died in camps. Moses and Clara Gitlin left Poland barely six weeks before it was invaded. Jacob and Leah Goren remained, persevered and somehow lived.

We do not know the fate of the thousands of Jewish lives that were led to faith and nurtured or were otherwise aided by

the mission during these fraught years. No doubt, unnumbered of these nameless souls who were brought to faith and nurtured under the aegis of the mission lost their lives. Those who share their faith look to see them in the world to come.

Along with many other Jewish groups who had previously resisted political Zionism and had altered their stance in light of the war's devastating effects, the ABMJ seemed also to soften its position, even if only a little. One of the few instances where I find any references in *The Chosen People* to activities beyond the scope of its immediate co-religionists comes in as close to a printed affirmation of Jewish statehood as there would be in the Cohn years. Even so, it is not from Cohn himself, but in a reprinted address entitled “Calling All Jews! Or What about the Fifth Freedom (Ezekiel 20:33 - 35)” by C. Gordon Brownville, pastor of Tremont Temple Baptist Church of Boston. It was delivered at one of the sessions of the Second New York Congress on Prophecy, held in Calvary Baptist Church, December 5 - 12, 1943. In it, Pastor Brownville makes a direct reference to the production of *We Will Never Die*, a pageant presented at Madison Square Garden earlier that year written by Ben Hecht, one of Hollywood's foremost screenwriters and an avowed Revisionist Zionist. Pastor Brownville's oratory is both eloquent and stirring,

Thirty centuries ago in Egypt thousands of Jews sat in mourning, and with bowed heads cried unto God for deliverance. On March 9, 1943, a repetition in some degree of that former experience took place. Forty thousand men and women at two separate observances of deep mourning sat in Madison Square Garden and bowed their heads. The lights went out even as in suffering Europe, where two million Jews already have been slain by the hand of Hitler and where four million more await the same terrible fate of the oppressed.



Not only does the voice of these forty thousand Jews rise up in prayer and in demand for action, but the voice of every true Christian ought to be joined with them. What about the Fifth Freedom? Should we, as Christians and as a Christian church, not unite our voice with Jews everywhere in demanding action upon this Fifth Freedom by the United Nations? This freedom has to do with the United Nations' promise to the of freedom from future persecution and the recognition of Palestine as a national Jewish homeland.²⁸

THE ABMJ, ZIONISM
AND THE JEWISH STATE

This brings me to the final element of my presentation – which is the development of the ABMJ's attitude toward Zionism over the time frame we have looked at. As we know, in its earlier days, Zionism was a minority ideology that was opposed by Jewish Communists, Socialists, the Orthodox and the Reform. It might come as surprise to some that although the ABMJ had an abiding interest in ministry in Palestine, Joseph Cohn, along with many other Jews of differing ideologies, was an implacable foe of Jewish statehood. Editorializing in *The Chosen People*, Cohn wrote,

Any Jew who has been born again and become a member of our Lord's body, the Church, has no further interest in Jewish racial or nationalistic schemes which the Palestine Zionist movement frankly is. Every so often we come across attempts to start something distinctively Jewish Christian, sometimes it is to be a Jewish Christian Church, as distinguished from a Gentile Christian... This of course is unscriptural, for in the Word of God it is always THE CHURCH, a church composed

28 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLIX, No. 5, (February, 1944), 16.

of both Jew and Gentile who, because He broke down the middle wall of partition between the twain have become one.²⁹

For Cohn, such opposition to statehood was not a matter of politics, or even, as it was for some religious Jews, so much a matter of Messianic timing. For him, it boiled down to sound ecclesiology and an almost instinctive aversion to any humanly derived substitute for the divine authentic expression of human community set forth in the Scriptures.

As the noose tightened around the neck of European Jewry, however, Cohn came to recognize that desperate times call for desperate measures and fervently threw his support behind Jewish immigration to Palestine, provided it be done legally. This, however, left the ABMJ to navigate the minefield around the problem of how to minister to illegal Jewish immigrants who had managed to dodge the British gatekeepers. Torn between the desire to render aid to unfortunate Jews, yet mindful of the risks of appearing to advocate lawlessness, Cohn nonetheless did not sugar coat the dire circumstances of European Jews desperate to find safety in what was virtually the only haven left available to them, provided they could reach it. As the situation grew more fraught, Herbert Singer, in charge of Jewish refugee ministry, reported as early as 1940,

Disillusionment is working its havoc. Thousands of Jews, fleeing the horrors and savageries of Central European desolations, overran the frontiers of Palestine, in their desperate search for a place in the sun. It is reported that many ships are still drifting about the Mediterranean, each loaded to the rails with hundreds of these poor shores, for a possible unpatrolled gap, into which their little ship might slip unobserved, and thus land their heart-weary cargo of human derelicts. It is thought that there must be between 15,000

29 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, (October, 1933), 14.



and 30,000 Jews now in Palestine, who have smuggled themselves in illegally. Your Mission is doing what we can to come to the help of these poor miserable and destitute human beings, but what we can do seems so small in the face of the appalling need, that we find ourselves bewildered and staggered.³⁰

Yet even after the war, when Britain appeared to be walking back every promise it had made to the Jews that once the war had ended, their plight would be addressed, Joseph, mindful of the authority of the British, would continue to exercise caution even as he attempted to provide practical aid. Clearly, however, there was a turning point when the ABMJ's feeling for Great Britain soured as the refugee problem escalated. As England continued to display a stony face beyond the end of the war, as he prepared to travel to Palestine in 1947, Joseph had an eye toward Jewish ministry even among those who had entered Palestine in a clandestine manner:

To my great pleasure, the British Government has already granted me a visa for Palestine...However, we shall hope and trust that the door will be open and that I will have full access not only to see for myself what is going on in that bitterly contested land, but that I may inaugurate a worthwhile program of help for the thousands who have been smuggled in, and who find themselves disillusioned and stranded. We may want to establish somewhere in Palestine a home which will care for these hapless creatures on a transient basis, so that many shall pass through our doors, and be helped on to something better both in material comfort and in spiritual blessings.³¹

The policy of the British and its effects upon suffering Jews exploded onto the world's front page in the affair of the ship

30 *The Chosen People*, Vol. XLV, No. 6, (March, 1940), 9.

31 *The Chosen People*, Vol. LII, No. 7, (April, 1947), 7.

Exodus in 1947, which was thwarted by the British Royal Navy in its effort to deliver about 4,500 Jewish refugees to Palestine. After weeks of unfruitful negotiations, the Jews were eventually shipped back to Germany, where they were held in two camps.

The appearance of a report in *The Chosen People* by journalist, activist and author Ruth Gruber, who died in 2016 at the age of 105, further demonstrates a dramatic change of attitude toward the harsh policies of British authority on the part of the ABMJ in its expression of open sympathy for the Jewish “illegals” who sought safety as the risk of life and limb:

It can now be revealed that while the population in the two camps apparently remained stable and the British authorities thought the Exodus people were settling down for the winter in Germany, actually these were people on the march, and nothing could stop them. In little groups they crawled out of the British camps and went down through Europe to secret ports in Italy and France, climbed on Haganah’s tiny fishing boats or large converted ships, and traveled the whole underground journey to Palestine, knowing the way might lead to Cyprus, knowing they might be killed... knowing the British might capture them again and send them back to Germany, yet knowing that the British could not break them.³²

Yet even so, one item not mentioned in *The Chosen People* was the declaration of statehood. In Joseph Cohn’s mind, the Zionist dream was a pipedream beneath his notice and doomed to fail because it would not take into account the authority of the King of Kings. For Joseph Hoffman Cohn, this had always been and would forever remain the paramount issue facing every nation and ideological system, as well as each individual Jewish and Gentile soul.

32 *The Chosen People*, Vol. LIV, No. 4, (January, 1949), 16.



CONCLUSION

Facing the same unimagined challenges posed by the onslaught of the Nazi atrocities that every Jewish organization faced, the ABMJ responded as best it could with the limited personal and resources it had at his disposal. In doing so, it faced challenges unique to its mission and the make-up of its constituency. Foremost among these was maintaining a balance between its primary focus of bringing the message of eternal life to its beloved Jews and rendering the practical aid that was necessary to maintain their lives in the midst of the threat of often imminent death. The members of the ABMJ staff on the ground who acted so courageously and sacrificially compose a roll of true heroes of the faith. In pouring out their lives so selflessly, they serve as an inspiration for us to remember and live up to their legacy.