

Agony in the Pulpit

Jewish Preaching in Response to Nazi Persecution and Mass Murder 1933-1945

by Marc Saperstein

DESCRIPTION:

Many scholars have focused on contemporary sources pertaining to the Nazi persecution and mass murder of Jews between 1933 and 1945—citing dated documents, newspapers, diaries, and letters—but the sermons delivered by rabbis describing and protesting against the ever-growing oppression of European Jews have been largely neglected. *Agony in the Pulpit* is a response to this neglect, and to the accusations made by respected figures that Jewish leaders remained silent in the wake of catastrophe. The passages from sermons reproduced in this volume—delivered by 135 rabbis in fifteen countries, mainly from the United States and England—provide important evidence of how these rabbis communicated the ever-worsening news to their congregants, especially on important religious occasions when they had peak attendance and peak receptivity.

A central theme is how the preachers related the contemporary horrors to ancient examples of persecution. Did they present what was occurring under Hitler as a reenactment of the murderous oppressions by Pharaoh, Amalek, Haman, Ahasuerus, the Crusaders, the Spanish Inquisition, the Russian Pogroms? When did they begin to recognize and articulate from their pulpits an awareness that current events were fundamentally unprecedented? Was the developing cataclysm consistent with traditional beliefs about God's control of what happened on earth? No other book-length study has presented such abundant evidence of rabbis in all streams of Jewish religious life seeking to rouse and inspire their congregants to full awareness of the catastrophic realities that were taking shape in the world beyond their synagogues.

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Complete Sermons

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READER INTERESTS:

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1932 (Prelude)

Jacob Xenob Cohen, "The Menace of Hitlerism to American Jewry," Free Synagogue, New York

1933

Harry Joshua Stern, "Hitlerism, Germany and Civilization," Temple Emanu-El, Montreal, Mass Rally.

Israel Levinthal, "Old Pharaoh in Modern Garb," Brooklyn
Jewish Center, NY

Jacob P. Rudin, "Dark Horizons - 1933," Temple Beth-El, Great Neck, NY

1934

Harold I. Saperstein, "The Call to Battle," Temple Emanu-El of Lynbrook, NY

1935

Ferdinand Isserman, "My Second Visit to Nazi Germany," Temple Israel, St. Louis, MO

1936

Abba Hillel Silver, "But Mordecai Bowed Not Down," The Temple, Cleveland, OH

1937

Israel Mattuck, "The Church Conflict in Germany," Liberal Jewish Synagogue, London

1938

Abraham Mayer Heller, "A Peoples Voice is Silenced," Flatbush Jewish Centre, Brooklyn, NY

Tobias (Tuviah) Geffen, "Sermon on .ayei Sarah 5699, at the Time of the Great Destruction of the
Jews in Germany at the Hands of the Evil Oppressor, Hitler, May his name and his Memory be
Blotted Out," Congregation Shearith Yisrael, Atlanta, GA

1939

Julius Cohn, "Farewell Sermon (Abschiedspredigt), Ulm Congregation"

Ignaz Maybaum, "The Anniversary of November 10," Brondesbury Synagogue, London

1940

Leo Franklin, "Is This the End?" Temple Beth-El, Detroit, MI

1941

Eliezer Berkovits, "Because of Our Sins?" United Hebrew Congregation, Leeds, England

1942

Yitzhak Katz, "Things I Intended to Say ... ," Conference of Jewish Social Self-Help (Zy-dowska
Samapomoc Spolczna, ZSS), Warsaw Ghetto

Michael Elton (formerly Emil Ehrnthal), "The Death Camps," Intercession Service, Day of Fast and
Mourning, Bedford, England

1943

Bertram Korn, "The Prayer for Life," Shaarei Shomayim, Mobile, AL

Akiba Predmesky, "The Ark of G-D Has Been Taken," Jewish Center of Williamsbridge, Bronx, NY

1944

Joseph Hertz, "The Battle of Warsaw," Bevis Marks Synagogue, London

Louis I. Newman, "The Cup of Fury," Congregation Rodeph Sholom, New York

1945

Abraham Cohen, "Peace Celebration," Birmingham Hebrew Congregation, England

Sources and Bibliography

Rabbis Cited

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