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## Silence and Outrage: Reassessing the Complex Christian Response to Kristallnacht in English-Speaking Canada

Jonathan Durance

### Abstract

Historians assessing the response of Canadian Christians to the German Jewish refugee crisis exacerbated by the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938 have broadly described the Christian response as one of silence; this article adds nuance to that description. Denominational records support the established thesis, but a fresh examination of the records of the Canadian National Committee of Refugees and texts published in leading newspapers leaves a different impression, one of an organized and sustained protest movement led by Christians. These sources testify to an outburst of widespread outrage in the weeks following Kristallnacht, followed by the emergence of a cohesive campaign spearheaded by the Canadian National Committee of Refugees. It was Christian clergy and prominent Christian lay people who forcefully protested the government's inaction and actively sought to intervene on behalf of Jewish refugees. Many of them harshly criticized their own denominations' response as reprehensible, but their involvement and voice means that the "silence of Christians" theory needs to be revised to reflect the privatization of religious expression which took place in Canadian culture during the 1930s.

Beginning the evening of 9 November and extending through the following days, the "night of broken glass" was marked by violence, bloodshed, looting, and destruction. Jewish citizens' property was confiscated and their sacred places desecrated. In one sense, it was simply another demonstration of anti-Semitic brutality in Nazi Germany, but the scope and savagery of the event was such that it came to define Nazi Jewish policy, and it confirmed in the minds of many outside Germany the extent of the dangers Jews were facing. As Sharon Gewirtz notes, for those who were previously sceptical about the regime's intentions towards Jews, "it was only the horrors of *Kristallnacht* which provoked the realization" that there could be no Jewish community in Nazi Germany.<sup>1</sup> The evidence of hundreds of burned synagogues, thousands of smashed windows, and numerous acts of individual violence against Jews made it impossible for the global community to ignore or misunderstand the atrocities the Nazis and their followers were perpetuating on the Jewish people.

This was certainly true in North America, where a large Christian population came to understand clearly the nature of the impending calamity. Many also realized how little they were doing personally or collectively to help the Jews. For some historians, this passivity and inertia remained unaltered in spite of Kristallnacht, which has led them to condemn Christians outside of Europe for failing to act in accordance with their stated beliefs. Robert Ross, for example, characterizes the Christian response to the

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Gewirtz, "Anglo-Jewish Responses to Nazi Germany 1933-39: The Anti-Nazi Boycott and the Board of Deputies of British Jews," *Journal of Contemporary History* 26, no. 2 (1 April 1991): 265.

Holocaust as the complicit “silence of the Christians.”<sup>2</sup> Hyam Maccoby, an authority on Judeo-Christian relations, broadened the indictment when he claimed that the underlying anti-Semitism in Christianity created a pervasive and permissive passivity. To him, the cry heard during every Christian massacre of the Jews throughout history was “Who killed Christ?”, which left Christians unable or unwilling to protest the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the problem for historians is the conflict between the Christian affirmation of love, mercy, forgiveness, generosity, and compassion, and inaction in the face of compelling evidence. This line of reasoning has led historians to consider Christians residing in self-proclaimed Christian countries in the 1930s, such as Canada, to be culpable and lacking in integrity because of their apparent failure to act in accordance with their stated beliefs and professed ideals.

This article questions the adequacy of the “silence” theory in the Canadian context by examining the response of English-speaking Protestant Christians during the critical ten-month period between the events of Kristallnacht and the beginning of the war. Once war broke out, the mobilization of human and material resources to oppose the array of Nazi injustices captured the attention of the country, and efforts to avert the Holocaust and save refugees became comingled with the war effort. In the months leading up to the war, however, the Christian response in English-speaking Canada was multifaceted, typically a matter of individual conscience rather than denominational socio-political action, and ultimately destined for bitter disappointment as the protest movement and the initiatives it sponsored failed to change anti-immigration policies or eradicate underlying strains of anti-Semitism.

### **Historiographic Considerations**

Four historians have provided the most thorough research into the nature and extent of the Christian Protestant response in North America, and all argue that Kristallnacht was a significant moment for the Christian community, even though they assess the response from three distinct points of view. Alan Davies and Marilyn F. Nefsky survey Canadian Christian responses to the Jewish plight in the 1930s and into the Second World War. They regard Kristallnacht as one of the four “milestones on the road to Auschwitz,” along with the Aryan Laws of 1933, the refugee crisis of 1939, and the initiation of the Holocaust itself.<sup>4</sup> In the end, though, Davies and Nefsky conclude that “no sustained universal outcry on behalf of the beleaguered refugees ever erupted from either the Christian or the Protestant rank and file, unless the coast-to-coast post-Kristallnacht rallies are regarded in this light. Neither Christian nor Protestant Canada spoke with a collective voice.”<sup>5</sup> Their source material led them to support the idea that churches and Christians in general were largely silent, although they qualify this assessment by acknowledging that the immediate response to Kristallnacht may have been an exception to the general pattern. This qualification is one of the reasons that the Kristallnacht response warrants further investigation.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ross, *So It Was True: The American Protestant Press and the Nazi Persecution of the Jews* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 105; Alan Davies and Marilyn Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?: Canadian Protestantism and the Jewish Plight During the Nazi Era* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997); Deborah Lipstadt, *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust, 1933-1945* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 1. Lipstadt notes the complicit nature of the American Protestant press and the “heavy burden” they bear as a responsible partner in the deaths of thousands of Jews who could have been saved.

<sup>3</sup> Hyam Maccoby, “The Origins of Anti-Semitism,” in *The Origins of the Holocaust: Christian Anti-Semitism*, ed. Randolph Braham (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?*, 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

American historians William Nawyn and Robert Ross have also studied the North American Christian response to the Jewish plight during this period. Their conclusions align with Davies and Nefsky's assessment that the responses to Kristallnacht represented the most significant development in the Christian community leading up to the war.<sup>6</sup> Even though they suggest that Kristallnacht inspired some meaningful Christian response, Nawyn argues that "rhetoric predominated over action" in the Protestant community.<sup>7</sup> Ross concludes that, despite the increased awareness and discussion in the Christian community, there "occurred another kind of 'silence' that was more disturbing in its consequences, the 'silence' embodied in the lack of intervention on behalf of the persecuted Jews and the almost total failure of such interventions as were attempted."<sup>8</sup> For Ross, the silence of the Christian church was the silence of specific deeds and measurable consequences, not the silence of articles written in Christian journals.

These representative studies address the entire period of the Holocaust, including the periods before and after the war. As a result, the analysis of the response to Kristallnacht in the ten months preceding the war is overshadowed and obscured by the general response to the Holocaust. To discover the nature of those Christians who spoke out against this general "silence," this article focuses on the Christian response to one event, Kristallnacht, in an effort to more clearly understand what Christians thought and did.

### **Immediate Response: Outrage and Indignation**

Many thousands of Canadian Christians came together in cities across the country to protest German atrocities and to campaign for government action in the wake of the Kristallnacht pogrom of November 1938. A summary of this initial response can be found in the books cited above and, more specifically, in an article by Kyle Jantzen and Jonathan Durance published in a special issue of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Fall 2011).<sup>9</sup> This article evaluated the nature and impact of protest meetings, held from Halifax to Vancouver, which brought together Jewish rabbis, Christian laity, and Presbyterian, United Church, Anglican, and Catholic ministers in an effort to inspire support for a change in Canada's policy towards the Jewish plight.

These Christian-led protests represented two shifts in the historic Canadian Christian response to Jewish persecution. First, the protests saw Christians become personally involved against the federal government's isolationism and the Christian community's inaction; individual action seemed to be replacing denominational action. Second, the spontaneous, disorganized criticisms expressed in the meetings set the stage for the later development of an organized Christian response that went beyond the confines of denominational strictures to create new venues and platforms for clergy and lay Christians to speak out and meaningfully assist Jewish refugees. These fundamental changes during the three-week period following Kristallnacht were more than just another stage in the unconscionable "silence" of the Christian community: they were the harbinger of meaningful change, as a disparate group reached out to the Jewish community and declared solidarity with it in meetings, sermons, and letters marked by passion and protest.

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<sup>6</sup> William Nawyn, *American Protestantism's Response to Germany's Jews and Refugees, 1933-1941* (Ann Arbor Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981), 79; Ross, *So It Was True*, 105.

<sup>7</sup> Nawyn, *American Protestantism's Response*, 190.

<sup>8</sup> Ross, *So It Was True*, 258-9.

<sup>9</sup> Kyle Jantzen and Jonathan Durance, "Our Jewish Brethren: Christian Responses to Kristallnacht in Canadian Mass Media," *Crisis and Credibility in the Jewish-Christian World: Remembering Franklin Little. The Fortieth Annual Scholars' Conference on the Holocaust and Churches*, Spec. issue of *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 46 no. 4 (Fall 2011): 537-548.

The meetings held during these three weeks saw 5,000 participants in Halifax, 4,500 in Montreal, 2,500 in Hamilton, 20,000 in Toronto, 1,200 in Kitchener, and 1,700 in Vancouver.<sup>10</sup> Newspapers also reported protest meetings in Kingston, Niagara Falls, London, Kirkland Lake, Winnipeg, and Lethbridge: the *Toronto Daily Star* reported that at least 60 meetings took place across Canada.<sup>11</sup> The increased awareness, both politically and in the public consciousness, was evident in the fact that the Toronto rally was not only front page news, but commanded the entire third page of the *Toronto Daily Star*. The paper printed pictures of various clergymen present, and ran a half-page picture of 3,000 people standing outside a packed Maple Leaf Gardens.<sup>12</sup> *The Vancouver Province* also reported that 300 people were forced to wait outside the 1,700-seat Lyric Theatre.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the last three weeks of November, all major newspapers provided clear evidence that Christians played a leadership role in the nation-wide protest movement. Through public means such as the mass rallies and group telegrams sent to the Prime Minister, and in more private venues such as church pulpits and prayer meetings, laypeople and clergy from the Christian community sought to galvanize a Christian response.

### **From Public Outcry to Organizational Focus: The CNCR**

The public outcry recorded in the media during the weeks following Kristallnacht was largely Christian in nature, which is inconsistent with an unqualified “silence” theory. Furthermore, there is evidence to suggest that Christians continued to protest through the popular press — as opposed to the denominational press — throughout the prewar period, and that this voice was both sustained and heard. However, there were other complementary platforms Christians used which reinforced and extended this medium of protest.

The birth of the Canadian National Committee on Refugees and Victims of Political Persecution (CNCR) during this period is particularly noteworthy, as it represented the realization that the energy generated by the protests needed to be channelled into an organizational structure before its force dissipated. An analysis of the CNCR’s organizational records, which detail their first meetings and activities, reveals an emerging frustration with the lack of an organized Christian response as well as a strengthening conviction that only through engagement with the Canadian government could Christians provide meaningful help to the Jewish people.

### **The Setting**

The creation of the CNCR in early December followed two important, well-publicized radio addresses broadcast on the CBC. The Rev. Dr. James W. Parkes delivered the first on 6 December. At the invitation of the Protestant-led Committee of Jewish-Gentile Relations of Toronto, Rev. Parkes arrived from England in November to speak about the refugee situation in Germany and Christian efforts to combat anti-Semitism.<sup>14</sup> Rev. Parkes was a widely-travelled activist, well-known in England, who played an important role in debunking the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in a famous trial in Bern, Switzerland, in

<sup>10</sup> Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?*, 132-135.

<sup>11</sup> “Jews Sob at Gathering as 20,000 Voice Protest,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 21 November 1938, 1, 15.

<sup>12</sup> “Speakers Warn that Protestants and Catholics also are Threatened,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 21 November 1938, 3.

<sup>13</sup> “1700 Vancouver Folk Vote to Invite Jewish Refugees to Canada,” *The Vancouver Province*, 21 November 1938, 5.

<sup>14</sup> “Refugee Problem Held Very Acute by Dr. J. Parkes,” *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 6 December 1938, 4.

1934-1935.<sup>15</sup> David Cesarani argues that he was one of the first Christian thinkers in the twentieth century to analyze anti-Semitism in his book *The Jew and His Neighbour*, and as a result of this awareness he played a significant part in helping save Jewish children before and during the war.<sup>16</sup> Rev. Parkes initially came to Canada to give several sermons and to help organize support for the Jewish refugees. However, the timing of his trip, which coincided with the protest movement stemming out of Kristallnacht, changed the nature and import of his trip. As a consequence, he became a leading figure in the Kristallnacht protests and a founding member of the CNCR. This development is not surprising given that it was Rev. C.E. Silcox, the head of the Committee of Jewish-Gentile Relations and also a founding member of the CNCR, who had invited Rev. Parkes, and later sought to employ Rev. Parkes' experience and charismatic speaking style to promote the CNCR. So warmly did the founding members of the CNCR receive Rev. Parkes' radio address on 6 December that they appended a transcript of it to their first set of minutes in order to help explain the organization's *raison d'être*.

Rev. Parkes' message reflected some of the prevailing themes found in the Canadian Christian response in November 1938 and foreshadowed those which would become most compelling to Christians. He began his address by laying the blame for the "Jewish question" on Christianity itself. He explained that the Christian majority had excluded Jews from almost every "normal" occupation and "often persecuted them bitterly on religious grounds."<sup>17</sup> He went on to debunk the idea that Jews had taken control of the country's economic interests because of Christian persecution:

An examination into Canada's Directory of Directors reveals that it is conceivable that [Jews] may influence our fashions, but not that they may control our future. And while a bachelor like myself may marvel at the ever-increasing extravagance of feminine head-gear, and lament the monotony of masculine raiment, no one could pretend that the control of such things constituted a national menace.<sup>18</sup>

Rev. Parkes' wry sense of humour about Canadians' ignorance of the nature of Jewish influence in their country demonstrates his recognition that anti-Semitism existed in Canada and needed to be confronted.

Two days after Rev. Parkes' address, Stanley Baldwin, the retired British Prime Minister and future Earl of Bewdley, addressed the United Kingdom in a radio message that the CBC broadcast across Canada. Later, when the CNCR was formally established, the founding members appended a transcript of Mr. Baldwin's remarks to the organization's inaugural minutes, just as they had with Rev. Parkes' radio address, because there was a consensus that Baldwin's remarks captured the essence of their message.

The address received broad media coverage from newspapers across Canada, although many chose to summarize and paraphrase his thoughts.<sup>19</sup> Stanley Baldwin's line of argument included the same overt appeal to Christian sentiment that one finds in Rev. Parkes' address. Historian Philip Williamson explains

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<sup>15</sup> Cesarani David, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen: Towards Taxonomy of Rescuers in a 'Bystander' Country - Britain 1933-1945," in *Bystanders to the Holocaust: A Re-Evaluation*, ed. David Cesarani and Paul A. Levine (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 46.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-6.

<sup>17</sup> Library and Archives Canada [LAC], Canadian National Committee on Refugees [CNCR], Manuscript Group [MG] 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 24, "Minutes of the First Meeting and Interviews with Members of the Dominion Government," 6/7 December 1938, Appendix VI (b).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> "Baldwin Sees Nazis in 'Inhuman' Blast," *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 December 1938, 1; "Sees Refugees as Challenge," *Kitchener Daily Record*, 9 December 1938, 22. These are just a few of the examples.

in his biography of Baldwin that he was “profoundly religious” in a way that “was not an intellectualised religion but a ‘very simple, very deep faith.’”<sup>20</sup> Moreover, his faith was “profoundly Protestant” in its “emphasis on individual conscience, duty, and moral values.”<sup>21</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that his sentiments aligned with those of Rev. Parkes and the CNCR, who also saw the need for individual Christians to take action to combat the silence of denominations and the inaction of local and national governments.

The significance of Mr. Baldwin’s and Rev. Parkes’ speeches is threefold. First, both make the point that overt, practicing Christians were in the forefront of those publicly protesting the treatment of the Jews and seeking to help them. Their addresses, broadcast nationally and given prominent coverage in most leading newspapers, carried a distinctly Christian message and appeal. Second, they support the idea that Canadian Christians were attuned to the international Christian community in general, and the British community in particular. As David Zimmerman notes in his article about the nature of the Canadian academic community’s response to the Holocaust, Britain responded much faster to the Jewish refugee crisis than Canada did, a point which Canadian Christians sought to utilize as a galvanizing tool.<sup>22</sup>

Third, they foreshadowed the rhetoric and attitudes that many Canadian Christians adopted in the following weeks and months. These speeches represented a growing belief that the churches had largely failed to respond to the suffering of Jews and of refugees in general, and that responsibility now lay with individual Christians to create change. It is significant that one of these addresses was made by a layman and the other by an itinerant clergyman. While the official denominational agencies of the churches hesitated or remained silent, individuals took action, and the most significant action they took was to found the Canadian National Committee on Refugees.

### **CNCR: A Christian Organization**

The League of Nations Society (LNS) was the official progenitor of the CNCR, but the true inspiration for its creation came from a small group of people, including LNS President Senator Cairine Wilson, a few clergy such as Rev. Parkes and Rev. Silcox, and other Christians and Jews. Senator Wilson’s contribution to the creation and administration of the CNCR would become, according to her biographer Valerie Knowles, “the most important campaign of her life,” a life filled with many firsts for women in Canada.<sup>23</sup> It also became the most important campaign in Canada on behalf of the Jews following Kristallnacht. But before addressing the mission and actions of the CNCR, it is essential to clarify why this organization should be included in an assessment of the Christian response to Jewish suffering.

At its inception, the CNCR did not have official ties to any of the denominational churches in Canada. For this reason, historians such as Davies and Nefsky and Abella and Troper, who focus primarily on the denominational church response, have paid little attention to the organization. Davies and Nefsky do not go as far as Abella and Troper, who dismissed the CNCR as a group of “well meaning but impractical idealists to be patronized but not taken seriously,” yet regardless they devote little space to the

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<sup>20</sup> Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 277.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 278.

<sup>22</sup> David Zimmerman, “‘Narrow-Minded People’: Canadian Universities and the Academic Refugee Crises, 1933-1941,” *Canadian Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (June 2007): 298.

<sup>23</sup> Valerie Knowles, *First Person: A Biography of Cairine Wilson: Canada’s First Woman Senator* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988), 195. As noted in the introduction, Cairine Wilson was the first female senator and a prominent defender of individual rights for both men and women.

Committee in their writings.<sup>24</sup> Instead, Davies and Nefsky use the CNCR as a litmus test for denominational support of the Jewish refugee crisis. They acknowledge that the United Churches' Board of Evangelism and Social Service, which was then under the guidance of Rev. Silcox, endorsed the CNCR, but do so merely to point out that the United Church and Rev. Silcox were showing some interest in the Jewish plight.<sup>25</sup> They do not fully investigate the CNCR because of its inability to substantially change the government's position before the war, and because they tend to treat the Christian response as an institutional effort rather than a broader movement of individuals. They admit the difficulty of defining what constitutes the "Church," but their decision to organize their book around denominations, their reliance on denominational source material, and their leader-centric analysis makes it clear that their preference is to see Christians as "groups" organized into hierarchies rather than free-thinking individuals.<sup>26</sup> In spite of this interpretation of Christianity in Canada, they point out that a categorical characterization of the Christian response as silent is inappropriate because there was "sometimes [a] contradictory attitude" found in the range of responses they observed.<sup>27</sup> Yet, their examples of people speaking out for Jews is restricted to three prominent "special envoys": Rev. W.W. Judd, Rev. Silcox, and Rev. Raymond Booth.<sup>28</sup> While these men played leading roles in setting up the CNCR and mustering help for Jewish people, a closer examination of the CNCR reveals that the Christian response went beyond this.

There is no question that the CNCR was not a denominationally run organization, nor was it tied organizationally or legally to any church. It was, however, an organization founded on Christian principles, by Christians, and for the purposes of steering and channelling a Christian call to action. This Christian dimension is evident in the addendums to the founding minutes from the first meeting of the CNCR. The two longest documents are Rev. Parkes' and Mr. Baldwin's addresses. The founding members also added another Christian document to their inaugural minutes, a March 1936 publication by the Social Service Council of Canada (SSCC) entitled "Canadian Christians and the German Refugees." The SSCC was a coalition of Christian social services formed in the 1920s to promote Christian social policy at the federal level.<sup>29</sup> In 1935, Rev. Silcox, also a founding member of the CNCR, took the leadership of this organization and turned its attention to the Jewish refugee crisis.<sup>30</sup> The document begins by claiming to "speak for Canadian Christians" by offering "unqualified protest against the treatment" of the Jews.<sup>31</sup> In an effort to clarify why the Canadian churches remained silent in the face of the Jewish plight, the paper cites three determining concerns: the potential for aggravating the situation in Germany, the existence of anti-Semitism in Canada, and the concern that reports were exaggerating the condition of "non-Aryans." While partly justifying this early silence, the SSCC argued that "further silence is impossible" and that "as Christians, we have learned that in Christ there is neither Jew nor

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<sup>24</sup> Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933-1948* (Toronto: Lester Publishing Limited, 1991), 284.

<sup>25</sup> Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 77-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 24, "Minutes of the First Meeting and Interviews with Members of the Dominion Government," 6/7 December 1938, in between appendix II and III; Davies and Nefsky, *How Silent Were the Churches?*, 56. The SSCC was an Anglican initiative, but was affiliated with the Baptists, Salvation Army, Presbyterian Church, United Church, and the YM/WCA.

Gentile.”<sup>32</sup> Like Rev. Parkes and Mr. Baldwin, the SSCC under Rev. Silcox acknowledged that there was a deficiency in the denominational response to the treatment of the Jews in Nazi Germany, even before Kristallnacht. They believed that “ancient prejudices”, which had been present in Canada for so long, continued to hinder churches and Canadians in general from acting in accordance with their Christian morals. It was time to organize for change and the CNCR was the result.

The CNCR was not only Christian in the sense that it was intentionally and overtly founded on Christian principles; almost all the leaders were themselves outspoken Christians. Chief among these were Senator Wilson, Rev. Parkes, Rev. Silcox, and Rev. Judd, all of whom were leading spokespeople for the Christian community and all of whom testified to the role their Christian faith played as a motivating factor in the founding of the organization. Senator Wilson was the most public and well known leader in the CNCR, but another Christian also played a pivotal role in the organization: Rev. (later Sir) Robert Falconer. Rev. Falconer, who served as the honorary president of the CNCR, was a close personal friend of Senator Wilson and a Presbyterian minister.<sup>33</sup> He was an academic and a leading New Testament scholar who served as the president of the University of Toronto and played a prominent part in the unification of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Congregational denominations. He sought what his biographer James Greenlee describes as “a moral and religious rejuvenation of society.”<sup>34</sup> Greenlee goes on to describe Rev. Falconer’s belief that the “diffusion of essential Christianity and a ‘higher conception of liberty’ would lead to overall moral regeneration.”<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, this ministerial desire for rejuvenation and his experience in negotiating ecumenical cooperation equipped him well to assist Senator Wilson in her quest to motivate a broad spectrum of Christians to their cause. They shared a common Presbyterian heritage, and both were dissatisfied with the churches’ and the country’s response to Jewish suffering in Germany.

The strongest argument against including the CNCR as a key witness to the protest of Canadian Christians is that most churches did not formally recognize it as a member of the ecumenical Christian community. In the months leading up to the war and during the war years there is little evidence of any official recognition or relationship between the Christian denominations and the CNCR, but this changed shortly after the war ended. In January 1946, the Canadian Council of Churches asked the CNCR to be its representative on the newly-formed Ecumenical Refugee Commission, which was under the auspices of the World Council of Churches.<sup>36</sup> Instead of creating a church-run refugee commission, as every other country had done, the Canadian churches realized that a group of Christians had already formed an organization that had successfully fought on behalf of refugees for nearly a decade.<sup>37</sup> The fact that the Canadian churches waited until after the war to associate with the CNCR was more indicative of the churches’ inability to act on behalf of refugees than a reflection of the CNCR’s fundamental Christian character. An examination of the CNCR makes it clear that it was comprised primarily of self-conscious Christians who organized and intentionally infused the CNCR with a Christian message and purpose. As a result, one must include an analysis of the CNCR in any attempt to understand the Christian response to Jewish persecution between Kristallnacht and the beginning of the war.

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<sup>32</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 24, “Minutes of the First Meeting and Interviews with Members of the Dominion Government,” 6/7.

<sup>33</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 7, file10, “Distinguished Educationist Sir Robert Falconer Dies,” unknown newspaper, 4 November 1943.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; James Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 93.

<sup>35</sup> Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer*, 338.

<sup>36</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 4, file 41, International Council of Churches, 10 January 1946. This is from an informal meeting, called at short notice, of the Toronto members of the CNCR along with Senator Wilson.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*



## Senator Cairine Wilson

The CNCR's most effective communication strategy was to have its two best-known members, Senator Wilson and Rev. Silcox, write and speak on its behalf. While Rev. Silcox focused primarily on developing regional chapters, Senator Wilson's activities in the first quarter of 1939 included the publication of an essay and the dissemination of speeches in various media formats. The most significant of these was an essay she wrote in the second week of January, which was featured in every major newspaper. This essay, which the *Ottawa Evening Citizen* entitled a "Call to Canada to Give Christian Aid to Jews," provided a valuable resource for concerned Canadians because it systematically catalogued the developments of Canadian protest over the previous two months.

Senator Wilson began by quoting and emphasising the importance of Mr. Baldwin's and Rev. Parks' radio addresses in December, and then informed readers that that only a few days after these addresses Malcolm MacDonald, Dominions and Colonial Secretary, had exhorted the Dominions to help England meet the challenge.<sup>38</sup> She concluded her overview by referring to a telegram sent by the SSCC to the Prime Minister in November, which stated that "the Christian conscience lays upon this Dominion an imperative moral obligation to share with other countries the responsibility of providing a haven for a reasonable number of selected refugees."<sup>39</sup>

Senator Wilson provided her readers across Canada with an understanding of the shift that had occurred in the Christian response since Kristallnacht and the implications this had for "Christian duty." While recognizing the struggle ahead, she portrayed the political and religious calls of Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Baldwin, Rev. Parkes, and the SSCC as an opportunity for Canada. The greatest challenge, in her mind, was the fact that "the Government is bound by regulations adopted at the height of the [depression]," which left little room for humanitarian, or emergency consideration.<sup>40</sup> For her, the issue was straightforward:

The question is: do the Canadian people wish the Canadian government to take action along the lines suggested in the foregoing [as summarized above]? Do they want Canada to play its part by admitting carefully selected families which have suffered only because they are attached to democratic forms of government or because of their racial origin or religious affiliations?<sup>41</sup>

Senator Wilson clearly believed that the responsibility lay with individual Canadians. If Canadians were going to throw off inherited prejudices and negative historical predispositions, whatever their supposed justification, they would have to act on the basis of their personal conviction, not on the basis of their membership in an organized religious body.

## Rev. C. E. Silcox

The Rev. C.E. Silcox was the most important and prolific promoter of the CNCR's work and perhaps the most persuasive advocate of Canadian support for the Jewish cause. An indefatigable traveller, he toured

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<sup>38</sup> "Canadians Urged to Decide on Refugee Relief Policy; Problem is Discussed," *The Calgary Herald*, 11 January 1939, 14; "Call to Canada to Give Christian Aid to Jews," *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 9 January 1939, 21. Other newspapers across Canada carried this story as well.

<sup>39</sup> "Christian Duty of Canada to Aid Refugees, Is Claim," *Toronto Daily Star*, 10 January 1939, 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> "Call to Canada," *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 9 January 1939, 21.

Western Canada during the inhospitable month of January, setting aside many of his commitments to the SSCC in order to further the cause of the CNCR and its Executive Committee. His first stop was in Regina on 7 January, during which he told a meeting called to support the CNCR that “Canada should grasp the golden opportunity of enriching the cultural and economic wealth of the Dominion” by opening its borders.<sup>42</sup> He supported Senator Wilson’s idea that Canada would benefit from the admittance of Jewish refugees, and went even further to argue that “if Canada does not take them she does not deserve prosperity.”<sup>43</sup> Rev. Silcox’s arguments presented the proverbial “carrot and stick” of potential blessing or potential curse. Both of these arguments touched on the more self-focused motivations found in the public responses during these months and the spiritual warnings seen in December and early 1939.

Two days later, on Sunday, Rev. Silcox spoke at Knox United Church in Regina and addressed both the refugee crisis and a recent statement by former Canadian Prime Minister R.B. Bennett at Knox United Church in Calgary, which was capturing the attention of the national media.<sup>44</sup> Mr. Bennett’s message was particularly critical of the Christian response in Canada to date, and Rev. Silcox sought to defend the actions of Christians who spoke out on behalf of the Jews, and answer some of the criticisms in Mr. Bennett’s message, because he felt “the Jew was not standing alone.”<sup>45</sup> Rev. Silcox believed the great “battle” that lay ahead was between “Christian tradition” and the “new paganism” of Nazism.<sup>46</sup> According to him, this challenge was the worst Christians had faced since the days of the Roman Empire. In keeping with a strong and irrepressibly positive postmillennial eschatology, he remained hopeful that one of “the greatest spiritual revivals of all times” was imminent.<sup>47</sup> Both Senator Wilson and Rev. Silcox were critical of the churches’ inaction regarding the Jewish refugee crisis, but they still saw Christianity and the “Church” as a body of ecumenical believers that could become the solution to the problem. This helps to explain why both continued to appeal to Christians and to structure their arguments in ways that reflected a Christian point of view.

Rev. Silcox continued his tour by visiting the small towns of Moose Jaw and Weyburn, Saskatchewan, before departing for Edmonton. In Moose Jaw and Weyburn, Rev. Silcox reiterated his self-centred, Canadian-centric argument, but he also took issue with the anti-Semitism that he thought he sensed in Saskatchewan and, to an even greater extent, observed in Ontario and Quebec.<sup>48</sup> After castigating those who he felt embraced this position, he told his listeners that a group of 20 people in Moose Jaw had raised \$3,500 while the “whole Christian community has raised scarcely anything.”<sup>49</sup> Despite this, Rev. Silcox encouraged the gathering in Weyburn with the thought that a “practical demonstration” would act as a “repudiation of anti-Semitism.”<sup>50</sup> It seemed logical to him that if Canada was going to help the Jews and thereby affirm its democratic and Christian principles, it would first have to eradicate anti-Semitic tendencies at home so that it could permit Jewish refugees to immigrate. He felt such action would have a redemptive, purging effect in Canada, which was stained by unconscionable failure.

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<sup>42</sup> “Silcox Favors Canada Taking Best Refugees,” *The Leader-Post*, 7 January 1939, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> “Church Fails in its Duties,” *The Vancouver Province*, 6 January 1939, 2; “Church has Failed Says Mr. Bennett,” *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, 6 January 1939, 2; “Has the Church Failed?,” *Toronto Daily Star*, 9 January 1939, 4. These are just some of the headlines from the Canadian Press report printed in many newspapers.

<sup>45</sup> “Challenge Seen by Silcox,” *The Leader-Post*, 9 January 1939, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Silcox’s focus on Quebec and Ontario stemmed from recent flashes of anti-Semitism in the form of more “Gentile Only” resorts and some cases of general harassment.

<sup>49</sup> “Attack on the Jews Watched,” *The Leader-Post*, 10 January 1939, 1.

<sup>50</sup> “Anti-Semitism First Step in Attack on Democracy—Silcox,” *The Leader-Post*, 7 January 1939, 5.

As a consequence of this public relations strategy, which centred on Rev. Silcox's tour and Senator Wilson's writings and speeches, the CNCR was able to build a network of regional chapters who could participate in a more organized response that stood in contrast to the more generalized calls of frustration and admonition that many individual Christians offered in the newspapers. In all cases, whether it was the tours, the radio broadcasts, the formal meetings of the CNCR, or the informal letters and editorials, it is possible to discern a more Canadian-centric rationale for action during this period in the first quarter of 1939. The early outpouring of sympathy for those who were suffering seems to have become a secondary cause for concern as the high-profile leaders called on Canadians to consider the positive impact the refugees would make on the economy and the culture. Alternatively, they also warned of the consequences of the moral failure to do what was right for the Jewish people. In the end, whatever the motivation, the CNCR presented itself as an organizational home for Christians of all denominations who wished to take action. The founders had positioned it within a Christian, but non-ecclesiastical, framework, in order to sponsor a grassroots network that would channel the protest into genuine care for refugees.

### **Meaningful Assistance**

One of the primary reasons that Abella and Troper, and to some extent Davies and Nefsky, dismiss the CNCR as a Christian voice in an environment of silence is that they see it as a rhetorical force for the Christian community and not an organization that could ever bear fruit and result in meaningful action on behalf of the Jews. If the story of the CNCR ended with Senator Wilson and Rev. Silcox's personal efforts, then this assessment would be accurate. The CNCR's formation a mere eight months before the start of the war gave the founders little time to organize into an effective agent of change, yet members of the CNCR quickly made their presence felt beyond Sunday morning pulpits and newspaper articles. They presented a broad audience with strongly worded and challenging publications, held public meetings, and collected money to provide assistance to some refugees.

Three cases from among those that were resolved before the start of the war in September illustrate how the CNCR provided meaningful assistance. All three ended quite positively for those involved, but their cases demonstrate the limits faced by the CNCR and other organizations when it came to assisting European Jews at this time. The first of these was the case of Dr. Mendel, a Jewish professor working in the University of Toronto (UofT) Department of Medical Research. Since his arrival in Canada on a temporary visa he had served at the UofT as an Assistant Professor without salary.<sup>51</sup> His case came to the attention of Senator Wilson and the CNCR in the second week of April after they learned that the government had denied Dr. Mendel's request for a renewal of his visa based on the fact that he had attempted to seek permanent residency for his family and himself. Senator Wilson brought the case to light in correspondence with Frederick Banting, a leading medical scholar in the Department of Medical Research at the UofT and one of the co-discoverers of insulin. In this letter, Senator Wilson expressed her belief that Director of Immigration F.G. Blair must have been misinformed about Dr. Mendel's situation at the UofT, because she could not think of any other reason why his application for refugee status would have been denied.<sup>52</sup> Senator Wilson knew that Dr. Banting's name and position were likely to have significant influence on Mr. Blair, especially given that the Nobel Laureate was not always supportive of the refugees' cause. In his biography of Dr. Banting, Michael Bliss notes that the professor generally

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<sup>51</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 1, file 5, "Prewar Cases: 1939-47," 18 April 1939. This was a letter from Dr. Banting to Mr. Blair.

<sup>52</sup> LAC, Wilson Papers, MG 27, vol. 1, file 1, "Banting, Sir Frederick, Refugee Problem, Dr. Mendel, Dr. E. Stein, Leadership League," 17 April 1939.

agreed with Mr. Blair's policy on limited Jewish immigration.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Bliss specifically mentions that Dr. Banting's effort to have Dr. Mendel admitted into Canada was more of an exception than a rule, which showed the degree of influence Senator Wilson and the CNCR could exert, even on those who were ambivalent supporters of Jewish refugees.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of his broader sentiments about Jewish refugees, Dr. Banting's ensuing letter to Mr. Blair on April 18 reviewed Dr. Mendel's situation in a very favourable light. He made it clear that Dr. Mendel had received no pay, had brought his own laboratory equipment, and had paid over \$10,000 dollars in salary for both a "German" and Canadian assistant.<sup>55</sup> On May 13, Mr. Blair responded with a letter expressing appreciation for the information and assured Dr. Banting that he would forward the information to the Chief Justice, which would likely lead to a positive decision for Dr. Mendel.<sup>56</sup> The efforts of the CNCR and Dr. Banting were rewarded later that year when Dr. Mendel and his family became naturalized Canadians.<sup>57</sup> More than anything, this incident illustrated the effectiveness of Senator Wilson's personal influence as well as the ability of an organized and publically astute committee to intervene, and in this case save a family from likely death.

Two other examples of the CNCR's efforts to assist Jews before the beginning of the war further highlight the challenges confronting the organization. One intervention was on behalf of Mr. Max Weile, another Jewish resident of Canada holding a temporary visa and seeking a permanent residency permit in order to avoid deportation to Germany. Mr. G. Raymond Booth, a member of the CNCR's Executive Committee, dealt almost exclusively with his case. Mr. Booth was a vocational clergyman on loan to the CNCR from the Society of Friends (Quakers), who continued to pay his salary during his services with the CNCR.<sup>58</sup> The involvement of the Quakers raises interesting questions about the role small Protestant denominations may have played in the protest movement. Undoubtedly, some denominations had difficulty aligning themselves with mainline Protestants on theological issues, but a denominationally neutral and non-sectarian organization like the CNCR may have been attractive.<sup>59</sup> Because this article relies on the published record in newspapers and on the records of the CNCR, further research using alternative sources is required to determine if the silence theory is applicable to Christians in the Anabaptist and "evangelical" traditions in the same way as it is to the mainline churches.<sup>60</sup> The important

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<sup>53</sup> Michael Bliss, *Banting: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1992), 252. Bliss cites an example of Dr. Banting telling Mr. Blair that a certain Jewish doctor was "not the type of immigrant who would benefit Canada."

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 245.

<sup>55</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 1 file 5, "Prewar Cases: 1939-47," 18 April 1939.

<sup>56</sup> LAC, Wilson Papers, MG 27, vol. 1, file 1, "Banting, Sir Frederick, Refugee Problem, Dr. Mendel, Dr. E. Stein, Leadership League," 13 May 1939.

<sup>57</sup> W. S. Feldberg, "Bruno Mendel: 1897-1959," *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the Royal Society* 6 (1 November 1960): 192. Feldberg notes that Dr. Mendel's son joined the Royal Canadian Artillery and participated in D-Day as a member of the Intelligence Corps.

<sup>58</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 25, "C.N.C.R. Minutes," 20 March 1939, 6; LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 17, "Vancouver Branch 1939-1947." This file contains a letter from Constance Hayward, the Executive Secretary, to Dr. Black, the head of the Vancouver branch of the CNCR, on 17 May 1939. It informs him that \$2,000 had been given by the Society of Friends (Toronto Branch) for six months of Mr. Booth's salary.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 259-61. Socknat describes the Quakers who became involved with the CNCR as a part of a group of "liberal pacifists" who became proponents of leniency towards refugees. He argues that the Quakers who became involved in this movement put aside some of their pacifistic tendencies and instead focused on assisting those being hurt by the European crisis, which seems in line with Mr. Booth's motivations for being involved in the CNCR.

<sup>60</sup> John Stackhouse, *Canadian Evangelicalism in the Twentieth Century: An Introduction to Its Character* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 16, 200. Stackhouse describes these evangelicals as a "largely informal network of Christians united in their central concerns but pursuing them with no limited cooperation." Moreover, he argues that

point here is that the Quakers chose to fund a position in the CNCR, and by so doing demonstrated that the CNCR was seen as the appropriate way for a socially active Quaker to respond. Mr. Booth was made Executive Secretary of the CNCR in the spring of 1939 and he increasingly became the voice and face of the organization.

On 7 August, only one month before the beginning of the war, Mr. Booth sent a letter to Mr. Blair regarding Mr. Weile's request "for permanent domicile" in Canada.<sup>61</sup> While recognizing that Mr. Weile had caused the Department of Immigration some "difficulties," Mr. Booth attempted to appeal for a "compassionate interpretation." Mr. Booth informed Mr. Blair of a recent message he had received from the Society of Friends in Germany, which stated that since Kristallnacht Jews returning to Germany were being "dealt with in a peculiarly vicious and sadistic manner in concentration [camps]" that often led to death.<sup>62</sup> Nearly three weeks later, Mr. Blair responded to Mr. Booth in a way that revealed the depressing attitude of his department. As far as he was concerned, people like Mr. Weile, who "invented lies galore," deserve to be sent back "to any country."<sup>63</sup> Fortunately for Mr. Weile, Mr. Blair doubted whether Canada would have an opportunity to send him back due to "existing conditions."<sup>64</sup>

Mr. Weile's case reveals the intransigence and disregard for humanitarian concerns prevalent at the Department of Immigration. There was no attempt to understand why Mr. Weile may have entered the country under false pretence. Furthermore, department bureaucrats seemed only too willing to use the supposed failure of one Jew to stigmatize the many. Mr. Blair informed Mr. Booth that Mr. Weile's actions would cause his department to question the declarations of many of his "fellow-countrymen."<sup>65</sup>

Nevertheless, the CNCR was able to play a role in assisting Jews, even those in poor standing with the government. During the week of the Throne Speech in January, the newspapers claimed that the government would pursue an immigration policy of "sympathy," which the CNCR and Mr. Booth sought to put to the test. The CNCR continued to challenge the government on this case until 1946 when the Department of Immigration, then under the administration of A.L. Jolliffe, finally told them that Mr. Weile's status would not change.<sup>66</sup> The work of Mr. Booth and the CNCR did not result in a modified decision in Mr. Weile's case, but it likely caused Mr. Blair to delay forcibly sending him back to Europe: it is quite likely that the engagement of the CNCR saved this man's life.

The third example of the CNCR's work on behalf of Jewish refugees in the months immediately preceding the war involves the case of the Herbst family, which was resolved just as Germany invaded Poland. Once again, Mr. Booth took a leading role by sending a letter to Mr. Blair on 4 September, 1939, asking him to assist the Herbst family. Mr. Booth's letter portrayed the Herbsts as a valuable addition to Canada due to their wealth and because one of them was Protestant.<sup>67</sup> Fortunately for the Herbst family, they were in Holland when the war started and, on 14 November, Mr. Blair informed Mr. Booth that they would be granted entrance into Canada on the condition of \$50,000 being transferred from their accounts in the United States.<sup>68</sup> The work of the CNCR obviously meant a great deal to the Herbst family, as demonstrated by the fact that when one of the sons took his own life two years later he bequeathed \$100

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Canadian evangelicalism never developed the same fundamentalist intensity as their American counterparts, which makes tracking the activity of evangelicals on such issues as social or political policy somewhat difficult. Nonetheless, they did have clear "concerns" that warrant further investigation.

<sup>61</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 1, file 5, "Prewar Cases: 1939-47," 7 August 1939.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 August 1939.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 February 1946.

<sup>67</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 1, file 13, "Herbst Family: 1939-1947," 4 September 1939.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 November 1939.

of his \$300 savings to the organization.<sup>69</sup> The article that reported his death claimed that discrimination played a role in the young man's suicide, yet the non-discriminatory work of the CNCR may have saved the rest of his family from a similar fate, which was something the young man recognized and acknowledged with his gift.

These three pre-war cases from the CNCR's files temper Davies and Nefsky's harsh conclusion that the CNCR was doomed to failure. They are correct in concluding that a radical modification of the government's policy was impossible, but that does not mean that the CNCR was insignificant or inconsequential. Certainly some Jewish individuals did not see it that way, nor did many Christians, including non-members who sought out the CNCR when they wished to assist the Jews. For example, Hope of Israel, a Christian organization whose mission was to bring Jews and Christians closer together, wrote articles refuting anti-Semitism and the expansion of Nazi propaganda in Canada.<sup>70</sup> When the organization decided to help a certain Jewish family they contacted the CNCR, through Mr. Booth, who worked with them to obtain employment and housing.<sup>71</sup>

The CNCR also worked with other multi-denominational Christian groups, such as the Women's Missionary Society and the YMCA, in the months leading up to the war. By 28 August, days before the war began, the *Toronto Daily Star* reported that "most of the churches in Canada are co-operating with the Canadian National Committee on Refugees" to "induce the Canadian government to admit a large number of selected refugees."<sup>72</sup> They reported that the CNCR claimed to have reached every minister in Canada with information regarding Canada's immigration policy and with ideas of how they could help refugees.<sup>73</sup>

The CNCR's interaction with Dr. Banting and Mr. Falconer also points to its attempt to create ties with the academic community in Canada. Organizational records in the months leading up to the war reveal another connection to universities. While the documentation is somewhat unclear, it is apparent that during the months before the advent of the war, Dr. J.S. Thomson, the president of the University of Saskatchewan, took the lead in setting up the Saskatoon division of the CNCR.<sup>74</sup> Interestingly, historian Paul Stortz argues that the work of the CNCR may have actually hindered the academic response because it provided academics with a sense that "others were doing it."<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, the case of Dr. Mendel and the willingness of university presidents to become directly involved with the CNCR confirm the broad base of appeal that the CNCR enjoyed. If the CNCR did invade the purview of the academic community, as Stortz's research seems to indicate, it was likely in an effort to engender support and action just as it was attempting to address a poor response in the denominational establishment.

The CNCR experienced a measure of success in its first few months of existence, even though it was unable to create a significant change in government policy. It not only had the satisfaction of seeing specific individuals and families helped, it also appears to have helped foster a climate of hope among

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 22 March 1941. This information was found in an article from the *Ottawa Citizen*. Unfortunately, the title has not been preserved.

<sup>70</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 3, file 3, "Falticzek, Mr. and Mrs. Franz: 1939-1946." The article "Contributions Jews Have Made to Modern Civilization and General anti-Semitism" comes from their March-April 1939 *Hope of Israel* publication.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 28 May 1939. From a letter between Hope of Israel and Mr. Booth.

<sup>72</sup> "Churches Plead Refugees' Cause," *Toronto Daily Star*, 29 August 1939, 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> LAC, CNCR, MG 28, vol. 43, box 6, file 10, "Saskatoon Branch: 1939-1947." Unfortunately, this file is incomplete and lacks significant correspondence. What is apparent is that the Saskatoon branch was set up in 1938, but remained inactive for much of the war. When the war drew to a close the branch actively assisted in the post-war refugee effort.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Stortz, "'Rescue Our Family From a Living Death': Refugee Professors and the Canadian Society for the Protection of Science and Learning at the University of Toronto, 1935-1946," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 14, no. 1 (2003): 248.

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Christians that some change could still occur. More than any protest or sermon, the CNCR provided practical assistance to Jewish refugees and empowered Christian organizations, Christian individuals, and members of the academic community who were looking for avenues to express their help and concern.

## **Conclusion**

This article assesses the adequacy of a theory which holds that Christians in Canada were inexcusably silent during one of the worst atrocities in recorded history. In order to undertake this assessment, traditional ecclesiastical sources were set aside in favour of sources which were more likely to reveal the nature and breadth of the supposed silence during this period. Davies and Nefsky ask in the title of their book: "How Silent Were the Churches?" The use of neglected source material makes it possible to find new and more definitive answers to this troubling question.

The questions also requires that due consideration be given to the different ways in which the Christian protest manifested itself at different times during the period between Kristallnacht and the outbreak of the war. One reason historians have adopted the silence theory is that the protest movement following Kristallnacht appeared to lack any enduring impact. The sources used in this thesis show that while the protest did change over time, it was not "silent" in the ways suggested by the silence theory. The ten-month period between the event and the war is marked by distinct stages, but elements of similarity connect them all. The first phase, which occurred in the final weeks of November, was filled with sermons, letters, and protests. This initial response was vigorous and widespread from coast to coast, but it was also spontaneous and largely the effort of individuals acting locally and regionally.

The following month of December brought two important changes in the Christian response. The first meeting of the CNCR at the beginning of the month indicated that there was a metamorphosis underway: the sincere but somewhat chaotic and emotional response so evident in November was giving way to words and deeds that reflected sobriety and moral fortitude. The protests in November had a catalytic impact on a segment of the Christian population which understood that if change was to occur, emotions would need to be channelled into organizational structures and sustained pressure would need to be brought to bear on decision makers who had the ability to introduce meaningful change. The founding of the CNCR was the most significant strategic initiative during this phase.

The final phase, from New Years to the beginning of the war, was characterized increasingly by a disheartening struggle to transform an evasive and determinedly resistant federal government. David Cesarani described individual political action in democracies during this period as "time consuming, wearying, frustrating, and often forlorn," which aptly describes the difficulties faced by Christians before, during, and after Kristallnacht.<sup>76</sup> In spite of these challenges, Christians and the organization they founded, the CNCR, experienced three enduring successes in these final months, which provide evidence that many Christians were not silent.

The first enduring success of the CNCR was its ability to influence the Christian community to remain publicly minded and concerned about social justice. While David Marshall, Nancy Christie, and Michael Gauvreau disagree about the way in which Christianity was changing in the first decades of the twentieth century, they all agree that there was a considerable diminishment in the official role that Canadian churches played in social reform.<sup>77</sup> The sources used here support the understanding that a more private "social evangelism" took place through individual action and lay-run organizations. Robert Wright notes that many saw the failure of the church to respond to the Jewish refugee crisis as a failure of

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<sup>76</sup> Cesarani, "Mad Dogs and Englishmen," 30.

<sup>77</sup> Christie and Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity*, xi.

the Christian church “to take its rightful place on the cutting edge of Canadian opinion on the matter.”<sup>78</sup> What became increasingly apparent in this research project, though, was that this criticism and concern came from Christians themselves, who became involved in the CNCR, wrote to their newspapers, or sent telegrams to their political leaders. These developments represented a gradual shift in Canadian society away from corporate ecclesiastical power structures to a more individualistic, personal expression of Christianity. This new expression of Christianity in culture was not a sign that Christianity had become “silent.” On the contrary, there remained a significant number of Christians who continued to promote Christianity’s role as a moral and social compass in the country.

The second enduring legacy of the Christian protest movement was personal, and focused on the lives of refugees who came as a result of the intervention of Christians. While only comparatively few Jews were able to immigrate to Canada before the war, the CNCR and its supporters managed to help save dozens if not hundreds of individuals and families.<sup>79</sup> They also helped to provide organizational and logistical support for individual Christian churches and agencies, such as Hope of Israel and, later on, the Canadian Council of Churches. While the number of Jews saved was insignificant in light of the almost incalculable horrors of the Holocaust, the sources used in this article support the contention that the CNCR and its supporters constituted one of the only Canadian groups to actually assist the Jews prior to the Holocaust.

The final victory was less tangible, but remains perhaps the greatest enduring legacy of this protest movement. Gerald Dirks concludes his analysis of Canada’s refugee policy during this period by explaining that it ushered in a new era in Canada’s response to future refugee crises. Before the Jewish refugee calamity of the 1930s, Canadians and their government largely ignored global refugee problems. However, in this instance, Dirks argues that the “decision to try and alleviate some of the hardships encountered by refugees was prompted by a heretofore unparalleled awareness of the problem.”<sup>80</sup> Canada’s response to refugee crises was never the same after the events of the 1930s and the ensuing war. Undoubtedly, some of these lasting changes were due to a national awareness of the Holocaust’s atrocities, but the public’s “unparalleled awareness,” to use Dirks’ term, was due at least in part to the work of Christians who wrote in newspapers, attended protests, lobbied the government, and organized the CNCR.

Canada’s positive image in the modern world as a place for refugees and a country that deals generously and fairly with individuals seeking freedom from oppression developed in the years following the Second World War. Nevertheless, one finds the antecedents of this radical new way of thinking in the Christian protest movement that followed Kristallnacht. While it is not possible to attribute causality from the sources used here, it is possible to see a correlation between the high profile, public action of the protestors and an openness to a new way of viewing refugees after the war.

A study of the Christian response to the Jewish suffering in Europe following Kristallnacht needs contextualization. Just as Stortz points out in his study of the academic community’s response to the persecution, historians need to understand the Christian response as a “microcosm of Canadian society.”<sup>81</sup> The Christian community, like the academic community and Canadian society as a whole, was not monolithic. One of the shortcomings of the “silence” theory is that historians who are denominationally focused tend to group all Christians together, thereby showing a remarkable disregard

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Wright, *A World Mission: Canadian Protestantism and the Quest for a New International Order, 1918-1939* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991), 225.

<sup>79</sup> The CNCR Papers indicate that they worked on at least 357 case files, some of which represent family groups, and most of which were Jewish.

<sup>80</sup> Gerald Dirks, *Canada’s Refugee Policy: Indifference or Opportunism?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1977), 46.

<sup>81</sup> Stortz, “‘Rescue Our Family From a Living Death,’” 260.



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for the diverse nature of Christianity. Even in the initial outburst after Kristallnacht it is possible to see theological, ideological, and motivational differences among those Christians who responded. Similarly, there were many who did not respond – who were seemingly silent. Some saw helping the Jews as deleterious to the nation, or of secondary importance given Canada’s economic problems and political realities. For those motivated by the arguments noted above, this position was unthinkable and un-Christian. The intensity of the criticism directed by protesting Christians towards the latter group was palpable, but in the end a strong minority voice was incapable of persuading an unresponsive government, which was most deserving of the “silent” label in the face of Jewish suffering.

The characterization of Canadian Christians as silent during the aftermath of Kristallnacht is not only incorrect and misleading, but diverts attention away from those Christians, particularly in denominational leadership, who failed to act in accordance with their stated beliefs during this tragic crisis. This article follows Tony Kushner’s approach, which seeks to “chart the impact of the Holocaust on ordinary people in the democracies, rather than to outline in detail the implementation of state policy.”<sup>82</sup> The failure of denominational leadership to implement a strong pro Jewish-refugee policy is not the focus of this article; rather, the focus is on the Christians whose protests reached out to their churches, the general public, and to the government. They did so in numerous ways and for diverse reasons in order to persuade a listening audience, who were then left without an excuse. The silence brought attention to those who spoke out just as those who spoke out brought attention to those who were silent. In the end, some were silent, some were not: both deserve to have their narratives understood and their role in Canada’s failure properly identified.

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<sup>82</sup> Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1994), 275.