

The Baptist World Alliance and Antisemitism: An Historical Overview

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Abstract:

This historical study investigates how the Baptist World Alliance responded to the struggles of the Jewish people throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in light of Baptist core convictions, as expressed in World Congress and General Council resolutions and statements. As a collection, the past resolutions, statements and messages of the Baptist World Alliance indicate that the Jewish people were given only minimal attention until the rise of Hitler and Nazism. Responding to that challenge, antisemitism as a manifestation of racism became a recurring theme in Baptist pronouncements. After the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, the BWA strove to articulate a balanced and nuanced position concerning the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (and terrorism), while avoiding any consideration of how antisemitism might play a role in the conflict. With the rise of twenty-first century antisemitism, in 2019 the BWA returned to its historical roots and once again expressed friendship with the Jewish people and opposed antisemitism.

Keywords:

antisemitism; Baptist World Alliance; Jews

The Re-Emergence of Antisemitism in the Twenty-First Century

Speaking online to the World Jewish Congress on the 82nd anniversary of Kristallnacht, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, on 9 November 2020, expressed grave concern about rise of contemporary antisemitism: 'In recent months, a steady stream of prejudice has continued to blight our world: anti-Semitic assaults, harassment and vandalism; Holocaust denial; a guilty plea in a neo-Nazi plot to blow up a synagogue [...] Our world today needs a return to reason — and a rejection of the lies and loathing that propelled the Nazis and that fracture societies today.' Guterres furthermore expressed

a personal commitment to continue ‘the fight against anti-Semitism and discrimination of every kind’.¹

Contemporary manifestations of antisemitism are occurring at an increasing rate. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) revealed that in 2019, ‘2,107 antisemitic incidents [occurred] throughout the United States. This is a 12% increase from the 1,879 incidents recorded in 2018 and marks the highest number on record since ADL began tracking antisemitic incidents in 1979.’²

Similarly, European countries are experiencing an alarming increase in antisemitic incidents.³ The European Jewish Congress (EJC) worries that ‘normalization of antisemitism on the streets, online and in mainstream society, in politics and media legitimises and encourages acts of violence against Jewish individuals and institutions’. The EJC provided troubling statistics confirming the rise of antisemitism:

France [...] saw a 74% increase in antisemitic incidents in 2018. In Germany, some 1,646 antisemitic acts were reported in 2018 [...] marking their highest level in the past decade [...] In the United Kingdom, reported antisemitic hate incidents hit a record high in 2018, with more than 100 recorded in every month of the year.⁴

Assessing the BWA's Position on Jews and Antisemitism

In response to this rising tide of antisemitism, the Baptist World Alliance General Council passed a resolution on 11 July 2019, rejecting antisemitism and violent attacks against other people of religious faith. In opposing such prejudice, the Council relied upon a consensus that had developed over the course of a century with regard to past manifestations of antisemitism and other forms of intolerance.

¹ ‘Oppose Hatred in all Its Forms, UN Chief Urges’, *UN News*, <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/11/1077282>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

² ‘Audit of Antisemitic Incidents 2019’, *Anti-Defamation League*, <<https://www.adl.org/audit2019>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

³ See European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Antisemitism: Overview of Antisemitic Incidents Recorded in the European Union 2009-2019* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020).

⁴ ‘Antisemitism in Europe’, *European Jewish Congress*, <<https://eurojewcong.org/what-we-do/combating-antisemitism/antisemitism-in-europe/>> [accessed 10 November 2020].

Baptists historically have believed that all humans, being made in God's image, are to live in freedom and liberty. Individual conscience is to be protected by soul freedom, which in the social and political realms, means that people of all faiths (and even no faith) deserve full political freedom and civil rights. Furthermore, racial and ethnic prejudice, and hate are sin and must be opposed. From its earliest days, the Baptist movement has specifically applied this principle to the Jewish people.⁵

The Baptist World Alliance (BWA) has served as a prophetic voice of conscience on behalf of most of the global Baptist family. Since 1905, when the first Congress was convened in London, to the present time, thousands of Baptists crafted, debated and adopted resolutions, messages, and statements that sought to express Baptist convictions in response to a panoply of spiritual, ethical, moral, social and political concerns. In between Congresses, the BWA's General Council would also meet and express judgements on pressing issues.

In Baptist polity, resolutions and other collective statements are not binding on Baptist individuals or churches. They intend to share wisdom and raise consciousness rather than to demand conformity or hinder the soul freedom and responsibility of people to follow the dictates of their own Christ-led conscience. In 1955, BWA General Secretary Arnold T. Ohrn stated this principle well:

Further, it should be understood that an Alliance Congress, when adopting pronouncements, can speak for itself alone. The resolutions naturally carry great moral authority, coming as they do from a Congress so representative of Baptists in the entire world. But no union or convention has ever authorized a Baptist World Congress to speak on its behalf. The people who voted for the resolutions, did so on their own behalf, not on behalf of their churches or conventions. But these statements would never have been proposed, much less adopted, if they were not considered indicative of the trends of opinion within the Baptist world.⁶

Inevitably, the Jewish people and their religion, place in society and struggles have come to the attention of the Baptist World Alliance.

⁵ Lee B. Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust: The Hand of Sincere Friendship* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2017), pp. 19–21.

⁶ Arnold T. Ohrn, ed., *Golden Jubilee Congress (Ninth World Congress), London, England, July 16–22, 1955* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1956), p. 6.

This historical study will investigate how the BWA responded to the journey of the Jewish people throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in light of Baptist core convictions, as expressed in World Congress and General Council resolutions and statements.

Baptists and Jews Before the Rise of Nazism (1905–1928)

During its formative period (1905–1928), the BWA’s resolutions and statements reflected a growing awareness of its responsibility to address significant issues and challenges. In the inaugural London Congress in 1905, delegates expressed their ‘profound sympathy with sufferers [of the] Rhondda disaster’.⁷ The Second Congress in Philadelphia (1911) produced resolutions on peace and social progress,⁸ two themes that would be revisited often by subsequent Congresses. In Stockholm, the Third Congress (1923) tackled specific issues in Russia and Romania, as well as temperance.⁹ Reconciliation between Baptists from World War I combatant states was addressed, anticipating positions and actions during the Nazi period.¹⁰

None of these statements evidenced any recognition of the Jewish people’s plight during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe suffered tremendously during World War I, and pogroms from Poland to Russia were not uncommon. Apparently, the BWA had not yet reached a stage of socio-political maturity to specifically engage Jewish people or their unique issues, despite the experience of several of its key national constituents.

One of the great Baptist apostolic leaders of the nineteenth century, Julius Köbner — ‘a converted Jew of remarkable intellectual

⁷ BWA World Congress Resolution 1905.2 *Disaster at Rhondda, South Wales*. Details of all the resolutions, messages, manifestos and statements referred to in this article can be found at BaptistWorld.org/resolutions. The original source for each resolution may be found in the *Citations* section of each pdf document.

⁸ BWA World Congress Resolution 1911.4 *Regarding Peace*; BWA World Congress Resolution 1911.5 *Social Progress*.

⁹ BWA World Congress Resolution 1923.8 *Rumania*; BWA World Congress Resolution 1923.5 *Temperance*; BWA World Congress Resolution 1923.6 *Russian Delegates*.

¹⁰ BWA World Congress Resolution 1923.3 *Thanks for Help in Time of Distress*; BWA World Congress Resolution 1923.7 *International Peace*.

and literary powers¹¹ — ministered alongside Johan Gerhard Oncken as they and others founded Baptist movements in Germany, Denmark and across Europe. British Baptists had been engaged in missions to the Jewish people for decades preceding the BWA's birth. Sébastien Fath has documented the existence of French Baptist philo-semitism, especially as evidenced by the ministry of Ruben Saillens.¹² Southern and Northern (now American) Baptists in the United States had interactions with Jewish communities, initiated missions to evangelise, assimilate, and alleviate the conditions Jewish immigrants faced, and passed resolutions concerning Baptist-Jewish issues by the 1920s.¹³ In 1921, Jacob Gartenhaus became the highest ranking Southern Baptist Jewish disciple of Jesus, when he was called to serve as the denomination's director for Jewish evangelism.¹⁴

Though unaware of the central place the struggles the Jewish people would occupy in the Baptist articulation of its core conviction of religious and political liberty a decade later, the 1923 Congress published the precedent that would guide their defence of Jewish rights. In a *Message to the Churches and World*, the rights of Jews are implicitly defended: 'The State should protect the rights of all men of various religious beliefs.'¹⁵

The BWA's Response to Hitler's Antisemitism (1933–1945)

After a year's delay due to the global depression and concerns about Germany's political climate, Baptists gathered in Berlin for the Fifth World Congress on 4–10 August 1934. Under the watchful eyes of the Nazi regime, Baptists passed perhaps its most prophetically courageous and significant resolution in the BWA's history. Newspapers across the world covered the deliberations and endorsement of Resolution 7

¹¹ J. H. Rushbrooke, *Some Chapters of European Baptist History* (London: The Kingsgate Press, 1929), p. 18.

¹² Sébastien Fath, 'Evangelical Minister Ruben Saillens and Judaism', *Archives Juives*, 40, no. 1 (2007): 45–57.

¹³ Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 19–66.

¹⁴ See Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 286–297, 426–432.

¹⁵ 1923 BWA World Congress, *Message of the Baptist World Alliance to the Baptist Brotherhood, to Other Christian Brethren, and to the World*. The message also contains the first specific reference to Jews, in a section on stewardship and tithing.

concerning ‘Racialism’, focused on the rights of racial groups and their status before God.¹⁶

In a concise three paragraph argument, the resolution expressed the core Baptist conviction that all people are made in the image of God and thus have equal political, social, and religious rights. Quoting Galatians 3:28, the initial paragraph endorsed an understanding of the Church as a multi-cultural and fully inclusive racial fellowship (including Jews) where equality and mutual reconciliation are normative:

This Congress representing the world-wide, inter-racial fellowship of Baptists, rejoices to know that despite all differences of race, there is in Christ an all-embracing unity, so that in Him it can be claimed with deepest truth there is ‘neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all in all’.

The welcoming of Jews as a race into the Church implied opposition to the emerging Nazi position that Jews should be excluded from the Church. The second paragraph expanded the argument to the civil realm by prophetically opposing all manifestations of ‘racial animosity’ even outside the confines of the Church. In this regard, it rightly went beyond the more famous Barmen Declaration that was released in May 1934.¹⁷ The BWA’s Racialism resolution declared,

This Congress deplores and condemns as a violation of the law of God the Heavenly Father, all racial animosity, and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward coloured people, or toward subject races in any part of the world.

The tripartite racial breakdown in the resolution can be found in other Baptist statements from the United States.¹⁸ Racialism as a social justice category addressed white majority concern for Blacks suffering from Southern Jim Crow era discrimination and lynchings, Jewish persecution and antisemitism primarily in Europe but also in the United States, and discriminatory policies affecting Asians (particularly Chinese and Japanese). Baptist opposition to ‘a every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews’ was immediately

¹⁶ BWA World Congress Resolution 1934.7 *Racialism*.

¹⁷ The text of the Barmen Declaration in English can be found in Hubert G. Locke, ed., *The Church Confronts the Nazis: Barmen Then and Now* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1984), pp. 19-25.

¹⁸ See Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 143–227, 272–340, 350–370.

understood as a rebuke to the Nazi antisemitic restrictions on Jewish freedoms, based on the spiritual principle of the equality of all people under God, which trumps all nationalistic considerations.

The final paragraph invoked a now forgotten core conviction, embraced not just by Baptists, concerning the ‘personality’ of human beings:

This Congress urges the promotion of Christian teaching concerning respect for human personality regardless of race, and as the surest means of advancing the true brotherhood of all people, urges the active propagation of the Gospel of Christ throughout the World.

Employed in a pre-psychological sense, *personality* referred to the spiritual essence of human beings. All people, by virtue of possessing a soul, were made in God’s image and thus possessed dignity and immeasurable worth; therefore the common possession of *personality* promoted the unity (‘brotherhood’) of the human race. By asserting that Jews, Blacks and Asians possessed *personality*, the resolution theologically rejected the Nazi antisemitic devaluation of the Jews as a supposedly inferior race. There are no inferior races, the Baptists declared in Berlin.

Black Baptist leaders attending the 1934 Congress not only pressed for the inclusion of the phrase ‘coloured people’ but further urged the BWA to convene its next Congress in the heart of the American South, so that oppressed Black people could enjoy the same support as the German Jews received. With National, Southern and Northern Baptist support, the 1939 World Congress was held in Atlanta, Georgia, on 22–28 July. This Sixth Congress did pass a resolution on Racialism, which was in reality merely a reprinting of the original 1934 resolution with a preface: ‘The Congress finds that the strong and unwavering convictions which govern the attitude and policy of the Baptist World Alliance are clearly and adequately expressed in the Resolution adopted by the Fifth World Congress, which met in Berlin in 1934. It therefore solemnly reaffirms what was then stated [...]’ The text of the original resolution was then quoted in full.¹⁹

The resolution echoed General Secretary J. H. Rushbrooke’s somewhat defensive response to criticism of the BWA’s rather

¹⁹ BWA World Congress Resolution 1939.5 *Racialism*.

lacklustre response to ongoing Nazi antisemitism in the years following the 1934 Congress and in particular, the travesty of Kristallnacht in November 1938.²⁰ There was nothing new in the 1939 resolution; it merely asserted that the Baptist movement's position on antisemitism had not changed. Most notably absent was any report of subsequent actions taken on behalf of the suffering German Jewish population.

The historical legacy of the 1939 Congress concerning antisemitism is accordingly mixed. The peacemaking impulses of Rushbrooke constrained the Congress from breaking new ground in opposing antisemitism in general or specifically criticising Nazi policies and actions against the Jews. Despite a vociferous public debate on totalitarianism and democracy (where the latter was championed by the British Baptist leader M. E. Aubrey), the German Baptist leadership's complicity with the regime was not officially rebuked. While personally opposing Hitler, Rushbrooke consistently sought to maintain the unity of the global Baptist fellowship despite political divisions, even after the Second World War broke out on 1 September 1939.

The Holocaust, Antisemitism and Genocide (1947–1965)

Copenhagen 1947

There were no World Congresses during the Second World War. Europe's devastation led to the BWA's post-war efforts to aid ailing Baptist national conventions and assist Baptist displaced persons. Accordingly, a European venue for the next Congress made a great deal of sense. In 1947, Baptists travelled to Copenhagen for its Seventh World Congress. The 1947 Congress, in contrast to its predecessor, not only revisited the topics raised by the 1934 Racialism resolution, but also

²⁰ A similar response by the BWA Executive Committee's Administrative Subcommittee two weeks after Kristallnacht merely recalled the 1934 resolution and stated that it 'offers a clear description of the attitude of the Alliance'. Unlike the Congress, the committee also asked Baptist entities to 'take steps to furnish all possible assistance to those who are the victims of anti-Semitic action'. See BWA Administrative Sub-Committee Meeting Minutes 1938-11-28, Section 8, 'Anti-Semitism', in *Baptist World Alliance Minutes of the Administrative Sub-Committee Meeting on Monday, 28th November, 1938 at the Offices of the Alliance, London* (London: Baptist World Alliance, 1938), pp. 8–9.

expanded on them in light of the intervening thirteen years in two historically significant resolutions.

The first resolution focused on ‘Race Relations’. It confessed that Baptists had ‘tried to ignore, evade, and attempt by platitudes to solve this most grave problem’, and that these avoidance strategies needed to be replaced by a deeper ‘appreciation for the ideals, aspirations, and personalities of all races’. In order to ‘build a Christian order and equality for all children of men’, the resolution rejected ‘un-Christian practices and abuses of people, such as lynchings, race extermination, economic and racial discrimination, unfair employment practices, and denial of political rights [which] are contrary to the principles of Christianity’.²¹ The term ‘race extermination’ no doubt included the Jewish persecution in Europe.

A second resolution concentrated Baptist attention on the Holocaust-era Jewish experience.²² Composed originally by Jacob Gartenhaus, it forthrightly acknowledged

the unprecedented suffering through which the people of Israel have passed during recent years, millions of them being exterminated by the most inhuman means; aware also that these sufferings are not yet at an end, but that hundreds of thousands are still in concentration camps or wandering homeless from land to land.

The Holocaust was summarised in honest terms and the ongoing post-war plight of Jewish refugees was not denied. The root cause of this ‘unprecedented suffering’ — prejudice against Jews — was still a threat. The statement asserted that ‘the poisonous propaganda and destructive designs of anti-Semitism are still at work in many lands’, eliciting an expression of Baptist ‘sorrow and shame that such conditions prevail’.

Reflecting Gartenhaus’s perspective, the resolution affirmed Jesus’s Jewish background and urged Baptists to ‘do everything in their power to alleviate the sufferings of the Jews’, while also ‘supporting missionary work among the Jews’.²³ Countries were asked to open their

²¹ BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.2 *Race Relations*.

²² BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.3 *Concerning the Jews*.

²³ Gartenhaus facilitated a conference ‘to consider our obligation to preach the Gospel to the Jews’ on July 30; see Walter O. Lewis, ed., *Seventh Baptist World Congress, Copenhagen, Denmark, July 29–August 3, 1947* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1948), p. 62.

borders to ‘the homeless and oppressed refugees’, which in context included Baptist displaced persons as well as Jews.²⁴

Not all of the resolution’s requests represented Gartenhaus’s personal views or expressed pro-Jewish sentiment. It advised ‘Jewry everywhere to refrain from provocative acts and to restrain those among them who would resort to violence’. This was a reaction against the King David Hotel bombing on 22 July 1946 and other violent acts against British rule. The resolution was silent regarding the Jewish aspirations for a territorial homeland, perhaps in deference to British sensibilities and an ambivalence surrounding the creation of an independent Israel within certain Baptist missionary circles.

On the closing day of the Congress, a ‘Manifesto on Religious Freedom’ was adopted and served as the meeting’s message to the global family. It asserted, ‘Since the foundation of all our freedoms is the dignity of man created in the likeness of the eternal God, it is our first duty to extend the rights of conscience to all people, irrespective of their race, colour, sex, or religion (or lack of religion).’²⁵ Outlasting Nazism, and presently facing the challenge of Communism in Eastern Europe and Asia, Baptists in Copenhagen reiterated historic Baptist core convictions on human freedom, which formed the theological basis for their support both of oppressed Blacks and surviving Jews, as well as for all other minorities around the world.

Cleveland 1950

Meeting in the American heartland city of Cleveland, the 1950 Congress symbolised the ascendancy of the American denominations within the BWA. With the destruction of the BWA’s London headquarters during the war, the offices of the BWA were relocated to Washington, DC. The East-West (communist/democratic) bifurcation of the political world led Baptists to place their faith in the mediatorial work of the newly established United Nations, and this was reflected in the Cleveland resolutions.

²⁴ See BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.4 *Displaced Persons*.

²⁵ This statement comes in the introduction to the 1947 BWA World Congress *Manifesto on Religious Freedom*.

Post-war reflection on the scope and horrific nature of the brutality of the Holocaust inspired efforts to declare the intentional destruction of a people illicit under international law. The 1950 Congress supportively pointed to the work of the UN, which adopted the term ‘genocide’ to denote such efforts: ‘Genocide is a denial of the right of existence of entire human groups, as homicide is the denial of the right to live of individual human beings.’²⁶

Although the Holocaust lay at the heart of the matter (historically speaking), the Baptist statement followed the generalising principle of the UN and did not specifically mention Jews; instead, it asserted that ‘during the last war certain of the nations were guilty of this inhuman practice, using it both against minorities within their own borders as well as against conquered peoples and prisoners of war’. Since ‘Christian conscience has been outraged by such treatment of human beings’, the Congress urged governments to ratify the Genocide Convention (six more affirmative votes were needed).

In 2021, the identification of the Jewish people as a distinct race is a controversial and disputable notion, but in the early to mid-twentieth century the concept was commonplace both in Baptist thinking and the wider social milieu.²⁷ Antisemitism was a manifestation of racial discrimination as well as a religious freedom issue. This dual manner of treating the socio-political challenges confronting the Jewish people was illustrated by the actions taken by the Eighth World Congress in 1950.

The Congress’s resolution on ‘Race Relations’ acknowledged its indebtedness to the resolutions published by earlier Congresses in 1934, 1939 and 1947 that ‘condemned racial discrimination’.²⁸ However, while reiterating the traditional trinitarian racial categories of Jew, American Black and Asian peoples, the proclamation broke new ground by referencing additional struggles: ‘This problem manifests itself in several unchristian ways such as discrimination against Jews in many lands, the Apartheid Movement in South Africa, the discrimination against

²⁶ BWA World Congress Resolution 1950.3 *Genocide*.

²⁷ The identification of Jews as racially white was largely the result of the post-war successful assimilation of Jews into the American middle class. See Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

²⁸ BWA World Congress Resolution 1950.4 *Race Relations*.

Oriental and Mexicans in some areas, and the segregation by law of Negroes in the United States; [...]’ The resolution declared that ‘discrimination and segregation based on religion, race, color and culture are ethically and morally indefensible and contrary to the gospel of Christ and the principle of freedom for which Baptists stand’, and so called on Baptists to reject ‘racial and cultural prejudice’.

Jews as adherents of a religion are specifically mentioned in the Congress’s Manifesto regarding ‘Religious Freedom’. Reaffirming the historic Baptist core conviction on religious liberty and freedom for all people, and linking it to the ‘the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, the Manifesto specifically affirmed that state churches should not restrict the religious liberty of ‘Jews and members of other religious groups’.²⁹

The 1950 Congress once again neglected to discuss the birth of an independent Jewish state. Even though Israel was founded as a technically secular homeland for the Jewish people, no one could deny its spiritual implications for many Jews (and Christians). Many Baptists, especially those influenced by evangelical and prophecy-centred dispensational movements, were supportive of Israel’s rebirth.³⁰ Furthermore, the BWA was obviously aware that the President of the United States, Harry S. Truman — a Baptist — had played a key role in promoting global recognition of Israel’s right to exist as an independent nation.³¹

Racial Inequality (1955–1965)

Nevertheless, with Europe’s Jewish refugee crisis resolved, and as American Jews left their immigrant past behind them and successfully became established within the middle class, the 1950 Congress resolution on Genocide effectively closed the chapter on Baptists, Jews and the Holocaust. As the memory of the Holocaust faded, new problems, such as the nuclear arms race, the Cold War, and race

²⁹ 1950 BWA World Congress *Manifesto—Mid-Century Call to Religious Freedom*, ‘Appeal to Action’ section.

³⁰ See Yaakov Ariel, *An Unusual Relationship: Evangelical Christians and Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), pp. 83–110, 171–13; Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, pp. 236–239.

³¹ See Michael J. Devine, ed., *Harry S. Truman, the State of Israel, and the Quest for Peace in the Middle East* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2009).

inequality, would trouble Baptists. Specific references to antisemitism became less common. For example, the 1955 Resolution on ‘Race Relations’ reaffirmed that in ‘1934, 1939, 1947 and 1950’, the BWA had ‘already declared itself unalterably opposed to racial discrimination in every form’,³² but antisemitism was not specifically mentioned. In a further declaration, the Congress similarly generically affirmed that ‘the right to be free is a gift from God to all men of whatever race’.³³

In 1960, Baptists from around the globe travelled to Rio de Janeiro for the first World Congress held in South America. The delegates recalled that their 1934 resolution on Racism proclaimed that Jesus ‘condemned every form of oppression or unfair discrimination toward the Jews, toward colored people, or toward subject races’ and expressed ‘gratitude to God for the measure of progress which has been made in the improvement of race relations’. Looking to the present and future, the focus of this Congress’s concern — ‘racial segregation and the caste system’ (American segregation and probably South African apartheid³⁴) — may have signalled a belief that antisemitism was no longer a leading manifestation of racism.³⁵

The trend away from focusing on antisemitism as a specific and ongoing manifestation of racism continued at the 1965 Congress in Miami Beach (a city with a significant Jewish population). In just one generic sentence, delegates affirmed ‘the brotherhood of all Christians and the equality of all men under God, regardless of race or social position’.³⁶ Similarly, the 1965 *Manifesto* thanked God for ‘the decrease of discrimination because of race or creed’.³⁷

³² BWA World Congress Resolution 1955.2 *Race Relations*.

³³ 1955 BWA World Congress Golden Jubilee *Declaration on Religious Liberty*, ‘Our Jubilee Declaration’ section

³⁴ The Fifteenth Congress in 1985 passed a detailed repudiation of apartheid in 1985; see BWA World Congress Resolution 1985.2 *Racism in General and Apartheid in Particular*.

³⁵ BWA World Congress Resolution 1960.1 *Race Relations*.

³⁶ BWA World Congress Resolution 1965.2 *Brotherhood and Equality*.

³⁷ 1965 BWA World Congress *Manifesto on Religious Liberty and Human Rights*.

Jews, Israel and the Middle East

Looking at the resolutions of the Tenth and Eleventh BWA Congresses, a Baptist could not be faulted for hoping that antisemitism was no longer a significant contemporary problem and that the Jewish state of Israel was not a pressing subject for critical reflection. That would change with the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbours on 5 June 1967.

Peace and Conflict Resolution (1967–1981)

The Six Day War fundamentally transformed the political dynamics of the Middle East. Israel emerged as a victorious and militarily strong national power, while its conquest of territory owned by Syria (the Golan Heights), Jordan (the West Bank) and Egypt (Sinai and Gaza) created a new reality that continues to be controversial to this present day.

Meeting less than two months after the conclusion of the Six Day War, the BWA Executive Committee merely referred to the region's 'continuing tension'.³⁸ Similarly, in 1968 and 1969, the Executive Committee noted conflicts around the world, with the Middle East being but one example.³⁹

Although not cited by name, Israel and its neighbours received attention in the resolution on 'World Peace and Reconciliation', passed by the Twelfth World Congress in 1970: 'We cry out against the continued tragedy of the conflicts in Indochina and the Middle East and urge that the killing be stopped.'⁴⁰ Baptists looked to the United Nations to facilitate peace negotiations in trouble spots such as the Middle East.

Another resolution continued the practice of recalling the sequence of statements against racism initiated by the foundational 1934 resolution, and also furthered the more recent strategy of avoiding specific mention of antisemitism:

³⁸ BWA Executive Committee Resolution 1967.5 *Message to Baptist Churches Throughout the World*.

³⁹ BWA Executive Committee Resolution 1968.1 *Peace*; BWA Executive Committee Resolution 1969.6 *Peace*.

⁴⁰ BWA World Congress Resolution 1970.1 *World Peace and Reconciliation*.

At Berlin in 1934, at Atlanta in 1939, at Copenhagen in 1947, at Cleveland in 1950, at London in 1955, at Rio de Janeiro in 1960, and at Miami Beach in 1965 the Baptist World Alliance registered its opposition to racial discrimination and its parent, racism, which is the evil of looking at men in terms of their differences of color or culture rather than their oneness as children of God. The fact that here again in Tokyo in 1970 we are obliged to address ourselves to this evil is evidence of how stubborn and deeply ingrained this practice is in human thought and action [...] We Baptists lament the presence of and repent for the sins of racism that have existed, [...] We pledge ourselves to labor within our own churches, conventions, and unions and also in the whole of society for the total elimination of every vestige of racism and those discriminations and oppressions which are its offsprings.⁴¹

In 1975, both trends continued as the Thirteenth Congress published a restatement of Baptist core convictions concerning religious freedom, human rights, peacemaking and morality. While opposing ‘violence and armed conflict persisting in many parts of the world’, neither the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 nor the Vietnam War was named. The resolution also affirmed that ‘the right to maintain cultural identity includes the rights of racial, ethnic, and national groups to maintain their self-determined identities. We affirm the principles set forth in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.’⁴² It is unclear if the Resolution intended to be applied to the Palestinian gains in the United Nations and the rise of the PLO as their representative in 1974–1975.

The Baptists’ reliance on the United Nations to mediate conflicts was restated in 1980.⁴³ The plight of Vietnamese boat people as well as that of Palestinians in refugee camps may have been in mind when the 1980 Congress implored unnamed governments to ‘act with humanitarian concern towards persons seeking shelter as a result of personal dispossession or exclusion from their own nations’.⁴⁴

⁴¹ BWA World Congress Resolution 1970.2 *Reconciliation and Racial Discrimination*; see also BWA General Council Resolution 1981.1 *United Nations Declaration Concerning Religious Intolerance and Discrimination*, and BWA General Council Resolution 1982.3 *Fundamental Freedoms*.

⁴² BWA World Congress Resolution 1975.1 *Religious Liberty*.

⁴³ BWA World Congress Resolution 1980.4 *World Peace and Disarmament*. This was followed up by BWA General Council Resolution 1984.1 *Nuclear Arms*, which stated: ‘WE SUPPORT the proposal of non-governmental organizations represented at the United Nations in calling for a peace conference for the Middle East, to which all parties to the conflicts should be invited.’

⁴⁴ BWA World Congress Resolution 1980.6 *Refugees*.

Meeting in between Congresses, the Baptist World Alliance's General Council penned some 215 resolutions and statements between 1981 and 2020. During these four decades, several expressed the concern Baptists felt toward the Israeli-Arab conflict. Continuing the trend of not explicitly mentioning Israel by name, the Council in 1981 presented an even-handed but general statement summarising 'its concern and position regarding multiple but interrelated crises in the Near and Middle East in the following expressions':

1. We express our profound concern regarding the blatant disregard for human rights, civil liberties and national self-determination.
2. We express our resistance to the pattern whereby powers outside the Near and Middle East manipulate the geo-political situation for national advantage.
3. We express our commitment to the pursuit of peace, liberty and social justice simultaneously.
4. We call on Baptists in every land to pray for peace in the Near and Middle East.⁴⁵

Terrorism (1982–1989)

As acts of Palestinian terrorism became more common, the BWA sought to oppose terroristic violence without appearing to explicitly support Israel. Perhaps unintentionally, this quest for balance enabled the BWA to avoid the issue of whether attacks against Israeli and other Jews constituted a manifestation of antisemitism.

In 1982, the General Council noted its 'concern over acts of terrorism, assassinations, and the taking of hostages all of which have posed potential threats to peace and stability, as well as being unconscionable assaults upon the individuals concerned'.⁴⁶ In like manner, the Fifteenth World Congress in Los Angeles in 1985 expressed opposition to terrorism, naming specific forms of violence it abhorred, including 'indiscriminate attacks against civilians through bombing of airplanes, hijacking, kidnapping, harassment and murder'. However,

⁴⁵ BWA General Council Resolution 1981.4 *Crisis in the Near and Middle East*. This balance may reflect internal division within the BWA. On the one hand, the Southern Baptist Convention was pro-Israel, while the three small Baptist conventions of Israel, Jordan and Lebanon (with a total membership in 1980 of 25 churches and 1,308 members) would have been more sympathetic with Arab and Palestinian concerns.

⁴⁶ BWA General Council Resolution 1982.6 *Peace and Peaceful Change*.

even while acknowledging that some forms of terrorism may have religious origins, it framed the problem in political terms and did not identify Jews as specific victims of terrorist attacks: ‘We deplore the destruction of human life and the deliberate infliction of human suffering upon innocent people.’⁴⁷

Hostage taking had been a feature of Palestinian insurgency since 1968, when an Israeli El Al plane was hijacked and sixteen people were held hostage. This was followed up by the 1972 Munich Olympics attack on Israeli athletes. In 1985, the hijacking of the Achille Lauro cruise liner by the PLO off the coast of Egypt, which featured the execution of a disabled American Jew, Leon Klinghoffer, was notorious. During its 1987 session, the BWA General Council specifically addressed this issue. Affirming the value of human life and rejecting turning people into ‘commodities for bargaining’, the Council blandly noted that hostage taking ‘feeds a cycle of hostility and makes a mutual desire for peace, justice and reconciliation more difficult to achieve’. It urged Baptists to pray for hostages and ‘the resolution of the problems leading to violence’, advised member unions to ‘appeal through the media to persons of good will to reject violent means of securing good purposes’, and curiously appealed to hostage takers to treat their prisoners in a ‘just and humane way’.⁴⁸

In two other resolutions, the 1987 Council praised host country Jordan for practising ‘religious toleration’ and prayed that the country might serve as ‘an instrument of just and lasting peace in the Middle East’.⁴⁹ The Council specifically thanked Marwan Doudin, Jordanian Minister of Occupied Territory Affairs — namely, the Israeli held West Bank.⁵⁰

Even though Israel celebrated its fortieth anniversary in May 1988, the General Council did not see fit to congratulate or even acknowledge the anniversary. Instead, it reaffirmed its commitment to a cessation of ‘hostilities between and within countries in the Middle

⁴⁷ BWA World Congress Resolution 1985.6 *Terrorism*.

⁴⁸ BWA General Council Resolution 1987.1 *Hostages*.

⁴⁹ BWA General Council Resolution 1987.2 *Religious and Racial Minorities*.

⁵⁰ BWA General Council Resolution 1987.6 *Appreciation*. See also <<http://www.marwandudin.org>> [last accessed 5 March 2020].

East'.⁵¹ The next year, it succinctly chose to 'deplore every incident in which persons and groups are subjected to actions which contradict the divine intention for personhood and human dignity, in particular, human rights abuses in the Middle East'.⁵²

Israel and the Palestinians (1990–2013)

The 1990s were a period of intense peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The Bush and Clinton administrations repeatedly sought to provide opportunities for Israel and the Palestinians to reconcile and end their hostilities, based on what became known as the 'two state solution'. There were some notable successes, such as the Oslo Accords (1993, 1995) and a peace treaty between Israel and Jordan (1994).

Throughout the decade, the BWA General Council repeatedly commented on the peace process in the absence of new World Congress resolutions. Following the Gulf War and Desert Storm (August 1990–February 1991), the Council urged Baptists to 'pray unceasingly and to work earnestly for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East and not least for a strong and mutual commitment on the part of Israel and the neighboring states to find a solution to the situation of the Palestinian people'.⁵³ This appears to be the first time Israel is specifically mentioned as a country in a BWA resolution.⁵⁴

In 1994, the General Council approvingly recognised the 1993 Oslo 'accords between the Israelis and Palestinians'.⁵⁵ Three years later, the Council reaffirmed support for the Oslo peace process and for the mediation efforts of the United Nations.⁵⁶ However, the Camp David Summit in July 2000 was not a success and its failure threw the Oslo process into a tailspin. The second Palestinian Intifada began in September 2000 and lasted for almost five years. In 2002, the General

⁵¹ BWA General Council Resolution 1988.5 *Peacemaking*.

⁵² BWA General Council Resolution 1989.2 *Human Rights*.

⁵³ BWA General Council Resolution 1991.3 *Middle East Situation*.

⁵⁴ The two references to Israel in Gartenhaus's 1947 resolution were religious in nature, not political. Jesus was a 'Child of Israel', or in another words a Jew; the Great Commission applies to sharing the gospel with 'the people of Israel'. (BWA World Congress Resolution 1947.3 *Concerning the Jews*.)

⁵⁵ BWA General Council Resolution 1994.5 *The Ministry of Reconciliation*.

⁵⁶ BWA General Council Resolution 1997.2 *Peace in the Middle East*.

Council passed a balanced and carefully worded resolution which, while deploring ‘violence’, did not condemn either Palestinian terrorism or Israeli military activity. It merely supported ‘all efforts to make peace between Israelis and Palestinians and to promote initiatives between Christians, Jews and Moslems in the common concern for peace’.⁵⁷ A year later, Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli leader to be mentioned in a BWA resolution that lent support to President Bush’s ‘Road Map to Peace’. It praised the ‘cooperation of the Israeli and Palestinian Governmental Authorities’ in working ‘toward the cessation of violence and a just and lasting peace for all peoples’.⁵⁸

The Arab Spring, with its pro-democratic aspirations, erupted in December 2010 in Tunisia and spread to Egypt by February 2011. In July 2011, the Council responded with a resolution that covered the protests, the status of Middle Eastern Christians, violence, religious freedom, the plight of refugees and Baptist-Muslim dialogue. The resolution also included a statement on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that, as was the standard approach, sought to balance the perspectives of both parties. Baptists were asked to ‘work and pray for a just resolution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, one that balances Israel’s need for security with an end to oppressive policies inflicted on the Palestinian people, and to be a strong support to the Israeli (Arab) and Palestinian Baptist Churches in the many pressures and challenges that they face’.⁵⁹

Within two years, it became clear that many of the aspirations of the Arab Spring movement would not be actualised, and in fact, political conditions deteriorated in several countries impacted by the upheavals. In July 2013, the General Council expressed concern for ‘an increase in the persecution of minorities, including Christians’ and condemned ‘attacks by Islamic extremists’.⁶⁰ Although United States Secretary of State John Kerry was preparing to initiate a new round of

⁵⁷ BWA General Council Resolution 2002.5 *The Middle East*.

⁵⁸ BWA General Council Resolution 2003.5 *Middle East*.

⁵⁹ BWA General Council Resolution 2011.4 *Resolution on the Middle East*.

⁶⁰ BWA General Council Resolution 2013.10 *Crisis in the Middle East and North Africa*. The Council also remembered English Anabaptist Richard Overton who ‘argued for religious liberty for Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims’ (BWA General Council Resolution 2013.15 *Human Rights Based on the Work of Anabaptist Richard Overton*).

peace talks later in the month, Israel was not mentioned in this resolution.

Confronting Contemporary Antisemitism and Prejudice

The Berlin Wall fell on November 9, 1989, signalling the collapse of the Soviet Union and its Eastern European alliance. At the same time, actions by both the United States and Soviet Union greatly impacted the lives of Soviet Jews. In October 1989, the Bush Administration capped Soviet refugee immigration at 50,000 applicants (it had previously been unlimited), while ‘events in the Soviet Union threatened the stability of the country, and rumours of pogroms spread. Soviet Jews and their family members, both Jewish and Gentile, flocked to Israel in unprecedented numbers: 181,759 in 1990.’⁶¹ The cover of the 7 May 1990 issue of *Newsweek* warned of ‘The Long Shadow — New Fears of Anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union’.

On 14 May 1990, *The New York Times* reported on massive protests against antisemitism in France sparked by the desecration of thirty-four graves in Carpantras and other acts of vandalism. The French Government ‘blamed the extreme rightist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen and his National Front for inciting racial hatred by calling for the eviction of 3.4 million Arab immigrants and for regularly sniping at France’s 700,000 Jews’.⁶² The Associated Press noted Le Pen’s antisemitism and indicated that about 200,000 French protesters had demonstrated against antisemitism, ‘including Holocaust survivors and President Francois Mitterrand’.⁶³

⁶¹ United Nations High Commission for Refugees gives this information at <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a7fd8.html>>, citing from a document prepared by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, *Jews from the Soviet Union* (2 November, 1994), paragraph 1 [accessed 12 November 2020]. Regarding the plight of Soviet Jews in this period, see Zvi Gitelman, ‘Glasnost, Perestroika and Antisemitism’, *Foreign Policy* 70, no. 2 (Spring 1991): 141–159.

⁶² Alan Riding, ‘Thousands in France Rally Against Anti-Semitism’, *The New York Times* (May 14, 1990), <<https://www.nytimes.com/1990/05/14/world/thousands-in-france-rally-against-anti-semitism.html>> [accessed 12 November 2020] (p. 3).

⁶³ Patrick McDowell, ‘200,000 March in Anti-Semitism Demonstration in Paris’, *The Associated Press* (May 14, 1990), <<https://apnews.com/article/e6c96df3fbabdc4f8f120642de922de>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

Meeting in Seoul, South Korea in August 1990, the BWA expressed its concern over the wave of antisemitism the world was experiencing. Referencing the Berlin Wall's collapse,⁶⁴ the resolution on 'Religious Persecution' applauded new 'opportunities of freedom' and then specifically condemned antisemitism: 'We particularly decry the use of religion to justify intolerance and persecution; and further we are appalled that anti-Semitic practices and slogans have again surfaced. We therefore declare our opposition to all forms of religious intolerance and persecution.'⁶⁵ This was the first specific mention of antisemitism by a World Congress since Rio de Janeiro in 1960, and it would turn out to be the last time a World Congress would address antisemitism by name in resolution form.

In 2008, the BWA revisited the horror of the Holocaust for the first time since 1950 in a General Council resolution focused on the Italian Government's efforts to fingerprint Roma people. Following trends in Holocaust research that sought to recognise non-Jewish victims, the resolution 'recalls that the Roma people were targeted and persecuted many times in history leading to the genocide perpetrated against them by the Nazi regime'. Although the statement maintained that Baptists 'stand against all forms of discrimination and for the safeguarding of the dignity and human rights of all human beings',⁶⁶ the centrality of Jewish suffering under the Nazis and antisemitism were not specifically recalled.

In July 2019, the General Council considered a draft resolution on 'Current Manifestations of Anti-Semitism and Religious Intolerance'.⁶⁷ The Resolutions Committee expanded its scope to include intolerance and violence against persecuted Muslims in Myanmar and China as well as Christians in Nigeria, Cameroon and India. The final version, renamed 'Current Manifestations of Religious

⁶⁴ 'The world has recently experienced the blessing of the destruction of walls and divisive restrictions which have separated nations and families' (BWA World Congress Resolution 1990.3 *Religious Persecution*).

⁶⁵ BWA World Congress Resolution 1990.3 *Religious Persecution*.

⁶⁶ BWA General Council Resolution 2008.8 *Involuntary Fingerprinting of Roma People in Italy*.

⁶⁷ For the purposes of full disclosure, the author of this article drafted the submitted proposed statement.

Intolerance and Religiously-Motivated Violence’,⁶⁸ retained most of the text of the original draft in regards to antisemitism. Citing antisemitic violent ‘attacks against synagogues in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA; and Poway, California, USA’, the resolution lamented ‘the well-documented rise of anti-Semitism around the world, for instance the marked increase in anti-Semitic crimes in western and central Europe’.

The 2019 resolution quoted in full the text of the 1934 World Congress’s protest against Hitler’s antisemitism. The extended quote was not gratuitous. It signalled that the BWA possessed a historically consistent tradition of opposing antisemitism, going as far back as the Nazi period. The Resolutions Committee also added a reference to the very beginnings of the Baptist movement, citing Thomas Helwys who, ‘in 1612, made his famous plea for Jews, Christians, and Muslims to be allowed to worship in freedom and so live at peace together in the same geographical space’. Freedom for people of all faiths constituted a fundamental Baptist core conviction, thus necessitating unequivocal opposition to antisemitism, no matter what its origin or form.

The BWA and the Jewish People: Past, Present and Future

As a collection, the past resolutions, statements and messages of the Baptist World Alliance indicate that the Jewish people were given only minimal attention until the rise of Hitler and Nazism. Responding to that challenge, antisemitism as a manifestation of racism became a recurring theme in Baptist pronouncements. After the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, the BWA strove to articulate a balanced and nuanced position concerning the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (and terrorism), while avoiding any consideration of how antisemitism might play a role in the conflict. With the rise of twenty-first century antisemitism, in 2019 the BWA returned to its historical roots and once again expressed friendship with the Jewish people and opposed antisemitism.

⁶⁸ BWA General Council Resolution 2019.2 *Current Manifestations of Religious Intolerance and Religiously-Motivated Violence*.

The 2019 General Council Resolution encouraged Baptists to demonstrate their opposition to antisemitism and other forms of prejudice by expressing ‘solidarity and sympathy’ with people of other religions and by ‘living in peace with everyone’. Beyond mere acceptance or tolerance, the resolution furthermore called upon ‘BWA member bodies to offer the hand of sincere friendship to our neighbors of other faiths, as an expression of biblical teaching that all human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and as a prophetic response of God’s love against all manifestations of terrorism, violence, and religious intolerance (Romans 12:21)’. It was J. H. Rushbrooke, as BWA General Secretary, who initially offered the Baptists’ ‘hand of sincere friendship’ to the Jewish world at a meeting in London in April 1935. Rushbrooke linked opposition to antisemitism with Baptist friendship to the Jewish people during their dark night:

When [...] as spokesman of my own communion at Berlin, I condemned in that city ‘the placing of a stamp of inferiority upon an entire race,’ it was not merely as a Baptist, but in the name of all instructed Christians that I spoke, and when our Congress passed its resolution—unanimously, in Berlin—deploring and condemning ‘as a violation of God the Heavenly Father all racial animosity, and every form of oppression or unfair discrimination towards the Jews,’ we expressed a judgment that, while we would apply it to men of every race, carries with it that special application a unique warmth of sympathy and a unique strength of just resentment, evoked by the knowledge of recent and continuing oppression and suffering. To my Jewish brothers and sisters under such conditions I extend the hand of sincere friendship.⁶⁹

In 2021 (and beyond), how might Baptists ‘extend the hand of sincere friendship’ to Jews in their neighbourhoods, countries and across the globe? Here are three suggestions, among the many available options.

First, the Baptist world might consider studying and endorsing the working definition of antisemitism created by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance: ‘Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish

⁶⁹ Original quote from ‘The Evils of Arrogant Nationalism’, *The Jewish Chronicle* (April 4, 1935), p. 30, cited in Spitzer, *Baptists, Jews, and the Holocaust*, p. 3.

community institutions and religious facilities.⁷⁰ As of the writing of this paper, thirty-four countries, along with dozens of municipalities, universities and organisations have endorsed the legally non-binding working definition.

Although the BWA has an admirable track record of opposing antisemitism, its resolutions do not provide an adequate definition of the term or its features. The IHRA definition could be discussed and endorsed by local Baptist churches, denominational judicatories and ministries. The IHRA website suggests examples of antisemitism that are worthy of reflection by Baptists. Some Baptists may find a few of the examples to be controversial, such as those regarding criticism of Israel. Baptists are not strangers to political differences, and the BWA has often been a forum where thorny issues have been addressed.

Second, the Baptist world, on all of its levels of life, might seek to be more intentional in expressing friendship by relating to the Jewish community through activities such as faith-based dialogues, social gatherings and cooperative endeavours that express both communities' justice values. In 1935, Rushbrooke declared that Baptists were in the Jews' debt because of their gift of the Jewish Scriptures; serious joint study of the Torah, Writings and Prophets could serve to build lasting bridges of understanding and deeper relationships between Baptists and Jews.⁷¹

Third, the 100th anniversary of the Fifth World Congress and its Racialism resolution will be in 2034. This might be a most appropriate occasion to bring Jewish and Baptist communities together for a celebratory reflection and forward-looking conversation.

⁷⁰ The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, <<https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism?focus=antisemitismandholocaustdenial>> [accessed 12 November 2020].

⁷¹ A precedent for this took place two decades ago. A group of Jewish Scholars published *Dabru Emet*, to which American Baptists responded. See <<https://www.baptistholocauststudies.org/dabru-emet>> [accessed 12 November 2020].