



Agony in the Pulpit

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

by Marc Saperstein

DESCRIPTION:

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

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

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