

A Question of Faith: Children of the Kindertransporte and Their Search for Jewish Identity

Ariella Esterson

Abstract

For many children growing up in Europe during the Third Reich, a period from 1933-1939 filled with growing persecution of Jews in Germany and annexed Austria prior to the full-scale Holocaust, the Kindertransporte was their only hope of survival. Once arriving in England, the children and youth, ages 18 and under, had very different experiences. There were a variety of factors which influenced how they adapted to their new surroundings. Specifically, each of the children were accustomed to a certain degree of Jewish observance in their homes. Whether they had been assimilated into German culture or came from religiously observant homes, where the children were placed in England, be it in Jewish homes, private Christian homes, hostels, or schools, the degree of religious observance and level of faith varied. This analysis focuses on the different experiences that the Kindertransporte¹ children had as it pertains to how they preserved the religious identity developed in their homes in Germany, and explains how those primordial home experiences shaped their future religious identities and levels of faith as adults.

¹ Though it has become commonplace among historians and laypeople, to pluralize the word Kindertransport using the 'S', as is common in English, as Kindertransport is actually a German word, it is actually more accurate to pluralize it using the term 'Kindertransporte,' as is common in German