

Baeck, Leo

(1873--1966), Reform rabbi, philosopher, and leader of German Jewry in Nazi Germany.

Baeck studied at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Breslau and the College for Judaic Studies in Berlin. He was ordained a rabbi in 1897 and led congregations in Oppeln, Dusseldorf, and Berlin. He also taught in the Reform rabbinical seminary. During World War I Baeck served as a chaplain.

Baeck was a creative scholar who published articles on many Jewish subjects. Although he considered himself a non-Zionist, he took a stand against a group of German rabbis who opposed Zionism and served on several Zionist committees. He was a leader of many German Jewish organizations, such as the General Association of German Rabbis, of which he was elected chairman in 1922.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, Baeck was made president of an umbrella German Jewish organization called the Reich Representation of German Jews. He thus acted as the official representative of all German Jewry. He was deported to the Theresienstadt Ghetto in 1943 where he served as a member of the Jewish camp leadership. His spiritual inspiration greatly boosted the morale of the other inmates. After the war, Baeck moved to London, where he pursued teaching, research, and communal work.