

## 8. *Bystanders and Rescuers*

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*The world is too dangerous to live in – not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen.*

ALBERT EINSTEIN

### OVERVIEW

Chapter 7 focused on the victims of the Holocaust and the perpetrators. Chapter 8 considers the choices open to everyone else once the Holocaust began. “Most contemporaries of the Jewish catastrophe were neither perpetrators nor victims,” writes Raul Hilberg. “Many people, however, saw or heard something of the event. Those of them who lived in Adolf Hitler’s Europe would have described themselves, with few exceptions, as bystanders. They were not ‘involved,’ not willing to hurt the victims and not wishing to be hurt by the perpetrators.” Hilberg says of these bystanders, “The Dutch were worried about their bicycles, the French about shortages, the Ukrainians about food, the Germans about air raids. All of these people thought of themselves as victims, be it of war, or oppression, or ‘fate.’”<sup>1</sup>

Were they “victims of fate”? Or did they still have choices? Albert Camus, a French writer who joined the resistance, believed that individuals can always make a difference.

I know that the great tragedies of history often fascinate men with approaching horror. Paralyzed, they cannot make up their minds to do anything but wait. So they wait, and one day the Gorgon monster devours them. But I should like to convince you that the spell can be broken, that there is an illusion of impotence, that strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it.<sup>2</sup>

And Cynthia Ozick warns, “When a whole population takes on the status of bystander, the victims are without allies; the criminals, unchecked, are strengthened; and only then do we need to speak of heroes. When a field is filled from end to end with sheep, a stag stands out. When a continent is filled from end to end with the compliant, we learn what heroism is.”<sup>3</sup>

## READING 1

### *What Did People Know?*

**H**olocaust survivor Primo Levi was often asked, “Did the Germans know what was happening?” He replied with a question of his own. “How is it possible that the extermination of millions of human beings could have been carried out in the heart of Europe without anyone’s knowledge?” He concluded:

In spite of the varied possibilities for information, most Germans didn’t know because they didn’t want to know. Because, indeed, they wanted not to know. It is certainly true that State terrorism is a very strong weapon, very difficult to resist. But it is also true that the German people, as a whole, did not even try to resist. In Hitler’s Germany a particular code was widespread: those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers. In this way the typical German citizen won and defended his ignorance, which seemed to him sufficient justification of his adherence to Nazism. Shutting his mouth, his eyes and his ears, he built for himself the illusion of not knowing, hence not being an accomplice to the things taking place in front of his very door.<sup>4</sup>

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In *The Destruction of European Jews*, Raul Hilberg proved that many had the opportunity to know about the killings:

Organizing the transportation of victims from all over Europe to the concentration camps involved a countless number of railroad employees and clerical workers who had to work the trains and maintain the records. National Railroad tickets were marked for a one-way trip. Currency exchange at the borders had to be handled.

Finance ministers of Germany moved to seize the pensions of victims from banks, yet the banks requested proof of death. Many building contracts and patents for ovens and gas chambers were required...

The railroads were an independent corporation which was fully aware of the consequences of its decisions.

The civilian railroad workers involved in operating rails to Auschwitz were simply performing their daily tasks. These were individual people making individual decisions. They were not ordered or even assigned.

Orders from the SS to the railroads were not even stamped "secret" because that would admit guilt of something abnormal in the bureaucracy. The many clerical workers who handled these orders were fully aware of the purpose of Auschwitz.<sup>5</sup>

For the film *Shoah*, Claude Lanzmann interviewed Walter Stier, the person responsible for "special trains."

*What's the difference between a special and a regular train?*

A regular train may be used by anyone who purchases a ticket. Say from Krakow to Warsaw. Or from Krakow to Lemberg. A special train has to be ordered. The train is specially put together and people pay group fares...

*...but why were there more special trains during the war than before or after?*

I see what you're getting at. You're referring to the so-called resettlement trains.

*"Resettlement." That's it.*

That's what they were called. Those trains were ordered by the Ministry of Transport of the Reich. You needed an order from the Ministry...

*But mostly, at that time, who was being "resettled"?*

No. We didn't know that. Only when we were fleeing from Warsaw ourselves, did we learn that they could have been Jews, or criminals, or similar people.

*Jews, criminals?*

Criminals. All kinds.

*Special trains for criminals?*

No, that was just an expression. You couldn't talk about that. Unless you were tired of life, it was best not to mention that.

*But you knew that the trains to Treblinka or Auschwitz were –*

Of course we knew. I was the last district; without me these trains couldn't reach their destination. For instance, a train that started in Essen had to go through the districts of Wuppertal, Hannover, Magdeburg, Berlin, Frankfurt/Oder, Posen, Warsaw, etcetera. So I had to...

*Did you know that Treblinka meant extermination?*

Of course not!

*You didn't know?*

Good God, no! How could we know? I never went to Treblinka. I stayed in Krakow, in Warsaw, glued to my desk.

*You were a...*

I was strictly a bureaucrat!<sup>6</sup>

Hilberg told Lanzmann how the “special trains” were financed.

...Jews were going to be shipped to Treblinka, were going to be shipped to Auschwitz, Sobibor or any other destination so long as the railroads were paid by the track kilometer, so many pfennigs per mile. The rate was the same throughout the war. With children under ten going at half-fare and children under four going free. Payment had to be made for only one way. The guards, of course, had to have return fare paid for them because they were going back to their place of origin.

*Excuse me, the children under four who were shipped to the extermination camps, the children under four...*

...went free.

*They had the privilege to be gassed freely?*

Yes, transport was free. In addition to that, because the person who had to pay, the agency that had to pay, was the agency that ordered the train – and that happened to have been the Gestapo, Eichmann's office – because of the financial problem which that office had in making payment, the Reichsbahn agreed on group fares. The Jews were being shipped in much the same way that any excursion group would be granted a special fare if there were enough people traveling. The minimum was four hundred, a kind of charter fare. Four hundred minimum. So even if there were fewer than four hundred, it would pay to say there were four hundred and in that way get the half-fare for adults as well. And that was the basic principle. Now of course if there were exceptional filth in the cars, which might be the case, if there was damage to the equipment, which might be the case because the transports took so long and because five to ten percent of the prisoners died en route. Then there might be an additional bill for that damage. But in principle, so long as payment was being made, transports were being shipped... *Mitteleuropaeisches Reisebuero* (The Middle Europe Travel Agency) would handle some of these transactions – the billing procedure, the ticketing procedure – or if a smaller transport was involved, the SS would...

*It was the same bureau that was dealing with any kind of normal passenger?*

Absolutely. Just the official travel bureau. *Mitteleuropaeisches Reisebuero* would ship people to the gas chambers or they will ship vacationers to their favorite resort, and that was basically the same office and the same operation, the same procedure, the same billing.

*No difference?*

No difference whatsoever. As a matter of course, everybody would do that job as if it were the most normal thing to do...

This was a self-financing principle. The SS or the military would confiscate Jewish property and with the proceeds, especially from bank deposits, would pay for transports.

*You mean that the Jews themselves had to pay for their death?*

You have to remember one basic principle. There was no budget for destruction. So that is the reason confiscated property had to be used in order to make the payments.<sup>7</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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What did Levi mean when he wrote that “those who knew did not talk; those who did not know did not ask questions; those who did ask questions received no answers”? According to Levi, how did that attitude allow “the typical German citizen” to win and defend “his ignorance, which seemed to him sufficient justification of his adherence to Nazism”? How does someone “win and defend” ignorance? Why would anyone wish to do so?

Suppose officials like Stier had acknowledged what they knew. Would they have had to act on that knowledge? If so, what could they have done? If not, how might they have justified their failure to stop the killings? Record your ideas so that you can refer to them later.

→The interviews with Stier and Hilberg can be seen in the film *Shoah*. The video is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 2

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### *Is Knowledge Enough?*

**D**uring the war, Jan Karski, a courier for the Polish Resistance, tried to alert people to the mass murder of European Jews. After the war, he explained how he came to be a messenger. He was approached by representatives of two Jewish organizations. Karski later recalled:

Both men were in despair. They were fully aware that the deportations from the Warsaw ghetto as well as from other ghettos in Poland would lead to the extermination of the Jewish people. They knew that the Jews were being transported to extermination camps (those were their exact words) although they did not know the details of the operation. They both stressed that unless dramatic, extraordinary measures were immediately put into effect, the entire Jewish people

would perish... When the two learned that my mission covered meetings not only with the Polish authorities in London but also with the highest circles of the Allied governments, they asked me to transmit a number of specific demands.<sup>8</sup>

The two men also insisted that Kaski see with his own eyes at least part of what he heard from them:

They understood as well as I that in my future talks with Western statesmen I would be much more convincing if my report was backed by eyewitness testimony. The extermination of the Jews was without precedent in the history of mankind. No one was prepared to grasp what was going on. It is not true, as sometimes has been written, that I was the first one to present to the West the whole truth of the fate of the Jews in occupied Poland. There were others... The tragedy was that these testimonies were not believed. Not because of ill will, but simply because the facts were beyond human imagination.

I experienced this myself. When I was in the United States and told [Supreme Court] Justice Felix Frankfurter the story of the Polish Jews, he said, at the end of our conversation, "I cannot believe you." We were with the Polish ambassador to the US, Jan Ciechanowski. Hearing the justice's comments, he was indignant. "Lieutenant Karski is on an official mission. My government's authority stands behind him. You cannot say to his face that he is lying." Frankfurter's answer was, "I am not saying that he is lying. I only said that I cannot believe him, and there is a difference."<sup>9</sup>

It is possible to live in a twilight between knowing and not knowing. It is possible to refuse full realization of facts because one feels unable to face the implications of these facts.

Among those who dismissed stories of German atrocities as war propaganda was W.A. Visser't Hooft, a Dutch theologian and the first secretary of the World Council of Churches. He changed his mind only after hearing an eyewitness' account.

From that moment onward I had no longer any excuse for shutting my mind to information which could find no place in my view of the world and humanity. And this meant that I had to do something about it.

Hitler's strength was that he did the unimaginable... A considerable number of people in Germany, in occupied countries, in the allied and neutral countries heard stories about mass killings. But the information was ineffective because it seemed too improbable. Everyone who heard it for the first time asked whether this was not a typical piece of wildly exaggerated war-time propaganda.

Visser't Hooft believed that "people could find no place in their consciousness for such an unimaginable horror and that they did not have the imagination, together with the courage, to face it. It is possible to live in a twilight between knowing and not knowing. It is possible to refuse full realization of facts because one feels unable to face the implications of these facts."<sup>10</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Think about Frankfurter's statement. What is the difference between saying that someone is lying and saying that you cannot believe what he or she is saying? Why do you think he chose not to believe?

Historian Leni Yahil divides knowledge into three parts: receipt of information, acknowledgement of that information, and action based on the information. What are the differences? How important are those differences? What facts would have been hardest for a Dutch Protestant like Visser't Hooft to accept? For an American Jew of German descent like Frankfurter? What do you think you would have had the most difficulty acknowledging? Laws that set Jews and others apart as the "enemy"? The campaign of terror? The mass deportations? The concentration camps? The gas chambers?

How does Yahil's division of knowledge apply to the way people today respond to the murders in Bosnia? To mass starvation in Somalia? To catastrophes in other parts of the world? Do people *know*? Have they *acknowledged* the information? Have they *acted* on that knowledge?

Visser't Hooft speaks of "shutting my mind to information which could find no place in my view of the world and humanity." How does one shut one's mind? What does the statement suggest about Visser't Hooft's view of the world and humanity? What view would have allowed him to accept the information as soon as he heard rumors? What does it mean to say that something is "beyond our imaginations"? Does it take courage to face the truth?

→Lawrence Langer believes that an underlying reason for the failure of Westerners to respond to news of the Holocaust was the "passive notion of what we might call the imagination of disaster, even with the evidence before our eyes, we hesitate to accept the worst. When the evidence is founded on unconfirmed rumor, we hesitate even more." From what you have learned so far, how do you account for the widespread failure to believe reports of mass murders? Why were those who reported the murders thought of as "mad"? The video montage, *Imagining the Unimaginable*, available from the Facing History Resource Center, explores the reasons so many people were unable to believe reports of mass murder. See also *Elements of Time*, pages 119-120, for an excerpt from Elie Wiesel's *Night* describing a "madman" who reported mass killings in Poland.

→For more on Jan Karski's efforts to inform Americans about the death camps and ghettos, see *Elements of Time*, pages 64-71. A video interview with Karski is available from the Resource Center.

Walter Bieringer, an American businessman who visited Germany in the 1930s, organized the Boston Refugee Committee for German Jewish refugees. He quickly discovered that eliciting help from Jewish and

Christian groups in the United States was more difficult than he expected, mainly because people refused to believe that the threat was as great as he said it was. One person told him, “You Jews exaggerate too much.” For additional information on Bieringer’s work, see *Elements of Time*, pages 72-79.

### READING 3

#### *Bystanders at Mauthausen*

Professor Ervin Staub believes that bystanders play a far more critical role in society than people realize.

Bystanders, people who witness but are not directly affected by the actions of perpetrators, help shape society by their reactions...

Bystanders can exert powerful influences. They can define the meaning of events and move others toward empathy or indifference. They can promote values and norms of caring, or by their passivity of participation in the system, they can affirm the perpetrators.<sup>11</sup>

Bystanders, people who witness but are not directly affected by the actions of perpetrators, help shape society by their reactions.

Events in Mauthausen, a small town ninety miles from Vienna, support Staub’s argument. After Austria became part of the Third Reich, the Nazis built a labor camp for political prisoners there. As the camp’s operations expanded, the Nazis took over buildings in a number of nearby villages. One of those buildings was Hartheim Castle. Until the Nazis closed it for remodeling in 1939, it was a home for children labeled as “retarded.” In the 1980s, historian Gordon I. Horwitz asked townspeople about the castle’s renovation. A man he identifies as Karl S. wrote to the chairman of a euthanasia trial held in 1969. That letter stated in part:

[The] house of my parents was one of the few houses in Hartheim from which one could observe several occurrences. After Castle Hartheim was cleared of its inhabitants (around 180 to 200 patients) in the year 1939, mysterious renovations began which, to an outsider, however, one could hardly divine, since no [local] labor was used for it, and the approaches to the castle were hermetically sealed. Following completion of the renovations, we saw the first transports come and we could even recognize some of the earlier residents who showed joy at returning to their former home.

Karl watched the buses arrive from a window in his father’s barn. He recalled that transports of two to three buses came as frequently as twice a day. Soon after they arrived, “enormous clouds of smoke streamed out of a certain chimney and spread a penetrating stench. This stench was so disgusting that sometimes when we returned home from work in the fields we couldn’t hold down a single bite.”<sup>12</sup>



Sister Felicitas, a former employee, has similar memories:

My brother Michael, who at the time was at home, came to me very quickly and confidentially informed me that in the castle the former patients were burned. The frightful facts which the people of the vicinity had to experience at first hand, and the terrible stench of the burning gases, robbed them of speech. The people suffered dreadfully from the stench. My own father collapsed unconscious several times, since in the night he had forgotten to seal up the windows completely tight.<sup>13</sup>

Horwitz notes, “It was not just the smoke and stench that drew the attention of bystanders. At times human remains littered parts of the vicinity. In the words of Sister Felicitas, ‘when there was intense activity, it smoked day and night. Tufts of hair flew through the chimney onto the street. The remains of bones were stored on the east side of the castle and in ton trucks driven first to the Danube, later also to the Traun.’”<sup>14</sup>

As evidence of mass murders mounted, Christopher Wirth, the director of the operation, met with local residents. He told them that his men were burning shoes and other “belongings.” The strong smell? “A device had been installed in which old oil and oil by-products underwent a special treatment through distillation and chemical treatment in order to gain a water-clear, oily fluid from it which was of great importance to U-boats [German submarines].”

Wirth ended the meeting by threatening to send anyone who spread “absurd rumors of burning persons” to a concentration camp.<sup>15</sup> The townspeople took him at his word. They did not break their silence.

## CONNECTIONS

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Why do you think the townspeople chose to believe Wirth despite evidence that he was lying? If they had acknowledged the truth, what would they have had to do? Would they have agreed with Visser’t Hooft (Reading 2) when he argued that it takes courage to face the truth?

Who was a part of the town’s “universe of obligation”?

According to Staub, what choices do bystanders have? What choices did people in Mauthausen make? What were the consequences?

How do the people of Mauthausen support Albert Einstein’s observation: “The world is too dangerous to live in – not because of the people who do evil, but because of the people who sit and let it happen”? What arguments might they offer in their own defense?

A concentration camp was located in Ravensbrueck, Germany. The townspeople knew about the camp; some local shopkeepers even used prisoners as slave labor. Yet very few people in the town expressed concern for the

inmates until the war was over. Only then did local women aid prisoners dying of typhus. How do you account for efforts to help the sick prisoners only after the war had ended? Was it terror that kept people from helping earlier? Or is there another explanation?

→Ervin Staub presented his study on the behavior of perpetrators, victims, bystanders, and rescuers at a Facing History Summer Institute. A video of his lecture is available from the Resource Center.

## READING 4

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### *A Matter of Courage*

In time, rumors of the mass killings reached Berlin. There, too, people had to decide how to respond. Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, a journalist who belonged to a resistance group, wrote in her diary in 1944:

“They are forced to dig their own graves,” people whisper. “Their clothing, shoes, shirts are taken from them. They are sent naked to their deaths.” The horror is so incredible that the imagination refuses to accept its reality. Something fails to click. Some conclusion is simply not drawn. Between knowledge in theory and practical application to individual cases... there is an unbridgeable gulf... We don’t permit our power of imagination to connect the two, even remotely... Is it cowardice that lets us think this way? Maybe! But then such cowardice belongs to the primeval instincts of man. If we could visualize death, life as it exists would be impossible. One can imagine torture, horror, and suffering as little as death... Such indifference alone makes continued existence possible. Realizations such as these are bitter, shameful and bitter.<sup>16</sup>

The horror is so incredible that the imagination refuses to accept its reality. Something fails to click. Some conclusion is simply not drawn.

Herbert Mochalski, a German soldier who took part in the invasion of Poland and a pastor in the Confessing Church, told an interviewer after the war, “It’s nonsense when a German soldier says... that he never saw anything, that the soldiers didn’t know anything. It’s all simply not true!” Haunted by what he had observed, he noted, “One saw it only driving by, you know. We sat on our trucks and saw it... so that we had no chance to learn what the SS was thinking. All right, we could, we should, have protested then, but how? We couldn’t have changed anything. I mean, all that is no excuse. Indeed, we all failed in this respect, that things went that far at all, isn’t that so? And that is the awful thing that weighs on all of us, up to today.”<sup>17</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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What did Ruth Andreas-Friedrich mean when she wrote, “Indifference alone makes continued existence possible”? According to Staub, what else does indifference make possible? How would Andreas-Friedrich respond to Camus’ belief that individuals can not only stop fate but sometimes reverse it?

Some victims and perpetrators speak openly of the choices they made. Bystanders are more reluctant to speak of their decisions. How do you account for the difference?

## READING 5

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### *From Bystanders to Resisters*

Among the few Germans to act on what they knew were Hans Scholl and his younger sister Sophie. In the spring of 1942, they and a friend, Christoph Probst, formed a small group known as the White Rose. In July, the group published a leaflet that boldly stated: “We want to inform you of the fact that since the conquest of Poland, 300,000 Jews in that country have been murdered in the most bestial manner. Here we see the most terrible crime against the dignity of man, a crime that has no analogy in human history... Why do the German people react in such an apathetic way to these revolting and inhuman crimes?”

What we wrote and said is believed by many others. They just don’t dare to express themselves as we did.

The following February, the Nazis arrested the Scholls and Probst and brought them to trial. The three freely admitted that they were responsible for the leaflets. Sophie Scholl told the judges. “Somebody, after all, had to make a start. What we wrote and said is also believed by many others. They just don’t dare to express themselves as we did.” She, her brother Hans, and Probst were found guilty and guillotined later that same day. Soon after their deaths, three other members – a university professor named Kurt Huber and two students, Alexander Schmorell and Willi Graf – were also tried, convicted, and beheaded.

Although the Nazis were able to destroy the White Rose, they could not stop their message from being heard. Helmuth von Moltke, a German aristocrat, smuggled copies to friends in neutral countries. They, in turn, sent them to the Allies who reproduced each leaflet and then dropped thousands of copies over German cities. The information in the leaflets came as no surprise to Moltke. As a lawyer who worked for the German Intelligence Service, he had been aware of the murders for some time.

After the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, Moltke wrote to his wife of “reports that in transports of prisoners or Jews only 20 percent arrive, that there is starvation in the prisoner-of-war camps, that typhoid and all

the other deficiency epidemics have broken out, that our own people are breaking down from exhaustion. What will happen when the nation as a whole realizes that this war is lost, and lost differently from the last one? With a blood-guilt that cannot be atoned for in our lifetime and can never be forgotten, with an economy that is completely ruined? Will men arise capable of distilling contrition and penance from this punishment, and so, gradually, a new strength to live? Or will everything go under in chaos?"<sup>18</sup>

In September, in yet another letter, he observed.

An officer reports that ammunition produced in violation of international law was found on Russians: dum-dum bullets. That they were such could be proved by the evidence of the Medical Officer, one Panning, who used the ammunition in a large-scale experimental execution of Jews. This produced the following results: such and such was the effect of the projectile when fired at the head, such when fired at the chest, such in abdominal shots, such when limbs were hit. The results were available in the form of a scientific study so that the violation of international law could be proved without a doubt. That surely is the height of bestiality and depravity and there is nothing one can do.<sup>19</sup>

What shall I say when I am asked, and what did you do during that time?

By late October, Moltke was asking, "How is one to bear the burden of complicity?... In France there are extensive shootings while I write. Certainly more than a thousand people are murdered in this way every day and another thousand German men are habituated to murder. And all this is child's play compared with what is happening in Poland and Russia. May I know this and yet sit at my table in my heated flat and have tea? Don't I thereby become guilty too? What shall I say when I am asked, and what did you do during that time?"<sup>20</sup>

Moltke sought an answer to that question by meeting secretly with a number of other prominent Germans at Kreisau, his country estate. There they considered ways of fighting the Nazis and building a new Germany after the war. By the summer of 1944, a few members of the Kreisau circle were ready to act, but not Moltke. He argued, "Let Hitler live. He and his party must bear responsibility to the end of the fatal destiny for which they have prepared for the German people; only in this way can the National Socialist ideology be obliterated."

On July 20, a member of the group, Claus von Stauffenberg, placed a briefcase containing explosives under a massive table around which Hitler and his staff were scheduled to meet later that day. The bomb exploded as planned, but the table blunted the damage. As a result, Hitler and other top officials survived the explosion. They promptly retaliated by executing nearly twelve thousand people, including Moltke who knew of the plan but did not take part in it. Before his execution in January, 1945, Moltke wrote his sons, ages six and three.

Throughout an entire life, even at school, I have fought against a spirit of narrowness and unfreedom, of arrogance and lack of respect for others, of intolerance and the absolute, the merciless consistency among the Germans, which found its expression in the National Socialist state. I exerted myself to help to overcome this spirit with its evil consequences, such as excessive nationalism, racial persecution, lack of faith, and materialism.<sup>21</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Friederich Reck-Malleczewen, a staunch monarchist who fought in World War I, kept a journal from 1936 until his murder at Dachau in 1944. In March 1943, he wrote of the Scholls:

I never saw these two young people. In my rural isolation, I got only bits and pieces of what they were doing, but the significance of what I heard was such that I could hardly believe it. The Scholls are the first in Germany to have had the courage to witness for the truth... On their gravestones let these words be carved, and let this entire people, which has lived in deepest degradation these last ten years, blush when it reads them:... “He who knows how to die can never be enslaved.” We will all of us, someday, have to make a pilgrimage to their graves, and stand before them, ashamed.<sup>22</sup>

Why do you think Reck-Malleczewen believes that it takes courage to “witness for the truth?” What does he mean when he says, “We will all of us, someday... stand before them, ashamed?” What is he suggesting about the responsibility of bystanders? Would Moltke agree?

Moltke wrote, “Certainly more than a thousand people are murdered in this way every day and another thousand German men are habituated to murder.” Why do you think he looks at murder in terms of its effect on both the victim and the perpetrator? What does it mean to live in a society where thousands have been “habituated to murder”?

Moltke asked, “How is one to bear the burden of complicity?” What is *complicity*? Is his complicity a result of his knowledge of mass murders? Or of his failure to act on that knowledge?

On July 21, 1944, Reck-Malleczewen wrote:

And now the attempt to assassinate Hitler... Ah, now, really, gentlemen, this is a little late. You made this monster, and as long as things were going well you gave him whatever he wanted. You turned Germany over to this archcriminal, you swore allegiance to him by every incredible oath he chose to put before you...

And now you are betraying him, as yesterday you betrayed the Republic, and as the day before yesterday, you betrayed the Monarchy. Oh, I don't doubt that if this coup had succeeded, we, and what remains of the material substance of this country, would have been saved. I am sorry, the whole of this nation is sorry, that you failed.<sup>23</sup>

What distinction does Reck-Malleczewen make between the actions of the White Rose and those of Stauffenberg and his associates? How important is that distinction? How would you assess the actions of the Scholls and their friends? Of Moltke and Stauffenberg?

Compare the choices open to individuals like Hans and Sophie Scholl, Moltke, and Stauffenberg in the 1920s and 1930s with those in the 1940s. What options were no longer possible? What choices were now more risky? What do your answers suggest about the difficulties of taking a stand at the eleventh hour?

## READING 6

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### *Protest at Rosenstrasse 2-4*

There is evidence of only one successful protest in Germany against the Nazis. According to historian Nathan Stoltzfus, it began on Saturday, February 27, 1943.<sup>24</sup> It was the day the SS rounded up the last Jews in Berlin – about ten thousand men, women, and children. Most were picked up at work and herded onto waiting trucks. Others were kidnapped from their homes or pulled off busy streets. It was not the city's first mass deportation, but this one was different from any other. This time, two thousand Jews in intermarriages were among those targeted. The Nazis had excluded them from earlier deportations, but now they were to be treated like other Jews.

When these "privileged" Jews did not return home as expected, their "Aryan" relatives began to make phone calls. They quickly discovered that their loved ones were being held at the administration building of the Jewish community at Rosenstrasse 2-4. Within hours, relatives began to gather there. Most were women. (A Jewish woman who married an "Aryan" did not have to wear a yellow star, but a man did. So the only females picked up in the raid were the daughters of mixed marriages.)

As the women arrived at Rosenstrasse 2-4, each loudly demanded to know what crimes her husband and children had committed. When the guards refused to let the women enter the building, the protesters vowed to return until they were allowed to see their relatives. They kept their

word. In the days that followed, people blocks away could hear the women chanting. Charlotte Israel, one of the protesters, recalls:

The situation in front of the collecting center came to a head [on March 5]. Without warning the guards began setting up machine guns. Then they directed them at the crowd and shouted: “If you don’t go now, we’ll shoot.”

Automatically the movement surged backward in that instant. But then for the first time we really hollered. Now we couldn’t care less. We bellowed, “you murderers,” and everything else that one can holler. Now they’re going to shoot in any case, so now we’ll yell too, we thought. We yelled “Murderer, Murderer, Murderer, Murderer.” We didn’t scream just once but again and again, until we lost our breath.

Then I saw then a man in the foreground open his mouth wide – as if to give a command. It was drowned out. I couldn’t hear it. But then they cleared everything away. There was silence. Only an occasional swallow could be heard.

The next day, Joseph Goebbels ordered the release of all Jews married to “Aryans.” Why? A man who worked for Goebbels later claimed the Jews were released “so that others didn’t take a lesson from it, so that others didn’t begin to do the same.”

## CONNECTIONS

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Draw identity charts for the protestors in the Rosenstrasse. How do their charts differ from those of Germans not married to Jews? Who was a part of each group’s “universe of obligation”?

In December, 1943, Himmler ordered the deportation of all Jews in intermarriages whose spouses had died or divorced them. The only exceptions were those who had children. Why do you think Himmler made those exceptions? What do they suggest about the importance the Nazis placed on public opinion?

While the crowds gathered at Rosenstrasse 2-4, eight thousand Jews who did not have “Aryan” relatives were shipped to death camps. No one spoke on their behalf. Why were the protesters silent when those Jews were sent to their death?

## READING 7

### *Fateful Decisions*

Few people in Nazi-occupied Europe were involved in resistance movements, protest marches, or plots to assassinate Hitler. Most tried to live as “normal” a life as possible at a time when life was far from normal. But as more and more relatives, friends, and strangers were herded off to camps, some were forced to make fateful choices.

Jolana Roth described the decision one man made. “My father’s very best childhood friend fought in the war with him and was very close. He was a Christian. When they came to get us for the transport, when they came to get us, my father knew. He rushed to his friend and begged him to raise my ten-year-old brother, to save his life. On his knees, he begged him. The friend said No.”<sup>25</sup>

In Germany, Christabel Bielenberg, an Englishwoman married to a German, was asked to save two lives.

It happened early in 1943... The actual date is immaterial... “Submarines” they were called, those Jews who at that time removed their stars and went underground, surfacing here, there, or anywhere, they might hope to find refuge. They had no ration cards and, every week, Ilse Liedke [an acquaintance of Bielenberg’s] went the rounds of her friends collecting spare food coupons, which were becoming more and more difficult to provide.

She had a blonde woman with her that morning; rather extra blonde who, after shaking my hand, hesitated on the doorstep and seemed unwilling to come into the house. Ilse, too, seemed satisfied that her companion should stay outside and, after glancing at our telephone to see that it was not plugged in, she explained why. The woman was a Jewess. She had removed her star when the Gestapo had come hammering at the door of her flat, and she and her husband had clambered down the fire escape and had been living in attics and cellars ever since. A safe hairdresser had dyed her hair, and latterly, a priest had housed them in his attic... Since yesterday the good Father had felt himself and his house to be under surveillance. Ilse explained that the priest had not asked his lodgers to leave, but they knew that the time had come and now they had no place to go. She added that the woman could pass as an Aryan, and would willingly take on any housework, any work at all in fact, which might be useful to me; but that her husband looked so unmistakably Jewish that he would have to live in the cellar and go out only at night.

Bielenberg was silent for a long time. Her husband, Peter, was in Norway on business and she was responsible for their two young sons.



Because she was born in England, two neighbors had had to vouch for her before her husband could leave the country. She decided to consult one of them before making a decision. She later wrote:

I pushed through the gap in the hedge to Langbehn's garden and found Carl at home, luckily alone. Knowing that he and Puppi Sarre [an acquaintance] were looking after a houseful of Jews somewhere in Potsdam, I do not think I expected his reaction to my story. It was explosive. I had come to him for advice, well, his advice was quite definite. Under no circumstances whatsoever could I give refuge to the man, or to the woman. I did not know them, I was English, Peter was away, I had no idea what I had contemplated doing. Seeing that Nick [her oldest son] was going to school, it could not be long before I would be found out, and the punishment for giving refuge to Jews was concentration camp, plain and simple – not only for myself but for Peter. “But--” perhaps the expression on my face showed something of a deep and very painful horror which I could feel beginning to take root somewhere behind my ribs... Where were they to go? Was I to be the one to send them on their way?

All of a sudden I had rather a different Carl before me, different at least from the friend I had thought of before as a cheerful extrovert. He drew up a chair and, sitting astride it, took both of my hands in his. “Listen Chris,” he said gently. “I know exactly the way you feel, do not think that I do not know. Why do you suppose I do the crazy things I do. Into the Prinz Albrechtstrasse, out of the Prinz Albrechtstrasse, pitting my wits against those SS bastards, saving the odd one here, the odd one there, but always wondering whether the next visit won't be my last, knowing all the time that single small acts of compassion are not the solution, they are stop-gaps which somehow have to be used if one wants to keep any sort of self-respect... Believe me, it is the deeper issue, the elimination of the whole filthy regime which must occupy our minds day and night. Now you have come to a crossroads, a moment which must probably come to us all. You want to show your colours, well my dear you can't, because you are not a free agent. You have your children, and while Peter is away you are my responsibility. You are British and, in spite of that fact, Hans Oster too has vouched for you, and, believe me, Oster is playing a very big game indeed.... ”

As soon as I pushed through the hedge again and opened our gate to the road, letting it click back shut behind me, I sensed rather than saw some movement in the darkness about me. “What is your decision Gnaedige Frau?” The voice, when it came, was quite close to me and pitched very low – it must have belonged to a small man, for I was staring out over his head. “I can't,” I said, and I had to hold on to the railings because the pain in my side had become so intense that I could hardly breathe, “at least—”, did I hope to get rid of that pain by some sort of feeble compromise? “at least I can't for more than a night,

perhaps two.” “Thank you,” again just the voice – the little man could not have been much taller than the railings – thanking me, in heaven’s name, for two miserable days of grace. I loathed myself utterly as I went back to the house to fetch the cellar key.<sup>26</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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Is there a difference between rescuing someone you know and saving a stranger? Is there a difference between refusing to rescue someone you know and refusing to save a stranger?

How did Christabel Bielenberg define her “universe of obligation”? What were the consequences of that definition? How did they contribute to her feeling that “I loathed myself utterly?” What other options did she have? How were they different from the choices she could have made earlier?

## READING 8

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### *Choosing to Rescue*

In Germany, the government imprisoned anyone caught sheltering a Jew. In Poland, the penalty was death. Yet, about 2 percent of the Polish Christian population chose to hide Jews. They did so in a nation with a long history of antisemitism. After the war, sociologist Nechama Tec interviewed a number of the rescuers. One factory worker told her sadly that she had done very little during the war. She had saved only one Jew and she had rescued that person only by chance. As her story unfolded, Tec discovered that Stefa Dworek had gone to incredible lengths to save a stranger.

Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve; they aren't born.

It all began in the summer of 1942, when Stefa’s husband, Jerezy, brought home a young Jewish woman named Irena. A policeman involved in the Polish underground had asked him to hide her for a few days. The woman looked too “Jewish” to pass for a Christian. So the couple decided to keep her concealed in the one-room apartment they shared with their infant child. To shield her from unexpected visitors, the Dworeks pushed a freestanding wardrobe a few inches from the wall. The space between the wall and the wardrobe became the woman’s hiding place.

A “few days” stretched to a week and the week, in turn, became a month and still the unexpected guest remained. The policeman was unable to find another hiding place for her. After several months, Jerezy Dworek demanded that Irena leave. His wife Stefa, however, insisted that the woman stay. The quarrel ended with Jerezy stomping out of the apartment and vowing to denounce both Irena and his wife. What did Stefa do?

I called Laminski [the policeman]... [and] he went to talk to my husband. He told him, "Here is my pistol; if you will denounce them you will not live more than five minutes longer. The first bullet will go into your head." After that my husband stopped coming... This ended my marriage. But Ryszard Laminski continued to come, helping us, warning us about danger. He never abandoned us.

Was Stefa aware of the danger to herself and her baby?

Sure I knew. Everybody knew what could happen to someone who kept Jews... Sometimes when it got dangerous, Irena herself would say, "I am such a burden to you, I will leave." But I said, "Listen, until now you were here and we succeeded, so maybe now all will succeed. How can you give yourself up?" I knew that I could not let her go. The longer she was there the closer we became.<sup>27</sup>

Then in 1944, the people of Warsaw rebelled against the Germans. As the fighting spread, it became too dangerous to stay in the apartment. So Irena bandaged her face and Stefa introduced her to neighbors as a cousin who had just arrived in the city. When the Germans finally put down the uprising, a new threat developed. Irena later described it to a commission:

Before the end of the war there was a tragic moment... We learned that the Germans were about to evacuate all civilians. My appearance on the streets even with my bandaged face could end tragically. Stefa decided to take a bold step which I will remember as long as I live. She gave me her baby to protect me. [The Germans did not evacuate mothers with young children.] As she was leaving me with her child, she told me that the child would save me and that after the war I would give him back to her. But in case of her death she was convinced that I would take good care of him... Eventually we both stayed.<sup>28</sup>

What motivated Stefa Dworek? "I knew I could not let her go. What could I do? Even a dog you get used to and especially to a fine person like she was. I could not act any other way... I would have helped anyone. It did not matter who she was. After all I did not know her at first, but I helped and could not send her away. I always try to help as best as I can."<sup>29</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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How does the dictionary define the word *altruism*? What does the word mean to you? Was Stefa Dworek altruistic?

In his study of rescuers, Ervin Staub states, "Goodness, like evil, often begins in small steps. Heroes evolve; they aren't born. Very often the rescuers make only a small commitment at the start – to hide someone for a day or two. But once they had taken that step, they began to see themselves differently, as someone who helps. What starts as mere willingness becomes intense involvement."<sup>30</sup> Write a working definition of the word *hero*. Was Stefa Dworek a hero?

→Nechama Tec and Ervin Staub discussed the sociology and motivations of rescuers at the Second Annual Facing History Conference. Both agreed that the decision to rescue Jews had little to do with the rescuer’s religion, nationality, schooling, class, or ethnic heritage. Most rescuers were independent individuals who refused to follow the crowd. They also had a history of performing good deeds and did not perceive rescue work as anything out of the ordinary. How does Stefa Dworek fit their description? A video of their joint presentation is available at the Facing History Resource Center.

→Both Tec and Staub benefitted from the help Christians gave Jews during the Holocaust. Nechama Tec relates her personal experiences in her memoir, *Dry Tears*. She also described those years to a group of Facing History students. A videotape of that talk is available from the Resource Center. See *Elements of Time*, pages 45-49 for a brief portrait of Tec. The book also contains a bibliography and study questions. Ervin Staub has explored ways of using information about rescuers to help students become more caring adults. The Resource Center also has video presentations of his talks at Facing History Summer Institutes.

Inge Deutschkorn, a Jew who was hidden along with her mother during the war, attributes her survival to German Socialists who created a network to help Jews. Members took unbelievable risks and even sacrificed their own ration cards to feed hidden Jews. Her story is recounted in *Outcast: A Jewish Girl in Wartime Berlin*, available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 9

### *Links in a Chain*

In their book *The Altruistic Personality*, Samuel and Pearl Oliner quote Johan, a Dutch teenager who rescued Jews. “My father said the world is one big chain. One little part breaks and the chain is broken and it won’t work anymore.” The Oliners went on to observe, “Rescuers did not simply happen on opportunities for rescue; they actively created, sought, or recognized them where others did not. Their participation was not determined by circumstances but their own personal qualities. Chance sometimes provided rescuers like Johan with an opportunity to help, but it was the values learned from their parents which prompted and sustained their involvement.”<sup>31</sup>

Rescuers did not simply happen on opportunities for rescue; they actively created, sought, or recognized them where others did not.

The experiences of Marion Pritchard, a graduate student in 1940 – the year the Germans invaded the Netherlands – confirms the Oliners’ view that the decision to rescue was a conscious choice. One morning in 1942, as she was riding her bicycle to school, she passed a home for Jewish children. What she observed that day changed her life.

The Germans were loading the children, who ranged in age from babies to eight-year-olds, on trucks. They were upset, and crying. When they did not move fast enough the Nazis picked them up, by an arm, a leg, the hair, and threw them into the trucks. To watch grown men treat small children that way – I could not believe my eyes. I found myself literally crying with rage. Two women coming down the street tried to interfere physically. The Germans heaved them into the truck, too. I just sat there on my bicycle, and that was the moment I decided that if there was anything I could do to thwart such atrocities, I would do it.

Some of my friends had similar experiences, and about ten of us, including two Jewish students who decided they did not want to go into hiding, organized very informally for this purpose. We obtained Aryan identity cards for the Jewish students, who, of course, were taking more of a risk than we were. They knew many people who were looking to *onderduiken*, “disappear,” as Anne Frank and her family were to do.

We located hiding places, helped people move there, provided food, clothing, and ration cards, and sometimes moral support and relief for the host families. We registered newborn Jewish babies as gentiles... and provided medical care when possible.<sup>32</sup>

Somewhere in between was the majority, whose actions varied from the minimum decency of at least keeping quiet if they knew where Jews were hidden to finding a way to help them when they were asked.

The decision to rescue Jews had great consequences. Pritchard described what happened when she hid a man with three children.

The father, the two boys, and the baby girl moved in and we managed to survive the next two years, until the end of the war. Friends helped take up the floorboards, under the rug, and build a hiding place in case of raids. These did occur with increasing frequency, and one night we had a very narrow escape.

Four Germans, accompanied by a Dutch Nazi policeman came and searched the house. They did not find the hiding place, but they had learned from experience that sometimes it paid to go back to a house they had already searched, because by then the hidden Jews might have come out of the hiding place. The baby had started to cry, so I let the children out. Then the Dutch policeman came back alone. I had a small revolver that a friend had given me, but I had never planned to use it. I felt I had no choice except to kill him. I would do it again, under the same circumstances, but it still bothers me, and I still feel that there “should” have been another way. If anybody had really tried to find out how and where he disappeared, they could have, but the general attitude was that there was one less traitor to worry about. A local undertaker helped dispose of the body, he put it in a coffin with a legitimate body in it. I hope the dead man’s family would have approved.

Was I scared? Of course the answer is “yes.” Especially after I had been imprisoned and released. Then were times that the fear got the

better of me, and I did not do something that I could have. I would rationalize the inaction, feeling it might endanger others, or that I should not run a risk, because what would happen to the three children I was now responsible for, if something happened to me, but I knew when I was rationalizing.<sup>33</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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In reflecting on her decision and the choices others made during the war, Pritchard is troubled by a “tendency to divide the general population during the war into the few ‘good guys’ and the large majority of ‘bad guys.’ That seems to me to be a dangerous oversimplification... The point I want to make is that there were indeed some people who behaved criminally by betraying their Jewish neighbors and thereby sentenced them to death. There were some people who dedicated themselves to actively rescuing as many people as possible. Somewhere in between was the majority, whose actions varied from the minimum decency of at least keeping quiet if they knew where Jews were hidden to finding a way to help them when they were asked.”<sup>34</sup>

Why do you think Pritchard sees the oversimplification as dangerous? Would Christabel Bielenberg and her neighbor agree? Do you agree?

Pritchard says of her own decision: “I think you have a responsibility to yourself to behave decently. We all have memories of times we should have done something and didn’t. And it gets in the way of the rest of your life.” She notes that she has always had “a strong conviction that we are our brothers’ keepers. When you truly believe that, you have to behave that way in order to live with yourself.” Whom does she include in her “universe of obligation”?

How was Pritchard’s decision similar to that of Stefa Dworek? How did it differ? Was Pritchard altruistic?

The Oliners contrast Nazi resisters with rescuers.

For most rescuers... helping Jews was an expression of ethical principles that extended to all of humanity and, while often reflecting concern with equity and justice, was predominantly rooted in care. While other feelings – such as hatred of Nazis, religion, and patriotism, or even deference to an accepted authority whose values the rescuer shared – influenced them, most rescuers explain their actions as responses to a challenge to their fundamental ethical principles. This sense that ethical principles were at stake distinguished rescuers from their compatriots who participated in resistance activities only. For these resisters, hatred of Nazis and patriots were most often considered sufficient reasons for their behaviors; for rescuers, however, such reasons were rarely sufficient.<sup>35</sup>

Was Pritchard a resister or a rescuer? What about Stefa Dworek? The Scholls? Moltke? Christabel Bielenberg and her neighbor?

→The film *Avenue of the Just* tells the stories of ten rescuers, while *So Many Miracles* focuses on the Rubineks and the Polish family that saved them. Both videos are available from the Resource Center.

## READING 10

### *The Courage of Le Chambon*

In a tiny mountain town in south-central France, people were also aware that Jews were being murdered and took action to save as many people as possible. The people of Le Chambon were Protestants in a country where most people are Catholic. They turned their community into a hiding place for Jews from all over Europe. Magda Trocme, the wife of the local minister, explained how it all began.

Sometimes people ask me, “How did you make a decision?” There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not?

Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done – nothing more complicated. It was not decided from one day to the next what we would have to do. There were many people in the village who needed help. How could we refuse them? A person doesn’t sit down and say I’m going to do this and this and that. We had no time to think. When a problem came, we had to solve it immediately. Sometimes people ask me, “How did you make a decision?” There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!

When asked of the risks she faced, Magda Trocme replied:

In the beginning, we did not realize the danger was so big. Later, we became accustomed to it, but you must remember that the danger was all over. The people who were in the cities had bombs coming down and houses coming in on their heads, and they were killed. Others were dying in the war, in battles. Other people were being persecuted, like those in Germany. It was a general danger, and we did not feel we were in much more danger than the others. And, you see, the danger was not what you might imagine.

You might imagine that the people were fighting with weapons in the middle of the square, that you would have had to run away, that you would have to go into a little street and hide. The danger was not that kind at all. The danger was in having a government that, little by little, came into the hands of the Germans, with their laws, and the French people were supposed to obey those laws.<sup>36</sup>

Early in the war, the police arrested Trocme's husband Andre and his assistant, Edouard Theis. Although they were later released, the Gestapo continued to monitor their activities. In the summer of 1943, the Gestapo forced Andre Trocme into hiding for ten months by offering a reward for his capture. Many knew his whereabouts but no one turned him in. When they were interviewed forty years later, the people of Le Chambon did not regard themselves as heroes. They did what they did, they said, because they believed that it had to be done. Almost everyone in the community of three thousand took part in the effort. Even the children were involved. When a Nazi official came to organize a Hitler Youth camp in the village, the students told him that they "make no distinction between Jews and non-Jews. It is contrary to Gospel teaching."

The people of Le Chambon drew support of people in other places. Church groups, both Protestant and Catholic, helped fund their efforts. So did Visser't Hooft's World Council of Churches (Reading 2). People in nearby towns also helped. For example, a group known as the Cimade led hundreds of Jews across the Alps to safety in Switzerland.

Pierre Sauvage, a Jew whose parents were hiding at the time he was born, believes that the villagers' courage must never be forgotten.

If the hard and fast evidence of the possibility of good on earth is allowed to slip through our fingers and turn to dust, then future generations will have only dust to build on.

If we do not learn how it is possible to act well even under the most trying circumstances, we will increasingly doubt our ability to act well even under less trying ones. If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, we will pass on no perspective from which meaningfully to confront and learn from that very horror. If we remember solely the horror of the Holocaust, it is we who will bear the responsibility for having created the most dangerous alibi of all: that it was beyond man's capacity to know and care. If Jews do not learn that the whole world did not stand idly by while we were slaughtered, we will undermine our ability to develop the friendships and alliances that we need and deserve. If Christians do not learn that even then there were practicing Christians, they will be deprived of inspiring and essential examples of the nature and requirements of their faith. If the hard and fast evidence of the possibility of good on earth is allowed to slip through our fingers and turn into dust, then future generations will have only dust to build on. If hope is allowed to seem an unrealistic response to the world, if we do not work towards developing confidence in our spiritual resources, we will be responsible for producing in due time a world devoid of humanity – literally.<sup>37</sup>

Magda Trocme also saw the rescuers as teaching a lesson. After the war, she told an interviewer, "When people read this story, I want them to know that I tried to open my door. I tried to tell people, 'Come in, come in.' In the end, I would like to say to people, 'Remember that in your life there will be lots of circumstances that will need a kind of courage, a kind of decision of your own, not about other people but about yourself. I would not say more.'"



## CONNECTIONS

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Not long after Andre Trocme and his family settled in Le Chambon, he wrote, “The humblest peasant home has its Bible and the father reads it every day. So these people, who do not read the papers but the scriptures, do not stand on the moving soil of opinion but on the rock of the Word of the Lord.” How do his comments help explain why people there were willing to risk so much for strangers? Would the villagers have been as willing to take a stand if they lived among people who did not share their convictions?

As Protestants in a nation of Catholics, the people of Le Chambon knew what it was like to be an oppressed minority. How do you think that experience shaped their response to the plight of the Jews? Encouraged them to respond as a community?

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist who lived in the early 1900s, believed that no society can survive unless its members are willing to make sacrifices for one another and their community. He argued that altruism is not a “sort of agreeable ornament to social life” but the basis of society. Would the people of Le Chambon agree? Do you agree?

Magda Trocme wrote, “We had no time to think. When a problem came, we had to solve it immediately. Sometimes people ask me, ‘How did you make a decision?’ There was no decision to make. The issue was: Do you think we are all brothers or not? Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!” Compare her response with that of the professor Milton Mayer interviewed (Chapter 4, Reading 15). He, too, had no time to think, but his response was very different from Trocme’s. How do you account for that difference?

Albert Camus was staying near Le Chambon when he wrote a novel called *The Plague*. Some think he was referring to the village and its people when the narrator states, “There always comes a time in history when the man who dares to say that two plus two equals four is punished with death... And the issue is not a matter of what reward or punishment will be the outcome of that reasoning. The issue is simply whether or not two plus two equals four. For those of our townspeople who were then risking their lives, the decision they had to make was simply whether or not they were in the midst of a plague and whether or not it was necessary to struggle against it.” Was the decision that simple for the people of Le Chambon?

What does Magda Trocme mean when she says the decision she and others made was not about other people but about oneself? What circumstances today require that kind of courage? For what reasons?

→Sauvage’s film about the villagers, *Weapons of the Spirit*, is available through the Facing History Resource Center. So is *The Courage to Care* and the book that accompanies the video. The film features the work of five res-

cuers in France, the Netherlands, and Poland. Among those included are Marion Pritchard and the Trocmes. The accompanying book includes many more rescuers from both Eastern and Western Europe.

What did you learn from the stories of rescuers? What do they teach us about human behavior? Elie Wiesel offers one answer in the preface to *The Courage to Care*, “Let us not forget, after all, that is always a moment when the moral choice is made. Often because of one story or one book or one person, we are able to make a different choice, a choice for humanity, for life. And so we must know these good people who helped Jews during the Holocaust. We must learn from them, and in gratitude and hope, we must remember them.”

After a visit to El Salvador in 1990, Rembert George Weakland, the archbishop of Milwaukee, commented on the life of Oscar Romero and other Catholic priests killed for trying to bring about change in El Salvador. “What set these people apart is that they stood for a kind of religion – a religious belief – that influences lives. Religion, for them, was not a case of obeying rules but of influencing lives – and that is a very threatening thing to those who want to keep order. But if religion doesn’t influence lives why bother with it?”<sup>38</sup> How do his comments apply to Le Chambon?

## READING 11

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### *The Mysterious Major*

Many have wondered how the people of Le Chambon were able to keep so many Jews hidden for so long without Nazi retaliation. When Philip Hallie, a professor of philosophy, wrote a book about the town, he asked the townspeople that very question. Many attributed their safety to “le major.” So did the Trocmes. They claimed he was responsible for the anonymous phone calls they received just before a raid.

Hallie discovered that the mysterious major was Julius Schmahling, the Nazi occupation governor of the Haute-Loire district which included Le Chambon. Although the Nazis replaced him in 1943, he stayed on as second-in-command until the war was over. According to Hallie, Schmahling was “no hero, no declared enemy of Nazism or of any other ‘ism’ – seen from a distance he was just one more dutiful member of the Nazi war machine. But seen up close, and seen from the point of view of the hundreds, possibly thousands of people he protected from the Gestapo and from his own vicious auxiliary troops in the Haute-Loire, he was a good man. He compromised with evil, and helped defenseless people as much as he could.” Why did he choose to help when so many others looked the

other way? Hallie cites two incidents in response to that question. The first took place when Schmahling was a young teacher.

He had prepared a dramatic lesson on the king of beasts, and full of it, and of himself, he walked into the classroom. As he spoke the first words, “The lions,” he noticed a little boy in the back of the room who had been sitting dumbly on his wooden bench during the whole term. The boy was waving his hand in the air to catch his teacher’s eye. The young teacher kept talking about the great beasts. In a few moments the boy jumped off his bench and called out “Herr Professor, Herr –” Schmahling looked at him in anger – he could not believe that this little dunce was going to interrupt his discourse on lions. Then the boy did something that really amazed the teacher. He called out, without permission, “Yesterday, yes, yesterday I saw a rabbit. Yesterday I really saw a rabbit.”

Before the words were all out, Schmahling yelled out, “Sit down, you little jackass.” The boy sat down and never said a word for the rest of the year.

In his old age, Schmahling looked back at that moment as the most decisive one in his whole life. Then, while he was crushing the boy with all the power of his German pedagogical authoritarianism, he was destroying something in himself in the very act of destroying the moment of sunlight in that little boy’s life. When the class was over he vowed to himself that he would never do such a thing again to a human being. Teaching and living for him, he vowed, would from that moment forward involve making room for each of his students and each of the people he knew outside of the classroom to speak about the rabbits they had seen.

And he kept his vow. It was as simple as that – and as infinitely complex as keeping such a vow during the German occupation of France.

Didn't they realize that decency needs no rewards, no recognition, that it is done out of the heart, now immediately, just in order to satisfy the heart now?

The other incident took place just after the war ended and Schmahling was brought to trial by the French Resistance.

As he rolled down the aisle with his sturdy body and in his slightly worn, green-gray, Wehrmacht officer’s uniform, he was not a figure of distinction, and he seemed an easy target for all the hatred the French were feeling against the Germans.

But when he was halfway down the aisle everybody in the room, including the toughest chiefs of the Haute-Loire Resistance, stood up and turned to him. As he walked up the aisle, people whispered to him, “Major, do you need more food in jail? Do you need writing materials or books?” As he walked, he smiled, and shook his head gently.

When he came up to the head of the tribunal, the tough old French Resistance chief who was chairman of the [hearing] bowed to him (for he had stood up with all of the others) and made a little speech of gratitude to him on the part of all of the Frenchmen in the Haute-Loire.

Later, in his diary, Schmahling described the meeting as *'fast peinlich,'* almost painful: he was glad for their praise and their affection, but didn't they realize decency is the normal thing to do? Didn't they realize that decency needs no rewards, no recognition, that it is done out of the heart, now, immediately, just in order to satisfy the heart now?<sup>39</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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What did Schmahling mean when he said that in crushing the boy in his classroom, he was destroying something in himself? What was he destroying? How was it like what the Nazis were destroying in the people they ruled? In themselves?

"In studying [Schmahling] and in learning to admire him, I have learned much about respecting myself and others." Hallie wrote. "I learned that ethics is not simply a matter of good and evil, true north and true south. It is a matter of mixtures, like most of the other points on the compass, and like the lives of most of us. We are not all called upon to be perfect, but we can make a little, real difference in a mainly cold and indifferent world." Do you agree?

## READING 12

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### *Schindler's List*

Jerzy Kosinski, who spent his childhood hiding in Nazi-occupied Europe, writes in *The Devil Tree*, "Of all mammals only a human being can say 'no.' A cow cannot imagine itself apart from the herd. That's why one cow is like any other. To say 'yes' is to follow the mass, to do what is commonly expected. To say 'no' is to deny the crowd, to be set apart, to reaffirm yourself." Schmahling reaffirmed himself by refusing to compromise his principles and so became an unlikely hero. Oskar Schindler, a German who joined the Nazi party for business reasons, was an even more unlikely one.

To say "yes" is to follow the mass, to do what is commonly expected. To say "no" is to deny the crowd, to be set apart, to reaffirm yourself.

Before the war, Schindler was known mainly for his interest in making a "fast buck" and his love of wine and women. During the war, he continued to look for easy money, chase after women, and carouse. Indeed he saw the war at first as a chance to indulge in all three. Soon after the invasion of Poland, he came to the city of Cracow in search of business opportunities. With equal doses of bribery and charm, he managed to convince the Nazis that he was the right man to take over a failed cookware factory outside the city. He then proceeded to make a fortune turning out mess kits

for German soldiers. Schindler's profits were extraordinarily high because he used low-paid Jewish workers from the ghetto the Nazis established in the city.

There was little to distinguish Schindler from the other businessmen who cooperated with the Nazis, until the Germans began to evacuate the Cracow ghetto. He and a friend went horseback riding that day. From the hills that overlooked the city, they could see the entire operation. Thomas Keneally reconstructs what Schindler and his companion saw that day in a novel called *Schindler's List*.

[SS teams with dogs] rampaged through the fetid apartments; as a symptom of their rush, a suitcase flew from a second-story window and split open on the sidewalk. And running before the dogs, the men and women and children who had hidden in attics or closets, inside drawerless dressers, the evaders of the first wave of search, jolted out onto the pavement, yelling and gasping in terror of the Doberman pinschers. Everything seemed speeded-up, difficult for the viewers on the hill to trace. Those who had emerged were shot where they stood on the sidewalk, flying out over the gutters at the impact of the bullets, gushing blood into the drains. A mother and a boy, perhaps eight, perhaps a scrawny ten, had retreated under the windowsill on the western side of Krakusa Street. Schindler felt an intolerable fear for them, a terror in his own blood which loosened his thighs from the saddle and threatened to unhorse him.

He *knew* they had no shame... But worst of all, if there was no shame, it meant there was official sanction.

Through it all, Schindler focused on a toddler dressed in red who ambled down the street seemingly unaware of the danger. Keneally then tells of Schindler's attempt to digest the horrors he had witnessed:

Their lack of shame, as men who had been born of women and had to write letters home (What did they put in them?), wasn't the worst aspect of what he had seen. He *knew* they had no shame, since the guard at the base of the column had not felt any need to stop the red child from seeing things. But worst of all, if there was no shame, it meant there was official sanction. No one could find refuge any more behind the idea of German culture, nor behind those pronouncements uttered by leaders to exempt anonymous men from stepping beyond their gardens, from looking out their office windows at the realities on the sidewalk. Oskar had seen in Krakusa Street a statement of his government's policy which could not be written off as a temporary aberration. The SS men were, Oskar believed, fulfilling there the orders of the leader, for otherwise their colleague at the rear of the column would not have let a child watch.

Later in the day, after he had absorbed a ration of brandy, Oskar understood the proposition in its clearest terms. They permitted witnesses, such witnesses as the red toddler, because they believed the witnesses would perish too.<sup>40</sup>

Schindler could not forget what he saw that day. It led him to deal with the Nazis in a different way. This time Schindler was not concerned with making a profit. Indeed he now spent enormous sums of money to keep his workers safe. He began by turning his factory into an official subcamp of a newly constructed labor camp at Plazow. For a time, it was a haven for about five hundred Jews. Then in the fall of 1944, the Nazis ordered both camps closed and all workers shipped to Auschwitz. Schindler refused to let that happen. He put together a list of eleven hundred men, women, and children that he claimed as his workers. He then used his money and influence to transport those workers to a new factory he was building at Brinnlitz, Czechoslovakia. When the Jewish women who worked in his factory were transported to Auschwitz by mistake, he accomplished the impossible. He managed to get the women back by offering Nazi officials a fortune in bribes.

## CONNECTIONS

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Kosinski wrote, “To say ‘no’ is to deny the crowd, to be set apart, to reaffirm yourself.” How does his comment apply to Schindler? To Marion Pritchard and other rescuers? To the Scholls?

Review your working definition of the word *hero*. What makes a person “heroic?” Does a hero possess certain qualities? Or is a hero defined by his or her actions? Was Schindler a hero?

According to Jewish tradition, “whoever saves one life saves the world entire.” How does it apply to Schindler? To other rescuers?

After the war, Schindler’s wife, Emilie, told a reporter that her husband had done nothing astounding before the war and had been unexceptional since. She went on to say that he was fortunate that in that “short fierce era between 1939 and 1945 he had met people who summoned forth his deeper talents.” Do you agree with her assessment? What do her remarks suggest about courage? About an individual’s capacity to grow and change?

→The book *Schindler’s List* by Thomas Keneally provides a detailed account of Schindler’s efforts. Steven Spielberg’s film of the same name is based on the book and provides a powerful perspective on the man and the time. The video and a study guide are available from the Facing History Resource Center. After viewing the film, Dorothy Rabinowitz wrote that it reminded her of other unlikely rescuers:

I have in mind, namely Hitler’s allies, the Italians, whose government ministries and army and highest political circles moved heaven and earth to see to it that not a single Jew was deported from Italy. They schemed, they plotted, they resorted to the wiliest of strategies and delaying efforts – including the invention of the most wonderfully complicated “census-taking” known to man – to ensure

that no Jews under their governance fell into German hands... . Not only would the Italian government – reflecting the popular attitude of the citizenry at large – resist deportation, its army and consuls undertook extraordinary efforts to rescue Jews in their zones of occupation. As an Axis partner, Italy’s forces occupied a large sector of Greece, part of Yugoslavia, and eight sectors of southeastern France, including Nice.<sup>41</sup>

How do you account for the stand the Italians took on the deportation of the Jews? In what sense was it like the one Schindler took? In what ways did it differ from his position?

→Rena Finder was one of the individuals on “Schindler’s List.” Her testimony is available on video from the Facing History Resource Center and is described in *Elements of Time*, pages 25-29. A 15-minute vignette on Schindler, “The Making of a Hero,” is also available.

## READING 13

### *A Nation United*

Oskar Schindler responded to the plight of European Jews as an individual. In Le Chambon, people responded as a community. In Denmark, they responded as a nation. The Germans conquered Denmark in the spring of 1940. Although Hitler allowed the prewar government to stay in power and kept only a token military force in the nation, the Danes deeply resented the occupation of their country and some struck back with acts of sabotage, riots, and strikes. In the summer of 1943, the Nazis decided to retaliate. They limited the power of King Christian X, forced the Danish government to resign, and disbanded the Danish army. They also ordered the arrest of a number of Christian and Jewish leaders.

The Danes were able to resist the cruel stupidity of Nazi anti-Semitism because this fundamental truth [thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself] was important to them.

Leo Goldberger’s father, the chief cantor at Copenhagen’s Great Synagogue, was among those the Nazis planned to arrest. They arrived at the family’s apartment before dawn one morning. Goldberger recalls what happened next:

My father came into my brother’s and my room and whispered that the Germans were outside and that he would not under any circumstances open the door. For me, this was the most terror-filled moment I had ever experienced. The insistent knocks of rifle butts. Fearing that they would break down the door any minute, I implored my father to open it, but he was determined not to. Then in the nick of time, we heard our upstairs neighbor’s voice telling the German

soldiers that we – the Goldbergers – were away for the summer, and that three o'clock in the morning was in any case no time to make such a racket!<sup>42</sup>

Although the Germans posted a guard outside the building before they left, the family managed to escape. By the middle of September, the crisis seemed to be over and the family returned to Copenhagen. A few weeks later, the Goldbergers and other Jews in Denmark learned that the Germans were planning to round them all up for deportation. The news came from Georg Ferdinand Duckwitz, a German diplomat stationed in Norway. When he received secret orders to prepare four cargo ships for transporting Danish Jews, he passed on the information to leaders in the resistance. They, in turn, informed Copenhagen's Jewish community. The Jews were urged to hide and then prepare for evacuation to Sweden. Goldberger, who was just thirteen years old at the time, remembers:

Where to hide? Our first night was spent as guests of a wealthy Jewish family who lived in Bedbaek, on the coast some 35 miles away. To our chagrin the family took off for Sweden during the night without even telling us or their Jewish refugee maid. Apparently my father had been asked by our host whether he wanted to chip in for a boat to take us all to Sweden but had been forced to decline. He simply did not have that kind of money. Near panic but determined to "get tough" and to find a way somehow, my father took a train back to the city; he needed to borrow money, perhaps get an advance on his salary and to see about contacts for passage on a fishing boat. As luck would have it, on the train a woman whom he knew only slightly recognized him and inquired about his obviously agitated facial expression. He confided our plight. Without a moment's hesitation the lady promised to take care of everything. She would meet my father at the main railroad station with all the information about the arrangements within a few hours. It was the least she could do, she said, in return for my father's participation some years back in a benefit concert for her organization – "The Women's League for Peace and Freedom."

True to her word, she met my father later that day and indicated that all was arranged. The money would be forthcoming from a pastor, Henry Rasmussen... The sum was a fairly large one – about 25,000 Danish crowns, 5,000 per person, a sum which was more than my father's annual salary. (Though it was ostensibly a loan, I should add that pastor Rasmussen refused repayment after the war.) The next step was to head for a certain address near the coast, less than an hour from Copenhagen. After hurriedly getting some things together from our apartment – a few clothes, some treasured papers and family photos, and, in my case, [a] newly acquired police flashlight – we were off by taxi to our unknown hosts for the night and our uncertain destiny.

The following night we were standing, huddled in some low bushes along the beach near Dragur, an outskirt of Copenhagen's



island of Amager. It was a bitter cold October night. My youngest brother, barely three years old, had been given a sleeping pill to keep him quiet. My brave and stoic little mother was clutching her bag with socks and stockings to be mended which she had taken along for reasons difficult to fathom rationally. We were anxiously and eagerly waiting for the promised light signal. As we were poised to move toward the signal, I could not help but wonder *why* this was happening. What had we ever done to be in hiding, escaping like criminals? Where would it all end? And why in God's name did the signal not appear? Then finally the lights flashed. We were off. Wading straight into the sea, we walked out some 100 feet through icy water, in water that reached up to my chest. My father carried my two small brothers on his arm. My mother held on to her bag of socks. And I clutched my precious flashlight. My older brother tried valiantly to carry the suitcases but finally had to drop them in the water. We were hauled aboard the boat, directed in whispers to lie concealed in the cargo area, there to stretch out covered by smelly canvases; in the event the German patrols were to inspect the boat, we would be passed over as fish. There seemed to have been some 20 other Jews aboard. As we proceeded out toward open sea my father chanted a muted prayer from the Psalms.

A few hours later, bright lights and the pastoral scenery of Skane along the coast outline of Sweden appeared. Wonderful, peaceful Sweden. A welcoming haven, never to be forgotten, where we remained until our return to Denmark at the end of the war in 1945.<sup>43</sup>

It was a community effort – organized and paid for by hundreds of private citizens – Jews and Christians alike.

Hundreds of other fishing boats carried nearly every Jew in Denmark – 7,220 men, women, and children – to safety. It was a community effort – organized and paid for by hundreds of private citizens – Jews and Christians alike. The money was used to pay fishermen to transport the Jews to Sweden. Although a few offered their boats for nothing, many could not afford to lose a day's pay. The money also went for bribes. It was no accident that all German patrol ships were docked for repairs the night of the rescue.

Not everyone managed to get out. Some were captured as they waited for a boat, while others were picked up at sea. But in the end, the Nazis were able to deport only 580 Jews. They were sent to Terezinstadt, the "model" concentration camp (Chapter 7, Reading 13). Still, no Dane was shipped to a death camp, in part because the Danish government constantly questioned the Nazis about their status.

## CONNECTIONS

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Were the Danes rescuers or resisters? Was their aim to save the Jews or to express their opposition to Nazi rule?

Compare the way the Goldbergers' neighbors responded when the Nazis banged on the family's door to the way people in earlier readings responded when the Nazis came for Communists and later Jews. What similarities do you see? What differences seem most striking?

Thomas Merton, a theologian, said of the Danes:

The Danes were able to do what they did because they were able to make decisions that were based on clear convictions about which they all agreed and which were in accord with the inner truth of man's own rational nature, as well as in accordance with the fundamental law of God in the Old Testament as well as in the Gospel: thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. The Danes were able to resist the cruel stupidity of Nazi anti-Semitism because this fundamental truth was important to them. And because they were willing, in unanimous and concerted action to stake their lives on this truth. In a word, such action becomes possible where fundamental truths are taken seriously.<sup>44</sup>

What "fundamental truth" did the Danes take seriously? What difference did that make in the way they responded to the Nazis?

Albert Camus argued "that strength of heart, intelligence and courage are enough to stop fate and sometimes reverse it." How do the Danes support his belief? Could others have done what they did?

## READING 14

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### *The Role of the Protestant Churches*

As a leader in Germany's Confessing Church watched the Gestapo round up Jews for deportation, he asked "Should we live on as if nothing had happened?" It was a question that many religious leaders asked during the Holocaust, but they did not all answer it in the same way. When leaders in the Danish church learned of plans to deport the Jews, they sent a letter to German officials. On Sunday, October 3, 1943, that letter was read from every pulpit in the nation.

Wherever Jews are persecuted because of their religion or race it is the duty of the Christian Church to protest against such persecution, because it is in conflict with the sense of justice inherent in the Danish people and inseparable from our Danish Christian culture through

centuries. True to this spirit and according to the text of the Act of the Constitution all Danish citizens enjoy equal rights and responsibilities before the Law and full religious freedom. We understand religious freedom as the right to exercise our worship of God as our vocation and conscience bid us and in such a manner that race and religion per se can never justify that a person be deprived of his rights, freedom or property. Our different religious views notwithstanding, we shall fight for the cause that our Jewish brothers and sisters may preserve the same freedom which we ourselves evaluate more highly than life itself. With the leaders of the Danish Church there is a clear understanding of our duty to be law-abiding citizens who will not groundlessly rebel against the authorities, but at the same time our conscience bids us to assert the Law and protest against any violation of the Law. We shall therefore in any given event unequivocally adhere to the concept that we must obey God before we obey man.

Wherever Jews are persecuted because of their religion or race it is the duty of the Christian Church to protest against such persecution, because it is in conflict with the sense of justice inherent in the Danish people and inseparable from our Danish Christian culture through centuries.

The Danish ministers who wrote that letter were Lutherans. So were most German Protestants. Yet few German ministers took as strong a stand. The German Evangelical Church expressed concern only for the plight of Christian Jews sent to concentration camps. A church official asked Adolf Eichmann to allow them to hold church services. Eichmann refused, telling him “that a Jew was a Jew, whether baptized or not.” The official claimed that Eichmann “could, however, assure me that the entire Jewish question here in [Germany] was only a transportation question.” He and others in his church never again concerned themselves with the “Jewish question.”

Ilse Harter, a leader in the Confessing Church, later commented:

More people than one thinks gave practical help. Would that have been possible had the Confessing Church protested better? I don't know. On no account do I wish to excuse the Confessing Church. We all became guilty, even those of us who helped the Jewish people. We didn't scream it out, because we knew, indeed: If what we do becomes known, these people will go to their deaths in any case, just as our path would lead to the concentration camp. Whereas, when we help secretly, perhaps they will survive. But show me the person who can be at peace with that position.<sup>45</sup>

After the war, Dietrich Goldschmidt, a leader in the Confessing Church, offered another reason no one “screamed it out.” He noted that “the idea that, from a Christian consciousness, one had to stand up for the Jews occurred to very few people... The Jews were ‘damned.’ This teaching that the Jews had condemned Jesus, the teaching that God had indeed made a covenant with the Jews but that this covenant was void after the murder of Jesus, and that the Christians are the people of the new covenant – that pops up even today in the heads of pastors.”<sup>46</sup>

Helmut Gollwitzer, another church leader, added:

We, too, had to learn that we had grown up with these prejudices theologically. At first, we thought that the Jews deserved our human pity, and the Jewish Christians needed our brotherly solidarity... [that] we had to help the Jews in Germany because they were a threatened people.

In the meantime, Karl Barth [a German theologian] had progressed further theologically. His basis for demanding that we help the Jews was that they are the people of God. That was a new basis for understanding the Bible, Judaism, and with that, for understanding anti-Semitism as well. The view that anti-Semitism was merely the antipathy of a majority against a minority had to be abolished.

It became more complicated because Hitler killed the gypsies as well, but... if he hadn't waged this complete campaign against the Jews, he wouldn't have been able to treat the gypsies in the same way. The Jews are truly the key. That is the central point with the Jews, theologically and biblically: How do we go about unlearning this part of the Christian tradition? This remains one of the most provocative questions in German Christianity today.<sup>47</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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How did leaders of the Danish church define their “universe of obligation”? How did leaders in the German Evangelical Church define theirs? The Confessing Church? What similarities do you notice? What differences?

Reread the letter the Danish ministers sent German officials. Why do you think they read it from the pulpit? How did they regard Jews? Freedom of religion? Their duty as “law abiding citizens”? What effect might a similar letter have had on German Christians?

What part does “patriotism” play in explaining differences in the way Danish church leaders responded to the Holocaust with the way German church leaders responded? How difficult is it to speak out against your own country in time of war?

Is Ilse Harter's explanation of why she did not “scream out” a rationalization? How is her explanation similar to those of Christabel Bielenberg (Reading 7)? Why is neither “at peace” with her position?

In describing the response of German Christians to the Holocaust, Dietrich Goldschmidt wrote, “Perhaps you know T. S. Eliot's ‘Murder in the Cathedral’? There's a place where the archbishop comes from France, and the choir, the women of Canterbury don't want him: ‘Yet we have gone on living, living and partly living... leave us and leave us be.’ This phrase has

stayed in my memory. Don't burden us with any knowledge, 'living and partly living, we want to get through.'"<sup>48</sup> What is Goldschmidt saying about the way most religious leaders responded to the question, "Should we live on as if nothing had happened?" To the larger question of "Are we our brothers' keepers?" What part did old myths and misinformation play in the way they responded? What part did fear play? Conformity? Obedience?

## READING 15

### *The Role of the Catholic Church*

Leaders in the Catholic Church were also silent as Jews were deported to death camps. On May 27, 1941, a week after the first round-up, Germaine Ribiere, a student in Paris, wrote in her diary:

For the past two weeks the sky has become more and more overcast. The Church, the hierarchy, remain silent. They allow the truth to be profaned. Father Lallier [a priest in charge of the Catholic student movement in Paris] told me that there are more urgent things for us to worry about than the Jews...

The tide is rising, rising. I am afraid that one of these days, when we wake up, it will be too late and we shall all have become Nazis. I am afraid, because people are asleep. Those who should keep watch are the ones who put others to sleep. We must shout the truth no matter what the cost. But who will do it? I know that there are Christians who are willing to accept martyrdom if necessary; but they do not know what is happening. They wait for a voice, and the voice does not speak. We must pray that it will speak.

France has betrayed her soul, and now Nazism is gaining the upper hand. All genuine values are dragged in the dust. We no longer have any honor. Petain has become the French Hitler. The great dance has begun and the world is blind. It is blind because it is afraid of death. The clergy remain passive. As in Austria, they accept what is happening...<sup>49</sup>

The tide is rising, rising. I am afraid that one of these days, when we wake up, it will be too late and we shall all have become Nazis. I am afraid, because people are asleep. Those who should keep watch are the ones who put others to sleep.

It would be a year later, in August 1942, before Archbishop Jules-Gerard Saliege of Toulouse told Catholics: "That children, that women, that men, that fathers and mothers should be treated like a vile herd, that members of the same family should be separated from one another and sent to an unknown destination – this sad spectacle it was reserved for our times to see... These Jews are men, these Jewesses are women; these aliens are men and women. You cannot do whatever you wish against these men, against these women, against these fathers and mothers. They are part of humankind. They are our brothers, as are so many others. No Christian can forget that."<sup>50</sup>

Why did it take so long for the archbishop and other leaders in the Catholic church to respond? In reviewing the Church's role during the Holocaust, some historians focus on Eugenio Pacelli who became Pope Pius XII in 1939. In 1920, he became the pope's ambassador to Germany; in 1929, he was elevated to cardinal. The following year, he became the Vatican's secretary of state. Like many people, Pacelli considered communism far more dangerous than fascism. Indeed he was convinced that Nazi Germany was a fortress in the fight against "godless" communism. He also believed that he had a duty to protect the Church in Germany from the Nazis. Those views led him to negotiate a concordat, or agreement, with Germany in July 1933. It was Hitler's first foreign policy success.

After he became pope, Pius encouraged efforts to rescue Jews who had converted to Christianity but not other Jews. Although the Vatican had detailed information about mass murders as early as the fall of 1941, Pius remained silent until the Christmas of 1942. Only then did he speak of the "hundreds of thousands who through no fault of their own, and solely because of their nation or race, have been condemned to death or progressive extinction." Although he was clearly speaking of the Jews, he never mentioned them by name.

Then in the fall of 1943, the Italians overthrew Mussolini. Almost immediately, Germany took control of Italy and began to deport Italian Jews. The Church responded by opening sanctuaries for "non-Aryans" in Vatican City. Yet Pius himself said nothing until the summer of 1944 when Admiral Miklos Horthy of Hungary began deporting Jews. A month after the deportations started, Pius cabled Horthy. "We have been requested from several sides to do everything possible to ensure that the sufferings which have had to be borne for so long by numerous unfortunate people in the bosom of this noble and chivalrous nation because of their nationality or racial origin shall not be prolonged and made worse. Our fatherly heart, in the service of a solicitous charity which embraces all mankind, cannot remain insensitive to these urgent wishes. Therefore I am turning personally to Your Excellency and I appeal to your noble feelings, in full confidence that Your Excellency will do everything in your power to spare so many unfortunate people further suffering."<sup>51</sup>

Father John Pawlikowski, Professor of Social Ethics at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, has studied the way the Catholic church and other religious groups responded to the Nazis. He concluded:

- (1) an overwhelming majority of Christian clergy acquiesced in the destruction of European Jews;
- (2) church leaders were unable to mount a successful effort against the Nazis. This bears serious reflection for the continuing struggles which the churches face in the contemporary world;
- (3) the church's self-understanding and its own sufferings under the Nazis were far too isolated from the sufferings of non-Christians, Jews

in particular, to whom suffering meant death. Why did the churches raise the issue of Nazi murder of “baptized” Jews to the exclusion of the Jewish people at large?;

(4) the churches were far too connected with the dynamics of German society to really stand in judgment against it;

(5) the Jewish Question could not be adequately addressed because of the long-standing theological tradition of anti-Judaism in the churches. This tradition must be obliterated once and for all by the post-Holocaust Christian community;

(6) the churches, which will never regain the kind of control over society they once had, must reflect anew on how to combat totalitarian power. Where are their primary resources in such a context?; and, finally,

(7) the churches’ fear of communism blinded them to all other forms of totalitarian oppression. Is there danger of repetition in our day?<sup>52</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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What did Germaine Ribiere mean when she wrote that France betrayed its soul? How does a nation betray its soul?

As head of the Technical Disinfection Services of the Waffen SS, Kurt Gerstein delivered prussic acid and other poison gases to Belzec. He tried repeatedly to warn the nuncio, or papal ambassador to Germany, that the Nazis were murdering the Jews. After several unsuccessful efforts, he wrote:

What action against Nazism could one demand of an ordinary citizen when the representative of Jesus on earth himself refused even to hear me, although tens of thousands of human beings were being murdered every day; and although to wait only a few hours seemed to me criminal? Even the Nuncio in Germany refused to be well-informed on this monstrous violation of the fundamental basis of the laws of Jesus: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”<sup>53</sup>

How do you account for the nuncio’s failure to acknowledge Gerstein’s information? For his failure to act on that information?

In 1993, James Carroll, a newspaper columnist and a Roman Catholic, wrote, “In 1963, a play by Rolf Hochhuth, ‘The Deputy,’ savaged the Vatican, especially Eugenio Pacelli – Pope Pius XII – for its complicity. Most Catholics doggedly rejected that play’s accusations, but when Pope John XXIII was asked not long before he died what to do about Hochhuth’s play, he replied, ‘Do? What can one do about the truth?’”<sup>54</sup> What options were open to the Church in 1933? In 1939? In 1941? What were the risks of each choice? Possible consequences?

→Father John S. was a Jesuit seminarian in Hungarian-occupied Czechoslovakia at the time Jews were being deported to Auschwitz. He recalls looking through a hole in a fence and seeing a Nazi guard brutally attack a Jew. “I just didn’t know what to do. At that time I was immobilized... It was beyond my experience – I was totally unprepared.” Father S.’s testimony is included in the video montage *Seeing* available from the Facing History Resource Center and described in *Elements of Time*, page xxix.

Professor Franklin Littell has studied the way churches and universities in the United States responded or failed to respond to the Holocaust. He found that many American religious leaders and academics were paralyzed in much the way their German counterparts were. A summary of a talk by Littell on the topic can be found in *Elements of Time*, pages 356-357.

## READING 16

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### *The Response of the Allies*

Soon after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, rumors of mass murders began to circulate in the United States. To many, the stories were too incredible to be true. On the front page of its June 14, 1942 edition, the *Chicago Tribune* ran this headline:

HITLER GUARDS STAGE NEW POGROM, KILL 258  
MASSACRED BY BERLIN GESTAPO IN “BOMB PLOT”  
Families Herded for Deportation

The story that followed described the murder of 258 Berlin Jews on an obviously trumped-up charge. The Nazis were claiming that Jews planted bombs in Berlin at a time when their movements were restricted and they were subject to a strict curfew. The story came from “various trustworthy sources” in Berlin – sources with access to officials in the SS and the Propaganda Ministry.

On June 16, 1942, the same paper ran a story on page 6 under this headline: “25,000 LATVIAN JEWS VICTIMS OF NAZIS.” The information for this story came from the Federation of Jewish Relief Organizations. Exactly two weeks later, also on page 6, readers encountered this headline: “One Million Jews Victims of Nazis.” The World Jewish Congress was the source for this story.

Deborah Lipstadt, the author of *Beyond Belief: The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust*, argues that the first story made the front page because “258” sounds authoritative. It is precise, unlike “about 260” or “over 250.” On the other hand, a number like “25,000” is more “difficult” to accept and “one million” is simply “incredible.”



Lipstadt notes that the larger numbers were harder to accept for another reason – they came from groups that represented the victims. Recalling atrocity stories during World War I that later proved to be false, publishers were cautious about claims of mass murder. So even though they printed the reports, they did not feature them and they carefully qualified claims. On November 26, 1942, the following appeared on page 16 of the *New York Times*:

#### SLAIN POLISH JEWS PUT AT A MILLION

One-third of Number in Whole Country Said to Have Been Put to Death by Nazis

Nearly a third of Poland's Jewish population – 1,000,000 persons – has perished in three years of German occupation, Dr. Ignacy Szwarcbart, Jewish member of the Polish National Council in London, told this correspondent today, amplifying Polish Government information on the new Nazi onslaught on the Jews.

Plans outlined by Dr. Alfred Rosenberg – Germany's race theorist, who says that the Jewish problem of Europe will be solved when no Jews are left – are systematically carried out. The victims of executions by mass-murder and gassing are only part of the thousands dying through "the organized spreading of diseases and artificial creation of conditions in which children, elderly people and the sick cannot survive," as Dr. Szwarcbart described it.

A million more persons, at least, are menaced by starvation and the lack of medical supplies. The Nazis make it plain that all Jews not wanted for military reasons must die. Poland is now a mass grave. Jews from all Europe are brought to the Warsaw ghetto and separated into two groups: the able-bodied young and the children, old and sick, who are dispatched eastward to meet sure death. Lublin, indeed, has two ghettos, one for able workers, the other for the useless condemned to destruction.

One hundred twenty thousand have been brought from Czechoslovakia and tens of thousands from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Holland, Belgium and France. The Lodz ghetto, containing many Jews from the West, has been completely closed for several weeks and no news has been allowed to penetrate through its walls...

Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, acting as chairman of a special conference of Jewish organizations, announced here yesterday that the organizations were convinced of the authenticity of a rumored Hitler order for the immediate extirpation of all Jews in German-controlled Europe...

These organizations, Rabbi Wise said, had authorized him to invite the aid of any Christian organization ready to speak out on behalf of the Jewish victims. They had also set Sunday, Dec. 13, as a day of mourning, to be observed by fasting and prayer by Jews "in all the lands where Jews are still free."

By the end of 1942, the CBS radio network had picked up the story. In a broadcast from London on December 13, Edward R. Murrow bluntly reported, “What is happening is this. Millions of human beings, most of them Jews, are being gathered up with ruthless efficiency and murdered. The phrase ‘concentration camps’ is obsolete, as out of date as economic sanctions or nonrecognition. It is now possible only to speak of extermination camps.”

Four days later, the governments of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union issued joint declarations stating that “the German authorities, not content with denying to persons of Jewish race in all the territories over which their barbarous rule has been extended the most elementary human rights, are now carrying into effect Hitler’s oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe.”

The phrase “concentration camps” is obsolete, as out of date as economic sanctions or non-recognition. It is now possible to speak only of extermination camps.

The declaration contained very specific charges:

Jews are being transported, in conditions of appalling horror and brutality, to Eastern Europe. In Poland, which has been made the principal Nazi slaughterhouse, the ghettos established by the German invaders are being systematically emptied of all Jews except a few highly skilled workers required for war industries. None of those taken away are ever heard of again. The able-bodied are slowly worked to death in labour camps. The infirm are left to die of exposure and starvation or are deliberately massacred in mass executions. The number of victims of these bloody cruelties is reckoned in many hundreds of thousands of entirely innocent men, women and children.

Thus, the Allies acknowledged the mass murders for the first time. Yet they continued to do nothing. Golda Meir, who later became prime minister of Israel, described Britain’s response to her demands and those of other Jews in British-controlled Palestine:

What was it that we demanded of the British and that they so stubbornly refused to give us? Today the answer seems incredible even to me. The truth is that all that [we] wanted from 1939 to 1945 was to take in as many Jews as could be saved from the Nazis. That was all. Just to be allowed to share the little we had with men, women, and children who were fortunate enough not to have been shot, gassed or buried alive by the very people to whose downfall the entire British Empire was in any case committed...

[Yet the] British remained adamant. They went on to fight like lions against the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese, but they couldn’t or wouldn’t stand up to the Arabs at all – although much of the Arab world was openly pro-Nazi...

After all, what would have happened if the British had [allowed Jews to find refuge in Palestine]? A few Arab leaders might have made threatening speeches. Perhaps there would have been a protest march or two. Maybe there would even have been an additional act of pro-

Nazi sabotage somewhere in the Middle East. And maybe it would have been too late to save most of the Jews of Europe anyway. But thousands more of the [millions murdered] might have survived. Thousands more of the ghetto fighters and Jewish partisans might have been armed. And the civilized world might then have been freed of the terrible accusation that not a finger was lifted to help the Jews in their torment.<sup>55</sup>

The United States took a stand similar to Britain's until January 1944 – fourteen months after news of the mass murders reached the Allies and thirteen months after the Allied resolution. Then on January 13, 1944, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau received a memo entitled, "Report to the Secretary on the Acquiescence of this Government in the Murder of Jews." It was prepared by a young Treasury Department lawyer, Josiah DuBois, and signed by his superior, Randolph Paul. The memo stated:

I am convinced on the basis of the information which is available to me that certain officials in our State department... have been guilty not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler.

One of the greatest crimes in history, the slaughter of the Jewish people in Europe, is continuing unabated.

This Government has for a long time maintained that its policy is to work out programs to save those Jews of Europe who could be saved.

I am convinced on the basis of the information which is available to me that certain officials in our State Department, which is charged with carrying out this policy, have been guilty not only of gross procrastination and willful failure to act, but even of willful attempts to prevent action from being taken to rescue Jews from Hitler.

I fully recognize the graveness of this statement and I make it only after having most carefully weighed the shocking facts which have come to my attention during the last several months.

Unless remedial steps of a drastic nature are taken, and taken immediately, I am certain that no effective action will be taken by this Government to prevent the complete extermination of the Jews in German controlled Europe, and that this Government will have to share for all time responsibility for this extermination.

The tragic history of this Government's handling of this matter reveals that certain State Department officials are guilty of the following:

- (1) They have not only failed to use the Governmental machinery at their disposal to rescue Jews from Hitler, but have even gone so far as to use this Government machinery to prevent the rescue of these Jews.
- (2) They have not only failed to cooperate with private organizations in the efforts of these organizations to work out individual programs of their own, but have taken steps designed to prevent these programs from being put into effect.
- (3) They not only have failed to facilitate the obtaining of information concerning Hitler's plans to exterminate the Jews of Europe but in their

official capacity have gone so far as to surreptitiously attempt to stop the obtaining of information concerning the murder of the Jewish population of Europe.

(4) They have tried to cover up their guilt by:

(a) concealment and misrepresentation;

(b) the giving of false and misleading explanations for their failures to act and their attempts to prevent action; and

(c) the issuance of false and misleading statements concerning the “action” which they have taken to date.

Morgenthau, whose father served as ambassador to Turkey during the massacres of the Armenians in World War I, condensed the report and then sent it to the president with a few comments of his own. Within days of receiving it, the president set up the War Refugee Board, under Morgenthau’s supervision. It saved about two hundred thousand Jews through diplomacy, bribery, and trickery. John Pehle, Jr., the man who headed the group, later remarked that “what we did was little enough. It was late. Late and little, I would say.”

## CONNECTIONS

Why would articles about the mass murders fail to make the front pages of newspapers around the world? How have newspapers, magazines, and television treated events in Bosnia? When do stories about “ethnic cleansing” make headlines? When are those stories reduced to a brief mention? How do you account for the change?

What we did was little enough. It was late. Little and late, I would say.

Compare the charges Golda Meir made with those in Morgenthau’s memo. What could the United States have done? What could Britain have done? Could either have stopped fate or even reversed it?

When the United States failed to take an aggressive stand against “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia in 1993, a number of state department officials resigned. What else can individuals do to express their outrage? To influence public policy?

One of the reasons often cited for the failure of Americans to respond to the Holocaust was inadequate coverage in the media. Another was widespread antisemitism in the United States in general and within the State Department in particular. “Indication that hostility toward Jews was reaching an ominous level,” writes historian David Wyman, “came from a series of ten surveys conducted between 1938 and 1941.” Based on those polls, he concludes that “as much as one third of the American population was prepared to approve an anti-Jewish movement, nearly the same proportion would have stood against such action, and the remainder would have been little concerned.” For a discussion of how those attitudes affected the nation’s immigration policies during and after the war, see *Elements of Time*, pages 77-79.

→The Fifth Annual Facing History Conference focused on the responsibility of the media to inform citizens of human rights abuses and genocidal situations. A videotape of the panel on “Media and the Coverage of Injustice” is available from the Resource Center.

## READING 17

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### *Should Auschwitz Have Been Bombed?*

**B**y 1944, most European Jews were either dead or on the way to death camps. Only one large group was still alive: the Jews of Hungary. They were safe chiefly because Hungary was an ally of Germany rather than a conquered nation. As an ally, Hungary had its own anti-Jewish laws that defined the status of Jews and allowed the government to take their land with minimal compensation. The nation was not willing to go any further, however. Then in 1943, Hitler asked Miklos Horthy to grant Germany jurisdiction over Hungarian Jews. When Horthy refused, Hitler announced that Hungary was no longer an ally. The following year, he invaded the nation and established a new government under Adolf Eichmann. Soon after, the Nazis began shipping twelve thousand Hungarian Jews a day to Auschwitz.

As word of the deportations reached the outside world, Jewish organizations appealed to the United States to bomb the railroad lines that led to Auschwitz or the camp itself. Assistant Secretary of War, John J. McCloy asked the War Department to look into the matter. Two days later, on June 26, 1944, officials dismissed the idea as “impractical” because, the bombing “could be executed only by diversion of considerable air support essential to the success of our forces now engaged in decisive operations.” Yet, between July 7 and November 20, American planes dropped bombs near Auschwitz on ten different occasions. On August 20, 1,336 bombs were released just five miles from the gas chambers. On three occasions, American pilots hit industrial areas near the camp.

McCloy supported the War Department’s recommendations. On August 14, 1944, he told the World Jewish Congress that *even* if bombing Auschwitz was possible, he would oppose it. The bombings, argued McCloy “might provoke even more vindictive action by the Germans.” He and others in the government insisted that “we must constantly bear in mind the most effective relief which can be given victims of enemy persecution is to insure the speedy defeat of the Axis.”

## CONNECTIONS

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→What factors affected the American decision not to target Auschwitz for bombing? How do you evaluate the final decision? For more information on the decision, see *America and the Holocaust: Deceit and Indifference*, available from the Facing History Resource Center.

Why did the plight of the Hungarian Jews get more attention from the outside world than did the plight of Polish or Russian Jews?

## READING 18

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### *A Man with a Mission*

At a time when many insisted it was too late to alter the fate of Europe's Jews, a thirty-two-year-old Swedish businessman saved thousands from the death camps. Raoul Wallenberg came to Budapest in July 1944, as an agent of the American War Refugee Board and the Swedish government. He was officially the secretary of the Swedish legation in Hungary with the authority to issue passports.

By the time Wallenberg got to Hungary, over 400,000 Jews had already been deported. Only about 250,000 remained. He tried to save those Jews by creating a new passport that placed the holder and his or her property "under the protection of the Swedish legation until such time as his emigration to Sweden could be arranged." Although he persuaded the Hungarian government to honor the passport, he was unable to get the Germans to do the same. When they refused to allow Jews to travel through Germany to Sweden, Wallenberg used the money he received from the American War Refugee Board to purchase or rent thirty-two buildings in Budapest. There he housed at least twenty thousand Jews awaiting "emigration" to Sweden.

Wallenberg inspired others to help as well. Per Anger, who worked as an attache in the Swedish embassy, described their efforts:

What would have happened if, in 1943, neutral nations had offered protection to the Jews of Warsaw, if great powers had offered citizenship to the Jews of Paris and Amsterdam?

Other foreign legations, too, the Swiss, Spanish, Portuguese, and the Papal Nuncio, got to work issuing identification papers of a similar sort. Ever since the German occupation began, the nuncio, Angelo Rotta, had been making energetic representations to the Hungarian government to help the Jews... Rotta had to work alone, without any particular support from the Vatican.

At the Swiss legation, Consul Charles Lutz carried on a tireless labor in the Jews' behalf. Once the Swiss had assumed the British interests in Hungary, they took care of conveying certificates to those Jews who had been granted entry to Palestine. True, this emigration

had... stopped altogether with the German occupation. However, this did not hinder Lutz from issuing papers or protective passports for a large number of fictional or actual holders of such certificates. The number approved by the Hungarian authorities rose to around 8,000 but in actuality the Swiss followed our example and took considerably more under their protection.

It is also well known how the Swiss, by taking over the interests of San Salvador at American request, succeeded in furnishing several thousand Jews with papers of citizenship in that Central American country. Actually, San Salvador had no citizens in Hungary, as the Americans were well aware. But what was involved was continually trying to find new ways to save human lives.<sup>56</sup>

According to Anger, the various foreign legations and the International Red Cross saved nearly fifty thousand Jews. The Swedes alone accounted for almost half of that number, chiefly through the efforts of Wallenberg. Whenever Jews were in danger, he would appear to distribute passports or offer help. Susan Tabon, one of the Hungarian Jews he saved, said of him:

He gave us the sense that we were still human beings. My mother and I were among thousands taken one night to stay at a brick factory outside Budapest. There was no food, no water, no sanitation facilities, no light. Then Wallenberg appeared and said he would try to return with passports, or “safety passes,” as we called them, and would also try to get medical attention and sanitation facilities. Soon afterward, some doctors and nurses came from the Jewish Hospital.

The point about Wallenberg is that he came himself. He talked to us and showed us that one human being cared about what was happening to us.<sup>57</sup>

Wallenberg even managed to protect the seventy thousand Jews living in what the Nazis called the “sealed ghetto.” When he heard that the Hungarian Nazis were planning to kill every Jew there, he demanded that the German commander prevent the murders. To the amazement of many people, the commander agreed. Wallenberg had convinced him that if the Jews died, Wallenberg would see to it that the commander was hung as soon as the Russians marched into the city.

Yet when the Soviet army liberated Budapest, it was Wallenberg who was in danger. The Russians immediately took him prisoner. No one knows exactly why they did so. Nor does anyone know what happened to him after January 17, 1945. Over the years, the Russians have insisted that he died in 1947. Yet some people claim to have seen him since then. In 1981, the United States honored Wallenberg for his courage and heroism by making him an honorary citizen. He was the second person to be so honored. Winston Churchill was the first.

## CONNECTIONS

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In an introduction to Per Anger's book about Wallenberg, Elie Wiesel notes, "Sadly, tragically, Raoul Wallenberg belonged to a small minority. And his mission started late, much too late, at a time when, except for those in the Hungarian capital, there were no more Jews left to be saved. Why had he not been sent earlier? Why had other diplomats not been dispatched to other cities, on similar rescue operations? What would have happened if, in 1943, neutral nations had offered protection to the Jews of Warsaw, if great powers had offered citizenship to the Jews of Paris and Amsterdam?" How would you answer Wiesel's questions? Would such an effort have stopped fate or even reversed it?

Lars Berg, a member of the Swedish legation in Budapest, has offered one explanation of why the Russians took Wallenberg prisoner.

For the Russians, with their understanding or, more accurately, their lack of understanding for human problems, it was completely inconceivable that Wallenberg, the Swede, had come down to Budapest to try and rescue Hungarian Jews. He must have come for some other reason.

In those days I was naive enough to believe that they were only accusing us of being spies for the Germans. One couldn't have known then that the Russians regarded the Americans as enemies at least as deadly as the Germans. Yet when you think about the fact that Wallenberg did come to Budapest at President Roosevelt's personal request, and that the funds at his disposal originated from the War Refugee Board in Washington, then you can understand better why the Russians regarded Raoul in particular as an American spy. And in the eyes of the Russians that was considerably worse than working for the Germans!<sup>58</sup>

For years, the Raoul Wallenberg Committee has been demanding that the Russians tell the world what happened to Wallenberg. How important is it to know his fate?

In Lithuania, Senpo Sugihara, the Japanese consul, provided visas to thirty-five hundred Jews. Those visas not only protected Jews from deportation but also allowed them to emigrate to Shanghai, China – then under Japanese rule. Sugihara stopped only when he was removed from his post at the request of the German government. How do you account for his willingness to take risks when others refused?

In March of 1993, the pupils of Class V13 and their teacher Borislav Trivunovic sent the following message to the world:

We wait spring... War is here. We wait peace... Nobody hears us, we are in a corner of world. All year we hope. We are fearless and persisting. Our fathers earn 3-4 DEM (or 5 kg flour) for month, we



haven't water, electric, heating – we bear it, but we can't bear hate and evil. War is hate and evil.

Our teacher learn us about love, concord and righteousness. He told us about Anne Frank and her hiding and life. After this story we took Anne's Diary from school's library. We read her Diary and acknowledge that our youth is very similar. After fifty years' history repetition again in Bosnia – war, hate, killing, hiding displacements.

We are twelve years old and we can't influence on politics and war... but we want to say for all world that we want to continue our lives in freedom and peace. In our country is war and WE WANT TO STOP THIS CRAZY WAR IN BOSNIA AND STOP ALL WARS ALL AROUND THE WORLD FOREVER!

We wait spring... we wait peace like Anne Frank fifty years before. She didn't live to see peace, but we...?

How can a letter like this one help sensitize people and make them do something in regard to the crisis in Bosnia?

→A vignette featuring Wallenberg is part of a thirty-minute documentary, “The Making of a Hero” that aired on *Chronicle*. A video is available from the Facing History Resource Center. Also available is the video testimony of Vera Goodkin, a survivor from Hungary who benefitted from Wallenberg's efforts. She regards him as the ultimate example of an individual who made a difference.

→In her autobiography *Choices*, actor Liv Ullman writes of a child with no choice:

I had to travel [to Somalia] beyond my profession and the people I loved and the events I had known [to see] an ultimate victim of war and indifference... A little boy showed me that we are not all really good deep down, because he was sacrificed to our lack of compassion. And since then, this small child has been with me, and his thin little hand is still holding my finger. One small child whose short life was affected by those who did not even know of his existence. One small boy with no choice at all, because the choices were taken over his head and he was never a part of choice. One little boy affected by cold choice, or maybe lack of choice would very soon lie down to desert sand and die.<sup>59</sup>

What are ways individuals can help to bring more choices to children in places like Somalia and Bosnia? What roles in particular can American students play in this process? A video interview with Liv Ullman is available from the Facing History Resource Center.

## READING 19

### *As the War Ended*

As the war drew to a close in the winter of 1945, the Soviet army pushed westward. To avoid them, the Nazis closed Auschwitz and other death camps in the east and forced inmates to march to camps farther west. As a result, camps like Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, and Dachau were overrun with dead and the dying. When Allied soldiers entered those camps, they saw things they would never forget. Lewis Weinstein, a lieutenant colonel in the US army, later recalled:

[On] this day in 1945, I was to discover what human suffering was all about... I was going to be able to see clearly that, yes, I suffered and I was hurting because I was black in a white society, but I had also begun to understand that suffering is universal. It is not just relegated to me and mine; it touches us all.

On March 31, 1945, during my daily visit to the Situation Room with its War Maps in our Paris headquarters, as I studied the Order of Battle on the large scale Nazi Western Front, I noticed near the town of Gotha an "X" in red crayon with the words "Death Camp." It was the first time I had ever seen those two words on a map or in a report. A red arrow pointed to these words, and was marked "Fourth Armored Division."

Immediately there flashed through my mind, "Death camp, death camp? It can't be a cemetery. It must be a murder camp and the victims must be Jewish; a death camp to murder Jews."

Nazi murders of Jews had been in the news when I enlisted in 1942, and the number seven hundred thousand was the highest I had heard until the number two million seemed to emerge in 1944. I had heard that number on my arrival in London. When I questioned my acquaintances in G-2 (Intelligence) about Nazi murders of Jews, the only answer was "It's an exaggeration, war propaganda." In January 1945, my sources described the numbers of Jews murdered as in the range of two or three hundred thousand. When there was a report on the liberation of Auschwitz, they told me that the reported numbers of dead were "in the realm of fancy." Even the reported numbers were sufficiently horrifying. And the words "Final Solution" had always been described to me as "resettlement."

Within minutes after seeing the words "Death Camp," I talked to the Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2. He said that a million or perhaps two million Jews had been murdered at Auschwitz and that this information was "top secret"... The Intelligence Officer said that Ohrdruf was one of the smaller death camps, as compared with Auschwitz, Buchenwald or Dachau, but it would be the first to be liberated by the American Army. He showed me other locations in our Allied zones. He was sparing of details, almost embarrassed, and he seemed reluctant to talk. I listened but I heard little. I was almost in a state of shock.<sup>60</sup>

After seeing Ohrdruf, Weinstein asked General Dwight Eisenhower to visit. Eisenhower later wrote that “I have never felt able to describe my emotional reactions when I first came face to face with indisputable evidence of Nazi brutality and ruthless disregard of every shred of decency. Up to that time I had known about it only generally or through secondary sources. I am certain, however, that I have never at any other time experienced an equal sense of shock.”<sup>61</sup>

Although Weinstein and Eisenhower had known the camps existed before they saw them, they were not ready for what they actually saw. Leon Bass, a young soldier, was even less prepared for his first view of Buchenwald.

[On] this day in 1945, I was to discover what human suffering was all about. I was going to take off the blinders that caused me to have tunnel vision. I was going to be able to see clearly that, yes, I suffered and I was hurting because I was black in a white society, but I had also begun to understand that suffering is universal. It is not just relegated to me and mine; it touches us all.

And so I walked through the gates of Buchenwald, and I saw the dead and the dying. I saw people who had been so brutalized and were so maltreated; they had been starved and beaten. They had been worked almost to death, not fed enough, no medical care. One man came up and his fingers were webbed together, all of his fingers together by sores and scabs. This was due to malnutrition, not eating the proper foods. There were others holding on to each other, trying to remain standing. They had on wooden shoes; they had on the pajama-type uniform; their heads had been shaved. Some had the tattoos with numbers on their arms. I saw this. I saw them with the wooden bowls. Some of them were standing waiting for food and hitting on the fence, this was wire fence, and making guttural sounds; not words – just sounds.

I said, “My God, what is this insanity that I have come to? What are these people here for? What have they done? What was their crime that would cause people to treat them like this?” You see, I wasn’t prepared for this. I was only nineteen. I had no frame of reference to cope with the kind of thing that I was witnessing.

As I stood there, looking, a young man came over who spoke English. He hadn’t been there very long because he looked rather healthy. He came over and he started to tell us about how many hundreds of thousands had come through the camp, and how many had died there.

And he had taken us around and showed us different places. He took us to a barracks, a place where they slept, and he said that usually fifty people would fit into these barracks, but they had jammed more than 150 in there. They had bunks going almost to the ceiling...

*Leon Bass tells his story to Facing History Students.*

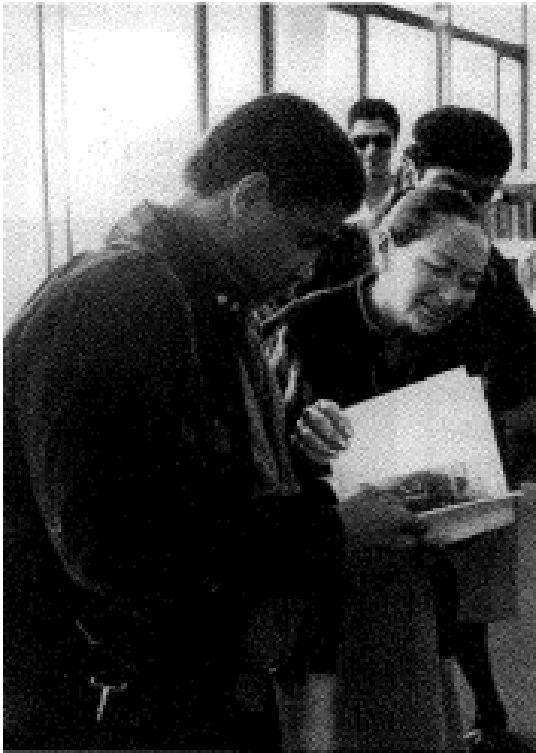


The odor was so bad I backed up, but I looked at a bottom bunk and there I saw one man. He was too weak to get up; he could just barely turn his head. He was skin and bones. He looked like a skeleton; and his eyes were deep set. He didn't utter a sound; he just looked at me with those eyes, and they still haunt me today. I remember looking at him. I backed off the steps, joined my friend, and started to walk away when another of the inmates came up, he could barely move...

After seeing all of that it was too traumatic; I was not fit for anything. I came out of there and I was not able to eat, I didn't talk, I just got back on the truck and went back to my tent. I never talked about this with my friends who were with me. It was so horrible you don't want to deal with it. You try to push it away, and this I was able to do.

The war ended; they broke up my unit. They sent me down to the Philippines for six months, but I didn't talk about what I had seen at Buchenwald. I came home in 1946, and I never told my parents. I went to college, met my wife, got married, had children, got a job – I still didn't talk about this. I pushed it away. But you can't push things away forever.<sup>62</sup>

Sonia Weitz wrote a poem describing the day she was freed.



*Students at Boston English High School meet with Facing History Speaker Sonia Weitz.*

#### **Liberation Day (Mauthausen, May 5, 1945)**

A black G.I. stood by the door  
(I never saw a black before)  
He'll set me free before I die,  
I thought, he must be the Messiah.

A black Messiah came for me...  
He stared with eyes that didn't see,  
He never heard a single word  
Which hung absurd upon my tongue.

And then he simply froze in place  
The shock, the horror on his face,  
He didn't weep, he didn't cry  
But deep within his gentle eyes  
...A flood of devastating pain,  
his innocence forever slain.

For me, with yet another dawn  
I found my black Messiah gone  
and on we went our separate ways  
For forty years without a trace.

But there's a special bond we share  
Which has grown strong because we dare  
To live, to hope, to smile... and yet  
We vow NOT EVER TO FORGET.<sup>63</sup>

## CONNECTIONS

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How did Weinstein react when he saw the words *death camp* on a map? What did he know at the time? Why do you think he wanted Eisenhower to see the camp?

→How did Sonia Weitz view the African American soldier who freed her? Why was his skin color significant to her? What does she mean when she says in the last stanza that they share a bond because they both “dare to live”? Classroom sets of Sonia Weitz’s book *I Promised I Would Tell* are available from the Facing History Resource Center. The book contains her poems as well as her memories of the war years.

On April 15, 1945, the American journalist Edward R. Murrow reported his visit to Buchenwald to his radio audience: “Permit me to tell you what you would have seen and heard had you been with me on Thursday. I will not be pleasant listening. If you are at lunch or if you have no appetite to hear what Germans have done, now is a good time to switch off the radio, for I propose to tell you of Buchenwald.” Why did Murrow feel it was important to give details? Was he being a responsible reporter in doing so? For additional information on liberation, see *Elements of Time*, pages 92-95.

→Leon Bass’s video testimony is available from the Facing History Resource Center and is described in *Elements of Time*, pages 82-90. For another account of liberation, see the portrait of Marcus Orr, an American soldier wounded while on reconnaissance at Dachau just before liberation, on pages 90-95. Also available from the Resource Center is Lewis Weinstein’s article, “The Liberation of Nazi Death Camps by the American Army – 1945: The Report of an Eyewitness.”

→The thirty-minute video *You Are Free* includes testimonies of Americans who witnessed the camps as well as survivors of those same camps. It provides an excellent overview of the confusing and troubling days that followed the end of the war. Leon Bass is among the witnesses featured in the documentary.

## NOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (HarperCollins, 1992), xi.
- <sup>2</sup> Albert Camus, *Notebooks*.
- <sup>3</sup> Cynthia Ozick, Prologue to *Rescuers: Portraits of Moral Courage in the Holocaust*, by Gay Block and Malka Drucker, (Holmes & Meier, 1992), xiii.
- <sup>4</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*.
- <sup>5</sup> Raul Hilberg, *The Documents of Destruction*, 148-149.
- <sup>6</sup> Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah*, 133, 134-135.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 142-144.
- <sup>8</sup> Quoted in Maciej Kozłowski, “The Mission That Failed: A Polish Courier Who Tried to Help the Jews” in *My Brother’s Keeper? Recent Polish Debates on the Holocaust*, ed. Antony Polonsky, (Routledge, 1990), 83.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-88..
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted in Leni Vahil, *The Holocaust* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 545.
- <sup>11</sup> Ervin Staub, *The Roots of Evil: The Origins of Genocide and Other Group Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 86-87.
- <sup>12</sup> Gordon I. Horwitz, *In the Shadow of Death: Living Outside the Gates of Mautkausen* (The Free Press, 1990), 59.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62.
- <sup>16</sup> Ruth Andreas-Friedrich, *Berlin Underground*, trans. Barrows Mussey, (Holt, 1947), 116-117.
- <sup>17</sup> Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 164.
- <sup>18</sup> Helmuth James von Moltke, *Letters to Freya, 1939-1945*, ed. and trans. Beate Ruhm von Oppen (Knopf, 1990), 155-156.
- <sup>19</sup> Helmuth James von Moltke, *Letters to Freya*,.160.
- <sup>20</sup> Helmuth James von Moltke, *Letters to Freya*, 175.
- <sup>21</sup> Quoted in *The Nazi Years*, ed. Joachim Remak, 170.
- <sup>22</sup> Friederich Reck-Malleczewen, *Diary of a Man in Despair*, trans. Paul Rubens, (Collier Books, 1970), 179-181.
- <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 195-196.
- <sup>24</sup> Based on information in Nathan Stoltzfus “Civil Disobedience and Mass Protest as Successful Resistance in Nazi Germany” (unpublished manuscript).
- <sup>25</sup> Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 422-423.
- <sup>26</sup> Christabel Bielenberg, *Christabel*, 111-115.
- <sup>27</sup> Nechama Tee, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi- Occupied Poland* (Oxford University Press, 1986),.54.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 176.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted in Daniel Goldman, “Is Altruism Inherited?” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, 12 April, 1985, 70.
- <sup>31</sup> Samuel and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (The Free Press, 1988), 142.
- <sup>32</sup> Marion Pritchard in *Courage to Care*, ed. C. Rittner and S. Myers, 29.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-33.
- <sup>35</sup> Samuel and Pearl Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, 170.
- <sup>36</sup> *Courage to Care*, ed. C. Rittner and S. Myers, 102.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>39</sup> Philip Hallie, “Major Julius Schmahling” in *Courage to Care*, ed. C. Rittner and S. Myers, 112-113; 114-115.
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas Keneally, *Schindler’s List* (Simon & Schuster, 1982), 129-130.

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- <sup>41</sup> Dorothy Rabinowitz, "An Army of Schindlers from Italy," *Wall Street Journal*, 22, December, 1993.
- <sup>42</sup> Leo Goldberger in *Courage to Care*, ed. C. Rittner and S. Myers, 92.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 93-95.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>45</sup> Victoria Barnett, *For the Soul of the People*, 153-154.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 132.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.
- <sup>49</sup> Quoted in Eva Fleischner, "Can the Few Become the Many? Some Catholics in France Who Saved Jews during the Holocaust" (Montclair State College, unpublished paper), 3.
- <sup>50</sup> Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-45* (Schocken, 1973), 435.
- <sup>51</sup> John T. Pawlikowski, "The Vatican and the Holocaust: Unresolved Issues" (Unpublished paper, Catholic Theological Union), 6-7.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> Quoted in Pierre Joffroy, *A Spy for God: The Ordeal of Kurt Gerstein*, trans. Norman Denny, (Harcourt Brace, 1969), 174.
- <sup>54</sup> John Carroll, "The Pope Owes Israel a Confession," *Boston Globe*, 23, November, 1993, op. ed.
- <sup>55</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life*, 164.
- <sup>56</sup> Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*, trans. D. and M. Paul, (Holocaust Library, 1981), 58-59.
- <sup>57</sup> Quoted in Harvey Rosenfeld, *Raoul Wallenberg* (Prometheus, 1982), 58.
- <sup>58</sup> Quoted in Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest*, 161.
- <sup>59</sup> Liv Ullman, *Choices* (Alfred Knopf, 1984), 104-105.
- <sup>60</sup> Lewis Weinstein, "The Liberation of Nazi Death Camps by the American Army – 1945" (Unpublished paper, 1985).
- <sup>61</sup> Dwight Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Doubleday, 1948), 408-409.
- <sup>62</sup> Quoted in *Elements of Time* (Facing History and Ourselves, 1989), 83-84.
- <sup>63</sup> Sonia Weitz, *Elements of Time*, 87.