

Conspiracy of Goodness: An Untold Story

by Harold M. Schulweis

Forty years after the volcanic earth quake that shook the foundation of Jewish trust, the temblors continue. In recent years, evidence has filtered down of betrayals and the abandonment of Jews by prelates, princes and presidents.

Can any people so brutally terrorized emerged unscathed, remain calm, altogether normal, after absorbing so massive a psychic trauma? The body count of those murdered—two out of every five Jews on earth, the wasting of 90 percent of our people, included 1.5 million Jewish children.

We are a people with an unconditional anger and we must understand and master that anger. This requires double wisdom—to hold on, lest we betray the past; to let go lest we murder the future.

We owe our children Jewish affirmation, the real possibilities of a healthier society. We owe them the nurture of basic trust.

We must not hold back the reality of anti-Semitism nor the need to fight vigilantly against it. I advocate no Pollyanna optimism. We and our children must know the history of Christian contempt for Jews the persecutions, inquisitions and curses, the outrageous silence of the church during the Holocaust.

But our knowledge must not remain stranded in stagnant water. Jewish historians and educators must be encouraged to rescue from oblivion the tragic neglect of uncounted, unknown, unsung gentiles who risked their lives and those of their families to protect Jews during the Nazi era.

It is a matter of no small consequence that experts on Holocaust history report that the overall topic of Jewish-Christian relationships during the war has not been researched nor studied. Why are we denied that healing knowledge?

Ask our children if they know the names of the Christian families who hid Anne Frank? Do they know the loving heroism of Alexander Rozlan and Herman Graebe, Mother Maria of Paris, Father Bernard Lichtenberg, Pastor Trochme and the villagers of Le Chambon who were responsible for the rescue of thousands in Nazi-occupied France? Have they heard of the courage of the Portuguese consul Aristides de Sousa Mendes who saved 10,000 Jews: the Italian Army's rescue of thousands of Croatian and Yugoslav Jews; the sewer workers of Lvov in Poland, who hid 17 Jews for more than a year. Why should our children hear only curses of our predators and not the blessing of the rescuers?

There are always too few righteous but truth be told, we do not know how many there were. There has been no active, systematic search for the rescuers who were in every country occupied by the Nazis.

Once, when I spoke of the "conspiracy of evil: a Dutch rescuer asked me why I never spoke of the "conspiracy of goodness:"

"Do you think," he asked, "I could hide Jewish families in my home without the active cooperation of the mailman, the milkman, the neighbors? For every one saved, there were seven who rescued. There was a conspiracy of goodness."

These Christian heroes are the clearest refutation of the alibi that there was no alternative to passive complicity with the persecutors. They showed that there was something to be said and done. All our children—Jewish and Christian—deserve to know of these men and women.

We are obligated to help those who are still alive, many living pauperized lives, pariahs of their own society, regarded as traitorous "Jew lovers." Memory requires that they be actively searched out and their waning years be lived out with dignity.

Quite properly, we hunt down the predatory criminals and their collaborators to bring them to justice. We also need to find the rescuers and to record their lives. We should visit them, adopt them as they adopted our frightened children and parents. Their behavior may help us face the mirror of our interior selves.

Foundation Joins ADL

The Foundation to Sustain Righteous Christians, an educational and philanthropic project to acknowledge non-Jews who helped rescue Jews from Nazi persecution, has become part of ADL's International Center for Holocaust Studies. Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis is the founding chairman.

The Foundation will hold conferences with Christian and Jewish theologians and educators and publish materials on the acts and implications of non-Jewish rescue efforts; develop school curricula and maintain a speakers bureau on the subject, and continue honoring non-Jewish rescuers with ADL "Courage to Care" awards at Holocaust remembrance ceremonies on Yom Ha'Shoah and other times during the year.

Two such awards have been made during 1987: to Miep and Jan Gies, who helped to shelter Anne Frank's family and to the late Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul who saved 10,000 Jews.

In addition the Foundation hopes to raise funds for non-Jewish rescuers in need of financial assistance and to provide a network of social support services.