

AN APPEAL TO SOCIAL SCIENTISTS: TO STUDY GOOD MEN AND WOMEN

by Harold M. Schulweis

Zivilcourage was not abundant in Nazi Germany and in the Nazi dominated countries of Europe, but it did exist and, perhaps, to a greater extent than one would expect. The evidence steadily mounts of an unknown number of silent heroes who risked their lives and jeopardized the lives of their families to save our people. There is far too small body of literature about the altruistic character of "righteous Christians" during the Holocaust years. One must credit Philip Friedman and Kurt Grossman as two pioneers of this crucial aspect of Holocaust historiography. I have read documents and heard from Jews who were rescued by non-Jews: athiests, agnostics, Christians, peasants, farmers, businessmen, priests and ministers, women, maid servants. These were human beings who protected, fed and clothed and hid Jews, hiding them in bunkers, attics, cellars, ovens, couches, stables, cowsheds, pigsties, cemetery graves, open fields. These were men and women, some raised in hostile anti-semitic environments, who lived in fear of their neighbors and the Nazi hunters. These were people who forged identification papers, visas, who helped Jews escape to freedom, who smuggled small arms to the Ghetto fighters.

How do you, hiding Jews, buy provisions for extra mouths to feed without arousing the suspicion of neighbors or the Nazis? How do you find clothing for them or dispose of their refuse without detection? How do you keep a hidden child from getting sick? How do you keep a little one from crying-when every cry means discovery and death? The late Philip Friedman in his pioneering work, Their Brother's Keepers, records that in 1946 the Jewish Committee of Bialystok aided 180 Christian families who were being persecuted by Rightist groups because of their generosity to Jews during the Nazi years. The Polish beggar, Karol Kicinski, bidding good-bye to two Jews he had hidden in his place, pleaded with them: "Please don't tell anyone I saved you; I fear for my life."

Alexander Roslan, his wife and daughter, a Christian Polish family, hid three small Jewish children, for three years. When German soldiers searched their home, the Roslans served them wine and whiskey, making them drunk enough to forget the reason for their search. Out of fear of informers, they moved from place to place; and, in moving, hid the children in odd places, one in a couch which they punctured with holes to help him breathe. At the end of the war one of the surviving children, Jacob Gilat, was sent to Israel and the Roslan family to a camp for the displaced in Frankfurt, Germany. Twenty years elapsed and all contact between the two had been lost. Jacob Gilat, now an atomic scientist, was sent to Oak Ridge by the Israeli government to do research. Here, after endless inquiries, he found the Roslans living in Queens, Long Island. Alexander Roslan and his family cried with pride-their "son," Jacob, had become a leading scientist. Jacob cried. His "family" was alive and well.

Herman Graebe now lives in San Francisco. As a German civilian contractor, he followed the German forces in Russia building railroads, roundhouses, and other structures. He learned of a pogrom in Rovno where 5000 people were rounded up and murdered, and he tells of his concern for what his son might some day ask him: "What did you do when people were in danger?" He knew what he had to do then and there to be able to answer his son. He requisitioned Jews for work details, and then established an underground escape route fashioned around a fictional branch office in Poltava, in the Ukraine. He was as much in jeopardy as those he rescued.

These are two families I have known well. Their experiences record a small part of unnumbered episodes of self-sacrificing rescue behavior. Their acts of righteousness were not impulsive, solitary gestures, but involved sustained commitment over long periods of time and entailed incredible risks.

In every country contaminated by the Nazis, there was such godliness to be found. The philosopher Woodbridge wrote that "there are times when a man ought to be more afraid of living than of dying." These heroes possessed the heroism of that fear.

Morale After Treblinka

How is it that we know the names of Eichmann and Rosenberg and not the names of Demiter Peshev and Archbishop Jules Saliege? How is it that the names whose memory is sworn to be wiped out are remembered but not the names of those who hid Anne Frank and her family and friends? Why are the names Kraler and Koophius unsung? Peshev, the Vice President of the Sobranie parliament of Bulgaria, stood up to the authorities and countermanded the deportation of the Jews of Bulgaria. He, and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, and the Bulgarian masses who crowded the railroad station, the depot for deportation, played a sacred role in saving the lives of 50,000 Bulgarian Jews.

Archbishop Jules Saliege of Tolouse on August 23, 1942, dared to circulate a pastoral letter to his diocese which enraged the Nazi occupiers of France. He wrote to this Christian flock:

"Alas, it has been destined for us to witness the dreadful spectacle of children, women and old men treated like vile beasts;-of families being torn apart and deported to unknown places...Pray for France, Our Lady. In our diocese scenes of horror have taken place in the camps of Noe and Recebedan. Jews are men. Jews are women. Not everything is permissible against them, against these men and women, against these fathers and mothers of families. They form part of the human race. They are brethren like many others. A Christian cannot forget that; France, beloved Motherland, France who carries in the conscience of all her children the tradition of respect for the human person, chivalrous and generous France. I have no doubt you are not responsible."

For Jews who feel the mandate to recount the Holocaust years, non-Jewish self-sacrifice is of utmost importance. The acts of these hasidai umot ha-olam (righteous non-Jews) lend a needed dimension to the records of atrocity. We are susceptible to the curse of "the eternal hatred" for "the eternal people." That malediction must be broken. It is an imprecation which tears apart our future into "they and us." They, the whole world, against us, their eternal victims.

We must for the sake of our sanity make use of history to restore a sense of balance, to provide some moral symmetry. Memory can be healing, but it requires skillful uses of materials at hand. On the festive eve of Passover, we eat "maror" the bitter herbs, dipped into the sweet mixture of "charoset." The hard bread of affliction is not avoided, but neither are the cups of wine which make the heart to rejoice.

For non-Jews, knowledge of the conduct and behavior of their contemporaries who rescued is no less essential. Those who may turn a deaf ear to accusation and villainy are more apt to pay attention to accounts of heroism.' They will be justifiably proud of such nobility of character in rescue behavior as we are proud of Jewish heroism. They may even seek to identify with such heroes and such acts. For those who acknowledge the existence of heroism must also admit to the existence of atrocity. There are no heroes without villains. There are no rescuers without hunters. There is no Kurt Gerstein, no Raoul Wallenberg, no Eduardo Focherini without Nazi S.S. men and gas chambers. There is no Anna Simiate, the Lithuanian librarian of Vilna who entered the Jewish Ghetto, obtained forged Aryan papers for Jews, carried food, small arms and ammunition for the Ghetto dwellers without Nazi Gauleiter, the Gestapo which starved and beat her, the spectators who informed against her.

Who can hear the voice of the nun and poet Mother Maria, who rescued Jewish children in Nazi-occupied France, and for that crime was sent to Ravensbrueck where she exchanged her precious Aryan identification papers with a Jewish woman chosen for the gas chambers--who can hear Mother Maria's voice without hearing the hoarse screams of her violators?

Whitewash?

Obviously, discovery of these righteous ones will not and cannot exonerate the guilt of those who stood idly by. To the contrary, these rescuers offer the most persuasive refutation of those who hide behind the shield of "I was just a cog in the wheel." There was and always is an alternative to complicity with evil. Here are case histories of human beings who could find ample rationale to avert their eyes and plead impotence, but who could not live the lie.

Wisdom, faith, truth urge us to know, record and hallow these acts of the righteous.

How Many?

Do the number of non-Jewish heroes involved in such rescue behavior during the Nazi period warrant such documentation and study? No one knows or will ever know the extent of rescue activity until a thorough search is made. Altruism, courage, moral heroism are generally rare. Is moral heroism because of its rarity not to be honored? For the sake of 36 righteous, the world is sustained; for the sake of 30 righteous non-Jews, the Talmud declares, the nations of the world continue to exist; for the sake of 10 good men, Sodom and Gemorrah would have been spared; and for the sake of two righteous women--Naomi and Ruth-- the rabbis say, the nations of Moab and Ammon were spared.

What of the purity of the motives? Do we know the motivations of the altruistic personality? The behavioral sciences have long studied the bigot, the twisted soul filled with hostility, the authoritarian personality, the anti-Semite, anti-Negro, anti-Catholic. But no comparable empirical study has been done for the altruistic personality. That is a tragic oversight. The systematic study of rescue behavior during the Nazi years provides a unique opportunity to understand the altruistic conscience. Is there a typology of the altruistic personality to be discovered? The knowledge derived from such an investigation may well prove indispensable for the training of moral character.

Why is evil behavior considered a legitimate field for study and not that of benevolent conduct? The absence of such studies amidst a plethora of Holocaust commissions and institutions may perhaps be traced to a bias whose roots are found in many traditions--among the Greek sophists (Calicles, Thrasymachus) in the Augustinian view of man "foul and crooked, sordid, bespotted and ulcerous"; in the counsel of Machiavelli; in the suspicion of Hobbes to whom man in his natural state remains "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short..."; in the savage optimism of Nietzsche and the chronic pessimism of Schopenhauer.

In more recent times, it is Freud to whom appeal is made for this pessimistic view of man's nature. In Freud's genetic thinking, the predatory origins of man's personality are taken as natural instincts, while all benevolence is contrived and artificial. In his *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud writes,

"The bit of truth behind all this--one so eagerly denied--is that men are not gentle, friendly creatures wishing for love...but that a powerful desire for aggression has to be reckoned as part of their instinctual endowment. The result is that their neighbor is to them not only a possible helper or sexual object, but also a temptation to them to gratify their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to

torture and to kill him. Homo homini lupus—who has the courage to dispute it in the face of all the evidence in his own life and in history?"

According to Freud, hostile and aggressive behavior flows from man's natural instincts, while love, compassion, self-sacrifice, altruism are so many masks of repression, forms of cultural hypocrisy. All moral aspirations are regarded as duplicitous diversions of the original instincts of man. Those who wish to draw moral conclusion from this Freudian scenario employ a genetic fallacy: the features of early man are regarded as revealing his true nature. But we believe that the line between nature and "second nature" is wrongly drawn when the social character of man's being is rendered out of bounds of his real nature. It is as if we are shown a snapshot of a baby and then informed that "this is the man," this and no more. This interpretation of Freud, carried into the field of morality, implies: Scratch an altruistic act and you will find lurking there a base motive. But this bias is as legitimate as its converse form: Scratch an evil act and you will find love frustrated as its motive. Both are reductive fallacies which seek one cause for all the varieties of human behavior.

Both the metapsychology of pessimism and of optimism err alike by obliterating real, moral distinctions. A totalitarian egoism allows no intelligible opposite to selfish acts. Saint and sinner--Anna Simiate, the rescuer, and Eichman, the hanger man--are ultimately of one ilk. An omnivorous altruism may similarly destroy all distinctions of right and wrong.

It may even be the case that altruism threatens us more than evil. The acts of good men and women show us what should be done, what could be done and point not alone to those who perpetrated the villainy but to the spectators, the on-lookers who only clucked their tongues.

Studies of the altruistic personality are needed. That motives are mixed, that egoistic and altruistic acts and motives may prove quite compatible, ought not to be denied. Hillel's brilliant aphorism fully understood our ambidextrous ego: "If I am not for myself who will be for me?" is followed by "but if I am for myself alone, what am I?"

One of the rabbinic sages teaches that "any affliction in which Israel and the nations of the world share is a genuine affliction." The philosophical despair with man is universal. Zarathrustra announced God's death; and the Nazis, that man is dead. Both heresies must be countered with evidence of the divine in our lives.

The world is hungry for moral heroes. For it has seen strength in villains alone. The world needs heroes of altruism, models of exemplary behavior who translate our abstract ideals into deeds to be emulated.

It is not strange that Jews should be concerned with lifting up the lot of all men. The particularism of Judaism knows itself compatible with universalism. It insists that from out of the matrix of their people's experience Jews are energized to think and act for humanity. Jews are called upon to tap the moral energy of Judaism for the sake of the world. They who know man's capacity to destroy can bear witness to his capacity to save. They who have seen such horror have in the darkness caught a glimpse of man's humanity. They are to be agents creating conditions for a better future--not slaves of history. They know how to use history to break the bonds of historic fatalism. They select and assign moral weight upon events which may be lost in the record of quantitative history. For Jewish faith is not in what has happened, but in what may yet be.