

AN APPEAL TO JEWISH SURVIVORS OF THE HOLOCAUST

by Harold M. Schulweis

To whatever audience we speak about the Christian Rescuers who risked life and limb to protect our hunted people in every country the Nazis occupied, Jewish survivors come forth to offer witness to their heroism. Some tell of being hidden in attics, cellars, stables, open fields; some of being fed and clothed and cared for during their illness; some of being given forged identification papers to escape the predators. The degree of risk, the duration of the rescue, the level of cooperation with neighbors, the number of Jews saved, the motivations of the acts vary--but they are all testimonies of acts of righteousness for people outside the circle of their faith.

Many survivors have lost contact with their Rescuers. While some communicate with them, not a few have sought to put that chapter behind them. They fear that to awaken that memory of those days will raise the nightmares they seek to bury. Understandably they seek a moratorium from those traumatic years. Yet, all of them seek ways to express their gratitude. The Rescuers of these Jews came from people not of the Jewish faith, who chose to act against the common grain of narrow self-interest. The heroism of their acts was not casual or impulsive. They were life and death decisions involving their families and requiring more than a short term commitment.

Tragically, many of these non-Jewish Rescuers who survived the

war years were not and are not regarded as heroes by their fellow countrymen. On the contrary, they were harassed and vilified as traitors and "Jew-lovers". Harmine Graebe's son was taunted by his playmates once the revelation of his parents' saving of Jews became known. The Polish beggar, Karol Kicinski, bidding goodbye to two Jews he had hidden in place, pleaded with them "Please do not tell I saved you. I fear for my life." The late Philip Friedman, in his pioneering study Their Brother's Keeper, reported that 180 Christian families were being persecuted by rightist groups in Bialystock after the war for their generosity to Jews during the Hitler year.

Today, four decades after the Holocaust, the rescuers live all over the world and in a variety of circumstances. Scattered reports inform us that many are living out their lives unbefriended, alone, in poor health and in dire economic circumstances. We have a moral mandate to lend dignity to the remaining life of these extraordinary human beings who would not join those who found reasons not to help. Jews have a unique stake in this witness. Surviving Jews possess a double memory: one of unspeakable evil and of incredible good. No scale can balance the two. Who can measure the quality of goodness against that of evil? The evil must be pursued and raised to high honor. Goodness must be rewarded in this world for the sake of the rescuers and the survivors, for their children and our own. Those who protected our family during the years of unspeakable atrocity must be protected by us from poverty and neglect in our times. They must know that

they are not alone.

The Foundation appeals to survivors who know of such men and women to come forth and testify, to tell us where the rescuers may be reached so that we may help them in their waning years. We appeal to "parnasim", supporters who can help the JEWISH FOUNDATION FOR CHRISTIAN RESCUERS, either by financial contribution and/or by serving as friends who will make contact with the rescuers. The tragedy of the Holocaust cannot be reversed. What remains to be done is to raise the sparks of human decency out of the impenetrable darkness. There is an obligation to recognize goodness, not just with rhetoric, but through deeds of loving kindness. The Foundation is an expression of Jewish gratitude to Christians who acted with exceptional courage to save Jewish children and adults from the ravages of Nazi madness. Such human altruism must not be forgotten.

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