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11-1-2013

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Alice L. Eckardt  
*Lehigh University*

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## “The 20<sup>th</sup> Century Crosses the Line into Genocide: Armenians and Jews”

Alice L. Eckardt

(Nov. 1, 2013. Penn State-Lehigh Valley)

### Introduction:

The word “genocide” was created in 1944 by Rafael Lemkin to apply to “the deliberate and systematic extermination of a national, racial, political, or cultural group.” It was adopted by the United Nations, and has been used by scholars ever since.

The word *holocaust* has a more extensive history and *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* gives four definitions:

- 1) A sacrifice completely by fire, a burnt offering in ancient and biblical times.
- 2) A great or complete devastation or destruction, especially by fire. (Both of these definitions spell the word with a small “h”. *Consider to what extent either of these definitions may be applicable to the Nazi destruction program.*)
- 3) A systematic mass slaughter of European Jews in Nazi death camps during World War II. (Spelled with a capital “H” for this specific event)
- 4) Any mass slaughter or reckless destruction of life. (a more general definition)

(The first two meanings apply to the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the *Septuagint*, the oldest Greek version done by Jewish scholars about 70-72 CE at the request of Ptolemy II; and to the Latin translation of the Bible by Saint Jerome at end of late 4<sup>th</sup> century, known as the Vulgate.)

A noted Israeli historical scholar, especially of the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer, sees genocide as the step prior to Holocaust, but he sees the Armenian massacres as fitting the term Holocaust. (*A History of the Holocaust*, 1982) Whereas an Armenian historian, Vahakn Dadrian, consistently uses the term genocide to apply to the Armenian massacres.

We’re dealing with two big chunks of history, hence there is only so much that can be said. After we look at the actualities we will do some comparing and contrasting.

### I. The Armenian Genocide:

The wholesale destruction of the Armenian Christian minority population of the Ottoman Empire in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was the first mass killing of the modern era, carried out mostly in the midst of World War I in which the Ottoman Empire fought alongside Germany and Austria against the western Allies and Russia. Yet there were two significant precedents for these outrages –

in 1894-95 and in 1909 – when tens of thousands of Armenian Christians were ruthlessly slaughtered by the Sultan’s armed forces and by mobs of the Muslim populace. It is clear that a widespread predisposition to violence against this minority group already existed.

Why? The Armenians were members of the Christian faith which Islam claimed to replace, and were accordingly officially identified as second class citizens<sup>1</sup> – subordinates in the multi-national and multi-religious empire. The confluence of Islamic dogmas and martial traditions produced an inherent “spirit of belligerence” toward the minorities. The fact that the Armenians had done well in trades and businesses and were better off financially than many of their Muslim neighbors added to the latter’s hostility.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Young Turk party was seeking to turn the existing pluralistic, though preeminently Muslim, Empire into a unified nation of a single and homogeneous ethnic Turkic community. These Turkish national leaders were themselves not ardent Islamists but rather secular nationalists who set out deliberately to rid the country of its largely quiescent Armenian Christians. The First World War of 1914-1918 offered the opportunity to carry out a wholesale slaughter without worrying about outside interference.<sup>2</sup>

It began in April 1915 when the Young Turk regime began by arresting 254 Armenian intellectuals and civic leaders, particularly those in Constantinople, deporting them to distant provinces where, out of sight, nearly all were murdered by the authorities, some in the most horrible ways. In the next step, able-bodied Armenian men in cities, towns and villages were “called up” to serve in the Ottoman Army, but instead were placed in unarmed labor battalions<sup>3</sup>, from which they were removed in batches and murdered in hidden locations. In Eastern

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<sup>1</sup> This classification required that they pay a second tax, but there were additional factors in their subservient position.

<sup>2</sup> Even after the war, in 1920, and 1922 (in Smyrna) Turkey carried out further killings of Armenian Christians with none of the Allied victors of the war interceding. Greek Orthodox Christians along the southern Turkish coast became additional victims of the Turks in this period.

<sup>3</sup> In World War II the Hungarian Army used Jews as unarmed labor units which were sent ahead of the Army to uncover hidden mines in the fields by stepping on them.

Turkey, near the border with Russia, the Armenian community, including those in the Turkish Army, were executed. And additional groups of men and boys were snatched from deportation caravans and killed on orders of Young Turk officials or their representatives.

Then it was the turn of women and children. The reports of the atrocities carried out during these lengthy marches are more than one can take in. Along the way women were repeatedly raped, and some women's abdomens were slashed open. When the Turkish guards decided to have some sport, they randomly chose four women and one teen age girl, tied them to stakes, and then took turns riding quickly by and beheading them, one at a time. At other times they crucified some, and impaled others on stakes. Children were sometimes thrown into ditches and covered with dirt or sand to smother them, or thrown into rivers. In one deportation of 12,000 only about 1,000 survived. Then at the end of the march in a desert area any survivors were abandoned without shelter, food, or water.<sup>4</sup> Much of this operation was carried out in full view of the people.

Thus a total of about one million were slaughtered outright, and 500,000 died of disease or starvation. Other numbers of the people managed to flee in one direction or another, and became, like the Jews, a scattered people.<sup>5</sup> Still, in the aftermath of World War I, from 1920 through 1922, atrocities and killings of Armenians continued with no interference from the outside world.

An Armenian first-hand account of this World War I genocide and its aftermath, as well as of the earlier ones of 1894-95 and 1909, by Abraham Hartunian<sup>6</sup> who became a Protestant minister, is particularly horrifying because it makes vividly clear the helplessness of his people and himself. They had no way to turn; no one from whom to ask help. Only in the eastern city of Van in 1915 could they offer armed resistance – until they ran out of ammunition and paid the consequences.

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<sup>4</sup> The recent novel *The Sandcastle Girls* by Chris Bohjalian focuses on this part of the Armenian genocide.

<sup>5</sup> A small state of Soviet Armenia was set up on part of the ancient homeland in 1922. In 1991 an independent Armenia came into being with the dissolution of the USSR.

<sup>6</sup> Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep*, 1968 &1976.

Many foreign businessmen and governmental representatives (including the American ambassador Henry Morgenthau, Jr.) witnessed what was being done and in shock contacted their governments pleading for some kind of intervention. With the *New York Times* reporting and editorializing in some 145 accounts. Americans became informed and indignant and rallied to support the “starving Armenians.” But the western European nations were already heavily involved in the war, and Germany was allied with the Young Turks government. Some German engineers who were building a railroad line under a government contract were horrified. One wrote that “It is a level of barbarism that is unimaginable outside of literature.” But they were helpless to do anything. A few men tried to produce evidence by taking photographs of the caravans of women and children, but when they were discovered doing so their photographic material and equipment was destroyed.

Henry Morgenthau appealed to Enver Pasha, one of the government’s leaders, that he intervene, saying he realized the Central Government was not responsible for the killings. But Enver immediately cut him off by saying that he accepted full responsibility for everything that had taken place. Indeed, he said, “the Cabinet itself has ordered the deportations. . . . we are completely justified in doing this owing to the hostile attitude of the Armenians toward the Ottoman Government.”<sup>7</sup> Morgenthau’s pleas for American intervention met with no success.<sup>8</sup>

One newspaper wrote that to most British leaders “Armenia [is] a word of horror, carrying the memory of deeds not done in the world since Christ was born....” Frustrated by being unable to do anything the Allied Governments jointly warned the Sultan’s government that they would hold “all members of the Turkish Government, as well as those officials who have participated in these massacres, personally responsible.” Unfortunately this promise was not kept; even worse, these powers ignored the killings perpetrated in 1920-1922.

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<sup>7</sup> Dadrian, . . . *Genocide*, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> Some 30 years later, during World War II, Morgenthau made some efforts to get the U.S. government (in which he was Secretary of the Treasury) to offer some belated refuge to Hitler’s Jewish victims. (Dadrian, . . . *Genocide*, p. 261.) Writing about the the terrible situation Jews were in, he castigated the State Department for not only doing nothing but also for suppressing information about the atrocities. ( Nora Levin, *The Holocaust*, p. 669)

Armenian survivors of this genocide and their offspring have been made victims again by their inability to get even an acknowledgment from Turkey of its crimes against their people.

## **II. The Holocaust or *Shoah*:**

Over many centuries of the Christian era anti-Judaism was a deeply rooted and integral part of Christian theology and teachings despite or because of the Jewish origins of the faith. This was particularly true in Europe, though early theologians in the East (in western Asia, Eastern Europe, and North Africa) produced many of these early century writings which were fraught with denunciations of the Jewish people. As a result, antisemitism with its many horrors became an all-too evident factor in Jewish life. By the medieval period it had become much worse and led to expulsions of Jews from numbers of countries (though not all at the same time), with wild accusations and beliefs such as that Jews kidnapped and used the blood of a Christian boy to make their Passover matzos, and to executions of all Jews in a town. But by the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries it had seemed to many to be a thing of the past.

However, the long-established anti-Judaism and antisemitism, now accompanied by new racial theories – including those of modern geneticists – provided roots for Hitler's and the National Socialists' resurrected and deadly version of hatred of Jews. In the years between 1933 (when Hitler first joined and then dominated the German government) and 1939 when World War II began with the attack on Poland the Third Reich publicly excoriated Jews over and over as a demonic "race" intent on gaining control of whatever nation in which they resided. The Nazis immediately began the process of segregating Jews from the rest of the nation by depriving them progressively of political positions, ownership of businesses, the right to vote, the right to use public parks, public transportation, public schools or theaters. Radios could not be owned; identity cards had to be marked with a "J" and every Jew had to bear a prescribed Jewish first name: Israel or Sarah. Intermarriage and sexual intercourse with "Aryan" Germans were forbidden. And every stage in this process was accompanied by a great deal of physical, as well as emotional, damage.

As with the Armenians in Turkey, the outbreak of war, in this case World War II, offered Hitler partial cover for his more radical measures. This began after the military assault on Poland on September 1, 1939, following the signing of a Non-Aggression Treaty with the Soviet Union (on Aug. 23). The military attack was overwhelming and merciless, with deliberate massacres of the civilian Polish population preceding and then accompanying barbaric outrages against Jewish

communities by both the Wehrmacht and the SS (*Schutzstaffeln*). Hitler's aim was to totally destroy Poland. By the end of December an estimated 250,000 Polish Jews had been killed by shootings, starvation, or disease.<sup>9</sup>

Then the Third Reich turned its military might against the nations west of Germany (including the air war intended to bring Great Britain to submission). Once those countries had been defeated, North Africa became the target along with more of Eastern Europe, and finally, in June 1941, the Third Reich attacked the Soviet Union. Hitler wanted its vast land mass and rich resources, especially oil.

In the early years Hitler had opened concentration camps, initially for any opponents of his policies, especially Social Democrats, Socialists and Communists. Jews became the next targets. With the attack on Poland the initial targets were political leaders and Catholic priests, and then the Jewish people. But with the spread of war Jews became the major targets and six special death camps<sup>10</sup> were opened predominantly for them.

With the attack on the USSR the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question" was given a primary place in Hitler's plans, and special units of *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) moved right behind the Army to round up and kill all Jews.<sup>11</sup> And the Army itself became (despite its initial reserve) directly involved in the actions.

The United States did not become involved in this massive war until Japan attacked our Navy and Air Forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in Dec. 1941.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. State Department was, unfortunately, under the aegis of a number of

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<sup>9</sup> Nora Levin, *The Holocaust*, p. 149.

<sup>10</sup> Auschwitz (including Birkenau), Belzec, Chelmno, Sobibor, Treblinka, and Mauthausen. Only the latter was outside Poland, in Austria.

<sup>11</sup> Eastern Europe, particularly Poland and Russia, were where the masses of Jews lived.

<sup>12</sup> Japan had preceded Germany in attacking its neighbors, having earlier conquered Korea, and then invading China successfully. Strangely enough both the city of Shanghai, and then Japan itself became a haven for more than 10,000 Jewish refugees.

antisemites, particularly Breckinridge Long. Reasons put forward for not getting involved in the so-called Jewish problem included a shortage of shipping, the effects of the depression, strong “anti-alien” sentiments, and using the fear of the “Arab question” as a way of negating use of Palestine as a place of refuge for Jews.

A shockingly blatant action occurred in May of 1939 – before war began – when a German liner named the *St. Louis* left Hamburg with 967 Jewish refugees who had papers to enter Cuba. Thirty were allowed to disembark at Havana but the rest were refused by Cuba’s president. The ship then cruised off the U.S. coast, killing time, in hopes that the American government would offer a temporary haven for its passengers. But finally it had to return to Europe where England, France, Belgium, and Holland finally offered to accept the refugees.<sup>13</sup>

“The Allies collectively refused to acknowledge that Jews as Jews were being murdered.”<sup>14</sup> Even cables sent from Switzerland in 1942 which provided realistic facts and numbers of Jewish deaths were considered exaggerated (although in fact the numbers were considerably less than the reality). Not until 1944 was Secretary of State Henry Morgenthau able to get the American government to establish a place of refuge for 1,000 Jews in northern New York State. All of this helps explain why U.S. troops were totally unprepared when they came across the horribly overcrowded, under-maintained German concentration camps now overflowing with Jews who had been moved west from the Polish camps ahead of the Soviet troops’ advance.

### **III. Shared factors in the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust:**

Let’s look at some of the similarities in these two wholesale murderous onslaughts:

First, a negative ideology was created or enormously inflated about a specific group of people. At the same time a positive ideology was applied to one’s own people and nation.

Second, these negative views about the minority were utilized by those in power to pursue a program of persecution and death.

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<sup>13</sup> This was not the only such happening: Three other ships with 200 Jewish passengers were rejected by Paraguay and Argentina; Mexico turned away a French ship with 104, and Cuba rejected a British ship with 72 Jewish passengers.

<sup>14</sup>Levin, pp. 140-41, 669.



Third, a process of separation and segregation was utilized to remove the chosen victims from the general public, and to prevent public knowledge of actions taken against the victims becoming widely known. (This was less true for the Ottoman Empire than the Third Reich.)

Fourth, in the destruction process men were generally separated from women and children. In Turkey each group was treated somewhat differently, and often at different times (with men the first target), though not less cruelly or murderously. Under the Third Reich women and their offspring were recognized as the essential ones to kill so that no more Jews would be born to replace those slaughtered.

Fifth, both genocides were the inventions of radical parties which could claim wide popular support and which quickly established totalitarian dictatorships. Both targeted peoples were trapped and had nowhere to go, and almost no one to whom to turn to for help. Most had no means of resistance (as guns or other weapons were denied to them by law). Spiritual and moral resistance was almost all they could do. (Yet there some exceptions in both cases.)

Should the post-war trials be included in this list of similarities? Even Turkey initially held some trials right after World War I; however, the accused had fled the country and therefore could not be punished. When they later returned and were put in power once again they continued their previous policies, ignoring the atrocities.

In post-war Germany the most significant trials were those held by the international victorious powers of those at high levels in the Reich government and Party. But the huge number of active participants at lower levels largely escaped legal judgment for their actions by the subsequent West German courts.

There were other similarities in the two genocides as well – as seen in the five categories of active participants:

The Chief Head(s) of State determined all actions.

– Talat, the Turkish Party chief and Minister of the Interior, and Enver, Minister of War, utilized the new telegraphic apparatuses set up in their homes to issue clandestine orders and instructions regarding the real intention of the “deportations”: i.e., massacre.<sup>15</sup> One of Talat’s telegrams reminded officials that

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<sup>15</sup> Dadrian, . . . *Genocide*, p. 384.

“the Government by order of the Ittihad Committee had decided to destroy completely all Armenians living in Turkey. . . . An end must be put to their existence, however criminal the measures taken may be, and no regard must be paid to either age or sex, nor to conscientious scruples.”<sup>16</sup>

- Adolf Hitler of course was the ultimate determinant of any significant decision for the Third Reich. Heinrich Himmler was given the job of getting rid of the Jews. It is interesting to note that he told his top SS leaders that what they were doing and must do was not something that they could ever boast about publicly, but they all knew it must be done.

The Military were the all-important forces in the wars and came to be in the killings.

- During World War I Armenian deportations and the use of “severe” measures against those in the labor battalions appears to have been initiated by the German General Bronsart. He compared Armenians to the Jews as “parasites outside the confines of [their] homeland, sucking the marrow of the people of the host country.”<sup>17</sup>

- The Reich’s generals capitulated to Hitler’s insistence and, along with the Nazi SS, carried out killing operations on the Eastern Front.

Special units were created for special tasks.

– The Turks released prisoners and used them for massacre duties in “The Special Organization” created for this purpose.<sup>18</sup>

- The *Einsatzgruppen* were four special killing units<sup>19</sup> assigned to follow right behind the Army in Eastern Europe and kill tens of thousands of Jews.

Collaborators were to be found everywhere.

– By remaining silent during the Turks’ killing of Armenians during 1894-96 Germans were incidental collaborators. But a German “political pastor” (Friedrich Naumann) justified Kaiser William II’s insistence on “political indifference” to the sufferings of Armenian Christians since the “Armenocide” was the “Asian” way of handling the country’s “internal affairs” and was “the lesser of evils in the overall

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Vigen Guroian, “A Comparison of the Armenian and Jewish Genocides: Some Common Features,” *Thought* 58, 229 (June 1983), p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> Dadrian, op. cit, pp. 256-57.

<sup>18</sup> Dadrian, op. cit., p. 324.

<sup>19</sup> The men in these units were ordinary, neither released prisoners nor committed antisemites.

picture.”<sup>20</sup>

- During the 1915 massacres of Armenians 32 German and Austrian agents were spying on Armenians and reporting to the Sultan.<sup>21</sup>

- During World War II German railroad workers regularly collaborated by scheduling the deportation trains carrying Jews to the death camps while still giving priority to the military trains carrying German men, weapons, and wounded.

- And native individuals and units of German-occupied countries not only carried out their own killings but also informed on Jews who attempted to hide or pass as gentiles.

Bystanders were well aware of what was going on, and at times witnessed killing actions, but did nothing, not even offering sympathy.

Helpers and Rescuers are a totally different category.

- Israel celebrates the “Righteous of the Nations” in its Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem. Here individuals from any country who are proven to have done whatever they could to help Jews in some way during the Holocaust years are honored. And despite all we know about Polish participation in actions against Jews during the Nazi occupation, there are more Poles so identified and celebrated than of other nations.

- With regard to Turkey I have found little evidence of rescue or help known to have been given by the population to the Armenians, though Hartunian does cite a few instances when he was helped in small ways by someone he didn’t know. Nevertheless, there is much more evidence of negative involvement.

#### **IV. Accounts of Rescue and of Betrayal:**

Let’s consider some individual stories, some good and some bad.

From Armenia: Sometimes young children were taken in by Muslim families. Abraham Hartunian tells of one such small girl. The adoptee-father did everything he could to make her forget her parentage and give up her Christian faith. But she continued to speak Armenian, and to make the sign of the cross as she prayed – despite gifts and promises. So then he turned to punishment and imprisoning her in dark places, even shutting her in with a savage dog, only to find the next morning that the dog never touched her but lay with its head in her lap. The man

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<sup>20</sup> Dadrian, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup> Dadrian, pp. 96, 97.

then decided there would be no more troubling “the little prophetess.”<sup>22</sup>

In Poland: In 1942 as the ghettos were being emptied into the death camps a Polish Jew, Mr. Zborowski, went to a Polish Catholic, Mr. Placek, in the village of Zarki (not far from Auschwitz) and asked if the Catholic family would consider hiding his Jewish wife, two sons and a daughter (though not himself). The two men had only a slight acquaintance from a few years before the war when the Catholic man had worked on the small house being built for the Jewish family. The Jewish prospective owner regularly shared his lunch and vodka with the workers. In the new situation both men had to make very difficult decisions<sup>23</sup> – one to ask for help, one to answer that request – because they both knew that if the Jews were discovered there the Polish family would probably be executed along with the Jews. Nevertheless the Catholic couple decided it was the right Christian thing to do. And so for 18 months the Placzeks fed four extra people out of limited rations, secretly disposed of the body wastes (since the home had no indoor plumbing), and created two hiding places in their small home for use at times of Nazi searches. One worry was whether their very young daughter might inadvertently give away their secret.

In 1979 one of the sons who had been hidden there invited my husband and myself and another Christian to visit this family. We experienced at first hand the simple but very deep faith of the Placzeks, including the now adult daughter. At the same time we witnessed the hatred of their neighbors who glared at us over the fence during our visit.<sup>24</sup>

In Holland: A young woman walking down a street in Amsterdam witnessed the cruelty with which a Jewish orphanage was being emptied of its small inhabitants by Nazis. When two Dutch women tried to intervene over babies' being thrown into the truck they were summarily thrown in with them. At that moment the young woman decided she would do whatever she could to help save Jews from such

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<sup>22</sup> Abraham Hartunian, *Neither to Laugh nor to Weep*, 1968, p. 103.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding the moral and even theological or philosophical questions in making such decisions see Simon Wiesenthal's *The Sunflower* (two different editions) which deliberately raises these questions and offers varied answers by individuals of different faiths or perspectives.

<sup>24</sup> Over the subsequent years the Zborowskis kept in touch with the Placzeks and regularly sent clothing and funds to them.

atrocities. She joined some friends to secure hiding places, false papers, clothing, and food for them. When she was unable to find a place for a father with three very young children she moved into part of a house in a country village and took on their care. A small hiding place under the floor was created for use whenever Germans and a Dutch police accomplice came searching. After one of these searches the Dutch Nazi returned by himself and discovered the hidden Jews. What was the young woman to do? She took out a small revolver a friend had given her and shot the man; she felt she had little choice. But what to do with the body? If the Germans were to learn that he had been killed they would ruthlessly retaliate against the village. So she went to a local undertaker and explained her problem. He placed the body beneath another already in a coffin awaiting burial. Since all the villagers hated the Dutchman who betrayed their values, no one said anything.

In Germany: On the night of November 9/10, 1938 the Nazi pogrom known as *Kristallnacht* raged across the country as well as in recently annexed Austria and Sudeten Czechoslovakia. Synagogues were burned or otherwise destroyed along with their Torah scrolls and prayer books, apartments and homes of Jews were looted and smashed, hundreds of individuals were killed, and about 30,000 Jewish men were sent off to concentration camps. Before the following Sunday both Protestant and Catholic bishops instructed their clergy not to speak about these events from their pulpits as *it was not a matter of Christian concern*. Most clergy had been badly shaken by the gratuitous violence and destruction but they obeyed. However one village pastor, Julius von Jan, refused to be silenced and in his sermon asked, “Where in Germany is the prophet . . . to utter the word of the Lord? Where is the man . . . will cry like Jeremiah, ‘Maintain righteousness, rescue those deprived of their rights? Do no one violence; shed not the innocent blood.’ . . . God’s commandments [have been] disregarded, houses of God . . . razed to the ground without punishment. . . A dreadful seed of hate has been sown. A frightful harvest will grow out of it unless God . . . allows us and our people to show sincere repentance.”

Von Jan was severely and publicly whipped and then imprisoned for the rest of the war. Yet he did survive, and in 1945 he returned to his congregation.

In Slovakia: The head of state of this post-1939 puppet nation (carved out of Czechoslovakia) was a Catholic priest. When mass deportations of Jews to the murder camps was undertaken in 1944 Rabbi Weissmandel went to a priest and begged him to intercede with the government to stop the deportations, at least those of the innocent children. The priest refused the request saying, “There are

no innocent Jewish children. You are all guilty of the Lord's death, and unless you confess this and enter the Church, you will suffer these punishments deservedly."

In Vichy France: Soon after the Vichy regime was set up, Premier Laval's government prepared its own set of Jewish laws, modeled after those of the Third Reich. Then a state minister contacted the Vatican to inquire whether there would be any papal protest at the issuing of these laws; the reply was that the Holy See saw no problems.

In contrast, Protestant Pastor André Trocmé in eastern France rallied all of Le Chambon's villagers to offer shelter and help to anyone who came seeking it. Accordingly Le Chambon took in some 900 Jews (along with some other political refugees), hid and fed them, or helped some cross the border into Switzerland. (Some neighboring Protestant villages also provided aid, though none on the scale of Le Chambon.)

In Denmark almost everyone got involved in protecting their Jewish fellow countrymen. When word came that the German forces were about to arrest all of them, Jews were warned and hidden. Then Danish fishermen took them overnight to neutral Sweden. Those Jews who had been missed (about 500) and were sent to Nazi camps were sent packages of food and clothing by the Danes. Even government representatives visited to these camps to investigate their condition. Almost all were ultimately saved.

Again Poland: In Lvov an unlikely location for hiding and unlikely helpers enabled young Halina Wind and about ten other Jews to survive the ruthless "Final Solution." They went down into the city's sewers. Three Polish sewer workers discovered them and initially one of them demanded money for his help and silence. But he shortly abandoned his antisemitic attitudes and, risking his own life, helped them survive over 14 months. After the war and on Halina's initiative trees honoring him and another of his fellow rescuers were planted in Yad Vashem's "Garden of the Righteous."

Holland: Anne Frank's story of living in hiding with her family in Amsterdam for almost two years is so well known. But most have not have heard of the terrible conditions in which she existed, and died, near the end of the war. After their hideout had been betrayed the families spent a brief time in a transit camp where Anne rejoiced at being out in the open again and with other people. But then they were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau, followed by Anne and her sister Margo being

transferred to Bergen-Belsen where they both perished of typhoid.<sup>25</sup>

Italy's Primo Levi is another survivor story. After Mussolini had been killed by fellow Italians the German troops took over completely and sent Jews in Italian prison camps to the Polish death camps. Thus Levi ended up at Monowitz (adjacent to Auschwitz) with Wiesel, and like him survived and eventually returned home. He wrote quite a number of powerful books, but many years later, like a number of other Holocaust author-survivors, committed suicide.

Just a bit about Elie Wiesel. He and tens of thousands of Hungarian Jews were the last of the Jewish communities to be deported to the death camps. Elie's mother and young sisters were taken directly from the train to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. He and his father were sent to the adjacent work camp of Monowitz. His account of their ordeals, and his own questioning of his previously unshakable faith, is succinct; with the book's brevity heightening its impact. One day all of the camp inmates were forced to watch the hanging of two men and a young boy. The boy weighed so little that his neck was not broken when he dropped and so he very slowly strangled. Wiesel asked himself, "Where is God now?" and he answered, "He is there, hanging on that gallows."

## **V. Conclusion:**

Is there a conclusion to all of this? Or, as Wiesel himself asks, are the interminable questions what we must live with? We haven't touched on the rethinking of theology, mostly by Christians but some also by Jews, that has come about in the decades since the *Shoah*. While we can't tackle that subject now, there is something else that must be said. Almost alone among the nations Germany has deliberately turned from its past and has striven mightily to eliminate, or at least to keep under control, antisemitic hatred and actions. And the churches of Germany have worked whole-heartedly to rid themselves of anti-Judaism and antisemitism.<sup>26</sup> Even so, the Jewish communities in Germany

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<sup>25</sup> A book entitled *Anne Frank: The Last Train* [author?] details her time at the death camp and Bergen-Belsen where she died in February or March 1945. Perhaps loss of hope contributed to her death since she had been told that her father had died, though in fact he had actually been liberated and was still living.

Two other teen agers who wrote diaries and then perished were Eva Heyman in Hungary and Moshe Flinker in Belgium.

<sup>26</sup> The churches of Germany have issued more statements on the subject of Christian-Jewish relations in all their religious aspects than in any other

(mostly made up of immigrants from Eastern Europe) feel the need for police protection at their synagogues and community centers as there are still “enemies” around them. And France, with the largest remaining Jewish population of any European country, is a nation where Jews once again feel uncertain, where antisemitic actions once again occur. The very large Muslim presence in today’s France is one of the reasons for Jewish unease. In recent years a large number of Jews have emigrated to Israel.

And on the world scene, antisemitism is more prevalent than ever, with much of it focused on the Jewish state, Israel.

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country. At the same time many other churches in Europe, North America, South America, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand have struggled with rethinking their theology, especially in relation to Judaism. For a large collection from 1945 to 2013, see *Bridges: Documents of the Christian-Jewish Dialogue*, Vol. 1 (2011) & Vol II (2013), ed. Franklin Sherman (New York & Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press).