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## The Evangelical Understanding of the Holocaust

Since the 1970s, the evangelical rank and file have shown growing awareness of the suffering of Jews and others during the Second World War. Books relating to the Holocaust have become popular in evangelical circles, often in conjunction with other themes, such as the position of the Jews in God's plans for humanity and the moral and theological questions arising from the murder of millions of innocent people. Biographies, memoirs, and novels have been written to inform evangelical readers about the Nazi regime in Europe from 1933 to 1945, as well as to educate Christians on the meaning and purpose of the horrifying events that took place during those years and how they fit into the larger scheme of divine plans for human salvation. Such literature has further come to set standards for the proper behavior of Christians during trying times. The writings reassure evangelicals that true Christian believers had nothing to do with the persecution and annihilation of Jews and others and in fact went out of their way to protect such people from the Nazis. Evangelical literature has further pointed to the horrors of the Holocaust as a proof that all human beings need the Gospel and should accept Jesus Christ as their savior and follow in his footsteps, thereby assuring their status as righteous persons in this era as well as their spiritual and physical salvation for eternity.

### Evangelicals Discover the Holocaust

The evangelical interest in learning about what happened to the Jews during World War II and the wish to make sense of it morally and

spiritually corresponded in some ways to the relation of Western societies at large toward the Holocaust. From the late 1940s through the 1960s, most European and American Christians were reluctant to confront the horrors of the Nazi persecution and murder of the Jews.<sup>1</sup> Such interest, however, grew considerably during the 1970s and 1980s, coming to occupy an important place in Christian evangelical literature as well. During the 1970s and 1980s, evangelicals published biographies and autobiographies recounting real-life stories of both Jews and non-Jews who had suffered under the Nazi regime. Since the 1990s a new genre has taken over among evangelicals, and the representation of the Holocaust has moved to novels that reconstruct and interpret it through fictional characters and semi-imaginary events.

A major element in the evangelical understanding of the Holocaust has been the implicit claim that the evils and horrors of the Nazi regime were committed by non-Christians. True Christians, those who had undergone genuine conversions and established personal relationships with Jesus, would not, by definition, take part in such regimes and atrocities. In fact, Nazi transgressions were carried out by anti-Christians, even if nominally some or even many of them were members of churches. This outlook has not been based on a historical examination of the involvement or noninvolvement of Protestant groups with the Nazi regime in occupied Europe. The historical reality that many Protestant leaders and churches in Germany supported the regime has often been ignored by evangelical writers.<sup>2</sup> They have concentrated instead on the heroism of individual members of pietist or evangelical churches and have presented the actions of such outstanding persons as normative. Such literary constructions convey the message that true Christians behaved in a manner that demonstrated Christian ideals. Refusing to accept Nazi ideology or cooperate with Nazi actions, they went out of their way to protect and hide Jews, risking their own lives along the way. In evangelical narratives, good Christians and Jews have stood together against the Nazis.

## Exemplary Christians and the Rescue of Jews: *The Hiding Place*

The most popular evangelical book on the Holocaust has been *The Hiding Place*. Published in the early 1970s, it was widely circulated until, at the turn of the twenty-first century, it was overshadowed by the popularity of a new genre of evangelical literature on the same topic. The narrator-protagonist of *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom, had published her memoirs nearly twenty years earlier.<sup>3</sup> The evangelist Billy Graham recognized the book's potential as an instructive evangelical tract and invited the Dutch heroine to the United States to lecture on her experiences. Graham also sponsored a new version of her book, coauthored by John and Elizabeth Sherrill, two professional writers, and it immediately became popular among evangelicals. Millions of copies sold in America, translations were made into a number of languages, and a film was produced.<sup>4</sup>

*The Hiding Place* tells the story of the ten Booms, a devout Dutch Reformed family who operated a watch shop in the Dutch city of Haarlem. Two unmarried sisters, Corrie and Betsie, lived with their aging father above the shop. Following the Nazi occupation of Holland, when the persecution of Jews and others began, the ten Booms gave shelter to Jews and non-Jews who were hiding from the Nazis. The family became involved in a clandestine operation to hide Jews as well as Dutch youths who were evading Nazi forced labor. The book offers a vivid account of many aspects of the rescue activity. The family had to be wary of informers and kept their rescue activity secret from those who did not take part in it. Daily life with hidden Jews is described with credibility. For example, it was difficult for the hidden persons to remain in their cramped quarters. One Jewish woman who could take it no longer gave herself up by walking out into the streets; she was recognized and arrested.

While ten Boom gives an accurate picture of Holland under Nazi occupation, indicating that only a minority were willing to save Jewish lives, her book implies that true Christian believers, brought up on biblical literalism, were in the forefront of rescue efforts. Indeed, according to Joseph Michman, the percentage of conservative Dutch Protestants who

rescued Jews during World War II was more than three times the percentage in the Dutch population, making up about 25 percent of those who saved Jews.<sup>5</sup> Ten Boom's edited memoirs also promote the belief that the Lord guides and protects righteous rescuers. Corrie's sister-in-law, for example, insisted on speaking the truth in all circumstances. At one time, the police, who had been informed of the presence of Jews, searched the house and inquired whether a blonde, blue-eyed, "Aryan-looking" girl was Jewish. "Yes," came the answer of the sister-in-law who would not lie.<sup>6</sup> The poor girl was arrested but later was released, so the story goes, by the Dutch underground. Another miracle that, according to Ten Boom, manifested God's guiding hand had to do with the possession of copies of the Bible. While in Ravensbrueck concentration camp, Corrie obtained a copy of the Book of Books and managed, in defiance of all regulations and inspections, to keep it, read it, and share it with others (193-94).

In actuality, the family paid dearly for disobeying the authorities. "The hiding place" was exposed. Corrie and her sister, father, brother, and nephew were arrested. Only Corrie survived. Theirs is a story of Christian martyrdom. The ten Booms kept their faith and values at all times and were a source of inspiration to the prisoners around them. Corrie portrays her father and sister as saintly figures, bringing tranquility and hope to the prison cells and concentration camp barracks where they were interned. She herself emerges from the pages of her reminiscences as a remarkable person, highly conscientious, humorous, and humane. Readers are invited to look upon her as an exemplary Christian. Jesus, she informs the readers, was her source of strength and guidance during her time of trial, offering her solace and inspiration when she was confronted with the deaths of those dear to her (163, 189, 223).

A major message of the book is the Christian command of forgiveness and love for one's enemies. According to the narrative, the ten Booms felt sorry for the Germans, who were engaged in evil and destruction. Corrie's father voiced a premillennialist, pietist, and evangelical understanding of the Jews and their role in history when he said that the Germans were doomed because "they have touched the apple of God's eyes"

(86). Likewise, holding to a more literal reading of Scripture, the ten Boom asserted that the Jews were still God's chosen people, destined to regain their role as God's first nation. The German attempt to destroy the Jews was futile and would ultimately harm the perpetrators. After the war and the German defeat, ten Boom promoted a message of forgiveness and reconciliation. The book thus targeted Germans, too, as potential readers and converts. It carried the message that the truly converted were utterly forgiven and that Christian victims and their former persecutors were now in the same boat, that of the redeemed.

Ten Boom became a celebrity, and her story often became a venue for evangelical Christians to construct a narrative of Nazi-occupied Europe and of Christian behavior during that time. Her memoirs, however, were not the only ones that expressed the evangelical understanding of the Holocaust.

### Jesus Heals Everyone: Nazi Perpetrators and Jewish Victims as Born-Again Christians

During the 1970s and 1980s born-again Christians who had witnessed the Nazi regime from different angles wrote memoirs. Although providing important historical information, the autobiographies primarily offer spiritual messages. They attempt to show the courage and righteousness of the truly converted. Taken as a whole, such books promote the idea that all people who lived under the Nazi regime, Jews and Gentiles alike, needed the ameliorating Gospel, if they had not believed in it earlier, and that once they repented and converted they were all forgiven and justified before the Lord. Evangelical narratives were perhaps the first non-German publications to look upon the Germans as victims of the war the Nazi state had initiated, even if many of them had supported that regime. Such narratives portrayed ex-Nazis as people who were for a while led astray by the powers of the devil but who redeemed themselves when they repented and accepted Jesus as their savior. Amazingly, secular memoirs and novels with similar emphases on German suffering in the last stages of the war appeared in English only in the 2000s.<sup>7</sup>

Autobiographical evangelical memoirs of ex-Nazis include those of Maria Anne Hirschmann, *Hansi's New Life* and *Hansi, the Girl Who Loved the Swastika*.<sup>8</sup> The books narrate the political and spiritual journey of a Nazi woman who became a born-again Christian. Hirschmann recounts the suffering of the Germans at the end of the war: the shock of the defeat, the fear of being raped by Soviet soldiers, and the exile to West Germany from the Sudetenland, which again became part of Czechoslovakia. Her reminiscences follow her immigration to America with her husband, who had served as a submarine officer in the German navy, their adaptation to their new homeland, and the spiritual journey that led her toward a conversion experience. "Jesus and I became friends one warm summer night under the stars. . . . I was like Paul, a chief sinner, I had rejected Christ deliberately when I became a Nazi," she wrote. "I despised His name and His life story as unacceptable to German superiority."<sup>9</sup>

Hirschmann states that she sought and obtained the forgiveness of God as well as of his true believers. But she complains that the Jews failed, in the years following the war, to show forgiveness. Jewish journalists "tortured" her by asking her if she knew about the concentration camps. While Germans bear guilt, she declares, Jews carry hate and prejudices (118). She asserts that she forgave her own oppressors, including the Soviets who had harassed Germans like her at the end of World War II (88). Hirschmann's memoirs end with an encounter with Corrie ten Boom. At first, she writes, she was afraid to meet this righteous Dutch savior of Jews, who, she knew, had spent time in a concentration camp. But this perfect Christian accepted her warmly. Ten Boom's attitude toward Hirschmann exemplifies the forgiveness every Christian is supposed to show toward her former enemies. Ten Boom even wrote a preface to Hirschmann's book in which she expressed that opinion. Thus Hansi's Nazi past is forgiven by both Jesus and his followers.

Hirschmann's book has been unusual, at least in English. More often it has been Christian Jews who have described, in edited evangelical autobiographies, their spiritual journeys in the midst of wartime persecution and suffering. A widely circulated book, Johanna-Ruth Dobschiner's

*Selected to Live*, offers a special meaning to the conversion of victims of the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> Like other evangelical memoirs of Holocaust survivors, it has remained in print since its first publication in the 1970s. It tells the sad story of a German Jewish family who fled from Germany to Holland. In 1940, the Nazi occupation caught up with them again. The first to be taken to a concentration camp and killed were Ruth's two brothers. Sometime later her parents too were deported to a camp. Ruth hid when her parents were arrested and lived in homes to which the Jewish council assigned her, working as a nurse in hospitals and children's homes. The deportations continued, and the inhabitants of such institutions were also rounded up and sent to death camps. Ruth was "chosen" by a clandestine Protestant Dutch network that rescued Jews and placed them in Christian homes. Her first hiding place was in the house of a Dutch Reformed minister who was later executed by the Nazis.

It was in the hiding place that Dobschiner discovered the Old and New Testaments, read them in their evangelical interpretation, and converted to Christianity. Dobschiner describes her rescuer "Domie" in terms similar to those generally reserved for Jesus. For her, he symbolized purity, love, protection for the meek, and self-sacrifice. "He died to secure my life in this world, Christ died to secure it in the next," she wrote (224). Like Domie, Jesus served as a father figure for her. When Dobschiner reached the passages in the New Testament that described his death, she mourned for him "according to the custom of my people . . . seven days" (162). In addition to being the religion of her saviors, Christianity embodied for the young woman hope for a new life, and the adoption of Jesus as a personal savior worked to overcome the loneliness of the hiding place: "With warm love He surrounded me in that bare attic. His Holy Spirit, able to be everywhere at the same time, covered me with security. I knew myself loved, even when no human being considered my needs" (197). Her survival, predetermined by God, opened her eyes to the truth of the Christian faith.

Dobschiner's autobiography was intended, among other things, to promote the evangelical faith. Its targeted audiences included Jewish readers, whom evangelicals wished to persuade about the need to adopt

the Christian message. Consequently Dobschiner's narrative includes statements that are intended specifically for Jews. She describes herself before her encounter with the Christian faith as being suspicious toward Christianity. But her prejudices, she asserts, had resulted from ignorance of the true nature of that faith. Christians, she found out, were kind people. Their behavior, she decided, must result from their faith. "It must be a special religion . . . hence their kindness in taking us in" (163). "I felt protected and loved among them," she concludes (213). She claims that if Jews only knew what Christianity was really about they would embrace it wholeheartedly. When Jews encountered nominal Christians who mistreated them, they mistook Christianity for the religion of the enemy. "The trouble is that our people don't know it, they have to be told," she emphatically writes (191). Dobschiner asserts that the suffering and murder of the Jews under the Nazis was a result of Jews' not placing themselves under the protection of their savior (177-78). However, in keeping with the evangelical outlook on the Jewish people, she foresees a hope and future for the Jews in the messianic age. "God would one day send the Messiah. He would deliver Israel and call nations to see true light in God" (156).

Another widely acclaimed evangelical biography, *Pursued*, promotes a similar outlook.<sup>11</sup> Vera Schlamm's memories of her experiences in Nazi-occupied Europe also gave special meaning to the suffering of Jews who later found spiritual comfort in Christianity. The Schlamms were German Jews who came to Holland as refugees and were sent during the Nazi occupation to a concentration camp. But they took active steps to save their lives by obtaining passports of a neutral South American nation. Schlamm describes the life in Bergen-Belsen, the German concentration camp to which she and her family were sent. As citizens holding passports of neutral countries, they were able to receive parcels from relatives abroad and were safe from being deliberately killed. Surviving the war, the Schlamms immigrated to America, where Vera studied medicine and trained as a pediatrician. During her years in California she gradually became persuaded of the truth of the Christian message. Her conversion offered a new perspective on her experiences during

World War II, which became, in retrospect, meaningful steps in her spiritual odyssey. The book conveys the notion that Schlamm's conversion was predetermined. Jesus was waiting to embrace her and bring her under his protection, hence her survival of the horrors of the Holocaust. Although she was not yet a Christian when she underwent those travails, her survival is presented as another manifestation of the wonderful gifts God bestows on his followers. Jews for Jesus, the largest group evangelizing the Jews since the 1970s, decided to publish Schlamm's memoirs, and a member of this missionary organization coauthored the book.

*Pursued* is a typical convert's memoir: written with the help of professional evangelists and presenting the protagonist narrator's earlier life experiences from a perspective acquired later in life. Literary critics speak about "formulation" in the construction of such memoirs.<sup>12</sup> Such narratives tend, for example, to emphasize the spiritual and moral transformations that conversions bring with them. Autobiographies in general, scholars of the genre remind us, are ultimately about the present more than the past. They display not what their writers "remember" but how they understand their past as they rearrange their present identities. In this case, Jewish converts to Christianity who survived in World War II Europe tell their stories to evangelical writers from the point of view of their present selves as Christian evangelical believers. The memoirs as a whole reflect the values of evangelical Christianity from the 1970s into the twenty-first century more than those of the protagonists during the war years. Coauthors and editors have utilized the narratives to educate Christians about the horrors of Nazism and to provide models for Christian behavior during times of duress. Such life stories also convey the message that exceptional life experiences should bring Jews and others to accept the Gospel, so that the presentation of the Holocaust also serves as an evangelization tool.

A somewhat different testimony from Dobschiner's and Schlamm's is Rose Warmer's *The Journey*. Like other memoirs, *The Journey* evolved from an earlier, shorter work.<sup>13</sup> The evangelical community was yearning to read Holocaust survivor-converts' life stories, so Myrna Grant, a professional evangelical writer, interviewed Warmer in her evangelical

Jewish retirement community in Haifa, Israel, and came out with a best-selling biography.<sup>14</sup> Warmer' was born into a middle-class Jewish family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She studied art, music, and dance and led a bohemian life in pre-World War II Vienna and Budapest. In keeping with other converts' biographies, this book describes Warmer in her preconversion state as centered on earthly interests and pleasures and as consequently feeling spiritually and morally empty. Finally, Rose found Christ and became an evangelist. Protected by Christian friends, she could have hidden during the war, but she felt that she had a mission—to bring the message of salvation to women in the death camps (104-7). So although she could have avoided being deported, she went to a concentration camp, trusting that Jesus would protect her. She realized that she would suffer, but she also knew that she would be saved if spiritually she could stand the trial.

Since Rose was young and fit, the Nazis sent her from the concentration camp to a work squadron in Germany, where she suffered hunger and cold. But as far as she was concerned she was setting an example to the other women and bringing them a message of hope and redemption. At times she encountered anger and resentment on the part of some women, but she also found willing listeners among them. Jesus, Warmer believed, was a father, mother, brother, and sister, and she felt especially inclined to bring Jesus to those who had lost their families (118). God's guiding hand, the memoir tells us, was evident and gave her courage to continue living even when she felt completely exhausted (136). Having a Bible with her meant a great deal to Warmer, and she carefully hid the copy she had brought. When she was forced to give it up she sought ways to replace it. Once a Nazi officer gave her a copy; another time she approached the commander of the labor camp for a copy and received one (137). The fellowship of true Christian believers was also very important, and she rejoiced when she met other Christians with whom she could pray or read Scripture.

After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Warmer emigrated there, settled in Haifa, and spent the rest of her life as a missionary to the Jews. The book sees a logical connection between the

Holocaust, the birth of the state of Israel, and the evangelism of Jews. Warmer saw her mission to be that of enlightening Israelis as to the true identity of their savior and the true Jewish role in history. In her book she interprets the emergence of the new state and the gathering of the Jews there as part of God's plans for humanity. She herself, she says, is living proof that God remained faithful to his people. "I was part of the promise! I had returned" (213). Warmer's journey to hell and back is presented as part of a broader spiritual journey: that of finding the Savior, submitting to his love and protection, discovering the ways in which he bestows his favors, and witnessing this to others.

A different Holocaust biography is Jan Markell's *Angels in the Camp*.<sup>15</sup> Like other books of its kind, it comes to educate the evangelical community about life under the Nazi regime and the horrors that befell Jews and others, as well as to give evidence about God's mercy and protection. Markell wrote down and edited Anita Dittman's testimony, which offers a window into the travails of *Mischlinge* (half-Jewish people) and their emotional and spiritual perspectives. The daughter of a Jewish mother and an "Aryan" non-Jewish father, Dittman gravitated during the Nazi period toward Christianity in order to find solace and meaning in her precarious life. Her father and mother being separated, Dittman grew up without her father, and she suggests that "perhaps my inner longing for a loving father drove me to my heavenly father so early in life" (9). Growing up in the German city of Breslau with her mother and sister, Anita joined a Lutheran congregation, whose pastor took special interest in converting Jews. Unlike "full Jews," Dittman was allowed to continue her studies in regular schools well into the war years. However, in the summer of 1944 the Nazis sent her to Barthold, a labor camp for children of mixed marriages, where the young inmates dug ditches. Finding solace in her faith, Dittman was certain that Jesus protected her and attributes her survival to his divine saving graces, as well as the goodwill of her pastor.

Like other evangelical books, *Angels in the Camp* comes to offer answers to the kind of questions readers might come up with in relating to the evils that a Christian country inflicted on vulnerable members

of its own and other societies. The protagonist-narrator differentiates between “true” Christians, who remained loyal to Christian principles, and “nominal” Christians, who identified with the Nazi regime and its goals. “But those people aren’t Christians; they just give real Christians a bad name,” she asserts (44). The book also confronts the question of how “a loving, all powerful God would allow such horrible things to happen” and offers an answer: “Granted, millions perished, but God also allowed millions to survive” (61). The book also presents the eventual German defeat as a result of the country’s brutal and unethical behavior. Like ten Boom’s father, Dittman’s pastor makes the claim that “the Jews are the apple of God’s eye. Because Germany has harmed them, she will never be the same” (64). Like all Holocaust memoirs produced by evangelical publishing houses, the book has a clear agenda of spreading the Christian evangelical faith and emphasizing the healing powers and ever-present constructive guidance of Jesus. The book’s subtitle, “A Remarkable Story of Peace in the Midst of the Holocaust,” offers the message that the harsh times of the Nazi regime enabled some people to discover the truth of the Gospel and that Christian believers can find peace and reassurance even in the midst of horror.

In sum, while acquainting the evangelical community with the history of the Nazi period and the suffering it brought about, the biographies promote evangelical messages, including the role of Israel in God’s plans for humanity. They portray the behavior of evangelical Christians throughout the war years as exemplary, a proof that the acceptance of Jesus as a savior guarantees correct moral behavior, courage, and an ability to survive spiritually, if not physically. The memoirs are also meant to promote the Christian imperative of forgiveness and reconciliation. The victims must forgive their repentant persecutors and accept them as fellow Christians. The destructiveness of Nazism should not work against the higher values of Christian love and unity.

## Representation of the Holocaust in Evangelical Novels

In the 1990s and 2000s, the evangelical representation of the Holocaust shifted considerably. Instead of reading edited autobiographies of Holocaust survivors who converted to Christianity, the evangelical community learned about the events of the Nazi era through a different medium: historical novels. By the 1990s many of the heroes of the evangelical Holocaust memoirs, including Corrie ten Boom and Rose Warmer, had died and were no longer available for interviews or lecture tours. More significantly, the new novels about the Holocaust were part of a larger trend in evangelical literary tastes and means of disseminating and transmitting theological perceptions and cultural values. Novels have come to replace theological tracts and social-political manifestos that were previously popular among evangelicals. In the 1970s, for example, the theological-political tract *The Late Great Planet Earth* was the evangelical best seller par excellence, selling tens of millions of copies all around the globe. It promoted a conservative evangelical critique of culture and society, coupled with a premillennialist interpretation of history and current world events.<sup>16</sup> By the 1990s, however, novels, not only for teenagers but for adults, had become the predominant genre to promote evangelical values in a form that readers could find exciting and attractive.<sup>17</sup> Authors created fictional characters, events, dialogues, scenes, and emotions to teach readers about historical events, moral concerns, normative Christian behavior, the transforming and healing powers of the Savior, and the challenges and travails that the future would bring.

Evangelical historical novels about the Jews often have two creators, one responsible for researching the historical background or determining the correct theological views and the other an actual “writer” who uses his or her literary and artistic skills to construct a compelling plot. The novels offer engaging plots, romance, heroism, suspense, and colorful locales. Some have reached not only convinced evangelicals but nonevangelical readers as well. Through them, many readers have become acquainted with evangelical doctrines of faith, including, at times, the anticipation of the imminent arrival of the end times and

a premillennialist understanding of the course of world history, including the role of the Jews and Israel. A number of prominent evangelical novelists have focused on the Holocaust, the Nazis, and Jewish suffering and have confronted theological and moral questions that other series relate to only marginally.

Evangelical Christian writers have not been the first to write historical novels on the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> Such books, which often included descriptions of the postwar Jewish struggles in Palestine, were popular in Hebrew and Jewish American writings long before evangelical writers began utilizing the genre. During the 1950s and 1960s, *Exodus*, Leon Uris's outstanding best seller on the Holocaust and the Jewish struggle for Palestine, enjoyed a large readership and an even greater audience when it was produced as a movie, with Paul Newman playing the fictional Israeli hero Ari Ben-Canaan.<sup>19</sup> Leading a ship of Holocaust survivors from Europe to Palestine in defiance of British policy, Ben-Canaan goes on to fight for the independence of the Jewish state. *Exodus* prefigured some of the evangelical dramas of the turn of the twenty-first century, which have also connected the Holocaust with the struggle for Palestine and have created scenarios in Europe and Palestine of the 1930s and 1940s. Written primarily for a Jewish audience, the book expressed a secular Jewish pro-Zionist point of view.<sup>20</sup> Many liberal Jews, both in America and in Israel, have since developed a more skeptical outlook on heroic Zionist narratives. Yet today evangelical novels relating to the Holocaust and the struggle over Palestine are reminiscent of *Exodus* and other popular Jewish books of an earlier period, promoting views on the situation in the Middle East from a pro-Zionist perspective. These new novels have woven together moments of Jewish, European, and Middle Eastern history with evangelical premillennialist moral codes and biblical exegeses, laced with romance and suspense.

While not as famous as Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, the authors of the Left Behind books, Bodie and Brock Thoene, have been among the most popular evangelical writers of historical novels at the turn of the twenty-first century. Their elaborate projects include a series of historical dramas on the Holocaust and another series on the Jewish struggle for a state in Palestine, with these two themes interwoven throughout

both series. The Thoenes, husband and wife, have worked as a team, with Bodie doing the writing and Brock, a professional historian by training, doing the research and providing the historical setting for the books. The team has constructed fictional personalities, placing them alongside real historical figures, and has combined imaginary situations with historical ones, adding dramatic elements to make the stories more compelling. The Thoenes are committed evangelicals and premillennialists, and their website openly promotes an evangelical theological outlook and cultural agenda. The couple has even sponsored a missionary agency, the Shiloh Light Foundation, aimed at spreading the Gospel among prisoners and other disadvantaged persons.<sup>21</sup> The books include study guides to promote evangelical morality and interpretation of Scripture. The guides include a list of biblical passages for those who “wish to investigate more about Jesus.” The Zion Covenant series views the developments in the life of the Jewish people, and other nations as well, from a messianic evangelical point of view, using the occasion to promote the premillennialist faith in the imminent second coming of Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Evangelical novels on the Nazi persecution of the Jews make for exciting reading. In semifictional, suspenseful historical scenes, Hitler conspires at his headquarters with his cronies, exploring schemes to persecute the Jews and deceive the world; young, loving Jews plan their emigration, hoping to reunite in new locales; Nazi secret services plot the killing of a German diplomat in France and blame the Jews for the murder, moving forward to plan the November 1938 attack on the Jews of Germany. Intrigued and captivated, readers follow the developments with suspense as if they were watching an action film. Readers are gratified that ultimately justice prevails and some of the protagonists survive and reunite. They identify with attractive and positive Jewish as well as non-Jewish protagonists who stand for righteousness.<sup>23</sup>

Like Leon Uris, the Thoenes wished to tell “the whole story,” although the novel series is often selective in the choices of events and developments. Unlike *Exodus* and many other books and novels on the Holocaust, the Zion Covenant novels pointedly omit gruesome details of the mass annihilation of the Jews. The series starts after the Nazi rise to

power in 1933, follows the implementation of discriminatory measures against the Jews, and ends before the genocidal policies of the Nazis are set in motion. The authors have stopped short of actual descriptions of mass murder, but not for lack of space in a series composed of nine books. Their choice corresponds to the nature of the series and the construction of the Jewish protagonists. Amazingly and unconventionally, the *Zion Covenant* volumes depict the Jews, not as helpless and passive victims, but rather as active, lively persons full of ingenuity, courage, and hope. While the authors convey compassion toward Jewish suffering under Nazi persecution, they describe the Jews as alive and energized. They are people with a mission in history.

In the midst of the Jewish saga of Nazi persecution there is “an interlude” and the plot moves from European cities to Palestine during the Arab revolt of 1936-39.<sup>24</sup> In addition to protagonists of the larger series, with whose struggles readers of the series have become already familiar, the novel *Jerusalem Interlude* presents more characters. This volume introduces readers to life in Palestine during the Arab revolt against the British, which corresponds to the years of the Nazi takeover of Czechoslovakia and Austria before the outbreak of World War II. The series in general, and this novel in particular, draws parallels between the Nazis and Muslim Palestinians, seeing a connection between the Nazi persecution of Jews in Europe and the Arab hostilities against Jews in Palestine. It points to the German Nazis’ and the Italian Fascists’ backing of the Palestinian Muslims and their leader, the mufti of Jerusalem, and the money and arms they provided Palestinian fighters. The book equates militant Palestinian stands with Muslim radicalism.<sup>25</sup> Readers also learn about British restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine, which made it difficult for Jews who wished to emigrate to the Holy Land to attain their goal. Another book series dedicated to the story of the Jewish struggle for Palestine, the *Zion Legacy* series, has followed in the footsteps of the *Zion Covenant* series and continues the saga in Palestine during the Arab-Israeli War of 1947-49. The Holocaust looms in the background of the second series, with some of the protagonists being Holocaust survivors as well as veterans of the previous series.<sup>26</sup>

## The Meaning of the Holocaust

Evangelical biographies and novels relating to the suffering of the Jews under the Nazi regime in European nations present the Holocaust as embodying a much deeper meaning than persecution and annihilation. It is a period in human history of both moral failures and spiritual triumphs. The Nazi regime and occupation were a trial that true Christians passed in an exemplary manner, having maintained their moral integrity. The Holocaust also provides a testimony that true Christians were protected even in the harshest of circumstances. They might have suffered physical harassment and even death, but such death was martyrdom, and their eternal lives had been guaranteed. Jews who survived were saved because they were predestined to play a role in history, in the rejuvenation of the land and people of Israel. Some were also called to accept their true savior, and bear witness to the Christian and Jewish communities about the saving power of Christ.

In these works, the suffering, misery, and mass murder that characterized the Jewish experience under the Nazis do not derive from brutal anti-Semitism instigated by various historical, sociological, psychological, and theological factors. They are rather the outcome of a rebellion against God: some segments of human society went astray, offering a short-lived triumph to the forces of darkness, while true Christians carried on with their values intact. The novels and biographies also convey the message that born-again Christians relate to Jews with goodwill and kindness. According to this interpretation, the Holocaust is ultimately a chapter in the Jewish and non-Jewish encounter with Christ. Nazism manifested an alienation from the knowledge of God and a shortsightedness that many of the Jewish victims shared. The remedy to the Nazi horrors is the evangelization of both Jews and Gentiles: the more people accept Christianity, the less chance there will be of such brutalities repeating themselves.

Evangelical biographies and novels convey an awareness of and sensitivity toward Jewish suffering and look upon the Jews amicably as heirs to the biblical covenant between God and Israel. The horrors they

experienced during the Holocaust are seen as steps in their collective spiritual pilgrimage toward their national rebirth and eventual recognition of the true message of God. Amazingly, evangelical novels and biographies do not pity the Jews and do not treat Jews who suffered or were killed during the Holocaust as helpless, miserable victims. As a rule, they are either live heroes or martyrs: people who have fulfilled a role in God's plans for salvation. Evangelical writers have tied the birth of the state of Israel to the Holocaust, viewing both developments as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies that speak about the return of the Jews to their land. The national rebirth serves as collective compensation for the Jews for their suffering and loss. It is also a proof that God has not abandoned the Jewish people, that he has not forgotten his ancient promises to that nation, and that the Jews are still "the Chosen People."

Evangelical novels on the Holocaust at the turn of the twenty-first century differ sharply in their depiction of Jews from evangelical writings of previous generations. Jews as individuals are not mystified, vilified, or "othered." In fact, on the personal level they are very much like their Christian friends and neighbors. In the novels, the Holocaust era is a time when righteous Christians and fine Jews stand together against enemies of God and humanity, struggling for the same causes. The evangelical literature on the Holocaust has revolutionized, at least partially, evangelical literature about Jews and their history. The novels and biographies also promote the union of all true believers and the overcoming, forgiving, and healing of ethnic differences and historical grudges. This, they promise, will take place in the end times, when Jesus will return, the Jews and the rest of humanity will recognize their true savior, and the messianic age will begin its course. Both the Holocaust and the birth of the state of Israel are steps in the journey of the nation of Israel toward its ultimate union with Christ. When the Messiah comes, the Jews will accept him as their own and their national restoration will be complete. Until then, it is the duty of the evangelical community to guide the Jews and help them to restore their ancient land.