

Lord Weidenfeld and Help for Christians

In his moving book, *Se questo e un uomo* (If this be a man; or Survival in Auschwitz), the Italian Primo Levi wrote that attitudes towards the Jews during the Holocaust mostly ranged from indifference to hostility. In a world of total moral collapse, he said, there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values.

It is a pleasure and it is important to make known the role of righteous individuals, Jews in origin, who in the past and the present, were and are not bystanders and stand, as Levi suggested, in contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility.

On July 1, 2015 Sir Nicholas Winton died at the age of 106. His parents were German Jews who moved to London, converted to Christianity and baptized their son. Winton, a stockbroker, was a modest man, a great and good man, whose activities were not revealed until 40 years after they had occurred. Conscious of the peril in store for European Jews after Kristallnacht, (the night of broken glass) on November 9, 1938, Winton immediately initiated and organized the rescue of 669 children, mostly Jewish, from Czechoslovakia in 1938-1940.

In this operation known as Kindertransport, Winton arranged for the safe passage by eight trains from Nazi occupied Prague and by other transport of the children, to London. He battled bureaucracy in a number of countries, overcoming incomplete documentation of the children and even using forged documents, and found families in the UK willing to host the children, most of whose parents died at Auschwitz.

Winton joins the rank of those righteous Europeans who saved Jews from a Nazi death. Most well known of these are Oskar

Schindler, German industrialist credited with saving 1,200 by employing them in his factories in Poland; Irena Sendler, Polish Catholic nurse who smuggled 2,500 Jews out of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1942-43 and gave them false identities; and the courageous Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

Winton's actions have inspired the prominent British publisher, philanthropist, and life long Zionist George Weidenfeld to organize a project, The Weidenfeld Fund on a new rescue mission. Weidenfeld himself, born in a cosmopolitan Jewish family in Vienna in 1919 had been aided, when escaping the Nazis in Austria, as a penniless refugee in London in 1938 by members of the Christian group, Plymouth Brethren, who had transported many other Jews in area under Nazi control.

Weidenfeld, now 96, is a figure larger than life. He has had a extraordinary career, starting as a political commentator, acting as chief of cabinet of the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, co-founding a major publishing house, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, recipient of many British and foreign honors, and being appointed a peer, a member of the House of Lords, in 1976.

Weidenfeld is now repaying a debt to the Christian community. Essentially, the Weidenfeld Fund plans to rescue 10,000 Syrian and Iraqi Christians who are suffering because from the unprecedented primitive savagery and the lust and sadism of ISIS.

In 2011 there were 1.1 million Christians in Syria, but more than 700,000 have fled since the war began in the country.

Weidenfeld's venture coincided with a similar project. Operation Safe Havens by the Barnabas Foundation, an international, interdenominational Christian aid agency helping Christians wherever they experience discrimination, oppression, and persecution as a consequence of their faith. It works with "the persecuted church." It directs its aid

mostly to Christians in Muslim environments. Its patron is the well-known Jewish public figure, Lord Reading, Simon Rufus Isaacs.

The Weidenfeld Fund acted in partnership with Barnabas and the Polish based Esther Foundation in the first rescue of 42 Syrian Christians families, 173 people in all, from Syria to Warsaw.

The project and the rescue effort has been helped by the UK Jewish National Fund, and by Martin Green, the Jewish philanthropist who is chairman of the Weidenfeld Fund which is also concerned with promoting better relations between Christians and Jews.

The Weidenfeld project is pledged to provide financial support for the 10,000 while they adjust to their new life.

Weidenfeld answers Islamic critics who complain that the rescue plan is limited to Christians in two ways. First, he is acting to repay the debt in memory of the Christians who aided him. Secondly, he challenges the Muslim community to provide help for the Christians who are being persecuted in their countries. Let others do what they like for Muslims.

The rescue operation is not only meaningful in itself. It is also meaningful in two other ways. First, it symbolizes the need for a further political and military response by the U.S. and western democracies to the horrors of the ongoing civil war in Syria and to the increasing threat to Christians as well as to civilization in general of the terrorist group, and the need to fight the evil of ISIS. Weidenfeld himself sees the Kurds are bravely fighting against terrorists. The Western world must have the will to defend itself as the Kurds are doing.

The second factor is the seeming lack of interest by mainstream Christian organizations in the fate of the persecuted Christians. In Syria, Christians once constituted

about a third of the population. In Iraq, the number of Christians has decreased from 1.5 million to 300,000 at most. Christians have been forced to convert to Islam, pay a religious levy (jizya), or get killed. Hundreds of Christians have been kidnaped in some cities.

The statement of the World Council of Churches on October 12, 2015 is pitiable. Its general secretary, Rev Dr. Olav Fykse Tveit said the WCC was "gravely concerned" by the dramatic escalation of the military operations in the conflict in Syria and strictly condemns them. He recognized that the cycle of extreme violence in Syria and its tragic implications on the whole Syrian population have become unacceptable. He called on governments to support a political peace process. Though Tveit was "gravely concerned," he believes that foreign military interventions cannot bring peace and eliminate extremism.

Tveit and the WCC say nothing about the persecuted Christians. Like all westerners of good will, Lord Weidenfeld and his colleague in the Weidenfeld Fund, Sir Charles Hoare Bt., remain baffled by the lack of real support, and only meaningless rhetoric, from some mainstream Christian churches and organizations to help with the resettlement of Christians being persecuted in Syria and elsewhere in Muslim countries.

Unlike Tveit and the WCC, Weidenfeld is calling and acting for the rescue of those persecuted Christians.

Too many in the mainstream Christian churches have in recent years frittered away their time and energy in discussing the desirability of boycotts of the State of Israel. They are much less concerned in any real way to respond to the reality that the Christian community in the Middle East is facing its greatest crisis. What is a significant contrast to the actions of a proud Jew and Zionist George Weidenfeld in his contribution to the rescuing of Christians. When will those champions of boycott against Israel and Jewish institutions wake up to the truth?