

Raise Your Voice and be a Light

JOBST BITTNER



70

NIE WIEDER SCHWEIGEN
ZU ANTISEMITISMUS UND JUDENHASS

Keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive will remain a permanent duty of any German government. This is true for the past, and it will remain so in future. For the future, we will have to come up with new concepts in order to prevent antisemitic incidents. The March of Life is a tremendous initiative doing its very valuable part. I wish every city had an event like this.

Dr. Felix Klein

Antisemitism Commissioner of the German Federal Government

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FOREWORD

In February 2018, I had the privilege of participating in the annual March of Life event in Tübingen, Germany. I will never forget 500 people, many of them descendants of Nazi SS officers, dancing and praising God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for the State of Israel and repenting for actions of their forefathers just one or two generations ago. There is no other place like Tübingen, the city which was the elite school for the Nazis where 300 of the main SS perpetrators and mass murderers were trained to hate and murder this people – where now the people were sharing positive energies of love and hope.

For me this was continuing my participating in the March of Life in Lodz with hundreds of people marching in the streets in September 2017. Lodz is the city where five of my eight great-grandparents were born and didn't survive due to the hate and cruelty.

At both of these events I was representing my family from the past, but also officially representing the State of Israel, created less than a century ago, expressing His covenant with the People of Israel. These events and many more of the sort are an expression of the miracles we are witnessing in our era, as the words of the Prophets of the Bible are unrolling and miraculously becoming reality in front of our eyes. As we are approaching the next major event of March of Nations in the streets of Jerusalem, marking the seventieth anniversary of the state of Israel, I am honored to share my blessings with the organizers of these fabulous events and especially Jobst Bittner and his wonderful wife and wishing we all unite to share the message of the Word of God of Peace and inclusiveness with all humanity.

Yehudah Glick, Member of Knesset, Israel

INTRODUCTION

More than ten years ago, we set out on the first “March of Life” together with a small group of people. Meanwhile we have reached more than 370 cities and 20 nations. Year after year, we see up to 60 Marches of Life taking place around the time of Yom HaShoah. The “March of Life” has become a global movement, mobilizing tens of thousands to take to the streets and reaching millions through the press and media. The message is always the same: Remember the Holocaust – and learn from the past! Tell the truth – and reconcile! Raise your voice against antisemitism and Jew hatred, and stand side by side with Israel in friendship! Raise your voice and be a light! That is what counts at a time when the global threshold for Jew hatred and antisemitism in the media and the digital world and on every level of society has become lower than at any other time since World War II.

This booklet is a compilation of information, personal stories and articles that are worth the read, which may serve as inspiration and encouragement. You can also use the sources mentioned in this booklet for your own events.

Some time ago, I spoke to a well-known Jewish-orthodox musician on the phone. Before I was even able to say anything, he greeted me with the words, “I know the work you do with the March of Life – you are light fighting against the darkness!” I was slightly taken aback and replied that it was our privilege to organize the Marches of Life. He said impatiently, “No, no! You do this for Holocaust survivors and raise your voices for Israel! You are light – and because of you darkness has to go!” So he actually said what we can read in the Prophet Isaiah:

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her vindication shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory. (Is 62:1-2a)

One of our first Marches of Life took us to Lithuania. During the preparations for the March, we met Jakob, who still lived in the same house that had been part of the Kaunas Ghetto in 1941. Kaunas used to be one of the most significant Jewish centers in the Baltic countries; today Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia. Jakob was one of the last survivors of the ghetto. After a very warm welcome, we followed him up a narrow staircase to the first floor where he lived. On the way upstairs, he pointed to the wooden stairs. When the ghetto was liquidated, SS soldiers had stormed up these stairs, rounding up his family along with the last survivors of the ghetto to take them to the mass execution. Jakob's father managed to flee from the house together with him and his siblings. His mother and her parents had already been arrested before. He saw when they were marched past their house. For eight months, Jakob and his family hid in a hole underneath the pigs in a pigsty, and they survived.

In the evening, we sat together with Jakob, and he shared his memories. By then, he had started to trust us and was willing to show us his most prized possession. He led us into his library. Next to ancient manuscripts belonging to his rabbinical ancestors he had a cardboard box, labeled with the address of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC. He carefully unwound the strings around the box and opened it. In the box, there was an old Torah scroll that had belonged to his brother. Until very recently, it had been on loan to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, and now they had returned it. Very carefully, he took it out and pointed to the dark brown stains. Jakob's brother had been a rabbi and

had saved the scroll from a burning synagogue. He was running from the Nazi thugs and pressed the scroll to his body to protect it. A shot rang out; the bullet went through his body, leaving him severely injured. The scroll was soaked with his blood. This was the story behind the brown stains. It was a rabbi's blood, who had risked his life for the Word of God.

Every single fate in the Holocaust has a name and a story. At the same time, the Holocaust could never have taken place if it had not been for the silent majority, who remained silent and indifferent, simply watching when Jewish life was degraded, disenfranchised, ostracized, and annihilated.

Our memory of the Holocaust is fading quickly. Once again, day after day Jews are forced to face fear, violence, and intimidation. Antisemitism and Jew hatred exist in almost every country, in every city – worldwide. If we want to prevent Jew hatred from turning violent and antisemitic defamation from spreading, it is not enough to say “Never Again” to the Holocaust. Once again we have the choice to become passive accessories and incur guilt through our silence just like our forefathers. The March of Life movement is a call in our days! Raise your voice – be a light! Don't wait for somebody else! I would like to encourage you to let this book inspire, touch, and call you personally!

IV. THE GUILT OF CHRISTIANS TOWARDS THE JEWISH PEOPLE

We as Christian will only be credible, if we are willing to face the atrocities committed against Jews in the name of Christ over the course of the past 2,000 years of church history. Even here it is true that we need to give up our inner distance and that we have to allow the Spirit of God to shake and shock us.

By our very un-Christian actions we have brought shame and reproach to the name of Jesus. We have sullied and disgraced Him before the Jewish people. It is my prayer that everywhere around the world where people are holding March of Life events around the time of Yom HaShoah people will not omit this truth, but rather that the guilt of Christians would be mentioned and confessed in the meetings and events.

The Deadly Infection of the Church

The Holocaust was neither new nor the crazy crime of a lone madman, Adolf Hitler. German bureaucracy was able to revert to centuries of experience and verdicts. Hitler only needed to look up the writing of the early church fathers and copy them in order to find justification for the greatest genocide of all times. John Chrysostom (AD 344 – 407), archbishop of Constantinople, wrote a series of homilies against the Jews. “The Jews are the most miserable of all men ... lustful, rapacious, greedy, perfidious bandits ... Because they murdered Christ, they have been repudiated and

cursed by God forever ... It is a Christian's duty to hate the Jews. The more we love Christ, the more we have to fight the Jews ..."²⁸ Did you know that the 1917 Code of Canon Law of the Catholic Church, promulgated at Pentecost 1917, still described all the anti-Jewish measures, like wearing yellow badges on their clothing or burning of synagogues, which the Nazis only had to copy? The Code of Pentecost 1917 was in effect unaltered until the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965). It was only in 1983 that all antisemitic passages were finally eliminated. You can also find Martin Luther's anti-Jewish statements in Hitler's pamphlet "Mein Kampf" (My Struggle). I am grateful for the many councils and declarations in the Church throughout the past 60 years that took a clear stand with Israel. And yet our churches and congregations still carry the burden of the heritage of the church father's Jew hatred and replacement theology like a deadly infection.

The antisemitic DNA of the early church still runs in our Christian veins more than we would care to think. It is the terrible truth that the Holocaust was nothing but the climax of centuries of hatred and intense persecution, often enough motivated by Christian theology. I once read an excellent brochure by the Sisters of Mary, and I found an article that to this day has not lost any of its explosiveness and importance. It is titled "Israel. My Chosen People. A German Confession before God and the Jews".²⁹ I am taking the liberty of referring to some important aspects here, but I will only mention the most important ones.

28 Malcom Hay, *Roots of Christian Anti-Semitism*, New York, 1981, p. 27.

29 Basilea Schlink, *Israel. My Chosen People. A German Confession before God and the Jews*, Old Tappan, N.J., 1987.