

Foreword to newly published book: *Greek Righteous Among the Nations*

Although I was born immediately after the Second World War, the events of 1933-1945 deeply and directly affected my family, and have had a formative impact on my life and outlook. Specifically, I have tried to understand the wide spectrum of behavior at the time, ranging from the most heinous—active, at times gleeful, participation in crimes against humanity, including countless children—to the most noble—risking one's own life to rescue others.

Since many fewer people were saved than exterminated, some ask why so much attention should be paid to the actions and motivations of the rescuers. Does it not give a skewed impression of the numbers involved and the moral balance sheet from the war?

In truth, it is precisely because the righteous were so few that we must not only honor their incomparable acts of human solidarity and courage, but also seek to understand what impelled them to do so. What traits lead individuals to do extraordinary things, to express solidarity with those who may be of a different background, but who are seen as no less human in the eyes of the righteous?

In a world where the word "hero" has been so cheapened by misuse and overuse that it has almost lost its meaning, those who displayed moral courage, and the physical courage that had to go with it, are, in fact, humanity's true heroes. They are the ones who should be held up to society – especially to young people – as exemplars of what is most worthy, sacred, and noble in our journey through life.

Thus, a study of those Greeks who saved Greek Jews during the darkest days of human history, as this volume does so admirably, is not just an account of the past, nor is it a "counter-balance" to the narrative of the Third Reich's Final Solution—after all, tragically, the vast majority of Greek Jews were arrested, deported, and annihilated in the Nazi death machinery. Rather, it poses a challenge to every person living today, Greek and non-Greek. It serves as a striking reminder of the human capacity to do good.

The story of Zakynthos, for example, has always moved me profoundly. The fact that two non-Jews, a Greek Orthodox cleric and a mayor, would go to such lengths to hide the island's Jews from the Nazis is way beyond praiseworthy. But the story asks more of the reader. How would any of us have behaved in their shoes? Would we have gone along with the Nazi request, or would we have stood our ground, even in the face of punishment or death? Some at the time – to be sure, not many, but certainly a few – passed this nearly unimaginable ethical test with flying colors. Would we? If the answer is "yes," then there is hope in our world and this book will have served a higher purpose. If not, then, alas, we may be doomed.

Today, there is no shortage of egregious violations of human dignity and disregard for human life.

In Europe, anti-Semitism is on the rise, Jews are increasingly concerned about security, and political leaders in London, Paris, Berlin, and other capitals have acknowledged the problem. Meanwhile, officials in Tehran call for the annihilation of Israel, the world's only Jewish-majority state. In some Arab countries, minority communities like the Yazidis, Baha'i, and Christians are targeted for forced conversion, persecution, death, or exile. In parts of Africa, young girls have been kidnapped and enslaved because of their religious affiliation or gender. In Syria over the past five years, hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions rendered homeless, as Greece, given its proximity, understands better than most. And, painfully, the list goes on.

Who will be the righteous in the 21st century? Who will give voice to the voiceless, power to the powerless, and hope to the forlorn? Who will demonstrate the indomitability of the human spirit? Who will say "I am a Jew" or "I am a Yazidi," even if they are not, in order to help save those who are? Who will take inspiration from the ancient Jewish teaching that we are all created in the image of God, and therefore must stand up for one another if we are truly to stand up for God?

Our world has much to learn from those Greeks in the Second World War who showed us how to answer these soul-searing questions. Our debt to them is eternal, as is our gratitude for the lives they saved.

This book completes an ambitious trilogy on Greece and the Holocaust. It is a remarkable undertaking. The credit for it goes to the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs for sponsoring the research and publications, and especially to an exceptionally talented and determined individual, Photini Tomai-Constantopoulou, Special Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Holocaust Issues. She has dedicated her career to preserving the memory of the tens of thousands of Greek Jewish lives lost in Nazi-occupied Greece. Now, with this precious book, she has honored those individuals rescued because of the actions of fellow Greeks, whose awe-inspiring bravery is recorded in these pages.

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