

Did the Children Cry? Hitler's War Against Jewish and Polish Children, 1939-45

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Richard C. Lukas

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In this, Lukas' seventh book, he traces the devastating effects of the Nazi regime on Polish and Jewish children during the years 1939 to 1945. Creating a time-line of military tactics, he outlines seven categories, detailing the losses and effects of each. They are Invasion, Deportation, Concentration Camps, Germanization, Resistance, Hiding, and the War and Child Survivors. In each, we meet rescuers and informants, heroes and criminals, survivors and victims.

Of perhaps greatest interest to Catholic readers is the chapter on hiding in which Lukas emphasizes the role played by clergy, religious and the laity. In it he writes, "The Catholic Church played a critical role in aiding unfortunate people, including Jews, during the war." Lukas related several instances where priests, monks and nuns hid children in the robes of their cassocks and habits to aid in their escape. Baptism and the hiding of children in convents and churches were also mentioned as methods of protection. Also noted are the tremendous losses suffered by clergy and religious, 50 percent in some places, 20 percent in others.

Those orders of women religious singled out for their heroic efforts include the Sisters of Charity (Grey Sisters), the Felician Sisters, the Ursulines, Little Servant Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, Franciscan Sisters of the Family of Mary and the Order of St. Elizabeth. Lukas quotes a

distinguished Jewish historian, Szymon Datner, on the efforts of Polish Catholic nuns, as such: "In my research I have found only one case of help being refused. No other sector was so ready to help those persecuted by the Germans, including the Jews....this attitude, unanimous and general, deserves recognition and respect."

Not to be forgotten were the efforts of individuals, no doubt with the support of many behind them. Ranking Polish clergymen, such as Archbishop Adam Sapieha of Krakow, Bishop Karol Niemira and canon Roman Archutowski, led the way by urging clergy to help the Jews. Others followed their lead, including Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, future Pope John Paul II, Karol Wojtyla, the Home of Father Boduen, and many other individuals and groups too numerous to name here but which are included in Lukas' account.

Trying to document how many children lost their lives has proven to be a very difficult task, and while no book will ever be able to tell the complete story, Lukas does a credible job. He intersperses the endless numbers, dates, locations and losses with personal accounts of tragedy and triumph. A well-researched book, Lukas carefully cites every name, number, organization and individual. His sources range from news accounts of the day to contemporary studies and research efforts, both in Polish and English.

Lukas does not overdramatize the situation as reality was tragic enough. He alternates between the head counts and personal accounts, between figures and faces. In his chapter, "The War and Child Survivors," and in the Epilogue, Lukas relates stories from some of the young survivors of the war. The lifelong effect is evident in one child who, after the war ended, was quoted as saying, "I would be able to see the whole world die and would go on playing."

-Karen Lynn Krugh