



# The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: A Christian Interpretation. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994, 2003

| Gushee, David P.

## (review)

Professor David Gushee's volume is mostly an academic treatment of the subject. He cites study after study and compiles his data by analyzing it critically to reach his measured observations and conclusions. Indeed, *The Righteous Gentiles Of The Holocaust* reads much like a doctoral dissertation, replete with 51 pages of endnotes and 18 pages of bibliography, plus indexes of biblical references, modern authors, and the rescuers. The most problematic factor from this reviewer's perspective is that Gushee would have likely benefited much more had he interviewed rescuers and those rescued first hand, rather than relying so heavily on secondary sources.

Nonetheless, Professor Gushee's volume shines while focussing on the ethical—or lack thereof!—factors among Gentiles during the Holocaust. The quintessential question for Gushee is: Why did so few Gentiles offer assistance to the Jews during the Holocaust and what motivated them to act accordingly?

The author then cites six faith motivations: i) A sense of special religious kinship with Jews. Gentile Christians recognised and celebrated common roots of their faith in the Hebrew Bible. Christians also emphasised that Jews are God's chosen people and therefore a blessed people, in serving and loving them, Christians are serving and loving God. ii) The remembered experience of religious persecution. This was especially so for the French Protestant Huguenots, who were persecuted as a tiny minority for three hundred years. Over 3,000 French Protestant lives were lost on the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572. French Protestants thus had compassion on the Jews who were a persecuted religious minority like themselves. iii) The incompatibility of Nazism and Christian faith. Some Christians regarded Nazism as an anti-Christian ideology; Bonhoeffer and Barth were among them. They said loyalty to Hitler was a violation of the First Commandment; God is God, not Hitler. iv) The equality and preciousness of every human life. This was emphasised by several denominations and their leaders. Here is one example from the Confessional Synod of the Old Prussian Union: "The right to exterminate human beings because they belong to another race, nation, or religion was not given by God to the government. The life of men [and women] belongs to God and is sacred to him. (p. 133)" v) Biblical teachings on compassion and love. Here Professor Gushee cites texts like: Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 7:12; 22:34-40; 25:31-46; and Genesis 4:8-10. vi) Christian commitment and spirituality. This, according to the author—a Baptist ethicist and minister—involves the realm of personal religious experience. For example, some Christians believed God was speaking to them by giving them an opportunity to rescue or help particular Jews. In the words of a Dutch rescuer: "There was never any question about it. The Lord wanted us to rescue those people and we did it. (p. 142)"

Ultimately, *The Righteous Gentiles Of The Holocaust* is a compelling confession to the Jewish community of how miserably Gentiles failed to help them under such horrific, evil circumstances; as well as an appeal to contemporary Christians to be re-educated and re-learn the rudimentary teachings of Jesus—with a view to the few righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust as exemplars.

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