



# Book Reviews

**The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe.** Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner. *The Free Press, 866 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10022. 1988. 260 pages. \$24.95.*

**Emissaries: A Memoir of the Riviera, Haute Savoie, Switzerland, and World War II.** Alexander Rotenberg. *Citadel Press, 120 Enterprise Avenue, Secaucus, NJ 07094. 1987. 309 pages. \$16.95.*

**The Warsaw Ghetto: A Christian's Testimony.** Wladyslaw Bartoszewski; translated from the German by Stephen G. Cappellari. *Beacon Press, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108. 1987. 103 pages. \$14.95.*

**The Cracow Ghetto Pharmacy.** Tadeusz Pankiewicz; translated from the Polish by Henry Tilles. *Holocaust Library, distributed by Pantheon, 201 East 50th Street, New York, NY 10022. 106 pages. \$16.95 (cloth), \$10.95 (paper).*

Reviewed by  
Jean-Marc Ran Oppenheim

Adequately and graphically chronicled in the numerous studies which deal with the military or political histories of the period, the story of the extermination of the Jews has forced us to question the morals and the values of a world that allowed, by its indifference, or encouraged, by its participation, those monstrosities.

Out of the bestial context of

Nazi-occupied and war-torn Europe, there now comes a glimmer of light and hope for humanity. Its form is partly shaped by the events and the individuals in the books examined here. The common theme which links these four titles is rescue; specifically, the rescue of Jews by non-Jews. Three of the titles are memoirs written by individuals who participated in the events described. Two of those, *The Cracow Ghetto Pharmacy* and *The Warsaw Ghetto*, are by non-Jews whose contributions to the rescue efforts were vital enough to be recognized and lauded by Yad Vashem, the Israeli institution dedicated to the study of the Holocaust. The third, *Emissaries*, is by a Jew. The fourth, *The Altruistic Personality*, written by a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, is a sociological analysis of the personality traits of the rescuers.

Tadeusz Pankiewicz's *The Cracow Ghetto Pharmacy* was originally published in Polish in 1947. It is a gripping account of life in the Cracow Ghetto from its inception in early 1941 to its ultimate destruction in December 1943. Pankiewicz, by administrative quirk, found himself operating the only pharmacy within the boundaries of the Cracow Ghetto drawn by the Germans. The pharmacy, in addition to medication, provided significant help to the Ghetto's inhabitants. It quickly became an important meeting place for the Ghetto's notables who gathered there after hours to discuss the latest German proclamations.

## The Warsaw Ghetto

A Christian's Testimony



Wladyslaw Bartoszewski  
Foreword by Stanislaw Lem

Information was exchanged by those present, support was provided for those who needed it, medicine was distributed as warranted. The author provides his recollections of events, personalities and conversations in a fashion reminiscent of stream of consciousness writing. He describes graphically the structure and administration of the Ghetto; including the Jewish bureaucracy which carried out the Germans' orders.

Because the pharmacy was located in the square from which the deportations took place, the author witnessed and vividly recorded those ominous and ultimately murderous events. On more than one occasion he gave shelter to individuals who managed to escape from the deceptive gatherings. While the narrative has a gripping rhythm, the translation suffers from an occasional syntactical mistake

and the story would have benefitted from a map or a sketch of the Ghetto's layout since the physical structure of the area played such an important role in his recollections.

Bartoszewski's account of the Warsaw Ghetto is also a tale of personal memory. It, however, is copiously supplemented by quotes from the published record, including German documents, the contemporary underground press, relevant Allied proclamations and broadcasts. His wartime role as a young liaison between the Jewish leadership of the Ghetto and the Polish underground gave him an invaluable perspective on the tragic events he skillfully narrates.

Because of his training as a professional historian, Bartoszewski is able to describe and, most importantly, assess the developments which led to the creation of the Ghetto, its structure and its eventual demise. His account of the Ghetto's uprising in April 1943 is lucid yet full of empathy for the doomed Jewish fighters and their supporters. And while he pays close attention to the details of the events and personalities he describes, he never loses sight of the moral perspective of the actions undertaken. This approach only serves to add to the historical dimension of the problem of rebellion and survival. It is a tale of moral and physical courage made greater by the apparent outcome of an unequal struggle.

Alexander Rotenberg was a young Belgian Jew who found himself working for the French Resistance as a courier

in the south of France. Along with other stateless Jews, he faced eventual deportation as a result of Vichy France's policies. At the urging of Jewish organizers, he decided to try to find a way to smuggle a number of Jews into Switzerland thus saving them from the French collaborationists. In the process, his cover was blown and he was forced to use his new-found channel over the Alps to save his own skin.

Written in a lively autobiographical style, Rotenberg's account reads like a story of adventure and suspense. Its impact, however, is far more substantial for he raises a significant question while in the process of recreating his wartime itinerary. Why did total strangers agree to help him escape, and why did he entrust his safety and his life to these strangers? Rotenberg only hints at the motives that compelled people to act selflessly and courageously in a manner that, if caught, almost certainly meant death. His is a wonderful story that weaves together courage, compassion and an excellent account of life on both sides of the French-Swiss border.

The Oliners' study of the altruistic personality examines in a systematic and thorough fashion the motives to which Rotenberg alluded. Theirs is a sociological project whose origins lie in the fact that Samuel P. Oliner was himself a survivor of the war in Poland who owed his life to Christian Poles. Spurred on by a desire to interview, with the help of trained social scientists in Europe and Israel, hundreds of individuals who actively participated in efforts to rescue Jews from the Nazi extermination machine.

The result is illuminating and extensive. The Oliners coded the results of their associates' interviews and, in a series of highly detailed tables, present their findings with the aid of a statistical perspective that should thoroughly please the most discriminating modern social scientist. Laymen should not be discouraged by this approach for the authors illustrate their findings by quoting liberally, almost unendingly, from their corres-

See BOOK REVIEW next page

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