Repentance for the Holocaust

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On 25 June 1950, a rabbi returned to Kassel, Germany, where he used to minister a Jewish community, who were now no more. He had come to the Jewish cemetery there to officiate at the consecration ceremony of a memorial for the Jewish victims of Nazi Germany. “We gather here for a moment of remembrance,” he began, “but do we need this moment? Our life is marked by gruesome memories in every moment. And if we could give expression to our pain at all, not the word but the scream, the piercing scream alone would be the expression for our suffering.”¹ Indeed, what more could have been said then and there when the memories were still so fresh?

But Rabbi Robert Raphael Geis did have a word for his audience on that day, a word that puts memories of suffering and the hatred that it naturally engenders in some perspective. He remembered and reminded his listeners of the “memories upon memories” of suffering and humiliation.\textsuperscript{2} He also remembered the love of the Jews for Germany that ended in catastrophe. But he was quick to remind his audience: “We were not alone in having made sacrifices (\textit{Opfer gebracht haben}); the followers of democracy, the truly faithful Christians, they all belong to the victims (\textit{zu den Opfern gehören}), whom we mourn.”\textsuperscript{3} Turning inward, he quoted Max Picard and warned his audience against forgetting the “sickness of Europe” that had made the atrocities possible, the healing of which required triumph over the “Hitler in ourselves” (P9). In the end he returned to the theme of memory:

\begin{quote}
We commemorate our dead, who had to die as creatures of God. If we want to keep them in living remembrance, then \ldots we must learn to recognize and love the human being as creature of God. Let me close with a prayer that is passed down to us in the Talmudic tractate of blessings: “The Eternal One, my God and God of my fathers, please grant that in no human heart shall hatred arise against us, and that \textbf{no hatred in our heart} shall arise against any one.”\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

Indeed, the memory of persecution and extermination can all too easily arouse antipathy—which is completely understandable—toward the perpetrators and their “willing executioners.” But can one simply wish it away like that? Yes, there was a minority of German opponents and victims of Nazism, as Victor Gollancz has already reminded us (P1), and that minority was not necessarily “less” in value than the majority (P10). And granted, too, that there is also a “Hitler” within each of us, that the call of turning should begin from within, a turning that begins with inward finger-pointing (P9). But are these stereotype-shattering memories and turning-the-table

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\item 2. Ibid.
\item 3. Ibid.
\item 4. Ibid. (emphasis added).
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insights enough to fight the strong currents of ill will that swell from the remembering heart? Is not “forgive and forget” a more direct remedy?

Rabbi Geis would be the last to prescribe forgetfulness as a cure for hatred, for he also saw danger on the other side: that Jews would neglect their duty of remembrance just because they were too busy participating in the postwar German economic “miracle,” thus failing at their vocation of serving as a forewarning to other peoples. “To remember (erinnern), to truthfully, honestly remember, is no sentimental feeling of pain. To remember means always the expulsion of that which is untrue from the inner home. . . . May those who are kindhearted to us join us in keeping this in memory (Gedächtnis), what kind of storm warning it is when Jews are being attacked, that it is always a sign of the coming of dark powers, which almost never stop at [just attacking] the Jews. We as Jews, however, should know that we are the sign among peoples.”

If forgetting leads nowhere, and only leaves what is false in oneself and one’s society unexamined, then the question remains: How can remembrance lead—or more precisely, which configuration of remembrance can lead—to the desired expulsion of the wrong without at the same time succumbing to hatred? A few months after Rabbi Geis’s sermon in 1950, another German Jew found a possible answer to this question. In January 1951 Kurt R. Grossmann, one of the first German citizens to be deprived of Germany citizenship (Ausbürgerung) in 1933 for “violating the duty and loyalty to Reich and people,” began to publish a series of short articles about non-Jewish rescuers of Jews, the “unsung heroes” (unbesungen Helden), in Aufbau. The objective was, as the author later explained, to pay the “debt of thanks” (Dankesschuld) and the “debt

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7. The concept was still unstable at this early stage. One of the “heroes” Grossmann hailed was an American telephone technician who had saved a handicapped
of honor” (*Ehrenschuld*) that he and the rescued Jews thought they owed their rescuers. One of those praised by Grossmann was the German scavenger “Mieze,” who, despite her poverty, had provided shelter and nourishment for two Jews in hiding in Berlin. In speaking of another rescuer, a Polish maid who had smuggled Jewish children out of a ghetto, taken care of them, and returned them to their surviving relatives, Grossmann wondered whether “it was the godly spirit who lived in this pious Catholic woman, or instinct” that was behind the life-threatening rescue mission. The remembrance of these heroes was at times also tinged with a sense of pity that they were not able to live a dignified life after the war as they well deserved. The report on Mieze, for example, ended with a reference to the squalid conditions in which the heroine lived in Berlin. Speaking of another German rescuer, Franz W. Fritsch, Grossmann was indignant that the hero was not recognized because he had “merely” saved Jews instead of “actively fighting” the Nazis, while the guilty were rewarded with “handsome pensions.” “It is a travesty of justice—for when someone thwarted the plans of the Nazis to murder the Jews or to exploit them until complete exhaustion, he was in fact combating National Socialism. Such acts should be rewarded and praised!” Grossmann’s broadening of the concepts of resistance and heroism, together with his persistent efforts to arouse public remembrance for his heroes, would eventually lead to the first collective recognition of the German rescuers of Jews in postwar Germany (see below).

While Grossmann was in the process of collecting these stories of rescue (and meeting the rescued and the rescuers, like Gertrud woman from a burning house. Kurt R. Grossmann, “Unbesungene Helden IV,” *Aufbau*, 16 Mar. 1951.


Luckner), a law was passed in the newly established State of Israel to commemorate—among the Jewish victims and opponents of Nazism—the “high-minded Gentiles who jeopardized their lives to save Jews.” The “Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Commemoration (Yad Va-Shem) Law” was passed by the Knesset on 19 August 1953. The institution (“Remembrance Authority”) established by the 1953 law (Art. 1) would in time be realized in the Yad Vashem commemorative and educational complex existing in Jerusalem today, and would include the “Righteous Among The Nations” commemoration (Art. 1.9). While why a nation would want to remember its own victims of foreign oppression is understandable, the reasons for writing a law to remember the foreign rescuers as well are not exactly obvious. As it turns out, the inclusion of the “righteous (gentiles)” in the state commemorative project had to do with the formation of the Yad Vashem idea itself.

According to the Israeli historian Mooli Brog, the idea of erecting a “monument of testimony” for the commemoration of Holocaust victims predated the end of the war: in 1942 a kibbutznik, Mordechai Shenhavi, first proposed the “national project” to the Jewish National Fund (JNF). Already at this time, Rabbi Moshe Burstyn of the JNF had suggested the use of the name Yad Vashem—literally, memorial and name—for this purpose, a term from the book of Isaiah (56:5). Though Shenhavi initially refrained from using


13. Article 1.9 of the Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Commemoration (Yad Vashem) Law.

14. In fact, it remains contentious to this day that Jewish rescuers of Jews are not honored by Yad Vashem as among the Righteous. See Arno Lustiger, Rettungswiderstand: Über die Judenretter in Europa während der NS-Zeit (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011), 414.


16. Brog also identified as the source the preexisting and “widespread custom in the new neighborhoods of Jerusalem” of using Isaiah 56:5 on dedication plaques for donated buildings for charity.
the name, he finally adopted it in 1945 when he publicized his idea amid a series of contentious discussions, lethargic responses, competing proposals, and public initiatives that saw the project of commemoration increasingly shaped by religious notions. It appears that the idea of establishing a “special room with the names of non-Jews who rescued Jews” was gleaned from another proposal and incorporated in the final “plan” Shenhavi presented to the public. Given the non-Jewish-specific context of Isaiah 56, the inclusion of the foreign rescuers in the commemoration of Jewish victims was unproblematic, if not “natural.” What emerged as a problem, however, was how to name the perpetrator: some in the Knesset called for the use of the name “German” instead of “Nazi,” the “German” instead of the “Nazi” oppressor, the “German” instead of the “Nazi” enemy. The proposed revisions were rejected on the grounds that remembrance of the victims should not serve the incitement of “racial hatred.”

It would be almost a decade before the first non-Jewish rescuers of Jews would actually be recognized by Yad Vashem. In the meantime, the “debt” of remembering the righteous, or sustaining gratefulness instead of hatred in the heart, had to be shouldered by private initiatives. Rabbi Geis continued to promote the memory

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17. The earliest proposal for remembering the righteous gentiles cited by Brog was presented by Baruch Zuckerman and Jacob Helman to the World Jewish Congress on 3 Feb. 1945, which was subsequently discussed by the JNF National Committee before Shenhavi’s “Yad Vashem Plan” was published for the first time in Davar on 25 May 1945. This point was confirmed by Brog’s correspondence with the author dated 9 Jan. 2013.

18. According to a report in the Freiburger Rundbrief, the right-wing opposition in the Knesset at the time proposed changing the wording of the legal text so that the word “German” would replace the word “Nazi.” This proposal was rejected by the then foreign minister Moshe Sharett, who said: “We would not be honoring the memory of the victims but desecrating it, if we abuse it to kindle racial hatred in the land of Israel.” See M.Y. Ben-Gavriêl, “Gesetz zur Verewigung des Andenkens an die vom Nationalsozialismus ermordeten Juden gebilligt,” Freiburger Rundbrief 6, no. 21/24 (1953/54): 40–41. See also Tom Segev, The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 436, 439.
of the “noble German human beings,” the “good-doers,” and “the other Germany” in his sermons and writings in the 1950s. And in 1957, two of the earliest collections of rescue stories during the Holocaust in honor of the righteous were published—one in German by Kurt R. Grossmann, and the other in English by Philip Friedman—thus complementing Geis’s religious claims with historical evidence. Of the two, the work by Grossmann, Die unsungenen Helden: Menschen in Deutschlands dunklen Tagen (The Unsung Heroes: Humans in Germany’s Dark Days), is still of primary relevance to our analysis, not only because it was published in Germany, but also because of its (over)emphasis on German rescuers and—consequently perhaps—the responses it generated in German society.

Overcoming his earlier disappointment with postwar Germany, Grossmann advanced his project of remembering his “heroes” within Germany itself. He was encouraged by a publisher in Berlin, arani Verlag, to collect more testimonies and make them known to the wider German reading public. Hence in early 1956, he made a public call (through the German dailies Telegraf and Süddeutsche Zeitung) for both the rescued and the rescuers to submit their testimonies, and received more than a hundred written responses. When the collection was published in the autumn of 1957, about half of the 350-page volume was devoted to Germany and Austria, and included the stories of “Germans at home” and “Germans in occupied territories.” Grossmann characterized his efforts to publish about the “unsung heroes” as a Jewish duty to remember the gentile rescuers:

22. Mertens, Grossmann, 269.
These selfless individuals, who acted as the unorganized determined executioners (Willensvollstrecker) of the eternal law of humanity, arose when they helped the crushed creature—the Jews . . . with the risk of their own life. . . . I feel as a Jew the duty to tell the story of the brave non-Jewish men and women. 23

One of the brave Germans remembered by Grossmann was Oskar Schindler. The account of Schindler’s work was not only the longest in the volume, but probably also the most substantial report of his rescue mission published in German until then—a mission that has become world-famous thanks to Steven Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List (1993). Indeed, Schindler’s story was apparently so important for Grossmann that he published a portrait of him, “Retter von 1100 Juden” (Rescuer of 1,100 Jews), in Aufbau even before his book appeared. 24 In this account we can perhaps trace Grossmann’s passion for remembering the righteous back to the urgings of Jews rescued by Schindler, the Schindlerjuden: “In the year 1947, a group of Jewish women appeared at the Jewish World Congress and appealed to its members to send basic necessities to the non-Jew Oskar Schindler. ‘Why should we send packets to a German?’ I asked. ‘What? Don’t you know the story of Oskar Schindler, our rescuer?’ The speaker of the group was incredulous.” 25 Though Schindler was for a long time neglected by his fellow nationals, his beneficiaries remembered him, gave him financial support, and brought him to Israel to be honored by Yad Vashem, as among the first to plant a tree in the garden of the Righteous Among The Nations. 26 Gratitude toward Schindler was so great that Leopold “Poldek” Pfefferberg, one of the Schindlerjuden, would prove instrumental in making the German righteous a household name, as we shall see below.

23. Grossmann, Menschen in Deutschlands dunklen Tagen, 12.
25. Ibid. (emphasis in the original).
For Grossmann, the remembrance of rescuers like Schindler and Luckner was important for both the Germans and the relationship between them and the Jews: “It seems to me to be decisive for the relationship between Jews and Germans that what is humane is not suffocated in that cruel happening . . . for the few examples (of hundreds) prove that there is a weapon against hysteria of the masses, and that nonconformism is neither antistate nor antisociety; the masses can learn from the courageous deeds of individuals, to orient themselves anew and to overcome the abject state of national shame.”

Grossmann’s endeavor to bring recognition to these unsung heroes found an enthusiastic response in the Jewish community in Berlin, which decided in 1958 to set up a fund to support the livelihood of recognized rescuers who were in need. The same year, at the instigation of Senator Joachim Lipschitz, the Berlin Senate joined this private initiative to bring honor and support to more “Unsung Heroes” (U.H.), which was now the official term for the rescuers. Senator Lipschitz, who had suffered Nazi persecution himself as a “half Jew,” concurred with Grossmann in that he saw in the “existence of these human beings . . . the proof that even the harshest dictatorship is not able to wipe out all seeds of humanity.”

Through the groundwork laid by Lipschitz and Grossmann, the rescued Jews and their relatives sought to pay, in their own words, the (inherited) “debt of thanks” and “debt of honor” they deemed they owed their benefactors.

Between 1958 and 1966, the U.H. initiative gave recognition and financial support to 760 rescuers. But more than just honoring the honorable, the initiators also wanted to turn Germans away from a concept of heroism that glorified only “patriots” like soldiers and generals, while “mere” citizens who followed their conscience were not considered. Grossmann was categorically against

27. Grossmann, Menschen in Deutschlands dunklen Tagen, 21 (emphasis added).
28. Ibid., 27.
29. Ibid., 28.
31. Ibid.
the all-excusing principle “My country, right or wrong”; rather he advocated the “eternal ethical law of humanity.” For him, heroes are “those few who, remaining clear-headed even as waves of mass hysteria swept by, . . . have helped oppressed people despite the collateral dangers.” They are “human beings who risk their lives and freedom for the sake of truth. . . . They act with no reward other than the satisfaction that they have done in the time given them what seemed to them to be the self-evident commandment of humanity.”

Coincidentally, there was no better time to debate what true heroism means than the early 1960s, when the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem laid bare how even a very ordinary paterfamilias could commit monstrous crimes. The much-observed trial of Eichmann made it all the more urgent to cultivate a remembering of evil that does not slip into convenient hatred against a single perpetrator or the one “perpetrator-nation.” We have already seen how Hannah Arendt’s report on the trial sought to bring attention to the non-German-specificity of the Eichmann phenomenon, in conformity with her earlier work “Organisierte Schuld” (Organized Guilt) (P1). We shall now look at how a rabbi in California was so moved by certain materials coming out of the trial that he acted immediately to bring Jewish attention to the neglected rescuers, which later—without any obvious plan at work—helped support German remembrance of the Shoah victims and their German helpers through the American TV series Holocaust, which was broadcast in (West) Germany in January 1979.

Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, born in New York in 1925 to Polish Jews from Warsaw, was listening to the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem when he heard for the first time the testimony of Hermann Friedrich Gräbe, a German civil engineer who had saved Jews

32. Grossmann, Menschen in Deutschlands dunklen Tagen, 11.
33. Grossmann, “Unbesungene Helden I.”
from mass killings in Ukraine and who later became the only German to testify for the prosecution in the Nuremberg trials.\footnote{See Lustiger, *Rettungswiderstand*, 26–27; Peter Krahulec, “‘The Road Not Taken. . .’: Grundzüge einer Didaktik der Erinnerung,” in *Erinnerungsarbeit: Grundlage einer Kultur des Friedens*, ed. Berhard Nolz and Wolfgang Popp (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2000), 55–64; and Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (London: Cassell, 1995), 11.} He returned to his community in California and established the Institute for the Righteous Acts (later changed to the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous) in order to search for, make known, and take care of the rescuers wherever they could be found. Through ceaseless sermons and writings on these righteous gentiles, a Jewish-American writer and TV producer, Gerald Green, came to know these hitherto little-known stories of heroism during the Holocaust. Apparently touched by these stories and also by Schulweis’s enthusiasm about their discovery, Green began to incorporate the “righteous Christian” in his own literary and media projects, culminating in the *Holocaust* TV series, in which Hermann Gräbe was remembered as “Kurt Dorf”—the good German civil engineer who had listened to his conscience and testified. In its novelized form, *Holocaust* was presented as a work of fiction that “will restore your faith [in humankind], despite its chronicle of monstrous deeds unparalleled.”\footnote{Gerald Green, *Holocaust* (London: Corgi Books, 1978).}

Yet, how can this be? How can the representation—even in fiction—of “monstrous deeds” in the Holocaust be anything but an antithesis to “faith in humankind”? For Rabbi Schulweis, the key lay in a particular kind of remembrance—\textit{remembrance for “constructive repentance.”} In May 1963, he gave a lecture at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles, in which he, like Rabbi Geis before him, broached the question of how to remember the Shoah. “Memory is an ambiguous energy,” he said. “It can liberate or enslave, heal or destroy. . . . How we interpret the Holocaust holds serious consequences for the character and morale of our children, not only for the Jewish child but for the non-Jewish child as well.”\footnote{The speech was reproduced in Harold Schulweis, “The Bias against Man,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 34, no. 1 (1963): 6–14.}
Schulweis, who had been a pupil of Abraham Joshua Heschel, was deeply concerned about a remembering that unwittingly solidifies the self-identification of Jews as “the world’s eternal victim.” As a father and educator, he wondered what Holocaust remembrance might do to the morale and moral strength of his children and students: “We dare not feign amnesia, but how are we to remember without destroying hope?” 38

For some other Jewish thinkers, the solution was to highlight Jewish resistance by remembering also the Jews who had actively fought back—physically as well as spiritually, so as not to succumb to the pessimism of powerlessness. 39 Rabbi Schulweis took another route, one that looks outward for confidence, in the world out there, in the hasidai umot ha-olam, the righteous non-Jews:

In Jewish tradition, belittling man does not raise the dignity of God. We do not turn toward God by turning our backs upon man. . . . It is not easy these days to speak for man. It is easier to believe in God than to believe that man is in His image. . . . How are we, as moral educators, to make memory the father of conscience and of constructive repentance? . . . Morality needs evidence, hard data, facts in our time and in our place to nourish our faith in man’s capacity for decency. . . . While yet in its embryonic stages, the evidence steadily mounts of an unknown number of silent heroes who risked their lives and jeopardized the lives of their families to save our people. 40

Schulweis cited Grossmann’s and Friedman’s pioneering studies as examples of this growing evidence. He also referred to the story of Hermann Gräbe—though neither Their Brothers’ Keepers nor Die unbesungenen Helden had mentioned him. For Schulweis, these “acts of righteousness” were “events of godliness”; the righteous were the “face of God,” the proof that God did not turn away from the victims, and the “evidence of the divine viability in our lives.” 41 As such, Jews and Germans alike should endeavor to

38. Ibid.
39. See, for example, Yehuda Bauer, The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness (London: Macmillan, 1980).
41. Ibid.
discover these valuable individuals: “We need Beate Klarsfelds and Simon Wiesenthalst to search out the rescuers of our people with the same zeal and energy with which the murderers of our people are properly hunted down and brought to justice.”

Like Gollancz before him, when speaking up for the German opponents of Nazism (P11), Schulweis was unimpressed by the argument that these good people were too few to be “representative” or “representable.” “Which perverse logic holds that we obliterate the memory of man’s nobility so as to preserve the memory of his degeneracy?” he argued. And he resented that names like Göring and Goebbels should become remembered but not (Hermann) Gräbe and (Heinrich) Grüber. Turning to Talmudic teachings, he noted:

For the sake of thirty-six righteous the world is sustained; for the sake of thirty righteous non-Jews, the Talmud declares, the nations of the world continue to exist; for the sake of ten good men, Sodom and Gomorrah would be spared; for the sake of two righteous women—Naomi and Ruth—the Rabbis say the nations of Moab and Ammon were spared. Who measures righteousness by number?

It is this willful—that is, unnatural, counternatural—tenacity in remembering the righteous others that contributes to moral remembrance, or remembrance for constructive repentance. “Memory can be a healing art but it requires skillful uses of materials at hand,” observed Schulweis. It is not only the spiritual health

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42. Beate Klarsfeld, a German journalist, and Simon Wiesenthal, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust, are both known for their engagement in bringing Nazis to justice.
44. Schulweis, “Bias against Man,” 12.
45. Heinrich Grüber was a Nazi opponent and a rescuer recognized by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among The Nations. Schulweis interviewed him in April 1962 and their conversation is recorded in Schulweis’s book Conscience: The Duty to Obey and the Duty to Disobey (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2008), 87.
47. Ibid., 11.
of the victims’ later generations that is at stake, but also that of the perpetrators, for “fingers of insistent accusation” may simply lead to resignation and “brooding guilt” rather than “constructive repentance.” Schulweis proposed instead that it is the duty of the Jews to help humanity regain a foothold after Auschwitz: “We are today called upon to tap the moral energy of Judaism for the sake of the world. We, who know man’s capacity to destroy, bear witness to his capacity to save.”

Many of these exhortations from this early lecture by Schulweis would be reiterated and expanded in the ensuing decades of his career as a Conservative rabbi, culminating in his dictum, “Remember the evil, but do not forget the good.” His persistent message about disproportionate remembrance of the righteous others generated a broad range of responses: in academia, the nascent research on the “bystanders” and the “altruistic personality” in the United States was credited to Schulweis’s initiative and encouragement. In addition, before he delivered his lecture on the righteous, the rabbi had already contributed to the popularization of the righteous through Gerald Green, who was also born in New York. The result of this early intervention was a thirty-minute feature, “The Righteous,” with six rescuers who had saved Jews from the Nazis recounting their stories, aired on Channel 11 (WIIC-TV, Pittsburgh) the evening of 24 December 1962. This early encounter with the rescuers was apparently so captivating that Green would continue to work on this theme in his subsequent works.

48. Ibid., 8.
49. Ibid., 14.
52. Ibid. See also “TV Tonight,” Indiana Evening Gazette, 24 Dec. 1962. According to this short description of the program, “the story [of rescue] came to the attention of producer Gerald Green through the writings of Rabbi Harold Schulweis.”
In 1965 Green published a novel, *The Legion of Noble Christians*, about a reluctant Irish Catholic, “Buck Sweeney,” commissioned by a Jew in America, “Sherman Wettlaufer,” to seek out and reward those “righteous Christians” in Europe who had rescued Jews during the Holocaust. The story of Sweeney and Wettlaufer, both from New York, and the European “nobles” they tried to reach out to, became not only a tool for recounting the heroic deeds of rescue amid human horror, but also an arena for debate about how and why the righteous should be remembered, in spite of the (European) cynicism against their remembrance. Among the noble Christians interviewed by Sweeney was “Dr. Ludwig Helms,” a German civil engineer who had testified in the war crimes trials.53 The tribute to the real Hermann Gräbe, who was the only German witness for the prosecution in the trials, was conspicuous: like Gräbe, “Dr. Helms” testified about the massacres of Jews in Ukraine in 1942 and for that became a social outcast because of his “traitorous” act.54 The testimonies of the two were almost identical.55

If Grossmann’s *Helden* and Friedman’s *Keepers* were the first historical accounts of the righteous as a group, then Green’s *Legion* could be the first, if not the only, fictionalized account of

54. Ibid., 76. See also Habbe, “Einer gegen die SS.”
remembering the righteous—as in searching for them and recognizing them—and the internal, psychological struggles involved in the enterprise.\footnote{Green, \textit{Legion of Noble Christians}, 47, 292.} When Green wrote this work, he could not have foreseen that the Jewish-Catholic collaboration—or more precisely, the Jewish-initiated joint effort—of remembering the righteous Christians would be replayed in real life in the 1980s, as we shall see later when a Polish Jew saved by a German Catholic insistently persuaded an Australian Catholic to write down the rescuer’s story and to make his name known, while at the same time—albeit unwittingly—bringing world renown to a Talmudic saying concerning the rescuer.

It is a pity that \textit{Legion} was never translated into German, as it could have added a timely canto for the unsung heroes to Peter Weiss’s \textit{Ermittlung}.\footnote{This drama by the German writer Peter Weiss was published and staged in 1965. It is a somber piece—divided into eleven cantos—that takes materials from the contemporaneous Auschwitz trials. Peter Weiss, \textit{Die Ermittlung: Oratorium in 11 Gesängen} (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1965).} Nevertheless, another chance came more than a decade later when Gerald Green was tasked to write the teleplay for the \textit{Holocaust} TV series, which, unlike \textit{Legion}, had a profound impact on the collective memory of the victims of Nazism in Germany.\footnote{For a concise assessment of the general influence of the TV series \textit{Holocaust} in Germany, see Torben Fischer and Matthias N. Lorenz, eds., \textit{Lexikon der ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945} (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 243.} \textit{Holocaust} was aired in the United States in 1978, and the novel in English came out the same year. Both were brought to German viewers and readers in 1979. The TV series itself was watched by millions of Germans, registering record ratings in postwar German TV history.\footnote{See “‘Holocaust’: Die Vergangenheit kommt zurück,” \textit{Der Spiegel}, no. 5 (1979).} In this creation of Green’s, Hermann Gräbe, the quintessential German righteous for Schulweis and Green—before Oskar Schindler’s name came to the fore a few years later—once again appeared as the German civil engineer who had seen the atrocities committed in the German name and bore
witness. “Kurt Dorf” was his name this time. And in addition to his role of being the only German who testified in the war crimes trials, Dorf also assumed the position of German conscience—the voice that kept speaking to closed German ears as the crimes unfolded. “Uncle Kurt” was portrayed by Green as attempting repeatedly to challenge the false moral certitude of his nephew, “Erik Dorf,” the German youth who gradually lost all his bearings as he ascended in the Nazi hierarchy.

On his first appearance in Erik’s diary, Kurt shocked his nephew by calling Reinhard Heydrich, Erik’s boss, the “Blond Beast.” When Erik was participating in the Babi Yar massacre, in 1941, having “developed a crust, an armor around any pity or compassion that might have remained” in himself, Kurt was there as the still small voice asking, disconcertingly: “Who were the . . . victims? . . . so many civilians? Is it really necessary . . . ?” When Erik’s family was happily playing Stille Nacht with the piano “offered” to them (in reality stolen from the Jewish doctor, Josef Weiss), Kurt would not relent from inquiring about the real owner and the fate of his family. When Erik wanted to discourage Kurt from employing Jews, who were “marked for special handling,” Kurt bluntly told him: “Say what you mean, Erik, say the word. Murder.” And finally, when the defeat of Germany was imminent and Erik was frenetically burning the Auschwitz files, Kurt was there, too, admonishing him: “Do you honestly think you can now hide the murder of six million people? . . . You may just manage to cheat the hangman with that kind of logic [that one was just obeying orders, not doing something wrong]. But I hope to God you don’t.” But Erik was already beyond admonishment at that point. “I should have had you shot long ago,” he told his uncle.

60. Green, Holocaust, 95.
62. Ibid., 208–11.
63. Ibid., 355.
64. Ibid., 392. It was also here that Green gave Kurt a chance to confess, to rid himself of self-righteousness.
Hence rather than just a footnote to the larger story, the German righteous was a thread throughout Holocaust. In Green’s execution, then, the vision of Rabbi Schulweis of harnessing memory—the memory of the righteous—for cultivating conscience was implemented. Whether it actually succeeded in this task, though, belongs to another inquiry. Furthermore, whether the Germans watching Holocaust actually recognized Hermann Gräbe in Kurt Dorf is another question, for the real righteous himself had received hitherto only scant recognition in his native land. Gräbe himself was sure that Kurt Dorf was modeled after him. But this connection was most probably beyond the average German TV viewer of 1979, not to mention Green’s encounter with Gräbe’s story through Schulweis, and the rabbi’s clarion call to remember the righteous in the aftermath of the Eichmann trial. Nevertheless, it is presumptuous to conclude that the unknown or little-known existence of real heroes behind their fictional adaptations “does not count.” For if and when a desperate German youth rejects Green’s message of “faith in humankind” in his Holocaust, because such “good Germans” could only exist in fiction, he can be comforted by the “hard evidence” that the German righteous exist, that there is a choice to do good even in “impossible” moral situations. It is little wonder then that a contemporary German commentator, who had a Nazi father, found Green’s Holocaust “merciful” (barmherzig), for not only were the German viewers spared the even more unpalatable

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65. In contrast to the novelized form, the original TV series had dedicated the first appearance of righteous Germans not to Hermann Gräbe, a.k.a. Kurt Dorf, but Fr. (Bernhard) Lichtenberg, whose actual words about the church praying also for the Jews were repeated almost verbatim in the artistic representation (see the first part of the four-part TV series).


67. “Real ‘Holocaust’ Figure Talks Up,” Merced Sun-Star, 10 May 1978.

brutality and bestiality committed in the German name in historical reality, which had been brought to light in previous court proceedings but had not been shown on TV, but there was also the remembrance of the German righteous, the light to look to in times of almost complete darkness and moral despair. 69

Between *Legion* and *Holocaust*, (West) Germany was in an eventful phase of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: in the courts were the Auschwitz trials, in theaters dramatized scenes of the trials were presented through Weiss’s *Ermittlung*, and soon the streets and campuses would be swamped by German youth yearning for change. But also in the Bundestag, politicians were debating about *Verjährungsfrist*, or the period of limitation for prosecuting Nazi murders. It was a time of intense remembering; some two decades after the downfall of Nazi Germany, the past was never quite as present as in this period.

For our present analysis of remembrance, a small detail in the *Verjährung* debates deserves mention, for quite unexpectedly, even in these ostensibly legal-political processes, Jewish conceptions of remembrance were injected into the German public sphere, thereby introducing the link between remembrance and atonement/reconciliation to German political culture. On 10 March 1965, a young German politician made his name with a speech before his fellow members of parliament. The subject of the debate was whether it made sense to give special treatment to murder, thus making Nazi murderers prosecutable even beyond the standing period of limitation of twenty years. Affirming such special treatment, the speaker argued that for those who were supporting the motion of extending the limit “a single consideration stands above all considerations of juridical nature, namely, that the sense of justice (*Rechtsgefühl*) of a people would be unbearably corrupted if murders have to remain unatoned for (*ungesühnt*)

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69. It is interesting to note that, typical of “repentant disagreement” (P8), it was a Jewish survivor, Elie Wiesel, who had in fact complained about the “exaggerated emphasis” on brutality and stereotyping in Green’s *Holocaust*. See his “Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction,” *New York Times*, 16 Apr. 1978.
when they can be atoned for.”\(^70\) For him, the argument that the issue must be brought to a close for the sake of national honor should be rejected, because “the honor of the nation is for me in making the honest attempt to do it [make atonement], although the attempt will, I know, remain incomplete, so that one can say, That which is possible has been done.”\(^71\) The speech itself was brilliant (and the motion succeeded, to a certain extent),\(^72\) but it was a single quotation in the speech that ensured that it would be remembered:

Finally I would like to close my speech with a saying. There is this saying in the memorial in Jerusalem for the six million murdered Jews... The saying is from a Jewish mystic of the early eighteenth century—. . . Forgetfulness extends (verlängert) the exile, the secret of redemption is remembrance.\(^73\)

The extension of “exile” for Germany (i.e., its being left outside of the community of nations) would thus result if the Germans failed to remember their “unatoned” wrongdoings through the “extension” (Verlängerung) of the period of limitation. This paradox was noted by a contemporary observer of the parliamentary debate: “[The Parliament] has faced up to the German past without hiding and dodging, it has conjured up painful memories, but precisely by doing this, it has pointed to a way out of the exile, the way that the Jewish mystic has spoken about.”\(^74\)

The speaker on that day was Ernst Benda, a Christian Democrat who led a minor dissenting faction in his own party to join ranks with the Social Democrats on this issue. He had just visited Israel


\(^71\) Borowsky, “Ende der ‘Ära Adenauer.’”

\(^72\) The beginning of the counting of twenty years was changed from 1945 to 1949, hence the decision on extension was postponed to 1969, when it was decided to extend the period to thirty years. Only in 1979 was it decided to definitively abolish the period of limitation for murder and genocide.

\(^73\) Borowsky, “Ende der ‘Ära Adenauer’” (emphasis added).

in 1964, where he paid tribute to Yad Vashem. Benda’s grandfather was Jewish, and his grandmother was among the “wives of Rosenstrasse” who had protested in Berlin for their imprisoned Jewish husbands.\(^75\) Benda’s translation of this Jewish saying attributed to the Baal Shem Tov became the standard German translation that would illuminate the meaning of remembrance, of painful but recuperative remembrance, for later generations of Germans up to the present.\(^76\)

While Benda, who would later become the president of Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court, was to be credited for introducing this Jewish redemptive meaning of remembrance to German public debates about a topic of the Nazi past, it was another German politician who would popularize it—also in the Bundestag—two decades later. Richard von Weizsäcker, the sixth president of the Federal Republic, gave a speech on 8 May 1985 to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of German capitulation. He called the day a “day of remembrance” (Tag der Erinnerung), “especially of the six million Jews who were murdered in German concentration camps.”\(^77\) Like Geis, he made use of the peculiarity of the German word for “remembering” to call for the internalization of history; but unlike Geis, who emphasized (to his Jewish audience) the task of “expulsion of that which is untrue,” including ethnic hatred, Weizsäcker emphasized (to his German listeners) the inclusion of


\(^{76}\) “Das Vergessenwollen verlängert das Exil, und das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung.” See Borowsky, “Ende der ‘Ära Adenauer.’” Its standard English rendering can be found in Elie Wiesel, Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 227: “Oblivion is at the root of exile the way memory is at the root of redemption.”

the victims, the survivors, and their values system in one’s deepest concerns: “To remember (erinnern) means to commemorate (gedenken) an event so honestly and plainly that it becomes part of one’s own interior (Teil des eigenen Innern).”\textsuperscript{78} Remembrance is akin to erecting a “memorial (Mahnmal) of thoughts and feelings in our own interior.”\textsuperscript{79} For Weizsäcker, the task of keeping remembrance awake is vital to Germans old and young, guilty or not, because he “who does not want to remember inhumanity is again susceptible to new dangers of infection.” Furthermore, remembrance on the part of the Germans is the precondition for any talk about reconciliation with the Jews:

The Jewish people remember and will always remember. We seek as human beings reconciliation (Versöhnung). Precisely because of that, we must understand that there can be no reconciliation without remembrance. . . . Forgetfulness extends the exile, the secret of redemption is remembrance. What this oft-cited Jewish wisdom probably wants to say is that faith in God is faith in his works in history. If we on our side are willful in forgetting . . . we would then offend the faith of the surviving Jews and ruin the sprouts of reconciliation.\textsuperscript{80}

This gradual migration of emphasis from “redemption” (Erlösung)—an originally religious, divine-human concept—to “reconciliation” (Versöhnung), interhuman reconciliation, would spread after Weizsäcker’s landmark speech as the secularized interpretation of

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} The German words for memorial, such as Mahnmal and Denkmal, of course carry different connotations. A Mahnmal is not only a memorial per se but a memorial as admonishment (Mahnung), so that the event remembered may not take place again.
\textsuperscript{80} Weizsäcker, \textit{Ansprache am 8. Mai 1985}, 5. The wording of the Jewish saying used by Weizsäcker was exactly the same as Benda’s. According to Weizsäcker’s biographer, the preparation of the speech involved teamwork that lasted for months. See Harald Steffahn, \textit{Richard von Weizsäcker mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten} (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), 107–9. At any rate, Weizsäcker wouldn’t have to look far for advice, for the saying, as he said, was already “oft-cited” by the German press around the time of the preparation of his speech. See, for example, the essay by Saul Friedländer, “Bewältigung—oder nur Verdrängung?,” \textit{Die Zeit}, 8 Feb. 1985; and also “Eine eigenartige geistige Gymnastik,” \textit{Der Spiegel}, no. 17 (1985).
the Jewish precept. The “exile” was interpreted to mean, among other things, also the division of Germany and the loss of former German territories. Quoting a sermon by Cardinal Meisner in East Berlin, Weizsäcker said, “The disconsolate result of sin is always separation (Trennung).” As such, he called for the strengthening of the “ability to make peace and the readiness for reconciliation within and without,” and commended Aktion Sühnezeichen for its “works of understanding and reconciliation” in Poland and Israel. Likewise, the meaning of forty years was also borrowed from the “Old Testament”—which, according to Weizsäcker, “holds deep insights for everyone regardless of his faith”—to signify a full generational shift from the “responsible fathers’ generation,” and to serve as a warning of the “danger of forgetting” and its consequences. Citing the book of Judges, he warned his fellow Germans that “often the remembrance of help and rescue . . . lasted only forty years. When remembrance broke down, peace ended.”

Postwar Germans did not only borrow this idea of remembrance in the service of redemption/reconciliation from the Jewish culture of remembrance. Another Jewish idea, which justifies the disproportionate remembrance of the rescuers because of the moral weight assigned to them, also figures prominently in the German culture of remembrance: “He who saves a single life saves the entire world.”

81. See, for example, Klaus-Dieter Gernert and Helmut Wolff, Das Geheimnis der Versöhnung heißt Erinnerung: Zur Situation von Kriegsgefangenen und Fremdarbeitern während des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Rösrath und andere zeitgeschichtliche Beiträge (Rösrath: Geschichtsverein für die Gemeinde Rösrath und Umgebung, 1991).
83. Ibid., 9.
84. Ibid., 13. In the book of Judges, one reads about the “peace that lasted in the land for forty years” under the leadership of Othniel, an interregnum between periods of subjugation caused by sin (3:9–12).
This quote from the Talmud has been used to commemorate individual German rescuers—even rescuers of non-Jews—from Oskar Schindler to John Rabe. The origins of its importation to postwar German discourse on the “good Nazi” were in fact to be found in Schindler’s rescue mission, which earned him a gold ring engraved with this saying made by the Jews he had rescued. Yet, if it were not for the persistent efforts of some Schindlerjuden to help spread the story of Schindler, this Jewish saying would probably have remained in the sphere of private memory, that is, between the rescued and the rescuer himself.

The Jewish-Catholic collaboration in making the righteous known that was prefigured in Green’s Legion took place in real life in the early 1980s, when Thomas Keneally, an Australian-Catholic writer of Irish ancestry, chanced upon Leopold Pfefferberg (a.k.a. Paul Page), a Schindlerjude in America, who insisted that the novelist write about the life of Schindler. Keneally initially declined Pfefferberg’s request, after listening to the story and seeing the documents. “I’m a Catholic and I do not know much about what happened to Jews during the Holocaust,” he said. “I will tell you all I know,” Pfefferberg insisted, and then added, “As a Catholic of Irish origin and a famous writer, you will be more reliable. . . . Human suffering, either Jewish or Irish, is the same.” What transpired was that the two flew around the United States and Europe together, interviewing people and fact finding, and eventually a novel was published that immortalized the name of Schindler.

Keneally’s Schindler’s Ark appeared in 1982 and became the blueprint for Steven Spielberg’s film Schindler’s List, which debuted a decade later. A contemporary review of the book in Der Spiegel

86. See the German poster of Florian Gallenberger’s film John Rabe (2009), which reads, “Wer ein Leben rettet, rettet die ganze Welt.”
87. See Crowe, Oskar Schindler, 454. See also Thomas Keneally, Schindler’s Ark (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 399.
88. This is Pfefferberg’s account of what happened when he first met Thomas Keneally, the future author of Schindler’s Ark/List. See Aleksander B. Skotnicki, ed., Oskar Schindler in the Eyes of Cracowian Jews Rescued by Him (Kraków: Wydawnictwo, 2007), 239–42. See also Keneally’s own account in his Searching for Schindler (London: Septre, 2008), 33.
carried a photo of the Kraków-Plaszów concentration camp with the quote “He who saves a single life saves the entire world.” This Talmudic saying is originally expressed in two parts: He who destroys a single soul (of Israel), destroys the entire world. He who saves a single soul (of Israel), saves the entire world (Sanhedrin 4:5; 23a-b). In its original context, it is about warning people of the severity of giving witness to cases concerning life and death in court, hence the twofold structure. It is an interpretation of the “bloods of your brother” in Genesis 4:10 and the guilt of the silent witness in Leviticus 5:1. In Keneally’s Ark, this saying marked the inception and completion of Schindler’s rescue mission, as Itzhak Stern, a persecuted Polish Jew, is portrayed as instilling this “crucial dictum” in the mind of his future rescuer, when they first met in late 1939, in whom he saw a possible “safe house, a zone of potential shelter.”

What is significant about this dictum is that it not only emphasizes to the potential rescuer the importance of the rescue mission. It also points out to later generations the great claim the rescuer has to their memory, even if she or he has saved only a single soul amid the murder of millions. As Rabbi Schulweis put it, the quantity of the rescuers has nothing to do with their quality. “We’re not dealing with a sack of potatoes. . . . He who saves a single life saves the entire world. These rescuers have saved many worlds.”

The same sentiment was expressed by Philip Friedman, whose wife and daughter were murdered by the Nazis: “We are willing to call them heroes if they saved even one human life.” In other words, this dictum legitimates the supposedly “disproportionate” remembrance of the righteous, which can all too easily be dismissed on “statistical” grounds.

89. “Der gerechte Goi.”
90. Keneally, Schindler’s Ark, 51–54. Crowe’s historical research has revealed a somewhat different account but with the essentials in agreement with Keneally’s. See Crowe, Oskar Schindler, 99–102.
91. Schulweis, “Post-Holocaust Recovery.”
92. Friedman, Their Brothers’ Keepers, 179.
93. Needless to say, the potential to use the other half of the self-same Talmudic saying to “disproportionately” remember or even punish the murderer exists.
But for one relatively just man, Noah, the world would have been completely destroyed, according to the book of Genesis. For some Schindlerjuden, the experience of being rescued by one man (and his wife, Emilie) could find expression in this biblical symbol; the ark of rescue is thus also the ark of memory—the carrier and transmitter of transformative remembrance. A Polish newspaper ran an article in 1983 calling Oskar Schindler “the Noah in Kraków.” “More than a thousand Jews found shelter in Enamel Dish and Munitions Factory in Kraków. It was a Noah’s Ark in times of contempt, when each day was filled with fear of Auschwitz,” a survivor was quoted as saying. Friedman quoted Sholem Asch in the introduction of his documentation Keepers: “On the flood of sin, hatred and blood let loose by Hitler upon the world, there swam a small ark which preserved intact the common heritage of a Judeo-Christian outlook. . . . It was saved by the heroism of a handful of saints.” Schulweis, on the other hand, quoting Isaiah 32:2, described the rescuers as having made themselves “as hiding places from the wind and shelters from the tempest; as rivers of water in dry places; as shadows of a great rock in a weary land.” For Keneally, who had once studied in a seminary, the multifarious symbol of the “ark” was also preferred to the “list”: “I liked Ark better than List. It was not only the question of Noah’s ark, but the Ark of the Covenant, a symbol of the contract between Yahweh and the tribe of Israel. A similar though very rough compact had existed between Schindler and his people. If they did their work properly . . . he would rescue them.” List was subsequently preferred by Keneally’s American publisher in consideration of American-Jewish feelings (for the ark of Noah could have conveyed the unintended message of passivity during the Holocaust). It was at this point that the originally theologically rich but potentially offensive

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94. Translated and reproduced in Skotnicki, Oskar Schindler, 361.
95. Friedman, Their Brothers’ Keepers, 13–14.
96. Schulweis, Letting Go/Holding On, 12.
98. Ibid., 188–91.
symbol of the “ark”—which points to both divine fidelity and the saving power of human righteousness—was dropped in favor of the nonreligious, inoffensive “list.”

But can the remembrance of the righteous really be offensive? Even with religious symbols that are at once evocative and ambiguous? Our brief survey above of German-Jewish efforts and collaborations in remembering the righteous can at least point to a palpable tradition in this characteristic remembrance, and to those turners who rose to take up this potentially hazardous task. After all, as is the case with any act of turning, this determined remembrance is also not without danger of abuse. Isn’t it a historical fact that both Schindler and Gräbe were Nazis? Then what’s wrong with statements like “Not all Nazis are bad” or “The Nazi era wasn’t all that terrible”? Attention and care are therefore called for when dealing with the remembrance of the righteous, to guard against such manipulation of subtle changes in context and connotation.

Jewish historian Yehuda Bauer once made a bold statement in the Bundestag concerning “memory work” in Germany: “We, Germans and Jews, are dependent on one another in this undertaking. You cannot cope with the memory work without us. . . . Together, we have a very special responsibility vis-à-vis all of humanity.” In light of the difficulty for Germans in remembering German rescuers of Jews without falling into the trap—real or suspected—of “whitewashing German history,” one has to concur with Bauer’s conclusion. Indeed, in remembering their helpers, the surviving Jews and the proponents of Jewish memory of the righteous are also helping Germans to remember a past, their past, that could otherwise be demoralizing to the point of paralyzing. On the constructed common ground of remembrance of the righteous, Jews lower themselves to the place of German bystanders and later generations where they

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99. Both were for a time nominally registered members of the NSDAP.
can both turn to the righteous few in humility. As the Israeli poet Chaim Hefer wrote in 1987 in “The Righteous,” “Would I have opened my family door / To a foreign child of men at my gate? . . . Remember the time of Sodom!”\textsuperscript{101} Without a doubt, the cooperation in memory work that Bauer spoke about also entails the more unpleasant task of remembering and examining the darkness, not just the sparks of righteousness surrounded by it, or else constructive repentance cannot also occur. There is no guarantee of the acceptance of the offer of cooperation in remembrance; indeed, as Stephan Braese observed in the first decades of postwar West German literature, “competitive memory” can still dominate.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} Excerpted and translated from the German rendition by Arno Lustiger. See his \textit{Rettungswiderstand}, 9–10.