

Spiritual Resistance in Marseille- J. M. Perrin, O.P.

I do not wish to trace the history of the War nor that of the Resistance, but only to say how I lived these events and the part that I took in them, a very small part, I acknowledge; I would have wished to give the maximum, because the very interests of the Lord were at issue. My blindness set me far from heroic witness... But in my action at the service of the spiritual resistance.... like assistance to the victims of Nazism, I saw the occasion to repair as much as I could the evil of antisemitism. I lived most often these years of resistance thinking that they gave me the possibility of risking my life for Christ and for my brothers in Christ... I helped a few dozen to escape, whereas thousands perished. This thought is so painful that I recall their memory only by necessity.

Hitler's victory in 1940 seemed to me worse than the greatest catastrophe in our history. The menace was spiritual and attacked the soul of France, because the persecution of the Jews was not only a national evil but it was the most grave offense that one might inflict on the Lord. This, according to Zechariah 2:12 is "a wound to the pupil of the eye." To treat human beings as beasts for destruction was a crime; it also manifested the hatred and contempt for that which touches most deeply the heart of Christ; it gave him, as Léon Bloy said, "like a blow in the face of his Mother". (97) It was necessary to show clearly that Nazism was a perverse ideology and to fight it as an imminent danger to the spirit. From 1937 I explained to students the meaning of the Vatican's condemnation of Nazism (*Mit brennender Sorge* of March 1937) without the right to appeal.

...We organized conferences to which we called Dietrich von Hildebrand, an Austrian anti-Nazi whom I would help later. One of the encyclical's directives was to fight antisemitism and to develop our links with Judaism. For more than ten years we were attentive to these links, thanks to the presence at Sainte-Baume each summer of Father Jean-Pierre Altermann, a Jewish convert.... From 1938 we had the habit of dedicating each Sunday morning to dialogue between Jews and Christians in a climate of respect and confidence which allowed a better response to questions of both sides. Together we denounced the evils of antisemitism. The mobilization put an end to these encounters, which remain one of the best memories of my life.

Father Piorot d'Alaune attended these sessions frequently and, in order to hide German Jews, he soon transformed the hostel of Sainte-Baume into a boarding school...

(98) When in 1940 Radio Vatican (created in 1931) began, in several languages, to denounce German violence, a Catholic, M. Cavatorta took down broadcasts by shorthand and distributed them, the *Voice of the Vatican*, the first clandestine Catholic periodical... 2,000 copies.

The bishop of Marseille, Monsignor Delay, wrote a letter to Catholics of Marseille, raising a vigorous protest against antisemitism, in the name of the Gospel and humanity created in God's image. On September 6, 1941 it was read in all the churches and chapels of his diocese. The diffusion of *Mit brennender Sorge* thus bore fruit. I believe that the Vichy government considered the encyclical to be "Church business" to which they did not wish to draw attention...

p. 99-110 Simone Weil

Help to Victims

(100) The fight against Nazism took place also with direct aid to victims. Indeed, scarcely several days after the Armistice, Edmond Michelet arrived from Brive at the monastery with a group of German

and Austrian refugees, approximately ten people, all in danger (the first victims of Nazism were German anti-fascists). He did not warn us because the telephone could be under surveillance. The soul of the group was Dietrich von Hildebrand, whom I knew already. This layman was a professor of Philosophy in Munich and was one of the first to denounce the anti-Christian evil of Hitlerism. First he was a refugee in Austria where he had friendly contact with the Chancellor Dollfuss. Sought by the Gestapo at the moment of the Anschluss, he escaped only by a miracle. He took refuge with his family in Switzerland, then in France and became very active in the group of thinkers linked with the Dominicans of Editions de Cerf.

(101) Again in danger of arrest, D.H. came to the monastery, accompanied by his wife, his daughter and daughter-in-law. With him as well was Father Oesterreicher, a Jewish convert who became a priest, Seckel and his wife, another Jew who had an important role in the Austrian economy, and Zendel, who spoke in German on French radio. These people were entrusted to Edmond Michelet by Bishop de Solages... He asked us to lodge this group and to find a way to help them to leave the country. He had crossed France from Brive for this, in spite of the chaotic situation for trains and roads in France in July 1940, just after the exodus. Von Hildebrand was not Jewish but he was on the list of wanted people; Seckel as well, in so much as he was Jewish.

We took counsel: They could not stay in the hotel because of the Gestapo. Oesterreicher stayed in the monastery as well as Zendel, I believe... For the others we found three trustworthy families and we began steps to make them leave France...

(102) For all these refugees it was necessary to find passports from a non-belligerent country and obtain visas from a consulate to cross the border. How to find these passports? If I have a good memory, we found them at the consulate of Czechoslovakia, so our protégés all took the nationality of this country. Among our friends was the vice-counsel of Brazil, Del Castro. He was pro-France and very friendly with Dominicans. However, his consul was pro-German so he had to present the papers for signature without the consul realizing that the visas were for persons in transit. Great difficulty! Finally these Czechs had a visa for Brazil.

This was the first step. How to make them pass to Brazil? They could not leave France openly because all was controlled. The solution was to bring them first to Spain. Father Danilo, a Dominican, and Solange Beaumier, my secretary, departed with them, on the way to Perpignan. We counted on our Dominican sisters to help them. We were lucky! They knew one of the secretaries at the police prefecture who immediately understood the problem and had them meet an officer... He simply asked Father Danilo if we knew all these people and if they worked for France. (103) We said yes, without further explanation... This man led all the families to the Spanish border, not by the normal route, but by a way known to him so as to avoid the customs post. When the cars reached the border, he said simply: "Now you are in Spain; I can leave you." Then he returned to Perpignan with Father Danilo. France was completely crushed, gagged, but she made it possible to save people. I think that this officer was in the prefecture for similar cases: to save people and lead them to the Spanish border.

... Several years after the War I met Hildebrand in the Munich train station. We met in the heart of Germany in complete freedom! Father Oesterreicher became one of the most active members of the Amitié Judéo-chrétienne in New York. I met him at the time of the Council; he was affectionate, friendly and marvelously fraternal.

Joseph M. Perrin, *Comme un veilleur attend l'aurore* (Paris: Cerf, 1998) p. 96-102. Translation by L.E. Frizzell

Rocco Buttiglione, "Reflections on Dietrich von Hildebrand's 'My Battle Against Hitler'" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 91 (2017) p. 747-50. See "A Dietrich von Hildebrand Bibliography" p. 751-54