

Seton Hall University

From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

May 4, 2014

Education by Example

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**Address at the Yom HaShoah Remembrance
Epiphany Cathedral, Diocese of Venice, Florida
Sunday May 4, 2014**

EDUCATION BY EXAMPLE

Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.

We gather under the somber shadow of the *Shoah*, in the context of the Nazi ideology that sponsored a warped vision of humanity. How did Adolf Hitler describe his political program? Hermann Rauschnig, an official from Danzig, East Prussia, recorded Hitler's "table talk" from 1932-1934.

We are now at the end of the Age of Reason.

The intellect.... Has become a disease of life.

Our revolution is not merely political or

social; we are at the outset of a tremendous overthrow

Of moral ideas and of Man's spiritual orientation...

The tablets of Mount Sinai have lost their validity.

Conscience is a Jewish invention; like circumcision,
it mutilates Man...

There is no such thing as truth...

One must distrust mind and conscience; one must place

One's trust in one's instincts.¹

Scorning the biblical teaching that every human being comes from the same ancestry, denying the sublime statement that each of us is created in the image and likeness of the one God, Hitler divided the world between Nietzsche's super-race and the lesser beings, some groups even less worthy of life than those designated to be slaves of the Teutonic race. To counter this abominable theory, still influencing certain groups, even in this country, we recall the teaching of the Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin. Looking at a pile of beautiful coins, a teacher exclaimed: "How great is the emperor who can make a hundred coins in his image, each exactly like the other! How much greater is our God, who can make millions of human beings in his own image, and each of us is different!" (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5).

We gather today shortly after the ancient Israelite feast of Passover, celebrated to our time as a perpetual memorial of the liberation of the twelve tribes from slavery in Egypt. That departure in haste showed how the God of Abraham could triumph over the Pharaoh, who claimed divine authority over his kingdom and all its inhabitants. Modern dictators have exhibited a similar megalomania.

¹ John Ms. Oesterreicher, *Martyrs of the Decalogue* (South Orange: Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies, 1984) p. 5. He lived and exercised priestly ministry in Vienna from 1927 until the *Anschluss* (Annexation) of Austria in 1938. From 1934 he fought against Nazi legislation in neighboring Germany. After the War he maintained that the uniqueness of the *Shoah* should not rest on the number of victims, horrendous as that total was, but on the fact that the Jewish people witnessed to God and the order of life to an authority higher than the State. He commented on the citation of Hitler: "The Jews were an invisible phalanx, standing in the way of the amoral society he [Hitler] wished to build, a society based, not on the distinction between good and evil, but on the 'Aryan instinct' or the drive of Nietzsche's "Blond Beast." Their very being spoiled his dream of becoming the architect of the new world, the creator of a society in which biblical values- the Ten Commandments, first of all- were 'outlawed.' As spoilers of his scheme, they had to be done away with. Even their memory was to be eradicated."

During the Passover Meal each spring, the Jewish people remember this past event in a distant place with the conviction that *this* generation is the beneficiary of the wisdom and power, the goodness and mercy of God. The event of Passover and Exodus was limited in time and space, but the divine attributes transcend the ages, so God's hand may be experienced again and again.

In every generation every Jew must consider himself as one who came out of Egypt... The Holy One, blessed be He, did redeem not only our ancestors but also us with them; as it is written; and he brought *us* out from there to bring *us* to the land He had promised to our ancestors.
(Passover Haggadah)

As in all the practices related to divine worship in the biblical heritage, the Passover Meal provides a context for education of the younger generation. The Father tells the children gathered around the table: "This is what the Lord did for *me* as he brought *me* out of the land of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8).

In the light of this spiritual message, which has been incorporated into the tradition of Christianity as well, some people ask: why was God silent during the years of the Shoah? Others ask: did God only *seem* to be silent? Were people, even many of good will, perhaps deaf to the divine voice echoing down the millennia in the Word being proclaimed in worship? Very cleverly, the Nazis allowed Christians to exercise piety by going to church, but attacked anyone who expressed a moral evaluation of their regime.²

Today, in this ceremony, we cannot fathom deep dimensions of this question, but we may recall the challenge to educate and inspire our contemporaries and the younger generation to consider the lessons of history, especially examples of fidelity and heroism. I wish to present two examples, one from the Second Book of Maccabees and the other about a Jewish teacher in Poland.

The drama of Jewish history includes many excruciating tests with vindication of the righteous for their fidelity. One of these events is celebrated each year in the eight day feast of Hanukkah, the rededication of the Temple in 164 B.C. after it had been defiled during the reign of the Seleucid Emperor Antiochus IV. Stressing the superiority of the Greek culture, he demanded that subject peoples refrain from their own religious practices and offer sacrificial worship to the Greek deities. Pious people of Judea rejected this demand on both accounts. A terrible persecution followed over a period of three years.

Two versions of this history are preserved in the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures. The First and Second Books of Maccabees belong to the canon of the Bible for Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Second Maccabees give spiritual resistance pride of place over the military genius of Judas Maccabeus, the son of Mattathias.

Education by example is celebrated in the narrative of the martyrdom of Eleazar, the elderly scribe, and that of the Mother and her seven sons. The text of 2 Maccabees introduced a theological interpretation of their heroism.

² Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has made the point about the seeming silence of God: "A weak parent seeks to control his children. A true parent seeks to relinquish control, which is why God never intervenes to protect us from ourselves." Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World* (N.Y. Schochen, 2005) p. 25

These punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people... The Lord never withdraws his mercy from us. Though he disciplines us with calamities, he does not forsake his own people. (2 Mac 6:12-17)

Eleazar refused to eat pork nor would he accept the substitute of kosher meat and merely pretend to share in the pagan sacrificial meal, "lest many of the young should suppose that Eleazar in his 90th year has gone over to an alien religion.... For the sake of me living a brief moment longer they would be led astray because of me, while I defile and disgrace my old age" (2 Macc 6:24-25). Personal or selfish concerns should never take precedence over a person's duty to the community and to the younger generation!

He contrasted fear of men and awe before God. "For even if for the present I should avoid the punishments of men, yet whether I live or die, I shall not escape the hands of the Almighty" (6:26). Eleazar's death will "leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws" (6:27). Courage should be contagious, so Eleazar's fidelity under duress will uplift others who face such ordeals. The narrator remarked: Eleazar's death was "an example of nobility and a precedent of valor to be remembered not only by the young but by the multitudes of his nation" (6:31).³

While we may not be put to such a test, as elder members of the community, our quiet and consistent attitude and practice of fidelity to highest moral principles in good as well as in difficult times will be remembered by the younger generation.

The young should be reminded of the fidelity of the three youths put to the test as recorded in the Book of Daniel 3. This narrative was an inspiration to those who experienced persecution at various times, both Jews and Christians. They enunciated a profound principle of faith.

To the threat of the fiery furnace, the three youths replied: "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace... But if not... we will not serve your gods or worship the golden statue that you have set up" (Daniel 3:16-17).

After recalling the witness of the elderly scribe Eleazar, I wish to introduce you and especially the young people to a special teacher in Warsaw, Poland. We know him as Janusz Korczak but his real name was Hersz Goldszmit (1878-1942). His parents were Jewish but they did not take him to the synagogue or offer much opportunity for him to learn about his religion. He studied to be a medical doctor and later became a teacher of children from the poor areas of Warsaw. He wrote frequently for newspapers and magazines, using the name Janusz Korczak.

Several years before Father Edward J. Flannigan founded Boys *Town* in Omaha, Nebraska in 1917 with the help of a Jewish businessman, Henry Monsky, Dr. Korczak founded a home for orphans in Warsaw. In his later years, Korczak came to an awareness of the place of prayer and religion in the life of the children he had rescued from the streets. He taught them to revere God and to pray even though he

³ See my essay, "[Education by Example: A Motif in Joseph and Maccabee Literature of the Second Temple Period](#)," *Of Scholars, Savants and their Texts: Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman* (ed. Ruth Link-Salinger) (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) p. 103-12 at 107-11.

struggled without the support of a faith community. “If I had kept in my heart a simple faith in God, I should have prayed that he hasten the moment of redemption; for the world in suffering, and first and foremost to suffer are the children.”⁴

When the Nazis conquered Poland in September 1939 they immediately imposed all the anti-Jewish laws that had been enacted in Germany from 1933 onwards. Korczak refused to wear the yellow star but made a large flag with the Star of David to fly over the orphanage where he lived with the children, teaching them to care for each other, conducting the affairs of the house under a council of ten boys and an adult educator. When the Warsaw Ghetto was created in late 1940, the orphanage was inside its walls. By then there were 200 children in his home.

Dr. Korczak was given opportunities by friends to flee from Warsaw, perhaps to leave Poland, but he refused to leave the children. On August 5, 1942 thousands of Jews were forced from the ghetto to the train station. Soldiers with whips drove them to cattle cars destined for Treblinka. Suddenly the commandant ordered the soldiers to step back. They saw Dr. Korczak in front of a marching group-children four abreast, following the flag of the orphanage. Pushed into the cattle car they did not cry but clung to their teacher.⁵ In an atmosphere of hatred they knew love.

Children in the United States have many treasures, but the most important is the sense of love that touches their lives, allowing them to grow with the gifts of the Spirit and to make the future with signs of hope in a world of respect and trust that together they can make a better society. As Saint John Paul II wrote in his “Reflections on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto” (April 6, 1993):

As Christian and Jews, following the example of the faith of Abraham, we are called to be a blessing for the world [cf. Gen. 12:2ff]. This is the common task awaiting us. It is therefore necessary for us, Christians and Jews, to be first a blessing to one another. This will effectively occur if we are united in the face of the evils which are still threatening: indifference and prejudice, as well as displays of anti-Semitism. For what has already been achieved by Catholics and Jews through dialogue and cooperation I give thanks with you to God; for what we are still called to do I offer my ardent prayers. May God further guide us along the paths of his sovereign and loving will for the human family.⁶

⁴ Z.E. Kurzweil, *Modern Trends in Jewish Education* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964) p. 190. For a biography, see Betty Jean Lifton, *The King of Children: The Life and Death of Janusz Korczak* (Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1988)

⁵ See the University of Minnesota’s Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies web biography at www.chgs.umn.edu/museum/responses/hergeth/bio.html.

⁶ See Eugene J. Fisher and Leon Klenicki (ed), *The Saint for Shalom: How Pope John Paul II Transformed Catholic-Jewish Relations* (New York: Crossroads, 2011) p. 235.