

Corrie ten Boom: A Protestant Evangelical Response  
to the Nazi Persecution of Jews

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There is a tree in Jerusalem. Beneath the tree is a plaque that reads “The ten Boom Family.” That tree is located on The Avenue of the Righteous Gentiles at Yad Va Shem, the memorial to those who perished in the Nazi Holocaust. On February 28, 1968, a Dutch survivor of Ravensbruck concentration camp, Corrie ten Boom, the last of her generation of the ten Booms, planted the tree and gave a short address. Before she spoke to the assembled crowd, she whispered to herself, “Father, Betsie, Willem, Kik—you gave your lives for God’s chosen people.”<sup>1</sup> In that little speech, she shared the inspiration that had led her and her family to shelter Jews from the Nazi genocide:

I remember Nollie [her sister] telling me: “We love the Jews because we can thank them for the two greatest treasures. First of all, a Book written by the Jews. It is the Bible and we must thank Israel for it. It is the Book which is almost bursting with good news and glorious promises. All its writers were Jews, except Luke, but he was converted through a Jew.” I want to thank you, the Jews, for this Book. For the Bible has shown me the way to the second blessing which Nollie mentioned. It got me acquainted with my greatest Friend. He was a Jew. On His

divine side He was the Son of God, but on His human side He was a Jew. And this Friend is my Saviour.

What a joy it has been for me to be in Jerusalem, the reunited city, now entirely in Israeli hands. However, we are all conscious of the fact that the times are very serious, not only in this country, but for the whole world. And what a joy that in this Book we see God's side of the history of the world. Many of you are expecting the Messiah to come, and so are we Christians. We believe He is coming again and He will do what He promised, "I will make all things new." Then the whole earth will be covered with the knowledge of the Lord like the waters cover the bottom of the sea.

Hallelujah, the best is yet to be!  
I wish you Shalom, shalom, shalom!<sup>2</sup>

Miss ten Boom's statement reveals, first, her evangelical commitment. But just as apparent is her professed love for the Jewish people and their heritage, a heritage that, in her view, provided the background for the Christian message. Taken at face value, the statement indicates belief in the strong ties that should exist between Christians and Jews, since both trace their beginnings to the same source. She and her family risked their lives to save Jews. Her father, Casper, other sister, Betsie, and nephew, Kik, died during their incarceration. Her lone brother, Willem, died shortly after the war after devoting the wartime years to hiding endangered Jews. Corrie herself suffered in a concentration camp before being released on New Year's Day 1945.

Should her statement be taken at face value, or were there other reasons for offering Jews refuge? Why should an old watchmaker and his two spinster daughters go to the trouble, knowing that discovery by the occupying troops would mean punishment, even death? This paper provides a history of the ten Boom family in World War II, the subsequent career of Corrie ten Boom, including the publication of her highly successful book *The Hiding Place*, an analysis of one critique of evangelical involvement in the rescue movement, a closer look at the ten Booms' attitude toward Jews throughout the family's history, and a conclusion regarding the motivation for their rescue activities.

### *The ten Boom Family in World War Two*

The watch shop and the ten Boom home in the city of Haarlem were in the same building, called the Beje, an oddly shaped structure that began as two separate buildings. The family never had much money, but their faith made them a strong unit. Before the war, they were convinced that Germany would eventually get rid of Hitler. Even “when letters to Jewish suppliers in Germany came back marked ‘Address Unknown,’” commented Corrie, “we still managed to believe that it was primarily a German problem.”<sup>3</sup> But then came the occupation and the restrictions on Jews; the increasingly hostile policies toward them became a Dutch problem after all.

Rescuing Jews was not something Corrie had planned ahead of time. Her brother, Willem, already was active in the rescue movement, but the rest of the family simply responded to needs deposited at their doorstep in the form of Jews who were seeking asylum. “We had not planned our rescue work,” Corrie later noted. “People started coming to us, saying, ‘The Gestapo is behind us,’ and we took them in. Soon others followed.”<sup>4</sup>

Corrie became the chief organizer of the underground that operated out of their house. The operation consisted of thirty boys, twenty girls, twenty older men, and ten women.<sup>5</sup> Until their arrest in February 1944, the ten Booms concealed more than 700 Jews,<sup>6</sup> some of whom had become permanent residents of the Beje. A secret hiding place was built into the wall in Corrie’s upstairs bedroom. Drills were conducted in anticipation of a Gestapo raid. The entire family actually relished the work.

The Beje was more than just a hiding place; it was a home away from home for those seeking refuge. Evenings were devoted to games, musical entertainment, the reading of Shakespeare, even Hebrew lessons. Each evening ended with prayers.<sup>7</sup>

On one occasion, news came that a Jewish orphanage in Amsterdam was about to be raided and all the babies killed. The ten Boom underground went to work, utilizing German army uniforms given to them by those who had defected. Dressed as German soldiers, the underground workers arrived at the orphanage, demanded the babies, and took them to safety. They saved one hundred lives that night.<sup>8</sup>

The ten Booms would often say that angels kept the house safe. They expected miracles. One of their underground workers later recounted an episode that he considered an answer to prayer. John, a distributor of underground papers, had been arrested, then released. Whenever he would go to the home of another underground worker, the Gestapo would follow shortly afterward and arrest the inhabitants. It was confirmed that he was now working with the Germans. “We struggled with the question of how to stop him and concluded that John had to be killed,” he related. Corrie, however, wouldn’t accept that. She felt they still had another weapon to use before the gun. “She asked us to follow her to another room in the house. All eight of us knelt with her as she prayed: ‘Lord, we have come to this terrible decision. But we pray you to show us this does not need to be done. Like Gideon, we ask for a token from you. If, before Monday, no one is taken prisoner anymore, we will assume that you have worked in the heart of John for the good of others.’ The arrests stopped.”<sup>9</sup>

Underground work at the Beje halted on February 28, 1944. A man came to the shop and asked for six hundred guilders. He and his wife had been hiding Jews, he said.

His wife had been arrested and if he could bribe the policeman at the station, she could be freed. He needed six hundred guilders; he had been told Corrie had “certain contacts.”

Corrie was sick with influenza and let down her guard. She promised to help.

The man was an agent for the Gestapo. It didn't take long for the raid to begin. As she lay in her bed, she saw the Jews and others they were hiding race past her into the specially constructed hiding place. The Germans dragged her downstairs with the rest of her family, the extended family that included her sister and brother who happened to be there that morning for a weekly worship service. All were taken away to prison.<sup>10</sup>

The Germans kept a guard on the house, convinced that Jews were hidden there. The four Jews and two underground workers who had escaped into the Angelscrib, as it was called, had to stay there nearly three days, afraid to make any noise. Sleeping was virtually impossible. The hunger and the waiting combined to make their tenure in the cramped hiding place torturous. Finally, on the third day, underground workers sneaked into the house and safely spirited away all six.<sup>11</sup>

The ten Boom family did not fare as well. From the local police station, they were transferred to the Scheveningen prison. Casper, age eighty-four, already was weak; he died ten days later in a hospital corridor and was buried in a pauper's grave, with no one bothering to inform the family.<sup>12</sup> Betsie was transferred with Corrie first to Vught, which had been constructed with political prisoners in mind, and then to Ravensbruck, in Germany, where Betsie died in December 1944. Kik, Willem's son, also was transferred to a concentration camp. When the Russians took the camp, they transported all the prisoners to Russia; he died from abuse and starvation.<sup>13</sup> Although Willem was released from prison some weeks after the raid, he suffered from tuberculosis of the spine and died

in December 1946.<sup>14</sup> Corrie herself, through a clerical error, was released from the camp. She returned to Holland determined to help those who had suffered in the war.

### Corrie ten Boom after the War

During their imprisonment at Ravensbruck, Betsie had felt God wanted them to set up a house after the war that would minister to refugees. Although it was primarily Betsie's dream, Corrie brought it to fulfillment. Once the war ended, she began receiving invitations to share her experiences. Increasingly, the invitations came from Christian groups in other countries, so that in just a few years, Corrie ten Boom, who had rarely left her own city of Haarlem prior to the war, became a world traveler. Taiwan, India, Argentina, Israel, Vietnam—she became familiar with every part of the globe, traveling incessantly until her health failed in 1978. During the span, she spoke in sixty-three different countries, not just to Christian groups, but also in prisons. She called herself a “Tramp for the Lord,” which became the title of one of her books. Her message was the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with a particular emphasis on forgiveness for one's enemies.

That message was tested early in her travels when, in 1947, she came face to face with one of her torturers. She was in Germany. At the end of her talk, a man came forward.

One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat; the next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back with a rush: the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man. . . .

The place was Ravensbruck and the man who was making his way forward had been a guard—one of the most cruel guards.

Now he was in front of me, hand thrust out: “A fine message, Fraulein! How good it is to know that, as you say, all our sins are at the bottom of the sea!”

And I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course—how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?

But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face-to-face with one of my captors and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbruck in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard there.” No, he did not remember me.

“But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein,”—again the hand came out—“will you forgive me?”

And I stood there—I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven—and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place—could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

It could not have been many seconds that he stood there—hand held out—but to me it seemed hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do.

For I had to do it—I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us. . . .

I knew it not only as a commandment of God, but as a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able also to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives, no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was as simple and as horrible as that.

. . . And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart.”

For a long moment we grasped each other’s hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God’s love so intensely as I did then.<sup>15</sup>

Corrie had passed her own personal test of forgiveness and now felt that she had the moral authority to tell others that they needed to forgive as well.

Her renown in the larger evangelical community began with the publication of her book *The Hiding Place* in 1971. To date, more than 4.5 million copies have been sold.<sup>16</sup> While in Israel, she presented the 2 millionth copy to Golda Meir and then prayed with her.<sup>17</sup> Corrie, however, did not become rich



through its publication. Instead, she directed the royalties into an organization she founded, Christians, Inc., which supports ten missionaries from ten different racial backgrounds.<sup>18</sup>

The book became so popular among evangelicals that a movie version came out in 1975. This was not the typical low-budget Christian film; it employed well-known actors such as Julie Harris (Betsie), Arthur O'Connell (Casper), and Eileen Heckart (a concentration camp prisoner). At the world premiere, in Beverly Hills on September 29, the theater had to be evacuated when a tear gas bomb went off. A member of the American Nazi Party was responsible.<sup>19</sup>

The film was well received by some reviewers. Rex Reed, for instance, gave it a four-star rating, commenting,

. . . *The Hiding Place* is one of those rare, magical films touched with the sincerity and sweetness of human goodness. It's a long, involving tapestry of faith and strength in the face of brutality and injustice that moved me deeply. . . .

*The Hiding Place*, like the valiant ten Booms who lived it, seems divinely inspired. Every man, woman and child with a Christian heart should consider it an honor to see it. . . . The film is a hymn to the kind of galvanizing inner perseverance that kept them from going mad.<sup>20</sup>

Another reviewer concluded: "I don't know whether the finished product—scheduled to be released at key premieres in selected cities throughout the United States, will win any Academy Awards or not. But if awards are made for integrity, sensitivity, humanity and spirit, this film will sweep them all."<sup>21</sup>

After the publication of the book and the release of the film, Corrie ten Boom became almost an icon in the evangelical world. Fleming H. Revell, her book publisher, and World Wide Pictures, the producer of the movie, even cooperated in July 1978 with a special "This is Your Life" tribute at the Christian

Booksellers Convention in Denver that year. Luminaries from the evangelical world and her old friends and associates from Holland combined to honor her.<sup>22</sup> Corrie's active life, however, came to an abrupt halt one month later when she suffered a serious stroke. She lingered until 1983, dying at age 91.

### *The Evangelical View of Jews—A Critique*

The story of the ten Booms seems straightforward—a family of Christians who appreciated Jewish heritage and who had a genuine love for the Jewish people, despite their own belief that God can accept no one without faith in Jesus Christ. The history of purges and other acts of discrimination in Christian Europe, however, has led to deep suspicions in some that the attitude of evangelicals toward Jews may not be as altruistic as it appears, or that at least their views are tinged with a certain condescension for a race of people who have rejected their Messiah.

This paper cannot be expected to deal with all evangelicals, but those suspicions can be tested on the ten Boom family, at least. Consequently, it seemed important to find some scholarly commentary on the family as a springboard to this examination. The ten Booms are treated significantly in an article by Hebrew University of Jerusalem scholar Yaakov Ariel that analyzes evangelical holocaust memoirs.<sup>23</sup>

Ariel's thesis is that conservative Protestants interpret the Holocaust within the parameters of their own theology, a theology that asserts the Holocaust was not caused by anti-Semitism, but more generally by man's alienation from God. He goes on to laud the behavior of evangelicals during the Holocaust, pointing out that "the percentage of fundamentalist Dutch Protestants who rescued Jews during World War II was more than three fold their percentage in the total Dutch population, making up about 25% of those who saved Jews."<sup>24</sup> Yet he says that their message was that the Jews brought this on themselves by rejecting Jesus as their Messiah. This analysis, while delivered evenhandedly and in an admirable spirit, misinterprets, I believe, the evangelical worldview in some significant ways.

Ariel quotes one Jewish Holocaust survivor who converted to Christianity: "If my people had known the things that pertain to their salvation, namely, to believe in the Lord Jesus and to proclaim Him to the people in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe, this disaster would never have happened." Ariel then comments that the speaker considered the destruction of European Jews by the Nazis as part of "God's plans for the Jews."<sup>25</sup> Perhaps the speaker being quoted said that at some point, but that is not evident in the article. Ariel seems to derive his conclusion from the quote itself. Yet, the quote merely speaks in generalities, i.e., if the Jews had accepted their Messiah and spread the good news, more people would have become genuine Christians, and there would have been less fertile ground for the Nazi poison to grow and thrive. There is nothing in that

quote to signify that the destruction of the Jews was God's plan, and thereby nothing to signify that this particular evangelical believed that it was.

As Ariel summarizes evangelical Holocaust memoirs, he concludes: "The Holocaust, the suffering, misery and mass murder that characterized the reality of Jewish existence during World War II, did not derive, in the evangelical interpretation as reflected in the memoirs, from brutal antisemitism, instigated by various historical, sociological or psychological factors. It is, rather, the outcome of a rebellion against God."<sup>26</sup> With this statement, Ariel creates a false dichotomy. It's as if the Holocaust came about *either* from anti-Semitism *or* from a rebellion against God. Lost is the concept that the rebellion against God may have come in the form of anti-Semitism; that the root of the problem was man's antipathy to God's law and that it manifested itself primarily through anti-Semitism.

A response to Ariel two years later in the same journal points out other problems with his approach. Lawrence Baron of San Diego State University notes that even though Ariel's title focused on "evangelical-fundamentalist Christians in general, five of the seven memoirs are by Jews who converted to Christianity before, during, or after the Holocaust" and another one "was written by a German supporter of Nazism who repented and became a Christian after the war."<sup>27</sup> In fact, the only memoir Ariel studied that actually fit his title was *The Hiding Place*. Baron questions Ariel's application of his thesis to the ten Boom family.

In the only two instances where Corrie referred to Jews who converted to Christianity, she refrained from denigrating Judaism and Jews and depicted Jesus as supplementing rather than supplanting the Jewish covenant with God. One case concerned Harry de Vries, who, in

Corrie's words, "had become a Christian, some forty years earlier, without ceasing in the least to be a loyal Jew." He is quoted as telling the ten Booms that he was "a completed Jew! A follower of the one perfect Jew." The other involved Mary, a Jewish girl whom the Germans arrested along with the ten Boom family. In prison she embraced Christianity and recalled that Casper once had assured her that she would remain a Jew even if she accepted Jesus. "On His divine side he was the Son of God," he had told her, "but on His human side He was a Jew."<sup>28</sup>

Baron considers the ten Booms' motivations for saving Jews to be typical of many devout Dutch Calvinist rescuers. He cites research from the Altruistic Personality Project, which indicates that many of the Dutch Reformed helped Jews "out of a philosemitism rooted in their religious beliefs."<sup>29</sup> Respect for the Jewish covenant concept and Biblical law fostered these philosemitic feelings.<sup>30</sup> Baron concludes his response to Ariel by stating, "While evangelicals interpreted their Holocaust experiences as a vindication of their religious beliefs, their proselytizing fervor was not always premised on a 'teaching of contempt' for Judaism and Jews, as the case of Corrie ten Boom vividly demonstrates."<sup>31</sup>

Baron does provide some evidence that the ten Booms were sincere in their love for Jews and that they did not consider Jewish resistance to the Christian message as the reason for the Holocaust. For a more vivid demonstration, however, one must look specifically at the history of the family.

### *The ten Booms' Attitude Toward the Jews*

It was Corrie's grandfather, Willem ten Boom, who, in 1837, bought the house that would later be used as an underground hiding place. Seven years later, his minister, Dominee Witteveen, came to Willem with a request to help him begin a prayer fellowship for the Jews. "Willem," he said, "you know the Scriptures tell us to pray for

the peace of Jerusalem and the blessing of the Jews.” Willem was in total agreement and this group began meeting in the Beje to read Scriptures and pray for the Jewish people.<sup>32</sup>

If there was one person who served as an inspiration for this movement, it was Isaac Da Costa, a lawyer and poet, Jewish and of Portuguese descent, who had been converted to the Christian faith. Da Costa’s primary goal was the revival of Christianity in Dutch society, but a significant portion of his work was devoted to missionary endeavors among his Jewish brethren. The World Conference of the Evangelical Alliance was held in London in 1851; Da Costa was one of the speakers. A portion of his address focused on the relationship between Jews and Christians:

. . . There is one nation which has not been represented at this great international gathering. It is God’s own beloved people of Israel. Let us remember that our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is now interceding for us at the Throne of God, was born a Jew in a Jewish family in the nation of Israel. It is true that Israel missed God’s target and was, for a time, set aside and dispersed among the nations. But the day will come when they will fall at the feet of their Messiah in true repentance and live! . . . The time will come when the King of the Jews will call a holy gathering in Jerusalem. This is not human imagination, but God’s own Word through the witness of another Jew, the Apostle Paul. . . .

We all agree that a strong bond ties us to Israel. As to the past, Christianity is a fruit, an offshoot from the old people of God. As to the present, is not Israel’s existence among the nations, despite centuries of hostility and persecution, one of the strongest proofs against the world’s unbelief? And as to the future, how clearly the fulfillment of God’s promises for Israel is related to the future of the world and the coming Kingdom of Christ!<sup>33</sup>

Nothing in that address would seem to indicate contempt for the Jews. Just the opposite is evident. And this is the man, Da Costa, that Willem ten Boom considered a hero of the faith. As a letter from Casper, Willem’s son and Corrie’s father, reveals, “As long as I can remember, the portrait of Isaac Da Costa has been hanging in our living room. This man of God, with his burning heart for Israel, his own people, has had a strong influence on our family.”<sup>34</sup> Because of Da Costa, Willem helped found the Society

for Israel. Corrie's father often told her, "Love for the Jews was spoon-fed to me from my very youngest years." "As a result," said Corrie, "deep respect and love for the Jews became a part of our home life."<sup>35</sup>

Corrie never knew her grandfather; he died the same year she was born. But her father, Casper, kept the legacy alive. He moved to Amsterdam when he was eighteen, opening a jewelry store in the Jewish section. Because of his upbringing, he had no problem feeling at home in the neighborhood, and it appears that the Jews welcomed him. He participated in their Sabbaths and other holy days. According to Corrie, "He studied the Old Testament, their Talmud, with them, and was given opportunities to understand and explain the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the New Testament."<sup>36</sup> Apparently, Casper was not viewed as a threat to the community, even with his strong Christian beliefs.

This desire to communicate with people of other beliefs stayed with Casper throughout his life. After he moved back to Haarlem and took over the watch shop, his home was open to all. "When he met anyone interested in the Bible," commented Corrie, "he did not hesitate to invite him or her to his Bible-study groups. He once told us about the extraordinary combination in his group studying the Book of Romans. There were agnostics, atheists, fundamentalists, a Calvinist, a liberal, and a Roman Catholic."<sup>37</sup>

Corrie also remembered trips to Amsterdam, when Casper would visit wholesalers. "Many of these were Jews, and these were the visits we both liked best. After the briefest possible discussion of business, Father would draw a small Bible from his traveling case; the wholesaler, whose beard would be even longer and fuller than Father's, would snatch a book or a scroll out of a drawer, clap a prayer cap onto his head;

and the two of them would be off, arguing, comparing, interrupting, contradicting—reveling in each other’s company.”<sup>38</sup> One of Casper’s chief competitors in Haarlem was a Jewish watchmaker. Yet he harbored no resentment toward the man. As he told his nephew once, “Mr. Kan is not my competitor. He is my colleague. And do not forget, he belongs to God’s chosen people.”<sup>39</sup>

Once the occupation of Holland was underway and the Jews began to suffer persecution, Casper, although quite old by then, devoted himself to the rescue effort. He even attempted to get his own yellow Star of David to wear, so he could identify with the Jews in their time of trouble. Although Corrie kept him from doing so, he compensated by taking off his hat to every Jew he would meet.<sup>40</sup> He surprised Corrie by his comment when he saw the soldiers packing Jews into the back of a truck: “Those poor people,” he lamented. Corrie thought he meant the Jews, but then he continued, “I pity the poor Germans, Corrie. They have touched the apple of God’s eye.”<sup>41</sup>

The rabbi of Haarlem came to the ten Boom residence early in the occupation, bringing all his precious books with him. He wanted Casper to watch over them. They had often prayed and read the Old Testament together, and were in the habit of exchanging books. “Old friend,” the rabbi said, “books do not age as you and I do. They will speak still when we are gone, to generations we will never see. Yes, the books must survive.” They never saw the rabbi again.<sup>42</sup>

When the family kept Jewish refugees in their home, they made them feel accepted. Casper’s lifelong habit was to read a portion of Scripture to the family before retiring for the night. One evening, when he was preparing to read from the prophet Jeremiah, he halted and then passed the Bible over to one of the Jewish men, saying, “I



would consider it an honor if you would read for us tonight.”<sup>43</sup> As Christmas 1943 approached, the family decided not to celebrate Christmas only, but to honor Hanukkah as well. Corrie remembered: “We were all very Jewish those evenings.”<sup>44</sup>

Once Corrie asked one of the Dutch Reformed pastors if he would be willing to take a Jewish mother and baby into his home for their protection. The minister was shocked and warned her not to be involved with such activity. Even when she showed the child to him, his only response was “No. Definitely not. We could lose our lives for that child.” Casper had overheard the conversation, took the baby in his arms, and commented, “You say we could lose our lives for this child. I would consider that the greatest honor that could come to my family.”<sup>45</sup> Whenever any of his friends told him to stop keeping Jews in his home because he could be sent to prison, he would respond, “I am too old for prison life, but if that should happen, then it would be, for me, an honor to give my life for God’s ancient people, the Jews.”<sup>46</sup> He did just that.

Corrie’s brother, Willem, was the one who started the rescue operation in the family. His interest in the Jews and in the rising anti-Semitism of the times became almost an obsession for him. As he related to his wife one day, “The Society for the Defense of the Christian Religion has announced a competition calling for a written study on the subject of anti-Semitism in Europe. Look, Tine, this is something that interests me. It may mean very little for my pastoral work, and it will not bring in any money, but the subject fascinates me. I would like to give all my spare time to such a study.” Willem followed his passion and later remarked, again to his wife, “I was captivated by the subject of anti-Semitism from the start, but now that I am really getting into it, it is taking

possession of me. I can no longer get away from it. The Jewish question is haunting me. It is so dangerous. Anti-Semitism has repercussions which will affect the whole world.”<sup>47</sup>

This attitude seems at odds with Ariel’s conclusion that evangelicals did not see anti-Semitism as the problem. Willem saw it clearly as one very dangerous outgrowth of man’s rebellion against God. He soon became known for preaching many sermons about Christians’ responsibility for helping the Jews and how the Old and New Testaments related to one another. Willem then became a missionary for The Society for Israel.<sup>48</sup> While it is true that the role of a missionary is to convert people, Willem did not try to do so out of contempt for the Jews, but out of a sincere desire to bring them to their Messiah. Interestingly, Corrie’s lone comment about Willem’s success was, “If he’d converted a single Jew in twenty years I hadn’t heard about it. Willem didn’t try to change people, just to serve them.”<sup>49</sup>

Willem’s doctoral thesis, written in the 1920s, prior to the persecution, was entitled “The Birth of Modern Racial Anti-Semitism in France and Germany.” He wrote to his wife, “I expect that in a few years’ time, there will be worse pogroms than ever before. Countless Jews from the east will come across the border to seek refuge in our country. We must prepare for that situation.”<sup>50</sup> Even before the start of the war, Willem was preparing his home to receive Jewish refugees and planning the organization of large-scale operations for rescuing them. When the time came, he used his home extensively for that purpose. Corrie relates the following:

Years later, my nephew Peter was visiting a synagogue in a suburb of Tel Aviv with a friend. At the end of the service, his friend introduced Peter to a Dutch Jew who had also attended.

“Do you happen to know the name ten Boom?” the Jew asked. He told that he had hidden in Willem’s house during the Nazi occupation. “When the Gestapo came,” he added, “I hid under the floor of Dr. ten Boom’s study. When

the soldiers came in, he started to scold them for disturbing his sermon preparation. The soldiers were intimidated by his self-confident manner and left him alone. Your uncle saved my life.”<sup>51</sup>

Willem’s views toward the Jewish people and the purposes of God are summarized in an article he wrote:

All through its history, God prepared Israel to show the world how a people should walk with God.

One day Israel will be the instrument to teach the whole world to worship and praise the Creator. . . .

Israel received the teaching according to the Torah, firsthand, but it is intended for the whole world, and if Israel neglects its vocation among the nations, it also receives the curse firsthand.

There is yet another aspect to Israel’s calling. It bears in itself a reflection of the condition of the whole world. Israel’s existence is directly related to the unity of the world’s nations. Therefore it is the international people *par excellence*.

When the peoples of the world get together and unite, Jerusalem flourishes. It is the city which is patterned after world peace. On the other hand, if Israel is on the decline, the whole organism of humanity is in upheaval, and world peace languishes.

We see the world becoming more and more chaotic, but when other nations have ruined themselves by their deification of power and violence, the great inner change will begin with the Jews. Israel will then behold its Messiah, and a spirit of repentance will come upon them. Up to the present time, it has shown them how they should not behave. The result has been centuries of suffering and dispersion. This will usher in the great springtime for the world. The days of refreshment (see Acts 3) will start, when Israel rediscovers its great missionary calling and its own ministry to the world. As a result, a great power toward worldwide renewal will flow forth from Israel in all directions. God’s people will have found the fountain where sins are washed away—it will share its joy with the whole world and lead it in a symphony of praise to the Creator, the God of Israel.<sup>52</sup>

Although Willem’s article does mention that Israel has received a curse, it is not the curse of deserved persecution and genocide. He simply believes that the dispersion of the Jews was the result of their rejection of the Messiah, and that one day they will awaken again to their first calling and be the missionaries God had intended them to be from the beginning of their history. He even posits that the whole world suffers when the

Jews suffer, linking the prosperity of the world to Jewish fortunes, which can hardly be called contempt for Jews as a people.

Gradually, Willem came to believe that the Christian witness to the Jews had to be of a different character than that to the Gentiles. Any approach that led Jews to believe that they had to forfeit their Jewishness to receive Jesus as the Messiah was wrong, he felt. Instead, he urged that Christians emphasize that acceptance of the Messiah was the avenue for a Jew to become “a true son of Israel” and experience “the fulfillment of the divine promises.” He asked The Society for Israel to stop using the term “missionary,” to inculcate an attitude of humility, to listen to the Jews rather than just preaching to them, and to learn lessons from God’s dealings with them historically.<sup>53</sup> One could say without too much exaggeration that Willem ten Boom’s life was inextricably intertwined with the Jews.

Although Corrie ten Boom’s later ministry took her to all parts of the world and to many people groups, she did continue to have an impact on Jews also, sometimes in indirect ways. A five-year-old Dutch boy was listening to Corrie in 1945, shortly after her release from Ravensbruck. That boy, Jan Willem van der Hoeven, was greatly influenced by her. Later, he became keeper of the Garden Tomb in Jerusalem and then opened the International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem in 1980. One of this organization’s primary goals was “to show concern for the Jewish people and the State of Israel, according to the biblical command in Isaiah 40:1 (RSV): ‘Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.’”<sup>54</sup>

Corrie prayed daily for the Jewish people all her life, but she discovered how hard it was to bring her message to them in the land of Israel itself. Many Jews equated

Christianity with Hitler, which troubled her deeply, seeing as how she had fought against Hitler's policies toward the Jews because of her faith. But when her name was added to the list of righteous Gentiles, more doors opened to her. As one of her biographers relates,

In one meeting she was introduced by a rabbi who said, "Now Corrie ten Boom will tell us about her greatest friend, the Jew Jesus."

When she spoke, she said that Jesus, from His human side, was the Messiah of Israel, born of the Jewish virgin, Mary; from His divine side, He is the Son of God. Some Jews began to get up and leave the meeting, but others present reprimanded them and told them to sit down and listen to what she had to say.<sup>55</sup>

When she was interviewed by a reporter from the *Jerusalem Post*, she told him, "My family and I have sacrificed our lives for your people. Three of them died for your sake, and I suffered much and almost lost my life for your people. Such an experience brings much love in one's heart. The love for you Jews is in my blood, since my grandfather prayed for the peace of Jerusalem."<sup>56</sup> The article was sympathetic; the love of her family for the Jews was too obvious for any other interpretation.

### Conclusion

Any critique of the beliefs and attitudes of evangelicals toward the Jews must also take into account the ten Boom family. They did not view the Jews or their beliefs as contemptible; rather, they loved and respected the Jewish heritage that formed the basis for their own Christian convictions. Indeed, far from seeing Jews as reprehensible, they instead saw them as God's first missionaries, a calling that God had never revoked. They disagreed with the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the Messiah, but sought to love them into what they considered to be the fulfillment of the promises originally made to the Chosen

People. They fought against anti-Semitism and risked—and lost—their lives in their defense of Jewish friends and neighbors.

Corrie, in particular, is known because of her books, particularly *The Hiding Place*. The popularity of her books is an indication that a great many evangelicals share her view of the Jews. Although her later ministry was not centered on the Jewish people, she did continue to speak with them and love them. One of her greatest desires, and the focal point of her message, was that of forgiveness, even forgiveness for Nazis who had killed one's family. She could speak that message authoritatively because she had lived it. She sought to communicate it to both Jews and Gentiles. She often would remind her listeners that “no pit is so deep that God's love is not deeper still.”<sup>57</sup> She had earned the right to say this.

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1. Corrie ten Boom, *Father ten Boom: God's Man* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1978), 152.
  2. *Ibid.*, 154.
  3. Corrie ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed. (Chosen Books, 1997; orig. Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1971), 58.
  4. Carole C. Carlson, *Corrie ten Boom: Her Life, Her Faith* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1983), 78.
  5. Carlson, 79.
  6. Carol Holt, “Obituary for Corrie ten Boom,” *Saturday Evening Post*, July-August 1983, 51.
  7. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 102-03.
  8. Joan Winmill Brown, *Corrie: The Lives She's Touched* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1979), 31-32.
  9. Jac Geuzebroek, “Miracles at the B.J.: What I Learned About God's Grace at the Hiding Place,” *The Banner*, 8 May 1995, 9.
  10. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 117-25.
  11. Carlson, 92-95.
  12. Corrie ten Boom, *A Prisoner and Yet* (Ft. Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1954), 19-20.

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13. Carlson, 89.
  14. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 218.
  15. Corrie ten Boom, with Jamie Buckingham, *Tramp for the Lord* (Ft. Washington, PA & Old Tappan, NJ: Christian Literature Crusade & Fleming H. Revell, 1974), 55-57.
  16. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Ed., jacket.
  17. Carlson, 205.
  18. Holt, 51.
  19. Carlson, 204; Brown, 112-13.
  20. Brown, 113.
  21. Carlson, 204.
  22. Brown, 134-37.
  23. Yaakov Ariel, "Jewish Suffering and Christian Salvation: The Evangelical-Fundamentalist Holocaust Memoirs," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 6, no. 1 (1991): 63-78.
  24. *Ibid.*, 71.
  25. *Ibid.*, 64.
  26. *Ibid.*, 76.
  27. Lawrence Baron, "Evangelical Converts, Corrie ten Boom, and the Holocaust: A Response to Yaakov Ariel," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993), 143.
  28. *Ibid.*, 145.
  29. *Ibid.*
  30. *Ibid.*, 146.
  31. *Ibid.*
  32. Corrie ten Boom, with C.C. Carlson, *In My Father's House: The Years Before "The Hiding Place"* (Old Tappan, NJ (Fleming H. Revell, 1976), 15.
  33. ten Boom, *Father ten Boom*, 31-32.
  34. *Ibid.*, 29.
  35. *Ibid.*, 33.
  36. ten Boom, *In My Father's House*, 18.
  37. ten Boom, *Father ten Boom*, 69.
  38. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 29-30.

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39. ten Boom, *Father ten Boom*, 146.
40. Carlson, 76; ten Boom, *Father ten Boom*, 67.
41. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 68.
42. Ibid., 72; Carlson, 76.
43. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 97.
44. Ibid., 113.
45. Ibid., 95.
46. ten Boom, *In My Father's House*, 15.
47. Ibid., 102-03.
48. Ibid., 103-06.
49. ten Boom, *Hiding Place*, 20.
50. ten Boom, *Father ten Boom*, 107.
51. Ibid., 108-09.
52. Ibid., 110-11.
53. Ibid., 111.
54. Carlson, 125.
55. Ibid., 175-76.
56. Ibid., 176.
57. Brown, 11.