



# Dead Even Before Death: The Holocaust and the Human Person

*Gerald Darring*

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This is a book about the genocidal attack on the Jews perpetrated by the National Socialist regime in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. The attack was carried out by the Germans and their collaborators, and succeeded in destroying nearly six million Jewish lives, thousands of Jewish communities, and an entire Jewish culture. It has been suggested that the Holocaust was about something deeper than antisemitism or hatred for the Jews. The Jews are always at the center of whatever “explanation” is given for the Holocaust, but some have attempted to probe deeper, looking for an understanding of what might have prompted the Nazis to decide that they had to rid the world of every single Jew. Holocaust historian Yehuda Bauer suggests that the National Socialists wanted a clean break with Western civilization, the civilization founded on principles established by the ancient civilizations in Greece, Rome, and Israel. “Athens and Rome, which are the source of modern aesthetics, much of modern law, and much else, are no more.... But the Jews are still here ... the symbolic surviving remnant of the values and the heritage the Nazis wanted to destroy.” The destruction of the Jews, Bauer suggests, would be for the Nazis a necessary ingredient in their plan to create a radically new civilization. To simply marginalize the Jews would mean no more than a reform of Western civilization. It would take the extermination of the Jews to make possible a complete break with the past. Holocaust theologian John Pawlikowski has given a different if not totally unrelated explanation, one which focuses on the Nazi conviction that the creator God had not done a good job and should be replaced. Writes Pawlikowski, “Much of Christian theology had tended to accentuate the omnipotence of God which in turn intensified the impotence of the human person and his/her inconsequential role in the governance of the earth. The Nazis were saying ‘no’ to this traditional relationship and the moral code that was integral to it.” In different ways, Bauer and Pawlikowski were saying that the genocidal attack on the Jews was the result of something much more profound in the Nazi worldview than antisemitism. In this book I would like to make a similar statement from a somewhat different perspective. I suggest that alongside the fundamental aspects indicated by Bauer and Pawlikowski, there was another side to the Nazi worldview, a total denial of human worth. After an initial chapter on the human person, there are chapters on children and the elderly, women, the handicapped, the sick, workers, blacks, Poles and Gypsies, gays, the poor, hungry, and homeless, educators and students, citizens, religious believers. The final three chapters are on the destruction of Jews, Holocaust denial, and the response to the Holocaust. An appendix includes a Yom HaShoah service.

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