

Auschwitz Inquiry

One of the most harrowing phenomena in all of human history, the German death camps were created for the implementation of the Nazi's "final solution" to the "Jewish problem." There were some 300 concentration camps and 6 pure extermination camps. In these state-sponsored centers some six million Jews were murdered, representing nearly 80% of the Jews living in occupied lands during World War II. When one adds other "undesirables," such people as ethnic Poles, Slavs, Romani, as well as disabled and homosexual people, the figures soar to well over ten million. What were the principal factors leading up to the *Shoah*? How could one of the most so-called advanced civilizations on earth devolve to such raw barbarism? Was it a *novum* or are there parallels anywhere else? How have Europeans processed and dealt with the consequences of these terrible camps, the largest and deadliest of which was Auschwitz? Most importantly, is there any meaning or theological sense possible in the face of such unspeakable evil? Is there a biblical interpretation of these events that brings any kind of sense to it, or were Christians accessories, if not complicit? We will explore these issues with presentations, discussion, and a visit to Auschwitz.

Dr. Edgar will speak on the significance of the largest and most destructive of the death camps during World War II. After setting forth the facts and dates, we will look at the immediate context in European history, hoping to gain some understanding of the possible causes leading up to the death camps. Of special importance will be the background of Germany between the two great wars, and the rise of the extreme right, with its particular agenda against the Jews. We will attempt to understand the minds of Adolf Hitler, Heinrich Himmler, Rudolph Höss, and Joseph Mengele. Of particular interest will be the testimonies of a few who endured the Holocaust, including Primo Levi, Anne Frank and Etty Hillesum.

The Inquiry will be in three parts. (1) Friday evening lecture by Dr. Edgar; (2) Saturday visit to Auschwitz; (3) Saturday afternoon de-briefing.

William Edgar is currently Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, USA. He was previously Professor of Apologetics at the Reformed Seminary in Aix-en-Provence. Before that he taught high school in Greenwich, CT, USA. He holds the Bachelor of Arts with Honors in Music, from Harvard College, and the Docteur en Théologie from the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His principal research interests are in cultural apologetics, African-American history and music, the music of Brahms, the French Huguenots, 19th century French church history, and the art of Paul Cézanne. His is widely published in those areas. Edgar is a jazz pianist and runs a Gospel-Jazz band. His chief avocations are running, reading novels and history, listening to modern French organ music, and watching Brazilian soccer-football. His wife Barbara and he have two children and three grand-children.

(1) Main lecture Friday evening

I Europe between the world wars

A. Inhuman philosophies

1. Darwinism

2. Nietzsche

3. Existentialism

4. Fascism

B. Germany

1. The German defeat of 1918

2. Economic facts in the 1920s

3. Weimar culture

C. The rise of national Socialism

1. Adolph Hitler & the Third Reich

2. An atmosphere of hatred & “cumulative radicalization”

3. A doomed alliance: Germany and Russia

II. The death camps

A. Early phase: 1933-1938

B. Expansion: 1938-1945

1. Administration
2. Locations
2. Life and conditions
4. Liberation

III Auschwitz

- A. History of the three sites
- B. Facts and statistics
- C. Life and death
 1. “Hier ist kein warum”
 2. Rudolph Höss
 3. Science, “medicine” and technology

IV Victims and survivors

- A. Video clips from “Weapons of the Spirit”
- B. Primo Levi
- C. Anne Frank
- D. Etty Hillesum

(2) Visit to Auschwitz I and II

(3) Debriefing reflections

- V Epilogue
 - A. Germany and Europe after the Holocaust
 - B. Theological and philosophical issues
 - 1. Can we write poetry again?
 - 2. The post-modern condition
 - 3. The “idea of man”
 - 4. Is evil banal?

C. Biblical insights

Suggested Readings (Asterisk denotes Required Readings)

General histories:

Mary Fulbrook, *A history of Germany 1918-2008*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008.

Yehuda Bauer, *A History of the Holocaust*, revised edition, Danbury: Franklin Watts, 2001.

Doris L. Bergen, *War and Genocide: A Concise History of the Holocaust*, 2nd ed., Washington, DC: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009.

Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War*, New York: Holt, 1985.

Auschwitz:

Sybille Steinbacher, *Auschwitz: A History*, New York: Harper, 2005.

Laurence Rees, *Auschwitz: A New History*, New York: Public Affairs, 2006.

Amir Haskell, *The Warden of Block 11*, Jerusalem: Contento de Semrik, 2014.

Steven Spielberg & Steven Zaillian, *Schindler's List*, film, 1993.

Rudolf Hess, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hess*, Phoenix: Phoenix Press, 2000.

Victims and Survivors:

*Primo Levi, *If This Is a Man*, and *The Truce*, London: Abacus, 1987.

*Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, New York: Everyman, 2010.

Etty Hillesum, *An Interrupted Life*, and *Letters from Westerbrook*, New York: Owl, 1996.

Elie Wiesel, *The night Trilogy*, New York: Hill & Wang, 2008.

Pierre Sauvage, *Weapons of the Spirit*, documentary, 1989.

Reflections:

Emil L. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History: Reflections in the Age of Auschwitz and the New Jerusalem*, New York: Schocken, 1980.

Arthur Cohen, *The Tremendum: Theological Reflections on the Holocaust*, New York: Crossroad Publishers, 1981.

*Os Guinness, *Unspeakable: Facing up to the Challenge of Evil*, San Francisco: HarperOne, 2006

A Holocaust Reader: Responses to the Nazi Extermination, Michael L. Morgan, ed., New York: Oxford university, 2001