

Article

# “Millions of Jews Died in That War . . . It Was a Bad Time”: The Holocaust in Adventures in Odyssey’s *Escape to the Hiding Place*

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Received: 2 September 2019; Accepted: 7 November 2019; Published: 15 November 2019



**Abstract:** In 2012, the Christian evangelical organization Focus on the Family published *Escape to the Hiding Place*, the ninth book in Adventures in Odyssey’s Imagination Station book series. This short children’s book is a creative reimaging of Corrie ten Boom’s Holocaust memoir *The Hiding Place* (1971). Corrie was a Christian who lived in Haarlem during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. Corrie and her family helped hide Jews and non-Jews from arrest and deportation at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators. Corrie’s story has played a significant role in the evangelical Christian encounter with the Holocaust. Like every Imagination Station story, *Escape to the Hiding Place* features two cousins, Patrick and Beth, from the fictional town of Odyssey. They travel back in time to help Jews escape the Nazis, all so they can learn a lesson about their ability to aid others in need. A harrowing adventure ensues. This paper does not criticize the valuable rescue work undertaken by Christians during the Holocaust, nor does it criticize the contemporary evangelical desire to draw meaning from Christian rescue work. Rather, the fictional narrative under consideration skews toward an overly simplistic representation of the Christian response to the murder of Jews during World War Two, contains a flat reading of Dutch society during the war, and fails to address antisemitism or racism. This paper situates *Escape to the Hiding Place* within a wider evangelical popular culture that has struggled with the history of the Holocaust apart from redemptive Christian biographies.

**Keywords:** Christianity; evangelicalism; Holocaust; children’s literature; Corrie ten Boom; The Netherlands; Holland; Dutch

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## 1. Introduction

Corrie ten Boom is well-known among American evangelicals (Ariel 1991, 2001). From her family home in Haarlem during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands, Corrie and her family, members of the Dutch Reformed Church, hid Jews and non-Jews from arrest and deportation. The Nazis and their Dutch collaborators eventually discovered the ten Boom family’s rescue work and arrested Corrie and some of her family members. Her father died in prison while Corrie and her sister Betsie were sent to a concentration camp. Betsie died in the camp and Corrie was later released because of a clerical error. Corrie returned to the Netherlands, where she began her ministry to heal Europe’s war wounds. Her story garnered attention from American evangelicals. Corrie became a famous Christian speaker and traveled the globe, especially after she wrote her memoir, *The Hiding Place* (ten Boom et al. 1971). *The Hiding Place* also became an evangelical film, via World Wide Pictures, a subsidiary of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. Christian publishers quickly began producing Corrie ten Boom biographies (Mainse 1976; de Kroon Stamps 1978; Winmill Brown 1979; Carlson 1983; Wellman 1984; Ray 1985; Poley 1993). Corrie’s speeches, memoir, other writings, and subsequent adaptations of her story have centered on a narrative framework of redemption—Jesus shone a light into the darkness of

the concentration camps and Jesus can shine a light into the darkness of any situation (Ariel 1991, 2001; Baron 2003a).

*The Hiding Place* was influential shortly after it first hit shelves and greatly shaped the popular market for life writing by Christians who survived the Holocaust. Evangelicals still find her story relevant. Analyzing Barnes & Noble's book sales in the early-2000s to mid-2000s, scholar Lawrence Baron noted that *The Hiding Place* was among the top ten most purchased books on the Holocaust. *Christianity Today* included the memoir in a 2006 list of the "fifty 'landmark' books that have shaped the way evangelicals 'think, talk, witness, worship, and live'" (Baron 2009, p. 250). One way in which Corrie's story has continued to have an impact in evangelical circles is through Christian educators and Christian publishers who have referenced and adapted it. Academics have noted how Christian schools in the United States sometimes read the memoir when studying the Holocaust, a contrast to the readings included in public school curricula (Schweber 2006; Schweber and Irwin 2003). Adaptations of Corrie's story for children and young adults actually began in the early-1970s, tempering depictions of the realities of life in the concentration camps (ten Boom and Hartley 1973; also see Wallington 1981; Watson 1982; Baez 1989; Briscoe 1991).<sup>1</sup> As new generations of children grow up in American evangelical households, it is unclear just how young people will engage Corrie's story, but publishing houses and writers are still producing adaptations, indicating that Christians recognize its ongoing relevance for young people (Benge and Benge 1999; Meloche and Pollard 2002; Wilber and Hering 2003; MacKenzie 2011; Wellman 2012; ten Boom et al. 2015; Sullivan and Wines 2016).

This article analyzes a creative adaptation of Corrie's narrative by a major conservative Christian organization, Focus on the Family. *Escape to the Hiding Place* (Hering and Younger 2012) is not a usual adaptation of Corrie's memoir, since it does not directly follow Corrie's life. It is a fictional story involving two time traveling cousins who end up in the Netherlands during the Nazi occupation. It borrows from Corrie's experiences and the children eventually encounter Corrie in the story. The book is part of the Imagination Station book series, a subseries in the larger Adventures in Odyssey (AIO) series. *Escape to the Hiding Place* is interesting because it borrows from *The Hiding Place* and plays with the themes of Corrie's memoir, but the authors add their own interests as well. Below, I set *Escape to the Hiding Place* within the broader context of children's literature about the Holocaust. I argue that *Escape to the Hiding Place* showcases a problematic approach to the Holocaust—it maintains a simplistic picture of Christians during the genocide and promotes an inaccurate representation of Dutch society during the occupation. The story also fails to address antisemitism or racism. Although *Escape to the Hiding Place* is not a well-known product of American evangelical popular culture, it is an example of the wider American evangelical literary approach to the Holocaust. In assessing *Escape to the Hiding Place*, I consider its relationship to Corrie's *The Hiding Place* and the publishing trends in which *Escape to the Hiding Place* is embedded.

## 2. Considerations and Scholarship

Before turning to scholarly readings of Corrie's memoir, I want to emphasize that I am not necessarily critiquing her narrative itself. I also do not necessarily criticize how she frames her experience through a redemptive lens. Evangelical Christians are not the only writers and readers who promote redemptive meaning making from the Holocaust. Disparate individuals and organizations have used Anne Frank's diary toward such ends over the last seven decades or so (Torchin 2012, pp. 103–4; Barnouw 2018, p. 36, on redemptive meaning making, see Spector 2007). Like other scholars who have researched Corrie's story, I recognize and affirm the valiant courage of the ten Boom family in resisting the Nazis and their collaborators (Baron 1993, 2003a; Ariel 1993). From wherever that courage emerged, whether religiously inclined, generally altruistic, both, or neither, Christians and Jews, among others, could have used many more ten Boom families across Europe. Corrie's story, however, does have its

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<sup>1</sup> This trend in Corrie ten Boom representations intersected a wider mid-1980s interest in the Holocaust and children's literature.

limitations. Like any work of life writing, she presents one perspective and interpretation of events. For instance, Corrie's experiences do not cover the scope of Christian involvement in genocide during World War Two. One should also not forget the actions (or inactions) of Christian perpetrators and Christian bystanders, whether in the Netherlands or elsewhere.

Alan Mintz once stated that the "meaning [of the Holocaust] is constructed by communities of interpretation—differently by different communities—out of their own motives and needs" (Mintz 2001, p. 40). From adaptations of Corrie's story, American evangelicals clearly have their own motives and needs when discussing the Holocaust and Corrie's place in this genocide. I will not fully engage in debates about where the boundaries of representation lie. I tend to be at once fairly conservative and fairly liberal, depending on various factors. I believe that art, humor, fiction, and strict historical accuracy all have their place in popular writing about the Holocaust. There are, however, times when representations of the Holocaust are less helpful for promoting constructive dialogue on atrocity and genocide.

In her article "A New Algorithm in Evil: Children's Literature in a Post-Holocaust World," Elizabeth R. Baer fashioned "a set of criteria by which to measure the usefulness and effectiveness of children's texts in confronting the Holocaust sufficiently" (Baer 2000, p. 384). She established four criteria: (1) "The book must grapple directly with the evil of the Holocaust"; (2) "The book should not provide simplistic explanations, but rather it should present the Holocaust in its proper context of complexity, even meaninglessness, of difficult questions for which there are no formulaic answers"; (3) "The book must convey—through the use of facts, emotions, and/or memory—a warning about the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism, and of complacency"; (4) finally, "the book should give the reader 'a framework for response,' that is, to create in the child reader a consciousness, a 'memory,' and a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination" (ibid., pp. 384–85, italics hers). Baer's four criteria are helpful for thinking through Focus on the Family's *Escape to the Hiding Place*. The book is, after all, a story that focuses on children transported into the middle of a war and a genocide. *Escape to the Hiding Place* is also fairly easy to assess with Baer's criteria. The authors are explicit about how the main characters should respond to their experience. Before turning to *Escape to the Hiding Place*, one must first wrestle with *The Hiding Place*.

### 3. Corrie ten Boom, *The Hiding Place*, and Evangelical Reading

Scholar Yaakov Ariel has probably provided the best reading of Corrie ten Boom's memoir in his analysis of Christian life writing related to the Holocaust. Ariel asserts that "*The Hiding Place* is probably the most widely read Holocaust literature in evangelical circles" (Ariel 2001, p. 2). As Ariel further notes, Corrie had already written a memoir of her Holocaust experiences, entitled *A Prisoner and Yet* (ten Boom 1954). According to Ariel, Billy Graham eventually became interested in Corrie's narrative and supported her travels and speaking engagements in the United States (Ariel 2001, p. 2). A married couple who were writers in Graham's network, John Sherrill and Elizabeth Sherrill, created a new publishing company, Chosen Books, to co-write a new edition of Corrie's story (*The Hiding Place* was their first title). The memoir was, therefore, rewritten for American evangelicals by evangelical writers who were experienced in adapting Christian life writing for the mass market.

The books co-written by the Sherrills prior to *The Hiding Place* were not Holocaust related, but they fit a religious publishing genre one might call Christian missionary adventure stories. They were exciting, inspiring, and affordable books about missionaries in harrowing situations for Jesus or who were improbable converts to Christianity. John and Elizabeth Sherrill co-wrote David Wilkerson's memoir about his missionary work with street gangs in Brooklyn (*The Cross and the Switchblade*; Wilkerson et al. 1962) as well as Brother Andrew's story about smuggling Bibles into Europe's Communist Bloc (*God's Smuggler*; Brother et al. 1967). The evangelical emphasis on exciting missionary adventures rose during a time in which the book market was booming (Luey 2009; Gutjahr 2009). Like *The Cross and the Switchblade* and *God's Smuggler*, Corrie's new, co-written memoir, appearing in 1971, sold very well under these market conditions (Ariel 2001, pp. 2–3). It is necessary to note that

scholars have exclusively analyzed *The Hiding Place* on its own terms or in conjunction with other Holocaust-related memoirs by Christians. Such work has been vital to understanding Corrie's story, but it also neglects the growing market for what I previously identified as Christian missionary adventure stories. I contend that *The Hiding Place* and its adaptations cannot be truly understood apart from this publishing trend. While evangelicals have long loved exciting adventures for Jesus, publishers of Christian missionary adventure stories spurred a popular-level postwar evangelical reading culture with works like *The Cross and the Switchblade*, *God's Smuggler*, and *The Hiding Place*, as well as *From Pearl Harbor to Golgotha* (Fuchida 1953; republished as *From Pearl Harbor to Calvary*, Fuchida 1959) *Through the Gates of Splendor* (Elliot 1957), *Black and Free* (Skinner 1968), *In the Presence of Mine Enemies* (Rutledge et al. 1973), and *Hansi, The Girl Who Loved the Swastika* (Hirschmann 1973). All of these works, largely published by Christian publishing houses, though not exclusively (Gutjahr 2009, pp. 380–1), fit a postwar Christian desire for reconciliation, forgiveness, and the further spread of the gospel message. For American evangelical readers coming out of a world war and into the Cold War, alongside the chaos and revolution of the counterculture, inspirational biographies and memoirs found welcome homes on their bookshelves. It is also no coincidence that the famous evangelical publishing house Fleming H. Revell Company published several of the aforementioned works and owned Spire Christian Comics. Al Hartley of Archie Bunker comics fame, himself a convert to evangelical Christianity in 1967, adapted many works of Christian life writing into one-shot comic books during the 1970s (Hartley 1977). Hartley undertook the first significant young-adult-oriented adaptation of Corrie's memoir in 1973. It was not the last time that an adaptation of Corrie's story for children and young adults would be linked to other memoirs and biographies of famous Christian missionaries (see below). To reiterate one key point, evangelicals have always envisioned Corrie's memoir and its adaptations as popular culture—meant for mass consumption—rather than highbrow or elite culture. Evangelical publishers have wanted to impact everyday readers with Corrie's message of love and reconciliation.

The preface to *The Hiding Place's* 35th anniversary edition, written by Elizabeth Sherrill (ten Boom et al. 2006), is worth briefly mentioning, as it reveals a bit more about how the Sherrills discovered Corrie's story. In 1968, Elizabeth Sherrill visited Darmstadt, Germany during a moment in which, according to Elizabeth, many everyday people did not think much about the Holocaust and there was even some Holocaust denial. A group of Lutheran women, the Sisters of Mary, sought to counter the neglect and denial. They "assisted Jewish survivors, listened to their stories, and publicized the truth about the Nazi past" (ten Boom et al. 2006, p. 11). Apparently, Elizabeth attended a retreat where the Sisters of Mary invited speakers who survived the Holocaust to share their stories. The first was a man who had survived the concentration camps and was still clearly haunted by its horrors. His body was marked by his anguish. Elizabeth wrote that he had "pain-haunted eyes, shaking hands that could not forget" (ibid., p. 11). The second speaker, Corrie, was entirely different, at least as Elizabeth remembered her. Her body was also marked by what she had experienced, namely the inner peace she had in Jesus: Corrie was "a white-haired woman . . . with a face that radiated love, peace, and joy." Elizabeth further drove home the similarities and differences between the two speakers: "But the story that these two people related was the same! She, too, had been in a concentration camp, experienced the same savagery, suffered identical losses. The man's response was easy to understand. But hers?" (ibid., p. 11). Elizabeth could not wrap her head around the inner peace, love, and forgiveness Corrie exuded. John and Elizabeth became acquainted with Corrie and they learned many life lessons from spending time with her (ibid., p. 12). Corrie also taught the Sherrills why the past, Corrie's story included, remains relevant today: "this is what the past is for! Every experience God gives us, every person He puts in our lives is the perfect preparation for a future that only He can see" (ibid., p. 12). The Sherrills wanted to share Corrie's inspirational story of a faith that moved her to oppose the Nazis, saw her through dark times, and enabled her to minister to victims and perpetrators in the aftermath of the war.

*The Hiding Place* proceeds as follows. The ten Booms were a devout Christian family in the Dutch Reformed Church. Two of the unmarried ten Boom children, Corrie and Betsie, resided in their father's



house in Haarlem, nicknamed the Beje (19 Barteljorisstraat). Their widowed father, Casper, ran a watch shop from the property. Corrie apprenticed under her father and became licensed in watchmaking, the first woman in the Netherlands to be licensed. Corrie was almost fifty when the war broke out. With the start of the war and the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands (May 1940), some of Corrie's family became involved in the Dutch resistance. Corrie stumbled into helping the resistance at first, namely by aiding a Jewish acquaintance who appealed to the ten Boom family for assistance in escaping the Nazis. Her father, who had personal relationships with Jews, embraced Jews who came to his door. Apart from personal relationships with Jews, Casper and his family had a firm theological conviction that the Jewish people were God's people. Corrie took to the resistance work quite well and members of the resistance built a hidden room at the Beje in case of Nazi raids. The ten Boom family home became a primary location in Haarlem for hiding Jews as well as Dutch men who might be deported to labor camps. Dutch civilian informants and the Dutch police were always a threat. The ten Booms trusted that God would help them in challenging situations, but they knew that God might allow them to be arrested, maybe even killed. In her memoir, Corrie noted that few of the ten Boom's fellow citizens were willing to do what the ten Boom's did (ten Boom et al. 1971; also see ten Boom 1954; Ariel 2001).

According to the story, at various points God saved the family from almost being found out by the Nazis and Dutch collaborators. Eventually, however, a Dutch informant exposed the ten Booms to the Nazis and the family was arrested. Corrie's elderly father died in prison while Corrie and Betsie were sent to a concentration camp. Even there, God showed the two sisters various miracles and provided for them spiritually and physically. For example, the two women were able to keep a Bible hidden from the Nazis. There was also a flea infestation in their block, but it kept the guards from visiting the block. Corrie struggled, often entertaining her fears, frustrations, and pain. Betsie, a major Christ-like figure in the narrative, helped Corrie keep the faith. The sisters performed spiritual work and witnessed to fellow inmates. After Betsie died and Corrie was released, Corrie returned to her hometown as the war was coming to a close. In the concentration camp, Betsie had a vision that she and Corrie would run a home where they could help victims and perpetrators find healing and rest. In the war's aftermath, Corrie sought to put Betsie's vision into action by creating just this ministry (it was not always successful). Corrie also had to enact the radical forgiveness she promoted in postwar Europe. At a speaking engagement in Germany, Corrie found herself face to face with one of her former concentration camp guards. He had since become a Christian and asked for her forgiveness. She did, in fact, forgive him and immediately felt a weight lifted from her shoulders, though she still struggled with total forgiveness (ten Boom et al. 1971). Corrie wrote or co-wrote many Christian books over the years (ten Boom 1972, 1976, 1977, 1978a, 1978b, 1979, 1984, 1986). She died in Southern California in 1983.

*The Hiding Place* was meant to communicate a number of themes to Christian readers: Jesus provides for and comforts his people in the midst of pain and suffering, even if they will die; the love of Jesus extends into the darkest of places; only through Jesus can one receive salvation; love and pray for your enemies; forgive those who cause you harm and anguish. Theologically, as Ariel summarized,

The book also promotes the evangelical understanding of the Jews and their role in history. Following a more literal reading of the scriptures, ten Boom believed that the Jews were still God's chosen people, destined to regain their role as God's first nation. The German attempt to destroy the Jews was therefore futile, and in the long run could only harm the Germans. (Ariel 2001, p. 3)

Indeed, it is early in the memoir that Casper essentially states that Hitler is a fool for touching the Jews, the apple of God's eye. One of the central themes of the memoir, as Ariel again identifies, is the idea that anti-Christians carried out the genocide (see below).

#### 4. *Escape to the Hiding Place*: Narrative and Themes

AIO has been quite popular with Christian children since Focus on the Family first created it as a radio program in 1987. Intended for children ages 8–12, and with over 800 episodes aired, AIO has developed an entire world around the fictional city of Odyssey and its citizens. The AIO series especially revolves around the goings-on at Whit's End, an ice-cream parlor in a Victorian house owned and operated by Minister John Avery Whittaker. [This is also the opening setting of *Escape to the Hiding Place*.] Several book spinoffs have emerged from the AIO radio program, one of which is the Imagination Station series (*The History of Adventures in Odyssey* n.d.; *What Is Adventures in Odyssey?* n.d.). In this series, the cousins Patrick and Beth travel back in time via a time machine called the Imagination Station. They have adventures and learn valuable lessons related to issues they face in their everyday lives. *Escape to the Hiding Place*, written by Marianne Hering and Younger and illustrated by David Hohn, follows this script.

As stated above, the origins of Corrie's memoir cannot be fully appreciated without understanding its place within the market for harrowing missionary stories. Similarly, it is important to note that *Escape to the Hiding Place* is a book within the larger Imagination Station series. Almost all adaptations of Corrie's story and Corrie ten Boom biographies for children and young adults have appeared via a similar marketing strategy. That is, evangelical publishers create a biography series, in which Corrie's story appears. Most publishers have framed these biographical collections with titles like "Christian Heroes," "Heroes of the Faith," and "Heroes for Young Readers." The various titles in each series center on key missionary figures, largely since the nineteenth century, such as Amy Carmichael, Eric Liddell, George Müller, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, Gladys Aylward, Mary Slessor, and Jim Elliot, among others. Adaptations of Corrie's story are not simply in conversation with *The Hiding Place*, but they are also in conversation with the expectations that publishers and authors have for their book series.

*Escape to the Hiding Place* begins with the cousins Patrick and Beth, who enter Whit's End with a problem. They are frustrated because they are not able to babysit in the church nursery, basically because they are too young (under eleven years old). They state that they feel "useless" and complain, "No one thinks kids can do anything" (Hering and Younger 2012, location 72). Whit responds by suggesting that in biblical history and non-biblical history children have played important roles in shaping the world around them. The children continue their complaints and Whit says that they need to visit the Imagination Station. Thus starts an "adventure," as Hering and Younger call it, that will teach the children the role they can play in the lives of others (ibid. location 82, chp. 1).

The station arrives at its destination. The children are already dressed in the clothing of the time and have been given the supplies they will need. As a general rule in the Imagination Station series, Whit is somehow able to anticipate what the children might need as well as the needs of others they encounter. Looking at their outfits, the children try their hand at guessing when and where they are. Suddenly, a plane in distress appears on the skyline. The children see the pilot eject out of the cockpit as it crashes to earth. They run to the crash to help the pilot, but on the way the children stumble across three armed soldiers dressed in gray and accompanied by German shepherds. The soldiers are also looking for the plane. The children instinctively hide in some shrubs, but an approaching German shepherd makes them anxious. A voice pipes up behind them, telling them to stay put. A distant bang distracts the soldiers and the children and the person behind the mysterious voice emerge from hiding. The voice belongs to a boy, Bernard, who is dressed as a woman to avoid being picked up by the Nazis and deported to a work camp. After Bernard uses the word "work camp," Beth slowly recognizes its significance—"She remembered from history how people died there" (ibid., location 155). Bernard tells Patrick and Beth that he is a member of the Dutch resistance and actively opposes the Nazis. The situation gets more precarious when Bernard informs them to be careful and not look suspicious or "The Germans might think we're up to something and shoot us" (ibid., location 161). Right as the children start on their way, they are indeed immediately confronted by an armed Nazi soldier. Patrick

and Beth get out of the situation with the identification papers Whit provided. So far, the experience has shown the children the dangerous circumstances in which they find themselves (*ibid.*, chp. 2–4).

After arriving at the farmhouse where Bernard lives with his parents, a farmhouse that has clearly seen better days, the children are introduced to Bernard's mother, Mrs. Vos. The family is devoutly Christian and out of religious conviction they hide people in need, Jews and non-Jews. Beth sees a little girl on a bunk bed. Her name is Mara and she is Jewish. As an aside, it is possible that the name "Mara" is a reference to Naomi, an Israelite woman in the Book of Ruth. Naomi asks that she be renamed "Mara" (Heb., literally "bitter") due to her grief over the deaths of her husband and her sons. This Mara's parents have been deported to a concentration camp. When the words "concentration camp" are used, Beth recognizes them like she did "work camp"—"She remembered these words from her history class at school. The Germans killed millions of Jews in the camps. Mara's parents were facing death, if they weren't already dead" (*ibid.*, location 233). The authors depict Mara as nearly lifeless or blank as Beth tries to comfort her. At this point in the story, Beth is struck by the enormity of the situation and the reality of genocide, though that word is not used. In this moment of encounter with Mara, Beth has come face to face with an embodiment of what she learned in school. In this scene, young readers have been provided a human face for the impact of genocide and the authors have briefly explained the specific target of the Nazis (*ibid.*, chp. 5).

Everyone present begins to eat, but they are interrupted when Mr. Vos comes into the house with the pilot, who is badly wounded. They send for a doctor and soon Dr. Nowak arrives. Nowak is a Christian Pole forced to serve the Nazis. He also happens to bring a baby with him when he arrives. The baby is a Jewish child and her mother is still in hiding somewhere in the Netherlands (at the ten Boom house). The baby survived due to the compassion of a German soldier. Patrick relays the baby's situation to Beth, "'Dr. Nowak said a German soldier saved her life,' Patrick said. 'He was supposed to make sure no one got out alive. But the soldier couldn't stand to kill a baby. The soldier smuggled the baby out and gave her to Dr. Nowak'" (*ibid.*, location 279). So begins the children's main mission of the story—to return the baby to its mother at the hiding place in Haarlem. Hence, the children have to escape to the hiding place. Patrick and Beth are worried at first, but they find the courage to undertake the task of reuniting the baby with its mother (*ibid.*, chp. 6–7).

Before Patrick and Beth leave to take the baby to Haarlem, they have a conversation with Mrs. Vos, where they call her family heroes. She responds, "We're not heroes . . . We're only doing what God wants us to do" (*ibid.*, location 299). The idea of resistance as "what God wants us to do" resonates with sentiments that Corrie and her family maintained about their resistance work as well. Also similar to Corrie's story, the Vos family seems to know that doing what God wants does not necessarily mean that they will be spared from arrest, harm, or even death. As good Christians in the story, they resign themselves to have faith in God's protection, but recognize that God could have alternative plans (*ibid.*, chp. 8).

Having undertaken their journey with the baby, the children make it by bike to the outskirts of Haarlem only to run into several Dutch police officers. One of the Dutch police officers checks their papers and pieces together what the children are up to. However, this officer unexpectedly helps them. He directs the children to the right location and informs them that if they get into a tight spot with other Dutch officers to simply mention his name. Earlier in the story, the Vos family talked about a Dutch police officer who actually participates in the resistance. The children wonder if this is the man about whom they spoke, but this question is left unresolved.

Once in Haarlem, things get even more troublesome. The children are out past curfew and are therefore susceptible to being stopped, searched, and arrested (the baby has no documentation). Bernard, who secretly followed the cousins to Haarlem, grabs Patrick right as a member of the Gestapo runs into Beth and the baby, who they have lovingly named Miriam. The Gestapo agent subsequently seeks to arrest Beth and the following exchange takes place:

"Stop talking and give me your papers," the officer said. His voice was filled with anger.

Beth took the ID card from around her neck. The officer glanced at it. Then he took a brass lighter from his pocket. He held the flame to the card. The cardboard quickly caught fire. Soon, it was just ash on the end of a string. Beth stared in horror.

“What are you doing? I can’t travel without that card,” she said.

“You have dark hair, dark eyes. Who is to say you are not Jewish?” he said.

“I’m not Jewish!” Beth shouted. The noise woke Miriam. She started to cry.

“Or perhaps you work for the Resistance,” the officer said. “Where else would you get the tires?”

He gripped Beth’s arm. “You are coming to the police station with me,” he said. “Then you will see what we do with Jews and spies!” (ibid., location 482)

With this exchange, the authors, I suggest, resonate with Baer’s first criterion: (1) “The book must *grapple directly with the evil of the Holocaust*, the evil that is *new* in this post-Holocaust world” (Baer 2000, p. 384, italics hers). What is the evil that is new? Baer states,

evil in post-Holocaust literature sometimes seems faceless and nameless and even hidden from the child, or of completely obscure origins. The child need not worry that s/he is guilty of the evil; rather, evil is depicted as something totally irrational, something that springs inexplicably, full blown, unannounced, into one’s life and most often directly destroys family life. (ibid., p. 384)

In the exchange, Beth (a child) is confronted by a Gestapo agent (an adult) who has the power to change what seemed to be hard and fast rules as he sees fit. There is meant to be an evil irrationality to the maniacal whims of the Gestapo agent and, by extension, the Nazis. Whether or not such an event took place is beside the point. The authors are presenting young readers with a kind of evil that has a face in this moment, but the face is representative of a more sinister, obscure evil that can wholly devastate. The Gestapo agent represents the unseen “we” in “you will see what *we* do with Jews and spies!” (emphasis mine).

Bernard creates a diversion so Beth can escape. Still holding the baby, and now released from the Gestapo agent’s clutches, Patrick and Beth make it to the Beje. They run into another Dutch police officer right at the threshold of the ten Boom house. This time, Corrie comes to the door and advocates for the children. Patrick smartly references the name of the first Dutch officer they encountered. As a result of this mutual acquaintance, and with a little bit of food as bribery, the Dutch police officer lets the children go. This officer, it seems, is representative of Dutch citizens who personally benefitted from the Nazi regime. Corrie actually asks the officer if he likes the Nazis, to which he nods in the affirmative. Regardless, the word is out and the Nazis and their collaborators come looking for the children at the Beje. Patrick and Beth have to crawl into Corrie’s hiding place with Jews on the run. They all wait with fear and trembling as the Nazis tap the walls looking for anything suspicious. They find nothing (Hering and Younger 2012, chp. 9–14).

After the Nazi intruders leave, everyone in hiding emerges from the secret space and has dinner together. An interesting conversation takes place over dinner:

Corrie’s father, Casper, said, “You will remember that Jesus Himself said that, as we help others, we are helping Him. So, in this household, God’s people are always welcome.”

Beth sipped a spoonful of soup. Then she said, “But aren’t you afraid of getting caught?”

Corrie’s father reached for an old Bible. It had a brass cover. He opened the book and turned the well-worn pages.

Beth could see that markings had been scribbled all over the pages.

Corrie’s father read a verse aloud. “You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.”

Corrie nodded. “God doesn’t always protect us from danger,” she said. “But He’s always with us when we face danger. And that’s enough.” (ibid., location 602)

On the one hand, this conversation alludes to, without explicitly stating, the ten Boom’s theology: the Jewish people are still God’s people and are therefore welcome in their home. On the other hand, there is also an ambivalence in how the authors universalize the message. Saving Jews is framed in the



language of generally aiding others, which is doing the work of Jesus Christ. The conversation further mirrors the Vos family's prior-stated conviction that God allows danger to befall Christians, but God is still present in the midst of it (*ibid.*, chp. 14).

The children hear the sound of the Imagination Station arriving outside the Beje to take them back. Patrick and Beth arrive at Whit's End and debrief with Whit about what happened. In this final chapter, aptly entitled "Whit's End," Beth states that she remembers the name "Corrie ten Boom" from somewhere. Whit informs her, "She wrote a book called *The Hiding Place*. It was about her family hiding Jews during World War Two. They saved hundreds of people's lives" (*ibid.*, location 628). Whit also informs the children that Corrie's father and sister died. Whit concludes by referencing the Holocaust, but without ever using the word, "Millions of Jews died in that war . . . It was a bad time. But it was also a time when good people became heroes. Many ordinary people risked their lives to follow Jesus' command to love others" (*ibid.*, location 637). "A bad time" is a definite understatement, but perhaps the authors thought that it was wording appropriate for young readers. Regardless, Patrick and Beth soak up the most important message, which, in Whit's words, is, "We may not be risking our lives for our faith right now . . . but God has useful things for all of us to do" (*ibid.*, location 636). The children leave Whit's End so they can pitch in at a church rummage sale for missionaries in Africa (*ibid.*, chp. 15).

The return to Whit's End and the debriefing with Whit occupies only about a page. However, this is the key chapter that firmly connects *Escape to the Hiding Place* to *The Hiding Place*. The Vos family is never mentioned. Instead, the final chapter focuses centrally on the ten Boom family. In general, as alluded to above, much of *Escape to the Hiding Place* mirrors Corrie's story quite well. The Vos family has a hiding place; they are devout Christians; they help those in need because of their Christianity; they are also part of the Dutch resistance that saves Dutch non-Jews and Dutch Jews. Like the ten Booms, the Vos family is constantly under threat of exposure, but they still have the courage to marshal onward, fully aware of the possible results. Much like Corrie and her family, the Vos family clearly recognizes the comfort and love of Jesus that helps them on an everyday basis during a time of moral testing and spiritual trial. It should be noted that, while the Vos family story mirrors the ten Boom story, the authors did not construct the family only in conversation with Corrie's narrative. It appears that the authors of *Escape to the Hiding Place* drew parts of the Vos family story from the rescue efforts of Frans Braal and Mies Braal. The Braals were members of the Dutch resistance whose countryside home became a place for hiding downed Allied airmen and others in need. Interestingly, the most substantial book about the Braals' activities never mentions their religious background (Alma 2008). The Vos family is a composite based on the authors' research and narrative needs (on Hering's research, see Cole 2011).

## 5. Christians, Jews, and History in *Escape to the Hiding Place*

Now that the plot has been outlined, and some scenes analyzed in brief, the following section will more thoroughly assess *Escape to the Hiding Place*. It will consider how the story tracks with Baer's four-part criteria, with a particular interest in criteria two, three, and four. This section is broken down into three parts. The first centers on the manner in which characters are constructed and represented. The second focuses on Christians as heroic characters, offering historical analysis to show that the evangelical emphasis on redemptive Christian biographies can come at the expense of greater nuance regarding Christian actions and inactions during the Holocaust. The final part takes into account a single question that the authors ask and answer at the end of *Escape to the Hiding Place*—"Did the Dutch people support the Nazis?" The question and answer are less than satisfactory, exhibiting a way in which *Escape to the Hiding Place* leans toward oversimplifying the complex historical context of World War Two and the Holocaust. Overall, *Escape to the Hiding Place* does take a somewhat complicated view of Christians and Dutch society, at least compared to the vast majority of Corrie ten Boom stories for children and young adults. Still, the narrative leaves much to be desired, generally reminiscent of the evangelical emphasis on Christian life writing about the Holocaust.

### 5.1. Considering Characters and Representations

The *explicitly* Christian characters mentioned in *Escape to the Hiding Place* are the Vos family, the ten Boom family, Dr. Nowak, and the time traveling cousins. As presented by the authors, the devout Vos family and the devout ten Booms are obviously active resisters from deep-seated religious conviction. Dr. Nowak is part of the Nazi apparatus, but the Nazis have more or less trapped him into this position. He becomes connected to the Dutch resistance and definitely seems concerned about the well-being of Jews under the Nazis, having helped save a Jewish child. Most adaptations of *The Hiding Place* for children do not depict any figure who is at once a Christian and a reluctant part of the Nazi regime. On the other hand, Dr. Nowak the professing Christian has a very convenient profession for the story. As a doctor, Nowak is presumably saving lives; he is not in a situation where he actually has to take lives as a Nazi. An adult reader, at least, can imagine Dr. Nowak bound to the Hippocratic Oath, such that the Nazis using him to care for their soldiers would not clash with his Christian faith.

There are several characters in the story who are left ambiguous. That is, unlike Christians who are motivated by faith, the reader is never given a reason for why the characters do what they do. They are religiously “blank” and ideologically “blank” characters compared to the clear Christian faith that moves the explicitly Christian characters to act. [I will ignore the Gestapo agent in this analysis.] One “blank” character is the police officer who the children encounter as they arrive on the doorstep of the Beje. This Dutch officer affirms his appreciation of the Nazis and desires to do his job well. Does he approve of the Nazis out of convenience or conviction? The authors leave this unclear but imply that he is somewhat bribable. Another “blank” character is the first Dutch police officer who stops Patrick and Beth outside Haarlem. This officer helps the children, clearly realizing that the children are smuggling a child to the ten Boom house. The authors also leave the convictions of this man open-ended, but he really wants to help. The ten Booms themselves were aided in their rescue efforts by some Dutch officials who were bribable and by some Dutch officials who were willing to participate in rescue efforts when asked (ten Boom et al. 1971; also see Moore 1997, p. 331; Moore 2010).

One final ambiguous character worth noting does not appear in person in *Escape to the Hiding Place*. This character is the Nazi soldier who gives the Jewish baby to Dr. Nowak. The soldier simply could not murder a Jewish baby, in spite of the orders he received. The soldier did a good deed in the eyes of the other characters, but the phrase—“He was supposed to make sure no one got out alive”—says nothing about whether he had any problem killing Jewish adults. It is certainly true that looking the other way, especially when children were involved, took place. One historian suggested, “Even German policemen were known to have allowed children arrested during house-searches to ‘escape’” (Moore 2010, p. 331). It appears that the authors of *Escape to the Hiding Place* wanted to complicate easy answers by introducing this offstage character. It would seem then that the book qualifies for Baer’s second criterion—“The book should not provide simplistic explanations, but rather it should present *the Holocaust in its proper context of complexity, even meaninglessness, of difficult questions for which there are no formulaic answers*” (Baer 2000, p. 384). Or, as another scholar suggested, “The Holocaust was a moral minefield. Victims, perpetrators, and bystanders all faced problematic choices, the effects of which often carried over into the postwar period” (Mengerink 2013, p. 334).

A critic could easily counter that not all portrayals in *Escape to the Hiding Place* are *sufficiently* complex. Much like the devout Christian characters who actively resist, the ambiguous characters—the two Dutch police officers and the unseen Nazi soldier—have agency. Meanwhile, the characters with the least agency in *Escape to the Hiding Place* are Jews. Mara is presented as the empty shell of a little girl, despite the fact that Bernard at one point calls “kids like Mara” heroes (Hering and Younger 2012, locations 235 and 303). [The authors miss an opportunity to explain any further what this means.] As previously summarized, when the children reach the Beje, they must huddle together with Jews in hiding. One can easily get the sense that the Jews in the hiding place are a passive mass. Obviously, most people in hiding during a raid would be frightened, but in that moment the most clearly heroic characters are Christians, i.e., Patrick and Beth. Though the authors state that “Patrick had never felt so nervous,” Patrick and Beth are not really depicted with the same

kind of fearfulness in that moment (*ibid.*, location 587). The Jewish characters hardly speak, and they never advocate for themselves. One could certainly question whether this is a sufficiently complex image. Jews in the Netherlands and elsewhere across Europe were resourceful in escaping, looking for help, and resisting (Moore 1997, 2010).

It should also be mentioned that the conclusion of *Escape to the Hiding Place* feels strange in light of its narrative framework. The idea of sending young children to the horrors of World War Two as an “adventure” suitable for a lesson in volunteering and charity is odd, but seeing *The Hiding Place* as an adventure story is not actually a deviation from the norm. As previously discussed, when Corrie’s story is placed alongside other Christian memoirs and Christian biographies published in the 1950s through the 1970s, there emerges a clear pattern of evangelically-oriented adventure narratives centered on faithfulness in times of trial and radical work for Jesus. Likewise, the first adaptation of Corrie’s story for children and young adults was a comic book version, entitled *Corrie ten Boom’s The Hiding Place*, adapted by Al Hartley for Spire Christian Comics. Spire Christian Comics, owned by Fleming H. Revell Company, marketed Corrie’s story bearing in mind the Christian missionary adventure trend. The first page of the comic featured an advertisement for the complete memoir sold by Chosen Books. Both the comic and the memoir were advertised as “suspense filled!” and “gripping in excitement!” but also “inspiring!” and “glorious in Christian lessons!” (ten Boom and Hartley 1973, p. 1). It is important to note that George Stevens’ famous 1959 film, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, was billed as a suspenseful adventure/romance story that ended with a redemptive moment. The original trailer for the film featured the lines, “No greater suspense story has ever been told,” “Here is the thrill of her first kiss!,” and “The excitement of her first love!” Considering how Corrie’s memoir and Anne’s diary have been marketed and used, *Escape to the Hiding Place* is less out of place in the wider history of Holocaust representation than one might initially think. Adventure and excitement are typical themes in adaptations of Corrie’s story for children, just as adventure and excitement continue to play a role in films about the Holocaust geared toward children and young adults (Baron 2003b). Few depictions of Corrie ten Boom have complicated the adventure arc. At least in comparison to representations of Corrie, representations of Anne Frank in popular culture have become more dynamic over time (Barnouw 2018, pp. 43–45, 112; also see the collected essays in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Shandler 2012), most likely because Corrie’s story circulates in an *evangelical* popular culture echo chamber.

## 5.2. On Christian Heroes

The authors of *Escape to the Hiding Place* emphasize heroic Christian individuals for a reason—to teach young readers (through Patrick and Beth) how they can do good work for Jesus, despite being young and despite living in a very different context. The emphasis of *Escape to the Hiding Place* can be summarized in Whit’s commentary on the Holocaust and World War Two, i.e., “it was also a time when good people became heroes” because “Many ordinary people risked their lives to follow Jesus’ command to love others” (Hering and Younger 2012, location 636). In spite of the “bad time” it was for Jews, the light of Christ shone through the darkness, which is in fact how Corrie described her experience. The Holocaust as genocide is less important than how the children spiritually interpret their experience as heroic helpers. Thus, Christians are the ultimate heroes since they are the ones who “risked their lives to follow Jesus’ command to love others.” Non-Christians, including Jews, are less relevant to the point of the story.

In his analysis of Christian memoirs about the Holocaust for adults, Ariel claims that these memoirs tend to support the idea that true Christians resisted the Nazis while those who participated in Nazi atrocities were anti-Christian:

A major element in the evangelical understanding of the Holocaust has been the claim that the evils and horrors of the Nazi regime were carried out by non-Christians. True Christians, persons who had undergone a conversion experience and established a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, could not, by definition, take part in the Nazi regime and its atrocities.

Nazi transgressions had been carried out by non-Christians, in fact anti-Christians, even if nominally some of them were members of churches. (Ariel 2001, p. 1)

However, there is a problem with this approach, also summarized by Ariel:

However, such an outlook is not based on any historical examination of the involvement or noninvolvement of evangelical groups with the Nazi regime in occupied Europe . . . The fact that evangelical churches in Germany supported the regime has often been ignored by evangelical writers. They do not, as a rule, present historical studies of Christian behavior during the period. They have concentrated instead on the heroism of individuals, members of pietist or evangelical churches, and have preferred to read their memoirs. Such biographical presentations have come to convey the message that true Christians behaved in a manner that demonstrated Christian ideals . . . (ibid., p. 1)

Again, it is important to highlight, just like Ariel does, that most evangelicals focus on Christian individuals who were heroes, rather than the more challenging aspects of Christian action and inaction during the Holocaust. Likewise, Christian memoirs like *The Hiding Place* tend to depict the Nazis as holding anti-Christian attitudes. For example, in *The Hiding Place*, when the Nazis raided the Beje and arrested the ten Booms, they violently interrogated Corrie. Corrie cried out “Lord Jesus . . . protect me!” and, according to her memoir, the Nazi interrogating Corrie responded, “If you say that name again I’ll kill you!” (ten Boom et al. 1971, pp. 121–22). The Nazis thereby come across as the quintessentially modern persecutors of Christians.

*Escape to the Hiding Place* follows this style in emphasizing that “We may not be risking our lives for our faith right now . . . but God has useful things for all of us to do” (Hering and Younger 2012, location 639). A key theme of the story then is that the children, working to save the marginal, were risking their lives for their faith. From the religious point of view, it certainly may be the case that, because their Christian ethic demanded action, they were risking their lives for their faith. Historically, the Nazis were often not interested in arresting Christians unless they resisted. While Jews appear to be especially targeted by the Nazis in *Escape to the Hiding Place*, antisemitism and racism are never mentioned in the story, providing no historically based reason for why the Nazis sought to capture, deport, and murder Jews. This is largely reflective of *The Hiding Place* and evangelical Christian memoirs about the Holocaust more broadly (Ariel 2001, p. 10). *Escape to the Hiding Place* fails Baer’s criteria on points three and four: (3) “The book must convey—through the use of facts, emotions, and/or memory—a warning about the dangers of racism and anti-Semitism, and of complacency” and (4) “the book should give the reader ‘a framework for response,’ that is, to create in the child reader a consciousness, a ‘memory,’ and a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination” (Baer 2000, pp. 384–85, italics hers). Realistically, falling short of criterion (3) leads to falling short of criterion (4). Without warning about the dangers of antisemitism and racism, one cannot give the reader a framework for response and a sense of personal responsibility regarding prejudice, hatred, and racial discrimination. Patrick and Beth’s response, while perhaps supporting a good religious cause at the end, depending on how one views missionary work, fails to consider important issues directly related to the Holocaust and preventing genocide.

A fairly flat picture of Christians in World War Two also avoids key tensions in Christian participation in the genocide. Scholars have shown that vast numbers of Christians in Europe, as individuals, churches, denominations, and communities, actively participated in the mass extermination of Jews, not to mention the historic role Christians played in fashioning and promoting antisemitism. Even top officials in the Nazi regime, usually thought to be fierce anti-Christian paganists, showed “only a partial rejection of Christianity” (Steigmann-Gall 2005, p. 112); “In other words, they seemed to oscillate between ambiguity and ambivalence. Such equivocation clearly precludes them from being considered Christian. But it also precludes them from being considered anti-Christian” (ibid., p. 112). One historian takes the conversation even further,

At least in a statistical sense . . . the nazis certainly were Christians . . . My critics usually counter that ‘real Christians’ do not hate, persecute or murder. But as I remind my interlocutors, there is a difference between historical/institutional categories and ideal definitions that groups establish for their members. (Bergen 2007, p. 28, author spells Nazis with a lowercase)

One may respond to my analysis so far by using the last quote against me—you missed the point of *Escape to the Hiding Place*; it is about ideal definitions that groups establish for their members. Be that as it may, evangelical adaptations of Corrie’s story for children and adults tend to obscure the difference between historical/institutional categories and ideal definitions by focusing heavily on the side of ideal definitions. Overemphasizing ideal definitions can threaten to totally eclipse the recognition of historical/institutional categories. I submit that the complete or near-complete eclipsing of historical/institutional categories is presently common in evangelical Holocaust memoirs and adaptations of Corrie ten Boom’s story. Popular literature on genocide, religiously or secularly focused, needs to pay particular attention to such blind spots.

In his analysis of “The Multiple Distortions of Holocaust Memory,” Manfred Gerstenfeld identifies a key distortion of Holocaust memory to be “Holocaust Deflection,” which he defines as “admitting that the Holocaust happened while denying the complicity of specific groups in it even if there is ample evidence of their involvement” (Gerstenfeld 2007, p. 41). As Holocaust deflection relates to Christian groups, one example might be the “Confessing Church” in Germany. Scholarship has shown that even the “Confessing Church,” a movement within German Protestantism opposing Protestant church alignment with Nazi Aryanization, “remained silent when it was confronted with the fate of the Jews” (Gerlach 2000, p. vii). Then, in the postwar era, “Many [witnesses in the church] tried to vindicate themselves by falsifying, omitting, or downplaying the record of their failures” (ibid., p. viii). Adaptations of Corrie’s narrative for children may not necessarily fit the precise definition of Holocaust deflection or resemble the case of the “Confessing Church,” but I would suggest that an overemphasis on Christian heroics can aid in fomenting an atmosphere for Holocaust deflection. Though intended for children, *Escape to the Hiding Place* breathes comfortably in this atmosphere.

As a final point on Christian heroes in general, an emphasis on the Christianness of certain rescuers potentially obscures the diverse motivations of these rescuers and other rescuers. Historians have shown that Dutchness could be a significant factor in why Dutch individuals became involved in rescue efforts (Baron 1992). There were also other groups who undertook resistance efforts, like communists. Naturally, rescue could be messy in the everyday experience. There were some who rescued Jews and non-Jews for gain and there were Christians who sought to rescue Jewish children in order to convert them (Moore 2010, p. 324).

### 5.3. Complicating Dutch Resistance and Postwar Narratives

Gerstenfeld’s notion of Holocaust deflection is helpful in other ways. Gerstenfeld’s principle examples of Holocaust deflection are national, e.g., Austria, Lithuania, Latvia, etc. In the postwar period, governments and intellectuals painted their nations and their citizens as victims, rather than presenting a more gray, nuanced, or problematic image. For example, postwar Austria, which largely welcomed Hitler during the *Anschluss*, embraced a narrative that it was the Nazi regime’s first victim. A similar gloss was also evident in the Netherlands for many years after the war. Scholars Matthijs Kronemeijer and Teshima succinctly stated:

[The] positive image of the Netherlands’ role in the Second World War and its opposition to the evil of the Nazi persecution of the Jews has become a founding myth for the Dutch nation. According to this myth, Dutch society was united in its resistance to anti-Jewish actions and in its collective opposition to German occupying forces. The myth further propagates the idea that Dutch society as a whole—and not Dutch Jews alone—was victimized by the Nazi regime. (Kronemeijer and Teshima 2011)



Though the “founding myth” took time to develop after the war, the image Dutch society eventually emphasized was one in which there was a “resistance norm”—Dutch citizens generally participated in resistance against the Nazis (ibid., citing [Hondius 2000](#); also see [van Berkel 2015](#)). Just as evangelicals have used Corrie’s story as a sign of almost universal Christian resistance to the Nazis, in the Netherlands “Acts of individual heroism and resistance were not only celebrated, but also appeared to emblemize the Dutch nation as a whole” ([Kronemeijer and Teshima 2011](#)). Furthermore, the need for a united narrative of resistance *and* national suffering at the hands of the Nazis meant that postwar Dutch society suppressed the particular suffering Jews experienced during the war. Dutch Jews experienced the war differently than their fellow Dutch citizens, as they suffered almost unimaginable losses of family, friends, and community. It was not until the 1980s that the voices of Dutch Jews were heard and the founding myth of postwar Dutch society came under fire (ibid.; also see [Foray 2011](#); [de Haan 1998, 2010](#)).

In *Escape to the Hiding Place*, the authors fall in line with the heroic narrative of Dutch society. At the end of the book, there is a short question and answer section. The first question asks and answers:

Q: Did the Dutch people support the Nazis?

A: *Most Dutch citizens did not. In 1944, the Nazis cut off the food supply because the Dutch people wouldn’t help them. Twenty-two thousand Dutch people died of hunger.* ([Hering and Younger 2012](#), location 644, italics theirs)

The oversimplified answer that most Dutch citizens did not *support* the Nazis is confusing because the answer cites an apparent example of Dutch *resistance* to the Nazis. The vast majority of Dutch civilians did not wish to be under Nazi occupation, but most Dutch civilians tried to reconstitute their lives as best they could and tried to navigate the rules and regulations of the new regime. The question could be better framed in light of the ambiguous characters in the story: *who* supported the Nazis, did not support the Nazis, resisted, or were bystanders; *when?*; *where?*; and, most importantly, *why?* These questions should be asked while being aware of the many complexities involved in parsing out distinctions, complexities that might not only defy easy classifications, but might produce no answer at all. Likewise, *how did Dutch resistance impact the Jews?* The Nazis slowly segmented Jews from the rest of Dutch society through progressive legislative restrictions. As [Kronemeijer and Teshima](#) have said, “only a small percentage of the Dutch population actually participated in the resistance movement while the majority of the population stood by and did nothing” (2011). Furthermore, most Dutch civilians who actively resisted did so when it was too late for most Jews in the Netherlands. Concerning the timeframe in which the rescue of Jews and non-Jews took place in western Europe, historian [Bob Moore](#) suggested, “Only when the population in general fell victim to Nazi ideological and economic impositions was there any widespread or organised resistance, but tragically often too late to help the many Jews who had already been arrested and deported” ([Moore 2003](#), p. 306). Resistance networks were fewer in the early years of the occupation of the Netherlands. When the tide of war turned against the Nazis, and the Nazis started to deport Dutch non-Jews for forced labor, resistance networks truly made their mark. While the ten Booms were part of the Dutch resistance at an earlier date than many of those who would eventually join the resistance effort, active resistance against the Nazis was much more common by 1944—the date selected by the authors as an example of general Dutch resistance.

In reality, Dutch bureaucratic apparatuses, left intact on a local level by the Nazis, meant the efficient implementation of Nazi deportation plans. This was one factor among others that made the percentage of Jews who died at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators in the Netherlands remarkably high for western Europe ([Moore 1997](#); also see [Croes 2006](#)). [The specifics of German oversight were important as well.] While most Dutch citizens did not support the Nazis, it is worth noting that some individuals jumped at the opportunity to help the Nazis for opportunistic purposes ([de Haan 2019](#); also see [Hondius 1994](#)). Non-Jewish rescuers and Jews in hiding were susceptible

to being ratted out by opportunistic Dutch civilians (Gerstenfeld 2006, pp. 33–34).<sup>2</sup> The Dutch government in exile, on the other hand, did little to bring attention to the plight of the Jews during and after the war (Hondius 1994, pp. 52–54). Again, the ten Boom family hid Jews at a fairly early date, but their heroic example, and the heroics of a limited number of other individuals, cannot be overextended to the entirety of Dutch Christians or the entirety of Dutch society. This historical account is marshaled not to fall into the same trap of oversimplifying the circumstances in which Dutch Christians and other Dutch individuals found themselves. Rather, the historical record exposes *some* of the problems in oversimplifying an entire nation's, an entire society's, or an entire community's response to Nazi rule and Nazi policies related to Jews (de Haan 2019).

There were other complicated issues in postwar Dutch society that challenge a universally heroic narrative. The five thousand Dutch Jews who survived the concentration camps generally received a cold reception upon returning to the Netherlands, if they did at all. Historian Dienne Hondius found that despite some positive reception from Dutch non-Jews, "the negative and disappointing experiences far outnumber the positive ones" (Hondius 1994, p. 56). For example, there was antisemitism, struggles over the restitution of property, and threats that Jews should be grateful for Dutch resistance during the war. All of these factors contributed to the silencing of Dutch Jews who returned to the Netherlands (ibid., pp. 56–61). To this day, Dutch society has not overcome the uneasy relationship between the voices of Jewish survivors and the Dutch founding myth (ibid., p. 63; also see Kronemeijer and Teshima 2011). Similarly, it is worth mentioning that other historians have shown how devout Dutch Christians, even heroes of the resistance, could have theologically-motivated, controversial impacts on the lives of Jews in postwar Netherlands (e.g., Dwork and van Pelt 2002, pp. 3–4).

## 6. Conclusions

The point of uncovering the complicated history of Christian participation in genocide and the complexities of Dutch resistance to the Nazis is not to disparage those who rescued Jews or those who resisted the Nazis in other ways. Rather, I have raised these historical points to show that *Escape to the Hiding Place* is an overly simplistic account of the Holocaust, even though it does show some greater nuance in comparison to other adaptations of Corrie's story. The problem with *Escape to the Hiding Place* is that the narrative constructed by the authors, including its themes and overarching message, deflects attention away from other discussions, like talking about antisemitism and/or racism. I suggest that individual stories of heroism like Corrie ten Boom's stand out all the brighter when recognized in light of their historic rarity and the historic reality. Moore stated it well when he said, "the actions of individuals can only be understood in the social, political and economic context in which they took place. Too often, the complexities of these circumstances have been lost in the concentration on the individual righteous rescuer" (Moore 2004, p. 395). Though a children's story might not be able to provide the entire context, a work like *Escape to the Hiding Place* shows that much more can be added. Recent scholarship on researching Holocaust rescuers and teaching Holocaust rescuers might provide approaches for helpfully contextualizing the lives of individuals (Kohen and Steinacher 2019).

Perhaps returning to an already mentioned case will enlighten the reader to options for Christians listening to other narratives from Holocaust survivors. Returning to Elizabeth Sherrill's introduction to the 2006 edition of Corrie's memoir, she claimed that she encountered Corrie's story while at a retreat where *two* survivors spoke about their experiences in the Holocaust. One survivor wore the pain of Nazi terror, while the other wore a face of compassion, joy, and love. In that moment, according to Elizabeth's introduction, she made a choice based upon her interpretative predisposition to look for redemptive light in the darkness. One survivor was silenced while the other was heard, and

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<sup>2</sup> *The Hiding Place* presents a more complicated picture on this account (e.g., ten Boom et al. 1971, pp. 213–14). Corrie had to rely on fellow Dutch civilians for help in hiding and feeding the Jews who arrived at the Beje. It was risky to approach Dutch countrymen and several times she feared exposure. Dutch officials in positions of power under the Nazis did help Corrie and her family; on the other hand, it was a Dutch civilian who exposed the ten Boom family.

heard around the world. Why should one think that everyone can survive the inexplicable horrors of the concentration camps already having made some definitive meaning from their experience? Should the voice of the still traumatized not be heard? As Elizabeth Sherrill sat listening to the two survivors telling their stories, she might have missed what the Sisters of Mary were trying to do. I don't know, I wasn't there. But maybe it was the case that the Sisters of Mary thought the other survivor's story needed to be heard as well. Maybe, just maybe, the Sisters of Mary thought that Christians needed to struggle with a scream for which there is no answer. Christian theologians and Christian intellectuals have sought to wrestle with the complex experiences and complex histories emerging from the Holocaust (Pinnock 2007). Evangelical stories about the Holocaust for children and young adults have largely failed to consider complicated tensions. To repeat, I am not necessarily criticizing redemptive meaning making from the Holocaust. A different paper would be needed. However, in light of recent research on the lack of Americans' knowledge about the Holocaust, greater historical clarity and nuance is called for, even for children and young adults who read religious literature.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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