



POLISH LEAGUE AGAINST DEFAMATION
11/8 Chmielna Street, 00-021 Warsaw, Poland
www.rdi-plad.org

Warsaw, 5th June 2020

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Philosophy Now
43a Jerningham Road
London
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Dear Sir or Madam,

We are writing you in order to draw your attention to the article “Those Who Justify Genocide” (https://philosophynow.org/issues/138/Those_Who_Justify_Genocide), which contains many misunderstandings and falsehoods that distort the history of the Holocaust.

In the article, Michael McManus retells the story of the Reserve-Polizeibataillon 101 as portrayed by Christopher Browning in his landmark work “Ordinary Men” (1992). The police battalion consisted of more or less ordinary policemen from Hamburg, Germany who conducted gruesome massacres of Jews in occupied Poland during the Second World War. What is striking, is that these policemen were not forced to participate in these mass murders; they were allowed to refuse to participate and those who did so were not punished for it. Naturally, this is a quite worthwhile subject to analyze from a philosophical standpoint and one that certainly deserves to be discussed.

For some reason, however, McManus seems to believe that Hamburg – Germany’s second largest city and a traditional hub of German Protestantism since the early 16th century – is located in Catholic Poland and that these policemen were Polish instead of German. About the German policemen he writes:

“The members of the Polish death squads, brought up in a Catholic country, ought to have had the same commitments. However, none of the cases examined by Browning showed any sign of religious principles.”

While it is true that Poland and Germany are neighbors and had been neighbors at the outbreak of the Second World War, their histories have been quite different. For example, it Germany triggered the Second World War when Germany attacked Poland on the 1st of September 1939. The German invasion and occupation of Poland was extraordinarily brutal; at the end of the war, the capital was completely devastated and millions of Poles lay dead. By far the worst-hit group in Poland were the Polish Jews, who were nearly completely annihilated by Nazi Germany in the Holocaust. As McManus points out, there were Polish attempts to help Jews, but these triggered a very hostile response. By 1941, aiding Jews in any way, shape or form was punishable by death. A year later, even the failure to report someone hiding Jews was punishable by death. These executions were carried out in a very public fashion and often-times even children and babies were publicly executed (as happened with the Ulma family). This stands in stark contrast to the German policemen who had every right to not participate in the murder of Jews.

Recognizing that Poland and Germany are two different countries that experienced the Second World War in two radically different ways is not – as McManus writes – an example of “foolish leaders [who] have chosen instead to ally themselves with those who deny their history – such as the manipulators who rule Turkey and deny Turkish responsibility for the genocide of Armenian Christians between 1915 and 1922.”

We ask for a correction and an apology.

Yours faithfully,

Maciej Świrski

Chairman of the Polish League Against Defamation