



War in the Shadow of Auschwitz (Religion, Theology and the Holocaust)

By John Wiernicki

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1943: Polish underground fighter John Wiernicki is captured and beaten by the Gestapo, then shipped to Auschwitz. In this chilling memoir, Wiernicki, a Gentile, details "life" in the infamous death camp, and his battle to survive, physically and morally, in the face of utter evil.

The author begins by remembering his aristocratic youth, an idyllic time shattered by German invasion. The ensuing dark days of occupation would fire the adolescent Wiernicki with a burning desire to serve Poland, a cause that led him to valiant action and eventual arrest.

As a young non-Jew, Wiernicki was acutely sensitive to the depravity and injustice that engulfed him at Auschwitz. He bears witness to the harrowing selection and extermination of Jews doomed by birth to the gas chambers, to savage camp policies, brutal SS doctors, and rampant corruption within the system. He notes the difference in treatment between Jews and non-Jews. And he relives fearful unexpected encounters with two notorious "Angels of Death": Josef Mengele and Heinz Thilo.

War in the Shadow of Auschwitz is an important historical and personal document. Its vivid portrait of prewar and wartime Poland, and of German concentration camps, provides a significant addition to the growing body of testimony by gentile survivors and a heartfelt contribution to fostering comprehension and understanding.

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Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In this simple but harrowing memoir, Wiernicki recounts his involvement with the Polish underground and his subsequent imprisonment in Nazi labor and death camps. What emerges is a raw exposé of the evil perpetrated against millions, the "deliberate, cold, premeditated murder of innocent people." Wiernicki's young, privileged existence fundamentally changes in the summer of 1939, when the Germans invade Poland. Within 28 days, the German forces wreak havoc on the entire nation, but they focus on burning synagogues and splintering families within Jewish communities. A proud Pole, Wiernicki joins the Polish resistance movement an impassioned but fragmented and necessarily secretive group as a freedom fighter. After being captured and tortured by the Gestapo, Wiernicki, a gentile, meets a fate similar to that of the millions of Jews whose extermination he soon witnesses. Wiernicki captures the brutality of the SS men as well as the total dehumanization of the inmates the reason they are unable to wield any resistance within the camps. Particularly startling are Wiernicki's accounts of the guards' sadistic behavior; that other authors have told these tales before does not lessen their power. Frightened prisoners are forced to sing at the whim of an SS man on penalty of death; women are humiliated and abused. Ruthless beatings and brutal kickings are the norm, Wiernicki writes, even during routine work. That the author is a gentile survivor makes his testimony especially significant at a time when Holocaust denial is defended by some as academic freedom. 17 photos.

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From [Booklist](#)

Wiernicki, a Polish partisan, was captured by the Gestapo in 1943 and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. From there he was sent to Buchenwald, and he escaped during a death march in April 1945 as the Germans forced 2,000 prisoners to flee ahead of advancing Allied troops. The author begins his memoir with a brief description of his prewar years growing up in the city of Lwow, his summer vacations, and his year at the military academy of Lwow, where he had planned to spend the next four years. He then writes of his life as a resistance fighter before being captured. Wiernicki, a gentile, recounts the killing of Jews in Auschwitz-Birkenau and describes his encounters with Josef Mengele and Heinz Thilo, the infamous SS doctors who conducted medical experiments on prisoners. Wiernicki's memoir, which includes 17 black-and-white photographs, is a haunting and intimate account of the Holocaust, written with an almost unbearable clarity. *George Cohen*

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Review

"The audience for this book should be everyone. . .trying to reach some personal explanation about the Holocaust." -- Stanislaus A. Blejwas, *author of Realism in Polish Politics*

"The author's intelligence and sensitivity prove indispensable guides to the twentieth-century hell of the Holocaust." -- Alan Berger, *co-editor of Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators*

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