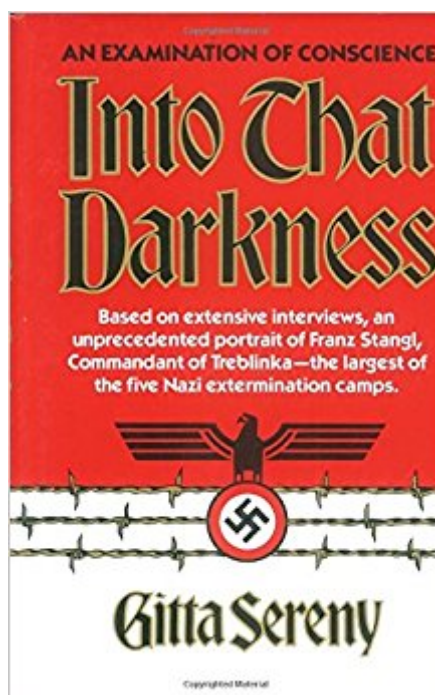


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Into That Darkness: An Examination Of Conscience



Synopsis

Based on 70 hours of interviews with Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka (the largest of the five Nazi extermination camps), this book bares the soul of a man who continually found ways to rationalize his role in Hitler's final solution.

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Customer Reviews

Based on 70 hours of interviews with Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka (the largest of the extermination camps), this book bares the soul of a man who continually found ways to rationalize his role in Hitler's final solution.

The scene is Treblinka; the character is Franz Stangl. The theme is the mass extermination of men, women and children. As Commandant of Treblinka, Stangl was imprisoned for life. Gitta Sereny covered the trial on behalf of a London newspaper. Fascinated by the prisoner, she decided to make an effort to get to know him better, to delineate him more deeply.

Sereny's journey into the madness that was the Nazi murder machine centers on her interviews with Franz Stangl, a commandant of Sobibor and Treblinka extermination camps. Sereny interviewed Stangl in the Düsseldorf prison where he lived in relative comfort and ease after his capture in Brazil, repatriation to Germany and sentencing as a war criminal. Stangl's tale takes the reader on a journey of this mass murderer who participated in the Nazi euthanasia horrors and was rewarded for his work by appointment as the first commandant to the Sobibor and subsequently to the Treblinka

extermination camps. Stangl is portrayed as a man comfortable with his actions. A man who denied having any personal feelings about those whose slaughter he oversaw. A man without remorse. Sereny doesn't take the reader into the details of the camps. Sobibor is almost a footnote and paints a rather incomplete picture of Treblinka's horrors. Though detailing the operations of the camps isn't her purpose, its absence of detail somewhat undermines the reader's ability to process Stangl's role in mass murder, unless the reader is versed in how these murder machines operated. A strength of her work is that she doesn't lead the reader to judge Stangl through her eyes as she studiously avoids interjecting herself between Stangl's words and the reader. However, she takes to task the Pope and leaders in the Roman Catholic church for their role in aiding and abetting the Nazi killing rampages beginning with the euthanasia program through the church's support assisting the butchers efforts to flee justice. This is an important work.

This book is great. Gitta Sereny interviewed many, many people in researching it, including, of course, Franz Stangl, his wife, her sister, one of his daughters, and several former SS-men involved in the Treblinka extermination camp, one of the most important being Franz Suchomel, who was interviewed by Claude Lanzmann in Shoah. Other former SS-men she interviews were Otto Horn and Gustav Munzberger. She really did her homework. She also interviewed former inmates of Treblinka, such as Samuel Rajzman, Berek Rojzman, and Richard Glazar, who's written a book about his experiences. The result is a very well-rounded, very credible and extremely accessible, well-written account of Franz Stangl's life, career, and activities at Hartheim, where he took part in the Third Reich's euthanasia program, T4, Sobibor, and Treblinka. The euthanasia link is important because most of the people involved in it were transferred to Sobibor and Treblinka when T4 was wound down. The skills they acquired were put to new and bigger uses. Sereny gives a gripping and interesting account of Stangl's escape to Brazil and interviews Vatican officials who were involved in helping Nazis escape to South America. She also investigates how much Pope Pius XII knew about the Holocaust and when. An interesting note is that Stangl lived openly in Brazil under his real name and his wife was registered at the Austrian consulate there under her real name.

This book succeeds in making a good point: the perpetrator of one of the worst mass murders in history, Franz Stangl, commandant of Treblinka, was not the psychopathic monster that stereotype would have him be. On the contrary, he was a diligent, loving father of three sucked into an evil system and lacking the heroic courage required to resist. The author describes the development of the Holocaust from euthanasia to ethnic cleansing. We learn that the same people who started up

and operated the euthanasia program were sent to Poland to apply their skills on a larger scale. A substantial amount of the book concerns the role of the Vatican in condoning euthanasia and turning a blind eye to mass murder. This is a bit of a tangent to the main theme and became tedious. It would have been sufficient to describe how the church assisted Stangl's escape without dwelling on the wider issue. Overall the book is engaging and the personalities of Stangl and his wife are well developed.

This book is very well written. Open, honest, and I believe the author got more out of Stangl than anybody else could have. It's a bit difficult to read simply because of the horror of the Holocaust, and those who willingly went along, or contributed, or even planned the murder of millions! Never forget!

Although the book doesn't answer the question that gave birth to it, i.e. how is it that a perfectly ordinary and even in many respects a decent man becomes or allows himself to become part of evil, it is still a captivating recount of the series of interviews between the author and Franz Stangl and his immediate circle. It is thoroughly researched and facts are counter checked, so you know this is a serious attempt at understanding Stangl's actions in the context of the time. The book doesn't give you any clear answers or revelations about the human nature. The closest it gets is in making a reference to "Evil breeds evil". I could not stop talking about this book or put it down.

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