

**OPENING ADDRESS TO *COURAGE TO CARE* EXHIBITION
GEELONG**

by

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ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF

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- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

- A giant in the field of moral philosophy, the late Professor Harry James Cargas, once wrote: “The Holocaust happened because the Holocaust could happen.”

- I’d like to reflect on that statement with you tonight.

- Negating every positive achievement of the twentieth century was the Nazi Holocaust of the Jewish people, a genocidal explosion which saw a sudden and irrevocable break with all of the humanistic traditions that had been developing in Europe over the previous thousand years.

- The relationship between mass death and the industrial state that became manifested in the Holocaust was an intimate one, and as a result of it having taken place we have forever a yardstick by which all other cases of genocide must be measured.

- Its message is so powerful that no definition of Western civilisation can ever again be constructed without reference being made to where the corruption of that civilisation can lead.

- The period of National Socialist rule in Europe was a time of immense upheaval, occasioned by deliberate and massive political violence.

- It was first confined to Germany, but then spread to Austria, Czechoslovakia, and, eventually, to most of Europe.

- Its brutality was, until 1939, almost solely directed against political opponents, but later in the decade it targeted Jews, solely because of their Jewish identity.
- The SS, the Nazi organisation responsible for planning and executing the antisemitic measures, sought the elimination of every trace of actual or potential opposition to Nazi rule, even from those whom, it considered, posed a threat through their very existence.
- This would be a genocidal struggle, forming part of a much broader campaign that was intended to destroy communism, annihilate the Jews, wipe out the free-thinking opposition, and (after the onset of war) reduce the status of the population in the occupied areas (particularly in eastern Europe) to that of ignorant and impotent vassals or serfs.
- For the Nazis' aims to be realised, their leader, Adolf Hitler, needed the expertise of professionals capable of organising the murder of vast numbers of people, and also a bureaucracy of men and women capable of implementing it.
- Hitler was able to call on the experts responsible for his ambitious pre-war eugenics scheme, which had seen the death of scores of thousands of so-called "defective" humans, those whom the Nazis referred to as "life unworthy of life" – Germans with congenital illnesses, emotional problems, crippling injuries, or physical deformities, among other features distinguishing them from supposedly "normal" people.
- The experts responsible for killing these people developed both the techniques and the mindset necessary for murdering large numbers of human beings – thus adapting what they had already been doing to the much larger tasks required in eastern Europe seemed, for many, to be a natural progression.
- However, what became most obvious from 1941 onwards was that the primary objective of German Nazism was the physical elimination of all of Europe's Jews.
- As one survivor of Auschwitz, Fania Fénelon, was later to recall, "The behavior of the SS was ruled by the terrible phrase: 'Woe to those who forget that everything that resembles a human being is not necessarily a human being.'"

- The genocidal nature of the Nazi regime is such an established fact that it does not require elaboration here.
- It is, as scholar Zev Garber has observed, the paradigmatic or model genocide.
- Unlike some cases of genocide, where the accent is on destruction “in part,” this was intended to be a *total* annihilation – destruction “in whole,” from which none would be allowed to escape.
- What did it take for a person – any person – to stand against this terrifying system?
- Given the nature of this exhibition, let’s look at some of those who had the “courage to care” about their fellow human beings at a time when many preferred instead to look away.
- We can start in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, a small Protestant village in southern France, between 1941 and 1944.
- In large part a Huguenot town, the citizens of Le Chambon were led by their pastor, **André Trocme**, who urged the members of his community to save any Jews who came into the village by the simple device of hiding them, and to then aid them in their escape from both the Nazis and the Vichy French police.
- Born in 1901, Pastor Trocme never thought there was anything special or heroic about what he was urging his parishioners to do; it never occurred to him that there would be any alternative to helping people in need, people who were in danger of their very lives at the hands of those who would do them harm.
- His explanation for doing so, he said, was because it was “the Christian thing to do”.
- Through the actions of Pastor Trocme and the citizens of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, it is estimated that at least five thousand Jewish children were saved from certain death.
- Another example of the kind of behaviour that could make a difference is to be found in the actions of a young American Quaker, **Varian Fry**.

- Born in New York City, Fry attended Harvard University, where he studied classics. He began his working life as a photographer, but, in 1940, he went to Marseille, France, representing an unofficial American refugee-rescue organisation called the Emergency Rescue Committee.
- Although he had no official status on behalf of any government while in Marseille, he worked hard to secure passports and visas that would enable refugees to emigrate from Vichy France and reach safety.
- His major interest was in saving the intellectuals and promoters of culture, as he was aware that culture and learning were the very opposite of what the Nazis stood for; and, as a result, that those he was trying to save were the bearers of the values most at risk in the Nazi New Order.
- Fry had no previous experience with the kind of underground activities that would be required for him to obtain the necessary papers – often forgeries had to be made – but, by the end of his mission, he had saved upwards of four thousand people from the hands of the Nazis.
- Many of these were prominent intellectuals, artists and musicians; among their number included Marc Chagall, Hannah Arendt, Pablo Casals, Heinrich Mann, and Max Ernst.
- When his resources for securing visas dried up, he smuggled refugees from Marseille to nearby Spain, across the Pyrenees.
- For this, and for himself acting without a valid passport, Fry was arrested by the Vichy French police and deported back to the United States, *via* Spain, in September 1941.
- Upon his return to the USA, he was reprimanded by the U.S. State Department for his illegal activities, no recognition being made for his outstanding humanitarian rescue activities.
- He lived out the next 35 years of his life in obscurity, and without appreciation.

- In 1996, he was named by Yad Vashem in Israel as one of the “Righteous among the Nations.” To date, he is the only American to be so named.
- Here in Australia, we cannot claim figures such as these; saving Jews during the Holocaust was something that could best be achieved within Europe itself, staring directly into the eyes of the beast.
- However, there is no doubt that, if the actions of any one person should be recognised for at least *trying* to help save Jews, this should be a man named **Albert George Ogilvie**, Premier of Tasmania between 1934 and 1939.
- Ogilvie, a Catholic, was elected to the Tasmanian Parliament in 1919 as the Labor member for the seat of Franklin (and was the youngest member of the House), and, in 1928, he became Leader of the Labor Party.
- He led the Party into government at an election in 1934.
- A highly energetic and domineering leader, Ogilvie was determined to modernise Tasmania, expand the population, and improve the state’s infrastructure.
- In 1935, he undertook a trip to Europe to see at first hand how other countries were dealing with the effects of the Depression.
- He visited many countries, including the Soviet Union and fascist Italy.
- Finally, he also visited Nazi Germany, where he was shocked by the antisemitism he witnessed.
- Upon his return to Australia, he was driven to try to help any and all Jews who applied to his state for refuge – even though, as a state premier, he had no say over federal immigration policy, at a time when Canberra was applying policies that sought to restrict Jewish refugee admissions.
- Ogilvie pleaded personally with his federal colleagues to allow Jewish refugees to enter Tasmania.

- He worked on the basis that Tasmania, as an island state, could take in Jewish refugees but restrict Jewish entry to mainland Australia, if that was the federal preference.
- He put forth proposals for block Jewish settlement on King Island, and went to great lengths to personally oversee the progress of individual applications from refugees.
- For the most part, despite his appeals, he was largely unable to soften the position of the federal immigration authorities in Canberra, though that never stopped him from *trying*; for Ogilvie, that was the most important thing.
- On 10 June 1939, however, he collapsed and died of a heart attack in Melbourne.
- It has been suggested that the immense pressure under which he had been working on behalf of Jewish refugees, on top of his workload as Premier, was a contributing factor to his death.
- Albert Ogilvie was, arguably, the only senior executive office-bearer in Australia in the 1930s to work for refugee entry from within his official capacity, in spite of existing regulations or policy considerations.
- Although he does not meet the criteria for recognition as a “Righteous Gentile,” owing to the fact that he was not in Europe during the Holocaust, and died before the outbreak of the Second World War, I would like to consider Albert Ogilvie as an Australian equivalent of a Righteous Gentile.
- Every Jew saved through his efforts – and there were, tragically, all too few – was one who did not suffer the fate intended by the Nazis just a few short months later.
- What do these three cases – **André Trocme** in the French village of Le Chambon, **Varian Fry** desperately trying to secure visas for the United States, and **Albert Ogilvie** in faraway Tasmania – tell us about the question of doing right during the Holocaust?
- In a world in which the majority of people did *not* act in the manner of these three case studies – indeed, where there were always far more who aided and abetted the

Nazis, than resisted them – what behaviour could we have expected from those around whom the maelstrom of the Holocaust swirled during the Nazi years?

- I wrestle with this issue with my students each year, as we consider a variety of moral dilemmas – a tiny variety from amongst a vast range – that people had to contend with during the Holocaust.
 - Whether or not, in the very first place, to get involved?
 - Who to save, and who to let go?
 - Whether to go into hiding?
 - Whether to fight back?
 - How to do so?
 - Whether, by fighting back, would one place one's family in danger?
 - If not fighting back, whether to acquiesce in the face of Nazi tyranny?
 - How far to go in submitting to Nazi dictates?
 - Whether to work *around* the Nazis, ignoring them as best you could?
- The Holocaust shows me, with crystal clarity, that – other than the victims – there were three kinds of people in Europe – and, by extension, throughout the world, and down to today.
 - There were those whom I call the **Burners**; that is, the people who actually did the planning, the rounding up, and, ultimately, the killing; in short, those most directly responsible for committing genocide. The Burners were small in number.
 - Then there were the **Righteous Ones**; those who did whatever they could to deny the Nazis their murderous victories by saving the lives – in whatever

manner they could – of those the Nazis were trying to wipe off the face of the earth. The Righteous Ones, like the Burners, were small in number.

- Finally, the Holocaust shows that there were a vast majority of people, neither Burners nor Righteous Ones, who were (as I call them) **Tortured Souls**; those who *wanted* to do something, who *knew* that one's responsibility to one's fellow-man tied everyone together in what has become known as the Universe of Moral Obligation – but who were, nonetheless, either afraid, indifferent, apathetic, or in some other way unable to assist those in need for reasons that were (in their eyes) perfectly legitimate.

- As I consider these matters with my students, we inevitably get to *the* question; the one which has been asked so often, in so many different settings, but with such little result.

- You know it; you might have asked it yourself: “what would *I* have done in the same situation?”

- Ultimately, for me, this is a question that doesn't really go anywhere; nobody will ever know what they would or wouldn't have done in such-and-such a situation, particularly one as extreme as the Holocaust.

- We only know the answer to that question when we're actually confronted with it, ourselves. I don't think it's something that can be dealt with in the abstract.

- Living in the shadow of the Holocaust, however – living in the 21st century, with the legacy of Biafra, Cambodia, East Timor, Bosnia, and Rwanda behind us, and with Darfur still present and unresolved – the question we should seek to answer is not “what *would* I have done,” but, rather, “what *should* I have done?” – and, in the case of Darfur, “what *can* I be doing *now*?”

- What are the options, possibilities, and alternatives that can best assist us to know the right way to behave when we are confronted with conduct from others we instinctively think is wrong?

- Each person will have their own answer to that question; for some, it will be through their upbringing; for others, it will be through their education or life experiences; for yet others, it will be through religion or some form of belief.
- Whichever way we go, I would conclude that above all, it cannot be achieved through ignorance, or denial, or over-sensitivity to the truth.
- Clearly, in spite of the Holocaust, intolerance is still with us.
- Racial hatred and ethnic murder have never featured more prominently, in so many people's daily lives, than during the past two decades.
- In 1986, one of my heroes, Elie Wiesel, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.
- Wiesel was a survivor of the Holocaust, having spent time in both the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps, and survived a death march in 1945.
- At his Nobel Lecture the day after he had accepted his Prize, he referred to the astonishment being felt by his generation at the state of the world, just a few decades after the liberation of the camps:

If someone had told us in 1945 that in our lifetime religious wars would rage on virtually every continent, that thousands of children would once again be dying of starvation, we would not have believed it. Or that racism and fanaticism would flourish once again. Nor would we have believed that there would be governments that would deprive men and women of their basic rights merely because they dared to dissent. Governments of the Right and of the Left still subject those who dissent – writers, scientists, intellectuals – to torture and persecution. How is one to explain all this unless we consider the defeat of memory?

- The challenge we all face – and by being here tonight, you are demonstrating that you are meeting that challenge – is to show that we are *not* allowing memory to be defeated, that we *do* remember, and that we *will* absorb the lessons of that horrible experience into our own daily lives and behaviour.
- Ladies and gentlemen, like it or not, we live, and have lived, in an Age of Genocide.

- The Genocide of the Jews, the Holocaust, was not the first, not even of the twentieth century.
- Before the Holocaust came the destruction of the Kulaks in Ukraine in the early 1930s.
- Before that came the Armenian Genocide of 1915-1923.
- Before that came the annihilation by the Germans of the Hereros of South-West Africa (Namibia), between 1904 and 1906.
- Since 1945, the cases have multiplied dramatically, despite the cry of “Never Again:” Biafra, Tibet, Bangladesh, Burundi, Cambodia, East Timor, northern Iraq, southern Sudan, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Kosovo.
- Now the nations of the world are debating – endlessly debating – what action should be taken to stop the genocidal killing taking place in Darfur; and while they discuss it, hundreds of people are dying every day, day in and day out, and have done so since 2003.
- It is not surprising that some good people, beholding all this, find their sensitivities saturated, and turn off.
- A term has been invented to describe how some feel in the face of the all-pervasive evil characterising daily life: “compassion fatigue.”
- The challenge, of course, is to rise above this, and to heed carefully the lines written by John Donne in 1624, which begin with the words “No man is an island, entire of itself ...”
- We cannot change our history.
- A dear friend, Rabbi Dr Steven Jacobs, has written that: “History is not what we wish it to be, no matter how brutal the reality. It is what it is, and our ability to learn from it, warts and all, will yet prove our own measure of worth.”

- Assuredly, this is true; so, in view of this, what are we to learn from this shocking experience?
- The passions unleashed against the Jewish people between 1933 and 1945 are the same kind that are still being unleashed against others, today.
- In our own self-interest, we must remember what happened, and take careful note, *because we dare not forget.*
- Ignorance will triumph if we forget;
- Hatred, intolerance, bigotry, discrimination and thuggery will again become fashionable if we forget; above all,
- Democracy will become vulnerable if we forget.
- A fragile democracy is not an effective democracy.
- In a society where pessimistic values predominate, citizens can lose hope for the future, and seek simple solutions to complex questions.
- Where such solutions are offered, there are always going to be people whose opinions are shouted down.
- A community valuing a plurality of viewpoints can become transformed into one in which only a single viewpoint is permitted.
- And we all know where that can lead; we know, too, that the dangers continue.
 - Every swastika and every hand raised in the Nazi salute is a warning.
 - Every ethnic, racial or religious joke, regardless of who tells it, is a slur.
 - Every graffiti daubing or cemetery desecration is a defeat.

- Every person insulted, harassed, assaulted or killed because of their origin or beliefs is a reminder of what happens when the ideals of humanity crumble, are chipped away at, or are abused.
- Quite clearly: unspeakable evil can reappear, and has reappeared, in our own day.
- It can happen elsewhere, and it can happen here.
- If we hold back, if we turn a deaf ear, if we look the other way, we betray democracy, human dignity, and our own destiny.
- We *can* confront the forces that would destroy us.
- We can use the law.
- We can employ the democratic system in the manner it was always intended.
- We can offer protest, when protest is needed.
- But above all, *we must never, ever forget* – and we must show our children and their children why it is also in *their* interest never to forget.
- That is why this exhibition is so important: not to dwell exclusively on the horrors of *yesterday*, but to highlight what some brave people once did as a guide to how we should behave *today* and *tomorrow*.
- And it is for this reason that I urge you all to observe, learn, and then share the messages the Courage to Care exhibition conveys.
- Ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour and my pleasure to commend this exhibition to you.
- Thank you.