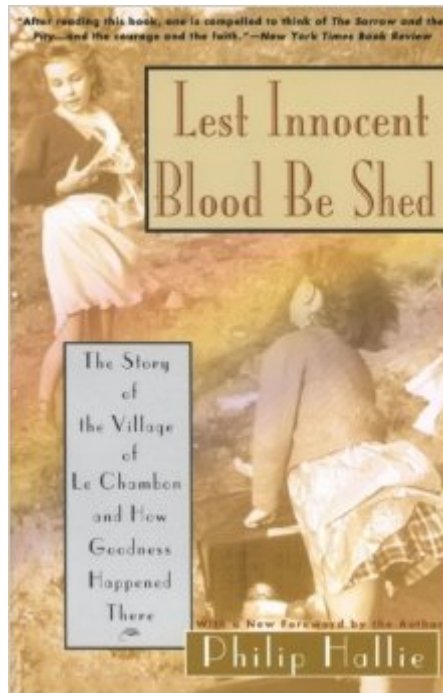


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Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story Of The Village Of Le Chambon And How Goodness Happened There



Synopsis

During the most terrible years of World War II, when inhumanity and political insanity held most of the world in their grip and the Nazi domination of Europe seemed irrevocable and unchallenged, a miraculous event took place in a small Protestant town in southern France called Le Chambon. There, quietly, peacefully, and in full view of the Vichy government and a nearby division of the Nazi SS, Le Chambon's villagers and their clergy organized to save thousands of Jewish children and adults from certain death.

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Customer Reviews

Philip Hallie, a Jewish philosopher, had slipped in to a state of depression as a result of his research of human cruelty, especially regarding the Holocaust. He felt as though he was a prisoner in that he wished harm on evil doers and had himself become untouched by suffering. He was doing research when he noticed something unusual, he was weeping. The reason? He had come across a short article about a village in France, which had resisted Hitler during the French Occupation (1940-1944). The village was the pacifistic Le Chambon. The book at hand is the result of Hallie's research (conducted in mid 1970's) into the events surrounding this village. He visited Le Chambon and interviewed several people. The main character of the resistance was Andr   Trocm   (deceased in 1971), a Protestant pastor, who with help of many-including his wife, Magda-provided a safe haven for Jews (especially Jewish children). The book essentially covers the years 1934-1944, with many anecdotes and observations. The bottom line for Hallie is that 'ethics' can only make a difference if action is taken. The people of Le Chambon simply helped the Jews

because 'it was the right thing to do.' This book is an easy read yet one that will make the reader think. There is an implicit religious basis for the peoples' ethics but a strength of the book is that there are no saints. Especially prevalent is Andr   Trocm  's humanity; he struggles immensely with death, especially of his mother and one of his sons. If you are looking for a morality based on deep and explicit theology you will not find it here. But everyone should take the following from this book: if your ethical stance is to lessen the evil in this world, then helping those who are in harm's way is as powerful, if not more so, than any show of violence.

Hallie is a brilliant writer and researcher who tells an amazing story of courage and faith. In it he demonstrates how "decent" people who stay inactive out of cowardice and indifference--when around them human beings are humiliated and destroyed--are the most dangerous people in the world. I didn't need his closing thoughts on ethics, and I would like to have learned more about what the villagers themselves did to protect the refugees. But the parts the author did well were so astonishing, it still gets five stars. It left me asking myself, "What exploited people groups can I help and how?"

This book stands as one of the top ten influential books in my life. Hallie details the struggle of a Protestant village in Nazi-controlled France to save Jews from persecution. Despite the obvious risks and the many sacrifices, the village hides and transports Jews beyond the reach of the Nazis. I found the village's decision and determination to fight a persecution unconnected to themselves amazing. It is an interesting challenge for each of us to evaluate how willing we are to show love for others.

The late Philip Hallie was a Jewish ethicist who became very depressed while studying the evils of the Holocaust. When he subsequently discovered the story of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon -- a village in southern France where Protestant pastor Andre Trocme led a rescue operation which saved thousands of Jews during WWII -- Hallie was completely and passionately intrigued and couldn't rest until he knew more. After further research and some meetings with Magda Trocme, Andre's widow, Hallie culminated his findings by writing "Lest Innocent Blood be Shed." Hallie was not a historian; he was an ethicist fascinated with this account of goodness which seemed to spring up out of nowhere (the original subtitle of the book gives a major clue as to Hallie's motives for researching and writing this book: "The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There"). Hallie got the basic storyline down, but he failed to grasp several key items. The

first thing he fails to mention is that there were many other villages on the Vivarais Plateau (the location of Le Chambon sur-Lignon) who had their own pastors and who conducted their own rescue operations in conjunction with that of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. Trocme was the catalyst on the plateau and he also wrote his memoirs for his family; i.e., he was the only pastor who left a paper trail, but he was not the only pastor-leader involved. Another item that sometimes mars the historical accuracy of the book is that Hallie based many "facts" and quotes on some poor-quality tapes that he utilized during his interviews with Magda Trocme. Occasionally, he gets a fact or a quote wrong. An excellent supplement to Hallie's book is the more recently published "We Only Know Men" by Patrick Henry. Its historical accuracy is flawless (and is immensely readable as well) and the first chapter clears up some of the misunderstandings engendered by Hallie's book.

We will be discussing this book among others at the Colby College Great Books Institute this August . The theme of our selections is "Do Unto Others". I have just finished reading Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed and cannot praise it enough. Beautifully written and with with a powerful message in light of current wars. Nonviolence must have deep roots and strong branches before it can bear the fruit of Le Chambon - a village which rescued Jewish children during World War Two. Pastor Trocme and Edouard Theis believed that nonviolence involves preparation and organization -Page 35 -We might begin to prepare now by learning about these good people (French Huguenots) who lived their faith . To them all lives were precious. I hope others will read and review this book and share their thoughts with us. tjl@ultranet.com Thelma J Lebeaux

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