

Magda and Andre Trocme

Andre Trocme and Le Chambon:

The Preciousness of Human Life

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Introduction

My portion of the research project focuses on a small section of the Protestant Church's response to the Holocaust. This is of the Protestant pastor, Andre Trocme, and his village Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. It examines their acts of resistance against the Vichy government and Nazis. This resistance resulted in saving 5,000 Jewish lives during the Holocaust.

Europe, under Hitler, was a dark place during the Holocaust. One mountain region in France, though, offered a bright light, with rays of hope. From 1940 to 1944, the small French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon resisted the Vichy government and the Nazis. My research focuses on Le Chambon and its leaders. It examines how and why the town opposed the government and saved so many lives. Under the leadership of town pastor Andre Trocme, Le Chambon united and successfully resisted the Vichy and Nazi demands, and in doing so saved 5,000 Jewish lives. The Chambonnais were not only guided by their leader Trocme, but by their own moral consciences. This peaceful opposition led by a man and his town resulted in one of the greatest, yet modest and relatively unknown acts of resistance during the Holocaust. The Chambonnais were able to resist the government by viewing these refugees solely as human beings. The Chambonnais' own persecuted history, outside organizations, and certain leaders of the Vichy and Nazi government also played an important part in this act of resistance. [thesis statement]

The Personal Andre Trocme

The town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was led by the Protestant pastor Andre Trocme. According to Pierre Sauvage's movie *Weapons of the Spirit*, and many other sources, Trocme was a conscientious objector pacifist. He was known to oppose certain issues in a peaceful manner. Philip P. Hallie, in his book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, discusses why and how Trocme came to be the rescuer he was. He said that much of Andre Trocme's ideas and actions in protecting the Jews and resisting the Vichy government were shaped by childhood events. The first event that Hallie describes is of Trocme as a young boy playing in the yard with his brother. The gate to the yard had been left open and a bony, pale man walked by. Stopping and looking at these two upper-class kids (the Trocme brothers) he simply shook his head and called them bastards (Hallie 50). Hallie says that for the rest of Andre Trocme's life, Trocme continued to see the wall in his yard that had hidden him from the rest of the world. He thought that these underprivileged people were judging him. According to Hallie, "this incident caused Trocme to turn his back upon his class and to work with the poor" (Hallie 51). Trocme would incorporate these world views into his teachings and resistance. As both a pastor of the Protestant Church and a human being, he would devote his life to helping those poorer people in need, who were simply humans also.

The second event that played an important role in Trocme's future actions was the death of his mother. In June 1911, the Trocme family got in a car accident after his father was angered by a small shanty car that had cut him off and thrown dirt on the Trocme car. Andre's mother was the only one who died in the accident. After seeing his mother's death, Andre Trocme saw human life as infinitely precious (Hallie 53). This belief would become an important message in pushing his villagers to protect and save the lives of all who sought refuge.

The last factor is of how Trocme saw and understood the events of World War I. Charles Moore, an author for the Bruderhof Organization, wrote a short biography of Trocme, called "Andre Trocme of Le Chambon." He says the young Andre could not understand why his German cousins would fight against his French half brothers only because of a war (Moore). This furthered his pacifist views of renouncing war and violent methods. Trocme blinded himself to differences between certain groups. He would only see human beings as one whole community.

The small farming village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was very poor and it seemed as if it was nearing extinction until Andre Trocme and his family arrived in 1934. Trocme established a secondary school in Le Chambon that emphasized peace and nonviolence. By 1938 he found his educational and religious partner, Edouard Theis (Hallie 82). Theis would become Trocme's assistant pastor and partner in the secondary school. Their religious beliefs of love would find a way to stop what Trocme called "diabolical forces like Nazism" (Hallie 83).

Le Chambon's Resistance to the Vichy Government and the Nazis

The teachings of Andre Trocme quickly spread throughout Le Chambon and were widely accepted. The Trocme family was well liked and Andre quickly filled the role of the moral and spiritual town leader. France fell to the Nazis in 1940. It was divided in two areas--the Occupied Zone (occupied by the Nazis) and the so-called Free Zone. Le Chambon was in this "Free Zone." The Free Zone, however, also enforced anti-Semitic Nazi doctrines and laws. Vichy government leader Marshal Petain signed a treaty with the Nazi government, agreeing to hand over all the Jewish refugees that the German government asked for. The day after this agreement was reached, Trocme and Theis gave a sermon to their church discussing this and how they should resist any government demands for refugees. Trocme's speech read as follows:

Tremendous pressure will be put on us to submit passively to a totalitarian ideology. If they do not succeed in subjugating our souls, at least they will want to subjugate our bodies. The duty of Christians is to use the weapons of the Spirit to oppose the violence that they will try to put on our consciences. We appeal to all our brothers in Christ to refuse to cooperate with this violence.

Loving, forgiving, and doing good to our adversaries is our duty. Yet we must do this without giving up, and without being cowardly. We shall resist whenever our adversaries demand of us obedience contrary to the orders of the gospel. We shall do so without fear, but also without pride and without hate.
(Moore)

This sermon began the Le Chambon resistance operation against the Vichy and Nazi governments. It was a simple call of duty as Christians to simply help out fellow humans in need. The Chambonnais only saw people in need, no divisions between Christians and Jews; when someone asked for help in the village, they would give it.

There were many things that the Chambonnais did to resist the Vichy government and the Nazis. Most importantly, every Chambonnais that was asked to hide and protect Jews did so. The Jews were housed in private homes, on farms, and in public institutions. Louis Bulow, is the director of the www.auschwitz.dk website and writes essays on the Holocaust. He said whenever the Nazis came into Le Chambon, the Jews were hidden in the countryside (Bulow). The Jews were provided this safe haven for as long as they wanted. Pierre Sauvage said, that if asked by the Nazis and Vichy government about these people living in their homes, they would simply reply that they were cousins. Many Jews that lived on farms quickly adapted and began working with the Chambonnais on the farms. No Chambonnais ever asked the refugees if they were Jewish or not. They simply viewed them as human beings who needed

help. Not a single villager ever turned a Jew over to the police. They also allowed Jews to make false identification cards, which was a major risk to both them and the Jews.

The children refugees were very important to the Chambonnais. Pierre Sauvage says that Le Chambon became known as "the village of children." The Jewish children were educated alongside the other kids in the village. Andre Trocme's cousin Daniel was instrumental in setting up safe havens for the children.

Le Chambon helped set up and was part of an underground railroad leading to safety in Switzerland. The farming village served as the center of the resistance in the region. Many of the Jews chose to use Le Chambon as a place to hide and prepare to go to Switzerland.

Trocme's congregation was not the only entity that fought to save Jewish lives in Le Chambon. There were many other important organizations in the village. The Quakers took an active role in helping hide and save many Jews. Outside organizations like the Swiss Red Cross set up homes and gave financial aid to house and shelter Jews. Private organizations and persons did so later on during the war also. The director of the Shoah Rose website, Elizabeth Kirkley Best said that the Darbyite community in Le Chambon, a radical Protestant branch, also collaborated with Trocme and the Chambonnais to help save Jews (Best). Other surrounding villages on the chateau also hid some of the Jewish refugees.

These acts of hiding and protecting put the lives of those who performed them in danger. In addition to risking their lives to hide Jews, the Chambonnais under Trocme went even further. They frequently denied to Nazi officials that they were hiding Jews. The Chambonnais stood up against the Vichy government. On 1 August, 1941, all the towns of France had been instructed to ring their church bells to celebrate the anniversary of Marshal Petain coming to power. Pastor Trocme chose not to ring the bells, as a symbol of resistance and opposition to the government and its actions.

In the summer of 1942, the village of Le Chambon was in danger. A Vichy government official had arrived in Le Chambon and said that the government knew Jews were hiding and living in Le Chambon. Trocme simply responded with "These people came here for help and for shelter. I am their shepherd. A shepherd does not forsake his flock. I do not know what a Jew is. I know only human beings" (Bulow). This was a major act of defiance. Two weeks later, the Vichy government police and Nazis arrived with buses to take the Jews away. The officials and police demanded Jews; Trocme simply responded that he did not have any Jews' names and even if he did he would not hand over a list to them (Hallie 108). Trocme warned everyone who was hiding Jews, of the arrival of the police. The next day was a Sunday. The police searched every house, but the entire village, including the Jews, had packed Trocme's church

(Hallie 109). The police searched the town for three weeks but did not find anyone and the buses left completely empty.

The Chambonnais had successfully resisted the Vichy police and Nazis and continued to do so each time they returned. Whenever new Jewish refugees were coming, the Chambonnais would say how many "Old Testaments" (Jews) were arriving in town (Best). When the Nazis came through the village, many Jews were hidden in the countryside. According to a villager, "As soon as the soldiers left, we would go into the forest and sing a song. When they heard that song, the Jews knew it was safe to come home" (Bulow).

The Results

Eventually Andre Trocme and Edouard Theis were arrested. They were released from imprisonment a few weeks later, even though they refused to sign a loyalty and oath to the government. After numerous warnings and fearing for their own lives, Trocme and Theis then went into hiding until the end of the war. The village continued to protect any and all Jews who came into the town and needed help. The Nazis came back and arrested Andre's cousin, Daniel. Unfortunately he and the Jewish children and teenagers he had been hiding and educating were arrested in June of 1943. They were deported to the Maidanek concentration camp and all killed in 1944 (Yad Vashem). Andre Trocme came out of hiding after the war was over and continued his pacifist fight for peace. In 1990, Le Chambon became the first community to be honored as "Righteous Gentiles" by the Yad Vashem institution in Israel (Bulow). Two trees were planted in Israel; one in honor of Andre and his wife Magda Trocme, and another in honor of Daniel Trocme.

Under Trocme's leadership, the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon effectively resisted the Vichy and Nazi government. The Chambonnais preserved 5,000 Jewish lives through peaceful opposition. It was a remarkable and amazing feat that successfully saved the precious lives of so many human beings.

Why did Le Chambon save so many?

A central question remains around Le Chambon which many scholars have tried to answer. That is, why did these Christian villagers choose to protect every Jew who needed help, while putting their own lives at risk? The first reason was because of Pastor Andre Trocme's leadership abilities. His pacifist teachings were widely accepted in Le Chambon. From the beginning of the Nazi occupation and Vichy

government, he urged his people not follow these evil demands of the government. Trocme and the Chambonnais viewed the Vichy laws as morally wrong (Hallie 271). Trocme's view of the preciousness of human lives was also believed by the rest of the Chambonnais. This common religious and moral belief helped unite the town to resist.

This conviction of the preservation of all human lives was of a great moral conscience that the Chambonnais possessed and practiced. Philip Hallie believed that these personal beliefs allowed them to resist the Nazis (Hallie 287). This was a moral strength that most others did not have.

This blind love for all human beings saved thousands. A number of interviews were conducted with the people of Le Chambon after the Holocaust. One of the most famous responses from a villager was that, "Things had to be done and we happened to be there to do them. It was the most natural thing in the world to help these people" (Yad Vashem). It simply did not make sense to them not to save fellow human beings. There were no questions asked, it was just done. The people of Le Chambon did not want to be seen as heroes. They saved these Jews because it was their religious and moral duty. Hallie strongly felt that the Chambonnais were ethically higher than other groups of people because of this. He used the allegory of the mountain that Le Chambon sat on. The Chambonnais were on a higher chateau of morality than most others (Hallie 286). Every single villager took it upon themselves to go to the greatest extent to save these fellow human lives.

Other Interpretations of Why the Chambonnais Acted This Way

There are other factors that may have played into why so many Jewish lives in Le Chambon were saved and why the Chambonnais protected every refugee who came into their village during the Holocaust. The first reason that is often overlooked is because of Le Chambon's own past. Pierre Sauvage's *Weapons of the Spirit* discusses this to some extent. Throughout the film, Sauvage shows clips of the people of Le Chambon singing their own songs of resistance that they had used to fight off the French Catholics in the past. These songs are still important today for the Chambonnais. Many of the villagers in Le Chambon were and still are descendants of the Huguenots. These were the first French Protestants. In the early stages of French Protestantism, the Huguenots were heavily persecuted by French Catholics. Andre Trocme's father's family was descendants of the Huguenots too. The Huguenot Le Chambon had struggled to overcome this oppression. The memory of this struggle played an important role during the Holocaust and helping others out in a struggle against unjust laws.

The last factor which may have helped with the successful Le Chambon resistance was because of the Vichy and Nazi officials themselves. Commissioner Pralay was sent by the Vichy to watch Le Chambon. He was there to patiently weed out the resistors and find the locations of Jews hiding in the area (Hallie 218-291). Many believe he purposely underestimated the amount of Jews who were in hiding. He also hinted to Pastor Trocme that there would be a raid on Daniel Trocme's house (Hallie 219). Pralay was killed a few weeks later by a violent guerilla resistant group living on the outskirts of Le Chambon. A few weeks after this, a member of the Maquis (a French Resistance guerilla group) who claimed to be a double agent for the Gestapo, came to Trocme. He warned Trocme that the Gestapo planned to kill him. These and other Nazi officials and figures helped the Chambonnais in some way or turned their backs on the town resistance, also help explain both how and why Le Chambon was able to save all these lives.

Conclusion

Andre Trocme and his assistant Edouard Theis were very important peaceful freedom fighters in a cruel and sadistic world order. Under Professor Marcuse's Power Action Grid, Trocme and Theis would fit under the intermediate groups section as "proactive resistors." According to Hallie, "Trocme and Theis believed that if they failed to protect those in Le Chambon, they the ministers, would share the guilt of the evil ones who actually perpetrated the harmdoing" (Hallie 283). This moral consciousness made them push even harder to resist and make sure that they would not fall under the "bystander" on the power grid. They saw that they would be "active perpetrators" under the Aryan section on the grid if they sat and let the government have its way with the Jews.

The Chambonnais themselves would also fit under the intermediate groups column as "resistors" and or "opponents" to the perpetrators. They denied the Nazis any Jews by protecting them. They also risked their own lives. By coming together as a community, the dynamics of the resistance strengthened and changed drastically (Marcuse). They were able to resist the repression much more. The group resistance is proactive and helps destroy the system based on moral principles before the system can effectively destroy them.

Andre Trocme, his family, friends, and the entire town of Le Chambon stand as one of the most powerful informal resistance operations during the Holocaust. Their pacifist actions serve as a timeless model in how people can come together to save other human beings. I argue that not just one explanation is enough to justify why the Chambonnais saved all these human lives. Through the simplicity of strong religious and moral teachings, aided by the other factors like the Chambonnais Huguenots own struggle, the help of outside organizations, and the luck with less brutal government officials in the village, led to these successful and powerful acts of resistance. Mainly by accepting the preciousness of all human lives and the belief that we are all merely human beings, allowed a town to resist the unjust and inhumane laws of the government and rescue 5,000 peoples' lives.

Annotated Bibliography/Linkography

Best, Elizabeth Kirkley. "Le Chambon." <<http://shoahrose.com/newchamb.html>>. 7 Nov. 2005.

The Shoah Rose webpage is an important site that examines the different roles that the Church played during the Holocaust. Elizabeth Kirkley Best is the director of the website. The site discusses how the Church was a divided body as some areas of it actually helped Hitler, others remained silent and watched the tragedies of the Holocaust unfold. It examines the future of the Church that Hitler saw, and how parts of the Church chose to resist and save lives during the Holocaust. This is an interesting website as it looks at the divided Church's response to the war and the Holocaust. It is a very extensive website. The mission that the director Best has for the website is to educate the public and the Church about the Holocaust. It intends to teach tolerance. The article "Le Chambon" briefly describes the figures and the events of Le Chambon during the war. Best discusses how the town allowed the hidden Jews to freely worship and the resistance methods the villagers used to stop the Vichy and Nazis. One of the important methods the article talks about is how the Chambonnais used the term "Old Testaments" as a code phrase to inform the town that more Jews would be arriving. This often threw off the police who were trying to round up the hidden Jews there.

Bulow, Louis. "A Conspiracy of Goodness." <<http://www.auschwitz.dk/Trocme.htm>>. 7 Nov. 2005.

The <<http://www.auschwitz.dk/>> website addresses a broad range of topics from the Holocaust. There are a number of essays, Nazi biographies, Holocaust photographs, Holocaust poetry, and links to other websites. Louis Bulow is the author of these informative essays and articles on this website about events and people during the Holocaust. There are dark stories and details about the horrors of the Holocaust. There are also a number of stories and articles written about the bravery and resistance displayed during the Holocaust. The particular article I found is a very concise description of how the Le Chambon resistance began. Bulow then discusses what kind of opposition was performed against the Vichy and Nazis. He ends with a brief discussion of both the consequences of this resistance and how the town and its pacifist freedom fighter leaders have been recognized. This article includes a few good pictures of the village, its leaders, and the children they saved. It also includes important quotes by Andre Trocme and from people who lived in the village during the town's resistance.

Hallie, Philip P. *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.

This is an extremely detailed book about the life of Andre Trocme and of the town of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. Hallie began researching Le Chambon after reading through an anthology of documents on the Holocaust. The short and simple article on Le Chambon struck him and inspired him so much, he decided to do his own research on the town and its resistance during the Holocaust. He did extensive research and interviews of the Chambonnais for this book. It examines the Le Chambon residents' actions during the Holocaust and why they acted in certain ways. Hallie gives his explanations of why he thinks the

Chambonnais protected the Jews and resisted the Vichy and Nazis during the Holocaust. His work in this book is very well known and is often cited with Le Chambon research and discussion. One of his most popular terms is "a conspiracy of goodness." Hallie feels that the Chambonnais under Trocme saved 5,000 Jews due to their common belief in the preciousness of human life and their high moral consciences.

Marcuse, Harold. Power Action Grid "Power Action Grid," History 33D, University of California Santa Barbara, 10 Nov. 2005.

Professor Marcuse's lecture examined how resistance worked during the Holocaust. The power action grid puts groups into boxes, based on the context of the situation that is occurring. Professor Marcuse showed how different groups' behavior can be used to categorize how a group or individual resists, goes along with the system, or does not act at all and serves as a bystander. The power-action grid was of great assistance in helping to understand Trocme, Theis, and the town of Le Chambon's roles in resistance during the Holocaust.

Moore, Charles, "Andre Trocme of Le Chambon," <<http://www.brudershof.com/articles/Andre-Trocme.htm>>. 7 Nov. 2005.

Charles Moore serves as a main author for the Bruderhof Communities. Through what I could find on the webpage, the Bruderhof Communities are groups of people who live together in a communal environment and way of life. They state that they care for the disabled and the elderly. The website says they are from a broad background, but base their ideas and ways of life on Jesus' teachings. Although I did not know much about the Bruderhof communities, the article on Andre Trocme and Le Chambon was very useful. Moore got much of his information from Andre Trocme himself. Trocme wrote and published two books: *The Politics of Repentance* (1953), and *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*. Moore uses quotes and excerpts from *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*. He also draws upon Philip Hallie's book *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. The article briefly describes Andre Trocme's childhood and young adulthood. Moore gives a detailed description of Trocme and the Chambonnais, and how they saved Jews and resisted the Vichy and Nazi governments. Moore cites the initial sermon that Andre Trocme and Edouard Theis gave in preparing the villagers for the resistance. He then discusses the importance of the sermon. The comprehensive description of Le Chambon during the Holocaust is very helpful in understanding what and why Le Chambon resisted to save thousands of human lives. Moore draws on direct sources and important research to further his own research about "Le Chambon."

Sauvage, Pierre, *Weapons of the Spirit*, Chambon Foundation, VHS, September 31 1989.

This movie by Pierre Sauvage is a documentary about the events in France and Le Chambon during WWII. It examines why the Chambonnais saved so many Jews. It has both a personal narrative and a number of interviews of people who were living in the village during the war. Those who were interviewed still lived in the town at the time of the interview. It shows how the Chambonnais had worked to save any and all of the Jews who needed help. It is really interesting because Pierre Sauvage was one of the Jewish babies who was hidden and protected there during the Holocaust. His parents sought refuge there and he was born in the area. His perspective on Le Chambon and his inhabitants is

very remarkable. The film documentary is a unique, in- depth look at Le Chambon's heroes who only saw themselves as saving other human beings. Sauvage runs the Chambon Foundation. The address to the website is <<http://www.chambon.org/index.html>>. Sauvage founded it in 1982. The foundation's goal is to make sure the memory of Le Chambon's resistance and help is never forgotten. Sauvage and his foundation have put together a number of documentaries about the Holocaust. Sauvage also has given a number of lectures throughout the world about the Holocaust.

Yad Vashem, "Le Chambon," <<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/Chambon.html>>. 7 Nov. 2005.

The Jewish Virtual Library website is an online encyclopedia founded and funded by the American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise. According to the website, the Jewish Virtual Library is the most complete online Jewish encyclopedia in the world. It has 13 different wings and the Holocaust is only one of them. The article "Le Chambon is originally from the Yad Vashem website. Yad Vashem is based in Israel. In 1953, it was established by the Israeli Knesset. It is in charge of documenting the Jewish people during the Holocaust as it says on the website and preserving the memories of all those who witnessed the Holocaust. The website is <<http://www.yadvashem.org/>>. The website has a number of archives, a library, a Hall of Names of 3.2 million Jews who died in the Holocaust from research of Pages of Testimony and other sources, a number of educational institutions, museums, memorial sites, and annual ceremonies. The article from Yad Vashem on Le Chambon discusses the various ways the Chambonnais successfully hid and protected the Jews who were passing through to Switzerland. It briefly describes a few events that occurred in the village during the Holocaust. The article provided by the Yad Vashem and Jewish Virtual Library talks about how the Chambonnais were very modest and declined any heroic labels. They saw their actions as natural and part of their religious and moral beliefs. It ends with a discussion about how the Yad Vashem has recognized the town and its leaders by planting two trees; one in honor of Andre and Magda Trocme and the other for Daniel Trocme.

About the author (back to top)

My name is Justin Young and I am a senior political science major at UCSB. I am very interested in Jewish history. I have taken a number of European history and Jewish studies classes. Many of these classes have spawned my interest in further research and analysis of both the history of the Jewish people and human beings in general. After hearing my rabbi address the topic of Le Chambon's resistance movement in one of his sermons, I found it very interesting and relevant to History 33D. I decided to do further research on this topic and ended up finding out it would be a great subject for the research project. I went online and found a number of sources about Le Chambon's actions in saving the thousands of Jewish lives and why they did so. I then went to the library and checked out Philip Hallie's *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*. I read through his book and his ideas of why Le Chambon had chosen the path it did during the war while much of the world stood by and watched. I then watched Pierre Sauvage's documentary *Weapons of the Spirit*, to get another perspective on the events in Le Chambon. Through the sources I found and my research, I was able to come up with an amazing, optimistic

conclusion about human beings. I feel that as human beings, we have the ability to see through any differences we may have. We then have the capacity to help those who may be in need. The greatest thing we have in common is that we are all human beings.