

IN RECOGNITION OF THE RESCUE OF DANISH JEWRY (ROSH HASHANAH 1943)

When the Germans invaded Denmark in 1940, they offered the Danes a very special treatment. The Nazis looked on the Danes as almost perfect Aryans, according to their racist theories, a superior people, like themselves.

And so, they left the Danes alone. They even left the Danish Jews alone.

This situation changed at the time of Rosh Ha-Shanah 1943, as a Gestapo unit prepared to arrest Denmark's 7,700 Jews and ship them to the concentration camps.

But the Jews received advance warning. Thousands of them fled to the coastal villages, looking for a fisherman willing to risk his life and sail them fifteen miles to neutral Sweden.

In exchange for Denmark's help in rounding up the Jews, the Germans offered amnesty for other Danes who were imprisoned. The Bishop of Copenhagen responded to the German offer with a proclamation to be read from every Lutheran pulpit.

"Because the persecution of the Jews conflicts with our love of human beings, and because every person is precious in the eyes of God, we will fight for the right of our Jewish brothers and sisters to have the same liberty we prize for ourselves. The Danish Church is fully aware of its responsibility to obey those in authority. At the same time, we are in conscience bound to affirm that God's law must be obeyed over civil law."

And so, throughout the High Holiday and Festival season, fishing-boats sailed every night until the last Jews had been saved.

They found refuge among the noble Swedes at a time when, in most parts of the world, doors were closed to the remnant of our people.

When the Danes talk today about those times, they say: "We didn't do anything special, only what was natural."

For themselves, perhaps, that is true. For us and for the world what they did was very special, good deeds based on a commitment to morality and humanity in the midst of the death and destruction caused by the Nazis' reign of terror.

It is therefore important for us to remember and to tell, from year to year, the story of the rescue of Danish Jewry and to honor the decency of the Danish people. *[Congregation repeats]*

Adapted, in part, from the text of the short film, Denmark 1943
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