

# Holocaust Memorial Day 2013

## Communities Together: Build a Bridge

### Resources and Liturgical Material for Christian Services

#### Introduction and background

The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust suggests that on 27 January 2013 we focus our thoughts on respecting different communities. The theme paper for this year opens:

Imagine waking up to find that the neighbours you have known all your life and even sat next to at school, now walk past you without stopping, now forbid their children from playing with yours, now spit at you and even attack you. Imagine that you have done nothing wrong, yet you are to be punished nonetheless and no-one will stand by you.

On Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January 2013 – we're asking you to remember and stand by those who were forced to live through these experiences. We want you to honour those communities which were destroyed in the Holocaust, under Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Darfur, as well as the atrocities in Armenia.

History tells us that communities which have lived side by side peacefully for generations and even centuries can be persuaded to turn on each other with murderous intent. People were betrayed by their neighbours and removed from the safety of their former communities and subjected to extremes of violence and injustice. It is the courage and determination of those who survived and rebuilt their lives that we can draw on today.

The resources created jointly by the *Council for Christians and Jews (CCJ)* and *Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI)* are intended to offer a range of materials which explore the theme for 2013, 'Communities Together: Build a Bridge'. They can be integrated into 'regular' worship or combined to create a special service.

The Council of Christians and Jews was founded in 1942 by Chief Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz and Archbishop William Temple. The CCJ has been addressing antisemitism and promoting Jewish/Christian dialogue for over 70 years.

Resources from previous years can be found at [www.ccj.org.uk](http://www.ccj.org.uk) and [www.ctbi.org.uk/hmd](http://www.ctbi.org.uk/hmd)

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## A History of Holocaust Memorial Day

Since 2001, the Government has invited British society to observe 27th January each year as Holocaust Memorial Day. This is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Soviet troops on 27 January 1945.

Holocaust Memorial Day is intended to provide an opportunity for reflection on issues raised by all atrocities, especially those events officially designated as genocides, such as Bosnia and Cambodia. The mass murder of millions of people of different ethnic, cultural, religious and political groups in more than one genocide provided the darkest side of twentieth-century human history. While the remit of the day is wide-reaching, its focus remains the central event we call the Holocaust. Although many others perished as a result of Nazi actions, this time provides an opportunity to consider the fate of European Jewry in particular, for whom Hitler and others reserved a special hatred, and which was almost entirely wiped out.



Christians have also been among the perpetrators of genocide, as well as among the bystanders and, indeed, the victims. Holocaust Memorial Day can give us cause to remember the reality that evil is still powerful in our world. It can strengthen our resolve to protect every community from ethnic cleansing and elimination.

## Bible notes and sermon pointers

This commentary on the RCL Epiphany 3 readings for 27 January 2013 is written through the lens of Holocaust Memorial Day.

### Old Testament

*Nehemiah 8.1-3,5-6,8-10*

#### Commentary note 1

Scholars are unsure whether this passage originally followed on from the preceding, or has been moved ('misplaced' even). There is yet more debate about what the 'book of the *torah* of Moses' was. <sup>1</sup> Was it

- a the five books of Moses, more or less as we have them;
- b only part of these, perhaps those belonging to one source (the 'Priestly' and the 'Deuteronomist' sources are the usual contenders) or
- c another work, really by Ezra himself, now lost to us?

But such historical questions can distract us from the drama. This is a story of national renewal, where the people hear, for the first time or as if for the first time, what their vocation is. We can call it their 'constitution' in both senses: it's the legal and social framework; it also sets out 'what they are made of'.



<sup>1</sup> *Torah* is typically translated 'law' in Christian Bibles. This has an ancient pedigree; the Septuagint typically has *nomos*, which does indeed mean law. But Christians have loaded the word with ideas of legalism and pedantry. *Torah*'s basic meaning is 'guidance' or 'teaching'. In its narrow sense (the first five books of the Bible), it even includes all the narrative and poetry, for these teach the people of Israel as much as the commandments.

The people show remorse for their failure to take any of it seriously. Through that, though, they hear the gospel's call. True repentance leads with great rapidity to the call to celebrate. Fatty things and sweet wine (treats for us today, too!).

'Official apologies' are controversial in our society. 'Truth and reconciliation' processes, after the model of post-apartheid South Africa, less so. We are reminded that 'the truth shall set you free'. Sometimes, as people and as peoples, what we most need is just to express remorse. This is hard, in our days. We are so used to non-apologies, buttressed by excuses:

'I am sorry that you are hurt.'

'There were errors but our procedures have been improved.'

But remorse is different. It plays no games. It doesn't seek to manipulate the other into saying all is okay, when it may not be.<sup>2</sup>

It can sometimes be the only chance of a 'bridge' to those we have most harmed.

### Commentary note 2

The *torah*<sup>1</sup> is not read as a piece of timeless (in the sense of 'free-floating') truth. Its teachers know they need to interpret. 'They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.' Perhaps they translated from Hebrew to Aramaic. But it's as likely to mean that they related Revealed Guidance to the conditions and contexts of the people, in all their distress and bewilderment.

So, is this a text to satisfy the 'conservatives' or the 'liberals' among the people of faith? For in our churches, no less than in the world, groups can be formed which alienate each other. They burn their bridges. A church should be a place where people learn to disagree graciously. It is to our shame that we often get it at least as bad as the world.

Conservatives may emphasise that there is a given – the book is read, its text to be understood as unchanging. Liberals may counter that it was the interpretation, fitted for that time and place, which was the important thing which guided people in their daily lives. But... what would our churches be like, if we were in the habit of admitting that both were right, and the devil – or rather the angel – is found in the detail of working out how the one relates to the other? Wouldn't we then really have something to say about all the wider enmities in the world?

### Psalm 19

The psalm is a classic poem of confidence in God, known in two complementary ways: through nature; through His Guidance to his own people (*torah*).<sup>1</sup> It might truly be summarised: 'God is in heaven, and all is right with the world.'

But the psalms and the Bible do not leave us in pious self-satisfaction for any length of time. The psalmist knows that, while they may feel settled, their insight into their own life and motivations (to say nothing of others') is limited. Who knows of their secret sins – secret, presumably to themselves? We risk complicity in the evils of our days, by our inaction, by the excuses we tell each other. So the psalm leads us to another truth/truism: 'There, but for the grace of God, go I'.

There is the promise of a bridge over these troubling waters, of resolution: we ask God, our rock and our rescuer, to orient us aright, not on the surface, but deep down. So we return to the goodness of God's Guidance.

Whenever we hear of war, violence and enmity elsewhere, the temptation is to shrug our shoulders and wonder about the irrationality of others. Why can't they just get on? So much of the Bible – its 'biblical realism', some call it – tells us this will not do.



<sup>2</sup> For more on remorse, and how it differs from the usual transactions of apology-giving, see Rowan Williams, *Lost Icons*



When we are stressed it is pretty obvious to ourselves that we are not wholly rational. When we are not stressed, we are quite good at hiding it, even from ourselves. But we know, if we are honest: one way of describing a lot of our motivation is as a bundle of fears and resentments. 'I am human; nothing human is alien to me' (Terence).

*May the words of my mouth and the mediation of my mind be acceptable before you, O GOD, my rock and my rescuer*<sup>3</sup>.

This verse (variously translated) is well-known and much loved by Christians. Doubtless many will use it to begin or end a sermon today, as on each Sunday. It also has an honoured place in the Jewish liturgy. It is the climax of the fixed prayer which has different names, one of which is simply, 'The Prayer' (*tefillah*). It is preceded by another prayer:

'May God guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully. To those who curse me, let my soul be silent; and let my soul be like dust to everyone...' A good corrective here to those who think of Judaism as the 'eye for an eye' religion.

The midrash (Jewish narrative commentary on Bible and other texts) has this story:

'Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel once sent his servant, Tavi, to buy "good food". Tavi, who was famous for his wisdom, brought back a tongue. Thereupon Rabban Shimon sent him to buy some bad food. Again, he returned with a tongue. Rabban Shimon asked him to explain how the same food could be both good and bad. Tavi said: "From a tongue can come good or bad. When a tongue speaks good, there is nothing better, but when a tongue speaks ill, there is nothing worse."<sup>4</sup>

## New Testament

*1 Corinthians 12.12-31a*

The idea that the human body is a microcosm of a whole society, or even of the whole cosmos is well-known in the ancient world. It is intrinsically attractive, at least to the powerful. It can be read as saying: 'a place for everything and everything in its place' – as a political message. Your role, however meagre and overlooked, plays its part, so get on with it.

St Paul, however, is saying something different here. First, he is arguing that (in that we give the great honour of clothing to the apparently dishonourable parts), all are equal, to be treated equally. Second, he grounds this in stating, rather matter-of-factly, that the body we are is... Christ's. We are the Body of Christ. Let the shock of this idea hit you, perhaps for the first time. Take in the humour too – the conversation between eye and foot. There was a time before these were tired slogans and illustrations.



In church and in society we are often told to tolerate each other, to build little bridges across wide gulfs of disagreement and alienation, so that there is less violence, either literal or rhetorical. For Paul, this will not do.

Here we have a picture to help us move beyond the tentativeness of tolerance to the exuberance of celebration. We need our differences, if the whole thing is to work, is to be what it is called to be. True, Paul was thinking of the Church, and this may not translate immediately to the wider society. But why not be ambitious?

<sup>3</sup> This is my own translation: 'heart' rather than 'mind' is both the literal and the traditional translation. But the metaphorical meaning of 'heart' has narrowed down to sentiment and emotion alone. In the biblical world, the heart was also the seat of thought and the will.

<sup>4</sup> Sherman, Nosson, 1987, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, New York: Mesorah Publications, Second Edition, 118-9.

If we think of a group as a body, what body are we imagining? The chances are it will be a 'normal' body – we will picture someone 'able-bodied'. The message may even seem to demand this – every limb and every organ is needed. But the moment this is spelled out, we know that it is not the case. Not everybody has every limb; those that don't can live full, fulfilling and fun lives. Remember the energy and grace of the Paralympics.

We are often told that war is just about 'taking action' or 'intervening' or 'going in'. We forget that people kill and are killed. But, when we are forced to face this, it can, in turn, make it harder to recognise that alongside the fatalities are casualties. We can even, perhaps at the margins of our consciousness, trivialise the loss of a limb, as 'nothing' compared to loss of life.

The charity *Help for Heroes* helps us attend to the injured among our own armed forces. But most people who are injured in war are probably not heroes. They were civilians, just making their way home at the wrong time. Can we enter imaginatively into their pain and lament – or is that one bridge too far?



The Body of Christ, as we know it, is disabled. Remember Thomas, who was invited to put his hand in Jesus' wounded side. The wound! The wound remains. God is so much more realistic about the wounds we give and receive than we are. Here is a bridge to the truth of ourselves.

## Gospel

Luke 4.14-21

In the weeks after Epiphany our gospel readings are of the beginnings. Here we have the beginning of Jesus' adult public ministry, according to Luke. Scholars add that we are also introduced to one of the key theological terms in Luke-Acts. You may be surprised that this is the simple word 'today' (*semeron*). It is a word that appears at crucial points, when we learn more of Jesus. The two most obvious times are in the story of Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5, 9: 'Today salvation has come to this house') and Jesus to the good thief on the cross (23:43: 'Today you will be with me in paradise').<sup>5</sup>

But this also exposes the problem with the text. Look at the citation from Isaiah. It's from Isaiah 61.1, closer to the Greek Septuagint than the Hebrew. It seems to be about more than a string of healings, however welcome in themselves. It's rather about a divinely inspired revolution. The character is anointed (*echrisen* – 'christed') to turn the world upside down; to put it right. But in what sense did that happen in Jesus' ministry? In what sense did it happen on that very day? In what sense has that happened through the history of the Church?

Of course, Christians have answers to these questions:

We speak of the messianic age breaking in, in Jesus, while not yet fully evident; the day is 'already but not yet'.

We may add that the release from oppression refers to an inner spiritual disposition (deliverance from sin, guilt or anxiety).

We may insist that the hope for real embodied change needs a change in the human heart.

And more...

The trouble is that we have tended to say all of this as if it's self-evident that Jesus brought about the day which Jesus and Isaiah were speaking of. We have assumed that those who cannot see this demonstrate their ill will. In particular, from very early days in the Church's history, we have said this of the Jewish people. There has been what is referred to a 'teaching of contempt' (Jules Isaac) for the Jews.

Some say there's a direct line from such contempt (found in the New Testament itself, some insist) to the Holocaust. We do not have to agree with that to want to be rid of this traditional contempt. What do we

<sup>5</sup> Other references are 5:26; 12:28; 13:32, 33; 22:61. There are also 8 occurrences in Acts. There are, to be fair, five occurrences in Matthew, but none in Mark or John.

lose, if we admit that the case for Jesus as Messiah is not self-evident? The case may be subtle; that doesn't make it unreal. Here again, we could let the truth set us free.

People who are familiar with the gospels know that Jesus soon meets with great hostility, and that in his home town of Nazareth. Indeed his hearers are enraged and want him dead (vv 28-29). Sometimes the impression is given that this was because Jesus is claiming messianic status for himself in his synagogue address. But the text makes it clear that today's citation and comment is itself well-received. The congregation are amazed at his gracious words (v 22). The corrective is to attend to vv 23-27, where Jesus refers to Elijah and Elisha and their healing of non-Jews, rather than Jews.

Since that is what caused the rage, preachers can often make assumptions that the Jews here were being prejudiced, were against the passing on of God's good things to gentiles. On this notion, the *Jewish Annotated New Testament* comments:



'Such conclusions misread Jewish history. Jews in general had positive relations with Gentiles, as witnessed by the Court of the Gentiles in the Jerusalem Temple, Gentiles as patrons of synagogues (7.1-10), and Gentiles as god-fearers (Acts 10). They also expected the redemption of righteous Gentiles, who would come streaming to Zion, as Zech 8.23 states, "In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'" The rejection of Jesus is not prompted by xenophobia; it is prompted by Jesus' refusal to provide his hometown with messianic blessings.'<sup>6</sup>

## Prayers

### Gathering prayers

*These responses are based on verses from the final 'movement' of Isaiah – so-called 'Third Isaiah' - close to the verses which Jesus cites in today's gospel.*

Arise, shine, for your light has come  
**the glory of God rises upon you.**

Darkness covers the earth  
**Thick darkness the peoples.**

Our hearts are cold  
**We forget how to love.**

But the Lord arises  
**His glory appears.**

Nations come to the light  
**Rulers to the dawn.**

Lift up your eyes. Look and perceive  
**They gather together. They come to you.**

<sup>6</sup> Levine, Amy-Jill and Brettler, Marc Zvi, 2011, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, Oxford: OUP, 107

We are made to need each other  
**To rejoice as one in our difference.**

This is the day that the Lord has made  
**We are glad. The world is new.**

*Cf Isaiah 60.1-4; Psalm 118.4*

*These responses are based on the Jewish blessing on hearing bad news. (That there is a blessing for bad news reminds us that a blessing is not the same as a thanksgiving.) The blessing is:*

*Blessed are you, LORD, our God, King of the universe,  
 the judge of the truth [or the true judge].*

Blessed are you, Lord  
**God of all creation.**

Through your goodness we have this time  
**to gather to learn the truth of ourselves.**

We cannot always feel joy for this life  
**We know too much of lives that are killed.**

Give us courage, when the news is bad  
**To bless you, the one true Judge.**

God, gracious beyond our imagining,  
 we want to trust that you are never more powerful  
 than when you are with those in the rawest need.  
 Give us the courage to do the right thing,  
 to speak truth,  
 to oppose what must be opposed,  
 and to build bridges with strangers,  
 through the one who is both familiar and unknown,  
 Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

### **Prayers of confession**

Father, you call us to life in a very good world  
 but we lack the courage to play our own part.  
 Lord, have mercy.

Jesus, your way is the bridge to a life unimagined  
 but we prefer to stay stuck where we are.  
 Christ, have mercy.

Spirit, you brood over weakness to make the world new  
 but we take comfort in pretence and evasion.  
 Lord, have mercy.

God,  
 in your mercy, in your mystery,  
 you come to us as Friend.  
 In your light we see how alienated we are,  
 from you, from our neighbours near and far,  
 from our very selves.  
 Only you can forgive us and heal us.  
 Forgive us and heal us.  
**Amen.**

### A prayer after Communion

God, as we thank you that you feed us  
with the bread of heaven, the bread for the morrow,  
may your spirit be upon us.  
Anoint us, for your new day in your new world,  
where the bonds and the bridges between people and peoples  
are strong and are strengthened by love and delight,  
through Jesus Christ, our host and our help.  
**Amen.**

### A sending out prayer

By your grace, O God,  
we are the Body of Christ,  
the bodily presence of the Anointed One.  
Trusting in that grace,  
we know that as we finish our worship  
our service is just beginning.  
Help us to find the bridge to Christ  
in the next person we have to face.  
Through your bridges to us,  
may war and hatred cease at last,  
and the hymns of heaven be heard,  
in this, our one and only world.  
**Amen.**



### Prayers of intercession

*We offer two alternative versions.*

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge,  
from the grime of what is  
to the glory coming to be.  
Renew your Church with the excitement of today.  
Bless its leaders, inspirers and challengers...

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge  
from the grime of hatreds which kill  
to the glory of peace and feasting together.  
Renew your world with the excitement of today.  
Bless the world's leaders, and those of our nation...

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**





Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge  
 from the grime of our exploitation, each of the other,  
 to the glory of a community of mutual delight.  
 Renew our community with the excitement of today.  
 Bless this locality...

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge  
 from the grime of a world where sickness seems to rule  
 to the glory of courage and hope and healing.  
 Renew those who lack health with the refreshment of today.  
 Bless those who need and have asked for our prayers...

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge  
 from the grime of the victory of deadening deathliness  
 to the glory of life bursting out from the tombs.  
 Renew those who mourn with the refreshment of today.  
 Bless all those who will die today,  
 especially those who will die in agony, alone, or at another's hand...

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Jesus Christ, your way is the bridge,  
 from the grime of what is  
 to the glory coming to be.  
 Renew each of us,  
 as your unrepeatable disciples,  
 with the excitement of today.

By bridges we live  
**Help us to build.**

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew in the Church which serves and loves you  
 with the Father and Son, with the Source and the Word.  
 Bless its leaders, inspirers and challengers...

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew in the world which struggles to trust  
 in any story of life, hope and change.  
 Bless its leaders, and those of our nation...

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew in the place where we are,  
 where you, we trust in our hearts, go before.  
 Bless this locality...

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew to those who are struggling towards health,  
 those who care for them and for whom they care.  
 Bless those who need and have asked for our prayers...

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew to those who are dying, who mourn,  
 and those who find themselves longing for death.  
 Bless those who die today,  
 especially those who will die in agony, anguish or at another's hand...

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

Spirit, we long for a livelier sense of your presence.  
 Be known anew in the lives of each one of us, as your disciples.  
 Bless us with the surprise we need.

Spirit, you come to make all things new  
**Let this be for us the Day.**

### A prayer activity

Put a table where everyone will be able to see it. Cover it with a cloth, ideally a dark blue one, to symbolise the insecurity/chaos of deep waters. Set out small, clean stones across the table. You can make a path or pattern with them. Leave gaps the size of a stone between them. Put the rest of the stones in a basket at the edge of the table.

Invite the congregation to take a stone and place it in a gap to build bridges between the stones already set out.

As they do this, they say, 'To build a bridge between...' and add their own concern for individuals, or people currently in enmity, or for a dream not yet realized – the bridge can be between the real-life present and the hoped-for future.

You could draw this to a close by reading the final verse of Philip Larkin's poem, *Bridge for the Living* (from *Collected Poems*).

Afterwards, either the whole congregation, or a group standing around the table break hands, raise their arms and shout **Lechaim!** or **To Life!** Lechaim is 'to life' in Hebrew, the traditional Hebrew toast. The 'ch' sound is throaty, as in the Scottish 'ch' in 'loch'.

## Hymns and songs

These suggestions are based on the Biblical passages.

### **Psalm 19**

All things praise thee, Lord most high  
 From all that dwell below the skies (Watts)  
 Lord of the boundless curves of space  
 Praise the Lord ye heavens adore him  
 The spacious firmament on high

### **Nehemiah**

Open this book that we may see your word (BPW13)

### **I Corinthians 12**

Come my way, my truth, my life (Herbert)  
 Jesus Lord, we look to thee (Wesley)  
 Diverse in culture, nation, race (LAU 841)

### **Luke 4.14-21**

Bring to the Lord a glad new song  
 I the Lord of sea and sky  
 Tell out my soul

The following song is a Chassidic-Jewish text attributed to Rabbi Nachman of Breslov. A translation is shown below. Put *Kol ha olam kulo* into YouTube to hear different versions.

*Kol ha olam kulo*  
*Gesher tsar meod*  
*Ve ha iqar*  
*Lo lefached klal!*

The world and all that is  
 form a very narrow bridge  
 And to cross it  
 Just be fearless, fearing naught at all.

## Stories

### Friendship – A Bridge to Life

In January 1943, just a few weeks after the CCJ was founded, a 17 year-old Polish Jew called Max was forced, alongside his brother and parents, onto a cattle train destined for the Treblinka death camp.

The family knew that to remain on the train meant near-certain death, so the parents urged Max and his brother to escape, prising open the bars and the barbed wire from the little window in the cattle car. The boys jumped off, at night and at speed, to avoid the sharpshooters on the train. They planned to walk towards each other after the train passed. But Max never saw his brother again and his parents were killed in Treblinka.



Max visiting the barn he hid in before moving to the nearby pit in November 1944

Wandering aimlessly through the wintry Polish countryside, Max was caught by residents of the area and handed over to the local police, who were under orders to send escaped Jews to a death camp. However, Max managed to bribe the police to take him to a slave labour camp instead. He was able to do so because of his father's friendship with a leading Christian businessman in Poland, Witold Trzeciakowski, to whom he had entrusted the family's money and valuables for the benefit of any member of the family that might survive.

With the approach of the Red Army in 1944, the Nazis decided to liquidate the camp, and murder any Jews who had managed to survive the appalling conditions. Anticipating such an eventuality, Max managed to lead a few friends in an escape and then sought refuge in the barn of a Pole who had worked in the ammunitions factory where Max was a slave labourer. This Pole had been receiving money from Trzeciakowski, and with it had been bringing food to Max in the camp; food that was the difference between life and death both for Max and his friends.

After a Nazi search party nearly discovered Max in the barn, the farmer fled with his family into the forest, fearing, quite rightly, that if Max was discovered, he and his entire family would be executed. Returning after a few days when he heard that the danger had passed, he agreed to bury Max in a hole in their yard.

Max lay in this hole from November 11, 1944 until mid January 1945. His was a world of complete darkness, except for a tiny opening through which the farmer passed him a bottle of water and a few potatoes, only once a week! To keep himself sane during this time, he recited songs, poems and psalms to himself.

However, his resilience meant that, weak and with aching bones, Max survived the war and went on to have a family and become a highly successful businessman. He passed away aged 84, surrounded by his children and grandchildren in London.

Max never doubted that his survival was due to many miracles and also to the bravery of his Christian friends.

**Max was the father of Maurice Ostro  
(Vice Chairman of the *Council of Christians and Jews*)**



## Security - A Bridge to Hope

John was born in Czechoslovakia in 1931. His parents were living in Dresden but he was born in Czechoslovakia whilst his mother was on a visit to her family.

John can still remember Hitler's visit to Dresden and his vociferous denigration of the Jews, transmitted via loudspeakers throughout the city, is still deeply entrenched in John's memory. His non-Jewish play friends soon started abusing him, calling him, 'dirty Jew'. In 1937 the family fled Germany in fear to the maternal family home in Czechoslovakia for safety, but following the Munich agreement the Nazis invaded there. John remembers an SS officer confronting his father in their home, and following this incident, things began to get much worse. John's father took John and his brother aside one day and broke the news to them that they were going on a long journey to England and that they would need to be brave... because, their parents would not be going with them. John remembers his mother giving him her watch - so that he would remember them.



John Fieldsend (left) with Sir Nicholas Winton MBE (right) Sir Nicholas Winton organised the rescue of 669 individuals (mostly Jewish children), from German-occupied [Czechoslovakia](#) on the eve of the Second World War.

John and his brother were put on a train to Hanover, to the Israelitische Gartenbauschule, which was serving as a transit base for Jewish refugees, and after several weeks there one of Nicholas Winton's trains from Prague diverted via Hanover to pick John and his brother up.

John's Christian foster parents met him at Liverpool Street station and took him to live with them in Sheffield. John testifies to the love and support he received from his foster family. He subsequently studied engineering at Nottingham University and after National Service in the Royal Air Force and some time in research and development in the electronics industry he studied for a Theological degree at London University.

He had grown into and could have expected a normal English life. Back in 1946, however, John and his brother had received a Red Cross parcel, which contained three photo albums and a farewell letter from his parents; he had last heard from them in 1941. He had hoped his parents were alive, but he later discovered that they had been murdered in the Holocaust in Poland in February 1943. The farewell letter concluded, - *We are going into the unknown...Don't forget us and be good.* John married Elizabeth in 1961 and they have three children and seven grandchildren.

**John is a member of the *Council of Christians and Jews*.**

## Acknowledgements

Biblical commentary and liturgical resources were written by the Revd Patrick Morrow

Produced by  
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