

IN MEMORIAM OF NORA LEVIN

On October 26, 1989, Professor Nora Levin, an Advisory Editor of OPREE died of cancer in Philadelphia at the age of 73. She had consented to serve on the Advisory Editorial Board from its inception because of her strong interest in the religious life in Eastern Europe, particularly of Judaism. She had contributed an article on Soviet Jewry and advised on matters pertaining to greater involvement of Jews with this publication. Until her death she was a professor of history of Gratz College in Philadelphia and the director of the Holocaust Oral History Archive.

I have met her for the first time about a decade ago at an annual Jewish-Christian dialogue of academics. From the start the strongest impression she gave was a tremendous sense of concern and interest for every person with whom she came in contact. Kindness, thoughtfulness, unpretentiousness, and gentleness were her most obvious qualities in addition to a brilliant mind. Soon thereafter I read her book *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry, 1933-1945*. This book is a very comprehensive study, including a country by country account of Hitler's attempt at the final solution to the "Jewish question." With particular interest I read the chapter on Yugoslavia, my native country, and found it remarkably accurate down to the smallest details of spelling strange sounding names and having a sense for geographic location and this by an American who has not experienced the Holocaust first-hand. Her account of the dreadful slaughter was compassionate, sensitive, and aware of complexities, never stooping down to hating or belittling any of the players in the great tragedy. Later I invited her to speak at my college and local church, and there she was able to portray the conditions in Germany leading to the rise of the Nazis and the resulting Holocaust with such clarity and consideration for the problems of inter-war Germany that it was obvious that she was a person who would not stoop down to simplifications or to putting down entire ethnic and religious groups for the deeds of a segment of such population despite the pain which was involved in such an analysis. While she had the proper appreciation of the uniqueness of the Holocaust Nora also shared with her audience her concern lest we remain unconcerned about other Holocaust-like situations, such as Pol Pot's Kampuchean destruction. On one occasion she and I were invited to speak about the Jewish-Christian dialogue at a summer camp where most of our audience were old-line Communists who had little interest in religion and even less appreciation about the Jewish-Christian dialogue. Though both of us realized that these people were locked in a time warp of the Spanish Civil War Nora's response was warmth and concern that they had let history by-pass them.

Her second major work, a two-volume *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival* was published only last year. This was another tour de force of historical scholarship. Originally, I was going only to glean some information from her book relevant to my research on religious liberties in the Soviet Union, but I became so engaged in the work that I read nearly every word. A whole new world, about which, it turned out, I knew so little, was being opened up through her work. Generations of scholars will be indebted to her for putting together historical narratives about the twentieth century's two bleakest spots for the welfare of the Jewish people.

She had recently traveled to the Soviet Union, the home of her ancestors, and gathered information on the fate of Jews as well as encouraged them. She became an able interpreter to American Christians as to why American Jews have such a keen interest in Soviet Jewry (see OPREE VIII, 1). And tirelessly she interviewed Holocaust survivors so that their story would not be forgotten.

With her passing away OPREE has lost a valuable resource person, but her life and work will remain an inspiration to us and all who had known her and were touched by her.

Paul Mojzes, editor