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DR FORST

C.L. Doctor Forst...

F. Mr Forst!

C.L. Ok, Mr Forst. This is the man?

F. This is the man we will talk about, yes.

C.L. How would you like to start to talk about him?

F. This is one of the difficulties: how to start when you have so much to say. It is always difficult, how to start. Do you want to know how I came to know him?

C.L. Yes, this I would like.

F. I knew him for the first time when he came back from his trip to Israel, and he stopped in Vienna. He was giving a speech, telling about his impressions, his thoughts. He was a powerful speaker, a powerful and dramatic speaker; he could captivate an audience. That was the first time I saw him, and I was fascinated by him.

C.L. When was this?

F. That was about 1931.

C.L. So you met him before the war.

F. Yes. The second time I met him, he was in Vienna to publish a book. You see, he was in Oxford, he had a great interest in old manuscripts, and he found there an old manuscript which he published and printed in Vienna. He was a man of highly-developed aesthetic

feeling, and he wanted me to design for him the cover and the first page of the book. I am a calligrapher also, and I specialised in Hebrew calligraphy. He wanted me to create a letter which corresponds to the time when that author lived. So I designed the artwork for him. He was in my house and we spoke at length. That was my first personal encounter with him.

C.L. But that was before the war.

F. It was before the war, right.

C.L. And why did he make this first trip to Israel, in 1931?

F. Well, every Jew likes to see Israel, and he also had the desire to see the Holy Land. But a personal contact I had with him only at that time which I told you, when I designed for him the first page of the book.

C.L. But he was a man of which age at the time, how old was he?

F. At that time he would have been about 30, 32, 33.

C.L. He was a young man.

F. He was a young man, yes. He was about my age. Maybe he was only 30 at that time, I cannot tell you exactly. I don't remember how old I was.

C.L. And did he start to talk at the time of the danger of rising Hitlerism?

F. No, at that time he did not talk to me about that, no. We were

talking about art, about the relationship of the Jewish people to art. He had many, many interests. You would not believe that if you had seen him. A man who was deeply steeped in orthodox Judaism, coming from a small little town in Slovakia. The mere fact that he went to Oxford shows you that the range of his interests was far beyond the limits of the small Slovakian town.

C.L. The town was Nitra?

F. Right.

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C.L. Why were you so struck the first time you met Rabbi Weissmandel?

Do you remember the speech he delivered?

F. I don't remember the entire speech. I remember only a certain phrase which he used in the speech; it was very poetic and dramatic. It is stuck in my mind. It might perhaps appear to you a minor thing, but to me at the moment it was very impressive. He was describing the Har-Hazeitim, the Mount of Olives, where there is a cemetery. All the Jews are buried on the Mount of Olives; the dead are facing all in one direction. This is the direction from

which the Messiah is supposed to arrive. And he described it: the Jews are lying there, waiting for him, in rows all directed to this side where the Messiah is supposed to arrive. He pictured that in such a way - I cannot really convey to you the impression I had - but that is what he said, and that is what made such an impression on me. He was a man of very deep feeling, he had a very strong poetic sense. So the way he described that was also a dramatic and poetic way, which made an impression on me.

C.L. He spoke in Hebrew?

F. He spoke in German.

C.L. He spoke good German?

F. Oh yes. He was very fluent in German, speaking as well as writing. He was a highly intelligent man. He was a man with a wide scope of knowledge. Everything interested him. He was here in this room, and he was watching me while I worked. He was here the whole day, looking over my shoulder while I was making designs. He told me "Why do you make it this way, why do you make it that way?" He had a deep interest in everything, every aspect of life. And of course, as an authentic Jew, he tried to combine all the aspects of life with his Jewish soul, with Judaism. "What does it mean to me,

what does it mean to me as a Jew?" We were talking about politics, about philosophical themes, but everything in the final analysis led back: "What does it mean to us, what does it mean to me?" He was, as I told you, in Oxford and he had contacts with many people there, many people who had quite different opinions, quite different 'Weltanschauung' than his. But he could converse with everybody, because everybody interested him. You know that at the time when Hitler occupied the Rheinland, and later, in 1938, Austria, Rabbi Weissmandel was in Oxford. He foresaw that Hitler would not stop there, he would go further; he tried to find ways and means for Jews to get out of Europe..

C.L. Already at that time?

F. Already at that time, when Austria was already occupied but Hungary and Slovakia were quite free. So he contacted the Archbishop of Canterbury, you know, you heard about that, his name was Dr Temple. He told me how he was trying to see him. He went to Lambeth Palace, which is the official residence of the Archbishop, and he just wanted to walk in. But the people did not let him go in - you must understand, Rabbi Weissmandel was not dressed very neatly. He was rather shabbily dressed, did not pay any attention to his exterior. They did not know

what he wanted, or who he was; they did not let him in. He begged them, but it did not help. So he was standing at the door for hours, in the rain, waiting for the moment when the Archbishop would come out. At one time he came out, and he approached him by the door, on the street, and told him "I have something very important to talk with you about". So he arranged an appointment with him for the next day, or 2 days later, I don't know. So Rabbi Weissmandel visited him- not once, but many times- and told him about the danger for the Jews. He had a practical plan: he had a plan that the Jews should emigrate to Canada. He tried to impress upon the Archbishop that he should use his connections with the Canadian Government to permit Jews to come to Canada. And he did make contact, the Archbishop of Canterbury. By the way, Weissmandel had a very good way of describing situations, of making them very plastic. He told me how the Archbishop was not very friendly inclined towards Jews, and still somehow he was impressed by what Rabbi Weissmandel told him. Slowly, slowly he became human and he was agreeable. He arranged another appointment with Rabbi Weissmandel. In the meantime he contacted several Canadian Government officials, and the end result was that the Canadian Government permitted a limited number of

Jewish families to come to Canada, provided that those families were agricultural people. The fact was that the Jews in Slovakia were not agricultural people at all, they were small merchants and storekeepers, so he telegraphed to Slovakia that they should immediately take a course in agriculture.

C.L. Weissmandel did?

F. Weissmandel telegraphed there that they should prepare themselves because the Canadian Government promised to send an emissary to Europe - I don't remember the place - where that official was to see the prospective emigres and interrogate them whether or not they had knowledge about agriculture. So he telegraphed there to immediately arrange that they should have some superficial knowledge. That took many months, until it reached that point. Then this official came. Whether he came to Bratislava or Budapest, I don't remember.

C.L. It was at the Hungarian border.

F. It was at the Hungarian border? I don't remember that, but when he came there, and the time came that people should come to him and apply for the visa, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia. So this meant that nothing came of it.

C.L. This means that already before the war he was completely aware...

F. Oh yes, he was completely aware of it.

C.L. And now, the second time you met him was after the war. Did you hear from him during the war?

F. I heard from him during the war because his frantic and desperate letters, which he wrote and sent in clandestine ways to various countries and various Government officials, finally landed in New York also, and those letters - or parts of them - were read publicly in the synagogue. So we all heard about that, how he begged for money. And he collected money, he collected vast sums of money.

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F. There was a very funny incident with regard to Rabbi Weissman while he was in Oxford. He was a very poor man, he had no money at all. Where did he get the money to go to Oxford? He saved it up, little by little, and when he was there he lived in a small room which he rented, in an old dilapidated house near the library. He had a little cooker, a petroleum cooker, where he made himself tea, and he ate bread. That was his meal. Tea and bread. So he had an aunt in Slovakia, an old woman. She knew he had no money, and she had an old five-pound note so she sent it to him. He was very happy to get the five-pound

note because it would help him for quite a while. Five pounds was quite an amount of money at that time. He needed to change the five pounds, and nearby was a big bank. So he went into the bank to change the note, but you know how Rabbi Weissmandel went around. He had a black beard, his hat with the brim in his face and his collar was always up, like this, and he had books under each arm and he was always absorbed in thought. That is the way he went around in the street, always absorbed in thought with his books under his arm. He went into the bank. When he came to the bank the doorman opened the doors wide, bowed before him and led him to the inner sanctum of the bank director. The bank director came towards him and led him into his office - "Sit down, wait a moment and I will be right with you". After a few moments he came back with a silver tray piled with English banknotes. He was flabbergasted, he did not know what it was. So he took out his five-pound note and said "But I only wanted to change my five pounds! So

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the director of the bank and all the people there started to laugh. What happened was that an English Maharajah was studying in Oxford at the time he was there, and he used to get his allowance at a certain time - at that time he was supposed to come to the bank to get his allowance. That English Maharajah also had a black beard, and he also went around like this, with books under his arm, and they mistook him for this man. So the whole thing ended in laughter. I mention this because when Rabbi weissmandel told it, he had a very good way of telling a funny story. He had a great sense of humour; he could make a whole audience shake with laughter.

C.L. It's a pity, because this money could have served him later on.

But yourself, you came to New York when?

F. I came to the united States in February 1939, a few months before the war broke out. The war broke out on September 1st, and I came in February, so it was a number of months before.

C.L. You settled immediately in Williamsburg?

F. No, I had relatives here and they rented a room for me in the Bronx. They paid for me - I had no money, I came here with 60 dollars. I had two children with me, my third child was not born at that time. Anyway, I lived for a week in the Bronx but I had no contact with people. I didn't find my kind of people,

I was a stranger there so I moved here to Williamsburg, because several Viennese people were already here. I wanted to be in this neighbourhood because I had friends here. Since that time I am still here.

Q. You said you heard of Rabbi Weissmandel during the war through the letters he wrote.

A. Yes. When I was here I went to the synagogue every day, and on the Sabbath they interrupted the service and read the letters of Rabbi Weissmandel which came. We organised action to collect money.

Q. What was the impression of these letters at the time, and of the orthodox Jews here in Williamsburg?

A. Well, it's difficult to say, because not the entire content of the letter was read to us. There were certain parts of the letter which the man who read them did not want to read in public.

Q. Why?

A. I don't know why. I have no idea. Only certain passages. You see, this letter was sent clandestinely, and maybe there were accusations contained in them, and the man who read it was afraid to read the entire letter. That's what I assumed.

Q. And through the letters you understood exactly what was...

A. Of course, of course we understood it. You see, this is a very

peculiar thing. You see, you understand a thing intellectually sometimes, but you don't understand it completely, shall I say with your heart, because understanding does not mean an intellectual understanding alone. It is more than that. You see, we could not really inside of us grasp the facts. We heard the words, and we believed it, but with the intellect. Because we were born in Europe, and we were born in an order though I lived one year under Hitler and I saw the order breaking down - but still, from breaking down the order and discriminating against Jews socially, to killing them, there is a vast gap.

C.L. This is a very important point.

F. Yes, yes.

C.L. Now when did you meet Weissmandel for the next time?

F. Oh, I met Weissmandel after the war. He came after the war. He was a completely broken man. He was staying in Williamsburg with a friend, and he gave him a small room, where he stayed. He was lying in bed all day, and hammering with his fists on the wall. He was crying, screaming. I visited him every day. I must say that at that time I myself had very hard times, because I was a newcomer, I did not speak English and I was looking for work. I went with my portfolio from

one book publisher to the another. I could not communicate with them, and they had no patience for me. So I was in very bad shape. Instead of going around looking for work I went in the morning to Rabbi Weissmandel and sat with him the whole day. He told me so many things, what he went through and what happened, and it came to me like a big wave - it was overwhelming. I just could not grasp it. He told me so many little incidents which occurred to him, like a man in fever - he talks not coherently, he talks about what goes through his mind, in a compulsion. He breaks out, says things which have no connection with each other. He told me, for instance, when he jumped out of the train - you heard the story...

C.L. The train that was bringing him to Auschwitz, with his family.

F. To Auschwitz, with his family, yes. He begged his family - you see, he loosened an iron bar in the train and was able with all his might to move the door and open a little slit, room enough to squeeze through it and jump out. When the train went on a curve, a little slower, there was an opportunity to jump. So he begged his family to come with him, but they did not want to.

C.L. Who was his family?

F. His wife and his mother and 5 children.

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F. In the train, besides him and his family,...

C.L. This was in October 1944, the second wave of deportations from Slovakia to Auschwitz.

F. Yes, that's right. He was in the train with his family - his wife, his mother and 5 children -

C.L. 5 children?

F. Yes. 5 or 6 - I think 5. He was desperately trying to do something.

C.L. Because he knew exactly what was going on?

F. Of course he knew, of course. You know that he was the man who took an affidavit with two escapees who came from Auschwitz and had a plan of the whole 'Lager'.

C.L. The crematorium...

F. The crematorium and everything, of course. He transmitted that information to the world.

C.L. And this was in April 1944, and he was deported himself in October, 6 months later.

F. Right. So he tried to persuade his family to jump. He had loosened an iron bar in the compartment in the train, and moved the iron door a little bit so that a slit was open which enabled one to jump. He begged them to jump with him, and they were apparently resigned and did not want to. So, after a while he jumped.

C.L. Alone?

F. He jumped alone, and of course it is up to us to imagine what went on in the mind of this man when he decided to leave his family in the train which was bringing them to their death and saving himself. You must understand if you can. - I cannot. - what went on to make that decision. So he jumped.

C.L. You cannot?

F. I cannot, no.

C.L. Did you talk to him about this?

F. Well, from that moment on he could not forgive himself. Despite the fact that later on he was active, - he even married again - but he never forgave himself for what he did, because the thought was haunting him all his life. Well, he told me after he jumped he went through woods, he did not know his way, and it was a terrible danger because there were Nazi

patrols and gendarmes all around. He told me he finally came to a little parish - a house where a priest lives - in a little village. He knocked at the door - it was early in the morning - and a woman opened the door. He was completely exhausted and begged her to give him a piece of bread. Apparently the woman realised that he was a Jew, the way she threw the bread at him. He gobbled it immediately, because he was starved, and finally he came to Bratislava. He went into a bunker there.

C.L. A cave?

F. A bunker is not exactly a cave, it is some sort of a hiding place, in a cellar or a camouflaged place. There were many people crowded in the bunkers. Anyway, when I met him after the war, as I told you he was living here in Williamsburg after he arrived here, in a little room in a friend's apartment. He was lying in bed crying and screaming, at me, as if I were responsible. At that moment he saw in me a man who saved himself with his family, living here, orderly, going after my business and a member of society, normal society. And there was he. So he saw in me the representative of the bourgeois, the middle-class man who didn't care what happened across the ocean. People who knew everything and went about their business. So he saw that in me. He screamed at me, shook his fists at me

C.L. Can you describe this screaming? What did he say exactly?

F. He said to me: "What were you doing, what were you doing while we were there? You know what you were doing?" He didn't finish his sentence, but he meant of course making children. That's what he meant - he did not say it, he didn't finish the sentence but I understood what he meant.

I went to him every day. The whole day I was sitting there by his bed. The man was completely out of his mind, completely out of his mind. Very, very slowly he came to himself. Very slowly.

C.L. Was he out of his mind for a long time?

F. Well, when I say out of his mind I didn't mean he was insane. I meant he was emotionally upset, deeply upset. He accused the whole world, he accused us, he accused me, he accused everybody.

C.L. But he spent all these years during the war trying to save the Jews.

F. He was trying to save the Jews. You know that he halted the transportations for many, many months with a promise to deliver money. You see, he was a product of those old Jews who bribed their way through life - who existed by bribing the Gentiles. So he knew that there is no physical resistance possible. The

is no heroism possible, you see. It is not like people say today, "We should have been fighting with them, we should have defended ourselves" - this is nonsense. There was a complete lethargy, a complete loss of initiative which grabbed everybody. It says in the Bible - I must mention this, whether you agree with it or not - in the fifth book of the Bible, there is a notice to the Jews - "If you are not going the way you should be, God will punish you". Among these words there is one sentence, which says "One man will drive a thousand", which means there will be just one man, and a thousand people will be afraid of him. In the concentration camp in *Serwit*? there were thousands of people, young men, old men, strong men, and there was a contingent of 10 SS men. They could have overpowered them, they could have thrown themselves on these men, but they didn't do it. Why?

C.L. In the extermination camps too.

F. Yes, but that was not an extermination camp, that was just what was called a 'Sammellager'. They could have overpowered these 10 SS men and run away, wherever their feet led them. But there should have been a desire to do something, but the people were paralysed. A complete paralysis.

C.L. You say that Weissmandel was this type of Jew.

F. He said that the power of money is enormous. You could find ways and means with money, when you have lots of money, to redeem your life. And he was right. He offered money...

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C.L. I would like you to come back, because it's very difficult, this point. The fact that this man spent all the years of the war trying everything to save the Jewish people. You know about his 'Europaplan' and so on. At the last moment, when he himself was going to his death, he saved himself.

F. Yes.

C.L. And in a way he doomed his family. I want us to try to elaborate more on this point.

F. Yes. Well, there is an important point which I would like to mention. I don't know if I can really formulate it as it should be - the idea of a hero. We conceive a hero as someone who sacrifices his life, who chooses death for an idea or something - that's a hero. But this man was a hero in saving himself.

C.L. This is the main point.

F. You see, his heroism was that his natural drive was to go together with his family, not to abandon them in this moment. He did the opposite. He saved himself. That was his heroism.

C.L. I think what you say is very deep.

F. Yes. And this heroism, where does it come from? It comes from the authenticity of the Jewish concept. There is a Jewish

concept which says 'on *Shema's* behavior? - 'You should choose life'. The life of a Jew, if it is acted out the way it should be, is very important, and the Torah permits to transgress even very severe prohibitions in order to save one's life because the life of a Jew is devoted to God. So, to give one's life away just for a sentimental feeling - like the pity one has for one's family - is not authentic. That is a human instinct. To save one's life for God because one has no right, as long as he can cling to his life, to give it away for some reason or another. And he thought "I can still live, I can do something for Jews, which means to do something for God". So that was a tremendous act of heroism

C.L. To fight against the human instinct?

F. To fight against the human instinct, yes. Call it human instinct, call it whatever you want.

C.L. Do you think that this could explain also the fact that - as you said some minutes ago - the Jews did not fight, it was not the same conception of heroism?

F. No, the fact that they did not fight back was not something which has to do with Judaism. It was a physical, a mental condition. It was a paralysis. That was not a well-considered and thought-out decision. It was not a deliberate intellectual decision, it was a paralysis. They just could not move.

C.L. How do you explain this?

F. I could explain it perhaps by saying that these people, who

saw themselves trapped with no exit, were resigned to the will of God. They said "What can I do, it is the will of God. I have to atone for something. It is something beyond my understanding, and I resign myself to the will of God". In order to make an intellectual decision, you have to have your full capacity of decision. They did not have that full capacity they only had resignation. But that resignation was somehow attached to a deeper religious feeling.

C.L. Do you think so?

F. I think so. If I put myself into their situation that is the only way I can conceive it. It is equally hard for me to put myself in the situation of Rabbi Weissmandel. But his was an authentic Jewish act - to try to save one's life. To make that clear I want to give you an example. Imagine a Jew in a concentration camp: The sword is hanging over him every minute. An SS guard comes to him and says "If you lick my shoes every day I will save your life." The Gentile hero would say, "I should do such a degrading thing? Where is my dignity? Where is my human pride? I will not do it. Kill me!" A Jew would say "I'll be glad to do that, as long as you let me live because, what is human pride? What is it? It is something imaginary, it is not real. It is not authentic. Authentic is to keep myself alive for God, because my life is not in my hands. I have to do something with it. I have a purpose in my life. So what if I lick his shoes? At least he will keep

me alive."

C.L. That is exactly what we saw in Poland at the beginning of the conquest, when the Germans cut at the religious Jews, they were like this. I think they reacted in the same way.

F. I think so.

C.L. They did not care.

F. They didn't care. "What is pride? It does not mean anything, as long as your life has a purpose". If one has an idea about his being in the world which would impress him, it has no sense. "Why am I here? What am I doing? Why am I born? My life is purposeless, so at least I have my human dignity, my pride, to which I will hold on." But if your life has a purpose, a sense, a destiny, a goal, then you would not easily give it away.

C.L. What is the purpose in such a case? It's God?

F. Right, right. The Jewish people in the authentic Jewish concept are a manifestation of God. The existence of the Jewish people, which is beyond the natural existence of peoples, the rise and fall of nations - nations become, they grow and they decline. Look at history, you have Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks - they are all gone. The Jews still live, which is in my opinion, and in the opinion of every authentic Jew, - and even in the opinion of others - a supernatural phenomenon. It impresses upon us the idea that the existence of Jews is something extraordinary,

collectively and individually. So if my existence is important then the licking of the shoes of the SS man is not important. C.L. Yes, I think I agree with you. But what I wanted to say about the fact that the Jews didn't fight...

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F. There is an interesting passage in the Talmud describing the problem: two people are in the desert, and one of them has a limited supply of water which would be sufficient to save the life of one of them. If they share it, both of them will die. Only one will be able to live. What shall he do? Shall he share the water with the other one, or shall he drink it himself? The accepted, authentic, Jewish idea is that the one who has it should drink it. He should save his life, because by sharing it he would satisfy his human feeling: he would not see the other one die, because both will die. On the other hand, it does not mean anything. What is important is to save one's life. The sentiment, the humane feeling towards the other one is just a feeling. But if you have the water, and you could save your life, you are not causing the other one to die. You are saving your life, and you must save it.

C.L. Yes, but who has the water?

F. One has the water.

C.L. Which one?

F. One of them has it. One of them is the owner, the possessor of it. So he should drink it and save himself.

C.L. How do you connect this, for instance, with the protests and the screaming of Weissmandel against the fact that the Jews who were not in danger did not do much to save the other Jews?

F. Well, he accused the Jews in America and in England of not sending the money he needed, which he was desperately crying for. Why does this fact contradict what I said? It does not. What I wanted to point out was that human sentiment is just a sentiment, it doesn't count. To transmit this to our problem: if people are confronted with certain death, and their situation is hopeless, their human sentiments - their feelings of anger, of desperation and revenge would drive them to kill at least one Nazi, or to jump on him, to do something. Instead they did not do it, they resigned themselves because they thought "I can't help it. I am in the hands of God, and I am in a hopeless situation. I can't save myself. What would it help me? Revenge, anger - it doesn't count. Besides the lethargy, besides the paralysis it does not make sense. I'd better resign myself to my fate and cry out " Shema'Israel". I'll say a chapter of _____, I'll make my reckoning with God." These are thoughts which a deeply religious person has.

The act of revenge, the use of physical power, even in a hopeless situation where it doesn't have any effect, that is the Gentile way. The proud knight, who challenges another one to a duel because he is ready to give away his life because someone has touched upon his honour - this is not Jewish.

Do you understand?

C.L. Oh yes, for me it's absolutely clear. And Weissmandel was himself very clear about this point?

F. Oh, yes. You mean the point...

C.L. The point of honour.

F. Yes. He said "I have to do everything in my power to save life" - and at the last moment, he had to save his own life.

C.L. Now, let's talk about what he did during the war.

F. The chronology of his activities is not very well known to me. I know that he had dealings with *Wyzlitzky*?, he went in and out of his office. He persuaded him to stop the deportation, he promised him money. You know that ^{he} faked the letter to...

C.L. This you must explain.

F. He sent an emissary to Switzerland to arouse the Jews there and bring back money. At that time there was talk of about 50 000 dollars, I think - it was a trifle at that time. The man did not come back, and the time limit was already over because Weissmandel promised that by such and such a day he would deliver. The day came and he had nothing to deliver,

so he came to ^{W.} with all kinds of lies; he told him that the man had an accident, or something. He forged the letterhead from a hotel in Switzerland with the writing of this man - 'I have got the money, have patience' and so on. He ordered the printing of this letter, and showed it to
There was no letter,...

C.L. And he invented the man?

F. He invented the man.

C.L. The man was called 'Rat', no?

F. I think so. This whole thing postponed the transportation.

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(muet)

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C.L. Rabbi Weissmandel thought that with money everything could have been done?

F. Yes. His concept of rescue was based on the receptability on the part of the Nazis, of the money; the ever-present greed, and desire for money. You see, money has helped Jews in the course of 2 000 years. They had no other means, just bribes, money, good words, begging, you know? This is the old established way, and he thought that it might be successful.

It might not be successful to save the Jews of Poland, because the Jews of Poland were already written off. But in his limited sphere where he was active there was a possibility to do things with money. You know that he faked letters, he told W. that he had sent an emissary with letters...

C.L. But he was the one who decided to bargain with the Nazis, and to offer money?

F. Weissmandel? Yes. He was the only person in the forefront, the only one who was active. Nobody else was active. He had his group, *913?* Fleischmann and later Rabbi Frieder and *Ingenieur* Steiner, that was his group, but he was the one in the forefront, the one who pushed the idea of money, money. He faked the letter and told W. that the money was on the way. Until the last minute, when W. realised that there will be no money. So Weissmandel himself was deported.

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C.L. I would like you to talk more than yesterday about Weissmandel in New York; the fact that he was broken, and so on, and what he was trying to achieve.

F. Weissmandel, as I knew him when he came back after the tragedy, when he came back to New York, he appeared to me as a man who was waking up from a heavy dream. A dream is a reality for itself, life is a different reality. So if one

wakes up from a heavy, oppressing dream he has to separate one reality from the other, which is sometimes difficult. He appeared to me as a man who has not shaken off completely that heavy dream. He had to find his way back into this reality. He was deeply shaken. He was in a situation - you see, he had seen a complete breakdown of order, social order and communal order, and everything all of a sudden had erupted. There was no order. So, to find himself back in an order (which he found here) was difficult for him. He could not accept it, he could not accept this order here any more. One day he said to me "I don't want to know everybody. I don't want to live here". So I said, "Where do you want to go what will you do?"

"I will go to Morocco, live there among the simple Jews who are not European, who are not infected with this order, all the ideas, this pseudo-reality. I will live there, I will submerge. Nobody will know me, and I will not know of you. I will go to Morocco."

He had this plan, and he even took action; he went to get a visa or something, I don't remember any more, but he was actually to go away to Morocco, because that was a place where he would be among Jews, but not this kind of Jews.

C.L. How was his encounter with American Jewry? I mean, not only orthodox Jews,...

(fin cassette 2)

(cassette n° 3)

F. He did not want (inaudible) ...in a little room here in Williamsburg. Nobody was allowed to see him except me and 2 or 3 other people he knew from before. He did not want to see anybody, or talk to anybody. He was raging, as I told you he was knocking with his fists on the wall. He was half-mad. Then slowly, slowly he came to himself and he said "I don't want to be here, I want to go to Morocco." It took a lot of persuading power to talk him out of that. He hated this reality, this pseudo-order. He went to the Bowery - you know, the Bowery is a place where the derelicts are, the bums as we call them, people who lie on the street - they had an attraction for him. Everybody who was outside this order attracted him, because he himself was outside this order. The orderly people, he couldn't look at them, because they represented something false, something fake, which is not true, which is superficial. So those unhappy people on the Bowery attracted him. He was walking there, and he stopped by a drunk, a derelict man. He asked him "Why are you here, what are you doing, what's your trouble?" He went from one to the other. He didn't even want to stay here in Williamsburg with a family who knew him and provided for him. He said "I want to go to the Bowery, in a little hotel" - you know, the hotels there are dilapidated slums. So he wanted to stay there. I think that describes to you what went on in him - his hatred of the so-called ordered

society, the 'Bürger', the 'bourgeois', the man who is satisfied with himself. These people who did not want to know what goes on there, they went about their business, those people who were responsible for the tragedy - he identified the present order with those people.

C.L. Did he meet Zionist leaders as well in New York?

F. Yes, when he came to himself and became a little more settled he went around frantically looking for his correspondents. He went to 'YDL'. YDL[?] is the Jewish organisation, they have an archive. He went there, he went to the public library, he wrote to the State Department. He was tracing his letters; he wanted to see what happened. He still could not understand, he wanted to know the people to whom he wrote. He went with me to Stephen Weiss...?

C.L. With you?

F. With me, yes... a man who was in a responsible position. He addressed a letter to him. As a matter of fact, one of those letters - he sent many, many letters - a copy of one was sent to Dr Weiss. Dr Weiss should be instrumental, he was friendly with Roosevelt, he had lots of connections and he was fascinated by that cynical man, Roosevelt, who said "I don't want to hear any more about the wailing Jews". You know, this expression has become infamous. Roosevelt said that. He was approached by various people to do something about the Jews who were being murdered, and he was tired of it. He said "I don't want to

hear about the wailing Jews". But Stephen Weiss was fascinated by Roosevelt, so he wanted to know what kind of man he was. Weissmandel was an immensely curious man, he regarded Stephen Weiss as an enemy, a man who bore on his shoulders a very heavy guilt. He wanted to see him, he wanted to know him. I went with him to Dr Stephen Weiss.

C.L. Can you describe the meeting?

F. Well, Dr Weiss was sitting in his office on a fauteuil, an easy chair upholstered in red, red like a bishop. He was sitting there in a half-lighted room...

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F. Dr Stephen Weiss, as you know, was the President of the World Jewish Congress, and a very influential man. He received Rabbi Weissmandel very friendlyly, they had a very friendly talk, they talked about Budapest (he was born in Budapest), talking about old times. Rabbi Weissmandel at that time started to build up the Yahad, and he talked about it to Rabbi Weiss with the secret hope that perhaps he might do something for his project. But he did not especially ask him, he talked about it and was perhaps secretly hoping that Weiss might be

helpful, with a certain feeling of atonement because Weiss knew what he did, what could have been done. I'm sure he realised it afterwards. So perhaps Weissmandel was hoping that Dr Weiss might be somehow cooperative for his work. I'm not very sure, but this is my guess.

C.L. What was the conversation? Did Weissmandel come to accuse?

F. No, no, by no means. Weissmandel was much too smart to enter with Dr Weiss into a conversation about the real matter.

C.L. They didn't talk about it?

F. No, they didn't talk about that, not at all.

...

F. As I said, it was plain curiosity of Weissmandel to know that man; what kind of man is that? To whom did I send my letters?

C.L. What did he say after the meeting with Weiss?

F. After the meeting he said nothing to me, he was just smiling at me. "Did you see?" he said, "did you see the man?" That's all. We understood each other. He didn't have to tell me anything.

C.L. He didn't say anything, but what did he think; in your opinion?

F. What did he think? The impression of the man probably confirmed his opinion about an assimilationist Jew which he always had. Weissmandel was very distrustful and very critical of non-authentic Jews. You know perhaps about Solly Meyer; the representative of the Joint Distribution Committee (C.L. in Switzerland?) yes, in Switzerland, who was approached. He met

with a Nazi representative on a bridge to Switzerland.

C.L. Yes, with Becher.ⁿ

F. Solly Meyer, who was a very important man, first of all did not believe the whole story, not at all. These are 'Ostjuden', you know, meaning 'Eastern Jews', upon whom he looked down. The Western Jew, the educated man who separated himself from the bulk of the Jewish masses, he looked down on them, did not take seriously all these communications. Finally he was persuaded to meet with a representative, and he was very negative.

C.L. Yes, this is another story.

F. I mention it to draw a parallel between the attitude of Solly Meyer and that of Stephen Weiss. The common denominator between the two of them is that both were assimilationist Jews. For Stephen Weiss the favour of Roosevelt, and to be in good graces with Roosevelt and not to disturb him or arouse his indignation was much more important than all those cries which came to him.

C.L. What you say is very severe.

F. Yes, it is. What else shall I tell you?

C.L. No, it is a very important point, a very important discussion.

F. You mean my description of the attitude of assimilationist Jews?

C.L. Yes. How would you characterise this, these American Jews?

Because in a way they tried to do something.

F. Of course they tried. They were not fully aware, and the fact

that they were not fully aware is also to be booked on the account of people like Stephen Weiss, who did not want them to become fully aware. Because, you see, the general policy of the Allied Governments was: We are engaged in a war, and we cannot pay special attention to the Jews because then we will be declared a people who fight for the Jews. It's a Jewish war; we don't want it to be like that, we will leave the reckoning till after the war. But in the meantime millions of people were killed; that was very unfortunate. But during the war the whole attention has to be direct towards winning the war. That attitude was explained to those influential Jews, and they agreed with it.

C.L. You think that they agreed?

F. I think they agreed with it. There is another thing - the idea of clandestine dealings was foreign to these people because they are, after all, ethical people, members of society. Anything clandestine, anything which is against the law such as sending money in secret ways, this is against the law and they are law-abiding citizens. That is another point which stood in the way, because what Rabbi Weissmandel wanted was to transgress the law. He said "Send me money in whatever way you can, even if you have to smuggle the money, do it!" But that idea was abhorrent to good citizens in the West, you see.

C.L. Yes, I think this is really the point. These people were

first Americans.

F. They were first Americans, or Swiss citizens.

C.L. For people like Weissmandel, or religious Jews in general, the first priority was to save the Jews, at any price.

F. That's right.

C.L. And Weissmandel was completely for this way, the clandestine.

F. Yes. He says "What do I care about man-made laws? I have to save Jewish lives, and any means is good enough for that. Even if somebody was imprisoned, or punished or fined for transgressing the law, what does it mean if I get the money and succeed in saving lives? Saving lives is a divine commandment, and the law, the civil law is a human-made thing. So how could you compare the two?"

C.L. The real discrepancy was that people like Weissmandel were completely conscious that it was a very specific and unique tragedy, what happened to the Jewish people.

F. Right. When I went around with the committee to collect money, I went to various Jewish synagogue communities. We spoke to the *Gabim?*, to the people in charge of the synagogue. We wanted them to collect money within their community. I was astonished, people did not believe us.

C.L. They did not believe what?

F. They didn't believe what we told them! We told them about the letters of Weissmandel, we told them about what was going

on in Europe. First of all I went with another man, and I suppose we did not look like swindlers and liars, so they half-believed because in our faces they must have seen that we really meant it. On the other hand, intellectually they couldn't even imagine these things. They thought these are exaggerations, this cannot be true, because they were living in an order and they couldn't conceive something which is completely out of order. So the information trickled through very, very slowly and became part of the consciousness. But the authorities...

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F. As it was, European Jews were completely trapped. There was no exit. The only exit out of the catastrophic situation was the way of money. Money, in Rabbi Weissmandel's eyes, was the only possibility to provide rescue because - you know, we Jews are an eminently historical people and Weissmandel was penetrated by Jewish history. Jewish history has proven that Jews saved their lives with money all the time. So that was the central idea. He was right, in so far as avenues opened themselves up for dealings with money. He conceived the

so-called 'Europaplan', which was his idea.

C.L. Can you explain this 'Europaplan' better?

F. Europaplan was a grandiose idea to save not only the Jews of Slovakia and Hungary but all European Jews, all for money. All the European Jews who were trapped, and as a matter of fact all European Jews were trapped - the Jews in France, and Belgium, and Holland, and those who were still in Germany - they were all trapped. So, since Rabbi Weissmandel saw and felt a possibility that money could do something, he widened his plan from rescuing just Slovakian or Hungarian Jews to a much bigger plan, to rescue all European Jews.

C.L. Because at the beginning he tried to deal with the Nazis in order to rescue the Slovakian Jews, and he thought that it worked.

F. Yes. He submitted this plan to Wizlitzeny (?) W. was not only sceptical, he laughed at it because he said "You don't even have the money to rescue the Slovakian Jews, how could you conceive of rescuing the European Jews? You will need an even bigger amount of money." But nevertheless, W. channeled this plan to the higher authorities - I think to Kaltenbrunner...?

C.L. And to Himmler...

F. And to Himmler himself! But nothing came of it because at that stage of the war they were not so interested in doing something for the Jews in order to win the favour of the

Allies, because they were still convinced they would win the war. Only at a later stage, when they were doubtful about victory, - if that European plan could have been realised later, they would have been more receptive but there were no Jews any more.

C.L. Yes, of course. All right, but Weissmandel conceived this Europaplan and thought "I need money, money is my bitter enemy", no?

F. Right. He conceived this plan because he saw there was an opening. The best proof of that is that he stopped the transportations for many months, in Slovakia. So that gave him obvious proof that they were receptive to money. At that time the question was only about 50 000 dollars.

C.L. Do you think the deportations were stopped because of the action of Weissmandel, and only for that reason?

C.L. Of course; that was the matter with this fake letter, the letter from Ferdinand Roth[?] Weissmandel faked a letter from an imaginary person who was the 'representative of international Jewry'. The Nazis were obsessed by the idea that there is 'international Jewry', a very powerful organisation. This idea came to them from that book, 'The Elders of Zion', which appeared at the turn of the century and established the idea that there is a secret, powerful organisation called the 'Elders of Zion', and they command all the Jews of the world. So there is something like 'international Jewry', which has

all these (secrets?) in their hands. So 'international Jewry' is very powerful.

C.L. 'International Jewry' has the money, too.

F. Has the money, of course. They are the capitalists, they have the money, all the money. So this idea of sending an emissary who will deal with heads of 'international Jewry' was believed. So Weissmandel, in faking this letter and making up the whole story that he would contact 'international Jewry' fell on fruitful ground.

C.L. But this was the real tragedy, because Weissmandel tried to trap the Nazis at their own game; he said Ok, the Nazis believe in 'international Jewry', so I will act as if there was an 'international Jewry'.

F. Of course, that was the idea. He used their own fantasy, and wanted to gain something from that by telling them "I will contact international Jewry, and I will get the money".

C.L. So what happened? International Jewry didn't answer.

F. International Jewry didn't answer because it doesn't exist.

C.L. Exactly. So now explain the story of Ferdinand Roth.

F. Well, he faked a letter that Ferdinand Roth, the 'intermediary' between Weissmandel and international Jewry, is in Switzerland and is acting to get the money. Of course, because the money did not come he faked another letter saying that the person with whom Ferdinand Roth is dealing is ill; he is in the hospital. He should wait for another 2 or 3 or 4 weeks, and the money will come. In his desperation,

Weissmandel did not know what would happen. He was hoping for a miracle, that in the meantime he would be able by clandestine ways to arouse Jews in America and Switzerland to provide the money. But he was not successful in that. So finally, Wizlitzeny, who was waiting and believing this fake letter and had postponed the deadline, finally he saw that nothing came of it. So the trains began to roll again.

C.L. This is the absolute tragedy, that he had to invent 'international Jewry', and 'international Jewry' did not exist, as you say. This is one of the most tragic points, in my opinion.

F. Yes, it certainly is.

C.L. But did he talk to you later on about this fantastic idea, the Europaplan, because it is a completely insane idea, in a way.

F. It is a completely insane idea, and on the other hand it was a very realistic idea. Because, after all, put yourself in his shoes. The man was desperate - desperate is an understatement. He was completely frantic, and he saw a small opening - money. When he suggested to Wizlitzeny that he would give him money, W. did not hit him in the face. He was listening to him. As a matter of fact he started the deportations, so he saw money is an agent, money is important. So why shouldn't he think on a bigger scale, it was natural; he said "if money can do something, why can't money be not only for the

Slovakian Jews? Money could work for the European Jews".
He was a man of thinking big. So it was not quite as insane
as you said.

C.L. Did he believe it completely?

F. A man in desperation believes what he has to believe in
order to hold himself. You cannot use a measurement of cool
logic for a man who is confronted with a situation that is
beyond logic. He has to operate with means that are illogical
because the whole situation was illogical.

C.L. And the people who answered him, I think they asked him for
reports...

F. Oh, they were very logical people. They were orderly people.
They wanted a complete report. "You need money? What for?
How much money did you spend, for what will you spend it?"
So how could he act like that? He answered, "I can't give you
a report, I am in a situation beyond..."

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(muet)

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F. About reports; Weissmandel needed big sums to send diplomatic

people, to send his messages in the diplomatic pouch to the Vatican, to Switzerland, to Turkey, wherever there were Jews - or non-Jews - in the free countries. He contacted them; he had to bribe these diplomatic emissaries to take his messages. He paid them good money for that. How could that appear in a report? He could not talk about these things, and many other amounts here and there, which helped in small situations. These are not matters in regular accounting. But people sitting in an orderly society, they want to know if they give money what it is for: "I want to know exactly." So two worlds were clashing against each other.

C.L. And this is the main point?

F. This is a very important point; it is a matter of mentality, of approach. What is money? To Weissmandel, money meant nothing. He could give money left and right when it could indirectly help somehow to pave a way, in indirect ways, to get someone who knows someone who knows someone who might be helpful. So all these things are not matters for accounting.

C.L. Yes, and they were answering with budgets, and so on. It was a real clash of two worlds. But it is a point: how is it possible to imagine Treblinka from Washington or New York? This is very difficult.

F. But the fact is that the State Department and the leading officials knew exactly what was going on.

C.L. All of them?

F. All of them.

C.L. And the leading Jews too?

F. The leading Jews too. But they had more relations with the gentlemen in the State Department, more affinity with them than with those orthodox, bearded Jews. These were different worlds. If that polished gentleman from the State Department explained to him "Look, we can't do these things now, we have to wait until after the war, don't disturb the public and don't interfere with the war effort" - he found an agreeable ear.

C.L. Could you talk about Weissmandel and the church?

F. This is a very, very tragic chapter. Weissmandel, as a religious man, a deeply, authentically religious man, had respect and affinity to any religious person. Also to a Christian - he respected religion per se. And this is an interesting thing: Weissmandel was a very clever man, but at the same time he was naive, in so far as to believe that a really religious man, a Catholic - in such a situation, how could he not be helpful? After all, the religion says 'LSD
' - 'thou shalt not kill' - this is one of the ten commandments, the Christians also believe in that. Now, the Church has shed a lot of blood. They killed Jews in the Middle Ages, but those were killings and cruelties under the veneer of religion. One religion against the other, all

right. And during the crusades Jewish blood was spilt, so the Church has a lot to bear on its shoulders. But now, at this point, there was no religious belief involved, there was not one religion clashing against the other, there was killing for no purpose. So why shouldn't the Church be helpful in that case? The Nazis did not kill the Jews for a religious belief, or for political reasons; they killed Jews because Jews just had to be eliminated! That was an obsession of Hitler and the Nazis, not for any religious reason. So the Church should be helpful. Weissman^{del}, in his naivete, approached the Vatican. He went to the bishop - his name was Kmetko - the bishop of Nitra. You see, the President of the Czechoslovakian State was Monsignor Tisso (? He was once secretary to Bishop Kmetko, so Tisso himself was not approachable; one could not go to Tisso. But Weissmandel thought "If I go to the bishop, who is his superior in the Church hierarchy, perhaps the bishop will use his influence on Tisso." So that was a very great mistake of Rabbi Weissmandel because the bishop - it is a very well-known fact - when Weissmandel told him about the deportations and the blood being spilt, the bishop (I can't quite remember if it was Bishop Kmetko or the Papal Nuncio, because he also went to the Papal Nuncio) one of the two said to him "There is no innocent Jewish blood. You are the killers of Christ! So (Weissmandel had said there are innocent children) there

are no innocent Jewish children. You are all guilty, and you will be punished".

C.L. This was the bishop?

F. Yes, it was the bishop. I didn't quite remember which of the two it was. Anyway, it comes from the mouth of the church. The reaction of the Vatican is also well known; Weissmandel bribed an official of the Slovakian Government who was present at the session of the Council of Ministers (probably as a secretary or something); and he told Weissmandel what was discussed. When a letter from the Vatican came to the Czechoslovakian Government and was read at the session, Weissmandel was told the contents of the letter. Weissmandel had written to the Vatican that families are being deported wholesale, so the Vatican wrote a letter to the Czechoslovakian Government (saying) that baptised Jews should not be deported together with authentic Jews; they should be separated. Families should be kept together, should not be torn apart. That was the concern of the Vatican. That was their humanitarian instinct: you cannot treat baptised Jews the same as other Jews, you must deport them separately, you see.

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C.L. Yes, this is a precise story of his meeting with the

bishop of Nitra and with the Papal Nuncio. But afterwards, when he was in New York, what was his general outlook?

F. His general outlook was, he was not only extremely bitter, he was confirmed in his opinion that there is a historical enmity of the Church towards the Jews- a basic enmity, which is not mitigated by some pronouncement or statement. Basically there is a deep enmity in the Church; it is part of its essence. He was only confirmed in that after his experience with leading Church officials, and with the Vatican itself.

C.L. And the rebuilding of the *Yashiva* of Nitra in America - what was the meaning of this for him? ^{9F} The meaning of this rebuilding was this: you have to bear in mind that Rabbi Weissmandel is and was a product of a line of Judaism which reaches back into antiquity. Judaism is built on Torah; Torah is the lifeline of the Jewish people. If there is no Torah there is no Jewish people. The centres of Torah in Eastern Europe have been destroyed; there were about 3 million Jews in Poland all together. The big *Yashivas*, the great scholars transmitted Torah. Torah is being transmitted from generation to generation, that holds us. That is our lifeline. After this breakdown he said to himself, "How will we exist now? We have to rebuild Torah". Because that was his motivation. So he had the idea of rebuilding the *Yashiva*. The *Yashiva* of Nitra was the last *Yashiva* in Europe still functioning. They operated underground. They were called the 'Vatican' because

they had built a network of underground shelters in the *Yashiva*, where they hid people, smuggling them over the border, collecting money, collecting jewellery. People went around on behalf of Rabbi Weissmandel - he was very well known all over Central Europe, especially in Slovakia and Hungary - to collect jewellery, watches, rings. People gave them away, and he used that jewellery; at the beginning he sent it to Poland, Before the extermination started people were in concentration camps, they had no food, nothing. So secretly he hired emissaries who went by secret ways to deliver packages of jewellery...

C.L. In the ghettoes?

F. In the ghettoes and in the camps, and they brought back receipts. Later on he collected jewellery and money - what was left - to bribe guides, Gentile guides, to smuggle people over the border. So that was the *Yashiva* until its last moments. But when he came to this country...

C.L. The *Yashiva* was completely destroyed?

F. Completely destroyed. The boys were taken to concentration camps, and after the war Rabbi Weissmandel gathered perhaps 60 boys who were dispersed all over, in concentration camps and hiding in various places and remained alive - he gathered them in Europe. They were brought to Paris and they stayed there for a while, and then he brought them over to this country. So he had them at hand, and he said "I will build the

Yeshiva again with these boys". These boys were the basis for this new undertaking. Rabbi Weissmandel was a very impressive man, and he won friends because his deep sincerity affected people. He came to know Rabbi Jong here, and Rabbi Jong was of course impressed by him and he on his part knew a man by the name of Alwyn Johnson. Alwyn Johnson was the president of the new school here in New York - that is a university - and he brought over many refugee scientists and well known people. So Jong interested Professor Johnson, and Johnson knew a man by the name of Rogozin - a wealthy man so the three got together under the influence of Rabbi Weissmandel, who wanted to build the *Yeshiva*, and Rogozin was prepared to buy an estate which was at that time available in Mount Cisco (?), the so-called Brewster estate. Mr Brewster wanted to sell it for 100 000 dollars and Mr Rogozin paid him the 100 000 dollars and the *Yeshiva*, however small it was at that time, moved in. That was the beginning of the Nitra *Yeshiva*. Rabbi Weissmandel lectured there, and of course he had to collect money. So instead of devoting himself to his scholarly work - he was a great scholar - he had to go around and beg money. He degraded himself; I know of one incident: he went from synagogue to synagogue on the Sabbath, and in the middle of the services there was a pause and Rabbi Weissmandel would talk, "I am building a *Yeshiva*, please help me". It was on one of those occasions when he made an appeal for money, and raised about 400 dollars. After that a man

came to him and asked "How much money did you make?" He said "Well, I made only 400 dollars". So the man said "Well, 400 dollars for one day isn't bad" - he thought he took it for himself. That's how far he degraded himself. He did not answer him, he just turned away. There were many instances like that. He went around in the streets like a beggar; he possessed nothing, just the clothes he was wearing. He had nothing. His personal compassion with another man was beyond description. I know of cases - he was concerned with everybody - the boys, and other people who came to him with their problems. He was capable of not sleeping and not eating and going to trouble for someone else, to help somebody or intervene for somebody. People came to him - the boys especially were lost, they were all orphans, they had nobody but him. So he was concerned like a father for each and every one. He loved them. I once came out to the *Yuba* and I saw when he was talking with the boys, his eyes, the love he had in his face for each and every one of them. I cannot really describe it; he was full of love and devotion. He had nothing in himself of his own personal concern, he was not concerned about himself. He didn't care about eating, sleeping, dressing... he gave himself completely away.

(cass. 3B)

C.L. And the story about the butcher?

F. Well, one day I was walking with him on the street, and a

man approached him and asked him in a very rude way, "You owe me this amount, so-and-so many dollars; you haven't paid my bill for the meat I delivered to the *Yashiva*." And he insulted him in front of me.

C.L. What did he say?

F. He said "what do you think? Why don't you pay me? You are irresponsible!..."

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C.L. Will you tell again the story of the debts and the butcher?

F. One day I was walking with Rabbi Weissmandel down the street and he was approached by a man who complained to him bitterly about an unpaid bill. He was a butcher who delivered meat to the *Yashiva*, and the bill was not paid in time. So the man approached him on the street and insulted him. He said "You are irresponsible, who do you think you are? Why don't you pay me? I will never deliver meat any more!" He used very rude expressions, which I don't remember any more, he insulted him severely. Rabbi Weissmandel was smiling and nodding his head, and then he turned away.

Things like that were typical of the life of Rabbi Weissmandel during the years when he worked for the *Yashiva*. He was completely absorbed in raising funds, paying bills -

electricity, gas, food - and he could not pay the bills, he was desperate. He was completely out of his mind just because of these things, these little things, besides the personal problems with which he was approached: boys getting sick, boys having trouble. Other people came to him with their problems; I remember he was once approached by a man who had trouble with his wife. His wife wanted to divorce him, and he told Rabbi Weissmandel about his difficulties. Rabbi Weissmandel walked with this man the whole night, up and down in the street, until the early morning. Yes, here in Williamsburg. The wife of the man was at this time separated from him and she was living in Israel. So Rabbi Weissmandel wrote her a letter and tried to reconcile, mediate. I know of a case when Rabbi Weissmandel happened to be in the house of a certain Rabbi here in Williamsburg, and in came a young boy and a young girl. They came to that Rabbi and told him that their mother had sent them (they were brother and sister) because the boy wanted to marry a non-Jewish girl. The mother was very upset about that, and when the Rabbi heard it he said to the boy "What do you think? How could you do a thing like that? I don't want to hear about it!" The boy expected the Rabbi would explain, and talk to him, but the Rabbi was very angry. He got very excited and said "How could you do a thing like that, who has heard of such a thing?" Rabbi Weissmandel was in the room at the time, so the boy said to the girl,

"Well, let's go. What are we doing here?" So they went out, and Rabbi Weissmandel went with them. He walked with them for hours in the street, and explained to the boy "Don't do that, this is not a thing which you should do". He explained the theological grounds, whatever reasons he gave him. He got the boy to promise that he would not take any action until a further meeting. The next meeting should have taken place the next week. The next week Rabbi Weissmandel had a heart attack and went to hospital in Mount Cisco. He called me from the hospital and said "I told you the story about this boy and girl, and I promised to meet them. But I am sick now in hospital; this is the telephone number - call them up and tell them that they should not do anything until I see them again". So I called that number, and the girl came to the phone. I said "I am calling you on behalf of Rabbi Weissmandel who spoke to your brother. Rabbi Weissmandel is ill, he has had a heart attack and he's in hospital. He begs you not to do anything further until he meets you again." The girl did not answer me. So I said "didn't you hear me?" She said "Yes, I hear you." So I said "Why don't you answer me?" She said "Because I can't talk to you because I am crying." I said "Why are you crying?" and she said "I am crying because this man has had a heart attack, and he is in the hospital, and he remembers me and I am on his mind, and he thinks about me. That's why I am crying." Rabbi Weissmandel never saw these people again, because he

had one heart attack after another. Then he died.

C.L. He was completely devoted to...

F. To other people. I just told you these examples; there are many, many others. These things came to my mind now, while we are talking, just to give you a very faint picture of what kind of man he was.

boite 217

NEW YORK 29

C.L. We come back to the Church. According to you, what are the reasons for this deeply..

F. The reasons for why does the Church hate Jews? The reasons are, I think, purely founded fundamentally in the structure of Christian belief. You see, at the beginning of Christianity - the question is this: why, among all the other religions in the world, do just the Christians carry the odium? Why have the taken it upon themselves to act out anti-Jewish feelings? We don't find it among the Moslems, we don't find it among other religions. Just the Christian religion has an ingrained urge to act out an enmity against the Jews. Why is this? It started from the beginning of Christianity, and I think the reason is this: There is a Talmudic saying that after 4 000 years the

time of the Messiah has come. After 4 000 years from the beginning of creation, the era of the Messiah has started. That time was about the same period when Christianity arose. We don't find any Messianic movement before the rise of Christianity. After the rise of Christianity, messianic movements started here and there, in various parts of the world. The world was pregnant, so to speak, with the birth of a Messiah, and something had to happen. A Messiah was born; it was a miscarriage. He was not born by us, he was born and taken up by the Gentiles who came in through the Apostle Paul. He was the one who created a receptive opening for the influx of Gentiles. He told them the Messiah had been born. So, the Christian Church is the one which carries the belief of the Messiah. Later it is developed into a trinity, a part of the godhead himself, but in the beginning it was just a messiah. The Jews did not accept it, but the Christian sect - as it was; it was really a Jewish sect in the beginning, but later it was widened by the influx of the Gentiles - they regarded themselves as the real Jewish people, and the Messiah was born.

Bobine 218

NEW YORK 30

F. Weissmandel's position towards Zionism: Weissmandel's position

is that of an authentically religious Jew. In his opinion, and in the opinion of an authentic, historical Jew, Zionism is a form which might be called 'national assimilation'. It is the motivation "Be like other nations". It stems from Theodor Herzl. Theodor H. was a Viennese journalist, who happened to be in Paris during the Dreyfuss affair. In his diaries Herzl says "If I had not read Dumont, I would never have known that I am a Jew". He heard in Paris "Mort aux Juifs" and he didn't understand why. His solution was that whatever we do, however much we try to be like the others, it doesn't help us. The best idea would be to create a corner in the world for ourselves where we could be like we want to. Perhaps then we will be respected. We will transplant the modern, the assimilated Jew into his own territory and there he will be like another nation(?). You see, Rabbi Weissmandel said once to a Zionist, "What have you done? What do you intend to do? You want to create another Paraguay? It will be another Paraguay. But we are a universal religion, a universal people. We are not bound to a territory; it is really a change of identity, what you are trying to do."

C.L. I understand this is the general outlook of the religious (

F. It is the general outlook.

C.L. But in connection with the holocaust, were Weissmandel's idea about Zionism changed, or fortified...?

F. The attitude of Zionism during the period of the holocaust was that of mechanics. You see, the whole idea of Zionism is this: for 2 000 years the Jews have been living in ()

mechanically - you can regulate the *Galuth*, you can normalise the existence of ^{the} Jewish people by creating circumstances for its existence; you press a button, you handle a machine by mechanical means, by political means (which are also mechanical means). So you use political means in order to create a new framework for the Jewish people by mechanical action, which will eliminate the (*Galuth*). But in the opinion of Rabbi Weissmandel and all of us, the (*Galuth*) is not something which can be regulated mechanically. It is something which has a deep meaning, why we are dispersed among the people. We have a mission for the world, we have to do something here. We have to be authentic, we have a purpose, which is connected with the destiny of the Jewish people. It cannot be regulated by mechanical means. We are different, we are unique and that idea of Rabbi Weissmandel, in contradistinction to that of Zionism, expressed itself also in the attitude of Zionism during the war years. Zionist leaders were interested in rescuing Jews, and channeling them to Palestine. They were interested in rescuing such Jews as could be useful to the building of the land, which means young and healthy people, not old Jews who are of no use. That is part of this concept of mechanical regulation - channeling Jews to one exit. If that exit - Palestine - was blocked because of the agreement between Hitler and the Mufti, (C.L. and the British) and the British of course,

who did not want to antagonise the Arabs, so the exit of Palestine was blocked. But still there were illegal ways, clandestine ways to smuggle Jews out, but only to Palestine. That also is one of the great failures, the burden of which was carried by a certain group at that time, who didn't understand better.

C.L. Can you explain this?

F. There were possibilities for Jews to be taken out into other countries, and for that purpose the official representatives of the Jews, the Jewish Agency, - their cooperation was needed. Their cooperation was not available, because their interest was directed only towards that one possibility which led to Palestine.

C.L. And to choose the people.

F. And to choose the people, yes. That was, of course, one of the tragic chapters in this whole story.

C.L. You don't want to say more about this?

F. No, I prefer not to talk about it because, you see, we cannot burden the totality of Jews because of what a small group of leaders, at a certain point in time, did. It was a mistake, a tragic mistake, and you cannot even burden the whole Zionist movement for the action of a small group of leaders. Besides the point that Zionism, in our opinion, is not identical with real authentic Jews. That is beside the point. We are talking now about the political actions which

were taken at that time. They were a mistake, a tragic mistake. But again, we should not, we cannot blame the totality of the people - not even the totality of the leadership.- for a small, misled group.

(petite intervention de Forst durant les plans de coupe - fin de la bobine, 12
21)

(F. I would like to talk, if you agree, about one point of view which I call 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'. This is a new term, which has been used by Germans now...)

Bobine n° 219

FORST 31

F. I think it is somehow fundamental in human nature that a person cannot go on living for ever with a feeling of guilt.

(plan muet - NEW YORK 33)

NEW YORK - FORST 34

F. There is an elementary feeling in human beings that they cannot go on living with a feeling of guilt. Think of the German people. The German people have committed a crime

which is singular in the history of mankind. And they know it. They have become aware of it, can they go on living with that feeling of guilt? It is impossible, against human nature. So they have created a new word, which is 'Vergangenheitsüberbewältigung', which means overcoming the past. It is part rationalisation, part deliberate forgetfulness, creating a mental gap between the past and the present, because a people cannot go on for ever with a burden of guilt. I would say that this elementary human feeling is not only taking place with the Germans, it is taking place with the Jews too. The Jews - especially those who saved themselves - should really have a feeling of guilt. How could they forget what they have seen? People who were in the camps, who wear the numbers on their arms, how could they step into this new order, burdened with the knowledge that this order is so temporary, and quite a different world from what they have seen going under? So, they try to forget. With them, 'Vergangenheitsüberwältigung' also takes place. Rabbi Weissmandel was a living reminder of the past, and as such he was unpopular. Subconsciously, people resented seeing this man, who in his whole appearance - in his face, and in his whole 'Erscheinung' - reminded them of what has happened. So they did not want to be reminded of that, so that is why he, in a way, was an unpopular figure. He disturbed the order. He disturbed the new way of life. Those people who had suffered all

these things, they were hungry for life, they wanted to compensate now for what they had lost. They wanted to forget; he did not let them forget.

C.L. He was a living reminder?

F. He was a living reminder...

I once thought, and said, "Sometimes something happens in the stars, a star falls down - we call it a comet. What is a comet? A comet is a star which falls out of the order of other stars, he falls and falls, and while he falls he starts to shine. He becomes incandescent, glowing. But while he is glowing, and falling, he is enlightening everything around him. But he himself gets burnt." Rabbi Weissmandel was such a star. He enlightened everybody around him. He was like a comet, but while he was lightening and spreading light around him, among the people who knew him, he got burnt himself. So people, when they see a comet, they stand for a while and are flabbergasted "Look! Look at that!" The comet shines, and in a second it gets burnt out. People say, "Let's go home, and eat supper". They return to their everyday common life. So he was a comet.

C.L. I think it is the reason why he was devoted to everybody, the reason why he was burning his life to...

F. Yes, he burnt himself up in his work for the *Yasava*, and he tried to do things, but he was consumed by it.

C.L. Would you say that he was a *Sodnik*?

F. He was a real *Sodnik*, in the full sense of the word. You don't easily find a man like him. He was an authentic Jew.

Bobine n° 220

NEW YORK FORST 35

F. When the time came for old Rabbi *Dugor*...

C.L. Rabbi O. was the head of the *Yashivim*

F. The head of the *Yashivim*, and father-in-law of Rabbi Weissmandel

When the time came, and the danger came nearer and nearer, they had to leave their house and go into hiding. They waited until the Sabbath ended because one is not allowed to carry things with one on the Sabbath; so they waited until nightfall, and they packed their little belongings and went into the woods. But at the end of the Sabbath, Jews have to make

Havdala, which is a prayer at the end of the Sabbath. For that you need a burning candle and a cup of wine or some other stuff. But they did not do it because they had to hurry to leave, and they went into the woods. They wandered, walking and walking, trying to find their way to some place. On Sunday morning they reached a little village with an inn, so Rabbi O. said - it was always on his mind, all the time - "we haven't made *Havdala* yet." So he sent his son to the little inn, which was a dangerous thing to do, you must not forget. You could never know what would happen. So he went in to buy some liquor in order to be able to make *Havdala*. That

worry was on his mind all the time while he was running away for his life.

C.L. He had to observe the law?

F. He had to observe the law, because that is the purpose of everything. Even in the midst of danger, that is the purpose of life - observance of the law.

C.L. Even in the midst of the biggest danger?

I say, even in the midst of the biggest danger?

F. Right. The biggest danger, yes.

C.L. How did he die, old Rabbi O?

F. He died in the woods. He got pneumonia. When he was dying, his last words were: Not to talk in the synagogue while the prayers are going on, because it is a grave sin to disturb the dignity of the synagogue, to talk among themselves while the prayers are going on.

C.L. Did people do this?

F. They still do it. But that was his message. Because, if a great tragedy befalls a Jew, he always thinks "What did I do?" He is always possessed by the thought "I did something wrong. I committed something, and that is why I am being punished. Who knows what I did?" Who knows? Maybe Jews are talking all the time during prayers. Maybe that created a disturbance upstairs, and now it is like a volcano. The lava in a volcano grows and grows because something goes on underneath. It takes a long time, and all of a sudden it explodes. So Jews

are doing things, wrong things. Maybe they are doing wrong things for a hundred years, or two hundred years. But it is not forgotten, it's there and it grows and grows like the hot lava in a volcano, until a time comes when the mountain cannot contain it any more and it explodes. So a great catastrophe happens, as a result of misdoings which we committed knowingly or unknowingly, because God is very sensitive about the Jews, what they do.

C.L. Do you think this is the reason why religious people, even when they were in the extermination camps, in the middle of all this horror, did not lose faith?

F. They did not lose faith because these ideas are ingrained in us for thousands of years. We live with these ideas: there is a connection between the people and God. There is a special relationship. What we do weighs very heavy - it weighs much heavier than what other people do.

C.L. Yes, but the punishment was much heavier too.

F. And the punishment is heavier, right. We are supposed to redeem the world, and we don't do it. We are supposed to be looked upon by all other people as the standard-bearers of God. People should look up to us. Instead, we are doing things that people look down on. We are the legion of the king. You see, all peoples are children of God but the Jewish people are called the first-born son. The first-born son has the responsibility towards the other sons. His actions pave the

way; his actions are very important. That is the special relationship, you see. I am aware that what I am saying is very unpopular, and it sounds very subjective, but what I am telling you is what I think, and what I think is not my personal opinion, because I am an orthodox Jew and that is the way that orthodox Jews think. Not today, and not from yesterday, but since the beginning. That's the way we think and live, and that trend of mind might perhaps play a role in the behaviour of Jews when they were facing...

NEW YORK FORST 36

F. That sentiment, of an ingrained responsibility of the Jew, individually and collectively, for his own fate and for the fate of the whole world, is perhaps the reason for that lack of physical resistance because, after all, the Jews were facing the gas chamber and they could not take action of physical violence out of revenge or desperation. It would not have helped them.

C.L. They could not do much.

F. They could not do much; they could jump on a soldier and they would be shot anyway on the spot; they had nothing to lose but they didn't do it because they were resigned. Why were they resigned? Because of that feeling: something has come over me, something quite unexpected, something I cannot escape from. And it happened to me because I am a sinner,

I did something wrong. So I have to resign myself to my fate. There is an important point; I mentioned before that antisemitic people have created a slogan: It's the guilt of the Jew. They make the Jew responsible for their own misery, and for the misery of the world. There is a truth, a theological truth in that, but the Jew is supposed to be the redeemer of the world. If he does not redeem it, he is guilty. He is responsible.

C.L. But it is very difficult to grasp. The children, innocent children - what is the sin of the children?

F. When a volcano breaks out it devastates everything around it, with no distinction...

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NEW YORK FORST 37

F. As to the reaction of the religious Jew with respect to the catastrophe: it is quite different from that of the non-religious Jew. The non-religious Jew questions God. He puts the question to God: How could God do that? How could God let it happen that a million children were gassed? You have a question towards God. But the religious Jew doesn't question God, he questions man. In a particular sense, there is a question which is not being asked: the question is, How did culture permit it? How did our concept of civilisation

and progressive liberalism and culture and evolution permit this? This hits the idea of cultural evolution in the face. Imagine, in the centre of Europe, the centre of culture and civilisation, university professors became murderers, became SS men who participated in killings. They justified it, at least they acquiesced in it. The natural question is : leave God aside, you have man before you. The obvious question to ask would be: I was brought up with a conce of culture, I was living within it. All these people had a long tradition of the so-called Judao-Christian civilisation, which is progressing; people are getting better, we have ideas of humanity and we are educated. All of a sudden something happens which has turned everything upside-down. What is the sense of culture, what is the sense of progress? What happened to all these ideas which we have been brought up with? Why don't they ask this question? But they are so brainwashed, so steeped in these ideas - they are now still involved in it - that they leave this obvious question aside and question God.

C.L. I understand you yourself said there was this atonement for sin?

F. Yes. The religious Jew has a concept of personal and collective atonement, and when a time comes when we are punished it is, like I said, an outbreak of a volcano which does not distinguish between good and bad; it is a reaction, an explosion. You

cannot ask a question about the ways of God. You cannot, because it is something which is beyond our understanding. We only know man, we only know what man does or what he does not do. Actions of man, that is what we see before us, and that is what we can question, and that is what we can rectify - perhaps that is within our power. So, since Jews live, or should live, in a special relationship with God - we cannot question that relationship, we cannot question. We have to accept. What we can question is the behaviour of man.

C.L. You mean the religious Jews question the behaviour of man, and the non-religious question God.

F. ...of the non-religious in the world around, which was quiet and did let it happen. And they question, therefore, culture. They question the concept of civilisation, they question the entire habits of man, the entire way of thinking of present man.

NEW YORK 38

C.L. I want to ask you about the Church. Did Rabbi Weissmandel tell you about the visit of the old Rabbi of Nitra to the Bishop?

F. Yes, he told me that he begged his father-in-law, the old Rabbi, to visit the Bishop because in normal times there was a certain formal relationship between the old Rabbi and the bishop; they met at occasions in a formal way, they greeted

each other - there was a superficial relationship. So Rabbi Weissmandel begged him to go to the bishop and tell him what was happening and try to persuade Tisso. The Rabbi declined, Rabbi *Dwyer* by no means wanted to go to the Bishop. He said: "It is of no avail. The Bishop is a Christian and he hates Jews; the Church hates Jews and it would not help in any way to go to him." Rabbi Weissmandel had a very strong argument with his father-in-law about that. They were both angry with each other. He described it to me: there was quite a vehement confrontation between the two, and Rabbi *Dwyer* steadfastly declined to go to the Bishop. Rabbi Weissmandel couldn't understand: What do you risk, why shouldn't you go? So he went himself. He came back, of course, and what Rabbi *Dwyer* said proved to be true. What did the Bishop tell him? When the bishop was told that Jews were being deported and innocent children were being killed, the Bishop said "There is no innocent Jewish blood; you will all be killed, because you killed Christ. You deserve that, you will all be killed. Your only way out is to accept the true Church, to be baptised and become Christians. That is the only way you could redeem yourselves of your guilt. Otherwise you will all be killed.

C.L. To convert?

F. To convert, yes. "That's why you still live. Because we expect you to convert, to be baptised. That is your destiny. That is the expectation which we hold of you. If you don't

do it you don't deserve to live. I tell you, you will all be killed." That is what he told him. Rabbi Weissmandel told me this...

(Cassette n^o 4)

Rabbi Weissmandel told me this, exactly how it was. He described the face of the bishop, how he was a wild fanatic; his face became red, and how he was shouting at him.

C.L. Shouting?

F. Yes. He said "Of course you will be killed. There is no innocent Jewish blood," as I told you. So Rabbi Weissmandel came back to Rabbi *Onyiah*, who said "Didn't I tell you?". That was in 1942. And in 1944, when the ...

C.L. The second wave of deportations.

F. The second wave of deportations, when the Jewish community was completely dissolved, and people went, tried to escape and run away to all places and the bulk of them were brought to *Sent*, which was a 'Sammellager', and from there they were supposed to be brought to Auschwitz and Treblinka and so on. So Rabbi Weissmandel undertook a second attempt, to see the Papal Nuncio. He saw the Papal Nuncio, and he begged him - he cried before him, with tears...

C.L. He told you this?

F. He told me that. I remember that exactly. He told me "Tears were running from my eyes, I could hardly talk to him. I begged him like a child: Please, how could you let that happen. So, the reaction of the papal nuncio was the same: "You deserve to die". So Rabbi Weissmandel told me that he cursed him, because the Nuncio said "If you don't go out right away I will call the police" and he was ready to ring a bell to call in his attendant and to call the police. Rabbi Weissman was afraid that he would call the police, so he cursed him and ran out.

C.L. How did he curse?

F. Yes, he told me...

C.L. How did he curse?

F. He didn't tell me what words he used, he only said to me "I cursed him. I cursed him," he said, "and I ran out".

That is the Church.

Bobine n° 223

NEW YORK 39 (muet)

NEW YORK 40 (muet)

à nouveau NEW YORK 40 3^{ème} clap (muet)

NEW YORK 41 (muet)

Bobine n° 222

NEW YORK 42 (muet)

Son seul; Bobine n° 159-son; interview M. Forst avec clap

NEW YORK - FORST (?)

F. The Christian Church has taken it upon itself to produce the Messiah, but it has not worked out. The times in which we have lived since then are full of wars and misery and unhappiness. It is not the fulfilment of what we understand as the times of the Messiah. So the Christian Church subconsciously blames the Jews for having taken it upon themselves to produce the Messiah, and not we. We are guilty that they had to do something which we had to do. That is a deep subconscious motive for blaming the Jews. "You are the ones who put the burden on our shoulders, because the time was ripe that something should happen, and it did not happen through you, who were destined to do it and to produce it. You haven't done it; we had to do it for you and it was not our task, it was your task." So, besides the fact that we still claim to be Jews, we are competitors, our mere existence is an obstacle. Our mere existence is something which is likely to disprove their claim, you see. They have to eradicate us, they have to eliminate us spiritually, and now, when the world is not religious at all, physically. They have lost the religion, but that element still lives in them subconsciously. The Jew is the enemy. There was a saying in Europe: "Der Jude ist schuldig", which means "it is the fault of the Jew. All misery in the world is the fault of the Jew." When a revolution happens, it is the Jews. Capitalistic undertakings, Communistic undertakings - all are the fault of the Jews.

This is the subconscious feeling, the Jew is the one who is guilty for everything. It stems from that idea, that everything is the Jews' fault, that the world has not been redeemed, that the world is still in a state of misery and confusion: it's all your fault. I remember the time in Vienna when there was an antisemitic regime all the time there - during the time of the monarchy, and later - it was an antisemitic country. Antisemitism was everywhere, but what I experienced was in my own home town, Vienna; it was the birthplace of *Luoga?* who was admired by Hitler because he was the leader of the Christlich-Soziale Partei, which was the antisemitic party. The saying "Der Jude ist schuld" was a common phrase. But deep down it's that theological reason, which was inherited from old times - it is the fault of the Jews that we have not succeeded, we have not brought about the fulfilment. That explains the stand of the Christian Church all the time.

C.L. Do you see that there is a change now?

F. Now? No, there is no change, because if the Christian Church would really, really eliminate its original antagonism and enmity against the Jews it would lose an integral part of its own essence.