



The Fragility of Goodness: Why Bulgaria's Jews Survived the Holocaust

Tzvetan Todorov

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With the exception of Denmark, Bulgaria was the only country allied with Nazi Germany that did not annihilate or turn over its Jewish population. Here a prominent French intellectual with Bulgarian roots accounts for this singularity.

Tzvetan Todorov assembles and interprets for the first time key evidence from this episode of Bulgarian history, including letters, diaries, government reports, and memoirs--most never before translated into any language. Through these documents, he reconstructs what happened in Bulgaria during World War II and interrogates collective memories of that time. He recounts the actions of individuals and groups that, ultimately and collectively, spared Bulgaria's Jews the fate of most European Jews.

The Bulgaria that emerges is not a heroic country dramatically different from those countries where Jews did perish. Todorov does find heroes, especially parliament deputy Dimitar Peshev, certain writers and clergy, and--most inspiring--public opinion. Yet he is forced to conclude that the "good" triumphed to the extent that it did because of a tenuous chain of events. Any break in that chain--one intellectual who didn't speak up as forcefully, a different composition in Orthodox Church leadership, a misstep by a particular politician, a less wily king--would have undone all of the other efforts with disastrous results for almost 50,000 people.

The meaning Todorov settles on is this: Once evil is introduced into public view, it spreads easily, whereas goodness is temporary, difficult, rare, and fragile. And yet possible.

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