



The Shadow of His Wings

Gereon Goldmann, Benedict Leutenegger (Translator), Mary Cherubina Madl (Translator)

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We **had** to do it. We had to reprint this book. Rarely has a book had such an impact on so many of us here at Ignatius Press. It is one of the most powerful and moving books we have come across. If you can only buy one book this season, this **must** be the one.

Here is the astonishing true story of the harrowing experiences of a young German seminarian drafted into Hitler's dreaded SS at the onset of World War II. Without betraying his Christian ideals, against all odds, and in the face of Evil, Gereon Goldmann was able to complete his priestly training, be ordained, and secretly minister to German Catholic soldiers and innocent civilian victims caught up in the horrors of war. How it all came to pass will astound you.

Father Goldmann tells of his own incredible experiences of the trials of war, his many escapes from almost certain death, and the diabolical persecution that he and his fellow Catholic soldiers encountered on account of their faith. What emerges is an extraordinary witness to the workings of Divine Providence and the undying power of love, prayer, faith, and sacrifice. *Illustrated*

The Shadow of His Wings Details

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From Reader Review The Shadow of His Wings for online ebook

George says

This is a great book about a boy growing up in Nazi Germany and standing up to the Nazi's and being a real hero by not compromising moral integrity in the face of a greater evil than most people can even imagine. It shows how to stand for the truth in the face of evil and fully rely on God. I highly recommend this reading book!

Javier Muñoz says

Libro super recomendable por el testimonio de vida de este hombre, otro más que sería merecedor de una película de Hollywood.

Especialmente impactante es el relato sobre sus vivencias durante la II GM, primero como experto en telecomunicaciones, y luego como médico, y cómo por encima de todo valora siempre la dignidad de la vida humana, por encima de bandos y rivalidades, intentando siempre facilitar el sustento espiritual a sus compañeros y heridos.

La segunda parte, donde ya es ordenado sacerdote y ejerce su ministerio en diferentes campos de trabajo para alemanes tras la finalización de la guerra, también tiene muchísimo contenido y está lleno de frutos de conversión pero también de cruces.

La última parte, ya como misionero y párroco en Japón, es la de los frutos sin fin y los "imposibles" hechos realidad en la comunidad que Dios pone bajo su cuidado.

Como nota final, destacar el patriotismo que rezuma por muchas de sus páginas; está orgulloso de ser alemán, pero no de pertenecer a un sistema diabólico como era el nazi del III Reich. Y ante todo, orgulloso de su fe católica y comprometido con la salvación de las almas que Dios ha puesto a su alrededor.

Marie Noël says

Disgusted by this author. Amid the horrors of WWII that he witnessed as a purported Catholic & seminarian, his primary motivation was to get ordained. He describes buying up Rosaries and other Sacramentals while he was in the S.S. in France since the French were selling them & he sent them back to his friends (who could no longer get them in Germany). Never did he help any of those suffering amid the Nazi occupation. He uses deceit and more lies to get ordained. Even talks many times of being in Italy and putting guns to the heads of priests to give him the Eucharist under threats to kill them so he can distribute the Eucharist on the battlefield to Germans. His methods were awful. When he gets captured, he finally says admits to being a priest when he wants better treatment from the Allies. When I think of what all those innocent people suffered under the Nazis & contrast how this author lived for himself vs. the heroic ones who helped others, I regret spending anything for this book.

Karen says

Completely inspiring! Amazing and believable at the same time. Goldman is no cookie-cutter saint.

Anne-Marie says

How on earth can you be a good Franciscan priest and an SS lieutenant? Well that was the dilemma forced upon young seminarian Gereon Goldmann when he was drafted into the SS at the beginning of World War II. How could he serve both Church and State when the State was run by such an evil force? Part of the answer lay in Goldmann's character. He was a strong willed, feisty man. But the other part of the answer lay in the hands of a powerful intercessor. Years earlier following the death of Gereon's mother, Sister Solana May promised the eight year old boy that she would take the place of his mother. Her lifelong fidelity to Gereon through prayer and sacrifice was truly heroic. In turn it enabled him also to be a heroic Franciscan priest who brought souls to God when they most needed it.

This is an astounding story of courage, strength and incredible miracles. What's more it is a masterclass in upholding your Christian beliefs in the face of monstrous opposition. Even when evil is so tangibly close, it is possible to bear witness to the Truth. Furthermore, behind this great man was an equally great woman - truly inspirational.

Arthur Gibson says

A friend had loaned me this book quite some time ago and being I wasn't given a due date... well I kinda let it lay for a while. So I finally got the chance to start reading it, and from the first few pages, I was hooked. It was certainly an action packed, exciting book! I should have not waited that long :p
Would totally recommend it.

James says

I couldn't get through this book and ended up skimming the last fourth. I feel kind of strange about it since there are so many good ratings, but I wasn't engaged.

The writing was pretty poor, which I would accept from a non-professional writer (for example, the excellent *With God In Russia* by Cizhek), but a couple of things bothered me. First, Father Goldmann was never wrong about anything and I felt him to be a somewhat grating narrator. Second, some of his actions were highly questionable. Holding guns to priests' heads in order to get the Eucharist to pass out to wounded soldiers? It's admirable that he wanted to help the wounded, but not by extortion.

Then, when he meets the pope, he has the document from a bishop that allows him to carry the consecrated host (which he got by waving his gun around), but he fails to mention the method in which he gained the document. The pope allows him to become a priest and study theology after the fact. I wonder what the pope would have done had he known the whole story...

Ian says

It's difficult to start this review without the standard clichés and cheap, ubiquitous adjectives. This was "an

"inspiring true story" and "an amazing narrative" about the "astonishing life" of Father Gereon Goldman, a Franciscan priest, who was forced to serve in the German army during WWII. *The Shadow of His Wings* is full of "miraculous episodes." This book is "a truly stirring account" of Father Goldman's experiences with "Nazi oppression" and "the horrors of war." See what I mean? But the thing is, in this case, the standard clichés and overused adjectives are all true. Father Goldman's autobiography really is inspiring, amazing, astonishing, and stirring—if any true narrative ever was those things, this one is. I want to do this book justice in my review by not relying on the usual tired descriptions, but maybe I'd be doing an *injustice* by eliminating words like inspiring et al. if they really are the best words to describe the story. Maybe this book puts meaning back into those words, rescuing them from the junkyard of triteness and mediocrity. Regardless of your own faith or religious tradition (I'm a former evangelical Protestant turned Roman Catholic with an agnostic bent), you should be able to find in Father Goldman's story of living through—and overcoming—the hardship and depravation of WWII something inspirational, something stirring, something that simply amazes you, and most importantly something to make you think about faith and the role it plays in our lives.

The Shadow of His Wings offers the reader several important themes that each deserves consideration. I'll try to give each theme its due. But first a synopsis to put the discussion in perspective:

Father Goldman was born Karl Goldman, Jr. in rural Germany in 1916. (The origin of the name "Gereon" is not explained.) His father was a veteran of WWI and was at the western front when Karl was born. I forget how many brothers and sisters he had, but it was a lot. His mother died when he was about 10 and then his father remarried and had more kids. Young Karl was always the biggest and strongest as he had his father's tall, muscular frame. But Karl didn't use his frame to bully people. Oh, he got in plenty of fights, but it was always defending his siblings from bullies or defending other school kids who were too small or weak to defend themselves. He was brought up with a strong sense of justice and helping those who were less fortunate.

Goldman was an alter server at a young age and professed an early desire to join the priesthood. He also became enamored with the Franciscan order and its creed of helping those in need. A nun that he met when he was young told him that she would pray every day for 20 years that he would be ordained a Franciscan priest. Against all odds, in the middle of the war, it would happen.

As a young man Goldman joined the seminary and studied philosophy, getting ready for his religious/theological instruction. While a seminarian he and his fellow students were drafted into the German army. As educated, principled men they were recruited to the SS and put to work in noncombatant occupations: medics and radio operators and such. That doesn't mean they would avoid combat—quite the contrary, but they were given jobs that didn't require them to pick up guns and kill people. Father Goldman managed to go through the war without ever firing a weapon in anger; he never killed anyone, though he did occasionally threaten people with his gun in specific desperate circumstances. The seminarians were constantly ridiculed and rebuked for their religion. They were part of the invasion of Poland, then into France, then later to Russia. Goldman himself was spared the Russian campaign because of a serious illness that left him incapacitated—that would save his life, as all of his fellows were killed in the Stalingrad campaign.

I won't tell you the rest of the story but rather I urge you to read it for yourself. You'll find out how Father Goldman survived the war and subsequent confinement in prisoner-of-war camps, how he became ordained a priest, how he ministered to his fellow soldiers and prisoners, and the desperate situations that tested his physical will and faith over and over. Goldman's story is better than any piece of fiction, full of suspense, conflict, surprises, and a great ending. Now to themes that I got from the book ...

The power of prayer:

The power of prayer is one of the more important themes in this book. Father Goldman clearly believes that the faithful persevering prayer of nuns and priests resulted directly in divine intervention that saved him from death more than once. I admit the circumstances surrounding his various close calls are indeed compelling and would be incredible coincidences. It certainly is hard to deny that, at least in appearance, it looks like other peoples' prayer played a huge role in guiding Goldman's life. I should note here that I have no reason to believe anything Goldman relates is not true; the book's editor insists that he has verified everything with eyewitnesses and contemporary documents, so I'm assuming all the important details are true.

So how should I react to this? I don't know. I'm struggling with it. For every example Goldman cites of prayer working in his life, there are plenty of examples of prayer leading to nothing. I've seen fervent, faithful, and perseverant prayer *not* lead to any perceivable results in my own life and in the lives of friends and family. But I've witnessed other instances of prayer working, or at least, *looking like* it was working. And Goldman's stories are, like I said, pretty compelling. So I'm still thinking about it.

As I've noted in previous reviews, my own faith has undergone a huge evolution over the last two or three years. *The Shadow of His Wings* is just the latest in a series of books that I've read in order to help me better understand the evolution my faith is undergoing, as well as to help me think about faith generally, and try to work out what it is that I really believe. I was once so sure of what I believed, but now I'm in some ways an agnostic, and even where I think I know what I believe I'm constantly questioning, challenging, revising when necessary. I'm just not at a place where I can be sure of things like I used to be. I don't think I'll ever be that sure of faith again, but I do hope to work out a "truth" that resonates with me and that I can settle into. There will be elements of protestant Christianity, elements of Roman Catholicism, and plenty of healthy agnosticism thrown in, but I will get there, eventually, and the story of Father Goldman I think is helping me on that journey.

Faith in times of suffering:

Even now, with all my doubt and constant critical evaluation of what I believe, I can't doubt the important role that a strong faith can play when you're undergoing suffering. And I don't mean the "suffering" that most of us endure in the U.S.—worrying about money, maybe an illness here or there, and whether our kids are learning anything in school—I mean real *suffering* under literally inhuman conditions. Suffering in the midst of war and concentration camps ... seeing your friends die all around you and facing death yourself every day ... that kind of suffering. Father Goldman's faith clearly carried him through those times in his lives, and as a priest ministering to other prisoners of war under awful, inhuman conditions he was able to bring out the faith in others that would carry them through those trying times as well.

Suffering as redemption:

Father Goldman offered up his suffering for a redemptive purpose, and he clearly believes that he benefited from others offering up their suffering for his benefit. This is a very Catholic thing, not really found in Protestant circles, the idea that you can offer up your suffering as penance for somebody else so that person can experience God's blessings.

I recently encountered the idea of redemptive suffering in *God's Problem* by Bart Ehrman. Ehrman shreds the idea of redemptive suffering from a logical perspective. But a few weeks ago I was having dinner with some friends—the most "Catholic" Catholics I know—and they describe the idea in more human, personal terms, and made it seem more plausible. Something else I need to keep thinking about as I search for truth

that I can believe.

Humanity in the midst of inhuman war:

As a medic in the German army, Goldman was able to offer comfort to soldiers who were suffering and dying all around him. And he witnessed acts of incredible kindness and self-sacrifice in the middle of the most inhuman circumstances. War brings out both the best and the worst of humanity.

Not all Germans were "bad guys":

When history is written by the victors, it's easy to forget that Germany wasn't a nation full of animals. Like any other nation, German contained examples of the best and worst that humanity has to offer, it's just that people who fell more toward the "worst" side of the spectrum were able to gain control of a desperate, hungry populace struggling to recover from WWI. The massive German army was built primarily on the backs of draftees; they drafted nearly every eligible man between the ages of 18 and 35 very early in the war, and then the jaws of war chewed up those men. A whole generation of German soldiers—their best-equipped and best-trained troops—most of whom were just well meaning young men who were drafted and tried to make the best of their situations—died in the invasion of Russia. Father Goldman escaped service on the Russian front and was put to work in the Italian front.

A few months into the German retreat through Sicily and then Italy, he was Sergeant-Major Goldman, an army medic and seasoned non-com, and he often the most experienced man on the battlefield despite his refusal to fire a weapon at another human being. Goldman's unit, having been devastated, slaughtered even, in the withdrawal and escape from Sicily, was supplemented with new draftees who were all very young (under 18) or very old (over 45). The new draftees, the young and old, were all that Germany had left to throw into the hungry jaws of war, and they were thrown in without adequate training and with very little support in terms of officers or equipment.

Those German soldiers were not all "bad people." Sure, some of them were Nazi sympathizers with ideas of moral and racial superiority. But most weren't. They didn't choose to be born in Germany. Indeed they probably did not want to conquer all of Europe, but they couldn't speak out without fear of Nazi reprisals against them and their families. They were drafted and sent straight to the front, with the bare minimum of training, and were told "fight or be executed." What would you do in those circumstances? Really ask yourself that question. If you were drafted to fight in a war that America started but that you didn't support, and you had no place like Canada to which you could flee, and America was losing and now threatened itself, and you were told to "fight or we'll execute you and imprison your family" ... what would you do? Would you really have the courage to refuse to fight in the unjust war? I wouldn't have that courage, and I bet you wouldn't, either.

The Germans were destined to lose WWII:

So if you've studied WWII at all, you know about Germany losing many of its best-trained "fighting-age" men in the Russian front, North Africa, and elsewhere, and the subsequent need to draft the young and old to send into the battlefields. This leads to something else that Goldman realized when he was fighting in Italy: by late 1942, certainly by early 1943, Germany simply could not win the war; Germany simply could not compete with Allied industrial might and manpower.

I recently completed Connie Willis's newest time-travel adventures: *Blackout* and *All Clear*. She likes to hammer points home with repetition—lots of repetition, btw—and one of them was that the outcome of

WWII was balanced on the "knife's edge" of history. Willis believes that WWII could have tipped either way at many critical points, and that the world was in real danger of Nazi/Imperial Japanese rule.

I'm not so sure that's true, at least not once the war was a couple of years old. Early on, it seems to me the Germans made a huge error by bombing London rather than smashing the RAF with superior German numbers. They then could have invaded Britain with air superiority and possibly conquered the British Isles. That was a very plausible outcome in 1940 and 1941, and obviously it would have set the Allied cause back tremendously, but it only would have lengthened the war. For one thing, the Germans were still bound to take massive losses on the Eastern Front; the invasion of Russia was doomed from the start. Also, the Germans would have taken significant losses in an invasion of the British Isles, and would have needed a huge occupation army to prevent armed uprisings from the British people. Keep in mind that Germany had a much more difficult time replacing losses—both human and materiel losses—than the Allies did. So every soldier lost in an invasion of Britain was a soldier that couldn't be replaced, couldn't fight in Russia, couldn't defend Germany from the Russians, and couldn't defend North Africa or Italy from the Americans.

The Americans, compared with Germany (and Japan, btw) had a near-unlimited supply of manpower and equipment. The United States was simply too big and too industrialized. And once Germany decided not to invade Britain, thereby leaving Britain as a staging ground for invasion of the Continent, they were doomed. Stuck between the Russians in the east and the British/American forces in the west, the Germans simply had no chance. The Germans put up a brave and effective fight given their lack of manpower and resources, thereby lengthening the war, but lengthening the war was all they ever could do. The *outcome* of the war, once Germany decided not to invade Britain, simply was not in doubt.

I certainly don't mean to say that winning WWII was easy, not by any means. Indeed the Allies were always going to win precisely because they were willing to work hard, endure hardship, and make the sacrifices necessary to defeat Germany and Japan. And I know that it's only with the hindsight of history that we can say with any confidence that the Allies were destined to win. At the time, the contemporaries had plenty of reasons for doubt and despair as they didn't have access to the whole picture like we do today. But Father Goldman, I think, realized that Germany was doomed to lose as early as the summer of 1943, when he was sneaking through the mountains of Italy and observing thousands upon thousands of Allied troops landing and marching northward, witnessing row upon row of Allied tanks and artillery lined up on the plains and beaches. Goldman commented at one point that he thought the German Army in Italy was outnumbered ten-to-one in manpower and a hundred-to-one in materiel. While in reality the situation might not have been *that* lopsided, it was still pretty lopsided. Many German units, their well trained paratroopers in particular, put up a hell of a fight, but all they did was slow the inevitable advance of the Allied juggernaut reaching up the Italian boot.

Conclusion

So what does one say about *The Shadow of His Wings*? Again, this book really is *inspiring* and *moving* in the true sense of those words, clichés notwithstanding. Father Goldman is a remarkable man who has done a tremendous amount of good in the world under the most difficult of circumstances, and you don't have to be a Roman Catholic, or even a Christian more generally, to think so. He is an example of the best that humanity has to offer, and someone we all should strive to emulate, if not in faith than at least in acts of kindness and self-sacrifice. We can all cling to our own faiths and find our own meaning from the spiritual realm, but I don't think anyone could deny that the world would be a much better place—for people of all faiths and cultures—if more of us lived out a life of love like Father Goldman.

Federico De Obeso says

Durante muchos años tuve en la mira leer este libro.

Por fin he podido leerlo y ha superado mis expectativas, ya que además de disfrutar la visión que narra en primera persona el Fr. Gereon Goldman sobre su participación en la Alemania Nazi y la segunda Guerra Mundial, este relato me recordó cómo cosas que parecen imposibles, pueden salir adelante cuando se unen la confianza en Dios y la mano del hombre.

Este libro relata a detalle cómo la oración, la Fe y la acción fueron las tres herramientas del Fr. Goldman a lo largo de su vida.

Si no lo has leído, ¡corre por tu copia y no termines el año si leerlo!.

Michael says

I was hesitant to read this book, for I thought perhaps this was some sort of apologist approach to bad decisions ("see, I didn't *mean* to join the SS!"). However, it was nothing of the sort. Rather it shows heroism in a bad situation. It causes you to ask what is more heroic running away or fighting evil from the inside? And even more so, how many of us could persevere following the latter course?

Joan Gilmartin says

I found it so incredible that I doubted at first that it could possibly be true. I am now convnced it certainly is. A wonderful book inspiring others to have the faith and fortitude which can in any circumstances, adverse as those of the protagonist were, bring happiness and the kind of satisfaction so many people would like to have.

Steven says

Inspiring biography of a priest-in-training pulled into service during WWII by the Nazis. The miraculous was everywhere as he weaved his way through the war as a Sercret Servie agent. Tremendously devoted to God and humanity, but not without his prickly side, Goldmann provides an uncommonly solid example for everyone seeking a higher path through the world. It is tedious in places and does not measure up to the spiritual classics, but it does provide a unique angle on a historical moment of terror.

Note: Received as a confirmation gift from Hank DeGoede.

PJ Manning says

A stirring account of the life of Fr. Gereon Goldmann, a German Catholic SS soldier who works through incredible circumstances to serve out his calling.

Irish Gal says

Awesome! Well-written, story flows well. Reading how his faith, others' prayers, etc. - overall Divine Providence - saved his life and changed others again and again. I've passed it on to my mom, then I'm loaning it to our pastor.

Dumpling says

I'm a sucker for triumph of the human spirit stories, even more so when they are based on a real person's life. This is one such book. Fr. Goldmann was a Franciscan seminarian who was drafted into the SS military (Hitler's army) at the start of WWII. Even while serving in an evil regime, by God's grace, he managed to minister to those around him of the mercy and forgiveness of Christ. Against all odds, Father made it out of the war alive and was immediately ordained to the priesthood. The heroic adventures of Fr. Goldmann detailed in this book are nothing short of miraculous.
