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professor, Howard Burkle, teaching courses on philosophy and religion and the Christian tradition, Dennis Haas teaching the Hebrew Bible, Christian scriptures, and other biblical studies, and Professor Kasimow was charged with teaching everything else.

Henry Rietz:

In addition to classes on the Jewish tradition, he developed an introductory course on major Asian religions and taught upper-level courses on the Tradition of Islam, Tradition of Buddhism, Modern Hindu Thought, the Holocaust, and also co-taught with Sandy Moffett in the theater department, the Human Image in Modern Drama, among other courses.

Henry Rietz:

When I was an undergraduate at Grinnell, I was a student of Professor Kasimow. I took the Jewish Tradition, Traditions of Islam, the Buddhist Tradition. He was also my academic advisor who, when I was aspiring to graduate school and engaging in interreligious dialogue myself, wisely counseled me that I need to learn more about my own tradition first. Although we spent a unit in his Jewish traditions class on the Holocaust reading works by Rubenstein, Fackenheim, Wiesel, and Wiesenthal, Professor Kasimow did not talk about his experience of surviving the Holocaust.

Henry Rietz:

As I, and I know many, many other alums will testify, when one takes a class with Professor Kasimow we engage in rigorous academic learning, but we're learning from a truly authentic human being who inspires us not only to love one's neighbor, but also to love the stranger. So it's with gratitude that I introduce to you Professor Harold Kasimow and invite you to, today, be his student.

Harold Kasimow:

Thank you all for coming. I'm especially grateful to Henry Rietz for organizing this event. I'd also like to thank Cheryl Fleener and Rabbi Susan Miller for the work that they did to promote my talk. Now, I know that there are people here who have read the newspaper last week and, also, there's some people I know who read Defying Darkness in the Grinnell Magazine, which was the first time that my story was written by Jackie Stolze.





known book of the 57 books that he wrote about his experience in Auschwitz and Buchenwald. it was published in 1960. When he first submitted it, he was told, "Your book is morbid. Nobody wants to hear your stories." So he had problems getting it published.

Harold Kasimow:

But then in 1960, Hill & Wang gave him a \$100 advance. In three years, it sold only 3,000 copies, but by 2006, it had sold a million and was translated in at least 30 languages. As a way to introduce the topic, I want to read a passage from the book which describes his reaction upon arriving in Auschwitz. I think he was about 15 years old at the time, that camp near Krakow, which is a major symbol of the Holocaust, where more than one million people, mostly Jews, but many others, were gassed, burned, and turned to ash.

Harold Kasimow:

Here's what Elie Wiesel wrote in Night. "I should never forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little faces of the children whose bodies I saw turn to wisps of smoke beneath the silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that eternal silence which deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself, never."

Harold Kasimow:

Wiesel said that he had to write about the Holocaust experience, "not to



Heinrich Heine's statement, "When people begin to burn books, burning people may soon follow."

Harold Kasimow:

My parents never really spoke about our experience to me and my two older sisters. We were there with them, but they knew that there are many, many questions that I have now that I've never asked them. They would only discuss it with other Holocaust survivors. The first person to whom I told my story was actually Professor Emil Fackenheim, who was arrested by the Nazis on November the 9th, known as Kristallnacht, Night of Broken Glass, and was sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

Harold Kasimow:

Fackenheim came to Grinnell in 1972. It was my first year. It was the Gates Lecture. He spoke on the commanding voice of Auschwitz. In his talk at Grinnell, Fackenheim stressed that the voice of Auschwitz commands that, "Jews are forbidden to give up on Judaism because that would give Hitler posthumous victory." I'm not going to quote him at length. He was the first person I sat down, South Lounge maybe or at the coffee house there and I told him my story.

Harold Kasimow:

He said in his talk that, "We're commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest the memory perish. Forbidden to despair of men in the world and to escaping in their cynicism and other worldliness, lest we cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz." Finally, "We're forbidden to despair of God," and so on. He said, "In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to it by doing his work."

Harold Kasimow:

I can't go into detail on my own problems with Fackenheim, but that's another talk. Fackenheim and Wiesel are the two best-known writers on the Holocaust who are known as Holocaust theologians because of their stress on the Holocaust as a unique event. Both Fackenheim and Wiesel viewed the Holocaust as something radically new and without precedent in the history of Judaism.

Harold Kasimow:





Berkowitz, and many others who were writing at the time. I began to see



document of the five families, so I have the names of those five families with the children's names and so forth who were left to work for the German army. Okay. For the next summer or so, we escaped. So then maybe one night when my father escaped, he took one other family with him. I think it was a man, woman, and a child, a girl. I think that the woman and the child survived. I don't think the man survived.

Harold Kasimow:

and give him a little bit of extra food. I mean mostly we just had ... Yes, the farmer who hid us was very poor, but we had potato peels and things like that, potato cellar. If my mother had a piece of bread, I kisse82 O Td Td Td Td Td T553l

crossing the border at night. On our way to a32012.2 (40656o3)1 61 (r)t0656o3OrOdeC

Harold Kasimow:







young. Start working on this great work of art called your own existence."  
Thank you very much. Thank you.

some of Fackenheim, Wiesel, and then ... But since that time, I've given a few. I don't know.

Harold Kasimow:



another story. Some can't even do that. But it reminds me of another story from Yaffa Eliach, who met this survivor.

Harold Kasimow:

This is a true story. He was a rabbi. He was a very prominent rabbi in Germany, and he used to take a walk every Saturday afternoon with his son-in-law. He had a habit of saying hello by name to everybody that he encountered and their title and so on. As he walked out of town, he always met this farmer, Herr Mueller. He always say, "Guten Morgen, Herr Mueller." Herr Mueller would always good-naturedly answer him, "Guten Morgen, Herr Rabbiner."

Harold Kasimow:

This went on for a while. Then the war started. Mr. Mueller donned a Nazi uniform, and the rabbi ended up in Auschwitz. He was standing in a lineup and he was hearing a voice going by, "Right, left, left, left." Right was to work yourself to death1 (r)1 (om)-2 (i)1 (nent )2. H (i)1r2 (l)3s (t)2 (o )4 (d)1g(o)]TJ4o

Harold Kasimow:

He wrote a book called *The Destruction of the Jews in Vilna and Surrounding Area*, and he took a testament from my parents, which is actually my sister's book. I never had the book. One of my sisters had that translated. But my youngest daughter made a point of getting that book. I know it's now being translated into English. But basically, we don't really talk about it. I know some families that ... But that would not be me. The Holocaust survivors, especially in the early years, there was very little ...

Harold Kasimow:

My mother's first cousin was Shmerke Kaczerginski. I mean, here, he wrote this book in '48 maybe. It's mostly Yiddish or Russian. In America, there was almost nothing until the '60s. People didn't really speak about that until the Eichmann trial. Elie Wiesel began to write. Fackenheim began to write. *The Deputy*, the play in New York came out, which I happened to see because I was in New York in the '60s. And then more and more materials came out.

Harold Kasimow:

But in general, there wasn't that. It was people, Holocaust survivors. Now there's just hundreds of diaries, but mostly they didn't start talking about it until they turned 80.

Speaker 9:

Are you Jewish? I had a wonderful German Jew from Munich, a professor for my first class in German. I dearly loved him.

Harold Kasimow:

I'm sorry. I didn't get that clear.

Henry Rietz:

They're asking your faith, if you're Jewish.

Harold Kasimow:

Yeah. Is there any question about that? There's a very interesting phenomenon going on in Poland. Now I've made many trips to Poland. The guesstimated number of Jews in Poland is about 5,000, but people think that there are actually about 20,000 Jews. Let me just tell you two quick stories. One is [inaudible 01:06:12]. My interpreter when I was traveling to

Lublin actually to speak about the Pope John Paul II, but anyway, my interpreter was a former nun.

Harold Kasimow:

I don't know at what age and I don't remember at what age she found out that her father, who was still alive, was actually Jewish. He'd just never told them. But there are a lot of people in Poland who didn't want their children to know that they had at least one Jewish parent. She wasn't a nun at that point, but she had been a non for many, many years. She was my interpreter.

Harold Kasimow:

The more fascinating story in Lublin, I met a priest who actually he was born in '43 just a few miles from where I was born in the Vilnius area. It was about north. We were about 100 miles or kilometers from north of Vilnius where we were born. So his parents gave him, when he was born, somehow they were still alive in '43 and they gave him to their friends who were Polish. The parents did not survive. His parents never told him that both his parents were Jewish.

Harold Kasimow:

But he had some suspicions. Occasionally, some kids would say to him, "You look different." His father said, "Don't listen to those kids." When he was about 18, he told his father that he wanted to be a priest. His father said, "You? The life of party, you want to be ..." He didn't want him to be a priest. And then his father died and he still didn't know his real parents. But before his mother died, she finally told him. So by the time I met him, he already knew his ... He had met his Jewish family that survived and so on.

Harold Kasimow:

He's still a Catholic priest. He's teaching at the Lublin University. I think he moved to Israel now, actually, because he's retirement age. It just happened I know a lot of these stories because when I was in Japan and the chief rabbi in Japan, by the time I went to Poland, this was 20 years later. This was 2004. Now he was chief rabbi of Poland. So we had many discussions.

Henry Rietz:

One more?

Harold Kasimow:

Okay.

Henry Rietz:

This will be the last.

Speaker 10:

I need to repeat my question. Professor, apparently you met some famous religious leaders as part of your research. Are there any that stood out to you or that you got any particular insight from that you could tell us about?

Harold Kasimow:

Yeah. I'm afraid many of them are not with us anymore because, remember, they were my professors. So when I was 19, they were at least 30 or so. Abraham Joshua Heschel, so now you can see the films about him and many books being written all the time, was my major influence, I would say. Temple University, the founder of the department, Bernard Phillips was very influential. He was a member. He really believed that if you want to know religion, -1 (n)-1 (.)15 you r re(rd P)-t

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Harold Kasimow:

My friend, Wayne Teasdale, who is a Catholic monk, but also sort of in the Hindu tradition in a way. So many of my people that I've encountered belong to more than one tradition, sometimes two, but sometimes even three, if they affiliate with three traditions. I think maybe many people know the name, Huston Smith, because he had a connection. I mean his book sold in the millions, *The Religions of Man*, it was originally called. Maybe some of you took a course in religion were probably exposed to that book. I guess he was a committed Christian, but he practiced Muslim practices.

Harold Kasimow:

The book that I edited with one of my closest friends and his wife, John Keenan, Linda Keenan went to Grinnell. Both of them outstanding Buddhist scholars, the book, *Beside S c he i1 (i)ew(e)-1 (te )2ered Bud4 (l (d a1 (hw e3)1*