

ASAM HIGH AWARD FOR STUDIES OF CRIMES AGAINST HUMANITY

Crimes against humanity' is an arduous subject, the examination of which requires utmost talent and courage. Whoever analyzes the complex factors underlying this extreme destructiveness of human nature must be careful and loyal to the truth. This process presents the historian with a solemn responsibility. Thus, those courageous scholars and their valuable studies should be supported in order to encourage further research. Within this context, The Eurasian Strategic Research Center, ASAM, presented the 'High Award for Studies of Crimes against Humanity', for the first time, to Prof. Dr. Guenter Lewy for his esteemed studies on this subject.

Prof. Lewy is a reputable historian and academician, regarded as an expert on crimes against humanity and genocide studies. His major works on this subject are "Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies", "Catholic Church and Nazi Germany" and "The Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide".

In the ceremony, The President of Avrasya-Bir Foundation, Şaban Gülbahar, delivered an opening speech, emphasizing the main issues covered by Prof. Lewy. Following that, Prof. Lewy was presented with the award by İsmet Sezgin. In his speech, Prof. Lewy focused on the concepts of crimes against humanity and genocide, as well as stressing the difficulties that the academic community witnessed in examining these issues.

The President of Turkish History Association, Prof. Yusuf Halaçoğlu, Former Secretary of the National Security Council, General Tuncer Kılıç, and Prof. Norman Stone from Koç University were among the participants of the ceremony.

Below, the speeches of Şaban Gülbahar and Prof. Guenter Lewy are presented.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY ŞABAN GÜLBAHAR

Dear distinguished guests,

I want to begin my speech with a famous proverb of Atatürk:

“Writing history is as important as making history. If the writer is not loyal to the maker, the unchanging truth will take a form that surprises the humanity.”

Historiography is a significant process of writing history that requires courage and responsibility. Entering into the darkest corners of history of mankind and revealing the truth is a challenging course that only the talented and courageous writers could dare. History means power whereas it is historiography that determines how and to what extent this power could be utilized. Here, the responsibility belongs to the historian. The power is in his hands and he would decide how to use it. However, it should not be forgotten that history likens a locked box which hides a very valuable treasure; it does not reveal its secrets to everyone. The only key that could unlock this box is responsibility. Only those who show the competency to be loyal to the past could walk into the dark and dusty corridors of history and to grasp its secrets.

Prof. Guenter Lewy is one of the exceptional scholars that could act in accordance with this sense of responsibility. Therefore, he has been esteemed by the world and his works are read with high interest.

Prof. Guenter Lewy was born in Germany in 1923. While he was ten years old, Nazi regime came to power and a period of suppression and violence began to shake Germany. As a result of these pressures, Prof. Lewy migrated first to Palestine and then to the United States just before the eruption of World War II in 1939. However, some of his relatives became victims of the Holocaust, committed by the Nazi Regime.

He had started his academic career in City College of New York and took his MSc and PhD degrees from the University of Columbia. His scholarship was started in the same university in 1953 and has continued in the University of Massachusetts at Amherst since 1964.

The sorrowful experiences that Prof. Lewy witnessed during his childhood and adolescence are quite significant since they determined the landmark of his academic career. The main characteristics of his works are the deep evaluation of the issue at hand and his broad philosophical perspective.

The basic problem that Prof. Lewy examines is how human beings could establish an ideology based on hate and animosity, and whether religion or ethics has a role in this process. Because of this, the concept of genocide, which can be

accepted as the peak of human destructiveness, turns out to be an often referred topic in his works. According to Lewy, under the establishment of an ideology based on animosity lies 'estrangement'. Estrangement of some groups by a dominant group in order to define its own identity has been seen in many societies and it can even be experienced today. However, this policy was brought to the extremes by Germany under Nazi administration and the estranged group was systematically exterminated after a process of anti-Semitism which had started even one thousand years ago. While examining the reasons and consequences of this process, Prof. Lewy analyses how abstractions like religion and ethics were either insufficient to prevent the construction of these destructive ideologies or used by the dominant group to legitimize these ideologies.

With this broad as well as deep point of view, Prof Lewy writes in different subjects. Particularly his works on the crimes against humanity are very significant because they demonstrate how an extremely complicated subject is examined with mastery. Prof. Lewy diagnosed the symptoms of crimes against humanity, which could be labeled as the most lethal disease of the history of mankind, with the sensitivity of a talented doctor.

In one of his major works on the crimes against humanity, "The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies", Prof. Lewy shows the oppression of Gypsies by the Nazi regime. Although having no comparable economic or intellectual power with the Jews, Gypsies turned out to be a hated minority, and Prof. Lewy tried to examine how and why they did so. He wrote so carefully that Publisher's Weekly Journal wrote that although Lewy's ideas were debatable, he defended his thesis carefully. In the Library Journal, this work was qualified as the basic study on the persecution of the Gypsies.

In "Catholic Church and Nazi Germany", which created a significant interest both in Europe and the United States, Prof. Lewy examines the role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust. Within this context he tries to show how the main representative of Christianity, which defines itself as the religion of peace and which is at least rhetorically so, supported the process of estrangement. In the book there are conspicuous references to the speeches of the German Catholic clergy on the Jews supporting the 'Arian race' ideology of the Nazis. A reputable journalist, who witnessed the destructiveness of World War II, William L. Shirer writes that the subject of the book was analyzed with openness and great courage.

The last book of Guenter Lewy is entitled “Armenian Massacres in Ottoman Turkey: A Disputed Genocide”. This book represents an intellectual uprising to the politization of the concept of ‘genocide’.

As I mentioned before, the issue of crimes against humanity requires courage and carefulness. Thus, the exceptional qualified works on this issue should be encouraged and supported. We are gathered here, tonight, to present Prof. Guenter Lewy the ASAM. I hope that he will accept this modest award.

Thank you.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY GUENTER LEWY

I am greatly honored by the award you have bestowed on me. Much of the time, scholars must consider themselves happy when their books are noticed and reviewed by their fellow specialists. It is gratifying to be able to reach a larger public, notably halfway across the world. Globalization, it is clear, is no longer just an economic phenomenon, but it includes the unity of humanistic studies across national and religious boundaries.

I would like to say a few words on how the books recognized by your award came to be written. I left my native Germany in 1939 as a young boy of 15, just in time to escape being a statistic in Hitler’s Final Solution of the Jewish Question. Growing up Jewish during the days of Nazi tyranny probably accounts for my life-long interest in problems of persecution and genocide. I also have always been attracted to historical situations that appeared simple and unambiguous on the surface but where I suspected a more complicated reality. In several cases this has led me to unexpected conclusions.

I had done my Ph.D. dissertation on the sixteenth century Spanish Jesuit Juan de Mariana, a defender of the right of resistance to tyranny and an advocate of tyrannicide in certain extreme situations. Nazi totalitarianism appeared to me to be eminently qualified as a case of extreme repression, and I therefore decided to look into the way the Catholic Church had reacted to this regime. In a letter to the Bavarian bishops written in 1945, Pope Pius XII paid tribute to the millions of ordinary Catholics who, he said, had fought against the demonic powers that ruled Germany. Yet after studying the actual events I learned that during the days of the Nazi regime the Church not only discouraged but actively condemned resistance to Nazi tyranny. The few Catholics who actively fought against the

regime were rebels not only against the state but against their ecclesiastical authorities as well. The church shared the widely prevailing sense of nationalism and was affected by the same excessive respect for authority that did so much to hinder the resistance to Hitler. The church's carefully circumscribed opposition to the regime was rooted in concern for her institutional interests — protecting the church's schools, newspapers, and her pastoral mission — rather than in a belief in freedom and justice for all men.

Some years ago I decided to undertake a comparative study of genocide. One of the main reasons why I abandoned this project is that each historical episode I looked at turned out be inadequately analyzed and understood by the existing literature and I was forced to do my own original spade work in the archives. That takes time, and time, especially for people of my age, is a commodity in limited supply. For example, the prevailing view of the treatment of the Gypsies by the Nazi regime was that this unfortunate minority was treated like the Jews - they were murdered because they existed as a racially defined group and not for their actions and beliefs. I soon discovered that this position was wrong. Since the Gypsies hailed from India and therefore were seen as originally "Aryan," Himmler exempted so-called "pure Gypsies" from deportation and the criterion of social adjustment played an important role in the selection process. Unlike the Jews, Gypsies were not selected for destruction because they existed.

That the unfortunate fate of the Ottoman Armenians during World War I is another case of mischaracterization and misunderstanding is a finding that will not surprise this audience. Yet probably not fully known and accepted by all is my conclusion that both sides in this long-standing controversy have simplified and distorted a complex historical reality. Both sides at times have used heavy-handed tactics to advance their cause and silence a full debate of the issues. Historians in both camps have resorted to questionable tactics of persuasion that includes willful mistranslations, citing important documents out of context, or simply ignoring the historical setting altogether.

During the last few years one can detect signs of a change in this situation. Turkish historical scholarship has shows signs of a post-nationalist phase, while some scholars on the Armenian side, too, now engage in research free of propagandistic rhetoric. It is to be hoped that soon it will become possible to discuss the tragic events of 1915/16 in the same non-partisan manner that is taken for granted in regard to most other historical topics.

American intellectual life, too, has not always been free of coercive pressures to conform. We experienced the politicization of academic life during the Vietnam War, and, more recently, the demand for political correctness. The difficulties I had in finding a publisher for my book on the Armenians are a case in point. Scholarship to be true scholarship must be open-ended and free of outside pressure. What is historically true is determined by the informed consensus of historians and not by the vote of legislatures or any other state agency. But unless scholars can find a hearing for their work their dedication to the canons of free inquiry is of no avail. The spirit embodied in your award will help safeguard this vital principle. Thank you ever so much.