

WELCOMING THE STRANGER: THE SHELTERING OF JEWISH REFUGEES AT LE CHAMBON-SUR-LIGNON

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Abstract

The small French Protestant village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and its neighbouring communities on the Vivarais-Lignon plateau sheltered between 2,000 and 3,500 Jewish refugees and potentially another 1,500 non-Jewish refugees during the Second World War. This paper argues that this occurred because of a social imaginary shaped by a strong Reformed Protestant identity and commitment to its values. This social imaginary came from centuries as a persecuted minority, a deep attachment to the Bible, a close affinity with the Jewish people, and a long tradition of hospitality. The inhabitants were catalysed into sheltering Jewish refugees by pastors aware of the dangers of the growing totalitarianism in Europe and with a commitment to mobilising their parishioners. The pastors used the “weapons of the Spirit” in a non-violent manner—although this commitment to non-violence was only partially shared by their parishioners. While there were many contributing factors at play—including social, economic, and geographic—religious factors were primary in the social imaginary that informed the community’s response in welcoming refugees.

Keywords

Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, Protestant, Holocaust, rescuers, hospitality

Introduction

“The bells don’t belong to the Marshall, but to God.”¹

(Amélie, concierge of the Le Chambon-sur-Lignon Reformed Church, when told of Marshall Pétain’s order that all church bells be rung on August 1, 1941)

The small French Protestant village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and its neighbouring communities on the Vivarais-Lignon plateau sheltered between 2,000 and 3,500 Jewish refugees and potentially another 1,500 non-Jewish refugees during the

1 André Trocmé, *Mémoires*, ed. Patrick Cabanel (Labor et fides, 2020), 370 (author’s translation).

Second World War.² In 1990, Yad Vashem, Israel's official memorial to the Shoah, recognised Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the Vivarais-Lignon plateau as "Righteous Among the Nations" for the work there to shelter Jewish refugees.³ In addition, forty-seven people from Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and twenty-four from the rest of the plateau have been individually named as "Righteous Among the Nations."⁴ Why did this village (and the wider plateau) shelter so many Jewish refugees when across Europe as Patrick Henry says, "99.5% of baptised Christians did nothing to help the Jews"?⁵ The thesis of this paper is that the Le Chambon-sur-Lignon response flowed from a strong Reformed Protestant identity that had been shaped by centuries of persecution as a minority. This will be demonstrated by constructing a social imaginary showing how the inhabitants saw themselves, others, and the wider world, and how this led to them sheltering Jewish refugees.

This paper focuses its analysis on the events associated with the Reformed Church at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and its two pastors, especially the lead pastor, André Trocmé, from 1940 to 1944, seeking to understand why this small community gave shelter to so many refugees. This church comprised the largest part of the population of the village,⁶ its history is reasonably well documented, and we have access to the thoughts of André Trocmé and his wife Magda Trocmé through memoirs and other publications.⁷ While there were also at least three large *Darbyste*⁸ communities in and around Le Chambon-sur-Lignon⁹ (and smaller Salvation Army and Quaker

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- 2 For the estimate of 3,500 see Patrick Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 2nd ed. (Dunod, 2024), 229. For the lower estimate of 2,000, see Muriel Rosenberg, *Mais combien étaient-ils ? Les réfugiés juifs au Chambon-sur-Lignon et sur le Plateau de 1939 à 1945* (Éditions Dolmazon, 2021), <https://www.fondationshoah.org/memoire/mais-combien-etaient-ils-muriel-rosenberg>.
 - 3 See Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 49. As of January 1, 2024, there were 28,707 people declared "Righteous Among the Nations," of whom 4,303 had been in France. "Names of Righteous by Country" (Yad Vashem, n.d.), <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html>.
 - 4 Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 229.
 - 5 Patrick Henry, *La montagne des Justes: Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, 1940–1944*, trans. Hélène Trocmé-Fabre (Privat, 2010), 172. The percentage is clearly rhetorical as opposed to deeply researched.
 - 6 The most comprehensive statistics are still those found in François Boulet, "Quelques Éléments Statistiques," in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 286–98. In 1936, the whole of the Vivarais-Lignon plateau had a population of 24,058, of whom 9,158 were Protestant. Le Chambon-sur-Lignon had a population of 2,721 of whom 2,500 were Protestant. Of these approximately 1,400 were Reformed Church and 1,000 were Brethren across multiple groups.
 - 7 Trocmé, *Mémoires*; Magda Trocmé, *Souvenirs d'une vie d'engagements: Mémoires de Magda Trocmé*, ed. Frédéric Rognon et al. (Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2021).
 - 8 The term *Darbyste* comes from the name of John Nelson Darby and refers to Brethren groups that had been established on the plateau from the 1850s. See Roy Coad, *A History of the Brethren Movement* (Paternoster Press, 1968), 85–90.
 - 9 Daniel Besson, "Les Assemblées des Frères, darbystes et Ravinistes, et l'accueil des Juifs," in *Le plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et résistance 1939–1944; actes du colloque du Chambon-sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 86–89.

groups), these are less well documented and will not be considered.

In their consideration of why rescuers of Jews across Europe behaved as they did during the Second World War, Samuel and Pearl Oliner conducted a large-scale quantitative study in the 1980s, interviewing seven hundred people from across Nazi-occupied Europe who had sheltered Jewish refugees.¹⁰ Their conclusions were that “. . . external opportunity, including knowledge, risk, material resources, and being asked did not alone determine who acted to save Jews and who stood by.”¹¹ What made the difference was their character, namely “. . . their capacity for extensive relationships—their stronger sense of attachment to others and their feeling of responsibility for the welfare of others, including those outside their immediate familial or communal circles.”¹²

The Oliners’ diagnosis of how such character developed centred on how parents shaped family values, including the types of discipline they used and the familial attitudes towards outsiders.¹³ However, as the Oliners admit, “. . . neither all rescuers nor all non-rescuers reflected one [the positive] or the other [negative] pattern.”¹⁴ While their general conclusions regarding the nature of the character of the rescuers—a “capacity for extensive relationships”—seem well supported, the Europe-wide scope of the study meant it was more difficult to observe how community, exemplars, symbols, stories, and history in a particular people group and location affected the development of a rescuer’s character, as the nature of the rescuers’ communities varied so widely across those interviewed. This paper seeks to fill this gap for the small village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. It uses as a starting point the correlation observed by the Oliners¹⁵ regarding the primacy of character as the reason for the rescue of Jewish refugees and seeks to understand how such character was formed, imagined, expressed, and sustained in the community of Chambon-sur-Lignon.

Case studies will typically start by attempting to construct a thick description of a case.¹⁶ As this is a historical case and the primary witnesses are no longer available, and because of the limitations of this paper’s format, a thick description of the case

10 Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Europe* (The Free Press, 1988), 2.

11 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 141.

12 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 249.

13 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 251–52.

14 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 253.

15 And supported more qualitatively by others such as Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: The Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Doubleday, 1994).

16 Note, however, that Robert Yin does not always require a thick description for researching case studies. See Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 6th ed. (SAGE, 2018), 18.

has not been developed. Instead, the existing historiography has been relied on to provide a description. This includes a range of secondary and primary sources, including testimony collected from memoirs¹⁷ and from eyewitnesses documented at the colloquium held at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in 1990.¹⁸

Case studies will also often seek to generalise conclusions from a case so they can be applied in different contexts.¹⁹ Because of the special nature of the community at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon—a minority Protestant community with a strong historical self-understanding—this will not be attempted. Instead, this paper will focus on how the primacy of character as identified by the Oliners was exhibited in just one community and what had driven the development of this character. Applying these conclusions elsewhere will need to be part of another research project.

Researchers have traditionally found it difficult to develop frameworks that take account of the diversity of traditions, stories, practices, and symbols of religious belief,²⁰ especially as the researchers themselves become more removed from any direct experience of faith. Maggie Paxson in her consideration of the events on the Plateau expresses this when she says, “Religion is always complicated, always hard to meaningfully fit into discrete social science boxes.”²¹ This paper addresses this challenge by using the concept of social imaginary developed by Charles Taylor and others as a framework to express how the people of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon imagined their world.²² Taylor uses the term social imaginary to reflect how “ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings”²³ in images, stories, and legends, seeing the social imaginary as “that common understanding which makes possible common practices, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.”²⁴ While Taylor uses the concept of social imaginary to understand major historical shifts across the West, social imaginaries have also been used to understand and describe smaller populations and timeframes. For example, Andrew Lunn describes social

17 Trocmé, *Mémoires; Souvenirs d'une vie d'engagements*.

18 Collected in Pierre Bolle, ed., *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon* (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992).

19 Robert Yin lists explanatory case studies from fifteen disciplines and professions, showing how case studies can explain correlations already identified by quantitative studies. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications*, 7, 22.

20 Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati, “Religion in Cultural Imaginary: Setting the Scene,” in *Religion in Cultural Imaginary: Explorations in Visual and Material Practices*, ed. Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati (Pano Verlag, 2015), 10.

21 Margaret Paxson, *The Plateau* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2019), 63.

22 See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2004). This material has also been develop further in a chapter in Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Belknap Press, 2007), 159–211

23 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 171–72.

24 Taylor, *Secular Age*, 172.

imaginaries in contemporary British methodism,²⁵ while Ryan LaMothe used the concept of social imaginary to understand how the faith beliefs of both Martin Luther King Junior and J. Edgar Hoover moulded their lives.²⁶ Daria Pezzoli-Olgiati notes that it is the imaginary that creates the possibility for selfless activities, motivates participation in society, creates memory through stories, and enables finding of meaning.²⁷ The construction of a social imaginary will be undertaken by seeking to understand the images, stories, and exemplars that influenced the people of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon to behave in the way they did. The social imaginary will be expressed by a series of summary “we . . .” statements presented from the point of view of the inhabitants and expressing the different ways they imagined their world.

Consequently, this paper has the following sections: this introduction; an outline of the events at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon that illustrates the core aspects of the thesis; a description of the social imaginary of the parishioners and pastors that supported the sheltering of Jewish refugees and how it was formed and shaped; and overall conclusions.

The Case Study: The Events at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon

“Whoever saves a life saves the whole universe.” (m.Sanh. 4:3)

This section describes the key events at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon during 1940 to 1944, illustrating how the Reformed Protestant identity was expressed in the character of individuals and the community, setting the scene for the development of a social imaginary in the next section. It finishes by outlining how recognition of what had happened at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon (and the wider Vivarais-Lignon plateau) occurred after the war.

Prewar

At the beginning of the Second World War, France had a population of forty-four million people with 800,000 Protestants (2% of the population) and 320,000 Jews (0.8% of the population).²⁸ In 1940 the Vivarais-Lignon plateau had a population of 24,000, of whom 35% were Protestants, an exceptionally high proportion when

25 Andrew J. Lunn, “Social Imaginaries in Contemporary British Methodism” (Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, 2018), <https://oxford-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/2018-11-lunn.pdf>.

26 Ryan LaMothe, “American Political Life: The Intersection of Nationalistic and Christian Social Imaginaries of Faith as Sources of Resistance and Resilience,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 5 (2015): 695.

27 Pezzoli-Olgiati, “Setting the Scene,” 24.

28 Patrick Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France: Les affinités électives; XVIe-XXIe siècle* (Fayard, 2004), 11.

considered against the national average. Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, one of twelve villages on the plateau, had a population of just over 2,500, 95% of whom were Protestant. Of these, the majority were members of the Reformed Church of France, along with approximately 1,000 *Darbyistes*,²⁹ and some Salvation Army and Quakers.

The Second World War

France surrendered to the Germans in June 1940 and First World War hero Marshall Philippe Pétain formed the Vichy government.³⁰ Catholics and Protestants alike supported Pétain's spiritual diagnosis of France's problems and his slogan of "Family, Work, Fatherland." Even the Grand Rabbi of France initially saw Pétain as someone to be trusted³¹ and preaching on the plateau³² and the plateau's Protestant journal—*L'Echo de la Montagne*³³—were both initially supportive of Pétain's program. However, as soon became clear, at the core of Pétain's policies was collaboration with the Nazis as the undisputed leaders of a future Europe and implementation of Nazi policies as the supposed price of being part of the new Europe.³⁴

Many Protestant leaders in France had been aware from the early 1930s through theologians such as Karl Barth of the deeply anti-Christian and pagan nature of Nazi totalitarianism and therefore the dangers of any French collaboration.³⁵ At Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, the day after the armistice was signed with Germany, on June 23, 1940, the two lead pastors of the Reformed Church at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon—André Trocmé and Édouard Theis—presented a statement to their parishioners pregnant with biblical allusions declaring that the ". . . power of this totalitarianism is like the authority of the Beast which is described in chapter 13 of the Apocalypse,"³⁶ and calling on the community to ". . . oppose the violence

29 For numbers see Boulet, "Quelques Éléments Statistiques."

30 For the formation of the Pétain government see Bénédicte Vergez-Chaignon, *Pétain*, Éd. revue et augmentée d'un post scriptum, Collection Tempus (Perrin, 2018), 375–434.

31 Richard P. Unsworth, *A Portrait of Pacifists: Le Chambon, the Holocaust, and the Lives of André and Magda Trocmé* (Syracuse University Press, 2012), 160–62.

32 François Boulet, "Les Prédications Des Pasteurs," in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 364.

33 François Boulet, "Les Journaux Religieux Locaux," in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 346.

34 See Robert O. Paxton, *La France de Vichy, 1940–1944: Preface de Stanley Hoffmann*, 2nd ed. (Editions du Seuil, 1997), 95–96.

35 See "Barmen Declaration," 1934, <https://creedsandconfessions.org/barmen-declaration.html>.

36 André Trocmé and Édouard Theis, "Annexe No 4: Message Des Deux Pasteurs Du Chambon à Leur Paroisse," in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d'Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 598 (author's

inflicted against their conscience with the weapons of the [Holy] Spirit” and “. . . refuse to collaborate with this violence.”³⁷ Within nine months of the signing of the armistice, the head of the French Reformed Church, Marc Boegner, was writing in March 1941 to the Vice President of Pétain’s advisory council and the Chief Rabbi in France expressing his distress at the antisemitic measures being introduced.³⁸ A group of French Protestant theologians and pastors concerned at the direction of the Vichy government met at Pomeyrol in September 1941 and developed a series of biblical theses denouncing antisemitism, and these were distributed widely.³⁹

One of André Trocmé’s first initiatives after the armistice (with the support of his Parish Council) was, in late 1940, to visit the refugee internment camps in Marseille. Here over 50,000 internees from many different countries, from children through to adult, were living in conditions of “awful filth and destitution.”⁴⁰ Even though this was in the French-controlled zone, by the end of 1940 Gestapo inspectors were already working to deport political refugees and Jews to Germany.⁴¹ Trocmé concluded an agreement with Protestant aid agencies—notably the Quakers, Swiss Aid to Children, and the Protestant refugee aid agency, Cimade⁴²—that Le Chambon-sur-Lignon would be a place of refuge for any children and adults the agencies could get released.⁴³ From 1941 the refugees were mostly children,⁴⁴ the number of adults rapidly increasing from mid-1942 through both Protestant and Jewish rescue networks.⁴⁵ Le Chambon-sur-Lignon had a long history of tourism, hospitality, and social endeavours such as children’s homes⁴⁶ and so refugees were

translation).

37 Trocmé and Theis, “Annexe No 4,” 599 (author’s translation).

38 For background and a copy of the letter to the Grand Rabbi see Jacques Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945: Dictionnaire thématique et biographique* (Éditions de Paris, 2000), 100–102.

39 Madeleine Barot et al., “Les Thèses de Pomeyrol” (Musée Virtuel du Protestantisme Français, 1941), <https://museeprotestant.org/notice/les-theses-de-pomeyrol/>. See also Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 154–57.

40 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 372 (author’s translation).

41 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 372.

42 AFSC (American Friends Service Committee); Secours Suisse aux enfants merged with Croix-Rouge Suisse and became Croix-Rouge Suisse secours aux enfants; Cimade (Comité inter-mouvements auprès des évacués).

43 Unsworth, *Portrait of Pacifists*, 164–67.

44 For details on number of places see Boulet, “Quelques Éléments Statistiques,” 286–98.

45 For details on the networks see Patrick Cabanel, “Les Groups Chrétiens de Sauvetage Des Juifs,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 89–101; Katy Hazan, “Les Organisations Juives de Sauvetage En Zone Sud,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Philippe Joutard et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 103–14.

46 See Christian Maillebouis, “Des Figures Méconnues Du Christianisme Social Sur Le Plateau,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick

able to take advantage of the existing infrastructure which included six hotels with 225 rooms and thirty-eight pensions.⁴⁷ Depopulation of rural areas on the wider plateau had helped make houses available for refugees. Farms also needed workers,⁴⁸ giving further economic incentives for villagers to welcome refugees.

Civil resistance against the Vichy regime slowly increased at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. In 1940 students at the new Protestant school—*l'École nouvelle Cévenol*, founded in 1938 on principles of internationalism, peace, and non-violence⁴⁹—refused to salute the French flag as required by the Vichy government.⁵⁰ When Marshall Pétain commanded that all church bells be rung on August 1, 1941, to celebrate the anniversary of the Legion of soldiers, this order was also disobeyed.⁵¹ After the arrest of 12,000 Jews in the *Rafle du Vel'd'Hiv*⁵² in Paris in July 1942 resistance hardened across the whole of France and large-scale spiritual resistance truly started on the plateau.⁵³ Within a month, school students read a statement about their opposition to the arrest of Jews to a visiting high-ranking Vichy official.⁵⁴ As it became clear to the French authorities that refugees were being sheltered illegally (at least according to the Vichy laws),⁵⁵ false papers were forged at volume, including identity cards, cards to enable access to rationed food and household goods, and even false French army demobilisation cards. Approximately 5,000 sets of papers had been produced for Jews and non-Jews by the end of the

Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 49–62; Marie-France Marcuzzi, “L’Œuvre Des Enfants à La Montagne Du Pasteur Louis Comte,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 39–48.

47 Sylvain Bissonnier, “Les réfugiés sur le Plateau, essai de typologie,” in *La montagne refuge: Accueil et sauvetage des Juifs autour du Chambon-sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 85.

48 Jean Baubérot-Vincent and Marianne Carbonnier-Burkard, *Histoire des protestants: Une minorité en France, XVIe–XXIe siècle* (Ellipses, 2016), 420.

49 Olivier Hatzfeld, “L’École Nouvelle Cévenole: Nouvelle Approche,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 161–74.

50 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 367–68.

51 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 369–70.

52 *Rafle* was a term used to refer to the rounding up of Jewish refugees. *Vel’d’Hiv* referred to the Winter Velodrome in Paris where this particular *rafle* occurred. See Pujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 160–63.

53 See Pierre Bolle, “La résistance spirituelle sur le Plateau,” in *Le plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et résistance 1939–1944; actes du colloque du Chambon-sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 327–40; Patrick Henry, “Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon: 1979–2015,” *The French Review* 89, no. 3 (2016): 85.

54 Jacques Sémelin, “Résistance Civile : L’exemple Emblématique Du Chambon et de Son Plateau,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 69.

55 Sémelin, “Résistance Civile,” 70.

war.⁵⁶ Discussion about how to respond to events was held weekly at lay-led neighbourhood Bible study groups over open Bibles and with prayer.⁵⁷ A further meeting at Pomeyrol attended by forty-six pastors was held in September 1942 to reflect on responses to the Jewish question.⁵⁸

On November 11, 1942, after the allies had invaded North Africa, the Germans occupied the southern zone of France,⁵⁹ bringing overt Jewish persecution from January 1943.⁶⁰ In February 1943 the Vichy government established the Compulsory Work Service⁶¹ which required more than 600,000 Frenchmen to work in Germany in terrible conditions.⁶² This led many young men to flee and join the armed resistance, raising the presence of armed *Maquis*⁶³ on the plateau and increasing the level of violent resistance.⁶⁴ Teachers and students—including theological students—were also joining the *Maquis* and engaging in armed resistance, much to the disappointment of Trocmé and Theis, who saw non-violence as central to their Christian faith.⁶⁵ One student readying himself for future theological studies said, “I know that the Gospel is against violence, but France must be liberated.”⁶⁶

The police imprisoned Andre Trocmé, Édouard Theis, and the head of the local schools—Roger Darcissac—from February 13 to March 15, 1943, because of their activities in sheltering Jewish refugees. The pastors subsequently went

56 Oscar Rosowsky, “Les Faux Papiers d’identité Au Chambon-Sur-Lignon 1942–1944,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 238–39, 244.

57 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 379.

58 Bolle, “La résistance spirituelle,” 334–35; Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 156–57.

59 For a description of zones and key dates see Éric Alary and Bénédicte Vergez-Chaignon, *Dictionnaire de la France sous l’Occupation* (Larousse, 2011), 428–31.

60 Daniel Curtet, “Témoignage d’un Ancien Pasteur,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 55.

61 Service du travail obligatoire (STO).

62 Alary and Vergez-Chaignon, *Dictionnaire de la France sous l’Occupation*, 397–98.

63 The common term to describe those involved in violent resistance. *Maquis* means bush or scrubland, where many of them hid. For the Protestant *Maquis* see Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 116–18.

64 Gérard Bollon, “Le Résistance Armée et La Libération Du Plateau Vivarais-Lignon,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 453–54; Alary and Vergez-Chaignon, *Dictionnaire de la France sous l’Occupation*, 397–98.

65 Patrick Cabanel, “Introduction,” in *Mémoires*, by André Trocmé, ed. Patrick Cabanel (Labor et fides, 2020), 21; Hatzfeld, “L’École Nouvelle Cévenole,” 164.

66 Hatzfeld, “L’École Nouvelle Cévenole,” 168.

into hiding in August after receiving tip-offs to avoid arrest by the Gestapo.⁶⁷ However, this was not before eighteen students and their teacher, Daniel Trocmé (a cousin of André's), were arrested and sent to concentration camps where they all subsequently died.⁶⁸ André Trocmé returned to Le Chambon in June 1944, and while he "... knew that his congregation had not become hard-core pacifist,"⁶⁹ the work of sheltering Jewish refugees had continued in his absence.

Paris and most of France were liberated from August 1944.⁷⁰ By the close of the hostilities with Germany, the plateau had sheltered 2,000 to 3,500 Jews and another 1,500 non-Jewish refugees.⁷¹ This included twenty-five different nationalities with an average age of thirty-five, 27% of the refugees being younger than sixteen.⁷² This had required cooperation from pastors, parishioners, civil servants, town halls, and even the French Prefecture and police through less than diligent enforcement.⁷³ The conditions were not idyllic, the community often functioning like a real-life family with all its "... moods, passions, different interests, kindnesses, malice ..."⁷⁴ However, despite this, Patrick Henry observed that "No other effort on this scale occurred for this length of time anywhere else in Occupied Europe."⁷⁵

Postwar

After the Second World War, France sought to forget and even deny its collaboration with Nazi Germany.⁷⁶ France needed heroes, and those immediately to hand were military leaders such as Charles de Gaulle and members of the armed resistance. Non-violent rescue of Jewish refugees was not considered heroic. As most non-violent rescuers in France saw their actions as deeply private, they said little or nothing, and recognition was not forthcoming.⁷⁷

67 Unsworth, *Portrait of Pacifists*, 188, 201.

68 Henry, *La montagne des Justes*, 65–83.

69 Unsworth, *Portrait of Pacifists*, 202.

70 Alary and Vergez-Chaignon, *Dictionnaire de la France sous l'Occupation*, 295–300.

71 For the figure of 3,500 see Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 229. For a figure of 2,000 see Rosenberg, *Mais combien étaient-ils ?*

72 Bissonnier, "Les réfugiés sur le Plateau," 81–82.

73 See Hazan, "Les Organisations Juives de Sauvetage En Zone Sud," 105. For the role of police and local Préfecture, see François Boulet, "Le Préfet Robert Bach et Les Gendarmes Français à La Montagne-Refuge (1942–1943)," in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 115–23.

74 Madeleine Barot, the head of Cimade, as quoted in Baubérot-Vincent and Carbonnier-Burkard, *Histoire des protestants*, 420 (author's translation).

75 Henry, "Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon: 1979–2015," 86.

76 See Paxton, *La France de Vichy*.

77 Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage*, 299–300.

While there had been an article in *Peace News* in 1953,⁷⁸ and André Trocmé had been declared “Righteous Among the Nations” in 1971 (along with Mireille Philip and Daniel Trocmé in 1976),⁷⁹ the “legend” of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon only started in 1979 with the publication of Philip Hallie’s book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*.⁸⁰ This book was followed by Pierre Sauvage’s 1986 film, *Weapons of the Spirit*.⁸¹ Hallie and Sauvage’s work stirred up issues that continue to be debated including the importance (or not) of Protestantism in the rescue (a central theme of this paper), the role of pacifism versus armed resistance, the contribution of economics, the role of Pastor André Trocmé versus that of others, and the place of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in sheltering Jewish refugees versus that of the other villages on the plateau.⁸² Rebalancing of perspectives occurred at a major historical colloquium held on the plateau in 1990,⁸³ with a smaller second colloquium held in 2002.⁸⁴ These gatherings were followed in 2013 by a collection of papers designed to provide updated perspectives to coincide with the opening of a museum in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon.⁸⁵ In parallel with these major activities, interest in the events in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and the Vivarais-Lignon Plateau has continued unabated through many academic and non-academic publications. While their papers address different issues to this one, Patrick Henry’s 2015 literature survey⁸⁶ and Nathalie Heinich’s 2023 article⁸⁷ together provide a useful review of what has been published.⁸⁸

78 “The Story of Chambon,” *Peace News* (1953).

79 Sarah Gensburger, “Le Village Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon: Le Visage Des Justes de France,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel (Albin Michel, 2013), 300.

80 Philip Paul Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon and How Goodness Happened There* (HarperPerennial, 1979).

81 *Weapons of the Spirit/Les Armes de l’esprit*, Documentary, 1986; Pierre Sauvage and Bill Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit: Transcript of the Feature Documentary (Version 1.1)” (Friends of Le Chambon Foundation, 1992), https://ia601206.us.archive.org/11/items/ERIC_ED398108/ERIC_ED398108.pdf.

82 Nathalie Heinich, “Comment Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon s’est Souvenu: Histoire d’une Mémoire,” in *Témoignage, Mémoire et Histoire: Mélanges Offerts à Jacques Walter*, ed. Béatrice Fleury et al. (Éditions de l’Université de Lorraine, 2023), 207–25, <https://doi.org/10.62688/edul/b9782384510207/c13>, <https://editions.univ-lorraine.fr/edul/catalog/book/b9782384510207/chapter/196>.

83 Documented in Bolle, *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon*.

84 Documented in Patrick Cabanel and Laurent Gervereau, eds., *La Deuxième guerre mondiale, des terres de refuge aux musées: le plateau Vivarais-Lignon, accueil et résistances les musées et sites de la Deuxième guerre mondiale [actes des 2 journées d’études, Saint-Agrève, 5 juillet 2002 et Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, 6 juillet 2002]* (Sivom Vivarais-Lignon, 2003).

85 Patrick Cabanel et al., eds., *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon* (Albin Michel, 2013).

86 Henry, “Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon: 1979-2015.”

87 Heinich, “Comment Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon s’est Souvenu.”

88 The most accessible and up-to-date work in English describing the whole period is currently Peter Grose, *A Good Place to Hide: How One French Community Saved Thousands of Lives from the*

A Social Imaginary of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon Parishioners and Pastors

Pierre Sauvage: “Why [did you shelter Jews]?”

Emma Héritier: “I don’t know. We were used to it.”⁸⁹

As noted in the introduction, the character of the rescuer is central to understanding their actions. This section describes the character of the parishioners and pastors using the concept of social imaginary. It does this by summarising how the community saw its world in first-person plural “we . . .” statements along with the supporting images, stories, symbols, and exemplars of their social imaginaries. These “we . . .” statements have been constructed based on an examination of the primary documents available (e.g., memoirs) and secondary writings by historians and other researchers since the events.

In any society, there will be a wide range of beliefs so the description of a social imaginary will inevitably contain generalisations. However, the provision of hospitality to the marginalised in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon was an almost unanimous response from the villagers, this being especially evidenced by the complete lack of informers and related incidents.⁹⁰ However, it was a complex situation as André Trocmé noted:

Unanimity certainly does not mean homogeneity. You could hear every possible language spoken in the streets of Le Chambon. Religious and non-religious, Christians and Jews, Reformed and Eastern Orthodox were elbow to elbow. But the real problem was the relationship with the people of the countryside—stuck-in-their-ways, and old-fashioned when compared with the refugees whom they often confused with tourists, shocked by the free manner of the school students and the town-dwellers, who were in turn shocked by the slowness and hesitations of the country folk.⁹¹

In writing about rescuers across Europe, Fogelman says that “The distinction between ‘truly holy’ and ‘superficially observant worshipers’ is an important one,”⁹² and as would be expected there was a wide variation in the depth of Christian faith on the plateau, with many only holding to a form of cultural Protestantism. When André Trocmé arrived as lead pastor at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in 1934,

Nazis (Allen & Unwin, 2015).

89 Sauvage and Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit Transcript,” 10.

90 Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (Basic Books, 1993), 231.

91 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 378 (author’s translation).

92 Eva Fogelman, *Conscience and Courage: The Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust* (Doubleday, 1994), 175.

he was struck by the difference between the parishes he had known in the north of France—“small, poor, Protestant parishes lost among the dechristianised mass, providing a haven of grace for all the walking wounded, despite quarrels and falls”⁹³—and what he found on the plateau. “But, at Le Chambon, everyone was Protestant, and that didn’t mean anything at all.”⁹⁴ This (at least initially) lower level of spiritual engagement meant that in practice it was the pastors and their wives leading and living out their faith that led to their parishioners following. By 1943, Trocmé’s tone had changed and when he was briefly imprisoned he was able to write to the parish on February 28 (along with Édouard Theis and Roger Darcissac), “We are not anxious for the Church. At Le Chambon as well, has not God prepared everything by giving to each one their responsibilities, so that the Church, for the glory of God, could continue, bear witness, and increase its influence, especially among the most disadvantaged among us?”⁹⁵ A further increased spiritual fervour was observed by pastors at the end of 1943, this being evidenced through attendance and contributions at Bible studies.⁹⁶ Potentially this implies that at least initially, many parishioners behaved virtuously because of deep cultural memory and habits, and it was by acting in this way in the context of their historical faith that (at least some) became more spiritually aware and their virtue was reinforced by this awareness.

Practices (e.g., attending a church service regularly, neighbourhood Bible study groups, family Bible reading) are key to forming and sustaining a social imaginary and thereby shaping peoples’ actions. James K. A. Smith says “. . . habits (precognitive dispositions) are formed by practices: routines and rituals that inscribe particular ongoing habits into our character, so that they become second nature to us.”⁹⁷ Such practices are both expressed by a social imaginary but also shape and support this imaginary. As Taylor notes, “If the understanding makes the practice possible, it is also true that it is the practice that largely carries the understanding.”⁹⁸ Practices at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon will be considered as the social imaginaries are defined.

The Oliners’s research indicates that across Europe, only 32% of rescuers started

93 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 322 (author’s translation).

94 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 322 (author’s translation).

95 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 413 (author’s translation).

96 François Boulet, “L’attitude spirituelle des protestants devant les Juifs réfugiés,” in *Le plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et résistance 1939–1944; actes du colloque du Chambon-sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 408–10.

97 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Baker Academic, 2009), 80.

98 Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 25.

helping Jews purely on their own initiative; the majority needed to be asked.⁹⁹ At Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, the leaders—André and Magda Trocmé and Édouard and Mildred Theis—were the key mobilisers or “catalysts”¹⁰⁰ of this activity, asking villagers to shelter refugees. Rescue started with initial ad-hoc networks of relationships, with people finding themselves progressively implicated and transformed as they became part of these networks.¹⁰¹ The social imaginary described for the parishioners will be that which explains their engagement in rescue activities. Given the critical role of the pastors as catalysts, there are additional points of social imaginary described for the pastors that show how their extended imaginary supported the catalysing and mobilisation of the community, even when their perspectives were not widely shared in the community (e.g., in the case of non-violence). Core characteristics that form these social imaginaries are outlined below.

Social Imaginary—Parishioners

Social imaginary statement 1: We are Huguenot¹⁰² Protestants, a community different from the rest of France, with a long history of persecution by the majority people and the state.

“A singular group of people with a singular history: this Huguenot stock, this memory of their persecution—not only the fact that they had a history of persecution but that they remembered it, that it mattered to them.”¹⁰³

(Pierre Sauvage)

The reasons for the rescue of Jewish refugees at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon centre on the community’s strong Reformed Protestant identity. Cabanel’s 2011 analysis of the numbers of the “Righteous Among the Nations” in France—*Les Justes*—indicated that 10.7% of *Justes* were Protestant, even though they were only 2% of the population.¹⁰⁴ This analysis also noted that in France 0.12% of Catholic priests

99 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 132.

100 Henry, *La montagne des Justes*, 29.

101 Marianne Ruel Robins, “Les Justes, une autre ‘histoire périlleuse’ : Histoire et mémoire protestantes sur le plateau Vivarais-Lignon,” *Revue d’Histoire de l’Église de France* 101, no. 1 (2015): 119, <https://doi.org/10.1484/J.RHEF.5.107559>, <https://www.brepolsonline.net/doi/10.1484/J.RHEF.5.107559>.

102 The term “Huguenot” has an uncertain derivation and initially appeared as a term of abuse for Reformed Protestants from 1560. Baubérot-Vincent and Carbonnier-Burkard, *Histoire des protestants*, 512.

103 Sauvage and Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit Transcript,” 66.

104 See Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 116.

and yet 6–7% of Protestant pastors were *Justes*.¹⁰⁵ It is important not to overreach the data, but it appears that there are fundamental factors in French Reformed Protestantism in the 1940s that made them more likely—especially if they were pastors—to be engaged in sheltering Jewish refugees.

Marianne Ruel Robins is more cautious about the centrality of Protestantism; she prefers to see reasons for rescue as a web of factors and directly challenges any idea of Protestant exceptionalism or moral triumphalism. However, she notes the importance of their experiences as a religious minority and the religious culture that made Protestants more inclined to resist the civil authorities.¹⁰⁶ Emmanuel Deun, on the other hand, describes an active cultivation of a spiritual Protestantism with those on the plateau being “. . . immunized by the spiritual heritage cultivated by Trocmé, Theis, and various others”¹⁰⁷ against the deadening “emotional contagion” of Pétainism that had spread across France.

The Reformed Protestant Church in France began with eighty years of conflict and persecution until the Edict of Nantes in 1598 introduced a measure of freedom within circumscribed limits. The edict’s revocation in 1685 led to intense persecution in the time known as *le Désert* until the rights of Protestants to worship freely was restored in 1787 under the Edict of Tolerance.¹⁰⁸ Protestants had been on the plateau since the 1560s,¹⁰⁹ benefitting in the face of persecution from the shelter and cohesion its geographical isolation brought.¹¹⁰ This history of persecution had contributed to a religious culture that made Protestants more inclined to resist civil authorities.¹¹¹ Across the plateau Protestants demonstrated strong social solidarity, a concern for public morality, and a desire for education.¹¹² Baron Haussmann noted in 1832 the strong memory of persecution of the Protestants in Haute-Loire.¹¹³ Magda Trocmé summarised the effect of this memory in this way: “So, in a way, we were prepared [to shelter Jewish refugees]. And the village was

105 See Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 113.

106 Ruel Robins, “Les Justes, une autre ‘histoire périlleuse.’”

107 Emmanuel Deun, *Le Village Des Justes: Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon: De 1939 à Nos Jours* (Imago, Ausas éditeurs, 2018), 192 (author’s translation).

108 See Baubérot-Vincent and Carbonnier-Burkard, *Histoire des protestants*, 97–255.

109 Serge Bernard, “Traces légendaires, mémoires et construction identitaire” (Université de Poitiers, 2004), 70.

110 Auguste Rivet, “Rapport General: L’État Politique et La Situation Du Plateau Avant 1940,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 27.

111 David P. Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation*, 2nd ed. (Paragon House, 2003), 159–63.

112 Rivet, “Rapport General,” 31–34.

113 Philippe Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel (Albin Michel, 2013), 193.

prepared because of its Huguenot past.”¹¹⁴

Symbols and practices that both reflected and reinforced history were intermingled in the village. For example, street names commemorated events—the road called the *chemin du Dragon* remembered oppression by Louis XIV’s soldiers,¹¹⁵ scout troops were named after pastor martyrs of the time of intense persecution known as *le Désert*,¹¹⁶ popular songs recounted history,¹¹⁷ Protestant cemeteries and churches were constructed to contrast with the Catholic equivalents,¹¹⁸ Protestant crosses were different from Catholic crosses, and there were plaques showing where there had been places of past Protestant worship.¹¹⁹ Anny Latour, a Jew sheltered on the plateau, noted that the community made pilgrimages to a place of past persecution,¹²⁰ and it was common for Huguenots to visit caves where their ancestors had hidden.¹²¹

The Tower of Constance, used in the seventeenth century to imprison Huguenots who refused to recant their faith was an enduring symbol of resistance. The director of the schools in Le Chambon, Roger Darcissac, had postcards printed with a picture of the tower and the text: “Many Protestants—men and women—were imprisoned there [the Tower] after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) [when the rights of Protestants to worship were removed], until 1768. One of them, perhaps Marie Durand who was a prisoner for thirty-eight years, inscribed on a rock this word: Resist.”¹²² These postcards were used to communicate the arrivals of Jews across the plateau¹²³ and the clandestine tract *Resistance* also took its name from these events.¹²⁴ All these images, symbols, stories, and exemplars provided reminders of Huguenot history and as the background to the imagination of those living in and around the village they were harnessed to support rescue.

114 Sauvage and Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit Transcript,” 19.

115 Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 73.

116 Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 74.

117 The most famous song being *La Cévenol*. For lyrics see Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 262–63.

118 Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 195.

119 Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 306.

120 Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” 196.

121 Madeleine Barot cited in Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews* (Basic Books, 1993), 230.

122 For picture and text of the card see Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” 196 (author’s translation).

123 Unsworth, *Portrait of Pacifists*, 168.

124 Patrick Cabanel, “Des Résistances de l’esprit,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 173.

Social imaginary statement 2: We are a people of the Book—our people came into being through the Bible, we see our story of persecution in the Bible though parallels with Israel, every house has a Bible, we read it, hear it read, name our children after it, and seek to live by it.

“ . . . we are in a place of the Bible.”¹²⁵

(Adrien Gensburger, a resistance chief)

The centrality of the Bible on the plateau is well attested. Boulet notes the prominence of the Bible, highlighting its promises of freedom and hope “in times of trouble and affliction,”¹²⁶ as well as the sense of history it gave where reading the Bible in secret was a sign of resistance.¹²⁷ Batten maintains that André Trocmé’s use of the Bible was a significant factor in how he catalysed spiritual resistance, building on the average Protestant’s devotion to the Bible through preaching and the neighbourhood Bible studies.¹²⁸ One of the rescuers, Georgette Barraud, said, “The welcome here had a lot to do with people still believing in something. In the Bible, it is written to feed the hungry. To visit the sick. That is a normal thing to do.”¹²⁹

While many rescuers when interviewed did not give explicitly theological reasons for their actions, the thought world of the Bible was never far away. Marianne Ruel Robins warns about giving theological reasons too much weight, arguing that “. . . theology is not the exclusive domain of an elite, which would be faithfully transmitted to consenting ears, but what is appropriated, rejected, interpreted and transformed by the faithful who are not professional theologians.”¹³⁰ But because a *paysan* who rescues Jews cannot give a carefully structured theological reason to an interviewer for their actions, this does not mean that their habitus has not been deeply theological formed. Boismorand states: “80% [of the Plateau Protestants] were unsure of their political stance, but all had acknowledged that a human being, Jewish or Christian, friend or enemy, persecuted or decorated, had the right to refuge, protection, and sustenance in the Church of Jesus Christ, and therefore in the Cévenol school and under the roof of those who had found the guidance for their daily life in the Bible.”¹³¹

125 Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” 189 (author’s translation).

126 Francis Boulet, “L’attitude Spirituelle Des Protestants Devant Les Juifs Réfugiés,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 423 (author’s translation).

127 Boulet, “L’attitude Spirituelle Des Protestants,” 427.

128 Alicia J. Batten, “Reading the Bible in Occupied France: André Trocmé and Le Chambon,” *HTR* 103, no. 3 (2010): 309–28.

129 Sauvage and Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit Transcript,” 16.

130 Ruel Robins, “Les Justes, une autre ‘histoire périlleuse,’” 107 (author’s translation).

131 Pierre Boismorand, *Magda and André Trocmé: Resistance Figures* (MQUP, 2014), 73.

The Bible was an ever-present symbol at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. There was a Bible in every house, Bibles were given to couples at their marriage, biblical names were commonly given to children,¹³² there was always a Bible open in the pulpit of the Temple,¹³³ going to the Sunday service was called going *au prêche*, to the preaching (of the Bible),¹³⁴ and long winters with little activity meant that social relations between neighbours were often dominated by reading the Bible.¹³⁵ There was a Protestant newspaper—*L'Echo de la Montagne*—with a readership of around 2,500. Edited by two pastors and two lay people, it regularly included articles citing the Bible and biblical reasons for action.¹³⁶

The internalisation of the content of the Bible into the social imaginary of the people was reinforced by many practices. There were regular services at the Temple where the Bible was preached and psalms sung, Sunday school, a three-year catechism process leading to confirmation, and young people's groups.¹³⁷ André Trocmé's predecessor, Roger Casalis, noted that Sunday afternoon meetings had been an excellent opportunity for discussion over the Bible, and that most of the participants had been women.¹³⁸ Trocmé's preaching covered the biblical themes of "... hospitality, love of God and love of neighbour, non-conformity, welcoming the stranger, and the Jews as God's chosen people with whom the Protestants had much in common ..."¹³⁹ The regular singing of psalms and canticles continually placed the Huguenots of the plateau in the thought world of the Jewish people facing hardship.

André Trocmé saw the neighbour Bible studies as especially important. He notes that at their meetings prayers were "... fervent, practical, concrete. It was there—not elsewhere—that we received from God answers to very complex problems that we needed to resolve to house and hide Jews in the months that followed."¹⁴⁰ Both the Bible as a symbol and its actual content were used to support the daily work

132 Joutard, "Les Affinités Mémoires," 189.

133 Joutard, "Les Affinités Mémoires," 190. The meeting houses of the Reformed were first called "Temples" in the 1530s in French-speaking Switzerland. This usage spread to Geneva and then France. Baubérot-Vincent and Carbonnier-Burkard, *Histoire des protestants*, 519.

134 Joutard, "Les Affinités Mémoires," 193.

135 Jacques Béthemont, "Espace et Temps d'un Pays de Montagne," in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 19.

136 François Boulet, "Les Protestants de La Montagne Dans l'entre-Deux-Guerres," in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Albin Michel, 2013), 30.

137 Batten, "Reading the Bible in Occupied France," 321–22.

138 Batten, "Reading the Bible in Occupied France," 321.

139 Batten, "Reading the Bible in Occupied France," 328.

140 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 379 (author's translation).

of the sheltering of Jewish refugees. Because of the place of the Bible in the social imaginary of the Huguenots and their familiarity with it, an appeal to the Bible as the basis for rescuing Jewish refugees would be responded to positively.

Social imaginary statement 3: The Jews are our cousins in the faith, we share with them the Old Testament, and they share with us a long history of persecution in France, and are often grouped with us when we and they are attacked.

“ . . . they were the people of God. That is what mattered.”¹⁴¹

(Marie Brottes)

The most widely cited religious reason for rescuers across Europe acting as they did appears to be an affinity with the Jewish people.¹⁴² Gushee sees this sense of kinship with the Jewish people as an important driver for the sheltering of Jewish refugees by Protestants in France, Denmark, and the Netherlands.¹⁴³ While some influential French Protestants were antisemitic,¹⁴⁴ in general Huguenots felt a special affinity with the Jews in France for both theological and historical reasons. Cabanel notes the commonality of the Old Testament in their belief systems as well as the shared ties of centuries of persecution.¹⁴⁵ Theologically, Calvin was less hostile to Jews than Luther, seeing the connection between the two Testaments in terms of continuity rather than rupture.¹⁴⁶ French Reformed Protestant thinking (at least among the elites) about the Jewish people was reflected in *Les Thèses de Pomeyrol* developed by theologians and pastors in September 1941 which rejected antisemitism on biblical grounds.¹⁴⁷

Antisemitism and anti-Protestantism were historically twin hatreds in France, with both groups seen as marginal to wider society.¹⁴⁸ Conspiracy theories were common¹⁴⁹ and Catholics often combined Jews, Protestants, and Muslims in their

141 Marie Brottes may have been the first to shelter Jewish refugees—she was a *Darbyste*. Sauvage and Moyers, “Weapons of the Spirit Transcript,” 26.

142 Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, 152–59.

143 Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, 152–59.

144 Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 16–23.

145 Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France*, 13–52.

146 Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” 190.

147 Barot et al., “Les Thèses de Pomeyrol.” Point seven states: “Founded on the Bible, the church recognises in Israel as the people God chose to give a saviour to the world, and in the middle of the nations, a permanent witness to the mystery of his faithfulness. This is why in recognising that the State is faced with a problem to which it must find a solution, the church raises a solemn protest against all statutes that reject the Jews from human community” (author’s translation).

148 Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France*, 181–213.

149 Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France*, 75–81.

attacks—these threats were not idle as the white terrors of 1795 and 1815 had shown in *le Midi*. It appears that most Huguenots, while perhaps not reflecting on the text of the Bible in any deep theological manner, identified with the Jews of the Old Testament when meeting violence.¹⁵⁰ The Huguenot people had been *Dreyfusards* during the time of the trial for espionage of the Jewish army officer Alfred Dreyfus.¹⁵¹ The leader of the Reformed Church, Marc Boegner, was already writing to the Chief Rabbi in March 1941 expressing the pain the National Council felt regarding the recent antisemitic legislation.¹⁵² Protestant leaders compared the *rafles* from 1942 when Jews were rounded up for deportation¹⁵³ with the St. Bartholomew's day massacre of Protestants in 1572.¹⁵⁴ In September 1942 there was a gathering at the Protestant museum, *Le Musée du Désert*, where 4,000 people attended, including some Jews.¹⁵⁵ Thus, attacks on the Jewish people often found an echo in the Huguenot experience and imagination.

This theologically and historically derived affinity was maintained through several practices. The plateau newspaper *L'Echo de la Montagne* used Bible citations to argue for affinity with Jews in 1943,¹⁵⁶ André Trocmé preached the affinities with the Jewish people regularly, and the content discussed in the neighbourhood Bible studies regularly reinforced connections with the Jewish people. Parents gave their children Hebrew names and there was level of community solidarity—for example between the Protestant and Jewish scouting movements.¹⁵⁷ All these practices reinforced the social imaginary of a people having deep affinity with the Jewish people and therefore preparing them to shelter Jewish refugees.

Social imaginary statement 4: We are a people of hospitality who habitually welcome the stranger and the one fleeing persecution.

“The hand of compassion is much quicker than the calculation of reason!”¹⁵⁸
(Kristen Monroe)

People do not become hospitable to strangers overnight. As the Oliners noted, “Their [rescuers'] involvements with Jews grew out of the ways in which they

150 Cabanel, *Histoire des Justes en France*, 238–39.

151 Joutard, “Les Affinités Mémoires,” 195.

152 Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 100–102.

153 See Poujol, *Protestants dans la France en guerre 1939–1945*, 160–63.

154 Ruel Robins, “Les Justes, une autre ‘histoire périlleuse,’” 108.

155 Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France*, 254.

156 Boulet, “Les Journaux Religieux Locaux,” 341–50.

157 Cabanel, *Juifs et protestants en France*, 219.

158 Cited by Henry, *La montagne des Justes*, 177 (author's translation).

ordinarily related to other people . . .”¹⁵⁹ This was the same at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon—they did not become what they had not been but were heirs to a long history of hospitality to the needy. Hospitality was already part of their social imaginary. There were established traditions of giving to the poor, providing respite and health care for children, and welcoming refugees.¹⁶⁰ Batten notes that while the villagers were taciturn by nature, they had historically sheltered those in need and cites the example from 1790 of sheltering Roman Catholic priests refusing to take the oath to the new state.¹⁶¹ Respite children’s homes were established from the late nineteenth century,¹⁶² with one such work having six hundred families across the plateau involved by the early twentieth century in welcoming these children.¹⁶³ These were the foundations of the social imaginary supporting work with refugees in the 1940s.

The role of economic factors in the provision of hospitality continues to create disagreement among researchers. While acknowledging “*la dimension morale*” of the rescue, Serge Bernard maintains the primacy of economic reasons for the tradition of welcome on the plateau.¹⁶⁴ In response to this, Patrick Henry criticises Bernard for confusing ends and means, writing: “But it is the spirituality, the moral courage, and the high degree of human solidarity of the inhabitants of the region [rather than economic aspects] which explain what happened between 1939 and 1944.”¹⁶⁵ Likewise, the Oliners and Eva Fogelman in their studies of rescuers across Europe maintain the primacy of the character of the rescuer. While economic interests and infrastructure were clearly a factor in enabling the shelter of refugees, at the core there was a community decision to provide shelter to those who needed it because of a deeply formed social imaginary that saw the importance of providing hospitality to the marginalised. It seems best to conclude that economic reasons should be considered as supporting factors that helped with the provision of hospitality rather than primary aspects of the social imaginary that drove rescuers to be hospitable.

Hospitality was reinforced from the biblical teaching in sermons and the various discussion groups. One pastor on the plateau, André Bettex, described the common

159 Oliner and Oliner, *Altruistic Personality*, 260.

160 Gérard Bollon, “La Tradition d’accueil Avant La Guerre,” in *Le Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance 1939–1944; Actes Du Colloque Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 151–60.

161 Especially remarkable given the long pattern of intense persecution of Huguenots by the Catholic church. Batten, “Reading the Bible in Occupied France,” 318.

162 See Maillebouis, “Des Figures Méconnues.”

163 Marcuzzi, “L’Œuvre Des Enfants,” 45.

164 Bernard, “Traces légendaires,” 377–79.

165 Henry, *La montagne des Justes*, 48 (author’s translation). Written in response to Serge Bernard’s assertions in his thesis and article about the primacy of economic factors.

sources of the imperative to shelter refugees as: “Our biblical formation. The duty of hospitality in Isaiah 58:7: ‘Share your bread with the hungry, and bring the wretched homeless into your house.’”¹⁶⁶ The Huguenot history encouraged compassion for others in need, just as their own ancestors had been persecuted and become refugees. At Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, the example of Magda Trocmé and her almost frenetic commitment to hospitality to whoever had need would also have influenced many.¹⁶⁷ As the four social imaginary statements are considered, a social imaginary of Huguenot identity and the importance of the Bible worked together to reinforce habits of hospitality to a people to whom they had a historically close affinity.

Social Imaginary—Pastors

While the social imaginary of the parishioners was foundational to the rescue, the pastors and their wives as leaders played a special role in catalysing this rescue by encouraging their parishioners to act on their social imaginaries. The additional aspects of their social imaginary that supported the rescue are discussed below.

Social imaginary statement 5: As pastors, we are part of an international movement and these connections have helped convince us that the growing totalitarianism in the world is pagan and anti-Christian.

“Formidable pagan pressures are going to exercise themselves on us and on our families to try and lead us to passive submission to totalitarian ideology.”¹⁶⁸

(André Trocmé and Édouard Theis, sermon preached on June 23, 1940)

International awareness of what was occurring in Europe, both politically and theologically, among pastors and elites in French Protestantism is well supported.¹⁶⁹ The Protestant aid agencies had strong internationalist roots¹⁷⁰ and in Le Chambon-

166 André Bettex, “Témoignage d’un ancien pasteur,” in *Le plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et résistance 1939–1944; actes du colloque du Chambon-sur-Lignon*, ed. Pierre Bolle (Société d’Histoire de la Montagne, 1992), 68 (author’s translation).

167 See Trocmé, *Souvenirs d’une vie d’engagements*. Her recorded memories provide much colour about life at Le Chambon that is missing from the *Mémoires* of her husband André.

168 Trocmé and Theis, “Annexe No 4,” 599 (author’s translation).

169 See Christophe Chalamet, “Les Pasteurs et Les Mouvements Ecclésio-Théologiques Des Années 1930,” in *La Montagne Refuge: Accueil et Sauvetage Des Juifs Autour Du Chambon-Sur-Lignon*, ed. Patrick Cabanel et al. (Paris: Albin Michel, 2013), 179–87.

170 Cabanel, “Les Groups Chrétiens de Sauvetage Des Juifs,” 95.

sur-Lignon the recently started Protestant school, *l'École nouvelle Cévenol*, had a self-conscious internationalist nature¹⁷¹ reflecting the internationalist perspectives of the pastors Trocmé and Theis. Strong national and international connections enabled pastors and other leaders to understand the implications of what was happening in Europe in the 1930s and therefore what was likely to occur in Vichy France.

National Socialism's structural inequality, its dismissal of the vulnerable, and its antisemitism were all reasons to see it as deeply anti-Christian.¹⁷² Karl Barth provided a theological model for how to understand the rise of Naziism,¹⁷³ attacking it as a false religion.¹⁷⁴ The Barmen Declaration of 1934 by the Confessing Church with which Barth had been involved was seen by French Protestant leaders as a significant document in increasingly difficult times.¹⁷⁵ In 1937, several pastors from the Vivarais-Lignon Plateau—including André Trocmé—attended a conference at Saint-Jean-Chambre on the plateau centred around the theology of Karl Barth, with Barth himself present.¹⁷⁶

The pastors in Le Chambon understood the nature of the rising totalitarianism in the world. André and Magda Trocmé were both, “Lucid observers of the international situation.”¹⁷⁷ André's mother had been German and so he kept a close eye on events in Germany while Magda was Italian and did the same with Italy. André Trocmé's first personal contact with Naziism was on the “March for Peace” across Europe in 1932 when in Heidelberg his group was confronted by Nazi Brownshirts, one of whom brandished a revolver at André. He observed that the growing brutality of Naziism let the Nazis act with impunity.¹⁷⁸ The example of the Confessing Church in Germany from the Barmen Declaration in 1934 onwards was personally significant. “It was the example of those men, profoundly rooted in the Gospel, that we wished to inspire us.”¹⁷⁹ Immediately after the French

171 Hatzfeld, “L'École Nouvelle Cévenole.”

172 See Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, 163–67.

173 See Sylvain Bissonnier, “Regards croisés : Résistance allemande et Résistance sur le plateau Vivarais-Lignon,” *reval* 44, no. 1 (2012): 52–54, <https://doi.org/10.3406/reval.2012.6211>, https://www.persee.fr/doc/reval_0035-0974_2012_num_44_1_6211.

174 Chalamet, “Les Pasteurs et Les Mouvements Ecclésio-Théologiques,” 184.

175 “Barmen Declaration.”

176 Bissonnier, “Regards croisés,” 53. Also see Chalamet, “Les Pasteurs et Les Mouvements Ecclésio-Théologiques,” 186. André Trocmé does not mention the conference in his *Mémoires*. Neither Trocmé nor Theis were admirers of Barthianism, with Trocmé complaining of the “. . . dryness of the Barthian theology, behind which many take refuge so as not to engage [in the world] . . .” Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 408 (author's translation).

177 Boismorand, *Magda and André Trocmé*, 78.

178 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 299–301.

179 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 358–59 (author's translation).

armistice with Germany, Trocmé and Theis presented their “Weapons of the Spirit” sermon¹⁸⁰ likening totalitarianism to the authority of the Beast in the Apocalypse. The social imaginary of the pastors had been strongly shaped by what they had seen occurring in Europe. Out of a social imaginary that saw totalitarianism as pagan and anti-Christian they appealed to their parishioners through their history, the Bible, their affinity for the Jewish people, and their longstanding commitments to hospitality to shelter Jewish refugees.

Social imaginary statement 6: As pastors, we believe that the Christian response to the rising evils of totalitarianism must be one of active non-violent resistance using the weapons of the Spirit.

“Non-violence is not a theory superimposed on reality, it’s a journey that we explore day after day in communal prayer and obedience to the directions of the [Holy] Spirit.”¹⁸¹

(André Trocmé)

Examining this aspect of the social imaginary requires stepping into one of the Vivarais-Lignon plateau controversies. Philip Hallie, the writer who began the “legend” of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, was a moral philosopher who sought to understand how non-violence worked in the context of rescuing Jewish refugees in France, and so his book reflected his own belief in the centrality of non-violence.¹⁸² While a non-violent approach was not universally adopted by the inhabitants of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon (and the wider plateau), it was however core to the Christian beliefs and daily lives of André Trocmé and Édouard Theis and deeply influenced their approach to leadership.

André Trocmé’s first encounter with Christian pacifism was as a teen in occupied France when he met a Christian German signals soldier. While this soldier was obliged to carry a weapon, he refused to fire it.¹⁸³ When André undertook his military service, he told his commanding office he would not fire his weapon to kill anyone.¹⁸⁴ Later, his pacifism made it difficult for him to find pastoral posts in France as the Evangelical Reformed Church had declared conscientious objection as irreconcilable with pastoral duties.¹⁸⁵ Trocmé describes his position on non-violence in *Jesus and the Non-Violent Revolution*. “His [Jesus’] nonviolence was not

180 Trocmé and Theis, “Annexe No 4.”

181 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 379.

182 See Henry, “Le Chambon-Sur-Lignon: 1979–2015,” 85–86.

183 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 116–18.

184 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 197–98.

185 Boismorand, *Magda and André Trocmé*, 303n7.

a means to reach this end, but rather a matter of obedience and witness to God, who is love and who alone will establish his kingdom on earth.”¹⁸⁶ Trocmé’s non-violence was therefore deeply Christian in that it was focused on obedience to the commands of Jesus rather than a means to achieve an outcome.

While non-violent civil disobedience because of conscience was the position of most pastors across the plateau, violent and non-violent resistance coexisted,¹⁸⁷ with the violent resistance of the *Camisards* across the Cévennes in the eighteenth century being part of the Huguenot memory of resistance.¹⁸⁸ André Trocmé was deeply disappointed that at the end of the war, people desired violent retribution and disapproved of him preaching to German prisoners.¹⁸⁹ However, while non-violence may not have been adopted by all the village, the non-violent beliefs and approach of the pastors provided a means of fighting back against totalitarianism through the rescue and shelter of Jewish refugees.

This non-violent resistance was anything but passive as is demonstrated by the lives of the Trocmés and the Theis. As a teen during the First World War, André Trocmé had lived in occupied France and was then a refugee in Belgium and so understood the consequences of war for displaced people.¹⁹⁰ He was continually creative and active, thinking of new ways to communicate *l’Évangile* and see it lived out. “[H]e wrote Bible stories and Catechism lessons for children . . . He organized trips and outings, formed a men’s circle, started a choir, and even established a little folk museum. . . .”¹⁹¹ The opening of the Protestant school, *L’École nouvelle Cévenol*, with its explicit non-violent basis was one result from his enthusiasm (and Magda’s ideas).¹⁹² And it was of course his visit to the internment camps in Marseille in 1940–41 that helped start the flow of refugees to Le Chambon. All this had occurred through his wrestling with how to live out non-violence during a war. It is difficult to see how the community’s response to Jewish refugees could have occurred outside of the non-violent aspects of the social imaginaries of the leading pastors in Le Chambon-sur-Lignon and across the plateau.

186 André Trocmé, *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution*, ed. Charles E. Moore, rev. and expanded ed. (Orbis Books, 2004), 140.

187 See Grose, *Good Place to Hide*, 191–207.

188 Boulet, “L’attitude Spirituelle Des Protestants,” 427.

189 Unsworth, *Portrait of Pacifists*, 215.

190 See Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 83–143.

191 Boismorand, *Magda and André Trocmé*, 65.

192 Trocmé, *Mémoires*, 366. Although Charles Guillon had also been pushing for the establishment of a school well before then.

Conclusion

“It is not the village that hides the Jews, it is the church, it is Christians. Christians will not deliver them [to you].”¹⁹³

(André Trocmé speaking to Vichy authorities as remembered by André Bettex, another pastor on the plateau)

The thesis of this paper is that the inhabitants of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon sheltered Jewish refugees because of an individual and communal character, a social imaginary shaped by a strong Reformed Protestant identity and commitment to its values. This deeply embedded social imaginary comprising of images, symbols, stories, and exemplars had been shaped by centuries as a persecuted minority, a deep attachment to the Bible, a close affinity with the Jewish people, and a long tradition of hospitality. The inhabitants at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon were catalysed into sheltering Jewish refugees by pastors aware of the dangers of the growing totalitarianism across Europe and with a commitment to mobilising their parishioners, using the “weapons of the Spirit” in a non-violent manner—although this commitment to non-violence was only partially shared by the inhabitants. While there were many contributing factors at play—including social, economic, and geographic—the religious factors as embedded in the community’s social imaginary were primary. When rescuers across Europe are considered, as Gushee says, “. . . the rescuers demonstrated very profound moral goodness as well as a number of . . . paths that can be taken to get there.”¹⁹⁴ For the community at Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, their path to profound moral goodness was through a social imaginary based on their Reformed Protestant faith and their historically formed communal identity.

193 Bettex, “Témoignage d’un ancien pasteur,” 70 (author’s translation).

194 Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust*, 147.