



ABOVE: Nuremberg Trials. Looking down on defendants' dock, ca. 1945-46. (WWII War Crimes Records)

The Nuremberg Trials . . . and Homeschooling?!

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Why, again, are we doing this homeschool thing?

I think if God could, He would grab each of us by the shoulders, look deeply into our eyes, and press into us His earnest answer to that question! Let Him do that now. Still your weary mind, open your yearning heart to His leading, and listen to a story . . .

Adolf was born in March 1906. His mother died before his tenth birthday. His father was a soldier and a miner. Young Adolf (not the one you're thinking of) never did graduate from high school but instead helped at the mine and worked as a mechanic and traveling salesman. A friend suggested he join a rising political group with career opportunities. Adolf Eichmann was eventually promoted through the ranks, becoming a top SS official in Nazi Germany. He directed the imprisonment, torture, and extermination of millions of Jews, determinedly working toward his boss's "Final Solution."

After the fall of Hitler, the victorious Allied armies hunted this notorious war criminal, but the soldiers who arrested him under a false name did not realize he was Eichmann and thus took no special measures to hold him. The mass murderer was able to escape, hiding first in Germany and then in Italy. Some priests helped him get Red Cross paperwork for Argentina, and he eventually blended into Buenos Aires society.

But he wasn't the only European who moved to Argentina after the war. So

During that trial, many expected to see on the witness stand a crazed killer, a flailing megalomaniac. Eichmann was, after all, a *mass* murderer! Millions died unspeakable deaths, the ovens and gas chambers were busy, at his hands! He oversaw the herding of humans into those awful trains . . . and was not moved to guilt or compassion, not even when all was recounted during the trial!

What the world saw, instead, was a commonplace man—he looked like anyone's balding uncle—who had most

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did a Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivor who had suffered under Eichmann, and whose daughter had unknowingly—due to an alias—befriended Eichmann's son. When her father discerned the man's true identity, Israeli intelligence swooped in, smuggled Eichmann out of Argentina, and set him before the world in a dramatic Jerusalem trial (1961), eventually hanging him.

recently been an Argentine factory foreman, daily riding the bus to and from work and bringing flowers to his wife on their recent twenty-fifth anniversary. In other words, he was *ordinary*.

Did he deny the heinous crimes? No, he only denied guilt, because he was merely "following orders." This was the same alibi given by Nazi war criminals at the earlier Nuremberg trials and now

called the “Nuremberg Defense.” (A powerful film on this topic, *Judgment at Nuremberg*, stars Spencer Tracy.)

One Jewish website¹ I checked claimed Eichmann was not even anti-Semitic, just bureaucratic. He was, in his mind, simply a good citizen going with the national flow. This morally exempted him, he felt.

A German-Jewess and political theorist, Hannah Arendt, who had escaped to America, witnessed and wrote about Eichmann’s trial . . . and this is what we want to specifically consider as homeschoolers. “She coined a phrase, ‘the banality of evil,’ to describe Eichmann,” explaining that it stems from “thoughtlessness—the tendency of ordinary people to obey orders and conform to mass opinion without critically thinking about the results of their action or inaction.”²

As, the Psalmist would say . . . *Selah! Stop and think what this means!* Most people assume that such blind, unthinking obedience as Eichmann’s, such a personal disconnect from moral responsibility, could happen only under duress and to *someone* else *somewhere* else, such as in Nazi Germany under the spell of an orator like Hitler, during the post-World War I chaos that helped him grasp power.

But is that true? Is it rare for people to do automatically and unthinkingly what their culture teaches them . . . in the glaring face of common sense, the lessons of history, and God’s own truth? Or is it common? Is it so common that we do it ourselves (even in our parenting and homeschools) without realizing it?

I already know the answer in my own life, but that doesn’t carry much weight. Let’s look instead at the unforgettable experiment—triggered by Eichmann’s trial—carried out by an American professor who wondered the same. Dr. Milgram asked local volunteers to “help with important memory studies” by “testing” people’s recall. They would be “teachers” and give electrical shocks to “learners” who failed to remember correctly. However, the “teachers” were the *real* subjects of the experiment, because the “learners” were part of the setup. They only pretended to forget and then pretended to feel painful shocks.

The stunning and disconcerting result of the experiment was that most *ordinary* townsfolk kept right on administering ever-stronger shocks—even a deathly

450-volt blast—over the pleading cries of the “learners,” their fellow townspeople! *Why? Because they were calmly told to do so by a single man in a lab coat.*

The “teachers” had no grudge. They’d never been harmed by the “learners.” They’d never even met! Nor did the “learners” act or look threatening. Yet, the “teachers” were willing to torture and

Then we must *also* ask how average American townsfolk (in Milgram’s experiment) could believe they were electrocuting their neighbors, and continued to do so, under the influence of a single, soft-spoken authority figure!

If it is common, then, to succumb to an “expert with a plan,” we should also ask *ourselves* if we have unwittingly allowed

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possibly kill these innocent neighbors—right before them—all so they could avoid resisting the program and could gain approval from the scientist! They wanted to be sure they hadn’t become noticeable by rocking the boat, so they did not *analyze the difference between their beliefs and their actions.*

These “teachers”—like Eichmann—were ordinary. They had not earlier been killers. But once the “expert scientist” endorsed a “plan,” it *easily* overpowered their own moral beliefs! And this occurred back in the 1960s, when the United States was more characterized by Judeo-Christian values!

So, if we have long wondered why so many *ordinary* German people (when there were churches in every town square and the German education system was considered academically successful) hunted their Jewish neighbors, helped load the trains, and fired up the gas chambers . . .

If we have long noted that Hitler would have been just a lonely maniac if millions of people had not cooperated with him . . .

our current post-Christian culture to tell us “how things are done.” Every day, the confident “talking heads” sell us their latest cure-alls and super-systems.

For example, who has defined “education” for us? Have we—without thinking—duplicated the educational methods, locations, goals, schedules, and philosophies of the world around us? Or have we really pressed into God for *His* definition of education?

The pre-World War German schools may have *looked* impressive, but John Gatto says they were actually designed to inhibit deep thinking, instead implying that an abundance of academic factoids was true education.³ This was a passive education, not an active one. It promoted the culture’s own values, rather than showing *through every academic subject* that God’s truths alone free and prosper mankind. Hopefully, this is not the style of your children’s education, for when the German population was asked to passively accept Hitler’s cruel extremes, many did so. They were unthinking clay in the hands of the “experts.”

Ad Space

Ad Space

Ad Space

Likewise, who has defined “family life” for us? Who said that Father and Mother and Children should be separated all day? What does the nature of *all* aspects of our daily lives: finances, entertainment, politics, time investments, etc., reveal about the influences we accept?

The good news is that once we—the lovers of the Lord—lock onto His truths, we hold to them relentlessly. Let’s just be sure to probe His principles for parenting and education too! We cannot be Eichmann-like ourselves, even if that is human nature. We cannot passively and unthinkingly apply the same secular educational method we experienced as students. We cannot be, like Eichmann, mere “bureaucrats” in our homeschools, mindlessly enforcing the secular goals of our post-Christian culture.

You and I have a mighty purpose! We are called to raise children whose spiritual and academic education is totally God-defined and unique to each family. We have all day, every day, and every “subject” to reveal the Lord so powerfully to our kids that they can withstand the subtle authority of the culture, but we must do so first . . .



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Endnotes:

1. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/eichmann.html
2. www.ask.com/wiki/Hannah_Arendt?qsrc=3044
3. Gatto, John. “Confederacy of Dunces.” Complete publication details of this article unknown; I was handed a photocopy that did not include citations.