



Antin Navolsky

(1894-1965)

aka Anton Izvolksi

by George Peretsky

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Father Antin Navolsky, my grandparent's parish priest, exemplified not only spiritual leadership in word but in deed. He and his parishioners did their utmost to protect their Jewish neighbors during the Holocaust. His story is truly one of heroism and humanitarianism.

Father Navolsky was a pastor in Tovste's Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic church from 1930-1963. He has been named "Righteous Among the Nations" by **Yad Vashem**, an Israeli organization that memorializes Jewish Holocaust victims. The following excerpt from *Yad Vashem*, "Anton (Izvolksi) Navolsky" provides insight into his courageous efforts.

Antin Izvolksi was a priest in the town of Tłuste (today Tovste), south of Czortków, Tarnopol District (Chortkiv, Ternopil' District). Before the war, Izvolksi preached tolerance and thanks to this the local Ukrainians had good relations with the Jews. During the years 1941-1944 Izvolksi expended much effort to protect the local Jewish population and he even helped Jewish refugees from Hungary that had fled to the town from the surrounding villages. On July 6, 1941, when the last Soviet soldiers left the town, gangs of young thugs roamed the surrounding area and attacked any Jew they came across; over 200 Jews were murdered on that day alone. When Izvolksi heard about this, he placed his followers on every road to Tłuste to stop the entrance of the murderers into the town. Throughout that day, he walked through the town's streets, gave encouragement to those of his flock fighting the attackers and calmed the frightened Jews. On July 9, the Hungarians entered Tłuste and two months later they passed their rule to the Germans. Throughout the German occupation, Izvolksi helped Jews in various ways and during "Aktionen" [Action] he hid them in his home and church. Ulka Sommer, one of those he rescued, later testified that during the war, Izvolksi preached love of Jewish neighbors. Even after a priest in the neighboring town was killed just for saying that Ukrainian independence will not be built on Jewish blood, Izvolksi continued to preach against murdering Jews. Izvolksi died in 1965 and for many years thereafter many Jews continued to be grateful for his wartime actions.

Yad Vashem Museum, Israel

On March 9, 1993, Yad Vashem recognized Antin Izvolksi as Righteous Among the Nations. In my correspondence with the Department of the Righteous, Yad Vashem corroborated that Anton Navalsky is Antin Izvolksi.



www.yadvashem.org

“The Hall of Names” at Yad Vashem displays the Jewish People’s memorial to each and every Jew who perished in the Holocaust – a place where they may be commemorated for generations to come.

“Remember only that I was innocent and, just like you, mortal on that day, I, too, had had a face marked by rage, by pity and joy, quite simply, a human face!”

-- Benjamin Fondane, Exodus Murdered at Auschwitz, 1944

More about Father Navolsky can be read on the website: [www. Tovste.info](http://www.Tovste.info) under Notable Figures.



www.Tovste.info

Duality of Man

by George Peretsky

*Forward for From Sword to Cross
Biography of Father Navolsky*

During the first try, my hand trembled a bit as I shot, but one gets used to it. By the tenth try I aimed calmly and shot surely at the many women, children, and infants. I kept in mind that I have two infants at home, whom these hordes would treat just the same, if not ten times worse (Snyder 205).

So wrote a German (Austrian) policeman to his wife of his feelings and experiences shooting the city's [Mahileu, Belarus] Jews. Whether this was the convoluted rationalization of one individual or whether this extended (and still extends) to the many executioners and perpetrators of sanctioned murder be they Nazis, Communists, or any nationality cannot be certain. The psyche of each individual is not readily generalized. Some undoubtedly have been motivated by fear of their victim, others by fear of their superiors, others revenge, still others lack any compassion and even harbor hatred for their fellow humans. They may see killing as a simple task.

The indoctrination process of young recruits that dehumanizes people other than their own, used by armies, promotes atrocities. Many or most of the atrocities committed are done by young soldiers, most not of legal age to vote or consume alcohol. The Nazi regime and ideology was especially adept in justifying their actions.

General Gustav von Bechtolsheim, commander of the infantry division responsible for the security in the Minsk area, fervently advocated the mass murder of Jews as preventative measure. Had the Soviets invaded Europe, he was fond of saying the Jews would have exterminated the Germans. Jews were 'no longer humans in the European sense of the word' and thus 'must be destroyed' (Snyder 206).

Within this macabre world of nihilistic reality millions were cast to suffer unimaginable consequences of World War II. For many their core values, their humanity, and their ingenuity for survival was tested. In a sociological sense, man's dual nature of killing and extending compassion was exercised over and over again. Interestingly, in Stanley Kubrick's movie, *Full Metal Jacket*: a helmet inscribed "Born to Kill," and a peace symbol worn at the same time by the main character portrays this dichotomy. Just as there are examples of individuals in all nationalities perpetrating atrocities there are examples of extreme heroism and compassion in defending fellow human beings.

“Righteous Among Nations”

Yad Vashem describes the Righteous Among the Nations:

In a world of total moral collapse there was a small minority who mustered extraordinary courage to uphold human values. These were the Righteous Among the Nations. They stand in stark contrast to the mainstream of indifference and hostility that prevailed during the Holocaust. Contrary to the general trend, these rescuers regarded the Jews as fellow human beings who came within the bounds of their universe of obligation

Most rescuers were ordinary people. . . . So far Yad Vashem recognized Righteous from 44 countries and nationalities; there are Christian from all denominations and churches, Muslims and agnostics; men and women of all ages

Some claim that the Righteous are a diverse group and the only common denominator are the humanity and courage they displayed by standing up for their moral principles. Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner defined the altruistic personality. By comparing and contrasting rescuers and bystanders during the Holocaust, they pointed out that those who intervened were distinguished by characteristics such as empathy and a sense of connection to others. Nehama Tec, who also studied many cases of Righteous, found a cluster of shared characteristics and conditions of separateness, individuality or marginality. The rescuers' independence enabled them to act against the accepted conventions and beliefs.

Bystanders were the rule, rescuers were the exception

(“Righteous Among Nations”)

Examples of exceptions are Natalia Obodiak (presently not recognized as Righteous Among Nations), Father Omelyan Kovch, and Father Antin Navolsky. Obodiak's story is featured in the website: *Tluste/Tovste, Ukraine* – “The Spitzer Story (Tluste Life and **Times** -Spitzer Story).” She was instrumental in saving the family from detection as they were hiding during an “Aktionen” (round up of Jews) in the town of Tovste (Tluste).

Father Omelyan Kovch was beatified by Pope John Paul II on his visit to Ukraine (“Ukrainian-German Collaboration”):

Father Omelyan Kovch . . . sacrificed his life while saving several hundred Jews. In 1942, father Kovch issued Jews large numbers of baptism certificates in attempt to save their lives. In doing so, he broke the Nazi prohibitions and so he was arrested in December 1942 and deported to the Majdanek concentration camp where he was gassed and burned on March 26, 1943 (“Righteous Among Nations in Ukraine”).

“Father Antin Navolsky”

Father Navolsky served as an officer in World War I, experienced the emotions of battle and those associated against his enemy. His conversion to taking up the priesthood exemplifies that dual nature in man. He truly gave up the sword for the cross. His story and life example is a guide to us all.



In 1997, the publication called *History of Churches in the City of Tovste* [Ukraine] was written by Jaroslav Pavluk. It was published by the League of Historical Ukrainian Cities, Chortkiw, Ukraine. The publication contains a biography of Father Navolsky: “From Sword to Cross.

Biography of Father Antin Navolsky translated by George Peretsky:

Antin Navolsky was born in 1894 in the village of Zazulintyach in the Zalishchik region to a prosperous and educated village family where he completed his elementary education. After graduating from high school in Kitsmany, he began his studies at Lvov Veterinarian School but was interrupted after two years by the First World War.

He served in the Austrian army from 1914 to 1918 and subsequently joined the Ukrainian Galician Army. Because of his army experience he was given the rank of captain and assigned to an elite unit known as the “Sichovy Striltsy” (“sich” – refers to settlement of 17th century Cossacks; “striltsy” – refers to sharp shooters). During the ensuing Ukrainian-Polish war, Antin was critically wounded at battles near Lvov, captured, and interned as a prisoner under the Polish regime.

After recovering his health, Antin managed to escape Polish imprisonment and successfully trekked through Zakarpattia (the Carpathian Highlands) to Stanislavshchena. There he rejoined his old army unit and they continued on to the renowned “Chortkivsky Offensive.” In 1919 his unit, in conjunction with other units of the Ukrainian Galician Army, crossed the river Zbruch and continued to battle the White and Red armies from Russia.

In 1920, together with fellow officers of the Ukrainian Galician Army, Antin Navolsky was captured and imprisoned in Tuchla by the Poles. He was released in 1922 and returned to his parent's village but as a former officer he was placed under surveillance, rearrested, and placed in the Chortkivsky prison. After six months, in ill health, he was released and put into the care of Father Florchuk in the village of Kulakivtsi. While recovering Antin made a momentous decision to turn his sword into a cross and enrolled into the seminary in the city of Stanislav.

He was ordained a priest by Archbishop Chomushun in 1930 and assigned as pastor of Tluste together with villages of Rojanivka and Anchelivka. By his example and sermonizing, he united the whole community and took on the enormous and difficult task of renewing the construction of the church which the parishioners began in 1912 (as designed by the architect Jan Zubjetsky).

During and after World War I, there was an economic downturn under the Polish occupation. No funds were available to build the church. Not discouraged, the young priest was able to organize a culture club which, under his young spiritual leadership, managed to acquire enough funds to continue constructing the church. By 1939 the church already had an erected cross. This brought great pride to the Tluste citizens and our Podilsky region.

During the Bolshevik occupation (1939-1941) of Tovste, the Soviets forced Father Novalsky to hide among his parishioners. Up to the last moments, the Bolsheviks searched for him and other individuals who they could not eliminate during their totalitarian rule.

After a few days of German and Hungarian occupation, Pastor Navolsky prophesied that the new occupation was not going to be better than that of the Bolsheviks. In his sermons he invoked brotherly love and aid to those [Jews] who were being persecuted and whose lives were in danger. Several Jewish families avoided death thanks to his efforts. He did this at mortal peril to his life.

After the war, the Jewish community recognized his role and leadership [as one of the righteous] and inscribed his name on a memorial plaque in an Israeli museum.

In the last years of his life, he lived poorly among parishioners and remained their spiritual leader. Father Antin Navolsky died in 1965 and is buried next to his mother in the Tovste cemetery.



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