

# An Audience of One



by Rolaant McKenzie

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In 1991, the German weekly newspaper, *Die Zeit (The Time)*, published a June 13, 1936, photograph showing a large gathering of workers at the Blohm & Voss shipyard in Hamburg at the launching of *Horst Wessel*, a navy training ship named for a Nazi SA officer who was murdered in 1930. This event included a speech by Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess with Adolf Hitler at his side. In a sea of people enthusiastically raising their arms in the Nazi salute, there was one conspicuous exception, a man toward the back of the crowd resolutely standing with his arms crossed over his chest. This photograph generated great curiosity regarding his identity, and a request was made to the public for information about this brave man.

Four years later, another German newspaper, the *Hamburger Abendblatt (Hamburg Evening Newspaper)*, published the photograph with an article entitled “1936 – Only One Left His Arm Down,” with the subtitle “Writer Looking for Contemporary Witnesses: Who Was the Man?” Shortly after this, the newspaper reported that the daughter of August Landmesser, Irene Eckler, identified the man in the photograph as her father.

August Landmesser (1910-1944) joined the Nazi party in 1931 hoping it



would help him gain employment. He later received a job at the Blohm & Voss shipyard. Landmesser was expelled from the party in 1935 when they found out that he was engaged to be married to Irma Eckler, a Jewish woman. Their subsequent marriage registration was rejected because of the Nuremberg Laws recently enacted prohibiting marriages between Germans and Jews. Nonetheless, August and Irma loved each other very much and continued to live as husband and wife, and their first daughter, Ingrid, was born later that year.

Special courts were established by 1934 to penalize anyone who refused to perform the Nazi salute. The penalties varied from fines or intimidation to incarceration in detention camps. Knowing this, Landmesser still refused to do the salute even with the peer pressure of everyone around him doing it and in the presence of Hitler himself.

The repercussions of Landmesser's courage were severe. He was eventually arrested and sentenced to two and a half years in the Börgermoor concentration camp in 1938. He was released to work as a foreman for the haulage company Püst in 1941. But in February 1944, Landmesser was conscripted into a penal combat unit, killed in action in Croatia six months later, and buried in a mass grave near the village of Hodilje.

Landmesser's wife Irma, pregnant with their second daughter, was taken by the Gestapo and held at the Fuhlsbüttel prison in 1938, where she gave birth to Irene. She was separated from her children and transferred to several concentration camps, including the one at Ravensbrück. In the end, it is believed that she was taken to the Bernburg Euthanasia Centre, where she was murdered in 1942 along with more than 14,000 others.

Both Irene and her older sister, Ingrid, were separated and survived the war with kind foster parents. In 1951, the local government in Hamburg recognized the marriage of August and Irma. Ingrid took the surname *Landmesser*, while Irene continued to use her mother's maiden name, *Eckler*.

Standing firm on righteous principles, especially against a tyrannical regime, does not always lead to honor and reward in this life. Too many times, it leads to cruel suffering and death, leaving the person to be vindicated in the justice of history. Kim Dae-jung (1924-2009), South Korean prisoner of conscience, statesman, and freedom advocate, alluded to this in his speech when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 2000, in Oslo, Norway:

"In 1980, I was sentenced to death by the military regime. For six months in prison, I awaited the execution day. Often, I shuddered with fear of death. But I would find calm in the fact of history that justice ultimately prevails. I was then, and am still, an avid reader of history. And I knew that in all ages, in all places, he who lives a righteous life dedicated to his people and humanity may not be victorious, may meet a gruesome end in his lifetime, but will be triumphant and honored in history; he who wins by injustice may dominate the present day, but history will always judge him to be a shameful loser. There can be no exception."

Micaiah the prophet was confronted with a moment of decision during a state visit of King Jehoshaphat of Judah with King Ahab of Israel (1 Kings 22:1-40). Ahab was soliciting the aid

of Jehoshaphat to wage war against the king of Aram to retake the city of Ramoth-gilead. But Jehoshaphat, being a good king who feared the Lord, wanted Ahab to seek His will first before deciding to go to war with Aram. So Ahab gathered about 400 “prophets” who benefited from their alignment with him as the king and would tell him what he wanted to hear, that is, the Lord will deliver the city into his hand.

But Jehoshaphat, apparently unimpressed by these sycophants for Ahab, wanted to hear from an authentic prophet of the Lord. Ahab reluctantly sent a messenger to summon Micaiah from prison, where he had placed him, someone he hated because he would not be swayed by his position of power. The messenger urged Micaiah to align his words with the other “prophets” so that all would go well with him, but he was determined to faithfully present what God wanted him to say.

Micaiah, once brought before the presence of Ahab, could have been intimidated by him and his hundreds of paid supposed men of God prophesying victory. He could have acquiesced to political power and the crowd following it in order to be released from prison. But he recognized that he had only an audience of One, that is, the Lord. It was to Him that Micaiah was most interested in being faithful, and so he told Ahab the truth that if he pursued his course, he would fall at Ramoth-gilead.

Ahab, angered that Micaiah would not echo the positive message of his “prophets,” sent him back to prison with meager rations until he returned from the battle in peace to presumably deal with him later. Of course, the truth of God’s word cannot fail, and Ahab fell in battle just as the prophet Micaiah said he would. But Scripture does not record whether or not Micaiah was ever released from prison when Ahab’s wicked son, Ahaziah, became king of Israel.

Ahab may have had power and prestige as king of Israel in his day, but he will always be remembered as a wicked ruler who

led Israel astray and died ignominiously because he refused to obey the word of the Lord. Micaiah, in contrast, will always be remembered as a true prophet of God who stood alone among a sea of opposition and steadfastly told the truth, like those whose trust was in the Lord though they “experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment” (Hebrews 11:35-38). Surely he will receive approval and reward from the Lord Jesus in His kingdom (Matthew 25:21; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus truly had an audience of One, His Father in heaven, whose will He came to accomplish:

“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.” (John 6:37-40)

On the night that He was betrayed, Jesus’ concern was for us. Though He knew hours later He would be hanging on a cross, Jesus prayed to His Father that His disciples be sanctified in the truth of His word, and not only His disciples, but all who would believe in Him because of their testimony (John 17).

When He was arrested and separated from His disciples, Jesus was taken before Caiaphas, the high priest. There He stood alone and did not shrink from telling the truth of who He was, the Christ, the Son of God, though it would cause His condemnation (Matthew 26:57-68). When He stood alone before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, He made the truthful testimony of His divine kingship (John 18:28-40).

Pontius Pilate was a powerful Roman governor of a conquered country, but he will ever be remembered in history as one who

acquiesced to a bloodthirsty mob and knowingly condemned an innocent man to death. But Jesus will always be the Lamb of God, who out of love for us willingly went to the cross to die a bloody death and fully atone for our sins. His bodily resurrection from the dead on the third day demonstrates that all who trust in Him, He Himself will raise to everlasting life when He returns.

August Landmesser and the prophet Micaiah are examples of doing the right thing by standing firm against evil in the face of overwhelming pressure to do otherwise. While they can be inspirations to us today to do likewise in the challenges we face today, let us never forget what Jesus accomplished on behalf of sinners through His perfect life, death, and resurrection. Let this cause us not only to truly believe in Him but also to be faithful to Him when inevitable trials come our way.

In the end, we have an audience of One, Jesus Christ, and eternal reward comes from Him.

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