In Chapter I of *To Mend the World*, after contrasting the book’s contents with that of *Encounters Between Judaism and Modern Philosophy*, Emil Fackenheim points out:

In the grim but ineluctable task of a direct confrontation with the Holocaust, our thought receives much help from historians, novelists, poets. It receives more help still—indispensable help—from witnesses that survived the ordeal and told the tale. But so far as thought (philosophical or theological) is concerned, one still is, except for a few comrades-in-arms, alone.¹

Let me draw our attention to Fackenheim’s acknowledgment of the central importance to his inquiry of what he here calls the “indispensable help” of the testimony of survivors and witnesses. A page later, having identified the central task of the work, to show how Jewish thought “can both expose itself to the Holocaust and survive,” Fackenheim refers to the most important “help” that this testimony provides, “a shining light,” he calls it, “in this midnight of dark despair.”² What he is referring to is the “resistance in thought and the resistance in life” that grounds the possibility of Jewish thought’s endurance, “To hear and obey the commanding voice of Auschwitz is an ‘ontological’ possibility, here and now, because the hearing and obeying was already an ‘ontic’ reality, then and there.”³ The crucial testimony, then, discloses “the shining light” of a resistance that is in some way paradigmatic. For those familiar with the work, it is no surprise that the testimony is that of Pelagia Lewinska, from her memoir *Twenty Months at Auschwitz*, when she describes her first awareness of the Nazi intent and remarked that she “felt under orders to live.”⁴ From the first moment that Fackenheim learned of those remarks, reading about them in Terence Des Pres’s *The Survivor*,

¹ MW 22.  
² MW 25.  
³ MW 25.  
when it was first published in 1976, their significance increased for him, culminating in their role in To Mend the World.\textsuperscript{5}

Lewinska’s testimony Fackenheim later calls “a historic statement” and says that it is “pivotal” to the book. In Section 8 of Chapter IV, he engages in a descriptive account of various types of resistance during the Holocaust, but in the “critical analysis” of “resistance as an ontological category” in Section 9, it is Lewinska’s testimony that has pride of place. The thought that has tried in every way to confront and comprehend the evil of the death camps arrives at a “horrified surprise, or a surprised horror,” and this is a philosophical thought that is itself possible only because it was already exemplified in the Holocaust by resisting victims, preeminently by Pelagia Lewinska, whose grasp of the evil and her situation is “epistemologically ultimate.”\textsuperscript{6} At this pivotal moment in To Mend the World, Fackenheim draws the conclusion that “Resistance in extremity was a way of being,” which he calls the end of a necessary excursus, clearly a philosophical one, in which the impasse of thought trying to comprehend and cope with Auschwitz is now seen to be neither absolute nor permanent. Post-Holocaust thought is possible now because resistance in thought was actual then, and because then it led to actual acts of resistance, now it also must lead not just to thought but to life.

All of this deserves careful, critical examination, much more than it has thus far received, but my purposes here point in a different direction. Pelagia Lewinska’s testimony is not the only testimony Fackenheim appropriates and explores. Various witnesses are considered in his descriptive account of resistance, including hasidim in Buchenwald and the Warsaw Ghetto fighters. But the role of these cases is to lead us to Lewinska’s culminating testimony, with its self-awareness and its self-conscious commitment to life. Later, however, in Sections 12–14, Fackenheim calls attention to cases of resistance for different purposes, as part of his articulation of post-Holocaust philosophy, Christianity, and Judaism. Post-Holocaust philosophical thought can occur today because there was already a resisting philosophical moment during that event, by Kurt Huber and the “White Rose” in Munich. Post-Holocaust Christianity is possible now because of the resistance of one such as


\textsuperscript{6} MW 247, 249.