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## The Truth about Tibet

*Tenzin Choegyal*  
Advisor to the Dalai Lama

**T**he youngest brother of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Choegyal was born in 1946. His first studies were as a monk at the Drepung Monastery.

In 1959, facing extermination by Chinese communist invaders, he and his family fled to India. His education continued under the Jesuits at St. Joseph's College. Upon graduation, he gave up his monk's robes and traveled to America for further study.



Eventually, he returned to India to help the growing Tibetan refugee community there and to serve variously as special assistant, private secretary, and advisor to the Dalai

Lama; as a member of the Tibetan ministries of religion and culture and security; and as an elected member of the Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies.

Since retiring in 1995, he has traveled widely to promote freedom for Tibet and to teach the religious precepts of Buddhism. ♣

*Tibetan leader Tenzin Choegyal gives a brief history of his country, which has suffered great persecution since the Chinese invaded in 1949. He notes that the Chinese deliberately set out to destroy religion, since it posed the greatest threat to their communist ideology.*

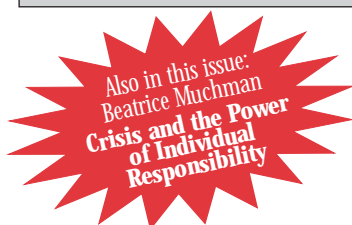
*His remarks were delivered at Hillsdale's Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar, "Faith and Freedom Around the World," sponsored in part by the Sage Foundation, on campus last fall.*

## Tibet's Origins

**T**ibet lies on a vast, arid plateau surrounded by steep mountain ranges in central Asia. It is bordered by China, Myanmar (Burma), India, Nepal, and Bhutan. Its area is nearly 500,000 square miles and it averages 15,000 feet in altitude, which is why the encyclopedias often refer to Tibet as the "Roof of the World."

According to legend, the father of all Tibetans was a monkey and the mother an ogress. (No doubt Charles Darwin would have been pleased by the first image and disturbed by the second.) Tibet's primitive tribes believed in "Bon," a shamanistic religion in which communications between the visible world and spiritual world were conducted by shamans, or priests.

Sometime in the 6th century, these tribes were consolidated into one tribe, and in the 7th century, they became a great nation under Songtsen Gampo, perhaps the most powerful ruler Asia had



yet seen. The emperors of China and Nepal offered him their daughters in marriage. These women were Buddhists, and they persuaded their husband to encourage the spread of their religion, which was founded in the 6th century B.C. by a young prince, Siddhartha Gautama, revered as “Buddha,” or the “Enlightened One.”

Songtsen Gampo sent many of his subjects to India to study Sanskrit and the “Pali Canon” (a body of scripture based on Buddha’s teachings) in order to develop a written Tibetan language. He also built nearly 200 Buddhist temples, and he established a body of common law that, with a few exceptions, was distinguished by its emphasis on Buddhism.

By the 8th-century reign of his descendant, Trisong Detsen, all major Buddhist writings had been translated into Tibetan, and scores of foreign Buddhists were teaching in Tibetan monasteries.

But in the 9th century, another king, Lang Dharma, attempted to exterminate Buddhism and restore shamanism. For one generation, there were no monasteries, no monks, no nuns. Buddhism appeared to be dead. But when Lang Dharma was assassinated, Buddhism gradually began to spread again.

During the 11th century, a famous Indian scholar, Atisha, visited Tibet and ended up staying for 12 years, teaching and writing. He helped Tibetan Buddhism to flourish.

## The Dalai Lama

In the 17th century, Tibetan Buddhism was so renowned that even the emperors of China sought the Dalai Lama’s guidance. Just who was the “Dalai Lama”? The title, which is Mongolian for “Ocean of Wisdom,” has been bestowed upon the spiritual leader of Tibet since the 15th century. A Western writer once explained:

Be it understood, they [the Dalai Lamas] are not gods; nor are they “living Buddhas,” as they are called by the Chinese (*Huo Fo-yeh*). They are the embodiment of the souls of men who were saintly during their first incarnations and are on their way to Buddhahood through a long succession of lives as mortals in this vale of tears.

The 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawong Gyatso (1617-82), became not only the spiritual but also the political leader of Tibet. According to one modern observer, he assured that the entire nation would be dedicated to a religious principle, “and it has been the constant attempt to put that principle in practice that has been Tibet’s greatest source of strength.”

At various times during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, parts of Tibet were temporarily under Chinese influence. But the Dalai Lama was always recognized as

the head of state.



## Tibet in the Early 20th Century

Western influences were minimal. A few missionaries and a few expeditions were sent to explore Tibet, but that was all. And China discouraged further foreign contact.

Then in 1904, the Tibetans signed a treaty with Great Britain. A few years later, when China threatened to tighten its grip on Tibet, it was to Great Britain that the Tibetans appealed for help. But the British government had pledged not to intervene in Chinese-Tibetan relations and on several occasions had even signed treaties with China regarding Tibet *without* consulting the Tibetans.

In 1911-12, a civil war in China sparked a Tibetan revolt. The occupying troops of the Chinese Imperial Army were forced to surrender, and in 1913, the Dalai Lama formally reaffirmed his nation’s independence. The new “Republican Government” in China insisted that Tibet was a Chinese province, but, for all practical purposes, independence was real and was acknowledged by a number of nations in the East and the West.

In the 1920s, the 13th Dalai Lama tried to bring Tibet, a nation of nomadic herders and farmers, into the 20th century. But he died in 1933, with most of his plans for a modernized economy, school system, and military unrealized.

In 1935, my brother—the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso—was born to a peasant family in a small village in northeastern Tibet. After passing many rigorous tests, he was formally installed as the Dalai Lama in 1940.

As the recent Hollywood film *Kundun* notes, the young Dalai Lama was greatly interested in technology, and he shared his predecessor's desire to modernize the country. He was delighted when the first English school opened in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa in 1944. He also advocated land reform, industry, and trade with the West.

## The Chinese Invasion

**M**eanwhile, China was planning a full-scale invasion. The first troops arrived in the outlying regions in 1949, and more soon followed. The communists claimed they were "liberating our brothers in Tibet from imperialist oppression."

In 1950, the small, poorly equipped Tibetan army was defeated. Tibetan delegates who were in China on a special mission were coerced into signing—without authority from the Tibetan government—a 17-point agreement that returned Tibet "to the big family of the motherland." On paper, existing political and religious freedoms were preserved, but China very quickly seized the opportunity to use its new "administration zones" and "military supervisors" to encroach upon them.

In 1954, the Dalai Lama attended the National People's Congress in Peking, hoping to find a peaceful way to deal with China without compromising Tibetan interests or Buddhist principles. This was when Mao uttered his famous warning, "But, of course, religion is poison. It has two great defects. It undermines the race [and] retards the progress of the country. Tibet and Mongolia have been poisoned by it."

Mao continued to send thousands of soldiers into Tibet. They looted monasteries and temples and imprisoned or killed resisters. By the end of 1958, Tibet was completely conquered.

In 1959, after hearing of Chinese atrocities committed in eastern Tibet, a group of rebels staged an unsuccessful attack on the Chinese garrison in Lhasa. Word spread that the Chinese planned to retaliate by assassinating the Dalai Lama. Thousands of Tibetans stood outside their leader's compound, ready to protect him.

The Dalai Lama and his entire family (which included me) secretly escaped only hours before the Chinese began shelling—and killing—many of those brave defenders.

## Genocide

**S**ince the 24-year-old Dalai Lama went into exile 40 years ago, more than 80,000 Tibetans have joined the refugee communities he founded in India, Nepal, and Bhutan.

They have fled from genocide. By its own estimate, between March of 1959 and October of 1960, the People's Liberation Army killed over 87,000 Tibetans in Central Tibet alone.

As Tibetan officials later reported,

The consequences of the confrontation which occurred were devastating: the Chinese troops massacred thousands of people; tens of thousands were taken to concentration or labor camps where most died; Tibetan cultural and religious institutions were destroyed and the population was subjected to terror campaigns and massive "re-education" efforts which the Chinese in China only experienced years later during the Cultural Revolution.

The current estimate is that more than 1.2 million Tibetans are dead as a result of the Chinese occupation.

Since 1979, the Chinese have claimed that religious freedom has been allowed in Tibet, but in reality it has only been superficial. A few rituals have been reinstated and a few temples have been rebuilt. Buddhist teaching is still banned or, in the rare cases in which it is allowed, under tight control. Only a handful of monasteries and nunneries—eight out of more than 6,000—were still in operation in the mid-1970s. In independent Tibet, the most prominent ones each trained 3,000-10,000 monks and nuns. Now, each is limited to 150-400 and is forced to teach Marxism.

A 1990 Communist Party document states: "With the development of our socialist system, the social system for the natural extinction of religion was established." Another, issued in 1991, adds:

We should oppose all who work to split the motherland in the name of nationality and religion. There should be no hesitation in taking harsh decision to deal with any political disturbance carried out in the name of nationality and religion, and in doing so the state's political, judiciary, and even military powers should be used.

Modern Tibetans realize that although "China no longer bombs or sends Red Guards to destroy Tibet's monasteries, its aim still remains the same as before: total elimination of Tibetan religion and culture." To help accomplish this end, China has flooded the country with Chinese settlers and soldiers—as many as 7.5 million—and it has instituted so many restrictions on the economy that Tibetans are among the world's poorest citizens. Entrepreneurship and industry are actively discouraged.

## A Free Tibet

A free Tibet exists—but not in the Tibetan homeland, where Tibetans have no rights except those that the Chinese see fit to grant them. The Dalai Lama has established a government-in-exile, which features a written constitution, a representative assembly, an independent judiciary, and all the other essentials of a democratic system. He has also founded a number of monastic centers of learning and schools for Tibetan children.

He travels around the world to educate others about the fate of the Tibetans. He tells a tragic

story—of six million people locked in a desperate struggle for survival. But he also tells an inspiring story—of those same people and their quiet courage, their deep faith, and their unquenchable optimism.

The Dalai Lama further explains why those who are neither Buddhist nor Tibetan should champion Tibet: We all share a common nature and a common spark of divinity. We all want to be free—politically and spiritually. The cause of a free Tibet, therefore, is the cause of all people.

Tibet has endured great suffering in the last half-century, but suffering can breed the kind of inner strength that people require in order to change the world for the better. 🌱

# Crisis and the Power of Individual Responsibility

Beatrice Muchman  
Author, *Never to Be Forgotten*

***Never to Be Forgotten: A Young Girl's Holocaust Memoir* (1997) recounts the struggle of Beatrice Muchman's family to survive in Nazi-occupied Belgium. Before Beatrice's parents were seized by the Gestapo, they ensured her safety by sending her to a small, isolated village where she was sheltered by Catholics.**

Eventually, Beatrice made it to the United States and attended the University of Illinois and Roosevelt University. She graduated with a B.A. degree in foreign languages and went on to teach French, German, and English in Chicago area schools.



Though now retired, Mrs. Muchman, who has spoken at the U.S. Holocaust Museum in Washington and at many benefits for Catholic and Jewish organizations, actively shares her experiences with audiences all over the country. 🌱

*Like Anne Frank, Beatrice Muchman kept a diary when she was a young girl hiding from the Nazis. Along with family letters and documents uncovered many years later, her diary became the inspiration for her moving memoir, Never to Be Forgotten.*

*Mrs. Muchman's remarks were delivered at Hillsdale's Center for Constructive Alternatives seminar, "Faith and Freedom Around the World," on campus last fall.*

In 1939, my family fled Germany and landed in Belgium. Some members were able to emigrate to the United States, but my mother and father, Meta and Julius Westheimer, and I were hopelessly caught up in bureaucratic red tape that prevented our escape.

The daily fight for survival in Nazi-occupied Belgium was beyond a young child's comprehension. For this reason, some of the stories I related in my wartime memoir, *Never to Be Forgotten*, I learned only after a cache of family letters, documents, and photographs was discovered a few years ago. Others, however, are based on my youthful recollections and on my diary, which I kept between 1939 and 1946. I would like to share just a few of those stories here.

Changing address? Please use the enclosed postpaid envelope or telephone (800/437-2268) or e-mail <imprimis@hillsdale.edu>.

This essay includes edited excerpts from *Never to Be Forgotten: A Young Girl's Holocaust Memoir* (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, 1997).

## Hiding in the Countryside

**T**he first time I saw my father cry was the second-to-last time I saw him. I was nine years old. That was more than 50 years ago in the summer of 1942.

We were in the Belgian countryside, in the village of Ottignies, about 25 kilometers from Brussels. My father had brought my cousin Henri and me there by train that morning. We were at the home of two middle-aged sisters named Marraine and Adèle. They were French Catholics who had agreed to take us in—“just for the summer,” we were told.

My father began weeping when he kissed me goodbye. Marraine and Adèle looked on awkwardly. Or maybe I was the one who felt awkward, wanting so much to look grown-up and embarrassed to see my father, of all people, acting like a child.

I understood a lot of things by the time I was nine years old. After fleeing our home in Berlin and moving to Brussels three years earlier, after learning to speak French and, more important, not to speak German, after being forced to quit school and hide in our cramped apartment for fear of discovery by the authorities, I understood things that a child that age should not have to know—things that too many children, caught up in the war, knew all too well.

But on that beautiful summer day I did not, or perhaps would not, understand why my father was crying.

My parents had prepared me for the trip, telling me that I would enjoy life away from the city—the fresh air, the sunshine, the flowers, the trees. But with the way my father was behaving, spending the summer in the country seemed like anything but a good thing. He was spoiling what was supposed to be a wonderful moment in my life.

It wasn't until much later that I came to realize why he was crying. He knew that this might be the last time he would ever see me.

He was gone in what seemed like an instant, rushing out the door, starting on the long journey down the steep hill leading back to the train station. I tried hard to put him out of my mind, as Marraine and Adèle attempted to make Henri and me feel at home in our new surroundings. But when I went to bed that night, I was still thinking about my father. I felt frightened and alone.

I thought they were abandoning me when in reality they were saving me.

Despite all the things I understood back then, despite all my efforts to see things as a mature young lady, I only saw them through a child's eyes. When I was told a year later that my father had been murdered by German soldiers, there was a part of me that didn't believe it, a part of me that didn't yet understand the finality of death. When I learned at the same time that my mother had been captured and taken away, I didn't believe that she was gone forever. I was sure I would see her again. I was wrong, but having that belief to cling to made it possible for me to cope during a time of great personal anguish.

## Memories and Secrets

**I** have carried the memories of my youth for more than half a century now, and at many times they have been an oppressive burden. But they have also been a great blessing, for they remind me of people whom I came to cherish, people who were willing to risk their lives to save mine.

Marraine was one of them. A Parisian, she came to live with her sister Adèle in Ottignies after her husband died. She had been a nurse during World War I, and the pain and suffering she had witnessed were her reason for providing refuge for Jewish children when World War II began.

Henri and I owed our lives to Marraine and Adèle, but we also owed our lives to the whole village. Almost everyone in Ottignies knew our secret and the secrets of the other Jewish children hidden there, but no one reported us to the German soldiers who patrolled the area. (Out of 4,000 Jewish children hiding in Belgium, 3,000 were saved precisely because of this kind of quiet, unsung heroism.)

My parents, of course, made the ultimate sacrifice—giving up their only child. But, being a child, I had no idea what an agonizing decision it was for them. I thought they were abandoning me when in reality they were saving me.

Like so many others who lost loved ones during the Holocaust, I learned very little about what happened to my parents. Most of what I knew came from my grandmother and my aunt immediately after the war. Some 40 years later, their accounts were validated in Belgian historian Maxime Steinberg's *La Traque des Juifs*. My parents were

# Faith and Freedom Around the World

“**R**egimes come and go. Governments are elected and voted out of office. Empires founded on repression, on tyranny, on false belief, melt away. The most glaring example is the Soviet Union. All its weapons—with billions of dollars spent on cruise missiles—were not able to stop the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the liberation of the Baltic states, Armenia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, and so on.

Throughout human history, only one empire has survived, and that is the Christian empire. It is not an empire in the political sense. It is an empire of an *idea*. It has survived persecution, war, and hostile ideologies because it teaches one lesson that can be summed up in four words: humility, integrity, truth, faith.”

—Excerpt from the September 1998 CCA speech, “Democracy, Religion, and the Rule of Law,” by José Ramos-Horta, 1996 Nobel Peace Prize Recipient ▲



One of the 11 speakers at Hillsdale College's Center for Constructive Alternatives September 1998 seminar, “Faith and Freedom Around the World,” was 1996 Nobel Peace Prize recipient José Ramos-Horta. A native of East Timor, he has spent the last two decades denouncing the invasion and annexation of his homeland by Indonesia. He described the East Timorese Catholic church as “a moral fortress. Without an army, without guns, without diplomatic backing . . . it struggles to defend its defenseless people.”▲



Scholarship recipient Marti Seyfert (left) met with Sage Foundation President Melissa Fadim and Hillsdale College President George Roche. In addition to providing scholarships, the Sage Foundation has supported the Sage Center for Fine Arts, the Shavano Institute for National Leadership, and the Center for Constructive Alternatives.▲

*Family Research Council President Gary Bauer has recently made headlines for his defense of human rights abroad. His speech was titled, "Why People of Faith Must Challenge China."* ▲



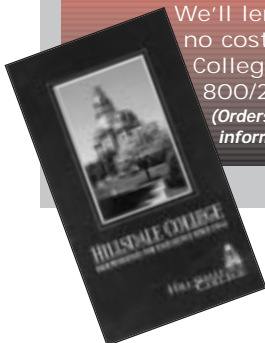
*Olga Hruby, executive director of the Research Center for Religion and Human Rights, recounted her role in the protest movement that went underground after the communist takeover of Czechoslovakia in February 1948.* ▲

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among a group of deportees en route to Auschwitz. They attempted a unique and daring escape. Despite the dispassionate rendering, in which my mother and father were mere numbers on a transport, reading about them on a printed page somehow made their lives—and their deaths—more real for me.

## Character

**T**hrough the good fortune of discovering their letters and reading about how I had filled them with joy, I was finally able to discover, in a deep and fundamental way, that my parents had loved me more than life itself. Translating their letters and writing about those years became my chance to forgive them, embrace them, and thank them.

They didn't wring their hands and say, "Our problems are too overwhelming, we can't do anything about them!"

It also became my chance to acknowledge those valiant rescuers whose unyielding sense of individual responsibility saved my life. In a time of unimaginable crisis, they chose to defy their conquerors and to do the right thing. They didn't wait for orders or seek anyone's approval. They didn't wring their hands and say, "Our problems are too overwhelming, we can't do anything about them!" They knew what they had to do, and they did it, without fuss, without regret.

We who live in the modern age would do well to remember the old adage, "Character is what we are in the dark, when no one is there to see us." The good people that saved me had character—the kind of character that lights up the darkness and shines eternally. 🕯

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