

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 867 – No. 47/2025

## Thomas and Christine Schirmacher commemorated the murdered Jews in Auschwitz and Krakow in 2024

(Bonn, 14.08.2025) The President of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), Prof. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher, visited the Auschwitz Memorial with his wife, Prof. Dr. Christine Schirmacher, last year, including the two concentration camps I and II (Birkenau), the remains of the Krakow ghetto and the oldest synagogues in Krakow, commemorating the murdered Jews as a sign of friendship with the Jewish people and against anti-Semitism. They are now publishing photos of this memorial trip.

### Auschwitz I and III

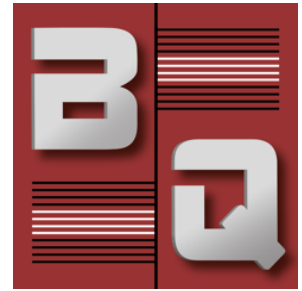
Thomas Schirmacher knelt and prayed in front of the reconstructed so-called black wall, also known as the “Wall of Death,” located between blocks 10 and 11 of Auschwitz I, where approximately 20,000 people were shot by the SS between 1941 and 1943, the majority of them Poles, then increasingly Jews. (Of course, there were further shootings before and after that.) The black wall is the place where wreaths are laid down next to the large monument in Auschwitz II (Birkenau). The changing flags in the background commemorate the various groups of victims.

Schirmacher visited Block 11 in particular, which, in the midst of an army of atrocities, surpassed everything else as a punishment block. It was here that the first people were killed with Zyklon on September 1, 1941 as a test.

The Auschwitz concentration camp was the largest German complex of prisoner and extermination camps during the Nazi era. The camp complex consisted of three large

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Thomas Schirmacher kneels in front of the black wall in Auschwitz I – Main Camp © Thomas Schirmacher

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concentration camps that were successively expanded and many satellite camps. Auschwitz consisted of the Auschwitz I concentration camp (main camp), the Birkenau extermination camp – Auschwitz II concentration camp, the Monowitz concentration camp and approximately 50 other satellite camps. The camp complex was located in the part of Poland annexed by the German Reich. The SS operated the camp complex from 1940 to 1945 on the western edge of the Polish town of Oświęcim (German: Auschwitz). 1.3 million people from all over Europe were deported here. 90 % of them were Jews. Auschwitz was the site of the systematic and factory-like murder of European Jews and other persecuted groups during the Holocaust (also known as the Shoah). The death toll is over 1.1 million people, with estimates reaching 1.5 million; the exact number of victims could not be determined.



Thomas Schirmacher kneels in front of the memorial in Auschwitz II – Birkenau © Schirmacher

## Krakow 1: The Krakow Ghetto

15,000 people were crammed into a district that had previously been home to 3,000 inhabitants. In 1942, 14,000 Jews were deported to the Belzec and Auschwitz concentration camps and 600 were shot in the ghetto. In 1943, 2,300 were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Hardly anyone survived. Today, all that remains of the ghetto are parts of the wall on ul. Lwowska and the ghetto pharmacy, which was run by a non-Jewish pharmacist who refused to move to Krakow.

HERE THEY LIVED, THEY SUFFERED FROM THE NAZI OPPRESSORS. FROM HERE THEY WERE LED ALONG THE LAST ROAD TO THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS. FRAGMENT OF THE WALLS OF THE JEWISH GHETTO 1941–1943

## Krakow 2: Schindler's factory

The Fabryka Emalia Oskara Schindlera, or Schindler's Factory for short, is a state museum in a former enamelware factory owned by Oskar Schindler in Krakow, through which and from which Schindler saved the lives of many Jews. The museum depicts the period of German occupation of Krakow from 1939 to 1945, with a special focus on the fate of Jews in the Krakow ghetto and the Plaszow forced labour camp in comparison to the employees in Schindler's factory. References are also made to the film Schindler's List, which was partly shot in the building.

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### Krakow 3: Krakow synagogues

The oldest mention of Jewish residents in Kazimierz dates back to the 1380s, and the “old” synagogue was built in the 15th century as the first synagogue. In 1495, all Jews were expelled from Krakow and settled in the neighbouring town of Kazimierz.

The Old Synagogue is now a museum. The bimah dates from 1570. There is also a copy of a 17th-century Hanukkah menorah that was stolen by the Germans and placed in Hans Frank’s residence.

The Remuh Synagogue is the second oldest synagogue in Krakow. The approximately 1-hectare cemetery was acquired in 1553. It is the oldest synagogue in Krakow that is still in use. It is not only important for Jewish life in Krakow but is also visited by devout Jews from all over the world because of the graves of famous rabbis.

Nowy Square is still often called “Jewish Square” and has been part of the Jewish quarter since the 17th century. The rotunda, a round market hall built in 1900, dominates the square and is well worth seeing.

The Schirmachers also visited the youngest and largest synagogue, the Temple Synagogue, built in Moorish style between 1860 and 1862, and the 17th-century Isaac Synagogue, which is currently undergoing extensive restoration.

### “Hitler’s war religion”

Schirmacher researched the Nazi era in two dissertations, one on Hans Naumann, the rector of the University of Bonn who was deposed by the Nazis, and the other on ‘Hitler’s *Kriegsreligion*’ [‘Hitler’s War Religion’] (1995). For this 700-page work, he used all known statements made by Hitler in writing and recordings, especially those that became accessible for the first time in the archives of

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Schindler's factory in Krakow © Thomas Schirmacher



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the Eastern Bloc states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Schirmmacher presented copies of the two-volume work to the memorial's archive.

### Downloads and Links:

- **Photo 1:** Thomas Schirmmacher kneels in front of the black wall in Auschwitz I – Main Camp © Thomas Schirmmacher
- **Photo 2:** Thomas Schirmmacher kneels in front of the memorial in Auschwitz II – Birkenau © Thomas Schirmmacher
- **Photo 3:** Thomas Schirmmacher kneels at the remains of the ghetto wall in Krakow © Thomas Schirmmacher
- **Photo 4:** Schindler's factory in Krakow © Thomas Schirmmacher
- Photo gallery: Schirmmacher pays tribute to the Jewish victims of the concentration camp at Auschwitz 1 (March 2024): <https://thomasschirmmacher.net/?p=23635>
- Photo gallery: Thomas Schirmmacher pays tribute to the Jewish victims of the concentration camp at Auschwitz 2 – Birkenau (2024): <https://thomasschirmmacher.net/?p=23650>
- Photo gallery: Schirmmacher pays tribute to the Jewish victims in Krakow and visits several synagogues (2024): <https://thomasschirmmacher.net/?p=23665>
- About the dissertation 'Hitlers Kriegsreligion' (in German): <https://thomasschirmmacher.info/?p=840>

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