

CATHOLIC CONGRESS - THE QUINCENTENNIAL

EVANGELIZATION IN THE AMERICAS

DRAFT #2

Catholic. CON

3-4-92

I am honored to have been asked to offer a Jewish perspective on the occasion of the celebration of the church's quincennial of evangelization in the Americas. I must confess to you that the occasion creates within me a conflict like that of Goethe's Faust: "Two souls dwelled in me." I can perhaps explain my conflict by referring to a short story written by the Hebrew writer Hayim Hazaz entitled "The Sermon". In that story Yudka, normally an articulate member of a kibbutz who never speaks on such occasions, startles everyone at the kibbutz meeting when he rises to declare, "I want to state that I am opposed to Jewish history." His stammering gives way to fury. "I would simply teaching our children Jewish history. Why the devil teach them about our ancestors' shame? I would just say to them: 'Boys, from the day we were exiled from our land we've been a people without a history. Class dismissed. Go out and play football.'" There are times when I look at Jewish history and see how darkened it is with persecutions and pogroms, expulsions and inquisitions that I would like to ^{dismiss the past,} ~~feign amnesia,~~ begin anew and tell the boys to go out and play football. ~~There are times~~

~~when I look at Jewish history and see how darkened it is with persecutions and pogroms, expulsions and inquisitions that I would like to feign amnesia, and tell the boys to go out and play football.~~

I ~~am tempted to feign amnesia.~~

Let us take, for example, the ^{celebratory} date of August 3, 1492. It marks the date that Columbus set sail for India searching for new routes to the Orient. But on August 2, the day before, it became illegal for a Jew to remain on Spanish soil by order of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. ^{August 2} the Spanish expulsion of Jews began. The King and the Queen obeyed the Inquisitor General of Spain - Friar Tomas de Torquemada - who ~~on religious grounds~~ proclaimed "One people, one kingdom, one faith." A wave of antisemitism swept the land in 1391 when Jews comprised 10% or one million of the 9 million population of Spain. Many Jews fled, some Jews remained Jews and many converted to Christianity. They were referred to as New Christians or Conversos. Theirs was not a conversion out of love but out of fear. Many of the new Christians kept secret fidelities to their tradition. ^{They lit Sabbath candles in the basement and the} They were referred to as Marranos which means "swine". The Inquisition, an institution little used in the Church was resurrected and Jews were tortured, imprisoned and killed. Their homes confiscated, their businesses and

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out

possessions taken away from them with the approval of the Church. The wealth of the Marranos was confiscated and thousands were killed. The Catholic theologian, Rosemarie Radford Ruether, claims "The dress rehearsal for the modern antisemitism that arose in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century took place in 15th century Spain. Spain, from the 7th to the 11th century had seen a unique society where Jew, Christian and Muslim lives side by side in a country divided between the Catholic north and the Muslim south. With the final expulsion of the Muslims in the 13th century, the new Spanish monarchy turned the zeal of Holy War upon the Jews. Commanded to either convert or get out, large numbers of these assimilated Jews chose to convert unlike their persecuted brethren in the German cities at the time of the Crusades who had preferred martyrdom to baptism."

With ~~their~~ conversion the discriminatory laws against Jews had been automatically abrogated. Nothing now prevented Jews from advancing into the highest leadership positions of Spanish society and many began to do so. But baptism proved insufficient to remove the image of negativity which had been stamped in the minds of Christians by a millennium and more of Christian anti-Jewish preaching. Within a generation new laws began to

be enacted against these new Christians, excluding them from holding offices in Spanish society but now on a purely racial basis. Like the laws of Nazi Germany which copied those of Spain, the Spaniard must have his genealogy searched by the Inquisition to ascertain whether he had any Jewish ancestry. These laws of "pure blood" which discriminated against Spaniards of Jewish descent were all nominally Christians and many of whom regarded themselves as the best of Catholics remained on the books of such groups as the Jesuit order until the second Vatican Council. *For Jews 1492 was no year for rejoicing.*

All of this is in our past and the past casts a terrible shadow over the present and the future. We are Biblically mandated to remember. The very verb "zachar" - remember - appears no less than 169 times in the Bible, ~~MEMORY MUST BE USED WISELY~~. I would like to use history and memory as a blessing. *MEMORY must be used wisely BOTH + the PAST and* Memory has a responsibility to the future. If the result of telling the story of the past is only the denigration of the human spirit the loss of trust and hope and discouragement of the vision to repair the world then memory becomes more a curse than a blessing. What can we on the brink of a new millenium do to go beyond the history of hatred and xenophobia and religious intolerance?

For Jews, the Holocaust remains the dominant psychic

reality of our lives. It is inescapable. It clings to our skin and beneath our skin. How could it be otherwise? Who could expect ~~that~~ a battered people having absorbed the murder of two out of five of its members, 40% of its community ~~should~~^{to} emerge~~d~~ unscathed, unscarred, fully normal?

The ~~deed~~^{shiver} of the Holocaust is not wholly what it has done to the ~~body~~^{destruction of} the Jewish people but what it has done to faith itself. It is especially difficult for a faith ~~that~~^{is} so profoundly immersed in theistic humanism, and ~~that~~^{attached to} so venerates the dignity of the human being. For mine is a tradition that with the Psalmist declares that the human being is but little lower than God. Characteristic of that religious humanism in Judaism is the rabbinic interpretation of a verse in Deuteronomy that instructs us not to hang a criminal over night because to do so is "a reproach unto God." The commentators ask why it is a reproach unto God and they answer with a stunning parable. A noble king had a twin brother who was caught in a crime, sentenced to death and hanged in the public square. When the people passed by the hanging corpse of the king's twin, they cried out "See, the king is dead." ~~So it is concluded that~~ God and man are metaphorically twins. To deface man is to disgrace God. Divinity and humanity are inextricably

bound. Still, in the face of Holocaust history and the long history of Jew hatred, all of this theistic humanism appears strained and shallow. Neither the arguments of Kant nor of Feuerbach is as devastating to belief in the existence and goodness of God as ^{an} the stark statistics and empirical data of the Holocaust. 1.5 million children murdered because of their Jewishness, 9 of every 10 European rabbis killed, the decimation of 90% of eastern European Jewry, 2 out of every 3 Jews living in Europe murdered, 1/3 of a people condemned to death. What can be said of the Divine image maker when the image of the human being is so twisted and deformed?

How can we speak to ourselves, to each other, to our children ^{of God's goodness and man's divine potential,} given the traumatization of our religious conscience? ~~Where in the heart of evil is there the small sound of the infant's cry?~~ I cannot distort history, I cannot erase it, and I cannot wish it away. I must find some evidence, some hard empirical data, some authenticated witness to the existence of godliness even in the hell of Auschwitz. ^{for goodness} ~~For this goodness~~ I have looked and found ^{it in the hell of Auschwitz,} ~~something that I think is important for our own relationships, for our future.~~

I have met and read of Christian men and women, flesh and blood human beings, farmers, peasants, doctors, priests, nuns from all walks of life and from every

country that the Nazis occupied - Italy, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia - ordinary people who risked their lives and the lives of their families to protect and shield the hunted members of my Jewish family. I have heard and seen the testimony of Jewish survivors who are alive today because of Christian people who sheltered them in closets, attics, barnyards, pigsties, sewers, monasteries, graveyards. This is a precious phenomenon which has not been given the attention it deserves.

I think it is important not only for the sake of history but for the sake of sacred memory, for the sake of morale and morality and for the sake of a brighter future that ^{The Church and the Synagogue} we tell our congregants, our children and our

children's children of the tens of thousands of non-Jews, believers and non-believers who risked life and limb and

who made of themselves a sanctuary. It is important that

~~you and I know~~ ^{we} and teach of those ^{ORDINARY people - flesh and bone like any -} who for days and nights stamped passports, visas, falsified documents and would

not turn Jews back to the countries of genocide. It is

important that Catholic children know about Eduardo

Focherini of the Catholic daily Avenire D'Italia whose

children died in the concentration as punishment for

their father activity on behalf of Jews. It is important

that we know of Anna Simiate, the Lithuanian librarian ^{at the} ~~who~~

conversion of villa who smuggled food and clothes into the U visa ghetto and saved the lives of Jewish children.

← Remember the evil but do not forget the good

Remember the past but do not forget the future.

"It was evening and chaos was on the face of the earth. And God said, 'Let there be light.'"

and of Skopstova, a Russian poetess and nun - Mother Maria of Paris who ended up in Ravensbrueck for protecting Jews and who exchanged an Aryan identification card with a Jewish woman chosen for the gas chambers. It is important that children know of Christian heroes, models of behavior who refused to be insulated and isolated within the four cubits of their own church but, who transcended their circle in order to protect the innocent of another faith, another catechism, another liturgy.

Why should
How ~~many~~ of our students and our congregants ^{not} know of the moral heroism of Cardinal Faulhaber and of the priest Bernard Lichtenberg of St. Helwig's cathedral who asked to be deported to the Jewish ghetto of Lodz so that he could be with the victims and who died on the way to Dachau.

How is it that we know the names of Hydrich, Himmler, Klaus Barbie and not the names of those non-Jews who hid Anne Frank and the families in an attic for two and a half years? Who are they? What are their names?

What happened to them after some informed against them?

in the AMERSTROFT camp
Where are they now? How do they live?

We have heard about the conflict around ^{Cardinal Glemp} the

and Carmelite convent around Auschwitz, but should the Polish people not be taught by Cardinal Glemp of another convent - a Benedictine convent - outside the ghetto of Vilna -

Aristides, a Portuguese Christian, a consul stationed
in Bordeaux who knew of the round-up of Jews
to be deported to their death.

Aristides who defied his Portuguese superior, ^{set} up
nights and days without food or sleep issuing thousands
of passports with Portuguese ~~visa~~ visa to stranded Jews.

Recalled by the Portuguese government for insubordination,
dismissed from the Foreign Ministry, forced to sell his
family estate in Estoril de Viseu, he died penniless,
a forgotten man. I know his children.

- Paul Pruniger, chief of Police in St. Gallen Switzerland
who lost his position and pension because he enabled
3,000 Jewish refugees to find sanctuary in Switzerland

- Sempo Sugihara, Japanese consul stationed in Cracow
who issued 3,000 transit visas to Polish Jews -
& who after the war was dismissed from his post because
he did not obey.

• He who saves a single life is considered as if he
has saved an entire world.

These rescuers saved tens of thousands of worlds.

where Anna Borowska, the Mother Superior together with six Catholic sisters risked their lives hiding out the Jewish leaders of the Vilna ghetto - Abba Kovner, Abraham Sutzkeva, Edite Borak, Arie Wilner - who were hidden in the convent dressed in nun's habits?

The church has an opportunity, I would say a mandate, to honor its own - to raise to prominence the Polish sewer workers wh hid 17 Jews for 14 months in rat-infested sewers of Lwov. Let Cardinal Glemp invite to Poland ^{my friends} Alex and Mila Roslan who kept two Jewish boys in their home and when scarlet fever broke out, took their Polish son, Yurek, age 10 to the Warsaw hospital. On his own, Yurek divided the powdered medicine and gave it to his parents so they could help Jacob and David Gilat, the Jewish youngsters the Roslans were hiding, who were also afflicted with scarlet fever.

Let the church celebrate the faith and works of Father Marie Benoit, the Capuchian monk who turned his monastery into a rescue agency for Jews and was known by the Jews as "Father of the Jews".

Aristides de Sousa Mendes, Paul Gruninger, ^{Sympo} ~~Imago~~ Saphara
The exploits are legion. ~~They~~ There are sacred moments that must not be buried in anonymity. They offer our children - Jewish and Christian - morale and models of moral heroism to emulate. Heroes are vital for faith. These heroes, these rescuers, do not lessen the darkness

of the Holocaust. There are no heroes without villains. But heroes help us enter the hellish cave with some hope, for there are sparks of human dignity that light up the cave.

No one can or should deny the radical evil, no one can or should deny the unspeakable atrocities that confirm the "nasty, brutish and short" in human nature. But that is not the whole portrait of man. Goodness, altruism, compassion are part of the nature of Adam and Eve through whose nostrils the spirit of godliness was breathed.

Our congregants, our children require what Erik Erikson called "basic trust" - not Pollyanna naivete, but "a favorable ratio of basic trust over basic distrust".

WE know this as "emunsch" - faith.

Why should our children not know that there is goodness out there, allies and friends who transcended the circle of their faith to leap into the leprous circle of others not of their liturgy or dogmatics? Why should children not be taught through fact that there was - and always is - an alternative to passive complicity with evil?

If this is no fantasy, no wonderful fairy tale,

That is history as well. We are more than recorders of history. We are makers of history. We are more than cameras. We are artists who are partners with God to repair the world, to bind the wounds, to mend the tattered fabric of society.

I am less interested in neo-culpa, less interested in shifting through the cremated ashes of the past. I am interested in what we

the survivors of the Holocaust: do
to join the arms with the minority, what we
do with our children so that they can
begin to believe again, to help again, to
struggle against the demons of racism and
anti-Semitism and xenophobia that offer Hitler
a posthumous victory.

You are witness, paint the land.

"If you are witness, then I, as it were, am God.
But if you are not witness, then I am, as it were
not God!"

We hold a double testimony - of the ~~crucifixion~~ cruelty
that degrades the crown of God's creation
and of the goodness that binds his wounds and
resurrects his life.

On a quantitative basis, altruism weighs in ~~on~~ light.
But some things small in number are great in consequence.
Goodness in Auschwitz was as small and simple as a boiled
potato, a piece of bread, a smoked sausage given the starving inmates.
Think of Primo Levi, who writes of Lorenzo, an Italian civilian worker
who brought him a piece of bread and the remainder of his ration every
day for 6 months in the concentration camp. Levi writes -
"I believe it was really due to Lorenzo that I am alive today; and
not so much for his material aid, as for his loving constantly reminded
me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good,
that there still exists a just world outside our own, something and
someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage... something
difficult to define, a remote possibility of good but for which it
was no ~~longer~~ was worth surviving... thanks to Lorenzo I
managed not to forget that I myself was a man"
(Survival in Auschwitz).

~~We must not forget.~~ We and our children must not forget
who they are -