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Jews Protest Papal Visit With Waldheim

A possible meeting between Pope John Paul II and Austrian President Kurt Waldheim during an upcoming papal visit to Austria may violate an agreement that Jewish leaders thought they had negotiated with high Catholic officials in Miami last September.

A letter sent by members of the International Jewish Committee on Interfaith Consultations regarding the probable meeting was "the most sharply worded protest ever sent to the Vatican by IJCIC," said Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

"We object not only to the substance of the announcement," said Steinberg, "but we thought there was a procedure in place whereby we would receive some consulta-

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tion or warning, as the agreement said, 'to avoid future misunderstandings.'"

The World Jewish Congress is one of five constituent organizations of IJCIC. Other members are the Israel Interfaith Association, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International and the Synagogue Council of America.

The group's letter, directed to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, warns that further meetings between the pope and Waldheim "could have the most serious implications for Vatican-Jewish relations."

According to the *New York Times*, Vatican officials have confirmed that the pope and Waldheim may meet as many as three times in keeping with protocol.

The IJCIC letter did not ask for a meeting between Jewish officials and Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican secretary of state. "We felt we'd been down that road before and accomplished nothing," explained Steinberg.

Instead, the letter asked for a response from Cardinal Willebrands to evidence about Waldheim's activities

as an intelligence officer in the German army during World War II.

An international commission is currently investigating charges that Waldheim participated in atrocities against Jews and Yugoslav partisans in the Balkans during his army service. The Austrian president has acknowledged that he served in the German army, but has denied any knowledge of the atrocities.

Waldheim's meeting with the pope at the Vatican last June outraged Jewish leaders and triggered a major setback in efforts to improve Catholic-Jewish relations. Jewish leaders discussed their dismay in meetings with the pope and Catholic officials outside Rome on Sept. 1, and again with the pope during his visit to Miami on Sept. 11.

Jerome Chanes, associate national affairs director of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, said "Catholic-Jewish relations in America are cordial. But it is Vatican-Jewish relations that are inherently problematic. This is another of the unpleasant surprises that have been visited upon us by this present Vatican administration."

Statement by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, Chairman of IJCIC

The statement by Elan Steinberg of the World Jewish Congress in JTA, Jan. 11, was entirely his personal utterance and in no way is to be construed as expressing the views of IJCIC.

Both the tone and substance of his comments do not reflect the consensus of IJCIC which was expressed with precision in the letter approved by all the member agencies and sent over my signature as chairman to Cardinal Willebrands.

~~That~~

The statement in that letter, and that alone, has standing as official IJCIC policy. By universal agreement of IJCIC member agencies, that letter ~~will~~ ^{was} ^{to} not/be released until Cardinal Willebrands has had an opportunity to read it and respond to our concerns. The leaking of the draft text of that IJCIC letter ^{to the press} /is utterly irresponsible, and violates the discipline of IJCIC.

POPE JOHN PAUL II REVISES AUSTRIA'S HISTORY

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

Pope John Paul II, ^{is} a spiritual leader of immense moral and intellectual stature, ~~He is also a fervent Polish nationalist~~ did not serve the cause of historic truth and justice during his recent five-day pastoral visit to Austria. Whatever his motivations, he gave moral credibility to delusions - ~~xxxxxxxx~~ that have pervaded Austria for ~~more~~ most of the past ^{the} fifty years since the Anschluss.

On his arrival in Vienna, the Pope inaugurated his ~~xxxxxxxx~~ visit by confirming two of the great deceptions of contemporary Austrian history. First, he said, Austria was the "victim...of the cruel tyranny" inflicted by the Nazis. Second, Austrian Catholics were essentially innocent victims - "among the many who were persecuted" - by the Nazi regime. As ^{did} the world knows, he/not mention the uniquely demonic destruction of the Jews, neither then nor during his homily at the infamous Mauthausen concentration camp.

The plain historic fact is that neither of those "victim" depictions are true. The Allies indeed conferred the status of victims on Austria through the 1943 Moscow Declaration, mainly ~~xxx~~ to stimulate Austrian resistance to the Nazis. But that fiction has obscured the contrary reality, namely, that the majority of the Austrians zealously welcomed Adolf Hitler from the very beginning of his annexation of their country, and implemented his evil policies of sadistic anti-Semitism with a fury that often outmatched even that of many Germans.

Those of us who lived through that traumatic period cannot reconcile that "victim" image with the film clips of some half million Austrians ~~xxx~~ deliriously cheering their fellow countryman, Hitler,

as he addressed them on March 13, 1938, in the Heldenplatz amidst fluttering waves of swastikas.

The Times of London wrote at that time that "few conquerors in history have had such a reception. No adjective suffices to describe the jubilation...There are no signs of a people bowing unwillingly to the foreign yoke."

When Hitler conducted a plebiscite on April 10, 1938, 4,270,000 Austrians voted in favor of the annexation, while less than 12,000 voted in opposition. The Anschluss was "legitimized" by an Austrian majority of 99.75 percent!

Proportionally, as Prof. George Berkley has noted, many more Austrians joined the Nazi party - one out of ten - during the seven year annexation than did the Germans - one out of fourteen - during the twelve years of the Nazi regime.

A million Austrians fought in the Nazi armies, while only 10,000, most of them Jews, joined the Allied armies. Resistance to the Nazis was feeble due to the inability to generate any meaningful popular support until the final days of the war. "A large percentage of the population," writes Prof. Walter B. Mass, "only turned against the Nazis when it became clear they were losing the war."

Dr. Simon Wiesenthal asserts that some forty percent of the Nazi SS who presided over the death camps were Austrians, and he holds Austrians responsible for three million Jewish deaths, well over half of those Jews killed in the Holocaust. These facts led Prof. Berkley to conclude in his study, "Vienna and Its Jews," that "Although tens of thousands of Germans energetically and often enthusiastically participated in the slaughter of Jews, the Holocaust from Hitler on down was even more of an Austrian phenomenon than a German one."

In the face of these brute realities, it is incomprehensible that Pope John Paul II, arbiter of faith and morals, would avoid or deny these truths.

No less mind-boggling was the Pope's revisionist description of Catholics as passive victims. The historic record simply does not sustain that distortion.

It is common knowledge among historians and witnesses that when Hitler crossed the border into Austria, Theodor Cardinal Innitzer, primate of the Austrian Catholic church, sent the Fuhrer a message of warm welcome, and publically called on the Catholic faithful to pledge their Nazi rulers complete obedience. Cardinal Innitzer then ordered Vienna's churches to be festooned with swastikas and their bells to be rung on Hitler's triumphant entry into the city. He also called on the Catholic faithful to offer prayers of thanksgiving for Hitler and his Nazi regime in the Sunday liturgy.

On the day after Hitler's arrival in Vienna, Cardinal Innitzer met him in his hotel and assured him that Austria's Catholics would be his most loyal followers as long as he granted the Church and its institutions the rights he had formally accorded the German church in the 1933 Concordat.

Three days later, the Austrian Catholic Episcopate issued a public statement praising the accomplishments of National Socialism and urged approval of the annexation by their followers. On March 27, Austria's bishops published a letter saying, "We joyfully recognize that the National Socialist movement has produced and is producing outstanding achievements...On plebiscite day it will be our self-evident duty as bishops, and our national duty as Germans, to declare ourselves in support of the Reich. We expect all faithful Catholics to acknowledge what they owe their nation."

Thus, the Austrian Catholic Church - far from being a passive victim - gave Hitler ~~an immense~~ powerful support and respectability at a time when his "upstart regime" was desperate for international prestige. The overwhelming support ^{that} Austrian Catholics demonstrated in the subsequent plebiscite on the Anschluss demonstrates how critical a role the church played in helping usher Hitler into power.

Six months later, however, the Church and Catholics were victimized when Hitler, violating the promises he made to Cardinal Innitzer, cracked down on Catholic institutions. He closed down theological seminaries, church schools, forbade

So there was in fact victimization of Austrian Catholics, but to concentrate ~~selectivity~~ selectively on that fate without acknowledging in any way the crucial role that Austrian Catholics played in helping establish Hitler and his regime is no less than a distortion of historic truth.

Not incidentally, it needs also to be acknowledged that the Austrian Catholic hierarchy demonstrated no public concern over what was happening to the Austrian Jews. A small number of lower clergy did risk helping Jewish victims, but the ~~xxx~~ Austrian church's efforts or protests in behalf of ~~xxxx~~ the Jews were practically non-existent.

There was a deep and widespread hatred in Austria for Jews, nurtured by centuries of traditionalist Church "teachings of contempt" which sanctioned the demonization of Judaism and the Jewish people. That became the engine of a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism in Austria which resulted in the deaths of some 110,000 Jews out of a pre-war population of 200,000.

The failure of the Pope to refer even once in his opening remarks and especially at the ~~xxx~~ hideous ~~xxx~~ Mauthausen concentration camp to the singularly vicious victimization of Austrian Jewry inevitably is received with the deepest offense by world Jewry which has memorized this abominable history.

Pope John Paul II did make a "good" moving speech/with Austrian Jewish leaders, He condemned anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish activity, and said, "We must remember the Shoah and make certain that it is never repeated." But that was his "Jewish speech." His "Austrian" and "Catholic" speeches were Judenrein, and it is the Austrians and the Catholic majority population of Austria that needs to hear those admonitions specifically, concretely, especially in light of its fifty-year denial of its horrendous Nazi and anti-Semitic past.

His several brief meetings with Waldheim, who symbolizes that denial and lying about Austria's past as well as his own, only underscored an implied sanction of that amnesia of responsibility for Austrian Nazism.

I have met with Pope John Paul II on four separate occasions since his elevation to the Papacy. I ~~like~~ believe he is probably one of the most intellectual Popes in recent history, and is a decent man who cares about truth and justice.

But he is also a fervent Polish nationalist. I wonder whether his Polish soul is not a key force which is contributing to this revisionism of the Nazi holocaust and the deemphasis of the ~~unique~~ unique tragedy of the Jewish people.

From numerous conversations with Polish Catholics, it is clear that there is a widespread resentment among many Polish people that "the world" has not acknowledged the suffering and victimization of the Polish nation in any way comparable to the universal awareness of the Jewish tragedy at the brutal hands of the Nazis.

When we met with Pope John Paul II at Castel Gondolfo on September 1, 1987, he greeted our Jewish delegation with these words: "Today is the anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland. I know of the suffering of the Jewish people at the hands of the Nazis. I also know of their destruction of my Polish nation."

~~In his~~

In the Polish depths of his soul, is the Pope seeking to achieve a moral equivalency between the victimization of the Jewish people and the Polish people in order to bring about a greater recognition of the loss of three million Poles during World War II? If that is the case, is it morally necessary and honest to minimize and relativize the Jewish tragedy in order to maximize understanding of the Polish tragedy?

When Poles and Jews meet to discuss the Nazi holocaust, almost invariably at the outset Jewish survivors speak passionately about Polish Catholic anti-Semitism and the role of many Polish Christians in helping the Nazis murder Jews. Poles respond by speaking with equal passion about how many Polish Christians helped save Jewish lives. Thus, there is denial on both sides.

I have an increasingly clear sense that Pope John Paul II has that issue of assumed Polish and Catholic guilt on his conscience, as much as he may have Austrian and Vatican complicity in mind. His statement to the Austrian Jewish leaders that

"It would be unjust and not truthful to charge Christianity with these unspeakable crimes" would seem to be an ~~its~~ intellectual effort to absolve Polish Catholicism, ~~xxxxxxx~~ the Polish people, as well as the ~~k~~ church generally in light of his deep feelings that Poland was a massive victims of Nazi aggression. The Nazis were "lunatics," he ~~is~~ saying, and the Poles, Austrians, and other Catholics were the victims of that lunacy.

The historic reality is clearly more complex than that. Jews had no military power in Christian Europe, and were universally victimized in countries of ancient Christian culture and civilization dominated by the Nazis. Christians - and specifically Catholics - were also victims, but they were surely at the same time among the hosts of vicious Nazi murderers.

Austria - with its singular history of devotion to Nazism and its racist, anti-Semitic policies / and practices - was the place to assert that complex ambiguity. Millions of young Austrian, German, Polish and other Catholic youths who are finally struggling to face the silences and denials of their fathers and grandfathers deserved to receive such guidance and encouragement from their Holy Father to accept not collective guilt, but collective responsibility.

WILL THE REAL POPE JOHN PAUL II STAND UP?

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

The Vatican's announcement that Pope John Paul II will make an unprecedented visit to the Great Synagogue in Rome would, under normal circumstances, evoke a most positive attitude among many in the Jewish community ~~and probably among many Catholics as well.~~ Since no previous Pope ^{apparently} ever paid a courtesy visit to the Chief Rabbi of Italian Jewry, such an act should be filled with symbolic meaning of ~~reconciliation and mutual respect~~ ^{and healing.}

Truth to tell, the announcement of that visit has stirred wide anxiety in the Jewish community, especially among those of us who have been committed to promoting understanding between Catholics and Jews over the past twenty years since the close of Vatican Council II.

Why the anxiety? The mixed reaction grows out of the fact that Pope John Paul II has been giving increasingly mixed signals about his theological attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, anti-Semitism, the Nazi holocaust, and the State of Israel. That perplexity exists not only in the Jewish streets, but increasingly among Jewish specialists in Jewish-Christian relations, like myself,

Ever since his election to the Papacy some seven years ago, a number of us who studied his writings and record felt that we might have a special friend in the Vatican in the person of this Pope.