

VT-296 Transcription

"Echoes Without End: The Holocaust." undated.

M1: A philosopher has written that language itself breaks down when one tries to speak about the Holocaust and its meaning. Our words pale before the frightening spectacle of human evil, which was unleashed on the world. And before the awesomeness of the suffering involved.

F1: "See, it is a shower room." [01:00]

M1: The sheer weight of its numbers, 11 million innocent victims exterminated; six million of them, Jews. Although words do pale, yet, we must speak, we must strive to understand, we must remember the terrible price paid for bigotry, and hatred, and also the terrible price paid for indifference, and for silence.

M2: Bigotry, hatred, indifference, silence; but the world has changed in 40 years, hasn't it? [02:00] Well, before you answer that, consider this: In the past few years, Cambodia's communist government has killed two million human beings. Idi Amin's government slaughtered 400,000 Ugandans, mostly Christian, and today, there are more than a million refugees who have fled Indochina. Most are

Chinese. Bigotry, hatred, indifference, silence: echoes without end.

M3: The national broadcasting company, in association with this NBC television station, presents, "Echoes without End: The Holocaust." At NBC New York, your host, Fritz Weaver.

FRITZ WEAVER: [03:00] There is nothing, nothing in the archives of history, to compare with the Holocaust. It was Adolf Hitler's blueprint for mass murder. By the early '30's, the Nazi dictator had created his Third Reich, boasting that it would endure for a thousand years, calling Germans the "master race." And for the first time in history, genocide became an avowed policy of a leading nation. Hitler set out to destroy an entire people: the nine million Jews of Europe, and he almost succeeded. Two of every three Jews were killed -- six million men, women, and children. And while the Holocaust was a unique horror in itself, there are some disturbing parallels in our world in 1979. Today, we have boat people and land people.

WALTER MONDALE: Most of the refugees leaving Vietnam are leaving by boats [04:00] and going out to sea, many times in craft that obviously are not seaworthy. Overcrowded, poorly provisioned, and in a very similar way to the period leading up to the Holocaust, they are being subjected to the worst kinds of human degradation and exploitation.

WEAVER: We asked Vice President Mondale, how do you interpret the days of the Holocaust?

MONDALE: The fact of it is, it was a total, inexcusable, moral collapse of the civilized world; and everyone of them tried to hide behind a legalistic, or some other kind of phony answer, but the fact is, we knew there was a problem, we didn't respond, and then the long night set in, and the world will never be the same. We can't let that happen again.

WEAVER: So I repeat the question, has the world changed since the days of the Holocaust? [05:00] To consider that issue, we have assembled a panel of distinguished Americans. The Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, of the American Jewish Committee; Dr. Claire Randall, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; and the Rt. Reverend Paul Moore Jr., Episcopal Bishop of New York. Dr. Randall, and gentlemen, it was suggested that we begin by showing a brief scene from the NBC "Holocaust" series. It takes place after the horror of Crystal Night, the first wholesale persecution of the German Jews. Young Erik Dorff has joined the Nazi government, and become an aide to Reinhardt Heidrich, head of the SS.

(video clip [05:38] - [06:19])

WEAVER: What has changed? Isn't it racial prejudice against the Chinese that is forcing their expulsion from Vietnam and Cambodia, Rabbi Tanenbaum?

MARC TANENBAUM: Well, yes and no, I think the distinction here is that the Nazi anti-Semitism was a unique phenomenon, which was rooted in nearly 2,000 years of religious hatred of the Jewish people in Western Christian civilization. The Nazis built on top of that a so-called "racial science," which became a justification for the extermination of the Jews collectively as an entire people. I saw, [07:00] during my recent two visits to Southeast Asia, first hand, what a form of racial hatred can lead to. When in east Malaysia, I saw a group of Muslim villagers come down to the sea, and push out ethnic Chinese in a boat, into the water, where they died, 250 people before my eyes.

CLAIRE RANDALL: I think that there's clear evidence that that which the Judeo-Christian teaching has said all along, still exists a fatal human flaw, which causes racial prejudice to be something which has historically been around, which is still around today; it's not only in Southeast Asia, and it certainly is there, but it is also in the United States, it's still very real here, though we

have faced it in many ways, but we have just recently seen evidences of the new upsurge of racial prejudice.

WEAVER: Bishop Moore?

PAUL MOORE: Yeah, I'd certainly agree with that, I think there's one thing that always strikes me when I hear about the boat people, [08:00] or about the Holocaust, or my own experiences in the war, or our going into Cambodia, or the bombing of Dresden, any one of these things we keep repeating in human history, is how very delicate civilization rests upon human beings. A personal experience, I was a young, decent, American Christian boy, and I went to war, and after a very few months, I was so brainwashed by my training in the United States Marine Corps, that I could kill without really being bothered by it. Now, with all the sensitivity with which I was brought up, and a sincere religious conviction, intending to be a priest, that could happen to me. It's no wonder that it can happen to people that are under great pressures.

WEAVER: The desensitization to which a human being is susceptible happens so quickly.

TANENBAUM: But I regard that as one of the primary issues that emerges out of the facing of the Holocaust, [09:00] as well as facing the contemporary destruction of human life in such massive ways, in Southeast Asia, in Africa, and

Asia, namely the obligation, not to stand by idly, and allow that to happen, as if that is somehow fated to be man's inhumanity to man. In point of fact, when people make a decision to stand against evil and demonism, they can make a difference; they can contain it; we're doing that now in Vietnam, when Hanoi was told that the world community would not tolerate their destroying a million and a quarter Chinese people, they had made a decision to stop driving people out of their country, to stop exploiting them, to stop robbing them, and they're now talking about a more civilized way of allowing people to leave the country.

WEAVER: Do you think that something similar would have happened in Nazi Germany, if 30-40 years ago, the nations of the west had stood together and made a similar demand on the government of Germany? Do you think the Holocaust could have been prevented?

TANENBAUM: [10:00] One cannot know for certain, but it is clear, looking at the literature, that the Germans knew, by the early signs of the response of the American government, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Churchill, the Red Cross, the Vatican, for that matter, that the world would not become very much agitated if the Final Solution were carried out. And that became an encouragement to them, in fact, to seek the extermination of the Jewish people. I'm persuaded today

that had the state of Israel existed in the 1930s, they would not have allowed Auschwitz to take place. And therefore, the Germans would have had to reconsider whether the final solution was possible.

RANDALL: I think at that period, it was almost impossible for people to conceive something as monstrous as what was happening. And I think the responses probably were out of a lesser understanding; nobody really understood what was happening, this was unbelievable that that could take place.

WEAVER: Let me introduce another scene from "*The Holocaust*", and in this one, [11:00] Dr. Weiss, the role I performed, is forced to leave Germany, and return to Poland.

(video clip [11:10]-[12:04])

WEAVER: Isn't that the same thing that is happening today, of Vietnamese officials confiscating property, money, everything of value, before they permit the boat people to leave?

RANDALL: Well, I think that certainly that sort of thing is happening again, and I think we have to recognize what this does to people, and the great need of these people. And, when we see all of that treatment, and that loss, and the fact that these people have nothing, and then see the richness of our own nation, that should cause us to open

our doors in ways more than we have, we've done a great deal, and the church agencies, church world service, the Catholic Relief, and the Jewish agencies, have done a great deal to resettle, more than anyone else, to resettle the Vietnamese refugees.

MOORE: Now in a sense you could say, [13:00] that part of the crisis we're facing today in the Middle East, and therefore in the world, is directly related to the Holocaust. There are relationships of cause and effect there. Certainly, you can say, that the plight of the boat people, and our having to deal with it, is related to our invasion of Vietnam and Cambodia. So we can never get away with the thing, and so we're not just talking about moral values here, which all of us are particularly concerned about, but the cold pragmatics of history. You can never do something like this without it coming back to visit you, and haunt you, and haunt future generations. And I think that if we can't convert people to decency, that we should educate people to the pragmatics of history.

TANENBAUM: There's a peculiar kind of cynicism that's been operating, about the way in which Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese have been buying their way out of Vietnam, I saw throughout Southeast Asia, [14:00] when I went with the international rescue committee twice this past year, as if

somehow, there is something cheap or vulgar about people spending money to buy their way out, they're being called "economic refugees," as if to separate them out from other kinds of refugees. And that's the sign of something of a dehumanization that is taking place. Human life is more important than property, or dollars. And to me, one of the great tragedies of the Nazi Holocaust, the experience that led up to that, was that we did not mobilize enough American Jews and governments and others, to buy every single life we could buy out. Beg, borrow, or steal, he who saves a single life is regarded as if he had saved an entire world.

WEAVER: A statistic which impressed me in Vice President Mondale's speech in Geneva, [15:00] was that if each of the member nations of the Evian conference before the second world war had agreed to take in 17,000 Jews, every Jew in Germany and Austria could have been got out alive. If we can return to the Holocaust, here's a scene where Polish Jews are forced into their country synagogue.

(video clip [15:19]-[16:19])

WEAVER: What can civilized peoples do about atrocities like that?

MOORE: I said earlier that our invasion of Cambodia probably was one of the reasons that the death marches is occurring

today. Do we as a nation realize this, when I watch it on television, do I know that I was part of the reason, because I allowed the administration of our country then to do this? We should be able to translate the foreign policy decisions of one year into the results of the next and see, again, when we do something like the invasion of Cambodia, these things will occur.

RANDALL: [17:00] The basic thing here is the loss of any respect of human life, the feeling that people become things to be destroyed, and when we dropped that atom bomb, many years ago, approximately the same time this sort of thing was taking place, and when we set fire to people in a city, we entered into the same kind of thinking that human life, individual human life, is not valuable; that masses of people can be used as weapons, or as some way to just destroy, in order to achieve something more; as you said, to achieve defense, or to achieve whatever. We're doing exactly the same thing now.

TANENBAUM: In a real way, I am persuaded that, increasingly, the world is entering into the Jewish condition. The world is really moving into a condition of exile. What the Jews experienced in the Holocaust was their total vulnerability; they became available for a sovereign state, distant from them, to destroy them as human beings, [18:00] and they had

absolutely no control over that decision to liquidate their lives. And as you look at the global condition today, nuclear weaponry -- the United States alone has the capacity, if we do not add another single intercontinental ballistic missile, we have more than 650,000 Hiroshimas in our nuclear missile silos. The Soviet Union has roughly the equivalent of that. I mean, there is the capacity now to create a global Auschwitz in the world.

RANDALL: I think people feel helpless against the great forces that are in the world, that turn this sort of thing loose, and feel, as individuals, that they can't stop it, but people banded together, and people thinking together, whether it's in synagogues, or churches, or in groups and organizations, or through their government, or the United Nations, or whatever, there are ways to stand up against this, and that's what we have to find, we can't feel isolated and alone when we know something is wrong. There are ways we can come together.

TANENBAUM: [19:00] We're all survivors in that sense, and really need each other.

WEAVER: There's this scene from *The Holocaust* which may help to explain how these things can happen. The scene is in Kiev, and Russian partisans have leveled half the city rather than let it fall into Nazi hands.

(video clip [19:20]-[20:20])

WEAVER: I suppose there are some dictators in the world who still look at it that way today. Rabbi Tanenbaum?

TANENBAUM: It is inconceivable to me that 40 years after the Nazi Holocaust, that the world can sit by while 400,000 black Christians were destroyed in Uganda, day after day after day, massacred, by a man who proclaimed Adolf Hitler as his hero, even had a statue of Hitler put in the main square of Kampala. And the silence of the world has been the silence of a cemetery. There's a great deal of generosity taking place in the world, and Jews and Christians are, thank God, magnanimous in their response to the Vietnamese boat people, [21:00]we've resettled 75% of the 210,000 who have come to this country. But there's still too much indifference.

MOORE: To them, and not to the Uganda situation, Marc?

TANENBAUM: In part, I really think the media were a decisive factor. Somehow it caught the attention of the media; the culture of the world, the consciousness of the world, is affected profoundly by what happens on the 6:00 news, and the 11:00 news. And that means the responsibility of the people in the media --

MOORE: Couldn't get pictures of the Ugandans, but they were taking pictures of the boat people.

RANDALL: Well, it's not as visible.

TANENBAUM: It's not as dramatic. But, I mean, the real moral issue though, is do people have to die dramatically to get attention? Do you have to have a sensational death in order for somebody to pay attention to you?

RANDALL: You see right now, torture is a way of life in Latin America. Many countries, it is an instrument by which people are controlled and dealt with. The kind of torture that we can hardly imagine. And we're not aware of that, either.

TANENBAUM: [22:00] Erik Dorff speaks of how you can massacre Jews, and you get used to massacring more, and who will pay attention to them, and they will become the focal point for the discharge of energy. I think that's a matter of obviously very real Jewish concern, because to the degree that anti-Semitism continues to be a factor in the society, Jews continue to be vulnerable as scapegoats.

RANDALL: And that's what happens when the mind goes over a line, that accepts destruction, like nuclear weapons. It's the same sort of thing. Then you would accept more and more, never realizing that your own destruction is built into that. There is no defense in the numbers. Your own destruction becomes -- and you begin to be able to accept that, it just seems irrational --

TANENBAUM: The banality of evil, as it were.

WEAVER: But then the perimeter of hostility moves in your own section, and then, at last, it seems to be, and then too late, you realize you are a member of the whole body that was threatened.

RANDALL: The whole human race is vulnerable at this point.

TANENBAUM: There was that famous line of Pastor Niemöller, [23:00] that "first the Nazis came for the communists, and I was not a communist. Then they came for the workers, and I was not a worker. Then they came for the Catholics, and I was not a Catholic, it didn't concern me. And then they came for the Protestants, and I was a Protestant, and it was too late."

WEAVER: That's well said. We have just enough time left now for some brief final thoughts on our original question, what lessons have we learned from the Holocaust. Bishop Moore, would you begin?

MOORE: The lesson which I think has taught me more than any other lesson is the enormity of which humanity is capable, and the desperate lesson is that it is before, and not after the event, that we must move and be sensitive.

WEAVER: Dr. Randall?

RANDALL: I think one of the things that we have to remind ourselves when we think about the Holocaust is the depth of

organized destruction, [24:00] which I think that particular Holocaust went beyond anything we've known since. All these things we're saying are very true, but the organized destruction of human life that took place there is something we must not forget, and I think one of the things we could learn from it is an understanding of why Israel exists, and why Israel is so important to the Jewish people.

WEAVER: Rabbi Tanenbaum?

RABBIT TANENBAUM: Well, I guess there are many things, but foremost, among the things we've been talking about, has been a new appreciation of what we've been talking about now for two thousand, four thousand years. The infinite value of every human life; that every human being is precious in the eyes of God, and the second historic lesson that I think Jews have learned is that you shall not stand idly by while the blood of your brothers and sisters cry out to you from the earth; not just Jewish brothers and sisters, but all human beings.

WEAVER: [25:00] I think that my own comment would be in the direction of the project that I was involved in; incidentally, Rabbi Tanenbaum, the NBC mini-series called *The Holocaust*, and that brought home, I think, to people, more quickly than almost any other way, that human misery

has to be perceived, felt, touched, and looked at, rather thought about merely in abstract terms. What can I do? What can you do?

MONDALE: Speak up in your community about the need to respond to these problems. Now, most of the churches in our country, the synagogues, the religious leadership of our country, strongly support these placement programs; other organizations are doing it as well. Work through your church, work through your synagogue, work through your religious institutions, to make certain that your church is doing its part, [26:00] make certain that offers are made to bring some of those refugees to your community, and then help make life desirable for them. It's one of the best things you can do.

WEAVER: I think it would be fitting if we looked again at Auschwitz, but this time, it is 1979, and his holiness Pope John Paul II is there.

(video clip [26:22]-[26:26]

WEAVER: Only the chimneys of the old barracks still stand.

VOICEOVER: The pope called Auschwitz a place built on hatred and contempt for the human person in the name of a crazed ideology. A place built on cruelty, and yet, it would have been impossible for me to not come here as a pope. It is necessary here to think with fear, of how far hatred can

go, [27:00] how far man's destruction of man can go, how far cruelty can go. At Auschwitz, there are plaques in all languages honoring the victims of Nazi terror. The Pope stopped before the plaques in Hebrew, and said, "The very people who received from God the commandant 'Thou shalt not kill,' themselves experienced, in a special measure, what is meant by killing." It is not permissible for anyone to pass by this inscription with indifference. [28:00]

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