

VT-855 Transcription

AJC leaders react to Kurt Waldheim/Pope John Paul II Meeting. June 1987.

F1: That cloud of controversy following Austrian president Kurt Waldheim since the revelations about his Nazi past has been stirred up once again, this time by Pope John Paul II. The pope's invitation to meet with Nazi -- accused Nazi Waldheim has Jewish groups outraged now. They say that such a meeting would put an extraordinary strain on Catholic/Jewish relations.

MARC TANENBAUM: Nazi totalitarian violates every basic principle that the pope has been preaching all over the world. So it's mind-boggling how one resolves that contradiction.

F1: Waldheim, who was a former secretary general of the United Nations, has been barred by the US State Department from visiting this country again because of the allegations about his Nazi past. [01:00]

(break in video)

F2: The Vatican insists that next Thursday's meeting is not an endorsement of Waldheim, just a reflection of the pope's willingness to see anybody who asks. Waldheim is barred from the United States because of an alleged Nazi's past,

and some say this invitation is sending out some very bad signals.

BENJAMIN NETANYAHU: I think it's a mistake. It's not accidental that the only place that Waldheim could receive an audience, other than the Vatican, were places like Libya and Uganda. Is this the company that the pope wants to keep?

TANENBAUM: Though Secretary Schulz has visited Austria, and has refused to see Waldheim. Attorney General [Neiss?] is now in Austria this week, he's not meeting Waldheim. There are heads of state who pass in and out of Austria, who simply as a matter of conscience, refuse to meet a man who for [02:00] 10 years lied about his role as a Nazi officer.

F2: Meanwhile, the American Jewish Congress has decided to boycott the pope's visit to the United States in September. Waldheim's meeting with the pope would be his first trip outside Austria since he was elected president last year. News 4 tried to contact the Archdiocese of New York for a reaction, so far, no response.

(break in video)

M1: A rift appears to be deepening between Jews and the Vatican over Pope John Paul's decision to meet with Austria's Kurt Waldheim. One major American Jewish group announced today

it will boycott a planned meeting with the pope when he comes to the United States. Jerry Bowen reports.

JERRY BOWEN: Coming in a year in which Pope John Paul condemned Nazi atrocities, prayed beside the ashes of concentration camp victims in his native Poland, and planned a fall visit to the United States, a country Kurt Waldheim is barred from because of his Nazi past, American Jewish leaders are baffled that the Austrian president is to be welcomed to the Vatican.

TANENBAUM: Now would the pope have received Adolf Hitler in the Vatican? [03:00] That's -- and what are the limits then to this? Doesn't one realize that one is conferring a certain kind of moral sanction by that kind of audience?

MARVIN HIER: In effect, the pope, you might say, is orchestrating or helping to orchestrate Kurt Waldheim's return to society.

BOWEN: With rare exception, Waldheim has been shunned by many world leaders. Shunned because of charges he knowingly sent Greek and Yugoslav Jews to death camps during World War II, charges Waldheim denies. Now, American Jewish groups are considering shunning the pope during his US visit, canceling scheduled meetings. The American Jewish Congress pulled out today.

HENRY SIEGMAN: To meet with him in an official audience gives out a message that is an appalling one.

BOWEN: A church official said the Waldheim visit, his first official trip outside Austria since his election one year ago, does not reflect a Vatican stamp of approval. Austria requested the meeting, said the spokesman, and [04:00] the pope has, quote, "A completely open-door policy." But in Los Angeles, where the pope will celebrate Mass at the Coliseum during his 10-day American visit, in the city's Jewish neighborhoods where a number of Holocaust survivors live, there is a sense of disbelief.

F3: It shouldn't be. We've gone through too much.

BOWEN: And so the trip goes forward. For Kurt Waldheim, a matter of state. For his critics, a matter of conscience. Jerry Bowen, CBS News, Los Angeles.

(break in video)

M2: Waldheim has to be a happy man, he's finally getting to go someplace. He hasn't had too many invitations since he was elected president of Austria and at about the same time, the world learned about his Nazi past. But as Christopher Jones reports, the trip he's happy about has upset a lot of other people.

ELAN STEINBERG: I think it's a tragedy for the Vatican, and a sad day for Catholic-Jewish relations. It is a situation

into which the Vatican has been thrust out of political consideration for Austria.

CHRISTOPHER JONES: Elan Steinberg [05:00] is upset because his organization worked tirelessly to reveal Kurt Waldheim's Nazi connections to the world. But now apparently, at least one part of that world may not have noticed. Kurt Waldheim, the former secretary-general of the United Nations, has been placed on America's watch list, barring him from entering this country because of allegations he helped persecute Jews and others while serving in the German army. But Austria elected Waldheim its president, and now the Catholic statesman is scheduled to meet with the pope at the Vatican on June 25th.

THEODORE ELLENOFF: For the pope to overlook that history and to override the judgment of a major power like the United States in excluding President Waldheim is surprising. It's morally and politically incomprehensible.

JONES: Today in New York, the World Jewish Congress and other Jewish leaders called upon the Catholic Church to provide some explanation. [06:00] In the Vatican, an official explained the pope has a completely open-door policy, but that does not mean he endorses what the leaders he sees stand for. Jewish leaders say they will be less upset if somehow, Waldheim's visit to the Vatican can be considered

a personal confessional visit by a devout Catholic to his spiritual leader. Whatever happens, Church officials have not said much, except they are known to hope that when September rolls around and the pope visits the United States, this will be just a distant memory. Christopher Jones, Channel 5 News at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

(break in video)

LYN BROWN: To the pope's plan to visit with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim next week. They are said to be considering boycotting a planned September conference with the pope in the United States. CNN has received indications however that they may not go that far in their opposition to the pope's actions. The Vatican meanwhile has issued a statement, saying the pope simply wants to keep channels of communication open with all heads of state. And that he does not approve of Waldheim's alleged Nazi activities. [07:00] Jewish leaders are expected to announce their stance on the issue at a noon news conference.

BOB CAIN: Joining us now in our bureau in New York to discuss the Waldheim-Pope John issue is Malachi Martin, an ordained priest and papal scholar. He's the author of several books, the latest of which is *The Jesuits*. With him is Theodore Ellenoff. Ellenoff is president of the American Jewish Committee. Gentlemen, thank you for joining us on *Day*

Watch. Let me turn first to you, Malachi Martin, and ask you what you feel the symbolism of this papal audience with Kurt Waldheim will be, in the eyes of the world?

MALACHI MARTIN: The symbolism of this is very simple. The pope is universal pastor of all Catholics in this world. And he cannot be impeded from meeting anybody, or following the bent of his papal heart in this matter, or anybody who tries to form his moral conscience. He has a duty and an obligation to meet any Christian who wants to see him, and to meet all heads of state, [08:00] insofar as Catholicism is involved in their state. It is very simple.

CAIN: Let me first -- all right, let me press on just a little further on that. Do you see any other symbolism?

MARTIN: No, I don't see any other symbolism whatever, except that if we were privy to what will go on between them, I'm sure we might find out that he gets very solid advice from the Holy Father of a religious nature.

CAIN: All right Mr. Ellenoff, same question of you, sir. Of the question on symbolism, what is your view?

THEODORE ELLENOFF: The Vatican is wreathed in symbolism and imagery, it's the moral stature of the Church which commands attention, and which bids government hold their due. The pope in Poland was performing not only religious rites, but exercising a plea for humanity and human rights

through the symbolism of the Catholic Church. And it is savagely ironic to contrast those efforts of last week with an audition [09:00] of the president of Austria, who exemplifies in the western world an identity and a consonance with the Nazi period and the Holocaust. This kind of imagery is frightening and morally incomprehensible.

CAIN: OK gentlemen, feel free, either of you, at any point, to jump in when you have a comment, or interjection.

MARTIN: Well let me say this much, apropos of it all. The moral conscience of the Catholic Church is not the same as the moral conscience of the Jewish people, or of Jewish leaders. And what Jewish leaders and the Jewish people, and the government of Israel, which has already commented on the pope's action, should remember is that this incident is very, very salutary. Because it will impose on the Vatican a reassessment of its relationship with Jewry, and impose also on Jewish organizations the need to see the fundamental difference between Roman Catholic conscience and the Jewish conscience. We are built on forgiveness and forgetfulness. The pope met Mehmet Ali Agca, [10:00] who pumped two bullets into him from a Browning automatic, why? Because this is Christian. He's meeting Kurt Waldheim not merely as the head of state, he's meeting him as a

Catholic. There are problems for the Catholic Church in Austria. Kurt Waldheim is the man who represents the whole of Austria. So that you must regard the pope as universal pastor. And it is about time, I think, that Jews in general, and Jewish organizations in particular, cease to form or try to form the moral conscience of the Roman Catholic Church. They can form the political conscience of these United States if they want, but for one of them to say that this was incomprehensible was to shoot himself in the foot. To say then they would withdraw from greeting the pope is to put that foot in his mouth. This is a rank attempt to form a -- and by the way, one more important point for the land of Israel. It does impose on the Vatican more caution in establishing diplomatic relations with their Israel if this is going to be the history of our association with Israel, [11:00] that it can force us, force the pope, who has universal pastoral duty, then there's going to be a second thinking. Remember one more thing. When Jesus associated with Roman tax collectors, the Jews of his time objected because the tax collectors were oppressive. But this pope is the representative of Jesus, and he's going to associate with anybody he thinks necessary for the good of the Church. That's strong language, but that is the fact.

CAIN: That is very strong language, Dr. Martin. One -- Mr. Ellenoff, one quick question of Dr. Martin before we return to you, if we may. I have heard fears expressed that this incident could mar growing friendship between Jews and Catholics, Judaism and Catholicism. It sounds to me, listening to you, Dr. Martin, as though it is already marred.

MARTIN: No, not marred, it's a two-way street in a good neighborhood. And while we understand the Jewish conscience, we understand the Jewish identity is built on victimhood and having been hated and persecuted, [12:00] and six million having been killed, they must also understand that we are built on an entirely different ethos. It is the ethos of the Son of God, who forgives all sinners, and forgets their sins once they repent.

CAIN: All right, Mr. Ellenoff.

ELLENOFF: There's a curious narrow band of exclusion in his best illustrations as pastor of the universal conscience, the pope has indeed cried out as to the humanity of all. And indeed, the pope and the Vatican has demonstrated in constant public statements and in writings that the Jewish history and Judaism is the basis upon Christianity's best and highest motivations. So as to take this particular illustration as an instance in which the -- at least Mr.

Martin, because I'm sure the pope will move to a higher ground, that Mr. Martin would seek to exclude Jewish comment on the [13:00] symbolism of the pope meeting indeed with a man who has become a pariah in the Western world, and is excluded from this country by the calm watch list determination of the United States government, after an assessment of facts, that the president of Austria, a sovereign country, cannot come to the United States because of his wartime history. Indeed, is a statement by this government of what it thinks of President Waldheim.

MARTIN: The pope is not a temporal ruler merely. He is a spiritual father. And Christianity is not based on its highest motivations on anything in Judaism. It's based on the doctrine of Jesus Christ. It also draws a lot from its tradition from Judaism, but it is independent and purely itself in its moral conscience and its moral judgments. That this country did exclude Kurt Waldheim officially from circulating here as Kurt Waldheim, and as head of [14:00] the Austrian state, that is the business of the United States government. But no man, nobody on earth, but nobody, will ever tell the pope in Rome whom he can or cannot meet.

ELLENOFF: No one would choose to tell the pope in Rome whom he should meet. But indeed, how frightening it would be if one would put together a visitation to the Vatican with Adolf

Hitler? That is indeed, would be an irony and a savagery that would be inconsistent with our history.

MARTIN: When Adolf Hitler did go to Rome, the pope closed up the Vatican and left the city for the whole time. It is also just as frightening to think that Israel, who has been negotiating behind the scenes and covertly with the Iranian government, which hates both the Jews and Christians, will turn around and criticize the pope for this. Let's put the shoe where it fits. We're dealing with a moral situation, and a moral conscience of Christians which is different from the moral conscience of our Jewish brethren. [15:00] We sympathize with their sufferings, we understand them. We also have expressed our sorrow for the part we played in it, if indeed we played a part in it. But we will repel any attempt to curtail the pastoral activity of our pope, who is independent of Judaism, and is responsible only to the Son of God.

CAIN: Well Mr. Ellenoff, I am hearing a lot of hostility here, as all our viewers and listeners are. You said just a moment ago you felt the pope would take what you called a higher ground than Dr. Martin when he speaks on the issue. Do you feel the dialogue we're hearing right now typifies, or in any way represents, what is coming to be the state of affairs between Judaism and Catholicism?

ELLENOFF: I doubt it very much, because last year on a visitation, an audience with the pope, and a discussion of human rights, I found that His Holiness was a man of broad vision, indeed a forgiving nature, as Mr. Martin has suggested, but a man who understands both the imagery [16:00] and the substance of human rights in the world. The unfortunate acceptance of a President Waldheim for an opportunity to meet in the Vatican is something that -- this is not just a question of Israel, but Jews all over the world, people all over the world, will indeed make comment. No one can force the pope to withdraw from his desire to meet with the president, but indeed, it involves fair comment and fair judgment on the regrettable aspects of doing so.

MARTIN: Fair comment and fair judgment we welcome, but let me add one more thing.

CAIN: Very briefly, Mr. Martin.

MARTIN: That Kurt Waldheim also has rights, and the Austrian people as symbolized by him have rights. We are consulting those rights, as well as the rights of the Catholic Church in Austria.

CAIN: All right gentlemen, I have to end our discussion because we have run out of time. Thank you both for having joined us. Theodore Ellenoff of the American Jewish

Committee, and Malachi Martin, papal scholar and author of the recently released *The Jesuits*.

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