

VT-872 Transcription

NBC Nightly News regarding Kurt Waldheim's invitation to
Vatican. 1987.

Tom Brokaw:

-- cries of outrage and disgust by Jewish groups in the US. Austrian President Kurt Waldheim arrived in Rome today for his scheduled meeting with Pope John Paul. Waldheim's audience with the pope is set for tomorrow. Since the announcement of that visit, many Jews in the United States have condemned the meeting because of Waldheim's alleged connection to Nazi atrocities during World War II. American Jewish activists carried their protests to St. Peter's Square today, some wearing the striped uniforms of concentration camp prisoners.

Avi Weiss:

We have come into Vatican Square to remember the six million of our brothers and sisters who perished during the Holocaust and whose souls are going to be desecrated tomorrow.

Tom Brokaw:

The Vatican again defended tomorrow's meeting between the pope and Waldheim. It says the pope has a tradition of seeing people from [01:00] all backgrounds. The Waldheim visit to Rome is our

interview topic tonight. Our guest is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee. Thanks for coming in. The pope with meets all kinds of sinners all the time, if indeed Waldheim is a sinner. What's the real problem here?

Marc Tanenbaum:

Well, I think there's a special situation here. First, I think it has to be said that the Jewish community, especially Jewish leadership, have the greatest respect for Pope John Paul II. I've had three audiences with him myself. An extraordinary personality. But our feeling is that this pope, who is recognized and justly so as being an international champion of human rights, is being compromised, exploited, by Waldheim, an unrepentant Nazi, who has lied about his past for more than 40 years. And he's coming to see the pope to obtain instant absolution of his sins without ever confessing his sins.

Tom Brokaw:

Well, [02:00] the pope has visited countries that are ruled by despots, by military dictators, and by civilian dictators. You were not heard from then.

Marc Tanenbaum:

I think one of the hopefulness -- hopeful aspects of this meeting tomorrow that we look forward to is that the pope in fact will continue the tradition he started in Poland, in Chile, Philippines, of confronting repressive people, tyrants, and calling them to justice. Telling them to turn away from their evil ways and confess their sins and support the kinds of policies of human rights and social justice that he's been committed to. We hope that happens tomorrow. The danger is that there will be a photo opportunity of the pope and Waldheim, that Waldheim will send these around the world, certainly through Austria and German-speaking countries, that he's Mr. Clean. And therefore, he doesn't have to [03:00] acknowledge at all any of his involvement in Greece and Yugoslavia, where he participated in activity that resulted in the death of thousands of people. It's a sign, not incidentally, to any former Nazi, any criminal, any murderer, any terrorist, that you can carry out these vicious acts and you never have to feel any guilt or confess your error. And somehow, if you hang around long enough, you might even be received by the pope because Waldheim is doing that tomorrow.

Tom Brokaw:

Are you also saying that you sense that there is some anti-Semitism at the Vatican?

Marc Tanenbaum:

No, I don't think so at all. I think this pope has been among the most forthright in his condemnation of anti-Semitism and his condemnation of Nazism. That's why it is all the more difficult for us to make sense out of his policies with regard to Jews and in effect, confirming, even symbolically, what Waldheim stands for.

Tom Brokaw:

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, thank you very much for coming in and joining us tonight.

Marc Tanenbaum:

Thank you. [04:00]

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