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REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST'S 5 MILLION "OTHERS"

Below is the text of the ad that appeared in the April 20, 1999 edition of the New York Times:

REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST'S 5 MILLION "OTHERS"

Ask the average student—from elementary school through college—how many died in the Holocaust and they will generally answer 6 million—6 million Jews. But the truth is there were 5 million "others" who were killed, most of whom were Catholic.

On August 22, 1939, the day before Hitler signed the Nazi-Soviet pact, he authorized the killing "without pity or mercy all men, women, and children of Polish descent or language."

On September 1, when Germany invaded Poland, the Poles became the first people to experience the systematic terror of the Holocaust.

Among Poles, there were 3 million Jews and 3 million Catholics who were killed by the Nazis. Dachau was home to nearly 3,000 clergymen, making it the largest "monastery" in the world at that time; more than 1,000 of them were murdered. And it wasn't just in Poland that priests were captured and killed, it was in Germany, Austria and other European countries that thousands met their death.

Unfortunately, some have blamed the Poles for what happened to Jews. But Poland was not an ally of Germany like Finland, nor was it a collaborator like Norway, nor was it a puppet government like Vichy France, nor was it home to fascist organizations like the Iron Guard in Romania. In fact, it formed resistance groups like Zegota, the only government sponsored and funded organization to aid Jews in Nazi occupied Europe. Hitler, who hated Christianity, resented the underground railroad that was established to rescue Jews.

"Antiquity was better than modern times," said Hitler, "because it didn't know Christianity and syphilis." He regarded Christianity as "the first spiritual terror" the world has ever known and that is why he did what he could to destroy it, saving his greatest ammunition for the Catholic Church.

To Hitler's secretary, Martin Bormann, "National Socialism [Nazism] and Christianity are irreconcilable." Hermann Rauschning, Hitler's associate, put it this way, "One is either a Christian or a German. You can't be both." The chief ideologue of fascism, Alfred Rosenberg, similarly remarked, "When we put on our brownshirts, then we cease to be Catholics or Protestants, we are only Germans."

That is why it is regrettable that some blame Christianity for what happened in Germany. Cardinal Edward Cassidy, president of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations With the Jews, recently said that "Persons very dear to the Catholic faithful have been condemned without proof," a clear reference to the unfair accusations being leveled today against Pope Pius XII.

Writing of the situation in 1943, Hitler biographer John Toland said, "The Church, under the Pope's guidance, had already saved the lives of more Jews than all other churches, religious institutions and rescue organizations combined, and was presently hiding

thousands of Jews in monasteries, convents and Vatican City itself.”

Those who deny the horror that Catholics experienced under Hitler should tell that to Polish Catholic Holocaust survivors like Michael Preisler and Bozena Urbanowicz Gilbride. It was bad enough what happened to them and their families, but it is unconscionable that they now suffer the indignity of having their own experience with Nazi terrorism denied.

The 5 million “others” are not faceless entities: they have a history and a legacy that all of us need to acknowledge. Christians, standing with Jews, must vow to work together, making “Never Again” a pledge we can all embrace.

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