

An Open Letter to the Editor of NEWSWEEK

Dear Sir:

Once again I find myself appalled by the ease with which writers in the mainstream press are able to publish anti-Catholic slurs. Please read the opening part of your snippet under "Short Cuts," one entitled "Rome Remembers the Holocaust," through the eyes of your Catholic readers, if you can imagine doing so:

Maybe even the pope has been inspired by "Schindler's List." This week the Holy Father is hosting a concert that – amazingly – is the Vatican's first official commemoration of the 6 million Jews killed by Hitler.

Several questions come to mind. The first is, why is it that the Vatican is singled out as not until now having had an official commemoration of the 6,000,000 Jews killed by Nazis? Has every other religious body on earth, including the Church of the Latter-Day Saints, the Church of England, every Sunni or Shi'ite organization, every Protestant denomination worldwide, all Northern Buddhist organizations headed by the Dalai Lama, every Zen group, all Native American shamanistic groups, or all of Shinto Japan, i.e., had such an event, the Vatican being, regretfully, the last?

If so, then your "amazingly" is justified. If not, then it isn't. In that case, one must simply categorize your writer's, and your editorial staff's, attitude toward the Vatican and the billion or so of us associated with it as being burdened with assumptions as ignorant and manners as bad as those of the rest of the all-too-prevalent Catholic-baiters in American society. This allies your thinking with that of such groups as the KKK, who routinely railed against Catholics as they did

against blacks and Jews, and with about as much sense and accuracy.

A few more questions: isn't it really rather nice of the Vatican to commemorate the members of an entirely separate religion who died in what is simply another of mankind's countless horrific genocidal slaughters? Is this something that the Vatican or John Paul II are really called upon to do at all? No, it isn't. So why do you seize the opportunity to cheapen the gesture? And why do you and the popular American press in general not mention the millions of Catholics who were slaughtered in the Holocaust, as well? Why is this routinely overlooked? If these victims are also remembered at the Holy Father's concert, will you report that should you cover it?

Questions again: Do you really think John Paul II or any other Catholic of good conscience needs to be inspired by Schindler's List to jog our memories of the Holocaust? Not only did we lose our own millions, among them one saint that we know of (St. Maximilian Kolbe, one of many Catholic priests and religious who died at Auschwitz) and one beata, the Blessed Edith Stein (also murdered at Auschwitz), but Oskar Schindler was Roman Catholic, albeit hardly a saint. There has been much musing in the press over what might have caused this apparently morally mediocre man to take the heroic and dangerous actions that he did, which on the face of it could gain him nothing of apparent value. However, I have never once seen mentioned the possibility that perhaps Schindler was troubled and motivated to do what he did because of the teachings of his Church, received earlier in life – a church which, in spite of an occasionally spotty history as an institution, has always offered many examples of and given support to those who are willing to rise above the general moral mediocrity and often downright evil of the world and show heroic virtue at whatever cost.

As for your accusation (and it is that) of a "50-year-

silence," which you make later in your piece, I think that if your writers would do a little digging around, they would find that Catholics and our Church, in print and by the spoken word, have not been accepting of the mass slaughter of the Holocaust or any other genocidal episodes directed against non-Catholics. Some examples of the latter, generally ignored by the American popular press, are the treatment by the English government of the Catholic Irish during the Famine years there, the treatment of Catholic priests and religious during the French Revolution, or the actions taken against Roman Catholics by communist governments around the world. Ukrainian Catholics, in particular, who belong to one of Rome's accepted Eastern rites, like the Lebanese Maronite Catholics recently slaughtered in their Middle-Eastern church, can wax very verbal on this point. There was precious little Catholic silence while these were taking place (when, of course, we knew that they were, or that they were as bad as they were) or afterwards. The same is true of general Catholic sentiment regarding the treatment of European Jews during the Nazi reign of Germany. Jews did not go unaided by Catholics, Jews alone did not die, and Jews did not die alone. There is simply no sense to be found in allying the leaders of the Roman Church with someone like Hitler, Pol Pot, or Ildi Amin, as has frequently been done to the late Pope Pius XII, head of the Church during the Holocaust – the canard that lies behind your writer's snide piece, as we all recognize only too well. A coworker of mine imbued with such ideas, as the writer of your piece apparently is, recently railed at me out of the blue, for no other reason than that I am a notorious mass-attender and am therefore somehow "the enemy": "Why didn't the Pope stop the Holocaust?" My answer, which seems sensible, was "The Swiss Guards aren't trained for that." In short, this sort of thing doesn't wash if you look at the facts.

-Laura Peterson, Ph.D.