

# CATHOLICS URGED TO BOYCOTT JEWISH MUSEUM

On March 17, New York's Jewish Museum opened a controversial exhibit, "Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art." Many Jews blasted the museum for displaying artwork they said trivialized the Holocaust; some called for a boycott of the museum. The museum's curator, Norman L. Kleeblatt, defended the exhibition saying it was supposed to "raise tough questions about commercialization and images that have become icons of the Holocaust." The Catholic League got involved declaring its support for the boycott.

On February 13, at a meeting of Jewish leaders in Washington, Menachem Rosensaft, an official of the Holocaust Memorial Museum and founding chairman of the International Network of Children of Holocaust Survivors, called for Jewish groups to boycott the Jewish Museum. The next day William Donohue urged Catholics to join the boycott. Here is what he said:

"Usually, it's Catholics whom the 'creative types' in the artistic community like to offend. Now it's Jews.

"There is nothing creative about 'designer' poison-gas canisters, Lego concentration camp sets, digitally altered pictures of a photographer holding a Diet Coke amidst Buchenwald inmates, toylike Hitler cats and handsome busts of that monster Josef Mengele. This is the kind of expression we might expect from some tongue-pierced adolescent hell-bent on a Columbine-styled rampage. It is not what we would expect from legitimate artists. Worse, we would expect that the venue for such rage would be some gallery in the East Village and not a prestigious museum. Moreover, we also object to the cover of the exhibit's catalog that features a cross morphing into a swastika.

"Dialogue is not the answer. A boycott is. Catholics should take this opportunity to join with their Jewish brothers and sisters and send a message to the officials at the Jewish Museum by joining the boycott triggered by Menachem Rosensaft. Anything that trivializes the Holocaust is offensive and 'Mirroring Evil' clearly meets that test."

The reaction in the Jewish community to the Catholic League's call for a boycott of the Jewish museum ran from favorable to skeptical. When Roman Kent, chairman of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, was asked about the Catholic League's decision to join the boycott, he replied, "We did not ask for their support. They came willingly to protest the trivialization of the Holocaust. What objections can I have?"

The *Forward*, a major Jewish weekly newspaper, ran a front-page lead story on the league's support for the boycott. "Museum Flap On Shoah Art Pairs Catholics With Survivors," was the headline of the February 22 edition. The subtitle, "Strange Bedfellows," was in recognition to the fact that some Jews have been critical of the Catholic League's defense of Pope Pius XII. When Rosensaft, the organizer of the boycott, was asked what he thought of the Catholic League's support in light of its continuous defense of Pius, he said, "The fact that we disagree on one issue does not mean we cannot have agreements on others."

In his interview with the *Forward*, Donohue did not shy from his support for Pius XII. "While we will continue to defend the record of Pope Pius XII," Donohue said, "we will be the first Catholic group out of the starting blocks to condemn any event that trivializes the Holocaust."

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) did not join the boycott. Its national director, Abraham Foxman, himself a Holocaust survivor due to the efforts of Catholics, was only mildly critical of the exhibition. "It's premature as long as there are survivors alive who may be offended."