

HOLOCAUST CONTINUES TO STIR DEBATE

Holocaust-related issues continue to provoke controversy both within the Catholic and Jewish communities, and between Catholics and Jews. In addition to our lead story on the Cornwell volume, the following stories have all been the subject of much debate.

Currently, there is a fierce quarrel brewing in the Jewish community between those aligned with professor Peter Novick, a Jewish historian from the University of Chicago, and his opponents. Novick has authored *The Holocaust in American Life* (Houghton Mifflin), book that takes a critical look at the way Jews in America have come to deal with the Holocaust. It is not a work that has endeared himself to those in the American Defamation League: he accuses the ADL, and others, of exploiting the memory of the Holocaust for crass fund-raising purposes.

Novick raises serious questions as to why, for two decades after the Holocaust, most Jewish Americans had little to say about the event. And now, he maintains, there are so many Jews who are engaged in a gold-medal race to use the Holocaust as a "victimization Olympics" that it has led them to assume "a postural moral superiority." Novick also denies the uniqueness of the Holocaust: "Every historical event, including the Holocaust, in some ways resembles events to which it might be compared and differs from them in some ways. These resemblances are a perfectly proper subject for discussion."

Tensions between Catholics and Jews have been exacerbated by Israel, so says Rev. David Yager, representative of the Holy See on a bilateral committee to improve relations with Israel. Rev. Yager blames Israel's anti-Catholic attitude for blocking truly good relations between the two groups. Specifically,

Rev. Yager took note of Israel's harping on Pope Pius XII for allegedly doing nothing to stop the Holocaust as the source of the problem. He labeled such charges a "blood libel." The ADL quickly protested this remark.

The Catholic League recently got involved in another related Holocaust dispute, this one involving a school curriculum on "Holocaust and Resistance Studies." The course, which was authored by Beth Dutton, has many admirable qualities to it, but there are some that the Catholic League found objectionable. The course outline is available on the Vermont National Educational Association website and has been taught in some Vermont schools.

In a letter to Ms. Dutton, we said that her course posits "a linear relationship between Christianity and Nazism" that is "not universally accepted." Furthermore, we contended, "If Christianity gave birth to Nazism, it needs to be explained why Nazism did not occur throughout Christian Europe and at an earlier time. Why, for example, did it find fruition in the 20th century and in a nation that housed the most well-educated people on the continent, if not in the world?" Ms. Dutton has not replied to our concerns and that is why we will pursue other avenues.

The league also contested an interpretation made by journalists that when Pope John Paul II recently said that he sought pardon for "the failure to respect and defend human rights," he was referring to Pope Pius XII's failure to confront Hitler. For the record, we quoted what the Holy Father said about his matter in Germany in 1995: "Those who don't limit themselves to cheap polemics know very well what Pius XII thought about the Nazi regime, and how much he did to help the countless victims persecuted by that regime."

Finally, there is the controversial report on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. An outside panel of administrative experts has found several problems with the

museum, including “excessive involvement” of the museum’s chairman and other board members; they were charged with stifling the authority of the director. More central to the concerns of the Catholic League was the conclusion that the chairman and the board need to address the extent to which non-Jewish victims of the Holocaust should be represented in the museum.

Regarding this last point, members are urged to read the absolutely fantastic article on this subject by William vanden Heuvel, former Deputy U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. and President of the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.

His piece, “America and the Holocaust” was published in the July/August edition of *American Heritage* magazine. It puts to rest the fatuous notion that FDR could have done more to save Jews from the Holocaust. Ambassador vanden Heuvel, who is a member of the Catholic League, also writes eloquently on the 9 *million non-Jewish* victims of the Holocaust.

A reprint is available from *American Heritage* for \$6.95 per copy (includes postage and handling). Call 1-800-925-9877 to order a copy.