

THE HOLOCAUST'S MORAL LESSONS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on Holocaust Remembrance Day:

Observing Holocaust Remembrance Day is special for Jews around the world, but it should also be recognized by those of us who are not Jewish. There are many things that we can learn from this monstrous event, among them being the seminal moral lessons that it bequeathed.

At Nuremberg, the standard Nazi defense was to claim that they were only doing what they were instructed to do. It did not work. The London Charter of the International Military Tribunal determined that “following orders” did not exonerate them. Though the Tribunal did not explicitly invoke natural law—e.g., we know in our heart of hearts that certain acts, such as the killing of innocents, is wrong—it essentially validated what Aristotle broached and what the Catholic Church later pioneered.

We need to remember this moral lesson because of the prevalence of moral relativism in our culture, the notion that there are no objective truths. This pernicious idea is not new, though it is more widely embraced today—allowing for glaring inconsistencies—than ever before, especially on college campuses. Its legacy is rich with irony.

“There is no such thing as truth, either in the moral or in the scientific sense.” Many professors and their students would fully endorse this view today. Hitler is the author.

Before Hitler there was Nietzsche. He spent his adult life trashing the teachings of the Catholic Church. He is famous for opining, “There are no facts, only interpretations.” The Nazis later agreed. Martin Heidegger also embraced Nietzschean relativism and, not surprisingly, he was a big fan of Hitler.

The idea that there are no objective meanings also marks deconstruction, a school of thought that originated in France in the 1960s; Jacques Derrida is its intellectual father. In this country, his views achieved currency through Paul de Man. Many intellectuals were shocked when it was revealed that de Man had been a Nazi collaborator in Belgium. If they understood the logical consequences of denying moral truths, they wouldn't have been shocked.

In a survey of college seniors, conducted in 2002, three-quarters of them said they were taught that right and wrong depend "on differences in individual values and cultural diversity."

When James Q. Wilson, a professor of political science who taught at UCLA and Harvard, discussed the Holocaust with his students, he found no general agreement that the Holocaust itself was a moral horror. "It all depends on your perspective," one student said.

Professor Roger Simon, who taught at Hamilton College, experienced the same reaction. He estimated that 10 to 20 percent of his students could not condemn the Holocaust. "Of course I dislike the Nazis," one student told him, "but who is to say they are morally wrong?"

Even more troubling, philosopher Christina Hoff Sommers found that students at Williams College, who were taught that "all knowledge is a social construct," doubted the Holocaust even occurred. As one student said, "Although the Holocaust may not have happened, it's a perfectly reasonable conceptual hallucination."

The good news is that the reality of objective truth cannot be erased, even in our cancel culture, though admittedly it is harder to voice this verity than ever before. It is incumbent on those of us who know better to point out the flaws inherent in moral relativism. It does not help when we have a president

who will not speak to this issue.

The White House statement by President Joe Biden on Holocaust Remembrance Day is embarrassing. Instead of focusing on anti-Semitism, he twice mentions, in short address, the plight of "LGBTQ+" people; he also denounces "homophobia." What day does he think he is observing?

It is noble of him to object to "dehumaniz[ing] groups of people," and to "all forms of dehumanizing bigotry." But if "LGBTQ+" people are to be cited in this regard, why is there no mention of the most dehumanizing of all behaviors—child abuse in the womb? We all know why: Our "devout Catholic" president champions abortion-on-demand.

The Catholic League salutes Jews all over the world for honorably observing Holocaust Remembrance Day. They prove that this day can be commemorated without exploiting it for political purposes.