

The Write Stuff

The recent Vatican-Israel diplomatic accord generated countless editorials, articles and letters commenting on the accord and the history of Catholic-Jewish relations. Many of these served as springboards to unwarranted and unfounded commentaries on the Church, Pius XII and the Holocaust. This letter from Catholic League president William A. Donohue, while responding to one such published letter, in fact countered much of what was printed as fact in recent weeks. It appeared in the *The Jewish Press* on January 21, 1994 headlined, "CATHOLIC LEAGUE RESPONDS TO CRITICISM."

The letter by Henry Gerber (January 7th) deserves a response. Mr. Gerber repeats the by now almost accepted wisdom that the Roman Catholic Church did nothing and remained silent throughout the Holocaust. While it is true that the Catholic Church did not, for eminently reasonable tactical purposes, lead a vociferous campaign against Hitler, it is a rank distortion of history to maintain that it sat on the sidelines.

Much of what the Catholic Church did to assist Jews was done surreptitiously. It had to. Lacking an army, and besieged by Nazi terror against Catholic priests, the Vatican had to proceed with caution. But it did act. Indeed, Pope Pius XII was praised by everyone from the New York Times to Golda Meir for what he did. Leading rabbis the world over extended their congratulations to the Pope, and Jewish survivors extended their heartfelt thanks to all those Catholics – lay and clergy alike – who helped them escape Nazi persecution.

Mr. Gerber also focuses on many other sins of the Catholic Church. In some cases, like in the Crusades, he is remiss in not mentioning that the killing of Jews was openly condemned at the time by the popes. By way of analogy, it should be noted that Pope John Paul II has repeatedly condemned

abortion, yet some Catholics disobey. Is it fair, therefore, to say that the Church sanctions abortion because some Catholics practice it? If that is the case, then it must be true that the Church sanctions sin of every kind because it is surely true that all Catholics, including the Pope, are sinners.

But there is no need to be defensive. Yes, the Catholic Church has sinned and it surely has not earned a clean slate for its dealings with Jews. But the Vatican accord with Israel does hold forth great promise for Catholics and Jews alike. In the end, a spirit of cooperation will serve both communities well.

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