

COMMENTARY

Holocaust remains Pope Pius' XII litmus test

Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Special to Sentinel-Voice

It was virtually an article of faith during the decade I attended Catholic schools that Pope Pius XII would one day be canonized a saint.

The priests and nuns routinely punctuated their prayers with fulsome praise of his goodness and greatness, and urged us to pray for his continued health and well-being.

In the decades since his death in 1959, Pius XII's march to sainthood has been wracked by fierce debate over his dealings with Hitler and his refusal to speak out against the Holocaust.

This, almost predictably, surfaced as an issue during John Paul II's historic visit to Israel and the Holy Land. And it should have.

While John Paul put the church firmly on the path to atonement when he raked Catholics over the coals for saying and doing nothing

about colonialism, slavery and pillage of the lands of indigenous peoples, the ultimate litmus test of his total commitment to healing remains his willingness to confront the Vatican's deep complicity in the Holocaust.

The test has been a hard one for the church to pass. Vatican defenders cloud papal guilt by accusing critics of ignoring the sacrifices made by thousands of Catholics in and outside of Germany who lost their lives to defy the Nazis and aid the Jews.

They also remind everyone that Pius XII poured millions into relief for war refugees, gave sanctuary to Jews inside the Vatican, and played a huge role in post-war recovery efforts and the restoration of democracy in Western Europe.

They also note that the Vatican apologized in 1998 for centuries of Catholic anti-Semitism and for the failure

to combat Nazi persecution of the Jews.

These noble acts make it even harder for some to understand why John Paul refuses to take the next step and criticize the Vatican's silence on World War II genocide. The answer is painful.

It will require that John Paul acknowledge that the silence was not simply, as he claims, due to the moral lapses of individual Catholics but, instead, was a deliberate policy of appeasement crafted by church leaders.

This has been well documented by Jesuit College, Cambridge University professor John Cornwell in his work, "Hitler's Pope: the Secret History of Pius XII." Cornwell points out that the Vatican signed its infamous concordat with Hitler in 1933 to prevent him from grabbing church property and meddling in church affairs.

In return, the Vatican pledged the absolute obedience of Germany's bishops and priests to Hitler. After ascending to the papacy in 1939, Pius XII underscored the church's allegiance by sending a letter praising "the illustrious Hitler," and expressing confidence in his leadership. Even as evidence piled up that thousands of Jews were being shipped to slaughter in Nazi concentration camps, Pius XII refused to reverse the Vatican's disastrous political course.

He ignored the pleas of President Roosevelt to denounce the Nazis. He declined to endorse a joint declaration by Britain, the U.S. and Russia condemning the killings of Jews, claiming that he couldn't condemn "particular" atrocities. He was publicly silent when the Germans occupied Rome in 1944 and rounded-up many of the city's Jews. Many were

later killed in concentration camps. He continued to send birthday greetings to the man behind it all every year until Hitler's death. And, he never reprimanded the Archbishop of Berlin for issuing a statement mourning Hitler's death.

The pope's only wartime pronouncement on the killings was a tepid statement denouncing the deaths "of hundreds of thousands." By then there were millions, and he never mentioned Hitler, Nazi Germany or Jews in that statement.

In an "Alice-in-Wonderland" twist on reality, Vatican defenders accuse those who have called for John Paul II to finger culprits within the church who aided and abetted Hitler's ravages of ruining prospects of reconciliation between Jews and Catholics. But the call for John Paul to bear his papal chest on church sins committed during the

Holocaust is not merely academic self-flagellation.

Unlike past horrors of slavery and colonialism, which the Pope rightly condemns, there are thousands of Holocaust victims still alive who bear eternal scars from the Vatican's acquiescence to genocide. And, the killing fields in Rwanda, Indonesia and Kosovo are grim testimony that the world has still not rid itself of the horrors of genocide today.

John Paul's apology for the sins of Catholics against the oppressed is a welcome and necessary step toward exorcising wrongs of the past. But his blind spot to the Vatican's stand-pat silence while millions were murdered will prevent him from attaining the purified conscience he professes to want so badly for the church.

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Carl Rowan's Commentary

Wise friendship gesture toward Iran

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON — In one of its wisest foreign-policy moves, the Clinton administration has made a genuine step toward reconciliation with Iran.

It might seem like small potatoes that the United States has removed the ban on imports of luxury items like

caviar and rugs from Iran, decided to return assets frozen since Iran's 1979 revolution and apologized for meddling improperly in Iran's internal affairs throughout the 1950s, 60s and '70s. But this is a big deal.

It could bring an end to an estrangement, often violent, that has harmed both countries. It could end a rift that has undermined Iran's economy and stopped the movement toward more personal liberty for Iranian citizens, especially women. And, it could end the unnecessary hostility that has harmed the United States by turning Islamic fundamentalists against it, causing a rise in international terrorism and creating a giant roadblock to peace in the Middle East.

It seems ages ago — actually, 1962 — that I went to Iran with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to find a marvelously friendly people and a staunchly allied government. There were not many overt signs that burning in the hearts and minds of many Iranians was a deep resentment that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency had masterminded a 1953 coup in which the leftist prime minister, Mohammed Mossadegh, was overthrown and the monarchy was restored.

And it seems many nightmares ago that, after a stunning triumph by the Muslim



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clerics, the wildest of the insurrectionists seized the American embassy, captured American hostages and ushered in an era of intense hatred.

The hostages finally were released in 1981 after President Reagan struck a deal in which some of Iran's gold bank assets and other properties were returned. But there was no hint that reconciliation was possible until 1997 when Mohammad Khatami was elected president. Last month the Iranian people gave Khatami loyalists control of parliament.

No one is sure how much that is a force for an Iranian-American rapprochement, because Ayatollah Ali Khamenei still holds dictatorial powers. But the United States, as well as Iran, has a lot to gain from a return to friendship and cooperation.

Iran has a strong voice among petroleum exporting countries, so it could be a force in urging OPEC to increase supplies so as to mitigate the damage that the recent jump in oil prices has done to segments of the U.S. economy.

We will soon know how Iran responds to the U.S. offer to allow more Iranian academics and athletes into the United States. And we will soon see whether Iran wants to ease the rising "energy crisis" in the United States. Islamic fundamentalist anger could make it impossible for Iranian leaders to respond with anything more positive than renewed rhetoric about how the United States is "the great Satan." But sooner or later Iranians will see the benefits of friendship with America, and the "sooner" just might be now.

What's wrong with this picture?

Rainier Spencer
Sentinel-Voice

In New York City, several police officers were recently acquitted of any wrongdoing in a case where they fired forty-one shots, killing an unarmed black man. These officers were not uniformed, came from an unmarked car, and accosted the man with brandished guns in front of his Bronx home near midnight.

When he did not react as though he was pleased to see them, they killed him in a veritable hail of bullets. This kind of action has deemed to be acceptable police work by a New York jury. The lesson we are to take away from this?

If you are black and stand in front of your own home in New York you should expect to be killed by policemen who try their best not to look or act like policemen.

Also in New York, another unarmed black man was killed by an undercover policeman. His crime?

Apparently, he became incensed when these officers asked him if he knew where they could buy drugs. He would be alive today, although perhaps in jail, if he had told the officers where they could buy drugs.

Unfortunately, he took offense at being asked such a question, and when the situation escalated and a struggle ensued, he was shot dead by another officer.

The mayor of New York City has gone on a crusade to dirty this innocently dead man's name. The lesson from this case is that if police in New York ask you to engage in a criminal act, you'd better comply or they might kill you.

A Haitian husband and wife are going to be deported from the United States because they entered the country illegally. Their children, who were born here, have the right to stay. If the parents want to keep

their children they will have to return with them to a situation of poverty, filth, disease, and crime back home.

If they want their children to remain in the relatively safe environment they have enjoyed here all their lives, they will have to abandon those children to someone else's care and separate from them. Obviously, these Haitian parents are not welcome here.

In another case, an African teenager is going to be deported from the United States back to the country from which he escaped. He came here in order to escape the abuse and torture he was receiving at home. He is also not welcome here.

In yet other cases, we see Chinese stowaways, some of them children, being returned back to China upon discovery by American authorities. The lesson here is that if you are Haitian, African, or Chinese, and enter this country in a search for better conditions, you are not welcome and will be sent back to the misery you were trying to escape.

In Miami, one segment of a young boy's family is refusing to return him to the Cuban father who loves him. The father, who had joint custody of the child, did not realize that the boy's mother was taking him to the United States on a raft.

Now, the boy's legal and biological father is being denied access to his own son. United States legislators are falling over each other attempting to introduce bills to make this one boy a special case and to essentially kidnap him from his own father.

The lesson in this case is very clear. If you are a white-appearing Cuban you are not only welcome here, but the law will be bent for your benefit.

It would be nice if these were April Fool's tales, but they aren't?

Welcome to America.