

Editorial

Times Report A Puzzlement

One must wonder what the New York Times is up to when it publishes on Page 1 a story accusing the Vatican of systematically helping Nazi war criminals escape from Europe after World War II.

On Jan. 26, the Times published an investigative report saying Vatican agencies played a key role in helping Nazis escape from Europe. It cited a recently declassified 1947 U.S. State Department report and statements by Serge Klarsfeld, a Paris lawyer who has specialized in tracking down fugitive Nazis.

Normally, such shallow reports are best ignored. But there is more to this latest story than the mere question of journalistic capability. For when an institution is charged with helping Nazis, it is implicitly being labeled anti-Semitic. The New York Times is aware and one must wonder why such a story found itself on Page 1.

Such reports concerning the Vatican and Nazism are anything but new. They crop up from time to time and are consistently explained by Vatican officials and historians. When the reports were rampant 20 years ago, Pope Paul VI appointed two scholars, the American Jesuit Father Robert Graham and Father Pierre Blet of France to study and publish Vatican documents on World War II.

Father Graham a scholarly and normally mild type said the State Department reports were "propagandist maneuvers" by people who "never miss the chance to crucify" the Catholic Church. "The

accusations in the report are founded on nothing but air," the Jesuit said.

Father Blet said the document cited by the Times was "irrelevant" and showed "very little consistency with other historical material of this period."

One of the central allegations of the Times article was that escaped Nazi war criminal Walter Rouff was housed for 18 months in "convents of the Holy See." Father Graham told NC News Service that that is "absurd."

He noted that there were "tens of thousands of refugees" all over Italy after the war and that in the confusion of the war and its aftermath the Vatican and Western resettlement agencies handled many refugees who lacked proper documentation. "People who had reason to evaporate just used false papers," he said. If any agency, Vatican or other, unwittingly processed a person with false papers that did not constitute complicity, Father Graham said.

Father Antonio Weber, who headed Vatican resettlement efforts after the war, said that among refugees the Vatican helped resettle were 20,000 who claimed to be Jews. He said that in many cases no one could be sure of their identities and he added, "Even if these war criminals came with their real names, who knew at the time they were war criminals? We could only believe what they told us."

Father Graham pointed out that many of the refugees in Italy after the war were from Communist countries. Many of them were designated by Soviet authorities as criminals and it was neither Western or Vatican policy to accept Soviet reasons.

"The policy of the Allies was not to force their repatriation, even if Stalin and Tito (of Yugoslavia) denounced them as 'war criminals,' Father Graham said.

Notice he said "Allies" and not Vatican. It was the policy of the West, not just the Vatican to question Soviet motives.

Along those lines, Father Graham noted that Rouff had been held by the U.S. military in Rimini, Italy, before he escaped. Father Graham wondered aloud how he escaped American detention if he had already been linked with the killing of tens of thousands of Jews.

Father Graham obviously did not feel the need to point out that thousands of Jews were harbored by the Nazis and eventually sent to freedom through Vatican efforts and that Pope Pius XII was honored for such efforts by Jewish organizations.

Pius XII is no longer with us but we must be grateful that one of the men on the scene, Father Weber, is still here to give first-hand reports of the time and its intricacies.

The Times report also said that Vatican officials consciously tried to infiltrate people with Nazi or Fascist sympathies into Latin American countries as long as they were anti-Communist and pro-Church.

Father Graham handled this charge deftly, noting that it went beyond even the evidence in the report and could only be wishful thinking on the part of those who wish to characterize the Catholic Church as politically right-wing.

Maybe so and the further danger is that such easily corrected charges appeared in a newspaper that sees itself as the epitome of fair play. But to be truthful, it is not the first time that the Catholic Church has received less than fair shrift from the New York Times. With confirmation hearings on the new U.S. embassy at the Vatican, is it possible that story was timed? If so, by whom? The U.S. State Department? The New York Times? Both? And the natural sequitur: Why?

and Opinions

Unborn Babies Are Human

EDITOR:

Jan. 22, 1984, marked the 11th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion in all 50 states. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, by a 7-2 decision in the Roe v. Wade and Doe v. Bolton cases, made a landmark decision on abortion. These decisions swept away all legal protection for the lives of unborn children during the entire nine months of pregnancy. They did this through three legal mechanisms.

First, they ruled that the unborn child is not a legal person. When Justice Blackmun spoke for the court and asserted that "we need not resolve the difficult question of when life begins," he was referring to the unborn as having "potential life." Clearly, human life is not the same as potential human life: an opposition is being created between actuality and potentiality -- to the detriment of the unborn child's personhood. One must not create a legal definition of personhood which defies the

medical evidence of what a person is "In Nationalist Socialist Law, the Jew...regardless of genetic evidence of his humanity...was deprived of his legal personhood and destroyed..."

Prior to the American Civil War and the antislavery amendments, such decisions as Dred Scott v. Sanford relegated slaves to the legal status of nonpersons in spite of clear biological evidence of their humanity. Wherever legal personhood has been defined without reference to objective genetic criteria, the door has been opened to the most frightful consequences. ("New Perspectives on Human Abortion.")

Second, the court created a new "right of privacy" for the pregnant woman, a right superior to the right of the unborn child to live, allowing the mother to have her baby killed. The husband or natural father is excluded from this privacy. In the words of "Planned Parenthood v. Danforth" (1976), a subsequent court decision: he is the "third party."

Third, the state was given a "compelling interest" in maintaining the mother's health. Health was defined

by the woman herself. If her pregnancy was a social burden, and if she could find a doctor to do it, she could have her preborn baby killed at any time during the entire nine months of pregnancy. An abortion can be performed for almost any reason if a woman can find a doctor who will do it.

The consequences of the Supreme Court decision have been the deaths of more than 15 million children. The rate of abortion has risen to the point that presently one abortion is performed every 20 seconds. We must examine our own lives, ask for God's help and grace and work to restore everyone's inalienable right to life both unborn and born.

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The Need For 3rd Party

EDITOR:

I enjoyed your editorial "Minority View." You pointed out the purpose and

need for minor parties and candidates very well. Third parties are able to create agendas of issues which major party candidates usually try to avoid.

The Right to Life Party is working very hard to try to force politicians to take a public pro-life stand. And if they are not pro-life, the candidate we run to oppose them will make sure that our little brothers and sisters who are threatened by abortion are not forgotten in the political arena.

On Monday, Jan. 23, I took part in the annual March for Life in Washington, D. C., to protest the legalization of abortion by the Supreme Court and to reaffirm our commitment to the sacredness of all human life. After the march, on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, I announced my candidacy for Congress in the 29th C.D. to oppose incumbent Frank Horton.

Promotion of the civil rights of the unborn is the paramount issue in my campaign, but a consistent pro-life position will be maintained. I will oppose not only the violence of abortion, but also the violence of nuclear weapons. My con-



"IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO SAY MORE THAN JUST 'HEAVEN IS UP AND THE OTHER PLACE IS DOWN.'"

cern for children is not limited to before birth but extends to all of God's children. I support a strong educational system which means support for church schools so necessary for the good of the entire society. I

support a strong economy to supply jobs and a surplus needed to protect the poor and hungry.

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Fr. Louis J. Hohman



The Open Window

Confession And General Absolution

Dear Father Hohman, While there has been much discussion about the waning practice of confession and the use of general absolution, I think I know less about the whole matter than I did

before. At least in the old days, things were clear-cut and we knew exactly when we had to go to confession. And most of us had a pretty regular schedule for going to confession even when it was not absolutely necessary. Could you help me sort out some of the problems. Why aren't people going to confession anymore? When do we

absolutely have to make individual confession? When does forgiveness come and from whom?

D.J.

Dear D.J.

I think people abandoned the confessional for several reasons. First, they were told that far too many confessions which involved only venial sins were simply "going through the motions," like a laundry, the confession itself being a laundry list. I think many people accepted this analysis of confession as describing their own very accurately. They realized that it had become such a routine matter that there was little depth of sorrow, or intention to change.

Hence I think it was easy for them to stop going.

Secondly, I think that the notion of mortal sin had spread to areas where we realized there really was no serious sin. Hence confession became less "necessary" for many people.

Thirdly, I believe that not a few people, having experienced communal penance (almost always with general absolution) found it to be a much more satisfying and enriching experience than the minute or two in the "box." People who had previously made regular confessions of devotion, found these communal penance services to be helpful and enriching and

many of these people still come regularly, mostly for spiritual guidance and growth.

When is individual confession necessary? It is necessary whenever we have caused a serious breach in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and therefore with the faith community.

Remember that the forgiveness of the serious sin comes from God, immediately upon our being truly sorry that we have thus violated His love and goodness. This has always been taught by the Church. We used to say that a serious sin was forgiven as soon as one made an act of perfect contrition. I believe I have

described perfect contrition in the sentence above. Is there really any other kind? One can celebrate this reconciliation with God in the third rite, that is, communal penance with general absolution, but the law requires that individual confession must be made before receiving the general absolution again.

Therefore in effect nothing has really changed. There is no way one can continue to dodge individual confession of serious sin over a long period of time.

Next week I would like to discuss why individual confession is required for serious sins and why individual confession is desirable for lesser sins.