

World & Nation

Pope's June trip to Austria raises new tensions with Jews

Vatican City (NC) — A Vatican Radio announcement that Pope John Paul II would meet with controversial Austrian President Kurt Waldheim during his trip to Austria next June drew sharp reaction from the Jewish community and a new episode of strain in Jewish-Vatican relations.

Some Jewish leaders, recalling the tensions over the ex-German army officer's reception at the Vatican last June 25 urged Pope John Paul to confront Waldheim over his World War II activities.

The Austrian leader was an officer in a German army unit, which committed atrocities against Greek Jews and Yugoslavian partisans. He has been accused by Jewish groups of participating in or knowing about those crimes.

Jewish leaders also said the pope should — in Waldheim's presence — speak about the Holocaust, the Nazi extermination campaign which took 6 million Jewish lives.

Some called on Waldheim to resign before the pope arrives. One Jewish leader said Waldheim should confess his past to the pope, then resign.

The Vatican said the pope's meetings with the Austrian president during the trip are a matter of protocol. The pope normally visits the head of state during a foreign trip.

On January 5, Vatican Radio broadcast the announcement of the papal trip and some details of the itinerary, including a planned June 23 meeting with Waldheim.

The schedule also includes a session with Austrian Jews and a visit to the former Nazi

concentration camp at Mauthausen on June 24.

A rumor that Waldheim would accompany Pope John Paul on the Mauthausen visit intensified Jewish concern over the Austrian trip.

On January 6, leaders of top Jewish organizations said they hoped Pope John Paul would discuss the Holocaust with Waldheim during the June 23-27 visit.

Morris B. Abram, chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, urged substantial discussions between the pope and the Austrian president on the issue.

"If the pope as leader of the Catholic Church and as head of a state ... feels obliged to reciprocate Kurt Waldheim's visit to Rome last winter, I respectfully suggest that he use it not as a mere formality but as an opportunity to give public expression to his views on the Holocaust and its dreadful and continuing lessons for all humankind," Abrams said.

Seymour Reich, president of B'nai B'rith International, said Pope John Paul should hear Waldheim's confession.

There is "only one useful act of such a visit," he said, "if the pope were to take confession from Mr. Waldheim, and if that act gave Austria's president the moral courage to do what he should have done years ago: publicly admit his past and withdraw from public life."

Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, linked new understandings between the Vati-

can and the Jewish community to the issue.

"It is to be hoped that in light of new sensitivities stemming from the pope's recent meetings ... with Jewish leaders, he will use the announced visit as a new and different opportunity to confront the issues of the Holocaust in the presence of Kurt Waldheim on Austrian soil," Foxman said.

A Jewish delegation met in Castel Gandolfo, Italy, this summer with top Vatican officials and the pope to iron out problems raised in Jewish-Catholic relations by the earlier Waldheim visit. Another meeting, in Miami, was part of the pope's itinerary during his U.S. visit last September, but Waldheim's reception at the Vatican became a major topic of that encounter.

The controversy over the Austrian trip bred rumors that Waldheim would accompany Pope John Paul on his visit to Mauthausen. In that death camp, an estimated 200,000 people died between 1938, when Nazi Germany annexed Austria, and 1945, when World War II ended. In the last four months of the camp's operation, an estimated 30,000 people — mostly Jews and

Gypsies — were killed or died of hunger and disease.

On January 7, the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations wrote the top Vatican official in Jewish-Catholic relations that a joint visit of the pope and the president "could have serious implications for Vatican-Jewish relations."

The Vatican, reacting the same day to reports of a leaked first draft of the letter, said, "There are no plans of any kind for them to go to the camp together."

But the Vatican response came after the letter's final draft had been sent to Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, head of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, head of the consultation committee, subsequently said he was glad to hear of the clarification.

In its letter, the committee had written that "we sought to present our views to the Holy See in the hope that we could together avoid another episode of public controversy which might strain our ongoing relationship."

McQuaid parents to present annual Italian night, dance

The Parents' Club of McQuaid Jesuit High School will present its annual Italian Night on Saturday, Jan. 30, in the school cafeteria. The evening will begin with a cash-bar cocktail hour, followed by an Italian feast. Strolling troubadours will perform during the dinner hour, and after dinner, dance music will be

provided by the trio Special Blend. Advance-paid reservations are required by January 25. Tickets, priced at \$12.50 per person, will not be sold at the door. Tables for a maximum of eight can also be reserved. Call (716)473-1130 for information.

The Alumnae and Faculty of St. Agnes High School

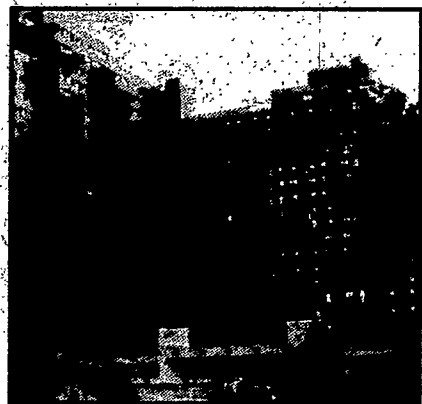
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