

# The Holocaust, The Holy Land and the Jubilee Year

By Rev. Emmanuel Charles McCarthy

**N**ight and Fog, a forty-minute documentary, is the most gripping artistic expression I have seen on the immensity and the incomprehensibility of the evil that is named the Holocaust. It is a film that I showed for nearly twenty years at retreats I directed on the Nonviolent Jesus and His Way of Nonviolent Love of friends and enemies. It leaves a person with a never-before-experienced type of emptiness and hopelessness. One's previous orientation toward reality is all but obliterated. The cacophonous interaction of mind, emotion and soul with which a person is left is manifest in the echoing and re-echoing of a single thought — "This is impossible!" For a Christian, who realizes that baptized Christians account for 95% of the personnel

who operated Auschwitz and all other such places of the heinous, it elicits a nauseating awareness that something of cosmic magnitude is terribly wrong with Christianity's understanding of Jesus and His Message, with Christianity's understanding of itself.

After living for forty minutes with *Night and Fog* a person knows with certainty that the decent into evil that he or she has just viewed cannot be dismissed as a momentary aberration in an otherwise benign spiritual tradition. Auschwitz was not built in a day, or in a decade, or in a century— or by one man. The first brick for the first oven at Auschwitz began to take form nearly two millennia ago. Wickedness of this grade was the consequence of a long process and not of an isolated diabolical personality who walked onto the stage of history at the end of this process. Without the process that preceded and prepared for the spellbinding personality, this so-called charismatic person would have been a laughing stock. The Holocaust was the product of a process not of a single person with superhuman powers.

Forty minutes of *Night and Fog* engenders in the Christian a sense of certitude that for a very, very long time the leaders in Christianity have missed the mark spiritually in some critical areas. Christian leaders have been among the best and the brightest of their time when dissertating on the non-terrestrial eternal Christ of faith. However, an unconscionable number of them have also been purveyors of grotesque irrationalities masquerading as incontestable rational truth, when speaking of the historical Jesus of the Gospels and the Way of life He asked of His disciples on earth. From abortion to atomic war, from Crusades to capital punishment, from torture to slavery, from witch burning to colonialism, the Christian ecclesial, political and theological elites have manufactured a logical assembly line of justifications for

activities by Christians that no sane person could ever picture the Jesus of history participating in or approving of. No group of people has suffered more because of this rationally sophisticated, yet theologically erroneous, separation of the Christ of faith from the Jesus of history than the Jews.

The earliest record we have of a Jew being put to death by order of the Holy Inquisition is 1288 in Troyes, France. The last record we have of a Jew being burnt at the stake at an Auto da Fe (Act of Faith) by order of the Inquisition is in Valencia, Spain in 1828. However, during these 540 years there is hardly a Christian leader, ecclesiastical or intellectual, denying the validity of this interpretation of the teachings of Jesus. In fact most prelates and theologians approved of it. Today, to pretend that a fifty year old neo-pagan Nietzschean philosophy of the will to power was mainly responsible for the Holocaust rather than the almost two millennia of Churches propagating and condoning anti-Semitism is tantamount to dishonoring the sufferings and the personhood of each Jewish human being who was hurled into agony or death by those who twisted Jesus' Gospel of universal nonviolent love into a gospel of justified parochial hate, enmity and homicidal violence.

To plead, that the past was a different age and that present day standards cannot be applied to it, is an inglorious attempt to mitigate responsibility for an abomination. There is no excuse for what the various Churches, founded as they were on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, did to the Jews. None! Zero! It is and will remain for all time an inexcusable, prolonged paroxysm of religiously legitimized evil. Virulent Christian anti-Semitism is perhaps the most infamous example in history of "madness in reason's mask," — that is, the spiritual absurdity of the followers of the



Emmanuel C. McCarthy at  
Auschwitz Crematorium



L'Osservatore Romano

### *The Pope at the Holy Sepulcher*

Jewish Jesus, who taught and lived the Sermon on the Mount unto death, rationally justifying for centuries the torturing, tormenting and killing of Jews. Again, this cannot be excused; it can only be admitted and forgiven and prevented. It must never be allowed to be understood as anything other than the logic of evil operating behind the guise of divine sponsorship.

If in the past the standard for wholesome Christian living included harassing and killing Jews and if it be argued that the average Christian, because of being nurtured in this standard from the cradle could not see that such behavior was radically contrary to the way and will of Jesus, then it is mandatory for Christianity today to name the people who were responsible for bringing such untruth into the Church. It is equally important that the Church specifically disassociates Herself from them by name and from every scintilla of logical and theological jibberish they conjured up to justify their anti-Gospel interpretation of Jesus and His Way. Any attempt at exculpating the anti-Semitic violence of members of the Church by rele-

gating it to a "different standard existing in a different age" cannot be allowed to succeed because it would undercut the transparent honesty necessary for a valid, reconciling, integral confession. Candor is a non-negotiable where Christian anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are the issues before the Church. Regardless how damaging it may be to the image of the Church or to some theologies and personages within the Church, the tears of ages, the tears of God, compel unflinching veracity about these historical realities.

In view of what has just been said, how in relationship to Jews should Christianity employ this Jubilee Year? During this time of restoration is there anything the Churches can do that could once and for all substantively reconcile most Christians with most Jews and most Jews with most Christians? Everyone recognizes that there is no adequate compensation for the misery Christians have inflicted upon the Jewish people over the centuries. There is no way to rectify the taking of one Jewish life. The best that can be done is that reconciliation; restoration, peace and good can be brought

out of evil by God's grace and human effort.

Certainly Pope John Paul II for his entire pontificate and specifically during this Jubilee Year has labored diligently in the work of reconciliation and restoration by admitting again and again the errors of Christianity and explicitly naming anti-Semitism serious sin. Leaders of other Christian Churches have likewise acknowledged grave failures in the past. In most Christian Churches today educational programs exist to combat anti-Semitism. On a rational level significant steps have been taken to assure that tomorrow is better than yesterday, that yesterday will not be repeated tomorrow.

However, this degree of woundedness can never be totally healed on the rational plane. The heart is the heart of the matter. It not only has its reasons that reason cannot know, it has its brokenness that reason cannot repair. It is the place where great desolation remains for Jews and Christians. The damage to the heart of both groups seems irreparable, short of Divine intervention. Yet, restoration and healing of the heart should be *the* project of this Jubilee Year and must be the ultimate goal of the Christian Churches. A society can rationally learn to be just toward another society after generations of being unjust. But, how does a society grow to care about a society it has spent countless generations abhorring? Mere remorse for the past is not adequate. Genuine repentance requires an intensely active and oftentimes expensive effort to restore what has been lost, not because legal obligation demands it but rather because a desire to make peace and to recreate human unity before God impels it. The Beatitude is "Blessed are the peacemakers," (Mt. 5:9) not blessed are the peace loving or the peaceful. It is making peace that is Blessed, that is of God that is Holy. It is by making peace that we shall be seen as true sons and daughters of the true God. (Mt. 5:9) However, making peace is costly — at least as costly as making war. The great spiritual question is, "Do we wish to pay the price for peace? If so, why so? If not, why not?"

For the purpose of bringing about peace between Jews and Christians, I would offer a proposal to the Church for this Jubilee Year. Since the roots of the Jubilee Year lie in Hebrew Scripture, let us first look at the per-



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inent passages of Scripture in order to spiritually understand what is being proposed. The description and commands of the Jubilee Year are found for the most part in Leviticus 25. The Jubilee Year begins on the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) fifty years after the previous Jubilee Year. During this year the “liberation of all the inhabitants of the land” (Lv. 25:10) is proclaimed and “each will return to his ancestral home.” (Lv. 25:11) We are told that, “In the Jubilee Year the (owner of another person’s land) must relinquish it and return to his own property.” (Lv. 25:28) With these precepts in mind I would propose that during this Jubilee Year the Church return to the people of Israel all the property She has acquired in the Holy Land with the exception of that property which is needed to pastorally care for Christians indigenous to this locale. Church land holdings in Jerusalem, in Bethlehem, on the Mount of Olives, on Mount Carmel, on Mount Zion, in Nazareth, etc. would simply be given back without condition to the heirs of the people who resided there before Christianity existed. Recognizing the importance that Jews place on the land in that part of the world, the purpose of such a gift would be to make a peace offering and an atonement offering “proportionate” to the evil that has been done to the Jewish people by Christianity. If one is guilty of premeditatively cutting off a persons arms and legs or of destroying his or her family, then repentance, love, peace, reconciliation, requires more than saying, “I made a mistake. I am sorry.” Nor, is reparation for such a Mount Everest of evil a matter of rational justice where proportional restitution can be roughly calculated, as it can for a breach of contract or for a tort. This is a matter of healing unhealable wounds of infinite depth in the domains of the meta-rational: hearts, souls, minds, spirits and relationships — human and divine.

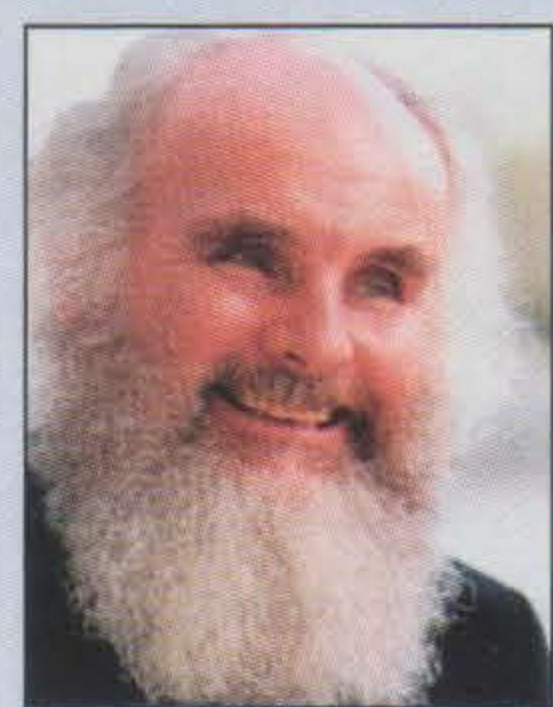
Some, perhaps many or most, would argue that this is crazy, that it is infinitely too much to give to the Jews for compensation. I would argue it is infinitely too little — and that we are not talking about compensation, for there is no compensation possible. The gift of every shrine in the Holy Land cannot compensate for even a single Jewish life taken during the centuries of lethal Christian anti-Semitism— and that is theological fact, not hyperbole. The Jubilee Year is not about the norms of compensatory justice that govern everyday life; it is about restoration beyond law. It is about restoration of what law and justice cannot possibly restore. It is about paying the price to bridge an abyss in order to free and to unite hearts that have been at war, in order to bring peace to hearts that were created for peace within the Heart of the Holy One, Blessed be He.

I am not sure what the spiritual or pastoral value is of various Churches having shrines in the Holy Land. Certainly Christianity has no essential need for this property. But, I am morally convinced that whatever it is, it would be dwarfed by the spiritual and pastoral fruits that would ripen upon the un begrudging return of these Church-owned lands to the Jewish people as a peace offering.

There are, of course, those who would assert that the Holy Land would not be the Holy Land for Christians without Christian churches and shrines. However, for Christians living in the Spirit of Jesus there is no holier land than that place where ancient enemies have been reconciled! And, where the Holy is palpably present, where the Shekinah resides, there the miraculous is — there the lame walk, there the blind see, there dry bones rise, there the glory of God enlightens consciousness, there night and fog are no more.

For such a land of holiness the human heart eternally pines. To such a land of holiness Christians, Jews and all humanity would flock in joyful hope. ■

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## God of Abraham...

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for all, as God willed:

*“No one threatening another, no one wounding or killing, no one robbing another.”*

Isaiah 2:1-5 expresses it in another way:

*“In the future, the mountain with the Lord’s temple will be the highest of all. The Lord will teach us his Law from Jerusalem and we will obey him. He will settle arguments between nations. They will pound their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; they will never make war or attack one another. People of Israel, let’s live in the light of the Lord.”*

The vocation of both the Jew and Christian, is to look forward to the realization of this promise, to help bring it about in the here and now and to strive always to live in God’s presence.

When we share our gifts unselfishly and give ourselves we really form community. It becomes a reality in very concrete actions and events: through the love of neighbor, by esteem for their religion and culture, by listening to the “other” by affirming what is good, true and noble in them. Each becomes what they really are by living the covenant in God, each with their own culture, personality, identity, language. The work of God is recognized in each of those who are in covenant with God. Both the Jew and Christian are fundamentally united in the covenant of Abraham with God, but in fact it is necessary that it develops into its fullness. We must foster communication and loving relationships through a continual conversion of heart that demands an openness to persons who are different and to their organizations.

To live the covenant established by God with Abraham, and to move towards its accomplishment within ourselves and around us, we need the help and grace of the living God. So let us pray:

*Lord, give us a humble heart of goodwill. Make us ready to serve and to be hospitable in our life. Give light to the eyes of each of us, and enable us to live without anxiety and in full security. Grant that we may be ‘bread and wine’ for each other, so that the blessing of the God of the covenant may be spread far and wide over all humanity, Amen. ■*