

Pope Francis on the Holocaust

Eloisa Perez-Lozano | Apr. 8, 2013 NCR Today

I recently wrote [an article](#) [1] providing English translations of the book *Sobre el cielo y la tierra (On Heaven and Earth)* co-authored by Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, and Rabbi Abraham Skorka, released in Spanish in 2010. A reader contacted me and asked what the pope had to say about the Holocaust, so here's an excerpt of their dialogue on the topic in honor of Holocaust Remembrance Day, which was Monday.

Skorka writes that many people ask where God was during the Holocaust, as they do when intense tragedies occur. He follows up by saying he believes there are questions that cannot be answered, that we cannot understand in any possible way.

Before asking that question, he writes, we should ask "where were the men, the ones who acted by action as well as those who acted meanly and mercilessly by omission."

"The Shoá (a Hebrew word for the Holocaust that means "devastation") was not a result of a circumstantial cholera, but a plan perfectly conceived within the European culture to exterminate a whole race for the mere fact of being Jewish," Skorka writes.

Pope Francis maintains that the "where were the men" question is "the biggest lie of human solidarity of that time."

"The great powers washed their hands, looked the other way, because they knew much more than what they were saying," Francis writes.

He points out that the Holocaust is a genocide, like others in the 20th century, but it had something the others did not have. According to Francis, there is an "idolatrous construction against the Jewish people."

"The pure race, the superior being, are the idols on which the basis of Nazism was formed," Francis writes. "It is not only a geopolitical problem, there also exists a religious-cultural issue."

Skorka answers that "he has touched on a sensitive point, probably the most profound of the Holocaust."

"Some people that argue that the Jews, with their six million dead, are not much more than a small part of 50 million victims from the Second World War," Skorka writes.

He goes on: "But the point is that the Jews didn't die for political reasons, they did not make up a combat army. None of those reasons would have been justified and would also be abominable. What the Holocaust was about was the extermination of a people simply by virtue of who they were, because of their culture, because of their faith."

He asks Francis what he thinks of the Catholic church's actions during those years, and Francis responds that the church did hide many Jews and worked on getting them passports. Cardinal Clemens August von Galen was even beatified because he stood up to the Nazis, which was no small feat.

Even with that, however, Francis says it took a while for the Vatican to realize what was going on and later, he heard "that the Church did not say all that need to have been said."

"Some say that if it would have done that, the reaction would have been much worse and it wouldn't have been able to save anyone," Francis says. "To protect some Jews, they say, the declarations were more cautious. Who knows if we would have been able to do more."

The book will be released in English on April 30.

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