



Theology, Ethics, Religion and Holocaust

John Jozvan Markovic

The Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, in conjunction with the Committee on Church Relations and the Holocaust of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council, sponsored the 2003 Winter Seminar for Professors Teaching Holocaust-Related Courses, titled "Theology, Ethics, Religion and Holocaust," from January 13 to 17, 2003, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C. The seminar was taught by John T. Pawlikowski, Professor of Social Ethics and Director of Catholic Jewish Studies at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago. He was assisted by Professor Stephen R. Haynes from the Department of Religious Studies at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee. Both have published numerous books and articles in academic journals.

The sixteen seminar participants were a diverse group, ranging from recent Ph.D. graduates to senior professors. Two of them were children of Holocaust survivors. In their classrooms, they teach history, theology, philoso-

phy, Judaic studies, church history, religious studies, sociology, law, political science, eugenics, and so forth. In their personal beliefs, some identified with Judaism, others with Catholicism or Lutheranism. Other participants were Baptists, Presbyterians, one Seventh-day Adventist, one Platonist, and still others non-committed.

Some of the major issues the seminar addressed were: 1) the nature and character of each, anti-Judaism and antisemitism; 2) how we relate anti-Judaism to antisemitism and Nazism; 3) ethics in Christianity; 4) Nazi ethics; 5) ethical issues essential for our contemporary society; 6) fear as a factor in Christian response during anti-Judaism and the Holocaust; 7) the politics behind the Concordat of July 1933; 8) the role of the Pope immediately before, during and after the Holocaust; 9) Pius XII and the Church as a moral voice; 10) the role of John XXIII and Vatican II; 11) Pedagogy of the Holocaust; 12) the presence or absence of God in the Holocaust; 13) how common was the resistance to the Nazis and willingness to help the Jews; 14) the church-state issues in Nazi Germany; and

15) a comparison of works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther and Augustine of Hippo. There was also a session devoted to organizing a class syllabus. A special feature of the seminar was a personal story by a Holocaust survivor, Flora M. Singer.

The last session, lasting almost two hours, was devoted to a discussion of the role of transcendent historical principles in our contemporary society and education. A remark was made earlier in the seminar, in connection with the discussion of Nazi ethics, that there are absolute ethical and moral principles overriding cultural boundaries. This triggered a debate among the participants that led to a decision to devote the last session of the seminar to this important topic. The last session concluded with realizing that serious problems still existed in Christian theology, and that these should be addressed soon. Another remark responded that if we were to rewrite Christian theology, then it should be done in the presence of God, on the grounds of Dachau and Auschwitz, and done by both Jews and Christians.