

# Vatican apologizes for failings in fighting Holocaust

By William Drozdiak=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

BERLIN -- The Roman Catholic Church formally apologized Monday for failing to take more decisive action in challenging the Nazi regime during World War II to stop the extermination of more than 6 million Jews.

But in a long-awaited document on the church's role in the Holocaust, the Vatican defended Pope Pius XII, who headed the church during the war, from accusations that he turned a blind eye to the systematic killing of Jews. Some critics say Pius was motivated by church religious prejudices dating from the death of Jesus Christ.

Pope John Paul II, in a preface to the landmark publication entitled "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah," expressed hope that the historic declaration of repentance by the Vatican about Catholic shortcomings in dealing with the Holocaust "will indeed help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices."

First reactions from Jewish leaders in Israel and the United States were mixed.

More than any of his predecessors, John Paul has made reconciliation with the Jewish people a priority of his papacy. During his 20-year tenure as leader of the world's 1 billion Catholics, he has become the first pope to visit concentration camp sites and to preach in a synagogue. He pushed the Vatican to open diplomatic relations with Israel in 1993 and hopes to celebrate the millennium with leaders of Jewish and Islamic faiths in an extravaganza of monotheistic religions on Mount Sinai.

At a meeting in 1987 with Jewish leaders, the pope promised them the Vatican would publish the church's history in dealing with antisemitism and the genocide of European Jews.

It was the first time Jewish representatives had held informal discussions with the pope, who insists Christians must overcome centuries of animosity and learn to regard Jews as their "older brothers."

"We deeply regret the errors and failure of those sons and daughters of the church," the Vatican paper said. "We cannot know how many Christians in countries occupied or ruled by the Nazi powers or their allies were horrified at the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest."

Meir Lau, Israel's chief rabbi for Jews of European ancestry, said he was thankful that "after two thousand years of hostility between the church and Jewish people, there is something new, a new atmosphere happening before our eyes." But he bluntly rejected the document's conclusions about Pius XII.

"His silence cost us millions of lives," Lau said in Tel Aviv. "One who ... does nothing to avoid the bloodshed is like a partner to the mass murder of human beings. He didn't do it, but he didn't stop it."

"It falls quite short of what was hoped for," said Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem. "Unfortunately, it does not unequivocally take responsibility for the teachings of the church that created the atmosphere that ultimately led to the Holocaust, and to the participation of numerous 'believing' persons in that crime."

Robert S. Rifkind, president of the American Jewish Committee, called the document a "step in the right direction for the future of Catholic-Jewish relations." However, he added, "it only begins to address many issues and questions concerning the role of the Catholic Church in the evolution

of antisemitism throughout the ages and its culmination in the (Holocaust). It tells the truth, but not the whole truth."

Phil Baum, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, criticized the Vatican's failure to "impose moral culpability on some leading church authorities ... who were either indifferent or in some cases actually complicity in the persecution of Jews."

The document praised the "wisdom of Pius XII's diplomacy" and cited his warning in a 1939 encyclical "against theories which denied the unity of the human race and against the deification of the state," which he feared could culminate in a terrible "hour of darkness."

The paper contends Jewish leaders supported the view that Pius helped save hundreds of thousands of lives. It cites the words of Golda Meir, the former Israeli prime minister, who eulogized Pius upon his death in 1958 for raising his voice "when fearful martyrdom came to our people."

Vatican historians say Pius worked behind the scenes and did not take a more assertive attitude in denouncing Nazi transgressions because he feared it would have little helpful effect and would worsen conditions for Catholics as well as Jews, in Germany and Nazi-occupied countries.

Cardinal Edward Cassidy, the head of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, defended the document as a historic confession of Christianity's failure to prevent the Holocaust. He said the paper went much further than addressing demands by some Jewish groups for an apology about the church's behavior during the war.

"This is an act of repentance," the Australian cardinal told reporters after the document was released. "This is more than an apology since as

members of the church we are linked to the sins as well as to the merits of all her children."

Cassidy added: "We feel we have to repent. Not only for what we may have done individually, but also for those members of our church who failed in this regard."

The document clearly bears the imprint of John Paul, who grew up under the Nazi occupation of his native Poland. He has said that with the approach of Christianity's third millennium, Catholics must take pains to examine responsibilities for the evils of history, especially the Holocaust, which he describes as an "indelible stain" on the 20th century.

The document cites John Paul as noting that while some Christians acted courageously during the Holocaust, "the spiritual resistance and concrete action of other Christians was not that which might have been expected."

The document acknowledges Christians have been guilty of much anti-Jewish prejudice over the past two millennia. But Vatican historians drew a sharp distinction in this document between anti-Jewish resentments that have tarnished Christian history and the diabolical hatreds that drove the Nazi dictatorship of Adolf Hitler to carry out mass genocide of European Jews.

"The Shoah was the work of a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its antisemitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, did not hesitate to oppose the Church and persecute its members, also," the paper says. "The Catholic Church repudiates every persecution against a people or human group anywhere, at any time. She absolutely condemns all forms of genocide, as well as the racist ideologies that give rise to them."

# Mysterious ads thought tied to drug probe

By Dan Thanh Dang=(c) 1998, The Baltimore Sun

ANNAPOLIS, Md. -- Amid the cheery birthday poems and flowery remembrances of the personal ads in the Annapolis Capital, a series of cryptic, even sinister notices began appearing last week.

Police are investigating three classifieds apparently addressed to confidential police informants in a recent federal drug case that culminated in the arrests of alleged members of one of the city's largest drug rings. Officials believe the ads are meant to intimidate.

Investigators have identified the person they believe is responsible for the ads, police said Thursday. But they are mystified that their suspect, whose name is being withheld by police, appears not to be connected to last week's arrest of Curtis Allan Spencer as an alleged drug lord.

Spencer, indicted on federal charges of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine base, was freed March 5 to the custody of his sister in Arnold to await trial. The first ad appeared that day.

The ads in the newspaper's classified section under the headings "In Memoriam" and "Happy Ads" read like this:

"Happy Birthday Ciel CI-135 and Ricky CI-136 From your friends In Annapolis may you see many more Good Job 3/5/63," which ran March 5.

"Congratulations on your marriage Ricky-CI-363 and Sylvia-CI-136 on 3/6/98 from your family in Annapolis City. May it be long and sweet," which ran Friday.

"In Memory of Sylvia Sharpe CI-348; Ricky Blake CI-363; Rico Medly CI-148; Charles CJ Moulden CI-158. Gone but not forgotten, and the pain is still there. Your family in Annapolis," which ran Tuesday.

The numbers and the letters "CI" are used to identify confidential informants in state warrants and affidavits. Such sources are never named. The numbers are in documents available to the public.

Police sources close to the investigation said that the numbers used in the ads are numbers that law enforcement agencies have used in state affidavits issued during the past year.

"I'm not going to confirm or deny that the people named are informants," said Lt. Stan M. Malm, commander of the police criminal investigative unit. "But we believe (the ads) to be designed to intimidate witnesses or potential witnesses in the case."

The mother of one person named in the ads, who asked not to be identified, said, "We don't have a clue why someone would put his name in the paper. We're scared because we don't want him mistakenly connected to all this. We don't understand, but we are worried."

Police Chief Joseph S. Johnson said he is confident that witnesses and informants in the case are, and will, stay safe. But he added that the ads are being taken seriously. "We are not overly concerned about what anyone chooses to put into the paper about who the sources may be, but it appears to be a fishing expedition," he said. "And we don't want to help them go through the process of elimination," Johnson said.

Annapolis police have long been after the drug ring Spencer allegedly led, which they say has controlled Annapolis' public housing communities for more than 25 years. Police say it's responsible for almost 80 percent of the cocaine base sales in Annapolis, estimated at \$20,000 per week.

During the past two years, police said, detectives started receiving more tips about the group. Last fall, police asked the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office in Baltimore for help. On March 2 and 3, police and DEA agents served state search warrants at 12 locations and arrested 18 people, including Spencer. Police also seized eight vehicles, three handguns, 6 ounces of crack cocaine and 1 ounce of marijuana.

Spencer, two officials in the Friends of Black Annapolitans political group that he founded, and two others were indicted on federal drug violations. The other 13 face state charges.

A magistrate judge released Spencer from jail because of his public activism, his close ties to his family in Annapolis and his mostly clean criminal record. Spencer is well-known for lending rent money and paying for funerals. He also bought athletic shoes for children, sponsored teams in city recreation leagues and coached a basketball team.

# Swaziland posts job opening for hangman

By Dean E. Murphy=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

MATSAPHA, Swaziland -- It has been 15 years since Phillipa Mdluli met her maker here on the gallows of Africa's mile-high kingdom.

A mother and notable businesswoman, Mdluli was hanged for the ritual murder of her domestic worker's daughter, whose body had been mutilated in the mystic belief that certain human flesh carries magical powers.

This month, Daniel Mhondlana Dlamini was handed an appointment with the executioner for an equally grisly crime. The cattle farmer was sentenced to hang for the ritual slaying of a 9-year-old boy.

Mdluli is long dead, the last person to be executed in Swaziland. Dlamini is supposed to join her soon. But Swazi officials have stumbled upon an awkward problem: They have no hangman to slip the knot.

To put it more precisely, says Justice Minister Chief Maweni Simelane, Swaziland is in urgent need of a "hangperson" -- an able-bodied man or woman "who has what it takes" to clear death row at the crowded Matsapha Central Prison.

"I must indicate that women are welcome, and if they meet the desired standard, they will be chosen for the post," Maweni recently announced to the media. "I therefore advise them to try their luck."

Swaziland, a towering notch of a country carved from the rugged highveld on the eastern edge of South Africa, wants to put its executioner to work before the end of the year.

But although Maweni has revealed that "most people are over the moon with excitement" about the opening -- inquiries have come from across southern Africa, government officials say -- the public search has caught just about everyone in Swaziland by surprise because it has been so long since the last hanging.

The unusual job posting also has had the unintended effect of drawing attention to the country's intractable problems of crime and punishment,

something Swazi officials would just as soon keep quiet.

"If you get the vibes in this country, crime is such that you can feel the time is not far off when people will start demanding executions," said Cosmo Nkonyeni, director of the Swaziland Association for Crime Prevention and the Rehabilitation of Of-

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enders. "There is a feeling that there must be that stick hanging overhead for people not to let the devil run in them."

For most of the past 15 years, no one spoke much about the country's death penalty because it was rarely imposed and never carried out.

Although King Mswati III does not rule with an iron fist, the country's cumbersome marriage of traditional and quasi-parliamentary governance leaves little room for questioning royal prerogatives, which include choosing wives -- he has six -- and having final say over when to tighten the noose.

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Senior prosecutor Jabulani Maseko said no one told him that the position was going to be filled. Human rights advocates said they are furious about the prospect of renewed executions. And the prison chief, irritated by all the sudden fuss, refused to discuss the subject.

"When it happens, it is going to be done quietly and professionally, and no one is going to know," said Mnguni Simelane, commissioner for correctional services. "We don't have public executions, and we don't ad-

vertise in newspapers for hangmen."

The general confusion extends to questions about the previous holder of the gallows post, whom no one can recall seeing much after he disposed of Mdluli in 1983. One popular explanation has him quitting out of boredom. Another version has him mysteriously going missing. Still another says he slipped back to his native South Africa, where he remained on call until the new African National Congress-led government outlawed capital punishment and forced him into retirement.

Because details about the country's executioner, above all his identity, are official state secrets, authorities offer only cryptic clues.

"If you are the hangman, no one wants to get close to you," said Muntu Mswane, minister of public service and information. "You have no friends. It is a lonely job."

With the sentencing of Dlamini on March 4, death row at the red brick Matsapha Central Prison has swollen to nine, a modest number by American standards but overwhelming for a country of about 1 million.

It is the largest death row contingent anyone can recall during the 12-year reign of King Mswati, who has yet to authorize an execution.

Until now, King Mswati, who turns 30 next month, has developed a reputation for leniency, using official holidays and royal celebrations to commute death sentences to life terms and life terms to 15 or 20 years.

"Personally, the king is reluctant to be associated with an event that leads to carrying out the death penalty," said James Dlamini, a legal adviser to the monarch and a former attorney general. "Being a small society, people in Swaziland tend to have that partiality. Even the authorities are reluctant to put criminals on death row."

But times have been changing. Officials say most of the country's condemned murderers have been handed their fateful sentences in the past several years, a grim reflection of persistent violent crime in the kingdom and the growing perception that the courts need to crack down on it.

The criminal activity, which includes about five armed robberies a day and an equal number of homicides each week, is blamed on unemployment of 22 percent and spillover from neighboring South Africa, which has one of the world's highest recorded crime rates.

Several of the death row inmates, including newcomer Daniel Dlamini, were convicted of "muti" murders, the ritual killing for body parts that is an age-old practice here and in some other regions of Africa. But officials said the others are common criminals sentenced to the gallows after showing no remorse for having killed while committing armed robbery and other more contemporary offenses.

"Right now, about 80 percent of the cases before the High Court of Swaziland deal with murder," said Jabulani Maseko, the country's senior prosecutor. "Even in carjackings, people are now getting killed. There is no end to it."

The sudden spotlight on the gallows may be directed at a larger audience as well. Swaziland has long struggled in the shadow of its giant neighbor to the west, in both good times and bad. The death penalty, some here say, is emerging as a distinguishing trait for the underdog in its unavoidably David-vs.-Goliath-style relationship with South Africa.

"The trend now is for our government to try to capitalize on South Africa's unpopularity," said Zenke Magagula, a defense attorney who represented an out-of-work security guard sentenced to death in 1996. "The thinking is that maybe the many people in South Africa who still support the death penalty will consider coming here -- people with money and people who want to invest."

The showy search for a hangman, many here suspect, is meant to scare potential criminals into behaving, even if the government has no real intention of reopening the gallows.

In the words of royal adviser Dlamini: "It may just be a matter of giving people the impression that they can't get away with murder."

# History of Auschwitz's death camps

by John Moriarty=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

In Auschwitz, Poland, the Germans built a concentration camp in an old Austrian army barracks across the river Sola from the city center.

Originally, the site was set up as a detention center for political prisoners, then as a work camp. It outgrew itself, and a second camp was set up nearby at Birkenau.

By 1942, the Germans began using Birkenau, and, to a lesser extent Auschwitz, as centers of mass murder.

The victims arrived by train for the infamous selection, in which about 10 percent of the strongest were chosen for slave labor.

The others were ordered to strip

and crowd into chambers where they expected delousing showers. Instead, they were gassed to death within minutes, then shoveled into ovens that altogether consumed up to 9,000 bodies a day.

Very few prisoners survived Auschwitz, but only Jews were selected for immediate death. The others succumbed to disease, starvation and exhaustion within months of their confinement.

Roughly 2 million Jews -- about a third of European Jewry -- and 2 million non-Jews perished at Auschwitz-Birkenau.

By the end of the war, the town of Auschwitz was cleansed of its 8,000 Jews; their synagogue was burned and Christians occupied their homes.

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