

Lessons for Holocaust Day

Yesterday, Jews around the world observed Holocaust Day. This day ought to be universally observed because the lessons of the Holocaust are universal. Here are some of them:

1. People are not basically good

At any time in history, the belief that people are basically good was irrational and naive. To believe it after the Holocaust – and after the Communist genocides in China, Korea, Cambodia, and the Soviet Union, the Turkish slaughter of the Armenians, and the mass murders in Rwanda, the Congo, Tibet and elsewhere – is beyond irrational and naive. It is stupid and dangerous, and therefore inexcusable.

2. The Jews are the world's canary in the mine

When Jews are murdered, it is a warning to decent non-Jews that they are next. Because Western nations dismissed Nazi anti-Semitism as the Jews' problem, 50 million non-Jews ended up dying. If the world dismisses Ahmadinejad's Iran as primarily the Jewish state's problem, non-Jews will suffer again. Jew-haters (or, if you will, Jewish state-haters) begin with Jews but never end with them.

3. Great good is no more common than great evil

That is why the most important task for any society is to devise ways to make people good. By "good," I do not mean people who do not murder or steal. People who don't murder or steal aren't good people; they are simply not criminals.

It is therefore worth pondering: With the collapse of America's Judeo-Christian moral foundations, how exactly will American society make good individuals? Those who equate goodness with support for a welfare state do not ask this question. But the rest of us are very worried.

4. Lies and victimhood make evil possible

Most evil is not committed by sadists. Most evil is committed by people who hold evil ideologies. And in modern times those ideologies have emanated from two primary sources: lies and victimhood.

Lies about Jews built Auschwitz (just as, for example, lies about blacks enabled the transatlantic slave trade). And along with lies about Jews, it was Germans' sense of victimhood that built Auschwitz. Perceiving oneself or one's group as a victim allows many people to rationalize doing evil.

5. Nazism, not Christianity, built Auschwitz

The symbol of Nazism was the swastika, not the cross. Had Nazism been a Christian movement, its symbol would have been, or at least included, the Christian cross. The claim that the Holocaust was a product of Christianity is a charge perpetuated by people and ideologies bitter over the nearly 2,000 years of Christian anti-Semitism in Europe. That bitterness is warranted. Blame for the Holocaust is not. Too many Christians supported the Nazis, but Nazism was anti-Christian.

The complex truth is this:

a) Nearly 2,000 years of European Christian anti-Semitism – including Martin Luther – rendered the Jew an outcast and thereby laid much of the groundwork for the acceptance of Nazi demonization of the Jews.

b) But no Christian institution or theology ever called for the extermination of the Jews. It took the secular shattering of the Christian conscience to accomplish that. This was prophesied 100 years before Hitler's rise, in 1834, by the great German poet, Heinrich Heine, a secular Jew:

"Christianity – and that is its greatest merit – has somewhat

mitigated that brutal German love of war, but it could not destroy it. Should that subduing talisman, the cross, be shattered, the frenzied madness of the ancient warriors, that insane Berserk rage of which Nordic bards have spoken and sung so often, will once more burst into flame. This talisman [the cross] is fragile, and the day will come when it will collapse miserably. Then ... a play will be performed in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like an innocent idyll."

European Christianity has much to atone for (and it has). But the collapse of Christianity should frighten every decent person. In Europe, it was first succeeded by fascism, communism and Nazism, and then by a soulless and morally confused secularism. What will succeed it in America?

6. Secular education has proved morally worthless

Professor Peter Merkl of the University of California at Santa Barbara studied 581 Nazis and found that Germans with a high school education "or even university study" were more likely to be antisemitic than those with less education ("Political Violence under the Swastika," Princeton University Press).

A study of the makeup of 24 leaders of Einsatzgruppen, the mobile killing units that killed nearly two million Jews prior to the use of gas chambers, showed that the great majority were highly educated: "One of the most striking things about the Einsatzgruppen leadership makeup is the prevalence of educated people, professionals, especially lawyers, Ph.D.'s. ..." (Irving Greenberg, in "Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era?" Ktav Press).

6. Pacifists in moral societies are morally worthless

No Nazi death camp was liberated by pacifists or peace activists. Every camp was liberated by a soldier who either killed or helped others kill.

7. Had there been an Israel in the 1930s and '40s, six million

Jews would not have been murdered

There would have been one place on earth that would have taken in Jews prior to the Holocaust, when Hitler was willing to let many leave. And during the Holocaust, one country would have fought for them – by bombing Auschwitz, for example.

8. The Chinese need their Holocaust Day

When the Chinese have their own Holocaust Day – a day that commemorates Mao's and the Communist Party's killing of 60 million Chinese between 1958 and 1961 – China will be a much more decent place. Until then, it is run by people who venerate a monster.

9. God is indispensable – but not a celestial butler

If we deny God, we will produce a morally lost society.

But if we rely only on God – and do not fight – evil will win.

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