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# Holocaust Education in a Catholic Context

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# What role did the Church play? What roles did Catholics play?

Bystanders  
Collaborators  
Resisters  
Liberators  
Martyrs  
Rescuers  
Perpetrators?

# The Holocaust

## The Shoah

The Holocaust was the murder of approximately six million Jewish men, women and children by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during the Second World War. (Holocaust Educational Trust)

# Defining the Holocaust

There is no 'official' definition of the Holocaust. However, the following overview from the Imperial War Museums provides a useful starting point.

“Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their “new order,” the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million were murdered, including 1,500,00 children.

This event is called the Holocaust.

Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of others as well. Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, trade unionists, political opponents, prisoners of conscience, homosexuals, and others were killed in vast numbers.”

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different’.

# Pope Francis honours victims of the Holocaust at Yad Vashem 26<sup>th</sup> May 2014



(Not for Publication!)

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[Attachment with March 11, 1939]

Secretariate of State  
Of His Holiness

The Vatican, January 9, 1939.

No. 77/79

Your Excellency:

As Your Excellency will surely know, laws have been passed in Germany as a result of which about two hundred thousand Catholics of non-Aryan descent are compelled to emigrate. Not a few of these are persons who excel in virtue, talent and science.

The Holy Father, moved by the misfortune of so many excellent persons, has commissioned me to enlist the active interest of the Most Reverend Bishops to that problem. Especially, the Holy Father makes the following proposals:

The Shepherds of the Church should strive to found committees for the assistance of non-Aryan Catholics who under their direction should give active assistance to the emigrants who often are very poor. These committees in the various countries also should strive to ease the conditions of entry which now are very numerous, exacting and difficult to meet, and they should strive to facilitate the permission to enter the various countries.

They should also cooperate continually with the societies and committees now existing in those countries in order that these good Catholics will find assistance and possibilities of employment. Whenever these emigrants have been given opportunity for settlement in separate colonization projects care should be taken that churches and schools are provided to safeguard their



4 next steps



The Holocaust Educational Trust  
Lessons from Auschwitz Project





## 4 next steps



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Lessons from Auschwitz Project

### **SS-Helferinnen at Solahutte**

These women were part of the Nazi regime that ran Auschwitz-Birkenau; put quite simply they were perpetrators.

**How could an image such as this help you to demonstrate that the perpetrators were not nameless monsters but people who in many cases were not much older than yourself?**

# We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah

John Paul II 16<sup>th</sup> March 1998

‘On numerous occasions during my Pontificate I have recalled with a sense of deep sorrow the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Second World War. The crime which has become known as the Shoah remains an indelible stain on the history of [this] century.’

‘an unspeakable tragedy which can never be forgotten, the attempt by the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people with the consequent killing of millions of Jews. Women, men, old and young, children and infants, for the sole reason of their Jewish origin were persecuted and deported. Some were killed immediately ... others ... degraded, ill-treated, tortured and utterly robbed of their human dignity, then murdered. Very few of those who entered camps survived ... those who did remained scarred for Life. This is the Shoah, a major fact of this century ... which still concerns us today. However, it is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that **we remember** for there is no future without memory. [3]

**The fact that the Shoah took place in Europe, that is, in countries of long standing Christian civilization, raises the question of the relation between the Nazi persecution and the attitudes of Christians towards the Jews**

# Anti-Semitism

## Scapegoating, Restrictions, Expulsion

200CE Tertullian Church Father, writes his anti-Jewish polemic in Latin *Adversus Judaeos*.

325CE After the ecumenical council of Nicaea, the Christian Church formulates its policy toward the Jews: they must continue to exist for the sake of Christianity in seclusion and humiliation.

386-7 John Chrysostom, Church Father in the East, violently anti-Jewish, delivers eight sermons in Antioch.

632 Official Church doctrine on conversion of Jews in Spain formulated.

1096-99 First Crusade. Crusaders massacre the Jews of the Rhineland

1190 Anti-Jewish riots in England: massacre at York, and other cities.

1215 Fourth Lateran Council introduces the Jewish Badge.

1290 Expulsion of the Jews from England, the first of the great general expulsions of the Middle Ages.

1348-50 Black Death Massacres throughout Spain, France, Germany and Austria, as a result of accusations that the Jews had caused the death of Christians by poisoning the wells and other water sources.

1411-12 Oppressive legislation against Jews in Spain as an outcome of the preaching of the Dominican friar Vicente Ferrer

1413 Disputation of Tortosa (Spain). The most important and longest of the Christian-Jewish disputations leading to mass conversions and intensified persecutions.

1421 Persecutions of Jews in Vienna and its environs, confiscation of their possessions, and conversion of Jewish children, 270 Jews burnt at stake, known as the *Wiener Gesera* (Vienna Edict). Expulsion of Jews from Austria

1492-5 Expulsions from Spain, Sicily and Lithuania

1569, 93 Expulsion from the Papal States.

1715 Pope Pius VI issues a severe "*Edict concerning the Jews*", in which he renews all former restrictions them.

1858 Abduction of a 7-year-old Jewish child, Edgard Mortara, in Bologna by Catholic conversionists (Mortara Case), which aroused universal indignation in liberal circles.

1938 Charles E. Coughlin, Roman Catholic priest, starts anti-Semitic weekly radio broadcasts in U.S.

# Blood Libel 1144-1899

*also known as the ritual murder charge—has falsely accused Jews of killing and using the blood of Christians for ritual purposes since the Middle Ages.*

1144 First recorded Blood Libel (Norwich).

1235 Fulda, Germany

1255 Lincoln

1490-91 La Guardia, Spain

1712 Sandomierz (Poland)

1840 Damascus

1853 Saratov (Russia), renewal of the blood libel throughout Russia.

1882 Tiszaeszlar, Hungary

1891 Xanten, Germany

1899 Bohemia

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different’.



# Anti-Jewish Laws

Sort the laws into chronological order.

Which law do you think was the most important? Why?

Which period do you think was the most important turning-point?

# Some were Neighbours

[Some Were Neighbors: Choice, Human Behavior, and the Holocaust | The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum \(ushmm.org\)](#)

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# **Dilemmas, choices and responses to the Holocaust**

# Who's Who?

Bystanders  
Perpetrators  
Resisters

## TASK:

Study each situation and decide whether it describes the activities of a bystander, a perpetrator or a resister.

# Perpetrators, victims, bystanders and rescuers

Perpetrator



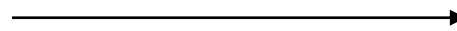
The person **doing** the injustice to someone else

Victim



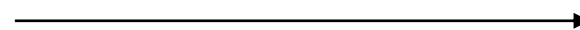
The person who is the **target** of the injustice

Bystander



The person **watching** the injustice being done and doing nothing to stop it

Resister



A person who makes a stand against or **resists taking part in** an injustice

# Dilemmas for Non-Jews

What could non-Jews do about the situation?



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# Edith Stein (1891 – 1942) Sr Teresa Benedicta of the Cross murdered in Auschwitz



# What is Resistance?

“standing up against....  
that includes both armed and unarmed actions”

Professor Yehuda Bauer

# Resistance

To smuggle a loaf of bread – was to resist

To teach in secret – was to resist

To cry out warning and shatter illusions – was to resist

To forge documents – was to resist

To smuggle people across borders – was to resist

To chronicle events and conceal the records – was to resist

To hold out a helping hand to the needy – was to resist

To contact those under siege and smuggle weapons – was to resist

To fight with weapons in streets, mountains and forests – was to resist

To rebel in death camps – was to resist

To rise up in ghettos, among the crumbling walls, in the most desperate revolt – was to resist

Source: Resistance from the Beit Lohamie Haghetaot Museum, Ghettos Fighters' Kibbutz in Grunwald-Spier (2018) Women's Experiences in the Holocaust in their Own Words.

# Sisters of the Holy Family of Nazareth, Nowogrodek, Poland

Twelve Sisters resided in the convent in summer, 1943. Jews were rounded up and killed right in the town. Priests in the area were killed. 120 people, including fathers and other members of Polish families were arrested July 17-19, 1943. The townspeople came to the Sisters and begged them to pray for their release. The Sisters prayed that if a sacrifice was needed, they be sacrificed and everyone be returned.

On Sunday, August 1, 1943, after spending the night in the basement of the commissariat, **Sisters Stella Mardosewicz, Imelda Zak, Kanizja Mackiewicz, Rajmunda Kukolowicz, Daniela Jozwik, Kanuta Chrobot, Sergia Rapiej, Gwidona Cierpka, Felicyta Borowik, Heliodora Matuszewska,** and **Boromea Narmontowicz** were driven into the woods a few miles from the town. There, they were shot and thrown into a mass grave.

# Blessed Franz Jägerstätter (1907-1943)

## Layman and Martyr

On August 9, 1943, the Nazis executed the conscientious objector in a prison in Brandenburg an der Havel, close to Berlin. This ordinary Upper Austrian peasant from St. Radegund was drafted into the Wehrmacht for military service in 1940. After weeks of basic training, he was exempted from military duty due to being “indispensable” on his farm. When he was drafted again in February 1943, Jägerstätter, the father of four young girls, refused to serve due to his strong religious convictions. The following is the summary of his own defense on July 6, 1943, from the trial records of the Reich Military Court in Berlin:

“Only in the past year had he become convinced that as a devout Catholic he was unable to engage in active military service. It was impossible for him to be a Catholic and at the same time a National Socialist. When he complied with the earlier conscription order, he did so because at that time he considered it a sin not to obey state orders. Now, however, God had given him the thought that it was not a sin to refuse armed service. There were matters in which one was obliged to obey God more than man; the commandment ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’ forbade him to engage in armed service, though he was prepared to serve as a paramedic.”



## Mgr Hugh O'Flaherty

Mgr. O'Flaherty initially dismissed accounts of Nazi atrocities as Allied propaganda. The Nazis' treatment of Rome's Jewish population transformed his opinions. In the autumn of 1942, he started smuggling and hiding refugees when the Germans and Italians cracked down on prominent Jews and anti-Fascists. Every evening, he stood in the porch of St. Peter's, in plain view of the German soldiers across the piazza.





# John Dobai



# John Dobai's Testimony

A picture of a Roman Catholic class. This picture was taken after a ceremony of first communion and these white outfits were hired. The bishop was there. About four out of ten of these boys come from Jewish families.

So how did this come about? It's a question of dates. We were born in the last quarter of 1933 and the first quarter of 1934. Almost exactly twelve months after Hitler came to power in Germany.

So what happened was that the parents decided that they should do everything they can to minimise the effect any Nazis may have. They thought if we became Catholics that might be very helpful. So they went down to the local parish church and asked the priest if they could become Catholics, which happened.

Now some of you believers in religion might find it strange this change of religion but our parent's generation were not believers. They were not believers in Judaism or any other religion, so it was not a great problem to become Roman Catholic. It felt at least they did something that might help to minimise the effect of Nazism. I will anticipate the story by saying this hope was actually not realised.

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# The Jewish Shtetl

And once,  
there was a garden,  
and a child,  
and a tree.

And once,  
there was a father,  
and a mother,  
and a dog.

And once,  
there was a house,  
and a sister,  
and a grandma.

And once,  
there was life.

*(Anonymous)*



# Shoes on display in Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum

This is a single shoe that was found amongst thousands at the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

**How could you use images of such artefacts to re-humanise those who perished?**

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# Websites

- Holocaust Educational Trust <http://www.het.org.uk>
- Holocaust Memorial Day [www.hmd.org.uk](http://www.hmd.org.uk)
- The National Holocaust Centre and Museum <http://holocaustcentre.net>
- United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <http://www.ushmm.org>
- USC Shoah Foundation <https://sfi.usc.edu>
- Wiener Library <http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk>
- Yad Vashem <http://www.yadvashem.org>