

Time to move on from Holocaust?

"HEALING," from I-K of history were Jews."

And six years later, after studying 10,000 sad and horrible photographs from the Holocaust, the Catholic author Harry James Cargas published some of them for the first time and concluded that the murders of six million Jews constituted "the greatest Christian tragedy since the crucifixion of Jesus."

So here is Roiphe, a Jewish writer, challenging her own people to "finish this absorption with a tragic past" for the sake of their health as a people. It is as if those yet among us who experienced the Holocaust — and who remain haunted in ways that other people will never feel — can or should authorize their fellow Jews to leave them behind on the figurative train.

"Survival does not depend ... on retaliation, revenge, warfare," she writes. "It rests on our friendships, on our ending the cycles of destruction. The name-calling can stop, and having seen in the Holocaust the shape of the end, we can take warning and turn toward each other, or we can turn on each other in an orgy of self-protection that will leave us, once again beasts, gnawing on bones."

Roiphe (the name means *healer* in Yiddish) makes cogent and important arguments for how the Holocaust has informed Jewish relations with blacks, Poles, Catholics, Russians, how it has penetrated Israeli and American Jewish life.

She gives her own examples to suggest that the Christian world has not yet absorbed this. She speaks of Kurt Waldheim, a former cog in the Nazi death machinery who remains president of Austria. She speaks of the historical revisionists who claim that the Holocaust is a Zionist invention. She vents anger at the beatification of Edith Stein, a Jew who became a Carmelite nun and then was sent to her death at Auschwitz. And she takes strong exception to the idea, now scrapped, to place a Carmelite convent inside Auschwitz.

There are other examples. When Cardinal John Krol, a Polish-American, was invited to address thousands of Holocaust survivors

from across the United States at a gathering in Philadelphia in 1985, he ducked the chance to speak of Polish or Catholic guilt and instead used his platform to decry abortion.

In recent months, the World Congress of Free Ukrainians has flooded the nation's newsrooms with slick folders about a "Forgotten Holocaust," Stalin's forced famine of 1932-33 in which millions of Ukrainians died. By appropriating the word *Holocaust* — which Webster's defines as the systematic destruction of the Jews before and during World War II — the Ukrainians choose provocation over education.

During the 1988 presidential campaign, eight leaders of George Bush's national ethnic coalition — one of whom said he doubted that Jews were either gassed or tattooed at Auschwitz — were dropped after they were linked to fascist or anti-Semitic organizations. But the issue was not raised in two presidential debates, and far more campaign time was spent discussing the Pledge of Allegiance.

Frederick Malek, a ninth official dropped from the Bush campaign — after reports persisted that he had gathered names of Jews in the Bureau of Labor Statistics at the behest of President Nixon — now is said to be in line for a job in the Bush administration.

"We have scarcely begun to face up to our own history," Eckardt wrote in 1967.

Indeed, two decades later a group based in Brookline, Mass., called Facing History and Ourselves, dedicated to teaching high school students about the Holocaust and genocide, was denied federal funding because it did not give equal time to Nazi and Ku Klux Klan viewpoints.

Because so much of her book depends upon relating contemporary events and trends to the Holocaust, it is imperative that Roiphe have her facts in order. It does not help when she emphasizes that an anti-Jewish pogrom in Kiev in November 1944 occurred only three weeks after the massacre of 100,000 Jews on the city's outskirts. The well-known massacre at Babi Yar took place three years

earlier, in 1941.

A Season for Healing is suffused with a psychological perspective that enables her to view clearly the desires and actions of a people as if they were those of a person. Listen, for example, to how she describes the world's reaction to the Palestinian uprising, to pictures of young Jewish soldiers beating Arab boys:

"It ... seems likely that the world is relishing these pictures because it relieves the burden of those terrible pictures of the (Nazi) camps. It releases the Gentile world from feelings of obligation to Jews who were victims. ... The entitlement that the Jews had won through their suffering in the Holocaust, the credit they earned, has now been finished and the world is relieved." The very premise of the book is psychological.

But just as only time can heal a person's emotional and physical wounds, the Jewish people cannot be expected to put the Holocaust behind simply because one person says it is time to do so. For a human being, some traumas take a lifetime to overcome, and some can never be put behind. How much more this is magnified for the wounds of an entire people.

"The lesson of the Holocaust," writes Roiphe, "is the value, the worth of every human life, the knowledge that when respect for individual human dignity disappears, savagery, bestiality, brutality follow directly, debasing everything in the society."

Like Reb Chaim of Brisk, the Jews in our time do not require an apology from the Christian world, but merely some signal that the meaning of the Holocaust has been understood. Rarely has this issue of how to carry on after the Holocaust been placed in perspective as succinctly as in the injunction of Rabbi Irving Greenberg, cited by Roiphe:

"No statement theological or otherwise should be made that would not be credible in the presence of burning children."

Unfortunately, because of so many examples to the contrary, any suggestion that the season for healing is at hand would be just such a statement.

Roiphe review contd

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