THE POPE'S WAR

It's not a religious war, according to His Holiness. Economic, yes. Political, sure. But not religious, because religious people want peace. That's what he said to journalists on his plane to Auschwitz. Really.

Pope Francis is very ecumenical, you see. And he remembers what happened to his predecessor when Benedict accurately analyzed the differences between Christianity and Islam. You remember, don't you?

He was pilloried by the politically correct crowd. The Church intelligentsia backed away from the Pope, launched a campaign of ecumenism with the Moslem world, and that was pretty much that.

So we shouldn't be surprised when Pope Francis says that while the world is at war, it certainly isn't a religious war. This just a few days after an elderly Catholic priest was murdered in his church in France, by radical Moslems who were careful to stage it in such a way as to dramatize its religious basis.

To be sure, the war is not entirely religious. We are under attack from an alliance of radical jihadis and radical secularists, bound together by hatred of the West, contempt for democracy, and support for tyranny. So let's give the Pope some wiggle room: it's not *only* a religious war.

But when Iran's supreme leader leads chants of "Death to America," he is invoking religious authority, and when Egypt's President al Sisi calls for a reformation of Islam, he is calling on religious guides to fight against the radical jihadis in their ranks.

Many have noted Francis' philosemitism. He's the third pope in a row that likes the Jews. Francis even likes kosher food, for heaven's sake. When his pal the chief rabbi of Buenos Aires flies into town, the Pope orders kosher takeout from the ghetto.

His Holiness showed the depth of his sympathy at Auschwitz, where he sat in silence for a quarter

of an hour at the grim entrance. He later remarked that the barbarism that characterized the Holocaust was still with us.

“Cruelty did not end at Auschwitz and Birkenau,” he said. “It is still around today … in many places in the world where there is war, the same things are happening.” Indeed. And there is a global war, driven in part by religious doctrine. What, exactly, does the Pope think should be done?

He has spoken fervently about the need to help the poor and powerless, and he has bemoaned the global war—one of the few world leaders to acknowledge it exists–but he has not shown any inclination to rally his followers to fight back. Not to defend themselves, and certainly not to win.

Francis could learn a few things from the Jews of Rome. After thousands of them were killed by the Nazis—most of them in Auschwitz itself—they concluded that the secular Italian state would not be able, even if willing, to protect them from their enemies.

So they organized themselves to fight back, and over the years they have effectively defeated neo-Nazis and fascists in the Eternal City. Rome today is one of the rare European cities where anti-Semites fear the Jews.

The key figure in the Jewish defense organization was Elio Toaff, the chief rabbi, and he effectively combined physical and spiritual training to create a new, self-confident generation. The Pope could do the same. Perhaps he is quietly doing just that; very few Romans could see what was going on in the ghetto after World War II. But there’s no sign of it so far as I know.

Pity. Catholics willing to fight back could be a formidable force on the world’s battlefields. The Jesuits, of whom Francis is one, know a lot about it.

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