

Jerry Amernic: Why Pope Benedict should lay low

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[Jerry Amernic](#)

The late Karol Wojtyla, better known as Pope John Paul II, was a man of courage and charisma, who stood up to the might of the Soviet Union and the Communist world, and who tried to improve relations of the Roman Catholic Church with other religions. Yes, he was deeply mired in age-old dogma that his institution is famous for, but he left much on the positive side of the ledger.

There is a story about him that many people may not know. In 1943, a Polish couple by the name of Jachowicz took in a two-year-old, Jewish boy whose parents would later perish in the Holocaust. Mrs. Jachowicz was a devout Catholic. She went to see a young parish priest, told him about the boy, and asked that he be baptised. The priest, none other than Wojtyla, asked what the boys' parents had wanted. Mrs. Jachowicz said that their last request upon handing over their infant son was that he be told of his Jewish origins, and returned to his people if they died. Well, Wojtyla refused to do the baptism. He said it would be unfair to baptise him while there was still hope that his relatives might take him when the war is over. In fact, that little boy did survive, and was eventually reunited with relatives in the United States.

Which brings me to the current pope. How many people, especially non Catholics, recognize the name of Benedict XVI? His name isn't nearly as familiar as that of John Paul II, which is probably a good thing. The current pope would do better to lay low.

An ugly story has reared its head in the Vatican. Richard Williamson is a British bishop who denies that six million Jews were killed by the Nazis. He was recently interviewed on Swedish TV, and said as much. Williamson is one of four members of the Society of St. Pius X. In 1988, these four men were excommunicated by the Church when they were ordained as bishops without the permission of the pope, namely John Paul II. Two weeks ago, the Vatican announced that it would lift these excommunications.

Williamson has gone on the record praising Ernst Zundel, who was the world's leading publisher of historical revisionism, which is a nice way of saying the Holocaust was a hoax. It does Canadians proud to know that Zundel's base was Toronto, where he lived from 1958 to 2000. He was eventually deported to Germany, and in 2007, a German court sentenced him to five years in prison. That never would have happened here, where freedom to incite hatred and discrimination is one that got away from our law-makers. In Canada, Zundel was found guilty by two juries, but later acquitted by the Supreme Court because his right to freedom of expression was said to have been violated by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But I digress. Back in the 1980's, after Zundel's first trial in Canada was declared invalid, it was announced that there would be a second. At the time, I had a weekly column in the Sunday edition of the Toronto Sun. I wrote a piece saying how disgusting it was that Holocaust survivors would once again have to march into the courtroom to explain that they really were Holocaust survivors. That prompted a letter to me from a neo-Nazi. He said, and I remember this well, that Zundel is "a friend of mine and people who *** around with my friends wind up accident-prone."

We got the police involved, and they charged him with making a threat. He was picked up, thrown into the cooler, and a hearing was held. The guy already had a criminal record, but had never been incarcerated. This is Canada, remember. To make matters worse, police found weapons in his apartment – guns, a slingshot with metal pellets, and a night scope, which is what you put on a rifle so you can see in the dark. At the hearing, the judge asked me to read the column I had written into the record. I did, and the judge said it was "very controversial." When it was all over, the charges were dropped, and the neo-Nazi was let go, but ordered not to write letters to any newspapers for a year.

Pretty tough, huh?

I don't have much sympathy for Nazis or Holocaust deniers. The term 'Holocaust denier' may not sound as bad as 'Nazi,' but show me a Holocaust denier who isn't an idiot and an anti-Semite, and I'll try to rationalize the legitimacy of the Flat Earth Society for you.

Where in the world does Pope Benedict XVI get off trying to reverse the excommunication of a member of his Church who denies the Holocaust? He now says that Williamson must recant his denial of the Holocaust in order to serve in the Church. Sorry, but it's a little late.

Frankly, I don't take much stock with the current leader of the Holy See. Not long after succeeding John Paul II, he created a firestorm when he made a speech implying that Islam could be equated with violence. He once said that American Indians secretly longed to be Christians. He has said that Orthodox churches were defective, and that other Christian denominations were not true churches. Before becoming pope, he said that Catholicism was the only true religion.

As a young boy in Germany, Joseph Ratzinger was a member of the Hitler Youth. For this, he shouldn't have to apologize. He had no choice in the matter. But for all his statements and mis-statements before and especially since becoming Pope, he has a lot to apologize for. The mess with Bishop or non-bishop Williamson is merely the latest fiasco.

We should not treat Holocaust deniers lightly. Unfortunately, Canada's record in this regard stinks, as does its record with Nazis who came here after the war. Why is this such an important issue? I'll tell you.

"Never again" is a worthy and honourable mantra for the human race to profess, but we should not be optimistic about the future being free of such catastrophes. The biggest culprit isn't even those who deny the past. The biggest culprit is something else within far too many of us. And that is complacency.

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