



**Bearing Witness**  
**OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance**

June 8, 2005  
Cordoba, Spain

I want to begin by thanking the ADL for having me on today's agenda. Cordoba is an important OSCE conference, and today's session is a valuable side program to our conference discussions.

Obviously, I don't speak for the U.S. delegation; nor for the Holy See; nor for the Catholic Church in the United States. But I'm happy to speak for the Archdiocese of Denver and the Catholic community in northern Colorado. The archdiocese oversees 37 parish grammar schools, two archdiocesan high schools and three private Catholic high schools run by religious communities. That's 14,000 students, making us one of the largest school systems in Colorado.

We don't mandate the "Bearing Witness" program. But we do make it known to our teachers and principals, and we do encourage its use on a voluntary basis. Over the past four years, about three dozen of our principals and key teachers have gone through the "Bearing Witness" program and adapted it in some way to their classrooms. That means at least several hundred of our students have experienced the effects of the program so far. Some of our teachers have also presented it to our annual educators' conference, which draws about 1,000 people. Our judgment, overall, has been positive, and we certainly plan to continue it.

Our interest in the program comes from our concern about the Holocaust. And our concern about the Holocaust has two roots.

First, obviously, the Holocaust is the central human tragedy of our time. Even in a century marked by mass murder and political violence, the Holocaust dwarfed anything in human experience for its scope, thoroughness and brutality. History has seen many evil moments and many examples of genocide. But the Holocaust will always be an icon of both the evil that ordinary people can do, and the greatness of the human spirit in surviving and overcoming that evil.

Second, since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has called on Catholics to examine and purify their memories of history; to reconnect with the Jewish roots of their faith; and - where possible -- to seek to repair relations with the Jewish people. For Catholics, the Holocaust is a human rights tragedy involving the murder of millions of innocent people. But it's also a religious catastrophe in which millions of people who claimed to be Christians enabled, colluded in or ignored mass murder. The only way to prevent that in the future is to honestly examine the past and repent.

I think the great strengths of the "Bearing Witness" program are its comprehensiveness, its good will, its professional quality and its sincere attempt to be fair in telling a terrible story. All of these qualities make it valuable for a Catholic audience.

I also need to say that some of our educators do question the balance of the way the story is told, and the age-appropriateness of some of the material. One of my personal concerns - not specifically about "Bearing Witness" but in general -- is that Americans have no memory. American students have a very poor grasp of history, and American Catholics can sometimes be among the worst.

No one can really repent, really change, or really find hope without a memory. It does no good to repent of the past if we don't understand history's real events and their context. Many Catholics would argue that choices that seem easy to criticize today were often brutally complex and difficult at the time. Many Jews would regard that as an evasion, or worse. But neither laundering nor blackening the historical record serves the truth. Reflecting on the Holocaust will be a long process, which is why Catholics and Jews will have issues of serious disagreement - like the legacy of Pius XII - for many years to come.

In that regard, I've heard from many Catholics - including people committed to better relations with the Jewish community -- who were very offended by both the content and the spirit of Arthur Hertzberg's May 14 piece on "the Vatican's sin of omission" in The New York Times. Mr. Hertzberg's biased writing was both unfortunate and unhelpful. But it may make a program like "Bearing Witness" all the more important, not just for its content, but equally for the process of cooperation and mutual understanding that it requires.

The Archdiocese of Denver is committed to that, and we're glad and grateful to have the ADL and other key Jewish organizations as partners in the work.