

Kaunas Holocaust Memorial Day Oct. 31, 2010

I am Michael Maass, and this is my wife, Fausta. She grew up here in Kaunas. We are the Lithuanian directors of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem. We represent about 14 million Christians of all faiths all over the world, including here in Kaunas. We come today to honor the Jewish community of Kaunas and Lithuania, and to express our love to you. Some of our friends who are pastors could not be here today because they have services right now. They send their love to you as well.

We stand today at the site of one of the greatest human tragedies that has ever happened anywhere. It cannot and must not be forgotten.

In fact, I see three great tragedies of the Holocaust. First, and most obvious, is the six million people who died . The annihilation of a people, and a rich culture. Children that were never allowed to grow up, families that were torn apart and destroyed. You here today understand this. Europe, I think, still doesn't seem to understand what she has lost.

The second great tragedy of the Holocaust is the effect that it had on the Jewish people who survived. Their lives could never be the same. Their families gone, properties and possessions taken and never returned. And then there is the question I have heard on more than one occasion from Jewish people here in this country. "Why did our neighbors hate us so much?" The Torah says to love your neighbor as yourself. This idea was almost lost during the war. The wound that was inflicted upon the Jewish people from the extreme hatred that was expressed towards them still remains, in part, today. And what about the spiritual wound? Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor who wrote of his experiences in the book simply entitled Night , had been a very religious Jew before the war, always going to the synagogue, praying and fasting for the Messiah to come. But he explains that because of what he saw in the Shoah, his God died. He could no longer believe. This is what the evil in mankind did to many of the Jewish people. We the Gentiles, including many who called themselves Christians, stole your people, your property, and your God. But we must separate the evil of man from the

goodness of God. He did not do this. Man did this. And God still loves the Jewish people. He calls you His firstborn son, the apple of His eye. And one day the Messiah will come.

The third great tragedy of the Holocaust is what it did to the nations where these things happened. A cloud of guilt and shame remains here that is not recognized. It is hard for many to see. But it must be removed for the blessing of God to ever come in its fullness. How can this be done?

First, there must be an acknowledgment of what happened, and that there were some Christian Lithuanians who did do wrong. Of course not all. There were many rescuers, and many who disapproved of what happened. But I say to the Christians of Lithuania, please say to the Jewish people the following: “It was not only the Germans who hunted you down and killed your families. Some of our forefathers did as well. Some of us took your clothing and moved into your homes. And many of us were silent and did nothing to help you. We are guilty as well as the Germans. We deeply regret what some of our brothers did to you. Please forgive us.” And I say these things to you, the Jewish people, today.

Second, there must be honest and accurate Holocaust education in the schools and churches. To the Christians I say that we must teach our children what really happened, and teach them to love the Jewish people, the ones who gave us our concept of the one true God, gave us our Bible, the prophets, apostles, even Jesus Himself was a Jew. I have seen how some choose to forget, or minimize what happened. Someone said that not remembering the Holocaust means to side with the executioners against their victims: not to remember means to kill the victims a second time. On the other hand, to remember means to feel compassion for the victims of all persecutions.

Thirdly, In the Torah, God said to Abraham, “I will bless those who bless you, and curse him who curses you.” God will bless the Christians of Lithuania if they will bless her Jewish people. Stop telling derogatory jokes and comments about them. Honor them. Love them. These are precious people to God.

To the Jews of Kaunas and of Lithuania I simply say that today I represent millions of Christians who love you, stand with you, and support you against all forms of anti-Semitism. Please forgive us and our forefathers for all the wrong we have done, often in the name of Christianity. It was a terrible wrong. We see that, and now embrace you as the apple of God's eye.