

## A MAN WHO KNEW MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

by Richard Cowden

*(Editor's Note: Sigmund Gorson is a Polish Jew now working as a radio and TV producer in the United States, A keynote speaker at the recent National Right-to-Life Committee Convention in New Jersey, Gorson. spent his adolescence in Nazi prison camps in Poland, where he was befriended by the recently canonized St. Maximilian Kolbe.)*

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There's a pin that many Jews and others wear, with the Hebrew letters that mean "Never forget !" Are you inclined to describe or talk about what you have remembered?

GORSON: To describe it to you fully, to portray it in detail and with justice, would require the pen of a Dante or the brush of a Rembrandt... but, the German and Austrian Nazis, they rounded us up, Polish Jews and Christians, marched us to the railway station with beatings and shooting above our heads, they stuffed us like sardines into the cattle cars, with no room to sit down or lie down or even stand up. We had no air, no food nor water, and for some four or five days as we headed toward Auschwitz, no facilities to urinate or defecate, and of course, many died. The stench of death and decay was horrible, and when the wailing of the women and children became too much for the Nazi barbarians, they began to shoot at random into the sealed cars, through the wooden walls. How to say, we envied those who died. Some prayed, many screamed and wailed, some literally went mad, some laughed, wildly, with madness.

I do not know how to describe this, in English. For many tried to kiss, and embrace, and say goodbye. It was heartbreaking.

At Auschwitz itself, kickings, beatings, attack dogs... were constant. Children or husbands or fathers who tried to stop beatings of their mothers or daughters or wives were... they were killed immediately, shot, or torn apart by dogs. Human flesh, you smelled it, the burnings and gassing were constant, but these savages murdered by every method imaginable.

Every day and every night trains kept arriving from all over occupied Europe. Everyone was stripped. Auschwitz prison camp director Joseph Mengele himself chose who would die immediately, in the chambers, and who would work for the German war effort. The Nazis photographed everyone, to humiliate them, to destroy their identity, and then they gassed them, hundreds at a time, babies and mothers, people with their hands clasped, frozen stiff, covered in slime.

Do I remember? Yes, yes, I will never forget; though I still cannot believe.

How long were you in Auschwitz, and the other camps?

GORSON: A total of six years. I was liberated by the British in 1945.

Did you meet Blessed Maximilian Kolbe?

GORSON: I held him in my arms he was ... everything to me. He was a humble Polish village priest, a refuge to me, he was an escape from madness. He took it upon himself to take special care of me because my parents were not alive. He stroked my head many times, because we were

completely shaved. He was a refuge from insanity. I remember I risked my life once. I stole some potato peelings from a kitchen cart. And though Fr. Kolbe was very, very hungry, he didn't ask for any food. He gave his food away, the little food we received, twice a day. The average American doesn't realize, even the Catholics don't realize, of his existence, his greatness. He gave away his food. He taught me so many things. His lips were swollen from hunger, but he was always smiling, always cheerful, the only one. God spoke through him. It was always raining at Auschwitz and Fr. Kolbe said it was God crying with us.

Do you think he had the same effect on the other inmates of Auschwitz, as he did on you?

GORSON: Well, lots of people had links with relatives, that the Nazis weren't aware of. I had no one, and it was people like me that Fr. Kolbe took a special interest in.

You have said that you attribute your survival of the Nazi camps to Fr. Kolbe's intercession. Do you mean while he was still alive, or did you pray to him after he died?

GORSON: Both. There must be something stronger than I in the world, or why would I survive? I believe that Fr. Kolbe's prayers saved me, absolutely. I still pray to him today. I believe with all my heart in his powers, his closeness to God.

You've also been quoted as saying that Fr. Kolbe was your confessor? Do you mean as a friend, or formally, as a priest?

GORSON: No, we suffered the same thing, so there was no need to confess. We all knew what the others were suffering.

Have you converted to Roman Catholicism?

GORSON: I don't like to talk about religion. Humility is my religion, and mankind. I believe in God with all my heart, but religion is a private affair with me. I was born of a lovely, highly educated Jewish-Polish mother, who studied at Sorbonne. So I am a Jew. But I believe in Fr. Kolbe, too, that he was very close to God. Incidentally, I see Sergeant Gajowniczek from time to time, the man Fr. Kolbe died for.

Did you give testimony at the Vatican hearings on Fr. Kolbe's beatification?

GORSON: No, I never wanted publicity. I... John Paul II happens to be a personal friend. I knew him after the war. He was a humble village priest in Cracow. And we have talked of Fr. Kolbe.

Why are you accepting publicity now?

GORSON: Because of abortion, because I saw the Nazis dragging babies from their mother's bellies to experiment on them, and... well, it is happening again, in my beloved America. Legalized abortion is legalized murder, just like the vicious Nazis, nothing less. If we condone these things, it won't stop, it is just a continuation of what the Nazis did. These... These 17,000 fetuses they found in plastic jars, and some judge won't even let them be buried, it's a continuation. Just like the Nazis. You begin with the very young, and then it's a straight line to the feeble-minded, the sick, the old, the gypsies, Jews, Poles, Christians, rabbis, priests. There was no

stopping then, and it won't be stopped here unless we stop it at the beginning, at abortion. And so I cannot be silent, I will fight and sacrifice all the time because to a Jew, to save one life is to preserve all mankind, and so I must, so I cannot be silent.

When did you come to the United States, and are you a citizen?

GORSON: We came, my wife and I, on Dec. 2nd, 1949, my birthday. I became a citizen in 1955, and I live in Delaware.

When you knew the Pope, back when he was a Cracow priest, did you have any idea he would become the Successor to St. Peter?

GORSON: No, but he was a great human being, and so I knew he would help the Catholic Church in Poland, that he would get promotions. But I didn't know he would become Pope.

There was a recent German magazine that accused Blessed Kolbe of being anti-Semitic on the grounds that one of his publications seemed to have some anti-Semitic inferences. Is there any substance to this?

GORSON; Oh, I wouldn't be alive today if it weren't for Fr. Kolbe. That is a heinous accusation. I don't even want to dignify it with an answer, but let me tell you something. They came up with the most heinous attacks on the Catholic Church. An infamous play was on Broadway recently, called "The Deputy" accusing the Catholic Church of aiding and abetting in the killing of Jews. It is not true, and I went to New York to tell that to the author of this ugly play. People in America can't understand. I escaped twice from the concentration camps when we were being transferred, and I hid out with other Jewish kids in convents and seminaries. And the nuns who helped us, they were brutally raped and killed. How can anybody say these things? The Catholic Church in Poland helped us, constantly, and Fr. Kolbe saved me personally. I don't understand now people can say such things.

Gorson, you were prisoner no. 52821 at Auschwitz, your parents and three sisters were murdered there, and you lost 58 members of your family to the Nazis. So when you call abortion America's silent holocaust, you speak with painful authority. Do you think the roots of the Nazi culture and the abortion culture are the same, and, if so, what can be done to uproot it?

GORSON: The direction is the same. The solution is to realize that, and just stop it, legally, actually, in every way.

Do you think President Reagan is doing enough to aid that cause?

GORSON: I'm against any politician who speaks with a forked tongue. God forbid that this should be true of President Reagan. But any candidate who is not embracing this noble philosophy to save lives does not deserve to serve the public.

Do you think the right-to-life movement in the United States, as far as you have seen, is headed in the right direction?

GORSON: I'm an optimist. If I weren't, I wouldn't be alive today. I feel this noble cause I will eventually win. Laws will be passed which will express that

this united nation cannot continue to allow for this heinous situation.

Given the ferocity of the pro-abortionists, do you think there will be violence when abortion becomes illegal again?

GORSON: No, I really don't think Americans are a violent people. Really, you are a very nice people, the nicest in the world. I think and hope soon, Americans will come to realize they cannot destroy what God has given us. Abortion is murder, legalized murder, nothing less, and Americans will reject it.

Do you know much about the history of Planned Parenthood?

GORSON: I have read quite a bit, unfortunately.

Do you know that eugenicists who worked for the Hitler government used to write for Planned Parenthood's official publication, the Birth Control Review, and that Planned Parenthood sent a number of delegates to Nazi eugenical conference in the 1930's? Or that Planned Parenthood's founder, Margaret Sanger, openly called for the elimination of the Negro race?

GORSON: I pity these people, I don't hate them I pity them. If they had gone through the experience I had gone through, they would not feel as they do, they would not do the things they do.

So you think they are more ignorant than malicious, or racists?

GORSON: Yes I think so, I think they are ignorant.

A lot of pro-abortionists maintain that really only Catholics are against abortion, and that most people think one should have the right to abort one's child. Is that just propaganda or do you think there is some truth in it?

GORSON; I'm a Jew. Most religious Jews, rabbis Orthodox, Hasidim, most people who think about this question, agree with the Catholics. The only conspiracy is to stop Americans from becoming what Germany became.

### ***Prayer to St. Anthony***

O Holy St. Anthony,  
gentlest of saints, your love for  
God and charity for His creatures  
made you worthy even on earth  
to possess miraculous powers.  
Miracles waited on your word  
which you were ever ready to  
speak for those in trouble or  
anxiety. Encouraged by this, I  
implore you to obtain for me  
my request...  
*(here mention your intention).*

The answer to my prayer may  
require a miracle; even so,  
you are the Saint of miracles.  
O gentle and loving St. Anthony,  
whose heart is ever full of human  
sympathy, whisper my petition into  
the ears of the sweet Infant Jesus,  
who loved to be enfolded in your  
arms, and the gratitude of my  
heart will be ever yours.