RABBI BARUCH COHON

Seeking My Brothers

After we say kaddish

This year Pan Pacific Park was under construction. So the Yom HaShoah memorial events were not concentrated there, but relocated to various parts of town: Temple Beth Am, the Wiesenthal Center, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Valley Beth Shalom, Valley Beth Israel, etc.

Rabbis from both Wilshire Boulevard and Beth Jacob welcomed some 1,000-plus youngsters bused to the historic WBT from all over Southern California last Thursday, to hear and to participate in stories and songs from the Holocaust.

Most of the audience was not Jewish. Many Latino kids were among them. And they were urged to do more than listen. To tell the stories to others, to their parents, their younger siblings, their friends.

A female survivor told her moving memories of three children who lost their lives. "A million and a half children could be just a number, but remember David," she said. "Remember the baby who was too weak to cry..."

Rabbi Steven Leder and Cantor Hershel Fox impressed another Shoah memorial gathering with word and with chant. And at VBS Sunday night, the L.A. Jewish Symphony performed a remarkable program of *Remembrances,* varying from

Michael Isaacson's lyrical interpretation of that title to the harsh and ironic *Dachau Lied* by Herbert Zipper in Lucas Richman's orchestration.

The performances carried us from the eloquent drama of Shony Alex Braun's *Symphony of the Holocaust* to the tortured innocence reflected in the world premiere of *Lee Holdridge's Suite* from the award-winning documentary *Into the Arms of Strangers: Stories of the Kindertransport.*

We were carried on to the uplifting *chutzpah* of the other premiere on the program: Wladyslaw Szpilman's *Piano Concertino.* Composed in 1940 as German bombs fell on Warsaw, it was borne through ghettos and camps and near starvation until lost in a burning building — and then rewritten from memory.

Szpilman's work survived. His son flew in from Warsaw for the concert.

And now?

After half a century, what is the message?

After decades of silence, an outpouring of print and film bears witness to the awful truth of what some Jew-haters try to deny.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the best Hollywood could do was the sleeper *Crossfire* and the award-winner *Gentlemen's Agreement* to dramatize

domestic anti-Semitism. And now, *Schindler's List* and *Life is Beautiful,* and opening on Broadway, *The Gathering,* and a TV remake of *The Diary of Anne Frank...*

Can we still learn anything from the *Churban* (the Ruin) of what was once the heart of world Jewry?

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe reportedly refused to accept glib answers to the Holocaust experience. No, he insisted, it was not a divine punishment. It was not a necessary prelude to reclaiming the Land of Israel.

"I can't let Him off the hook," he said. "It was what it was. We cannot interpret it now; maybe we never will."

Besides remembering and reminding the world, what then can we do about it?

Let me give you one message the Holocaust leaves us, loud and clear. Like most Jewish messages, it will not find unanimous acceptance. But think about it. Here it is:

Don't cremate our dead.

Too many Jews went up chimneys in

Europe. Don't send any more Jewish bodies out that way.

Cremation destroys the "house of the spirit," and the human spirit is what we cherish as the Divine Image. Its physical home, even though temporary, has the same sanctity as a Torah scroll. We don't burn unusable scrolls, we give them an honorable burial. Can we do less for our loved ones?

Cremation therefore violates Jewish law and tradition.

Cremation also brings to the mind and to the nostrils the nazi stench.

IBM helped power that stench, and IBM has no regrets. CIA files prove that allied countries employed German war criminals and let them escape punishment. But we must not adopt their methods.

Conventional burial may be more complex. More expensive. But it is the function of Jewish communities to see that no Jew is deprived of the right to be buried with dignity in a Jewish cemetery.

Think it over. Because, unhappily, this is a decision that we all must make.