

The Man - - Marc H. Tanenbaum is a national spokesman for the Jewish community. I have heard him speak a number of times on television and have read many of his publications. His name has often arisen in conversation with mutual friends. But until this week I had never met him personally and spoken with him.



That rare privilege was offered by the Springhill Avenue Temple in Mobile which on April 15 (an otherwise ominous date, thanks to IRS) presented its annual institute for the clergy of the Mobile area. Each year an outstanding Jewish scholar has come to speak, and this year it was Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, National Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee.

During Vatican Council II, this versatile man was the only rabbi serving in the preparation of the Council's declaration on the Jews. Since then he has been involved in practically every dialogue with Catholic and Protestant scholars in developing ecumenical programs. He has been the Jewish representative in educational, cultural, and religious efforts in our country and across the world. So it was a

privilege to have a few hours with him on his first visit to Mobile.

The Message - - What did Rabbi Tanenbaum have to tell us here in south Alabama? First of all, he made us realize what a remarkable age we live in from the standpoint of Christian-Jewish relations.

The Rabbi pointed out that since and largely because of Vatican Council II, our country has gone through "an ecumenical explosion" during these past fifteen years. Jewish scholars are now probing the place of Jesus in their tradition, and Christian scholars are understanding more and more of our Jewish roots. The recent TV special of "Jesus of Nazareth" is a good example of this new development. Rabbi Tanenbaum was the Jewish consultant working closely with the Catholic producers of this momentous accomplishment. "For the first time since the first century", Rabbi Tanenbaum pointed out, "Jews and Christians are engaged in scholarly consultation on their common heritage." When you study the history of Jewish-Christian relations through the centuries, this development in these last few years is truly amazing.

What is still missing is a comparable exchange on the local grassroots level, not just among the theologians. In this regard we were able to impress the Rabbi. In Mobile for two years now Catholic and Jewish couples have met in one another's homes for an evening's talk about their understanding of their faith traditions. Our diocesan ecumenical commission worked with leaders of the Temple to get the program

started, and since then it has gone along beautifully with no further organizational help. These meetings involving committed lay people have enriched everyone involved and have been unprecedented in our community.

The Future? - - The unfinished agenda was the final topic of the Rabbi's presentation. He recalled his own early education and his ingrained fear of the Church of Jesus Christ which was depicted as the oppressor of his people through the centuries. Catholic scholars have also described the traditional condemnation of Jewish belief and traditions in their early education. In recent years there has been an intense effort on both sides to purge our catechetical materials of prejudicial attitudes and rather to foster an attitude of respect and understanding. The same now has to be done in our history texts and in many of our literary criticism courses.

The Rabbi concluded by pointing out areas of the world convulsed by religious hatreds: The Middle East, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, the Sudan, Uganda, other African Muslim territories, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, etc. He contrasted this sorry picture with America where there is freedom of religious belief and still religious allegiance and support unequalled in many of these areas. This is our beautiful opportunity and our obligation he concluded: to establish here a society of respect for differing religious traditions and a place devoid of all religious prejudice for the first time perhaps in all of recorded history.

By Bishop John L. May