



(Mobile Press Register photo by J.P. Schaffner)

**Monsignor Oscar H. Lipscomb, left, administrator of the Mobile Catholic Diocese, talks with Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman during an area clergy meeting**

## ***Humor of clergymen***

In speaking in separate programs in Mobile this week, both Dr. Albert C. Winn of Richmond, Va., who is moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., and Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman, professor of liturgy at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, interspersed their talks with humor.

Herewith a sampling of the humor:

Winn: "Presbyterians don't get angry at the church. They just get hurt. The interesting thing is that when Presbyterians are hurt, they act just like everybody else does when they're angry."

Hoffman: "The last time I was involved in a flood similar to this (the flood in Mobile last weekend), I had gone to talk about a book I had written about Jewish prayer. Somebody said to me, 'You know so much about Jewish prayer, Rabbi, why don't you offer a prayer to end the water — the flood and the rains,' to which I was forced to respond, 'Unfortunately Jewish prayer evolved in the land of Israel where the problem always is drought. I'm very good at bringing the rains. Stopping them, I have no power at all.'"

# Jesus' words about bread 'must have made sense in a Jewish context,' says speaker to clergy

Press Register Report

The words, "This is my body," which the New Testament says Jesus used in reference to bread at a supper before his crucifixion, should be viewed in a Jewish context.

**IN SPEAKING TO** Mobile area clergy this week, Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman, professor of liturgy at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, said, "Jesus after all lived a life of a Jew.... He spoke in a Jewish atmosphere to Jews. Thus what he said must have made sense in a Jewish context."

During the program for clergy at Spring Hill Avenue Temple, Hoffman talked about the significance of bread in Jewish history and for first-century Christians.

**HE SAID THREE OF** the Christian Gospels interpret the Last Supper of Jesus as being a Jewish Passover Seder meal, at which "this thin layer of very untasty stuff known as matzah" is a part. The matzah is unleavened bread.

Various rules and traditions now surround the eating of matzah, and the rules are taken for granted, "but obviously when the rules were formulated there must have been some sense to them."

According to Hoffman, who is an ordained rabbi, "Originally, as tradition has it, the children of Israel left Egypt. They slaughtered a lamb. The lamb's blood was put on the doorpost of the house so that the angel of death passed over and killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, and the Jewish firstborn would be saved."

**THIS "SALVATION FROM** the angel of death by the blood of the sacrifice of the lamb then was marked by every year sacrificing a lamb."

The speaker said matzah during "that critical first century, the century that Jesus knew and his disciples knew so well, was actually a stand-in or an equivalent of the paschal lamb.

"To use it was to participate in a salvational symbol. I should note that the word 'salvational' used by people in different religions and even in the same religion differs, and so I'm using the word rather loosely.

**"I DON'T MEAN TO** say precisely what people are saved from or how they're saved or who gets saved.... I simply note that there was some concept of salvation that's written in the Bible and is recorded in both the Old and New Testaments as different opinions."

The professor said that "whatever the experience was in the Jewish community regarding the paschal lamb, by the first century that experience was to evolve into using matzah, and from that we understand Jesus' words as well as Jewish tradition."

**ACCORDING TO HOFFMAN,** the matzah during the Seder meal includes a small piece known as the afikoman which is eaten at the end of the meal. The afikoman must be "the last thing you eat that night."

The tradition of afikoman was "recorded by the year 200, but the tradition is earlier than that."

In Jewish history before the first century, when paschal lamb rather than matzah was served at the Seder meal, a rule was that "after you eat the paschal lamb, you may not afikoman."

**WHILE THE PRECISE** meaning of the statement is unknown, "early understanding of this tradition is unanimous" in interpreting the statement as meaning that after eating the paschal lamb, persons were not to "eat and run, stuff themselves on rich desserts or carouse." Instead they were to stay for

the religious part of the festival and pay attention to the relating of the story about the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt.

The speaker said that by "the third century at least, it was assumed that the unleavened bread and the paschal lamb were in the same category. Rules that applied to the paschal lamb were now transferred to the unleavened bread."

**NATURALLY DURING THE** third century a question was raised, therefore, about whether the afikoman rule that had applied after eating the paschal lamb in early history had come to be applied to matzah.

Said Hoffman, "I'm not too interested in what the answer is to that question. I'm only interested that the question was posed," giving evidence matzah is thought of in the same category as the paschal lamb.

He said that bread was seen as a salvational symbol both by the Apostle Paul and the rabbis in the first century. "The Christian and Jewish interpretations coalesce beautifully.

**"THE JEWISH EVIDENCE** comes from a very interesting little tale known as the Midrash tale on the Bible." The Midrash story depicts Adam and Eve in a paradise eating from bread trees — "bread trees growing right out of the ground."

The bread from the trees has been interpreted by the rabbis, not as what is placed on a table, but as "the bread which God in the future will bring forth out of the earth. As there was a paradise in years gone by, so eschatologically speaking, a paradise awaits us."

**SAID HOFFMAN,** "THE Christian tradition is very similar." He cited as an example Jesus' words, "Give us this day our daily bread" in the Lord's Prayer. Early church fathers interpreted Jesus' reference to bread as meaning eternal life rather than what one eats for physical sustenance.

"So you see, both Jewish and Christian traditions are the same here. Bread was a symbol of salvation."

**THE PROFESSOR SAID THAT** in early Jewish history each person had to offer his own paschal lamb, but because everybody could not afford a lamb, a formula known as "an inclusive formula" evolved. The rule allowed a group of people to relate "as a kind of fellowship group to one lamb."

Said Hoffman, "When the Evangelists wrote their Gospels in which Jesus was pictured as sitting at a Seder meal, they knew that it was the custom for the leader of the Seder to begin the meal with (a statement) in which all around were included in this particular paschal lamb of the moment. The paschal lamb sitting there on the table referred to the paschal lamb of Egypt, yet belonged uniquely to each person present.

**"IT WAS A SYMBOL** of salvation, and yet it belonged specifically in this instance to all there who would eat it, partake of it and experience salvation of the past in the present moment.

"Jesus must have had that in mind, and that must be the context in which the Eucharistic words are spoken."

**JESUS POINTED TO THE** bread and gave it new meaning, according to Christian interpretation. The bread was "not the old lamb but the new lamb, not the old salvation but the new salvation — all those novelty newnesses, however, understood only because of the context of the old."

In a closing statement in the hour-long lecture, Hoffman said, "My conclusion is that basically Judaism and Christianity both have great depth — great depth which includes together an understanding of religious moments."

# Jewish people's self-understanding

PHOTOS: Jewish leaders who participated in the institute for clergy sponsored by Spring Hill Avenue Temple included, pictured in the left column below, Mrs. Gary Rich, president of the Sisterhood of the temple, and Rabbi Irwin Cutler, spiritual leader of Dauphin Street Synagogue; pictured in the right column below, Dr. Lawrence A. Hoffman, in the top photo, speaker for the institute; Harvey M. Gandler, in the middle photo, president of the local temple; and Rabbi Steven L. Jacobs, spiritual leader of the temple.

By SYLVIA HART  
Press Register Reporter

"The religious community is spiritually rich only insofar as it is able to integrate novelty and a new world with its past," said a speaker to Mobile area clergy.

DR. LAWRENCE A. Hoffman, professor of liturgy at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, made the comment in the second of two lectures to clergy meeting at Spring Hill Avenue Temple.

Said the professor, "To the extent that the selective perception of who we are changes to meet the times, we are able to carry religious promise into our personal lives. Otherwise we shrivel and become a skeleton of ourselves. We become cardboard characters."

Hoffman said Jews throughout history have given "various interpretations of who we are as a people." The salvational experience is involved, and its interpretation "will be different in every age."



"NEVERTHELESS THE appreciation of the experience of feeling a sense of deliverance is one that everyone can relate to, and indeed our religions (Christianity and Judaism) are alike in trying to relate that."

According to the speaker, the understanding of the Jewish people is through myths. In explaining the word "myth," he said, "You can't say, 'It's only a myth and therefore not true.' Myths say something truer than true. They express the inexpressible. They are ways of saying what we live and die for.... (A myth) is not reality itself. It's a selective perception of reality. It's a word used the best we can to express reality but never in fact incorporating all of reality."

IN TALKING ABOUT an early view the Jewish people had of themselves, Hoffman referred to a part of the biblical book of Deuteronomy in which "farmers are talking." The farmers "understood their covenant as being a covenant of the land with the people and God. 'We do what God wants; God gives us good crops.' Indeed that is the Deuteronomic theology."



Said Hoffman, "This is one particular view of a sacred people's history, naturally salvation only seen against the history of who we are. Salvation will be the rains falling and crops coming up in this time. A later time it changes."

Hoffman noted Jewish self-understanding changed for city-dwellers. "As it happened, the most significant event now became the Passover" beginning in about the year 70.

"The temple (in Jerusalem) has been destroyed. A great war against Rome has taken place. The people are desolate. They are destroyed internally as well. They've practically been annihilated from the face of the earth. They ask themselves, 'Lord, where are you? What shall we do now in the face of this tremendous defeat at the hands of Rome, in the face of a religious vacuum caused by the destruction of the temple? Lord, what is salvation for us, and who are we to you? What is the history of our people now?'"

A PROBLEM THAT developed for the rabbis was "hordes of Jews" were leaving the

# changes with events in history

land of Israel because of defeat in war and the resulting famine.

"The holy people was leaving the holy land, and the rabbis fought a battle against the people's desire to escape their faith."

The rabbis gave a new interpretation of the Jewish people through commentary in the Passover Haggadah, according to Hoffman, who held up a book known as the Haggadah.

In their commentary, the rabbis said their forefather Jacob left the land of Israel for Egypt, but he did so only because God directed him. Jacob was told by God not to go to Egypt forever. In fact, according to Hoffman, the biblical account does not indicate Jacob went to Egypt because he was told to do so by God. Moreover, Jacob's family stayed "generation after generation" in Egypt.



**IN THE RABBIS'** commentary, Laban the Aramaean (Jacob's uncle) was described as worse than Pharaoh of Egypt, who enslaved the Jews. However, because of the arrangement of the consonants and vowels in Hebrew, the word "Aramaean" was read "insightfully" as "Roman."

The lesson that was to be drawn from the commentary was that the Romans of the year 70 were worse than Pharaoh of the past. A further lesson was that the Jews living about the year 70 should not leave the land of Israel. "Stay here and build."

**THE INTERPRETATION** was that "salvation would come for people who rebuilt the land. Salvation would come that the people would recollect its religious experience and restore it to a new grandeur."

Said Hoffman, "Jews now had a new picture of their history. The Roman experience was new, and it was integrated into their consciousness.... With the synagogue and with a new emphasis on the home, family life, city-dwelling, they looked ahead to another salvation equivalent to that great one in the past (when the Jews escaped slavery under Pharaoh of Egypt).



Hoffman said still another interpretation was given to Jewish self-understanding during the Middle Ages in Europe when the Jews "rediscovered messianism, particularly in connection with Elijah.... Religion now centered in Elijah, who would bring about the coming of the messiah."

**BRINGING HIS LECTURE** to the modern age, the professor said a view of today's Jews is given partly in the Passover Haggadah. Besides traditional readings, the Haggadah of Reform Jews now includes "what is happening in Jewish history," including the Holocaust, the extermination of 6 million Jews by the Nazis in the World War II era.



Jews today have various interpretations of salvation, including a personal messiah and a messianic age.

"In either case, the Jewish community anticipates still a destiny with God to serve the world, to bring about a better time no matter what."