

Jews developed thanksgiving festival centuries ahead of U.S., says Mobilian

In their celebration of the Thanksgiving holiday, Americans tend to think this country created the tradition of a day of giving thanks to God for blessings.

ACTUALLY A festival of giving thanks existed among Jews centuries before the United States was in existence, according to the Rev. Dani D'Aunay, pastor of St. Peter's Lutheran Church in Mobile.

Ms. D'Aunay spoke to participants in the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue not only about a festival of thanks but other festivals celebrated by Jews before Christians adapted the practices.

MS. D'AUNAY said the Old Testament book of Leviticus describes the Festival of Booths, or Sukkot, which is a harvest thanksgiving festival. Sukkot also commemorates the Old Testament account of

when the people of Israel wandered in the wilderness and dwelt in temporary booths.

Remembering the Festival of Booths, Mobile Jews and Christians together participated in a Thanksgiving prayer service led by the Rev. James L. Lambert, chemistry professor at Spring Hill College.

LAMBERT ASKED the Jews and Christians to join for prayer because "the activity of prayer, it seems to me, is really the sign of life of a community of faith."

In her address before the service of prayer, Ms. D'Aunay said, "One of the things that is always impressive to me in worshiping in the Christian community of faith is how little we really have in the way of our traditions or principal festivals and celebrations that we can call our own."



Dani D'Aunay



Mobile Press Register photos by Victor Calhoun

James L. Lambert

THE LUTHERAN pastor said early Christians developed festivals by adapting them from Jewish practices or by fusing the festivals of Christians with those of ancient Greece and others.

According to the speaker, "The early Christian community faced a very difficult problem because it had no past. It was living responding to teachings it had heard quite recently or within 10 to 20 years of the death of its teacher (Jesus)."

The early Christian community "needed a structure, forms of worship, forms of celebrating basic events in its life that were marking the gradual building of a history of this community of faith," Ms. D'Aunay said.

SHE CONTINUED, "Since a good number of the people participating in this (early Christian) community were Jewish, it was natural that they would take liturgical festivals, orders of worship and structure those into the Christian community and build upon that base a form of worship that is still the basis for the Christian Church liturgical year and every primary festival in the Christian Church at the present time."

MS. D'AUNAY gave some examples.

Pentecost, a festival of the Christian Church, occurs seven weeks after Easter in celebration of the New Testament account of the descent of the Holy Spirit on early Christians.

ON PENTECOST day, Ms. D'Aunay said, Christians "proclaim in fact the birth of the Christian Church."

The birth of the Christian Church is described in the New Testament book of Acts as a time when the Holy Spirit descended on people gathered together.

The reason for the gathering of people, according to Ms. D'Aunay, was for a celebration of Shavuot, a Jewish holiday commemorating the biblical account of God's revealing the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

Christians, according to the speaker,

appropriated the festival of Shavuot as their own celebration "of the birthday of the church."

THE CHRISTIAN celebration of Ash Wednesday in preparation of Easter includes the imposition of ashes on the foreheads of Christians as a sign of penance.

The Old Testament includes "the ritual of atonement and the imposition of ashes on members of the community of Israel as a mark of atonement, of penance, centuries ago," the speaker said. "The Christian community still carries that over and uses that same ritual — the imposition of ashes."

Ms. D'Aunay said, "The very order in which we worship we take over from a basic service in the early synagogues.

"THE FACT that we have a lectionary — that the Christian community has an orderly way, a regular system or sequence in which it reads parts of Old and New Testaments — is from the early Christian community," which adapted synagogue practices of reading Hebrew Scriptures.

THE FESTIVAL of Christ the King was celebrated last Sunday by some Christians, who focused on Christ as king of their lives.

That festival, Ms. D'Aunay said, "draws upon Old Testament sources for its understanding of what kingship is and what a king was supposed to be."

The Old Testament book of Psalms is among sources that give "an understanding of kingship and what was expected by the kingship of God and by the kingship and the shepherding of the rulers of Israel."

Ms. D'Aunay said the modern Jewish community has "a marvelous heritage and history all its own and can survive and recount its history very well" without acknowledgement generally of Christianity.

ON THE other hand, "we have the Christian community indebted for its heritage, its roots and its sense of understanding of what is called New Testament Scriptures to all the richness of the past of the people of Israel."