

Jewish-Christian issues must be confronted on a continuing basis, says Mobilian

"I don't personally think there can be any true ecumenism or interfaith accomplishments until the Jewish-Christian issue is confronted and confronted," said Mobilian Mary Filben.

MRS. FILBEN and her husband Paul, local Catholic laypersons, have returned from a national workshop in Boston which was attended by 950 Christians and Jews.

Several years ago when the Filbens began attending the national workshops, the Mobilians were meeting with 20 to 25 persons. The workshops have "grown by leaps and bounds, so the so-called problem is being addressed by Christians and Jews," said Mrs. Filben in a Press Register interview.

HER HUSBAND said, "I think that since Vatican II (in the mid-1960s), the staggering implications that are posed to Jewish-Christian relations are more than just something kind of nice to do or dialogue in which we can sort of talk to each other and tolerate each other.

"The issue is mainly theological. We're at a point at which we don't have too many choices if we're going to continue to be viable as a religious entity because there is a relationship between an Israel of God and a church of God. There's a definite relationship or covenant that exists between us."

Talking about some of the workshop's small-group sessions he attended, Filben said participants in one session played a kind of psychological game.

The leader of the session posed words such as "Jew" and others, and the participants responded with the first word coming to their minds. The game uncovered some latent anti-Jewish feelings even among "righteous people," Filben said.

HE ADDED, "The Ku Klux Klan is a mild irritant in comparison to the insidiousness of so-called righteous Christians who do not consider themselves anti-Semitic."

Mrs. Filben said some small-group sessions focused on the state of Israel. "I think we have to continue talking about the state of Israel. You don't have to be anti-Jewish to be against the state of

Israel, but many times it goes hand in hand."

When told The Press Register received a news release indicating one of the workshop's small-group sessions on the Middle East presented an Arab viewpoint, the Filbens said the entire workshop audience heard a Moslem Arab, Dr. Seyyed Hussein Nasr, who teaches in the religion department at Temple University in Philadelphia.

FILBEN SAID that Nasr "got a standing ovation from Jews and Christians alike." Nasr "was very positive. He was head-on. He presented a challenge to those of us who are Jews or Christians to look at an Islamic viewpoint. He said we've got to do that, and I agree with him."

Asked why Mobile's ongoing Jewish-Christian dialogue has not presented an Arab Moslem viewpoint, Filben responded, "We've been in existence for eight-plus years as a local dialogue group attempting to address some monumental issues.

"But it seems rather presumptuous to assume that Jews will give Christians their undying trust in eight years after 18 centuries of mistrust for good reasons."

HIS WIFE added, "I think it's absolutely imperative to address the Jewish-Christian issue before we as a group of Jews and Christians begin to address the Jewish-Arab issue. I don't see how it can be done otherwise."

Talking about other small-group sessions of the national workshop, Mrs. Filben said participants focused on many topics, including women's issues in religion and in the world generally, hunger issues, nuclear weapons, prayer, and stereotyping of religious groups, mainly Jews, by the mass media, particularly by some television dramas.

MAKING AN observation, Mrs. Filben said she saw only two black persons in the crowd of 950 in Boston.

"For whatever reason, black people generally have not become involved in the dialogue either nationally or locally," Mrs. Filben said, adding that black clergy are regularly invited to local dialogue sessions and are always welcome.