

Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue

Volume 1, Issue 2

January 1998

Rabbi Harold Kushner to speak in Mobile

The world renowned author, Harold S. Kushner, will be speaking to a Mobile audience on March 3, 1998.

Rabbi Kushner is one of the most sought



after speakers in the country. He is known nationally and internationally as the author of *"When Bad Things Happen to Good People"* and many other best sellers. Among them is his latest book, *"How Good Do We Have to Be?"* He will address that question in Mobile at the Dauphin Way United Methodist Church on March 3. The time for the lecture is 7:00 PM. This special program is being jointly sponsored by the Mobile Area Christian/Jewish Dialogue, The Mobile Jewish

Welfare Fund, The Compassionate Friends, Mobile Chapter, and Widowed Persons Services. Tickets will be available at the following locations: Barnes & Noble at Springdale Plaza, Paul Brown's Hallmark at Bel Air Mail, Radney Funeral Homes, and all branches of Colonial Banks. On the Eastern Shore, tickets will be available at the Page & Palette. All tickets are \$10.00 and there will be general seating. You are encouraged to get tickets early to assure that you will not miss this extraordinary opportunity to hear Rabbi Harold S. Kushner.

How Good Do We Have to Be?



Tuesday, March 3, 1998
Dauphin Way Methodist Church
7:00 PM

Dr. Eva Fleischner receives award

The National Catholic Center for Holocaust Education presented its Nostra Aetate Award to **Dr. Eva Fleischner**, a Catholic theologian, author and teacher. (Below Center).



Many of you will remember Dr. Fleischner, who was our Yom haShoah speaker in 1996, and has been deeply involved in Christian-Jewish Relations for the past 29 years. Most recently, Dr. Fleischner, along with collaborator Dr. Michael Phayer, published *Cries in the Night: Women Who Challenged the Holocaust*. The book presents a study of eight Catholic women in Germany, France and Poland who rescued Jews during the Holocaust. The Center is located in Greensburg, Pennsylvania at Seton Hill College and specializes in Holocaust education.

Greetings Mobilians!

Dr., Eugene J. Fisher

Paul Filben has asked for some reminiscences from my talks in your wonderful dialogue program. I am more than happy to do so. The Mobile series has for more than two decades been one of the mainstays of the dialogue on the national landscape. I have been quite pleased to be a part of it on two occasions; the first during the tenure of Archbishop John May, of blessed memory and the second more recently under Archbishop Oscar Lipscomb. Both times, I was paired with a non-Catholic speaker of note. The two topics raised issues of central importance to the relationship between the Church and the Jewish People, so I will reprise some of points made during those exchanges. Before delving into the substance of the



discussions, a personal reminiscence may be in order. Though I have lived in Virginia for twenty years, and proudly so, I must say that my deepest experiences of Southern hospitality came during these two visits to Mobile. The first time I stayed at the Archbishop's residence. My co-speaker

was Rev. William Weiler, then in charge of Jewish-Christian relations for the National Council of Churches. Archbishop May took the two of us on a personal tour of the city, culminating in a tour of the ante-bellum mansion itself. The second time was a banquet at the residence, hosted by Archbishop Lipscomb, in honor of Mr. Avi Granot of the Israeli Embassy and, through him, of the great breakthrough in relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel.

In my time with the Bishops' Conference, I have been privileged to attend a number of most impressive functions in Europe, Latin America, Australia and here in the United States, held at embassies and palaces, religious institutions and government buildings.. (It's a tough job but somebody has to do it, as they say. I have also slept in some places that make one yearn for the relative luxury of the seediest American motel chains.) I have learned that it is not really the place but the people that count; not their income or aristocratic heritage, but the sense of openness to the other. .of truly spiritual exchange that they hunger for and surprisingly, they often achieve through Jewish-Christian Dialogue. These are what

I call the magic moments of dialogue. Martin Buber, the great pioneer and philosopher of dialogue called them moments of "I-Thou" encounter where new realities are made possible for humans in an exchange permeated by the Eternal Thou who has called both the Jewish People and the Church into existence to serve a divine Will greater than either can adequately convey.

In the Archbishop's residence in Mobile, I sensed such a moment, facilitated by the graciousness of our host and the sense of history brooding over the place. The first layer of history for us was obviously that of the American South. But for this particular group of Southerners (including

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a transplanted Northerner like myself and an Israeli whose parents were saved by having been placed on Oscar Schindler's famous list), there was another, deeper, layer of history giving poignancy to the toasts in honor of the Pope and the State of Israel. We were Jews and Christians, the heirs of peoples touched by God whose destinies, sometimes for good, often for ill, have been interwoven for two millennia. Today, one realizes at such moments with a profound chill, we live in a generation which has an opportunity granted to no previous generation of Jews and Christians over the course of all those long, often bitter centuries. Today we are granted the miracle of the chance to

"Greetings" . . .continued

change permanently for the better, the course and the very nature of our relationship as peoples of God.

The present Pope, John Paul II, is a Pole, himself a witness of and throughout his life to, the great evil of the Holocaust. Indeed, history I believe will judge that the Pope's witness to the Shoah and struggle against antisemitism is one of the chief marks of his long pontificate. Is it accidental that a Polish Pope and witness to the Holocaust was the first Bishop of Rome to visit, and not only visit but pray in the Great Synagogue of Rome? I, for one, think not. The Second Vatican Council in 1965 broke the back of that terrible nexus of theological canards against Jews and Judaism so aptly called "the teaching of contempt" by Holocaust survivor Jules Isaac of France. It did so by taking the keystone out of the arch of Christian anti-Judaic polemic—the charge of collective guilt for the death of Christ.

With the keystone gone, the whole edifice of hate crumbled. Jews could not be presented as cursed "as if this followed from Sacred Scripture," as the Council put it. God's covenant with the Jews must be understood in the present, not the past tense. The Jews as God's People have a continuing role to play in God's plan of salvation that was not exhausted in giving birth to Jesus. That plan, and the need to witness to it (and therefore to the imperfection of a

broken world in need of healing, of what Judaism wisely calls "tikkun olam") perdure, a brokenness to which the Shoah so starkly attests to in our own time. To this "sacred witness" of the Jews, the Pope has said the Church is called to add her own voice, not to replace or to muffle, but to increase and to amplify.

In the moving memorial concert to the victims of the Holocaust held in the Vatican in 1994, in the presence of numerous survivors and virtually the entire Vatican Curia as well as Cardinals and Archbishops from around the world, Pope John Paul II said that he felt the presence of the victims, to whom he could only respond with a commitment on the part of the Church never to forget, and to work to destroy forever the causes of antisemitism wherever they may be. This pledge has led to the extraordinary series of "examinations of conscience" in Rome and throughout the Church, such as can be seen in the statements of the German, Polish, and most recently French bishops acknowledging the failures to act and evils perpetrated by so many Christians during World War II. In January of 1995, Archbishop Lipscomb speaking as Chairman of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops articulated the sense of "responsibility" of Catholics in America to ensure that no future generation of Catholics will be

vulnerable to the blandishments of antisemitic hatred.

But with the "teaching of contempt" destroyed I believe irrevocably; the question is: What will replace it in Christian teaching? How will Judaism respond to this seismic shift of the tectonic plates of interreligious reality in our time? These are the questions that face our two religious communities today. They are questions that neither of us can answer on our own. They can only be answered together, in a dialogue of reconciliation.

A chief element of the long process of healing that, perhaps in a generation or two may result in reconciliation between us, was addressed in the first of the two lectures I gave for the Mobile dialogue. Long before the Southern Baptist resolution to establish an organized effort to convert the Jews as a people, Mary and Paul Filben invited me and my Protestant counterpart in the National Council of Churches to address what is in many ways a very complex issue. Rev. William Weiler, an Episcopalian priest, and myself, I must say, were very much in sync, theologically, in our approaches (though I had the advantage of some very definitive statements of the Second Vatican Council and the Pope on which to draw for authoritative sources). Both of us understood the challenge in similar ways, which I will try to summarize as simply as possible here.

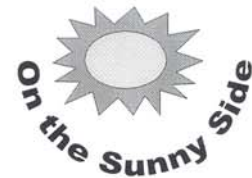
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□ First, it needs to be remembered that the Church's proclamation of the redemption of humanity in the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Jesus is—and always will be—a universal one, addressing the Good News to all humanity without exception. Thus, the Church's doors can never be closed to any potential convert, Gentile or Jew, as St. Paul makes abundantly clear in his epistles. But does the universal significance of the Christ event (which mainline Protestants, Southern Baptists, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christians all equally affirm) mean that in order to be saved the sincere individual must perforce become a member of the Church through baptism? In Catholic teaching, the answer here is clearly “no.” One must also recall the doctrine of God's universal will to salvation, and the workings of the Holy Spirit, the divine “breath” Who “hovered over the waters” even before Creation, according to the first chapter of Genesis, and Who is universally present throughout Creation even now. Thus, the sincere Muslim or Buddhist can, by God's all-embracing grace, find salvation by practicing his or her faith.

If this is true of the great world religions in general, it is argued how much more so is it true of Judaism? For Christians know on the basis of clear biblical testimony some very crucial truths about Judaism. Judaism, no less than Christianity, is a faith founded on divine revelation. Jews, no less than Christians, are God's People, called into being as a People by God and in eternal Covenant with God. The prayers of Jews, no less than the prayers of Christians, are continually inspired by divine revelation. The Law (Torah, really “Teaching”) given by God to the Jews on Mount Sinai is the Law of God. Jewish witness to the validity of the Ten Commandments (Deuteronomy 5) and to the Law of Love (Deuteronomy 6: “Hear O Israel, the Lord Your God is One. You shall love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole mind,” and Leviticus 19:18 “You shall love your neighbor as yourself:”) is as central to Judaism as it is to Christianity. Christians who believe in the divine inspiration of the Bible can discern in Judaism a grace-filled response to God's call, a divinely sanctioned religious tra-

dition with its own integrity, one that holds sufficient salvific validity for its adherents. Hence, Judaism is to be approached by Christians with infinite respect and spiritual admiration. Anything that might diminish that respect, indeed might harm the freedom of faith relationship between God and His People, must be eschewed by the Church. Up to this point, I believe all Christians of good will would be in agreement. A pastoral judgment, I would say, is what really separates Rev. Weiler and myself from the current policies of the Southern Baptist Convention. In our judgment, it is very clear that any organization set up by the Church, specifically to convert Jews, would inhibit the free response in faith of Jews to God's call. The reason for this judgment is not hard to find in history. Forced conversions, expulsions, massacres, pogroms. From the Jewish point of view, organized Christianity is a very scary prospect indeed, and especially so when the Church “targets” the Jewish community. As a Christian I can wish that such abuse had not taken place. But it did, and it would be irresponsible of me to act as if it had not. So while from a purely theoretical point of view, one can make the case that the Church has every right to bring its proclamation to the Jews with organized vigor, from a point of view that tries to take reality into account, the case is very weak. Evidence for this, of course, can be seen precisely in the heated response of the Jewish community to the Baptist resolution, which for Jews raised the ancient specters of abuse, persecution and mass murder, specters hardly likely to facilitate a free response to God's grace.

So for Catholics and mainline Protestants, a case that appears simple so some Christians has been made very complex by countless misdeeds of baptized Christians over centuries culminating, of course, in the Shoah. We are called as the Pope has said time and again, to repent, to acknowledge our own sins perpetrated against Jews. This is our task as Church today, as a joint statement by the Lutheran, Catholic and Episcopalian bishops of New York recently affirmed.



By: Paul Filben, Editor

Just a few random thoughts for your consideration from an anonymous source.

You only live once!!! Never live your life saying, “What if?” Imagine there is a bank which credits your account each morning with \$86,400, carries over no balance from day to day, allows you to keep no cash balance, and every evening cancels whatever part of the amount you failed to use during the day. What would you do? Draw out every cent of course.

Well, everyone has such a bank. Its name is TIME. Every morning, it credits you with 86,400 seconds. Every night it writes it off, as lost, whatever of this you have failed to invest to good purpose. It carries over no balance. It allows no overdraft. Each day it open a new account for you. Each night it burns the records of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no drawing against the tomorrow. You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get from it the utmost in health, happiness and success. The clock is running. Make the most of today.

To realize the value of ONE YEAR, ask a student who has failed his exam. To realize the value of ONE MONTH, ask a mother who has given birth to a premature baby. To realize the value of ONE WEEK, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper. To realize the value of ONE DAY, ask a daily wage laborer who has ten kids to feed. To realize the value of ONE HOUR, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet. To realize the value of ONE MINUTE, ask a person who has missed the train. To realize the value of ONE SECOND, ask the person who has won a ‘silver’ medal in Olympics.

Treasure every moment that you have! Treasure it more because you shared it with someone special. . .special enough to have your time. . .and remember, time waits for no one.

(Your comments are always welcome!)

Coming Up This Quarter



Mark your Calendars

Jan. 23, Friday 8:00 PM Springhill Avenue Temple: **Mr. Al Vorspan**, VP Emeritus of the UAHC will be the "Paul & Fran Brown Scholar-In-Residence." His topic will be: *Tough Choices for American Jews and Israel.* All Dialoguers are invited.

The Jews of Kiev: Renaissance after Babi Yar. A photo exhibit documenting the rebirth of Jewish life in the Ukrainian capital after communism and the Nazi era, was photographed by Yosefa Drescher, an Israeli free-lance journalist who has also worked in the US and England. The exhibit will be on display at **Springhill Avenue Temple** for the weekend of **January 23**. It will then move to **Ahavas Chesed Synagogue** for the weekend of **January 30**. It will then be on display at UJA Campaign events during the first two weeks of February.

For centuries, the name Kiev was synonymous with both Jewish culture and anti-semitism. The city was the site of numerous pogroms and the 1841 massacre of 100,000 people, mostly Jews, at the Babi Yar ravine. It was also home to some of the most famous Yiddish writers of all time, including Shalom Aleichem, creator of the character Tevya, the Dairyman. The exhibit includes a photo of the matzah bakery at the city's ancient synagogue, which survived the Holocaust because the Nazis used it as a stable. During the Soviet era, several Kiev Jews were jailed for breaking a law that banned the baking of matzah for Passover. Today, the bakery supplies all of Ukraine, Moldova and even exports to Moscow.

March 3, Tuesday, 7:00 PM Dauphin Way United Methodist Church: Rabbi **Harold Kushner**, "How Good Do We Have to Be?"

Israel at 50

The evening of December 23, 1997, the first night of Hanukkah marked the opening of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Israel. On that evening, a candle-lighting ceremony, a veritable Festival of Lights, occurred where the Heads of State of various countries each lit candles, from within their own country, to launch a year-long celebration. Participation from world leaders reconfirms the miracle of the holiday and the miracle of the establishment of the democratic State of Israel.



Mark Your Calendar in Advance

In celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Israel, the Mobile Jewish Welfare Fund is inviting **Mr. Chaim Potok** to Mobile at a time as yet undetermined. Mr. Potok is the author of "The Chosen" and many other best sellers. Tentative plans are for April 26, 1998 at the Adams Mark Hotel. As plans are finalized, we will notify you.

Yom haShoah



We are working on the annual **Holocaust Remembrance Day** service which will take place on the night of April 22, 1998. A number of possibilities exist for this important event, but plans have not been finalized as of this date. The Bevill Community Theatre, the company that presented the play last year at the Synagogue, is offering to return with its newest production: "BRUNDIBAR" the children's opera that was performed in the Terezin concentration camp. This would be the premiere production and is being launched by the

Alabama Holocaust Advisory Council and the Bevill Community Theatre.

Another sponsoring entity is the Southern Shofar. The show features children 8-18. Composed in 1939 for the children of the Jewish orphanage in Prague, BRUNDIBAR, premiered in a cramped attic theatre in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt (now Terezin, Czech Republic) in September, 1943, to an audience of prisoners, camp leaders, and Swedish Red Cross workers who were monitoring conditions at the camp. The following year, Krasa was transported to Auschwitz and never heard from again. This is just one of the options we are researching at this stage. We will, of course, keep you posted on our progress.

Holocaust Advisory Council

For many months now, the Alabama Advisory Council, which we serve on, has been working toward the goal of making this council a full-time Commission of the State. It has been difficult and time-consuming at best, and frustrating and disappointing at worst. In a message from Montgomery today, we learned that the Holocaust Commission Bill will be introduced on Tuesday, January 13, 1998 by Representative Jim Carns in the House Legislature. This is good news, indeed. The bad news is that we still do not have a State Senator lined up to introduce the Bill in the Senate. We are making calls daily, and thus far have been unsuccessful. Unfortunately, Sen. Roger Bedford did not seem too receptive to our previous inquiries. We will, nevertheless persist, and advise you as to our progress.

Meanwhile, it is important to know that the Alabama Holocaust Advisory Council has been in place since the days of Governor George C. Wallace. The council has developed a Holocaust Memorial Service which historically was held at the Governor's mansion, but as recent as this past year, we were successful in getting it moved to a more public setting in the Archives Building at the State Capitol. A number of Mobilians attended last year's service, including survivors and liberators as well as those of us who serve on the Council. We hope to have updated information for you by the next issue.

Upcoming Articles of Interest

When we discovered that the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue Newsletter would become a reality, it became clear that we would have to enlist the help of others to submit articles for publication. We began by asking some of those people who had, in fact, been to Mobile and had spoken to the Dialogue group. We are happy to report that the four people we contacted all enthusiastically agreed to submit their articles for inclusion in this newsletter. Dr. Fisher's piece appears in this issue. Fr. John Pawlikowski is a theologian at Chicago Theological Union and will offer his observations on his recent trip to the Vatican in our next issue. David Bossman, a professor of Theology at Seton Hall University will have a commentary in a future issue on "Values in a Pluralistic Society." Rabbi James Rudin of the American Jewish Committee in New York graciously accepted our invitation as well. His remarks will appear in these columns later in the year. We are grateful to each of

these gifted and very busy scholars for their willingness to contribute to this publication.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

In the interest of being good managers of Dialogue funds, we are taking this opportunity to thank each of you who have been so generous and forthcoming with your donations to this effort! While we were tempted to send a "Thank You" card to each of you, we resisted the temptation and instead, offer our sincere thanks to you via this newsletter.

If any of you wish to contribute \$10.00 or more, please make check payable to:

Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue
1537 Deerwood Drive East
Mobile, Alabama 36618



What's On Your Mind?

We are interested in what you would like to see in future issues of this newsletter. If you have any items of interest that you believe would be appropriate for inclusion in this publication, please mail them to us at the address listed. . .or e-mail us at: pfilben@dibbs.net. We are dedicated to producing the most informative newsletter possible and we hope to develop and maintain the highest quality at all times. The Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue is now in the middle of its 23rd year and continues to be one of the "mainstays of the dialogue on the national landscape" according to Dr. Eugene Fisher, National Conference of Catholic Bishops.. There has been much accomplished but much still needs to be done. It remains our task to do our part to repair the world (tikkun olam). We need your involvement. If you want to help in this effort, please let us know.

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Inside this issue:

Rabbi Kushner in Mobile
Dr. Fleischner gets Award
Upcoming Events
Message from Dr. Fisher
Israel at 50
Scholar-in-Residence
Holocaust Advisory Council