

Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue

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Paul Filben, Editor

Mainstreaming The Dialogue

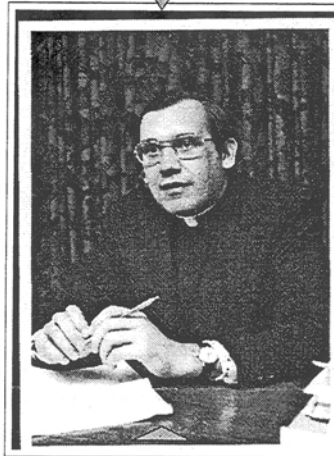
First, let me thank each of you who have sent your generous checks to help with the continued publication of this newsletter. The dialogue has presented two major events this past month which were attended by record-breaking crowds. The "Kushner event" drew over 1200 people. More than two hundred people gathered at Ahavas Chesed Synagogue to hear Ms. Nessie Godin, a holocaust survivor, who came to Mobile from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in cooperation with the Dialogue. Our thanks to *Joy Grodnick* for her coordination of this event. What a "joy" to work with her. It was our pleasure too, to work with the other sponsors of the Kushner visit. Our gratitude goes to: *Nicky MacDonald* and The Compassionate Friends, *Mary Yarber* of AARP/ Widowed Persons Services; and *Doris Claire Stein* from the Mobile Jewish Welfare Fund, Inc. The fact that each of the organizations and individuals have been able to work together in this effort is a testament to the success of the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue and to the dialogic process over the years. Congratulations to all.

By: John T. Pawlikowski, O.S.M. Ph.D.
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This past autumn I had the opportunity to share in two important conferences that constructively affect the future of Jewish-Christian Dialogue. The first took place at the Vatican as part of the Jubilee process leading up to the Millenium. Bringing together some sixty Catholic scholars from various parts of the world the three day conference focused on core issues in the relationship between the Church and the Synagogue. In particular issues related to the

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biblical tradition. About one half of the participants were recognized experts in Catholic-Jewish relations. The others were important officials of the Roman curia and members of the international theological commission. The discussion was not always an easy one since those who had not been deeply involved in the dialogue often raised questions which the experts, and in some cases, official documents, had already resolved. Right in the middle of the conference Pope John Paul II addressed the group, expressing regret for those in the Catholic community who had espoused anti-Judaic teachings. He reiterated his long-standing view that Christianity and



Judaism remain deeply connected as religious traditions in a very positive way. While his was a relatively brief statement, John Paul II clearly identified himself with the outlook of the experts on the Catholic-Jewish relationship. In the Jubilee year the organizers of the meeting headed by the theologian of the papal household undoubtedly aimed at bringing the developments since Vatican II's NOSTRA AETATE to the center of Catholic consciousness. Hopefully, they also paved the way for the issuance soon of the more comprehensive Vatican statement on antisemitism that has been long anticipated. (see page 2 for "We Remember. . .") The second conference came some three weeks later, in mid-November. The site was the Catholic University of Leuven (Belgium) whose faculty were so instrumental in the development of many of the Vatican II documents. The conference was titled

"The Myriad Christ" and focused on Christology in light of interreligious relations. I was asked to present a plenary address on "The Holocaust and Christology." This was one of the first international, specifically Christian theological conferences to give such prominence to issues related to the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The audience consisted of people from throughout the world with many Asian and Indian theological students in attendance. I found many of these students quite interested in questions raised by the Christian-Jewish dialogue. Several other papers on aspects of the Christian-Jewish dialogue were scheduled in the seminar sessions. In my presentation, I was able to focus on both the importance of replacing the classical Christian theology of Jewish displacement from the covenant with a constructive theology of Christian-Jewish bonding and on the significance of Nazi ideology for Christian understanding today. Much work certainly remains in bringing the new theological understanding of Judaism to the forefront of Catholic thinking and expression. But both of these conferences auger well for the continued enhancement of this process.



Editor's Note: Fr. John Pawlikowski has been a speaker in Mobile on several occasions. He is one of the many dedicated people in the International Dialogue who continues to work toward building bridges between Jews and Christians.

"We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah"

The following are excerpts from the Vatican's official English version of the document on the Holocaust:

"This century has witnessed an unspeakable tragedy, which can never be forgotten: the attempt by the Nazi regime to exterminate the Jewish people, with the consequent killing of millions of Jews. . . This was the Shoah. It is a major fact of history of this century, a fact which still concerns us today. . . Did Christians give every possible assistance to those being persecuted, and in particular to the persecuted Jews? Many did, but others did not". . . "The Church's relationship to the Jewish people is unlike the one she shares with any other religion. However, it is not only a question of recalling the past. The common future of Jews and Christians demands that we remember, for 'there is no future without memory.' . . We ask all Christians to join us in meditating on the catastrophe which befell the Jewish people, and on the moral imperative to ensure that never again will selfishness and hatred grow to the point of such suffering and death. . . "The fact that the Shoah took place in Europe, that is, in countries of long-standing Christian civilization, raises the question of the relation between the Nazi persecution and the attitudes down the centuries of

Christians toward the Jews. "The history of relations between Jews and Christians is a tormented one. . . In effect, the balance of these relations over two thousand years has been quite negative. . . . "Despite the Christian preaching of love for all, even for one's enemies, the prevailing mentality down the centuries penalized minorities and those who were in any way 'different.' Sentiments of anti-Judaism in some Christian quarters, and the gap which existed between the Church and the Jewish people, led to a generalized discrimination, which ended at times in expulsions or attempts at forced conversions. The Shoah was the work of a thoroughly modern neo-pagan regime. Its antisemitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, did not hesitate to oppose the church and persecute her members also. . . "We cannot know how many Christians in countries occupied or ruled by the Nazi powers or their allies were horrified at the disappearance of their Jewish neighbors and yet were not strong enough to raise their voices in protest. . . . We deeply regret the errors and failures of those sons and daughters of the Church. "Pius XII . . . warned against theories which denied the unity of the human race and against the deification of the State, all of which he saw as leading to

a real 'hour of darkness.' Unfortunately the governments of some Western countries of Christian tradition, including some in North and South America, were more than hesitant to open their borders to the persecuted Jews. . . . "We wish to turn awareness of past sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be no more anti-Judaism among Christians or anti-Christian sentiment among Jews, but rather a shared mutual respect."

The following are excerpts of an introductory letter from Pope John Paul II to the Vatican's document on the Shoah:

"On numerous occasions during my Pontificate I have recalled with a sense of deep sorrow the sufferings of the Jewish people during the Second World War. The crime which has become known as the Shoah remains an indelible stain on the history of the century that is coming to a close. . . . It is my fervent hope that the document 'We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah' . . . will indeed help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices. May it enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the Shoah will never again be possible."

B'nai B'rith Calls on Vatican to Open WWII Archives

On the eve of his upcoming trip to Rome to meet for the second time with Pope John Paul II and high-level Catholic officials, B'nai B'rith International President Tommy P. Baer called the newly-released Vatican statement on the Holocaust an important step forward.

"B'nai B'rith welcomes this statement and the condemnation of antisemitism in all its forms. However, before there can be closure on this chapter of history, we once again call on the Vatican to open its archives to let historians examine the role of the church and church leaders during World War II in order to set the record straight," said Baer. Church officials have refused to make an exception to their 75-year

closure of the Vatican archives, something B'nai B'rith has been urging them to do.

"This document is an important step in the right direction in recognizing the 'errors and failures' of Roman Catholics during the Holocaust, but we are disappointed that it stops short of acknowledging the need for full and open disclosure of the Vatican archives on the World War II period," said Baer.

... "an important step in the right direction in recognizing errors and failures. . ."

B'nai B'rith applauded a 12-page statement by the Commission for Religious

Relations with the Jews for condemning 2,000 years of anti-Jewish persecution and for emphasizing that early interpretations of New Testament scriptures have contributed to a climate of hate toward Jews which played a role in legitimizing the Holocaust. B'nai B'rith, with members in 56 countries including the United States, Israel and Italy, is a member of several commissions examining the Holocaust and its aftermath, including the World Jewish Restitution Organization.



News and Views

Yom haShoah

Historically, the month of April and the observance of the Days of Remembrance (Yom haShoah), marks the end of the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue year. As usual, the month is filled with many events that are newsworthy. This year, the Dialogue will humbly offer its annual commemorative service on the eve of Yom haShoah, April 22, Wednesday at 7:00 PM. The service will be held at Springhill Avenue Temple. We are pleased to announce the return of the Bevill Community Theatre group from Hamilton, Alabama who will present "BRUNDIBAR", a children's opera composed in 1939 at Theresienstadt Concentration camp. There will, of course, be a Candlelighting Service prior to the performance. This production in Mobile will be the premiere performance of BRUNDIBAR in Alabama. It features twenty children ages eight to eighteen from four Northwest Alabama counties. The original production took place in a cramped attic in the concentration camp at what is now Terezin 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, the composer, Hans Krása, was transported to Auschwitz and was

never heard from again. The tour will perform on April 23 at the Alabama Days of Remembrance ceremony held at the Capitol Building in Montgomery.

Yellow Candles

This year on April 22 more than 200 families in Mobile will be lighting special Yellow Candles to observe Yom ha Shoah. This is another opportunity and yes, perhaps an obligation for each of us to join in this remembrance. Twenty percent of all high school students have no knowledge of the Holocaust. They are ripe for the revisionist history we wish to avoid. The Dialogue would therefore encourage and recommend that each of us, Jew and Christian, join in this Candlelighting at home. Individual candles will be sold for \$5.00 each and bulk mailings to entire congregations can be arranged. If you or your congregation would like to participate, please contact Rabbi Steven Silberman 343-6010, Dr. Steven Pittler 460-6861 or Mary & Paul Filben at 342-9384.

Israel 50

This year, on May 12, Israel celebrates its independence, Yom HaAtzma'ut. Israel 50 will be recognized in Mobile as well as in communities worldwide. On May 1 at 5:45 PM, all are invited to a service, a Community Shabbat, at the Springhill Avenue Temple. 1769

Springhill Avenue. An Israeli, Mr. Yoram Adar, will be the guest speaker and he will talk about the history of the State of Israel for the past 49 years. This is open to the public and is a wonderful opportunity to recognize the significance of the State of Israel to Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

In keeping with the momentous event of "Israel 50", there will be a Photo Exhibit at St. Dominic's Catholic Church on Burma Road. This will be a one day showing on Sunday May 17, 1998 from 7:30 AM - 1:00 PM. The exhibit consists of dramatic photos of the people of today's Israel and is the work of Mr. Zion Ozeri. There is more than adequate parking in the lot and the exhibit will be at the Murphy Center at St. Dominic's Church.

Many of you have inquired about videotapes of the Rabbi Kushner Lecture. They are available by calling Melinda Klotz, Wind River Video Productions at 476-9773. Melinda can also be reached at P. O. Box 161354, Mobile, Alabama 36616. The quality of this videotape is exceptionally good and we are indebted to her for her work on this project. All inquiries regarding the purchase of the tapes should be made to Melinda.

Editorial

Paul Filben

We stand on the threshold of the millennium. Within the next eighteen months we can expect strange and bizarre predictions. The doomsday people will be once again, foretelling the end of the world with their usual references to carefully applied Biblical verses. We humans have been through many epochal periods: The Stone Age, the Period of Enlightenment, The Classical, the Age of Technology. . .from the Romantic to the Postmodern. We have witnessed numerous tragedies and triumphs. If we look back a thousand years, despite the economical and the technological, one cannot help but be convinced that it is the people after all, that make the difference. It is the people who make

history. . .and the fact that the individual counts for something. During the 20th Century, we have been a part of a period in history that produced the automobile, the airplane, the telephone, the personal computer, the microchip, and yes, two world wars. There has been much that has been accomplished for good. . .and regretfully there have been moments of misery, chaos, self-destruction and fear. Nevertheless, as one can see the tiny tree that demands to grow through a crack in the barren mountainside, people have chosen life and will continue to pursue life. For Christians, the marking of time is A. D. (Anno Domini) 2000. For modern Jews and many others, the calendar is most commonly referred to

as C.E. or Common Era. Together, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and others stand on the threshold by whatever name it is called. Each previous time period has imprinted an indelible mark on humankind. From the ignominy of slavery to the horror of the Shoah. . .from the horse drawn carriage to the supersonic airplane and the quest for other life in space. What is in the future for us? Does our existence mean something? We think it does! We are the "New Adam" . . . We are the "New Eve". . .it is up to us to be responsible for all of creation. . .it is up to us to repair the world. Each of us has our job to do. Pope John Paul II calls on us to build a civilization of love, based on respect for the dignity of the

The Mobile Dialogue

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human person. the individual who continues to choose life in spite of the uncertain future. The Pope's message through the document, "*We Remember*". . . is an important one, albeit disappointing, and hopefully will serve as a beginning to a new era in Christian-Jewish Relations. We must learn to live together in peace and "bristerhood" if we are to sustain this universe and dutifully fulfill our mandate to *Tikkun Olam*.

Part of a story told by Leonard Crow Dog in "American Myths and Legends" states: "The Creating Power said to them: "The first world I made was bad, the creatures on it were bad. So I burned it up. The second world I made was bad too, so I drowned it. This is the third world I have made. Look: I have created a rainbow for you as a sign that there will be no more Great Flood. Whenever you see a rainbow, you will know that it has stopped raining." The Creating Power continued:

Now if you have learned how to behave like human beings and how to live in peace with each other and with other living things—the two-legged, the four legged, the man-legged, the fliers, the no-legs, the green plants of this universe—then all will be well. But if you make this world bad and ugly, then I will destroy this world too. It's up to you." . . . "Someday there might be a fourth world," the Creating Power thought. Then he rested."

During the month of April, Christians around the world will celebrate Easter. The Resurrection event is the hallmark of Christian faith assuring the continuation of life over death. Jews, likewise will celebrate Pesach (Passover) marking the march into the desert after four hundred years of slavery, responding to that mysterious call to freedom, that moves us to abandon the comforts of the familiar and take a chance on the beckoning horizons of the unknown. We choose life! Despite the promise of

doomsday predictions, let us begin the new millenium with the will and strength and faith to do our part to make the world a better place.

1. "New Adam" Rev. Philip Culbertson

On The Sunny Side

Things My Kids Taught Me

It's more fun to color outside the lines.
Ask why until you understand.
Hang on tight.
It doesn't matter who started it.
Make up the rules as you go along.
Ask for sprinkles.
If the horse you're drawing looks more like a dog, make it a dog.
Save a place in line for your friends.
Sometimes you have to take the test before you've finished studying.
If you want a kitten, start out by asking for a horse.
Making your bed is a waste of time.
You can't ask to start over just because your losing the game.