

George Mason addresses Christian-Jewish Dialogue in Mobile

By Jerry Darring

MOBILE—Good fences make good neighbors. Or do they? This was the question asked in the final lecture of the twenty-ninth year of the Mobile Christian-Jewish Dialogue presented by Rev. George Mason, pastor of Wilshire Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, and formerly pastor at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Mobile.

Mason based his talk on the Robert Frost poem "Mending Wall," which is traditionally understood to mean that there is no good reason for the wall, that Frost wants us to cast off the inherited attitude toward the wall—good fences make good neighbors—so that we can stop mending walls and start mending ourselves. But if we reflect on the title, we are lead to consider a second view of the poem, according to which the wall is useful, for if we did not have the wall to mend, if we did not have to work at it from our own sides, for our own vantage points, if we did not have to deal with the sayings of our fathers, we might not meet or spend time together at all.

Applying this to Christian-Jewish dialogue, Mason acknowledged that Christians might say that Paul broke down the wall separating Jews and gentiles, and some Christians might even say that we are now one people and might respond, saying that good fences make good neighbors and pointing out the many difficulties Jews experience where the dominant culture is Christian.

"The advantage of the dialogue," said Mason, "is that it gives us the opportunity to acknowledge the wall together and to wonder together why we need it. The dialogue may be providing us with an opportunity to mend ourselves.



DIALOGUE—George Mason, speaker at the last Christian-Jewish Dialogue for the year, greets Colleen Chinn, an English and theology major at Spring Hill College, who attended the lecture.

Mason called attention to three walls which are worth considering. The first is the wall that we have built in this country separating church and state. This wall has succeeded in enabling both church and state to prosper, and while the debate about the meaning of the separation of church and state continues, the wall has provided a place where the conversation can take place.

The second wall is the one that is being built in Israel now, separating Israelis from Palestinians. This wall, in Mason's opinion, is not a step toward peace but rather a provocative step that is at best sideways in the sense that it might enable the people in that troubled area to develop some neighborliness and to realize that history can never be healed by killing off your enemies.

The third wall addressed by Mason is that which has been built up by the movie "The Passion of The Christ." Mason told

of his viewing of the film together with a rabbi friend. Mason worried the whole time about how the rabbi was reacting to the one-dimensional treatment of Jews in the film. The rabbi, meanwhile, found himself thinking about how painful it must have been for his friend to sit there watching his Lord and Savior suffer. They left the movie and had an intense two-hour discussion, a meeting at the wall that separated them, a meeting that would not have taken place if the wall had not been placed there by the movie, imperfect as it is.

Mason concluded by pointing out that Christian-Jewish dialogue can lead Jews to understand that Christians should not have to censor their faith in the public square so as not to offend others, and it can lead Christians to understand the hidden prejudices in the way they tell the Gospel story that can be hurtful to people whom they say they love.