

First Christian-Jewish Dialogue Lecture for 2006-2007 looks at Anti-Semitism

By Perilla A. Wilson

MOBILE—The Christian-Jewish Dialogue, in its 31st year of continuous meetings, was turned over to Spring Hill College's Dr. George Gilmore by Mary and Paul Filben, its founders, officially at the first lecture for the current year. Dr. Donald Berry, state education chairman for the Alabama Holocaust Commission, presented a paper on "The New and the Old in Current Anti-Semitism," at Byrne Memorial Hall on the Spring Hill campus last week. Berry spent three and a half weeks in Israel this past summer on a grant with other educators from around the world at a seminar at Yad Vashem.

Berry opened by quoting from a letter by a James Floyd of Cullman, Alabama, to (former) Governor Don Siegleman accusing him and "Commissioner Paul Filben" of being Israel's "willing executioners" of Palestinians. The rhetoric was as vitriolic as it comes and exemplifies the current type of anti-Semitism that Berry feels "links hate groups in the Middle East with bigots of every description in the western world." He went on to enumerate some of these cultural origins

as "white pride", Christian evangelism, and Islamic anti-Zionism.

He pointed out that anti-Semitism has been around as long as Christianity has and has seen a resurgence everywhere particularly with the breakdown of Middle East peace talks in 2000. Berry elaborated on four of the most predominant claims "regarding the danger of Jewish influence." First, he cited the "association of Jewish persons with the devil and the occult." This claim is the most persistent and Jews are blamed for everything that went wrong in the world. Secondly, are pseudo-scientific racial theories that Jews are a sinister race. Related to the second, is the notion that all Jews are "wickedly intelligent" and this makes them "geniuses of perverted deeds." Next, they are seen as "masters of modernity" and all the evils of industrialization are blamed on the Jews. Finally, politics enters the picture with the Jews being blamed both for "rampant capitalism and for radical socialism at the same time."

Berry also characterized anti-Semitism by four types: 1. Ancient anti-Semitism directed against the Jews as a distinct cultural group; 2. Religious anti-Semitism arising from the ascendancy of Christianity; 3. Racial anti-Semitism resulting from racial theories of superiority; 4. anti-Zionism or counter-cultural anti-Semitism which is the "new"



Christian-Jewish Dialogue began its 32nd season under the auspices of Spring Hill College with a lecture by Dr. Donald Berry, right, state education chairman of the Alabama Holocaust Commission. Seen here with him are Dr. George Gilmore, Spring Hill College; Frances Mutchnick, Springhill Avenue Temple; Mary and Paul Filben, Holy Family Founders of the Dialogue; and Nadine Mendelsohn-Ziskind, Ahavas Chesed Synagogue.

anti-Semitism, as much anti-Israel as anti-Jewish.

Describing historical anti-Semitism comes fairly easy when observing the prejudices underlying it. Looking at current anti-Semitism, one sees after 9-11 that Islamic extremists resurrected old prejudices and Zionism was compared to Nazism, Jews were said to be running the government of the U.S., Jews were blamed for Jesus' death, and there were calls

Israel as the lightning rod. There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world but Arabs have undue influence over Islam," he says, and attributes funding of mosques around the world and the spread of the faith to Saudis.

It is no longer acceptable in most progressive countries to deny the Holocaust but this European acceptance and the end of church silence have spurred extremists to "renew ancient

for abolishing the state of Israel. According to Berry, anti-Semitism in the U.S. showed growth in 2002 for the first time in a decade and in an Anti-Defamation League (ADL) survey, Europeans indicated that 21% were "most anti-Semitic." Traits of the new anti-Semitism include denial of the Holocaust as an invention of the Jews to cover any responsibility for Palestinian persecution, and "complete delegitimation of Jewish religion and consequently the state." Others include the contention that Jews are succeeding in their aim to control the world; Arabs, Moslems and white supremacists (or Christians) need to unite against Zionism; to oppose the U.S. is to oppose Israel; and, in the "new age," Israel will no longer exist.

Leading to an increase in cooperation between the extreme right and Palestinian extremists since the end of the cold war have been such things as: internet availability; a view of the new world order that includes the threat to the radical right of Jewish control of western governments, the military strength of the U.S. and international economic collaboration; and a shared "eschatology" calling for the elimination of the new world order.

According to Berry, "new anti-Semitism is largely generated in the Middle East with the state of

rhetoric." However, Berry urged non-Jewish friends who love the state of Israel but remain silent out of deference, to go ahead and criticize Israel. "Everyone does it ... especially Israelis," he says. "Israel's existence must be predicated on the same basis as any other contemporary state. Israel should be allowed the same defence as any other state. And Israel should be held to the same moral standards as any other state."

Ignorance leads even the best-intentioned people to fall prey to the message of extremists and "malevolent bigots". This brief summary of Berry's paper on new and old anti-Semitism cannot hope to do justice to the broad topic that he covered so well. Suffice it to say, that the caveat he issued in the conclusion would serve us all well ... "Confessing Christians and Jews and Muslims must displace (this ignorance) with understanding in order to effect a positive change in our world."

Surely, reasonable, peace-loving Christians, Jews, and Muslims (in spite of unjust attributions accorded the followers of the true tenets of Islam in this country since 9-11) far outnumber the radical extremists who would strive for a new "Holocaust" ... but those of us who count ourselves among the former must not allow the latter to prevail.