

ENCOUNTER OF THE DIALOGUE KIND

By Margie Olster

MIAMI, Sept. 13 (JTA) Though the skies outside were stormy, the air inside an auditorium at the Miami Center for the Fine Arts had cleared after Pope John Paul II's meeting with 196 Jewish leaders here Friday morning. Anger over the Pope's audience with Kurt Waldheim faded into warm words of praise for the Pope's address as Jewish leaders assessed the meaning of his words.

Both Catholic and Jewish representatives welcomed the unprecedented meeting with a Jewish delegation on American soil, calling it a highly significant statement of Vatican ideology on key issues of Jewish concern.

The spokesman for the Jewish delegation which met Pope John Paul II here Friday morning challenged the Catholic Church to put a halt to revisionism of the Holocaust and called on the Pontiff to recognize the historical role Christian teachings have played in perpetuating the anti-Semitism in Europe which culminated in the Holocaust.

"While your sensitive concerns and noteworthy pronouncements about the Shoah have been heartening, we have observed recent tendencies to obscure the fact that Jews were the major target of Nazi genocidal policies," said Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, chairman of the International Jewish Committee on Interfaith Consultations (IJCIC), and the speaker chosen to represent the 196-person Jewish delegation which met with the Pope at the Miami Center for the Fine Arts.

A Controversial Statement

The Pope spoke of the unique Jewish experience in the Holocaust and proclaimed the legitimate rights of both Jews and Palestinians to a homeland. He reaffirmed the Church's condemnation of anti-Semitism.

In a somewhat controversial statement, the Pope said, "I am convinced that history will reveal ever more clearly and convincingly how deeply Pius XII (who served as Pope during the Holocaust) felt the tragedy of the Jewish people, and how hard and effectively he worked to assist them during the Second World War." Jewish groups have criticized Pius XII for his silence on Nazi persecutions of the Jewish people during the Holocaust.

Waxman told the Pope, "We hope that your strong condemnations of anti-Semitism will continue to be implemented in the schools, the parishes, teaching materials and the liturgy, and reflected in the attitudes and behavior of Catholics throughout the world."

Waxman added, "Greater attention needs to be paid to the Christian roots of anti-Semitism. The 'teaching of contempt' for the Jews and Judaism must be ended once and for all . . . the Shoah was the culmination of centuries of anti-Semitism in European culture for which Christian teachings bear a heavy responsibility."

Waxman said that Jews remain concerned with persistent anti-Semitism and the "Church's repudiation of anti-Semitism is of critical importance in the struggle to eradicate this virulent

plague from the entire human family." Waxman participated in the delegation of nine which met with the Pope September 1 at his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo outside Rome. In his speech Friday, Waxman said the differences expressed at that meeting remain to be resolved. He addressed two of the major points of dissension between Jews and the Vatican, the Pope's June audience with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, and absence of formal Vatican recognition of the State of Israel.

Calling the meeting at Castel Gandolfo "highly significant," Waxman said, "You and high Church leaders listened to the deeply felt concerns of the Jewish community that were raised following last June's state visit to the Vatican by Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, who has never expressed regrets for his Nazi past."

Waxman urged the Vatican to establish full and diplomatic relations with Israel quickly. "We must express our concern at the absence of full diplomatic relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel," he said.

Waxman also cited the positive progress in Catholic-Jewish relations in the past two decades, saying, "A meeting such as this is part of the healing process that is now visibly under way between our two communities." He added, "One of the major achievements of our joint encounters is the shared recognition that each community must be understood in its own terms, as it understands itself."

'Catastrophic Event Of The Shoah'

The Pope provided a response to critics who charged that the Church has made statements universalizing the Holocaust. "Considering history in the light of the principles of faith in God, we must also reflect on the catastrophic event of the Shoah, that ruthless and inhuman attempt to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe, an attempt that resulted in millions of victims -- including women and children, the elderly and the sick -- exterminated only because they were Jews," he said.

Following the exchange, several Jewish representatives from the delegation said this statement was the first affirmation by the Pope that the Shoah was specifically a Jewish plight.

The Jewish delegation greeted the Pope with lukewarm applause as he entered the small but packed auditorium. During Waxman's address, the Pope, dressed all in white, appeared pensive and serious. The Pope and Waxman shared the stage, sitting side by side behind the lectern from which they addressed the delegation.

Security was tight throughout the Pope's stay in Miami, and a smattering of U.S. Secret Service dotted the auditorium during the exchange.

The delegation interrupted the Pope's speech with applause only once after he advocated continuing education on the Holocaust. "Similarly, it is to be hoped that common educational programs on our historical and religious relations, which are well developed in your country, will truly promote mutual respect and teach future generations about the Holocaust so that never again will such a horror be possible," he said. The Pope

then invoked the traditional Jewish cry of "Never Again," which was met with resounding applause.

The Pope then addressed another issue high on the Jewish agenda, the State of Israel.

"After the tragic extermination of the Shoah, the Jewish people began a new period in their history. They have a right to a homeland, as does any civil nation, according to international law," the Pope said. But he immediately followed by saying the Palestinians also have the same right to a homeland.

Notably absent from the Pope's speech was any reference to the Waldheim audience which had so offended the Jewish community. However, press reports Friday recounted the Pope's first public remarks on the Waldheim audience, made to reporters on the flight to the United States.

The reports said the Pope had responded "No" to the question of whether the Waldheim audience may have been a mistake. The reports then quoted the Pope as saying, "It was necessary. It's necessary to show the same appreciation, the same esteem, for every people. He came as a president, democratically elected, of a people, of a nation."

Thursday night at a dinner given by the local Jewish community to their national colleagues attending the meeting with the Pope, a high-ranking Vatican official who spoke alluded to the Waldheim audience as a "faux pas."

Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, President of the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, said to the some 300 Jews and Catholics at the dinner, "Let me hope that with help from above we will achieve what the Church has asked us to do and that we can do this the right way so there becomes a new perspective for the Jewish people . . . We should forgive each other when there are missed occasions or even faux pas on the road."

A Historical Perspective

Both Jews and Catholics who attempted to assess the meaning of Friday's meeting and the events surrounding it stressed that the process must be viewed in its proper historical perspective. For example, Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, noted that although the Pope's statement on Israel fell short of the full diplomatic recognition desired by the Jewish community, ten years ago when the Pope granted an audience to a Jewish delegation, the Vatican struck all references to Israel from their statement.

Two events in recent Vatican history catalyzed the unprecedented exchanges between the Pope and the Jewish community both Friday in Miami and two weeks earlier in Rome. One of those events was hailed by world Jewry, the other, abhorred.

Twenty-two years ago, the Vatican reversed its attitude of contempt for Jews, propagated for nearly 20 centuries, in a declaration known as Nostra Aetate (Latin for "In our times," the opening words of the document). In Nostra Aetate, the Catholic Church described Christianity as a branch of the tree rooted in Judaism. Jews welcomed the new era in interfaith relations. Three months ago, Pope John Paul II granted an audience to President Kurt Waldheim and praised him as a man of peace. The Pope's silence on the Holocaust during this meeting in face of documented evidence of Waldheim's membership in a Nazi army unit met with abhorrence among Jews. The two events stand at the two extremes of the

continuum that is modern Catholic-Jewish relations. Many agree that the events illustrate the complex and often confusing signals the Vatican sends out to Jews and obscures the significance of the two recent exchanges between the Pope and Jews and the larger significance of the Catholic-Jewish dialogue.

Cites 22 Years Of Progress

In his speech to the Pope, Waxman cited the progress made since Nostra Aetate was declared 22 years ago. "It is clear that the teachings proclaimed in Nostra Aetate are becoming major concerns of the Catholic Church, and under your leadership are being implemented in the teachings of the Church and in the life of Catholics everywhere . . . The last quarter century has irreversibly changed the way we perceive and act towards each other."

But the process of reconciliation is far from complete, Waxman said. "We still have some way to go because Catholic-Jewish relations are often filled with ambivalence, ambiguities and a painful history which must be confronted."

The Pope in his address to the Jewish leaders also noted the progress since Vatican Council II. "It is also desirable that in every diocese Catholics should implement, under the direction of the Bishops, the statement of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent instructions issued by the Holy See regarding the correct way to preach and teach about Jews and Judaism. I know that a great many efforts in this direction have already been made by Catholics, and I wish to express my gratitude to all those who have worked so diligently for this aim."

Both Jewish and Catholic figures who participated in the Miami meeting stress the significance of Vatican II and Nostra Aetate as the backdrop on which all current Catholic-Jewish dialogues are based, a backdrop of mutual recognition and legitimacy.

The declaration legitimized an interfaith dialogue and touched off a major revision of Catholic textbooks, liturgy and sermons which resulted in the deletion of many of the most contemptuous portrayals of Jews as bearing collective responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus.

Rabbi Solomon Schiff, director of chaplaincy for the Greater Miami Jewish Federation and also a member of the Jewish delegation which met with the Pope in Miami, said, "Vatican II recognized that Jews cannot be held accountable for the crucifixion." One significant revision of the liturgy was removing the term "perfidious Jews" from the traditional Catholic-Easter service commemorating the resurrection of Jesus. "It may seem like a small thing, but it's a step," Schiff said.

"Historically, the liturgy speaks of Jews in derogatory terms and this led to pogroms, persecutions and ultimately, the Holocaust . . . You can't undo 2,000 years of a very unhappy relationship in 20 years. The only thing you could hope for is to turn the tide around," he said. On the darker side of the nascent Catholic-Jewish dialogue lies incidents like the Waldheim audience, Schiff said. "The Waldheim meeting gives credence to many revisionists who preach that the Holocaust never happened. When the Pope meets with Waldheim, it could give the signal that there's nothing wrong with recognizing former Nazis, and it casts doubt on Waldheim's guilt. "The revisionists are looking for straws to build their straw

house, and the Waldheim meeting was a straw," Schiff said. But the Pope's failure to condemn Waldheim or Nazi war crimes and the added pain for Jews upon hearing the Pope praise Waldheim as a man of peace does not stand out as aberrant in the Vatican's various interpretations of the Holocaust's meaning. Schiff noted that the Catholic Church's beatification of Edith Stein, a Jew who converted to Catholicism and later died in Auschwitz, represents "confusion and distortion of the Holocaust." Stein was murdered because she was a Jew, Schiff said. But she was made into a martyr for Catholics.

Mark Freedman, American Jewish Congress executive director of the Southeast region, said the greatest progress in Catholic-Jewish relations since Vatican II has been the document's impact on church institutions. "Change has been visible," he said. One area of great progress has been in the Catholic-Jewish dialogue which Freedman called "productive and fruitful."

On the other side, the pre-Vatican II theology and literature depicting Jews negatively still exists," he said. "There is still a great deal to be done in education relating to that doctrine. We can still see instances of quoting the gospels," but a great deal of the texts, liturgies and sermons have been revised, he said.

Four Significant Areas Of Progress

Arthur Teitelbaum, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Southern area director, said the recent exchanges between the Vatican and Jewish leaders have produced four significant areas of progress:

*The Vatican has indicated a willingness to raise the meetings with the Jewish community to a level of greater importance by assuring the participation of its Secretary of State.

*The Pope has stated no theological reason exists as an obstacle to normalizing relations with Israel. The Church has cited two major political obstacles to formal diplomatic relations with Israel: a resolution to the Palestinian question and concern over the security of Christian communities in Middle East countries. But political obstacles are easier to overcome than theological ones.

*The promise of a Papal encyclical within 12 to 24 months stating the Church's position on contemporary anti-Semitism, the Church's role in anti-Semitism and its relation to the Holocaust.

*The Vatican has agreed that in the future the exchanges with Jewish groups will be regular and not only when a crisis arises.

"We understand that the Church moves in incremental ways," Teitelbaum said. "We expect evolutionary, not revolutionary change."

THE MIAMI MEETING AS A MEDIA EVENT

By Lisa Palmieri-Billig (Rome)
and Hugh Orgel (Tel Aviv)

Sept. 13 (JTA) -- In Israel, the center of Judaism, and in Rome, the seat of the Catholic Church, reaction to Pope John Paul II's exchange with American Jewish officials in Miami Friday morning was confined largely to the media.

There was no official comment in Jerusalem where the consensus seems to be that the Miami encounter was yet another event in the continuing Jewish-Catholic dialogue, which in itself produced no changes, particularly with respect to the issue of Vatican recognition of the Jewish State. According to Dr. Yitzhak Minervi, one of Israel's foremost authorities on Israel-Vatican

relations, there was no breakthrough. In an interview published in Haaretz Sunday, Minervi suggested that the Pope's meeting with the Jewish delegation at the very start of his American tour was aimed at improving the Vatican's image in American eyes, since it was tarnished after his meeting last June with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim.

In Rome, there was a notable contrast between the general press and the official Vatican newspaper, *Osservatore Romano*, handling of the Pope's meeting with the Jewish leaders. The latter devoted an entire page to the event, with liberal quotes from the speech by Rabbi Mordecai Waxman who was selected to speak for the American Jewish community.

The general press carried such headlines as "Hard Confrontation," "Harsh Dialogue," and "Polemics Between the Pope and Jews in the U.S." Some correspondents saw the Pope's reference to the rights of the Palestinian people to a homeland as an expression of the real "pre-condition" for Vatican recognition of Israel.

A headline in *Osservatore Romano* read, "By Meditating On The Terrible Suffering of the Shoah, the Church Increasingly Recognizes its Ties With Jews." The paper explained that the American Jewish community is the largest in the world and the Catholic-Jewish dialogue, especially since Vatican Council II, "has become intense and fruitful."

According to the Vatican organ, "It is a dialogue of faith whose aims are the search for greater fidelity to the respective paths of believers in a common commitment of witness to the holy name of God and a mission of peace for mankind. On a local level, the cooperation in religious and educational fields is very fruitful, for example, prayer texts are produced together, without however creating erroneous confusions."

Two excerpts of the Pope's speech were set off in boxes: "The differences in faith must not become motives for discord but rather open the path for reconciliation" and "History will reveal even more intensely how Pius XII worked in favor of the Jewish people during the second World War." Most of Rabbi Waxman's speech was published in Italian translation.

Dr. Minervi, author of the standard work, "The Vatican, The Holy Land and Zionism", observed in his interview that "The Pope repeated what he had said before. For instance, what he had to say Friday about the Palestinians, he said at his Otranto address in 1980, but he added at that time that the Palestinians lost their homeland because of the establishment of Israel," Minervi noted. "He has also mentioned Jewish rights to a homeland several times in the past, such as in his papal letter on Jerusalem in 1984, when he also said that the Palestinians should also be granted their rights."

According to Minervi, there are no theological reasons why the Vatican should not recognize Israel. Non-recognition now is the result of world and regional politics, not religious questions, he said. The Jerusalem Post said in an editorial Sunday that the significance of the Miami meeting was limited. "It was an event which broke no new ground, but by its very occurrence signalled a pragmatic interest in quiet co-existence," the paper said. The Post added, "It is well, therefore, for Israel and the Jewish people, too, to reduce expectations. So the Vatican is not yet ready to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. So what?..."

A LESSON IN ECUMENISM

By Rochelle Saidel

NEW YORK, Sept. 13 (JTA) -- Jewish leaders talking with Pope John Paul II in Rome and Miami about issues of Catholic-Jewish relations, including the Pope's June meeting with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim, might consider as a model the climate of Catholic-Jewish understanding that has emerged in Brazil, the world's most populous Catholic country.

Waldheim has been accused of Nazi war crimes and placed on a U.S. Justice Department "Watch List" which bars his entrance into this country.

In Brazil, with some 117 million Catholics and about 150,000 Jews, Rabbi Henry Sobel coordinates the National Commission for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue, which is sponsored by the National Bishops' Conference of Brazil (CNBB) and composed of five Jewish and five Catholic leaders.

Sobel is the rabbi of Congregacao Israelita Paulista in Sao Paulo, a Liberal synagogue (affiliated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism) which has a membership of 2,000 families and is the largest in Latin America.

Asked to comment on the Rome and Miami meetings, Sobel told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a telephone interview: "Whatever I say, I can only say from the perspective of interfaith relations in Brazil. Catholic-Jewish dialogue is thriving in our country. Our 'Guidebook for Catholic-Jewish Dialogue in Brazil,' published last year by the CNBB, recognizes the "right of the Jews to a peaceful political existence in their land of origin, a right which fulfills itself in the State of Israel."

The guide, which was distributed in December 1986 to Brazil's 229 Catholic archdioceses and dioceses, covers such subjects as Israeli, Jewish history, the Holocaust, roots of anti-Semitism, Judaism in Brazil, and interfaith cooperation.

The introduction to the guide says its objective is "helping Catholics in Brazil to better understand the historical, religious and national aspirations of the Jewish people." Sobel said, "The National Bishops' Conference of Brazil is definitely one step ahead of the Vatican." In April 1987 Sobel accompanied the president of the CNBB on an official trip to Israel.

A Case Of One Blunder

Asked about the Pope's meeting with Waldheim, Sobel said: "The Pope, no matter how important he may be in the Catholic hierarchy, is only a human being. And human beings make mistakes. It was wrong for the Pope to receive Mr. Waldheim; many Catholics in Brazil with whom I have a close personal and working relationship share this opinion. But the ecumenical cause is greater than any one individual, and we cannot let one blunder set back 22 years of progress."

The 22 years refers to the publication in 1965 of "Nostra Aetate," which was a major step forward in Catholic-Jewish understanding. In November 1985, to mark the 20th anniversary of this document, the first Pan-American Conference on Catholic-Jewish relations was held in Sao Paulo, under the sponsorship of the CNBB.

Seven resolutions were adopted, including one that stated "Zionism is not racism," to mark the 10th anniversary of the United Nations General Assembly's adoption of the infamous Zionism equals racism resolution.

Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, Cardinal Archbishop of Sao Paulo, the world's largest archdiocese, told the JTA: "We, Catholics and Jews in Brazil, join our brothers and sisters in the United States and all people of good will in the hope that the Miami meeting on September 11 will be successful and will bear worldwide fruits, with the blessings of God. Catholics and Jews are united more than ever before here in Brazil, and we hope the same will be true elsewhere. I pray for peace in the world and for the efforts of all people who strive for an understanding between peoples."

Sobel said: "We in Brazil are determined to move on as enthusiastically as ever, and we hope and trust that other countries will follow suit, so that the echo of our labors can be heard loud and clear in the Vatican. I am convinced that the more opportunities we have to talk with each other, to share our satisfactions and give vent to our frustrations, the more we will consolidate our rapprochement. All of us committed to interfaith dialogue and action in Brazil have a stake in the success of the Pope's meetings with Jewish leaders. Let us not look back. Let us look ahead."

SOVIETS WILL ALLOW 5 MORE LONG-TERM REFUSENIKS TO LEAVE

NEW YORK, Sept. 13 (JTA) -- Five more long-term Jewish refuseniks and their families have received permission to emigrate from the Soviet Union and will soon go to Israel, the Long Island Committee for Soviet Jewry (LICJS) reported Friday.

The five -- Lev Elbert of Kiev; Lev Furman, Yosef Radomyslsky and Abba Taratuta, all of Leningrad; and Anna Lichterova of Moscow -- were all first refused permission to emigrate more than 10 years ago.

Their permission follows the announcement last week that four other long-term refuseniks including Iosif Begun and Viktor Brailovsky also would be allowed to emigrate. In addition, it was reported last week that Australian Soviet Jewry activist Isi Leibler had accepted an official invitation to spend Rosh Hashanah in Moscow as a guest of the Jewish community center there.

He is believed to be the first non-rabbi involved in international Jewish affairs to receive a formal invitation from the USSR in the Gorbachev era.

More than 300 Jews who became refuseniks at least 10 years ago remain in the USSR, according to Lynn Singer, LICJS executive director. She considered the latest releases as a bid "to get rid of the stars, to take the pressure off" before Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze's upcoming talks with U.S. leaders.

Sen. Lawton Chiles (D. Fla.), who worked for the release of the Taratutas, felt the same way. He told the JTA Friday that "part of this is pre-summit, and there's still another half million people there who want to get out."

Chiles spoke with the Taratutas by phone last May 3 from a Florida synagogue and said he then induced the entire Florida Congressional delegation to write to Soviet leaders on behalf of the Taratutas and initiated phone calls to Soviet officials. He said he didn't know if his efforts helped the Taratutas, and noted he would try to help other families seeking to emigrate.

He said the U.S. must continue to place human rights issues at the top of the agenda with the Soviets.