

JEWISH GROUPS OUTRAGED OVER CHRISTIAN 'WARNINGS' ON JESUS FILM

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, July 21 (JTA) -- Protests by fundamentalist Christian groups over a controversial film biography of Jesus have taken on "anti-Semitic implications," according to condemnatory statements released this week by national Jewish groups and the Roman Catholic archbishop of Los Angeles.

The statements refer to protests voiced by former Moral Majority leader Rev. Jerry Falwell and other fundamentalist Christians about "The Last Temptation of Christ," a Universal Pictures film directed by Martin Scorsese and based on a novel by the late Greek writer Nikos Kazantzakis.

Falwell and others have warned that the release of the film, scheduled for September, could lead to what he called "a wave of anti-Semitism in this country" because top executives of MCA, the entertainment conglomerate that owns Universal, are Jewish.

One group, the Baptist Tabernacle of Los Angeles, has staged two protests in the past week against MCA Chairman Lew Wasserman, carrying signs reading "Wasserman fans Christ-killer image" and "Wasserman Endangers Israel," and chanting "Paid for with Jewish money."

At a demonstration Saturday outside of Universal's offices, a plane overhead trailed a banner reading "Wasserman fans Jew-hatred w/ 'Temptation.'"

At Tuesday's protest outside Wasserman's Beverly Hills home, one man portrayed a bloodied Jesus while another played a whip-carrying Wasserman stepping on his back.

According to a statement by the Rev. R.L. Hymers Jr., leader of the tabernacle, "The person lashing Christ is the way that extremists will see members of the Jewish community who either support or finance the film."

Threats, Not Warnings

But Jewish groups are taking Falwell and Hymers' statements less as warnings than as threats.

"Rev. Falwell's irresponsible comments run the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy and threatening the nation's religious pluralism," according to a statement by Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

Falwell's constituents "would be far better served if he warned them against anti-Jewish prejudice rather than forecasting a wave of anti-Semitism," Foxman added.

Leaders of the American Jewish Congress acknowledged in their statement that the film might offend some Christian believers, but said the constitutional right both to make and to protest the film "does not create license to engage in bigotry and use it as an opportunity for anti-Semitism."

Falwell and Hymers "know very well that Universal Studios is a publicly held corporation, that its executives who happen to be Jewish are not 'Jewish leaders' but business men, that the film is based on a novel written by a Christian" and is directed by a Christian, said AJCongress

President Robert Lipton and executive director Henry Siegan.

They added that a statement by Falwell saying he personally would not blame "Jewish leaders" was unconvincing.

In a telephone interview Wednesday, Ira Silverman, executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee, said that "to raise the issue of anti-Semitism in what might otherwise be a legitimate religious question over the merits of the film is a malicious act, or at best a mindless one."

According to a spokesman for Universal, a screening of the film for New York-area Jewish leaders is being scheduled for mid-August.

Los Angeles Archbishop Roger Mahony said in his statement, released Monday, that he "strongly oppose(s) the anti-Semitic implication that a few voices have raised in this matter, and I am hopeful that our excellent Jewish-Christian relationship will help diminish any suggestion that this film was produced to be 'anti-Christian.'"

Mahony offered high praise of Wasserman, with whom he worked when Wasserman helped plan for Pope John Paul II's visit to Los Angeles last year.

Mahony said he was confident that Wasserman "would not allow any film to be released through his studios which was offensive to a large segment of the film-going public."

Mahony indicated, nonetheless, that the film is likely to be labeled "morally offensive" by the United States Catholic Conference.

Scorsese Studied For Priesthood

Filmmaker Scorsese attended Catholic schools while growing up in New York and studied for the priesthood for a year while a teenager.

A Universal statement released July 12 said that he "deeply believes that this film is a religious affirmation of faith."

The Catholic response to the film has been muted compared to the reactions of fundamentalist leaders, like the Rev. Donald Wildmon of Tupelo, Miss., who has threatened a boycott of Universal and all MCA subsidiaries should the film be shown.

Other critics include Morality in Media, a Jesuit group; the Eternal World Television Network; and the Campus Crusade for Christ, which offered to reimburse Universal for the film's \$10 million production costs, for the right to destroy all copies.

Universal declined the offer in full-page ads in four major newspapers Wednesday.

"The Twentieth Century has provided us with further evidence of the abuses which occur when monolithic authorities regulate artistic expression and religious belief," said an open letter addressed to Campus Crusade President Bill Bright, who was invited to, but did not attend, a July 12 screening of the film for religious groups.

"In the United States, no one sect or coalition has the power to set boundaries around each person's freedom to explore religious and philosophical questions whether through speech, books or film.

"These freedoms protect us.

"They are precious.

"They are not for sale."

RIOTING IN NABLUS, EAST JERUSALEM LEAVES TWO DEAD, 16 WOUNDED

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- At least two Palestinians were killed and 16 wounded in clashes with Israeli security forces in Nablus Thursday.

Rioting also erupted in East Jerusalem for the third successive day. One policeman was injured and extensive damage was done to Jewish and Arab property.

The outburst in Nablus, the largest Arab town in the West Bank, was triggered by a violent demonstration in the casbah marketplace.

Israel Defense Force soldiers opened fire to disperse the crowd, killing two. The dead were identified as Maher Abu Ghazaleh, 23, and Hussan Abdel Aziz, 18.

Late news reports indicated a third Palestinian was killed in Tulkarm, but the person has not yet been identified.

The disturbances in East Jerusalem and environs began Tuesday night and continued into Thursday. Scores of Arab youths rampaged through the streets, overturning garbage cans.

Roadblocks were set up on Saladin Street, East Jerusalem's main commercial artery, as rioting spread to the Jerusalem suburbs of Silwan, Wadi Joz and Jabel Mukaber.

Rioters smashed windows in the Jewish neighborhood of East Talpoyot that abuts Jabel Mukaber. They also ranged through the streets behind the Rockefeller Museum, which is in East Jerusalem across the way from the Old City.

Many Arab and Jewish buses and cars were damaged.

The eruptions in East Jerusalem began Tuesday following the funeral of 16-year-old Nidal Rabaddi, a Christian Arab who lived in the Old City's Christian Quarter and attended Freres College there.

He was found shot to death earlier Tuesday in Beit Hanina, a neighborhood in northern Jerusalem, where he had gone to study with friends for final examinations.

There were no clues and neither the IDF nor the police were involved in shooting incidents in Beit Hanina. There was no evidence to implicate Israeli civilians.

Coincidental with the youth's death was the end of the school term, which helped contribute to the rioting.

CEASE-FIRE IN IRAN-IRAQ WAR LEAVES ISRAELIS APPREHENSIVE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- Israeli diplomats and other analysts here and abroad have been taken by surprise by the sudden cease-fire in the 8-year-old Iran-Iraq war.

The dramatic announcement from Teheran Tuesday that it had accepted U.N. Security Council Resolution 598 calling for the cease-fire has provoked profound anxieties in Israel.

After years of not-very-subtle, nudge-and-wink suggestions by senior policymakers and others here that continuation of the conflict in the Persian Gulf was essentially to Israel's advantage, Israelis are confronted by the prospect of peace between two battle-weary but battle-hardened regional powers, both fiercely hostile to the Jewish state.

Government officials did little to allay the newborn fears. Admitting they had not anticipated

the new developments, Cabinet ministers mullied over the strength of the Iraqi army emerging triumphant from the crucible of war.

Premier Yitzhak Shamir spoke of "a new era," and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres ruminated about "two previously preoccupied powers now with time on their hands," which, he seemed to intimate, could only lead to mischief.

Israeli and other diplomats at the United Nations in New York said the end of the Gulf war will shift regional tensions back to the Arab-Israel conflict. Within a few years, the analysts said, Iraq may pose a major threat to Israel.

Iraq has been officially in a state of war with Israel since 1948, and now possesses more than half-a-million well-trained, combat-experienced soldiers.

In addition, Iraq used chemical warfare against Iran, which poses a new threat to Israel.

Moslem Fundamentalism

Iran, meanwhile, will be able to devote more resources to Moslem fundamentalism in the region once its war with Iraq ends.

In Jerusalem Thursday, Zeev Schiff, the respected defense commentator of Haaretz, accused the government of "wasting the eight good years" when Iran and Iraq were locked in mortal combat, and "paralysis of strategic thinking."

Schiff was implying that Israel should have used the room the Gulf war afforded it to maneuver for more energetic efforts to reach peace terms with Jordan and the Palestinians.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin, more than any other commentator, put the events in perspective without alarm or complacency.

He agreed with analysts such as Schiff that Israel "missed opportunities" in the context of diplomacy with Jordan, but said the end of the Gulf war would not mean immediate strategic dangers for Israel.

For one thing, the defense minister said, neither Iraq nor Iran will be in a position to deploy their forces against Israel for months or perhaps even years to come.

If nothing else, their mutual enmity and distrust will require each of them to maintain deterrent strength along their common border, even after the fighting ends, Rabin pointed out.

The societies of both countries will moreover want to enjoy an interlude of peace after eight years of hardship, suffering and danger.

Finally, each of the combatants must rebuild its shattered economy before it can embark on new military adventures against a relatively distant foe, Israel.

Rabin said he would not be asking for increases in Israel's defense budget right now.

But he made clear that the end of the Gulf war will, soon enough, mean the end of this "luxury" of reduced military budgets for Israel.

Iran, meanwhile, bruised and battered by its war with Iraq, may seek to prove to its citizens and to the Moslem world that it is a force to be reckoned with by stepping up support for Hezbollah, the fanatical Lebanese Shiite "Party of God."

Rabin and other defense officials said Israel will be watching its northern front very closely.

Meanwhile, at the United Nations, Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar announced Wednesday that he was sending a military team to Iran and Iraq immediately to work out a basis for implementing the cease-fire resolution.

(JTA U.N. correspondent Yitzhak Rabi contributed to this report.)

DESPITE INVISIBILITY AT CONVENTION, JEWS STILL ACTIVE IN DUKE'S CAMPAIGN

By Steve Rose

Atlanta Jewish Times

ATLANTA, July 21 (JTA) -- While the Democratic National Convention was busy with the coronation of Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis as the party's standard-bearer in November, pro-Israel lobbyists and Jewish leaders had reason to reflect on the future of Jewish participation in the Democratic Party and in the Dukakis campaign.

Steven Grossman, a key adviser to Dukakis who has become a spokesman for Jewish issues in the campaign, pointed out a significant decrease in Jewish representation among convention delegates since the last convention in San Francisco in 1984.

Four years ago, Jews constituted 9 percent. This year, estimates have ranged from 2 to 6 percent. "The Jewish leadership has got to concentrate on building grass-roots Jewish participation," Grossman said.

"It is not enough just to contribute money," he said. "We have got to get more Jews involved in the political process."

He added, "Clearly, we are doing our job at the highest levels, but that's not enough."

There was general recognition at the convention that Jewish Democratic leaders and lobbyists for Israel are very supportive of Dukakis.

That enthusiasm spilled over when Kitty Dukakis was introduced Monday morning with what appeared to be an uncharacteristic endorsement by the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the pro-Israel lobby in Washington.

The Next First Lady

Larry Weinberg, chairman emeritus of the AIPAC board and a former Democratic national committeeman, presented her as "the next first lady of the United States."

AIPAC is bipartisan and its policy is not to endorse candidates for political office of any party.

Steven Rosen, an AIPAC spokesman, was quick to explain that Weinberg's introduction was "simply an off-hand remark" that did not reflect AIPAC's official position.

If there is unusual enthusiasm among some Jewish leaders for the Dukakis campaign, it is due, at least partially, to the sizeable number of Jews who have worked closely with Michael and Kitty Dukakis.

They include Susan Estrich, the Dukakis campaign manager; Leonard Zakim, executive director of the New England office of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith in Boston, of which Kitty Dukakis is a board member; Alan Levinthal, campaign finance manager; and Grossman, who is also involved in fund raising.

Also, Robert Lieber, a professor at Georgetown University who is the candidate's Middle East foreign policy adviser, and Hyman Bookbinder, for many years the American Jewish Committee's Washington representative, who is a key adviser to the campaign.

"Kitty Dukakis is Jewish and Michael Dukakis grew up in a highly Jewish neighborhood. We know firsthand how strong is their commitment to issues important to Jews," Grossman said.

At the same time, he said, "The campaign is aggressively seeking Jewish support. We don't take the Jewish vote for granted at all."

BROOKLYN RABBI OFFERS CONVENTION BENEDICTION

By David Friedman

ATLANTA, July 21 (JTA) - The Democratic National Convention, which officially nominated Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis as the Democratic Party's candidate for the presidency Wednesday night, was blessed by an Orthodox rabbi from Brooklyn.

Rabbi Morris Schmidman, executive director of the Council of Jewish Organizations of Boro Park, gave the benediction at the close of the session, in which Dukakis received 2,876 votes and the Rev. Jesse Jackson 1,218.

Schmidman was introduced to the convention by Rep. Charles Schumer of New York, who arranged for the rabbi to deliver the closing prayer.

A spokesman in Schmidman's Washington office said that in the New York primary last April, Schmidman played an important part in the Orthodox vote in Brooklyn going to Dukakis, despite the strong bid made by Sen. Albert Gore of Tennessee.

PERES BERATES ORTHODOX RABBIS ON 'LAND FOR PEACE,' INTOLERANCE

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, July 21 (JTA) -- Foreign Minister Shimon Peres castigated some 500 Orthodox rabbis from 30 countries for opposing equal rights for Reform and Conservative Jews, and for creating a rift in the Jewish people.

He also tried to convince them that peace with the Arabs is worth territorial compromise.

Peres, leader of the Labor Party, addressed the meeting of the World Conference of Rabbis and Community Leaders. It is composed of Orthodox Jewish clergy and lay leaders from North and South America, South Africa, Europe and Israel.

The foreign minister was genuinely angered when an Israeli rabbi asked him how he intended to stop the Reform and Conservative branches of Judaism from "undermining the Jewish people."

Castigating the Orthodox for creating a rift, Peres declared, "I won't let the Jewish people be split because of your intolerance."

He vowed to "do everything" to prevent war between the different streams of Judaism, and that he would do it "with or without your help."

Peres urged the assembled rabbis from overseas not to become involved in Israel's internal political struggles.

He said that on political matters, the rabbis spoke with no greater authority than anyone else.

SIXTH FLEET TO TRAIN IN ISRAEL

By Hugh Orgel

TEL AVIV, July 21 (JTA) -- Israel will soon be a training ground for U.S. Navy airmen and Marines attached to the Sixth Fleet, the fleet's commander said Wednesday.

Rear Admiral Kendall Moranville spoke in Haifa after a week of joint exercises at sea with the Israel navy. "One of the things we need is airplanes flying over land and that the Marines can practice their skills on land," he said.

"I have been given assurances that this will happen in the near future," the admiral added.

Israeli defense establishment sources refused to comment. A spokesman said it was not Israel Defense Force policy to discuss joint maneuvers.

NEW AJCOMMITTEE HEAD CHARTS A CAUTIOUS PATH OF CHANGE

By Andrew Silow Carroll

NEW YORK, July 21 (JTA) -- A conversation with Ira Silverman had turned from discussion of the Democratic National Convention to the subject of whether Jews should publicly criticize Israel, as most conversations with leaders of American-Jewish organizations are bound to during these days of the Palestinian "intifada."

The newly appointed executive vice president of the American Jewish Committee mulled the subject for a long moment, before answering in careful, measured tones.

"I don't believe in speaking out against Israel," said Silverman, biting hard on the last word. "What I do believe in is stating plainly our view about how best to achieve a peace for Israel."

"That view may differ from the view of the prevailing Israeli government administration at any given time, but we will still say forthrightly what we think."

Like most Israeli governments since 1967, Silverman continued, AJCommittee has clearly supported a settlement with the Arab nations, based on some exchange of territory for peace.

What is not clear, he said, is to what extent the present Israeli administration supports the same principle.

"We haven't so much criticized that administration, as much as we've simply said what we think." And by refraining from criticism, AJCommittee has not lost its effectiveness as a voice on Middle East issues, Silverman believes. "We are in contact with influential Israelis everyday," he said.

Silverman's position on this issue hinted at what could be his style in the new job: analytical, diplomatic and cautious, but with a willingness to push the organization he represents into territory slightly ahead of where it has been accustomed to going.

Nudging Agency Beyond Neutrality

If he offered no specific criticism of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir or of the American Jewish Congress, one of the most outspoken of Israel's recent organizational critics, he seemed to be nudging AJCommittee beyond the posture of calculated neutrality it has retained in recent months.

Silverman spoke about his goals for the 82-year-old organization during an hour-long interview at his mid-Manhattan office.

While those goals are bound to mean changes for the committee, the 43-year-old Silverman recalled that he was "an old AJC hand," having served as director of special programs until 1981. Any changes, he said, would be made gradually.

Accordingly, he remains dedicated to the committee's belief in maintaining Israel's security, to religious and ethnic pluralism, to assisting threatened Jewish communities abroad and to scholarly research and analysis of American Jewish life.

But he also holds to the principle of "tikkun olam" (healing the world) and intends for the organization to become increasingly "action-oriented" in its approach to the issues.

He spoke, for instance, of a need to "focus harder than ever on enhancing black-Jewish ties. But that does not mean rolling over and playing dead when we see manifestations of anti-Semitism

among blacks," he said. "We intend in that case to come down hard."

Group Is Not Neo-Conservative

Silverman rejects the notion that, as publisher of the neo-conservative magazine Commentary, AJCommittee "has been a symbol of the Jewish turn to the right." While he remains a "proud publisher of Commentary," he insisted that "the committee's volunteer leadership is not cohesively oriented toward neo-conservatism -- it is, in fact, more liberal."

But he said he was not sure if that was true of the American Jewish community at large. Despite the claims of Jewish liberals that American Jewry is more dovish than its leaders recognize, there is no "demographic basis" on which to measure the political temperature of the community, Silverman said.

"The American Jewish Yearbook for 1988 studied the attitudes of American Jews on a whole range of issues," he said of the annual book AJCommittee publishes. "And they seem to retain as broad a range of opinion as jokes about American Jewish diversity seem to suggest."

Silverman's own background is as diverse as that constituency. He holds his undergraduate degree from Harvard University and a master's in public affairs from Princeton.

He served in executive positions in higher education, first at Princeton and later in Washington, where he also moonlighted as Washington correspondent for both the Jerusalem Post and Yediot Achronot.

Before joining AJCommittee for the first time in 1977, Silverman directed the Synagogue Council of America's Institute for Jewish Policy Planning and Research.

From 1981 to 1986, he served as president of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, overseeing that seminary's move from an inner-city complex in North Philadelphia to a campus in the suburb of Wyncote, Pa.

Until accepting AJCommittee's top professional job, Silverman directed New York's massive 92nd Street Y.

'Pan-Denominational' Approach

The last two positions seemed to have shaped many of his attitudes toward Jewish life. From the Reconstructionist movement, he gained an appreciation for what he called a "pan-denominational" approach to Judaism that fosters diversity but rises above divisiveness.

And he called the 92nd Street Y, a major cultural and educational institution, the embodiment of both Jewish and American ideals of culture, politics and creativity.

Fostering those ideals at the AJCommittee remains his ultimate philosophical goal, but until then, there remain more practical steps to be taken -- "institutional repair," in his words.

"We need to reach to attract younger members," he said, admitting that the "big givers" who are the lifeblood of non-profit organizations tend toward an older and wealthier profile.

"It is imperative that we reach out to younger members who can bring their own diverse talents."

On the subject of politics and the platform the Democrats could carry into the White House in November, Silverman might well have been speaking of his own tenure: "Possible changes will be made," he said. "But I'm confident the outcome will be consistent with our views."