



Report: From Recognition to Reconciliation: Looking Back and Looking Forward at the Millennium

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Report: The 16th National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations

16th NATIONAL WORKSHOP

ON CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATION

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From Recognition to Reconciliation: Looking Back and Looking Forward at the Millennium

About 500 conference participants - academics, practitioners, clergy, lay people, leaders of inter-faith organizations and those working at grass-roots level - had come together in Houston, Texas, and benefited from this widely spread mixture as well as from the lectures from leading persons in the US Jewish Christian dialogue and the 70 different workshops which offered models and wide-ranging exchange of ideas for continuing work on Christian-Jewish relations in the USA and other regions of our world including recent church statements, Shoah education and the role of the media in interfaith relations.

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ), partner and member organization of the International Council of Christians and Jews (ICCJ) in America, presented its excellent diversity training program, named Camp Anytown, in which the NCCJ gives an important contribution towards the need to educate young Americans to live in that highly diverse US contemporary society.

In his opening address William Cardinal Keeler, Archbishop of Baltimore, spoke of the immense changes in Jewish-Christian relations since Nostra Aetate. However, when he also tried to defend Pope Pius XII in the face of recent publications, he touched upon a new problem in Jewish-Catholic relations: clarification of the role that Pope played during the Holocaust.

Debating Past and Future Reading of Scripture Dr Amy-Jill Levine of Nashville School of Divinity and Dr Mary Boys, of New York Union Theological Seminary, left no doubt that joint study of major

Christian and Jewish writings remains central to mutual understanding. Dr Levine pointed out five issues for ongoing future work: Jews to read more central Christian texts; not only the New Testament but also liturgical texts, such as the Mass; to address also the differences in Jewish and Christian scripture and text understanding and not only the similarities; to discuss the real and potential anti-Jewish material in the Christian texts; to be more precise: what do we mean when we speak of "Jesus the Jew" and "Jesus, the Redeemer in his relation to the Jewish Law"?

Mary Boys confirmed the necessity of in-depth concentration on these themes. Despite many efforts, not much has been achieved so far. Too many misconceptions of Judaism continue to be articulated in the churches. She urged: To reflect the past and present of Christian-Jewish relations through common scripture study; to address more adequately the Church's origin within Judaism; for Christian teachers to be more appreciative of Jewish tradition; to understand better Jewish and Christian concepts of revelation; to learn about other holy scriptures and traditions and to view the Christian-Jewish dialogue in a broader interreligious context.

Dr Eugene Fisher of the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the National Catholic Bishops Conference and Rabbi Leon Klenicki of the New York Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Interfaith Department presented an historical survey on Christian Jewish relations by speaking about Historical Memory; Reckoning and Healing.

Dr Michael Wyshogrod, Dean of Religious Studies, University of Houston, disappointed participants by not speaking about the planned topic "Jewish understanding of Christianity" and instead asked how the Church should deal with Jewish converts to Christianity who yet claim to be considered as Jews. In this context he suggested that those within the Church who remain serious about their Jewishness should put on phylacteries and observe kashrut, a suggestion which provoked much controversy among his listeners.

Dr Jay Rock, director of Interfaith Relations, National Council of the Churches of Christ and Rabbi James Rudin of the Interreligious Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, both from New York lectured on The Other as person of God: towards recognition and reconciliation with other religious traditions. A survey of the fast growing different religious movements and their attitude to interreligious relations showed that future Christian-Jewish dialogue will need to define itself more precisely in relation to the growing interreligious encounter. There was need to develop a theology of pluralism, suggested Rabbi Rudin. Pluralism, he stated, "was ordained by God" and was a powerful antidote to authoritarianism and fascism.

Rounding up the conference, Rabbi Samuel Karff and the Baptist Rev William A. Lewson, both religious leaders from Houston, spoke about what each has learned from personal encounters thereby giving ample proof that respectful mutuality today can also be achieved in the US South.

Conference participants visited the Houston Holocaust Museum and had the privilege of hearing the moving story of a woman who, as employee in the home of a German Wehrmacht officer in Poland, hid Jews in the cellar of her German master's home. There was also a choir and cantor concert at the Emanuel synagogue.

It was a good survey of past and ongoing challenges, though not many new issues were addressed. Personally, I would have liked to hear a more precise analysis of contemporary Christian-Jewish relations in the USA, and a clear outline of the necessary future steps. I also missed a serious reference to the growing encounter with Muslims as one of the most important challenges of the Jewish-Christian dialogue. The call for more joint scripture studies, for a reflection on the century just coming to its conclusion, the need to find answers to the wide-spread sense of emptiness in relation to God, as well as the need to relate contemporary Christian-Jewish dialogue to the wider interfaith encounter were for me the most important issues of the 16th National Workshop.

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