

Split Grows Between Jews and Liberal Churches

By Jay Merwin
Religious News Service

While President Carter is attempting to revitalize Middle Eastern peace efforts through new meetings with the government leaders of Israel and Egypt, the gulf between the liberal traditions of American Protestantism and Judaism on the same volatile issues appears to be growing wider.

During the 1960s, liberal Protestants and Jews forged a powerful religious front against racial discrimination and the Vietnam War. Now they have difficulty speaking to each other on issues concerning Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. In February, 17 national Jewish organizations boycotted invitations to testify at the National Council of Churches' hearings as part of a Middle Eastern "fact-finding" probe. The Jewish agencies alleged an "anti-Israel bias" in the agenda and in the nature of the proceedings.

Black clergy, who had marched arm-in-arm with Jews at civil rights demonstrations during the 1960s, had all but sundered that special relationship by 1979. Blacks seemed to blame Jews for the resignation of United Nations Ambassador Andrew Young that August over his violation of the ban on U.S. negotiations with the PLO.

Last fall, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, and other black civil rights figures, met with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and urged the U.S. to accept his organization as the sole negotiator for Palestinian Arabs.

A few months later, a national rally of black pastors in Detroit issued a similar call and accused the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith of "racist" activities.

Partly in response to the Andrew Young affair, the executive committee of the 32-communication Protestant and Orthodox ecumenical organization appointed a Special Panel on the Middle East/Israel-Palestinian Conflicts in September. At the November Governing Board meeting, the NCC commissioned the panel to tour the Middle East, study issues of conflict there, and recommend an appropriate U.S. policy on the question of recognizing the PLO as the "legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." The panel is due to submit its report to the May Governing Board meeting. By next November, the NCC plans to



Anwar Sadat, Jimmy Carter and Menachem Begin at the White House ceremonies marking the signing of the Middle East Peace Treaty, March 26, 1979.

adopt a new and more comprehensive policy on the Middle East conflict.

Israelis hold no basic objection to rights for Palestinians and some form of negotiations with them. Trouble arises over who should be their bargaining agent. The PLO is regarded as a liberation army and political representative by many Palestinians displaced in the war following the creation of the Jewish state in 1948. To Israel, and most Jews everywhere, the PLO is a desperate terrorist group bent on her destruction.

The NCC has dealt with numerous anti-Israel proposals from some of its Orthodox denominations over the past dozen years. These churches have Arab members scattered throughout the Middle East who allege discrimination and injustice at the hands of the Israeli government. The harshest resolution proposal yet, submitted in November 1979 by the Antiochian Orthodox Church, has been set aside for consideration after the panel report this May.

The proposal would have the NCC petition the U.S. government to end all military and economic aid to Israel, "until such time as an internationally recognized body affirms that Israel is in compliance with international law and is guaranteeing the human rights of Christians and Muslims as well as those of Jews within Israel and in the occupied Arab territories."

The panel's work has drawn little support from the Jewish community. Rabbi James Rudin, the American Jewish Committee's NCC observer for eight years, has expressed "profound dismay" over the panel's approach to its task. Rather than inching toward acceptance of the PLO, the council should rebuke it for its "continuous, unbroken resort to terrorism, to national genocide," he says.

Cracks in the bulwark of the liberal Christian-Jewish alliance appeared as early as the 1967 Six Day War. American response to the Israeli preemptive strike against its Arab neighbors seemed to defy previous political labeling on the issues of war and pacifism. "The doves of Vietnam sprout hawk feathers over Israel," a newspaper columnist wrote at the time.

Protestants who remained in the "dove camp" over the Middle East conflict grew increasingly sympathetic to those rights claimed by Palestinian Arabs and often violently pressed by the PLO. The PLO, it seems, had officially entered the Third World bloc. And liberal Protestant solidarity with these underdeveloped countries hinted at tacit acknowledgement of the "Zionism equals racism" shibboleth. Consequently, Israel was sometimes portrayed as the instrument of aggressive U.S. aims in the Middle East.

In 1973, the NCC

Governing Board addressed the Yom Kippur War in terms that were so narrow and neutral as to annoy many Jews. Their resolution seemed to be skirting the fact that Egypt attacked first this time, and on a Jewish Holy Day. Instead, the statement placed its hopes for peace with the United Nations and urged the U.S. and the Soviet Union to halt arms shipments to the belligerents.

In May 1978, the Governing Board resolved that the U.S. should stop sending anti-personnel bombs to Israel. That action was prompted by the Israeli invasion 14 miles into Lebanon as a measured response to repeated PLO attacks launched from bases there.

Rabbi Rudin, who is the American Jewish Committee's assistant national director of interreligious affairs, labeled the NCC move as "an unfair, unbalanced, anti-Israel resolution." The board, he said, was "singling out Israel alone for condemnation."

As early as 1973, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee, was saying Protestant-Jewish relations had collapsed to the point where they had to be rebuilt "from the ground up."

Blame for the rift between the two "former natural allies," he said, lay squarely with the mainline Protestant churches who had "failed their Jewish neighbors on virtually every Jewish priority concern." Even earlier, in 1970, Rabbi Tanenbaum said, "Liberal Protestant leaders chilled my blood when they told me unblinkingly, face-to-face, 'the right of Israel to exist is an open question.'"

Later, the NCC and the

National Conference of Catholic Bishops went on record as affirming the right of both the Israelis and Arab Palestinians to self-determination. Individual denominations, though, have pushed the issue much further. The United Methodist Church, the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and the Church of the Brethren have publicly called for PLO participation in any Middle East peace negotiations.

The Roman Catholic Church, too, has prominent figures who put the claims of the Palestinians before the interests of Israel. The Rector of Holy Cross College in Worcester, Mass., Father Joseph L. Ryan, SJ, tells his university lecture tour audience to distinguish between the "violence of the oppressed" and "violence of the Oppressor." He has alleged that non-Jews are treated as "second-class citizens in Israel," and advocated the establishment of a Palestinian state in the Israeli-occupied West Bank or Gaza Strip. More dramatically, Father Daniel Berrigan, SJ, has denounced Israel as a "criminal Jewish community," and as a "settler state."

The NCCB has, as might be expected, taken a more temperate stand. Its president, Archbishop John R. Quinn, told the May 1979 bishops' meeting that the Camp David accords would fall apart unless the negotiations were opened up "in a way that other Arab states are moved to participate in it."

In statements issued in 1973 and in 1978, the bishops urged support for Israel's rights to "secure and recognized boundaries," as well as for the "rights of the Palestinian Arabs to participate in negotiations affecting their destiny and to a homeland of their own."

Because the Catholic hierarchy has made no moves to broach the subject of just

who should be allowed to speak for Palestinian Arabs, Catholic-Jewish relations have remained stable. Yet, beneath this relative tranquility, is a deep Jewish indignation over the Vatican's long-standing refusal to extend diplomatic recognition to Israel. The official reasoning behind this is that Israel's borders are still in dispute; she is in a state of declared war with every Arab nation save Egypt. Underlying the Vatican's reluctance, may be a fear of reprisals against Catholics living in Arab countries if the Holy See were officially to embrace the Jewish state.

However, Pope John Paul II's visit to the former Nazi extermination camp at Auschwitz, Poland, last summer and his tour of the United States in October, 1979, have done much to revitalize relations with Jews.

The pontiff's attention to the living memory of Auschwitz caused "many in the Jewish community to respond with a sense of deep identification with the pope who realized how critical, how central Auschwitz is to an understanding of Western civilization," said Rabbi Tanenbaum.

In his address to the U.N. General Assembly, the pope strongly reiterated his support for the Camp David accords, a pact that has been vehemently denounced by most of the anti-Zionist Third World voting bloc there. At that time, and in that place, "I think that took a lot of courage," said Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress.

Later in his speech, Pope John-Paul cautiously stated that peace in the Middle East "cannot fail to include a consideration and just settlement of the Palestinian question." He did not, however, even mention the PLO, or its claims to be the sole representative body of Palestinians.

Economists Debate

Have We Abundance Or '30s Crisis?

Opposing views of this nation's economy will be aired tomorrow afternoon at Colgate-Rochester and its affiliates at 1100 S. Goodman, and everyone is invited to listen, and to ask questions.

Dr. Ernest W. Lefever, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C., and former senior fellow of the Brookings Institution, will talk about "The present U.S. economic system: its contributions to abundance, freedom, and justice."

His adversary will be Michael Harrington, national

chairman of the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, on "The American economy: the deepest crisis since the Great Depression." They will argue with each other, after their speeches, and answer questions from the audience.

The program runs from 1:30 until 5:30 p.m. in the auditorium at 1100 S. Goodman St. It is sponsored by the Economics and Religious Program of Colgate Rochester Divinity School — Bexley Hall — Crozer Theological Seminary. The format: Dr. Lefever's address, at 1:30; conversation between

him and Harrington; questions from audience; coffee break; Harrington's talk at 3:30; dialogue, questions.

Both speakers have written extensively on politics and economics. Dr. Lefever, an ordained minister, has B.Div. and Ph.D. degrees from Yale University. Among his books is the recently published "The CIA and the American Ethic," of which he is co-author. Harrington, from Holy Cross College, the University of Chicago and Yale Law, most recently published "The Decade of Decision."

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