

Jews, Christians Must Continue the Dialogue

The following is an edited transcription of a report presented by Margery S. Nurnberg, diocesan director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, to a meeting of the Commission on Interfaith Cooperation on Monday, Nov. 26 at the Jewish Community Federation. The topic was Ms. Nurnberg's report was the Eighth National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations, which she recently attended.

By Margery S. Nurnberg
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and Interreligious Affairs
Jewish/Christian dialogue is delicate but not hopeless. Within the last decade Jews and Christians have begun an honest relationship which is not afraid to talk about where we differ as well as where we agree.

Given the history of Christian antisemitism, the Jewish response may be slow at times, yet Christians must start the reconciliation process as a sign of our sincerity and conversion.

The Jewish community must face an honest encounter with Christians that includes more accurate information about the positive developments in the Church's attitudes and an openness to discuss the concrete aspects of the Middle East conflict.

The first and oldest issue in the dialogues was the crucifixion story. The accounts of the death of Jesus served as a source of deep conflict; Jews were persecuted and called Christ killers. Vatican II and numerous Protestant denominations have laid to rest the



Margery Nurnberg, left, diocesan director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, speaks at a luncheon meeting of the Commission on Interfaith Cooperation.

deicide charge. Biblical scholarship has shown it to be baseless. However in our popular culture the Passion Plays have not shed the charge that the Jew, collectively, crucified Jesus. Jews have a right to bring this to our attention and Christians have the responsibility to stop it.

We need to dialogue about the God question, about Jesus as the way to the Father...but not the Father. Many theologians and scholars are painfully aware that the field of Christology needs reworking. Questions about Christology create fear and anxiety in the Christian churches. Fortunately "fulfillment" theology is being eliminated from seminary training. Culbertson says that many Christians tragically cannot recognize that God's grace continues

with Judaism and thus affirms Christianity. Christology has developed in such a way as to give us a Christ so universal that he clouds the particularity of God.

We need to confront the God question as it relates to the Holocaust. The reality of the Holocaust raises questions of belief for both Christians and Jews. Why was God silent when six million people cried for mercy? If Jews have a pro-

blem of belief (The world is so evil, why does the Messiah not come?), so do the Christians (The Messiah has come, why is the world so evil?). The few "righteous Christians" who risked their lives to save Jews cannot hide the fact that the overall Christian response is one of the most shameful chapters in Church history.

The Christian/Jewish dialogue needs to focus on the longstanding Jewish land tradition. Israel should be a

reality, not a theological phenomenon. It is no longer the promised land but the state of Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict must be faced.

We need to ask: How do Jews understand Christianity? How do Christians understand Judaism? If all the assumptions and ignorance were written down we would all be profoundly ashamed.

Like buying land in Anathoth let us have faith in the future. There is no substitute for human commitment and energy. Let us allow service to overcome apathy, to recognize our reliance on God, to have a sense of common purpose in forming the kingdom. Religious educators need to create a Jewish/Christian curriculum, spiritual leaders in seminaries need Jewish/Christian education.

We need to stay alert to the Church/State issue. There have been massive assaults against the separation theory. Religious choice is a right and we must keep our government as totally secular as it is humanly possible to be.

We do not need to, nor ought we, worship together. It is not an impediment that we cannot say prayers together.

We need to seek reconcilia-

tion as sons and daughters of God. We need to continue the dialogue.

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