

# Spirit of reconciliation has far to go

By Father Richard P. McBrien  
Syndicated columnist

When the history of this pontificate is written, Pope John Paul II's outreach to the Jews may be among his most enduring achievements.

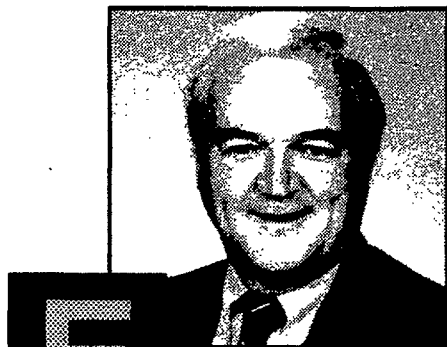
The most recent papal initiative is of particular significance. Earlier this month the pope invited Elio Toaff, Rome's chief rabbi, to the Vatican as guest of honor at a concert given by the London Royal Philharmonic Orchestra to honor the memory of Holocaust victims.

In a land where gesture (*figura*, in Italian) is of the highest importance, the pope may have been trying to underscore the two faiths' equal dignity by seating the chief rabbi next to himself on identical thrones.

A large menorah, or ceremonial candelabrum, stood out over the crowd of 5,000 invited guests, including about 100 Holocaust survivors with their children and grandchildren. Six survivors of the death camps lit six candles, representing the six million Jews murdered by the Nazis.

According to *The New York Times*, the concert's high point came when the cantor of Temple Emanu-El in New York intoned in Hebrew the 92nd Psalm. "O Lord, it is good to give thanks," to a composition written by Schubert in 1826 for the dedication of a synagogue in Vienna.

The pope himself was described as being visibly moved when actor Richard Dreyfuss read Kaddish, the



## ESSAYS IN THEOLOGY

Jewish prayer for the dead, to Leonard Bernstein's music. Many in the hall wept openly.

"Many at that time mourned, and their lament crowds still," the pope said to the survivors. "We hear them here, too. Their lament did not perish with them, but lifts up strong, struggling, heartrending, and it says, 'Do not forget us.'"

"The candles lit by some of the survivors," he continued, "seek to demonstrate symbolically that this hall has no narrow limits, but that it contains all the victims: fathers, mothers, sons, brothers, friends. In our memory they are all present. They are with you; they are with us."

Although the chief rabbi did not speak at the concert, he issued a state-

ment expressing his appreciation for the pope's effort to commemorate the Holocaust, adding that the concert itself had "a significance that goes beyond that of a simple artistic event."

At an audience earlier in the day, a survivor of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising told the pope: "As a young boy growing up in prewar Warsaw I feared crossing the sidewalk next to a church. Now, some 50 years later, the unthinkable is happening."

A survivor of the death camps at Auschwitz and Matthausen added: "When the pope shook my hand, I had the feeling 2,000 years of Jewish suffering had come to some kind of turning point." The pope, he said, demonstrated "that there is a way to live together in harmony and peace."

The change in Catholic-Jewish relations had been initiated more than 30 years earlier by Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council.

In October of 1960, Pope John — who as a Vatican diplomat during the World War II had assisted in the escape of many Jews — told them his favorite biblical story about Joseph recognizing his brothers.

"I am your brother," the pope concluded. "We are all sons of the same Father. We come from the Father, and must return to the Father."

The Second Vatican Council that Pope John himself had called to work toward the unity of all peoples was especially emphatic about the close spiritual bonds that exist between the

church and the Jews.

Jesus and the Apostles were Jews, the "Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions" (*Nostra Aetate*) pointed out. And he Jewish people "still remain most dear to God."

The council deplored "the hatred, persecutions, and displays of anti-Semitism directed against the Jews at any time and from any source," because they contradict the cross's meaning of Christ through which the Prince of Peace "reconciled Jew and Gentile, making them both one in Himself" (n.4).

For too many centuries, however, Christ's cross has functioned for our Jewish brothers and sisters not as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, but of fear, division, and even death.

And that explains why, for example, the Holocaust survivor at the Vatican concert reported that, as a young boy in Poland, he had been afraid to walk by a Catholic church.

Our record has been, for the most part, shameful. But thanks to visionary leaders such as Pope John XXIII and Pope John Paul II and to remarkable events such as the Second Vatican Council and this recent Vatican concert, that record has begun at last to improve.

The achievement of these individual leaders and events, however, will be finally meaningless unless and until the spirit of reconciliation permeates the entire Catholic community, everywhere.

# What's really going on in business today?

By Gregory F. Augustine Pierce  
Syndicated columnist

Every once in a while, something comes across my desk that doesn't fit into any of my existing categories. Such a thing was a copy of the "executive summary" of *What's Really Going On?* by F. Nahser and Susan E. Mehrrens.

Described as "a pre-publication presentation of a pragmatic method for achieving success through self-doubt," this booklet turned out to be a 24-page condensation of a 450-page study done by an advertising firm in Chicago "designed to provide business with a new method of determining what's really going on in the face of our current information overload."

The authors conducted a wide-ranging survey based on more than 6,000 books, monographs, articles, personal interviews and then used those to identify some of the surprising facts and long- and short-term trends of our time. Their purpose was to "help move business away from the short-term reactive mode and toward action based on sharper interpretive skills



## FAITH AND WORK

and a broader understanding of the role and value of their products."

One of the booklet's sections deals with religion and spirituality. First, the authors offer some surprising facts: a new religion is formed in the U.S. every week; 63 percent of Americans believes the U.S. is in a state of moral decline; and the fastest growing religion in the U.S. is Islam.

They offer some short-term religious trends, such as "an increasing restiveness with conventional religious orthodoxies" and "a rise in interest in fundamentalist religions that offer solace and a sense of certitude amid the confusions and ambiguities" of today. They also see "an erosion of the place religion has held in the civil identity of the nation," using examples such as the increase thefts and looting of church properties.

They also see a host of trends "reflecting Americans' personal involvement in seeking God, or in determining the meaning and purpose of their lives." More people are redefining "God" to be more inclusive of the feminine, and others are refusing to look to religious authority figures to tell them what's right or what to believe. "Voluntary simplicity" is a trend toward "voluntary simplicity."

"The religious/spiritual aspects of life is likely to grow in coming decades because the large cohort of baby boomers is aging, and the elderly are well known for having more religious/spiritual interest than younger people," they write. "So expect to see

more concern with the ultimate issues and big questions about the meaning of life, the nature of reality, etc.

"Other trends related here include the growing recognition of the divinity of the human spirit; the widening appreciation of the power of the mind; and the awareness that existence has many planes beyond the physical (e.g., mental, emotional, spiritual, etc.). While currently business may seem to be the antithesis of spirituality, in our long-term future it is likely we will see a revisioning of business, from being a way to earn a living (as most people think of it today), to being a spiritual discipline, set in the context of personal 'vocation,' or divine calling."

What do all these trends mean for business? According to the authors, it means that "business in the future has the opportunities that lie in the challenges we face now, by identifying its outmoded assumptions, broadening its thinking and vision, and seeing beyond the reality of the moment."

And if that's what they mean for business, what do they mean for those of us involved with organized religion?

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