

Jews, Catholics ready to resume dialogue

At an Ethics and Public Policy Center seminar on "We Remember," the Vatican's recent statement on the Holocaust, a distinguished rabbinical veteran of the Jewish-Catholic dialogue suggested that "the agenda" for the conversation had been completed.

In the decades since Pope John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council revolutionized the relationship between Catholics and Jews by removing offensive references to Judaism from the liturgy, by rejecting the "deicide" charge against the Jewish people, and by condemning anti-Semitism, things have changed dramatically.

Catholic religious education texts now emphasize Jesus' Jewish consciousness and the church's debt to its Jewish heritage. Tolerance and civility were understood to be the moral base line for intragroup relations in society. The church has begun to cleanse its conscience about the complex relationship between Christian teaching and the Holocaust. There were details to be settled. But, the rabbi concluded, we were almost finished with "the agenda."

I had to disagree. I suggested that the most important items on "the agenda" were just coming into focus.

The welcome advances in Jewish-Catholic relations since Vatican II, cou-



the catholic difference

BY GEORGE WEIGEL

pled with the extraordinary reservoir of good will built up among Jewish people by Pope John Paul II, has put us on the threshold of an entirely new relationship. Catholics and Jews are now poised to pick up the conversation that ended abruptly during the First Jewish War, c. 70 A.D. Catholics and Jews are positioned to open an intense theological dialogue for the first time in more than 1,900 years.

This, I believe, is what John Paul II has been looking forward to throughout a pontificate notable for its unprecedented accomplishments in Jewish-Catholic relations. The pope's regular meetings with local Jewish communities around the world; his steady condemnation of the sin of anti-Semitism; his historic visit to the Synagogue of Rome in April 1986; his completion of full diplomatic

relations between the Holy See and the State of Israel — all of these have been good things in their own right. But they have also been part of a systematic attempt to clear the ground of the debris of centuries so that the real conversations — the theological conversations — between Catholics and Jews can start again.

The pope believes this is a religious obligation for Catholics. On many occasions he has said that the church cannot think about itself without thinking about Judaism; from a Catholic point of view, Judaism is not another "world religion," but a religion intrinsic to our own, without which Christianity is inconceivable.

Jews, John Paul insists, are our elder brothers and sisters in the faith. And, like St. Paul in Romans 9:11, John Paul teaches that God's covenant with "Abraham's stock" is irrevocable. For all of these reasons, a theological dialogue between Catholics and Jews is an imperative.

It will take some doing to get it started. Jews wonder whether "theological dialogue" is code language for "proselytization." And at a moment when the American Jewish community is deeply engaged in a crucial debate about its own nature (religious or ethnic?) and its demographically precarious future, it may seem a bit odd to say to our

Jewish friends it's time to get serious about a theological dialogue with Catholics. Moreover Christianity does not have a "place" in Jewish understanding parallel to the place that Judaism has in Christian identity.

Yet some of the finest Jewish minds of the 20th century turned their minds to the question of where Christianity — whose Bible, liturgy and basic theological apprehension of reality are a heritage from the Jewish people — "fits" into a Jewish view of God's plan for the world's salvation. Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig and Abraham Joshua Heschel wrestled with this. Some of today's leading Jewish thinkers, including David Novak of Toronto and Jon Levenson of Harvard, have taken up the issue.

Election, covenant, messianic hope. To think that Jews and Catholics are now poised to pick up the conversation on these questions that was tragically interrupted more than 1,900 years ago is both thrilling and humbling. And if it happens, it will happen here in the United States, where the dialogue is light years ahead of anything in Europe. It's something to look forward to, and something to give thanks for.

Weigel is a senior fellow at the Ethics and Public Policy Center in Washington, D.C.

Happiness comes through sharing

Sunday's Readings: (R1) Luke 12:13-21. (R2) Ecclesiastes 1:2; 2:21-23. (R3) Colossians 3:1-5, 9-11.

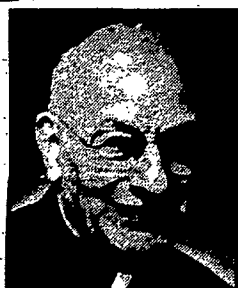
People do crazy things where money is concerned. A woman tried to hold up a bank. Her weapon? A device that she said controlled a bomb in her car. Brandishing her weapon, the woman demanded money from all three tellers. Suddenly the tellers realized that the device was not a remote control for a bomb at all, but a garage-door opener. They realized this when they saw "Sears" on the device.

Jesus told a parable about a man who did a crazy thing about money. Jesus didn't call him crazy, but he called him a fool.

There's nothing wrong with having money. St. Paul warned Timothy that "the love of money is the root of all evils" (1 Tm 6:10). Many people read that verse wrong; it is not money, but the love of money that is condemned.

There's nothing wrong with having money. In fact, there are some things that only money can buy. Braces for the kids' teeth. A good education. A dependable car. Decent clothes to wear to church. Health and fire insurance.

In our Lord's parable the man was rich. There is nothing wrong with that. A lot of us wish we had his problems. Some of



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

us are having difficulty just getting by.

The man in the parable was a fool not because he had money. He was fool because of what he did with his money. He kept it for himself alone.

The rich man thought, "What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops. This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.'"

The rich man made the same mistake that many of us might make. He assumed that he could find happiness in things. Wrong. Nobody ever found genuine happiness in mere things. Happiness comes

from relationships. Happiness comes from sharing. There are many people who have only money — and no joy.

Happiness comes from sharing with others. Most parents know that. They find more joy in giving to their children than in hoarding for their own pleasure. And their joy increases when their giving reaches out to others: to the poor, the needy, the homeless, the tempest-tossed.

Of course, the most foolish thing you can do with money is to make it your god.

Henry Ford once asked an associate about his life goals. The man replied that his goal was to make a million dollars. A few days later Ford gave the man a pair of glasses made out of two silver dollars. He told the man to put them on and asked him what he could see.

"Nothing," the man said. "The dollars are in the way."

Ford told him if his only goal was dollars, he would see nothing else in life and miss a host of greater opportunities.

"Invest in people," Ford said. "Invest in serving others, not simply in making money, and you will live."

Money is important, but it is only a means to reach higher goals. Service to others. Obedience to God by giving to the church. Billy Graham once said, "There

are no U-hauls behind hearses."

There's a joke about the miserly millionaire. When dying, he ordered his heirs to put a chest of gold in the attic to take with him to heaven. He died. The heirs complied with his wishes. They put the chest of gold in the attic. A week later, his wife went to the attic to check. The chest was still there. His wife cracked, "We should have put it in the cellar."

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, August 3
Jeremiah 28:1-17; Matthew 14:13-21

Tuesday, August 4
Jeremiah 30:1-2, 12-15, 18-22;
Matthew 14:22-36

Wednesday, August 5
Jeremiah 31:1-7; Matthew 15:21-28

Thursday, August 6
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; 2 Peter 1:16-19; Luke 9:28-36

Friday, August 7
Nahum 2:1, 3; 3:1-3, 6-7; Matthew 16:24-28

Saturday, August 8
Hebrews 1:12:2-4; Matthew 17:14-20

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