

WORLD & NATION

Catholic-Jewish committee works on relations

By Tracy Early
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — "Dominus Iesus," last September's Vatican document on non-Christian religions, was one of the difficult issues addressed by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, said attendees at the committee's meeting in New York May 1-3.

David Berger, an Orthodox Jew who teaches history at Brooklyn College, presented a paper raising questions particularly about a statement in "Dominus Iesus" that the church "must be primarily committed" to "announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the church."

That teaching shows why Orthodox Jews might resist theological dialogue with Catholics, he said.

"A climactic paragraph of 'Dominus Iesus' effectively expects Jews to participate in an endeavor officially described as an effort to lead them, however gently and indirectly, to accept beliefs antithetical to the core of their faith," Berger said.

Criticism of Orthodox Jews for resistance to theological dialogue should be "suspended as long as this passage of 'Dominus Iesus' remains in force without a formal assertion" by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which issued the document, or the pope that it does not apply to dialogue with Jews, he said.

Assurance on that point was given during the meeting by Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

"'Dominus Iesus' is an intra-Catholic document about interreligious dialogue addressed to Catholic theologians concerning problems with relativism, syncretism, universalism and indifferentism," the cardinal said. "It does not enter into the Jewish-Catholic dialogue."

Cardinal Kasper left the meeting to join Pope John Paul II on his trip to Greece, Syria and Malta, but his statements were quoted in a joint communique released by the committee at a press conference May 4.

At the press conference, Cardinal Edward I. Cassidy, Cardinal Kasper's predecessor in the Jewish relations post, said the concern of "Dominus Iesus" was non-Christian religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism.

The religion of the Jews is not viewed as "another religion" in the same sense, he said.

Berger did not attend the press conference, but was "not completely satisfied" by Cardinal Kasper's explanation, according to Seymour Reich, a New York lawyer who chairs the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations.

That committee and the Vatican Commission on Religious Relations with the Jews established the liaison committee fol-

lowing the Second Vatican Council, and it was having its 17th meeting.

In addition to the joint communique reporting on topics discussed, the committee issued two documents.

The longer one, a "Declaration on Protecting Religious Freedom and Holy Sites," said "interreligious and anti-religious violence have been on the rise," and declared "our common commitment to the protection of religious freedom and to the security of holy places."

"We must do more as religious leaders to teach our fellow believers respect for people who belong to other religious traditions," committee members said.

They also said that "religious leaders should never use their declarations for incitement or make shrines and houses of worship havens for hostile political action."

The declaration did not mention any specific violations of religious freedom or holy sites, but Reich said the committee had in mind such incidents as the destruction of Joseph's tomb or the Buddhas in Afghanistan, and forced conversions in Sudan.

He said two Catholics from the Middle East, Maronite Archbishop Paul Nabil Sayah of Haifa and Msgr. Rafiq Khoury of the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem, contributed suggestions and phraseology for the declaration that was "helpful for them and for us."

The other document issued by the committee was a Recommendation on Education in Catholic and Jewish Seminaries and Schools of Theology.

Courses on Jewish-Catholic relations should be "an integral part" of a Catholic seminary curriculum "and not merely elec-

tives," the liaison committee said.

The document also said it was "particularly important that Jewish schools teach about the Second Vatican Council and subsequent documents and attitudinal changes which opened new perspectives and possibilities for both faiths."

Auxiliary Bishop Stanislaw Gadecki of Gniezno, Poland, who has been involved in Catholic-Jewish relations on behalf of the Polish bishops, spoke to the liaison committee about the massacre of Jews by Poles at Jedwabne during the Second World War.

According to the joint communique, he stressed "Polish responsibility for the crime," and said the perpetrators were influenced by a desire to find a scapegoat to blame for their misfortunes, and by "the traditional anti-Semitism grounded on Christian stereotypes."

Religious freedom report critical of abuses

By Patricia Zapor
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — The second annual report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom doesn't mince words.

Abuse of religious rights in Sudan is worse than ever.

Religious freedoms in China continued to deteriorate, apparently unaffected by a U.S. strategy of encouraging change by supporting open-market policies.

As their term as the first commissioners of the three-year-old organization expires, the members were blunt in their criticisms of countries that abuse religious freedoms and about how they think the United States should be addressing those issues.

Commission members include Washington Cardinal Theodore E. McCarrick; Justice Charles Smith of the Washington state Supreme Court; Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; and Elliott Abrams, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Other members represent Baha'i, Mus-

lim, legal and academic organizations.

The 188-page report released May 1 looks at the religious freedom situations in 10 countries — China, India, Indonesia, Iran, North Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, Sudan and Vietnam.

Each section reviews legal and policy issues affecting religious practices, discusses problems faced by specific religious groups and makes policy recommendations for the U.S. government.

Some of its most blunt language appears in the sections on China and Sudan.

For instance, last year, the commission strongly urged Congress to oppose Permanent Normal Trade Relations status for China until the Chinese government made substantial improvements on reli-

gious rights.

"The commission was concerned that by (approving the trade status) ... the Chinese government could be led to believe that the United States does not attach significant importance to the right to freedom of religion," the report explained.

The trade status was approved, prompting the commission to note: "The commission's concern has been validated by the deteriorating religious freedom situation in China over the last year."

Circumstances in China highlighted included an intensified crackdown on unregistered religious communities and those it considers cults, including the Falun Gong and some Protestant house churches.

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Catholic Courier (USPS 135-580)

Vol. 112 No. 31, May 10, 2001

Published weekly except the last Thursday in December.

Subscription rates: single copy, 75¢; one-year subscription in U.S., \$20.00; Canada and foreign \$20.00 plus postage. Offices: 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14624, 716/328-4340. Periodicals postage paid at Rochester, N.Y.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Catholic Courier, P.O. Box 24379, Rochester, N.Y. 14624.

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