

NCS AND NCCC MEETING IN DELRAY BEACH FLORIDA JANUARY 10-12, 2012

The third consultation between the National Council of Synagogues and the National Council of Churches of Christ took place at the Duncan Conference Center in Delray Beach, Florida from January 10-12. The topic of the meeting was: "How We Define Ourselves as Jews and Christians in North America." The two presenters were Professor Alan Berger, who holds the Raddock Family Eminent Scholar Chair for Holocaust studies at Florida Atlantic University and the Rev. Dr. Jay Rock, emeritus Director of interfaith relations for the Presbyterian Church (USA). The two respondents were Rabbi Leonard Gordon of Congregation Mishkan Tefila, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. and Rev. Nicole Diroff, Director of Outreach and Innovation of the Interfaith Center in Greater Philadelphia. Rev. Dr. Tony Kireopoulos, Associate General Secretary of the NCCC and Rabbi David Gutterman, head of the David Posnack Jewish Day School in Dade County, Florida, taught texts from Christian and Jewish sources. Several breakout sessions enlivened the discussions of the topic and the various presentations

Alan Berger noted that contention and debating issues are very typical of Jewish identity and have been since the days of the Talmud that stressed, "Both these and those views are the words of the living God." Jewish identity is more than just religion: it entails peoplehood, the land of Israel, ethnic aspects and national components. The experience of living in freedom is quite new to Jews and they have not resolved some of the issues and paradoxes incurred by this new freedom. America is different from other Jewish experiences and this will challenge Jews as never before as they continue to question what is a Jew? and engage in often confusing debates over the meaning of Jewish existence,

Rev. Jay Rock noted that Christian self-understanding is a chosen rather than given: we choose to link our lives to Jesus Christ for Christians are not born but made via baptism. These baptismal vows are renewed each Easter. Being a Christian requires constant efforts to transform ourselves and is an ongoing process. It entails the renunciation of sin, participation in the body of Christ, conversion to God's way, the acceptance of the Holy Spirit in our daily lives, a strong understanding of ourselves as a people called to serve one God, and constant efforts to transform ourselves and build God's Kingdom here on earth.

Rev. Nicole Diroff described youth programs designed to strengthen Christian identity and stressed that good youth programs make for involved Christian adults. She challenged the group to define "essentialism"--i.e., what is a *sine qua non* for Christian or Jewish identity.

Rabbi Leonard Gordon reflected on how the Shoah affected the identity of his own family who lived in Nazi Europe. He also discussed how some of the leading Jewish scholars handled the issue of apostates who left the Jewish fold or returned to it after apostasy.

In the breakout sessions and critique of the conference, several stressed the need to involve more young people in our interreligious work and particularly seminarians. Several delegates suggested that future topics for our joint consideration should include the role of religion in politics and public service. Also, the subject of religious fanaticism and the need to create a more congenial climate for

other faith traditions and an understanding of those traditions was placed on the agenda for future discussions.

The Jewish delegates included: Rabbis Leonard Gordon, Alvin Berkun, Lewis Eron, Richard Hirsh, Joel Meyers, David Straus, Jeffrey Wohlberg, David Sandmel, Gil Rosenthal, and Mrs. Judith Hertz . The Protestant delegates included Revs. Jay Rock, Alfred Moss, David Miller, Charles Wiley III, Nicole Diroff, Tony Kireopoulos, and Mark Kharas.

Rabbi Gilbert S. Rosenthal and Rev. Dr. Tony Kireopoulos planned the consultation.