

Report on the Consultation of the National Council of Synagogues
And the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Peace and Friendship

Union for Reform Judaism

New York, NY 10017

December 1, 2014

9:00 AM to 2:30 PM

Present:

Jewish Participants: Rabbi David Straus [Co-Chair], Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi David Fox Sandmel, Dr. Jack Fein, Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, Rabbi Daniel Polish, and Dr. Adam Gregerman

Catholic Participants: Timothy Cardinal Dolan [Co-Chair], Bishop Denis Madden, Rev. Lawrence Frizzell, Msgr. Robert Stern, Rev. Brian E. McWeeney, Msgr. Guy Massie, Rev. Charles Cortinovis, Rev. David Michael, Rev. Joseph Zwosta and Rev. John Crossin, OSFS [USCCB], Rev. Dennis McManus [Consultant, USCCB].

1. Cardinal Timothy Dolan chaired the morning session. He began by offering a prayer. He then thanked the hosts at the Union for Reform Judaism and those who had worked to prepare the meeting. He reported that he saw Cardinal Keeler recently and the Cardinal responds but has slowed considerably. He indicated that he expects to add a couple Bishops to the list of Catholic Participants in the near future.

He mentioned that Rabbi Gil Rosenthal could not be present because of the illness of his wife.

2. *Rising Anti-Semitism in Europe* Dr. Kenneth Jacobson, Deputy National Director of ADL offer a half-hour presentation on the topic. . Dr. Jacobson elaborated on several questions.
 - A. Is it happening again? No, he says, the Holocaust was unique. Today the Governments, for example, are opposing rather than supporting manifestations of anti-Semitism.
 - B. What is this disease? This is the same as always: The reality of Jews is not what you see, they are more sinister; millions believe in the so-called Protocols of Zion; for many, this disease is a response to social anxieties—cultural and economic changes are more profound in Europe than in the USA. In addition, the sense of shame about the evil of the Holocaust has diminished over the decades.
 - C. What is going on now? There is increased anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism. There is transparent anti-Semitism now. There is more of an environment where anti-Semitism

happens. Surveys show that there are more people with anti-Semitic attitudes than previously. Some even ask: Is there a future for Jews in Europe?

- D. He sees how this will work out as related to the integration or lack thereof of Muslims in Europe. If they are successfully integrated, anti-Semitism will diminish.

3. *Response* Dr. Steven Colecchi, Director of the Office of International Justice & Peace at USCCB offered the Response

- A. He began by noting that the Catholic Church, for example Pope Francis, is speaking out on these issues. Being anti-Semitic is against Christian values. He fears that there will be more incidents in this country.
- B. He continued by speaking about social anxiety fueling the return to racism. There has been a loss of shame which Colecchi attributes in part to the rise of segmented media and social media that he believes allows anti-Semitism to grow.
- C. He believes that the Jewish-Muslim relationship is important in Europe.
- D. He believes that the 'asymmetry' of the Gaza Conflict has been exploited by radical forces in Europe for their own processes.

4. A lively discussion followed. A few points: Cardinal Dolan noted that as Christian culture has weakened in Europe so has the ability to transmit the values of *Nostra Aetate* in Europe. Several Jewish participants questioned 'asymmetry'. Colecchi responded and noted the need for a long-term solution in the Middle East.

Dr. Jacobson noted the importance of France with its large Jewish and Muslim populations. A majority of Jews in France expect to experience an anti-Semitic incident personally. Some questioned his stance on the integration of Muslims as a harbinger of the future but he believes it will be in fact what happens.

5. *The Persecution of Christians in the Middle East*-Monsignor John Kozar, President of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association and Michael J.L. La Civita, Chief Communications Officer of CNEWA gave a country-by-country pastoral and statistical overview of the decline of numbers of Christians in Middle Eastern Countries. They distributed materials to all participants.

Monsignor Kozar noted that poverty, poor food distribution, corruption, oil interests and so forth are part of the fabric of life in this area. He stressed that Christians and Muslims are suffering. Christian refugees are often not warmly received and fear residing in refugee camps where they might become known and later targeted. They often settle in Christian neighborhoods if possible.

Christians often feel secure in the presence of the church. They do not separate faith and community/nationality. Many are migrating out of their ancestral homelands because of the conflicts led by Muslim extremists.

The church can provide an abiding presence, be a beacon of hope, encourage deep faith in God and serve in the role of peacemaker. He cited numerous instances including some from the recent visit of Cardinal Dolan to the Middle East.

6. Rabbi Daniel Polish of Congregation Shir Chadash, Hudson Valley, NY offered the response.

He reminded everyone that the Muslims had no Enlightenment as there was in the West. There is no liberal Islam in the western sense. Rather there is a struggle going on between accomodationists and an energetic minority of Muslims favoring the past. He foresees a long struggle within Islam and a need to help the accomodationists wisely.

Rabbi Polish perceived silence by Christians about the Middle East Situation. He understands that the Vatican now would be encouraging the Jewish community to speak up about the persecution of Christians.

He proposes, however, that we practice a religious humility in speaking to Muslims given the fact that we have gone beyond things they still practice. We need to be sensitive in how we talk about Islam. He would avoid talk of a Clash of Civilizations—Many Muslims are themselves persecuted.

7. The discussion included a number of items. There was some questioning of Rabbi Polish's avoidance of a Clash of Civilizations. There are elements of truth if not total truth in this model. Cardinal Dolan noted that in fact that the Catholic view of speaking out has changed and yes we are happy if our friends speak up. Msgr. Massie noted that Middle Eastern countries tend towards types of theocracy where religious and national identities are merged. Rabbi Marans asked for a clarification of the work of Catholic Relief Service and CNEWA. Msgr Kozar explained that CRS aids all people with no exceptions and often works with US government contracts. CNEWA has a particular sensitivity to Catholics and other Christians in the Middle East and within this context works for the good of all. Dr. Gregerman raised the question whether the tables that Christians once 'sat at' in the Middle East even exist anymore in the changed situation.
8. Rabbi David Straus presided at the afternoon session

- A. Fr. Crossin presented a brief overview of the Nostra Aetate Conference at Catholic University May 19th to 21st. This will be the celebration of the USCCB.

(1)The Conference will have three tracks—a public track and two dialogue tracks that will be closed to the public. The Muslim-Catholic Plenary, beginning Tuesday evening, will bring together members of the three Muslim-Catholic regional Dialogues. The Jewish-Catholic Dialogue will begin Wednesday and go into Thursday ending at noon.

(2)The public track will include a presentation on the basics of dialogue with application to interreligious dialogue as well as a presentation by Father Francis Clooney, SJ of Harvard on Hindu-Catholic relations. There also will be an Assisi-like prayer on late Tuesday afternoon.

(3)The Central element of the Conference will be the presentations by the three Cardinals— Cardinal Tauran [Muslim-Catholic Relations], Cardinal Koch [Jewish Catholic Relations internationally] and Cardinal Dolan [Jewish-Catholic Relations in the United States—past, present, future]. Each of these presentations will be open to all participants. Each will have a distinguished Respondent [Professor Nasr, Rabbi Greenberg and Rabbi Marans (apologies for forgetting to mention Noam’s role—JWC)]

(4)More details will be forthcoming.

(5) The members noted that local colleges should be notified of this Conference and resources developed from the Conference.

- B. The members shared some details on local, regional and national events being planned to celebrate Nostra Aetate.
- C. Rabbi Straus shared Rabbi Gil’s report in his absence. This led to an extended and deep conversation on the ‘Price Tag’ Phenomenon in Israel. Some perpetrators have received sentences that involved reporting to a court-designated official. Dr. Gregerman noted that this is not merely adolescent immaturity but rather has a political dimension putting pressure on the government. Fr. McManus raised the question of ‘reform’ rather than just punishment for perpetrators—should they be compelled to get to know the others whom they disrespect? The extended discussion included reference to the value of bringing the problems this Phenomenon causes to the attention of the Israeli Consulate and to the general public [perhaps through a letter]—though others noted that this has been done previously. Some noted the difficulties in connecting with this radical fringe of Orthodox Judaism—they disrespect fellow Jews also.
- D. Father McManus reported that he and Bishop Losten would get together and develop their thinking on possible changes in Eastern Catholic Liturgies and a method of approach to this sensitive matter.
- E. Given the ‘bumps’ in developing the Statement of our Dialogue on persecution of Christians that appeared last summer and given the absence of Rabbi Rosenthal, Fr. McManus proposed that he and Rabbi Gil get together, form a small group and develop a proposal for the Co-Chairs on a process for developing future statements.

In the discussion that followed, the members indicated their desire for regular press releases that will serve as a public record of the meetings.

- F. Cardinal Dolan reported that the details of the Papal Visit are cloudy. Pope Francis has indicated that he will visit New York. The visit most likely will be short, no more than a day. Most likely he will speak at the United Nations. Other details will be forthcoming.
- 9. The Conversation adjourned at 2:30. The next meeting will take place during the Nostra Aetate Conference at Catholic University May 19 to 21, 2015. Details will follow.