

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SYNAGOGUES
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS**

June 20, 2018
CARDINAL COOKE CATHOLIC CENTER, NEW YORK, NY

Attendance:

Rabbi David Straus, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Lewis Eron, Rabbi Harold Berman, Rabbi Alvin Berkun, Rabbi Adam Gregerman, Leslie Brier, Martin Budd, Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, Rabbi Elyse Wechterman

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Rev. Al Baca, Fr. Dennis McManus, Mr. Evan Cummings, CSP, Rev. Larry Frizzell, Bishop Basil Losten, Bishop James Massa, Msgr. Guy Massie, Ms. Julia McStravog, Rev. Brian McWeeney, Bishop William Murphy, Ms. Nancy Robinson, Bishop Edward Scharfenberger, Mrs. Jan Skrehot

Guests:

Professor David Hoffman, Deputy Consul General of Israel Amir Sagie, Consulate of Israel Political Advisor Andrew Gross, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Bernadito Auza

MINUTES RECORDED BY RABBI HAROLD BERMAN

Cardinal Timothy Dolan opened the meeting with prayer and welcomed those who were new to our discussion. Cardinal Dolan also mentioned our shared concern for families whose children have been separated from them at the U. S. border. Others complimented Cardinal Dolan on his leadership in expressing concern for the human suffering endured by those who have come to America seeking a better and safer future.

Archbishop Bernadito Auza, Papal Nuncio to the United Nations, shared a number of concerns regarding relations between the government of Israel and the Holy See. He reported that some agreements have been in place over the years, and that some issues have been in discussion waiting for agreements to be concluded. He noted the closure of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem for several days last year over the question of taxes on church properties and a proposed Knesset bill regarding restrictions on the sale of church land. He shared that the Knesset bill regarding the sale of church land was withdrawn after appeals to the Prime Minister.

Archbishop Auza also discussed concerns about funding for the 84 Christian schools in Israel as budget proposals have reduced the amounts of money allocated to the children in those schools. Promises of additional subsidies have not yet been fulfilled.

Archbishop Auza also spoke of other work in which the church has been involved at the United Nations, including rejection of Holocaust denial and support for refugees all over the world. He also discussed the recent withdrawal of the United States from the U. N. Council on Human Rights, and expressed regret that the Council has not been responsive to proposals for changes that would deny membership on the Council to nations that

flagrantly abuse human rights and commented on the failure of the Council to moderate its agenda, which now condemns Israel in its resolutions more than all other nations combined.

Deputy Consul General of Israel Amir Sagie reported that agreements on church property and other economic issues are nearing conclusion and should be finalized soon. He added that Israel is looking forward to the formal celebration of the twenty fifth anniversary of relations between the Israeli government and the Holy See.

Deputy Consul Sagie also expressed Israel's concern over the possible advancement of the late Polish Cardinal August Hlond toward sainthood. Much has been written about a record of anti-Semitism in Hlond's writing and behavior. On the other hand, it was noted that relations between Israel and Poland are generally positive, despite some troubling nationalist tendencies in the current Polish leadership and efforts to criminalize any suggestion of Polish complicity during the Holocaust. Israel honors the memory of thousands of Poles who rescued and protected Jews during World War II.

It was also recognized that our meeting in New York coincided with World Refugee Day and concern for refugees now seeking asylum in Israel was expressed. Deputy Consul Sagie spoke of the effort to find solutions regarding the needs of refugees seeking asylum in Israel and noted that only single men were at this point facing potential deportation. Families were not being separated. **Andrew Gross** also noted the work Israel had been doing to provide help to Syrian refugees through emergency supplies and medical treatment.

It was announced that **Deputy Consul Sagie** would be leaving his post in August and returning to Israel. **Cardinal Dolan** presented him with a gift and expressed good wishes in behalf of the entire group.

Rabbi Noam Marans spoke of the vacant position of Special Envoy for Anti-Semitism, a position that has been vacant since the beginning of the current administration. He thanked the Catholic Church for its support in advocating for the post to be filled and expressed the hope that the current Secretary of State would be more open to filling it than his predecessor had been.

Fr. McManus and Cardinal Dolan mentioned that there had been some publicity about published material concerning the Mortara Affair of 1858 in which a Jewish boy had been taken from his parents by the Church because a nurse had arranged for his Baptism without informing the parents. It had been reported that Steven Spielberg was working on a movie about the affair, but that the project had been shelved. Under present circumstances, all Church authorities agree that, especially after *Nostra Aetate*, there could be no justification for separating a family in this way, and the negative response to comments in an article on the Mortara incident published in *First Things*, confirmed that the position of the Church and relations between the Church and Jews in general is entirely different from what it was in the Nineteenth Century.

Future topics were considered, looking forward to our next meeting on November 15 in Baltimore and in planning for meetings after that. **Leslie Brier** suggested that human trafficking was a topic in which all had a concern and on which we could all work together. It was also noted that **Rabbi Abraham Skorka** of Argentina would be spending at least a year in America beginning in August and, considering his close relationship to **Pope Francis**, would be a very interesting guest for a future meeting. Since the November meeting will be in Baltimore, it would be appropriate to invite the Papal Nuncio from Washington and the Israeli Ambassador to the United States. Topics might include the implementation of Nostra Aetate in other parts of the world and interfaith relations on a wider scale.

Afternoon Study and Discussion

Entering the Covenant: What Defines Jewish Identity?

Professor David Hoffman, Vice Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, led the first part of the afternoon of study with a presentation on the significance of immersion and circumcision in establishing the covenant of Judaism as part of one's identity. He noted that identifying someone as Jewish is established by birth (to a Jewish mother) or by conversion (equivalent to a re-birth as a new person) but that circumcision itself does not confer Jewish status. He noted sources that confirmed the Jewish status of one who is not circumcised, a situation that has become more relevant as large number of Jews from the former Soviet Union became part of Jewish communities in other places.

Professor Hoffman noted that volition is also necessary for one who converts to Judaism, and one who is converted as a child has the right to reject and cancel that conversion on reaching adulthood.

Professor Hoffman also noted that the issue of belief was only introduced into the discussion of conversion, and of Jewish life in general, centuries after the Talmud. Affirmations of belief are not central to Judaism and not specifically required to join the Jewish people.

An outline of Professor Hoffman's talk was distributed.

Circumcision and Baptism: A Parting of the Ways?

Fr. Dennis McManus of Georgetown University and St. John's Seminary, Boston, before turning to theme of Baptism, spoke of several situations in which the Catholic Church has worked to support the needs of Jews in ritual and in dialogue. He spoke of challenges to ritual slaughter and also to circumcision that had arisen in several places in Europe, and of the Church's work to protect the right of Jews to uphold their faith. Nostra Aetate was a turning point in the Church's vision of the Jewish people and also in the Church's understanding of itself.

Fr. McManus also spoke of the insistence of the Catholic Church in dialogue with other Christian denominations that the proselytization of Jews be removed as a stated goal, even at the cost of cutting off the dialogue.

Fr. McManus also spoke of issues from the earliest days of the Church over the question of requiring Jewish rituals, such as circumcision, for Jewish followers of Jesus. Paul argued that no one should be forced to become a Jew in order to be a follower of Jesus, while others argued that in order to be a Christian, one should live a full Jewish life as Jesus had. Circumcision, for a considerable period of time, remained a ritual for Christians who came from the Jewish community even as it was not required for "Gentiles." After the destruction of the Temple in the year 70 the question became less significant because the overwhelming majority of Christians no longer came from the Jewish community. Circumcision became a sign of what the New Covenant had left behind and was regarded with some negativity in many places until Vatican II.

Introducing the central ritual of Baptism, Fr. McManus spoke of the use of water to symbolize creation and Baptism as admission into a covenant with Jesus and all that Jesus represents. Baptism washes away personal sin and original sin, brings a person into a covenantal relationship with Jesus, whether the person is male or female, promises eternal life, leads the way to the other sacraments of the church, makes one a child of God, connects one eternally to Christ and makes a person's body a temple to Jesus.

Fr. McManus noted that through most of history, most Christian denominations, despite different traditions of Baptism, accepted the Baptisms performed by other churches, which had a profound impact on the ability of others to be married in the Church and to feel accepted in it.

There is no equivalent in Catholic tradition to identity by birth. One is never born a Catholic, one is baptized as a Catholic, and although the Baptism nearly always takes place before a child is encouraged to express his or her own volition, Baptism remains valid whether or not an individual affirms it.

Can one renounce Baptism? One can stop practicing as a Catholic, but spiritually one never ceases to be a Catholic in the eyes of the Church.

Fr. McManus was also asked to share a written text to be distributed.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Harold J. Berman