

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF SYNAGOGUES UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

June 19, 2019
FORDHAM UNIVERSITY AT LINCOLN CENTER, NEW YORK, NY

Attendance:

Rabbi David Straus, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Lewis Eron, Rabbi Harold Berman, Leslie Brier, Martin Budd, Professor Adam Gregerman, Rabbi Steve Gutow, Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi Joel Meyers, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rabbi Jonathan Waxman, Rabbi Elyse Wechterman, Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Bishop Basil Losten, Bishop Denis Madden, Bishop James Massa, Bishop Mitch Rozanski, Rev. Lawrence Frizzell, Rev. James Loughran, Rev. Brian McWeeney, Msgr. Guy Massie, Julia McStravog, Rev. Walter F. Kedjierski, Rebecca Cohen, Nancy Robinson, Rev. Dennis McManus, Rev. Manuel J. Rodríguez

Guests:

Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Rev. Manuel J. Rodriguez, Professor Phillip Cunningham, Papal Nuncio Archbishop Bernadito Auza, Fr. Ryan Muldoon, Fr. Stephen Reis

MINUTES RECORDED BY RABBI HAROLD BERMAN

Cardinal Timothy Dolan opened the meeting with prayer and welcomed those who were new to our staff, Fr. Walter F. Kedjierski and Rebecca Cohen, as well as others who are new to this dialogue. Cardinal Dolan also gave special thanks to Fr. Dennis McManus and Rabbi Harold Berman for his effort in coordinating the meeting, and introduced Fr. Ryan Muldoon, recently ordained as a priest and Fr. Stephen Reis, secretary to the Cardinal. He also thanked Bishop Rozanski for his leadership of the Bishop's committee and acknowledged Rabbi Wayne Franklin, who will retire at the end of June from his pulpit in Providence, Rhode Island.

Rabbi David Saperstein introduced Rabbi Abraham Skorka, noting his forty two years of service as a congregation rabbi in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and his leadership over the years in many aspects of interfaith work, including extensive collaboration with Pope Francis during the Pope's lengthy period of service to the Church in Argentina.

Rabbi Abraham Skorka presented a historical review of the settlement and growth of Latin American communities in general and of Jewish life, particularly in Argentina, beginning in the 1800's. He noted a much different heritage of language, institutions and religious life, compared to the United States and Canada, with slower development of democratic institutions.

Argentina was in various periods a haven for Jews who had been persecuted in Europe, and with few exceptions did not have a history of anti-Semitism. The most significant growth of the community came in the aftermath of World War II, with increased

educational opportunities and strong ties to the State of Israel. Although there was discrimination, there were opportunities for advancement in many areas of public life and strong interfaith ties. Although the community sustained deadly attacks on the Embassy of Israel and the Community Building, Jews felt supported by their neighbors of other faiths.

Pope Francis, during his time of service in Argentina, offered exceptional leadership in interfaith dialogue, and, at considerable personal risk, spoke out for political and economic justice. He was always concerned for, and spoke for, those who had been excluded and oppressed.

Fr. Manuel J. Rodriguez, responding to Rabbi Skorka's presentation, noted many of the challenges, all over Latin America, of dealing with discrimination and imperfect democracy. He noted, in speaking of the era of World War II, that the only country in Latin America that was willing to accept refugees from Nazi Europe in time of danger was his native country, the Dominican Republic.

Fr. Rodriguez also noted the challenge of hate crimes, the largest number of which involve anti-Semitism, in New York today and repeated the commitment of the Catholic Church to fight racism and discrimination in all forms against any group. The Church is also deeply concerned about separation of families of those who are today trying to find asylum in the United States from other parts of the world.

In the **discussion** that followed it was also emphasized that the cooperative work of the Church with other religious groups never involves one group evangelizing the other.

It was also noted that there are many additional religious groups and movements in Latin America, some of which share the interfaith work of Jews and Catholic, some do not and some actively exploit differences for their own ends. Muslims in Latin America can be found actively participating in interfaith dialogue, although some Muslim groups do not take part in any dialogue with others.

The goal of dialogue, in addition to increasing understanding, is bringing people together with a greater appreciation for the value and dignity of human life, enhancing the dignity of women in society and fighting poverty and abuse at all levels.

It was noted that great strides in dialogue came in the aftermath of *Nostra Aetate*, but that the work of Pope Francis has dramatically expanded the teaching of mutual respect in more recent years.

Cardinal Dolan led the business session of the meeting, at which **November 18, 2019** was designated as the date for the **next dialogue** meeting. It will be held somewhere **in New York**, with the National Council of Synagogues securing a location. **Immigration** to America, its history, challenges and opportunities was set as the key topic for that discussion.

Lunch was sponsored by the **Consulate General of Israel** in New York, including a discussion program moderated by the **New York Board of Rabbis**.

The **afternoon session** featured a panel discussion that focused on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel.

Rabbi David Straus, serving as moderator, introduced the discussion with emphasis on the success of relationships in the aftermath of *Nostra Aetate*. He noted that dialogues following the Vatican's declaration on interfaith relations in 1965 led to deepening ties between faiths from which many positive things emerged, diplomatic ties being only one of them.

Ambassador Dani Dayan made note of several previous encounters between popes and Zionist leaders. Nahum Sokolov met with Pope Benedict XV and gained a sympathetic ear for the Zionist cause and Israeli President Zalman Shazar met with Paul VI and discussed common Biblical roots of Judaism and Christianity. But comments by Pope Francis in praise of Theodor Herzl went far beyond any previous discussions or exchanges between Israel and the Vatican.

Papal Nuncio Archbishop Bernadito Auza spoke of agreements that have strengthened the exchange between the Vatican and Israel in the years since diplomatic relations were established. As there are deep and unique spiritual roots in the Holy Land, and many Catholic institutions are located there, the Vatican's connection to the State of Israel is unlike any other international relationship.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan discussed the meaning of Vatican relations with Israel in both theological and political terms. He noted that Pope John Paul II was the first pope to actually use the phrase, "State of Israel." Pope John Paul II considered recognition to be necessary first because it was the right thing to do, and because *Nostra Aetate* should not be seen as merely a statement, but also as a mandate for action. Reflected in the Vatican recognition was an affirmation of mutual trust and understanding as well as a promise to work together for human rights all over the world.

Professor Adam Gregerman gave an historical background to the relationship, noting how dramatic and unparalleled was the movement from hostility to friendship. From early texts suggesting the destruction of Jerusalem as a punishment from God to a statement by Pius X that the Vatican could never sanction Jewish control in the Holy Land, there was a great deal of uncertainty about the Zionist enterprise. The dramatic turning point came with *Nostra Aetate*, but its rejection of the idea that Jews are alienated from God and its condemnation of anti-Semitism offered no statement about the modern State of Israel. Even after *Nostra Aetate*, popes visited Israel without recognizing the state. Ultimately, the Church found a way to recognize the state without offering a specific theological meaning to its role in history.

Ambassador Dayan added that Israel is very proud of the growth, security and prosperity of Christian communities in Israel. Remembering the challenges of the past should not prevent us from moving forward together in the future. He emphasized that the most important element of the relationship is trust.

Cardinal Dolan noted that in the past some people believed that all of the issues of the relationship should have been resolved before there was diplomatic recognition. Pope John Paul II believed that once relations are in place and trust is established, everything else becomes possible.

Archbishop Auza offered the final statement that while much has been done, there remains much work ahead, but we will proceed with the confidence that no challenge is impossible to overcome.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Harold J. Berman
Executive Director
National Council of Synagogues