

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

MINUTES

June 21, 2017

CARDINAL COOKE CATHOLIC CENTER, NY

Attendance:

Rabbi Harold Berman, Leslie Brier, Martin Budd, Rabbi Lewis Eron, Rabbi Wayne Franklin, Rabbi Leonard Gordon, Rabbi Steve Gutow, Rabbi Noam Marans, Rabbi Daniel Polish, Ann Rosenthal, Rabbi Gilbert Rosenthal, Rabbi David Sandmel, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Bishop William Murphy, Bishop James Massa, Bishop Basil Losten, Rev. Dennis McManus, Rev. David Michael, Rev. Lawrence Frizzell, Msgr. Guy Massie, Rev. Brian McWeeney, Msgr. Robert Stern, Ms. Nancy Robinson

Guests:

Dr. Mark Riebling, Deputy Consul General of Israel Amir Sagie, Consulate of Israel Director of Regional Affairs Michael Alexander

Cardinal Timothy Dolan opened the meeting with prayer.

Rabbi Gilbert Rosenthal reflected on the life and legacy of the late Cardinal William Keeler, who passed away in March. Rabbi Rosenthal spoke of their meeting in 1987 and of many encounters in the years that followed, including celebrations in which Jews and Catholics came together in large numbers to pay tribute to the Cardinal's work.

Cardinal Keeler related at one time that after World War II the Church was approached by a couple who had taken in a Jewish child during the Holocaust. Contrary to precedent of the famous Mortara case of a century earlier, the Church insisted that the child be returned to his Jewish family.

Cardinal Keeler was an advisor to the Vatican Council in the 1960's and worked from that time on to create positive relations and mutual respect between Jews and Catholics. He was a humble servant of the Church and a proud friend of the Jewish people.

Rabbi Jeffrey Wohlberg added that he met Cardinal Keeler when both served in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and that through all the years that followed, Cardinal Keeler remained a friend and attended many Wohlberg family events.

Cardinal Dolan offered a welcome to Rabbi Rosenthal and his wife Ann and expressed thanks for all his efforts over the course of many years in behalf of interfaith dialogue. **Rabbi Rosenthal** was presented with a plaque that expressed gratitude for his years of service and pictured him with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

Members of the group introduced themselves and new members were welcomed.

Dr. Mark Riebling began his presentation with praise for the work of those who bring communities together even as enemies try to divide us.

Dr. Riebling discussed his new book: *Church of Spies: The Pope's Secret War Against Hitler*. He began by mentioning that John Cornwell, author of the 1999 book *Hitler's Pope*, had retracted much of what was in his book after the release of new files and documents.

Dr. Riebling shared a story of papal resistance that involved work Pius XII did to undermine and try to remove Adolf Hitler from power from 1933, before he became Pope, and through the duration of Hitler's rule. The Pope was in regular coordination with a network of people, including Protestants and Catholics, seeking to undermine the Hitler regime and working to build a better post-war world that would emerge after Hitler's defeat.

In some ways, Dr. Riebling argued, it was this work behind the scenes that made the Pope less able to speak out publicly, lest it draw attention to what he was doing and to the people with whom he was working. At first, he was concerned that Hitler might nationalize the German Catholic Church, and so he worked to protect the interests of Catholics and the Church in Germany, but gradually he moved to working with the British, essentially functioning as a secret agent, and communicating with those who were spying on Germany.

Over time the Pope made extensive efforts to save Jews as well as Catholics, and although one may argue that he might have done more, or said more, there is voluminous documentation of his efforts at every stage of the war.

Dr. Riebling argues that all Vatican archives should be opened, but that opening the archives will not answer all questions, because not all records are complete and there will always be questions about what may be missing. He suggested that while it is important to review the past, the most important legacy is for Jews and Christians to continue to work together going forward.

Deputy Consul Amir Sagie spoke of the recent visit by President Trump to Israel. The President became the first American President to visit the Western Wall while in office. His visit also was an effort to reopen the peace process.

Mr. Sagie also spoke of cooperation between Israel and the Vatican, leading to an agreement on issues regarding Church property and other legal/economic concerns that will, hopefully, be signed in the near future.

Mr. Sagie shared the text of a document that was presented as being on behalf of the “Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land.” It was not a widely publicized document and very few names were associated with it. He also spoke of the challenges of dealing with UNESCO, which has recently released prejudicial statements about Hebron, in addition to other statements that ignore Jewish and Christian history in the land of Israel.

Finally, Mr. Sagie suggested that while there is not a great deal of movement in the peace process, and dramatic breakthroughs seem unlikely in the short term, there are many things that can be done, and that Israel is trying to do, to make life better for Palestinians who live under Israeli rule. Mr. Sagie also suggested that while there is some concern about recent American arms deals with Saudi Arabia, that is a minor issue compared to the major threat to peace in the region, which comes from Iran.

The next meeting of the Dialogue group was set for Thursday, November 9, 2017. The location will be arranged by the National Council of Synagogues.

Potential topics were discussed, including:

Climate change, in light of statements by Pope Francis, and the issues of human and economic welfare that emerge from environmental forces.

Human suffering and how it is viewed theologically in both communities
The Shoah and ongoing studies regarding the events of World War II

Assisted Suicide – and how proposals for changes in the law are approached by both communities

Immigration issues

Religious liberty and its potential conflict with civil rights

Persecution of Christians in various places around the world – the need for updates in an ongoing concern

Islam – its true nature and how it relates to Jews and to Christians.

Perceptions of **death and eternity** and how it is understood in our respective faiths

The question of what is appropriate regarding **political advocacy from the pulpit**

Of these, the ones that had the most support for our next discussion were: climate change and environmental challenges, assisted suicide and the policy questions that surround it and worldwide persecution of Christians.

Cardinal Dolan closed the meeting, inviting all to join for lunch and following lunch all were invited to join at the Cardinal's home for dessert followed by a tour of St. Patrick's cathedral. The Cardinal's hospitality, as always, was appreciated by all.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Harold J. Berman