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CARDINAL GLEMP'S VISIT IS A TIME FOR CHANGE

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

When Cardinal Jozef ~~Gorkx~~ Glemp, primate of the Polish Catholic Church, visits the United States from September 19 through October 7, there are essentially two contradictory responses that are open to American Jewish leadership.

The first: concentrate entirely on the Cardinal Glemp's horrible anti-Semitic statements made in his homily on August 26, 1989, at the shrine of ~~St~~ Czestochowa, and ignore any changes that have taken place since that time.

The second: keep clearly in mind the crude anti-Semitic themes expressed in that offensive homily, but acknowledge with both reason and decency that a ~~many~~ number of important changes have taken place since 1989 ~~in both~~ the attitudes and behavior of both Cardinal Glemp and leaders of the Polish Catholic Church. The challenge then becomes how to build on those changes and ~~so~~ assure that the movement toward uprooting anti-Semitism in Poland is ~~strengthened~~ strengthened and made a lasting program.

The risk of the first response of seeking publicly to ^{4/}humiliate Cardinal Glemp by serving a summons on him when ^{he} he lands in Boston is that it will gratify the egos of two or three individuals, but the consequences of that action could be exceedingly damaging to the pififul Polish Jewish remnant as well as to American Jewry.

Someone has to keep in mind that American Jewry is passing through a very troubling time. The confrontation between the Bush administration and the Shamir government over obtaining the \$10 billion in guarantees for loans for Israel, even with the most positive compromise, is going to leave a great many Americans angry at Jews for opposing the U.S. president in favor of the Israeli government. I do not think we should underestimate the negative fallout of this emerging confrontation.

Then the Crown Heights black pogrom against Lubavitcher Jews discloses how pervasive a black culture of vicious anti-Semitism is creeping out around us. While moderate black leaders have remained largely silent in the face of the most hateful, Nazi-like verbal violence and murderous riots, a number of the black radical agitators - the Rev. Al Shapton, Sunny Carson, Maddox and Mason, et al;

have had the audacity to warn that Crown Heights^{S/} pogroms ~~we~~ could well be repeated in Williamsburg, Boro Park, Washington Heights and elsewhere. With the encouragement of the Rev. Louis Farrakhan, Dr. Leonard Jeffries, and anti-Semitic rap lyrics, who can guarantee that imitative behavior could not break out in other cities?

A public explosion against Cardinal Glemp in the United States clearly runs the risk of alienating the entire American Catholic hierarchy, the majority of whom are trusted friends of the U.S. Jewish community, not to speak of tens of thousands of Polish Catholics in the United States.

It is more than probable^{b/} that public attacks against Cardinal Glemp while he is in the United States will have the most dire consequences for the elderly Polish Jewish community. As happened when Rabbi Avi Weiss invaded the sanctuary of the Carmelite nuns, another wave of anti-Semitism can be ~~expected~~ expected in Poland should Cardinal Glemp be publicly humiliated while in the United States. But it will be the ~~the~~ frail Polish Jews who will be beaten, ~~and~~ cursed, and spat ~~on~~ upon, not the Jewish ~~persons~~ persons living in the safety of Riverdale and Cambridge, Mass.

Jewish leadership are elected to office by their significant constituencies^y - to whom they are regularly accountable - for the primary purpose of defending Jewish interests and assuring Jewish security. It would be perverse if they felt justified in ~~provoking~~ provoking further animosity and hostility toward Jews.

American Jewry has abundant real problems with the imminent U.S.-Israeli confrontation, the Crown Heights black culture of vicious anti-Semitism, not to speak of the latent garden-variety anti-Semitism which lies buried in the culture.

Since 1939, Cardinal Glemp committed himself to transfer the Carmelite convent to a new center that is under construction. He gave the full authority of his office to an extraordinary declaration of the Polish Catholic hierarchy that condemned anti-Semitism "as evil and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel." He approved the reading of that historic pastoral document in every Polish Catholic Church in January 1991, ~~and~~ an unprecedented act in the history of Poland.

And in August, in a letter sent to a Polish Catholic archbishop in Detroit, Cardinal Glemp retracted charges he had leveled during his 1939 homily that "seven Jewish demonstrators" had intended physical harm to the Carmelite sisters or destruction of their convent.

I do not know whether Cardinal Glemp is a genuine ba'al teshuvah. ^{he} But and the Polish Catholic church which he leads have shown demonstrable signs they are undergoing serious corrective changes in their attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, the Nazi holocaust, and Israel.

When a group of us from the Synagogue Council of America meet with Cardinal Glemp and American Catholic cardinals and bishops on September 20 in Washington, we feel we will be acting in the best Jewish interests to help advance that process of change and transformation, and not to torpedo it through angry outbursts.

--Rabbi Tanenbaum, for thirty years director of interreligious and international relations for the American Jewish Committee, is a former chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC), the official body relating to the Vatican and other world Christian bodies. He is now a lecturer, writer, and consultant.

