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Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 12, Folder 3, Auschwitz - Carmelite controversy, Undated.

DRAFT

The American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, and The American Jewish Congress deplore the resolution adopted at the Executive meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Montreal, May 7, 1989, calling on its member communities in 70 countries to refrain from meeting with the current Pope during his future visits abroad.

The failure by the Catholic Church of Poland to fulfill the two-year old commitment to remove the Carmelite convent presently on the site of the former Auschwitz death camp is indeed a cause for serious concern. We believe it essential that commitments made be kept and we call on the European church leaders who were also signatories to the agreement and the Vatican -- whose support for the agreement we have reason to assume -- to work toward a speedy resolution of this painful problem.

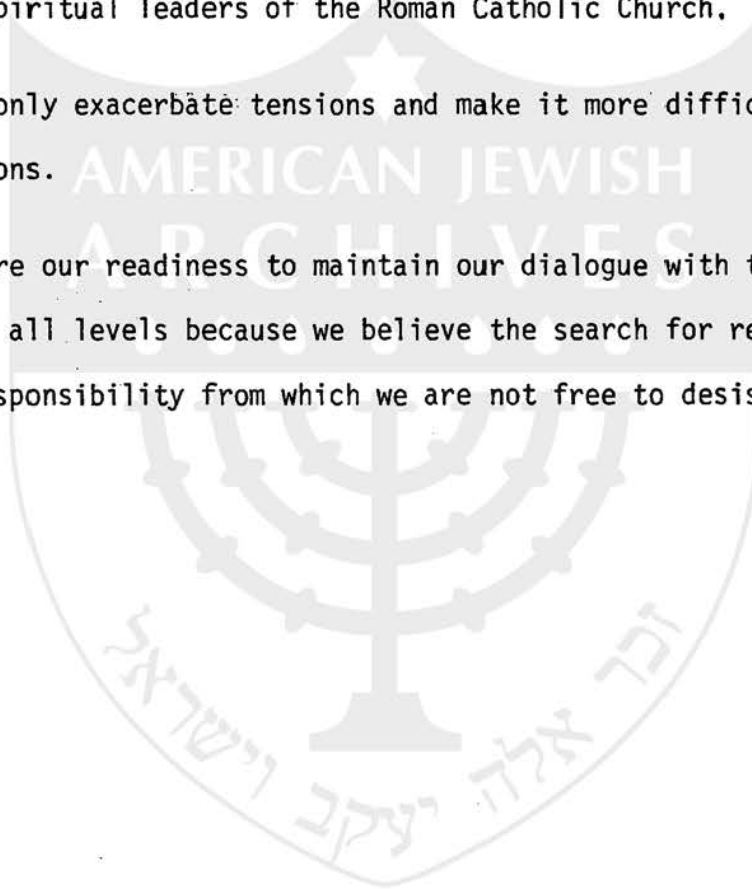
At the same time, we cannot forget that Jewish-Catholic relations extend over a much broader range of issues than the Auschwitz convent problem. Since Vatican II and the adoption of Nostra Aetate in 1965 much progress has been made in strengthening mutual respect and understanding between Jews and Catholics worldwide.

A more positive attitude toward Jews and Judaism and an affirmation that God's covenant with the Jewish people remains unbroken have found expression in Catholic teaching on the highest level.

There remain issues of disagreement on political and diplomatic matters, and some of these have led to Catholic-Jewish tensions in the past and may lead to tensions in the future. The absence of full diplomatic relations between the Vatican and the State of Israel deserves particular mention as one such issue. But we believe that these outstanding problems will not be resolved by refusing to meet with the spiritual leaders of the Roman Catholic Church.

Such a course can only exacerbate tensions and make it more difficult to find appropriate solutions.

We therefore declare our readiness to maintain our dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church on all levels because we believe the search for reconciliation to be our joint responsibility from which we are not free to desist.



Embassy of the POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

Press Office

2640 SIXTEENTH STREET, N. W., WASHINGTON, D. C. 20009 • 234-3800

POLISH AUTHORITIES ON CARMELITE CONVENT IN OSWIECIM

/A statement by the Office of Government Spokesman/

AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

The Carmelite convent application for taking over the building for a cloister at the former concentration camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau was approved by the Office for Denominational Affairs in 1983. Earlier no single institution or organization was interested in place at which the convent is situated now. It was a storage facility for a local cooperative.

It was only in 1985 that representatives of certain Jewish communities presented objections to the location of the convent there. At that time direct contacts between representatives of Catholic Church in Poland as well as other European countries and representatives of Jewish organizations took place. On February 22, 1987, in Geneva, an agreement was reached. It stipulated the construction of the Center for Information, Educational Meetings and Prayer to which the Carmelite convent would be moved. To date the Center has not been built and the convent remains at its previous site.

In this context protests of Jewish groups from abroad visiting the site of the former concentration camp took place at the cloister.

State authorities are not involved in the above matter. Nevertheless they anxiously wish that the dispute be resolved in the spirit of the Geneva agreements. The application for the location of the Center of Information, Education, Meetings and Prayer was submitted by the Metropolitan Curia in Kraków on March 10, 1989. On March 15, the same year a proper site was recommended by the Bureau of Architecture and Urban Development and the final decision regarding location was made on June 15 by the Mayor of the city of Oświęcim.

The question of starting the construction and its financing does not involve state authorities but only the parties to the Geneva agreement. However the state authorities are concerned by growing tensions over the case of the convent and they appeal for restraint, understanding and calm, especially at the place which is the symbol of martyrology of millions of people of different religions and nationalities. Further fanning of tensions has also negative international implications, especially on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II. It weakens the significance of the martyrology of Jews and Poles.

We are for quickly taking measured and fair steps to fulfill the Geneva agreement.

x x x

Polish authorities will make efforts to contribute to the resolution of the conflict.

DECLARATION

DE LA COMMISSION DE L'EPISCOPAT POLONAIS POUR LE DIALOGUE

AVEC LES JUIFS

Suite à l'énoncé du Dr Gerhard Riegner, co-Président du Conseil directeur du Congrès Juif mondial/ CJM/ à Genève, rapporté par l'Agence de Presse Internationale Catholique dans le n° 4 du 4 janvier 1989, je suis dans l'obligation d'y apporter quelques précisions.

1. Tous les documents de l'Eglise catholique d'une certaine importance concernant les relations avec les juifs, ont été depuis longtemps traduits en polonais et sont facilement accessibles aussi bien dans le pays tout entier que dans chaque diocèse. Actuellement la publication complète, en langue polonaise, et en un seul volume, de tous les textes concernant ces problèmes, est en cours de préparation. Ils ont, par ailleurs, fait l'objet d'études et de travaux universitaires.
2. Le Cardinal Joseph Glemp, Président de la Conférence Episcopale Polonaise et Primat de Pologne, et l'Episcopat polonais tout entier, apprécie l'importance du projet proposé par le Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, Métropolitain de Cracovie, pour la construction du Centre d'Information, d'Education, de Rencontre et de Prière à Auschwitz.
3. Le rôle du Centre d'Auschwitz - tel que l'Eglise catholique le conçoit - a été clairement défini par le Pape, qui, s'adressant aux autorités juives à Vienne, a affirmé : "Parmi les multiples initiatives d'aujourd'hui qui sont prises dans l'esprit du Concile pour le dialogue judéo-chrétien, je voudrais indiquer le Centre pour l'information, l'éducation, la rencontre et la prière qui va être réalisé en Pologne. Il a pour objectif d'étudier la Shoah, ainsi que le martyre du peuple polonais et des autres peuples européens, à l'époque du national-socialisme, et de se confronter à eux sur le plan spirituel. Il est à souhaiter que ce Centre produise de féconds résultats et serve de modèle à d'autres

nations. Les initiatives de ce genre produiront également des fruits pour la convivence de tous les groupes de la société et les inciteront à s'engager en faveur d'une attention réciproque pour les faibles, les délaissés, les marginaux, à surmonter l'hostilité et les préjugés, à défendre les droits de l'homme, en particulier le droit à la liberté religieuse, pour chaque personne et communauté." Par ces paroles, le Pape, a définitivement donné au projet du Centre d'Auschwitz, orienté vers l'avenir, une dimension ecclésiale et universelle.

4. Les difficultés retardant la réalisation du projet du Centre comme le déplacement du Carmel d'Auschwitz, ne proviennent en rien de la mauvaise volonté, mais sont toutes de nature objective. Elles résultent en partie de formalités administratives, en partie de l'histoire même d'Auschwitz, de sa signification et de la valeur symbolique de ce lieu pour le peuple polonais. De même que pour les juifs, Auschwitz est le symbole de la Shoah, de même pour tous les Polonais, Auschwitz reste le symbole du martyre sanglant de la nation polonaise.

Pour nous, la construction du Centre et le déplacement du Carmel sont aussi importants l'un que l'autre pour l'avenir, dans l'esprit même de l'accord signé à Genève, le 22 février 1987. Ce projet de Centre est orienté d'une manière tellement évidente vers l'avenir. Il doit servir à l'éducation des générations futures, au perfectionnement de l'information et à l'approfondissement de la compréhension mutuelle. Il mérite sans aucun doute de la part des chrétiens et de la part des juifs, la juste reconnaissance de sa valeur, l'engagement sincère et les efforts communs.

Au nom de la Commission

Mgr Henryk Muszyński
Président

Dear Mr. Leibler,

Thank you for your letter, I believe that we agree far more than we disagree on the countering of anti-Semitism.

It is a matter of both conviction and practice with me that no one, Jew or gentile, has the right to 'dignify' or tolerate anti-Semitic remarks. I fully concur with your feeling that these must be ^{denounced} ~~condemned~~ clearly and unequivocally. The record will show that I have made my position clear on this point on many occasions, and in many parts of the world.

At the same time, I am persuaded that neither the Jewish people nor the Jewish cause are served by stridently denouncing people and leaving it at that. That may relieve the emotions but it generally effects no change for the better.

My belief is that, along with the strongest ~~and most effective~~ condemnation of all anti-Semites, there must be an effective strategy and program to change their views, especially when they are in a position to influence the attitudes and behavior of not just tens but hundreds of thousands, and possibly millions. The decisions of Vatican Council II on Catholic-Jewish relations is a dramatic example, I believe, of the positive changes that can be brought about in the Jewish interest.

I should welcome an opportunity to discuss ~~via~~ these and related matters in person. I do believe that we share very much in common.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

Sir Sigmund Sternberg

1 Suppose a ~~five column~~ headline in your leading news-
✓ paper today read, "Catholics call for worldwide boycott of Jews
3 and Israel."

4 Suppose the Vatican proposed a boycott by all Christian tourists
5 to the State of Israel? ~~Suppose~~ the American Catholic hierarchy called
6 on 52 million Catholics to refuse to have any dealings with U.S.

7 Jewish businessmen, professionals - doctors, lawyers, real estate people -
8 cultural, and artistic personalities in reprisal for the World Jewish
9 Congress' proposal that world Jewry refuse to meet with Pope John
10 Paul II? ~~The view of Christ on earth for nearly a billion Catholics~~
How world-wide?

11 ~~What~~ do you think the overwhelming majority of American
✓ Jews would react to such a ~~proposed~~ Catholic boycott of Jews and Israel?

12 Well, I can tell you that such a destructive scenario ~~is~~
13 with its potential for a "holy war" may be remote, but is not ultimately
14 impossible if the WJC persists in its present inflammatory course.

15 Since the World Jewish Congress' first widely-publicized
16 story in major daily newspapers under headlines blazing, "U.S. Jews
17 call for world wide Boycott of Pope," several ~~extreme~~ Catholic groups have
18 in fact called on the American Catholic bishops to pronounce
such a reciprocal "boycott" of Jewry. Only the restraint and good
will of a number of key Catholic officials have prevented such
reprisals from being given consideration - at the present time...

19 ~~There~~ I believe that it is far more revealing of the
attitudes of top American Jewish leaders that at this very moment
the national leadership of the United Jewish Appeal is working
assiduously to arrange an audience for 200 of the biggest contributors
to the USA with Pope John Paul II in Vatican City this summer. They
are members of the Israeli Prime Minister's "Special Mission," each of
whom has contributed a minimum of \$100,000 to Israel's economic needs.

My impression is that they will completely ignore the
WJC's Rambo ideology, and act as if the boycott proposal was just
a feverish publicity stunt that will do nobody any good.
except some newspaper headlines

HIS EXCELLENCY
TADEUSZ MAZOWIECKI
PRIME MINISTER ELECT
THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND

WARSAW (?), POLAND

IN BEHALF OF MANY THOUSANDS OF JEWISH LEADERS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, WE WISH TO EXTEND TO YOU OUR HEARTFELT CONGRATULATIONS AND BEST WISHES ON YOUR ASSUMPTION OF THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER OF POLAND. THE JEWISH PEOPLE HAVE HAD A LONG AND COMPLEX HISTORY WITH THE NATION OF POLAND, AND WE EAGERLY SUPPORT EVERY MOVEMENT TOWARD THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DEMOCRACY, ECONOMIC JUSTICE, AND HUMAN RIGHTS.

WE ARE CONFIDENT THAT JEWISH LEADERS IN THE WORLDS OF COMMERCE, TRADE, AND FINANCE WILL WANT TO PLAY AN APPROPRIATE ROLE IN HELPING POLAND ACHIEVE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND STABILITY. WE HOPE IT IS NOT MISUNDERSTOOD IF WE MAKE REFERENCE TO THE FACT THAT THE CURRENT IMPASSE OVER THE MOVEMENT OF THE CARMELITE CONVENT OFF THE GROUNDS OF AUSCHWITZ TO THE AGREED UPON NEW CONVENT COULD BECOME A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO PERSUADING THE WESTERN WORLD OF THE NEW SENSIBILITIES OF THE EMERGING DEMOCRATIC POLAND. WE ARE PREPARED TO DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO HELP IN THE CALM AND MUTUALLY RESPECTFUL~~LY~~ RESOLUTION OF THIS HIGHLY PUBLICIZED PROBLEM. AGAIN, PLEASE REST ASSURED ~~OUR~~ OF OUR HEARTIEST BEST WISHES AND OUR PRAYERS FOR GOD'S RICHEST BLESSINGS OVER YOU, YOUR FAMILY, THE SOLIDARITY MOVEMENT, AND THE FUTURE OF A REVIVED DEMOCRATIC POLISH NATION AND PEOPLE.

RESPECTFULLY YOURS,

SIR SIGMUND STERNBERG
LONDON, ENGLAND

RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM
NEW YORK, N. Y.

Church balks over Auschwitz convent

NEW YORK (JTA) — The long-promised removal of the Carmelite convent from Auschwitz has been indefinitely postponed by a Polish Catholic cardinal, a move that Jewish leaders say will severely strain Catholic-Jewish relations.

Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, the archbishop of Krakow, announced on Vatican radio Aug. 8 that the building of a proposed interreligious information center was now "an impossibility."

The announcement drew criticism from the other three Roman Catholic cardinals who were signatories to the agreement reached two years ago to remove the nunnery from Auschwitz.

Cardinal Albert Decourtray of Lyon, France, said that the agreement made with representatives of world Jewry in Geneva on Feb. 22, 1987, "is mandatory and binding on those who signed it. Its decisions cannot be re-examined."

His statement was supported by Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, archbishop of Paris, and Cardinal Godfried Danneels, head of the Catholic church in Belgium, both of whom also signed the 1987 agreement.

The proposed information center was to have been built off the site of the former death camp and was to have housed the convent as well.

Macharski attributed his decision to halt construction of the center to "a violent campaign of accusations and defamation, and offensive — not only verbal — aggression, which echoed up to Auschwitz."

The campaign, Macharski said, was the work of "certain Western Jewish circles."

Jewish organizations have reacted with outrage, not only at Macharski's nullification of the agreement to move the convent, but at the wording of his statement.

Numerous Jewish organizations have publicly protested for the convent's removal, and demonstrations have been mounted at the convent itself.

Last month, seven New York Jewish activists climbed over the fence surrounding the convent and asked to speak with the nuns. They were beaten and dragged off the grounds.

This demonstration reportedly incensed Macharski. Sources in Europe say that Macharski called the demonstration "violent and intolerable" in a meeting with local priests.

Rabbi Avraham Weiss, who led the demonstration at Auschwitz, called for Jewish leaders to

"freeze dialogue" with the Vatican until the convent is moved.

Weiss also said the Polish government should bear responsibility for the convent and suggested a travel boycott of Poland by Israel and world Jewish organizations if the situation does not change.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who has been deeply involved with the convent issue, is taking a more conciliatory approach.

He said that Polish leaders had told him in the past few weeks that Macharski's commitment to build the convent and the center by 1990 "was firm."

But, Tanenbaum said, the recent demonstrations have caused a backlash in Poland and "touched off a furious reaction among Polish Catholics who now support, even insist, that the Carmelite convent not be moved."

In his statement, Macharski said he was suspending action on building the center since, "because of lack of respect for the nuns and for their human and Christian dignity, the peace to which they are entitled was disturbed. Christian conventions, the symbols of faith and of piety, were not respected."

Israeli officials said recently that the Polish deputy foreign minister had indicated to Israelis that his government would intervene in the matter.

Earlier this month, Decourtray solemnly promised that the convent will be removed "at its earliest" and blamed the delays on "local bureaucracy" in Poland.

The Federation of Polish Jews of the United States urged in a statement that the Catholic-Jewish interfaith dialogue be suspended until the conflict is re-



CARMELITE CONVENT which at the heart of a longstanding controversy.

solved.

The group also urged the cancellation of Jewish participation in observations to mark the 50th anniversary of the outbreak of World War II, scheduled to take place in Poland Aug. 30 to Sep. 4. At the same time, it issued a call to Jews around the world to suspend trips to Poland by groups or individuals.

Recent sermons by Pope John Paul II seem to imply that the Christian covenant with God superseded the Jewish covenant with God and that the Christian covenant was forged because of "Israel's infidelity."

This conflicts with previous statements by the Pope that God's covenant with the Jews was "never revoked."

The statement by the European Union of Jewish Students said that the combination of the Pope's remarks and Macharski's announcement "seems to imply that the Catholic Church believes that the Shoah was retribution for the Jews' infidelity."

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BOB BREST
AUTO WORLD

NEW ENGLAND'S #1

Vatican Urges Relocation of Convent at Auschwitz

Continued From Page A1

Jews," said a statement issued here today. It was signed by Johannes Cardinal Willebrands, a senior Vatican official, who as President of the Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews has been involved in the dispute.

Though it was not a direct order for the nuns to move, the statement was seen by Catholic and Jewish figures as the Vatican's clearest public commitment yet to resolve the controversy.

Under the 1987 agreement reached in Geneva, the convent was to have been relocated by February of this year, but the interfaith center has yet to be built. Jews have mounted protests, culminating in a violent clash between American Jews and Polish workers at the convent in July, and these have prompted the Polish Catholic hierarchy to suspend the accord.

Glomp Called for Renegotiation

Last month, Jozef Cardinal Glomp, the Primate of Poland, called for renegotiation of the agreement and described the church officials who negotiated it as "not competent." The church officials included Franciszek Cardinal Macharski, the Archbishop of Cracow, in whose jurisdiction the convent is situated, and three other European cardinals.

After those three Cardinals issued a statement declaring that the agreement should be upheld, the Polish church's Commission for Dialogue With Judaism called on Sept. 6 for new talks with Jewish leaders on relocating the convent.

Over the months, Jewish spokesmen repeatedly appealed to Pope John Paul II to intervene in the case, but on several occasions the Vatican insisted that the convent issue was a matter for the Polish church to resolve. Today's statement appeared to reverse that stand.

"This is intended to contribute to a more serene atmosphere in the dialogue between Jews and Christians," said the Rev. Pier Francesco Fumagalli, an aide to Cardinal Willebrands, after distributing the statement. "I hope we will be able to brighten up the mood."

Today's statement was published in the official Vatican Bulletin, which implied, according to a Vatican spokesman, that it had the endorsement of the Pope, who as Archbishop of Cracow before Cardinal Macharski first proposed the convent, which was established in 1984.

Today's statement was met with positive reactions from Jewish spokesmen in Europe and the United States. Rabbi James Rudin of New York, who leads the International Jewish Committee Committee for Interreligious Consultations, sounded pleased after a

visit to the Vatican today.

"This is a very positive and very important statement and I welcome it warmly," said Rabbi Rudin, who said he had personally received the news from Cardinal Willebrands this morning.

"We are moving to an equitable solution," he added, "in which there should be no winners or losers."

There was also positive reaction among Catholics, including the French Bishops' Conference. The Rev. Jean Dujardin, secretary to the commission for relations with Jews at the bishops' conference, said the Vatican had "cleared the horizon" and endorsed "the spirit of Geneva." But he told reporters that the relocation of the nuns was not likely to take place until the new center was built.

Time of Construction Uncertain

At the Vatican, Father Fumigalli today said the question of when and how the prayer center would be built would be left to the Polish bishop in whose diocese Auschwitz lies.

"It would not be realistic to talk about the number of months or years involved," he said, "The central point is to build the center and it is important that the Holy See will contribute economically."

Father Fumigalli declined to disclose how much money the Vatican would contribute to the building costs. Cardinal Glomp has estimated the cost of the center at \$2 million.

Although part of the land for the new center had already been bought, Polish

Catholic leaders have said they laid money for construction and have appealed for outside help. According to the 1987 accord, the nuns are to move a site about 600 yards from "the perimeter of the concentration camp."

Jews began objecting to the nuns' presence at Auschwitz shortly after the convent's establishment in 1984 in building once used to store deadly gas.

Polish Catholics argued in response that there was nothing offensive about nuns who lived a secluded life of prayer at a site where many Catholic Poles, including priests and nuns, were also killed.

After the deadline set by the Geneva agreement passed in February, Jewish groups from outside Poland staged protests, one of which ended when Polish workers at the site beat and ejected seven American Jews who had entered the convent.

The dispute became even more bitter when Polish church officials said they were abandoning plans for the construction of the new center. Cardinal Glomp criticized Jews in language that many Jews called anti-Semitic and offensive. In the furor, Cardinal Glomp canceled a planned visit to the United States, scheduled to begin Sept. 21.

Despite the anger on both sides of the dispute, some Catholic and Jewish leaders in Europe have played down the conflict, calling it merely an irritant rather than a threat to relations between the two faiths. But one prominent European rabbi expressed regret today at the Vatican's statement.

Text of Vatican Statement

Special to The New York Times

ROME, Sept. 19 — Following is the text, translated from the French by The New York Times, of a Vatican statement today on the Jewish-Catholic dispute over a convent at the site of the Auschwitz death camp:

The commission of the Holy See for religious relations with Judaism has acknowledged with satisfaction the communiqué published on Sept. 6, 1989, by His Excellency Msgr. Henryk Muszynski, president of the Polish Episcopal Commission for Dialogue with Judaism.

The expressed intention to proceed with the establishment of a center of information, of meeting, of dialogue and of prayer, as called for in the Geneva declaration of February 1987 is received positively, because the Holy See is convinced that such a center would contribute in a significant way to the development of good

relations between Christians and Jews.

The Holy Father, in effect, in his address to the Jewish community of Vienna on June 24, 1988, expressed the hope that "this center produce fruitful results and serve as a model for other nations."

The prayer and the life of devotion of the Carmelites, whose monastery will be in some way at the heart of the center, will contribute decisively to its success.

In order to sustain the implementation of this important but costly project, the Holy See is prepared to contribute its own financial support.

JOHANNES WILLEBRANDS
President

MOVE BY VATICAN APPLAUDED IN U.S.

Bishops and Jewish Groups See Healing of Tensions

By PETER STEINFELS

The Vatican's declaration backing relocation of a Roman Catholic convent from the site of the Auschwitz death camp removes a serious impediment to better Catholic-Jewish relations, leaders of the church and of Jewish organizations said yesterday.

The statement "eases tensions and puts a welcome end to a problem that has plagued Catholic-Jewish relations since the Carmelite convent was opened in 1984," said Seymour D. Reich, the president of B'nai B'rith International. Mr. Reich currently serves as chairman of two umbrella groups of Jewish organizations, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations and the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.

Similar evaluations came from spokesmen for the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Synagogue Council of America and the World Jewish Congress.

New York Prelates Agree

John Cardinal O'Connor, the Archbishop of New York, and Bishop Francis J. Mugavero of Brooklyn quickly endorsed the Vatican statement. "It is my hope that it will help to heal the wounds that have been suffered during this controversy," said Bishop Mugavero, who was formerly in charge of Catholic-Jewish relations for the American bishops' conference.

"The beginning of a beginning," Cardinal O'Connor called the statement when questioned yesterday by television reporters. "Now we're going to have to set about the business of reconciliation, of trying to dissipate whatever bitterness has developed."

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, international consultant for the American Jewish Committee, said yesterday's statement confirmed "the usefulness of the quiet diplomatic discussions that have been going on between Jewish representatives and Vatican authorities for the last several years."

Rabbi Avraham Weiss, who occupied the convent's porch with six other demonstrators in July and was beaten by Polish workmen, reserved judgment on the Vatican statement. It included no specific timetable for the convent's relocation, and "with a history of broken agreements, there is

cause for concern," he said. "We will not be silent until the nuns leave."

Rabbi Weiss said the Auschwitz convent was "part of a larger Vatican attempt to de-Judaize and Christianize the Holocaust." Jewish relations with the Vatican can be fully normalized "only when this process is halted," he said.

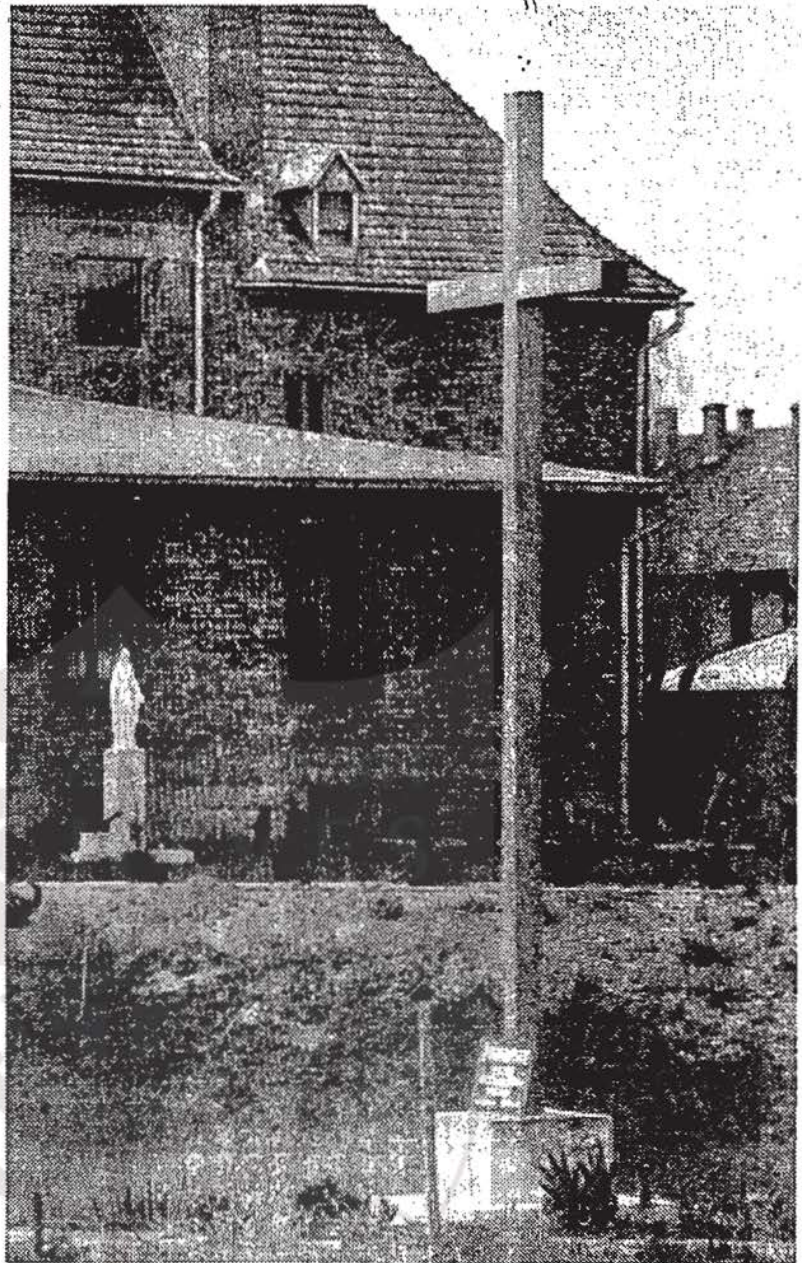
Other Jewish reaction was much more positive. "I am delighted that the Vatican has broken its silence," Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, said.

Henry Siegman, executive director of the American Jewish Congress, said

the statement opened the way to a renewed "dialogue that deals not with complaints we have with one another but seeks to address jointly the larger, far more serious issues that beset our society."

Rabbi Tanenbaum said, "Coming on the eve of the Jewish High Holy Days, this statement will change the tone or topic of a lot of sermons."

Elie Wiesel, the Nobel laureate and survivor of the Nazi horror, called the statement "a new beginning in the dialogue." Mr. Wiesel said he was "grateful to those Catholics, the powerful as well as the humble people, who raised their voices with ours."



Associated Press

The Vatican has expressed support for the relocation of a Carmelite convent from the site of the Auschwitz death camp in Poland, above, to an interfaith prayer center to be built outside the camp.

Mr. Elli Wohlgerenter
Jewish Telegraphic Agency

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, international relations consultant of the American Jewish Committee and retiring chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) today announced that Vatican spokesmen reported that "the Carmelite convent built on the grounds of Auschwitz is now in its final phase of realizing the movement of the convent away from the boundaries of the former Nazi death camp."

Tanenbaum also reported that on January 24th, Cardinal F. Macharsky, archbishop of Cracow, issued a statement declaring that "the new convent will be built away from the boundaries of the former Nazi camp, along with the interreligious center for prayer and information. The convent will be constructed on separate grounds inside the new interreligious center, so that it will be in the vicinity of the camp but well outside its boundaries."

Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, President of the Vatican Secretariat on Religious Relations with the Jews, today in Vatican City expressed "gratitude and support for the decision" and for Cardinal Macharsky's announcement.

Rabbi Tanenbaum, who presided over IJCIC's negotiations with European Jewish leadership headed by Theo Klein, president of CRIF in Paris, and with four Roman Catholic cardinals, today welcomed "Cardinal Macharsky's announcement as a sign of good faith which Cardinal Willebrands and the four European cardinals have demonstrated throughout ~~this difficult crisis~~ this difficult crisis."

The four European cardinals, in addition to Willebrands, were Cardinal deCourtray of Lyons, Cardinal Lustiger of Paris, Cardinal Daneels of Belgium, and Cardinal Macharsky.

"These five Catholic leaders," Tanenbaum said, "have understood the profound meaning of Auschwitz to the Jewish people and have sought to honor the sanctity of that horrible death camp to Jewish memory throughout their negotiations against great resistance from the Carmelite nuns and some traditional Polish Catholic leaders. From the very beginning, I felt strongly that the Jewish people have a stake in supporting their allies in this cause, and not to weaken their credibility by recklessly attacking them. That judgment has been justified by this action. We now await the next practical steps that will ~~xxx~~ translate this clearcut commitment into practical reality."

After the convent is moved, Tanenbaum said, we will need to reopen in IJCIC and with the Vatican the discussion of our plans for holding a series of consultations on the history of anti-Semitism in the Christian West, culminating in the Nazi holocaust. Those conferences may well lead to a major declaration of the part of the Vatican for uprooting ~~the~~ these poisonous weeks of anti-Semitism throughout the world."

His Excellency
Bishop Henryk Muszynski
87-800 Wloclawek
ul. Gdanska 2/4
Poland

~~Dear~~

My Dear Bishop Muszynski,

I deeply appreciate your warm and thoughtful letter of January 25th. Your generous and sensitive words mean very much to me, and I reciprocate your sentiments.

It is reassuring to know that the Carmelite sisters have assented to ~~agreement~~ reached in the Geneva Agreement between Catholic and Jewish authorities in February 1987.

But I share your concern as to what might happen in the interim period between that decision and the time it will take to construct the new center. As you can see from the enclosed statements, anger is rising in a number of Jewish quarters over what is taken to be the violation of the 1987 agreements, and the failure ~~of~~ of any movement over the past thirty months.

In response to press inquiries, I have tried to issue some moderating statements (see the enclosed.) But as February 22nd comes closer, and if nothing happens of a constructive nature, I fear that all voices of moderation will be overwhelmed by the angry pronouncements, more than likely on both sides.

A key, it seems to me, would be to find an "interim center" already established in which the Carmelite sisters could carry on their vocation of ~~for~~ prayer and meditation while the new center would be developed. I do not have any concrete idea of what is meant by "a sharp reaction of some Polish people," but I do believe that only some real action of some interim movement would lead to reduction of strong statements on the Jewish side.

Otherwise, I am afraid that we will have a dynamic developing of "reciprocal hostility" on both sides, and that would muddy the atmosphere for a long time to come.

I do appreciate the real commitment of Cardinal Marchewski, ~~yourself~~, the other Cardinals and yourself to trying to resolve this difficult problem. I pray to God for an early resolution so that we might be spared unnecessary further alienation which would set back the reconciliation that all of us desire.

With warmest good wishes, I am,

Respectfully yours,

EMHT

OP-ED

THE NEW YORK TIMES

THE AUSCHWITZ CONVENT, THE HOLOCAUST, AND THE JEWS

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

Since the close of Vatican Council II in 1965, no event has challenged the integrity of Catholic-Jewish relations as has the construction of the Carmelite convent on the grounds of the Auschwitz death camp.

In 1984, a small group of Polish Carmelite nuns quietly transformed into a convent an old theater used by Nazi SS troops for storage of Zyklon-B gas with which they murdered several million Jews, Poles, and others in their gas chambers.

The first information about the convent appeared in a fund-raising brochure distributed in Belgium in 1985. Prepared by a Catholic traditionalist group called, "Aid to the Church in Distress," the pamphlet stated that the convent enables "the Carmelites to do penance for us who are still alive," and characterized it ~~as~~ as "a spiritual fortress and a guarantee of the conversion of strayed brothers from our countries."

The reaction, especially among Jewish survivors of Auschwitz in Europe and elsewhere, was immediate and filled with rage and resentment. None of the literature promoting support of the convent contained a single reference to the systematic mass killing of two million Jews in that Vernichtungslager (annihilation camp.) The vague, mystical reference to "the conversion of strayed brothers" resonated as a triumphal appeal to pursue the dead even beyond the grave.

In subsequent months, the Carmelites erected a 23-foot cross, which is now the dominating religious symbol of Auschwitz. Both the promotional brochures

and the dramatic cross signify to many Jews - and sympathetic Christians - who have recently visited the convent, that Auschwitz is now being commemorated as a place essentially of Christian martyrdom.

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Whether consciously intended or not, a revisionist scenario of history has been

When -- Christians were the victims, not Jews. The silence over the murder of unfolding that no Christians were murderers. If the pattern were to continue, it is Jews suggests that in fifty years Auschwitz will be perceived as having nothing to do not inconceivable termination of the whole of European Jewry, nor with the demonological with the planned extermination culture - which prepared the way for the Nazi holocaust. anti-Semitism - the del

and Christians with whom I have spoken since 1985 are fully Many thoughtful Jews that more than a million Polish Catholics, among them aware of the tragic reality that exterminated re/~~extermination~~ in Auschwitz since June 1940. The Carmelite bishops, priests, and nuns, we firmly believe, have both a religious duty and moral right nuns and other Catholics, I find the souls of their kinspeople. to mourn the death and pray for

No Jew of conscience opposes or is critical of such appropriate acts of memorialization. But Auschwitz cannot be allowed to become transformed into a Christian "holy place" that supersedes or displaces the actuality of that purgatory for the Jewish people.

A distinguished Catholic cardinal of France, who has been at the center of this controversy, has spoken to the core issue with utter clarity. Albert Cardinal Decourtray of Lyon, president of the French Conference of Catholic Bishops, has declared:

"It is the attempt to totally exterminate the Jews that we call the Shoah, of which Auschwitz is the symbol. Such affliction and suffering have conferred on the Jewish people through its martyrs a particular dignity that is quite properly its own. And to construct a convent at Auschwitz would, for me, impinge upon that dignity."

Cardinal Decourtray, joined by three other Roman Catholic cardinals, have been meeting with Jewish leaders during the past several years. In their 1987 Geneva agreement, they arrived at a common mind on two major points: first, Auschwitz must be preserved in its integrity as a memorial to the Shoah in the terms described by Cardinal Decourtray; second, ~~the~~ a new convent is to be built in 1990 as the first structure in a planned Catholic-Jewish dialogue and study center some 500 meters away from Auschwitz.

The Carmelite sisters, who refused for two years to move off the grounds of Auschwitz, have finally acceded to the expressed will of their superior^s in Rome and ~~for~~ Cracow, among them Pope John Paul II, who reportedly made two private interventions. Jewish survivors of Auschwitz, and most other Jews throughout the world, continue to be distressed, fearing that the nuns will remain at their present site into the indefinite future, insensitively^s proceeding to "de-Judaize" the meaning of Auschwitz through their symbols and activity.

That distress is intensified by some recent manifestations of Polish anti-Jewish expressions, recalling the violent and relentless anti-Semitism of traditional Polish Catholic society over the past three centuries.

The fact of anti-Semitism^(in Poland) in both its political and religious forms is not new. What is new^{now} is that there is a core group of Roman Catholic churchmen, led by Franciszek Cardinal Macharski, archbishop of Cracow, and younger Polish intellectuals and activists, who are ashamed of their country's anti-Jewish hatreds of the past and are committed to creating a more positive and mutually respectful future with the Jewish people.

The removal of the Carmelite convent from its present site and the preservation of Auschwitz in its primordial reality will be a decisive sign of how real is their determination in shaping a better future for Catholics and Jews in Poland, and elsewhere throughout the world.

--Rabbi Tanenbaum, international relations consultant for the American Jewish Committee, is immediate past president of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.

COMMENTARY (525 words)

**AUSCHWITZ CONVENT IS BETWEEN POLES AND JEWS;
IT IS NOT A VATICAN-JEWISH CONFLICT**

By Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

--NEW YORK

It is a positive thing that the meeting of the World Jewish Congress Executive in Montreal during early May adopted a resolution abandoning an earlier pronouncement of its American Section calling for a worldwide Jewish boycott of Pope John Paul II.

While this latest action may in time help ease the mounting tensions in Vatican-Jewish relations -- the worst I have seen during the past 30 years -- much damage has been done, and it will take considerable knowledge, experience and wisdom to correct the present troubled situation.

The core of the problem remains the presence of the Carmelite convent on the grounds of Auschwitz.

The pious, determined nuns created the problem by their unilateral transforming of a Nazi warehouse used for storing Zyklon-B gas into a convent. But some Jews, I believe, have misconstrued the stubborn Carmelite issue.

The removal of the convent to other quarters -- which has been agreed upon by all parties -- is overwhelmingly an issue

that concerns the Polish Catholic Church, the Polish government, the Carmelite Order and world Jewry.

By church law and discipline, only the Polish church has the power to remove the convent, which is under its jurisdiction. The pope and the Vatican have much influence, but not the decision-making power, and there is a basic difference between power and influence.

Last week, Cardinal Jan Willebrands, Vatican head of Catholic-Jewish relations, at a meeting with several of us, confirmed that the Polish Catholic church possesses decisive authority to move the Carmelite convent to a new center.

He said the Vatican and he personally can and will help in the transfer, but only in the background.

It is a weird irony that most Roman Catholics have a limited perception of papal infallibility (only in "Faith and Morals"), but some Jews in their naivete believe that the pope is infallible in everything in the Catholic's world.

All he has to do is snap his fingers, and the convent and the nuns would disappear. If it has not disappeared yet, obviously the pope does not want it to, therefore, boycott the pope.

Well, the Vatican also knows how to play the boycott game. My intuition tells me -- I don't yet have hard evidence to confirm it -- that when the Vatican and the Anti-Defamation League canceled their scheduled meeting in early May, the first time to my knowledge that has happened with a Jewish group in 30 years since Vatican Council II, the Vatican was signaling that it

does not like this boycott trifling with its Holy Father. If it continues, I'm afraid there will be further reprisals.

Meanwhile, the issue remains as it was at the beginning. The convent, which distorts the meaning of Auschwitz to the Jewish people, must be removed to an interim place until the new center and convent -- which the pope committed himself to support in Vienna in June 1988 -- are constructed.

That is the issue that must be negotiated directly, wisely and with calm effectiveness by world Jewry, the Polish Catholic authorities and the Polish government.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum is international consultant for the American Jewish Committee.



AUSCHWITZ, WHERE MILLIONS OF JEWS WERE MURDERED BY THE NAZIS, IS UNIQUELY SPECIAL TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY; TO CALL IT EMOTIVE WOULD BE A CRASS UNDERSTATEMENT. Auschwitz both symbolizes and summarizes the Holocaust for Jews. Establishment of the convent has aroused impassioned feelings among the Jewish communities of Europe-particularly survivor groups. It has touched religious, ethnic and national nerveendings.

But POLISH CATHOLICS WERE MURDERED TOO AND THE NUNS WISH TO PRAY FOR THEIR SOULS./Bishop Henryk Muszynski of Wloclawek, chairman of the Polish Episcopate's Commission for Dialogue with Judaism, wrote MHT on February 24, 1989, "You have written, "Auschwitz was built by the Nazis for the primary purpose of exterminating European Jews." Now, it is obviously true, but not from the very beginning. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica, vol 8, p871, mass murder of Jews began in March 1942. And the first transport of Poles arrived at Auschwitz the 14 June 1940. From this time on, during nearly two years, the Auschwitz camp was functioning as an extermination camp primarily for Poles. It is of course quite possible, and even very likely that there were also some Jews among the prisoners defined as "Poles" but they came to Auschwitz not as Jews, but as Poles. The first transports of Jews, defined as such, arrived truly in March 1942 and the first Jewish transport sent to Auschwitz by RSHA arrived the 12th May 1942. Such was the real beginning of the systematic extermination of Jews decreed at the Wannsee conference, the 20th JANUARY 1942. Many thousands of Polish people were dying in Auschwitz already since the summer 1940, and that is why among others as I have many times repeated, Auschwitz has become for the POLES, STILL DURING THE WAR, A HOLY SYMBOL OF MARTYRDOM OF THE POLISH NATION. THUS UNDERSTANDING PERSONALLY VERY WELL THE FEELINGS AND THE SENSITIVITY OF THE JEWS FOR WHOM THE SAME AUSCHWITZ HAS BECOME THE SYMBOL OF SHOAH, I am not able to see how to convince in a plausible way my compatriots that the Carmelite convent should be moved at once to a not yet existing "interim center" DESPITE THEIR PIOUS INTENTIONS THEIR PRESENCE HAS GENERATED ENDLESS MISUNDERSTANDING WHICH IS NOW TURNING TO ILL WILL. Embedded in this tangled web are competing and conflicting self-perceptions of Jews, Roman Catholics, Poles and other national groups; vastly different understanding of history, still unreconciled views of how the victims of Nazism should be memorialized. Jewish communities of Belgium, France and Italy have led the fight against the convent (Jews of eastern Europe a third center of Jewish life, along with Israel and the U.S.)

WJC RECENTLY CONSIDERED A WORLD JEWISH BOYCOTT OF PJP II WHEREVER HE WENT AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF JEWISH PARTICIPATION IN JOINT FAITH ENTERPRISES ALL OVER THE WORLD. MORE MODERATE COUNSELS PREVAILED.

BUT THERE WAS A STRONG SENSE OF CRISIS MERELY POSTPONED RATHER THAN AVOIDED. ALTERNATIVE TACTIC TO APPLY AS MUCH PRESSURE AS POSSIBLE BEFORE NEW JULY DEADLINE EXPIRES. THIS HAS MADE IT MORE A

A GLOBAL ISSUE, A MAKE- OR- BREAK TEST FOR CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS FOR IT CHALLENGES THE SINCERITY OF A FAR WIDER GROUP THAN THOSE DIRECTLY CONCERNED WITH THE AUSCHWITZ CARMELITES.

FROM THE JEWISH POINT OF VIEW CHRISTIAN JEWISH RELATIONS ARE ONLY WORTH FOSTERING IF OVER A CRITICAL ISSUE LIKE THIS THEY CAN DELIVER SATISFACTION.

DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN CATHOLICS, ANGLICANS AND PROTESTANTS ARE LOST ON MANY ORDINARY JEWS. THEY SEEM TO SEE THE AUSCHWITZ CONVENT AS A BLATANT PIECE OF AGGRESSION WHICH DEMONSTRATES THE TRUTH OF THE OLD SUSPICION THAT NO CHRISTIANS EXPRESSION OF GOODWILL TOWARDS JEWS, WHATEVER DENOMINATION IT COMES FROM CAN EVER BE REALLY TRUSTED.

THERE IS NO EVIDENCE HOWEVER THAT THE NUNS MOTIVES ARE CONSCIOUSLY ANTISEMITIC; THEY HAVE OFFERED TO PRAY FOR THE JEWISH VICTIMS OF AUSCHWITZ AS WELL.. THAT IN ITSELF IS A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF THE FUNDAMENTAL MISUNDERSTANDING AT THE ROOT OF THIS CRISIS, FOR MANY JEWS GREETED THE OFFER AS COMPOUNDING THE OFFENSE.

IT SEEMS TO BE THE CASE THAT EVEN THOSE IN THE CHURCH WHO HAVE BEEN MOST SYMPATHETIC TO THE JEWISH GRIEVANCE HAVE SCARCELY GRASPED EXACTLY WHY THE ISSUE IS TO THE JEWS SO IMPORTANT. CARDINAL JOHN O'CONNOR'S REFERENCE TO THE HOLOCAUST AS JUDAIISM'S 'GIFT TO THE WORLD WAS NOT MALICIOUSLY INTENDED BUT IT WAS PAINFUL NONETHELESS. AT THE NUNS PROBABLY DO NOT BEGIN TO UNDERSTAND; NO DOUBT THAT IS WHY A MOVE THIS JULY SEEMED A FAIR SUBSTITUTE FOR A MOVE IN FEBRUARY.

AUSCHWITZ STANDS FOR THE UNIQUENESS OF THE HOLOCAUST. TO REGARD IT AS THE SCENE OF ONE MORE DREADFUL MASSACRE, ONLY IN DEGREE WORSE THAN COUNTLESS OTHER INHUMANITIES OF MANKIND, IS TO IGNORE THAT IT WAS THE FOCUS OF AN ATTEMPT TO WIPE OUT THE WHOLE JEWISH RACE.

EVEN TO MENTION THAT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF CHRISTIANS WERE MURDERED BY THE NAZIS THERE COUPLING JEWISH AND NON-JEWISH SUFFERING AND DEATH AS SOMEHOW A SHARED EXPERIENCE SEEMS TO JEWS TO THREATEN THE SYMBOLIC MEANING OF AUSCHWITZ AS A PLACE OF SPECIFICALLY JEWISH DESOLATION WITHOUT PARALLEL ON EARTH.

BUT ANGER SEEMS TO GO DEEPER EVEN THAN THAT.. EUROPEAN JEWRY HAS SPENT ITS WHOLE EXISTENCE IN THE SHADOW OF CHRISTIANITY UNDER A PERPETUAL PRESSURE TO DISAPPEAR, TO CONVERT, TO GIVE UP. JEWS BECAME AWARE OF EVERY CHURCH, CHAPEL, CONVENT OR CROSS AS AN OMINOUS SYMBOLIC REPROACH TO THEM FOR REMAINING AS THEY WERE./

TO THE JEWS OF EUROPE CHRISTIANITY WAS NOT A RELIGION OF THE LOVE OF GOD BUT A RELIGION OF HOSTILITY TOWARDS JEWS. A CHRISTIAN CHAPEL IN AUSCHWITZ, NOW TOPPED BY A CROSS, FEELS TO THEM LIKE AN ATTEMPT TO HOUND THE DEAD EVEN BEYOND THE GRAVE - OR EVEN TO CELEBRATE JEWISH EXTERMINATION AS A KIND OF CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH.

Christians/illustrates both the depth and the volatility of certain critical issues between the RCC and the Jewish community

Problem is not what they are doing - they are praying - but where Auschwitz concentration camp. Origins of convent remain unclear. In 1984 Carmelites of Cracow were given permission by the Polish Govt. to occupy a building on the outer edge of the camp. Originally intended as a theater, the building was used by the Nazis to store supplies, particularly the Zyklon-B gas used in the gas chambers. Jews were never consulted nor informed about this decision, and only learned about the convent the following year through the circulation in Belgium of a fundraising brochure by an organization called "Aid to the Church in Distress". The brochure called the convent "Catholics' gift to the Pope..." claiming the Carmelites do penance for us who are still alive" referred to the "victorious power of the Cross of Jesus," and predicted the convent would become "a spiritual fortress, a token of the conversion of brothers from various countries who went astray." as well as

These triumphalist formulations drew objections from Xans and Jews alike (Christian members Amitie Judeo-Christienne (JXC Friendship Society of France criticized fundraising pamphlet.)

Dutch/Belgian protests

Cardinal Decourtray of Lyons, France, declared: "It is the attempt to totally exterminate the Jews that we call the Shoah, of which Auschwitz is the symbol."

Such affliction and suffering has conferred on the Jewish people through its martyrs a particular dignity that is quite properly its own. And to construct a convent at Auschwitz would, for me, impinge upon that dignity."

Cardinal Macharsky who visited and was profoundly moved by Yad Vashem, viewed the convent as an act of reconciliation; to Jews it was an act of appropriation.

Ensnung controversy focused attention on the meaning of Auschwitz for Poles as well as for Jews. In article in Polish Catholic weekly TYGODNIK POWSZECHNY, emphasized that Auschwitz is also a symbol of the martyrdom of the Polish people during the Nazi occupation," and asked, "Do these two symbols really have to divide our two nations? Defying church authorities to close their convent and move out, they have signalled their defiance by erecting a prominent cross above the old theater building they are occupying in the concentration camp compound.

They were supposed to be gone by Feb./ 23, a date agreed after top-level negotiations between JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

CHURCH HAS NOW PROMISED THEY WILL LEAVE IN JULY but there are not many Jews who believe it.

CHURCH OF COURSE WOULD BE QUITE PROPERLY OUTRAGED BY THE VERY SUGGESTION,. BUT VERY FEW JEWS WILL HAVE EVEN AN INKLING OF THE REASON WHY PRESENCE OF A COMMUNITY OF NUNS IN AUSCHWITZ PRAYING FOR PEACE AND FOR THE DEAD MAKES PERFECT CHRISTIAN SENSE. THE JEWISH INSTINCT IN A PLACE LIKE THAT IS TO LEAVE IT AS DESOLATE AS POSSIBLE, PHYSICALLY MORALLY AND PHILOSOPHICALLY.

AUSCHWITZ IS NOT SACRED TO JEWS; IT IS THE VERY OPPOSITE OF SACRED. TO EXTRACT SOLACE OR MEANING FROM SUCH THINGS LET ALONE FIND HOLINESS THERE IS TO TRY TO MITIGATE THE EVIL, TO PRETEND IT WAS SOMEHOW NOT AS BAD AS IT REALLY WAS, AND THUS TO BELITTLE MILLIONS WHO DIED THERE. AT AUSCHWITZ THERE WAS A CHAPEL FOR THE 'CONVENIENCE' OF MEMBERS OF THE SS. THAT IS TO SAY WHEN THE DEVIL APPEARS HE CHARACTERISTICALLY COMES IN THE GUISSE OF GOD AS WELL AS OF HUMAN BEINGS. / Elie Wiesel at one time compared the "EVENT" (the Holocaust) to the revelation at Sinai. Auschwitz seemed to me an anti-Sinai. Something essential was revealed there and it will take us centuries to unravel its mysterious message. Just as we cannot comprehend Auschwitz with God, we cannot understand it without God.

BUT THE CHRISTIAN INSTINCT IS THE EXACT REVERSE; IT IS TO SANCTIFY SUCH A PLACE. CHRISTIANS CONSECRATE THEIR CEMETERIES, BUILD SHRINES WHERE ACCIDENTS OR EXECUTIONS HAPPENED, CELEBRATE THEIR MARTYRS AND CALL THE PLACE OF MARTYRDOM HOLY. THERE IS ALSO A CONVENT OF NUNS ON THE SITE OF THE GALLOWS AT TYBURN PRAYING FOR PEACE AND FOR THE DEAD. /

THE TOTAL CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THESE TWO APPROACHES TO AUSCHWITZ HAS HIDDEN THE FACTS EACH SIDE IN ITS OWN WAY IS TRYING TO EXPRESS ITS UTMOST SORROW AND GRIEF. BUT AUSCHWITZ IS THE LAST PLACE ON EARTH AT WHICH JEWS CAN BE EXPECTED TO LOOK ON CHRISTIAN SYMBOLISM WITH SYMPATHY. AND IT IS THE CHRISTIANS WHO MUST GIVE WAY-FOR THEY WERE NOT ONLY AMONG THE VICTIMS; THEY WERE AMONG THE MURDERERS.

POLES AND JEWS NEED DE-MONSTRIZING

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

It was the first ^{1st} "dialogue" between Polish Catholics and Jews in the United States. It took place about seven years ago in a seminary in Oak Park, Michigan, which specialized ^s in training Catholic priests of Polish origins.

As the Polish and Jewish ^{1st} "delegations" began their conversations, the first exchanges quickly became intense, heated, and finally revealing. The Jews - particularly those born and raised in Poland before and during World War II - wanted only to talk about the vicious anti-Semitism that assaulted them and destroyed most of their families.

The Polish Catholics - including those born in the United States - focused almost entirely on how Polish Christians had saved Jews from the Nazis. ⁿ ~~They~~ There are more trees planted in the 'Path of the Righteous' in Jerusalem's Yad Vashem memorial ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ honoring 'the Righteous Gentiles' of Poland than from any other country in Europe," several of them kept repeating.

It took three days of exhausting, often excruciating talk before the Jews and Poles were able to acknowledge the abyss in their differing perceptions of the same period of history that their peoples had experienced in "the old country."

Jews today are re-experiencing that abyss as they read the callous and shocking words of the present Primate of Poland, Cardinal Joseph Glemp of Warsaw. The cardinal, son of a Polish muzhik, inhabits a world in which the pride of the Polish Catholic church fused with the mystical nationalism of that battered country is so defensive and paranoid that he has space for Jews only as outsiders and enemies.

That is hardly a new vision in Poland's history and culture. Poland ~~is~~ has been probably one of the most battered countries in Europe over centuries. Partitioned and enslaved at least four times since the 17th century, wiped out repeatedly as a nation by foreign invaders, dismembered by the Nazis and the Soviet Union during World War II, Poles experience their identity overwhelmingly as victims of outside forces.

And through much of that threatened history, the Catholic Church has been the mainstay ⁿ defender of Polish unity, ^{nationalism,} /language and culture.

While Jews, particularly escaping German Jews of the thirteenth century, at first encountered Poland as a country of refuge, the relatively large size of Polish Jewry, their emergence as the backbone of the urban middle class lodged between the nobles and the serfs, resulted in bitter competition, envy, and finally vicious hatred.

Jews - who constituted by 1765 some ten percent of the Polish population in Warsaw and in other major cities - constructed their society as the chief world center of Judaism, with a magnificently rich religious, educational, and social life. Much of that culture was Yiddish-speaking (derived from their German origins) and led frequently to the charge that they were not authentic Poles, but a separate nation within the Polish nation.

Thus, Poles and Jews became isolated from one another. When Poles suffered from external invasions from the Mongols (13th century) and the Turks (15th century), and later from the Swedes, Austrians, ~~and~~ Prussians, and Russians (1772-1815) who dismembered Poland, the Jews of ^{times} were made the scapegoats for their ^{ful} ~~frightening~~ suffering.

The "success" of the Jews in vastly enriching Polish business, professional, and cultural life - and even sharing in the military defense of the nation against its endless invaders - was perceived irrationally and exploited purposefully by political parties such as the National Democratic Party and even more reactionary and fascist groups (such as NARA), all ~~is~~ in intimate alliance with the Catholic Church, as a threat rather than as a source of support and enrichment.

The incessant vulnerability of the Polish nation, the ancient Christian demonology of Jews as "Christ-killers" and the "anti-Christ," resulted in the most vicious riots, pogroms, blood libels and violent persecutions that Jews experienced more intensely in

Poland than almost anywhere else in Europe. During the Nazi holocaust Jews were indeed saved by some decent Polish Catholics, but many were handed over to the Nazis or brutally killed by Polish peasants and others.

When Cardinal Glemp orates about alleged "Jewish superiority," "Jewish control over the world's mass media," and "Jewish campaigns of anti-Polish propaganda," he discloses how deeply his spirit is mired in that ancient Polish History of defensiveness and paranoia. Jews are still the outsiders and pariahs to sacred Polish nationhood.

How dare they lay claim to Auschwitz as their Armageddon?

The Carmelite nuns, in conformity with the traditions of the medieval church, are defending both the dignity of the Church Militant and the honor of Polish nationhood. That is the sum total of the present reading of Polish history from which a millenium of Jews and Judaism are excluded.

When Jews hear ~~the~~ Cardinal Glemp's provocative speeches, they reenact the horrendous experience of Jewish victimization for centuries in Poland, in which the Catholic Church was a primary fount of anti-Jewish demonology.

Should ^{these} ~~this~~ Rashomon readings of Polish history and culture continue in this "cycle of reciprocal hostility," there is small hope of any Polish-Jewish understanding, not to speak of reconciliation.

Somehow, some way, ^{if} wider, rational minds and spirits in the Polish and Jewish communities must find a way out of this deadlock of history. These palimpsests of radically contrary readings of the historical record in Poland need to become unpacked and shared with both Poles and Jews in a spirit of mutual knowledge, and finally, in mutual empathy.

It is probably asking for too much, but it would be a providential act if Cardinal Glemp in his forthcoming visit to the United States (beginning on September 17th) could see the challenge of "de-monstorizing" Polish-Jewish relations as his central mission. --Rabbi Tanenbaum, international relations counselor to the American Jewish Committee, is immediate past president of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultation.

SHOULD WORLD JEWRY BOYCOTT THE POPE?

by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

Should Jewish communities around the world boycott meetings with Pope John Paul II when he visits their countries?

The American section of the World Jewish Congress on March 15th proposed that the WJC Executive at its May 7th meeting in Montreal "call upon its member communities in 70 countries to refrain from meeting with the current Pope during his future visits abroad."

The reason given by the WJC for this proposed "boycott" (as newspaper headlines called it) was due to the "failure by Catholic Church authorities" to close down the Carmelite convent on Auschwitz grounds by the February 22, 1989, agreed-upon deadline.

At the March 23 meeting of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC) held in New York, I went on record as disassociating myself from ~~that~~ both the concept and the rhetoric of that "boycott" idea. My reasons were as follows:

1) During 1988, while I served as IJCIC chairman, I helped European Jewish leaders negotiate an agreement with Polish and West European Catholic cardinals for (a) closing down the convent; (b) moving it to another center that is to be built off the grounds of Auschwitz; and (c) after much ~~xxx~~ resistance, persuading the Carmelite sisters to agree to move to the new center. ~~which is xxxxxxxx~~

-including the Pope and the Vatican -

2) The fact is that European Catholic leaders have agreed to the crudely, Jewish terms. This, to put it ~~crudely~~, has been a Jewish "victory" in terms of preserving Auschwitz as a sacred memorial for the martyred Jews and others who perished. of principle and policy. What remains outstanding is the method of moving the nuns to an interim convent until the new center of mediation is built away from Auschwitz' holy soil. Polish Catholic authorities assure me they are working at that task now.

In what perspective, does it make any sense to proclaim a Jewish "holy war" against the Pope, to excommunicate him around the world? That is responding how many Catholic friends are ~~xxxxxxx~~ to this proposed WJC boycott.