
Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Jewish leaders praise the Pope's Auschwitz sermon

By MEL JUFFE

What the telegram said

The American-Jewish Committee today called Pope Paul VI and half a million Jews worldwide to praise the Pope's Auschwitz sermon in Poland yesterday. The sermon, read in four parts, was a major statement of the Pope's views on the Holocaust.

The sermon, which lasted nearly an hour, began with a letter to the Pope from the American Jewish Committee, expressing the group's appreciation for the Pope's words.

In particular, the American Jewish Committee praised the Pope for his courage in addressing the issue of the Holocaust. The committee noted that the Pope's words were a step forward in the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish community.

The sermon was accompanied by a letter from the American Jewish Committee, which expressed hope for continued cooperation between the two communities.

In his sermon, the Pope expressed his sorrow for the suffering of the Jews during the Holocaust, and urged all people to remember the lessons of the past.

The sermon was broadcast on television and radio around the world, and was widely praised for its courage and humanity.

A crown of thorns made of barbed wire

Murray Kempson with the Pope at Auschwitz feels the chill and the hope that death left behind

Never again was the cry that echoed through the buildings of Auschwitz, the site of the Nazi crimes. The Pope, in his sermon, mourned the deaths of millions of Jews and called for a new beginning.

The Pope said, "Never again must we allow such suffering to occur. We must learn the lessons of Auschwitz and work to prevent such tragedies from happening again."

The Pope's words were met with a chorus of applause from the crowd of thousands of Jews who had gathered to hear the sermon.

The American Jewish Committee today called for immediate action to prevent such crimes from happening again.
No Vatican change on Israel

From TULLIA ZEVI

Rome

Israel's special mission to the inauguration of Pope John Paul I on Sunday will include her Ambassador in Italy, Mr Zeev Sheh; the Embassy Minister for Religious Affairs, Mr Meir Mendes; and the director-general of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs, Mr Israel Lippel.

Jewish circles followed the papal election with great interest. They have expressed the hope that the programme of cautious renewal outlined by the new Pope in his first speech to the cardinals does not imply any slowing down or shelving of the revision of the Roman Catholic Church's attitude to Judaism and the Jews, set in motion by the 1965 Ecumenical Council and fostered by Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI.

His confirmation in office of all the high-ranking members of the curia, including the State Secretary, Cardinal Jean Villot, and the "Foreign Minister," Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, seems to imply the continuation for the time being of the present Vatican line on the Middle East—including friendly though unofficial, relations with Israel.

However, in his first speech, Pope John Paul I said he was "particularly thinking of the tortured land of Lebanon" and also of "the situation in the land of Jesus." He expressed the hope that Pope John Paul would recognise the State of Israel.

Members of the small Jewish community in Venice do not recall having had many opportunities to meet the Pope when he was the city's archbishop. They remember him as a benevolent man entirely absorbed by his pastoral duties.

However, he was a friendly guest of honour at a reception given in Venice in April, 1974, by the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee.

Our Jerusalem Correspondent cables: Following the election on Saturday of the new Pope the Israeli afternoon paper, "Maariv," has republished an interview with him in 1972 in which he stated that he "regarded favourably the return of the Jews to Palestine."

He also told his interviewer, Mrs Geula Cohen, now a Likud Knesset Member, that he believed that "after being dispersed for all these years, the (Jews) are at last entitled to a State of their own."

Pope John Paul said last year that he had always felt friendly towards the Jews. His mother had once worked as a maid for a wealthy Jewish family, who had always treated her very well.

This term, considered by many to be over-cautious, lends a touch of wishful thinking to the message of good wishes sent to the new Pope by Rabbi Shlomo Goren, Israel's Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi, in which he expressed the hope that Pope John Paul would recognize the State of Israel.

Their Bombs Rocked Cairo—and the Israel Government

But who sent them? Who gave the orders?

For the first time, the sensational details of an Israeli sabotage attempt inside Egypt told by those who took part.

OPERATION SUSANNAH

Beginning exclusively in next week's JEWISH CHRONICLE

June 8, 1979

POPE JOHN PAUL II'S PILGRIMAGE TO AUSCHWITZ
IS AN HISTORIC TURNING POINT IN JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS

by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

(Rabbi Tanenbaum, national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, met with Pope John Paul II on March 12 during the first official meeting the Pope held with Jewish leaders.)

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The pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Auschwitz on June 7 was a moral act of surpassing historic importance. It may well become the most significant development in the movement to advance understanding and friendship between Christians and Jews since the adoption of the Vatican Council's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions in 1965.

That assessment is based on the fact that virtually every Jew engaged in efforts to promote improved relations between Christians and Jews comes to the dialogue table with a consciousness deeply informed by the Nazi holocaust. Auschwitz, the chief Nazi death factory in which 2.8 million Jews and a million non-Jews were burned to death, symbolizes fatally for every Jew who lives under its shadow the loss of one-third of the Jewish people. And to the majority of American Jews who are descendants of European immigrant parents - there is the constant haunting question that can never be evaded: Why were my families destroyed and why did I deserve to live? For, there but for the grace of God anyone of us American Jews could have suffered a similar fate in the gas chambers and crematoria of Auschwitz.

Auschwitz also symbolizes the silence and indifference of the world, including the majority of Church leaders, to the massacre of Jews and other human beings. As Dr. Franklin Littell, the Methodist scholar, and other Christians leaders have recently asserted, Auschwitz is as much
a moral and spiritual crisis in the collapse of Western Christendom— the site of the Nazi holocaust— as it is a continuing trauma for the Jewish people.

Over the past several decades, Jewish leaders meeting with Christian authorities have felt that, with rare exception, most Christian leaders have sought to avoid facing the actuality of the horrors of the Nazi holocaust and, in particular, its unique demonic consequences for Jews. The several statements made about the Nazi nightmare by Christian leaders have frequently been couched in vague pieties or sentimental universalisms— another illustration of "man's inhumanity to man." Given the concrete ideology of Adolf Hitler who was determined to exterminate the entire Jewish people under his control— the "final solution" was conceived only in relation to the Jews— such vague declarations gave more offense to the Jewish spirit than consolation.

That is why the words and actions of Pope John Paul II during last week's visit to Auschwitz and Birkenau have had almost an electric effect in the Jewish community. In his characteristically direct and explicit manner, the Pope avoided generalities and spoke to the Jewish soul as much as he did to the Catholic peoples of the world:

"In particular, I pause with you before the inscription in Hebrew," he said gesturing toward the memorial plaques inscribed with Hebrew and Yiddish verses of tribute. "This inscription awakens the memory of the people whose sons and daughters were intended for total extermination. This people draws its origin from Abraham,
our father in faith" (thus reaffirming the common spiritual bonds in the Bible which link together Christians and Jews.)

Pope John Paul then added: "That very people that received from God the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" itself experienced in a special measure what is meant by killing." And then, of utmost significance, the Pope said:

"It is not permissible for anyone to pass by this inscription with indifference."

That is an unprecedented call, without precedent except for a similar declaration by Pope John XXIII in 1960, for an end to the widespread callousness and indifference to the sufferings and destruction that the Nazis inflicted on the Jews and five million other human beings. And implicit in that Papal statement is a call today to humanity at large to end its similar indifference to the epidemic of dehumanization in the world - to stand against the massacres, the torture, and violence suffered by the Vietnamese, the Cambodians, the Lebanese, the Ugandans, the Nicaraguans, the South Africans, the oppressed Jews and Christians in the Soviet Union.

When Jews speak to Christians about Auschwitz, they are not interested in invoking collective guilt; they are interested in a response of collective responsibility. Pope John Paul, kneeling before the death wall of Auschwitz, did just that, and that one gesture of healing may decisively affect the entire future course of Jewish-Christian relations in our lifetime.
HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
VATICAN CITY, ITALY

YOR:

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE IS DEEPLY MOVED AND HEARTENED BY
THE WORDS AND SYMBOLIC ACTS OF YOUR HOLINESS IN HONORING THE MEMORY
OF THE MILLIONS OF VICTIMS OF NAD ID BESTIALITY, IN PARTICULAR THE
NEARLY THREE MILLION JEWS WHOSE LIVES WERE DESTROYED IN THE CREMATORIA
OF AUSCHWITZ. YOUR REVERENT KNEELING BEFORE THE HEBREW AND OTHER
INSCRIPTIONS MEMORIALIZING THE SACRED DEAD AND YOUR REJECTION OF INDIFFERENCE
TO THE KILLING OF MILLIONS OF JEWS AND OTHER HUMAN BEINGS IN AUSCHWITZ,
MT THE MOST INHUMAN AND BRUTALIZING DEATH CAMP AMONG ALL THE NAZI
MURDER FACTORIES, IS A POWERFUL SYMBOL OF MORAL CONSCIENCE THAT IS
OF HISTORIC MAGNITUDE. YOUR REJUDICATION OF HATRED AND PREJUDICE
AGAINST ALL PEOPLE, YOUR COURAGEOUS AFFIRMATIONS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
AND HUMAN RIGHTS FOR ALL MEMBERS OF GOD'S HUMAN FAMILY, DESERVE OUR
MOST HEARTFELT AND APPRECIATIVE RESPONSE.

RESPECTFULLY,

RICHARD MAASS
PRESIDENT, THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
date December 1, 1978

to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum

from Adam Simms

subject Polish reaction to Pope John Paul II Statement

I think you may be interested in a follow-up to my previous memo on this subject, which detailed a mixed response I had received concerning your statement.

I had occasion in mid-November to speak for a few minutes with the Rev. Mencelaus J. Madaj, the archivist of the Archdiocese of Chicago, and president of the Polish American Historical Association.

Rev. Madaj was extremely positive about your statement and was very happy to receive it. In fact, he told me that he had taken the liberty of making copies for distribution on his own.

When I told him of the mixed reaction I had received from another quarter, he said: "Oh, you mean about Cardinal Hlond? Well, there's no way anyone can excuse or apologize for him." Rev. Madaj was not in the least fazed by the matter of pre-WWII anti-Semitism in Poland.

I might add that Ref. Madaj stayed in Cardinal Wojtyla's villa in Krakov in June, while visiting Poland to deliver a paper on Polish church history. He is ecstatic over Wojtyla's elevation, and expressed quite a bit of satisfaction that the event had the effect of "sticking it to" Cardinal Cody. (I took his word for it, and didn't inquire further.)

Best regards.

AS:dv
December 20, 1978

Rabbi M. Tanenbaum
A.J.C.
New York office

Dear Mark,

I am sending you herewith some more articles that have appeared in German press at the end of November on Oberammergau. As far as I know there were no further comments on the subject in the recent weeks.

I should like to hear from you about the meeting of the IJCIC that was supposed to take place today, and whether decisions were made regarding Klutzin's proposal.

La Croix, the catholic daily of Paris, has published the full text of the pope's observations recently made during a weekly audience that was attended by about 50,000 people.

He referred to President Sadat's wish that the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt be signed on Mount Sinai in the presence of the pope. John Paul II said:

"How much I too would like to step the soil of my Saviour and Redeemer! How I would like to take the same road upon which the People of God once walked and go to the summit of Sinai where God gave the Commandments! How I would like, with love and humility, to traverse the roads between Jerusalem, Bethlehem and the Kinereth! How I would like to stop on the Hill of the Transfiguration, from where one can see the mountains of Lebanon! Since the beginning of my pontificate such a pilgrimage has been and still is my greatest desire. I appreciate all the requests and suggestions that were made to me on this matter. But to my great regret, I must for the time being renounce such a pilgrimage."

With my warmest greetings.

Sincerely Yours

Boch

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A distinguished Jewish leader visiting Edmonton last week highly praised Pope John Paul II with whom he had a recent audience in which the pontiff urged Christians to strive to understand Judaism on its own terms.

"The pope is a young and vigorous man who will hopefully have a long papacy," said Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee based in Washington, D.C.

Rabbi Tanenbaum, addressing about 100 people in Beth Shalom Synagogue March 19, -- a week after his papal audience in Vatican City -- said the pope warned evangelizing Christians not to give offense to the Jews.
Instead, the pope stated that Christians must strive to understand why Jews may have difficulty in accepting Christianity and who is the key rabbinic consultant during Vatican II witness, the rabbi, leading to the church's historic declaration on the Jews.

and other leading representatives of world Judaism at the audience heard Pope John Paul strongly condemn all forms of anti-Semitism as being contrary to the spirit of Christianity and to the dignity of the Human person.

(An NW news story quoted the pope as saying at the audience: "The Catholic Church clearly repudiates in principle and in practice all such violations of human rights wherever they may occur throughout the world.

"I believe that both sides must continue their strong efforts to overcome the difficulties of the past, so as to fulfill God's commandment of love and to sustain a truly fruitful and fraternal dialogue that contributes to the good of each of the partners involved and to our better service of humanity," the pope said.

(Philip A. Klutznik of Chicago, president of the World Jewish Congress, told the pope in the name of the group that Catholic advances in understanding of Judaism since the Second Vatican Council have resulted in increased friendship and understanding on both sides, "based on the affirmation of a shared reverence for sacred Scripture, the condemnation of anti-Semitism, support for religious liberty and joint social action."
Mr. Klutznik praised the Catholic Church for having "courageously upheld" religious values against violations of religious liberty and human rights around the world.

Rabbi Tanenbaum said the pope also spoke about the rootedness of Christianity in Judaism and the way in which the two religious communities are connected.

Pope John Paul mentioned, however, that Christians by definition must evangelize. Yet Christians must also respect religious liberty in line with the teachings of Vatican II.

The pope also promised to do everything in his power to bring peace to the Holy Land, which he said "is holy for you as it is for us."

The pope concluded his formal audience with the words: "Peace be with you. Shalom, shalom," the rabbi recalled.

But equally as important as the formal part of the audience was what Pope John Paul did immediately afterwards, the Jewish leader said.

Significantly, the pope, when asked if he would visit Israel said: "Israel: I hope to go there very soon."

Rabbi Tanenbaum said no pope before referred to the state of Israel by name but, because of political reasons, had only referred to the "Holy Land".
The rabbi was impressed as the pope began his informal audience by walking down vigorously from his throne, and meeting every one of the Jewish leaders.

"He shook hands firmly with every one of us, asked about how we were and what we did and looked us firmly in the eyes."

The Polish pope, Rabbi Tanenbaum, had an excellent record of helping Jews when he was still a priest and bishop in Poland.

In 1964, there were a series of desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in Cracow, including defilements of tombstones over Jewish graves. It was widely believed that these acts were inspired or carried out by agents of the Polish Communist party or the secret police.

But the then archbishop of Cracow called upon Catholic students attending the University of Cracow to clean and restore the defiled tombstones and to repair the Jewish cemeteries, Rabbi Tanenbaum said.

Subsequently, Archbishop Wojtyla publicly condemned Communist functionaries for their anti-Jewish acts and called on them to desist from any further hostile actions against the remnant Jewish population.

As cardinal, the pope also helped the Jewish community raise funds to open a synagogue.

Rabbi Tanenbaum described the pope as being able to identify with Jews as victims of persecution.
"Auschwitz happens to be in his diocese," the rabbi said.

The Jewish leader said he thought Pope John Paul will be "a great activist" in the church rather than a conservative, as portrayed by the media.

The rabbi also speculated that John Paul II may well become one of the great popes in history, praising him and other Christian leaders everywhere for fighting anti-Semitism.
Dear Cardinal Cooke,

The letter from Mr Benjamin Meed, President of the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization, that you transmitted to Pope John Paul II has reached His Holiness as he is preparing for his journey to Poland, during which he intends to visit Warsaw and Auschwitz.

In the April 22 commemoration of the uprising of his Jewish fellowcountrymen the Holy Father sees a reminder of the need to safeguard at all times the objective and inviolable rights of every human being. Man is made in the image and after the likeness of God. As such, he is superior to systems and ideologies. The repeated attempts to subordinate him to what is lower than him and the curtailment of the rights of any individual or group of human beings must be countered by vigilance and self-sacrifice. His Holiness prays that through the commemoration many will be inspired with such an attitude and he invokes God's blessings on their work for the good of all.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+G. Caprio
Substitute

Cardinal Terence Cooke
Archbishop of New York
1011 First Avenue
New York, New York 10022
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

POPE JOHN PAUL II PRAISES WARSAW GHETTO REMEMBERANCE

REFERS TO "UPRISING OF JEWISH FELLOW COUNTRYMEN"

As Pope John Paul II is preparing for his journey "home" to Poland, he received notice of the April 22, 1979 Commemoration of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which was held in New York's Temple Emanu-El, according to a communication today received from the Vatican Secretariat of State. The Pope responded with a statement containing a warm reference to "commemoration of the uprising of his Jewish fellow countrymen." He noted that in addition to visiting Warsaw he will also visit the site of the former Auschwitz concentration camp in southern Poland.

The Vatican communication was transmitted to Cardinal Terence Cooke, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New York, who referred it to the New York Board of Rabbis with a request that it be brought to the attention of Benjamin Meed, president of the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization in New York. The latter, known as WAGRO, had organized the annual April 22 Commemoration.

"The Holy Father," reads the statement, "sees a reminder of the need to safeguard at all times the objective and inviolable rights of every human being."

"The curtailment of the rights of any individual or group of human beings," it continues, "must be countered by vigilance and self-sacrifice."

In releasing the text of the statement, which was signed by Archbishop Giovanni Caprio, substitute Vatican Secretary of State, Mr. Meed expressed his and his organization's appreciation of the Pope's understanding and compassion for the remembrance of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Mr. Meed added that this is a significant development in Roman Catholic-Jewish relations, which he hoped "will serve as a memorandum for history".
POPE RESPONDS WARMLY TO
WARSAW GHETTO MEMORIAL SERVICE

NEW YORK, May 31 (JTA) -- The Warsaw
Ghetto Uprising memorial service held at Temple
Emanu-El in New York April 22, has drawn a warm
response from Pope John Paul II, the Warsaw Ghetto
Resistance Organization (WAGRO) reported today.
WAGRO president Benjamin Meed, who had written
to the Pope about the event, received a letter yes­
terday conveying the Pontiff's acknowledgment.
The letter, addressed to Terence Cardinal
Cooke, Roman Catholic Archbishop of New
York, was signed by Archbishop Giovanni Caprio
substitute Vatican Secretary of State. Cooke re­
ferred it to the New York Board of Rabbis with
a request that it be brought to the attention of
Meed. The letter stated that Meed's message,
transmitted by Cardinal Cooke, reached the Pope
"as he is preparing for his journey to Poland dur­
ring which he intends to visit Warsaw and
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Meed, whose organization organized the an­
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understanding and compassion for the remem­
brence of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust was
a significant development in Catholic-Jewish
relations which, he hoped, "will serve as a
memorandum for history."
September 29, 1978

Dear Marc:

Enclosed is the only clipping the Chronicle dug up about Pope John-Paul -- and it is dated this year. According to the Chronicle there is no story by Zevi except this one; and in general their library has no material on Pope John-Paul.

Today, however, all this is has become academic, the poor man died and that's that. But having started the search I thought I'd finish it.

It was nice to see you, and I hope all's well with you.

With very best wishes for a Happy New Year,

Cordially,

Nives Fox

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
American Jewish Committee
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New York, N.Y. 10022