Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992
February 21, 1984

AJC Area Directors

Marc H. Tanenbaum

Showing of film on Pope John Paul II, April 22

We have just learned that CBS-TV will be airing the three-hour film on the life of Pope John Paul II on April 22 (8 to 11 p.m., ET).

The enclosed article on the Jewish aspects of the film stresses its potential importance for increasing understanding between Catholics and Jews.

As we did in connection with NBC-TV's miniseries on the Holocaust and on Jesus of Nazareth, I should like to suggest a number of programming possibilities:

1) Local CBS-TV stations will be asked to arrange for a preview of the film for leaders of the Christian and Jewish communities, probably during the week before April 22.

A local interreligious dialogue should be arranged at the station during which Catholic-Jewish relations and anti-Semitism could be discussed. You can play a helpful role by contacting the local CBS-TV management and offer to cooperate in suggesting the best local Christian and Jewish leadership who might be invited for the preview and the dialogue. It would also be helpful to contact the local Catholic Archdiocese's media-communications director with whom you could cooperate. (This article could be distributed as a background for discussion.)

2) Local religious and TV columnists and writers should also be invited to cover the dialogue. References to local Christian leaders identifying themselves with the Pope's stands against Nazism, Communism, and anti-Semitism in their general stories are self-evidently helpful.

3) National Catholic church officials will be calling on local diocesan ecumenical, interreligious and communications contacts to give leadership in arranging dialogues and press conferences. It would be wise to cooperate with them, making available the material in this article.

Given the problems we have with propaganda equating anti-Zionism with racism, etc., this film could be a constructive antidote if creatively used.

Please let me know of whatever developments take place in your community and whether we can be helpful to you.
November 7, 1983

NEW FILM ON POPE JOHN PAUL II IS POSITIVE CONTRIBUTION TO CATHOLIC-JEWSH RELATIONS

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

(Rabbi Tanenbaum, director of international relations of the American Jewish Committee, served as Jewish consultant to the film on Pope John Paul II.)

A just-completed film on the life and career of Pope John Paul II is, in my judgment, good for the Jews. The two-and-a-half hour film was previewed last week before a predominantly Catholic audience in New York's Lincoln Center and received sustained applause.

Titled simply, "John Paul II," the film dramatization will be shown in Vatican City on Nov. 12, and will be aired over CBS-Television network during February 1984 (exact date not set yet.) According to Allen Morris of Taft Enterprises Company, co-producers with Alvin Cooperman-DePaul Productions, the Pope John Paul film will in time be shown throughout Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America in diverse languages and therefore its potential impact is global in scope.

Acted brilliantly by British actor Albert Finney, this Papal life-story contains a number of dramatic scenes of special interest to Jews. The script deals forthrightly with the pervasiveness of anti-Semitism in pre-World War II Poland, the horrors of the Nazi holocaust, and the response of Pope John Paul II both as youth, prelate, and later as Archbishop of Cracow.

The first encounter with crude anti-Semitism takes place in a cafe in Wadowice, the Pope's birthplace. A drunken Polish policeman named Moljek rants about the oncoming Nazis:

"We beat the Germans in 1918. We beat the Russians in 1920. We did the work of ten, each of us did. We ate starving dogs -- more value to us than the Jews, I can tell you."

Karol Wojtyla, then a teen-ager, identifies strongly with his close Jewish friend and classmate, Theodor Krawich. In a subsequent
poignant scene, Karol and Theodor are picnicing in a meadow, and Theodor
talks with pain about being taunted as "Jew Boy!" to another Polish youth
who tore his coat. Karol, in a burst of anger, responds:
"It's ignorance! The exact opposite of what Christ taught. Feel
sorry for him. He's ignorant."

Then Theodor says:
"I can't wait to leave this place...You've been like a brother
to me, Lolek. I mean it."

Catholics, and other Christians, will be better able to under­
stand the bestiality of the Nazis as Jews understand it -- perhaps even be
helped to identify with and join in solidarity with Jews -- as a result of
such brutal encounters with the Nazi Governor General of Poland, Hans Frank,
who arrogantly proclaims to Archbishop Sapieha his plans for the fate of
Poles and Jews:

"Poles, like Jews, are Untermenschen, subhumans. They have no
right to life. But we intend to use some of them...the Slavs, not the Jews
...as a work force of the German Reich...Every educated person will be re­
garded as an enemy and marked down for destruction. Jews will be done away
with...We shall make the name of Poland a long-forgotten name on the ancient
maps."

The most explicit -- and moving -- involvement of Karol Wojtyla
in the fate of Jews takes place in two scenes. One is in a stone quarry
where he comes to the defense of a Jewish laborer from Auschwitz and
saves his life as a Nazi guard is about to beat him to death. The other
portrays Wojtyla joining an underground Polish group that saves the lives
of a Jewish family. There are several long dramatic scenes showing the
future Pope handing out forged passports and leading the Teitlebaum fam­
ily through Nazi guards to safety.

Capping the emphasis on Wojtyla's life under the Nazis is a scene
where his girl friend complains that he does not have enough time for her.
She says:
"Everyone knows what you're doing...taking Jewish families out
of the ghettos, finding them places to hide. Is that what's keeping you
away?"
That sensitivity to Jews, his opposition to anti-Semitism, continues into his later career. Toward the end of the film, Cardinal Wojtyla calls a meeting of the Curia, the bishops of Cracow, to discuss the struggle with the Polish Communist government. The cardinal asks his bishops to join him in supporting the students and academics in their struggle against the government. One of the bishops complains that many of the academics are Jews, therefore, why support them? Cardinal Wojtyla replies:

"The government uses that to deflect attention from the issues."

It should be made clear that this film is devoted overwhelmingly to the life and career of Pope John Paul II, and that his attitude towards Jews and anti-Semitism is a secondary, even tertiary theme. But precisely because this is a film made primarily for Christian audiences, and such a well-made and impactful story of heroic proportions, its strong positive references to this Pope's attitudes and behavior toward Jews can only be a derivative, but important benefit in affirming Catholic friendship for the Jewish people.
October 31, 1983

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
165 East 56th Street
Room 502
New York, New York 10022

Dear Marc:

Enclosed find your tickets for the premiere benefit of POPE JOHN PAUL II for Wednesday, November 2, together with tickets for the post-performance dinner. You should plan on being at Avery Fisher Hall by 6:45 p.m.

I'm looking forward to seeing you on Wednesday evening.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Alan R. Morris

Enc.

BY HAND
September 29, 1983

His Eminence
William Cardinal Baum
Secretary for Commission for Non-Christians
Vatican City

My dear Cardinal Baum,

I sincerely hope that you have had a restful and pleasant summer.

My purpose in writing to you now is to seek your advice and assistance in regard to an important matter.

In recent days, I was invited to see a preview of a television film on the life of Pope John Paul II. It is a magnificent production, superbly acted, and dramatizes powerfully the humanism, spirituality, and moral courage of the Holy Father. It also contains some excellent passages on the Pope's attitudes and actions toward the Jewish people.

The program is scheduled to be shown over one of our major television networks, the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS-TV), in February 1984. The Archdiocese of New York feels so positively about the film that it is planning a major public showing of the film at Lincoln Center in November in support of Polish relief and refugee aid.

In light of the foregoing, I should like to explore with you the possibility of having the film shown before the Synod of Bishops when it meets in Rome during October. I am not sure to whom in the Curia this proposal should be addressed.

I would be grateful if you could bring this to the attention of the appropriate person(s) in the Vatican, or advise me whom to write to.

With warmest good wishes, I am,

Cordially,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
National Director
Interreligious Affairs

MHT:RPR
Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum,

I wish to thank you for your kind letter of September 20, which was delivered only on October 12.

I am aware that Monsignor Jorge Mejia has already been in touch with you on the matter you raised and has sent you the necessary information.

The Synod of Bishops will close at the end of this month, but in view of the fact that the Synod Fathers' agenda has been an extremely full one I think it would have been difficult to follow up your interesting proposal.

The Pontifical Commission for the Means of Social Communication will be able to assist you in finding an alternative solution.

With every good wish, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Rabbi MARC H. TANENBAUM
National Director, Interreligious Affairs
The American Jewish Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022
September 20, 1983

His Excellency
Archbishop Achille Silvestrini
Vatican Secretariat of State
Vatican City

My dear Archbishop Silvestrini,

I sincerely hope that you have had a restful and pleasant summer.

My purpose in writing to you now is to seek your advice and assistance in regard to an important matter.

In recent days, I was invited to see a preview of a television film on the life of Pope John Paul II. It is a magnificent production, superbly acted, and dramatizes powerfully the humanism, spirituality, and moral courage of the Holy Father. It also contains some excellent passages on the Pope's attitudes and actions toward the Jewish people.

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With warmest good wishes, I am,

Cordially,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
National Director
Interreligious Affairs

MHT:RPR
September 20, 1983

Monsignor Jorge Mejia
Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity
Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews
Vatican City

My dear Jorge,

I sincerely hope that you have had a restful and pleasant summer.

My purpose in writing to you now is to seek your advice and assistance in regard to an important matter.

In recent days, I was invited to see a preview of a television film on the life of Pope John Paul II. It is a magnificent production, superbly acted, and dramatizes powerfully the humanism, spirituality, and moral courage of the Holy Father. It also contains some excellent passages on the Pope's attitudes and actions toward the Jewish people.

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With warmest good wishes, I am,

Cordially,

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
National Director
Interreligious Affairs

MHT: RPR

bcc: Allen Morris
Dear Marc,

Many thanks for your letter of September 20, arrived here the 29th, the day the Synod began. After that, I have been absent for some days for some business of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity.

The competent office for the question you raise is the Pontifical Commission for Social Communication, whose President is Archbishop Andrzej Maria Deskur. They are always very nice and cooperative.

However, my impression is that the time of the Synod is not very appropriate for the projection of a film; the bishops have such a heavy schedule, that it could end up by not getting all the attention it is worth of.

If you would like to try still, then you should bear in mind that the Synod is bound to finish around October 29. And I would advise to contact first (if you have not done it yet) Archbishop Laghi at the Apostolic Delegation in Washington DC.

We all here - Cardinal Willebrands, Fr Duprey and myself - have appreciated very much your concern and sympathy during the illness of the recently deceased Cardinal Cooke.

With best greetings and asking for you and your colleagues of the AJC the blessings of the Lord, I remain,

Yours, in friendship,

[Signature]

Secretary to the Commission
March 8, 1984

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
National Director,
Interreligious Affairs
The American Jewish Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022

Dear Marc:

I am enclosing a copy of a study guide that has been prepared by CBS in connection with the telecast of the POPE JOHN PAUL II film. I think they've really done a good job and I know they will be sending out approximately 200,000 of these. You may have additional ideas with respect to using these and I know CBS would be cooperative.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Alan R. Morris
Enc.

BY HAND
A THREE-HOUR DRAMATIC SPECIAL
APRIL 22, 1984, 8 - 11 PM ET ON THE CBS TELEVISION NETWORK

POPE JOHN PAUL II

A VIEWERS’ GUIDE BY CULTURAL INFORMATION SERVICE MADE POSSIBLE BY CBS
In a 1979 Time magazine story, Pope John Paul II was described as the "world's most impressive and natural leader." His strategy, uniqueness and personal example won him thousands of admirers around the globe. For 750 million Catholics, he is the sound of light in matters of faith and morals. For others, the pontiff is a charismatic figure with clarity of vision and strength of character—two qualities sorely needed in a world wobbling on the brink of disaster.

How did Karol Wojtyla, known as "Jozef," become the first non-Italian pope in 455 years? What experiences during his adolescence and young adulthood shaped his personality? When did he decide to become a priest? What forces in his private and public life forged his convictions? What can we learn from his life about the calling and challenges of religious leadership?

On April 22, the CBS Television Network will present "Pope John Paul II," a three-hour dramatic special. The script by Christopher Knopf answers many of these questions as it charts the life of Karol Wojtyla, now 64, through two years of his papacy. The film, which is titled "The Story of Karol Wojtyla," was shot in Wadowice, Poland, near Krakow, and in Rome.

The film will air on CBS, the network that brought us the series "60 Minutes." It will also be shown in movie theaters.

The Story of Karol Wojtyla

On September 28, 1975, Cardinal Karol Wojtyla of Krakow, Poland, was the shock of the week when Pope Paul VI named him the new pope. The choice was unexpected, even by those who knew him well.

His life has been marked by his dedication to the Roman Catholic Church and his commitment to social justice. He has been a leader in the struggle against Communist domination in Poland.

The film will include interviews with people who knew Karol Wojtyla as a child and as a young man. It will also feature footage of him in Rome at the Vatican.

The Bulletin Insert

The back page of this week's issue has been specially designed as a guide to the film. It includes a three-minute clip from the film, a three-page article about Karol Wojtyla, and a three-page guide to the film.

Resources


Karol Wojtyla's first doctoral thesis was titled "Theology: How and Where Can the Human Person Be Recreated in the Spirit?"

The film will show footage of Karol Wojtyla at the Vatican, including scenes from his first papal audience and his first public appearance.

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APRIL 22, 1984, 8 - 11 PM ET
ON THE CBS TELEVISION NETWORK

On April 22, the CBS Television Network will present "Pope John Paul II" starring Albert Finney. The drama covers the life of Karol Wojtyla from his teenage years in a small town in Poland to his election as pope in 1978.

Many aspects of John Paul's character are revealed in this moving story. In high school, he is a top student, athlete, aspiring actor and devout altar boy. In Cracow during the Nazi occupation of Poland, he is a dedicated patriot striving to keep Polish tradition alive through an underground theatre. At great personal risk, he helps save the lives of Jewish families who are fleeing Nazi persecution.

Karol Wojtyla's seminary classes are held in secret out of sight of the Gestapo. After he is ordained, a new threat to Catholic freedom in Poland emerges. In his parish work with young people and his efforts later on behalf of the steel workers of Nowa Huta, Wojtyla must use his strength, his courage, his skills in negotiation—and above all, his faith—to confront the repression of Poland's communist regime.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION
1. What is the most interesting and revealing aspect of Karol Wojtyla's life presented in this television drama?
2. What special qualities does Wojtyla possess which help him communicate so well with youth?
3. When he is appointed bishop, Karol expresses his concern that he will become isolated from the people at the parish level. How does he maintain contact with ordinary people during the following years? Why is Pope John Paul II often called "the people's pope"?
4. What do you learn from this television drama about the role the Catholic Church has played in Polish history?
5. Wojtyla disagrees with Archbishop Wyszynski about the best way to oppose communist oppression in Poland. Do you believe the church should become involved in politics?
6. Cardinal Wojtyla asserts that unbelief and atheism are the major issues which must be addressed in our time. Do you agree? What other challenges must religious groups face in the 1980s?
7. Discuss the significance of prayer as revealed in the film. What spiritual disciplines do you follow to give depth to your life?

TABLE TALK

Pope John Paul II has proved to be a defender of freedom and an opponent of totalitarianism. This ethical stand was apparent even in adolescence. The following quotation is taken from Karol's welcoming address to Cardinal Sapieha, which is depicted in the television drama. It would make a good discussion starter for a mealtime conversation with your family.

"Freedom is not only a moment. It is a condition of happiness. It forms the roots of man's becoming good or bad by his actions. To deprive a man of his freedom is to endanger his happiness. Freedom becomes the root of human morality."

This Viewers' Guide was prepared by Cultural Information Service (CIStems, Inc., P.O. Box 786, Madison Square Station, New York, New York 10159), a nonprofit organization and publisher of resources for lifelong learners and a series of TV and Film Viewers' Guides. Directors: Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat. Designer: Rudy Michael. The development and distribution of this guide were made possible by CBS. Copyright © 1984 by CIStems, Inc. This material may be reproduced for educational purposes.