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Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992

Box 64, Folder 11, Italy - antisemitism, 1972-1988.

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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Institute of Human Relations
165 EAST 56TH STREET NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

PARIS OFFICE

30, rue La Boétie
Paris VIII

Italy

FO-Eur
September 15, 1972

MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department
From: Abraham Karlikow
Subj: Anti-Semitism in Italy

The President of the Italian Union of Jewish Communities, Judge Sergio Piperno, was received yesterday morning by Italian Premier Andreotti. A press communique put out by the Premier's office declared briefly that two subjects had been discussed, the various manifestations of anti-Semitism in Italy and the situation of the Jews from Libya.

In conversation with us here today, by phone, Judge Piperno said that he was very satisfied with his conversation with the Premier at which, in fact, a number of subjects were discussed, with the Premier being very cordial.

According to Judge Piperno, the authorities will now be taking special measures to protect Jewish monuments, schools and institutions and will press more actively in the seeking out and prosecution of perpetrators of anti-Semitic acts.

It may be mere coincidence, but as you will see from Nives' memo today, a vignette of the effect of anti-Semitism in Padua (where "a small bomb" started a fire in the synagogue last September 7) Italian police in that city raided the bookstore featuring anti-Semitic literature just about the same time Dr. Piperno was meeting with Premier Andreotti.

Judge Piperno also said that the Premier gave him assurances ~~that~~ of understanding for the contention of the Jewish community that the Jews who have come to Italy from Libya qualified as Italian citizens. This, you will remember from previous memoranda, can be of critical importance for indemnification claims recently filed by Jews from Libya under an Italian law of last year.

Judge Piperno would not go into the other subjects he discussed with the Premier by phone, though assured us that of course he would be willing to do this viva-voce when next we are in Italy. One can imagine that this also included discussion of Italian reaction to Munich, the fight against terrorism in Italy, and the connection between extremist groups in Italy, both on the right and the left, with Arab movements.

cc: Mr. Gold
Dr. Lachman
Mr. Ellerin



Neo Anti+Semitism Moves Ahead in Italz.

By Professor Augusto Segre

Recent press reports and comments about neo+Anti+Semitism in Italz are substantiall^z valid and ^{even though} pertinent. Other evidence from a vareitz of sources---not always clearly identifiable, ^{bears} being of mixed and shaded origin---~~supports~~ them out.

One certainl^z should take into acc ount~~xxxxxxx~~ the existence of healthy forces in Italz which limit the scope of anti~~S~~emitic attempts. This, though, should not preclude examination of the structure of such phenomena and their eventual effects on a societ^z going through a difficult stage of crisis.

^{making up}
The composite elements ~~in~~ the attitude of the Catholic religious world often leave^z the observer of these phenomena very much perplexed. Indeed while contacts with a certain circle at the very highest level---~~xxxxxxx~~ ^{at the top level} not onl^z in hierarchical rank but in spiritual and intellectual evolution --- create^z possibilities for dialogue and mutual understanding, and for certain positive important developments, at the middle level, on the contrarz, one finds a clerg^z belonging to the peripher^z of the Chruch that has not yet ~~xxxxxx~~ reformed. Here one meets up with inveterate mental habits, deep prejudices, and almost total ignorance of anz change in relations.

Then there is a third Church level that ought to be opentl^z denounced before public opinion as ^{an} examples of bad faith, of sheer incapacit^z ot see the light. It is this group that, although numericall^z slight, still has been the most dangerous, making its polluting weight felt at Vatican Council II and persisting in its attachment to a medieval concept of ~~Chrxxxxxx~~ relations with Jews, regretting the good old dazs when one could shut them up in ghettos or send them to the pyre. The anti-Jewish frensy of certain priests (a Don Cozzi, a Father Colosio) are not, unfortunately, just idol ted incidents. Honest clergzmen of Catholic faith, are

~~SAC~~ ~~SL 40~~ ~~6-100~~

ITALY
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THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Paris Office: 30, Rue La Boetie, 75 Paris 8, France • Elysees 69-11, 83-63 • Cable: Wishcom, Paris • Zachariah Shuster, European Director

FO-Eur
March 27, 1972

APR 4 1972

MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department
From: Nives Fox
Subj: Anti-Semitism in Italy

Enclosed is a photocopy of a new fetching design which is being distributed at Rome University in thousands of copies by students affiliated with the extra-parliamentary left.

The design is on an adhesive sticker, no doubt made for purposes of easy display.

We are checking to find out which leftist group is involved and whether there have been any reactions.

cc: Milton Ellerin

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PARIS OFFICE

30, rue La Boétie
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NOV 20 1972

Dr. Lachner

FO-Eur
November 16, 1972

MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department - David Geller
From: Nives Fox
Subj: Anti-Semitism in Italy

Recent incidents in Milan -- in which old-time hard-line Fascist veterans smeared Jewish store windows and walls with slogans like "Jews to the Ovens," in one of the most open anti-Semitic acts since the end of the war -- are but part of what is now a steadily mounting crescendo of anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist manifestations of one kind or another in Italy.

While particularly centered in Northern Italy, still, pamphlets and material from that area now, apparently, are beginning to be sent southwards as well in some instances, according to our contacts in Rome.

Most anti-Semitic manifestations are of the classic sort and anonymous for the most part, taking the form of wall smears, leaflets, and menacing and insulting letters. They are directed everywhere: to Jewish firms, individual business people, professionals and community leaders; and are sent out now not only in cities and towns where there is a sizeable Jewish population, like Milan, but even where the Jewish community is so small as to be virtually non-existent, like Parma.

In Milan, for example, in the last few weeks, both the former and present presidents of the Jewish community, Messrs. Guido Jarach and Massimo della Pergola, have received minatory communications. The last letter, just two days ago, was addressed to a Mr. Natek, owner of an export-import firm dealing primarily with Israel. Scrawled across the walls of the community offices recently was the kind of graffiti so popular on New York subways: "The Joint Works here -- See Duccio." On the same street as the Jewish old age home, though fairly far away, the walls were splashed with the more crude "Jews Equal Shit." Another wall on still another Street bore the epithet "Pig Jews"; and on the autoroute leading to the lake area north of Milan one could read the huge, painted "Death to the Jews."

There was nothing anonymous, though, about the acts of the Fascist veterans who celebrated the 50th anniversary of Mussolini's March on Rome a fortnight ago. These were former troops of the Salò Republic, that last-ditch Fascist government set up by Mussolini toward the end of the war, when he was wholly a Nazi puppet. A particularly disfigured target of their wrath as they smeared anti-Jewish slogans was the Levi Art Gallery on Monte Napoleone, Milan's most elegant shopping street; and passers-by who failed to respond in what they considered suitable fashion to their cry of "comrade" were beaten up, some requiring hospitalization.

The Parma events, however, are more typical of the insidious approach to harass and terrorize Jews in Italy today.

The Jewish population of the pleasant Po Valley city of Parma is so small that the excellent and detailed Italian Jewish community guide issued in Milan does not even bother with a figure -- perhaps fifteen to twenty Jews in all live in the city, according to our contacts in Italy.

Yet, at the beginning of this month, a leaflet was widely distributed through the Parma mails reading "Zionists to Kill." The text? "Who are the Zionists of Parma, blood brothers of the assassins of Israel, accomplices of their massacres, their plunder and their crimes?" The leaflet continued with an accurate listing of 9 names and addresses of Jews in Parma, affirming that to these should be added firms and properties "of Zionists." It then went on: "Revolutionaries will strike pitilessly at the Zionist beast, the physical persons that represent it, the parties and state institutions that protect it, its properties and its trafficking. Death to Zionists." This was the second such leaflet in Parma, a similar one distributed about two months ago.

Naturally, we discussed developments like these with the Jewish community leaders from Italy present at the European Forum last week. As recently as last March, when the Union of Italian Jewish Communities organized a meeting on the subject of anti-Semitism in Italy, the tendency on the part of the leaders of the larger communities was to downplay or minimize, though the smaller communities already were concerned.

Such reluctance may have been due partially at least to an odd dichotomy in the attitude of Italian Jewish community leaders when discussing anti-Semitism in their country. They would say -- perhaps mindful of the kindness often displayed by Italians, including Blackshirts, even in the most difficult period of Jewish persecutions -- that "The people doing these things are Fascists; Italians would not do such things." And they looked somewhat taken aback when one pointed out to them that Fascists, too, are an Italian product, with then agreeing, with the inimitable palms up, shoulder-shrug, sheepish grin Italians are famous for.

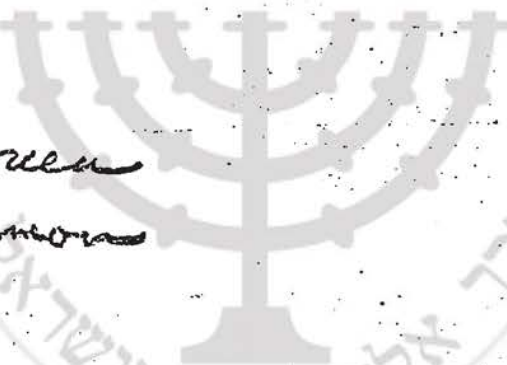
Now no one is grinning, and there is a general concern expressed, the feeling that manifestations like this may simply become part of the daily life of a Jew in the country today, in its present disturbed condition, as the awfulness of the holocaust years fades from memory, the right seeks to re-assert itself more strongly and with leftist anti-Israel ideology a permanent feature of the Italian scene.

Seeking to react -- after official representation made to Premier Andreotti, of which we wrote you on September 15 -- the Union of Italian Jewish communities has decided to undertake its own study of current anti-Semitism, and the European Office has agreed to help support and participate in this.

cc: Mr. Gold
Dr. Lachman
Mr. Ellerin

bcc: M. Bergman
M. Gerson

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES



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ITALY
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FO-Eur
May 5, 1972

MAY 15 1972

MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department
From: Nives Fox
Subj: Italy -- Anti-Semitism

You have by now heard about the desecration of an abandoned Jewish synagogue in Gorizia, a small town in Northern Italy, not far from the Yugoslav border. The event has been widely reported and the four young vandals apprehended. Local authorities have declared that this was an act devoid of political meaning, committed by youngsters of 15-17 living in the vicinity of the synagogue, who broke in to play ball.

This opinion, however, is not shared by some of the Italian press and the members of the UNIONE in Italy, whose President, Dr. Sergio Piperno, publicly qualified the event as the most outrageous one since the end of the war and of strict Fascist connotation.

As one of our contacts said: "Boys need not go to a synagogue to play ball and perform ignoble acts of profanation on sacred scrolls. This is more than a prank."

There have been, in fact, a number of anti-Jewish episodes in the past year. They can be classified as those which were anti-Israel, from the left; and those that are taking place now, and are a result of the difficult climate of past months in Italy and the present pre-election political fervor.

No holds are barred in the campaigning of the neo-Fascist groups: they are as openly and barefacedly anti-Semitic as during the Mussolini era, said a friend. The city streets,

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Rome in particular, are covered with an unbelievable amount of Fascist leaflets, tracts and posters -- not to speak of blaring speakers from moving cars. This is quite usual in the country at election times; but this year surpasses all previous efforts, and the MSI and other Fascist groups have a truly exceptional amount.

One group, called SAM (Squadre di Azione Mussolini) mailed signed leaflets -- post-marked Gorizia, and after the synagogue desecration -- to Jewish families in the area with the following text "Don't have modern ideas, tomorrow (we'll declare) war on you too. (signed) SAM: only carnage! The neo-Fascist advance does not die."

Jews in Italy do not feel that the population as a whole, or the authorities, are involved or indifferent about these incidents. All repeat that they are the doings of Fascist groups alone, using anti-Semitism for their own political aims and because Jews are such perfect scapegoats for every occasion.

The area of Udine and Gorizia in this northern part of Italy ~~are~~ also being pin-pointed as a hot bed of Fascist activities and as the possible source for the large printing and distribution of the "Protocols of Zion" now to be found pullulating all over Italy.

In this area, about a month ago, the Jewish cemetery of the small town of Gradisca was also desecrated. It was in a very isolated spot, right on the border with Yugoslavia, and it was impossible to establish just how and who was responsible for this incident at the time it took place.

Previous acts of serious synagogue vandalism took place in Viareggio, in 1968; and the nearby city of Leghorn, in 1971.

cc: Milton Ellerin



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

Paris Office: 30, Rue La Boetie, Paris 8, France • Elysees 69-11, 83-63 • Cable: Wishcom, Paris • Abraham Karlikow, European Director

FO-Eur
September 15, 1972

SEP 19 1972

MEMORANDUM

To: Foreign Affairs Department
From: Nives Fox
Subj: Italy - Anti-Semitism

"What can I tell you? Naturally we are depressed..." said the wife of a leader of the Jewish community in Padua.

How does a Jewish community of 185 souls become demoralized?
This is the way it happened in Padua:

Anonymous threatening letters received over a period of years; the pressure of Arab propaganda strongly felt on the local level; and, last week, a bomb that started a fire at four in the morning in the synagogue. Left on the wall of the building a scrawl -- "Long Live Freda."

Franco Freda, a Padua lawyer, presently in prison, is a leader of the small extreme rightist AR group (Avanguardia Rivoluzionaria) in the Italian neo-Fascist MSI party. For years AR has been spreading ^{anti-Semitic} propaganda and organizing terrorist attacks. One example of their work: the bombings of Milan and Rome banks in December, 1969, causing 19 deaths and dozens of injured, and for which Freda is now serving a prison term.

What took place last week in Padua, however, was not the beginning of the story. As long as seven years ago, and for the duration of several months, the President of the Jewish community received daily threatening letters, addressed to him personally, signed "Freda" and stamped with the AR insignia.

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The police and court officials carried out an investigation as requested by the community, but to no avail. The case was classified as a second degree crime, eventually granted amnesty and filed. After June 1967, there began a second wave of letters, no longer addressed to the community President personally, just sent to its office; and also to various Jewish families in the city. Another official inquest...another case filed.

Last week, the community organized a public meeting at the synagogue, with a press communique inviting those who wished to show their solidarity for the victims of the Munich tragedy. The attendance was large and the temple was packed, with about 100 Jews and over 400 non-Jews crowding its steps and aisles. Just a few hours later, in what appears to be a direct response to this gathering, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at the synagogue entrance. "Era una piccola bomba" said one person I spoke with, "and only the portal burned before the firemen arrived."

Padua, a small town but famous because the site of one of the oldest universities in the world, is about 20 miles from Venice. It falls within the northeastern region of Italy pinpointed in past months as a center for open outrages of militant extreme neo-Fascist grouplets. It is from this region that originates the printing of anti-Semitic publications (Protocols of Zion, etc.) and the planning of desecrations of the cemetery and synagogue in Gorizia last May.

Distribution of AR material is handled by a bookstore in Padova, Ezzellino, on via Patriarcato 32, very close to AR headquarters, at No. 18. The 1972 collection of the bookstore was advertised in an elegant catalogue, and included a long list of neo-Nazi and racist texts, each accompanied by a brief explanation of contents. The good looks of both bookstore and material on sale evidence ample financial backing.

We have just learned that the Ezzellino quarters underwent a police search yesterday morning -- perhaps a sign that the authorities are making a more serious effort in prosecuting the group after the episode in the synagogue and in this post-Munich week.

The Jewish community as such lived a tranquil existence in Padua after the war and until the beginning of menacing letters around 1965. After June, 1967, there was the added growth in the number of Arab students at the University, now approximately 600. Their activists have been openly involved in propaganda work, alternating alliances with extreme leftist and rightist groups, as suited them best, and staging frequent public meetings with regular outside speakers for the last two years. Attendance at these meetings is good, the hall used usually filled to capacity, about 500 persons. The anti-Israel and anti-Semitic speeches and discussions, the literature distributed, achieve their aim.

The community is ever more depressed in this worsening atmosphere. Some efforts were made to counteract this trend, with the cooperation of the local chapter of the Jewish Youth Federation. But even these were carried out with the feeling that they must be kept at a low key, lest more fuss and more trouble be created. The fact that the authorities have been ~~been~~ cooperating and understanding at all times might also be the cause for a certain attitude of timid resignation that becomes evident when one speaks to members of this cluster of 185 Jews. And one is saddened to hear "We must be careful about showing ourselves too prosperous" as one Jewish reaction to prevent difficulties; and "perhaps this must be part and parcel of life for a Jew in Padua from now on."

The general reaction of Paduans to past prolonged harassment of this small Jewish minority is limited to a shake of the head and a shrug of the shoulders. But the attempt to set fire in the synagogue caused considerable indignation in the city these past few days.

ARCHIVES
* * *

Back in June, 1969, the monthly published by the Italian Jewish Youth Federation in Rome, Ha Tikwa, carried a lengthy article about the activities of AR and its leaders, Franco Freda and Giovanni Ventura, listing the group's 11 points platform. Here are some: gas chambers and concentration camps in Germany were really abandoned Farben installations; photographs of victims in these so-called camps were in fact taken from a film showing the effects of allied bombings on German civilians; Jews were responsible for the network of espionage that gave the Russians America's atomic secrets; Jews tortured and plundered the entire Arab population in Palestine; Jews hold the major power positions in the economic world and dictate the policy of Western nations; Jews are responsible for almost all wars and it is they who promoted the Russian revolution and all other Western revolutions; etc.

At that time, too, Ha Tikwa wrote of the legal actions taken by the Jewish citizens of Padova against Freda and AR's distribution of material containing Nazi and racist ideology. After the arrest of the two AR leaders there was additional press coverage about their anti-Semitic activities including the accusation of the Treviso magistrature to this effect.

In their published books and pamphlets the vilest adjectives are used to describe Jews: "We feel an almost physical repulsion toward all that is said by the sons of Zion" and "Perhaps the Jew Miklos succeeds in counting money better than in counting corpses," are but a small sampling of their scorn. For historical and philosophical backing they quote at length from Paul Rassinier (La Mensonge d'Ulysse), the Protocols of Zion, and Julius Evola, the chief theoretician of Europe's extreme rightist parties.

M. Gold

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cc: Dr. Lachman
Mr. Ellerin

Route - 1 branch - 132



memorandum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date May 26, 1988
to David Harris
from James Rudin
subject

Here are the National Catholic News Service stories relating to growing anti-Semitism in Italy.

The May 12th story deals with Rabbi Toaff's interview with an Israeli paper while the May 24th story describes the Italian Bishop's statement about anti-Semitism.

Warm regards.

AJR:FM

Enclosure

bcc: Judith Banki
Benita Gayle-Almeleh
Bert Gold
Jack Lapin
Alan Mittleman
Marc Tanenbaum ✓



CLASSIFICATIONS May 12, 1988 (120 words)

NEW YORK (NC) — The following are classifications of movies which recently were reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Communication.

"Lady in White" (New Century-Vista Film Co.) — U.S. Catholic Conference classification, A-III — adults. Motion Picture Association of America rating, PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

"Salsa" (Cannon) — U.S. Catholic Conference classification, A-II — adults and adolescents. Motion Picture Association of America rating, PG — parental guidance suggested.

"Casual Sex?" (Universal) — U.S. Catholic Conference classification, O — morally offensive. Motion Picture Association of America rating, R — restricted.

"Shakedown" (Universal) — U.S. Catholic Conference classification, O — morally offensive. Motion Picture Association of America rating, R — restricted.

END

HIGHLIGHTS May 12, 1988 (190 words)

NEW YORK (NC) — The following religious broadcasting highlights were compiled by Marist Father Joseph Fenton of the U.S. Catholic Conference Department of Communication. Consult local listings for times and stations in your area.

TELEVISION

Sunday, May 22 (CBS) — "For Our Times" — CBS reports on the special problems facing immigrants from the Caribbean — the second largest group of immigrants in the U.S. — and the work done by church groups trying to assist them.

Sunday, May 29 (CBS) — "For Our Times" — CBS News correspondent Mitchell Krauss reports on the progress and problems of Israel as it celebrates its 40th anniversary of statehood.

RADIO

Sunday, May 22 (NBC) — "Guideline" — South African journalist Rolf Botha reflects on the consequences of apartheid in his country as well as some impressions from his recent trip through the United States.

Sunday, May 29 (NBC) — "Guideline" — Henry Herx of the USCC Department of Communication discusses his forthcoming book, "The Family Guide to Movies on Video," offering capsule reviews and ratings for over 5,000 theatrical films and intended to assist parents in selecting worthwhile movie fare for home viewing.

END

RABBI May 12, 1988 (510 words)**RANKING RABBI SAYS CHURCH AUTHORITIES BEHIND ANTI-SEMITIC ARTICLES**

By Greg Erlandson

VATICAN CITY (NC) — A Vatican spokesman rejected allegations by Rome's chief rabbi that church authorities were behind the publication of what the rabbi said were anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli articles in Italian Catholic magazines.

Italian news reports of a May 9 interview with Rabbi Elio Toeff in the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth said the rabbi blamed the Vatican for anti-Semitism in the Catholic media.

On March 18 the authoritative Jesuit-run magazine Civiltà Cattolica (Catholic Civilization) published an article which described Israel's harsh suppression of frequently violent Palestinian protests in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip as a "vendetta" recalling Nazi atrocities against the Jews.

Expressing "surprise" at the press reports of Rabbi Toeff's remarks, Father Giovanni D'Ercole, vice director of the Vatican press office, said May 11 he could not understand how the Vatican could be accused of supporting anti-Semitic publications.

(MORE)

Father D'Ercole's statement was broadcast by Vatican Radio May 12.

Calling the rabbi a man of "balance," Father D'Ercole noted that "he had received the Holy Father in the historical visit to the synagogue of Rome and has been close to him in various occasions."

"He has continuous contacts with ecclesiastical personalities of various levels and his relations with these responsible for the church of Rome are cordial," Father D'Ercole continued. For these reasons the rabbi's statements are even more surprising, he added.

Father D'Ercole said he agreed with the rabbi that the "mass media" may not distinguish between Jews in general and the Israelis.

Declaring that the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories has made world opinion "more sensitive" to the Palestinian question, Father D'Ercole observed that Italian Jewish organizations also "have distanced themselves from the attitudes of the Israeli government on this problem."

Papal statements and recent church documents agree on "the necessity of vigilance to prevent a resurgence of anti-Semitism," Father D'Ercole said.

"One cannot understand, then, how one can affirm that behind publications hostile to the Jewish people and Israel there is the Vatican," the spokesman concluded.

The Rome-based daily La Repubblica reported May 11 that Rabbi Teaff told Yedieith Aharoneth that "church authorities abstain from strongly condemning Israel. They prefer to do it through the means of Catholic communications."

In a May 12 interview with La Repubblica, the rabbi was quoted as singling out for criticism several Italian Catholic magazines, including Civiltà Cattolica.

On "demonizing" Israel, Zionism and Judaism, the rabbi said, "the source is important," for "it is that of the church, a moral voice, for a believer almost indisputable."

The rabbi called the comparison of the Nazi extermination of the Jews with Israeli actions during the Palestinian uprisings a work of "exquisite anti-Semitism."

The author of the Civiltà Cattolica article, Jesuit Father Giovanni Rulli, subsequently confirmed that the Vatican Secretariat of State had approved the article. The Vatican agency normally reviews articles prior to publication in the magazine.

Examples of anti-Semitic acts cited by the rabbi included threatening letters he has received as well as the firebombing of a Jewish bookstore in Turin, Italy, in mid-April.

END

Dr. Brouwer said the problems come when "the dead faith of the living is substituted for the living faith of the dead when love of nation becomes an America-first movement giving second place to love, justice, peace and truth; when concern for personal renewal becomes privatism."

Dominican Sister Dorothy Follard, who teaches at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, led the gathering's first Bible study.

In discussing the second chapter of Ephesians, where the gathering's theme of "No longer strangers" is found, Sister Follard criticized fighting and self-centeredness within and among the churches "while the stranger at the door often found us cold and forbidding."

"But this is Pentecost," she said. "We can unlock our hearts to new expressions of faith. The Pentecostal gift of diversity is a richness. We need the theological richness of each faith community."

The gathering spanned the week between the Western observance of Pentecost Sunday, May 22, and the Eastern Orthodox observance, May 29.

In a workshop on economic justice, a Lutheran minister praised Pope John Paul II's recent encyclical on social concerns.

The pope was "sharply critical of both East and West for their pursuit of materialism, for exporting their ideological conflict and for ignoring the immense poverty around the world," said the Rev. Art Simon, founder and director of the Washington-based lobbying organization, Bread for the World.

In discussing "Economic Justice: A Theology of Enough," Mr. Simon acknowledged the churches' responsibility to help the poor. But government policies must play an active role in creating a just economic system, he said.

In a session on the "Cross of Christ," the Rev. Emilio Castro, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, was joined by Msgr. Robert C. Rehkemper, vicar general of the Diocese of Dallas, and the Rev. Roberta Hestenes, president of Eastern College in St. Davids, Pa.

Jesus' death on the cross — a fate usually reserved for criminals, rebels and dissidents — has led the world's poor to believe that Jesus identified himself with the downtrodden, the marginalized, the sinner, Mr. Castro said.

While "the preferential option for the poor" is slowly gaining acceptance among mainline churches, he said, the poor have long accepted that Jesus favored them and accompanied them in their quest for justice.

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STATEMENT May 24, 1988 (510 words)

ITALIAN BISHOPS RAISE 'PROFOUND CONCERN' OVER ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS

By Greg Erlanson

ROME (NC) — The Italian bishops' conference has expressed "profound concern" over recent anti-Semitic incidents in Italy and reiterated church opposition to anti-Jewish prejudice.

The statement followed widely publicized assertions by the head of Rome's Jewish community that anti-Semitism is growing in Italy and that Catholic publications and journals were publishing anti-Semitic articles with the support of "church authorities." The controversy has been fueled in part by a Jesuit-run magazine's commentary on Israel's suppression of Arab protests in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Rome's chief rabbi, Elie Toaff, also cited anti-Jewish graffiti, threatening letters and the arson destruction of a Jewish bookstore.

The May 23 statement by the Italian bishops' secretariat for ecumenism and dialogue was signed by the secretariat's president, Bishop Alberto Ablondi of Leghorn. It was published by the Vatican newspaper, L'Osservatore Romano.

Continued clashes between Palestinians and Israelis have given rise to "grave concerns for the risk of distortion of information and consequent emotional reactions which, in the extremist fringes, could explode in violence," the bishop said.

(MORE)

The statement asked Catholics to avoid "partial or deviant interpretations or simplifications" with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli situation.

The bishops said "episodes of intolerance against Jews and Jewish institutions" and "attitudes of hostility and prejudice" are of "profound concern" to the Catholic community.

Recalling the historic visit by Pope John Paul II to the synagogue of Rome in 1986, the bishops quoted from his talk on that occasion that "acts of discrimination, unjustified limitation of religious freedom, oppression also on the level of civil freedom in regard to the Jews were, from an objective point of view, gravely deplorable manifestations."

Noting the shared belief in the "only God of Abraham" that typifies the Christian, Jewish and Moslem religions, the Italian bishops called for dialogue among the three faiths in an effort to promote peace.

Rabbi Toaff asserted that church authorities were behind the publication of what he said were anti-Semitic articles in Italian Catholic magazines.

According to Italian news reports, the rabbi told an Israeli newspaper that "church authorities abstain from strongly condemning Israel. They prefer to do it through the means of Catholic communications."

The Vatican issued a statement May 11 rejecting the allegations.

Rabbi Toaff cited graffiti, threatening letters and the burning of a Jewish bookstore as examples of growing anti-Semitism in Italy.

In a May 18 response to written questions submitted by National Catholic News Service, the rabbi criticized publications ranging from the Jesuit-run Civiltà Cattolica and the church-owned Italian Catholic daily Avvenire to the weekly Il Sabato for having printed articles he judged anti-Semitic.

The rabbi said the characteristics of such articles included "the demonization of the Jewish state, the parallel between Zionism and Nazism, between Hitler's extermination of the Jews and the Israeli repression in the occupied territories."

"I do not want to say that the Italian Catholic press is in general worse than the rest of the means of information," the rabbi said. However, "the responsibility of the Catholic press is greater," he added.

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