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Preserving American Jewish History

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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 34, Folder 13, John Paul II [Pope] - visit to United States, 1979.

WELCOMING CEREMONY
HYMN

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home:

Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting thou art God,
To endless years the same.

A thousand ages in thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be thou our guide while life shall last,
And our eternal home.



Welcoming Ceremony
His Holiness Pope John Paul II

O God, shepherd and ruler of all the faithful, look with favor on your servant Pope John Paul II whom you have appointed pastor of your Church. Grant that by word and example he may assist those over whom he is placed, so that the shepherd and the flock entrusted to his care may together attain everlasting life.

Saint Patrick's Cathedral
New York
October 2, 1979

Pope John Paul II, when he visited this country in October, received a national welcome greater and warmer than any the U.S. has given to an individual in many, many years. His quite warmth, evident personal kindness, and concern for all humanity touched millions of American Catholics and non-Catholics alike, even before his historic visit. During that tour, he brought out many of the best hopes and sentiments ^{to be found} in that deep but shaken reservoir of American good will.

In an era of national economic troubles and almost perpetual world crisis, the new Pope's calls for a return to morality and an end to violence emanate from a man whose realm has no armies, no border guards, and no atomic arsenals--and who still, through his personality and position, commands the attention and respect of a divided globe. Perhaps for this very reason, his words seemed to have touched Americans like those of no other living figure have been able to.

The new Pope's concern for humanity extends, as his whole life within the Church makes clear, to a concern for the welfare of the Jewish people as well.

"He was the friendliest of the Polish Catholic bishops towards the Jews of Poland, and he was among the most vigorous in his rejection of anti-Semitism," Father Henri d'Anjou of Portchester, N.Y., told Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Director of the AJC's Interreligious Affairs Department. Father d'Anjou lived in Poland and helped save the lives of a large number of Jews during the holocaust, and knew the new Pope when he was a priest, having met frequently with him from 1952 to 1956.

Rabbi Tanenbaum met Pope John Paul II in March, 1979, in Vatican City, at an audience between the Pope and Jewish leaders from around the world.

"When I met Pope John Paul II I was deeply impressed by his

intellectual sharpness, his deep spirituality, his sensitive respect for Judaism and the Jewish people," Rabbi Tanenbaum wrote in an essay that appeared in several ~~major~~ newspapers, including the New York Post, and in the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin.

In his formal address, the Pope spoke to the international Jewish leaders of the close relationship between their religion and Christianity, and called for a dialogue between Catholics and Jews, Rabbi Tanenbaum reported. The Pope forcefully repudiated all forms of anti-Semitism as being opposed to the essence of Christianity, and said he would do all in his power to help bring peace to the Holy Land.

"Israel, I want to come there soon," he said.

"There is more than a surface symbolism in the fact that the Pope arrives in the United States on Yom Kippur," Rabbi Tanenbaum wrote, because "this man experienced in his ~~xxx~~ personal life the suffering, the barbarism, and the dehumanization of Nazi racism and anti-Semitism."

During World War II, he worked to save Jewish lives from the Nazi death machine, and he studied at an "underground seminary." Father d'Anjou, who attended the same seminary, told Rabbi Tanenbaum that the significance of this ~~xxxx~~ lies in the fact that, like other underground schools of the time, the seminary was a center for "anti-Nazi ideology and resistance."

According to Maciej Jakubowicz, the president of the Jewish religious communities of Poland, x "Throughout his years as Bishop of Krakow, Karol Wojtyla was always approachable by Jews, and periodically, he used to inquire what was happening to the Jews, particularly in relation to their religious life and their religious

x

institutions."

When, ~~in~~ around 1964, there were a series of desecrations of Jewish cemeteries in Krakow, including defilements of tombstones over Jewish graves--actions believed to have been inspired or carried out by agents of the Polish Communist Party and/or its secret police--Archbishop Wojtyla called upon Catholic students at the University of Krakow to clean and restore the defiled tombstones and to repair the cemeteries.

He subsequently delivered a public sermon, during a large Corpus Christi procession, in which he condemned the Communist functionaries for their anti-Jewish acts, and called upon them to desist from further hostile acts against the remnant Jewish population.

His ~~own~~ Chancery published a journal of high academic quality, Common Weekly. Archbishop Wojtyla personally authorized publication of a series of articles in that journal commemorating the Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust, as well as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising of April 1943.

In addition, he supported the publication of a series of articles and book reviews on Jewish history, religion and culture.

In 1971, recalled Jakubowicz, four years after his designation as a Cardinal, the new Pope came to Krakow Synagogue during a Friday night Sabbath service. He spoke warmly with the small congregation, and asked what problems they had since he had heard they were having trouble maintaining their synagogue. "Over the years," Jakubowicz said, "we know of no case where Cardinal Wojtyla or the Krakow Church was associated with any instance of anti-Semitic or other prejudicial statements or actions regarding the Jewish people." One can only

speak of the new Pope, the Krakow Jewish leader said, "in excellent terms as a person and as an open minded religious leader."

Given the bitter history of the Jewish experience in Poland, there had been some widespread anxieties in the Jewish community about the accession of "a Polish Pope." But, Father d'Anjou told Rabbi Tanenbaum, the new Pope "was always considered different from the old hierarchy on all issues of human justice. He will be different now, as he was before, in his relations with the Jewish people."

Pope John Paul II's beliefs about human liberty and dignity,
of these beliefs
and their extension to the Jewish people (and to all non-Christians)
then, do not constitute a recent adumbration to his world view.

And, in his first official statement about his personal attitudes on the relation of the Catholic Church and the Jewish people, Pope John Paul II told the Jewish leaders he met in March 1972 "I believe that both sides (Christians and Jews) must continue their strong efforts to overcome difficulties of the past, so as to fulfill God's commandments 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 to humanity."

"As a sign of understanding and fraternal love already achieved" (between Christians and Jews), Rabbi Tanenbaum recalled the Pope concluding, "let me express again my cordial welcome and greetings to you all with that word so rich in meaning, taken from the Hebrew language, which we Christians also use in our Liturgy: Peace be with you. Shalom, Shalom!"

But this was not the first time that the new Pope, as Pope, expressed his hopes for fruitful Christian-Jewish dialogue. When

Cardinal Wojtyla was elected to the Papacy, Rabbi Tanenbaum, wrote the Vatican to offer his best wishes to the new Pope. G. Shapiro, Substitute, wrote back to the Rabbi, stating "The Holy Father received with pleasure the letter you wrote on the occasion of his election to the See of Rome.

"It is indeed inspiring for His Holiness, at the beginning of his spiritual mission, to assess the deep echo of this mission finds even in those who do not belong to the Church. It is also significant to see the growing relation between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish religion, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council and its Declaration Nostra Aetate on the relation of the Church with the non-Christian religions. This relation will certainly grow even more strongly and decisively in the future, with the good will of the parties concerned."

In his essay on the arrival of Pope John Paul II in America, Rabbi Tanenbaum wrote "That message of Shalom--or peace, of mutual respect, of love, of human solidarity--uttered by this charismatic Pope in a troubled, even threatened world--could not come at a more opportune time not only for America but for the world at large."