

FROM THE RABBI'S STUDY

(On Saturday morning, February 7th, a television crew from CBS-National filmed the Shabbat morning service of Beth Am. CBS is preparing a film to be aired on national TV during the visit of the Pope to Miami and other cities this coming September. Since I am currently President of the Synagogue Council of America, I was asked to make a statement about the response of the Jewish community to the Pope's visit. Following is the statement I made during the Service, part of which will be presented on TV).

The Torah portion this morning tells us about some of the plagues God worked upon the Egyptians. Try to imagine how these Hebrew slaves must have felt as they labored under their cruel taskmasters day after day. It would have been natural for them to lose all hope and faith. The Torah tells us about two different kinds of miracles that occurred under the leadership of Moses. First of all, there were "miracles" that we call "the plagues". Secondly, there was the miracle of faith and hope manifested by our ancestors.

Who had ever heard of a God who cared about slaves, who heard their cry, who knew their pain? Yet our ancestors believed in the possibility of such a God, and they responded to Moses' call to freedom. Some say that the great miracle at the splitting of the Red Sea was that the waters parted and our people were able to walk through on dry land. Others say that the great miracle was that our ancestors had the courage to walk into the sea knowing that they could very well be drowned.

In the end, to believe in the possibility of miracles is to believe in the possibility for change and improvement. This kind of faith is not only Jewish. It is also shared by our Christian friends who revere our Bible along with us. We Jews in Miami are anticipating an important event of sharing with the Miami Catholic community when the Pope visits our community in the near future.

Ever since the reign of Pope John who inspired the edict known as "Nostra Aetate", the Catholic Church has undertaken sweeping procedures to eliminate anti-semitism. Since that time the Church has actively sought to come close to the Jewish people, not for the purpose of conversion, but out of respect for a people and the church has publicly recognized to have a unique and continuing relationship with God.

During the dark years leading to Naziism, Christians had taught that God had rejected the Jews and now related only to Christians. This doctrine of "rejection of the Jews" has been abandoned by the Catholic Church. The current Pope now speaks of the "mystery" that enables God to hold dear at one and same time the covenant with Christians and a separate covenant with the Jews.

Laymen may not comprehend at first the radical nature of these new assertions, but they have in fact opened up a whole new era of possible cooperation between Jews and Catholics. We know that Pope John Paul II has met with Jewish delegations in Rome, and he recently made an historic visit to the Synagogue in Rome. As the Pope has said on one occasion when meeting with Jews, "I am Joseph. I seek my brethren". The Pope's visit to Miami this coming September is another example of such seeking.

It is important to note that the Pope has sought out this meeting with national Jewish leaders in Miami. As the President of the Synagogue Council of America, I want to say that we Jews eagerly look forward to this meeting. We are anxious not only to hear what the Pope has to say, we are hopeful of having the chance to inform him of some of the concerns of the American Jewish community.

Some Jews have criticized the Pope for not authorizing the Vatican officially to recognize the State of Israel. I, too, would like to see the Church embrace

Pope  
Self  
Christians

high  
of

*Handwritten notes:*  
D.D.  
Christians

the State of Israel in a more formal fashion, but we Jews would be seriously remiss if we did not acknowledge the substantial steps the Pope has taken towards the Jewish people during his term of office. The new spirit that reigns in the Catholic Church towards Jews is evidenced, I believe, in the willingness of the Archbishop of South Florida, the Very Rev. Edward McCarthy, to accept an invitation to speak in the pulpit of this Synagogue on an occasion just a few months away. Such a fraternity between Catholic and Jewish Clergymen would not have been possible before the policy enunciated by Pope John and known as "Nostra Aetate", a policy that the current Pope, John Paul II, has chosen to support and advance.

From the excitement I have observed about the Pope's impending visit to Miami, excitement manifested by Jews as well as by Christians, I can say that the Pope's seeking of his brethren is being accepted in the best spirit. I can only hope that his visit will set in motion an intensification of mutual seeking not only between Jews and Catholics but between representatives of all religious groups in America.

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