

Vortrag „Aktuelle Fragen der katholisch-jüdischen Beziehungen in den Vereinigten Staaten“ im Jüdischen Theologischen Seminar, New York

Erzbischof Timothy M. Dolan (New York), Präsident der Konferenz der katholischen Bischöfe der Vereinigten Staaten am 12. April 2011

Der Erzbischof von New York Timothy M. Dolan, der zugleich den Vorsitz der katholischen Bischofskonferenz der Vereinigten Staaten innehatte, hielt am Jewish Theological Seminary in New York am 11. April 2011 einen Vortrag, welcher der Vertiefung der freundschaftlichen Verbundenheit zwischen der katholischen und der jüdischen Gemeinschaft von New York galt und an das Ereignis des Besuchs der Großen Synagoge in Rom durch Papst Johannes Paul II. 25 Jahre zuvor anknüpfte. Der Geist der Freundschaft habe sich angesichts der Schwierigkeiten in der Beziehung, die ihre Stärken habe, zu bewähren. Gemeinsam sei den beiden Gemeinschaften die Bewunderung für das Leben und Wirken von Papst Johannes Paul II., dem die Heilung der Wunden der Vergangenheit ein großes Anliegen war und dessen vielleicht größte politische Initiative in der Aufnahme der diplomatischen Beziehungen des Vatikans mit dem Staat Israel 1993 bestand. Zu den Herausforderungen der katholisch-jüdischen Beziehungen gehöre die Frage der Verantwortung von Papst Pius XII. in den Jahren des Holocaust. Es sei die Rolle der katholischen Kirche als Ganzes in der damaligen Zeit zu verstehen.

Introduction

Thank you, Chancellor Eisen, for your introduction and the warm welcome that The Jewish Theological Seminary has extended to me this evening. We assemble here, Chancellor Eisen, because of your thoughtful invitation for me to address your community both in my role as Archbishop of New York and as a religious colleague in our great city. I fondly recall our partnership over a year ago in speaking together at the invitation of Fordham University. It was my pleasure last year at this same time to visit with the Orthodox Jewish community at Park East Synagogue, through the kindness of Rabbi Arthur Schneier, on the occasion of the dedication of a plaque to commemorate the visit of Pope Benedict XVI there on April 18, 2008. It would be my hope to continue speaking publicly every year with the Jewish community of New York in all of its diversity – Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist – in order to broaden the friendship begun by my predecessors and which helped bring to New

York the cooperation between Jews and Catholics that began at the Second Vatican Council almost a half-century ago.

For, in fact, tomorrow marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome, furthering as it did between us the ongoing chapters of true dialogue, built on the admission of past wrongs, and the resolve to build a friendship that will prevent these from happening again. The Church has even gained a positive insight into her own identity through her interaction with the Jewish community. I repeat now what a quarter of a century ago John Paul II first said in the Great Synagogue about the effects of this new dialogue:

The first [effect] is that the Church of Christ discovers her „bond“ with Judaism by „searching into her own mystery“ (cf. *Nostra aetate*, no.4). The Jewish religion is not „extrinsic“ to us, but in a certain way is „intrinsic“ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.

We should take great satisfaction that on January 17th of last year, Pope Benedict XVI also visited the Great Synagogue, and there repeated John Paul's daring message of repentance and of friendship, reaffirming for us three important points worth reminding ourselves about this evening:

- First, our visits with each other stand as evidence of a commitment to bettering our relationship as a religious duty to which we are mutually obliged. The good will we share has over and over again provided us with the resilience often needed to work our way through whatever difficulties arise on the journey we share. Our strength in this effort comes from God, who prompts our hearts to undertake this task and who never fails to nurture what he inspires in us.
- Second, we note that papal visits in particular to various synagogues and my visit with you today are signs of friendship between our communities as hoped for in the Second Vatican Council's document on our relationship, *Nostra aetate*, no.4. There, we find something of a blueprint for our future: the vision of what can and must be reconciled between us, together with the friendship it promises. Our visits with each other, especially in holy places, reaffirm and recommit us to pursuing that same friendship as we embrace each other in the great peace of God.
- Third, be assured that this tradition of invitation and visitation, of welcome and of hospitality offered and accepted, is intended to put to rest the notion that the Church's renewal of her relationship with the Jewish people is not an authentic or irreversible part of her life, but merely a quirk or eccentric courtesy of a particular bishop of Rome. On the contrary, the decisions of Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI to visit with their neighbors, most especially in Israel as a full diplomatic partner of the Holy See, is a direct affirmation of all that *Nostra aetate* challenges the Church to realize in herself. As a result, Christians and Jews everywhere should be able to see in us examples of how those who love God must work together to heal a past where before there was little but conflict and misunderstanding.

I thank you, then, my „elder brothers and sisters,” for your outreach to me as Archbishop of New York and to the Catholics of this city. I never tire of expressing my appreciation to the ever-welcoming Jewish community here – in all of its vibrancy and differences – for extending the hand of friendship from the day of my arrival two years ago this week until now.

The Strengths of Our Relationship

As you might know, I was elected President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops last fall, forcing me regrettably to leave aside, at least temporarily, the role as Co-Chair of the Jewish Catholic Dialogue that I had earlier assumed for the US bishops. However, none of these changes lessen in any way the strength of my commitment to our Catholic-Jewish friendship here in the Archdiocese of New York, nationally, and globally. In light of this, I am very pleased to report that over the past year, many Catholic and Jewish dialogue partners have worked hard at our exchanges both locally and nationally around three key points:

- First, we have begun to re-evaluate our dialogue’s purpose and style, setting aside what I have called the „dialogue of grievances” and turning instead to a „dialogue of mutuality.” Too often in the past, our grievances with each other have been our sole topic of discussion, without a balancing attention to our mutual needs as believers who live in an increasingly secular culture, often hostile to religious expression of any kind. Surely, a new perspective is needed in which we try to settle what is unresolved, yet to build support for what is mutually beneficial in the free exercise of our faiths. I would point to positive and fruitful conversations about last year’s Oberammergau Passion Play as a good example.
- Second, we have taken tentative but successful steps to promote a sense of *mutuality* by identifying issues of pressing concern to both our communities – such as interreligious marriage, handing on our traditions to our children, and stopping the „leakage” of faithful – which scholarly research such as that of the Pew Center tells us is afflicting both of our religions – and to look at them together, sharing with each other our common apprehensions, strategies and practical tactics that help us to understand not only each other’s traditions, but thereby often helping ourselves to see our own in a new way. These are what we call „pastoral issues.”
- Third, it seems that we are only at the beginning of appreciating each other’s concepts of „memory” and the vital, but very different roles these play in our religious lives. „Memory” in the sense of a collective awareness of God’s saving actions and revelation, and respect for a shared identity is a foundational element of our dialogue together; without it, we lose a sense of who we are, most especially in relation to each other. As well, „memory” is inseparably linked to „mutuality in engagement” and these two qualities make natural partners in the construction of interreligious dialogue. It is my hope that in whatever years God may give me as Archbishop of New York, our Catholic-Jewish dialogue may be marked by a practice of „memory” which never fails to hold us accountable to the honesty and transparency demanded by the tragedies of the past, but also to a „mutuality” of concern

for each other which places our friendship and commonly shared and savored memories first, and our grievances second.

There is a final or unofficial „fourth” point that has characterized our dialogue in the United States this past year: it is our mutual admiration for the life and work of Pope John Paul II, whose example has given Catholics and Jews a new way of encountering each other, free of ancient prejudices that have blocked our mutuality, our commonality, and the purification of memories with each other. As you may know, Pope Benedict XVI has announced that on May 1st of this year he will beatify John Paul II, in recognition of his heroic life of service and sanctity. I have been moved by how many of you have expressed your desire to join with us in thanking God for the gift of John Paul’s leadership, a bridge to Jews and Christians alike, a legacy of friendship and honored memory.

And there is much to be thankful for in the pope who pioneered Catholic-Jewish relations. Born into the Polish village of Wadowice – where Jewish and Catholic children built life-time friendships in the face of 20th century bigotries – Karol Wojtyla would come to love Jews as his own. This fundamental esteem for Jews allowed Wojtyla to cross the barriers of race and religion that otherwise prevented both Jews and Catholics from seeing each other as fellow citizens, believers-in-God, and proud Poles. To make his point, Karol Wojtyla, as Archbishop of Krakow, would protectively visit a synagogue in that great city during the mid-60’s threat of a Soviet crackdown, reassuring a stunned Shabbat assembly that, as their brother, he would not want harm to come to them, and would stand with them in resisting it.

Looking back at such defiance, John Paul’s actions seem like a mere rehearsal for his fearless visit to the Great Synagogue of Rome in 1986, where he re-iterated in the most dramatic of settings that the Catholic Church deplores and condemns anti-Semitism in all its forms. Unique amongst popes ancient and modern, John Paul thereby began a tradition between our leaders of the visitation of holy places that even to this day serves as our inspiration and model. For this pope, Catholics and Jews were no longer „strangers” to each other, but brothers and sisters whose futures were inter-locked in a mysterious plan of salvation, now linking the one to the other in God’s house, whether synagogue or church.

John Paul’s flare for confrontation with Fascists was not limited to the Communists of Krakow or Moscow. Many recall with surprise his shrugging himself free from an official Auschwitz-state-guide in June of 1979, ignoring propaganda about the lives of non-Jewish comrades who had died there in the *Shoah*. Alone, he then walked with a gentle resolve straight to the memorial for Jews, where he knelt on the ground to pray for forgiveness and for their happy repose before God. In a single gesture, John Paul managed to minimize Communist boasts and to target the Nazis with their true guilt: the systematic murder of millions of Jews, too often denied by a shamed world. To seal his teaching on the evil of the Holocaust, John Paul would later publish the stunning text of *We Remember* (1998), hoping that his statement would „indeed help to heal the wounds of past misunderstandings and injustices.” He prayed that *We Remember* would „enable memory to play its necessary part in the process of shaping a future in which the unspeakable iniquity of the *Shoah* will never again be possible.”

Perhaps his greatest political initiative, however, was to establish – against all advice – diplomatic relations with the State of Israel in 1993. Without this complement to his reform of deep-seated Catholic anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism, John Paul seemed to doubt that Jews would ever believe that the Church had truly converted from her older ways or embraced the transformative teachings of Vatican II's *Nostra aetate*. In addition, the pope wished to rest the notion that a Jewish state was, in some way, a theological problem for the Catholic Church that would prevent her from acknowledging the right of Jews to self-determination. Nothing could have been farther from John Paul's mind.

As with so many of this pope's innovations, one gesture opened the way for another, but now it would be Jerusalem's turn to reciprocate, welcoming John Paul in 2000 with a joy that recalled the jubilant hymn of Psalm 87: „So all sing in their festive dance: My home is within you!” In surely his greatest trip abroad, John Paul came to Jerusalem not only as the home of Jesus, but as the city of the living God for Jews and Muslims alike. First paying homage at *Yad Vashem* to the memory of those who had died in the Holocaust, the pope made it impossible for Catholics to deny the horror of that event without being unfaithful to their own calling. Perhaps, then, we see the real purpose of his now famous prayer at the Western Wall: to state at first gently what his successor, Benedict XVI, would nowadays repeat boldly, that to be Catholic is to repent of harming even one Jew in the name of another, called Jesus.

A Unique Challenge to Catholic-Jewish Relations

A particular issue that challenges all three of these new horizons in dialogue across the US is the question of Pope Pius XII and the Holocaust. A considerable bibliography of works has already been produced – some popular in style, others more scholarly – to examine this issue from many points of view, some severely attacking Pius, others vigorously defending him, with Jewish, Catholic and agnostic scholars on both sides. And yet, for all the tremendous amount written, there is little agreement amongst us about what responsibility Pope Pius XII actually bore.

As a result, it may be time to suggest a way in which the shape of the questions being asked about Pope Pius XII can benefit from a close critique by the three points we have given here: grievances versus mutuality; commonality of concerns; and the development of shared memory between our communities.

There seems to have been no time previously in which two popes, who were each other's contemporaries, and then simultaneously considered for beatification, have caused such a polarization amongst observers as we see today in the case of Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II. For very often, we find the papacies of these men being pitted against each other, almost as opposites. How, one might ask, can the same Church see both of these men as holy, both as moral leaders, both as examples of the following of God as revealed in Jesus?

A help in answering this question might have come in a distinction made by Fr. Frederico Lombardi, the Vatican Press officer, following Pope Benedict XVI's decision to advance Pius XII to the second of the four stages of canonization, simultaneously giving both him and Pope John Paul II the title, „Venerable.” In his statement, Fr. Lombardi draws a line between the

„stuff,” the data, of the canonization process, on the one hand, and the evaluation of papal success or failure, on the other. For, what constitutes holiness of life – that is to say, closeness to and friendship with God – is not measured in the same way as political, social, or financial success. Many saints have been failures in their chosen careers; still, they loved God and their neighbor deeply. I understand the same to have been true of some judges, leaders, and prophets of Israel! Decisions about holiness are spiritual in nature, and often surprise or upset historical judgment. Even John Paul’s own papacy, revolutionary in so many ways, experienced some of the inadequacies typical of governments everywhere. George Weigel’s recently released study of soon-to-be Blessed John Paul II, a sequel to his magisterial biography of 2000, points out failures and disappointments of the pope’s 27 year pastorate. And yet, frequently admitting their own faults and apologizing for those of the Church, holy men and women are no less holy for their efforts.

As a result, Fr. Lombardi’s statement can add something crucial for our reflection tonight about the meaning of Pope Benedict’s decision to advance Pius XII’s cause. „There is, then,” he wrote, „no intention in any way to limit discussion concerning the concrete choices made by Pius XII in the situation in which he lived.” In effect, beatification and canonization in the Catholic Church do not carry any approval of specific historical decisions a would-be saint may have made. That kind of judgment belongs to historians and scholars – a process that Fr. Lombardi is quick to point out should not be shut down, but actually be intensified by the Church’s veneration of Pius XII for other reasons. Scholars and analysts are invited and encouraged to do their work, evaluating popes – even harshly, if deservedly – for their competence and performance, or lack thereof, in all the roles they chose to play on the world stage.

But even with this distinction in place for the Catholic Church, the current debate about Pius XII has become shrill for another reason, namely, the very shape of the question itself that dominates even the scholarly debates about his papacy. Too often, this lead question is popularly formulated this way: Was Pius XII guilty of failing to save Jewish lives in the Holocaust? Supporters of the pope immediately weigh in by showing what the pope did to save lives; accusers respond by demanding an overall accountability of papal policy relative to the Nazi horror that allegedly resulted in a deadly negligence towards Jews.

However, our first point of critique from above about Catholic-Jewish dialogue may help us to pause and ask: What should be the starting point for our examination of this pope’s relationship to the victims of the Holocaust? I would submit that the popular question about Pius XII’s guilt implicitly carries a negative judgment about him. It appears to be a question of grievance rather than of mutuality.

Instead, shouldn’t our conversation about Pius XII begin with what is the only and inevitable starting point for every fact-based inquiry, namely, What does the historical record tell us? And if that record has not yet been fully established, then isn’t our first duty to begin constructing that very record?

Of course, the sources in the Vatican archives especially for the war years of 1939-45/46 are essential to just such a process. I find it commendable that the Vatican’s position has always

been to provide full access to these sources for scholars, just as it has already succeeded in doing for the years 1922-1938 – the pontificate of Pius XI, whose Secretary of State was Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII. It should also be noted that the present frustration about the pace of opening the Vatican archives is shared across the board by researchers everywhere, Catholic, Jewish, and neither of the above. Whatever is needed to complete this project, even in phases rather than only as a whole, should be explored for its practicability.

Let me be clear: as a trained historian, I, too, look forward to the opening of the Vatican archives at the earliest possible date. Whatever the Archives hold, the Catholic Church does not fear the truth about the often heroic and sometimes disgraceful conduct of her leaders and members during the Second World War. In any case, much of this is already known. Nevertheless, I will resist the circular argument being advanced by many that says the purpose for opening the Vatican archives is, in effect, to prove the presumed guilt of Pope Pius XII. We must remember that it is impossible to judge moral responsibility when the facts themselves have not been clearly established. Any dialogue built on „mutuality” must begin, then, with a „mutual question”, stated more objectively: What does the historical record tell us about Pope Pius XII and the victims of the Holocaust?

Our second point – that of identifying areas of common concern, even if only from enlightened self-interest – is also of help in the present debate. Surely our shared desire to understand not only the role of the pope but of the Catholic Church as a whole in the Holocaust will help all of us to reaffirm the central importance of continuing education against genocide and of the real achievement of John Paul II in helping to implement the urgent concerns of *Nostra aetate*, no. 4. Without this goal in mind, a future of ambiguous opposition to discrimination of all kinds, but especially to anti-Semitism, draws closer. The common concern we face is to defeat the anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism that gave rise to the Holocaust, and which we see dangerously repeating itself across the globe. One of my Jewish partners in our dialogue commented to me that now Jews and Catholics are closer than ever, as we both are in the crosshairs, for example, of religious extremists.

Lastly, there remains the precious question of memory. There is a sense in which any archive can be called a „depository of memories” – personal or group, religious or secular. At stake in our discussion of the Vatican Archives is also the delicate right of survivors to know the fate of their loved ones, that their memories of them may be formed in the truth of events as they unfolded during that most terrible of conflicts. Whatever can be identified in the Vatican Archives of the life history of the family members of any survivor should be secured as quickly as possible.

As well, establishing the memory of all who assumed a heroic role in the saving of lives – including the many brave citizens who risked everything to defend their Jewish brothers and sisters against the Fascists – also deserves our best efforts. Determining truth for memory’s sake must become a common goal. This applies equally to case of Pius XII.

Conclusion

As we conclude our program this evening, I am reminded of my remarks a year ago on how many times the nature of interreligious dialogue has changed since the middle of the last century. At their start, most such dialogues tentatively explored a relationship of „tolerance” for the religious other. Later, dialogues evolved into associations dedicated to limited „cooperation” in areas such as fighting racism and poverty. Eventually, the idea of „exchange” took hold as the preferred method for dialogue, so that both communities could begin to know each other „from within”, i.e., from the self-told stories that inform our religious partners of who we say we are.

Today, however, I am suggesting that we take a further step: that we „engage” each other actively, fully respectful of our identities and differences, yet come together in whatever ways would help us to build up a sense of mutuality. What until now has been an „arms-distance” style of learning – perhaps more concerned with mistakes than achievements – may do well to become a mutual engagement on many levels that not only reminds us of our obligations to each other, but carries us to a new level of friendship. True dialogue needs to begin in mutuality, discover its commonalities and build its memories together.

A dramatic example of this kind of joint effort between Catholics and Jews was given us just two weeks ago, when Pope Benedict XVI visited the site of the Ardeatine Caves on the outskirts of Rome. It was there on March 24, 1944 that Nazis murdered 335 Italians, 35 of whom were Jews, the rest Catholics, in retaliation for a Resistance attack killing of 33 Nazi soldiers. Together with Rabbi Di Segni of Rome, the pope wept and prayed, denouncing yet again the work of the Nazis who took any life, Christian or Jewish, that opposed their drive to dominate Europe and to jack-boot religious expression.

Deeply moved, the Pope then read what had been written on a sheet of paper left behind in the prison cell of a partisan shot by the Nazis. It said: „God, my great Father, we pray so that you can protect Jews from the barbaric persecution:” 1 Pater Noster, 10 Ave Maria, 1 Gloria Patri.“ Indeed, this prisoner had given his life to protect Jews from Nazis, offering three familiar Catholic prayers as he did so: the Our Father, the Hail Mary and the Glory be to the Father. In this hero’s witness, as the Pope so well discovered, we see the simple faith that ultimately becomes the dialogue of love and service.

Finally, both of our communities are anticipating their coming holy days with joy and gratitude. As Passover and Easter approach, I offer you my prayers and best wishes, that –

On this Passover, you may rejoice in God's commands
to celebrate the wonders that delivered His people
from the land of Egypt!
May every race and nation be freed
to enjoy his everlasting peace
and may His blessings be upon you and your families!

Thank you!

Quelle: <http://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources/documents-and-statements/roman-catholic/us-conference-of-catholic-bishops/949-dolan2011apr12> - eigene Übersetzung.



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