

Jewish-Catholic Relations

Boston to Long Island (by way of Jerusalem and Rome)

By WILLIAM MURPHY

It pleases me very much to be able to write this column at the time of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Every year that I have been Bishop of Rockville Centre I

FIRST PERSON

have sent a letter of greetings to all the rabbis I know of here on Long Island. This year it is an added privilege to join my longtime friend, Professor Larry Schiffman, for the *Long Island Jewish World* newspaper group and for *LI Catholic*. Professor Schiffman has written as comprehensive an overview of Jewish-Catholic relations as I have read in a long time. This is one of his many gifts as a scholar and extraordinary teacher. In association with all he has written, let me offer you some thoughts as a pastor who considers himself a brother and friend to the many Jews who have enriched my life. While much of this is personal, it explains why I, and I believe every Catholic, is called to be a committed and

As I grow older, I have come to realize how blessed I was to have grown up where I did and with whom I lived. At Boston Latin School, Jewish and Catholic boys studied and grew together in an atmosphere in which adolescent curiosity about the other opened up avenues of understanding and camaraderie at a young age. At age 12, I went to shul for the first time. I was invited by my Jewish friend, David Kozodoy, to come to Temple Emeth and be part of a youth gathering where we faced up to the reality of prejudice and discussed the ways we could overcome it in ourselves and with others.

In my circle of friends, then and now, we — Jews and Catholics — have always had an easy relationship of friendship and respect. Of my school friends, there was one who called himself a secular and agnostic Jew. He and I would have long conversations about faith and belief. Each sure of himself, I now realize we both showed more intellectual bravado than real insight and conviction. I went to seminary.



Bishop Murphy (front row, third from left) at a meeting in May with representatives of the Orthodox Union, the Rabbinical Council of America, and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to discuss issues affecting the Jewish and Catholic communities.

Forces when the threats against Israel placed all Israeli soldiers in danger. I joined his family in prayer when he became seriously ill and died in the holiest place for Jews to return to their maker, Jerusalem. Blessed be the Lord!

Only later did I realize that the blessings of such friendship was not a universal experience for all Catholics and all Jews. Professor Schiffman has already explained how important the Second Vatican Council is for us Catholics and, with *Nostra Aetate*, for Jews as well as Catholics. Returning from my studies in Rome during the Council as a priest, I had to confront anti-Semitism within the Church and among my own parishioners.

Fortunately in Boston, Richard Cardinal Cushing was archbishop. His sister was married to a Jew and he gave one of the strongest and most influential talks at the Council in favor of the Church's Declaration on the Jews. He placed me on the Archdiocesan Ecumenical Commission at age 27 and from that came the Massachusetts Jewish Catholic Committee, the first such committee in the U.S.

My first trip to Jerusalem and Israel came as a graduate student in Rome. I was swept up by the mysterious beauty of the Holy City and joined my brother priests in all the places made holy by Jesus, especially the Holy Sepulchre, the Cenacle, the Mount of Olives. I was confirmed in my faith. But I also had a twofold deepening of my

understanding and love for Jews and the whole Jewish faith tradition. First, Jerusalem is the city of the Chosen People. Here the Almighty chose to dwell. Here is the fulfillment of the promises made to the Patriarchs, the City of David, the eternal capital of Israel. Second, at Yad Vashem, the modern story of the most evil expression of anti-Semitism, we priests were faced with the whole specter of that, the oldest prejudice in the world, still active today but reaching its zenith in the horror of the Shoah.

Back in Rome, my life changed when I was asked to work in the Holy See and eventually was Under Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace. Before the Council Pope St. John established the Secretariat for Christian Unity and shortly thereafter, he and its head, Cardinal Bea, established a Secretariat within that Office for Religious Relations with Jews. This may sound strange to Jews but it has a significant importance. The roots of our Catholic faith are so deeply embedded in the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, in Jewish customs and feasts that we Catholics cannot understand our own faith fully without grasping how deep is this relationship which is unique and must always be so. As St. Paul tells the Romans, the Jews are his brethren, his kin. He goes on: "They are Israelites, theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship

and the promises."

From this insight, the many Jewish Catholic initiatives Professor Schiffman described and in which the two of us have been involved these past 50 years have evolved, developed and reached a level of mutual respect, friendship, sharing and witness beyond which, as you, Larry, said so well, none of us could have imagined.

Now back on Long Island, the Jewish communities are alive, vibrant and expressive of the richness and inspiring witness that truly proclaims in word and deed how the Almighty has called, blessed and sent His chosen people into the world. As Catholics we give thanks to Him for our Jewish friends and neighbors. We re-commit ourselves to living in this relationship of fraternity and friendship, respecting one another's faith and traditions and defending one another's faith and religious freedom when both faiths are so much under attack today. We will not abandon each other. And we will use our mutual commitments, our friendship, our life of faith and hope and love to help repair the world by being faithful to the One whose covenants have given us life, our identity and our commitment to Praise the Lord from whom all good things come.

Bishop William Murphy is the Bishop of Rockville Centre.



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enthusiastic protagonist for all we, Catholics and Jews, can do to deepen our relations, broaden our outlooks and offer a concrete witness of persons of faith to a world that needs to find in us signs of God's truth, goodness and love.

He became a doctor, married his wife, an Orthodox Jew, and then returned to Israel where he practiced medicine in Jerusalem. He became very observant. I shared his worries when his first son was serving in the Israeli Defense