

INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Commission

**Monday, December 16, 1985
10:00 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.**

Mimi Alperin, Presiding

ATTENDEES

- Rabbi Gunther Hirshberg
- Manette Kaufman
- Irving B. Levine
- Edna Nass
- Annabel Neaman
- Ruth Robinson
- Gadiel Smith

STAFF

- Rabbi A. James Rudin
- Judith H. Banki
- Dr. Alan Mittleman

GUESTS

- Richard Yao
- James Luce

I. The meeting began at 10:20 as Mimi Alperin introduced Richard Yao and James Luce, directors of "Fundamentalists Anonymous." Yao and Luce explained that they had both been Protestant fundamentalists, one by upbringing, the other by choice, who chose to leave the fundamentalist community. Since fundamentalism is more than a set of beliefs, they noted, and fundamentalist churches are all-embracing, exclusivistic communities, deciding to leave the church is a traumatic experience. One can lose friends, family and one's psychological stability -- in short, one's "world." Having experienced this painful transition first-hand, Yao and Luce decided to develop a mutual support network for other ex-fundamentalists.

"Fundamentalists Anonymous" began in April, 1985 with a two-line ad in the Village Voice. The organization has since mushroomed and has attracted over 10,000 ex-fundamentalists as well as considerable media attention. Following appearances on the Donahue Show, the Today Show and mention in several major news magazines, Yao and Luce left their professional Wall St. jobs and began to build their organization. F.A. has 29 chapters nationwide, with the potential of another 100. They must be very cautious in developing chapters, however, because some fundamentalists have already tried to "infiltrate" and subvert the organization. F.A. is a non-coercive, non-ideological group, and is not against religion: both men belong to the American Baptist Church. In fact,

chapters usually meet in churches and the goal of the organization is to "resocialize" ex-fundamentalists so that they can become independent in personal decision-making once again.

Yao and Luce stressed that fundamentalism is characterized by an authoritarian "mindset," which is incompatible with a positive appreciation of religious pluralism. In addition to providing counseling for ex-fundamentalists, they attempt to educate the public about the social and political implications of fundamentalism.

In the discussion which followed, several IAC members inquired about the fundamentalist-Jewish connection in groups such as "Jews for Jesus." Yao and Luce pointed out that 10-15% of the total response has been from Jews leaving fundamentalist groups.

- II. Rabbi Rudin described the AJC's response to the growing threat of anti-Semitism and political extremism in the nation's farm-belt. Farmers are facing their worst financial crisis since the Depression. Since the rest of the population does not appear to share their acute distress, farmers in the Midwest feel isolated, misunderstood and abandoned. Their own organizations are not united and they have been targeted by hate groups for recruitment. Anti-Semitic propaganda in the region utilizes the traditional themes of Jewish economic dominance, conspiracy, and exploitation of the "Aryan races."

AJC's response has been primarily in the areas of information gathering and public education. Rabbi Rudin, Chicago Midwest regional director Jon Levine, and Chicago AJC Chapter President Marcia Lazar travelled to Iowa and Kansas in August to learn the situation first hand. AJC field staff have been kept fully informed and an AJC backgrounder was prepared and distributed. Rabbi Rudin published an op-ed in the Christian Science Monitor (enclosed). A major news-conference at AJC headquarters in September increased awareness of the problem around the nation. AJC is submitting a grant proposal to a major corporation for the funding of a three year program. Presently, the AJC is building a network of concerned Christian leaders in the farming regions. Rabbi Rudin pointed out that the churches are the "first line of defense" against extremism and the only institutions which most farmers still find credible.

- III. Judith Banki discussed the IAD's 27 commemorations of Vatican Council II. During the past year, AJC chapters and Roman Catholic dioceses in every region of the country co-sponsored this intensive program of Catholic-Jewish relations; the most successful chapter-national program in AJC's history. The AJC had never undertaken such a sustained and broad-based program before, and Ms. Banki pointed out that we have a very strong base on which to build

future cooperative programs with the Catholic community. One such projected program will be the development of Holocaust education in the Catholic schools.

A discussion ensued about the significance of the recent Extraordinary Synod in Rome. Cardinal Bernard Law spoke and Rabi Rudin responded to the Cardinal's address. Judith Banki also participated in the last Vatican II commemoration of the year. The IAD staff explained the purpose and results of the Synod. It was generally agreed that Catholic-Jewish relations will not be impeded by current discussions in the Church.

Irving B. Levine of Boston gave a report of the Boston community-wide commemoration, held the night before. The commemoration was funded entirely by the Boston archdiocese. All of the synagogues, rabbis and leadership of Jewish communal agencies were invited to attend a banquet at St. Joseph's seminary.

- IV. Rabbi Mittleman discussed two AJC-sponsored seminarians' conferences held in November. A conference at the New York Archdiocesan seminary, Dunwoodie, in Yonkers, N.Y., brought 90 Catholic and six Jewish seminarians along with Rabbi Rudin, Rabbi Mittleman, and Dr. Steven Bayme of JCAD together for a day of learning and dialogue. A two-day conference at the United Church of Christ's Lancaster (PA) Theological Seminary brought together 20 Jewish and 40 Protestant seminarians from around the country. Both programs were enthusiastically received.
- V. A discussion of IAD's 1986 program priorities was begun, but was limited due to insufficient time. IAC members suggested that programs be undertaken to combat the "Christianization" of America; to teach the lessons of the Holocaust; and to stimulate balanced discussion about Israel on campuses. A full discussion of program priorities will be held at the next IAC meeting.

SAVE THE DATE: The next IAC meeting will be held on Monday, March 17, 10:00 a.m. - 12:45 p.m.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dr. Alan L. Mittleman

Enc.: Christian Science Monitor Article
Program of Boston Commemorative Event.

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