

Father Pawlikowski Speaks At Catholic-Jewish Dialog

"Research is revising the old image of the Pharisees of the time of Jesus," a Servite theologian, president of the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago, declared in his talk in the Catholic-Jewish Dialog series at the Springhill Avenue Temple Nov. 16.

"The intertestamental Pharisees started a religious revolution within Judaism which had profound influence even on the early Christian Church," declared Father John Pawlikowski, O.S.M., internationally recognized authority on Christian-Jewish relations.

In broad outlines, he described the "creative Era" when Judaism was rescued from its juridically oriented interpretation of the

Torah by a new theological movement within which the Christian movement itself logically can be placed.

Father Pawlikowski pictured the Pharisees as challenging the status quo within Judaism much the same way as Jesus did. As heirs of the prophets, the movement expanded the Jewish understanding of God and stressed a new sense of God-in-us, in one's neighbor. He described the new intimacy of God with persons and families in private and family prayer, and in the synagogues created by the Pharisee movement.

Father Pawlikowski added two other foundations associated with the Pharisees: The Oral Torah, and the Rabbinate. The Oral

Torah was the name given to the living interpretation of the first five books of the Bible as applied to the daily lives and situations of contemporary believers. The Rabbis were the interpreters, the teachers, the translators of the written letter into the living Word of God for the here and now. Their many schools of thought (there were at least seven Pharisee divisions, including Hillel's Pharisees of Love") were written down in the dozens of books of the Talmud to become the Jewish theologies of later periods.

One of the speaker's most striking insights of Judaism was into the role of the Pharisees in the survival of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple, which

had been the center of the old hereditary priesthood and its ritualistic liturgy and orthodox adherence to the Law. The local synagogues and family prayer enabled Jewish religious life to continue in the diaspora. Where the priests saw the Temple as the only House of God, the Pharisees urged the synagogue as the House of the People of God for prayer, alms, doing mercy, imparting knowledge and housing the poor.

Father Pawlikowski also spoke about the parallels between the best of the Pharisaic traditions and the Sermon on the Mount; the way in which their emphasis on individual dignity and worth and afterlife prepared the way for the acceptance of the Christian teaching on Resurrection; and the concept of God-in-us as a step toward being open to the mystery of the Incarnation.

As for the Gospel's denunciation of "the Pharisees," the Chicago theologian cited the fact that the Talmud has just as bitter denunciations of fellow Pharisees by others who held different theological views. He said that Jesus was obviously denouncing those Pharisees who were His antagonists, not such as Hillel, who was tolerant of Him and His disciples.

According to Father Pawlikowski, Jesus Himself was a "Rabbi" in the Pharisee tradition. He carried the teachings of the Pharisees to their ultimate implications.