

Local Jews hear theologian explain why Christians believe in Trinity

By SYLVIA HART
Press Register Reporter

Jews sometimes consider the Christian belief in the Trinity as idolatry and not worship of one God.

However, the Christian view is that "though three in his relationship to us, God is one," said the speaker at the latest dialogue of Christians and Jews in Mobile.

Explaining reasons for the Christian belief in the Trinity was the Rev. Richard W. Rousseau, a member of the religion faculty at Spring Hill College, who spoke to Jews and Christians gathered at Visitation Monastery.

Father Rousseau said Frances Young, a lecturer in New Testament at Birmingham University in England, has named two major functions of the Trinity.

"The first is a way of expressing the involvement of God with people and with the world. . . Monotheism, for its sublimity, has one hidden danger, and that is of lapsing into Deism, or forming a view of a God who is remote, static, uninvolved, an unmoved mover or first cause, who set the world in motion and now lets it alone, a figure, in brief, who does little to inspire religious devotion and commitment.

"One of the functions of Trinitarianism in Christianity has been to help avoid such a remote, uninteresting and uninterested God."

Father Rousseau said the second function of the Trinity named by Ms. Young is that "by its very complexity and mysteriousness it has been a constant warning against over-simple theologies, blasphemous in their attempts to pin down the being of God. Religion is destroyed without mystery — even paradox.

"This is not to say merely that the Trinity is a mystery, but that it deals with mystery. It is a truism in the religious and devotional life that genuine religion depends on a mixture of awe and familiarity. . . In the Trinity, God is both awesome father and familiar brother."

Going beyond Ms. Young's explanations, Father Rousseau said, "The matter needs more precise

analysis and expression." The lecturer also presented views of the Trinity as espoused by Gordon Kaufman of the Harvard University Divinity School.

According to Father Rousseau, the Harvard professor begins "with a broad understanding of the Christian God" in explaining the Trinity.

"The Christian God is the God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ. This is very carefully put, and each of the three components needs to be examined carefully.

"First there is the word 'God.' When we speak of such revelation of God in Christ, the emphasis is on the fact that it is GOD and not anything less who is revealing and is revealed. .

"Second, the words REVEALS HIMSELF in Jesus Christ emphasize 'the continuing and present effectiveness, meaning and actuality of this event'. . . When we say that God reveals himself in Jesus Christ we are saying that this is happening here and now and is not something confined merely to the past. . .

"Third, we say that God reveals himself IN JESUS CHRIST. By that we are continuing the ancient Jewish revelatory tradition that God does not reveal himself everywhere and anywhere, but only in particular points and persons in human history. History itself is so massive, chaotic and undifferentiated that even though God is active through it all, our poor human hearts and minds need indications of significance, of priorities, so we can sort it all out, simplify it and take it to heart."

According to Father Rousseau, Kaufman says one must remember the three reference points, each of which is important.

"Obviously God cannot be omitted without losing the very foundation . . . Without God, the focal point or the meaningful depth of history would disappear. If the second point be omitted, then God's action in the present is omitted and it is difficult to see how we could speak of him at all. . . And, finally, if we eliminate the third element of the description, namely, Jesus Christ, we would find it difficult as Christians to give any content to such words as 'God' or his 'revelation.'"

The Jesuit priest quoted from Kaufman in summary: "God makes himself known as one-in-three, three-in-one. He must be conceived as simultaneously Father (God as transcendent), Son (having a particular and definite character and being, as seen in the historical person-event Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit (present in and to and with us in our world)."

Said Father Rousseau, "The Trinity in Christian faith, then is not a mysterious wall behind which God hides; it is a gateway, a road, a voice, a ray of light that opens, broadens and enlightens. It allows us to consider the Father as the uniqueness of God, the transcendent otherness of the creator and ultimate limit; the Son as the revealedness and lovingness of God who comes to us; the Spirit as the continual presence and activity of God in history and in us. Though three in his relationship to us, God is one."