

# 'Christianizing' Seder hit

By SYLVIA HART  
Press Register Reporter

A Mobile couple this past week expressed their opposition to a practice by some U.S. churches in recent years of "Christianizing" the Seder meal from the Jewish festival of Passover.

Paul and Mary Filben, local Catholic laypersons who are among leaders of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue, said a Christian version of the Seder meal is used in some churches especially during the Easter season when Christians commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ, as recorded in the New Testament. The Christian Holy Week, the week preceding Easter, begins today.

**JEWS WILL BE** participating in Seder meals in homes this week during Passover, which begins at sundown Wednesday. Passover commemorates the Jews' deliverance from Egyptian bondage, as recorded in Scripture.

The Seder meal in Jewish homes includes foods symbolizing the Passover story.

Mrs. Filben said, "It has been only in recent years that Christians generally have been willing to talk about Jesus as a Jew and to look seriously at our roots in Judaism."

While focusing on their roots in Judaism, however, well-meaning Christians sometimes have "attempted to baptize the Seder," Filben said, "by adding New Testament readings and Christian prayers."

While favoring the use of Seder ceremonies in churches, Filben said the observances should be according to Jewish practice. "We should treat the Seder as we would property that belongs to someone else — with dignity and respect."

Filben continued, "The implication is that when you put the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper) and the Seder together, the Seder finds its completion in the Eucharist. That reduces Judaism to a starting ground for Christianity and that's all."

**THE FILBENS** do not view Judaism merely as "a starting ground for Christianity" but as a viable religion in its own right.

The couple quoted from a 1980 newsletter of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' committee on the liturgy: "The primary reason why Christians may celebrate the Passover festival should be to acknowledge common roots in the history of salvation. Any sense of 're-staging' the Last Supper should be avoided."

A common belief among Christians, the Filbens said, is that "Jesus instituted Eucharist at Passover. This is being disputed by some scholars today."

Regardless of when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, Filben said, "there should be a clear-cut separation between the two events — when the Seder ends and the Eucharist begins — and they should not be portrayed as similar or identical events."

Mrs. Filben said, "I think the Jewish people understand that Christians are well-meaning in their interest in the Seder, and I think the Jewish community would be open to helping us as Christians understand the meaning of Seder."

Filben added that churches interested in celebrating the Seder "might seek out a couple from the temple or synagogue (Spring Hill Avenue Temple or Dauphin Street Synagogue) to help them."

The Filbens cited a Seder ceremony hosted last year by Dauphin Street Synagogue for members of Dauphin Way United Methodist Church as an ideal way for Christians to understand the meal's significance for Jews.

**CATHOLICS HAVE** guidelines for the observance of the Seder which are available by writing Dr. Eugene J. Fisher, Executive Director of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations, U.S. Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1312 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington D.C. 20005.

Mrs. Filben said that unless Christians address the issue of Christianizing the Seder, the matter can become an impediment to "the tremendous strides" made in Jewish-Christian relations in the United States in recent years.

Filben added, "When something hurts other people we should refrain from doing that. That's a simple premise."

Sunday, April 4, 1982



Mary and Paul Filben