

Shared cultures make dialogue productive

Editor's note: Mary and Paul Filben, this week's guest columnists, are founders and co-chairpersons of the Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue.

On October 28, 1965, Pope Paul VI and 2,221 Catholic bishops from around the world signed the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate — In Our Times).

The section on the Jews, Number 4, comprised 15 sentences in Latin. Those few sentences committed the Roman Catholic Church to an irrevocable act, a reconsideration of the soul. This document is best known for its repudiation of the age-old deicide charge and of anti-Semitism. While these statements are critically important, it was the implicit affirmation of the ongoing nature of God's Covenant with the Jews that has provided the basis for a dialogue of mutual esteem between Christians and Jews. Statements from the World Council of Churches and other Protestant bodies continue to fuel the healthy fires of dialogue.

The Mobile Area Jewish-Christian Dialogue began in September 1975 and is currently celebrating its 20th year of continuous dialogue in Mobile and Baldwin Counties. The Mobile Dialogue has the enviable reputation of being the



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longest-running continuous dialogue in the country. These events are always open to the public. During these 20 years we have discussed many diverse topics.

The list includes such subjects as: "The Papacy," "The Klan and the American Nazi Party," "Who or what killed Jesus?" "The Resurrection," "Pharisees (Who Are They, Anyway?)" "The Trial and Crucifixion," "Abortion" and many others. We have committed ourselves to three topics which must necessarily be part of the ongoing dia-

logue. They are: "The State of Israel," "The Holocaust" and "Anti-Semitism."

These are critical to our understanding of who we are as Jews and as Christians and how we can come to understand the "other." We have begun! Much has been accomplished! There is still much to be done!

So far ... so good ... so what! The 21st Century is upon us, and the burden of responsibility for the continuation of the dialogue rests with another generation. We can

only hope and trust that they will continue. The next 20 years challenges us to a new "halakha," a new way, yes, perhaps a new language in which we can talk about the "other" in one's own terms and yet frame one's thoughts in terms understandable to the "other." We have much to learn from each other.

It is our hope that Jews will understand that the Christian affirmation about Jesus and his saving event is central to our understanding of salvation, but that belief should in no way suggest that Jews cannot or should not draw salvific gifts from their own traditions. Christians can learn from the heroic witness of Jewish fidelity to God's Covenant ... as a sign to be interpreted within God's design.

Judaism, no less than Christianity, comes from God. This is the message of the dialogue and it is one to which we Christians in the dialogue must recommit ourselves in each generation. So far ... so good ... so what? Only time will tell. Will we meet the test? Will we risk the new questions and the new answers? We only know that we are thankful to be alive today in this time and place. May all of us be worthy of the God who challenges us and delights us and sometimes even surprises us.

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