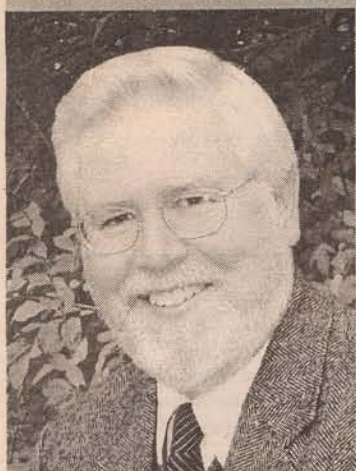


Christian/Jewish Dialogue held



By Perilla A. Wilson

"Telling the Christian Story Anew (and Implications for Jewish Self-Understanding)" was the topic of Dr. Philip A. Cunningham's address to the Christian-Jewish Dialogue recently at Ahavas Chesed Synagogue. Cunningham is executive director of the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning at Boston College where he is also adjunct professor of theology. His lecture, primarily relating to his book published by Paulist

Press last summer, "A Story of Shalom: the Calling of Christians and Jews by a Covenanting God," resonated of last March's lecture for the Dialogue by Mary C. Boys, on her book, "Has God Only One Blessing?: Judaism As a Source of Christian Self-Understanding." Both authors emphasized the necessity for a revision in the way we tell the Christian Story in light of the Church's rejection of "supersessionism", the dominant theme in the classic version for over 1500 years.

Cunningham stressed that the old view that Judaism existed only as a preparation for Christ's coming, ignored the validity of their covenantal relationship with God. This overarching aspect was pervasive in all Christian religions before the 20th century. He pointed out that supersessionism "fossilizes the Jewish faith" and we have to recognize that a covenant with God is forever. He believes that Christians have an obligation to affirm the validity of Jewish spirituality anew when tell-

ing their story.

In outlining reasons for the need to retell the Christian story, he also cited the rise of Biblical criticism and the need to hear what the author intended in shared gospels before attempting to apply them to one's own life. The document *Nostra Aetate* stressed that we must not promote passages that criticize the Jews, (e.g. in Romans 11.) Cunningham said that because we live in the West, our thoughts and way of life are shaped by our history and culture and we don't think the same way that the early fathers did, who were influenced by early philosophers concerned with "beingness", the nature of things.

"Proper harmony and mutual respect is being in shalom with one another," he pointed out. So then, what difference is it to Jews how Christians tell their story? The reason, he feels, is called "oppositional definition" - i.e. both communities have tended to define themselves over and against the other. "Resurrection," which was a Jewish concept, became a Christian word with Christ's resurrection. Jews' opinion of Christians was formed in response to the Christian contempt seen in supersessionism. He believes that Jews need to avoid the claim that Christians are trying to convert them.

"We're asking new questions of ourselves and one another and that poses a challenge. We must read in a way consistent with the story of Shalom," he said. He believes that after a quarter century of dialogue we should be at a place where both Christians and Jews are more comfortable with being honest with each other. In the question period, he cheerfully admitted to not having all the answers but was willing to offer his considered opinion and was extremely well-appreciated by his audience for his explanations on a level they could understand without the "jargon." He closed by urging all to read the Lucan infancy narrative "in light of God's eternal love for Israel."