

Christian-Jewish dialogue continued.....

*The way in which the incarnation of Jesus Christ is understood is crucial to the future of Jewish-Christian relations, according to Father John Pawlikowski, OSM, professor at the Catholic Theological Union and the Chicago Cluster of Theological Schools. Pawlikowski spoke at the Nov. 6-9 National Workshop on Christian-Jewish Relations, held in Los Angeles. His remarks were in part a reaction to and analysis of the paper on Jewish-Christian relations developed by Tommaso Federici, a professor at San Anselmo in Rome (see *Origins*, current volume, p. 273ff). Federici rejected undue proselytism of the Jews by Christians. Still, Pawlikowski said, the problem has not disappeared. The "problem of preaching the Gospel to the Jews remains unsolved at the highest level of theology," he explained. The understanding of Christ is critical to the solution of this problem, he added. Pawlikowski said Jewish-Christian relations cannot be based on an understanding of Christianity as simply "Judaism for the Gentiles." Nor does the customary "total fulfillment" interpretation of Christianity suffice. What is needed, he said, is a "renewed Christology." The text of Pawlikowski's remarks follows.*

John Pawlikowski

The past few years have witnessed significant discussions, sometimes passionate, on the topic of Christian witness to the Jewish people. In some ways the issue has been more intense in Protestantism where official organizations for missionizing Jews continue to exist. The Catholic community has virtually abolished any official attempts in this regard. The two principal groups dedicated to this effort in the past, the Fathers of Sion and the Sisters of Sion, have both reversed their directions dramatically since Vatican II, becoming leaders

in the new dialogue made possible by the council.

Yet even in the Catholic community the problem of preaching the Gospel to the Jews remains unsolved at the highest level of theology. Until it is, I am convinced that authentic dialogue between Catholics and Jews will not be possible. There will always remain a sense of mistrust on the part of the Jewish community. In addition, the rejection of any missionizing attempts directed specifically toward the Jewish community will remain almost totally dependent on the good will and experience of individual Catholic leaders. Non-evangelizing of Jews will not yet be part of the basic faith of Catholic men and women, as it should be. And in moments when certain Christian groups may decide to launch a campaign for Jewish converts in a particular community the response against such a campaign on the part of Catholic leaders will generally prove timid at best for fear that a public stand would make them appear to be "selling out" the Gospel. This projection is based on actual experiences with such events in several sectors of the country over the past couple of years.

One significant attempt to address the theological questions connected with the question of mission to the Jews is the paper by Professor Tommaso Federici, professor of biblical theology at San Anselmo in Rome. Originally delivered in Venice to an official meeting of the Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee, the paper was recently published in *Origins* (Oct. 19, 1972).

In his presentation Federici introduces a basic distinction between proselytism and witness, and *witness* he interprets in a very dialogic sense. For him the church must clearly and unequivocally reject every form of undue proselytism toward the Jewish community. To be excluded are all forms of preaching or witness which in any way constrain individual Jews, or the Jewish community as a whole, physically, morally, psychologically or culturally.

Federici is thus rejecting without qualification all conventional missionary approaches toward the Jews. Such approaches, marked as they have been by a sense of superiority in faith on the part of Christians, must be totally eliminated. In this call, Federici joins a growing group of Christian theologians such as Gregory Baum, Krister Stendahl, and Monika Hellwig — to name but a few.

To replace the old-style missionizing approach Federici calls for the development of reverent dialogue between Christians and Jews. In such a dialogue Christians can share with Jews, best perhaps through existential experiences, the specific contributions that Christian existence make to authentic humanity. Those of us who join Federici in this call in no way mean to imply that dialogue is a new missionary technique. Rather it is a recognition on the part of the Christian churches that while they have important contributions to make to humanity's religious understanding, their own faith needs to be deepened and expanded by living contact with the faith of all non-Christian believers, but in a special way with Jewish tradition which after all formed the context for Christianity's birth.

In the course of the dialogue in which all notions of superiority and all forms of proselytizing are absent, Christians will try to communicate to Jews while they feel the Christ event carries a central meaning for the entire human family. Here Federici is rejecting the approach of some Christian theologians, and I think he is right in doing so, which would see Christianity as nothing more than Judaism for the Gentiles, as the way Christians can enter the covenant originally made with Israel.

But, since the new relationship between Christians and Jews is dialogical, Christians will be anxious to listen to their Jewish partners explain the central insights of the Jewish faith tradition. In the process Christians will undoubtedly find new possibilities for faith expression and begin to develop hitherto latent strengths and potentialities in the faith perspective of the church.

If a criticism can be made of Federici at this point, it is that he does not go far enough. It is likely from my personal experience of 10 years in the dialogue that some of these new faith expressions and possibilities will be totally new to the church, not merely the activation of something already present in embryo. Federici seems unwilling as yet to break with all aspects of the "total fulfillment" interpretation of Christianity which has been responsible for its detrimental superiority complex vis-a-vis Judaism and other non-Christian religions throughout the centuries. I am convinced this attitude must be clearly repudiated if Christian theology is to become ecumenical at its core. Yet Federici has moved significantly in this direction in this paper.

Federici, in concert with those of us who have rejected proselytizing of Jews, does not exclude the possibility that in the course of dialogue individuals may decide that they can achieve a spiritual deepening by switching from one religious community to the other. Such a phenomenon cannot be ruled out *a priori*. But conversion can never be the direct aim of dialogue. Recognizing the incompleteness of all present faith traditions, we will leave personal decisions about conversion to the judgment of individuals and to the mystery of God's grace.

In my mind the principal drawback to the Federici paper regarding the issue at hand lies in the lack of any in-depth confrontation with traditional Christian interpretations of Christology. The contemporary call for the repudiation of Christian missionary efforts toward Jews will assume theological validity only if it is linked to current Christological reinterpretations within the church. Otherwise it will continue to look to many like a failure in carrying out the supposed gospel mandate to preach the good news to all nations.

Increasingly theologians are urging that Christianity must look anew at its contention that the Jewish sense of the messianic age, the time of fulfillment, was totally realized in the death-resurrection of Christ. Such a re-evaluation of traditional Christology will have significant implications for the future of the Jewish-Christian dialogue, for the motif of the messianic age is in many ways more central to Jewish self-understanding than the concept of a personal Messiah. While it remains imperative for Christian theology to maintain the uniqueness of the Christ event, the understanding of this uniqueness must be such that it leaves room for the continuity of the Jewish faith and the Jewish covenant.

When Federici insists on the continuing validity of Judaism after the birth of Christ he avoids any discussion of how this assertion challenges much of traditional Christian Christological interpretation.

In probing ever more deeply the implications of the penetration of humanity by divinity itself in the incarnation, the Christian churches must begin to recognize that their covenant, as it has been historically interpreted, does not completely express the meaning of human salvation in all its dimensions. Far too frequently the piety and the theology of the Christian churches have produced a Christology overly individualistic and other-worldly and tempted by an excessive desire for what Paul Tillich has termed "cheap grace."

Throughout the same period Judaism, with a faith deeply rooted in its covenantal tradition, has preserved the sense of salvation as ultimately communal and the spirit that the drama of human salvation is being worked out through deeds of human righteousness performed within the flow of human history. And in its "no" to the explanations of Jesus frequently offered by Christians, Judaism has served as a perpetual reminder of the continuing eclipse of God despite the intense self-revelation accorded the human community in the incarnation.

The renewed Christology that calls for birth, the Christology without which the question of missionizing Jews will never be finally resolved, is one that acknowledges that, despite their shared biblical heritages and other similarities, Judaism and Christianity are essentially distinct and valid religions. Each emphasizes different but perhaps ultimately complementary aspects of humanity's religious dimensions. The Federici paper has given us some excellent working principles for dealing with the issue of Christian witness to Jews. But unless these are anchored to a renewed Christology they will not have their desired impact. It is urgent for Federici and others interested in this vital question to now turn their attention to an explicit reformulation of the church's Christological tradition.