

5749: A Year to Forget

By Arno Herzberg
(JTA)

It was a year of regressive suspense, of mournful strife and quarrels and of a scornful letdown. It was a year that started with hope and with solid expectations, and that ended with grave disappointments. It was a year better to be forgotten.

The days and months went by without a clear, decisive blow to the Arab uprising. We learned a new word — intifada. We forgot an old adage — patience. Events dragged on. As usual, advice was given by everybody to everybody. Finally, frustration got ahold of us. This was not the Six-Day War. This was a year stretching into eternity.

As with every long, enduring matter that defies settlement, the world and the world press forgot who started it all, who won every war against a bitter foe, who does not want peace and who wants to dictate the terms of a "solution" which, at best, can be only temporary, a slippery armistice with the still prevailing intention to destroy Israel. The victor has to submit to the loser.

With every day that went by and goes by, the question arises whether Israel will be able to live with the Palestinians side by side.

Too much confidence has been erased. Too many acts of terrorism have unraveled a thin layer of trust. All the plans and all the ready made proposals might go up in smoke (literally and brutally). After all, we are looking for a solution of a problem which is now more than 50 years old — the Arab uprising started in 1936.

It is all a tremendous tragedy, not getting peace of mind, not being able to get relief from tension and frustration. A widening by-product of this atmosphere has been a decline of responsibility to the point where we are at a loss on how to proceed.

Every time a serious discussion is started about steps towards peace, somebody, Jew or Arab, will interrupt the process, will come up with new demands, with new interpretations and with new ideas which defy the intentions of all concerned.

Every time a new approach to the problem is underway, some Arab group will find it convenient to throw a bomb, to increase tension, to create frustration and to kill the prevailing calm.

The same is true on the other side. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir submits an election plan, which is rightly steeped in generalities and with many holes to be filled in by negotiation.

Instead of waiting until Yasir Arafat and his gang find fault with it or raise impossible demands, three Likud greats attach conditions to the proposal jeopardizing the existence of the unity government, upsetting the country and the few friends Israel still has, and handing Arafat a propaganda victory.

It all defies the imagination of a rational person. But we gradually have been getting used to a situation where the not-so-normal has become the normal.

Strife and quarrels have found an easy grip on Jews. The year was full of it, both in Israel and in the Diaspora. I think of an old story — The Temple was destroyed, they said, while Jew was fighting Jew, and because Jew was fighting Jew.

There are enough hostile elements in the world waiting for the right moment. We only have to open a newspaper. The headlines are like trumpets heralding an evil deed Israel has perpetrated. Hundreds of people can be killed in any part of the world. It is hardly mentioned. If two Arabs are wounded it is front-page news. We got used to it during the year.

The letdown we felt when Secretary of State James Baker scolded Israel can not be brushed aside. Instead of telling the Arabs in uncertain terms that they are responsible for the state of affairs in the Middle East, that they are prolonging the tension, that they do not want peace, he shifted the problem to Israel and devoted a short sentence to the intransigence of the Arabs. It was a well-intended gesture.

That is the way the new winds are blowing. That is the language of the appeasement crowd. They manipulate the language to suit their purposes. They debase simple words. A terrorist is no longer a terrorist as long as he "negotiates" with the United States. Nobody is interested in his past. A killer can become a statesman.

There was enough double talk during the year to last us for awhile, and it wasn't just going on in this country. It recently became known that Israel, in 1987, asked to purchase civilian gas masks, including respirators for children, from Britain. The chemical arsenal of the Arab powers was and is growing. It was a matter of prevention. But permission was not granted.

Foreign Secretary Sir Geoffrey Howe explained. "We advised the Israelis not to proceed because of possible implications for chemical and biological weapons proliferation," Howe said, "because gas masks are not merely used for defensive purposes. They can help a country to develop an offensive capability."

Said one member of the Parliament: "I can't see how gas masks for civilians, especially for children, can be considered offensive weapons."

Britain is not willing to protect civilians and children, but the \$30 billion worth of weapons it is selling to Saudi Arabia are not acquired for offensive purposes by the Arabs. Appeasers always find the right word. But these are the "statesmen" who hold our fate in their hands. Their double talk is a sinister warning of things to come.

With all the questionable developments around us, we might be inclined to forget what the past year has brought. But we can not blot it out of our memory. The stakes were high. They have become higher. They will be still higher in the coming year. We are burdened with a heavy legacy.

Arno Herzberg was JTA bureau chief in Berlin in the 1930s.

On Reflection...By Ira Gissen, Va/NC ADL Dir.

The Catholic Convent Controversy

"The shedding of blood in Auschwitz in 1989 is an obscenity. Resolution of this matter is way overdue." Those two sentences concluded an editorial titled "A Time to Act" which, in its opening paragraph, declared: "The controversy over a Carmelite convent on the grounds of the former Nazi death camp at Auschwitz — Oswiecim in Polish — has gone from unseemly, to nasty to violent."

It is not surprising to find such language on this subject in a Jewish publication. But it was not in a Jewish publication that it appeared. It was, instead, the lead editorial in *The Catholic Virginian*, the official periodical of the Richmond Diocese.

The convent, which is the center and cause of the controversy, was established five years ago in a former theatre building which was used by the Nazis to

store Xyklon B, the gas used in the mass killings. Many Jews protested the location of the convent, asserting that its presence was a profanation to the memory of the martyrs of the Holocaust.

Jewish and Catholic representatives, building on the good will and understanding that has been growing between the two communities since the issuance of *nostrae aetate*, met in Geneva in 1987 and agreed that the nuns would be moved out by last February 22. Also, it was agreed that an interfaith center for information, education and prayer — including the relocated Carmelite convent — would be built near the camp.

Pope John Paul, II gave his blessing to the construction of the interfaith center and the relocation of the convent. Nonetheless, as *The Catholic Virginian* points out: "But apparently the Polish pope has an extremely difficult problem on his hands when it comes to getting the

sisters, who have strong local support, to move out. Vatican authorities continue to identify the problem as local and in the hands of the Polish hierarchy. Tragically, it is much more than a local problem."

In the meantime, the nuns erected a 23-foot high cross at the site that was the subject of all of the controversy.

Four Roman Catholic cardinals signed the agreement two years ago to remove the Carmelite nunnery from the grounds of Auschwitz. Three of them have sharply criticized the fourth signatory, who now apparently refuses to honor the commitment.

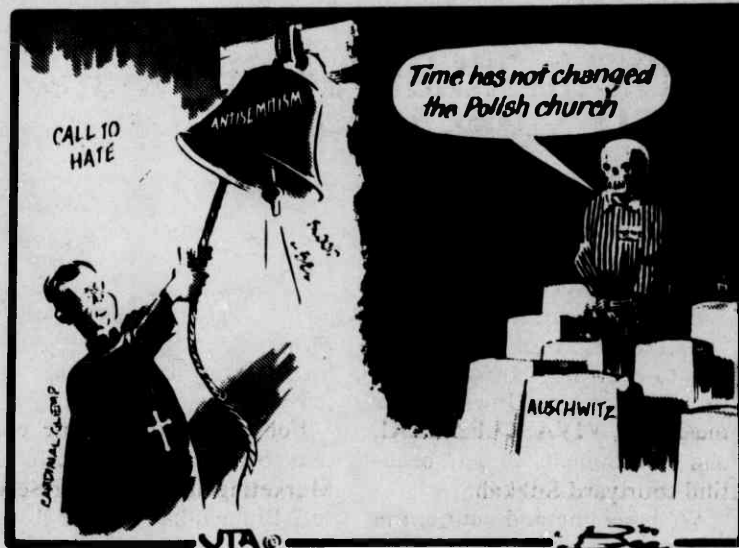
Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, the Archbishop of Krakow, has announced that he was scrapping plans to construct a prayer and information center off the Auschwitz grounds to house the nuns. He explained his change of plans by blaming the "violent campaign of accusations and slanders and outrageous aggression" against the convent.

In contrast, the three other Roman Catholic cardinals who signed the agreement strongly disagreed with his decision. Cardinal Albert Decourtray of Lyon declared that the agreement "is mandatory and binding on those who signed it. Its decisions cannot be reexamined." He added, in commenting upon Cardinal Macharski's explanation, "The recent demonstrations, as regrettable as they might be, do not count when compared to the cause which the agreement of February 22, 1987, aimed at defending." Cardinal Decourtray added: "We shall do whatever we can to continue the dialogue started under the Geneva agreement and we need mutual respect so as not to hurt the memory of Auschwitz."

Cardinal Decourtray's declaration is supported by the other two signatories, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, and Cardinal Godfried Damneels, the head of the Catholic church in Belgium.

The secretary of the Polish church committee for dialogue with the Jews, Stanislaw Musial, stated that Cardinal Macharski's decision not to honor the agreement "is a strictly personal decision which has not been approved or even discussed either by the Vatican or by the other cardinals."

The controversy may well serve to test the strength of the flourishing Jewish-Catholic dialogue. Those of us who are dedicated to further strengthening that relationship will see the controversy as a challenge to our dedication, and not as an obstacle to our progress.



Representative Leland Was a Mensch

By Marc H. Tanenbaum
(JTA)

Rep. Mickey Leland was called a "martyr for the hungry and starving."

That is an appropriate description for the congressman from Houston, who tragically lost his life recently in an airplane crash in Ethiopia.

Some 15 people died with him, among them Ivan Tillem, a young Jewish leader from New York. The fact that Leland and Tillem traveled together on that mission of mercy says a great deal about their shared commitments to relieving the terrible suffering and hunger of tens of thousands of destitute African refugees.

Leland was a person often criticized by some right-wing politicians. But he also won the admiration and loyalty of many Jewish leaders who knew that he never traveled to Ethiopia without paying special attention to the plight of black Ethiopian Jews.

Committed to improving black-Jewish relations in America, Rep. Leland took the lead in organizing an exchange program of black and Jewish students who together visited Israel and African countries in order to understand each other's cultures better.

In 1955, this compassionate congressman mobilized a citizens' campaign to win public support for increased food aid and medicines for starving and

ill Africans.

He asked me to help win Jewish support for that humanitarian effort, and I did so without hesitation. A small group of Jewish leaders joined me at his dramatic press conference at the Capitol. What brought us together spontaneously was the knowledge that Mickey Leland was a mensch for all good black and Jewish causes, and for his commitment to the common welfare and better understanding between all peoples.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum is international relations consultant to the American Jewish Committee, and is immediate past chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations.

THE CHARLOTTE JEWISH NEWS

P.O. Box 13369, Charlotte, NC 28211

Published monthly by:

Charlotte Jewish Federation . . . Michael L. Minkin, Director
Foundation of Charlotte Jewish Community &
Jewish Community Center . . . Barry Hantman, Director
Lubavitch of N.C. . . . Rabbi Yossi Groner, Director
Editor . . . Rita Mond
Advertising Asst. Blanche Yarus
Editorial Board Joel Goldman, Chair
Phil Joffe, Sally Schrader, Marcia Simon,
Dr. Selwyn Spangenthal, Barry Wohl, Barbara Ziegler

Copy deadline the 10th of each month
P.O. Box 13369, Charlotte, N.C. 28211

The CJN does not assume responsibility for the quality or kashruth of any product or service advertised.

Publishing of a paid political advertisement does not constitute an endorsement of any candidate, political party or political position by this newspaper, the Federation or any employees.