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Editorials

Papal Prospects

The Sept. 11 meeting at Castel Gandolfo, Italy, between Pope John Paul II and American Jewish leaders served as a kind of "dress rehearsal" for the Pope's meeting this Thursday in Miami with a broader Jewish delegation. Clearly progress was made at the Castel Gandolfo meeting, which Henry Siegman, president of the American Jewish Congress, said was "historic in a very positive way."

At the meeting, the Jewish leaders of various major organizations were able to directly confront the head of the Roman Catholic Church to express their concern over the Pope's June meeting with Austrian President Kurt Waldheim. The papal audience granted to Waldheim provoked worldwide outrage among Jewish leaders because of disclosures that Waldheim, former secretary general of the United Nations, had apparently attempted to cover up his record of service in Hitler's army in World War II in which he is alleged to have helped deport Jews to concentration camps — a charge which he denies.

The Jewish delegates also urged the Vatican to reconsider its long-standing refusal to extend full diplomatic relations to the State of Israel.

Regrettably, neither the Pope nor Vatican spokesmen expressed regret over the Waldheim meeting, but the official communique acknowledged that the church understood Jewish concerns over the meet-

ing. The official explanation that the Pope merely received Waldheim as just another head of state was simply not satisfactory.

The Pope also did not specifically deal with the issue of Vatican recognition of the State of Israel, but he did agree to meet with Jewish leaders on a regular basis to improve communications and to prevent similar misunderstandings such as the Waldheim affair from happening in the future.

Some Jewish groups, which were not represented at the meeting, complained over its lack of substantive progress. Rabbi Avi Weiss, chairman of the Coalition for Concern, criticized it as "an audience rather than a dialogue." Still others indicated plans to stage protest demonstrations during the Pope's visits to Miami, San Francisco and other cities.

Both the planned meetings and the peaceful protest demonstrations are entirely appropriate reactions to the concerns over the Waldheim matter and the issue of Vatican recognition of the State of Israel.

We hope that this week's meeting will build upon the progress made at last week's session as well as the Pope's laudable letter to St. Louis Archbishop John J. May, president of the National Council of Bishops, in which the Pope reiterated his understanding of the lessons of the Holocaust as well as the urgent need for good relations between the Catholic church and its "elder brothers in Abraham."



Letters to the editor

To the Editor:

The controversy surrounding Kurt Waldheim's recent state visit to the Vatican created a serious crisis in Catholic-Jewish relations. Pope John Paul II's meeting with the Austrian president, who is on the U.S. Justice Dept.'s Nazi "Watch List" and forbidden entry to this country, put into serious jeopardy the long-planned Sept. 11 Miami meeting between the Pope and American Jewish leaders.

Because of the official nature of the Waldheim visit and the Pope's unqualified praise of the Austrian president, the Pope was perceived as rejecting the unique meaning of the Holocaust to Jews.

Fortunately, many Catholic and Jewish leaders in the United States and throughout the world quickly sensed the danger. They expressed their profound concern, both publicly and privately, and in early August, Cardinal Johannes Willebrands, the Vatican secretary for religious relations with the Jews, invited a Jewish leadership delegation to Rome for a two-day meeting prior to the Pope's U.S. visit. In addition to Cardinal Willebrands, the Jewish leaders met

with Cardinal Agostino Casaroli, the Vatican secretary of state. At the conclusion of the conference, the Jewish delegation held an unprecedented 90-minute conversation with the Pope.

This meeting, in conjunction with the letter written to Archbishop John May, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, is believed to be a conciliatory gesture toward Jews. The letter is a clear indication of the Vatican's official understanding of Jewish pain and suffering during the Holocaust.

All of the issues currently on the Catholic-Jewish agenda were discussed, including anti-Semitism, the Nazi Holocaust, the paradoxical statements on Jews and Judaism that have recently emerged from the Vatican-Israel relations. It was an extraordinary series of meetings with enormous potential historic significance.

I believe the Vatican invitations to meet with the church's highest officials, together with the Pope's recent letter, have helped prevent permanent damage to Catholic-Jewish relations. Such damage would have been

an incalculable loss. Ever since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 and the issuance of this historic declaration, *Nostra Aetate*, there have been more positive Catholic-Jewish encounters than there were in the first 1,900 years of the Roman Catholic Church.

Catholics and Jews have begun the long overdue process of reconciliation. We still have some way to go because Catholic-Jewish relations are also fraught with ambivalences and ambiguities. But in a world of increasing interreligious, interethnic and interracial strife, the development of positive Catholic-Jewish relations is one of this century's great success stories.

But there are extremists in both communities who would like to see the interreligious clock turned back to pre-Vatican Council days. It is often simpler to maintain hatred and suspicion than it is to build complex bridges of mutual respect and understanding. Sadly, some extremists want to blow up

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The Federal Courts Tell It Like It Is

JCRC alert

As we begin our preparations for the High Holidays this year, we once again remember our Jewish counterparts in the Soviet Union who still are not free to join their families in Israel and celebrate Rosh Hashanah with them. In 1979, 51,320 Jews were able to leave the Soviet Union; last year, only 914 were allowed to emigrate. Although the number of exit visas issued in 1987 has increased slightly, the number of refusals has actually increased.

Rosh Hashanah begins this year on the evening of Sept. 23, a time when Jews traditionally send wishes to family and friends for a healthy and happy New Year. For several years, members of the St. Louis Jewish community have sent New Year's greeting cards to refugees. Soviet Jews who are seeking basic human rights and the maintenance of their traditions need to be reassured of the West's commitment to them.

The Jewish Community Relations Council once again is making New Year's greeting cards available for mailing to those still trapped in the Soviet Union. The cards, which have been printed by the JCRC, are written in Russian and English and cost 15 cents each. The message speaks of our continued support to those prevented from participating in a free society. The cover shows a traditional Jew blowing a shofar, and reads "Happy New Year" in Russian. The inside message, also in Russian, says, "We have not forgotten you, nor



will we forget you." Cards are available singly or in quantity and can be ordered by calling Ruthie Forkush at the JCRC office, 432-0020, extension 874. The card will require a 44-cent stamp for mailing, or preferably should be sent registered mail, return receipt requested.

Cards must be picked up at the JCRC office in the Jewish Federation Bldg., 12 Millstone Campus Dr.

This year, as we celebrate the 200th anniversary of our Constitution, which guarantees us our religious freedom in the United States, please join those in cities all over the country in purchasing and mailing cards to those in the Soviet Union who are denied their religious freedom.

Editor's Note: "JCRC Alert" is a periodic column prepared by the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Group defends tuna kashruth

NEW YORK — The Rabbinical Council of America, the largest Orthodox rabbinic body in the world, is dismissed at statements attributed to the chief rabbinate of Israel regarding the production of Chicken-of-the-Sea Tuna Fish manufactured in Bangkok, Thailand, and exported to Israel. The OU supervisory procedure for tuna fish was developed many years ago in conjunction with the Rabbinic Kashruth Commission of the Rabbinical Council of America in consultation with, and approved by, Harav Hagoan Joseph B. Solovevitch, shlitza, in Russian. The inside message, also in Russian, says, "We have not forgotten you, nor

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employed by responsible kashruth agencies throughout the world.

The Rabbinical Council of America is informed by the chief rabbinate of Jerusalem that these are the same procedures that are followed in Jerusalem and that, consequently, it has approved the use and sales of the OU tuna in that city. Most contemporary halachic authorities in Israel, and throughout the world, approve of these kashruth standards for commercial food production.

Consequently, the Rabbinical Council of America proudly reaffirms its endorsement of the OU kashruth supervision of the tuna fish in question.

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