



Monthly Highlights

October 2011

International Interreligious Affairs

Oct. 21-23 - Jordan, Dead Sea

World Economic Forum – MENA : Special Arab World Meeting.

I was invited to participate in this annual summit of the World Economic Forum in the Middle East which this year returned to the Dead Sea in Jordan (having taken place on other occasions in Sharm-a-sheikh and in Marrakech.) Among other religious figures who were guests of the WEF were AJC's friend Dr. Ahmed Abaddi of Morocco, Bishop Yohanna Golta, Coptic bishop of Alexandria and second in hierarchy to the Coptic Patriarch, Bishop Munib Younan of Jerusalem who is also president of the World Lutheran Federation, and Imam Mazhar Shahin of Cairo known as the El Tahrir Square Imam who became the major religious personality giving spiritual leadership and guidance to the successful revolution in Egypt.

Aside from the opportunities to participate in and address sessions at the summit, the meeting serves as an invaluable arena for networking and developing contacts and relationships in the Arab world in particular and the Muslim world at large.

(The report from this summit may be found at:-

http://www.weforum.org/events/special-meeting-economic-growth-and-job-creation-arab-world#flickr_show)

Oct. 24-26 - Switzerland, Lucerne

Jubilee Symposium of the Institute for Jewish-Christian Research at the University of Lucerne



University of Lucerne

The University of Lucerne was the first place in Switzerland where, in 1971, Jewish studies was introduced as a university specialty. Ten years later the Institute for Jewish-Christian Research (IJCF) was established in the university under the leadership of Professor Dr. Clemens Thoma and since 2001 the institute is led by Dr. Verena Lenzen. On the occasion of these 30- and 40-year anniversaries, the IJCF held a special celebratory symposium (the full program may be viewed at:- http://www.unilu.ch/deu/ijcf-symposium-2011-programm_671858.html), the highlight of which was the address by Cardinal Dr. Kurt Koch, a former lecturer at the institute as well as former bishop of Basel who this year was appointed President of the Vatican's Commission for Religious Relations with Jewry.



Cardinal Kurt Koch

I was invited to give a response on the subject of Jewish-Vatican Relations – Opportunities and Problems. The text of my presentation may be found at :-

http://www.rabbi davidrosen.net/Articles/Christian-Jewish%20Relations/Jewish-Vatican_Relations_%20-%20Opportunities_and_Problems_October_2011.pdf

Oct. 27-28 – Italy, Assisi and Rome

Gathering of world religious leaders for peace, convened by Pope Benedict XVI

On the occasion of the twenty fifth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's convening of world religious leaders for prayer for peace in Assisi, Pope Benedict XVI invited religious leaders from the different faiths around the world to join him in Assisi and Rome. It was my honor to be invited to head the Jewish delegation invited to this event and to address the gathering.

(<http://www.ajc.org/site/apps/nlnet/content3.aspx?c=ijITI2PHKoG&b=6396135&ct=11306691¬oc=1>)



Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I;
Pope Benedict XVI; Rabbi David
Rosen; Prof. Wande Abimbola



Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams;
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I; Pope
Benedict XVI; Rabbi David Rosen

The following day, the participants were all received personally by Pope Benedict XVI in the Vatican and were also hosted to lunch (where kosher fare under rabbinical supervision was provided for the Jewish delegates.)

Reports, the text of my presentation, and photographs of the confab may be viewed at :-

<http://www.jta.org/news/article/2011/10/28/3090017/benedict-expresses-shame-for-christian-violence>

<http://sg.news.yahoo.com/photos/pope-benedict-xvi-greets-rabbi-david-rosen-assisi-photo-111510406.html>

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/patriarchate/6302848880/>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/holy-summit-united-on-message-for-fanatics/story-e6frg6so-1226179959582?sv=6c6c9c4480ad3ea06a006023c435894d#.TsCm-vh3so.email>

http://www.sydney.catholic.org.au/news/features/2011/20111028_285.shtml

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/news/detail/articolo/assisi-2011-9522/#>
Lisa Palmieri Billig La Stampa/Vatican Insider October 31, 2011

<http://multimedia.lastampa.it/multimedia/vatican-insider/en/lstp/91297/>
Historic Interreligious Meeting in Assisi: Photos - - La Stampa/Vatican Insider October 30, 2011

http://www.upi.com/News_Photos/News/Pope-Benedict-XVI-leads-the-25th-Interreligious-Talks/5821/2/?ref=ma - series of photos and detailed captions

<http://vaticaninsider.lastampa.it/en/homepage/news/detail/articolo/assisi-asis-dialogo-interreligioso-interreligious-dialogue-dialogo-interreligioso-9388/>
Speech of Rabbi David Rosen at Assisi – La Stampa/Vatican Insider October 28 2011

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=yYguSOP4LMU> Video of Vatican lunch.

However outside Italy and the Catholic media, there appeared to be a lack of appreciation of the significance of the gathering.

Paradoxically part of this was precisely what some journalists found unremarkable – namely that it was basically a repetition of John Paul II's initiative for interreligious dialogue and prayer for peace taken twenty five years ago and repeated by him in 1993 and in 2002.

However if the latest Assisi gathering had not taken place it would have been possible to view John Paul II's initiative (and similarly with his visits to the great synagogue in Rome and to the State of Israel) as idiosyncratic and reflecting John Paul II's personal preoccupations. Benedict XVI accordingly not only provided his own affirmation of these, but to a large degree has institutionalized his predecessor's innovations and made them part of the fabric of the Catholic Church.

In fact, there were indeed some innovative aspects to this latest meeting in Assisi, which I can attest to having participated in the previous two meetings.

Most evidently, there was Benedict's specific inclusion of the voice of agnostic humanism in the meeting; as well as his own insights in his impressive presentation. Especially notable in this regard was his admission and expression of regret for violence and abuse by Christianity. However much of the significant innovation was symbolic - in form rather than substance. Interestingly, one aspect was the degree of social intimacy, as well as modesty, on the part of a Pope who is generally perceived as more reserved and less outgoing than his predecessor. Much more time and effort was spent by Benedict in greeting his guests personally both in Assisi and especially the next day in the Vatican. More opportunity was also provided for the participants to break bread together.

Yet as opposed to the previous meetings where John Paul II was both seated on a raised throne (or at least a bigger chair on a platform), Benedict XVI sat on the same kind of chair and on the same level as all the other participants. Moreover as opposed to the past seating arrangement which had been in a V shape with the Pope sitting at the apex, Benedict placed the principle representatives of other religions immediately alongside him on either side.

The position of the Jewish representatives was particularly striking. While the Christian leaders were seated next to him on one side, for the first time the Pope placed the head of the Jewish delegation in the seat right next to him on the other side (before the representatives of any of the other religions.) Similarly the rest of the Jewish delegation sat first in the row of non-Christian delegates.

Moreover in his speech on the second day at the Vatican welcoming the delegates, the only non-Christian representatives he referred to by name were those from the Jewish community which he described as "especially dear to us".

Some Vatican watchers have claimed recently that the Vatican's attention has moved away from the Jewish community to focus more on Islam. While there is no question that relations with Islam are a matter of special concern for Catholicism (as for other branches of Christianity), not only in the Arab and Muslim world, but also within Europe; anyone honestly observing this remarkable event in Assisi would have been struck with the demonstration of the special connection and commitment that the Pope and the Church feel towards Jewry.

Israel

In the wake of ongoing attacks on Muslim places of worship and memorial, Ed Rettig and I submitted the following piece that was published by Ynet.

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4133711,00.html>