



Monthly Highlights

May-June 2019

International Interreligious Affairs

USA

On May 1st, a remarkable conference took place at the United Nations co-hosted by the Secretary General of the Muslim World league Dr. Mohammed Abdulkarim Al Issa on the theme of Responsible Leadership in Contemporary Society. The conference, co-hosted by Mr. Bawa Jain the SG of the World Council of Religious Leaders, focused on specific areas of leadership including the fields of politics, economics and environment. I was privileged to be a speaker on the panel on religion and responsible leadership which consisted of Dr. Al Issa himself; Swami Avdeshanand Giri, Chair of the Hindu roof body, the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha; The Venerable Shi Ming Yi , the Abbot of the Foo Hai Chan monastery in Singapore; and Monsignor Khaled Akasheh of the Vatican.

On the evening before, a groundbreaking event took place at the AJC headquarters at which, in addition to a public interview with Dr. El Issa, a memorandum of understanding was signed with AJC's CEO David Harris in which Dr. Al Issa committed himself to participating in an AJC led visit to Auschwitz on the occasion of the 75th year of its liberation and to hosting an AJC delegation in Saudi Arabia.



Rome

June 6-9, AJC co-sponsored a highly acclaimed conference on Jesus and the Pharisees (www.jesusandthepharisees.org) with the Pontifical Biblical Institute under the leadership of professor Joseph Sievers. The conference, which was live streamed globally, sought to explore recent scholarship concerning Second Temple Judaism and relations between the different communities and movements at the time, in particular the Jesus movement and the forerunners of rabbinic Judaism.

At the same time, the conference specifically sought to address and correct the negative use and stereotypes of the name Pharisees, in keeping with specific directives from Vatican documents that either were unknown or had been forgotten within the Church. As a result, the antisemitic pejorative use of the name Pharisee is still widespread within the Church even at the highest level. The media coverage in Rome and in the Catholic world as a whole ensured the success of this conference and the text of the Pope's address at the papal audience for the participants highlighted this effect.

Media coverage included the following :-

<https://www.romereports.com/en/2019/05/14/pontifical-biblical-institute-tackle-stereotype-depiction-and-misuse-of-the-term-pharisees/> (youtube)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bF3-Z3wrzhU>

<http://catholicphilly.com/2019/05/news/world-news/of-scribes-and-pharisees-conference-challenges-negative-stereotypes/>

<https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/world/2019-05-12-pope-urged-by-jews-to-take-care-over-pharisees-talk/>

<https://catholic-sf.org/news/conference-challenges-stereotypes-about-scribes-pharisees>

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/pope-urged-by-jews-to-take-care-over-pharisees-talk/>

<https://religionnews.com/2019/05/10/as-catholic-jewish-relations-warm-in-rome-they-cool-in-chicago/>

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2019/05/08/scholars-aim-to-give-christians-a-kinder-gentler-view-of-pharisees/>

USA

At the end of May/beginning of June, I was back in the US for the AJC Global Forum, prior to which I participated in a symposium on Religions and the Environment convened by the newly established Loka Initiative for the Integration of Faith and Ecology at the University of Wisconsin's Center for Healthy Minds.

Vienna

On June 19th, I addressed a conference on the subject of Interreligious Dialogue and Human Solidarity which took place at the Hofburg palace in Vienna, convened by the Grand Mufti of Azerbaijan, Allahshukur Pashazade and the government of Azerbaijan, in cooperation with the Vienna based King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Center for Interreligious Dialogue.



On the day before I participated in a gathering at KAICIID, convened by H.E. Miguel Moratinos, the United Nations Secretary General's High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, on the subject of the protection of holy sites.

Chile

A notable achievement for AJC interreligious advocacy concerned Father Carlos Irarrazaval who in mid-May was appointed auxiliary bishop in Santiago by Pope Francis. The next day in an interview Irarrazaval made antisemitic comments declaring that "Jewish culture is chauvinistic even today" (See <https://cruxnow.com/church-in-the-americas/2019/05/28/new-auxiliary-bishop-in-chile-draws-fire-for-comments-on-abuse-women-and-jews/>)

While the Chilean Jewish community initiated a meeting with Irarravazal and elicited an apology, we considered this to be a case requiring far more serious action. Through our intervention with leadership at the highest level of the church in Latin America we conveyed our profound dismay to the Pope who took action and Irarravazal was prevented from assuming the apostolic position (see <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/chilean-auxiliary-bishop-elect-steps-down-after-controversial-statements-75830> .)