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Ex-Priest Says Jews Should Take Initiative

Convert to Judaism Thinks Faith Must Follow Up Abandonment of Anti-Semitism

BY ERNEST A. SCHONBERGER
Times Staff Writer

A former Catholic priest who has become a devout Orthodox Jew says improvement in future relations between Catholics and Jews now hinges upon the Jewish community taking the initiative.

Abraham Carmel, the name he adopted when he converted in 1953, had been the Rev. Kenneth Charles Cox until he left the priesthood in England in 1948. He wrote the book, "So Strange My Path."

Carmel, interviewed after a recent lecture series at Brandeis Institute in the Simi Valley, said Jews have been given optimistic hope by Catholic Church statements against anti-Semitism, reversing 1,900 years of indifference or antagonism.

Ushers in New Age

"Pope John XXIII," said Carmel, "ushered in a new age of understanding between Christians and Jews. He was the greatest

instructions. But church instructions now definitely want to check this and this is very important. I believe it will filter down."

Born an Anglican

Carmel, born an Anglican and ordained a Roman Catholic priest in 1943, went through a five-year probation before Jewish officials in England would accept him into the faith.

Now, as a writer and lecturer, he is a foremost advocate of Judaism, although his full time vocation is teaching high school English in New York City.

Carmel is so orthodox that he is among the minority of Jews who abide by the strictest laws. He will eat only kosher food, will not eat meat or dairy products at the same meal and won't ride in a car or use electricity on the Sabbath. On his flight to Los Angeles, he forgot to advise TWA of his diet requirements, so he chose not to eat at all.

Celibacy never worried him during the priesthood, said Carmel, and he has not married now that he is free to.

Remains Friendly

He said his attitude toward the church has remained one of friendship.

spiritual leader in centuries."

"But," he said, "there remains a major obstacle. Many Jews have said to the church: 'Thank you for nothing. We don't need absolution.'

"At this stage the Jewish community must initiate a bridge of understanding with Catholics of the next generation. There is much in common between the two cultures, spiritually and in heritage. The real problem is in the memory of parents.

"Many of our Jewish people," said Carmel, "are skeptical or cynical. I'm not. Nor am I naive. It is true that many priests were anti-Semitic in their sermons and catechetical

He said it is essential that Jews direct their energies, instead, to going after their own uncommitted with a Jewish Billy Graham leading.

"Our people," he stressed, "have an obligation. We lost 6 million Jews in the holocaust (under the Nazis), so why lose more? We must do something about it."

Carmel said he has never been able to fully understand his attachment to Judaism.

Felt Attraction

"I was of Episcopal parents. I had no Semitic friends in my early days. I don't believe I have ever felt anti-Semitic, but rather, when I began to meet Jews, I was always drawn toward them.

"All my other attitudes I can explain. But my philo-Semitic attitude? This I cannot explain."

Carmel said he has always believed in God.

"God," he put it, "has always been as real to me as London Bridge. I would like to have doubted in my youth. I tried very hard to be in fashion and disbelieve. But I just couldn't.

Carmel said that when he entered the priesthood he was of firm Catholic conviction, "but I lost conviction in the divinity of Jesus.

"My theological argument always was that so long as a person is able to believe in the divinity of Jesus, the other dogmas

can be rationalized. If Jesus was divine, He could anything.

Became Contrary

"But it became contrary to my reason that an infinite God could take upon Himself the limitations of human nature and time and space in the form of a human."

Carmel said he believes there will be a messianic age some day, but that when this messiah comes he will not be divine, but perhaps like Moses.

"However," said Carmel, "I believe the essential thing that will characterize the messianic age will be peace and justice in the world. Without this there is no messianic era. And we claim, of course, that for 2,000 years this has been so."

He said he believes Judaism will eventually be widely accepted if Jews work at their mission of "giving witness to true monotheism, the unity of God.

"The ecumenical movement—and the statehood of Israel—are providential signs of the comeback."


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