

A JEWISH FRIEND OF OPUS DEI

by Antonio Gaspari

A candid talk with Chilean Rabbi Angel Kreiman

The Opus Dei conference in Rome was attended not only by Catholics devoted to Jose Maria Escrivá. Angel Kreiman, Chief Rabbi of Chile for 20 years and current International Vice-President of the World Council of Synagogues and advisor on Latin America to the White House is also a Collaborator with Opus Dei (a non-member who participates in Opus Dei activities). He explains his devotion to Escrivá and the movement as stemming from both practical and theoretical considerations. Practical, because while a student in Chile the socialist government decreed that university entrance exams must be held on a Saturday and the only university to open its doors to observant young Jewish students was that of Opus Dei. Theoretical, because Kreiman sees Escrivá's message of the sanctification of daily life through work as an echo of the same Jewish message.

Rabbi Kreiman, you believe that Jews and Christians are united not only by theological and spiritual roots but by their experience of persecution and suffering.

RABBI ANGEL KREIMAN: My wife, Suzy Kreiman, died in the terrorist attacks on the central offices of the Jewish Community in July 1994 in Buenos Aires. In a previous attack, a Catholic priest died when his Church, which was in front of the Israeli Embassy, was hit. On that occasion, I wrote in an article that "Jewish-Christian blood has been spilled again, as when Christians and Jews were killed during the persecutions in the Roman Empire."

Do you see similarities between Judaism and Opus Dei?

KREIMAN: In Genesis it is written that you will work and offer up your work for six days and the seventh day will be for the Lord your God. We do not have the right to rest on the Sabbath if we have not worked for God during the six preceding days. Each one of us sanctifies and consecrates our lives to God through our work. Therefore, Escrivá's concept is eminently Jewish: one does not live for God only in the synagogue or in the Church, one lives for God always and everywhere.

In the Talmud it is said that between the extraordinary and the ordinary, the ordinary is more important because it is not the great moments, the applause, the big ceremonies which make Our Lord happy. One worships God more by contributing to his work of creation. Therefore, when we speak of



Jewish rabbi Angel Kreiman (left) greets Catholic leaders (left to right) Michel Sabbah, Camillo Ruini and Luis Clavel, rector of the pontifical university of the Holy Cross (Santa Croce), run by Opus Dei

social action or when we share in communal work, we do not do so for personal pleasure, but because it is the way to bring the Kingdom of God to the world. It is the search for that which we call the Messianic Era, realized only through the daily efforts of man in his work and in his home. The concept of Human Rights also comes from this.

The Talmud says, "He who saves a human life is as if he saved all humanity," and in the same way, "if you kill a human life, it is as if you kill all humanity." As Jews, when we save a human being we do it because he is made in the image and likeness of God and not because he is of this or that political view. In the same way, we are in favor of life. We are absolutely against abortion, and in favor of social justice so that each can live with dignity — which is the social doctrine of the Prophets.

How do you view religious dialogue and tolerance?

KREIMAN: The term tolerance for me is a detestable and horrible word. Many who use it frequently are intolerant with religious people. Interreligious dialogue requires that each participant is coherent, honest and practicing his own religion.

Interreligious dialogue cannot be theoretical; it must be exercised between those who are practicing, religious, intelligent and observant. Those who can maintain their culture and identity. Dialogue consists in working together; one discovers that there are many more things that unite us than divide us.

In the case of Jewish-Christian dialogue, we have much in common theologically, philosophically and even culturally. We are united above all by a concern for the future of humanity. We hope that in the future we will be together at the banquet table of God in one body, to share the Pascal Feast.

In the meantime, we must develop a relationship of love, as the Bible instructs. We have both been persecuted since the time of the Roman emperor. We are persecuted today by paganism, idolatry of the body, objects, animals. There is an obsession for material and physical things instead of the passion of the vocation of service. The word service is a key word: in Hebrew it means work.

Work viewed as service to God and our neighbor is exactly the concept that will better the world.