

## REVIEW

Rembert G. Weakland, OSB

*A Pilgrim in a Pilgrim Church: Memoirs of a Catholic Archbishop*

Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2009, xiii + 429 pp.

Reviewed by Eugene J. Fisher, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (retired)

Archbishop Rembert Weakland, now retired, was one of the leading figures of the American Catholic Church and its efforts to implement the Second Vatican Council's vision on the national, local, and parish levels. He was, though not so centrally as Cardinal William H. Keeler, a leader as well of ecumenical, Catholic-Jewish and interreligious relations, as this book amply shows. Thus, while the book does not concentrate on Jewish-Christian relations, it does bring them up and it provides a sense of the overall context in which Catholic-Jewish relations, in particular, made such progress in the years in which he was abbot, abbot-primate, and archbishop. These were years, as Weakland shows, not just of progress in implementing the Council, but of backlash to it both locally within the United States, and, in certain aspects, from Rome itself. And Weakland was often a lightning rod for the "Catholic culture wars" that have raged during this period. Those interested in the history of Catholic-Jewish relations in the USA can profit from this book.

When he was abbot of St. Vincent's Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, Weakland was asked by the then National Conference of Catholic Bishops to host what was to become the first official dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Jewish People ever in the history of the Church. He readily agreed and the dialogue took place in January of 1965, well before the passage of *Nostra Aetate* by the Council in late October of that year. The symposium brought together a number of the leading thinkers in both communities and, as Weakland states in describing it, led to lasting friendships among them, particularly his with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum (p. 116). The papers, as he notes, were published in Philip Scharper, ed., *Torah and Gospel: Jewish and Catholic Theology in Dialogue* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966). The topics included the history of the relationship, liturgy, scripture, freedom of conscience, religion and society, and Israel. These have been topics central to the dialogue ever since. Interestingly, the Holocaust was not explicitly among them, being raised within the larger context of history rather than on its own.

The book also shows something of the parallel and intertwined history of American Jews and Catholics as immigrants into a predominantly Protestant country, facing the same discrimination and exclusionary practices. He speaks, for example, of how in 1993, while he was archbishop of Milwaukee, the Jews and Catholics of that city jointly celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their arrival in that city, and how throughout his tenure as archbishop, Jews and Catholics met frequently to discuss freely their concerns regarding the social challenges facing the city and how they could work together to address them (pp. 161-162).

In 1985, Weakland accepted an invitation to speak on the Bishops' Economic Pastoral, the development of which he was leading for the Bishops' Conference at the time, and which was being verbally pilloried by the Catholic right and even more confrontationally by members of Lyndon LaRouche's party, which had as he rightly states, an anti-Semitic tinge to it. One member of this party, he narrates, ran up to the *bima* and threw a piece of bloody liver at him.

After the security guard had taken the woman away, Weakland narrates, "I asked the audience to reflect with me on how historical this evening was: here was a Catholic archbishop speaking in a Jewish synagogue and both of us together were being treated to this ignominy" (pp. 301-302).

Being a Vatican II liberal in an increasingly conservative hierarchy, Weakland was often questioned by Rome about his policies and actions on a range of matters, including his plans for re-designing his archdiocese's cathedral. One such criticism raised against him by American conservatives for which he had to answer to Rome during a major investigation of him in 1988 was that he had affirmed that the Vatican should recognize the State of Israel, an allegation that today, he can only find "amusing" (p. 322). As a side note, I might add that I, too, had made such affirmations in public and was never questioned about it, even though I was at the time a Consultor to the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

In November 1999, anticipating Pope John Paul II's Liturgy of Repentance in St. Peter's in which the pope asked God's forgiveness on the Church for the sins of Catholics against the Jews over the centuries, the Milwaukee Catholic-Jewish conference sponsored a joint prayer service in a synagogue, during which Weakland asked forgiveness for the negative Christian teachings and actions toward Jews throughout history and especially in the city of Milwaukee. All the Catholics in the congregation responded "Amen," most resoundingly, to his affirmation of God's ongoing, never abrogated covenant with the Jewish people. After the service, Catholics and Jews hugged each other in a spontaneous kiss of peace (pp. 393-395). As Weakland states, I sent copies of the service and of his talk to all the dioceses of the country to serve as a model of what they might do to make the upcoming year of Jubilee a time of reconciliation between Jews and Catholics. As he rightly says, "such a deeply prayerful gathering was only possible after twenty-five years of dialogue in which we have come to know and trust each other as friends" (p. 395).

I have one nit to pick with Weakland regarding Christian-Jewish relations. On two different occasions, he evokes the ancient Christian teaching of contempt against Jews and Judaism, which he rightly condemns. But on both occasions, he calls it "St. Augustine's" teaching. It is true that the teaching can be found in Augustine's writings, but it did not originate with Augustine. It was already well developed and widespread by the end of the second century. Augustine merely passed on what was a common set of negatives by his own time. And Augustine must be credited for carving out the theology that ultimately underlay the official policy of the Church that the Jews must be allowed to worship freely as their ancestors in the Bible had. Because of Augustine, Judaism alone of all non-Christian religions that existed at the time of Constantine was declared a *religio licita* and allowed to survive within Christendom, while all others were suppressed. On this, see Paula Frederikson, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).