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Benedict becomes first pope to visit American synagogue

RACHEL ZOLL | April 18, 2008 11:01 PM EST |

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Rabbi Arthur Schneier, right, shakes hands with Pope Benedict XVI at the Park East Synagogue in New York, Friday, April 18, 2008. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)



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NEW YORK — Pope Benedict XVI became the first pope to visit an American synagogue Friday, bringing greetings for the Passover holiday and accepting gifts of matzo and a seder plate. Benedict, 81, stopped briefly at Park East Synagogue on Manhattan's Upper East Side, near the Vatican residence.

"I find it moving to recall that Jesus, as a young boy, heard the words of Scripture and prayed in a place such as this," he said.

At a Roman Catholic church in Manhattan, the pope later warned other Christian leaders against "so-called prophetic actions" that conflict with traditional views of the Bible, a reference to the debate over Scripture that is fracturing churches in America and around the world.

In his visit to the synagogue, Benedict was shown the congregation's collection of parchment scrolls, and two youngsters presented him with the Passover gifts.

The German-born pontiff then offered a gift of his own: a reproduction of a Jewish codex.

"In our lifetime, we have experienced the ravages of war, the Holocaust, man's inhumanity to man and tasted the joy of freedom," said Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who lived in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.

"This momentous occasion takes place on American soil, where men and women escaping the clutches of oppression and religious persecution have built a nation of democracy and freedom. This is a nation which has allowed all religious communities to flourish."

The Jewish community makes "a valuable contribution to the life of the city," Benedict said. "And I encourage all of you to continue building bridges of friendship with all the many different ethnic and religious groups present in your neighborhood."

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The visit was Benedict's second as pontiff to a Jewish house of worship. On his first papal trip abroad in 2005, Benedict entered a synagogue in Cologne, Germany, that had been destroyed by the Nazis and rebuilt.

At his visit with Christian leaders, the pontiff said allowing individual congregations to interpret the Gospel undermines evangelism at a time when "the world is losing its bearings" and needs "persuasive common witness" to salvation in Christ.

"Only by holding fast to sound teaching will we be able to respond to the challenges that confront us in an evolving world," Benedict said at the evening service with Protestant and Orthodox clergy at St. Joseph's church, which was founded by German immigrants and still regularly celebrates Mass in German.

"Only in this way will we give unambiguous testimony to the truth of the Gospel and its moral teaching. This is the method which the world is waiting to hear from us."

Benedict did not mention specific issues troubling the churches. However, many Protestant groups have been arguing for years over how to understand what the Bible says about truth and salvation, and whether it prohibits gay sex.

The U.S. Episcopal Church caused an uproar among its fellow Anglicans in 2003 by consecrating the first openly gay bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire.

The global Anglican Communion, the world's third-largest religious group, is now near the break of schism. Other mainline Protestant groups based in the U.S. are also divided over the issue.

Several of those denominations sent representatives to the pope's Friday event.

Christopher Epting, ecumenical officer of the Episcopal Church, said he didn't feel the pope was singling out his or any other church. He added that Episcopalians are still in dialogue with the Catholics.

The ecumenical service was one of the many efforts by Benedict to reach out to other Christians and to members of different faiths during his six-day visit to Washington and New York. It is his first visit to the United States since he was elected pontiff in 2005.

Earlier this week in Washington, the pope met with Jewish leaders, along with Muslim, Buddhist, Jainist and Hindu representatives.

The American Muslim leaders who attended the Washington interreligious meeting had said they were committed to working with the Roman Catholic church but were uneasy about some of Benedict's past comments and actions.

Many were upset by his Easter baptism in St. Peter's Basilica of an Egyptian-born Muslim who has called Islam inherently violent.

Benedict, like Pope John Paul II, has also worked to heal the centuries-old rift between the Orthodox and Catholic churches.

At Friday's services, leaders from several of the denominations briefly greeted the pope. Among them was Bernice A. King, daughter of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and an elder at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in Lithonia, Ga.

The head of the National Association of Evangelicals, Leith Anderson, a pastor in Eden Prairie, Minn., also attended.

Associated Press Writer Victor L. Simpson contributed to this report.

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To get all worked up because he was "just" in the Hitler Youth and not a Nazi is like being a member of the Dick Cheney Fan Club and insisting you're not a Republican.

As the child of a survivor, and the descendant of Jews expelled during the Inquisition (yes the pain and the bitterness go wayyyy back) I personally couldn't care if the Pope crawled on his knees whipping himself while he asked for forgiveness. Not that he will...didn't he just give a prayer during Easter asking that Jews "see the light" as it were?

Please don't come back slamming me for hating Catholics, or pointing out all the good they do. Because yes there are people out there who are Catholics who do amazing social works, and fight for the cause of justice and the poor. But the "Church" and the Pope? They're just in it to perpetuate their own institution and their own power...

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The pope's visit falls into the category of too little too late. Last night I had the privilege of seeing the new documentary Constantine's Sword, that outlines the Catholic church's long, ugly history of anti-semitism, including its refusal to do more to combat the Holocaust. The film is the story of this history as well as of today's Air Force, which openly attempts to convert people, including Jewish cadats, to Ted Haggard's church. The defrocked Mr. Haggard is a big player in the film. But the film's main star is brilliant former priest and anti-Vietnam activist, James Carroll. The film is astonishing and should be required viewing by every high school and college student, and every member of Congress, and everyone else. It just opened in NYC at the Lincoln Plaza and the Quad and is going into broader release soon. www.constantinessword.com

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Why didn't the poop also visit a Mosque in New York? Interfaith dialogue is a farce.

By the way, the Zionists on this post accuse him of being Nazi in his youth. So what? Zionist today are worse than Nazis.

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You had me at hello.

You showed your true colors in sentence number two.

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"The German-born pontiff then offered a gift of his own: a reproduction of a Jewish codex"

Nice gesture, but why a "reproduction" as surely the Vatican must have many of these original works.

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It is obscene that this man was allowed into a Temple and greeted warmly. What craven political correctness. He was part of the Hitler Youth, was in the German Army and whether he belonged formally or not to the Nazi Party, he was in his youth a NAZI!!! All the old fashioned conservatism and rigidity grows clearly out of his cultural roots, Nazism. To make excuses now, because first he was Paul's hatchet man and now is a POPE, is a sad joke. God's representative on earth. God has to be hiding his head in shame and Hitler has to be laughing his ass off.

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It may be time to "forgive and forget" much to move our civilization(s) ahead, but this one sticks in my craw as well. Some things don't deserve to be forgotten, especially when there has been no request for forgiveness.

"I am sorry I was a Nazi," is significantly different than, "Hey, I was just a teenager forced to go along." Which may be true, but sidesteps the question of whether said teen AGREED with the Nazi message." Also, the above rationalizations are not coming from the now Pope, but from his defenders and supporters. Then again, this die was cast long ago, when the much revered Pope Paul made now Pope Benedict XVI his hold-the-line-against-modernity main man.

Last, any parsing of "Hitler" Youth vs. "Nazi" Youth is lost on me, a distinction without a difference. As if Hitler was less evil than Naziism, when I believe, should you want to split hairs, the truth is the opposite.

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Correction: Pope John Paul II, not Pope Paul in just-prior post under alan2a. (I hit Post instead of Preview.)

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Good read on topic:

<http://atheism.about.com/od/benedictxvi/i/RatzingerNazi.htm>

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Caption on the picture:

"We wear the same hats."

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So, the Nazi Pope has a sense of irony?

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Hardy-har-har-har.

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Was he counted for a minyan?

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"Awesome speech, Popey."

-- G. W. Bush

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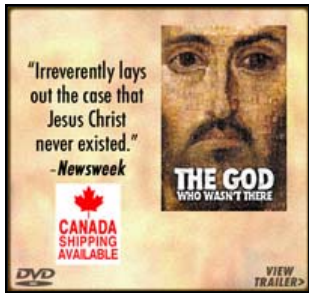
Gosh, I am glad he finally recognized Protestants exist after yesterday's sessions with Jainists, Hindu, Islamic, et al faiths. After all, that dialogue is needed since the Protestants are stealing so many of the Church's members world wide by their active evangelism and more modern approaches to worship After all most people are not converting to or from those other groups in anywhere they are leaving the Catholic faith worldwide and joining more evangelical Christian churches. Even though the Church in the United States is only maintaining and growing because of the the influx of Hispanics from Mexico and beyond as it is losing 10% per year or so of the traditional Catholics, the number of Mexican protestant

churches in the US is also growing exponentially, as well.

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