

Roy Meachum

The cry of anti-Semitism: Hogwash!

In the undulating crises of the current White House scandal, major attention fell this week on the role Israel may have performed in setting up the swap of weapons to Iran for U.S. hostages.

We hear the familiar cry of "anti-Semitism" — raised every time criticism appears of Israel. It has appeared in *Letters to the Editor* and in quotes provided as parts of news stories.

Hogwash!

On the record, the principles of Judaism have as little to do with Israel's *realpolitik* as the teachings of Jesus figure in the official acts of this overwhelmingly Christian nation.

Where anti-Semitism increases in this country, American Jews must look to themselves and their actions, as individuals and through their organizations. Most American non-Jews understand that Israelis govern Israel and not their co-religionists who choose to live in other nations, including the United States.

There is little willingness to lay on American Jews responsibility for questionable Israeli actions, including the foreign power's role in supplying arms to Iran.

On the other hand, American Jews invite resentment — and regenerate anti-Semitism — when they forcefully intervene in attempts to manipulate American policy and individuals on behalf of Israel. Sweeping aside the contradictory statements about the present White House mess, the latest example arises over John Cardinal O'Connor, the archbishop of New York.

With no "outside" assistance, O'Connor has converted the gothic spires of his St. Patrick's Cathedral "seat" into the center for a maelstrom of controversy. He barely landed (1984) in the job when he launched a national media assault on Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro for her failure to give assurances she would seek to impose their mutual Catholic faith's anti-abortion policy on non-Catholics, if elected.

The cardinal has scarcely stepped out of the public spotlight since, battling women's groups, gay activists, civil libertarians, liberals of all stripes and even conservatives concerned with the prelate's threat to the constitutionally-mandated separation between church and state, as exemplified by the Ferraro case.

At the same time, O'Connor proceeded to forge

near-perfect harmony with leaders of New York's Jewish community, the largest in the entire world, including Israel. According to reliable estimates, more Jews live within a short drive of St. Patrick Cathedral than the entire population of the "Jewish" state: 5 million vs. 4 million, in round numbers.

The harmony improved when the Vatican decided to exculpate Jews in the death of Jesus, finally removing the slanderous "Christ Killers" epithet. It became ecstatic when the pope paid a call on Rome's main synagogue, the very first time the head of the Catholic Church ever entered a Jewish house of worship.

While there is no evidence New York's archbishop contributed to either decision, much of the credit came his way, as the Vatican's visible representative, from his city's Jewish community and its leaders. In O'Connor were invested all the hopes, as a cardinal with direct access to the pope, for handling any problems remaining with Rome, including full and unqualified recognition of Israel; a recognition that would encompass its legal ownership of Jerusalem and the occupied territory, the West Bank and Gaza.

This was the situation, as reflected in various writings appearing in the *New York Times*, before O'Connor traveled to Lebanon last summer on an inspection of refugee camps, in his role as head of U.S. Catholic welfare services. It was not his first trip to Israel's troubled northern neighbor; he had expressed sympathy before for the men, women and children locked up in the camps, where death provides the one true liberation for most of them.

Only last summer New York's archbishop, for the first time, put himself on record as favoring a Palestinian homeland. This meant the removal of the West Bank and Gaza into Arab hands, a proposition favored by every major nation — including the United States and the Soviet Union — and a sizeable proportion of Israelis, but at odds with hard-liners, men like the present prime minister, Yitzhak Shamir.

The consternation at Cardinal O'Connor's pro-Palestinian statement can scarcely be imagined. Immediately, pressure, in the form of suggestions, was forthcoming on arranging for the prelate to visit Israel, "to hear the other side." O'Connor agreed, with no recorded hesitation. A date was set for the recent holiday

season. Official invitations came from high Israeli officials.

The troubles began before his limousine made the short journey out to Kennedy International Airport. The Vatican cleared its throat at the threat to its Israeli policy posed by an "official" visit by a prominent prince of the church to Israeli officials, located in Jerusalem. A stormy tempest followed in the diplomatic teapot.

It seems the Curia feared that New York's archbishop dropped by for a chat in the places where the Israeli government conducts its normal business might be interpreted as a portent that the Vatican was about to change its consideration of Jerusalem's status. Despite all denials, their after-the-fact words could not remove the impact made by O'Connor's actions in showing up in the offices which signify Israeli governance over the Holy City.

I personally doubt that American Jewish leaders tried to set up the cardinal. I think they were caught as much unawares as he. There may have been individuals who understood the implications, but probably more Israelis than New Yorkers. I don't know. There has been nothing on the record but anguished protests raised by Vatican insistence that the cardinal observe protocol and stay out of Israeli governmental buildings during his call on Jerusalem.

The protests were in full throat before O'Connor departed, when he announced a change in his itinerary, supposedly because his presence was required in Rome for the anointing of an auxiliary bishop, forcing him to cut short his travel time. The ceremony came as "a surprise," which should have been seized upon by the cardinal and his Jewish friends to cancel his travels to the Middle East.

At that point, the entire blame for any problems could have been safely laid at the feet of faceless Vatican bureaucrats. No damage would have been done between New York's archbishop and the city's Jewish community. They could have worked together — with all cards on the table — to produce another timetable, one that might have produced positive results. Their harmony would have remained intact. Furthermore, they could have counted on the sympathy of many American Catholics, who are having their own troubles these days with the

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Vatican.

Of course things didn't work out that way. The imbroglio grew, fueled by hurt feelings that the cardinal went ahead with his plans to hold conversations with Jordan's King Hussein and that nation's minister for religion. As Israel, Jordan enjoys no official recognition from the Vatican, but it occupies no disputed territory; most of all, the king's palace is not in Jerusalem, which the Curia wants internationalized, allocating major religious shrines to the charge of various religions, including Islam.

To his credit, John Cardinal O'Connor made the best of an impossible situation; he visited and listened to Israeli officials in Jerusalem, but in their homes not their offices. To no one's astonishment, Prime Minister Shamir refused to receive the cardinal, but President Chaim Herzog and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres graciously participated in the compromise.

Unfortunately for his sponsors, after making his permissible calls, New York's archbishop did not recant on his call for a Palestinian homeland. In the same breath he repeated, for the umpteenth time, his admonition that Israel should not be held solely to blame for the Palestinians' plight.

O'Connor paid his respects in all the right places, including the Wailing Wall and the Holocaust Museum; from all reports his conduct was exemplary and not lacking in grace. At one point, before the Wall, he entreated a rabbi for his blessing and received the response: "Let us bless one another."

He picked up his auxiliary bishop in Rome, where he also set forth proposals for what he hoped to become a Vatican-sponsored initiative for Middle East peace. Before leaving for New York, he announced he was encouraged by the Vatican response to his suggestions.

Meanwhile, the criticisms at home died out, O'Connor had apparently muted the sting to hurt feelings, even though his position on the Palestinians had not changed. According to his published remakes, he looked forward to "reporting" to his Jewish friends. He left Rome with what appeared to be "justifiable" self-satisfaction.

On landing at Kennedy, New York's archbishop discovered that, while he was in the air, the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish

Organizations, a principal sponsor of his trip to Israel, had issued a statement to the media. The cardinal still had not received a copy when he held a press conference following a St. Patrick's mass the following day. He obviously resented the lack of courtesy when he talked to reporters.

"(The statement) amounts to a unilateral censure," O'Connor said, "which I do not appreciate and which makes it more difficult for me to move farther toward peace." He also added: "I have never been so pilloried."

Immediately after the cardinal's reaction was known, the organizations backed off. "We did not censure the cardinal," a spokesman said. "Cardinal O'Connor is a friend, a powerful voice against anti-Semitism."

The matter of course did not end there. There have been major editorials this week. Friends of Israel want to shift the blame for the unfortunate affair on the Vatican, but that appeal comes too late, as I said.

Certainly in time amiable relations will be renewed between the prelate and the Jewish community; they need each other too much to remain estranged for long. Placating the cardinal will not undo the damage; I make the statement with the certain knowledge that some American Jews will not want to see the fact stated in print.

Modern anti-Semitism does not come from the top, not in this country. Laws and the media's watchdogs prevent its existence as official or corporate policy. It still festers and feeds on ignorance and resentment. Its principal source of sustenance these days is the myopia of American Jews, who are blind to everything, it seems, in their zeal to protect Israel. They make enemies out of friends, in their zeal.

The real tragedy lies in the reality that Israel takes care of itself and its interests very well, and with no need for outside guardians. Perhaps, Israelis take care of themselves too well. They have lost their status as underdogs, in the world's eyes.

No one can seriously believe the government in Jerusalem will suffer in the present White House scandal; they are professionals who, in fact, resent amateur bumbler. Israel officially distanced itself from any criticism aimed at Cardinal O'Connor.