

THE JOSEPH CARDINAL BERNARDIN CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF
EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY AT SPERTUS COLLEGE

Remember the days of old
Consider the years of many generations

Deut. 32:7

We study the past to understand the present. Our history is like a tree which contains all of the wood from the very first. What is newest is most easily seen. When we probe our collective past, we look to records and artifacts that survive like inner rings of the tree.

The spiritual, artistic, economic, political and social experiences of Eastern European Jewry are a vital part of our collective memory. They span more than 1,000 years and are embedded in the upheavals of secular history and the evolving Roman Catholic Church. Yet even today, these Jewish experiences remain a scantily considered and under-appreciated part of our lives.

Some Jews and Christians have resolved to do better. Within the unique pluralism of contemporary American society, they are turning to their Eastern European roots to understand themselves and to bequeath something finer to their children than ignorance and animosity.

Unique work in this field is being done by the four Institutes of the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center.

I. Institute for the Study of Eastern European Jewish Art and Artifacts

Devoted to the study of Jewish life as depicted in the visual arts, this Institute will initiate major exhibitions. Works of great artistic and cultural significance, never before seen outside of Eastern Europe (and rarely there), will be made accessible to scholars and the public.

A forthcoming exhibition from Poland, now in the planning, includes portrayals of traditional images of the Jew in Polish life: cart driver, water carrier, and Talmudic scholar at worship and study. But there is much more. Epic canvases depict Jewish participation in Poland's anti-Tzarist insurrections of the 19th Century. Others, drawing on Expressionism, Impressionism and Cubism, will reveal to many students for the first time how Eastern and Western European aesthetic movements met in Poland.

Another exhibition in the planning, from Hungary, will focus on the works of the 19th and 20th Century Jewish artists. These will include traditional landscape and genre painters, as well as the avant-garde artists whose themes and styles illustrate the complexities of Hungarian Jewish culture.

Jewish life in Eastern Europe engaged the attention of artists in other media as well. In ritual objects of silver, bronze and embroidery, the spirit of varied lands and peoples is captured, stimulating our imagination in a journey from the Middle Ages through the Renaissance, Mannerist, Baroque, Rococo, and Neoclassical periods. The beauty and uniqueness of the art and artifacts in these exhibitions will excite a general audience, as well as stimulate experts to delve deeper into academic investigations of aesthetic theory, symbology, stylistic analysis, and cross-cultural influences.

The Bernardin Center is not alone in these efforts. In Hungary and Poland, art historians, ethnographers and curators are eager to participate. They will share in the recovery of national treasures and enhance their analytical methods and tools working with new materials and American colleagues. This, they say, will help overcome efforts weakened by inadequate information and insufficient understanding of the cultural, religious and social diversity from which the Jewish art of Eastern Europe emerged.

The Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center is committed to publishing the results of its work at low cost to the widest readership at nominal prices. Catalogs will include scholarly texts for lay audiences and museum-quality reproductions. The inaugural exhibition from Poland, subsidized in part by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities, will travel to major museums across the United States.

II. Institute for the Bibliographia Judaica

The Institute for the Bibliographia Judaica is dedicated to the preservation of primary sources vital for future research on the history and culture of European Jewry. Our labors will commence in Poland, once the largest and most important Jewish community in the world. It was the wellspring which shaped and nurtured the religious, social and political traditions of the greater part of world Jewry today.

Archives, libraries, monasteries, museums and private collections house vast repositories of Jewish learning and living. These treasures survived the flames that consumed their creators.

Manuscripts, unpublished scholarship, community registers, incunabula, hand-corrected copies of classic volumes, and significant correspondence between giants of Jewish learning have been painstakingly preserved. Many of these materials are located in deteriorating facilities, remain poorly protected and uncatalogued, and are inaccessible to scholars who are able to read them. Our Institute for the Bibliographia Judaica is devoted to the preservation of these resources.

Cataloguing, microfilming and publishing, at a low cost, these religious and secular materials are the long-term goals of this Institute. We expect to compile in a score of volumes an indexed bibliography encompassing the broadest range of socio-historical materials on the Polish-Jewish past.

Not limited to the riches of Poland alone, The Center and our Institute will address all of Eastern Europe. Working with the Polish Academy of Sciences, we will draw upon reciprocal agreements, thus obtaining access to archives in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, as well as the Soviet Union.

III. Institute for the Study of the Jewish-Christian Experience

"The project of the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center for the Study of Eastern European Jewry at Spertus College [leaves us] full of hope for achieving knowledge and understanding through dialogue."

Francicus Cardinal Macharski,
Archbishop of Krakow
in referring to the Institute
for the Study of the Jewish-
Christian Experience.

Given our common biblical heritage, there is great need to increase religious understanding. It inhibits our search for reconciliation across borders and traditions, across social classes and political systems. In our country, ecumenical and interfaith dialogues have addressed themselves to increasing understanding to a degree unknown elsewhere in the world, but the same efforts across international boundaries have been singularly few. This Institute will pioneer such an international address to the problem with a program involving the Catholic clergy in Poland. It is of crucial importance that Polish priests come to terms with the historic reality of the Polish-Jewish experience.

To that end, the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Center's Institute for the Study of Jewish-Christian Experience will inaugurate an intensive, ecumenical annual Seminar. It will be a daring, pioneering effort to examine the shared historic experiences which have separated Polish Christians and Jews. Participating Polish Catholic priests and their American Jewish Christian counterparts will live and learn under an international faculty.

Working with us in the Seminar will be Cardinal Macharski, the Pontifical Institute of Jagellonian University of Krakow, the Catholic University of Lublin, the Association of Chicago Theological Schools, and rabbis from three major branches of American Judaism.

Each year's proceedings will be published.

IV. Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies

The Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies will serve as the center for a consortium of far-flung academic institutions, whose teaching and research facilities will enhance and be enhanced by the preservation and study of the cultural deposits, restored to our sight from inaccessible collections in Eastern Europe.

As manuscripts, documents and artifacts become available to scholars, challenges to more conventional academic approaches to Eastern European Jewish Studies will arise. New source materials will have to be examined critically by scholars using strict standards for text criticism. Distortions of history will be corrected by recently developed methodologies from the social sciences.

Scholars from many disciplines and nations, will participate in the development of this Institute and its programs -- interdisciplinary seminars, lectures, symposia and individual research projects.

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For further information about the Bernardin Center at Spertus College, please contact:

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