

REMARKS

OPENING OF CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF EASTERN EUROPEAN JEWRY

SPERTUS COLLEGE OF JUDAICA

JOSEPH CARDINAL BERNARDIN

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Today marks the beginning of the realization of a dream cherished by many of us for the past five years: the opening of the Center for the Study of Eastern European Jewry to be located here at Spertus College of Judaica, a Chicago institution of which we are all proud.

The inspiration for this Center originally came from Dr. Mira Brichto. When I first learned about the concept from her, while I was still the Archbishop of Cincinnati, I realized that the project had great merit and warranted my full support. If there was any doubt in my mind, she took care of that!

From the very beginning, however, I understood the importance of ensuring the continued preservation of the art, artifacts, and scholarly works spanning a millennium of Eastern European Jewry. It is also very important to make these cultural treasures accessible here in the United States where they will be seen and used to great advantage, I am sure, by scholars and ordinary citizens alike. I commend both Dr. Brichto and Dr. Sulkin for the leadership they have given to make this dream a reality.

The Holocaust was a heinous crime of incalculable savagery and despicable prejudice. We must ensure that it is never repeated.

Nevertheless, the tragedy would have been even greater if many private individuals, churchmen, and governments had not risked saving the precious artistic and scholarly expressions of Judaism that will form the core of the Center and its various Institutes. The very existence of the Center will help to keep the tragedy of the past deeply ingrained in our memory so that it can never be repeated in the future.

My decision to back the effort to establish this Center also had more personal dimensions.

Throughout my ministry as a priest and a bishop I have opposed anti-Semitism in whatever form I have encountered it. My association with the Center gives me personally another platform from which to encourage others to "Say No to Anti-Semitism!" It affords me a unique opportunity to express again a longstanding conviction of mine expressed clearly in the Second Vatican Council's declaration, Nostra Aetate:

[The Church] deplores all hatreds, persecutions, displays of antisemitism leveled at any time or from any source against the Jews.

That same historic document also reviewed the elements of our common heritage and called for a mutual understanding of and respect for our respective religious traditions. On many occasions, I have personally endorsed efforts to promote better Jewish-Christian relations, and I continue to pray that there may continue to be substantial interaction here in Chicago. As I mentioned in my response when I received B'nai B'rith's International Humanitarian

Award several weeks ago, it is important that we continue the good work of the past quarter century. It is inevitable that tensions or misunderstandings may arise at times among friends. But they can be dealt with more easily and constructively when the two have built up a vast reservoir of friendship, respect, and mutual understanding, as our two communities have done. Beyond what it will actually accomplish in the academic and cultural fields, I see the Center as a new symbol -- and a most powerful one at that -- of the strong -- indeed, unbreakable -- bond that unites us.

The establishment of this Center, as many of you know, has required the assistance and cooperation of the Catholic Church in Poland. Happily, this has been achieved and has, in turn, further strengthened the bonds between the Synagogue and the Church. I am pleased that in my own small way I have been able to help facilitate this cooperation.

The Center itself will provide an excellent opportunity for Jews and Christians to come to a mutual understanding of and respect for their respective religious and cultural traditions. It will greatly enrich the cultural and religious diversity of this metropolitan area. It has already attracted the attention of scholars throughout the world, and its influence will undoubtedly extend well beyond the walls of Spertus College of Judaica.

Needless to say, I am honored that the Center bears my name. This gesture means a great deal to me because it comes from people whose dedication, scholarship, and fidelity to their heritage I respect very much. In agreeing to the use of my name for this

Significant endeavor, I am humbled and re-commit myself to providing interfaith leadership to the best of my ability. And I trust that this new initiative will enjoy your enthusiasm and support.