

Dr. Richard C. Hertz

Spiritual leader talks of problems to be overcome

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The old year was coming to a close, and the new year prepared to introduce its own historic happenings.

Dr. Richard C. Hertz, senior rabbi at Birmingham's Temple Beth El, sat contemplating both in his comfortable study.

The rabbi's physical appearance belies his almost 65 years. His surroundings indicate that much has been accomplished in such a short period of time.

"Change is natural," he ruminated. "The only people who don't change live in cemeteries. The ability to cope with change will be the great challenge."

Due to retire soon after a 27-year tenure at Temple Beth El, Dr. Hertz is already looking forward to change and a "new" career.

Well, not entirely new, he said. An expanded career would be more accurate. The University of Detroit, where he has been an adjunct professor of Jewish Thought since 1970, has established a "chair" in its philosophy department that he expects will take a good deal of his time when he leaves his duties at Temple Beth El next year.

CONTEMPLATING the past and the future, Dr. Hertz's words were both reassuring and unsettling. His conversation hopped from senior citizens to youth, international terrorism, and a belief that churches and temples have both left the challenge of aging unmet.

"I think this will be a great time to live," he said.

"There will be problems. But, young people will do great things if they continue to believe in themselves and what they can do with their lives."

"I'm very hopeful. I will retire, and in a parochial sense I will leave my congregation in great shape."

This will be a great time for the next generation. The good old days weren't so good.

"No, I think there will be a great opportunity for young people to make lives for themselves and their families."

Calling himself "an optimist and a realist," Dr. Hertz cautioned, "Problems are there to be overcome. There will be no more John D. Rockefeller."

"The most we can hope for is a roof over our heads. We must seek ways to enrich the quality of life."

He sees, he said, danger from all sides.

"There is a great deal of uncertainty

in the international scene as well as the national scene, which create uncertainty in our lives as well.

"We take peace so for granted," he said philosophically.

PARTICULARLY worrisome, he said, are activities of anti-Semitic forces at home and abroad.

"One of my seminarian students at the university asked me in class, 'Rabbi, what's going on in Paris?' It was just after reading that a bomb exploding outside the Temple in Paris had killed four passers-by and injured 12 others."

"Police said that the bomb was big enough to kill 200 people if the Friday night service had not lasted longer than usual."

The tragedy, he said, held particular meaning for him.

"It's this particular temple was especially precious to me. It was the Liberal Synagogue on the Rue Copernic, the Reform Temple, where I had preached a few years ago and where I always worship whenever I am in Paris."

"It's not a large or pretentious synagogue, but it is the center of Reform Judaism in France."

The temple's rabbi, Michael Williams, he said, later explained that the bombing was only one of a series of related terrorist activities arising out of the latent anti-Semitism lingering in France since World War II.

Williams also reported, Dr. Hertz added, that a neo-Nazi movement has been growing in Europe.

As disquieting, he added, is the growth of anti-Semitism in the United States. He was shocked, he told his congregation, at remarks made by the Reverend Bailey Smith, leader of the Southern Baptists, who stated "God does not hear the prayer of a Jew."

"THERE IS A tendency today to pull in," Dr. Hertz said. "To let the rest of the world go hang."

"But the interdependence of multiple economies won't permit that. The frontiers are no longer on the Potomac."

"What happens in Japan vitally affects Detroit. What happens in the Persian Gulf, Iran and Iraq affects all of us."

Also challenging each of us in the coming years will be the attitude each of us holds toward the community in which we live, he said.

"I'm not waving a Rotary flag," he said. "But, the U of D is not just on Six Mile Road. Wayne State University, the Historical Museum, the Art Institute—all are great resources to the entire community. I believe that the suburbs have to put something of what they have taken out back into the city."

"For people to be only concerned for where their yard begins and ends is a great mistake. The churches and synagogues have a responsibility to make people recognize their responsibilities to their community."

"Our young people have that sense of idealism, and they should be applauded for it."

He is hopeful for the metropolitan community, he said.

"People are beginning to realize that they can't run away from crime. We have to deal with our problems together."

"We have to work as one metropolitan community with great resources which have to be mobilized and not split. I see Detroit as Phoenix-like. It will rise again."

THE FAMILY, he said, will be another great challenge in the coming decade.

"My family is all over the map. Many of the support systems that were there in my grandparents' day are no longer there."

"Family lifestyles have undergone such a change in the past two decades. The new morality has made different values for different situations."

"I rarely perform a wedding service for 18-year-olds anymore. They are much more mature in their attitudes, and marriage is being postponed until later. I don't say that marriages are lasting any longer, but they are much more aware of what they are getting into."

In Jewish life, divorce was considered very uncommon. Today, the Jews are as busy in the divorce courts as any other group.

"However, they are not as well prepared because it is something so new in their lives. There is no stemming the tide or its many commitments."

There is also no stemming the tide in the number of single parents households, and all the problems that ensue from that fact, he added.

Another challenge will be coping with the loss of money to maintain charitable and cultural institutions.

"When people have to drop the things they have grown accustomed to supporting—the clubs, charities and the cultural institutions, these organizations have to find other ways to support themselves at a time when we need them the most."

"There have been many changes in the lifestyle of the people in the suburbs who have been traditionally looked to for support. The churches, the symphony and the museum, all cultural and charitable institutions are feeling it, and they are tightening their belts and postponing the things they need to do."

"They are so dependent on people's ability to respond that they are having to curtail vital projects that they need to do."

THE COMING YEARS will mean drastic changes for all of us, he said. "The whole era, the 70s, was one of instant gratification, including instant religion. It won't be that way in this new decade."

Dr. Hertz expects the aging population to be a prime challenge to the individual, the church and the synagogue in coming years.

"It used to be that grandmother came to live with us. That's no longer possible."

"I don't think that churches and temples have done nearly enough for the old. There is so much emphasis on the young. It's a challenge that is unmet."

"I don't mean to say that either should be golden age societies, but they must identify the problems and the needs of the old."

Then he said contemplatively, "Maybe the old turn to religion to fill a vacuum in society or to battle loneliness."

"We haven't come to terms with that. It's not peculiar to old people alone. Maybe we should begin to consider it a problem for all of us."

In spite of all these challenges, Dr. Hertz remains hopeful for the future. Quoting from a recent message to his congregation, Dr. Hertz said, "Life is what we make of it. We can throw off a tremendous burden we are carrying about needlessly if we remember to live with each problem as it arises and not before."

"Life for too many people is overwhelming because they make it so. We can't run away from life. Not every man is the architect of his own fortune, but he is of his own character."

Winter dance classes offerings announced

Two new mid-winter dance classes will be available in the mid-winter semester beginning, Jan. 28. A class of mixed modern jazz combined with ballet technique and a class in exercise and acrobatic dance are offered.

The jazz-ballet class is aimed at teens and adults and will be taught from 8:30 to 7:20 p.m. Mondays in the multi-purpose room of the Parks and Recreation Building in the Southfield Civic Center.

Enrollment is open to all residents of Southfield as well as non-residents. Fee for the 16 week session is \$40.

According to Estelle Shifman, dance director for Southfield Parks and Recreation, this is a way to stay fit and

improve posture, poise, and self-assurance.

Leotard, tights and ballet slippers are required. For more information call Parks and Recreation at 354-9603.

Beginning at 6:30 p.m. Jan. 28 at Kennedy School, the exercise and acrobatic class is also for teens and adults. This is a beginner course designed to develop strength, endurance and flexibility.

Leotard, tights and special dance shoes are needed. The necessary equipment will be explained by the teacher at the first class. The fee is \$40 for 16 weeks.

For information or consultation on appropriate class registration, call Parks and Recreation at 354-9603.

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