

Religious tradition rich with treasure

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. RONALD P. BYARS

up in dry and barren times. People who are spiritually adrift discover their own inner neediness when a charismatic figure manages to awaken them to their yearning. Unfortunately, many of the drifting have no knowledge or experience with which they might exercise judicious discrimination. There is, after all, no such thing as a generic "spirituality" — only particular kinds — and not all spiritualities are created equal. Writing in the March 30 "New York Times," Yale Professor David Gelernter argues that "When the old religions are reeling, people cobble together new ones. In spiritually ignorant times like ours, the new ones won't be much good, generally speaking, but people need something."

It's true, of course, that the simple fact of being new does not discredit a religion. Christianity was new once, and so were all the other familiar religious traditions. In Jerusalem during the first century of this era, the religious majority regarded the little Christian church as a sect, certainly, if not also a cult. The problem in our generation may be that whatever is old is automatically considered obsolete. At church, they play "old" music and sing "old" hymns and read "old" scriptures, and maybe even wear peculiar "old" costumes — so certainly what they do there can have nothing to do with what's new or worthy by late 20th century lights. Surely, if there's any enlightenment to be had, it can't possibly be in the custody of the church where my parents took me to Sunday School, or the synagogue where I celebrated the high holy days, can it?

The age of a tradition neither proves its merit, nor disproves it. However, religious traditions with a history beneath them have at least one clear virtue: generations of people have experienced, examined, sifted, tested, embraced and practiced them. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and other religions have been "around the block" a few times. Each of them has been questioned, doubted and subjected to analysis through the lenses of literally hundreds of different societies. Their weaknesses have been exposed, and are a matter of record for those who care to examine it. Their strengths have been made clear not only in scholarly volumes, but in the countless who have lived and died by them. Whatever the merits of a new religion, its liability is that it has no track record. There is no one to write a reference, so to speak, for "Heaven's Gate" or its equivalents. In an open marketplace of religions, "Let the buyer beware!"

I have more than a smacking suspicion that many who become aware that they have spiritual needs have too quickly jumped to the conclusion that their best bet is to construct a tailor-made religion of their own — or to adopt whatever may be new in the religious marketplace — particularly if the new thing clothes itself in scientific jargon. Having turned their backs on religious traditions that seem too closely aligned with earlier generations, they overlook the treasure to be discovered there. To find the treasure, one must first look for them. Then, one must apprentice oneself to the tradition.

It's reported that a member of a synagogue complained to his rabbi that people couldn't understand the liturgy — the order of worship — in use in the synagogue. Could he please change it? The rabbi replied that "Our work is not to adjust the liturgy to suit our sensibilities, but to adjust our sensibilities to the liturgy." What does that mean? In pondering the question, there is the beginning of an answer.

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BELIEFS Values

Rabbi wins coveted Dove Award

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

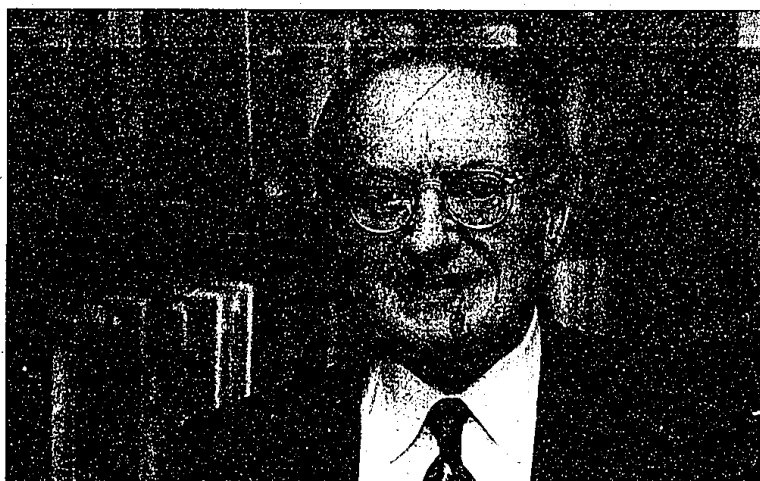
Shortly after taking the pulpit at Cong. Shaarey Zedek in 1959, Rabbi Irwin Groner began the interfaith work that has characterized his rabbinate and earned him the honor of being a 1997 recipient of the Dove Award.

The coveted award is presented to two religious leaders from the Christian and Jewish communities who reflect the work of the Southfield-based Ecumenical Institute of Jewish-Christian Studies by promoting relationships between the two faith groups. His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit will also be accepting the award at the fourth annual Dove Dinner to be held at 6 p.m. on Monday, May 6, at Cong. Shaarey Zedek, 23735 Bell Road, Southfield.

"I'm particularly grateful to have my name linked with that of Cardinal Maida, who is a dear friend. His ecumenical spirit elevates our entire community," said Groner, a Chicago native who chose his path in life with hopes of making a special contribution to the rabbinate. "I'm looking forward to the opportunity to express my gratitude and my appreciation to Cardinal Maida for his great moral leadership in our community and for the blessings that his friendship has bestowed upon me. I'm looking forward to the celebration of the wonder and achievement of dialogue which enables us to be enriched by our differences and to draw strength from them. And I'm looking forward to the Dove Dinner in the hope that I can help advance the cause of understanding and cooperation so ably advanced by the Ecumenical Institute."

Drawn by the opportunity to work with a leading figure in the American rabbinate, Groner left his first pulpit experience in Arkansas to serve as Rabbi Morris Adler's assistant at Cong. Shaarey Zedek. Three years later, the congregation left its fifth house of worship in the city of Detroit to follow the migration of the Jewish population to Oakland County.

The prominent, triangular synagogue, created in 1962 to suggest a mountain symbolic of the Biblical encounters between God and man, is now home to one of the foremost Conservative congregations in the country. Together with its branch facility in West Bloomfield,



STAFF PHOTO BY DAN DEAN

Interfaith symbol: Rabbi Irwin Groner of Cong. Shaarey Zedek has been building bridges of faith throughout his life and he's happy to stand beside His Eminence Adam Cardinal Maida as this year's recipients of the Dove Award.

the 136-year old congregation boasts 2,000 families.

After Adler's unexpected death, Groner was made senior rabbi in 1987. Eleven years later, in an expression of trust and confidence, he was elected rabbi of the congregation for life.

"Because I shared in the lives of so many people, this became our home, our community, our place," said Groner. Sharing his sentiment is Groner's wife, Lillian, who holds the couple's three children, Debbie, David and Joel.

But Groner's work was never confined to the walls of the synagogue he calls home. Groner began building interfaith relationships in the 1960s on the committee of the Bloomfield Hills-based

Jewish Community Council and as a member of the Greater Detroit Interfaith Round Table. For 20 years, he addressed social issues as one of four Oakland County clerics who wrote monthly columns for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. Groner was also the first member of the clergy to serve on the Judicial Tenure Commission of Michigan, ending his four-year term as vice chairman.

"Because of the contacts he has had over the years, many representatives of other faiths have been to our congregation and spoken to our congregation," said Leonard Baruch of Southfield, Shaarey Zedek's executive director. "Rabbi Groner represents sincerity and

integrity, and he's outstanding in terms of his speaking ability to make people understand and comprehend their faith in Judaism."

Groner serves as president of the Michigan Board of Rabbis, a member of the Board of the Governors of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Detroit and on the Rabbinic Cabinet of the United Jewish Appeal. Groner became involved in his most recent ecumenical endeavor, The Religious Leaders Forum — at Maida's invitation in 1993, when the pair, along with Episcopal Bishop R. Stewart Wood, established the organization.

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Holocaust Center hosts remembrance

The Oakland County-based Holocaust Memorial Center will host the 52nd anniversary of the end of the Holocaust and the 54th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The 52nd anniversary of the end of the Holocaust and the 54th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, U.S. Armed Service Units, representing Team Selfridge Air Force Base under the command of Brig. Gen. Allen News, will participate in commemorating the liberation of the concentration camps.

The chairman of the Memorial Committee are Dr. Joseph Berenholz of Farmington Hills, Dr. Steven Grant of West Bloomfield and Alan Zekelman of Bloomfield Hills. The program is sponsored by Shneur Haplayth of Detroit ("The Remnant," the association of Holocaust survivors) and the Holocaust Memorial Center in cooperation with the Jewish Community Center of Metropolitan Detroit, the Bloomfield Hills-based Jewish Community Council, C.H.A.I.M. (Children of Holocaust Survivors Associ-

tion in Michigan), Hidden Children of Michigan, the Greater Detroit Interfaith Round Table of the National Conference, the Ecumenical Division of the Archdiocese of Detroit, and the B'nai B'rith Michigan Regional Council.

The 1 p.m. ceremony will feature a procession of U.S. Armed Service Units, represented by Team Selfridge Air Force Base, which helped liberate the camps. After the singing of anthems and welcoming addresses given by Harry Parris, president of Shneur Haplayth, and Abraham Weberman, past president of Shaarit Haplayth, a candlelighting will be held in memory of the six million Jews murdered by the Germans and the victims of the recent terrorist attacks in Israel. The candles will be lit by Holocaust survivors and children of Holocaust survivors.

Speakers will include Col. Ronald W. Rubin, vice commander, 127 Fighter

Wing, Selfridge Air National Guard Base; Saul Waldman, president of the Holocaust Memorial Center; Gustav Berenholz, chairman of the HMC Executive Committee; Dr. Charles Silow, president of C.H.A.I.M.; Rene Lichtman, Hidden Children of Michigan; Jerald Kaufman, vice president of the Jewish Community Center; Allen Zekelman, president of the Jewish Community Council; Dr. Daniel Krichbaum, director of the Greater Detroit Interfaith Round Table of the National Conference; a representative from the Archdiocese of Detroit; and Rabbi Charles H. Resensweig, founder of the Holocaust Memorial Center.

The Jewish Community Center and the Holocaust Memorial Center, northwest of Maple and Drake in West Bloomfield, are wheelchair accessible. Call (610) 661-0840.

Battle Creek Chorus to sing at St. James

The second event of the 1997 Friends of St. James Music series will be a concert sung by the Battle Creek Girls' Chorus at 4 p.m. Sunday, May 4.

Under the direction of newly appointed Music Director Brian Cissold, the chorus is comprised of 26 girls ranging in age from 10 to 14. It maintains a repertoire that includes sacred, classical and light "pops."

The chorus is a young organization that has been gaining momentum and recognition since its founding in 1988. The chorus made its first major tour in May 1993, where they were awarded a silver medal for performing excellence at the Tangle to International Music Festival.

The concert will be held at St. James Episcopal Church, 355 W. Maple, in downtown Birmingham. The concert and parking are free to the public. An ice cream social will follow the performance.

COMMUNITY MESSENGER

Community Messenger features spiritual announcements from Oakland County religious institutions. Write: Community Messenger, c/o Beliefs & Values Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Our fax number is (810) 644-1314.

TEMPLE BETH EL

Temple Beth El, 7400 Telegraph, Bloomfield Township, will welcome Eliahu Ben Elissar, Israeli Ambassador to the United States, at 7:30 a.m. on Thursday, May 1. Elissar's visit marks the first appearance by an Israeli ambassador at the temple, and is the first of three special weekend events. The installation of Congregation Education Director Arghin will be held at 7:30 p.m. on Fri-

day, May 2. The Shabbat service will include the dedication of "Beach for Hope," the temple's new suicide prevention program. "The Persuasions" will introduce "Pass on the Love," the theme song of the war against youth suicide. "The Persuasions," perhaps the single most important of a cappella group of our generation, have been performing since the early 1960s, when they worked the street corners of Brooklyn.

The group will continue the weekend emphasis on hope when it takes to the stage for cabaret-style performances at 8 and 10 p.m. on May 3, in the temple's Handelman Hall. Show tickets are \$15 for adults and \$10 for students. Proceeds benefit the "Beach For Hope" program.

Temple Beth El is one of only 17 Reform congregations nationwide to win the Irving J.

Fain Social Action Award, presented annually by the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism of the Union of American Hebrew congregations. The honor is given for promoting the tradition of Tikkun Olam, or repairing the world. Beth El was recognized for its December Cost Drive, a cooperative effort with the Southfield-based Detroit Jewish News and the office of Doug Rice. The impetus came from the example set by Ranya Kelly, "The Shoe Lady of Denver, Colorado." Kelly donated 10,000 coats, innumerable shoes, baby equipment and 5,000 pounds of flour to aid Detroit needy. Temple members helped in bringing the items to the area and distributing them two days to more than 45 churches, missions and shelters. Social Action chairwoman and cost drive chairwoman

Lois Gerenraich, Rabbi David Castiglione and students Amy Pappas and Tanya Shaye accepted the award in Washington, D.C.

HOLocaust MEMORIAL

Cong. Shir Tikvah of Troy invites the public to join them as they host a Holocaust Memorial Service in memory of the six million Jews who perished in Europe during World War II. The service begins at 7:45 p.m. on May 2, at Northminster Presbyterian Church, 3633 W. Big Beaver, between Adams and Coolidge in Troy. Rene Lichtman, co-chair of the Hidden Child/Child Survivors of Michigan and vice president of the Holocaust Education Coalition, will give a thought-provoking talk on his experiences as a hidden child in France during the Holocaust.

The seventh grade students of Shur Tikvah's Family Education Program will present a Sunday morning session with a Yom Hashoah or remembrance service at 11:30 a.m. on May 4, at the Reeper School dome in Bloomfield Hills for all Family Education Program kindergarten through sixth grade students and their families.

TEACHER APPRECIATION

Temple Shir Shalom, 3999 Walnut Lake, West Bloomfield, will host its annual Teacher Appreciation Shabbat at 8 p.m. on May 2. The service will be given by Education Director Mindy Nathan. All are welcome. For information, call (810) 737-8700.

FOR MORE COMMUNITY MESSENGER, PLEASE SEE PAGE C8