



Bishop Emeritus Richard C. Hanifen

Keynote Commencement Address

Regis University, May 4, 2014

Rabbi Hirsch and I first met more than 18 years ago when Father Ed McGuinness, S. J. asked if we could meet together to discuss a difficulty that had arisen in the Jewish community of Colorado Springs around Christian evangelism that was being carried out in the schools and causing difficulties for Jewish children who were being told that they could not be saved because they did not believe in Jesus. I shared with Rabbi Hirsch that our Catholic children were also confused because they were being told that they were not Christians since they followed the pope and not Jesus.

We decided in that conversation that we ought to call together religious leaders in the Colorado Springs area to discuss how our families were experiencing this sincere effort on the part of evangelical Christians to bring salvation to everyone. It was their deep conviction that this was their call from God. Rather than attack that belief, we decided we should come together to share what we experience when that kind of evangelism affects our children.

From this effort came a group in Colorado Springs called the "Community Concerns Group" that addressed religious differences and their implications for our people living together in the same community. Because we had begun a dialogue and had developed friendships from it we were able to help our people to come together rather than come apart because of their religious holdings.

Rabbi Hirsch eventually saw this sort of dialogue as so important that he took time to go on retreat and to listen to God on the matter. From that time of prayer he determined that he should establish, with the help of these same leaders, the Center for Christian Jewish dialogue. From that effort grew an effort to bring dialogue to Christians and Jews throughout the City of Colorado Springs and well beyond. Thanks to Rabbi Hirsch's love for dialogue and his skills the Center became nationally known.

Over the following fifteen years, Rabbi Hirsch and I appeared in many Catholic parishes, Temple Shalom, Alvernia University, in Reading, Pennsylvania, and twice at Regis University here in Denver. The two of us became deep and lasting friends, reunited thanks to this invitation from Regis to address you.

With Rabbi Hirsch's permission, I wish now to share with you how I see God's hand in this entire adventure of dialogue. Rabbi Hirsch's father, living in Cleveland attended John Carroll University, a Jesuit University, where he obtained his college degree. In the course of his studies he became close to faculty and staff of this Jesuit University and came to share with his son his

affection for what this University under Catholic auspices had done for him. Rabbi Hirsch shared with me that he never forgot what his father told him.

Perhaps it was that openness to the Catholic gift that he listened so closely to the wisdom of Rabbi Abraham Heschel. Rabbi Heschel was a powerful influence on the development of the Vatican II document "Nostra Aetate," which examined and encouraged a new openness to the Jewish gift and to listen to St. Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul advised the newly forming Christians that they needed to remember that they were the branch grafted on to the olive tree, the Jewish people. They were not to hold themselves superior. Further, the Fathers of the Council stated: "The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles. Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross, Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles making both one in Himself."

Perhaps the openness my friend here received from his father also led him to become for many years a professor at Regis University.

Had not all this prepared him for this openness, he and I would not be standing here before you and would not be sharing the deep friendship that we have known all these years. More than anything we said during our times of dialogue, this friendship, that came to be known as "the Howard and Dick show," bore witness to the process and possibility of dialogue as the way to Shalom.

Together we stand before you in this commencement address and call for you to open your hearts and your minds to dialogue, far more than debate. Dialogue is between people of flesh and blood more precious than ideas and differences. We call upon you to give yourselves to openness and to accept the dignity of those with whom you disagree. You may consider them to be in error, but they deserve your respect and your willingness to hear them out.

I am convinced in my heart that Jesus called every Christian to become the harmony of difference and to find ways not to eliminate the other with whom we disagree but to join them in fruitful dialogue.

The search for mutual understanding is the way to peace. Our world awaits educated minds and understanding hearts to bring about the harmony of difference this world so needs. Becoming people for others, the Jesuit tradition, is your gift from this institution. Use it well is all we ask.