



Barkai Center for Practical Rabbinics

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The Barkai Center for Practical Rabbinics aims to improve the fabric of Israeli society by intensively training Israeli rabbis in all aspects of communal rabbinics so that they can lead their communities to a more meaningful connection with Judaism and act as a unifying force in Israeli society.

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Pope Benedict XVI, less charismatic than John Paul II, furthered the late Pope's outreach to the Jewish community. PHOTOS BY GETTY IMAGES

Jewish Leaders: Benedict Built On John Paul's Work

Despite several dustups, the pope 'set a template for the future.'

Steve Lipman
Staff Writer

In the early years of his papacy, Pope Benedict XVI hosted an audience at the Vatican with Abraham Foxman, the Holocaust survivor who serves as national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

After the exchange of often pro forma declarations on the range of issues that typically characterize Jewish-Catholic dialogue sessions, the pair posed for photographs.

"He grabbed my hand," Foxman said, and then the pope said, in English, "I will be there for you in your fight against anti-Semitism."

"I wasn't surprised" by the unscripted remark, Foxman said. "He's a smart man." The German-born pope, who unexpectedly announced this week that he will resign, at 85, by the end of this month because of failing health, understands the importance of anti-Semitism — which many Jews fear is on the rise worldwide, especially in countries with growing Muslim populations — to the Jewish community. "He's a student of history."

"He kept his word," speaking out regularly against anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial during the following years as leader of the Catholic Church, Foxman said. "He was good for the Jews — period."

In nearly identical words, many longtime participants in interfaith dialogue this week praised the tenure of Benedict XVI, a studious and introverted man who succeeded the charismatic John Paul II as pope. They pointed to Benedict XVI's visit to Auschwitz, where he declared that "by destroying

Israel, [the Nazis] ultimately wanted to tear up the tap root of the Christian faith"; to his visit to Yad Vashem, where he expressed "deep compassion" for the "millions of Jews killed"; to his visits to synagogues in Rome, New York City and Cologne, Germany; to his institution of Days of Judaism, on which the tenets of the Jewish religion are taught at Catholic churches around the world; to his frequent meetings with Jewish leaders during his international travels. And they pointed to his 2011 book, "Jesus of Nazareth, Volume II," which stated that "there is no basis in the New Testament for claims that the Jewish people were responsible for the death of Jesus."

The Jewish leaders said Benedict XVI built on the work of John Paul II, who had repeatedly broken ground in Jewish-Catholic ties, establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, visiting Rome's synagogue, apologizing for Christian indifference to Jewish suffering during the Holocaust, referring to Judaism as the honored "older brother" of Christianity and in general pushing relations with the Jewish community to the forefront of Catholic concerns.

"A lot of people [in the Jewish community] were very anxious. A lot of people were very worried" when the former Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, a voice for conservatism in the church hierarchy, and a member, against his will, of Hitler Youth in his homeland during World War II, became pope, according to Foxman.

Benedict XVI, Foxman said this week, "walked in the footsteps of John Paul. [He] has profoundly bolstered the positive trajectory of Catholic-Jewish

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