

# Catholic Priest Paints Holocaust

BY ROSEMARY GREENBANK

A Cedar Grove priest who is a student and teacher of Jewish religion and history has created a series of paintings on the Holocaust. The 13 paintings are a strong statement by the Rev. Leonard P. Spanburgh, an associate pastor at St. Catherine of Siena Church, on the atrocities committed against the Jewish people in Nazi Germany 30 years ago.

The parish priest says they are his "protest against the horrible terrors . . ." Father

Spanburgh was moved to express his strong emotional response after completing a three-year course on Judaism at Hebrew Union College in New York.

The only Catholic priest in the class, he enrolled because "I wanted to get the Jewish viewpoint on the Bible . . . and then branched into history." An entire year of the course was spent on the Holocaust, he said, "and I just had so much inside of me, I had to get it out."

The paintings have been

exhibited at Temple Shalom of West Essex in Cedar Grove and at the Judeo-Christian Conference held recently at Mt. St. Dominic Academy in Caldwell where Fr. Spanburgh teaches "the Old Testament from a Jewish viewpoint."

The exhibit is free to travel, says the priest who is anxious to display it with the idea, "Here's a Christian who wants to make a statement . . . We are brothers."

Father Spanburgh says he finds the Jewish culture and religion "among the most beautiful in the world," and American Jewish history he terms "fantastic."

The paintings, 12 gouaches and one large oil, have a poster-like quality with their strong, bright tones. One, of a four-year old boy studying, won a first place prize at the West Essex Art Association's sidewalk show

last year. Another, depicting the famed scholar and teacher, Dr. Janus Kurczak, leading children from an orphanage into the Ghetto, may someday hang in the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel, which has indicated interest in owning the work.

The paintings represent several years' work on days off from Parish duties. The priest is a self-taught painter and his earlier work is in the style of Andrew Wyeth, he says.

A complete departure is a large abstraction in oils based on a rock song, "I Used to Be A King," which he plans to exhibit in a local show this year.

Father Spanburgh has written and illustrated a children's book to be published soon. "Little Jackie" is the story of a palm tree that talks and ultimately becomes a table in a temple in the Holy Land.

Young people figure strongly in the priest's paintings, as they do in his parish work. Father Spanburgh teaches second, third and fourth graders at St. Catherine's School, in addition to a daily class at Mt. St. Dominic's.

Close to getting his M.A. in Jewish Religion from Hebrew Union College, the priest says he reads everything on the subject and wants "to study more."

He also would like "to get a course going locally . . . to teach Judaism to Christians . . . to make them realize the oneness" of the two faiths, said the priest who stresses "Christ's Jewishness" in his classes.

"God's covenant is forever . . . We are all called to the covenant, to the teachings of Moses. If people understood this, we could never have another holocaust," Father Spanburgh believes. "We find from the Old Testament our common calling is to practice this and teach it."



HASSIDIC BOYS, are portrayed in this gouache by Father Spanburgh.



LEADING THE CHILDREN. Famed scholar and teacher, Dr. Janus Kurczak is portrayed in this painting, one of the series on the Holocaust.



PAINTS SERIES. The Rev. Leonard P. Spanburgh shows one of his paintings, this one of a rabbi teaching the children.

Photos By  
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