

C-1539 Transcription

Statement approving Billy Graham's denunciation of Christian  
proselytizing of Jews. 1973.

M1:

"I believe God has always had a special relationship with the Jewish people. In my evangelistic efforts, I have never felt called to single out the Jews as Jews. Just as Judaism frowns on proselytizing that is coercive, or that seeks to commit men against their will, so do I."

Those words were written and just issued to the press by Dr. Billy Graham. When you consider the fact that Dr. Graham is the leading evangelist in the nation, and probably in the world today, they assume unprecedented importance.

Dr. Graham returned recently from a trip throughout sections of the United States and became concerned about reports over growing acts of psychological harassment, deception, and intimidation carried out by fervent young evangelists against Jewish young people on public high school and college campuses. In addition, there were episodes of disruption of Jewish religious services by campus Crusade for Christ types as is the recent case of Portland, Oregon and Dr. Graham became troubled

about the deteriorating effect of such incidents on Christian-Jewish relations.

At the request of Billy Graham, I visited with him recently at his lovely mountaintop home in Montreat, North Carolina, and we spent three hours together reviewing virtually every aspect of relationships between Christians and Jews here and abroad.

Finally Dr. Graham decided on his own initiative to issue his statement clarifying for the first time publically his opposition to proselytizing the Jewish community, his commitment to American pluralism in which all religious and racial groups are full partners, and his conviction that Judaism, as he told me, possesses a covenant from God which is eternal, forever, and not subject to abrogation.

Dr. Graham makes an important distinction between conversion and proselytization which I find sensible. Conversion involves an act of private conscience. Proselytization calls for a concerted strategy to undermine the religious commitments of another group. In an open democratic society, conversion is inevitable and is a two-way traffic between Christians who become Jews and individual Jews who become Christians. The proselytization

against an entire group is absolutely off-limits and impermissible, Billy Graham declares.

Dr. Graham has also taken firm positions in the past condemning anti-Semitism, and he has been a strong supporter of Israel on the basis of deep Biblical conviction and also has been extremely helpful to the cause of Soviet Jews.

Based on his most recent statement on the permanent value of Judaism, and other positive convictions he shared with me during our meeting in Montreat, I am persuaded that Dr. Graham is destined to make a fundamental and lasting contribution to the improvement of Jewish-Christian understanding that may well become a historic turning point in relations between evangelical Christians and Jews. This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

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