

CD-1064 Transcription

Discusses Jewish-Christian relations on "Religion in the News"

(Paulist Communications). undated.

JOHN MULHALL: Paulist Communications, Religion in the News,  
Program #291.

MARC TANENBAUM: Key '73, despite some controversy and  
unfortunate publicity, became an occasion in which many  
Christian leaders sought to come to terms with the reality  
of the faith and the people of Israel, and to develop an  
adequate theological understanding of that, the same time  
it became an occasion for Jews to think more deeply about  
the inadequate Jewish theology of Christians and  
Christianity. So I'd say on the whole, despite the  
confusions, it provided an occasion for some quite  
significant clarification of a basic issue in the context  
of American society.

MULHALL: This is Reverend Mulhall of the Paulist Fathers  
reporting for Religion in the News. Key '73 was an  
interdenominational effort of Christian churches which  
dealt with the problems of evangelization in the [01:00]  
modern world. It was a springboard for much ecumenical  
cooperation between these Christian churches. However, it  
also proved to be a stimulant for cooperation and common

research between Christian and non-Christian religious groups, especially efforts between Catholics and Protestants, and members of the Jewish faith. Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum is a leading spokesman for American Judaism. As head of the American Jewish Committee, Rabbi Tanenbaum spoke with us concerning recent developments in Jewish-Christian relations. He cited, for example, some effects of recent theological findings.

TANENBAUM: Well, one of them is the fact that Jesus was so much a Jew, that you really cannot understand his life, his teaching, his education, his nurture, and his ministry, without taking into account how deeply rooted he was in the Pharisaic tradition of the intertestamental period. Now that must say something to Christians, as it [02:00] says something to Jews. Christians, obviously, cannot retain any anti-Semitic notions in any logical way, still have a commitment to Jesus the Jew as Lord and Savior. That contradiction in terms ultimately must be faced, because were Jesus to be present to day, and were he have to face anti-Semitism among some Christians, it's obvious he would regard them as hypocrites and unbelievers. So that's one of the implications of it.

From the Jewish side, there's a recognition of the degree to which Jesus remained very close to the normative universal Judaism of first century Palestine. And so, we must look at the historic Jesus as being someone who incorporated something quite precious in the tradition of Judaism, and it must be reexamined afresh.

MULHALL: Are you saying, therefore, that there has been a significant development [03:00] in the Jewish attitude toward Christ?

TANENBAUM: I think there's a significant development in terms of synthesizing the knowledge we have in a rabbinic reading of the synoptic gospels, which gives us a much clearer picture about the historic Jesus as a teacher, as a rabbi, as a miracle worker. We know, for example, from our own Jewish studies, that there were many miracle workers in intertestamental period. Jesus was very much part and parcel of that community which sought to heal people. So I think there has been a growth in the understanding of Jesus of Nazareth as a historic personality, as a Jew of first century Palestine Judaism.

MULHALL: Part of the key to improved human relations in the future lies in our system of education. Textbooks, for instance, have always reflected social prejudices and biases. In recent years, we have seen movements to remove

slanted statements about women, blacks, [04:00] and members of certain ethnic groups from our supposedly "objective" textbooks. Ridding the books of such prejudicial treatment could contribute to the elimination of similar prejudices in society. The American Jewish Committee has been working with Catholics and Protestants, and their own Jewish educators to improve this situation. Rabbi Tanenbaum offered some insights into their efforts.

TANENBAUM: We have carried out -- that is my own group, the American Jewish Committee -- literally pioneered in this work, as far back as the 1930s, we began a series of parallel textbook studies with Saint Louis University, which undertook a series of self-examination of textbooks in the Catholic community. We did a series of studies with Protestant scholars that were published by Yale Divinity School, and we've conducted a series of studies at Dropsie University of Jewish textbooks in terms of what Jews teach about Christians, people of other [05:00] religious communities, racial, ethnic minorities here and abroad. We've all been engaged in a common effort to try to close the gap between our professions of love and justice, and the way in which we practice or fail to practice that in our teaching materials. It is of some significance that as a result of these three sets of textbook studies, important

changes, improvements have taken place, in the Catholic, the Protestant, and the Jewish materials. For example now, in Israel, a whole series of pamphlets have been introduced, used in the public school system of Israel, teaching for the first time in 1900 years church history, something about the historic Jesus, the early Church, Christian traditions and doctrine. In this country, we have produced for Reform Jewish high schools a book which is an introduction in comparative religion in which there is a major section on Catholicism and Protestantism which have been approved by Catholic and [06:00] Protestant authorities. That too is unprecedented.

So I think what is happening is that in the pluralism of American society, and in the pluralism of the world community, as we have come to recognize that in order to live together meaningfully, we have to know each other as persons, as communities, and not as stereotypes. That's leading to a very positive and creative response in each of our faith communities, and I'm very gratified by the beginning of the response in all of our communities.

MULHALL: Jerusalem abounds in perhaps more religious tradition than any other city in the world. Preserving the individual traditions that are represented has prompted suggestions to

internationalize the city. Such a movement could have a detrimental effect on some of the Jewish characteristics of Jerusalem. The Catholic Church has recently taken a position with regard to preserving the religious traditions. Rabbi Tanenbaum explained this position, and commented on some difficulties that may arise.

TANENBAUM: Essentially, the Vatican's policy, as we have been informed, is that it [07:00] does not seek in any way, shape, or form to return to the situation in 1947, when the internationalization of the City of Jerusalem was proposed. All that the Holy See is asking for today is that the status of the holy places be given some international [patent?], some international treaty, which will assure that the authority of the holy places will remain under the particular community to which the holy places have some meaning. That is to say, Christians will have an international guarantee that all Christian holy places will be administered and supervised by Christian authorities; similarly Muslim, as well as Jewish holy places.

Of course, what that will mean is essentially giving legal status to what exists already *de facto*. The holy places in Jerusalem and elsewhere are conducted already by Christian authorities, [08:00] as Muslim holy places are supervised

and administered by Muslim authorities, especially from Jordan. So, it's a matter of moving to a higher level of public recognition of the status of the holy places, and I know from my own negotiations with Vatican authorities, and members of the foreign ministry of Israel, that this will not be a terribly complicated problem.

There will be, in all candor, an intra-Christian problem, which will have to be resolved, and intra-Muslim problem that will have to be resolved. Christian authorities are not agreed among themselves as to who should have control over the holy places. The Greek Orthodox Patriarch in Jerusalem and the Armenian Patriarch, who owns something like 75% of the real estate of the holy places in Israel, insists that nothing can be done without their playing a central role in controlling and administering the holy places. And they're somewhat, quite frankly, put out that Israel has been negotiating [09:00] with Rome, as it were, behind their back, and they now insist that negotiations must go through their front offices. And so, Christian authorities will have to work this out as an ecumenical problem. Once they have resolved it, I have no question that they will have the international guarantee which

Israel and the Vatican have been talking about, literally in a matter of days.

MULHALL: It is impossible to talk about Jewish-Christian relations without discussing the political turmoil in the Middle East. In November 1973, the Catholic bishops of the United States released a statement dealing with the right of the State of Israel to exist, and the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination. We spoke with Rabbi Tanenbaum about this statement and about the prospects for peace in the Middle East.

TANENBAUM: I think it was a good statement, a very helpful effort. It was extremely balanced; it was moderate; it was a serious analytic statement of the complexity of the problems in the Middle East, and in that sense, I think it was [10:00] a constructive contribution. The statement, you will recall, began as its first basic position, an understanding that the Roman Catholic bishops in the United States support the right of the State of Israel to exist, to be free of harassment and threats of intimidation and annihilation. Its second point was to acknowledge the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination, as well as to some form of redemption of the terrible plight of Palestinian refugees.



Well, there isn't an aspect of that that the Jewish community will not agree to. The general approach is one of reconciliation, and that has been a position that we in the American Jewish Committee have taken now for years. We believe that Jews and Christians have an obligation together not to polarization the situation in the Middle East, or in this country, for that matter, but must undertake seriously the obligation [11:00] to reconcile conflicting parties to try to find a common ground so that we can advance the cause of peace and justice for all of the people in that area. But presupposed in that is an acceptance on the part of all nations, and all peoples, to the right to exist as sovereign nation states which self-determination for each valid community there. And in that sense, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States has ratified that approach, and in that sense I think all of us welcome that as a very helpful statement leading forward to an atmosphere of mutual understanding and mutual coexistence.

MULHALL: Someone has said that there is no just solution possible to the problems in Palestine. Would you agree with this rather pessimistic outlook or not?

TANENBAUM: I have a kind of basic hope that grows out of my biblical faith and my prophetic faith, which says that God

renews his wonders every day. That is [12:00] to say, I think we see now that a determined effort, skillful attention to try to bring about an easing of conflict, a recognition that one requires patience, and one must, with great care be sensitive to all interests, can lead to a positive result. The disengagement between forces of Egypt and Israel were unthinkable several months ago. Well it's now happening. The conversations are being speculated about between Jordan and Israel, I think they will happen. Eventually, conversations will take place between Syria and Israel. Little by little, the pieces of that mosaic will be put together. It will take time; it will not be dramatic or flashy. But if that's the way in which peace has to be brought about, then I'm all for that kind of patient, deliberate negotiation to bring about that result that all of us devoutly hope for.

MULHALL: We've been discussing recent [13:00] developments in Jewish-Christian relations with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee. For further information on this issue, write to, "Religion in the News," Program #291, Paulist Communications, Box 1057, Pacific Palisades, California, 90272. "Religion in the News" explores significant developments in theology, ecumenism, and the religious dimensions of social issues. Opinions expressed

are not necessarily those of the producers, or of this station. This is Reverend John Mulhall.

END OF AUDIO FILE