



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 2, Folder 22, "The Passover and Proselytizing", 17 April 1971.



April 17, 1971

WINS RELIGION COMMENTARY
RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM* OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
"THE PASSOVER AND PROSELYTIZING"

The controversy over the television program, The Passover, prepared by the American Board of Missions to the Jews, has resulted in some confusions and tensions which ought not to go unattended. While Jewish individuals and organizations did protest against the misleading nature of the program, it needs to be made clear that there was no Jewish suppression nor efforts at censorship of the telecast. After making a careful check, this commentator is satisfied that the decision not to show the program was made entirely by the TV stations' management who sought to comply with the normal Federal Communications Commission regulations which require that programs must be "in the public interest."

Why was The Passover program considered to be not in the public interest? In the first instance, it contained errors of theological and historical fact, misrepresented the Jewish tradition, and therefore misled the public. To use the Kol Nidre prayer of Yom Kippur as liturgical music for a Passover seder is to perpetrate the ludicrous. To pretend to a television audience that this was an authentic Jewish

* Rabbi Tanenbaum, who is National Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, presents a weekly religion commentary over WINS-Westinghouse Broadcasting System.

Passover ritual while allowing an actor to portray a traditional Jewish head of the household who mispronounced and stumbled over elementary Hebrew prayers is to border on an insult to the Jewish public.

But the Jewish objections were based on an even more fundamental consideration, namely that of the proselytizing approach to Judaism. To uncover the deep roots of Christianity in Judaism is not to deny Christianity; rather its effects are to deepen and enrich the Christian's self-understanding through recovery of his or her origins. To portray the Passover, and indeed all the concepts and traditions of Judaism solely or primarily as preparation for fulfillment in Christianity, as this television show does, is for the daughter faith to deny her mother autonomy and the right to independent existence.

In a time when major Christian institutions have repudiated proselytizing as offensive to them, when leading Catholic and Protestant scholars have rediscovered Judaism as a living faith of permanent value, and have come to understand Jews in their own terms and not just as candidates for conversion, the proselytizing efforts of the American Board of Missions to the Jews appear dated, anachronistic, and not in the public interest of anybody.