

Preserving American Jewish History

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

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 2, Folder 29, "Do You Know What Hurts Me?", February 1972.





The opinions expressed in this magazine are those of the authors and do not reflect necessarily the viewpoints of the editor or ALCM. It was with much distress that I received the latest edition of Event magazine published by the American Lutheran Church Men. It is ludicrous to think that the magazine is taking a new approach it is the same old line that we are getting from almost every house organ of the church today.

Under no circumstances would I recommend the magazine to anyone under its present format. The objection is not the issues that are discussed, but the one-sided point of view that is represented. We all are exposed everyday to the voluminous tirades of the news media, and to have a church magazine give it to us again is unnecessary. . . . Under the banner of relevancy you can get away with almost anything today except, of course, presenting the alternative

> (Rev.) James Corgee Long Island, New York

to the left (Berrigan) philosophy.

I'm one of the "pseudo-Christians" the letter writer from Tucson, Arizona (December issue), has the ability to judge; if such judgment is possible. Apparently I am not a "truly dedicated Christian" in his view either as I believe *Event* is one of the top religious publications today. It is often unpleasant and even painful to look in depth at many of the problems our churches have ignored for too long.

My husband and I feel Event has such great value that we sent a gift subscription to our son in Texas. Does that make us all "pseudo-Christians"?

Isn't it a comfort to know that when our lives end, we shall be judged by God and not our fellow humans? Until such time: Right on *Event* and may you continue to challenge us "pseudo-Christians" in the hope that we shall become more Christ-like even if we don't measure up as fellow Christians in the eyes of some.

> (Mrs.) Earl Rodine Des Moines, Iowa

## letters

One emphasis in *Event* that should be much more underscored is preparation for underground Christianity. *Event* freely criticizes our Establishment. But competent observers admit the likelihood that within the next two to ten years our country will be taken over by atheistic revolution. What are we Christians doing to prepare for survival of the faith in Christ when the government closes our churches? What should we do?

#### Marjorie G. Zimmerman San Antonio, Texas

After becoming acquainted with your magazine through the adult discussions at our church, I am presently subscribing, and I am beginning to see how the Christian church can have a positive, although provocative, influence on modern society. A few years ago I had serious doubts, but if the thoughts and ideals reflected in Event magazine are any reflection as to the direction our church is moving to establish a positive theological outlook to the current problems, then my doubts are completely erased.

I am a senior in high school, and believe I may safely assume that your publication will serve as a direct scenario for the action of idealistic youth involved in the American Lutheran Church. It is definitely a positive action, and I believe, the will of God. I fear, however, that many members of the church, unfortunately, are steeped with the notion that God's mission is isolated to the boundaries of Ethiopia, Madagascar, or the Philippine Islands, and not within the boundaries of our United States. I commend you in your efforts and hope that readers who are ministers will make Event available for their congregations, especially youth groups.

> David Anderson Northfield, Minnesota

Hasidic rabbi, renowned for his piety and compassion, was unexpectedly confronted one day by one of his devoted, youthful disciples in their house of prayer and study. In a burst of feeling, the disciple exclaimed, "My master, I love you!"

The ancient teacher slowly looked up from his • books and then asked his fervent disciple, "Do you know what hurts me, my son?"

The young man was baffled. Composing himself, he stuttered, "I don't understand your question, Rabbi. I am trying to tell you how much you mean to me and you confuse me with strange questions."

"My question to you is not at all strange or irrelevant," the Hasidic rabbi stated. "It is the very soul of understanding love and compassion in our tradition. For if you do not know what hurts me, how can you truly love me?"

If Jews and Christians want to consider seriously their mutual relationships, it is not sufficient that they declare to one another generalized sentiments of reciprocal regard. Genuine caring between groups, as between individuals, presupposes a willingness to enter into the life situation of the other, and to be present with concern and support at the moment when the other person or group is hurting.

As human beings, Christians and Jews share a universal agenda. In a growing interdependent "global city," they are both concerned about eliminating wars and establishing peace; about overcoming racial injustices and ending the scourges of poverty, illiteracy, and disease; about ecology and preserving the quality of life; about nation-building and economic development in the Third World; about closing the gap between the "have" and the "have-not" nations (20 percent of the world's population who live in the predominantly white, Western world still control 70 percent of the world's wealth); about reordering our national priorities.

This universal agenda links together Christians and Jews as citizens and as neighbors. That linkage, I would argue, would be inconceivable without a basic commitment to the "Judeo-Christian" value system which orients Jews and Christians in a special, distinctive way toward the universe. While Judaism and Christianity obviously differ in their respective interpretations of Sacred Scriptures, the biblical ground of these monotheistic faiths unite their adherents in a theology of creation which affirms the unity of the human family under the sovereignty of a transcendent Creator-God; a shared reverence for the prophets of Israel who require justice and righteousness and therefore impose an obligation of respect for the dignity of every person and of building a society based on caring and compassion. They also share common

# Do You Know What What Hurts Me?

### Marc Tanenbaum

approaches to a theology of redemption which conditions Jews and Christians to a messianic view of history and thereby requires active participation in shaping purposefully the events of history so that the kingdom of God on earth—a redeemed world freed of hatred, war, and bloodshed—may ultimately be realized by the universal fraternity of the people of God.

The truth of the matter is, however, that humanists and ethical culturists, even Marxists, share in this universal agenda, albeit the ground of their values has been secularized, and most no longer recognize nor acknowledge their indebtedness to their biblical-prophetic sources which shaped decisively Western civilization. From this point of view, Judaism and Christianity have succeeded far better than they have been aware. Their biblical values have become blended imperceptibly into the cultural wallpaper of Western society which now takes for granted ("co-opted" is the current word for it) the revolutionary contributions of ethical monotheism. In turn, the universalization of the lewish-Christian agenda has had the paradoxical effect of weakening the sense of special vocation of both Christians and Jews and, consequently, has eroded the conviction that their relationship to one another has any further special importance.

But here two crucial points must be made. The first is that universal value systems that are cut off from a vital relationship with their particularized sources and origins have tended to wither and collapse. That is precisely what happened to the "oukemene"—the ecumenical empire of Alexander the Great and his followers—whose Hellenistic civilization lost vital, nourishing contact with the human realities and dynamisms of the Greek city-states. It became a "cut-flower" civilization, an abstract society, and its culture and social fruits died for lack of continuous nurture.

In many ways that is what is happening to the "civic religion" of America, which is becoming an idolatrous caricature of a living, authentic



Rabbi Tanenbaum explains the Passover to Hugh Downs, host of NBC-TV's Today Show. biblical religion. A vital Judaism and Christianity whose prophetic impulses are in good working order ought to subject to continuous judgment and constructive criticism these tendencies to manipulate religious symbols for the apotheosizing of distorted nationalism and the "American way of life" as the objects of ultimate loyalty and veneration.

The decline of that lively prophetic consciousness, which at its best convicted as inadequate all self-worship of ego and group and required the loyalty of a faithful people to certain minimal ethical and spiritual norms ("commandments" or "laws"), is nowhere more grotesquely to be seen today than in the widespread and pervasive paganism, hedonism, and self-indulgence of our consumer society, "the people of plenty." How to reverse that new paganism and to restore the sense of self-transcendence and of biblical stewardship of material goods for service to all members of the human family—especially the poor and the deprived—ought to be a high priority on the universal agenda of Jews and Christians today.

Not only would the restoring of such an alliance between Christians and Jews in opposing these antibiblical tendencies help both communities cease taking each other for granted at the cost of their mutual disadvantage, but it would also restore to Judaism and Christianity that authentic vocation of sensitizing and humanizing society, the building of world and national community based on mutual concern and reciprocal trust—which is what the covenanted community of Israel was all about in its truest purposes.

The second point that needs to be made about present-day Jewish-Christian relations is that each community of faith not only participates in the universal agenda but also has its own "particular" agenda that is valid and legitimate in its own terms. Jewish-Christians relations today are crucially determined by the way and to the degree to which we listen to each other's particular agenda and support one another actively when the particular claims of the other do not violate one's own principles.

Thus, for example, the Catholic agenda includes such particular issues as government aid to parochial schools; and public morality positions on abortion, divorce, and birth control. The Protestant agenda involves such concerns as developing a Protestant theological consensus that would bring some order out of the confusion that issues from the death-of-God school to evangelicalism; the racial crisis in the Protestant churches which is the unique scene of racial difficulties since some 17 million of the nation's 22 million blacks are identified in some way with the Protestant community; and ecumenism in all its tendencies and countertendencies, since Protestantism, to its credit, took the first initiatives and provided the earliest leadership in launching the ecumenical movement.

The Jewish agenda, in its particularity, is concerned about the security and survival of the people and the State of Israel who play such a central and dynamic role in the Jewish religion and in Jewish cultural identity; the achievement of the human rights of the 3 million Jews in the Soviet Union; the liberation from oppression of Jews in Arab countries, especially Syria, who suffer from torture and denial of the right to emigrate; the new forms of virulent anti-Semitism now being fostered as an article of political policy by the Soviet Union, East European Communist parties, and their Arab allies (see "Jews under Communism," by Paul Lendvasi, Commentary magazine, December 1971); and the urgent question of Jewish education of our young people who are the basis of any Jewish future.

The Catholic has a right to expect Protestants and Jews, if they are genuine allies, to try to understand the magnitude of the education crisis the Catholic people face. While no one who is deeply committed to the separation of church and state (as this writer is) should be expected to compromise that fundamental position on which the democratic experiment pivots, Catholics do have a moral right to expect that their partners in dialogue search out with them positive ways of alleviating their school crisis, for the simple and selfevident reason that all Americans have a basic stake in the quality education of some 5 million American children who happen to be Catholic (and of some 60,000 Jewish children who attend Orthodox day schools; and of Protestant children in primarily Lutheran parochial schools).

imilarly, Protestants have a right to expect that their ecumenical allies demonstrate empathy and support in meeting the vital needs of their particular agenda, and not to stand aloof in self-righteous smugness, muttering pleasurably over "the theological nervous breakdown of Protestantism," (as some non-Protestants have recently done), or the decline of "WASPism," the latest form of bigoted ethnic stereotyping. Catholics and Jews have a vested interest in the constructive renewal and reform of the Protestant ethos because "the ecumenical moderates" of American Protestantism (to use Martin Marty's term) created those conceptions and practices which made possible pluralism, dialogue, and religious liberty-the foundation stones of an open, voluntary, democratic society.



By the same token, the Jewish community has a moral right to expect that Catholics and Protestants who take seriously their Jewish partners go beyond the conventional pieties and sentimentalities of Christian "charity" and seek genuinely to understand what hurts the Jewish people today. Having lost a third of their flesh-and-blood family in the Nazi holocaust just twenty-five years ago, Jews are not being irrational, hysterical, or hyper-sensitive when they call upon Christian allies, who claim to be "branches grafted on to the olive tree of Israel" (Romans 9 to 11), to take an unequivocal stand against those Arab leaders who in May 1967 were threatening "the final solution" of nearly 3 million Jews now living in Israel, or against those Soviet leaders who are engaged in the religious and cultural extinction of Judaism through

ROSH HASHANAH, traditionally regarded as the first day of Creation, marks the beginning of the Ten Days of Penitence. A shofar, or ram's horn, is blown, a symbol of God's summons to the people for self-judgment, self-improvement, and atonement. The days of penitence are devoted to prayer, solemn festivities, and rest from work. The period ends with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, which is the holiest and most solemn day in the Jewish religion. (RNS photo) forced assimilation of Jews who are being denied elementary rights of religious self-determination and of emigration.

Any Christian who truly knows his Jewish neighbors must surely realize that the Jewish people are opposed to the cold war, desire détente between the superpowers, and, above all, pray and yearn for shalom, peace, which is the very name of the God of Israel and the God of all the nations. They want peace and justice not only for themselves, but for all people, including the Christian and Muslim peoples in the entire Middle East. But it is a false consciousness and a defective univeralism that pursues a universal peace that requires the sacrifice of any particular group or its vital interests. Ultimately, the Jewish-Christian dialogue will make its greatest contribution when it manages to articulate the vision and to create the living relationships that make possible the establishment of authentic human community without compromise of the essential differences and claims to truth and value that Christians and Jews, and all historic groups, legitimately embody. For that is the vision of the people of Israel which is as old and as new as King Solomon's prayer of dedication of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, "Hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to thee for; that all people of the earth may know thy name, to fear thee, as do thy people Israel; and that they may know that his house which I have builded, is called by thy name....That all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that there is none else." (1 Kings 8:43, 60).

Rabbi Tannenbaum is national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee.

### For Thought

1. The author compares Judaism and Christianity favorably and then proceeds to contrast both with the "civic religion" of America. What is his purpose? Can it be said that the "authentic vocation" of Christianity is the "sensitizing and humanizing society, the building of world and national community based on mutual concern and reciprocal trust"?

2. Has the author projected your "particular" Christian interests? How far can the Christian go in "affirming" Jewish interest without denying the interests of Arab Christians? Arab Muslims?

3. What impressed you most about this article? Least? How would you characterize the author? Could he be a friend? Or does he threaten you? One house serving Two Faiths

This house of worship is shared by two congregations who have entered into a Covenant of Brotherhood. It has been architecturally designed to serve as a synagogue on the Sabbath and Jewish holy days and as a church on Sunday and days of Christian observance.

Together the Village Presbyterian Church and the Brotherhood Synagogue engage in community actiutiles to foster better understanding and cooperation. These activities are carried on through the Brotherbood Council without compromise to the religious conscience or the established traditions of the two congregations.

This program of sharing and working togethee was begun in 1954 and represents our effort to bring about a world of peace and brotherhood



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