



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 30, "Jewish-Christian Relations and the Future of America", 2 November 1972.



November 2, 1972

ELECTION REFLECTIONS:  
"Jewish-Christian Relations  
and the Future of America"

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

Just how important for America are the relationships between Christians and Jews?

If you take a look at the voting results of the 1972 Presidential election, you will have a pretty good insight into the practical consequences for our nation of the state of health of Jewish-Christian relations.

*It is evident,*  
~~As of this writing, it appears~~ that President Nixon ~~will~~ receive a substantial percentage <sup>(32%)</sup> of the votes of the American Jewish community. Some observers estimate <sup>d/</sup> that he ~~will~~ receive <sup>d/</sup> just about double the number of Jewish votes that he tallied in the 1968 election, a record high proportion of Jewish voters for the Republican party. Consistently over the past decades, Jewish citizens have voted overwhelmingly for the Democratic party, based on a deep-seated Jewish commitment to liberal and internationalist values and ideals. Thus, in the 1968 Presidential election Jews gave a higher proportion of their votes (88%) to Senator Hubert Humphrey than did the Puerto Ricans, even though the substantially higher socio-economic status of the Jewish community should have led to a more conservative class voting pattern.

How does one explain this turn of events and what are its implications for the social and political future of America?

Numerous explanations are being offered, and among the more obvious ones are some such as these: President Nixon deliberately courted the Jewish voters by providing substantial economic and military aid for the State of Israel thereby allaying the anxieties of the Jewish people over the security of Israel. He also supported the human rights of the 3,000,000 Jews of the Soviet Union, including their right to emigrate to Israel and elsewhere which is an emotionally-charged, high priority concern among most American Jews. He also demonstrated a concrete concern for the job security of thousands of middle-class Jews (and others), especially in the federal, state and municipal civil services and in education who feel that the introduction of a "quota system" would be directly at the expense of their livelihoods. And so on and so forth.

I have no doubt that these factors played a vital role in the effective wooing of the enlarged number of Jewish voters into the Republican camp <sup>past election</sup> this year, but that is far from an adequate explanation. From conversations with hundreds of Jews from every class and status in American life, I am persuaded that a very substantial number voted not so much for President Nixon as against Senator George McGovern. And here I am not speaking about personalities, because in many ways Senator McGovern's prophetic passion especially against the Vietnam war and the Watergate

scandal made him an appealing figure as a latter-day Isaiah or Amos to a great many Jews. In fact, a number of Jewish religious and communal leaders signed a full-page ad in The New York Times a week before the election supporting McGovern for his stand protesting the moral outrage of that incredible political espionage.

It was the fact that Senator McGovern was the foremost spokesman in our nation today of the liberal Protestant social gospel ethos that ironically, I believe, triggered off the profound ambivalence among many in the Jewish community that finally resulted in so many Jews withholding their votes from him.

As contrasted with the evangelical ethos that President Nixon has embraced and articulated, the liberal Protestant social gospel ethos reacted against the pietism, private salvation and otherworldly emphases of evangelicalism and insisted that the Gospel requires a commitment to social justice, to redemptive action in history, and to reconciliation between man and his fellow-man. That liberal Protestant world-view was clearly far more congruent with the Biblical-Rabbinic world-view of Judaism than was that of privatist-apocalyptic

theology of evangelicalism.

That theological compatibility led many Jews to assume that they shared almost inevitably strong common interests with liberal Protestants. Indeed, as religious historians have repeatedly informed us, the liberal Protestant leaders and churches broke with the "Evangelical Empire" concept that claimed that America is "a Christian nation," and that advocated instead a pluralist vision of America that supported religious liberty and dialogue. On a theological level, it was liberal Protestant scholarship that provided much of the leadership that articulated a new Christian understanding of Judaism as a living faith of permanent value and truth to the Jewish people, and not just as a passing phase substituted by the "new Israel" of Christianity. Indeed, liberal Protestants were among the first to abandon proselytization which reduced Jews to being solely candidates for conversion. They were also the first to undertake the revision of Sunday School textbooks and church education teaching materials as a major step in removing the theological basis for anti-Semitism in Christian pedagogy.

And on a social-political level, liberal Protestants and Jews formed the backbone of the coalition in the civil rights struggle in the 1960s, and in virtually every major effort to

combat racism, overcome poverty, enlarge economic development domestically and in the third world.

But exactly there is the crisis point between liberal Protestants and Jews. Given the deep kinship in theological and social orientations between liberal Protestants and Jews, it was natural that most Jews had developed certain expectations about liberal Protestant attitudes and behavior toward Jewish interests. Side by side with the universal agenda which Jews share with liberal Protestants, there is a particular Jewish agenda whose pressing priorities are: preserving the security of the State of Israel, the liberation of Soviet Jewry, the relief from oppression of Jews in Arab countries, combatting anti-Semitism in the United States and abroad, and preserving the job security of middle-class Jews while not hurting the equal opportunities of blacks and other deprived minorities.

With the exception of the Soviet Jewry issue, the liberal Protestant community failed their Jewish neighbors on virtually every Jewish priority concern. Liberal Protestants, including Methodists, found it possible to support practically every new nation in the third world, except Israel. Liberal Protestant leaders chilled my blood when as recently as 1970 they told me unblinkingly, face-to-face, "The right of Israel to exist is still an open question." The right of Chad, Dahomey, Zambia, Zaire, etc. to exist was unqualified and absolute, but Israel's

existence had to be defended and justified every other day by Jews to liberal Protestants. How do I explain that to my Jewish constituency to whom Israel is the only reliable refuge after the Nazi holocaust trauma?

In the dozens of dialogues between Christians and Jews since June, 1967, the one issue that obsessed liberal Protestants was that of the plight of the Arab refugees, always articulated with the implication that Israel uniquely or solely was responsible for their hapless condition. Far more Protestant ink and passion have been spent on Palestine refugees than on any other single refugee problem in the world. Hardly ever did liberal Protestants voice a word of compassion or concern for the nearly 750,000 Jews who were driven out of Arab countries, whose total property and capital wealth were appropriated by Arab governments. Not a flicker of "Christian charity" for Jewish refugees; not a word of advocacy for compensation and reparations for Jews from Arab countries. And that is not past history. Read the latest brochures prepared by the Near East Council of Churches distributed by Church World Service in recent weeks to all the churches of America and you will understand how one-sided and grotesquely unfair is the role of liberal Protestantism in relation to Israel and the Jewish community.

Add to this the fact that not a single Protestant denomination has a single person working full-time at seeking to

develop relationships with the Jewish community--in contrast to the Roman Catholic community's Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish relations--and you get the picture of liberal Protestantism's stance toward the Jews as Jews perceive<sup>d</sup> it in November, 1972.

Double-standards, one-sidedness, moralism, indifference and hostility--these are the ingredients of the Jewish-Christian stew cooked by the several headquarters of liberal Protestantism. And that sour diet fed to the Jewish community by mainline Protestant leadership since June, 1967 has resulted in a widespread Jewish conviction that the liberal Protestant community simply cannot be counted on as friends or allies on the crucial issues that affect Jewish survival and continuity.

The breakdown of that trust in the liberal Protestant ethos and its symbolic exponent was demonstrated in voting booths around the nation as Jews fought against their ideological intuitions and pulled the Republican lever, most of them for the first time in their lives.

The problem of the breakdown of that trust on the part of Jews toward liberal Protestants is of fundamental importance to the future of our country. Our society desperately needs a major reordering of its national priorities in order to begin to treat seriously the urgent human needs of our cities and its

deprived peoples. How will that reordering take place unless there develops strong and effective coalitions of like-minded people who will become the constituents in every city and state for meaningful social change? Given the conservative political shifts in our nation, the ranks of allies for such coalitions grow thinner and thinner, and that means that the nation itself can no longer afford the drifting apart and even alienation between the former natural allies of the social justice coalitions, liberal Protestants and Jews.

There are still solid theological and ideological grounds on which to try to rebuild something of that liberal Protestant-Jewish coalition. But somebody, somewhere in the liberal Protestant society is going to have to show some genuine interest in wanting to repair the bridges between themselves and the Jewish community, and it is going to take more than resolutions and pious political statements. The task ahead is nothing more nor less than that of rebuilding from the ground up, deed by deed, action by action, ~~of~~ the new edifice of Jewish-Christian relations whose foundation-stones will need be authentic concern, caring, and support for those matters on which the very lives of our peoples rest.

---

Rabbi Tanenbaum is the national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee, and is widely regarded as a leading figure in the advancement of Jewish-Christian understanding. He was the only rabbi present at the Vatican Council

during the deliberations that led to the adoption of the Conciliar Declaration on Non-Christian Religions. Rabbi Tanenbaum is presently the co-secretary of a joint Vatican-International Jewish Consultative committee, and of a similar liaison body with the World Council of Churches.

