



# 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 34, "Key '73 - An Interim Report" [draft], 19 April 1973.

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KEY '73 -- AN INTERIM REPORT

Key '73, the unprecedented nationwide ecumenical campaign designed "to call the continent to Christ" and "to share with every person in the North American continent the gospel of Jesus Christ," launched--in addition to a variety of evangelistic programs and activities--a significant dialogue within the American religious community. One aspect of this dialogue was intra-Christian, with various individuals and church groups expressing different viewpoints on the meaning of evangelism and who was--and who was not--appropriate targets for conversion. One aspect of it was Christian-Jewish, as Jewish leaders sought clarification from Christians on the implications of the provocative Key '73 slogan for American pluralism and Christian-Jewish relations. And one aspect of it was intra-Jewish, with some spirited exchanges regarding the impact of intensified Christian evangelism on the future of Jewry, the Jewish role in America, and relations with Christians. While this report will touch upon all three areas, it will focus in particular upon the impact of Key '73 on Jewish-Christian relations.

Key '73 is a coordinated effort involving some 140 Protestant denominational and other church groups, and an estimated 45 Roman Catholic dioceses. Among the participating denominations, there is strong support from Baptist, Methodist and Lutheran groups, as well as from agencies such as the American Bible Society, the Billy

Graham Evangelistic Association, the Campus Crusade for Christ, Faith and Work and the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. The Key '73 central committee represents each participating group. The United Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church withheld approval of Key '73 at the national level, but allowed participation by individual congregations and clergy. In a similar vein, the Roman Catholic Church left the matter of participation to individual churches or dioceses.

While Key '73 was officially launched with the showing, on January 6 and 7, of the film Faith in Action on 200 television stations throughout the United States, plus full Canadian coverage, a great deal of planning had preceded it. One of the leading participants in Key '73, the Campus Crusade for Christ, sponsored its own conference, Explo '72, in Dallas in June of 1972, with intensive workshop preparation in evangelism for the forthcoming effort. As envisioned by its planners, Key '73 will sponsor an enormous range of evangelical activities, including prayer and Bible reading meetings, home visits, rallies in churches and other places, and distribution of materials.

#### Jewish concerns

Even before the official launching of Key '73, some Jewish spokesmen began to express concern regarding the implications of the



movement for Jewish existence in America. Was the Jewish community to be considered a target for conversion? Most of the mainstream Protestant denominations participating in Key '73 did not maintain a special missionary program directed to the Jewish community, but some of the participating groups, such as the Campus Crusade, were known to aggressively seek Jewish converts on college campuses. It was feared, moreover, that certain independent missionary groups whose efforts were solely directed to Jews--such as the American Board of Missions to the Jews and its offshoot, Jews for Jesus--while not themselves associated with Key '73, would ride the coat-tails of the evangelistic campaign to further their own programs of proselytizing among Jews.

Writing in December, 1972, Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, national director of interreligious affairs of the American Jewish Committee, raised the question of Key '73's attitude toward Jews and Judaism as an opportunity for achieving mutual understanding and reciprocal respect between Christians and Jews:

"The year-long evangelical campaign, Key '73, scheduled to begin in January, could well become an historic turning point in relations between Evangelical Christians and Jews of the magnitude of Vatican Council II, provided it is used as an opportunity to clarify Christian recognition of Jews and Judaism as valid sources of truth rather than as objects of conversion.

"Christian leaders, including Evangelical leaders, have a valid theological alternative to proselytizing which has

already been accepted by substantial numbers of recognized Catholic and Protestant theologians and Biblical scholars, namely, that the Covenant of Sinai is permanent, and that Christianity must see itself not in terms of substitution, but rather in terms of being a complementary Covenant to the Covenant of Israel."

A related concern was whether Key '73's objective "to raise an overarching Christian canopy in North America" was a return to the idea of "Christian America" and what this meant for the civic and cultural role of Jews and other non-Christians in the United States.

As these questions were raised in both private and public forums, Christians responded in varying ways.



Some, including Key 73 leaders, confronted the questions and issues raised by Jewish colleagues head-on, and replied unequivocally that they considered the Jewish community off-limits to Christian evangelizing. Others, while they could not abandon the hope of finding Jewish converts, firmly rejected coercive or harrassing ~~harrasing~~ approaches, and affirmed the supreme value of free choice and free conscience. A number publicly condemned excesses committed by over-zealous groups or individuals. Several addressed themselves to the question of a "Christian nation." These responses are documented below.

#### Jews Should Not Be Converted

Among the most forthright ~~disavowing~~ statements disavowing the intent to convert Jews was one issued by the executive committee of the Key 73 task force of the Southern California-Arizona Conference of the United Methodist Church, and signed by Ralph B. Johnson, chairman of the task force. It said:

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Another Key 73 official, the Rev. Joe Hale of Nashville, wrote:

"Key 73 was organized by Christians wanting to share a personal meaning in faith with those who seek no faith. We have never been interested in cornering people who have a meaningful faith and trying to persuade them."

In similar vein, the Rev. Charles L. Eastman, associated with the North Miami, Florida, Key 73 and minister of the First Congregational Church, wrote a letter to the rabbis in his area, in which he stated:



Similar sentiments were expressed by Governor Rebin Askew, honorary chairman of the Florida Key 73 campaign. "When I accepted," he reported to the St. Petersburg Times (Feb.17,1973) "I made it very clear that I thought it should be an evangelistic effort to reach the unchurched and we should not proselytize to Jews ~~and~~ or Catholics."

## Jewish Community Not a Target

Not all Christians, of course, would or could deny the hope of ~~individual~~ Jewish conversions to Christianity. But a large number clearly and publicly stated that the Jewish community, as such, must not be singled out for any special efforts and must not be considered a target group for Christian evangelism. Several leaders used such public statements as the occasion to condemn coercive or manipulative approaches to Jews, and to repudiate anti-Semitism. In ~~several~~ communities, a number of Christian clergymen wrote ~~in~~ letters of ~~personal~~ assurance to rabbis who were personal friends, or Jewish communal leaders/expressing their commitment to the cause of continued Christian-Jewish ~~unity~~ cooperation. In one community — Springfield, Mass. — a group of 200 Protestant and Catholic clergy took out a full page adver-