



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 3, Folder 5, "Moral Aspects of America's Foreign Policy", 21
January 1976.



TESTIMONY BEFORE THE U. S. SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Presented by

RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM

NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF

AMERICAN JEWISH
INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
ARCHIVES

(Member of the 1980s Project Working Group on Human Rights of the Council on Foreign Relations; and Member of the Steering Committee of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration's Citizens Dialogue Programs)

On the Subject of

"MORAL ASPECTS OF AMERICA'S FOREIGN POLICY"

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 21, 1976

U. S. SENATE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, D. C.

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Mr. Chairman and Distinguished members of the U. S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee,

My name is Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum. I serve as National Director of Interreligious Affairs of the American Jewish Committee, a major human relations agency of the Jewish community. I am grateful, Mr. Chairman, for the privilege of your invitation to testify here today together with eminent leaders and friends from the Roman Catholic, Protestant, Greek Orthodox, and Black Church communities. The views that I present are my own, although I should like to think that they find concurrence among many in the Jewish community.

The American Jewish Committee was established in 1906, in the wake of pogroms in Czarist Russia, to protect the lives and rights of Jews in the United States and abroad. Basic to its philosophy is the conviction that the denial of justice or equal opportunity to any group threatens the rights of all. To further this concept, our national headquarters, the Institute of Human Relations, has been developed as a center for research and social action in the field of inter-group relations between the various religious, racial, and ethnic bodies in the United States and abroad. In addition to a national membership drawn from every major city in the United States, we maintain offices in Europe, Latin America, the Middle East (Israel), and have correspondents in parts of Asia and Africa.

The American Jewish Committee has been committed from its earliest days to the ideals of the promotion of peace based on

the right to self-determination, co-existence, mutual respect between peoples and nations, and constructive collaboration between the nations and peoples of the earth in service of our common human welfare. In particular, we have sought to make a contribution to the advancement of international human rights, that is, to the idea that it is desirable and feasible to promulgate universal standards of human rights and to establish institutions or procedures for implementing them. In addition, we have pioneered in a program of religious and general education designed to uproot the sources of group hatred found in negative or hostile stereotypes that frequently feed religious bigotry and political-ideological fanaticism, the explosive chemistry which is responsible for so much of the religious-ethnic conflicts that tragically pockmark virtually every continent of the globe.

These convictions and actions derive primarily from:

a) the moral and ethnical value system of Judaism as a religious civilization, and b) the American democratic ethos. I should now like to say a few words about these value assumptions which constitute the frame of reference for the subsequent comments I wish to make about several foreign policy issues that confront the American people and other members of the human family.

A - MORAL AND ETHICAL VALUES AND IDEALS OF JUDAISM

Neither the Bible nor Rabbinic Judaism has a word for "ethics". A small volume in the Mishnah often referred to as the "Ethics of the Fathers" - because it contains much ethical instruction - is en-

titled in Hebrew merely "The Chapters of the Fathers." Ethics is not conceived apart from religion, so that it is included in whatever expression the Bible and the Talmud use for religion. Ethics is part and parcel of "the way of life" of Judaism.

That Jewish "way of life" has its origins in the experience of the Divine Presence in the midst of the decisive events of the Exodus and of Sinai, events which have altered the entire course of human history. The children of Israel experienced the reality of the Lord of history through His involvement in their liberation from physical oppression, persecution, massacre, and injustices as "slaves unto Pharaoh in Egypt". To Pharaoh, who was worshipped as a Divine emperor and who was the source of law, never its servant, the Israelite slaves were regarded as chattel, "the untouchables" of ancient Egypt.

At Sinai, the Israelites had a transforming experience of Divine Revelation as moral will which was ratified by an everlasting Covenant. Henceforth, the Israelites are perceived by God to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." What an extraordinary Divine-human scenario! Yesterday, they were slaves, the outcasts of history, now an entire people are stamped with the dignity of priesthood and holiness, and are set on the course of history with a messianic task of redemption in society and through history until the coming of the Kingdom.

Israel's religion, Prof. David Flusser asserts, was a break-

through in human consciousness. The God of Israel initiated a new era in the history of mankind, introducing a new concept of justice - which is the central message of His revelation - an uncompromising moral law, and an original social order to be established paradigmatically in the Holy Land of Palestine,¹ conceived in this justice. This postulate of individual and social justice was not to be limited to Israel only. The Creator of the universe postulates this justice for all His human creatures, it was incumbent on all the peoples of the world.

The concept of justice which emerges from the Hebrew Bible is not just the regimen of mighty men - the Bible does not identify God on the side of Pharaoh and his imperium! It stresses that God cares for the poor and unprotected, for the orphan, the widow and the stranger. The basis of social justice was not to be external power and might, but the reverence of God and obedience to His moral will.

To understand the idea of justice in Israel, we must bear in mind the Biblical teaching that the human being is created in the image of God, that each human life is sacred and of infinite worth. In consequence, a human being cannot be treated as a chattel, or an object to be disposed of for someone's program or project or ideology, but must be treated as a personality. Every human being is the

1. (See The Holy Year and Its Origins in the Jewish Jubilee Year, by this writer, published by the Vatican Office for the Holy Year, 1975, Vatican City).

possessor of the right-to-life, dignity and honor, and the fruits of his or her labor.

Justice is respect for the personality of others and their inalienable rights, even as injustice is the most flagrant manifestation of disrespect for the personality of others. Judaism requires that human personality be respected in every human being - in the female prisoner of war, in the delinquent, even in the criminal condemned to death. The supreme importance of the human being in the economy of the Universe is expressed in this Rabbinic teaching "Man (the human being) was first created as a single individual to teach the lesson that whoever destroys one life, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had destroyed a whole world, and whoever saves one life, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had saved a whole world." (Sanhedrin 4 5).

However, justice is more than mere abstention from injuring our fellow human beings. "The work of justice is peace, and the effect thereof quietness and confidence forever." (Isaiah 32:17). It is a positive conception, and includes economic well-being, intellectual and spiritual growth, philanthropy, and every endeavor that will enable human beings to realize the highest and best in their natures.

The conditions for that self-realization require active efforts to bring about the final disappearance of injustice and oppression, which as represented in the Jewish High Holiday liturgy, are the

goals of human history. "And may all wickedness be consumed as a flame and may evil rule be removed from the earth," declare the Rosh Hashonah prayers.

And finally, the stability, as well as the happiness of a community, can only be assured when it rests upon a foundation of peace. In the absence of peace there can be neither prosperity nor well-being. "Peace is equal in worth to everything," declare the Rabbis (Sifra). And they add, "Beloved is peace since the benedictions only conclude with the hope of peace," thus teaching that the blessings even of the High Priest are of no avail unless accompanied by peace (Numbers Rabbah 11.7.)

While the Prophets of Israel and the Rabbis believed that God intended the nations to be at peace with one another, war was not prohibited. Jewish ethics would admit the duty to defend the higher values in human life by war if necessary. If Isaiah or Jeremiah had thought that yielding to the foreign invader would mean destruction to the religion or the people they valued, they would have urged resistance, with the same vigor that they demanded constantly the practice of righteousness in obedience to God's will. All the facts of Biblical and post-Biblical Judaism taken together lead to the conclusion that the ethical judgment on war, according to Judaism, is that it must be eradicated to make human life conform to the Divine rule, that those guilty of causing it commit a crime against humanity and a sin against God. However, they are

justified who, to defend the higher values in human life, resist, if necessary by war, an attack on them. The justification would extend to a nation's defense of its liberty. The spiritual values in the life of a nation, which include its historic distinctiveness, may justify it, when attacked or threatened to engage in war to save its independent existence. (See Dr. Israel Mattuck in his study of Jewish Ethics, particularly his chapter on "The Judgment on War.")

B - THE AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC ETHOS | A BICENTENNIAL PERSPECTIVE

As we mark the observance of the American Bicentennial, it will be helpful at this Senate hearing to recall that however angrily the Founding Fathers might argue over points of constitutional structure, they agreed unanimously that it would take more than a perfect plan of government to preserve ordered liberty. Something else was needed, some moral principle diffused among the people to strengthen the urge to peaceful obedience and hold the community on an even keel.

Theophilus Parsons wrote at the end of his great Essex Result,

"The spirit of a free Republican Constitution, or the moving power which should give it action ought to be political virtue, patriotism, and a just regard for the natural rights of mankind."

Samuel Adams spoke for all American thinkers when he reminded James Warren,

"We may look up to armies for our defense, but virtue is our best security. It is not possible that any state should long remain free where virtue is not supremely honored."

Another Bostonian added, "Liberty cannot be preserved if the manners of the people are corrupted, nor absolute monarchy introduced, where they are sincere."

The decade of crisis preceding the Revolution brought new popularity to the cult of virtue that had long held sway in the colonies. Revolutionary thinkers drew heavily on their colonial heritage in proclaiming virtue the essence of freedom. There was a widespread conviction that free government rested on a definite moral basis - a virtuous people. Conversely, the decay of a people's morals signaled the end of liberty and happiness. On no point in the whole range of political theory were Americans more thoroughly in accord.² Free government was in large part a problem in practical ethics.

Most of the ceaseless preaching about "the fatal effects of luxury to a free state" was directed at the mother country. This was especially true in the last months before independence, when men like Edward Bancroft began to argue that the "Effeminacy, luxury, and corruption which extend to all orders of men" in England would poison the youthful body of America unless it were to cut short its dependence.

Americans could launch a Republic with some hope of success, for it was the one form of government, John Adams pointed out, "whose principle and foundation is virtue."

2. The Political Thought of the American Revolution by Clinton Rossiter, Harvest Books.

In the process of exhorting one another to be brave, frugal, and honest, and of damning England as "that degenerate land," American writers worked out a well-rounded theory of the ethical basis of the government. In particular, they identified the essential public virtues, described the contrasting political fates of good men and bad, and recommended techniques for promoting virtue and discouraging vice.

In addition to approving all recognized Biblical (Jewish and Christian), Roman, and English virtues, Americans singled out several attitudes or traits of special consequence for a free republic:

First, the willingness to act morally without compulsion, to obey the laws of nature as interpreted by reason and the laws of man as established in consent,

Second, the love of liberty, the desire for the adventure and sacrifices of free government rather than the false security of tyranny;

Third, public spirit and patriotism, defined by a native in 1776 for the enlightenment of his fellow Virginians as "a disinterested attachment to the publick /sic/ good, exclusive and independent of all private and selfish interest;"

Fourth, official incorruptibility, a state of virtue saluted by Jefferson in The Summary View when he reminded George III that "the whole act of government consists in the art of being honest;" and

Fifth, industry and frugality, hard work and plain living, the only path to personal liberty and national independence. Special attention was devoted to the fifth of these qualities for industry and frugality were essential to the success of America's program of economic resistance.

The cultivation of these great public virtues - moral action without compulsion, love of liberty, public spirit, incorruptibility, and industry and frugality - was considered the first duty of a free people. Men and women who displayed these qualities were the raw material of liberty. Without such people, in low places as well as high, free government could not possibly exist. The fruits of virtue, for nations as well as men and women, were liberty, prosperity, and happiness, the fruits of corruption and luxury were tyranny, poverty and misery. "And as too great authority intoxicates and poisons kings, so luxury poisons a whole nation," Nathaniel Ames warned.

How to encourage virtue and thus "keep up the spirit of good government?" To this key question of political liberty, Americans replied. (a) hortatory religion, (b) sound education; (c) honest government, and (d) a simple economy.

A) RELIGION - The strain of piety in the philosophy of American life is evident in the appeal of the Declaration of Independence to "Nature's God," "the Creator," and "the Supreme Judge of the World." Few thinking lay people, whether believers like Samuel Adams or

skeptics like Benjamin Franklin, ever doubted the indispensability of organized religion in the preservation of public and private morality.

The practice of religion was as essential to virtue as was the practice of virtue to freedom. Religion helped put order in ordered liberty, especially by emphasizing the dependence of public morality on private virtue.

B) EDUCATION - The second means of promoting virtue was public and private education. Like their colonial forbears, the men and women of the Revolution considered the inculcation of morality one of the three or four basic purposes of all instruments of education.

C) HONEST GOVERNMENT - In the Revolutionary mind, natural law and virtue were closely identified. The Massachusetts Constitution reflected the deeply-held conviction that government was important as a promoter of virtues. Not only did it nourish morality indirectly by encouraging and protecting, and perhaps supporting, the instruments of religion and education; it was expected to make a number of direct contributions by:

a) Passing sumptuary laws "to discourage prodigality and extravagance, vain and expensive amusements and fantastic foppery, and to encourage the opposite virtues;"

b) Making proclamations from time to time of days "of public humiliation, fasting, and prayer."

c) Operating itself at the highest level of justice, virtue

and incorruptibility.

Preachers never tired of exhorting legislators and judges to be men of spotless integrity in both public and private dealings. Orators never tired of reminding the public that it should look for virtue before all other qualities in selecting candidates for public office.

D) SIMPLE ECONOMY - One influential group of Revolutionary thinkers asserted that the virtues necessary to maintain free government were more likely to flourish in an agrarian than in a manufacturing or commercial economy.

In sum, just as religion, education, government, and agriculture could raise the level of public and private morality, so morality could strengthen each of these great human undertakings. It was the business of political philosophers to discover the virtues that lead to free government, and the form of government that leads men and women to virtue.

II - SOME MORAL AMBIGUITIES

Like Israel of old, we were a messianic nation from our birth. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution defined the mission. We were born to exemplify the virtues of democracy and to extend the frontiers of the principles of self-government throughout the world

A sense of mission can be a fruitful source of discipline and inspiration. The substance and content of our national sense of mission, namely, the preservation and extension of democratic self-government, is more valid than other forms of national messianism. Indeed, Prof. Bayless Manning, writing in the January 1976 issue of Foreign Affairs on "Goals, Ideology, and Foreign Policy," makes precisely this point in discussing the conduct of foreign policy in the nation's "third century"

"No contemporary American can be unaware of the deficiencies, shortcomings and blind spots that still mar the social landscape of the United States today, and the painful slowness with which we have sometimes moved to correct these failings. But many Americans, especially younger ones, do need to remind themselves that, for all its blemishes, the United States stands in the forefront of the world in its commitment to the proposition that the individual human being should be free - free to think what he wants, write what he wishes, assemble as he will, read as his curiosity leads him, paint as his eye uniquely sees, worship as to him seems right, and espouse whatsoever political position he finds congenial, so long only as he accords those same privileges to his fellow citizens."

"The United States has been imbued with this spirit of individual liberty since its founding, and its institutions are imbued with it today. There is no doubt whatsoever in my mind that this urge for individual self-expression has ever been the ultimate revolutionary aspiration and always will be. In this sense, the United States remains the most progressive revolutionary society in the world."

Prof Manning concludes

"Whatever policy the United States may follow in economic matters, it is debatable whether the developing nations that have adopted central economic planning systems will ever welcome the return of fully free-market forces to their economies. But if America preserves at home its steadfast stand in favor of the claim of the free individual, and also continues to make progress in dealing with its own internal social inequities, the United States will eventually regain its moral leadership among the nations of the world - not by force of its economic power and its arms but by virtue of its ideological example as a society of free men."

While concurring with much that Prof. Manning stands for, it would be helpful to keep in mind continually something of the moral realism associated with the thinking of the late Prof. Reinhold Niebuhr. One of the moral hazards of a democracy, Dr. Niebuhr wrote, particularly with a strong sense of mission, is that it ascribed a purity of motive which no nation possesses, or for that matter all but saintly individuals lack. American foreign policy expressed the simple anti-imperialism which was a staple of our policy for a generation. It had the defect that it was blind to the moral ambiguity of the imperial enterprise, of the mixture of creative and exploitative purposes and consequences in the impingement of strong nations on weak ones. For a nation of great economic strength like ours was bound to express itself in economic penetration of weaker nations - a form of covert imperialism which permits the expression of power without too obviously contradicting original ideals.

Such nations are inclined to pretend that they have triumphed over the baser impulses - chiefly the will to power, political lust, and ambition - screened behind the ideal purposes with which our sense of mission has endowed us. The pretension of superior virtue of a

particularly powerful nation gives comfort to our Communist adversaries with their dogmatic anti-imperialism, more deceptive and simple than our own, and is bound to prove vexatious to even the friendliest and closer allies

While I believe democracy to be the ultimate norm of political organization, no better way can be found for chastening correctives to false messianic pretensions than by making every center of power responsible to the people whom it affects, by balancing subordinate centers with other centers of power to prevent injustice, and by denying immunity from criticism to any organ or mouthpiece of prestige or authority.

III - SOME APPLICATIONS OF MORAL VALUES TO CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY CONCERNS

ARMS RACE AND NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROLIFERATION .

The deep concern for upholding and preserving the preciousness of human life and for building a just and peaceful world community has at no time in human history been more seriously threatened than by the current spiraling arms race and insane proliferation of nuclear weapons. Following a study that I made of the rise in crime and the spread of violence and terrorism, accompanied by the staggering increase in international trade in arms and in nuclear installations, I found no more appropriate characterization of this period than that of "An Age of Terror" or an "Age of Violence". (See my paper, "Religion In An Age of Violence," delivered before the International Conference of Christians and Jews on the Nazi Holocaust in Hamburg, Germany, June 9-11, 1975).

Consider some representative data

In each of the 60 military conflicts since the end of World War II imported weapons were used almost exclusively, and those arms have brought not only violence and destruction but death to more than ten million people (The MIT Center for International Studies)

In 1973, \$240 billion were spent to train, equip and maintain armed forces. The international trade in non-nuclear arms now tops \$18 billion annually - up a from a mere \$300 million in 1952, and a jump of 550% since 1950. In fiscal 1975, the United States sold \$9.5 billion in military supplies to 71 countries, \$600 million worth more was sold through commercial channels and another \$600 million worth was given away.

The Soviet Union is second in international arms sales - \$39 billion since 1950, \$5.5 billion in 1974. France is third with a sale of \$3 billion to 80 nations, and Britain follows with \$1.5 billion.

In 1973, Third World nations imported \$7.7 billion. Impoverished India has doled out \$3 billion to the Soviet Union for arms in the past three years. Pakistan, scrimping to find \$250 million for a new fertilizer factory, spends at least that much on weapons annually.

Today there are 426 nuclear power plants in 39 nations, a number of which would permit production of atomic bombs as well as electricity. The International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, according to the New York Times of Nov. 2, 1975, predicts "the installation of 356 nuclear generating stations in the third world by 1990."

Poor nations can be expected to obtain nuclear weapons as a by-product of the atomic power plants that many of them are now

building or contemplating, and it is quite conceivable that some may use these as instruments of blackmail to force the developed world to undertake a massive transfer of wealth to the poverty-stricken world.

Five arms control experts, writing in the Harvard magazine of Nov 1975, predict that some nuclear wars are likely to occur before this century's end as a direct result of bombs spreading around the world like an "epidemic disease." The proliferation of "peaceful" nuclear power only aggravates the danger because as MIT Political Scientist George Rathjens (formerly of the U. S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) writes, "by the end of the century there will be several thousand reactors around the world, each producing enough material to build a weapon a week."

The peril is compounded by the knowledge disclosed by Dr. Ted Taylor in his study, "Nuclear Theft," that an atomic weapon would not be impossible for a guerilla-group to construct with just over 13 pounds of plutonium. It is believed that more than 4,000 pounds of plutonium were shipped in the United States last year and nobody knows exactly how much of that material was lost in transit or production

I fully appreciate, and support in many ways, the argument made by Dr. Paul Nitze that "the United States take positive steps to maintain strategic stability and high-quality deterrence" as a means of assuring that the Soviet Union or an enemy is deterred from believing he could profit from seeking a nuclear-war-winning capability or effectively use pressure tactics to get their way in a crisis situation (Foreign Affairs, January 1976.) Nor am I unmindful of the need and possibilities of controlling the defense budget through judicious

pruning of waste (Foreign Affairs, January 1976, "Controlling the Defense Budget," by Barry M. Blechman and Edward R. Fried.)

Given the "absolutely catastrophic nature of nuclear war," we must ask whether our Government and its allies have done enough to restrict their sales of nuclear reactors to unstable countries and to countries of uncertain political persuasion. Andrei Sakharov has proposed the creation of an international committee to investigate all nations, forbidding all bombs. Sen Hubert Humphrey has introduced a bill calling for Congress to share systematically in shaping policies guiding arms exports. We sincerely trust that Congress will help America finally to develop a rational approach to arms sales as well as to the intensification of universal disarmament measures. The very survival of the human family depends on such measures taken vigorously here and in concert with other nations.

POSTSCRIPT

If time allows, I should like to make some additional comments about the following issues:

- 1) Human Rights and Foreign Policy
- 2) Economic Justice. The New International Economic Order
- 3) The United Nations and UNESCO
- 4) Energy Independence
- 5) A Program for Global Education in Pluralism and Coexistence Between Nations and Peoples.