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

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 5, Folder 35, Tri-faith Dialogues statement [excerpts],
Undated.



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EXCERPTS FROM STATEMENT BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, NATIONAL DIRECTOR,
INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE.

A radical confrontation of the problem of the images and submerged attitudes that Catholics, Protestants, and Jews hold toward each other; a more sensitive and deeper use of the dialogue as an instrument to improve communication on the local and lay levels; and a more effective mobilization of interreligious social action programs are the major "new frontier" interreligious areas that will call for increased cooperation between the major faith communities during the coming decade.

While tri-faith dialogues usually are based on an examination of social justice issues and problems of pluralistic accommodation, the subterranean currents beneath these encounters most often turn up as theological or theologically-conditioned problems. Those social action practitioners who emphasize working together in the civic order and avoid or postpone confronting the religious icebergs beneath the surfaces may very well be creating more problems for interreligious cooperation than they are seeking to resolve. The profound and mounting interreligious conflicts over such public policy questions as religious practices in the public schools reveal that Americans have hardly begun to face up publicly to the theological and historical roots of the present-day Catholic perception of the Protestant, the Protestant perception of the Catholic, the Christian perception of the Jew, and the Jewish perception of the Christian.

The religious textbook studies conducted at St. Louis University, Yale Divinity School, and Dropsie College, which were inspired by the American Jewish Committee, is just now beginning to force out into the open a realization that social action positions that each of these groups take toward each other are crucially shaped by their respective faith perspectives. Thus, in a somewhat oversimplified formulation, these studies reveal that certain mainline Protestant denominations have been teaching in their church schools for decades that Catholicism is a conspiracy. Many Catholic textbooks have been teaching parochial school students that Protestantism is a heresy. Both Catholic and Protestant textbooks have been inculcating in their children a view that the Jews by virtue of their rejection of Jesus as the Messiah are

faithless and unredeemed. Jewish textbooks in many instances condition Jewish children to a view of the Christian as his persecutor throughout history.

To a very large extent, these underlying attitudes which Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish teaching systems communicate in their religious subcultures correspond remarkably to the way in which their members view each other in their public debates over the Supreme Court decision on prayer and Bible reading in the public schools, over federal aid to private education, Sunday closing laws, birth control, and similar issues.

The implication of this for social action it seems to me, is that a major "new frontier" in interreligious affairs for the next decade or so will be for each of the religious communities to assume responsibility for overcoming the distorted perceptions and images that each group prolongs about the other, in order that Catholic, Protestant and Jew can relate to each other in real human terms rather than through the inherited polemical myths of the past. Only until each religious community sheds its mask, and pretense, and enters emphatically into the fears, anxieties, hopes and needs of the other, will we be in a position to make religious pluralism a working reality rather than a verbal formula disguising our biases and resentments.

As these efforts become translated into reality through more affirmative portrayal of the Jew and Judaism in Christian teaching materials, liturgy, and publications, and indeed in the mind and the daily practices of the individual Christian, Jews themselves will be confronted with the inescapable moral obligation to face their own anti-Gentile and anti-Christian attitudes which are defensive and compensatory inheritances from their painful encounters with Christians. As Jews dig deeply into their histories they will find justification and precedent for a positive revision of their view of the Christian, even as they expect that the Christian has resources in his tradition that will enable him to reinterpret and revise his understanding of and relationship to the Jew in affirmative terms. And this area of revision of basic images and attitudes that Christian and Jew hold toward each other may well be one of the most decisive areas of concentration in the new frontier of social action for the major faith communities.