



# THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

*Preserving American Jewish History*

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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 15, Folder 8, Christians in Israel, 1977-1978.

memorandum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

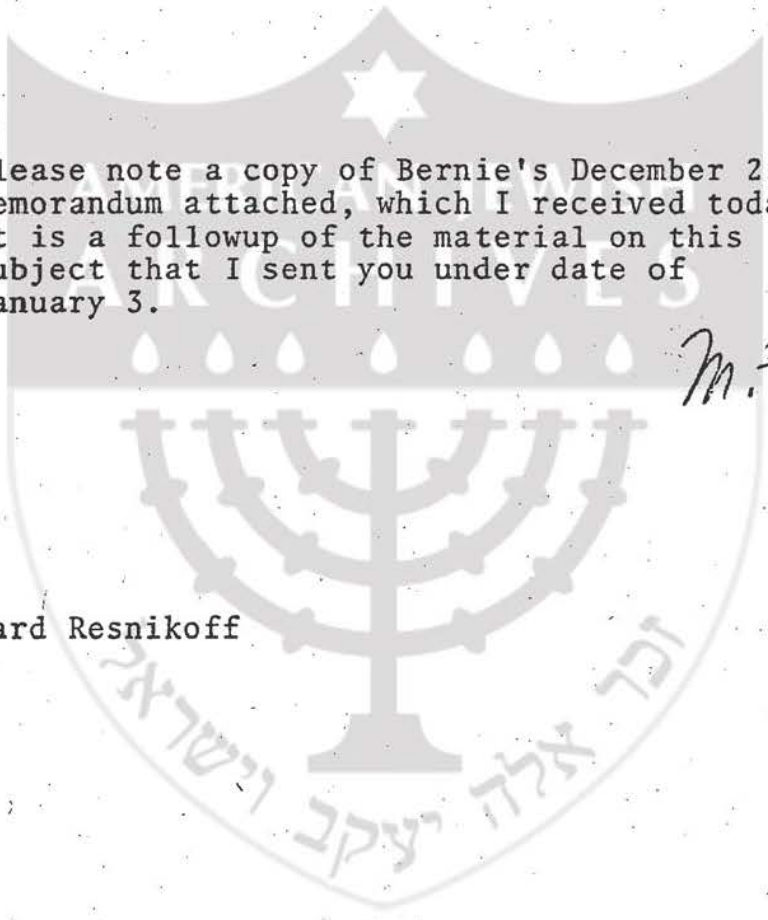
**date** 4 January 1978  
**to** Bert Gold George Gruen Marc Tanenbaum Mort Yarmon  
**from** Morris Fine  
**subject**

Please note a copy of Bernie's December 25 memorandum attached, which I received today. It is a followup of the material on this subject that I sent you under date of January 3.

M.F.

MF/ac  
Att.

cc: M. Bernard Resnikoff



JAN 4 1978

memorandum

## THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

**date** December 25, 1977  
**to** Morris Fine  
**from** M. Bernard Resnikoff  
**subject**

This is the third report, with more to follow, of inquiries and consultations regarding the proposed amendment to the penal code that would limit certain missionary activities.

Because of the way this matter is unfolding, and because you will be winding up with what is fairly a process record, please consider utilizing these reports as a case record in order to clarify for ourselves, with greater particularity, what is a proper intervention role for us in a legislative debate to revise the domestic law.

As previously reported, I had requested an appointment with the Director General for the Ministry of Religious Affairs to discuss the implications of the proposed amendment. He was amenable that such a conference include other people who would be similarly interested, and so I took the initiative of inviting along Joseph Emanuel of the Israel Interfaith Committee, David Clayman of the American Jewish Congress and Zeev Furst of the Anti-Defamation League.

All three gladly accepted the invitation; however, Zeev called me up the night before to say that he was under the weather and might not be able to attend: he didn't.

Meanwhile, in advance of the consultation, and in order to prepare for it, I had a telephone consultation with Knesset Member Shulamit Aloni who is, of course, against the bill and with whom I have a scheduled conference on the subject at the Knesset later this week. But, over the phone, she reviewed her deep-seated concern over the proposed bill, how it had to be submitted only by someone who still suffers from the Galut mentality, the inherent dangers to the invasion of privacy as the police would undertake to secure evidence and of the public relations consequence for Jews abroad. As a result, she urged me to send a telegram to M.K. David Glass (Mavdal), chairman of the Knesset law committee, requesting that no action be taken on the bill until some kind of determination is made as to its possible consequences for Jews abroad.

Armed with this information, the delegation call upon Director General Israel Lippel on Friday, December 23.

Lippel was frank enough to admit that internal administrative matters plus budgetary hearings have prevented him from getting too closely involved in the ramifications of the proposed law. But he did review for us, what we already knew, that the history of Jewish immigrants to this country includes attitudes and biases that cannot be ignored, that for many, a Christian is an anti-Semite and a missionary - either dormant or active.



Morris Fine  
December 25, 1977

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While he himself does not have the data, on the strength of which the bill was allegedly created, he imagined that such data could be collected.

He agreed that fighting missionaries could be largely an affair for the private sector and that general Jewish impressions about Christians in the country are based on misinformation.

I told him that, as far as the American Jewish Committee is concerned, we are not now for or against the bill; but that we are deeply interested in collecting the objective data on the basis of which the bill is supposedly based, and that we would also want to look into the question of whether or not there could be consequences for Jews in the Diaspora. Joseph Emanuel, on the other hand, announced that the Israel Interfaith Committee had taken a position and is now opposed to the bill. I utilized that moment to recall the proposal by Shulamit Aloni, without mentioning her name, for obvious reasons, and determined that both David Clayman and I would have difficulty, in the name of our respective organizations, asking the Knesset Law Committee to hold up passage of the bill. Joseph Emanuel, on the other hand, representing a membership organization of local citizens, felt free to send such a message, if it were decided to do so.

In the discussion that followed, and weighing the different options available, it was decided that Mr. Lippel would try to arrange for us an early consultation with Knesset Member David Glass and, at this writing, such a meeting is scheduled for this week.

MBR/jw



December 30, 1977

Morris Fine

M. Bernard Resnikoff

To give you a feeling as to what happens when the President of Israel formally receives the heads of the Christian communities on the occasion of the New Year, to which I was invited, I enclose copies of the addresses by the President as well as the Minister of Religious Affairs. As you can see, the speeches were prepared with such care that no controversial issues appeared.

MBR/jw

cc: Marc Tanenbaum ✓

Enclosed Addresses ✓



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF ISRAEL

לשכת נשיא המדינה

President Katzir's Address to the Heads of the  
Christian Communities  
December 29, 1977

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Honoured Guests,

Let me welcome all of you most cordially at this annual New Year Reception in my Residence. May my greetings and good wishes for the year 1978 be conveyed, through you, to the members of your communities and to the many thousands of Christian visitors who come on pilgrimages to the Land at this season.

It is most encouraging to learn from the words of the Minister of Religious Affairs and from your representation here today, how dynamically life and tradition go on within your respective communities. As you function side by side with other great religious traditions, you exemplify co-existence in diversity which is the key to peace among men.

In the composite society of this triply Holy City the challenges are unique and our responsibilities are weighty. Jerusalem is increasingly becoming a world centre for inter-faith encounter and religious learning, as indeed it should be. The dozens of conferences and study programs conducted here over the past year have created new bonds of an interreligious and international nature. It is especially gratifying to note the growing number of participants from countries in the Third World, several of which have no diplomatic relations with Israel.



Perhaps one of the most consistent and constructive forms of cooperation between Israel's different religious communities during this year has been their continuing aid, alongside the Government's, to the needy, the sick and the injured from the Christian villages of southern Lebanon. The plight of that country and the activities initiated at the Good Fence, our joint border, serve as a universal lesson in the agonies of war and the need of peace.

As we stand on the threshold of the Gregorian New Year, two weeks before the Julian New Year, there is a hope that binds us all. That hope is peace. The visit to this country of President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and the response it evoked in our two peoples, have emphasized the importance of positive human action. The desire for peace has been expressed not only in formal speeches by President Sadat and the Israel Government, but also in the joyful demonstrations of Israeli and Egyptian men, women and children on the streets of our cities. And the initiative has been carried further most effectively by Prime Minister Begin himself.

I trust that you, through your spiritual guidance, will contribute to the realization of the hope and the ideal, till, for the benefit of all men, true peace comes to this region where men first foresaw a world of peace and human understanding.

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לשכת שר הדתות

Address by the Minister of Religious Affairs  
to the Heads of the Christian Communities  
29 December 1977

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Mr President, Your Beatitude Patriarch Benedictos,  
Your Beatitude Patriarch Derderian, Heads of the Christian  
Communities, Director-General of the Ministry of Religious  
Affairs, Members of the Knesset, senior civil servants,  
honourable guests:

I am indeed glad of this opportunity to meet with  
all of the Heads of the Christian communities in Israel  
here at the President's Residence on the occasion of the  
New Year -- and, possibly, at the start of a new era in  
the Middle East.

It is a fitting moment to affirm once again the  
commitment of the Israel Government to uphold the religious  
freedom of each and every community and to foster mutual  
tolerance and respect among them and among the different  
religious groups in the Land. A major feature of this  
undertaking is the preservation of the status quo in the  
Holy Places, which is the responsibility of my Ministry.

During the past year, the Government has sought  
most diligently to promote, through its Ministry of  
Religious Affairs, the good relations that exist between  
us. We might mention, for instance, the excursion that  
was organised for representatives of the different  
Christian Churches to the "Good Fence" at our border with  
Lebanon, where they were able to see at first hand the



humanitarian activities being carried out there; or the study tours which have been conducted for young Christian seminarians in Israel. Likewise, in the context of the protection and maintenance of the Holy Places, let us, for example, point to the works of repair which we are carrying out in the Coenaculum and within the complex of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Such contacts and projects as these assuredly contribute to an atmosphere of trust and friendship.

It is a pleasure to note the manifold activities -- religious, educational and cultural -- in which your communities have engaged during the past year and which are the expression of their vitality and prosperity. Such was the appraisal of distinguished Church leaders who visited Israel and with whom we met during their stay. Further demonstration of a dynamic spiritual and religious life can be seen in the unprecedented numbers of faithful who came to Israel from all parts of the globe, on pilgrimage to the Holy Places.

My colleagues and I well appreciate the great spiritual and practical responsibilities incumbent upon the leaders of the Christian communities in Israel and wish to assure you of our sincere respect for the diligence and devotion with which you serve your communities, for their benefit and for that of the country.

May my sincere greetings for the New Year be carried through you to the members of your Churches in Israel and overseas. It is my earnest hope that the

cordial cooperation between us will continue to prosper and that together we might enhance the stature of religion.

May the coming year bring the supreme blessings of peace and brotherly love to all in our Land and to men of goodwill everywhere.

In the words of the traditional Jewish blessing:  
"May the old year and its ills end, and make way for the new year and its blessings".



MEMO from Gene Fisher

To Rabbi Tanenbaum

Date 1/5/78

☒ For your information

☐ For necessary action

☒ For your comment

☐ Please return

☐ As per your request

Remarks... This looks quite bad  
on the surface... Do you have  
any more information on it?  
Anything being done?.....



## Protestants in Israel Charge Bias

Special to The New York Times

TEL AVIV, Dec. 29—Protestant churches in Israel protested today against the enactment of a law making missionaries liable to five years' imprisonment if they offer material inducements to people to change their religion.

An emergency committee of the United Christian Council said in a telegram addressed to Prime Minister Menahem Begin that the law, enacted Tuesday, could be "misused in restricting religious liberty in Israel."

The law does not mention missionaries, but an explanatory note attached to the bill, which had been introduced by Rabbi Yehuda Meir Abramovitz of the ultra-orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party, said they were offering "huge sums of money" to "ensnare the souls" of the poor. It also said they tried to induce people to emigrate and soldiers to desert.

"None of the Christian communities in the country known to us engages in such practices," the council told Mr. Begin. But its chairman, Canon Naem Ateek of the Evangelical Episcopal Church in Haifa, said later at a news conference that "tourists might find a Jew and talk

to him about faith in Jesus and they might give more incentives."

The Rev. Henry Knight, an Anglican, said loose wording in the law could result in "an innocent act of charity given to a person who was interested in learning more about another faith landing the donor in court." He said he feared that troublemakers might try to induce churches to offer enticements and then report to the authorities.

Binyamin Halevi, the member who guided the measure through Parliament, said it applied both to Jewish and to Christian proselytizing. According to Israeli sources, some 500 Christians annually are converted to Judaism, often for purposes of marriage. Few Jews become Christians.

In their telegram, the Protestants said they had not been offered the courtesy of consultation, and had received no reply when they made representations. They said the bill had been "hastily pushed through Parliament during the Christmas period when Christians were busily engaged in preparing for and celebrating their major festival."

# Christian Missionaries in Israel See Discrimination Under New Law

2-14-78

Special to The New York Times

TEL AVIV, Feb. 13—An ice-cream vendor appeared on an Israeli television talk show recently to say that he would convert to Christianity to avoid going to jail for three years.

The vendor, Pinhas Golan, explained that he faced the sentence because he could not pay more than \$6,000 in fines for peddling without a permit. His appeals to the Government and to various institutions were in vain, he said, so in desperation he was taking up an offer by a Christian missionary to pay his fine and enable him and his family to settle abroad.

The incident focused new attention on an amendment to the penal code, adopted by Parliament in December, that makes it an offense punishable by five years' imprisonment to offer anyone material benefits to change his religion; accepting the offer is punishable by a three-year term.

The United Christian Council, an umbrella organization of Protestant churches and agencies, has been campaigning for repeal of the amendment, which is regarded as the start of a move to restrict the Christians, who number 5,000 to 6,000.

## Justification for Law Denied

After Mr. Golan's appearance on television, the Rev. Henry Knight, an Anglican who is a spokesman for the council, said that if the story were true the missionary concerned should be disciplined but that such cases did not justify what he described as a loosely worded measure.

The measure does not specify Christians. Its sponsor, Rabbi Yehuda Meir Abramowitz of the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Israel Party, has acknowledged that while he wanted a law prohibiting Christian proselytizing he settled for the limited legislation because he felt Parliament would not pass a more sweeping one.

The Christian Council, which includes Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans and Presbyterians, has protested the law in telegrams and petitions. Last week it addressed to Attorney General Aharon Barak a memorandum urging that he invite an independent international commission to investigate what led people in Israel to embrace Christianity, Judaism or Islam. Father Knight forecast that such an inquiry would find there are

pressures on people to convert to Judaism.

Israeli law requires both partners in a marriage to be of the same religion, and a substantial number of Israelis are said to have changed faith to wed; few Jews become Christians, according to Israeli sources, but 500 Christians a year convert to Judaism. Father Knight maintained that immigration and citizenship law gave Jews intrinsic privileges that might be construed as incentives to convert.

## Strong Criticism of Christians

The churchmen, in their memorandum, demanded that an apology be delivered in Parliament for "unfounded allegations and charges" said to have been made in debate on the amendment. Gideon Hausner of the Independent Liberals had said it could not be forgotten that for 2,000 years the Jewish community was reduced by conversions to Christianity, often under brutal coercion. Binyamin Halevy of the Democratic Movement for Change, a new political party, called missionaries "a cancer in the body of the nation." Some Orthodox deputies charged that missionaries "with unlimited means" had incited Israeli soldiers to desert their units and Jews to emigrate.

The churchmen, denying that they exploited poverty, inadequate housing or other privation to win converts, reaffirmed a joint declaration by the Christian communities, saying that "by discussion, talks and literature we seek to answer the inquiries by those who desire to obtain information about Christianity." They added: "We believe we cannot refuse to do so, because we must share with everyone the light and joy of our faith."

There has been no official response to the clergymen's protest, but Yisrael Lippe, Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, dismissed it, in reply to a query, as a tempest in a teapot. Asserting that the law was not antimissionary but antibribery, he said, "Christians can preach and convert all they want as long as they don't offer material benefits." While he acknowledged that the atmosphere in Israel did not favor large-scale conversion to Christianity, he observed that it was to the credit of Israeli democracy that Christians could preach here as they do.



AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE  
Foreign Affairs Department

AJC Efforts Regarding the New Israeli Law  
Prohibiting Certain Missionary Activities

During the past several weeks, the AJC Foreign Affairs Department in cooperation with the Interreligious Affairs Department has been actively and intensively involved in efforts to diffuse tensions created by a recent amendment to Israel's Penal Code. These efforts culminated in letters, on February 9, by AJC President Richard Maass to Israel Prime Minister Menahem Begin and Minister of Justice Shmuel Tamir. (Text of letter to Mr. Begin is attached.)

Under this so-called "anti-missionary" law, which is to go into effect as of April 1, 1978, a person using bribery or other material inducements to convert a person from his religion is liable to five years imprisonment or a IL50,000 fine. A person who receives or agrees to receive money or other material inducements in return for a promise to convert or to bring about the conversion of another would be liable to a less penalty of 3 years imprisonment or a IL30,000 fine.

Our Israel Office has been reporting to us on developments leading up to the enactment of the law, and the adverse reaction it has created within the Christian community in Israel.

The law itself does not mention missionaries, but an explanatory note attached to the amendment when it was introduced in the Knesset as a private member's bill by Rabbi Yehuda Meir Abramowitz, of the Orthodox Agudat Israel Party, stated that missionary organizations were using various means, including unlimited financial resources to "entrap souls" particularly among the poor to convert them from their religion and to induce them to emigrate. It also stated that missionary organizations have been active in the Israeli army in an attempt to influence soldiers to desert their units.

An emergency committee of the United Christian Council, a group of Protestant Churches in Israel, has protested the enactment of the law in a telegram to Prime Minister Menahem Begin, stated that it could be "misused in restricting religious liberty in Israel." The Protestants also complained that they had not been consulted, had not received replies to their communications, and that the bill had been "hastily pushed through Parliament during the Christmas period when Christians were busily engaged in preparing for and celebrating their major festival."

Dr. M. Bernard Resnikoff, director of AJC's Israel Office, both individually and in cooperation with the Israel Interfaith



Committee, contacted various government officials, including the Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, to obtain clarification of the draft law even before its passage and to point out the dangers it might produce in restricting religious liberties and in creating interfaith tensions in Israel and abroad. In addition, he has met with several Knesset members to obtain their views on the implications of the law.

Following a meeting with Knesset member Gideon Hausner, former Israeli Attorney General and the most prominent liberal legal authority to favor the amendment, Dr. Resnikoff reported that Hausner saw the law primarily as a legitimate deterrent to forced conversion, especially in view of the history of compulsory conversion of Jews throughout the ages. He views "enticement" as a form of force and hence a criminal offense. He did not believe that the law ruled out free discussion, persuasion, or even propaganda. In fact, by ruling out "undue" influence and extortion, Hausner felt that the law would permit interfaith discussion and the free exchange of ideas on substantive religious issues.

On the other hand, Knesset member Shulamit Aloni, leader of the Citizens Right Movement, was vehemently opposed to the new law. In view of the very limited number of confirmed cases of induced conversion that the proposed bill was intended to cover--four in 1974, nine in 1975 and four in 1976--Aloni stated that it was unnecessary to enact such controversial legislation which would only serve to exacerbate group antagonisms.

Dr. Resnikoff also met with Rabbi Abramowitz, the sponsor of the bill, who now stated that only the text of the law itself was pertinent and that the explanatory remarks he had attached to the amendment with regard to missionary activities should be ignored. He pointed out that Christians were not named in the text of the amendment. Dr. Resnikoff concluded that the rabbi seemed insensitive to the civil rights and intergroup relations issues involved.

Mr. David Glass, Chairman of the Knesset Law Committee and former director of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, informed Dr. Resnikoff that the Law Committee had dealt exclusively with the proposed legislation and had disassociated itself from the biased and even anti-Christian sentiments expressed by the Knesset member who had introduced the bill. Glass pointed out that his committee had caused the law to specify that only those who give a material benefit in order to convert others are guilty of a criminal offense. This should reduce the concern about the application of the law on those enjoying such benefits as free and innocent education, accepting an honor or the like. Mr. Glass challenged the right of Christians in Israel to be upset by the law, noting that very few countries offer religious denominations the privileges that Israel does in terms of tax exemptions, diplomatic status and other benefits. Nevertheless, he did acknowledge the need for a campaign of interpretation to the Christian community to allay their concerns.



Dr. Resnikoff was also engaged in day to day consultations with the American Embassy sharing with U.S. officials the substance of his own findings on the issue and helped arrange a meeting of a group of Protestant ministers, who had previously met with U.S. Ambassador Samuel Lewis, with the Chairman of the Knesset Law Committee.

The new "anti-conversion" law has also aroused serious concern among Christian leaders in the United States. The issue has been widely reported in the general press and has received adverse reaction in the Christian press particularly. The AJC's Inter-religious Affairs Department has received phone calls and letters from several Roman Catholic, Protestant and Evangelical leaders conveying their distress and concern over the passage of the law in Israel.

In his letters to Prime Minister Begin and Justice Minister Tamir on February 9, AJC President Richard Maass pointed out the concern of Christians in the United States, many of whom have been Israel's staunchest supporters. While noting AJC's moral offense at proselytization whose purpose is to undermine Judaism, the letters pointed out that the provisions of the new law lend themselves to interpretations which go beyond the intention of the legislators and appear aimed at intimidating the Christian community in Israel. Mr. Maass suggested that in view of the widespread concern over the law, Israeli government spokesmen should clarify the limited intent of this legislation and its application and reassure the Christian community of Israel's commitment to freedom of religion and to the full exercise of the rights of the Christian community in Israel.

Although there has not yet been an official response from the Israel Government to the churchmen's protest or to our letter, the New York Times reported on February 14 that in response to its reporter's query, Yisrael Lippel, Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, asserted that the law was not anti-missionary but only antibribery. "Christians can preach and convert all they want as long as they don't offer material benefits."

February 16, 1978

George E. Gruen and Marc Brandriss

## Poor Taste

It is very upsetting to a really born-again Christian when one picks up the daily newspaper and reads very anti-Jewish, anti-Israel "Letters to the Editors" by the Oldhams (March 1) and the like. But when their letters start appearing in our *Baptist Standard*, a paper published by born-again Bible-believing Christians, we have hit an all-time low in our Baptist work.

"I will bless them that bless thee and curse them that curse thee" thus saith the Lord. I believe this promise just as I do all of God's promises.

As born-again Hebrew Christians, we enjoy the *Baptist Standard* very much; but as believers, we are appalled by the lack of taste in printing anti-Semitic letters two weeks in a row.

Are we to have more? Who is the *Standard* trying to appease?

Pat and Ed Borofsky

Carrollton

*The Standard is not in the appeasing business, but it is in the informing business. The Oldham letter (March 1) was in response to the Avnon letter (Feb. 8). The issue in both letters concerned a new law which has been passed by the Israeli Knesset (parliament) which goes into effect April 1, 1978, and could place a hardship on Christian missionaries in Israel.*

*The law makes it a criminal offense to give money or something worth money with the intention of tempting another person to change his religion. The law is so broad that some fear even a gift of a Bible could be considered as a material inducement to conversion. (See story, P. 9)*

## Missionary Says

# Rights Guarantee Needed in Israel

In an unprecedented consultation between evangelical Protestant leaders and high government officials, Aharon Barak, attorney general of Israel, assured a delegation from the United Christian Council meeting in his office that a recent law regarding change of religion "applies in both letter and spirit to all men and all religions equally and without discrimination."

As he answered questions of the delegation, which included Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board representative, Robert L. Lindsey, Barak said the only aim of the law, passed by the Knesset (parliament) last December, is to prevent the giving of or the taking of material bribes to bring about the change of religion.

LINDSEY, Baptist leader in Israel for 34 years, pointed out in the March 9 meeting that even though the Christian community in Israel appreciates the assurances given by the attorney general to help prevent harassment and false accusations under the new law, Christians, as well as other religious minorities in Israel, are still without legal basis for protection since Israel has no written constitution.

"We are being defamed publicly, and we are helpless to change the myth held by 90 per cent of the Israeli public that Christians have unlimited sums of money which they use to bribe people to convert and then to leave the country," Lindsey said.

"Only the passage of a constitution with clauses similar to that of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteeing freedom of religion and thought can give us the protection we need," Lindsey stressed.

BARAK TOLD the delegation that he is presently involved in drafting a constitution containing such features and that he hopes the Knesset document will pass at the earliest possible time.

After the meeting, wire services reported, the Israeli minister of justice sent a letter to Richard Maass, president of the American Jewish Committee, stating, "There is no intention whatsoever on the part of the Israeli government to restrict in any way religious freedom of the Christian community or any other community in Israel."

Maass had protested that the "sweeping provisions" of the law appeared to be "intended to intimidate the Christian community."

Paul Swarr, general secretary of the Christian Council, said that although the meeting with the attorney general was positive, the council would continue to work for the repeal of the law which has the potential to limit Christian activity and endanger religious liberty. (BP)