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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 32, Folder 8, Jewish settlers in Jerusalem's Christian quarter, 1990.



ראש העירייה
رئيس البلدية
MAYOR OF JERUSALEM

May 13, 1990

His Eminence John Cardinal O'Connor
The Archbishop of New York

Your Eminence:

I received a copy of your article in Catholic New York which has also received wide media coverage here. I hope you will understand my decision to reply frankly.

You will not be surprised to learn that I was upset by your column which appeared after our meeting in New York, when I clarified not only my opinion of this stupid and reprehensible incident, but also the factual situation, assuring you that it is not in any way part of an anti-Christian policy of the Israeli government. The conspiracy syndrome demonstrated by the overreaction of the Christian leaders in Jerusalem is understandable, as they are under constant pressure and threats from the PLO and Moslem leadership of the 'uprising' to identify with their cause. In fact, the joint communique of the leaders of the Christian communities, which you so liberally quote, serves them as an alibi against these threats, threats which I witnessed myself when I called on the Greek Orthodox Patriarch to express my sympathy and solidarity.

What surprised me was that you chose to subscribe to this conspiracy syndrome in your column which will surely not help in our efforts to reinstate the understanding and harmony which have characterized relations between Jews and Christians in Jerusalem through the years.

There is already a great deal of misinformation current. Last night I met with a group of two hundred German Christians who had been convinced, before their arrival here, that what was under dispute was the Church of the Holy Sepulchre itself and not a derelict hospice which had been neglected by its church owners for decades. I am afraid that this is undoubtedly a misconception shared by many Christians throughout the world.

You know well the Israeli government's long record of respecting the rights of the Christian community in Jerusalem - but you make no mention of it. You make no mention of the fact that the Easter festivities, both of the western and eastern churches, were carried out in the most exemplary fashion. You also make no mention of the fact that for the holiday of Id el-Fitr, 50,000 Moslems prayed at the mosque on the Temple Mount, where Solomon's Temple had stood and where we, in a show of unprecedented magnanimity, decided that Jews would not even be permitted to pray in the open in deference to Moslem religious sensibilities. You never refer to the decision of the Israeli government already some years ago to return the Notre Dame Hotel which had



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been sold to the Hebrew University by the Assumptionist Fathers without the prior approval of the Vatican. The sale was entirely legal but we pressed the University to accede to the Vatican request to return the building, as we felt that it was important to the goodwill between the Christian and Jewish communities.

Let me remind you. Not one Christian voice was raised, not even in a whisper, when the Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives was vandalized for nineteen years, when Jewish gravestones were used for Jordanian legionnaire latrines. Perhaps that would have helped prevent the similar wave of anti-Semitic vandalism which today is happening in France and in many other countries.

There is no question that the action of the Jewish settlers was political, but I feel more and more strongly that politics is equally the motive behind a good deal of the reaction.

You quote Abe Foxman in your article; I am thus taking the liberty of enclosing his article which appeared in today's Jerusalem Post. I can only second his eloquent words.

I must conclude with the fact that beyond the one-sidedness of your article, I am personally deeply offended. Certainly you must also realize that it makes it much more difficult to carry out the assignment which you asked me to undertake.

Sincerely yours,

Teddy Koller

Encl.

O'CONNOR RIPS ISRAELI 'LAND-GRAB CONSPIRACY'

By LUCETTE LAGNADO

In his most stinging attack ever on Israel, John Cardinal O'Connor yesterday branded a move by Jewish settlers into the Christian quarter of Jerusalem's Old City "obscene."

And he issued a clear warning there are "perceptions by some" the move is "a signal of a conspiracy to grab lands all over Israel currently occupied by Christians."

The cardinal's sharp language, published in his weekly newspaper column, had Jewish leaders here stunned and reeling.

O'Connor even cited suggestions by "some people" that the Israelis are "speeding up . . . a design to make it virtually impossible for Christians to function anywhere in the land."

Cardinal brands Jewish settlement in Jerusalem's Christian quarter 'obscene'

"What has happened in Jerusalem is obscene," he said. "In my judgment, the Israeli government has acted reprehensibly."

O'Connor's remarks, which appear in his column in Catholic New York, a publication of the Catholic Archdiocese, were immediately denounced by Jewish leaders as "shocking" and "provocative."

The move by 150 Jewish settlers to a complex owned by the Greek Orthodox Church in the Old City's Christian quarter fueled widespread condemnations by U.S. Jewry, several Jewish leaders pointed out.

An Israeli court has since moved to evict most of the settlers.

Some Jewish officials predicted O'Connor's statements could have far-ranging repercussions, tearing apart Christians and Jews in both America and Israel.

Rabbi Fabian Schonfeld, secretary of the World Jewish Congress, said he was "shocked" and then all but accused the cardinal of mouthing classic anti-Semitic remarks.

"That [the East Jerusalem] move was unwise, I'd be the first one to agree," Schonfeld told The Post.

"But to speak of a 'conspiracy' almost sounds like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion," he added, allud-

ing to a classic anti-Semitic tract.

"I hope Cardinal O'Connor will find it possible to correct what he has written. There is no conspiracy. There never was a conspiracy."

O'Connor's "language is intemperate and inappropriate — the Cardinal knows there is no conspiracy," said Malcolm Hoenlein, executive director of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

Suggestions of an Israeli "conspiracy" against Christians "are certainly not a reflection of reality," he added.

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee, an expert on Jewish-Christian relations, expressed dismay over O'Connor's "provocative" language and issued a dire warning:

"That kind of language will



JOHN CARDINAL O'CONNOR
Stinging attack.

provoke some of the extreme elements in the Jewish community to call for a total break in Catholic-Jewish relations."

Elan Steinberg, director of the World Jewish Congress, said "O'Connor's comments have undermined the work of those of us who have striven so hard to improve Catholic-Jewish relations."

"He may well be throwing fire on a very tense situation," he added.

O'Connor could not be reached for comment. A spokesman said the column "speak[s] for itself."

April 24, '90

JEWISH SETTLERS IN JERUSALEM/CHRISTIAN QUARTER
GIVE ISRAEL'S ENEMIES MAJOR MORAL VICTORY

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

If Israel's Arab enemies had wanted to devise a global strategy for ~~isolating~~ isolating the Jewish State from world Christian public opinion, they could not have done it more effectively than did the 150 Orthodox Jewish settlers who occupied the Greek Orthodox St. John's Hospice in Jerusalem's Christian quarter.

During the past week, I spoke at length with some of the most prominent ~~Christian~~ leaders of the major Christian denominations - Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Evangelical, mainline Protestant. Without ~~any~~ exception, they expressed deep feelings ranging from "upset" to "outrage" over ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~settlers'~~ settlers' action.

The anger focused on what "the squatters" did, when they did it (during the highly sensitive Christian Holy Week), where they did it (in the established Christian quarter in East Jerusalem), and why they did it.

"We do not question the right of Jews to live in East Jerusalem," one Roman Catholic scholar, - a great ~~fix~~ friend of Israel and the Jewish people - said to me. "But this group cannot deny Christians the right to live in areas surrounding their holiest shrines."

The fact that elements in the Israeli government at first denied ~~(anything)~~ ^{anything} having to do with financial support for leasing the St. John's hospice, and then was forced to admit that key ministers were involved in the payment for the lease may well have far-reaching consequences for Israel's credibility. Mayor Teddy Kollek succeeded in building great confidence in the Christian (and some parts of the Muslim) world that Israel could be trusted to assure full freedom of religion to non-Jewish inhabitants.

This "hard-ball Jewish group" one Christian spokesman said, "has started an erosion of confidence in whether the Israeli Government can be trusted to assure the basic rights of the earlier 'status quo' agreements in a unified Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty."

Responsible Christian leaders are waiting to see if Israeli courts will resolve the issue in a just and peaceful manner. Were that not to happen, all of us will have our hands full trying to cope with the ~~hostile~~ hostile political and public opinion fall-out against Israel.

Robbi T. (with various comments to N.Y. etc)

April 26, 1990

ST. JOHN'S HOSPICE EPISODE IS NOT UNSALVAGEABLE

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

The most serious consequence of the ~~St.~~ St. John's hospice turmoil is that for the first time since 1967, it has raised doubts among major Christian - and American Jewish leaders as to whether Israel will continue to honor the established rights of Christians and Muslims to free access to their sacred shrines and holy places.

That is a predominant conclusion that has emerged from conversations that I have had last week with some of the foremost Christian leaders in the United States - Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Evangelical, and mainline Protestant. In differing ways, that is also a concern of top U.S. Jewish leaders.

St. John's hospice, the property of the Greek Orthodox Church, is clearly ~~not~~ neither a Christian shrine nor a holy place. Its proximity, however, to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre - the holiest place revered by more than a billion of the world's Christian population - has invested the take-over of the hospice by some 150 Orthodox Jews with powerful emotional and symbolic meanings.

The street violence, the armed guards, the tear-gassing of Christian patriarchs and bishops by Israeli troops - that was the image of the St. John's hospice event that was communicated ~~to the~~ by the media to the entire world. A number of key Christian leaders saw that episode as the beginning of a drive by "some extremist Jewish groups" to drive Christians out of the Christian quarter, in violation of the terms of "the status quo."

"We do not question the right of Jews to live anywhere in Jerusalem," said Dr. Eugene Fisher, executive secretary of the Commission on Catholic-Jewish relations of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. "But Christians cannot be denied the right to live around the Christian holy places."

Dr. Fisher, who is a long-standing and trusted friend of Israel and the Jewish people, said that the small Jewish group may have a legal, technical right to lease the hospice, but their action violates the spirit of "the status quo" and other established agreements.

The Roman Catholic scholar then drew a discomfiting analogy. "In some ways, the St. Johns hospice issue appears ^{to be} the Auschwitz convent issue in reverse." He explained that the Carmelite ~~nuns~~ ^{technical} nuns had a ~~legal~~ right to build their convent on the grounds of Auschwitz, but they were totally insensitive as to what that meant to the Jewish people. Enlightened Western Catholics, in dialogue with Jews, understood keenly what a symbolic affront that convent meant to the Jewish people, and finally prevailed on the nuns to agree to move to the new convent away from Auschwitz when it is completed.

The St. Johns hospice settlement is seen by the overwhelming majority of Christians as such a symbolic affront to Christian sensibilities, Dr. Fisher said.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of North and South America, Archbishop Iakovos, who is the foremost Orthodox Christian leader in the Western Hemisphere, was mostly critical of the role of Israeli governmental officials. The disclosure that an Israeli Ministry was secretly involved in laundering nearly two million dollars for the leasing of the Greek Orthodox property indicated that this was more than a "spontaneous" act on the part of yeshiva bachorim and their families.

"This is an episode of expropriation through machinations and deceptions," Archbishop Iakovos said. "The Israeli government's funding was undemocratic and an unfriendly act. It is seen as an act to occupy all of Jerusalem which is holy to Christians, Muslims, ~~and~~ as well as to Jews."

The Greek Orthodox patriarch's feelings assume particular importance among American Jews since he was the first Orthodox bishop to condemn publicly the United Nations resolution caricaturing Zionism as racism, and has pioneered with this writer in advancing Greek Orthodox-Jewish understanding.

With all of Israel's massive public relations problems, Mayor Teddy Kollek's genius in maintaining reasonable harmony between Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Jerusalem was perceived widely in the Western world as an oasis in interreligious co-existence. The continued assurance by the Jerusalem Municipality of uninhibited free access to all holy places - in daily fact as well as in law - may now begin to be seen by both Christians and Jews as starting to erode.

The Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, former president of the University of Notre Dame and probably the preeminent Catholic leader in the United States, was gentle but firm in his evaluation. "Jerusalem has been and is a collection of differing quarters, and there must be respect for each other's sensitivities. I can imagine what the reaction might be if fifty Christian families were moved into the Jewish quarter," he said.

Father Hesburgh, who serves on the Jerusalem Committee, said that "Teddy Kollek and loved is respected/for his achievement of good relations between the various religious-ethnic groups. I would advise my Israeli friends, Don't rattle the cage. You will be asking for big trouble."

The contrast between what has been perceived as Israel's democratic virtue in assuring religious pluralism and what appears to be an emerging violation of that tradition is troubling Jewish leaders as well as Christian spokesmen. Seymour Reich, the able president of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, put it ~~xxxxxxxx~~ directly, "The St. John's hospice episode blemishes an otherwise excellent record in ~~xxxxxx~~ Jerusalem of religious pluralism, tolerance, and free access to the holy sites. St. John's hospice is not a shrine, but the perception has been created, it is not the actuality, that access to a Christian shrine is being violated. In that perspective, Israel is failing to take into account the feelings of others."

The troubled situation has been compounded, Reich said, by the seeming involvement of the government, and the misinformation that has come from the government (about the funding.)

Mayor Kollek's immediate critical reaction and the response of virtually every major American Jewish group who were disturbed by the St. John's hospice event have helped stem the erosion of confidence in the American government and the Christian world. *in Israel's intentions, both*

While every move at St. John's hospice will be watched carefully, both Christians and Jews look toward the highly-respected Israeli courts to resolve the issues in a fair and just manner.

As one Christian leader put it, "It is still not unsalvageable."

Rabbi Tanenbaum, international relations consultant to the American Jewish Committee, is immediate past chairman of the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations (IJCIC).