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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 43, Folder 14, Religion and Human Rights conference, 1980.

Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N Y 10027

DEPARTMENT OF EAST ASIAN  
LANGUAGES AND CULTURES

502 Kent Hall

September 23, 1982

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum  
American Jewish Committee  
165 East 56th Street  
New York, New York 10022

Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum:

I am enclosing some papers for the forthcoming conference on Religion and Human Rights, which will be held at the Seven Springs Center in Mt. Kisco, October 14-17.

Could I ask you to advise me at your earliest possible convenience how you would like to travel to the Center, please? In case you plan to drive, I am enclosing travel directions. There is also train service to Mount Kisco from Grand Central Station, and a train schedule is enclosed as well. Also, I would appreciate your letting me know what dietary restrictions you observe so that I may inform the caterer of your needs. And (finally), may I please have five to ten lines of biographical data for inclusion in the conference program? Thank you so much.

We are asking conference participants to plan on arriving at the Seven Springs Center between four and five o'clock on the afternoon on October 14. We will meet for drinks at 5:30 and for dinner at 6:15, and the first session will be held at 7:30. We will finish with lunch on the afternoon of the 17th. While you are at the Center you may be reached at 914 241-1880, which is the Center's main number. I should mention that they have an indoor swimming pool and tennis courts in case you wish to bring a suit or a racquet to enjoy those facilities. There are some lovely places for walks in the area as well.

We look forward very much to seeing you in October. I shall be sending some additional papers and an agenda later, and if I can help you in any way in making your plans, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,



Irene Bloom

Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N.Y. 10027

UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON GENERAL EDUCATION

420 West 118th Street

December 4, 1980

Mr. Sidney Liskofsky  
Jacob Blaustein Institute for  
the Advancement of Human Rights  
156 East 56 Street  
New York, New York 10022

Dear Sidney

In accordance with our earlier discussions, I enclose the materials prepared by Irene Bloom for circulation to the Administrative Council for the December 15 meeting. These include (1) a minute of the planning session with a copy of the paper prepared for that session, (2) a tentative agenda for a two-day conference, and (3) a tentative budget and budget justification.

It is my understanding that should the Council approve going ahead with the conference, Dr. Bloom would be ready to assume the responsibility of conference coordinator. Despite my urging, Irene Bloom has not included an honorarium for herself, which ought to be a minimal \$1500 bringing the budget to about \$20,000.00.

As I mentioned to you, I am prepared to support the proposal at the Blaustein Council meeting. I think it responds to the directive of the Council for a project in Religion and Human Rights as reasonably as can be expected from the academic community, and in some ways much better than we would have requested.

Even more important, I find two interlocking virtues in this proposal. First, it brings into the human rights orbit, and particularly into the Blaustein orbit, a group of scholars of the first rank on issues of religion and ethics, like Pennikar, deBary, Cantwell Smith, etc. Second, it involves scholars and observers of Third World views and concerns in a discussion of human rights in a depoliticized context. Both of these are considerable virtues and I believe that Bloom and the others are prepared to implement this proposal, apparently in a more ambitious and exciting way than we had originally proposed. Relative to the possible achievement of a conference of significant scope on the highest international standard, the expenditure is very modest.

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Mr. Sidney Liskofsky  
December 4, 1980  
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The reservation that you, I, and others, I am sure, have is the degree to which such a conference gets into the practical issues of human rights in the present context. There is no secret that our hope and plan would be to move further in this direction, and, I believe, several papers not yet worked out should go along that route.

Yet even on this question, theoretical work is a prerequisite for clarification of the issues and a degree of scholarly latitude is a condition for depoliticization. Further, I believe the practical implications will naturally emerge as the conference agenda becomes concretized. This proposal can also be developed with a view to follow-up by a more "political" conference involving activists.

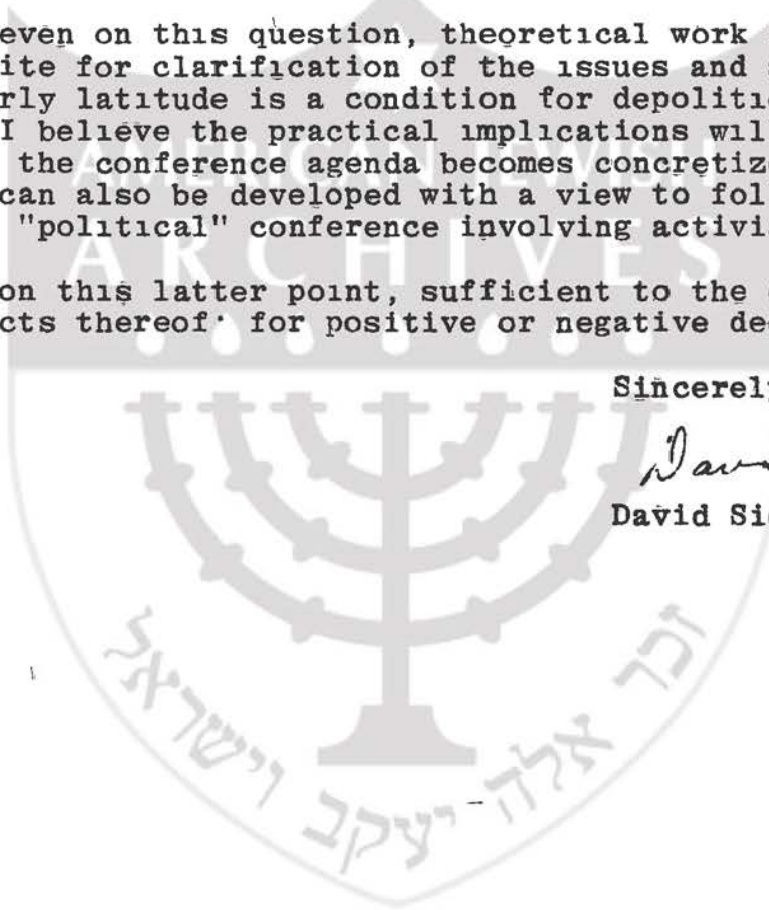
But on this latter point, sufficient to the day are the projects thereof for positive or negative decision.

Sincerely,



David Sidorsky

DS/lm  
enc.





Proposal to Jacob Blaustein Institute  
December 15, 1980

Religion and Human Rights

Conference Agenda

The agenda for a conference on religion and human rights must at this stage be adumbrated in only the most preliminary form; however, endorsement of the general concept is sought as the basis for pursuing further discussions with prospective participants in an effort to crystallize the issues to be focused on in the conference papers and discussion.

The proposal offered here is to move ahead with planning of a conference which would concentrate on historical analysis of the evolution of human rights thinking in the Judaeo-Christian context and consideration of fundamental human rights concepts in cross-cultural perspective, with attention also to religious alternatives to human rights formulations. The focus throughout might be on the evolution of concepts of the person, social order, and the state in different religious and cultural contexts, on ideas of justice (social, political, divine, cosmic), and on the relation between religious ideas and legal and political thought.

The conference might open on a Friday evening with dinner, followed by a talk on human rights and cultural relativism (Mme. Herzog, Raimundo Pannikar are possible candidates for this.)

In a Saturday morning session, three papers on the development of human rights concepts within the Judaeo-Christian religious context - one paper on the perspectives of Judaism (R.J. Zwi Werblowski a possible candidate for paper writer on this), one on traditional Christianity, one on the social and political implications of Protestant Reformation thought.

On Saturday afternoon, four papers on Islam (Fazlur Rahman, Daniel Pipes, Wilfred Cantwell Smith), Hinduism (Ainslee Embree, Raimundo Pannikar), Buddhism (Joseph Kitagawa), Confucianism (Wm. Theodore deBary, Irene Bloom).

On Sunday morning, three papers on topics in religion and law:  
1) classical and Christian interpretations of natural law as compared to modern concepts of natural law (Jürgen Habermas); 2) law and charisma as alternative bases of authority on human rights issues (Paul Valliere); 3) religion, human rights, and non-Western legal traditions (J.D.M. Derrett on the Laws of Manu and Hinduism; Jerome Cohen on Confucianism and the Chinese legal tradition, etc.)

On Sunday afternoon, discussion of the philosophical and religious bases of the idea of "universal human rights" - the relevance and applicability of the concept in light of religious and cultural pluralism. (Here, if not before, it would be important to incorporate the perspectives of African religion - possible contributors to the discussion include Mary Douglas, Laura Bader, Francis Deng, Dunstan Wai.)

## Conference on Religion and Human Rights

## Draft Budget

Conference center		\$6,875
Accommodations for 25 participants for three days at \$85 per person per day, including all meals	- \$6,375	
Extra expenses	\$500	
Major transportation		6,590
1 Tel Aviv	\$2,176	
1 Paris	752	
1 London	848	
1 Rome	1,070	
1 Los Angeles	350	
1 San Francisco	350	
2 Chicago (350)	700	
2 Boston (112)	224	
1 Washington	120	
	<u>6,590</u>	
Ground transportation		1,000
Duplicating and mailing (30 sets of conference papers plus conference materials)		1,500
Telephone		500
Secretarial assistance		1,500
Inflation factor on air fare - 10%		659
Miscellaneous		300
Total		18,924

## Conference on Religion and Human Rights

## Budget Justification

The per diem figure for accommodations at Arden House is the actual figure quoted by the Arden House director for 1982. This figure could be revised upward before the end of 1982.

Figures for air transportation are based on current rates, using Special Economy fares but not excursion fares, since the latter are contingent upon minimum stays of between six and fourteen days, and it would need to be determined whether an individual participant would be able to stay, at his/her own expense, for a period longer than the three-day term of the conference. However, every effort would be made to economize where possible by booking at excursion rates. Only a ten percent inflation factor on air fares has been added in here; this is a minimal figure, as rate increases are often more substantial than this, and several may occur in one year.

For ground transportation, include transportation of participants from their homes to local airports, etc. and round trip transportation from New York airports to conference center. For Arden House, the rate for their limousine service (car accommodates four persons) is \$85 per trip, each way. Add return transportation from local airport near participant's home to his/her home. The figure of \$1,000 is only realistic assuming that many of the New York area participants get to conference center at nominal or no cost to conference budget.

Secretarial assistance is required for help with mailings, duplicating of conference papers, distribution of conference papers, transportation arrangements, etc. No such help is available at Columbia; conceivably a work/study student could be hired to be responsible for this work.

In the present draft, no figure has been added in to cover pre-publication expenses (additional duplicating, circulation of galley and page proofs, etc.), since the form that the conference publication would take has not yet been determined. Additional help might be required for this at a later time.

Dec. 1980



## Religion and Human Rights

Minute on the Planning Session of 11/24/80

Those who attended the planning session held on November 24, 1980 at the School of International Affairs, Columbia University, and hosted by the Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights were:

Peter Awn	Department of Religion, Columbia University
Irene Bloom	Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University
Wm. Theodore deBary	Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures and Director of the Humanities Center, Columbia University
Louis Henkin	School of Law, Columbia University
Sidney Liskofsky	Blaustein Institute
Lowell Livezey	World Without War Council
Paul Martin	Director of the Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University
Raimundo Pannikar	Department of Religious Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara
Wayne Proudfoot	Department of Religion, Columbia University
Phyllis Sherman	Blaustein Institute
Roger Shinn	Union Theological Seminary and Committee on Church and Society of the World Council of Churches
David Sidorsky	Department of Philosophy, Columbia University
Linda Sokolski	Center for the Study of Human Rights, Columbia University
Joan Turner	General Education Program, Columbia University

Others unable to attend the meeting but expressing interest in its outcome:

Mary Douglas	Russell Sage Foundation
Ainslee Embree	South Asian Institute, Columbia University
Donald Shriver	President, Union Theological Seminary
Paul Valliere	Department of Religion, Columbia University

Among the questions discussed was the problem of priorities - how to give appropriate attention both to the important and still unstudied theoretical problems involved in the topic - problems crucial not only to human rights discussions but, more broadly, to cross-cultural studies as a whole - and to pressing human rights concerns in the contemporary world. Opinion was divided as to the order of procedure here. Several participants, including Professors Pannikar, Henkin, and deBary, argued for the need gradually to build up a context for subsequent discussions of religion and human rights through sustained attention to religious ideas and the relation between religious ideas and political and legal philosophy. Other participants, including Professors Shinn and Sidorsky, were of the opinion that both the

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relation between religious ideas and social and political practices in different cultural contexts and the role of religious institutions in contemporary human rights efforts throughout the world deserved careful attention.

There was general agreement, however, that the topic of religion and human rights is one which, for all its potential significance for human rights discussions, has been largely neglected up to now, as much because of the theoretical and conceptual difficulties involved as because of the sensitivity of many of the issues embedded in it. There was a consensus that scholarly attention should be directed to the topic and that its scope, difficulty, and importance suggested that more than one conference would ideally be devoted to it. Mr. Liskofsky suggested the possibility of a conference at which parallel workshops would be held on comparative and theoretical issues in religion and human rights and on religion and contemporary human rights issues. Others felt that there would be an advantage in holding the conference on theoretical and comparative issues first so as to establish a context for subsequent discussion of contemporary human rights concerns and the issues of religious freedom and religious toleration.

At the adjournment of the meeting the group requested further advice from Professor Pannikar who will attend the late December 1980 meeting of the International Institute of Philosophy in Dakar. This meeting will be devoted to the topic of religion and human rights. Professor Pannikar, who will be presenting a paper at the meeting, will be in a position both to meet philosophers now working in this area and to give further thought to appropriate directions and specific foci for a scholarly conference to be held in the United States. It was agreed that further planning for such a conference should be resumed early in 1981 with the help and collaboration of Professor Pannikar.

Irene Bloom  
December 2, 1980

Human Rights and Religion: Historical and Comparative Perspectives

Focus

For some time now it has been evident that, though a great deal of work is being done by scholars in the social sciences, working for the most part on contemporary problems in the area of human rights, relatively little has been published on fundamental human rights concerns as illuminated by the historical study of religion in cross-cultural perspective. The importance of religion as a factor in human rights thinking and practice has been recognized but not systematically explored, in part because methodologies for comparative and cross-cultural studies are still being evolved. However, growing attention in recent years to the problems of conceptualizing human rights and, more specifically, of assessing the relevance of classical Western theories of human rights to non-Western societies has served to underscore the potential importance of a human rights focus both for exploring the relation of fundamental religious ideas and values to political and social theories and for cultivating a more adequate basis on which to approach the perennial but ever more compelling issue of cultural relativism vs. ethical universalism.

Given the fact that discussions of contemporary human rights issues frequently assume an understanding of the relation between human rights and religion, while, in fact, this relation has not been adequately explored, an initial conference on this subject would usefully draw attention to some of the underlying issues, e.g.,

1. The development of human rights concerns within the Judaeo-Christian context: analyses of the ways in which Judaeo-Christian religious ideas and concepts served as a background for the development of modern Western concepts of human rights. Subheadings under this general rubric might include:
  - a) concepts of the person, social order, the state - their respective claims
  - b) ideas of justice
  - c) various topics in religion and law, e.g.,
    - 1) classical and Christian interpretations of natural law as compared to modern concepts of natural law
    - 2) law and charisma as alternative bases of authority on human rights issues
  - d) religious pluralism - the question of resisting tyranny; emergence of religious communities distinct from the state
  - e) religious bases for Western individualism; the centrality of individualism in Western concepts of human rights
  - f) the concept of freedom of conscience; its evolution



2. Resources of non-Western religious traditions: exploration of analogs (or "functional equivalents") in non-Western religious traditions to Western human rights concerns; comparison of values which evolved in the West with those which evolved in the cultural contexts associated with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, African religions. A series of papers focusing on these traditions might be linked through prior agreement among the contributors on common issues to be addressed in several papers, e.g.,

- a) concepts of the nature and dignity of man
- b) perceptions of the human condition and objects of human life (place of man in the universe; his relation to the human community, natural world, God, Heaven, ultimate reality)
- c) concepts of the value of the individual and his place in society (relation of rights and duties, individual and social rights; reciprocal expectations in social life)
- d) bases for significant distinctions among persons (equality and inequality: relevant bases for either)
- e) ideas of justice
- f) relation of religion and law
- g) human freedom (whether or not a relevant concept in a given tradition; its definition and importance; its theoretical and actual limitations and the bases for these limitations; implications of the concept, if any, for individual and political liberty)

3. "Universal human rights": relevance and applicability of the concept in light of religious and cultural pluralism



## Format

The conference proposed here would bring together a small group of scholars (perhaps 20-25) to explore some of the theoretical and comparative issues inherent in this topic. The meeting might be held over a period of two or two-and-a-half days, ideally at a conference center conducive to sustained discussion and exchange of ideas during mealtimes and between sessions as well as during the formal conference meetings. The expectation would be to base the work of the conference on discussion of a series of working papers to be prepared by the participants and circulated among them in advance of the meeting. These papers might then be revised and amplified on the basis of the discussion and exchange during the conference and resubmitted for publication in a conference volume (or a special issue of a journal). The objective would be to contribute to the deepening of discussion on the subject of human rights and religion and to stimulate further such studies in the field of religion as well as philosophy, history, and anthropology. The work of this conference, which would concentrate primarily on the historical analysis of the evolution of human rights thinking within several religious and cultural contexts, might also serve to prepare the way for a subsequent effort to explore more fully the relation between religion and contemporary human rights issues.

