



# 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 43, Folder 15, Religion and pluralism, 1984.

## THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

**date** August 22, 1984  
**to** David Gordis  
**from** Gary Rubin  
**subject** Comments on Religion and American Pluralism Statement

Bookie's memo to you of August 17 and the attached comments from Howard Kohr on our program on religious pluralism merit serious consideration as we plan our statements and actions on this issue.

The memo agrees that there is consensus on the final version of our "Religion and American Pluralism" statement on which there was much agency collaboration. Still, Howard's remarks make clear that in any program we do, we ought to define our objectives with precision. I think it is important to clarify our position on the points Howard raises:

1. Our objection to the steady erosion of Church-State separation should have nothing to do with whether this comes from "the white, conservative evangelical community" or from groups with whose "politics we agree." Any advocate, religious or otherwise, has a right to make his or her views on issues known. This includes the examples Howard cites of Rev. Martin Luther King on civil rights, the Bishops on nuclear peace or, for that matter, abortion, or Evangelicals on family policy. What is objectionable is the official use of public office or institutions to promote religion. When the President, the public school or the municipal government, through official appearances, organized worship periods or publicly owned religious symbols, endorse particular beliefs or practices, we are no longer talking about a vague term like "mingling" politics and spiritual concerns, but of actual state support for religion. We should be sharp in stating that the danger is not participation in politics by people who happen to be religious, but the use of the prestige and institutional power of public office to promote religious activity.
2. On Howard's second point, we should be absolutely consistent in protesting the official use of Jewish symbols just as we do Christian ones. This does not preclude Presidential or Congressional participation in private or civic ceremonies, but it does mean that we should oppose public endorsement of any properly religious rites or beliefs, including our own.

3. I see no great problem in AJC supporting values education programs in the public schools. The reason these are attractive is precisely that they support no one religion and respond to need to build a national values consensus. The material for this program should draw on ideals that all moral systems hold in common, such as honesty, loyalty and community responsibility. This leads in the direction of national unity, while public support of religion leads to social fragmentation.

In short, I think our program on religion and public affairs speaks to an important current need that we have the resources to address effectively. Howard is correct in pointing out that we should be clear about what we are criticizing and sharp in defining our objectives. In my view, the statement we have issued does this. We must continue to stress these points as we develop our programs on this issue.

GR/sg

cc: Irving Levine  
Hyman Bookbinder  
Jim Rudin  
Marc Tanenbaum ✓  
Mort Yarmon  
Bill Trosten  
Selma Hirsh  
Howard Kohr  
Sam Rabinove  
Marilyn Braveman

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date August 17, 1984  
 to David Gordis  
 from Hyman Bookbinder  
 subject Religion and American Pluralism

As you know, I've been pleased to see the final version of this important statement. Both Howard Kohr and I made editorial suggestions and are pleased to see them reflected in the document.

In the days following the approval of the statement, the issue really did explode with the Cuomo and related developments. Howard and I had a number of shmoozes about the difficulties involved in actual implementation of the concerns we express. I invited Howard to put down in writing what troubles him, and the result is the thoughtful memo he sent me and is enclosed herewith. I do not subscribe to everything in it, but I do believe that he challenges us to think seriously about some tough questions.

Objecting to New Testaments in the Republican kits was an easy judgment call, but there will be much tougher ones to make. And we'll need some sophisticated guidelines for such judgment calls. I'm afraid we don't have much time to develop them, with an Administration in place that does not share our basic misgivings.

HB:dw

encls.

cc: Irv Levine  
 Gary Rubin  
 Jim Rudin  
 Marc Tanenbaum  
 Mort Yarmon  
 Bill Trosten  
 Selma Hirsh  
 Howard Kohr



THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date August 13, 1984

to Bookie —

from Howard HK

subject Religion and American Pluralism

It appears as if the agency is about to embark upon a major campaign on Religion and American Pluralism. While this is an important new development to counter the trend toward the blurring of the distinction between church-state it also raises some questions that need to be addressed.

1) Do we really mean that we don't want any religion injected in the realm of public affairs? The injection of religion into public affairs by Rev. M.L. King, Jr. in the 1960's to bring about civil rights reform; the anti-Vietnam War effort by a variety of clergymen and more recently the Catholic Bishop's statement on nuclear war (and their soon to be released statement on capitalism) are examples of religion playing a role in politics that large segments of the Jewish community applauded. Is our concern about the injection of religion into politics a concern only if it comes from the white, conservative, evangelical community, or is it a real concern about all religious intrusion? Do we support the mingling of religion in politics when we agree with the goals of those doing the advocating and oppose it only when we oppose the policy positions being advocated. We can't have it both ways.

2) There is the issue of the "intrusion" of Jewish ideas and rituals into public life. Menorahs on display during Chanukah on public lands (this is no different in principle than the creche problem); the President quoting Psalms before a B'nai B'rith convention; the President attending a public Chanukah lighting ceremony where he says "let us pray together that the warm lights of Chanukah will spread the spirit of freedom..."; the President discussing the rights of Passover and telling the people attending a Holocaust Survivors Gathering how to respond to their children when asked why they attended this gathering, "...because I love God, because I love my country, because I love you, Zachor..."; or the Vice President quoting Deuteronomy (30:19) before an AIPAC convention; these are all examples of our highest political officials injecting religious (Jewish) ideas into public affairs. We can't have it both ways -- the President and other political figures quoting Jewish scripture to Jewish audiences being acceptable but quoting Christian scriptures

in public is not. What is an acceptable use of Judeo-Christian precepts in public speaking and what isn't? When does the use of religion to shape public policy exceed the bounds of church-state separation? This question deserves further discussion.

3) AJC statements keep referring to the term "religious freedom." The name of our major project for example, is the "National Religious Freedom Education Project." The issue however, is not one of religious freedom -- we are free to practice our religious beliefs -- rather it is one of religious pluralism and toleration. Religious freedom is a problem for Jews in the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc countries not the U.S.

4) AJC wants to sponsor values education programs in the public schools, but what will the basis for these values be? Can we as a Jewish organization advocate values without calling upon our own Jewish values that we would like to see imparted to our youth. Can or should AJC avoid injecting religious values, including Jewish values, into the realm of educational values in public schools?

The point of all these questions is that we must be more specific in our statements and language concerning the difficult issue of religion in politics.

Is what we are concerned about the intrusion of religion in general in public affairs or is it the promotion of a particular religion above all others? Our statements to date have not been clear about making this distinction.

encl.



## Trying to Stuff The Religion Issue Back Into the Box

Yesterday we learned from the news that Bishop John W. Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has drafted an election-year statement warning his fellow bishops not to take sides for or against particular candidates. The statement is one response to a widespread worry that the church is getting too active in politics. But in Washington this week a commission of eminent Catholic laymen heard experts call for even stricter self-control by the church when it deals with political questions.

Last year the bishops' conference created a stir by issuing a pastoral letter on the subject of nuclear deterrence. The letter argued against a deterrent strategy. By what special authority or expertise in this field, asked critics, did the bishops press their views in the thorny nuclear debate?

Clearly unchastened, the bishops are about to strike again. This year the conference will issue a pastoral letter on the U.S. economy. The possibilities for controversy are mind-boggling.

This time, though, other parts of the religious community have reacted more decisively to the bishops' initiative. The American Catholic Committee, a lay or-

## Capital Chronicle

by Suzanne Garment

ganization dealing with social issues, has set up its own Lay Commission on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy. The commission will issue its own letter and has been holding hearings to gather information and opinions.

Commission leaders have voiced their approval of the bishops' project; churchmen have publicly welcomed the laymen's contribution. Private opinions are said to be somewhat less cordial. The list of lay commissioners is wide-ranging. But heading the effort is former Treasury Secretary William Simon, which suggests that in this round of the great social debate, capitalism is not simply going to roll over and play dead.

At their meeting this week in Washington, the commission, chaired by its vice chairman, theologian Michael Novak, heard from a number of speakers about the attitude of Catholic social thought toward the whole subject of social justice. Conservatives predominated; the list will lean the other way at the next hearing in September. A theme emerged clearly from the day of testimony: Christian teaching is hard to press into the service of specific

Robert Spaeth of St. John's University in Minnesota dissected a recent paper by Midwestern bishops on agricultural issues and pointed to the morally empty quality of most of it—of the prescription, for instance, that the land should provide a "moderate livelihood." A little more caution might be useful this time around, he said.

Prof. Ralph McInerney from the Jacques Maritain Center at Notre Dame explained that Christianity was not a doctrine workable only in an enlightened social structure. The faith was relevant to all economic systems. As the Rev. Ernest Fortin of Boston College put the central argument, "Christianity is not a political religion." Therefore, he said, it behooves Christians to act with some modesty and self-discipline when they are tempted to start making connections and translations between Christianity and secular social life.

The exhortation to modesty called to mind another statement that hit the press recently. New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, fresh from wowing the Democratic convention in San Francisco, took on Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York. The archbishop had said that he didn't see how a Catholic could vote for a candidate who explicitly supported abortion. "Formal religion," the governor answered indignantly, "more aggressively than ever before, is seeking to use the political process." He urged Democrats to confront the issue and loosen the illegitimate grip of those trying to manipulate voters through religion.

But Gov. Cuomo did not stop there. He thought there was another thing Democrats should do, and rhetorically addressed his opponent President Reagan: "Mr. President, if you want to debate in this campaign on the implications of religion, I will start with the need for love in society. . . . My platform . . . says we're going to reach out to those people in wheelchairs and to those people who have been left out, we're going to help them up. Your platform is 'We'll take care of the people God has already taken care of, make them as strong as possible and hope that on their own they'll take care of everybody else.' That's not my kind of Christianity."

In other words, it is not OK to coerce people's votes on abortion, but it is OK to talk about how the Democrats' social programs are Christian and the Republicans' are not. Christianity evidently tells us that redistribution is more moral than growth and that pushing productivity means immoral neglect of the poor. The religious moralism of the left is noble in politics; the religious moralism of the right is impermissible.

Not for nothing did the founders of the American political system, and indeed most of the great theorists of modern politics, fear the influence of religion in political life. Few incentives lay politicians can offer have as strong an effect on a believing human being as a threat to his immortal soul. The current high-decibel level of public talk on the subject is therefore excessive and inflammatory. But such libelous as Gov. Cuomo who want the church quiet on abortion cannot have it both ways. They are going to have to take some of the advice of the lay commission's experts this week and stop appealing to the higher morality when they want to make some partisan point about the highly secular subject of getting and spending.



RABBI BERNARD S. RASKAS

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September 11, 1984

Dear Colleague:

Like you, I am now preparing for the High Holydays. The Judgment Days are approaching and, of course, what the rabbi says on the pulpit and, more importantly, off the pulpit has a significant impact on congregants.

The reason I am writing to you is because America is approaching its Judgment Day on November 6. Only this time, we the people make the judgments. It would appear to me that Jews must take this election especially seriously because now there are clearly two choices in the direction America will take and what we decide will affect generations to come.

One direction is that of the Republican Party, about whose platform Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell said: "If they had given us the privilege of writing it, we really could not improve on its content." This is the party whose campaign chairman wrote to Christian ministers in 16 states urging them to re-elect the President because "he has been faithful in his support of issues of concern to Christian citizens." That same party is committed to deny the right of free choice in abortion and is trying to impose prayer in the public schools.

William Safire (hardly a liberal) commented appropriately on this in the New York Times. He said: "No President, not even born-again Jimmy Carter, has done more to marshal the political clout of these evangelicals than has Ronald Reagan - to his historic discredit." And then he added most significantly: "Some Jews have been beguiled by the fundamentalist support of Israel, and others, mainly Orthodox, are allied with Catholics supporting tuition tax credits for religious schools. Because today's religious political movement is un-Semitic rather than anti-Semitic, shortsighted Jews fail to see the danger to any minority religion from a 'Christian Republican Party.'"

That party is led by a President who fought brutally to sell AWACS, F-15's and other sophisticated weapons - \$8.4 billion worth - to the royal family of Saudi Arabia. I was Chaplain for the Day in the Senate when the vote was taken. I know how the Administration exerted intense pressure to win the day. If elected to a second term, President Reagan will have no reason to heed Jewish interests at all. His attitude is clear: smile now, they'll pay later.

The other direction is that of the Democratic Party and its nominee, Walter Mondale. "Fritz" Mondale has worked long and hard for the freedom and rights of all people. His selection of a woman as Vice President shows his courage, his convictions, his innovative qualities. He is a compassionate and decent man committed to a just society. He is also a strong and honest man - strong enough to tell the American people that he will raise taxes to bring down the enormous deficit with which Ronald Reagan has saddled us. He knows that the most solemn responsibility of a President is to keep us strong to deter war - and to use that strength to keep the peace and to make certain that nuclear weapons are never used.

On Israel, Walter Mondale's record of support is outstanding. He opposes the Reagan policy of selling arms to the Arabs as an inducement to come

(over)



to the negotiating table - a policy that has never worked. He will move the American embassy in Israel to Jerusalem, where it belongs. And he will never have a Secretary of Defense who believes it is more important to avoid getting the Arabs mad at us than to save American lives - as Caspar Weinberger revealed when he refused Israel's offer of the Rambam Hospital in Haifa for the wounded and dying U.S. Marines who were victims of a terrorist attack in their barracks in Beirut.

Like you, I am concerned about anti-Semitism and I share the waves of concern that Jesse Jackson has been sending into the Jewish community. But Walter Mondale is the candidate, not Jackson. Walter Mondale's program is the platform of the Democratic Party, not Jackson's. Walter Mondale owes Jesse Jackson nothing - and Jackson knows it.

I have known Walter Mondale for more than 25 years. Recently he told me, "Yes, I want the votes of black citizens. But I will never let a whiff of anti-Semitism come near me, my campaign or my Administration. I never have and I never will." I believe Walter Mondale.

Not because I know Walter Mondale but because his record speaks for itself, I hope you will join with me and many others in supporting his candidacy for President, either publicly - on the record - or privately, among your friends and congregants. When we cast our ballots on November 6, we will be placing our lives in the hands of the man our country chooses. I want my life to be entrusted not to a person who jokes about bombing the Russians and who thinks a nuclear war is winnable, but to a man like Walter Mondale - a leader who respects religious liberty and separation of church and state, a public servant who has demonstrated that sense of justice and compassion that our Hebrew prophets first expressed, and who will seek these qualities in the men and women he appoints to his cabinet, and to the United States Supreme Court.

I wanted to share my feelings with you on the eve of a new Jewish year because I am so concerned about the future, as you surely must be. May you and yours, as well as all Israel and all the world, have a *shana tovah*. May this be a year of peace for all humankind.

Shalom,



Rabbi Bernard S. Raskas

# NEWS COMMITTEE

FROM THE



**THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE** Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

*MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations*

FOR RELEASE AFTER 11 A.M.,  
WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 5, 1984

NEW YORK, Sept. 5..... Representatives of major religions in America, citing "a serious erosion of governmental commitment to the constitutional principle of separation of religion from government," joined today in urging leaders of the Democratic and Republican parties to oppose "any and all efforts, whether direct or subtle, to tamper with the First Amendment."

Appearing at a news conference this morning at the national offices of the American Jewish Committee in New York City, leaders of the Protestant, Roman Catholic, Baptist, and Jewish communities issued a joint statement calling on party heads "to reject categorically the pernicious notion that one brand of politics or religion meets with God's approval and that others are necessarily evil."

"We urge them to speak out now," the statement continued, "and to recommit both major parties to the spirit of religious tolerance and mutual forbearance that is indispensable to a free society."

Howard I. Friedman, AJC's President, was chairman of the meeting. He was joined by Dr. Claire Randall, General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in U.S.A.; Sister Margaret Ellen Traxler, the founder and past President of the National Coalition of American Nuns, and Executive Director of the Institute of Women Today; Rabbi Mordecai Waxman, President of the Synagogue Council of America, and Rev. Dr. James M. Dunn, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

-more-

Howard I. Friedman, President; Theodore Ellenoff, Chair, Board of Governors; Alfred H. Moses, Chair, National Executive Council; Robert S. Jacobs, Chair, Board of Trustees;

David M. Gordis, Executive Vice-President

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CSAE 1707



The speakers noted that "a clear and present danger to Americans of all faiths" came from efforts by the government to intrude into religious practices or to impose certain religious beliefs or values on citizens who do not share them."

"The state should not behave as if it were a church or synagogue," the statement asserted. "In sum, the state should be neutral, not partisan, in matters religious."

Those who signed the statement denied that "America officially is a Christian republic" although they acknowledged that some citizens seemed to imagine that America was such a republic.

"There is no mention of Jesus and, in fact, there is no mention of God either" in the Constitution, the statement went on, adding such omissions "scarcely were inadvertent." The founders of the nation "knew well what they were doing," it added, pointing out that they were aware of what had happened "to heretics and dissenters of all faiths" in European countries where church and state had been joined, and "they did not want that to happen here."

Because of this, Article VI of the Constitution contained a provision --"revolutionary for its time" -- holding there should be no religious test for public office, and the First Amendment barred Congress from establishing religion or from prohibiting its free exercise. The joint statement went on:

"It cannot be stressed enough that the First Amendment is fundamentally designed to protect religious and political parties from the caprice of those in power."

This constitutionally mandated principle of church-state separation, the statement continued, guarantees to all Americans the freedom to join or not to join any denomination. This, it added, "has enabled religions to flourish here with a vitality and absence of divisiveness that are the envy of religious men and women the world over" and has also allowed "non-believers, so many of whom are no less moral or decent or patriotic than people of faith, to live as equal citizens without penalty or stigma."

The signers pointed out, though, that "religious and spiritual values have contributed immeasurably to human progress from barbarism to civilization," adding that America had been profoundly influenced for the better by Judeo-

Christian concepts. Religion has thrived in America, they went on, because of "our long-standing tradition of separation of church and state, which has served as a bulwark of religious liberty for all."

The signers acknowledged that separation of religion and government had never been absolute, citing military chaplaincies and tax exemption for religious property as "accommodations" that are considered by virtually all Americans to be "both reasonable and proper."

"But this does not mean," they went on, "that citizens should seek to enlist the authority and machinery of government to advance their own deeply held sectarian convictions on issues where there is no broad consensus."

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Q010-First Amendment

August 30, 1984/smm

