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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 45, Folder 16, Sonrise Center, 1980.

July 8, 1980

Hyman Bookbinder

Seymour Sarat

On July 2nd Sam Rabinove sent a memo to me with a copy to you regarding plans for a "Christian-oriented business complex in Oklahoma city to be called Sunrise Center." In his memo, Sam suggested the desirability of a Federal law modeled after one in the State of New York which would make it an unlawful discriminatory practice for any person having the right of ownership or possession of or the right to sell, rent or lease, land or commercial space to refuse to rent or withhold from any person such land or commercial space because of race, religion, national origin or sex.

Would you please let us have your reactions to this proposal. If you concur with it what do you suggest as next steps?

SS:og

cc: Bert Gold
Sam Rabinove
✓ Marc Tanentaum
Milt Tobian

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date July 2, 1980
to Seymour Samet
from Samuel Rabinove
subject "Sonrise Center"

JUL 2 1980

You shared with me a clipping from the Daily Oklahoman of June 12 which reports on plans for a Christian-oriented business complex in Oklahoma City to be called "Sonrise Center." The president of the development company which is planning the complex has announced that it will accept only tenants who are professed Christians. Sixty percent of the retail space and 12% of the office space has already been leased. There is no indication as to whether or not any government funds are involved in financing the construction of the complex. The question is whether this "Christian-only" policy for acceptance of tenants is legal.

This is the first situation of this nature that has come to my attention. It could not happen in New York. §296 5(b)(1) of the New York Human Rights Law makes it an unlawful discriminatory practice for any person having the right of ownership or possession of or the right to sell, rent or lease, land or commercial space to refuse to rent or to withhold from any person such land or commercial space because of race, religion, national origin or sex. Unfortunately, there is no comparable Federal law.* If this Oklahoma complex portends more of the same (as I believe it well may, given the broad scale campaign to Christianize America), we need such a Federal law, and we ought to begin to seek its enactment. (The New York law is a good model.)

With regard to Oklahoma, I have asked Yolanda Charney of the Tulsa CRC to have a volunteer lawyer research the law in that state to ascertain whether or not the proposed religious exclusion policy is lawful. She has promised to do so. She will also find out whether or not any government funds are involved in the financing of the project. If so, that would provide us with a basis for protest and, perhaps, a law suit if the protest is not successful. (Unlike the issue of Medicaid funds flowing to Jewish old age homes which exclude Christians, there is no serious "free exercise of religion" issue in this situation.)



*The Civil Rights Act of 1866, however, does bar this type of discrimination based on race.

SR:lk
CC: B.H. Gold, M. Tobian, H. Bookbinder