



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 53, Folder 6, Yaseen, Leonard, 1973.

LEONARD C. YASEEN

430 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

August 28, 1973

Mr. Leonard H. Goldenson
Chairman of the Board
American Broadcasting Company
1330 Avenue of the Americas
New York, New York 10019

Dear Mr. Goldenson:

Fred Rose has suggested that I write you concerning a much needed documentary film.

You are aware, of course, of the insidious pressures building up in many parts of the world that threaten Jews and Israel. I, like many others, have participated in Jewish and Christian efforts to stem the tide of vitriol that never ceases.

Currently, I am national co-chairman of the A.J.C.'s interreligious affairs commission which is dedicated to a long-range program of striking at the roots of Christian and other prejudice. Misconceptions concerning the Jewishness of Jesus, the myth that Jews--all Jews--are Christ killers, the charge that Jews are accursed of God have been perpetuated in Christian teachings over the centuries and have been exploited by others for political and economic purposes.

This situation is changing. Many concerned Christians are coming to realize that it is unnecessary to denigrate Jews in order to maintain a strong Christian Church. Please note the enclosed statement issued by eighteen prominent Catholic and Protestant theologians representing a growing sentiment on the part of Christian leaders. They are eager to receive materials

LEONARD C. YASEEN

1430 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

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that will help them shape teaching curricula to conform with historical truths. This is being done--to a degree.

But there is a compelling need for on-going, positive (rather than defensive) programs, especially visual, to place the Christian-Judaic relationship in proper focus. To my knowledge, there are none.

For that reason, I have begun to write a series of articles to be published in Christian periodicals, and hopefully, also to be used as the basis for future television and visual educational programs.

The initial article, The 2,000th Year, appeared last month in the conservative magazine TOGETHER, published by the United Methodists, and was the first time an argument such as this had ever been presented in that periodical. Since July, more than 40,000 reprints have been requested by Protestant, Catholic, and Black church groups. There seems to be a desperate need for forthright, authoritative, and unbiased evidence to establish more harmonious interreligious relationships.

Illogically, because of a lack of education, the distortions of the past appear to be accepted as unassailable by many Jews as well. For example, the film Jesus Christ Superstar was produced by Universal Studios. It is plainly a Passion Play that has been labeled "entertainment". But it is not entertainment for impressionable minds who see Jews in the Satanic role of Christ beaters and killers. Christian theologians deplore this type of film which provides dangerous nourishment for the bigot.

It seems to me that we must develop palatable, positive visual programs that can counteract ancient

LEONARD C. YASEEN

430 PARK AVENUE, NEW YORK 22, N. Y.

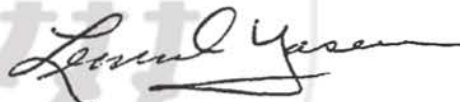
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canards and provide a potential in our lives to overcome prejudice.

You mentioned your weekly program, DIRECTIONS, to Fred. This would provide an ideal format for a single program that would incorporate The 2,000th Year and a second article, The Cost of Bigotry, a document just completed that deals with the issues raised in the statement by the eighteen Christian scholars.

I would welcome the opportunity of meeting with you and Fred, or, of course, conferring with any members of your staff you deem appropriate.

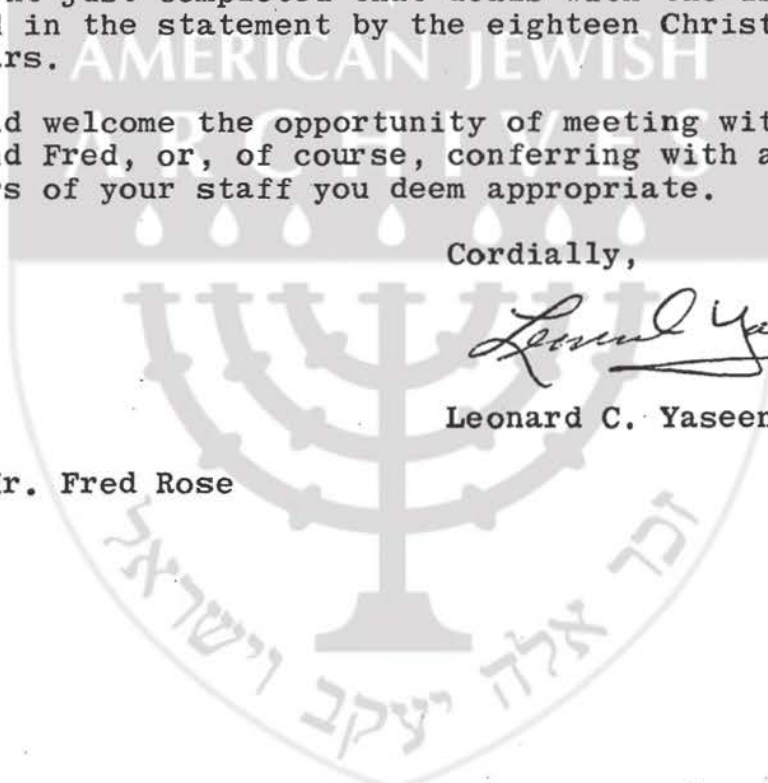
Cordially,



Leonard C. Yaseen

LCY/d

CC: Mr. Fred Rose



Rose Associates, Inc.
Builders and Owners

529 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
(212) 986-1700

Frederick P. Rose, President

August 30, 1973

Mr. Leonard H. Goldenson,
Chairman of the Board
1330 Avenue of The Americas
New York, New York 10019

Dear Leonard:

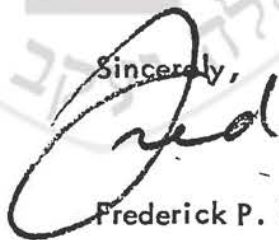
It was just delightful being with you and Isabel last Sunday, and Sandy and I are hoping we can have another match before snow falls.

Leonard Yaseen's suggestion for a T.V. program for "Directions" is very interesting, and when shown many times as a film strip, will have a beneficial educational impact on a large number of people.

I hope the proposal will be favorably considered, and if there is any way I could help move it along, please let me know.

See you soon.

Sincerely,



Frederick P. Rose

FPR:wef

bcc: Mr. Leonard Yaseen ✓

Rose Associates, Inc.

Builders and Owners

529 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017
(212) 986-1700

Frederick P. Rose, President

August 30, 1973

Mr. Leonard Yaseen
430 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10022

Dear Leonard:

As promised, enclosed is a little support for your project.

I'd be interested to hear if you are successful. All good wishes.

Sincerely,


Frederick P. Rose

FPR:wef
enc.

Thomas H. Wolf
Vice President and Director
Television Public Affairs

August 30, 1973

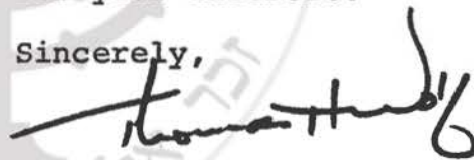
Mr. Leonard C. Yaseen
430 Park Avenue
New York 22, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Yaseen:

Mr. Goldenson asked me to reply to your long and thoughtful letter inasmuch as the DIRECTIONS series is produced under my supervision. I am asking Mr. Sid Darion, executive producer of DIRECTIONS, to have some research done on your suggestion and will get back to you in the near future.

Thank you so much for your interest.

Sincerely,



THW:ee
cc: Mr. Goldenson



100 UNIVERSAL CITY PLAZA
UNIVERSAL CITY, CALIFORNIA 91608

PHONE 985-4321

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

August 13, 1973

Mr. Leonard C. Yaseen
430 Park Avenue
New York, New York 90022

Dear Mr. Yaseen:

I have your letter and have read your article and the statement by another group of Christians.

When you phoned I tried to make clear that I was not and am not involved in the picture making and creative operations of this company. However, I do have a substantial interest in our company and its activities. I am saddened by the fact that Rabbi Tannenbaum has used you as he has others to force upon others his point of view. The producer-director and the creator-writers of this Rock Opera do not share Tannenbaum's view therefore he attacks the Rock Opera and goes all out to destroy their artistic achievement. Therefore what is the difference between Rabbi Tannenbaum and Rabbi Kahann?

Tannenbaum made an attack on our company and film without even a discussion with us. He stated your call to me was the official notice by the American Jewish Committee that they had taken exception to what we had done.

I could not discuss this film with you because you have said it all on the phone to me when you stated that my company and I were a party to the making of a film that could very well give rise to another Hitler in this country.

Mr. Leonard C. Yaseen
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I don't think you have any concept of rational dialog or even knowing the other view of the question. First, freedom of speech is something that we Jews constantly preach except that we are bigoted when somebody does something that a very few of my co-religionists take exception to. Second, I believe that 99% of the American people, both young and old, who see this movie are spiritually moved and feel a great empathy in modern terms that Christ is somehow related to the underdog in our society rather than the view that this picture depicts the Jews as the killers of Christ.

When this album first was published it was done with the blessing of all denominations. We have had a tremendous number of requests from sects of the Christian Church for the use of the music in public performances to interest young people in religion in terms of the contemporary style.

I don't know how many hundreds or thousands of people have seen the concert version authorized and produced by the Stigwood Company but there was never a protest at that time by Tannenbaum or anybody over this project, and particularly the album which was the largest album sale in the history of this company.

Only when the stage version was developed for New York was an attempt made to condemn this. Nowhere but in New York had a meaningful effort been tried and frankly to little avail. The frenzy that

Mr. Leonard C. Yaseen
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Tannenbaum and the American Jewish Committee and others have developed over the showing of the picture has reached its peak in New York and it's an attempt to destroy a property that has in the main and to the vast majority of viewers found it a most rewarding experience. The criticism that you make and that Tannenbaum makes is not apparent from the audience and their reaction to this play or film. I think that Tannenbaum has a right to his view and so do you. I think by what you do and have done you have made it possible for others with different views to take similar measures and steps to "fight fire with fire". I do not agree that a rock musical must be discredited by Tannenbaum or you or anyone who will attempt to destroy someone's property if it doesn't conform to a single view.

Nothing will be gained by any meeting with you now or ever. I don't think you ever will do as much or have been as active as I am and have been in Jewish affairs. I think Tannenbaum is a disgrace and I think the people that believe he is doing the right thing do not serve the best interest of the people of our country or any country.

Sincerely,



Taft B. Schreiber

TBS:eb

No dice!

Ephraim Kishon

A STORM broke out across the ocean over a movie whose action takes place in this country, all of which was shot in this country, and which most probably will never be shown here. We are referring to "Jesus Christ Superstar," the New Musical Covenant between the Almighty and the Rolling Stones. The success of the movie is a foregone conclusion; it is bound to break all box office records, if for no other reason than the protest voiced by Rabbi Tenenbaum and his colleagues.

The respected rabbi, head of

one of the most important Jewish organizations in the United States, raised his voice in a surprisingly factual and restrained way, against the anti-Semitic flavour of the religious rock opera, which, in his view, fastens collective guilt on the Jews, presents the rabbis of the time as fanatics wearing black kaftans, and once again washes the white hands of the Roman proconsul Pontius Pilate.

We are inclined to agree with Rabbi Tenenbaum. However, it is difficult to present a passion play in which the Jews emerge as likeable, just as it is difficult to shoot the Exodus without upsetting Pharaoh's adherents. Only a great director like Cecil B. de Mille was able to carry off this mission impossible in "The Ten Commandments," but of this film it may be safely said that we liked the book more. We can assume that in this case, the producers of "Superstar" did not make any special attempt to adhere to the version of the crucifixion portrayed in the original stage musical. Still, we have certain doubts regarding the protest

of the respected rabbi. In our view, the time has now come to stop cooperating with the Gentiles in this field.

WE JEWS have been cooperating with them for 1733 years. In every generation, we submit an order nisi against the ruling Pope and ask him to show cause why he should not stop levelling such accusations against us. We expect the Holy See to exonerate us, and we forget that popes as a rule belong to the Catholic creed, and that Catholics are nurtured on anti-Jewish sentiments from the age of two weeks.

Personally we met this problem in the gym hall of our primary school in Budapest, when Gusti the Bully accosted us and remarked:

"You killed Jesus."

"That's not true," we answered

"So help me, it's not true."

I checked on the matter at home. My father categorically denied the accusation and I believed him. I cross-examined daddy, told him wherever he went; if he had been involved in Jesus' (Continued on page 33)

No dice!

(Continued from page 33)

murder, I would certainly have noticed it. Only gradually did it dawn on me that this had nothing to do with logic; quite the contrary, it was something deeply rooted in tradition, and the Catholic Church would never drop the ideological platform that had proved itself so well.

The only way to end the argument with them once and for all, therefore, is to admit unequivocally that we, the Jews, did crucify Jesus.

Let's tell them: "Sorry, we won't play with you any longer. We're tired."

BESIDES, it seems to us that the accusation is not unfounded. We did indeed officially request the mandatory authorities to crucify him. In the eyes of our ancient priests, the fellow was a reformist firebrand, if not a dangerous Communist, and severe disciplinary steps were taken against him.

But all this belongs to history, like, say, the Emperor Titus. The Romans, it will be remembered, succeeded in tearing down our Temple quite a number of times, and massacring us in the bargain; yet we take the family up Italy in August, as if nothing had happened.

True, we have heard that Jesus was the son of God. Maybe so. Though this matter needs further study, because the evidence is at best circumstantial. There are many religions in this world. About a billion Buddhists, for instance, have completely different concepts of the godhead. No convincing proof has yet been produced as to who is right. This writer has an obsessive fear that after his untimely death, he will move to the Other World and find that the ancient Egyptians were correct: the gods are those creatures with the animal heads whose profiles they depicted on their walls, and we'll look like a bunch of idiots with our monotheistic religions...

So, for the time being, we want to enjoy the benefit of the doubt. Maybe Jesus is the son; maybe he is only the spirit. Let's leave the matter open.

SOME PEOPLE may object to our talking like this about the God of 600 million believers. They have enormous reverence for Jesus.

If memory serves us, we have already related the story of that pious Hungarian sergeant, who strutted in front of our morning parade in the concentration camp and delivered himself of the following brief personal statement:

"You'll croak here, down to the last man-jack of you, you dirty Jews, because you killed the son of God."

Thereupon a brave lawyer stepped forward and said,

"I respectfully inform you, sergeant, sir, that Jesus, too, was a Jew."

"Then," the sergeant replied, "he's a dirty swine, just like the rest of you."

That's to say, the sergeant, as a practising Catholic, could not forgive even Jesus for belonging to the nation of his murderers. So how could they ever forgive us?

You don't have to forgive us, mister sergeant, we plead guilty. We executed Jesus, we and no one else. And so as to wind up the long investigation, we are happy to announce that the criminals have been identified and apprehended: Jesus was killed by this writer and his uncle Egon (U.S.A.).

Now, at long last, can the other accused be freed on bail?

THERE IS ANOTHER aspect to the story: the director of "Superstar," Norman Jewison, is a true friend of our country. Not in

word but in deed. For now, the great Jewish people have boycotted Israel, condemning it in the process, with gusto, until this nice General came and brought over, practically by force, two monster productions, thereby breaking the general boycott. Ever since, has been full of praise for us, they say he's fallen a little in love with us. God knows what he's in us, but it's a fact that he's planning to shoot his next film, General Wingate, here too, provided we let him.

Let's decide once and for all who is our friend; a producer who shoots a movie here, a features black-kaftaned rabbi or a producer who has them wear snow-white kaftans on location in Spain?

On one occasion, when Jewish was being carried away by his enthusiasm, he reminisced about a meeting with our pilot cadets at a base somewhere in the south. Talking to them at dusk, he asked: What do you expect from life? One of them, he said, got up and replied,

"There are three things we don't want, sir: to stand in line to be pitted by you, and to be thrown into the sea. That's all."

Jewison thought he was shooting a movie for the pilot cadets and forgot all about Rabbi Tenenbaum. It was a grievous mistake. Maybe we misled him on that airbase.

THIS STATE was not established by the sweat of our brows, in order to wipe anti-Semitism off the face of the earth, but to give it, at long last, legal status.

The most marvelous achievement of the State of Israel is the permission we give the Gentiles to be anti-Semitic. They were solemnly allowed not to love us because—refreshing thought!—we don't care if they don't. We are no longer a bunch of "white niggers," who may not be shown on the screen except in a positive light; we are not the eternal minority begging consideration for its difficult situation. We've got a country of our own, at least as beautiful as theirs, at least as honest as theirs, a country of quite respectable achievements, whose blue passport snugles in our pocket and warms it. We no longer depend on their sympathy. Someone in the great big world doesn't love us? That's his problem.

It's all right for them to be anti-Semitic. Even in movies.

Indeed, let it be known to whom it may concern, that it was not Pontius Pilate who executed Jesus of Nazareth; it was we who did it for reasons of our own. We shouted at the top of our lungs: Crucify him. We chased him with tanks and Fouga Magisters, the lot Jesus was a Jew like us, as were all his holy disciples, so this is simply an internal Jewish matter, almost a family affair, and we reject any foreign intervention. Surely, such a small and chosen nation has every reason to be proud for giving mankind Freud, Marx, Einstein, Moses and Jesus. And if the last-named is indeed God's son... then the Father, too...

We made this State so that the Jews should stop trembling and imploring, so that they should be able to look unblinkingly into the blue eyes of the Holy Church. Let's watch the nice rock opera from the same viewpoint from which it was shot by our friend, director Norman Jewison. Let's judge whether it is an entertaining musical or not, a good movie or a bad movie. Just like the Italians watch "Satyricon," the English, "Joan of Arc," and the Americans, "Last Tango." Let's judge without inferiority complexes, like free and equal men standing with both feet on the very ground that stretched under their ancestors' feet many, many years before the young rabbi became a superstar in the neighbourhood of Kibbutz Kfar Hahoref.

Translated by Yohanan Goldstein by arrangement with "Ma'ariv"



100 UNIVERSAL CITY PLAZA
UNIVERSAL CITY, CALIFORNIA 91608

PHONE 985-4321

EXECUTIVE OFFICES

August 30, 1973

Mr. Leonard C. Yaseen
430 Park Avenue
New York, New York 90022

Dear Mr. Yaseen:

Mr. Schreiber thought that you would be interested in the enclosed which was reprinted in The Jerusalem Post after its first publication in 'Ma'ariv'. Mr. Schreiber thought that Rabbi Tannenbaum and Dore Schary would appreciate a copy.

Sincerely,

Secretary to
Taft B. Schreiber

D R A F T

Sept. 13, 1973

Mr. Taft B. Schreiber
MCA
100 Universal City Plaza
Universal City, California 91608

Dear Mr. Schreiber:

I want to acknowledge your letter of August 13th. Owing to my having been out of town on business obligations I have not had an opportunity to reply before now.

After reading your letter carefully I must share with you my genuine personal regret at your refusal to want to acknowledge even the possibility of the validity of the concerns raised about the potential negative influence of Jesus Christ Superstar. While you choose to scapegoat the American Jewish Committee and Rabbi Tanenbaum, I think as a matter of fairness you should come to terms in your thinking that their views are shared by the leaders of every major national Jewish religious and communal organization.

Before the AJC and Rabbi Tanenbaum said a single word publicly about the movie, representatives of 12 Jewish organizations affiliated with the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council pre-viewed the film in New York. As the representatives of Universal Pictures who were present could have told you, the reaction was universally one of deep distress over the terrible caricaturing of Jewish priests and pharisees and "the Jewish mob" in screaming for the death of Jesus. I enclose a copy of the statement adopted by

some 500 representatives of Jewish organizations nationally and locally at the NJCRAC convention. Are you prepared to say that the views and convictions of the most responsible Jewish leadership of the United States is to be dismissed by you?

You make other charges which I believe as a matter of honesty and decency should not go unanswered. You say "Tanenbaum made an attack on our company and film without even a discussion with us." The record will show, Mr. Schreiber, that the American Jewish Committee has sought on several occasions to meet with Mr. Norman Jewison as far back as October 1971, with Mr. Lou Wasserman and Mr. H. H. Martin in order to discuss the concerns of the Jewish community and AJC. In each instance the principals involved in the making of this film refused to meet with such responsible Jewish spokesmen. It was these persons in fact who provided no alternative to the American Jewish Committee but to make its case public. I am persuaded that had Mr. Jewison, Mr. Wasserman, or Mr. Martin responded in a civil way to these requests for a serious discussion that some formula might have been worked out that might have made it unnecessary to carry out this program of public education and information about the issues that concerned us. Their refusal is responsible for what subsequently took place. It is basically unfair to impute to the AJC responsibility for what MCA and Universal Pictures are themselves responsible for having created. That's

equivalent to holding the victim responsible for his victimization.

As for the question of freedom of speech, I think again you are being unfair to the issue. From the very outset, the American Jewish Committee made it clear that it upheld the right to freedom of expression of Mr. Jewison and Universal Pictures. We made it equally clear in every way possible publicly that we were opposed to boycott, censorship, sit-ins, etc. But the issue of freedom of speech is not a one-way street. The right which you preserve for yourself is equally available to Jewish leadership and the AJC.



September 13, 1973

Mr. Bernard Abrams
67 Ferncliff Drive
West Hartford, Conn. 06117

Dear Bernie:

I hope this finds you well and trust that you and Jane have had a good summer.

I understand from several sources that you are concerned about the position that we took on Jesus Christ Superstar. May I suggest that you read the enclosed item that I wrote for Christian Century and also the reactions of Christians and blacks to the movie?

As we had anticipated, the movie has just been introduced in Argentina. In light of the very unsettled political situation there, including the emergence into the government of Juan Peron of Catholic reactionaries who have been involved in anti-Semitic actions, we have reports that there is a growing anxiety among Jewish leadership in Buenos Aires and elsewhere about the potential incitement to hostile attitudes towards Jews there.

Similar concerns have come to us as a result of the upheaval in Chile. The Jewish leadership in Switzerland has asked us for all our analyses and materials since the movie has just been introduced there, and the Jewish leadership appears to be quite concerned about its potential harmful impact among both left and reactionary elements.

At the Board of Governors meeting Leonard Yaseen will report on Superstar and our program in relationship to it. I hope you will feel free to express your concerns during that discussion.

With warmest personal good wishes, I am

Cordially,,

MHT:MSB
Encls.

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum

BCC: P. Perlmutter, S. Katz, W. Katz, E. Elander, ✓ Yaseen

memorandum

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date Sept. 12, 1973
to Marc Tanenbaum
from Mort Marmon
subject

This is the response from the Readers Digest on the Yasveen matter. I don't think we've helped the cause particularly by trying to push the matter, and I feel it inadvisable to push further on it. However, I will pick up Birnie's suggestion that I contact him a year from now.



READERS DIGEST



SENIOR EDITOR • *William A. H. Birnie*

September 11, 1973

Dear Mr. Yarmon:

Thanks for the material you sent me some time ago on "Jesus Christ, Superstar" in relation to Leonard Yaseen's article. I have again called this to the attention of our editor at Christmastime but I'm afraid that the article is not going to be used in December of 1973 or January of 1974.

Sorry.

You might remind me to try again next fall.

Sincerely,

Bill Birnie

Mr. Morton Yarmon
Director of Public Relations
American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street
New York, New York 10022