

CD-1031 Transcription

Marc H. Tanenbaum and Jitsuo Morikawa conversation concerning

Jewish-Christian relations on *Dialogue*. 8 April 1973.

MARC TANENBAUM: -- today with regard to relationships between Jews and Christians, would be for me to indicate at the outset that I haven increasingly a conviction that Judaism is still the least known religion in this country today. That is to say that given the fact that there's 4,000 years of history of Jewish religious life, culture, piety, mysticism, liturgy, by and large I have a sense that many Christians, except for a rarified group of academicians and theologians, and persons like yourself, really think Judaism came to an end at the close of the first century, with the rise of Christianity; that it somehow seemed to have exhausted its mission and [01:00] purpose. And yet, no one can understand the several millions of Jews who live in this country, and the tens of millions throughout the world, without taking into account that we are really the sons and daughters of 1,900 years of growth and development, and that we regard ourselves as a living faith community of permanent truth and value to our constituents. I don't know how that bumps up against some of the perceptions of American Baptists. Do Baptists see Jews as a

faith community that is viable to its constituents? Or are we simply objects of conversion?

JITSUO MORIKAWA: I would say that many of us in the American Baptist churches affirm the Jewish community as a people of God, whose covenant relationship with God continues from the past into the future. And of course, there are others in the American Baptist churches who feel the Jews are objects of their [02:00] evangelistic concern, and emphasis, along with all the other people. So we represent a very diverse community of people. But I would think that perhaps the distinction between those of us in the Christian faith and Judaism is that you represent a people who are a sign and witness to the coming of the Kingdom. And the Christian community, the Christian church, is a community that says that that Kingdom in a sense has come in Jesus Christ. Not in its fullness, but it has intervened into history, whose fullness and consummation is still in the future. And I would presume that the Christian community, the American Baptist community, basically affirms that kind of a conviction, in contrast to Judaism.

TANENBAUM: I think that's a hopeful statement of the question of the basic [03:00] distinction between Judaism and Christianity. Of course, one would have to say that what we're really talking about is the centrality of the

idea of the Messiah, of the Messianic Age, in both of our traditions. And from the point of view of Jewish tradition, the affirmation of the Messianic idea is still a central theme in our tradition. And yet, I think the basic distinction is that we believe that when the Messianic Age has come, the signs of it involve a radical change in the human condition; that is to say, according to our Messianic expectations, the signs of the coming of the Messianic Age are witnessed by the fact that there is an end to war and bloodshed and persecution. That there emerges a universal fraternity in the world; the lion lies down with the lamb is not just a metaphor, but a reality in that sense. So that -- maybe this is a good place for me to tell the story, [04:00] in Hasidic tradition, about the idea of the Messiah, which makes the point about our basic distinction on that question. The story is told that in one of the rabbinic academies, a rabbi was sitting and studying. And there was a great furor outside the window. And he raced to the window, and he asked what was going on. And one of the disciples came to him and said, "People are saying that the Messiah has come; the Messiah has come." And he looked around, and he said, "But nothing has changed." And so he went back to study the Torah. So there is that sense of still waiting for the coming of the Messiah in Jewish

tradition, and as you say, Christians believe that some form of redemption has already taken place, but is not fully consummated.

MORIKAWA: And I think there's very good grounds for the Jewish community to say that the claims made by the Christian Church are beyond -- are exaggerated claims. That the display of the coming [05:00] of the Kingdom of God, we do not really signs of. And the Christian community, I think, is saying, has continued to say over the years, that the display of the coming of the Kingdom of God occurred in the coming of Jesus Christ, in his person, in his life, his death and resurrection. And the emergence of a community of people called the Church. So just as the Israel community is a sign and a witness to the coming of the Kingdom, so the Christian Church claims that the Church is also a sign and witness to the coming of the Kingdom in its fullness in the future.

TANENBAUM: Of course, that does say that while that is a basic difference in terms of how we perceive our roles in history, at the same time it does affirm something which is a common bond, namely that both of us continue to be Messianic communities of hope, looking toward a fulfillment at the end of time, [06:00] and recognizing that we have the responsibility, as we would say in our tradition, that

Jews and all people who are committed to a covenanted relationship with God, have a responsibility for seeking to bring about redemption in society and history, pointing toward the end of time. So in that sense, I think that is a very strong linkage that continues to bring us together, and perhaps we see that -- and you could help me understand this, I think, better than I do at this moment. I have the sense that when Jews and Christians come together, we see the fundamental differences, as I think we need to see, in honesty. Yet, when we relate to each other in relationship to Oriental faith communities, we recognize the degree to which we are bound together by a common vision, simply by contrast, I would say, with the Buddhist experience, with the Hindu experience, and other non-Western religious traditions. Is that your own sense, out of your own background?

MORIKAWA: Yes, I would certainly agree with you that, [07:00] Marc. I come from a Buddhist tradition. But I would say that I have a far deeper affinity with Judaism than I do with Buddhism, of course, since I've become a Christian. And I would say that I'd like to put it in this way: the commonality arises over the fact that the ultimate reality, which we claim was revealed in Jesus Christ, is the same ultimate reality affirmed by the Jewish community. By

Judaism. We are speaking about the same God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. And I would imagine that the only difference lies in the fact that the Christian community affirms that that ultimate reality was disclosed in history in Jesus Christ, where as Judaism [08:00] does not. Is that, would you say that --

TANENBAUM: Well, I think that's true, but it would have to -- in all candor, I think we would have to face the fact that for the Jew, it is an impossibility in faith for us to acknowledge the fact that God, who is perceived as altogether Other, reveals himself in human form. We would affirm that the -- well I would fall back on the language of my late sainted teacher, Rabbi Heschel. Heschel used to say that Judaism had no symbols of God. The only symbol of God is man. And that it is in the relationship between man and his fellow man, the degree to which man learns to reverence the dignity of another human being, that in that relationship, one finds the presence of God. So that it is in the relational aspect of man to his neighbor that one understands something of the relational aspect [09:00] of man to his creator. And yet, Judaism would deny that God has human corporeality. And I think it is sometimes the confusion that Jews feel they see, when they think of Christians, or hear Christians speak of Jesus in his

historic dimension as a human person, also being God incarnate. And there's a question in the Jewish mind whether Jews can comprehend the fact that God is manifest in a human person, and still remain God, who is wholly Other. And whether the human person in fact can be the vessel of divinity. And I think that is a basic tension and distinction between us, that we will have to continue to suffer through together, as one of the mysteries between Judaism and Christianity.

MORIKAWA: Which leads us to the question of the freedom and the liberty to confess our faith [10:00] to each other. And we American Baptists hold to the strong tradition that we must struggle and fight for the right of every person --

TANENBAUM: I think that's been a very strong bond between Baptists and Jews --

MORIKAWA: Right.

TANENBAUM: -- this very deep commitment to religious liberty and freedom of conscience.

MORIKAWA: Right. I think we trace ourselves back to Roger Williams, for example, here in the United States history. A community that welcomed into its community all sorts of people, Jews and people who were not Christians, because we stood for the right of every individual to exercise his freedom and his religious faith. After all, Baptists do

come from a tradition, you know, who were persecuted in the sixteenth century by the majority church. We were Anabaptists, the minority. So through the centuries, I think, we have been a people who have fought for the rights of every person to exercise his own faith and belief, according to the [11:00] dictates of his own conscience. Which says that we exercise the right for the Jew to be a Jew, also for the right for the Baptist to confess and practice his faith, and witness to his faith, in this pluralistic society.

TANENBAUM: Well I think you'll get no argument from me, or from any Jew, on that score. We cherish that right for ourselves, and I think Jews would defend that right for every person to proclaim that truth. I think that the issue for us, I suppose in relationship to the question of Evangelism, is the basic distinction that we would think is required to be constantly clarified, between evangelization and proselyzation.

MORIKAWA: I don't know the difference.

TANENBAUM: Well, I would see the difference -- recently, I had the privilege of spending three hours with Dr. Billy Graham discussing some of these questions. And Dr. Graham made the distinction, and as we agreed upon it, I felt we had a common mind on it -- [12:00] evangelization I think

means proclaiming the truth as one sees it, to anyone one encounters, with the understanding --

M2: Unfortunately we must take a break, but don't go away.

We'll be right back on *Dialogue*.

(break in audio)

TANENBAUM: -- proselytizing, which means an intention to undermine the faith of another community as a group, is one that becomes morally offensive in a pluralistic society. And I suppose that raises the whole issue of our discussion of Key 73, doesn't it, Jitsuo.

MORIKAWA: Yes. Marc, I notice from the newspaper reports, and so on, that the Jewish community seems to be greatly distressed over what is happening in Key 73 and the possibilities of further misunderstandings, as well as injury, between the Christian bodies and the Jewish groups, and I would [13:00] certainly welcome our getting into that conversation, because I represent a communion, a denomination of people who certainly want to be in the most creative relationship with the Jewish community, which relationship we've enjoyed for many, many years in the past. Let me say just one or two things about Key 73 from our perspective as American Baptists. We see in it something occurring here in the American church scene, namely 140 or 150 denominations and groups, an

unprecedented breadth of ecumenicity brought together in a common concern of evangelization. And in one sense, this is a very significant event, because the Protestant churches have really been divided, polarized to the left and to the right. The denominations that are part of the ecumenical movement, and the churches that are outside of the ecumenical movement, so to speak. But now, [14:00] we're engaging together as one single community. And I think that's good. The second thing I want to say is that, so far as the American Baptist churches are concerned, we have our particular style that we're engaging in around the theme of the Evangelistic lifestyle, of the whole people of God, which embraces into our concept of Evangelism, the widest breadth of understanding of the Christian Gospel, not simply in terms of pietism, not only in terms of personal evangelism, although we include that. So that we feel very deeply involved, in a very exciting way, in our common participation in Key 73. But I think you want to lay out to me, and for the sake of this audience, the grounds of your concern, arising from the Jewish community, in relation to Key 73.

TANENBAUM: Jitsuo, at the outset, I think it's evident, in light of our [15:00] conversation about religious liberty, that the Jewish community, not only would not want to

hinder the freedom of Christians to evangelize Christians, but in fact would feel that if Key 73 would deepen the spiritual life and the social commitment of Christians, as Christians, the in fact the Jewish community would bless that undertaking. I think the cutting edge has to do with the degree to which Key 73 is used by some proselytizing groups, including those within Key 73, but especially those outside of it, who are riding on the coattails of its publicity, for the sake of seeking to zero in on the Jewish community. I have in mind specifically groups such as the American Board of Mission to the Jews, the Jews for Jesus Movement, the Young Hebrew Christian Alliance. These are groups who are set solely for the purpose of seeking to find loopholes in the religious convictions of Jews, especially ignorant Jews. [16:00] And to try to undermine their faith commitment. That's absolutely unacceptable to the Jewish community, and for a number of reasons. One is that it is based on the classic proselytizing tendency to want to make a caricature of Judaism. You will find, for example, in some of the literature the American Board of Mission to the Jews, that it describes Judaism as an empty and false religion. And it denigrates Judaism, defames Judaism, in order to prove the superiority of Christianity. Now, the Jewish community is not going to sit by passively,

nor do I think any community would, if it found that an entire effort was being undertaken to defame, and to distort the reality of that faith community. Secondly, I think our concerns have to do with some of the tendencies of some groups, such as the Campus Crusade for Christ, and Young Life groups, which are zeroing in on Jewish children in the high schools, with various kinds of deceptions [17:00] and intimidations and social ostracisms. I'll just set a case in point. In Montclair, New Jersey, in the public high school, the Campus Crusade for Christ has set up a building eight blocks from the high school. Recently the daughter of a cantor of a traditional synagogue was invited to a Coke party. It was supposed to be a social occasion. Well the girl came to the occasion, and the kids suddenly cracked out the Bible and began testifying to Christ with her. She's a proud Jewish child, very deeply rooted in her faith. She loves her faith and her people. And she got up after a while and she said, "Well thanks very much. I didn't come here for this, but no thank you." And she walked out. Well she came back to her high school, and the kids who were involved in proselytizing her began to ostracize her. So that they banned her in the cafeteria, wouldn't involve her any more in social and recreational activity. Now that kind of stuff has begun to take place in

many high schools around the country: Columbus, Ohio; Portland; Miami; Dallas, Texas; [18:00] where I've just come from. So that our concern is that the bodies which are involved in Key 73 recognize that while there is legitimacy to the undertaking of the mainline churches in this effort, they need to recognize that under this umbrella, all kinds of nuts and fruits are growing up. And there's some responsibility to make it clear that there are some limits and guidelines, as to what is permissible and what is impermissible. And hopefully this is something that we can talk through together, and find constructive ways to make it clear that what Billy Graham has called "zealots without knowledge" have some sense that the community will not simply indulge this kind of behavior.

MORIKAWA: I would imagine that you're trying to make a distinction between those people out of their own zeal who take undue advantage of Jewish young people, as an attempt to seek to win them to the Christian faith, use [19:00] coercive methods, use psychic, political pressures, which we certainly would absolutely repudiate. I think it's a violation of the whole spirit of evangelism, seen from the perspective of the Christian Gospel. At the same time, I hope you're not saying that the Jewish community would want to forbid the freedom and the liberty for Christian young

people to bear witness to their faith to Jews, as well as to any people in terms of the joy and the delight of their faith, in their particular religion.

TANENBAUM: Jitsuo, in principle, I would say yes. The problem is that the practice is beginning to overwhelm the principle. And I think as a result of that, the mood is beginning to develop in large parts of the Jewish community, that young people in their zeal, and with the sense that is apparently being suggested to them by [20:00] some of their trainers, that they've got to make hay every day. And there's a special joy in getting Jewish kids. I think would have much greater caution about that today than I would have had three months ago.

MORIKAWA: I would imagine, I would imagine what's happening is the kind of coercive ways of penalizing young people who do not respond to their invitation to become Christians, so that unless they become Christians, they're penalized from becoming a part of the leadership of a campus, on the university or in a high school.

TANENBAUM: Or on the athletic teams, for example.

MORIKAWA: Yes.

TANENBAUM: Kids are just being bumped off the basketball teams because they won't join the Fellowship for Athletes for Christ. See, part of it, I think, you come with a very

balanced, rational approach toward evangelization, which has great sensitivity to human feelings and human relationships. Some of the persons whom I've now had experience [21:00] with, and some of these groups, Campus Crusaders, Young Life, come with a much more fundamentalist theological tradition. And to them, life is a matter of black and white. You are either saved or damned. Therefore, here they're offering the choice of being saved, and when a Jewish kid says, "I feel already in a right relationship with God; please don't bother me." So the alternative is that you're damned. And then, one begins living out and making sure that you feel that you're damned. Well that's a kind of cycle which I think someone has to begin paying attention to. And if Christians don't pay attention to it, then you must expect that Jews are going to have to defend the civil liberties and religious rights of their young people, as well as of others.

MORIKAWA: Absolutely. I certainly agree with you. The other side, however, I just want to keep insisting -- Rabbi Weinstein of the KAM Temple was a neighbor --

TANENBAUM: Jacob Weinstein of Chicago, a great friend of mine.

MORIKAWA: Yes, of Chicago, yes. He and I are very close friends.

And I used to say to Jacob, "Jacob, you know, you're a Jew.

[22:00] I'm a Baptist minister. As a Baptist minister, I have an accountability to witness to you about my faith." And Jacob used to say, "Jitsuo, you wouldn't really be a Baptist minister if you didn't." I simply want to say to you, and I'm sure you affirm this, and to the listening audience, that the Christian faith is an evangelizing faith, which shares out of the bounteous gratitude of the joy that has come to them through being a recipient of the Christian Gospel, wants to share that out to people regardless. And I have certainly not made attempts to try to convert a Jew to Christianity --

TANENBAUM: Not on this program yet tonight. You've got a few more minutes.

MORIKAWA: Yeah, that's right. But I feel no reluctance to share my Christian faith [23:00] to a Jewish friend.

TANENBAUM: Can I say something about that? I learned something about evangelization from a Roman Catholic priest that made a great impression on me. There's a priest who's the president of a college in Rome, Pro Deo University, who at one time served as a missionary in Africa. And he came back -- we're good friends -- and he said to me, "Marc, you know, I have learned something tremendous about how to be a Christian." And forgive me; I'm not trying to tell you how to be a Baptist. I just want to share this experience. And

he came back from Africa, and he says, "There was a time when the Catholic Church was very authoritarian. And we used to go into Africa, and we would say to the Africans, or the Asians, 'This is the faith, the true faith. You must accept this faith in order to be saved.'" He says, "That was a scandal and an outrage. It was imperialism, triumphalism, everything that man by his arrogance was presuming to overwhelm other people with. We've learned to be generally humble in relationship to the calling of the Gospel. We come to Africa now; we seek to be present [24:00] as a witness by our lives, and by our work and our service. And what we say now to the Africans and Asians is, 'This is what my faith means to me. This is how it shows itself in the life in which we live. If this means something to you, and you want to know more about it, you come to me, and I'll be glad to tell you about it.'" It's a whole different style. And in a very real sense, that's the Jewish style, of the Jewish presence in the world. This is to say, Jews do not proselytize. The Jews hope that by virtue of the way in which they conduct themselves, by the example they try to give, or ought to be trying to give, as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, to do justice, to love mercy, to seek to bring about redemption in the world, that by the style of life they live with their families and

their community, that they will make a difference in the lives of other people. And the other people don't have to become Jews in order to be saved. We offer up the covenant [25:00] of Noah, that as men affirm --

M2: As usual, we've run out of time. You've witnessed a dialogue, a conversation between Marc Tanenbaum and Jitsuo Morikawa. Join us again next week on *Dialogue*.

(music)

M3: The preceding was prerecorded.

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