

CD-1039 Transcription

Marc H. Tanenbaum and Jerry Falwell - 85th Rabbinical Assembly
convention [1]. 1983.

Finster:

(applause) Dear colleagues and friends of the Rabbinical Assembly, we welcome all of you here tonight. I want to tell you that we have at this convention broken important and good ground of outreach. We ought to feel happy and gratified about that, for we have dealt [00:01:00] with some of the major issues that face the American Jewish community, and especially on its agenda of social concern, and I am particularly gratified to see and to hear that. Issues such as nuclear disarmament, Jewish poverty, attitudes toward the handicapped, the problem of cults, Ethiopian Jewry and Syrian Jewry, alcoholism, we even had a session on domestic violence. Had I the time, I would want to tell you as the chairman of the social action committee that the work of our colleagues in Israel, in that arena, has been of great consequence and vast [00:02:00] importance to us. A few weeks ago I was privileged to join with them in Israel, in the Knesset, to help defeat the so-called *me hu yihudi* amendment to the *Hok Hashvut*, to the Law of the Return. And I know that they are doing yeoman work on behalf of our movement, as is the Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly for Soviet Jewry, for I

know, having attended the remarkable session that they held yesterday -- which unfortunately was very sparsely attended -- but there will be occasions when we'll call upon you, and expect to very soon, to show your support for our [00:03:00] brothers and sisters of the Soviet Union, and we certainly hope that you will respond at that time and that you will communicate that as you have been doing to the people of our communities and our congregations.

Tonight we deal with a crucial concern: the future of Jewish-Christian relations in America. Touching on the issues of church and state, as it is called, touching on evangelical missionizing, and on the relation to the state of Israel. I think you will want to know that the other evening I heard that the CCAR, our Reform brethren, will also be meeting with Mr. Falwell at a future convocation that they are now planning. In a time when [00:04:00] fortunately and thankfully we can bring to our podiums our Orthodox brethren and the Reform to meet with us, we do so to note our sameness as well as our separateness, for at this convention we have had dialogue with many segments of the American community. We want to continue to talk with them and indeed to influence them. We have had Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta, because the South is a very important part of America. Yesterday we welcomed Roy Innis, the head of CORE, because the

[north?] is a very important part of America. [00:05:00] And tonight, we welcome Jerry Falwell, who speaks for middle America and, in many ways, for all of Americans who adhere to his view. (laughter)

We will want to clarify central concerns. We have many questions. We seek solid answers. We want to hear what he has to say and what Marc Tanenbaum has to say, and we hope to be heard. We are here, therefore, to explore our commonality, while admitting our disagreements, but we're here to do so in the most agreeable way that we can. For not to discuss the future Jewish-Christian relations [00:06:00] in America would be a disservice to our people and a tragedy for America, for the Jewish and Christian contributions to the American way of life is an absolutely indispensable one. America needs -- I'm sure you believe as I do -- both of our traditions working at their best, nourishing and sustaining the fabric, and the stream of American life. We have no intention of avoiding the real issues or making believe they do not exist. Let us walk together when we can, and when we depart from each other, let us do so with knowledge and with decency. This is not only the American way, I would submit to you that this is the Jewish way. And this is certainly the way in which we hope to conduct this session this evening.

[00:07:00] Our first speaker will be Reverend Jerry Falwell, one of the outstanding Evangelical preachers and teachers of America, whose thought over these last years has affected millions of people in this country. He's a graduate of the Lynchburg College in Virginia, and of the Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, and I read here that he is one of the 25 most influential people in America according to the *US News and World Report*, and the second most influential man in the United States according to *Good Housekeeping* 1983 annual poll. (laughter) Mr. Falwell has been the recipient of the Jabotinsky Centennial Award in 1980, presented to him by Menachem Begin. He is the founder of the Thomas Road Baptist Church in 1956, which then had 35 members and which today has a membership, [00:08:00] I read here, of 21,000. A founder as well of the Moral Majority in June 1979, a political organization that is pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-strong national defense. Its membership today speaks of six and a half million American families.

He will be our first speaker, and then we will hear from our dear friend, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who is an honored colleague and a cherished friend. A graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, a member of the Rabbinical Assembly, it is a particular pleasure for me to present him to you, since at one time he was a member of a congregation that I personally served

[00:09:00] and we go back together to college days at Yeshiva University, where my respect for his sincerity and knowledge first began. Already at that time, in college days, he was deeply concerned with the future of American Jewry, and that respect has subsequently blossomed into admiration for the devoted service that he has brought to the Jewish people through more than 25 years effort with the American Jewish Committee. I must add that when reading recently of Marc's meeting with Pope John Paul II in Rome, I felt a surge of pride that the Jewish position would be presented by such a devoted and informed member of the Rabbinical Assembly. And so after Reverend Falwell, Rabbi Tanenbaum will immediately speak.

One last word about the format, [00:10:00] I've asked each of our two speakers to make an opening statement, which we hope will not exceed 20 minutes. Then there will be time for comment of each upon the other for five or six minutes, and this should leave time for questions. And so, dear friends, our program will begin. We shall now proceed, and I ask you to receive Reverend Jerry Falwell. (applause)

Jerry Falwell:

Thank you, Rabbi. I have been reading about your assembly
(shouting in background) and having read about your assembly --

we have Baptists also who misbehave, [00:11:00] and so don't be embarrassed -- pardon? That's fine, we're glad to have him. You're not, all right. (shouting in background) I repeat, I've been reading about your assembly in the national media, and I was amazed. And as I listen tonight also, (shouting in background) very much amazed at the kinship of what happens in Baptist meetings, namely the congregational spirit that goes on --

FINSTER: Just wait a moment. (inaudible)

M: There can't be very many.

FALWELL: You say there can't be very many of those? (laughter)

M: There were only eight outside.

FALWELL: There were only eight outside, all right. Are they dues-paying members?

FINSTER: No, no.

FALWELL: No? No. (laughter) [00:12:00]

M: (inaudible)

FINSTER: I'm sorry.

M: (inaudible)

Jerry Falwell:

I understand. No problem. Third time. (laughter; applause) The amazing likeness of this Rabbinical Assembly and an out-of-order

Baptist convention is very obvious, and I feel right at home about five minutes in to the railroaded motions that went through with no opposition allowed. (laughter)

I want to say that it is a great honor for me to be here -- and I mean that, that is not a trite statement but sincerely from my heart -- as one who was raised up in Virginia. And if you had time to read Merrill Simon's book, that we ask Merrill [00:13:00] to help us -- we paid the bill to send to you -- for the purpose of your knowing where we came from and where we are, and hopefully where we're headed and why. Having grown up in Virginia, and having grown up in a very provincial attitude and lifestyle and relationship, to be here, speaking before hundreds of rabbis who, in my estimate, are such a vital part of the American fabric, considering where I come from -- and I won't go into that beyond this statement -- I'm honored. And I want to thank you, each of you, for allowing me to come. And though we may not agree on every issue, I want you to know that I sincerely love you and it's my great honor and privilege to be here in your midst, and I hope that tonight I can share a few things, as will Marc, that will help us perhaps to better understand who we are and where we fit, not just [00:14:00] into the present, but into the future for both of our communities.

I've just returned last week from our fifteenth tour of Israel. We carried a group of some 830 pilgrims through the land. We go each year. We stay in Jerusalem for most of the tour except for our visit into the Galilee. We employ Israeli guides, we travel on Israeli buses, we bring members of the Israeli government -- if and when they can -- to address our group, as happened this last experience, the purpose being to bring pastors, ministers, religious leaders from our community to the land of the Bible, to Israel, to meet the people, as well as the land, and come back truly committed to the Zionist commitment that is at our breast. That did happen again this year, and we were very delighted to have [00:15:00] Mr. [Moshe Aron?] speaking to us. We were very privileged to meet with the prime minister and the deputy prime minister, and to have Mr. Sharon speak to our group. We were delighted to have [Harry Hurwitz?] participate in a national live satellite show from Jerusalem that covers the nation on the final Sunday night of our tour there, and to discuss what is affecting Israel today.

When Merrill Simon called me three years ago to ask permission to trail me all over the country for two years, in a question and answer kind of format, to write a book on what Evangelical Christians really are up to, and what they believe, and the relationship that seems to be developing between conservative

Christians and the Jewish community, I'll admit I was somewhat dubious. Because very frankly, I was aware of [00:16:00] many of the questions that we would be asked, probing questions that could not be avoided, and questions which demanded answers that would be offensive. We agreed to that commitment, and in fact for about two years Merrill would fly into this city and that city and meet with us, and many, many scours of hours spent on airplanes, in terminals, in motel rooms, wherever, in answering questions that were to go into a book that he wanted to write, in his words, to set the record straight and to determine what is the stance of this conservative Christian public today, not just towards the state of Israel, but towards Judaism and towards contemporary issues, and what are those ulterior motives, if in fact they exist, that are in the hearts of Christians in this country [00:17:00] towards the Jewish people and the settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel. When the book was finished, I was glad it was. It was hard work. But I tried to do several things in answering the questions in the book -- and in the event you didn't get one, we brought some and we'd be very happy for you to take one with you, free. We addressed Israel, Judaism, contemporary issues, from our own biblical and cultural perspective as honestly as I knew how to do it, and put it on the record permanently. I then, again -- riding here from Evansville, Indiana, where I spoke this

afternoon, and Huntsville, Alabama, where I spoke this morning, and Lynchburg, where I was earlier this morning -- I reread the book, reread it carefully, [00:18:00] and it brought back the memories of those hours with Merrill, into which I think for the first time -- I could be wrong, but I think for the first time, Marc -- and not speaking for all Americans, or even all Evangelicals, for no one does that, but speaking for myself and I think a significant group of conservative and Bible-believing Christians -- I think I shared the perspective that is ours, and I think for the first time there is a record of reference for perhaps better understanding.

The past 20 years there has been developing in this country a phenomenon, as I call it, a reversal of roles in the conservative and the liberal church. When I speak of the conservative church I am not speaking of Baptist, per se, I'm speaking of those millions of American Christians who believe the Bible is the word of God, Old and New Testament, who believe in the deity [00:19:00] of the Lord Jesus Christ, and who have professed a new birth experience in relationship to God through Christ and his gospel, his death, burial, resurrection. As opposed to the liberal branch of Christendom, that would also pledge an allegiance to Christ, but who would not, for example, believe in the infallibility and the authority of the word of

God as we do, nor take a stand on biblical issues as we do in the conservative church, and I would probably say personified mostly by World Council of Churches, and its American counterpart, the National Council of Churches. When I came along as a youngster -- and I'm 51 now -- I was encouraged by the rabbi who received the award, as I am by Ronald Reagan and a few others who are still doing it well -- my point of view -- that we have [00:20:00] in this country, in the past 20 years, watched the conservative church that at one time was anything but committed to Zionism and to Jewish people, coming towards a commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant, coming towards an humanitarian commitment to the state of Israel, an historical commitment, and in some other areas, commitments that are very much American-centered. I watched that happening while simultaneously I watched liberal Christendom in this country moving more towards the PLO point of view and away from a commitment to the state of Israel and the Jewish people and their interest. I say a phenomenon because it is rather new. Some 10 years ago we began meeting in conservative Christian circles about how may we express our commitment to Israel? We've been going there for years to the land, taking pilgrimages, but how may we express [00:21:00] our commitment? And we began speaking publicly, and we began inquiring with various lobbying groups that were interested in the land and the state of Israel.

We began offering our talents and offering what headcount we might have for purposes of political persuasion. But I suppose it was not until the last five years that there has been a dialogue developing between the Jewish community and the Christian community that has brought about things like this. If I were to accept all the invitations to speak in synagogues that I receive now, I wouldn't have time to speak in the churches. I go as often as I can. I speak as many places as I'm able, whether Reform, or Orthodox, or Conservative. This is my first time with you, but I know many of you as individuals. [00:22:00] I believe that any meaningful and continuing relationship must be based on several premises. Number one, total honesty. That is what the book is all about. It was not an attempt to sidestep issues or compromise our positions. What you see in the book *Jerry Falwell and the Jews* is what I preach at Thomas Road Church, and none of that has been said in a corner, it's been said publicly and openly, and has been, is being said, will be said permanently.

Secondly, I believe that any continuing relationship -- and I believe it is a continuing one -- must be based upon patience. I do not for one moment believe that the Jewish community is monolithic any more than the Christian community is, nor do I expect that Jewish people are going to wrap their arms en masse

around conservative Christian leaders and Christian laypeople, because [00:23:00] we have not come to the point where we are suddenly, and I rather suspect they will be our children who really know the wholesomeness of this relationship more so than we. I'm only here to tell you that, speaking for myself and thousands like myself, we have made a commitment, and no amount of malignity from inside your camp or ours is going to break that commitment. It is not based upon ulterior motives, it is not based upon the necessity of the Jewish gathering in Israel to set the stage for the second coming of our messiah. I will just say in one statement that as I interpret scripture there is no such necessity, there is no such requirement for Jewish occupation or the building of a temple or any other happening in Israel or anywhere else, before we experience the second advent of our messiah.

[00:24:00] My commitment, like the commitment of most of the conservative Christian church in this country that I dialogue with, is based upon, number one, a belief in the Abrahamic Covenant that God deals with nations in the relation to how those deal with the apple of God's eye. We believe in the chosenness of the Jewish people and we believe that what God told Abraham is as binding and as true today as when he said it 4,000 years ago: "I will bless them that bless thee and curse

them that curseth thee." Beyond that my commitment is based upon a belief in the humanness and the human needs of not just Jewish people in this country, but three and a half million in the state of Israel, who through great hardship and great deprivation have moved into [00:25:00] their land, aligned by their European neighbors, totally misrepresented by the international media, looked upon as everything but human beings by many here in our own country, but who have nevertheless survived everything that debased human nature could throw at it, survived as a strong and a permanent fixture upon this planet. It is the American way, as well as the Christian way, to help those who need help and those who sincerely deserve help. Historically I believe, and I feel that history supports this, that the land belongs to the Jewish people. And I further -- (applause) I further believe that Israel is the [00:26:00] best if not the only true friend America has in that part of the world (applause) and that every dollar we spend, our tax dollars in Israel, is the best defense dollar we spend anywhere in the world, for any purpose, and I do not look on our grants to Israel and our loans to Israel as charity, I don't look on them as foreign aide, I look on our monies in Israel as an investment in our well being, in our interest, economic and political. And I say to those who disagree that if it were not for Israel and what she does, not just with her money, but her men, if it were

not for the Israeli presence, the Soviets would well now own the oil fields [00:27:00] of the Middle East, and we would not be sitting here in an economy that is strong and flourishing, and enjoying all the privileges there from this evening. We, as Americans, actually owe a great deal more to Israel than Israel owes to us in dollars and cents. I therefore stand here as one who is committed to Israel for those and many other reasons, and I can say to you that is where our Christian brothers and sisters stand in the (inaudible)

I say that a number of things are needed. Number one, honesty. We need not think we're going to change each other. I haven't come in to convert you, and I assure you you're not going to convert me. (laughter) I have come here to tell you that I'm with you, I'm for you, whether you want me to be or not, and that's where I will be when I leave here, whether you want me to be or not. (applause) [00:28:00] And I am further here to tell you that I didn't come here to receive an offering -- I don't think I'm going to (inaudible) but it hasn't been mentioned yet. (laughter) I came here at my own expense, because I want to be here and I hope that I can say what I'm going to say now, and say it in a way that it will come across in the spirit I intend to say it. I believe that if we are to develop the kind of relationship that needs to be developed -- and neither of us has

an overabundance of friends outside the United States. You and I happen to be in this country, well insulated, with love, and friendship, and resources, but when you leave these borders, like it or not, you and I are in a very distinct minority, and our friendship, our need of loyalty to one another, has never been so accentuated as it is right now. [00:29:00] I believe that, as we heard one of the rabbis say this evening regarding the purchase of Israeli bonds requiring faith, I believe down the long haul there must be a willingness to express faith and a willingness to exert patience to determine if in fact this phenomenon is for real and if it is permanent. If it is permanent, and if some 70 million conservative Christians in this country can be marshaled together in a strong, unswerving block of support for Israel and for Jewish people everywhere, and against anti-Semitism, it will have been worth everything the Jewish community expended to achieve. If, in fact, it is for real [00:30:00] it will have been worth everything that we in the Christian community expend to achieve, because I repeat, we desperately need each other, regardless of the advantages and the disadvantages of our relationships.

I want to tell you that what I know about what is happening today is for real and we're here to extend the right hand of friendship as we've been doing for a number of years, with no

expectation of anything in return, but just the willingness to continue the dialogue, continue the efforts. Recently, this past year as a matter of fact, I was asked by Congressman -- is it Lantos, from California -- to appear before a subcommittee at the House as the Jerusalem bill was being discussed. I was asked if I would bring an address to that group [00:31:00] and I did. I don't usually spend a number of hours preparing anything, because I speak 25 times a week and I travel 8,000 miles a week, and I don't have time for a script -- I get a few thoughts in my head and then fire away. That's the way I notice it's been done here tonight. (laughter) (applause) As Flip Wilson said, the devil made me do that. (laughter) But I want to read to you something that I did spend a few hours on, because it really expresses not just my commitment to the move of the embassy to Jerusalem, but I believe my heartbeat and the heartbeat of the conservative Christian public in this country, [00:32:00] a growing heartbeat towards Israel. So I'd just like to read it as I conclude my 20 minutes. (laughter)

One of the issues we have addressed from the outset of Moral Majority in 1979 and from the beginning of my ministry nearly 28 years ago is support for the nation of Israel, born in our lifetimes, and for the Jewish people everywhere who deserve a homeland where they may be forever free from the scourge that

nearly eliminated them from the face of the earth during World War II. The question before this joint hearing today, however, is not the support of Israel -- though it is in a sense -- but rather whether a sovereign nation has the right to declare its capital where it wishes and have that capital recognized by other sovereign nations. As all of you are aware, the United States recently granted full diplomatic recognition to the Vatican, [00:33:00] a religious entity that, despite this recognition, still does not recognize Israel as a nation, much less Jerusalem as its capital. The political identification of the Vatican flows from its religious status. Jerusalem, on the other hand, is revered not by one religion but by three, and even by those who hold to a secular faith, it has always been and is the historic capital of Israel. Even in our dispute with the British, the English government did not deny us the right to place our capital in Philadelphia, or New York, or Washington, or anywhere else we pleased. This has been the historic right of all nations, whatever their political status, religious belief, or concept of freedom to establish its capital where it wishes. The argument might be advanced, as it often is, that Jerusalem is a controversial city and that some accommodations should be made for the dissention [00:34:00] that so often surrounds it. What about the land held by the Soviet Union in violation of signed treaties at the end of World War II? Has the Soviet

Union's violation of these and other treaties been sufficient for us to tell the Russians we will withdraw diplomatic recognition from you? Of course it has not. Have these treaty violations been enough for any president or our state department to suggest we should punish the Soviets by moving our embassy to Novosibirsk or Siberia instead of Moscow? They have not. This is a double standard, Mr. Chairman, which no other nation, save Israel, is expected to endure. We treat no other nation the way we treat Israel. President Reagan has just finished a trip to the People's Republic of China, a nation that is officially atheistic and hostile to everything we stand for and believe in, yet our embassy is in their capital of Beijing. Nicaragua recently had a revolution and we are hardly favorable toward the regime that holds power by force and denies the elections they promised, yet our embassy's in [00:35:00] Managua.

Israel has treated Jerusalem, and particularly access to the holy places of the three religions, better than any other has or would. As a pastor I am particularly appreciative of how the Israeli government, particularly the city administration of Jerusalem, Mayor Teddy Kollek, have meticulously maintained access for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Even Israel's harshest critics cannot criticize her on this issue. Compare Israel's treatment of the holy places to Jordan's when that nation maintained control over east Jerusalem. Jordan raised all Jewish

synagogues in east Jerusalem. Jordan used tombstones from Jewish cemeteries for roads and for latrines in its army camps. Jordan signed an agreement with Israel that it would let any Jew visit the Western Wall. It never lived up to that agreement. Jordan forbade any church to build a steeple higher than the Islamic minaret. [00:36:00] Compare this with Israel's record, not only in Jerusalem but also its open bridges policy over the Jordan River, which allows Muslims and anyone else to cross into Israel and visit the holy places in Jerusalem, even if the country from which the person comes is at war with Israel. Israel is not obligated under international law, Mr. Chairman, to provide access to citizens of countries at war with Israel, but she does it. Even the Vatican recognizes this policy. Listen to what Israel's Declaration of Independence states: "The state of Israel will be based on the principles of liberty, justice, and peace, as conceived by the prophets of Israel. We'll uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of religion, race, or sex. We'll guarantee freedom of religion, conscious, education, and culture, and we'll safeguard the holy places of all religions."

Is there any nation in the Middle East, which has made such a pledge or has carried it out so faithfully as Israel? I think not. Jerusalem is not only the capital of the nation of Israel,

[00:37:00] it is also the capital of the three great religions. Jerusalem is holy to Christians because of what Christ did there. Why did Jesus come to Jerusalem? Because he recognized it as the capital of his country. It is the same with Islam. Mohammed lived and worked all his life in Arabia, but Muslims believe that when he went to heaven he came first to Jerusalem, because he recognized Jerusalem as the center of Judaism and Christianity and saw the validity of the claims of their prophets. Of course to the Jew, Jerusalem is the capital because it was declared so thousands of years before Jesus and Mohammed, by God himself.

What then is the main stumbling block keeping the US from doing what is morally correct, religiously justified, and politically correct? It seems to be the fear of what might happen given the threats of some who have an interest in keeping Israel destabilized and her borders unfixed. Should we really be fearful of such threats? I think not. President Harry Truman was advised by the State Department [00:38:00] in 1948 not to recognize the newly independent nation. He was told that Arab nations would riot, American embassies would be attacked and forced to close, and that America would be boycotted by the Arab states. Mr. Truman ignored the advice and did what was right. He recognized Israel and the threats failed to produce the dire

consequences that were predicted. I might mention that the US, which does not recognize Berlin as the capital of East Germany, still maintains its embassy in Berlin. We sometimes treat our adversaries better than our friends. Israel is the only nation on earth which is denied the right to place its capital where it wishes. It is not right, it is not fair. Tel Aviv is no more the capital of Israel than Alexandria is the capital of Egypt. Tel Aviv is a modern creation; Jerusalem is an ancient heritage. Tel Aviv is the brainchild of man; Jerusalem is the heartthrob of God. Moving our embassy from exile in Tel Aviv to its rightful home in Jerusalem would tell the world that our commitment to this single democracy [00:39:00] in the Middle East is irrevocable, that regardless of economic or political conditions, we stand behind Israel's right to exist free from outside predators and that no surplus or shortage of oil, or any other reason, will allow us to sacrifice our friend on the altar of expediency. Do we think that we can promote reasonable behavior among those who have sworn to wipe Israel from the map by allowing threats to determine American policy, even the location of our embassy? From whom should we expect reasonable behavior? From Libya? From Syria? From Iraq or Iran, the latter of which we are told is responsible for the killings of our marines in Lebanon. From the reasonable and rational PLO, who massacre innocent women and children and civilians of all types,

and who certainly are not going to kill fewer Israelis because we've kept our embassy in Tel Aviv. Israel is not asking for a favor, Mr. Chairman, it is exerting a right, the right to be treated as other nations, the right to have its capital [00:40:00] recognized by all nations. This is the heartbeat we have towards Jerusalem, towards Israel, towards Jewish people, and we're pleased to be here tonight to express it to you. Thank you. (applause)

Marc Tanenbaum:

(laughter) It's too Jewish. (laughter) [00:41:00] A week ago Friday I had the privilege of being part of a small group of American Jewish Committee leaders, men and women, who had an audience with Pope John Paul II in the Apostolic Palace. If you're looking for a place to hold a fancy [*chassen?*] or bar mitzvah (laughter) -- you can even arrange for a kosher caterer, I understand, in the new spirit of the times. I mention that because, first of all, in itself [00:42:00] it was a deeply moving and I believe in some ways historic occasion. Once you have an opportunity to read the text of the official declarations that were exchanged between our leadership and the pope regarding the present relationship between some 800 million Roman Catholics throughout the world whom he represents and the Jewish people. But the reason I tell you that story is not to

make my Catholic-Jewish speech tonight, but to tell you that after that audience was over and there was an exchange of gifts, which is usual protocol, we in fact presented to him a copy of the Book of Esther, illuminated by an Israeli artist. He kept asking, "What is this phrase *Mordecai lo [chach'va v'lo yishtach chaveh?]*" (laughter) [00:43:00] Jerry Falwell, that's Baptist for "Mordecai would not kneel or bow down." But the reason I begin with that story is that after the audience was over and the spirit was genuinely irenic, deeply respectful, warm and genuinely loving -- the pope actually in his official text spoke of his love of the Jewish people, a love he said so profound it is a love which the New Testament has inherited from the Old Testament. Well after the audience was over and we came out into the hall of St. Peter's Basilica and said *shalom aleichem* to all the Swiss guards, one of the bishops on the Vatican staff came over to me and said, "Boy, that was a wonderful audience. What do you do for an encore?" And I said, "I'm going to Miami Beach to share a platform with Reverend Jerry Falwell." (laughter) (applause) [00:44:00] [*alvega halishcht?*] And he turned to me and he said, "Oh."

Reverend Falwell indicated the new life that he has been going through in recent years in terms of the invitations that he has been receiving from synagogues and temples to come and make the

kind of magnificent address that he has this evening. I want him to know that he has great commiseration on my part, because I'm working the other side of the street.

Recording:

This program is continued on the opposite side.

(break in audio)

Marc Tanenbaum:

[00:45:00] -- thank him tonight, because had he not been invited by the Rabbinical Assembly I would not have a chance to meet so many Jews and rabbis all in one occasion. I want to respond to Reverend Falwell's address in the spirit with which has defined the terms for our conversation this evening: namely, a spirit integrity and genuine honesty. I believe the greatest compliment that two people who really respect each other can pay to one another is to speak out of their hearts, heart to heart, with all the honesty they're capable of, whatever the pain, as part of the process of purgation of pain and coming to a deeper mutual appreciation.

[00:46:00] I began my outreach to Evangelical Christians in 1965, because as I began traveling through the South, through Dallas, and Houston, and Arizona, and Atlanta, Georgia, and

Greensboro, I began to realize something that Reverend Falwell was suggesting here this evening. The ignorance, the illiteracy, the caricatures, the stereotypes that Jews and not only Jews, but the vast majority of American Christians, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestant and others, had about Evangelical Christians and Christianity literally began to verge on an obscenity. The quality of the people I began to meet, the genuineness of their heart, their desire to know Jews, and Israel, and Judaism, [00:47:00] became a very important challenge for me personally as well as professionally. And so I began in late 1965 to establish a relationship with Dr. Billy Graham, then with the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Jimmy Allen, and many others there, Dr. Harold Olson, the president of the Evangelical Free Church, and I began to realize that the gap between our perceptions and our realities are staggering and really quite incredible in the twentieth century, in an age of such massive, instantaneous communication.

We can bounce messages off satellites around the world, and we walk across the street from each other and not know who we really are and what we're about. One of the most hardening aspects [00:48:00] of now nearly three decades of service in the area of seeking to overcome misunderstanding and promote mutual appreciation, mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews -- of all denominational groups -- has been a recognition that there

is in every religious community the potentiality of growth and development provided there is an intention to want to overcome ones parochialism and isolationism, and elevate that into some kind of idolatry, some kind of chauvinism. "It's mine and I'm not going to change." And I think the growth and relationship between millions of Evangelical Christians -- perhaps there are 70 million, that's what the Gallup Poll says now. The last kinds of statistics I've seen from the Southern Baptists were something like 40, 50 million -- whatever the numbers -- incidentally 20 million [00:49:00] in this kind is statistical (inaudible). But the fact remains this has been one of the most significant developments in the transformation of the history of the United States since the end of World War II, and I want to say that I, personally, am grateful, first, that the Rabbinical Assembly had the intelligence and the wisdom in its leadership to extend this invitation to Reverend Falwell, especially in light of the recent events that have taken place through the last election. Presupposed in this invitation is a determination to uphold the fundamental principles of American democracy, the first of which is freedom of expression; secondly, both a Jewish as well as a deeply democratic commitment to seeking [00:50:00] knowledge and truth through open discussion and debate. We had something to do with that in the tradition of [*kenat sofree mar bechochma?*], the competition of the scribes, increases wisdom,

and I think this evening is a helpful move in the development of such a process of unlearning that which needs to be unlearned, and learning that which has to do with the real world in which we live today.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge again, as I did once before to Jerry Falwell when he did me the honor of visiting with me in October of 1980, that the Jewish community, with whatever other differences we may have on other issues that I want to talk about in a moment, the Jewish community does not take for granted the fact that there are millions of Evangelical Christians across the entire spectrum, [00:51:00] from fundamentalists to mainline even to some of the more liberal elements of the Evangelical community, does not take for granted the stalwart support that they have given us in advocacy of the security and the well being of the state of Israel and our brothers and sisters there. (applause) We've had some Jewish leaders on their own speak with phlegm and venom, sometimes more in anger than in wisdom. (inaudible) with our supporters. Let me tell you the reality that Reverend Falwell speaks of tonight. I was invited to speak before the World Council of Churches in Vancouver at its assembly as the official Jewish representative. And I was there with a Muslim, and a Hindu, [00:52:00] and Africans, and Christians of the western world. Sitting through

that assembly I could not believe what was going on. Apart from the fact the place was honeycomb with PLO people, that it was honeycomb with KGB agents following the Russian Orthodox Church around. And there's some good things the World Council of Churches does in social justice, refugee, humanitarian issues. They are to be honored. But sitting through that assembly I could not believe that this was the year of 1984 when that assembly leaped to adopt resolutions condemning the United States for anything that we did to stand against communist expansionism, and totalitarianism, and to uphold democratic countries, but couldn't bring itself to adopt a single resolution critical of the Soviet Union for its invasion of Afghanistan, or the repression of human rights upheld, or Cuban Angola. That's not the kind of world that we want to see [00:53:00] constructed for the future, for ourselves, for this great country, and for our children. And so on many levels, in terms of the firm, profoundly biblical, grounded support of Israel, for the stands that he and Billy Graham and many others have been taking against anti-Semitism, for the support that they have given us in the advocacy of the human rights of Soviet Jews and other oppressed Jewish communities, we thank God and we thank God for their stalwart support and solidarity with us.

But that's not why we're here this evening. If that had been the level of relationship and the nature of the issues that had been between us, there would not have been this great concern about somehow wanting to reestablish dialogue with Reverend Falwell, and fundamentalist Christians, and Moral Majority people, and others. [00:54:00] In that spirit of honesty we need to deal with a reality. During the course of this last election, we take polls in the Jewish community every month to know how Jews feel about issues. If you had taken a poll in March and April of last year, President Ronald Reagan would have received at least 50 to 55%, perhaps even 60% of the Jewish vote in the United States during that campaign. The Jewish community -- I think all of us would acknowledge this -- was absolutely appalled that a candidate for the presidency of the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, running on the Democratic ticket, could have at his side a Louis Farrakhan, preaching the most vicious kind of Nazi-like anti-Semitism and that that could go on without any significant [00:55:00] response. And in reaction to that, I think the whole mood of the Jewish community was indeed we know where we are with Ronald Reagan, we know where we are in terms of a strong defense of America, we know where we are in strong support for Israel, strong support for Soviet Jewry, and many other causes, and the mood in the Jewish community was in fact preparing to give him the highest

proportion of the Jewish vote of any Republican president in history. And then a number of things began to take place and this is what we have got to face in candor, to see what our mutual perceptions of these issues are, how we can deal with them, whether they are issues that are so fundamental and incapable of change and modification, reinterpretation, in which case we have a different set of problems to deal with. Or do we have problems of time lag, cultural lag, and perhaps even linguistic problems that can be dealt with in a constructive spirit and resolve. I want to mention four of them quickly to identify them and perhaps we can have discussion about them.

[00:56:00] There was a theme which began to emerge early on, even as far back as 1980, began to take on the concrete form of an ideological formulation, a fundamental conception, that began to emerge out of certain quarters of the alliance between fundamentalist preachers and ultra conservative politicians, an example of which is the following: a born-again Christian, acknowledged born-again Christian, who I take it would identify himself with the religious political ideological wing that Reverend Falwell has come to embody for a great many millions of Americans, is an official of the United States Department of Education. He used American governmental funds to mail a speech [00:57:00] to public school teachers and superintendents

throughout the whole middle west, declaring in these words charges that godlessness is now controlling every aspect of our society, and then asks how can these things be happening in America, this land of freedom, this Christian nation? What has happened to our Christian system of values? This government-funded speech then added in the last few years Christians have woken to the desperate need of a truly Christian educational system for their young people. I'm excited to see the growth of the Christian textbook and the curriculum ministries. Now as a graduate of a Jewish parochial school, I see absolutely nothing discontinuous -- there's no dissonance from me in a Christian school system. But the notion that the American public school system, which has been the meeting ground for the Americanization of generation [00:59:00] upon generation of America, which is the ground of the pluralistic experiment of America, when that is seen as an avenue for that kind of (inaudible) of an ideology, it means that we have serious problems to contend with.

Now beyond that, the US Department of Education has also proposed regulations to restrict funds for the Magnet Schools Assistance Program for teaching secular humanism. Similar restriction involved the prohibition of secular humanism has already been passed in the education for the Economic Security

Act. Nowhere is the term "secular humanism" defined, and I tell you as I've read through the literature, Thomas Jefferson by that definition -- or absence of definition -- could have been defined certainly as a humanist, if not a secular humanist. Benjamin Franklin even had strong humanistic qualities about him. The point is there is a basic conception which is emerging [00:59:00] in this kind of simplistic black and white formulation, the notion that America is in great moral difficulty. Indeed it is -- and I want to talk about that in a moment -- but that the only way to save America is to make this into what it was in the good old days, namely an Evangelical empire, as Professor Martin Marty calls it in his book, which won the National Book Award, the history of the emergence of the separation of church and state in this country.

I simply want to say that there is a great need for us to discuss together our differing perceptions of the history of America. I tell you that my reading of all of the major church historians, never mind secular historians, Martin Marty, Sydney Ahlstrom, Winthrop Hudson, Sidney Lee, all of the major Christian historians from whatever denominational tradition they come from will tell you that the only time that America [01:00:00] was in any way a Christian nation was during the period of the Massachusetts Bay colony after 1629, which lasted

75 years. It yoked together church and state. You could not run for public office unless you were vowed say for by the minister, by the preacher, who had to say that you were in good standing in communion. Yes, there were established churches in 9 of the 13 colonies, but the whole struggle of America over 200 years was to disestablish church from state, to bring about the possibility of religious liberty and freedom of conscience, and indeed for me the great irony, at this moment in much of this discussion, is that we owe it to the Southern Baptists, the Evangelical Baptist preachers, to the circuit-riding Methodist preachers, to the dissident Presbyterians who fought a life-and-death battle in this country in the state of Virginia to disestablish them to the Anglican church in order to assure [01:01:00] freedom of conscience, not only for themselves, for their own preachers, but for everyone living in the state of Virginia. And for them to hear that America's a Christian country, for Roger Williams to be told this is -- they would have understood if someone said that America is predominantly a Christian society, a society made up of at least a 145 million people who call themselves Christians. That is a fundamental difference between a Christian society and a Christian state, which must remain neutral and secular. It is the common order, it is the secular, within which all of us have our being, our

independence, on the basis of mutual respect and first class citizenship. (applause)

[01:02:00] Wait, I got more. (laughter) I want to make one other point -- two other points, really. I'll try to be as brief as I can. No I'll finish early, because I got to catch an eight o'clock plane in the morning. (laughter) I'll tell you if the meeting goes well tonight, maybe Reverend Falwell will invite me on his Learjet to go with him.

The second concern I have -- and I think this has been a concern widespread in the Jewish community -- has to do with a notion that America is in very great moral trouble. And I want to say that I think that Reverend Falwell especially and many people associated with him have had perfect pitch [01:03:00] about the moral decline in much of our society. I've just read the cover story of *Newsweek* Magazine on pornography in America. My wife is a criminologist. We had dinner the other night with Rudy Giuliani, an Italian United States attorney who has just brought the heads of five mafia families to town. And he just began telling us of the problems of the corruption and the exploitation pornography, prostitution, drugs -- the massive amount of drugs that is eating at the soul of the society. And we've got real problems to deal with. And raising those problems

in a serious, responsible way that can lead to serious, responsible solution is all of our responsibility, not only the responsibility of Reverend Falwell or those around him -- and I'm sure he would acknowledge [01:04:00] that. But I have to say that there is something amiss about the way in which the issue of the moral troubled soul of America and its social condition is being defined. When you begin saying that we need to restore America to being a Christian nation, not society, a Christian nation state, so that we can return to the condition we were at our origins, I have to say to you that that kind of mythologizing is nothing less than the revisionism of American history. And the more I hear of it, and I see it and read it everywhere, I have to tell you that we are being victimized, even paralyzed, by a very great lie. And we better face it.

(applause)

[01:05:00] Say a complex thing simply. If you read William Lawrence Sweet's *History of Revivalism*, Robert Handy's *History of the Churches of the United States and Canada*, Timothy Smith, a Baptist scholar historian -- a very great one -- on what America was like in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, it has absolutely no relationship to what some fundamentalist preachers are saying about the soul of America. All of them will agree that by the end of the eighteenth century America was

virtually an un-church country. No more than 10% of the population was affiliated with churches, not to speak of synagogues, of which there were virtually none. But beyond that, this country was indifferent religiously. Beyond that the immigrants who came to this country who went to the frontiers to work in those difficult, hard laboring, uncouth conditions, this was virtually an uncivilized society. [01:06:00] You know what the greatest problem of America was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century? Pervasive drunkenness. A social anthropologist has written a book called *The Alcoholic Republic*. This country was sodden in drunkenness. Mills, steels, God knows what, everywhere, including puritan New England. And that low moral condition, low brutal vices, which provided a condition for lynching, and the kind of high noon morality, the kind of breakdown of morality -- the reason -- now why do I raise that fine point without going into too great detail? It's because this is a reflection of the tendency to mythologize America. To tell Americans about a country, the great golden past, we have declined from that past, which is to say we are all moral pigmies. They were all moral giants in the past. We have declined. We've got to confess [01:07:00] our sin. And we believe in *t'shuva*. But the way which one defines that problem, what happens is a kind of moral paralysis of the will. And I would suggest we need to study that history together.

And finally, I want to conclude just with this last concern I have, and that is how does one deal with a problem of language, apocalyptic rhetoric? And I don't want to be judgmental about this. Everyone has a right to their own conceptions, their own ideologies, their own language. But something has happened when religious rhetoric of an apocalyptic character spills over into the political process, and I think that a great many Americans, and certainly a great many Jews, are deeply troubled.

[01:08:00] There is a cosmology, which sees the world in a cosmic struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness. That's a humanistic way of talking about the classic (inaudible) doctrine that ultimately there is a struggle between the forces of Christ and the anti-Christ, and the anti-Christ is Satan. Now one has a right to believe that, to believe in the truth of that, but when one looks at what that apocalyptic rhetoric meant in terms of its reality, literally from the Middle Ages down to contemporary times, it became a political engine in society, which said that you not only sought to negotiate differences, but if you saw life as a struggle between the forces of Christ and Satan, you were religiously obligated not only to defeat Satan, but to destroy Satan. Satan had to be removed from the earth before the millennium could take place. [01:09:00] And I have now sat with enough

congressmen and senators who were defeated in some of these campaigns, who would describe not only in terms of their voting records and how they may have been deficient in one way or another, but because they're anti-Christian and therefore anti-American, they're in league with Satan and they had to be wiped out politically. And some of them have been literally finished as a result of this kind of, what for me is a kind of fanatical campaign, and is a disturbance of the political process.

These are issues that people of good will can discuss, however emotionally charged they may be. I hope that process has begun this evening and will continue. I would not want to see a 1984 repeat itself, where Jews vote because they feel fear on both sides, fear the sense [01:10:00] of political homelessness, nowhere to go. We have not labored in this country, we have not enriched this country, we have not sunk roots in this country, to wind up at the end of the twentieth century feeling marginal to the society. And we need people like Reverend Jerry Falwell, and Billy Graham, and many others to engage us in this dialogue, not only for our sake, but for the future democratic health of this religious pluralist society, which is the greatest bastion of civil and political liberties in the world today. (applause)

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