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Dr. Franklin Little on Israel and Christian-Jewish dialogue.

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Dr. Franklin Littell is Professor of Religion at Temple University in Philadelphia. Dr. Littell has devoted his life to an explanation of the common roots of the Jewish and Christian experience. His book, *The Crucifixion of the Jews*, was published in 1975 and has won critical praise in its forthright account of anti-Semitism and Jewish and Christian histories. He has devoted much time and energy to helping the Christians understand the meanings of the Holocaust and Israel in shaping not only Jewish history, but the Christian experience as well. In 1969, Dr. Littell helped found Christians Concerned for Israel. Dr. Littell received his Bachelor of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary, and holds doctorates from Yale, Union, University of Marburg, [Thiel?] College, and [Whittimer?] College. He has lectured and [01:00] written widely. It gives me a great deal of pleasure to introduce to you at this time a man who, himself, expressed the conviction that the two major events of recent Jewish and Christian history are the Holocaust and the restoration of Israel. Dr. Franklin Littell.

(applause)

Franklin Littell:

Thank you very much. It's an honor to be here on this occasion to share with my old friend Rabbi Tanenbaum. The evening, if I have nothing more serious to correct any chairman about than to say that my name is pronounced "Li-TELL," my future [02:00] will be secured indeed.

When I thought of this very nice invitation which came to me from Mr. [Dunn?], colleagues, I wondered why an Anabaptist Methodist would be invited to speak about Jewish-Christian dialogue. I've had some wonderful experiences with Southern Baptist brethren at Louisville, and New Orleans, and Fort Worth, in the seminaries and various conferences, but usually on the theme of religious liberty, whereas in the one before us this evening. And yet as I thought about it, I remembered that one good reason might be that because a monolithic, repressive Christendom has always [03:00] been wretched for both dissenters and Jews. As a Church historian looking back to the thirteenth century, I remember that the Fourth Lateran Council, which introduced the yellow badge for Jews appearing in public, was also the council which launched the Inquisition. It was the time of the Crusades, both external and internal. It was a terrible time for [Weldenzies?] and [Abogensies?] and Bogomili as well as for the Jews. So that might be one thing which ties our concerns

for religious liberty and the dignity of the human person and conscience to this theme of Christian-Jewish mutuality.

Another might be that in our own lifetime, we have seen [04:00] what is sometimes called post-Christian ideologies and systems. Programming genocide for the Jewish people and destruction for faithful Christians. One has only to think of the Third Reich or the plight of Soviet Jewry and evangelical Christians today in Russia to see, again, the mutualities which come before us whenever we think of religious liberty and the common stake of Jews and Christians.

We might say that the thing which brings us together is that Christians who are truly committed and prepared to stand up as volunteers, and Jews must form an alliance against common enemies, of which the twentieth century has given us a number. I think of [05:00] the Anschluss which recently occurred in [Lebanon?], and the destruction of the Christian communities there, and the fact that in their time of trouble, Israel was the only national support they received. I predict that in 10 years, the little Maronite communities will be as pitiable as the Copts of Egypt. Although, now this miracle has occurred, this most unexpected thing, who is to say that hopeful signs may

come out of a new Egypt, a new Israel, a new relationship in the Middle East.

But the problem of discussing this kind of [06:00] partnership is that we Christians do not come into any interaction with Jews, with the Jewish people, or any alliance of that kind with clean hands. You see, there were two watershed events. Alpine events, as the poet Bialik would have put it. Formative, unique events in recent history. And I mean both Jewish and Christian history, and not just one, a restored Israel. And as background to this discussion of how Jews and faithful Christians may stand together against common enemies, how they may overcome [07:00] the wretchedness of centuries of antagonism, and particularly of false teaching on the Christian side about the Jewish people. There was always the fact that 35 and 40 years ago, when faced by our first examination on the importance of Jewish survival to Christianity, we flunked our exams miserably.

Now, Christianity faces the most serious credibility crisis in 2,000 years. Christianity -- certainly Christendom -- and for many people around the world, that means Christianity [08:00] has become incredible to many in Asia, and Africa, and even of our own youth. I think often of that passage in Isaiah in the fifty-first chapter that says, "Your Lord, and the Lord your

God, who pleads the cause of his people, behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of trembling, and I will put it into the hand of your tormenters." And when I think of what it was like, 40 and 45 years ago for our Jewish friends to see Central European Jewry being crushed and destroyed, and to the miracle, which is a restored Israel [09:00] today. And [since either way?] in which in so many different dimensions of our Christian witness and style of life, we are trashing around, it does seem to me that the cup of trembling has been passed out of the hands of the Jewish people into the hands of the Christian churches.

Of course, these are two mysteries, and it would be wrong, certainly, to refer to the Holocaust and the restored Israel as two sides of the same coin. But there are two discrete events, not to argue the question of relationship, which are watershed events [10:00] for Jews and for Christians. Just 35 and 40 years ago, Christendom, after teaching contempt of the Jews for centuries, divided into three groups. In the first group were the perpetrators, in the second group were the victims, and the third group were the spectators. About the perpetrators, we have many volumes, some of them popular volumes today, about the Fuhrer and his associates. But you and I who are educated people, and who are professing Christians, must never forget [11:00] that the six million Jews were put to death by baptized

Christians in the heart of Christendom. And if that's not a credibility crisis, I don't know what one is. And if we talk about the educated dimension of it, they were put to death not by ignorant savages off in the bushes someplace, but by products of what was then the best university system in the world. The death camps were designed by professors and built by PhDs, so to say. And Himmler was proud of the fact that in his [Death Head?] group, he had large number of high officers with PhDs. [12:00]

Well, Bormann was not a Christian. He was [ausgetreten?]. The leader of the agricultural post in Hitler's cabinet also was an avowed non-Christian. But it's too little too late for us to say, "Well, these were pagans." That would have been a good word 35 years ago. Today, we have, as Christians, to live with the moral implications of this first massive event, which can either poison or perhaps redeem Christian-Jewish relationship. Adolf Hitler died a Roman Catholic in good standing. Never excommunicated, never even [13:00] rebuked. And to this day, an annual mass is had in his memory in Madrid. Every year, by a priest who's still in good standing. Herman Goering was laid away in a Christian service as our dear departed brother in Christ, [Protestant?]. Well, the perpetrators. The victims. It's not at all symmetrical, but it gives us perhaps an opportunity to speak and to be grateful to our Jewish neighbors and friends

that they will speak about such things, [14:00] that there were faithful Christians at a time when millions betrayed their baptism and left the Jews alone to face the Adversary with a capital A now. There were between 11 and 12,000 Christian martyrs, as far as we can determine. People like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, [Pob Schlichtenberg?] of the Catholic Cathedral in Berlin, who prayed every Sunday morning for the Jews. Not the baptized Jews, now. He was one of the few who saw the importance of Jews as Jews, and not just non-Aryan Christians. Father Max Josef Metzger, leader of the Catholic Peace Union. Father Alfred Delp. Pastor Paul Schneider, [15:00] the first of the Protestant martyrs, who was arrested and beaten until he died in prison. Their names should be honored.

I think always of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom I knew. And then I remember that Heinrich Gruber's office. Gruber's office, the [Gruberstehl?], as they called it in Berlin, smuggled over 1,000 Jews to safety. And of those people in the Gruber [burrow?], 38 out of 57 died at the hands of the Gestapo. That is, Christians who stood up in the great tradition of Christian martyrs.

[16:00]

And we who are in the Free Church tradition shouldn't rejoice too quickly about it, because it is true that the apostasy which

was [lain?] throughout Christendom at the time of the Third Reich was apostasy by [influent?], people had been baptized and infants, and hadn't the faintest notion what it meant. But the record of the Free Churches, I know the record of [Paul Schmidt?], and the *Baptistengemeinden* in Deutschland. We shouldn't take too much comfort either in that dimension of it. I know the record of the *Bischöfliche Methodistenkirche*, which happens to be my denomination.

The truth is that when the Jews had to stand alone against the evil powers, [17:00] most of the Christians, under temptation, pressure, ran and betrayed their baptism, betrayed their calling. A few stood up. Not enough to make symmetry, but enough, perhaps, to talk about such things. To talk about our present and future as Christians and as Jews.

I think of Bonhoeffer. He told us in the summer of 1939, he was the secretary of the German Student Christian Movement, that Hitler was the face of the Antichrist, and he had to be destroyed. And he was picked up because of his friendship with people, and the July 20th attempt on Hitler's life. He was safe enough in this country. He'd been offered a job teaching at Union Theological [18:00] Seminary by Reinhold Niebuhr and Uncle Henry, Henry Sloane Coffin. He could have stayed. But he said

"No, [the enemy is?] going to be defeated, and I have to go back and share the sufferings of my people, or I'll have no right to rebuild a new Germany." And he almost made it. He almost made it. They killed him on April 8th. Himmler sent the order out, and they killed thousands of leaders of various resistance groups when the end was so close. They killed him on April 8th in the Flossenburg, just a few days before the American Army got there to liberate the survivors.

And for those of you who think and pray about the great mysteries [19:00] of this age in which we live, let me tell you this one. We have it from two British Air Force men who were prisoners of war in the Flossenburg. Bonhoeffer had a little prayer group, which met every morning, read the Bible, pray together. And they used the *Losungen*, which is the meditation book that the Moravians founded 250 years ago, and it's been used ever since in German-language areas by Protestant Christians. And the *Losungen*, [or the day?] in which they killed him has, with God before us, who can stand against us?

[20:00] The mysteries and the tragedies, and the agony [we face?] in this day is one in which any faithful person, Jew or Christian, has to wrestle as Jacob wrestled with the Angel of the Lord to find his or her way through the doubts, the

temptations, the social pressures, as though the German way of life, which was very high in the nineteenth century, or the American way of life, which is very high today. There's any substitute for a faithful community. And so the Church is like a dead fish [afloat?] with the current belly-up, instead of to swim against the stream. One thing we Christians can learn in interaction with the Jewish people is that [21:00] a people which is stamped in the Biblical mold, a people on whom the hand of the Lord has been laid are a [clever?] culture, because they live in anticipation of the kingdom which is to come, not blessing and sanctifying the high places of the present age.

I stress the Holocaust because we can't find our way through until we work out our time of mourning for the apostasy of Christendom. Until we are able to understand why it is that the most powerful crucifixion story in contemporary literature was written by a Jew. [22:00] It's Elie Wiesel's tale in the book *Night*, of the death of a little boy in the death camp. Why should that be? Then we will begin to work our way through to the kind of mutualities which God certainly intends Jews and faithful Christians to enjoy with each other.

Well, the third group are the spectators. Some of you know, certainly, Arthur Morris book, *While Six Million Died*. It was a

popular book in paperback. The whole story has been documented with all the necessary footnotes and sources by Henry Feingold. The truth is, that when [23:00] Central European Jewry was being wrung to pieces, the so-called Christian nations, including our own, including Britain, turned their faces away from even the most immediate and necessary responses, even temporary aid. *The Christian Century*, that great liberal Protestant journal, and its editor, when there was a chance to get 100,000 temporary visas to rescue, as it were, a piece of flesh from the bird's mouth, published an editorial by Charles Clayton Morrison, in line with a whole series of his editorials in which he said, "Don't do it, the immigration line's high, don't let the Jews in, any more of them." [They're simply?] anti-Semitism, and so on and so on and so on. [24:00] [Rachel Fishman's?] book tells that story, detail after detail.

Where were you on 15th of June, 1939? How many can remember that? Well, it happens to have a special meaning to me. And I saw a few weeks ago *The Voyage of the Damned*, which is the story of the St. Louis, a ship which set out, was not admitted to the harbor in Havana, and was turned away from our shores by Coast Guard cutter. Had to go back to Hitler's *Festung Europa*, and [25:00] two-thirds of the people perished. And in the scene of that day, when our ships were turning the St. Louis away to the

deaths of two-thirds of its passengers, (inaudible) [on the screen?] June 15, 1939, which is Mrs. Littell and my wedding day. I thought of that passage in the New Testament, you know, "Where are you on that day?" One of them said, "I'm out plowing a field," (laughter) and one of them said, "I was [married?]." I mean, who can answer? Who can answer? If we have to answer, you know, if Thou, O Lord, should judge iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? [26:00] We are spectators. Christendom...

I [don't?] want to talk about Pius XII. There have been whole books written about Pius XII. I'll tell you about Bishop [Melli?] at my church. We visited with him on July 17, 1939, and he told us how Hitler had taken German youth out of the dancehalls, and how he had changed their lives to athletic spirituality. They were no longer smoking, staying out late nights. And he concluded his good, Methodist talk, "Hitler is God's man for Germany." And that was seven months after the *Kristallnacht*, after [27:00] it was plain for all to see the brutal anti-Semitism and thuggery of the Hitler machine.

And I think that the leaders of Christendom in this first examination of the Christians about Jewish survival, I'm reminded of a story which appeared in July of 1975 in the *New York Times*. This may give us a bit of [narration?]. And he gave

me help in finding my way about the spectators. It's the story, it's like something out of Damon Runyon. It's the story of one Peter Diapoulos who was interviewed in some distant city, three days, two nights, closed [28:00] motel room, shades drawn, and then disappeared out into the bushes again. He was on the lam, as the saying is, from the Mafia. Peter Diapoulos had been a member of the Gallo faction of the Colombo Family of Brooklyn. And he was disenchanted with his life as a street fighter and gangster because John Gallo, the older brother, had been gunned down with one of his aides in a Brooklyn restaurant, and the leadership of the faction had been taken over by Albert Gallo, popularly called "the Blast." And his complaint was [29:00] when the boys are down there in the street fighting it out, the Blast isn't there with them. He's way up in the bleachers looking on. The Blast, says Peter Diapoulos, is a high-bleacher.

Now the problem of the leadership of Christendom, by and large, during the agony of the Jews in the *Shoah*, in the Holocaust, is that they were high-bleachers. And you and I, [each in his own history?], his own way, has to answer the question, "What was I doing? And where am I now?" [And when a Butz?], Professor of Electrical Engineering, [30:00] or a KKK leader, or a [Pake?] in New York City, or a [Haug?] in Philadelphia or someplace else, in ways brutal or subtle, attacks the integrity of the Jewish

people, are we high-bleachers? Or are we there to be counted faithful as servants of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who is the Christians' God if they stay Christian? And don't apostatize.

So my word about the first event, watershed if [you're going to?] this time is a paraphrase of an ancient teaching the rabbis taught, that if the gentiles had understood the meaning of the destruction of the Temple, [31:00] they would have mourned it more than the Jews. And I say that if the Christians were to understand the meaning of the Holocaust, they would mourn it more than the Jews. Today, in this time of miracles and change, it is truly a much more difficult thing to be a professing Christian, to look at the mighty works of God in history, than it is to be a Jew.

Well, of course, the question is now can we speak of such things? Or maybe why should we speak? One of Bonhoeffer's great sayings was that one act is worth [32:00] 100 sermons. I think, in speaking of Christian-Jewish mutuality, of *Aktion Sühnezeichen*, or Action Reconciliation, which was founded by a friend of mine, Lothar Kreyssig, in 1958. A man of the resistance in Germany, who set out to convince and to mobilize young German volunteers to go to the areas where great wrong had

been done by Germany to other people. And you will find such volunteers outside of Germany, and particularly in Israel today. Forty-three young volunteers in Jerusalem, led by Dr. Michael [Krupp?], working with young people [33:00] in clubs, helping to harvest in the *kibbutzim*. Being present, not passing out tracts and pamphlets, but being present in a work of reconciliation. Or I think of Nes Ammim, which is a Christian *moshav* up in northern Galilee, next door to the *kibbutz* of ghetto fighters. Nes Ammim was founded by one of the most remarkable Christians I've ever known, Johan Pilon. And Johan Pilon was sent out to Palestine [then-mandate?]. He was a Hebrew-Christian missionary, a regular, old-fashioned [sila trapper?]. And then it came to him in 1948, as he tells the story, that this was no longer, in the age of the Holocaust, [34:00] and at the time when Israel had had to fight so desperately in the first battle for her liberty, for a Christian to take that line toward the Jewish people. And he committed himself in what he called his second conversion. He'd been sent out by a very conservative Dutch Christian group. The second conversion. And his wife and he committed themselves to live the rest of their lives and help to build up the land. And today, Nes Ammim has developed these wonderful [Bacharach?] roses with long stems, 30-inch stems, very stiff. And they're shipped out by the tens of thousands every morning from [Lydd?] Airport to Frankfurt and to Rotterdam, and scattered all over

Europe. And now they have [35:00] 30-something acres of avocado trees that they're building. They're not preaching, they're not talking, they're simply being present in a desperately important [internal role?].

Oh, I think of some efforts which have been made in this country toward reconciliation. I'm especially grateful for the fact that, since 1974, when we first started emphasizing this mutuality and identity, there has been a growing number of Christian families and congregations observing *Yom HaShoah*, which is the memorial day to the six million. And last [36:00] year, several hundred congregations, Christian congregations, had observances on *Yom HaShoah*. Next -- put the date in your datebook -- the evening of May 4th and the day of the 5th in the common calendar. We Christians much work through our time of mourning. I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on anybody, but simply to say either we wrestle our way through to a new understanding and a new teaching, or we shall not master the credibility crisis.

The second thing is not how can we speak, but who can speak? What right has any gentile to talk of such things? And we must speak under compulsion. [37:00] You remember when I say I'll no longer speak in his name? Then there is, as it were, a consuming

fire shot up in my bones, and I'm weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain. The Holocaust, and the whole problematic of Christian-Jewish relations since the time of the Church Fathers and the teaching of the great lies about the Jews is not something to be talked about at the party table. It is something which involves the very central mysteries and struggles and wrestling for faith. And if we speak at all, we must speak under compulsion. We speak -- well, Elie Wiesel's book *The Oath* helped me profoundly on this one. It's the story of [38:00] a man, a survivor, who had seen his community destroyed. He was the only one who escaped alive, and he took an oath that he would never talk of it, lest the Almighty should overhear, and in his judgment, destroy the universe. And then sometime later, he is face-to-face with the young man who is holding life cheaply, and life's meaningless, and he's contemplating suicide. And he breaks his oath to save a life. The only right that we have to speak of such things is to save life.

And then finally, the question is what kind of language shall we use? And here, we run into the [39:00] most acute, immediate difficulty that I have seen when Christians begin to talk about rethinking and reworking, Christians and Jews begin to talk about what they have in common, and so forth. Because at least in the circles which I generally run in, we are accustomed to

use the language [of the?] Enlightenment, the language of educated people, the language of abstraction, of generalizations, of propositions. And we fall very easily into a kind of a false universals. [For instance?], one of my friends -- I won't mention the name, but because he's known to many here -- said the other day to me, "Why should I be any more interested than any one of 150 other nations?" Well, anybody who can ask that question is simply talking another language.

[40:00] Then you say, "Well, Seychelles as you know, and Cyprus, and other little countries. It's a way of thinking. The thought is [well nations?]. The category is -- the rubric is nations, and then there are various nations, hmm? It shows up even more clearly in correspondence I get now, since Christians Concerned for Israel got started. Any number of people that I've worked with in various social concerns over quite a few years, to say, "Well, you say we should be concerned about the Jews, and about what we do to the Jews. Look what we did to the American Indians." And of course, the only answer to that is, "What's that got to do with it?" But I know what it has to do with. It has to do with the kind of a mind that is trained to look for larger and larger formulae, [41:00] preferably mathematical. So that instead of talking about Israel or talking about the Holocaust as discrete events, we can talk about man's inhumanity to man. When we got the program for the high school started in

Philadelphia, the first major school district to do it in this country, the only opposition which came to it was from people who said, "Let's not talk about the Holocaust. Let's talk about genocide." I mean, we're trained to think in abstractions, and not to think in terms of events, the language of events, the story.

Think of the Exodus. Well, someone comes along with the kind of learning which we're accustomed to deal with, and says, "Well, [42:00] since time immemorial, people have been wandering about the face of the Earth. And the Jews, the Hebrews coming -- slaves coming out of Egypt are another wandering of people." Well, that's not what the Exodus is all about, of course. It's a way of abstracting the meaning. Two or three years ago, in a class for undergraduates which I have taught on genocide, politics, and religion, we were trying to make clear the importance of events, discrete events, the story. And in the front row, there was a boy who said, "I don't care any about the Exodus. That happened way back then, I want to talk about these, I want to talk about problems today." And [then?] stood up, for the first time [43:00] opening her mouth, a very striking woman about 15 years older than most of the students, black woman, and she started off. And for eight and a half woman, she spoke passionately of the Exodus. And it finally came to me that back

of this story of the people who came out of slavery moving toward freedom in the promised land, the language she was using, she was talking about something that had happened to her and her people in the United States a hundred years ago, and she wasn't going to give that up for anybody.

Truth is to remember, to see oneself, and one's history, and one's family, and one's people against the alpine events as told, in this case, in biblical history. Or take [44:00] Sinai. You speak of the giving of the law. Well, pretty soon, somebody tells you about Confucius analects, and somebody else talks about some other great lawgiver, and what you have is that every tribe has had lawgivers. Which of course is not what Sinai's about. What was given us, Jews and Christians at Sinai, is that by which nations and generations are broken or made. Or what the Christians profess at Golgotha, about Golgotha. [Nobody?] remembers that Martin Luther King was assassinated, and Gandhi was killed by Hindu extremists, and Socrates had to drink the hemlock. And then pretty soon, instead of what one must say yes or no to in a discrete event [45:00] becomes simply "This is a bad world for good men." Which is an amiable generalization, but not exactly what we're talking about. The same thing is true of the Holocaust. The same thing is true of a restored Israel. Israel is not simply one of 157 nations in the United Nations,

or something. The language of abstraction and generalization is the language which leads to debate. The language of the story, whether the story is the Exodus, or the Holocaust, or a restored Israel, calls for a yes or no, that is either you get it or you don't.

And so what Israel means to me [46:00] is an event which can be understood only in the language of the Bible, in the language which narrates the actions of God in history. The story that can't be described in the language of philosophy, it can't be abstracted in terms of some other generalization system. It means something which comes right through to the heart of life commitment. It's part of the recovery of an authentic Christianity, after a time of apostasy followed by a time of spiritual wrestling and recovery. And the text for that is the first verse of the fifty-first chapter of Isaiah: "Look unto the rock [47:00] whence you were hewn and of to the whole of the quarry whence you are digged. Look unto Abraham, your father, and unto Sarah that bore you. For the Lord shall comfort Zion."

Well, that's the story. Either you get it or you don't.

(laughter) (applause)

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