

CD-1095 Transcription

Interview with Pat Robertson on the 700 Club, 12 October [1981?]

ROBERTSON: (applause) Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen.

For those of you who watch this program live via satellite, this is Columbus Day, and it's a holiday. And we celebrate the time in 1492 that Columbus sailed the ocean blue. Well, this is supposedly the time that our nation was discovered. But something very significant happened. This is Spain, and somewhere along here in the Madrid area, Columbus took off and, with some little ships, he came around and went over to find a new world. But, at the same day, according to what records I have, another little band of people took off from Spain. It was one of those very unusual things that happened. While Columbus was leaving to come and find America, the Spanish people were expelling their Jewish population, and the boats crossed, I understand, in the river, coming down out of here. One group went over to find [01:00] refuge in the Middle East area, around Turkey and into that area. The other came over here as if God himself was saying, "Well, I'm going to prepare something -- a nation -- that would look after the rights of my people." It's strange that it happened within the same period time, but it did.

And at this point, this evening, is the beginning of a very, very special festival -- the Feast of Tabernacles, as we call it, or *Sukkot* -- whatever name you give it. And this is the period of the high holy days of our Jewish friends. And today, it's a great pleasure to introduce on *The 700 Club* a man who's been described as the human-rights rabbi of America. (laughter) He's the national interreligious affairs director of the American Jewish Committee. He's been a pioneering leader and thinker in social-justice movements for the past 30 years. It's a pleasure to welcome to *The 700 Club*, from New York City, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum. (applause) [02:00]

TANENBAUM: Thank you.

ROBERTSON: It's lovely to have you with us.

TANENBAUM: Thank you.

ROBERTSON: It's a joy you can be here, during the period of these very special holy days.

TANENBAUM: Well, I feel the symbolism is important, in terms of binding Christians and Jews together at this time of the year.

ROBERTSON: It really is.

TANENBAUM: Because the *Sukkot* festival is a festival of universal peace and love in Judaism.

ROBERTSON: What does it mean? Because it's very important to all of us, I think. Well, what is the significance to the Jewish people, of this feast?

TANENBAUM: Well, the Bible tells us that *Sukkot* is the Hebrew word for booths or huts. When the children of Israel left Egypt and went into the wilderness, they built huts to protect them from the heat of the sun of the Sinai wilderness. And beyond that, when they settled in the promised land of Canaan, and began the harvest season, it was during the autumnal period when the spring harvest began to be gathered in, that they set up booths in the field, as they were gathering [03:00] the harvest. But it assumed a great deal of symbolism for them. Perhaps the most beautiful symbol is that, during this festival of *Sukkot* or tabernacles, every believing Jewish man and woman take a *lulav* -- the palm branch -- and an *etrog* -- a citron, which is very much like the lemon. Holds them together, and offers up a blessing to God. And the *lulav* and the *etrog* symbolize the unity of the whole human family.

ROBERTSON: That's beautiful.

TANENBAUM: And they thank God for the unity and the love which binds together all of God's children, in his loving embrace.

ROBERTSON: Well, you know, it's interesting that the prophet Zechariah, I believe, speaks of all the nations coming to Jerusalem to celebrate this particular feast in --

TANENBAUM: That's right.

ROBERTSON: -- in the millennium time -- the era of universal peace.

TANENBAUM: That's true. *Sukkot* also has that kind of forward-looking hope for the future, as the hut in which the whole human family will come together under God's embrace.

ROBERTSON: Well, it's an exciting thing. And I'm glad that you could be here on the eve of it, anyhow, to share it with us. [04:00] You've been just pioneering in relation to the interfaith dialogue. What stereotypes are you fighting? The stereotypes of the Jewish believers, stereotypes of Evangelicals, for example -- what are you trying to do to build bridges in between them?

TANENBAUM: Well, in point of fact, I became concerned, as a Jew, as a victim of stereotypes -- we have suffered from such stereotypes across the past 1,900 years. The notion of Jews as Shylocks and Fagins has had disastrous consequences for us -- have led to pogroms and inquisitions. As I began to grow up, and began to see that, in fact, there were some sources of these anti-Jewish images in Christian teaching,

I began working with Roman Catholics and mainline Protestants, in the '50s and '60s. And they began purging their textbooks and teaching materials of anti-Semitic images. They began dealing, as Vatican Council II did, in 1965, [05:00] with the notion of Jews as Christ-killers, which the Vatican Council rejected as being unbiblical and contrary to the spirit of the gospels. I began to find, later in the 1960s, as I began coming through the South, that there were stereotypes about Evangelical Christians. Outside of the 11 sunbelt states of the South, in much of the Northeast, the Midwest, the Northwest, people who had no contact with Bible-believing Christians tended to perceive them as crackers, illiterates, indolent people, Bible-thumpers -- somehow, a kind of "ugly duckling" of American society -- people who could not be trusted with any serious responsibility. For that reason, I began to find that, during the election campaign for President Jimmy Carter, much of the reaction against him -- the first Southerner, Bible-believing Christian to apply for the presidency of the United States -- he was dismissed, not on the basis of who he was, or what he did or couldn't do -- dismissed on the basis of being a cracker. [06:00] And who could allow a cracker to come to the White House?

ROBERTSON: That's right.

TANENBAUM: So, I began writing some pieces. I've been -- my academic discipline is in the religious history. I wrote a few pieces, did some broadcasts, about the role of Southern Baptists in shaping the tradition of religious liberty; separation of church and state in America; their role in shaping education in America; social-welfare systems. Not only Southern Baptist farmer-preachers, but Methodist circuit-riders, dissident Presbyterians. It's here, in this state of Virginia, that the struggle for the separation of church and state, and religious liberty, and freedom of conscience, took place. And 200 million Americans owe it to the Southern Baptists and Southern Methodists --

ROBERTSON: Yeah, for --

TANENBAUM: -- that we have, today, that inheritance of the Bill of Rights. We tend to forget that.

ROBERTSON: Well, my forbears were part of that struggle, as a matter of fact, back in Virginia in the, well, seventeenth century, really -- in the early eighteenth century.

TANENBAUM: Well, they paid a very terrible price for them --

ROBERTSON: Oh, yes.

TANENBAUM: -- that most Americans don't know about. The Anglican [07:00] establishment ran this state. It had an alliance with the House of Delegates. No Baptist preacher

had the right to preach, unless he could get a license from the Anglican bishops.

ROBERTSON: That's right.

TANENBAUM: You weren't allowed to bury anybody unless you had a license from the Ang-- Well, they fought a tremendous struggle. They petitioned the House of Delegates, and based on that, the Virginia declaration for religious liberty was developed, first by James Madison, and then Thomas Jefferson, who fought a 10-year struggle. And that became the basis of the Bill of Rights. So, it's a very precious contribution --

ROBERTSON: Sure.

TANENBAUM: -- that Virginian and Baptists and Methodists have made to the very nature of American democracy.

ROBERTSON: Well, you're very perceptive. Well, not too many people realize these things. They haven't taken the trouble to study into our history, and learn what's there.

TANENBAUM: Well, I've had occasion to travel through many parts of the world. I have seen in Malaysia, for example -- a predominately Muslim society. I have seen in Iran, in Lebanon, and elsewhere, the price that is being paid for the denial of religious liberty. The price that is being paid for an absence of a doctrine of religious pluralism.

[08:00] That is, the right of every group to be itself on

its own terms -- by right, not by sufferance. I've seen Christians killed before my eyes by fanatic Muslims. I saw the Ayatollah Khomeini in Malaysia before he came in Iran. I saw ethnic Chinese and Vietnamese Christians pushed into the ocean to drown before my eyes. They were called heretics, infidels, by fanatic Muslims who had no conception of freedom of conscience and religious liberty. So, we dare not trifle with this tradition of religious liberty. It is the most precious contribution that America has to give to the world today.

ROBERTSON: Without question. We'll be back with more with Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum right after this message. Stay tuned.
(applause, music)

(break in audio)

ANNOUNCER: (music in background) Rheumatism made it difficult to stand or sit, let alone [09:00] walking or bending, for Fanny Castro. Her doctor, as most doctors, said the pain could be relieved but not cured. Fanny had received Jesus Christ as savior listening to radio, and later learned through watching *The 700 Club* on television that Jesus also healed the sick.

CASTRO: (foreign)

TRANSLATOR: Isaiah 53 says, "He carried our diseases." And since I was beginning in the ways of the lord, I called *The 700 Club* for prayer. Very nicely, a brother answered and asked me to pray a prayer of faith. In that moment, I started feeling a warmth that started in my waist, and went down my legs -- very hot. And my body was shaking. And I had much joy, and began crying. The next morning, I began testing out my legs. That was two and a half years ago. Praise the lord forever.

ANNOUNCER: Your special CBN twentieth anniversary gift of \$100 can make the difference. Call *The 700 Club* now.

(break in audio)

ROBERTSON: [10:00] (applause) Welcome back, ladies and gentlemen. We're talking on this very special day -- the eve of *Sukkot*, the very important Feast of Tabernacles. And during the Jewish holy days, this entire period from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur, and then this very important festival. Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum is here with us. And he has perhaps studied as much as any of the rabbinical scholars concerning the beliefs of Protestants, beliefs of Catholics, and the traditions of our nation. Let me ask you, Rabbi Tanenbaum, about this whole matter of religious

freedom. And my forebears were Baptists, here in Virginia, and were jailed -- some of them. One of them was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. And they fought for these things. But, yet, I don't think that they desired a totally secular society where secular humanism, for example, would essentially be the religion of the state.

[11:00] Now, how do you avoid that? How can you have religious freedom, which we all want, and at the same time, allow a Judeo-Christian morality to be in the -- you know, the institutions, which is true? I mean, our institutions presuppose the existence of a supreme being.

TANENBAUM: Well, I would think, Pat, the distinction has to be made between the state and society. It is clear that the First Amendment was intended to prevent the entanglement of religion in the affairs of government, and even more so, to prevent the entanglement of government in the affairs of religion.

ROBERTSON: Yeah, especially.

TANENBAUM: So, essentially, the state is perceived of as a neutral instrument whose purposes are to fulfill the will of the people. I think the question is the nature of the society. And my own sense is that part of the whole struggle of how to establish values in the society has far more to do with what I find many Evangelical ministers have

said to me in the past -- the failure of religious leaders themselves, by virtue of their life, their witness, their [12:00] work, to make religion really relevant in the life of people. I have found that, in my own work on world hunger and world refugees, and concern for humanitarian and social-justice concerns, that to participate in these great human concerns and touch the lives of young people, they begin to feel the power and the relevance of the Bible and the religious tradition -- that it makes a difference in the life of people. They don't need the government to tell them that.

ROBERTSON: They certainly --

TANENBAUM: They don't need the government to establish those values. And my own sense is that the more effective people like yourself become through the media and elsewhere, in communicating some of the things you were saying earlier about a concern for the dignity of human life; a concern for the image of God in every human being, and how to uphold that, ennoble that; a concern for the quality of life, of family, of society. That if one is really effective in that way, in this voluntary, pluralist society, one does not need government to establish that.

ROBERTSON: Oh, absolutely.

TANENBAUM: [13:00] In fact, government becomes a crutch. And it's a confession of the failure of religious leadership to really do the job, and therefore calling on a crutch from the outside to do it for them.

ROBERTSON: Yes.

TANENBAUM: And my hope is, as we join hands together, as we have been doing in recent years between Evangelicals and Jews, with whom we've been holding dialogues and conferences all over America... Some of the greatest leaders, from Dr. Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell and Bill Bright and Dr. Jimmy Allen, and many others -- while we have differences, we recognize great similarities in certain areas of concern. And we've been doing it now with 50 million Roman Catholics and their leaders, and mainline Protestants. Putting together that mosaic of God's human family, concerned together about these values, and demonstrating that in the real life of people, makes the whole question of the role of government -- even makes secular humanism a trivial issue. "What you are" as Emerson said, "speaks out so loud I cannot hear what you say."

ROBERTSON: (laughter) That's true.

TANENBAUM: If we're really faithful people, and do God's work in the real world and the real lives of people, we need not worry about that kind of [14:00] opposition.

ROBERTSON: How do you stop, though, the onrush, if government gets bigger and bigger, as it is, and intrudes into every aspect of life, as it does in the Soviet Union? Then you begin to get oppression against Jewish refuseniks and also against Evangelicals and against, as a matter of fact, all expression. And then, before long, the ministers have to submit their sermons to the state, and the KGB authorizes or doesn't authorize. How do you, you know, avoid that (overlapping dialogue; inaudible)?

TANENBAUM: Well, I think that's a real issue. And I think you've made an important contribution by raising that issue. In fact, in many ways, I think it probably was a factor in the election of President Reagan. I think the American people began to feel that government bureaucracies were becoming oppressive. It became a Parkinson's Law -- they just began growing like Topsy, without any sense of limit. And I think we see that today, in some government agencies. For example, the Internal Revenue Service, which has set up, for itself, the right to define what constitutes religion and what is not religion.

ROBERTSON: That's right.

TANENBAUM: Which may well be a violation of the First Amendment. They determine [15:00] who's a minister of the gospel and what constitutes sacerdotal service, and become

oppressive -- begin taking away tax benefits and that sort of thing. But you have that in many other government agencies. I find people in the religious universities appalled by the amount of paperwork they have to do for the Department of Education.

ROBERTSON: That's right, that's right.

TANENBAUM: Presidents have said to me they spend more time filling out forms in triplicate and multiple forms for the government than they're able to carry out their administrative work as presidents. So, in that sense, I think there has been a very important need for us to raise the question -- even blow the whistle -- on bureaucracies which have become like a golem, a Frankenstein --

ROBERTSON: That's right.

TANENBAUM: -- taking a life of their own. And the way that's going to happen is through the democratic process. I think we have got to turn to congressmen and senators, as citizens -- Christians and Jews together -- to say, "This has gone far enough. I am not going to spend from January to May working simply to pay a government bureaucracy in order to provide jobs for people who are not prepared to do any real, productive work, except for make for paper piles.

ROBERTSON: Well, you know, the Jewish community suffered a great deal, [16:00] as all of us did, I think, back in the

Depression days. And I think many allied themselves with the Franklin Roosevelt policies. Is this a major shift in Jewish thinking? I think a number of Jewish leaders were in support of Ronald Reagan this last election, which, in itself, was sort of a surprise.

TANENBAUM: Well, I think that has happened. Dorothy Parker had a marvelous line: "The Jews are like everybody else, but only more so."

ROBERTSON: (laughter)

TANENBAUM: Because we are a minority community, we are very conscious of trends in a society. We know that, frequently, we have been the litmus test of the quality of democracy in a society. When Jews are the first to be attacked or oppressed, Christians better watch out what happens to them afterward.

ROBERTSON: That's right, that's right.

TANENBAUM: I think there is no dogmatic quality in the identification with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This was a society in very great trouble. He provided a program for dealing with the poor and the deprived and the depressed, and they responded to that. Also, the whole value system [17:00] of Isaiah and Jeremiah, of caring for the poor, the orphan, the needy. That's a very deep thing in Jewish consciousness -- a concern for the oppressed of society. In

that sense, there was both a combination of that biblical values of the Jews, as well as a historical need, which led to that response. And I think Jews, like other Americans, began to realize that our society was in very great trouble. The moral decline in the society became appalling to us after Watergate and Vietnam -- the moral corruption that was going on at every level of society -- in government, in law, in medicine, in business -- and had the sense that this society needed some kind of renewal -- a fundamental, moral, spiritual renewal. And the hope was that, with the election of President Reagan, there'd be a movement away from the excesses that accumulated in the past, and a new beginning could be tried now, especially with regard to the economy and dealing with the problems of inflation and unemployment, as well as domestic, social-justice concerns. We also were very much concerned [18:00] about the rise of the Soviet Union as an expansionist power. We felt that, particularly in terms of the Soviet threat to Israel and the Middle East.

ROBERTSON: That's the primary one.

TANENBAUM: And President Reagan's deep understanding of the threat of Soviet ideology and Soviet expansionism, and the need to really strengthen that, stand against that, led many Jews to feel that this was the way they wanted to go,

and wanted to support that kind of strengthening of the national defense of America. Jewish people understand, as do you and many Evangelical friends, that America is still the freest democracy in the world.

ROBERTSON: That's right.

TANENBAUM: And that, if we take this for granted, we will find the one haven of liberty in the world compromised, and none of us can afford that. So, that shift has taken place, in that sense.

ROBERTSON: Well, I hope we can stand together, because if there was ever a time that there does need to be a new beginning -- morally, spiritually, economically, in every way... You know, it's now -- it's profound need here in our society. Well, I appreciate the work that you're doing, and may God continue to bless you and give you strength in it. Thank you. [19:00] Please come back again.

TANENBAUM: Thank you, Pat. God bless you.

ROBERTSON: Thank you.

TANENBAUM: A privilege to be with you.

ROBERTSON: Thank you. Rabbi Tanenbaum, a tremendous servant of the lord, and a representative of his people. We'll be back with more as we continue this special twentieth anniversary week here on CBN, right after this message. Stay tuned. (applause, music)

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