

CD-1108 Transcription

Address, The Jewish-Christian Encounter: Disputation and  
Dialogue at the University of Judaism [2]. 8 May 1978.

Marc Tanenbaum:

No human life can be made available for anyone else's program or project, even for someone else's revolution or ideology. That conception is more challenged today than at almost any other time since the days of Egypt. Ireland, Cyprus, a quarter of a million Greek Orthodox refugees, as a result of the Turkish-Greek War, who are still languishing in their camps. And except for the Greek Orthodox in America, nobody pays very much attention to them. When Mairead Corrigan and Betty Williams came to my office, those two women who became known as the Peace People and received the Nobel Peace Prize, they said they reached the point of their lives when Betty Williams saw her sister's [01:00] two infant children destroyed before her eyes by the hand grenades of the IRA, great ideological revolution. No question there is justice on the side of the Catholic minority, which has been oppressed unjustifiably. But they reached a point in their consciousness when it simply became unacceptable that the massacre of innocent men, women, and children could go on day in and day out. And nobody took hold in any significant way to make a change in the life of their

people. The Sudan, nearly a million people have been massacred. Five, six years ago. It just goes on and on. The Soviet Union, the dissidents made to appear to be psychotics and pressed into hospitals. Sharanskys. Lithuanian, Evangelical Baptists who were being persecuted as badly as Jews in the Soviet Union.

Lithuanian Catholics who will be liquidated spiritually [02:00] before the next two generations.

People ask me, is there any relevance to being a Jew or a Christian in the kind of world in which we live today? I no longer understand that question. Because to me, as I understand the central affirmations of Exodus and Sinai, and for Christians in Calvary, beneath all of the language and all of the theological formulae, the fundamental affirmations are a revolution in the consciousness of humankind. Which has never been more relevant than it is today in the kind of world in which we live. The need to reaffirm, not just piously, not just as weekend cant, [03:00] but to reaffirm in the words of the late, blessed Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, who wrote in his extraordinary essay, "The Sacred Image of Man," these words: "Judaism has no image of God. Neither this synagogue or temple is an image of God. Not even these sacred Torah scrolls, whose hems we kiss when they pass in procession before the synagogue, and in every synagogue in the world, as a sign of our ultimate

reverence for the holy word of God and the Torah. Neither is that an image of God. Not even the ram's horn, the *shofar*, is an image of God, nor is the candelabra. There is only one image of God," Heschel wrote. "And that is [04:00] you and me." We are the trace of God in the world. And Heschel concludes, when Moses saw it, to try to penetrate the mystery of God's existence, God's nature, God's essence, and confronts God, and asks, "Who are you? Tell me what you are, who you are, so I can tell my people whom they're believing in when I ask them to believe in the Lord God of history. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And we read in the Torah that Moses hears the voice of God and is told to hide in a cleft of the mountain. "*Ki lo yerani ponyo v'chai*, he will not see my face and live." [05:00] And then God reveals his nature to Moses in these words: "*Adonai Adonai el rachum v'chanun-erech apayim v'rav-chesed v'emet. Notzer chesed lo'alafim nosei avon vofesheh v'chata'ah v'nakeh*. The Lord God is a compassionate God, a merciful God, slow to anger, swift in forgiveness, who forgives until the thousandth generation."

We become aware, in our daily lives, of what it means to be committed to a divine presence in the world, writes Heschel. Only the degree to which we live out in our daily lives, in our schools, in our houses, our businesses, our families, [06:00] our daily interaction with one another, these virtues, which are

the virtues of God Himself. Of compassion, of caring, of love for one another, of justice, of being present to one another when one hurts, is in pain, and is in suffering. I believe that the Jewish people have learned one permanent, universal lesson. Out of this tradition of affirmation, and out of the pain and the trauma of the Nazi experience, it is a paraphrase of the book of Leviticus: "You shall not stand idly by [07:00] while the blood of your brothers and sisters cry out to you from the earth." This is not a moment to talk about chosenness. But certainly the experience of the Jewish people across the past 4,000 years, across 30 civilizations, is paradigmatic. And what we have learned about responsibility for one another is perhaps summed up, and with this I close, with an experience I had some months ago in a Catholic church in Jackson Heights, in Queens of New York. I had been invited to address a group of predominantly Irish Catholics, an audience of 700-800 people. Some German Catholics, some Italian Catholics. [08:00] I was asked to talk about the Jewish experience and the meaning of Israel to the Jewish people in historic and religious terms.

And after I had finished my talk, an Irish Catholic woman arose, and in the spirit of genuine friendship, even love and candor, she said, "Rabbi, I think I understand everything you were trying to say to us about the meaning of Israel to the Jewish

people, and Soviet Jews. But very frankly, I really still cannot assimilate the fact that every time something happens to Israel, every time something seems to go wrong, no matter how large or how small, the Jewish people seem to get so upset. I mean you march to Congress and you write letters, and you collect money, and you put in telegrams, and you write ads. I really cannot understand all of that [09:00] response. I responded to that woman, in the same spirit of friendship and respect and love and candor. I said, "My dear lady, the real moral question for me is not why the Jewish people care so much for their three million brothers and sisters in Israel, or their three million brothers and sisters in the Soviet Union. The real moral question is why is it that you and so many of your other Irish Catholic friends, and Irish Protestants in this room and outside seem to care so little? Blood of your blood, flesh of your flesh. The source of your culture, your language, your faith. Is that not something that should lead to a restlessness, [10:00] a sleeplessness over the dignity and the welfare of your own flesh and blood?"

This is a world that is so troubled, that is on the brink in so many ways, with its nuclear capacity for self-annihilation. In which daily terrorism has become one of the banalities of our newspaper. It is a time for Jews and Christians who take the Biblical commitment with the least seriousness to begin to think

once again on what do they stake their lives. It is a time for the Biblical humanism, the rabbinic humanism, that calls us together [11:00] to stand, in the deepest sense of the word, for *tikkun ha'olam*. For the redemption and the repair of the world, while there is still time. Thank you.

**M1:**

Rabbi Tanenbaum, let me thank you for what I at least personally believe is a terribly important statement. At a time when the Jewish community as a whole, and when the Jewish community leaders, are struggling with the question of whether we aren't turning too much inward, your eloquence and reminder of our duties as members of the larger human race, it seems to me, is very critical and most important. Thank you. All of you who have questions, if you would please [12:00] pass your cards to the aisle, we'll collect them up here and address questions for a 15 minute period to Rabbi Tanenbaum. Can I look at a few? The first question I received, in order, Rabbi Tanenbaum, asks you to comment on the escalating campaign by the Evangelical Christians to proselytizing Jews, especially Jewish youth. And what are you, as a leader, or the community's "foremost apostle to the Gentiles," in quotes, doing to combat this assault on our people?

**Marc Tanenbaum:**

Thank you for the question. (inaudible) You've heard the question, or shall I repeat it? "Would you comment on the escalating campaign by Evangelical Christians to proselytize Jews, especially Jewish youth? [13:00] What are you," and I'll do without the business about the "apostle to the Gentiles"; that was not my term, that was *Newsweek's* term. "What are you doing to combat the assault on our people?" Well a number of things can be said. One can in fact go back to 1973, when the Key '73 campaign began. When we did in fact take the leadership in challenging that campaign, whose slogan was to call the continent to Christ, campaign launched by Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ. And we joined together with others in raising some questions about the intention of the campaign, [14:00] because it had implications as much for America's democratic pluralism as it had for the Jewish community. Because the notion of creating an Evangelical America, which was an effort to try to recreate what was taken to be the Golden Age of America, the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was in fact a very repressive society of Puritan orthodoxy, began to concern liberal Protestants and Catholics as much as it did Jews.

I think maybe the most direct way to respond to this is to tell you what we're about as of this moment. We are engaged in a

major -- confrontation may be a harsh word -- I hope it will not become that -- in a major conversation with a Missouri synod Lutheran church, which recently [15:00] adopted a resolution calling on all of its churches to carry out an intensified campaign for proselytizing the Jewish people, not just Jewish young people. And they published a volume on how to missionize the Jews that in fact is a piece of raw anti-Semitism, in which a prototypical Jew is portrayed as Mr. Abe Goldberg, with a long hook nose, kinky hair, and with a cartoon showing that this Mr. Abe Goldberg, who is representative of American Jews, that all he cares about are his golf clubs, his car, his vacations, and making money. And that he never goes to the synagogue. And because he is so empty and bereft of Judaism, therefore he is a sitting duck for the Missouri synod of the Lutheran church.

[16:00] We have had three meetings with the Missouri synod. As of three weeks ago, they have agreed to withdraw this publication, and to send a letter to 3,000 of their pastors, apologizing first for its anti-Semitic content, and saying that they're now engaged in conversation with the American Jewish Committee, regarding their entire program.

So that's the most recent episode of what is taking place. There are a whole variety of other things that we have been engaged in, and frankly exposing the Jews for Jesus movement under



Moishe Rosen, who uses deception and fraud, who presents himself to Jewish young people, especially in such heavily populated Jewish communities near Stony Brook College on Long Island, as another Jewish sect. The only distinction is that you fulfill yourself as a Jew by becoming a Messianic Jew, [17:00] that is to say a Christian. So when he speaks to the Jews, he minimizes the Christology of Jesus, and when he speaks to Evangelical Christians, he is more Evangelical in those churches than Dr. Billy Graham himself. And minimizes his Jewish ethnic tribal connection," as he puts it. So that area has not gone untended. And finally, not to perpetuate this into a very long discussion, in 1973, at the height of the Key '73 campaign, when the Campus Crusade for Christ was bringing great psychological pressure, even coercion, against Jewish young people in colleges and universities, especially schools like Duke University, University of Michigan, and elsewhere, and we called a press conference and exposed their methods. And I met with Dr. Bill Bright, who was head of the Campus Crusade, and told him forthrightly, [18:00] that unless you tell your people to keep their hands off our young people and to stop this campaign of intimidation and coercion, we will go to the media of America and call by chapter and verse every episode of your violation of the religious liberty and the privacy of our young people in America. And you defend yourself before the people of America,

including the people who contribute to your campaign. For engaging in these un-American practices, which violate the principles of religious liberty and religious pluralism.

I got a call from Dr. Billy Graham following a statement that I made to that effect. And Graham asked me to meet with him at his home in Montreat, North Carolina. We spent three and a half hours together, discussing a great many things, including Vietnam and the race question, but especially the issue of the evangelizing of Jewish youth. And Graham said that he had begun to take seriously [19:00] the objections of the Jewish community, myself and others. He had begun to look into the Bible, and he realized that Christians had no right to read into the text what may well not be in the text. And he began quoting to me Pesukim, from Deuteronomy 7 of God's eternal covenant with the Jewish people, Psalm 89, other verses. And I asked him, "Would you put that down in writing, Billy?" And he did. He issued a statement that time, saying that he was opposed to the specialized missions to the Jews, including the Jews for Jesus movement, the Hebrew Christian movement. He was not giving up his Great Commission as a Christian to evangelize all people. But he was opposed to methods of deception and fraud and pressure and psychological coercion. And ever since that time, Billy Graham has now been subjected to great pressure from the

Jews for Jesus movement, Evangelical churches who claim that he is now abandoning the faith. So in a sense, this is an ongoing, perpetual problem, and it will be with us for a very long time.

[20:00] The important thing is that Christians know that the Jewish community is not going to sit idly by and be treated as if we are some objects to be moved around on the Evangelical chessboard.

"How do you view the Christian response?" is the next question. "How do you view the Christian response to the television presentation of the Holocaust?" In two more weeks, I think, we may be able to give you a response based on some empirical data, rather than impressions. We are now in the midst of conducting a study with research analysts, doing a national public opinion sampling of the response of Americans to the Holocaust program. And at that time, we hope to have a more precise idea as to how both Christians and Jews [21:00] have responded. Whatever differentiation there may be in the responses of various denominational groups, black groups, white groups, Hispanics, and others. I was visiting with NBC a week ago, was looking at some of the mail they received, which was overwhelmingly positive, from Christians who had viewed it. I know that in almost every major community in the United States, there were conversations taking place, dialogues taking place, in churches.

Between Christians themselves and Washington, DC, there was a major dialogue between the Lutheran church, Memorial Place Church, and an African Methodist Episcopal church, who brought together both of their congregations, 1,500 people, to watch the program on the evening of April 16<sup>th</sup>. And to ask themselves the questions, "What does this mean to us? What are Christian responsibilities to stand against anti-Semitism? What are your attitudes to Israel today?" And issues of that kind. [22:00]

Perhaps the most important response of all to this, and with this I want to conclude a response to this question. On the night of April 16<sup>th</sup>, there was a meeting in Camp David of the entire White House staff, that President Carter called. Vice President Mondale was present. Brzezinski, Vance, and every member of the president's cabinet. We had suggested, through our Washington director, Hy Bookbinder, who was a former legislative aide to the late Senator Hubert Humphrey, and a close friend of Vice President Mondale, that it might be of some importance that the President, the White House staff, and the cabinet find the time to view *The Holocaust*. [23:00] And in Camp David, all of them did, together. We were told that a number of those who were present viewed the entire production. We were also told that several who were present, by the third night, literally became ill after watching the program. And for a good number who were

present, it was the first insight into the magnitude of the suffering, and the trauma that Jews went through in the Nazi experience. I do not believe that it is an accident that at this last meeting between Prime Minister Begin and President Carter, at that meeting's close, President Carter, for the first time, [24:00] talked about the Nazi Holocaust, the history of Jewish suffering and pogroms and inquisitions and death itself, as he said. And then announced that he was establishing a national commission for the first time since the end of World War II on the part of any president of the United States, was establishing a national commission to create an appropriate national American memorial, commemorating the six million Jewish men, women, and children who died. The president of the United States and Rosalynn Carter watched *Holocaust*.

You know, it might be a little better if they heard another question. Why don't you read some of the questions and let me respond? I got a (inaudible) an unending monologue here.

**M1:**

Well, this is a more pragmatic question than a philosophical one. The gist is that we as Jews [25:00] are often told that more and more help is needed for Israel and for other Jewish pursuits, and that what we give is never enough. The question,

"Should we divert part of our limited capacity to help for the benefit of non-Jewish human suffering?"

**Marc Tanenbaum:**

It is not a simple response, I think, that one can give. You've heard the question, all of you. We're constantly called upon to give support to Israel, and Soviet Jewry, and quite appropriately so. How does one make a decision to, as the question asks, to divert funds for other purposes? There is a question of choice and priorities. And in our own experience, of my own group, there is no question that if Jews do not [26:00] accept the primary and central responsibility for the support of Israel, and support of Soviet Jewry, that it's obviously not going to come from other quarters, except for what the United States government does. But not unrelated to that fact must be a recognition that the United States government, in a year when it contributes \$2.5 billion in aid to Israel, in fact contributes more than the United Jewish Appeal has made available to Israel altogether during the course of the past decade. Which means that the feelings and the attitudes of 220 million Americans, the things that are of concern to them, cannot and morally ought not to be ignored. [27:00]

I can tell you of an experience, which says something about where the Jewish psyche is, Jewish *neshamah* is. In 1968 down through 1970, at the height of the conflict in Nigeria, when there was a group of Ebos, Christian Ebos, struggling to create Biafra, and they were being massacred ruthlessly. And Ebos came to us, as Godfrey Binaisa of Uganda came to us, and said virtually the same thing. The Ebos were called the Jews of Nigeria. They were a minority community, highly educated, a very intellectually advanced people who were involved [28:00] in the whole economic, political, cultural structure of Nigeria. And who wanted to have a place of equality and first class citizenship in the society. When a group of Ebos came to our office, and showed us pictures of their children who were starving to death in the bush of eastern Nigeria, with bloated bellies and their hair turned orange by protein malnourishment, we called together a group of 21 Jewish organizations, the whole range. From the Zionist organizations to the UJA, to JDC, to Mizrahi, National Council of Jewish Women, the whole range of Jewish organizations. The Rabbinic groups, the congregational bodies. And after one of the Ebos began to describe the plight of his people, and again, silence. And indifference. [29:00] All of the Jewish organizations, without exception, agreed unanimously within the hour that they would undertake to create an American Jewish emergency relief effort for the victims of

the Nigerian-Biafran conflict. And over the course of the next year, and year and a half, we raised nearly a million dollars to help save human lives. Black Christians and black Muslims.

And there was no ulterior motive involved. We had no interest in doing this for the sake of converting them to Judaism, as is the case perhaps sometimes with other groups. It was an expression of Jewish conscience and Jewish moral values. And nobody mobilized them. Nobody forced Jewish agencies. And they discussed the issue in relation to Jewish priorities and agenda, and every Jew in that room [30:00] said that after the Nazi experience, we dare not sit by idly and allow human beings to die before our eyes and not lift a finger. And Jewish doctors from California sent an entire hospital clinic to Biafra. And a Jewish manufacturer of protein from fish sent tons of protein to help keep a whole generation of young people alive. It was done really without any sense of ulterior motive, but I can tell you two consequences, in terms of what has happened. Godfrey Binaisa of Uganda, it turns out, out of his feelings of deep friendship for the Jewish people and for Israel, because Jews [31:00] were present to him on other situations, and Israelis were present to him, became the person in Uganda who brought into Uganda and in other black African countries, technical assistance programs.

And Binaisa's last words to me is that after Idi Amin is



dislodged from office, as he will surely be, the Ugandan refugees in this country, and in England and elsewhere, are not sitting idly by. When he is dislodged from office, one day Binaisa and people like him are going to emerge in the leadership of Uganda. And Binaisa said to me, what's volunteering it? His experience with the Jewish community in the United States has been such, they have been the first to listen to him, even to give him a hearing. The first to provide him with funds, to help bring his family here, and to take care of him. His own sense, [32:00] out of his own Biblical tradition as well. He said that, "When we come to power, I want to you to know that the first act that the new Ugandan government will undertake is that we will establish diplomatic relations with the State of Israel voluntarily. And we will do everything possible to make sure that every black African government that really has its own interests at heart, and knows that it's not going to sell out its soul to the Arab governments, will be talked to, to understand the importance of doing that." So that's an indirect answer to the question. I don't think I can give a universal response. I think that becomes a matter of individual conscience, and the conscience of individual persons and groups. For my part, even symbolic actions of caring, symbolic gestures of being present to people in parts of the world, means something. And usually mean more at critical times,

when people they're being abandoned by everybody else. [33:00]  
Jews know what that means, perhaps better than others.

**M1:**

In light of the time, let me take one last question. And it's very hard amongst all of these questions to ask, though I will leave you the others to think about. But I think this is very practical, and a pragmatic question that many of us are faced with today, and I'm sure you are publicly. And it's a sequitur to the comments you've made. "As staunch supporters of Israel, and in light of your lecture, how do you view the treatment of Palestinians? They report Israelis are withholding their freedoms."

**Marc Tanenbaum:**

Well, there are Palestinians and there are Palestinians. I have a very great concern about the human rights of Palestinians, and their right to achieve some kind [34:00] of national self-determination. That by no means, and in this sense, I would support an intuition of Menachem Begin and a great many Israelis, that by no means should allow for the possibility of what is taken to be national self-determination but in fact becomes on occasion, for the PLO to do to the Palestinians what Idi Amin has done to the Ugandans. Let me tell you what I mean

by that. Two years ago, a study was conducted by a Greek Orthodox scholar at Miami University in Ohio. His name is Dr. Theodore [Idionopolis?]. He does not belong to any Jewish organization. [35:00] He is not an Israeli. He is a devout Greek Orthodox Christian. He wanted to find out for himself, what are the realities in that part of the world, since many Greek Orthodox are prominent in Israel. The Greek Orthodox Church, in fact, together with the Armenians, own nearly 75% of the properties on which the holy sites of Israel are located. So Professor Idionopolis went to the West Bank and to Gaza, and carried out a series of interviews with the leaders of Palestinian communities. Mayors of cities. Editors of newspapers, educators, intellectuals. And one of the conditions that they made for answering the questions is that no names be recorded. [35:00] But he carried out a meticulous survey, using a very scientific methodology, which he developed with the social science offices at his university. He found that that plebiscite, in which he interviewed some 900 people on the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians, 78% of them did not want the PLO as their representative. And they said that they refused to have the PLO as their government, because their culture and their society is based first on a clan system, secondly on a land-based system, that is to say they are an agricultural people overwhelmingly. They are opposed to the imposition of a

nationalist, Marxist system, which is the ideology of the PLO, and certainly of Chabash and the PLFP [*sic*]. [37:00] They see themselves as far more related to Western economics, at best a mixed economy, given to free enterprise, and that if national self-determination is constructed in a way in which the PLO will come in and by means of terrorism intimidate them to elect Arafat as their duly elected leader by virtue of a gun and a hand grenade, then in fact you do not have national self-determination. You have as much national self-determination there as the black Anglicans and Roman Catholics have in Uganda. When I was last in Israel, more than a year ago, an editor of an East Jerusalem paper called *Al-Quds*, a Palestinian, wrote an editorial somewhat critical of Yasser Arafat. His body was found in the Jordan River the week afterward. That's also [38:00] national self-determination, isn't it? Which is to say that, for my part, I do not think that the future can be built by allowing ourselves to be hitched to the hitching post of the past.

There is no question that it has been a moral obscenity that every Arab government surrounding Israel has in the most calculated and cynical way used the Palestinians as a chess piece on their board for their own political purposes. There are Arabs who told me that Nasser himself made Gaza into an insane asylum in which he locked in the Palestinians, would not allow

them in fact even to go to Cairo, to go to Cairo University. I know what can happen to refugee problems. If people really care, and simply don't use the rhetoric of caring. I remember Dr. David [Aronson?] [39:00] once -- he may not recall it himself -- but an address he once gave at the Jewish Theological Seminary, defined the term "flirtation." They're flirting with solving the refugee problem. Dr. Aronson you may recall once said, "Flirtation is when you pay attention without any intention." And they've been paying attention to the problem without intending to solve it.

We have just gone to Southeast Asia, where the hatred between the Vietnamese and the Thais are far greater than the hatred between the Jordanians and the Palestinians. And over this weekend, as a result of the report of this commission to the President and to Brzezinski and Vance and Mondale, Mondale announced that the United States is changing its policy, its immigration quotas from 7,000 to 25,000. The Vietnamese will be brought to this country, 25,000 of them; they'll be resettled. [40:00] But part of the condition that took place is that Thailand will help resettle the other 75,000 through that country. And you will now see, within the course of the next year, 100,000 refugees resettled; their camps will be disbanded.

There will be an international aid program. And these people will be restored to human dignity.

That pattern could have taken place for two million, a million and half, Palestinian refugees, not in one year. It could have taken place 20 years ago, if the Arabs wanted to. And I can tell you that there were Jews in the United States, and I joined among them, Phil Klutznick and others, who began to organize a Jewish relief effort for Palestinian refugees in the same way in which we did for the Biafrans. And we then got a message that the PLO, [41:00] that this will be a confession of the Jewish collective guilt for the Palestinian problem, and we had to abandon it. So somewhere along the way, my friends, the cycle has to be broken. Because peace will not come to the Middle East unless some form of self-determination that is not PLO self-determination takes place.

I'm going to close with this. It's telling tales out of school, but I think an audience of this kind needs to know it. Dr. Billy Graham had a meeting with President Carter and Vice President Mondale and Brzezinski some months ago. They talked to me about it. He came to them and said, after the October 1<sup>st</sup> agreement in which the United States proposed an agreement our country and the Soviet Union, that the Soviet Union be brought in as a full

standing partner for peace in the Middle East. That the [42:00] majority of the Evangelical Christians whom he knows is opposed to that, and equally important, the majority of the 40-50 million Evangelical Christians whom Dr. Graham said whose thoughts and views he thinks he knew and reflected, were absolutely and unalterably opposed to the creation of a PLO state. Graham said, you see what the PLO has just done to the Christians in Lebanon. The world community doesn't know this, but Lebanon, which was once the strongest stronghold of Christendom in the Middle East, an economic and political power, the Maronite Christians in Lebanon, which had very substantial influence in the government and the military of Lebanon, represented [43:00] to millions of Christians throughout the Middle East what Israel represented to the Jews in Arab countries. It was a basis of the Christian presence and strength and influence in that part of the world. The PLO, up until the last Israel reprisal, had literally destroyed the foundations of the Christian Maronite and Orthodox community in Lebanon. And there's a real question whether they will ever be restored to their former influence and status. And if Syria and the PLO have their way, a ghetto will be created in Lebanon, which will become a Christian ghetto. But which will be a far cry from what the Maronite had been in the past.

END OF AUDIO FILE