



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series A: Writings and Addresses. 1947-1991

Box 1, Folder 25, Marc H. Tanenbaum before the Catholic Press Association [excerpts], 29 May 1964.

Excerpts from Address by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum,
National Director, Interreligious Affairs Department,
American Jewish Committee, before the Catholic Press
Association, May 29, 1954, Pittsburgh, Pa.

"No discussion of the new world of Christian-Jewish relationships can rightly begin without paying tribute to the singular leadership which the American Catholic hierarchy has given both in Rome and in this country to the significantly improved atmosphere of understanding and mutual acceptance between Catholics and Jews," Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Director of the American Jewish Committee's Interreligious Affairs Department, declared before the Catholic Press Association in Pittsburgh on May 28th.

From American Jewish Committee officials in Rome as well as from conversations with Cardinals and bishops we are keenly aware of the forthright statesmanship that the American hierarchy has displayed in helping Catholics to confront the evil of anti-Semitism, the roots it has found in the soil of distorted teachings about the role of the Jews in the Crucifixion, as well as the new directions toward which they have pointed in pressing for a deeper appreciation on the part of Christians of their relationship to Jews and Judaism, both ancient and modern.

With regard to the report from Rome of the designation by Pope Paul VI of a new Secretariat for relations with non-Christians, Rabbi Tanenbaum declared that there appears to be some confusion about the nature of this Secretariat and, in particular, its relationship to the Jewish question. Until some of the contradictory reports are reconciled, it is both useless and potentially dangerous to speculate on the implications of this new body for Christian-Jewish

relationships. Without presuming to enter into the internal questions of Vatican Council policy that this action represents, non-Catholics are beginning to recognize the penetrating theological and historical issues that this development might well augur. From the point of view of Christian theological teaching, it is understandable that Christian scholars recognize that the future kerygmatic vigor of Christianity fundamentally rests on a profounder grasp of its relation to Judaism and Jews as the Chosen People in salvation history. From this point of view, it appears to be inevitable that any discussions of Christian ecumenism must ultimately be grounded on the role of the Jews in Sacred Scriptures, and the ensuing relations of Christians to that central reality. This logic would seem to argue strongly for Cardinal Bea's Secretariat to continue to be the natural lodging place for the Jewish decree and for the implementation of any follow-up program for improving Catholic-Jewish relations.

On the other hand, the theological and historic encounter between Christians and Jews across 1900 years has been so ambiguous and so marked with conflicting attitudes and behavior of both love and hate, that some Jews who have tired of being compelled to play an unwilling role as the "eternal Judas" in the Christian Passion have come to prefer being perceived by Christians simply as human beings, "detheologized" non-Christians. In this Jewish view, the Jews ultimately will be relieved of both the tension and the burden of a sibling rival relationship (more precisely "parent-child" relationship) with Christianity.

In my view, this latter position represents a danger of first magnitude to Jews, and perhaps an even greater hazard for Christianity. To transform Jews into "non-Christians" on a parity with Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucionists, and others in effect institutionalizes the Marcionite heresy. It could lead to the undermining of the Biblical and Prophetic dynamic in Christianity that grows out of its dialectical relationship with Jews and Judaism. For Jews to accept a role that separates them out from the ethical monotheistic mainstream of Western civilization could well spell a separatist doom for Jews and Judaism as a numerically insignificant ethnic minority.

I find it impossible to believe that Divine Providence has preserved the Jewish people through 2,000 years of dispersion, vicissitude, and martyrdom only to bring the Sons of the Covenant to such a meaningless end.

These are fateful choices that neither Christians nor Jews can contemplate with equanimity, nor without the most penetrating and critical examination of the fundamental issues at stake and their ultimate import for the future of religion as well as of the entire human family.