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Box 1, Folder 35, "Interreligious Relations in Light of New Realities of Nuclear-Space Age" [excerpts], 20-24 September 1965.

EXCERPTS FROM AN ADDRESS BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, DIRECTOR OF  
INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS, THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE  
BEFORE NORTH AMERICAN COLLEGE IN ROME, ITALY  
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"INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS IN LIGHT OF  
NEW REALITIES OF NUCLEAR-SPACE AGE"

It is impossible to understand what is happening at the Ecumenical Council or what is happening in Ecumenism and the inter-religious world at large, unless we make an effort to comprehend the contradictory situation with which we of the Western world, and we of the Western Religions, in particular, are confronted today.

The ultimate contradiction, quite obviously, is that posed for the entire human family by the nuclear age itself. The science and technology which hold out the possibility for the first time in man's recorded history of banishing the scourges of poverty, disease and ignorance, are at the same time a Pandora's box of apocalyptic terror that enables modern man to "overkill" himself at least 125 times!

In the middle of the 11th century, the Catholic Church was in a position to enforce a "Truce of God" which greatly restricted the time when it was permissible to carry on warfare. By means of the Truce of God, the Church prohibited warfare between contending parties from Wednesday evening to Monday morning of each week, and during the period of Church festivals. Thus, there were at least theoretically only eighty days for fighting in each year, and never more than three consecutive days. The difference between the unitary society of the Middle Ages in which the Church held effective political power and the relative impotence today of all the Churches combined to affect, for example, the decisions for the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear bombs is too obvious to require comment. Nevertheless, this paramount "social action" question must be confronted with a new seriousness as to whether the Prophetic, moral, and spiritual resources of the world's major religions cannot be asserted at this critical hour to help achieve a 20th century "Truce of God" before the world destroys itself in a nuclear-missile holocaust, and almost tragically, either through mechanical error or human miscalculation.



Schema 13 on "The Church and the Modern World" which expresses in concrete terms the spirit of Pope John's great Encyclical, Pacem In Terris, together with similarly far-reaching documents of the World Council of Churches, and analogous pronouncements by world Jewish bodies, religious leaders of Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism, make clear that there is in fact an emerging consensus on the central moral issues of world peace and world community on the part of the faith communities in the Occident and Orient. As a first step toward mobilizing the tremendous spiritual energies that reside among the millions of adherents of Christianity, Judaism, Islam and the religious traditions of the East, toward the realization of the peace objectives that are shared by these traditions, I formally propose that appropriate leaders of the faith communities take the initiative in convening an "International Conference on Religion and World Peace." The recent conference on "Religion and Race," with which I was privileged to be associated as program chairman, is testimony to the great impact that such a combined religious witness can make. Based on the success of such an enterprise, one could then visualize the possibility of a world-wide meeting of a similar

character. When leaders of the world's major religions will come together at one table to pursue justice, charity, and peace in freedom, we may well be witness to the beginning of the translation into reality of the prophetic vision of messianic peace for all mankind, Pacem in Terris.

There are other decisive factors which have undergirded the renewal and reform of religious communities, and foremost among them has been the recognition of the part of Pope John of blessed memory, Pope Paul, and other Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish leaders of the radically altered new realities which confront all Western religions, and the West itself. (There is substantial evidence that certain forms of "aggiornamento" are taking place among the major Oriental religions - Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism - but this paper is confined primarily to a survey of the Church and Synagogue of the Occident.

For the first time since the emergence of Christianity in the fourth century as an established, organized religious community, Christians - and allied with them Jews and all others who count themselves as citizens of the West - find themselves at one and the same time as a minority and a majority. Out of the



3.3 billion people who inhabit our planet today, less than one billion are Christians and Jews. Every year 22 million non-whites, non-Christians, non-Jews are born into the world as contrasted with eight million who are born Christian and Jewish. The annual population growth rate, for example, in Asia is 2.6%, as compared with 1.6% in the United States, and 0.7% in northern and western Europe.

Roman Catholics today number some 18% of the total world population, and population projections indicate that by the year 2000, the world Catholic community will number 11-to-12% of the 6 billion inhabitants of the earth. In light of such statistics, Rev. Karl Rahner's insistence on the "Diaspora" situation of Christians takes on concrete human meaning and is not just a charming Biblical metaphor to be taken abstractly (it takes on meaning for Jews, too, but apparently Jews are veterans of the Exile and suffer less trauma, having come to grips with the condition some time ago at Babylon).

The "diaspora" situation of Christianity (and Judaism) is profoundly shaped by other forces as well. The emergence of communism as a global pseudo-Messianic religion with an effective missionary enterprise and a determined anti-theistic ideological program, represents the most powerful and unprecedented opponent

in the 1,900-year human experience of Christianity. Since the end of World War II, 14 formerly "Catholic" countries have become Communist satellites and more than 100 million Christians are now behind the Iron Curtain. The largest Communist parties in the world, outside of the Iron Curtain, are found in predominantly "Catholic" countries; namely, France and Italy. The Communist inroads in Cuba and the considerable hold of communism in other parts of Central and Latin America are sources of profound anxiety to the West. None of the dominant nations in the world today are "Catholic" as contrasted with the pre-World II situation when Catholicism was a major political force in France, Italy, and the Balkans, and in Europe generally - and Europe was the major force in the world.

Another dimension of these "new realities" is the rise of the nationalisms of Africa and Asia. In many of these countries, Christianity is regarded as the "white man's religion," the handmaiden of Western imperialism and colonialism. (Jews are involved in many ways in Asia and Africa through the activity of the State of Israel which has been carrying on a significant program in technical assistance. To some extent, the Israelis have also been looked upon as agents of the "Western-imperialist-colonialist" world). The tragic massacres of missionaries in the Congo



and Angela reveal the depths of the hostility of the African toward the Westerner, even if the European was at one time considered a Christian benefactor. The harrassment and banishment of Christian missionaries in the Sudan is only one of the more recent of a long series of acts in many parts of Asia and Africa that have reduced Christians to tolerated minorities.

According to the Methodist publication, the Christian Advocate, the establishment of Islam as the official religion of Malaysia resulted in a ban on religious teaching by missionaries and the use of the radio for evangelical purposes. In Nepal, Methodist missionaries were allowed to open a hospital on the promise that they would not evangelize and that the government could take over the equipment in five years if it so desired. In Ceylon, the government has nationalized 2,500 Catholic and Protestant schools which served 140,000 students. In the United Arab Republic, Christian schools are permitted to stay open on the condition that they allow the teaching of the Koran in the classroom by a Moslem teacher.

Accompanying the rise of nationalism is the resurgence of the Oriental religions, once regarded as moribund. Of the 242 million Africans, for example, there are 35 million Christians (23 million



are Roman Catholics, 7 million are Protestants, and 5 million are Eastern Orthodox. Of the remaining Africans, 160 million are classified as animists; and 89 million are Moslems). Islam, which numbers some 430 million adherents in the world, has the most aggressive missionary outreach in Black Africa. Islam converts seven Africans for every one African converted either to Catholicism or Protestantism. Every embassy of the United Arab Republic in Africa has an "attache" for Islamic affairs, which is a euphemism for a Moslem missionary. Similarly, Buddhism (153 million adherents), Hinduism (335 million adherents) and Confucianism (300 million adherents) have been undergoing a renaissance, are rapidly developing political sophistication reflecting itself in effective social organization (the new Buddhist quasi-Political structures in Viet-Nam are a powerful example), and have become increasingly competitive with Western Christianity.

A statement on "the Pope's Plan for Latin America" which appeared in The Catholic World, edited by Rev. John Sheerin, contained a report by CELAM, the Episcopal Conference of Latin America which discusses frankly the situation of some 200 million souls there. This report says that it is not unusual to find cases where

60 or 70 percent of the couples are without religious marriages. Some who are said to be Catholics have not even been baptized. There is one priest for every 5,000 compared to one for every seven or eight hundred in the United States. In a recent survey in Chile, 60 percent of the men favored abortion. The Latin American population is increasing faster than that of any other continent in the world. There is not a single government in Latin America that is not threatened by economic upheaval and political instability, fertile grounds for the marauding of the Castroites and Communists on the left and the Peronists and fascists (like the Tacuara movement in Argentina, in alliance with the thick nest of Nazi emigres and the Arab League) on the right.

The "contradictory" aspect of the existential situation that I referred to earlier grows out of the fact that at the moment that Christians and Jews are becoming collectively a "minority" living in the "diaspora," we are at the same time experiencing an unprecedented growth and strength as a "majority" in the United States. The Churches and Synagogues in America, and their auxiliary bodies, today have the highest rate of growth, the highest levels of per capita contributions, the most extensive building programs, the highest rate of attendance at religious services and of enrollment of their children in religious schools,



the most carefully developed social welfare programs for youth, the aged, the delinquent, in effect, from womb to tomb. This growth has taken place not incidentally in a free, voluntary, pluralistic society, and not in a confessional church-state arrangement. But this very growth and this very strength have given many Christians and Jews - and other Americans - a "buffered" vision of the world at large. The description of the American state of mind by Bishop Fulton J. Sheen is tragically accurate, "Americans live in a sumptuous palace in the midst of a vast slum."

The problems of religious liberty, freedom of conscience, the question of proselytization or witnessing, freedom of movement, the relationship of church to state, racial and religious discrimination - once regarded as the preoccupation of Westerners and Christians in the internal relationships between Catholics and Protestants on the one hand, and Christians and Jews on the other, have now been catapulted onto the world scene. In an age in which there is instantaneous global communication, rapid transportation and mobility, it is no longer possible to "keep under wraps" for long, or to withhold from the judgment of a restive contempt for the human person or which deny him his "natural rights."



An attack on a Negro in Birmingham is condemned the next day in an editorial in a Ghana newspaper. The harrassment of Christian missionaries in Jerusalem is protested on the front pages of Christian newspapers and the general press in various parts of the world (I speak here in defense of the rights of the responsible missionaries, not the "rice missionaries" who deceive children and who exploit the desperate poverty and confusion of newly-arrived Jewish immigrants from Arab countries). The denial of the religious rights of a Protestant or Jew in Spain or in Colombia is the subject of a consultation within a matter of hours in New York or Geneva. The banishment of priests and nuns from Indonesia results in immediate protests.

From the foregoing, I would summarize three conclusions:

(1) A world teetering on the brink of nuclear destruction can little afford the perpetuation of an atmosphere of hatred, division, and suspicion.

(2) The human society, both East and West, threatened by moral decay and materialism, needs every human and spiritual resource to meet the overwhelming needs and challenges of our age. Repressive, mutually antagonistic religions and racial and ethnic group conflicts will paralyze mankind in its effort to meet the challenges of survival. The monopolies and hegemonies of the past

must give way to a global pluralism in which, in the words of Pope John's encyclical, 'Pacem in Terris, "the universal common good, that is, the common good of the entire human family" is promoted.

(3) Religion itself will be irrelevant if it continues to perpetuate the glaring contradiction between preaching high moral principles of love, sympathy and charity, and allowing the undisciplined practice of the opposite in the forms of race prejudice, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, anti-Protestantism, and other ethnocentric blasphemies.

It is my thesis that the issue of relations between Christians and Jews has reached the point of ripeness, a point of maturation in a way that can be seen analogously in terms of the ripeness and the fullness which relations between the Negro and white societies have reached.

In many ways the mythology, the unreality, the capacity to abstract human relationships and to empty them of solid human meaning and feeling find its analogy in the relations between Christians and Jews. What we have begun to confront in the relationships between Christianity and Judaism and between Christendom and Jews is the fact that there is a fundamental ambivalence historically and theologically within Christian teaching and



within Christian social practice which we have begun to face in a way that has never been confronted before in the past nineteen hundred years of the Christian-Jewish encounter. Just as the social revolution of the Negroes today has caused us to confront the race issue in a way that we cannot escape, so certain revolutionary facts of the twentieth century have made the Christian-Jewish confrontation inescapable.

I believe that the Nazi holocaust and all that that has meant for the Christian conscience, as well as the tremendous needs of a new world of the 20th century in which Christians and Jews together find themselves increasingly a minority in relation to a non-White, non-Judeo-Christian world, are compelling us to confront the deep realities of the contact between Christians and Jews. Fundamentally, Christianity has never made up its mind as to where it stands in terms of its common patrimony with Judaism and its daily attitudes and relationships and behavior toward Jews.

Within the past four to five years all of us have lived through what in fact may be the most revolutionary period in the history of the Christian-Jewish encounter over the past two millennia. As in race relations, the Churches have begun to seek



to reconcile the ambivalences and the contradictions between theology and history. The Vatican, through the Ecumenical Council's initial approval of a declaration dealing with Catholic-Jewish relations; the World Council of Churches, which has adopted a very forthright resolution at New Delhi in December, 1961, and which has been carrying out a significant program of confronting this evil, this scandal of anti-Semitism which hangs like an albatross on the conscience of the churches, and American Catholic and Protestant bodies have all contributed dramatically to the powerful assault against anti-Semitism. Their wide-ranging programs of textbook and curriculum revision, teacher training, seminary education, retreats, adult education, have been confronting increasingly the issues of responsible portrayal of Jews and Judaism. The Church must reconcile her teachings of love and charity and fraternity with the practices of her faithful, which have far too long been marked by contempt and animosity for the Jew. While it is recognized that anti-Semitism arises out of multiple phenomena, political, social, economic, Christians cannot allow Christianity to be exploited by anti-Semites and bigots to advance this teaching, which is an anathema to the Church.

Those of us who stood in Rome on those two days last year when the Jewish declaration was introduced to the Council, witnessed the turning of a cycle of history. A cycle of history that was for far too long malignant has begun to turn, and may yet become benign, may yet allow Christians and Jews to approach each other, not through the myths, the superstitions and the hostilities of a polemical past but as human beings, sons of Abraham, to share a common patrimony in their love of God and therefore, their love for one another.

