



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 2, Folder 37, "Major Issues in the Jewish/Christian Situation Today", January-February 1974.

CONTENTS

Page 4
**EDUCATING FOR JEWISH
VALUES**
by Simon Greenberg

Page 8
**WHAT CAN A KIBBUTZ
TEACH US?**
by Sr. Miriam Lahey

Page 12
**ANTI-JUDAISM IS THE
LEFT HAND OF
CHRISTOLOGY**
by Rosemary Radford Reuther

Page 18
**THE RELIGIOUS
SIGNIFICANCE OF ISRAEL:
A CHRISTIAN
PERSPECTIVE**
by Eva Fleischner

Page 24
**THE JEWISHNESS OF
JESUS**
by Thomas Suriano

Page 30
**MAJOR ISSUES IN THE
JEWISH/CHRISTIAN
SITUATION TODAY**
by Marc H. Tanenbaum

Page 34
**JEWS: SOME CHRISTIANS
ARE THEIR BEST FRIENDS**
by Bernhard E. Olson

Page 39
**WHY WE STILL CAN'T
TALK**
by Monica K. Hellwig

Page 43
**THE BI-POLAR
EXPERIENCE**
by John T. Pawlikowski

New Catholic World

Published since 1865

Vol. 217 No. 1297 Jan.-Feb./ 1974

Published by the Paulist Fathers 75¢

PUBLISHER

Kevin A. Lynch, C.S.P.

MANAGING EDITOR

Robert J. Heyer

EDITORIAL BOARD

John B. Sheerin, C.S.P.

John Kirvan, C.S.P.

Urban Intondi

Richard Payne

Jean Marie Hiesberger

Donald Brophy

ART AND DESIGN

Gloria Ortiz

Editorial Office: 1865 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10023, phone: (212) 265-8181. Business office 400 Sette Drive, Paramus, N.J. 07652. Phone (201) 265-5770. One year subscription \$4.50; two years \$8.75; three years \$12.75. Add 50¢ per year for Canada; \$1.00 per year for foreign. For change of address send the mailing label with old address from a recent issue together with new address including zip code. Allow 30 days for change. *New Catholic World*: Published bimonthly at 400 Sette Drive, Paramus, N.J. 07652. Copyright 1972 by the Missionary Society of St. Paul the Apostle in the State of New York. All rights reserved. Second class postage paid at Paramus, N.J. and at additional mailing offices. *New Catholic World* is indexed in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature. *New Catholic World* is available on microfilm from University Microfilms, Inc. 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan. The opinions expressed herein are those of the individual writers alone, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Paulist Fathers.

MAJOR ISSUES IN THE JEWISH/CHRISTIAN SITUATION TODAY

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

Marc H. Tanenbaum

In the first century, Rabbi Hillel, a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, was asked by a pagan to instruct him about the entire Torah while standing on one foot. Being asked to write an article of about 2,000 words on the world of Catholic-Jewish relations involves something of the same order of *chutzpah* (impertinence) and hazard of distortion. Hillel's reply has become a classic model not only of epigrammatic rabbinic wisdom, but of literary brevity as well. "That which is hateful to you," Hillel instructed the pagan, "do not inflict on your fellow human being. All the rest is commentary." No 2,000 words about anything could improve very much on that insight!

But if I cannot improve on Hillel's wisdom, I will defer to him and borrow from his method. If I were asked therefore to summarize the present state of Catholic-Jewish relations, the generalization which keeps coming to mind is that "Catholics and Jews are

Rabbi Tanenbaum is National Inter-Religious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee and is widely regarded as a leading figure in the advancement of Jewish-Christian understanding. He was the only rabbi present at Vatican Council during the deliberations that led to the adoption of the Conciliar Declaration on Non-Christian Religions. Rabbi Tannenbaum is presently co-secretary of a joint Vatican-International Jewish Committee and of a similar liaison body with the World Catholic Conference.



out of phase." And now let me try to explain, not on one foot, but in some 2,000 words, which in themselves are inadequate when you consider seriously the intense complexity of both the Catholic and Jewish communities and traditions.

The Roman Catholic and Jewish communities possess both universal and national religious-ethnic dimensions, and in these senses they have very much in common. They are not simply creedal fellowships, but have rich social substance in which their religious and moral ideals and values are incarnated in the very lives of their peoples. When Vatican Council II shifted the metaphor of Catholic self-understanding from the "mystical body of Christ" to "the pilgrim Church" and the "people of God," those reformulations were instantly understandable to Jewish theologians. Those reconceptualizations were essentially biblical, and forgave the triumphalism, essentially Jewish. Those Catholic affirmations have equivalencies in traditional Jewish categories of self-definition: by divine action at Sinai, the Jews emerged into history as a covenanted people, a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" obligated to carry out a task of messianic redemption in the world until the coming of the kingdom. Thus, from their very origins Jews have understood themselves as "a

holy people of God" on pilgrimage. That growing commonality in the biblical world-view is decisive for understanding everything else that is happening between Catholics and Jews!

As human societies with universal and national aspects, Catholics and Jews have both "foreign" and "domestic" agendas. Each of these agendas reflects the life interests of our respective peoples, interests of survival and continuity, and the time is past due for either Catholics or Jews to feel apologetic or defensive about articulating or pressing for the realization of their legitimate group interests. But shaped by substantially different historical experiences, these "foreign" and "domestic" agendas are in some ways "out of phase" and it is important that we try to understand how we got this way, and what might be done to synchronize these interests where humanly possible. And if we cannot synchronize interests where differences of principle or faith are involved, at the very least we should try to understand the real reasons behind the different positions, and learn how to respect the difference, rather than deal with the other through caricatures and stereotypes which are a violation of truth, justice, and charity.

I begin with the "Jewish agenda" which, for obvious reasons, I know best. Both the "foreign" and "domestic" sides of the Jewish agenda are determined decisively by the two watershed events of contemporary Jewish life—the Nazi Holocaust and the rebirth of the state of Israel. Nazi Germany's mass slaughter of six million Jewish men, women, and children destroyed one-third of the body of the Jewish people. Every Jewish person born in the shadow of Dachau and Auschwitz has learned from that trauma at least three permanent, universal lessons:

First, when your enemy says he is going to destroy you, you take him with absolute seriousness. In Germany in the 1930's, many Jews, in-

ured by their middle class comforts and deceived about the permanence of sin and evil by German *kultur* and *gemutlichkeit*, dismissed Hitler as "a monkey" and as "insane." Jews can no longer afford such delusions and faulty diagnosis.

Second, Jews can no longer tolerate for a moment the luxury of standing by while the blood of their brothers and sisters cries out from the earth. That is why Jews in such disproportionately large numbers marched in Selma and in the civil rights march on Washington; that is why they also joined with Catholics and Protestants in seeking to bring relief for the victims of massacres in the Nigerian-Biafran civil conflict. These were in many ways acts of delayed atonement for the sin of spectatorship during the Nazi genocide when there were few Jewish marches on Berlin and on Washington which could have made some difference; and even if not, there was a moral obligation to try to make a difference that was faulted.

Third, the fact that in our lifetime two out of five Jewish lives were destroyed has filled every Jewish life with heightened value and preciousness. Indeed, it has heightened the Jewish appreciation of the dignity and infinite worth of every human life, but in all candor there is a special intensity in the value attached to a Jewish life. For Jews are a minority people, and the very survival of this people depends on the preservation of "a critical mass" of Jewish persons who can make the sustaining of Jewishness and Judaism meaningful and worthwhile.

These three "lessons"—among others—inform critically the consciousness of the vast majority of Jews today. The overwhelming and unprecedented response of American and world Jewry in solidarity with Israel when attacked by unprovoked Arab aggression on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, cannot be understood apart from these lessons of recent Jewish history. Spiritually, psycho-

logically and existentially, the Jewish people simply cannot afford another single attempt by Arab leaders or anyone else at their "final solution" of the Jewish problem through aggression and mass destruction. Virtually every Jewish person in the world—whether religious, agnostic, or atheist—knew in his or her bones that the destruction of Israel, God forbid, would be the lethal blow that would end all meaning for the Jewish presence in history. Auschwitz epitomized the total vulnerability of Jews as defenseless victims in the scenario wrought demonically by others. Israel, the resurrection of Jews after their death, signified that for the first time in 2,000 years Jews finally were restored to mastery over their own fate and destiny. The universal determination of the Jewish people to try to preserve Israel against attack and aggression meant nothing less, symbolically and actually, than a supreme effort to close once and for always the Auschwitz chapter in Jewish history, with its nightmare images of Jews perennially led as victim sheep to the slaughter.

Animating these human and historical considerations has been the powerful spiritual and moral motif of Judaism which affirms that "he who saves one human life" is regarded as if "he had saved an entire world." Thus, sacrificial giving to the United Jewish Appeal, 35,000 young Jews volunteering their services for kibbutzim and other non-military services, and the giving of blood in vast quantities were all part of acting out the supreme *mitzvah* (religious commandment)—saving life.

On the graph of Jewish priorities, therefore, "foreign" concerns have predominated since the end of the Second World War. In addition to the massive undertaking of saving Jewish refugees from the wreckage of Nazi Germany, and of helping to build a safe haven in Israel, the foreign agenda of Jewry has been preoccupied with concerns for assuring the human rights of the three million Jews in the Soviet Union, with

the oppressed and persecuted Jews in Arab countries, especially in Syria and Iraq, and with combatting the massive anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda waged on every continent by the Arab countries and the Communist nations, led by the Soviet Union.

These inescapable "foreign" obligations of preserving as many lives as humanly possible have in many ways overwhelmed the "domestic" needs of American Jewish life. And there are plenty of problems of Jewish survival, continuity, and renewal in America. The impact of the "American way of life"—its powerful assimilative forces, common culture, paganism, hedonism, consumerism, self-indulgence—is having the same corrosive effects on Jewish traditions, group loyalties, and religious indifference and relativism as it is on the Catholic community. The most pressing issues on the "domestic" Jewish agenda are those which deal with strengthening the religious and cultural identity of Jews, especially our youth: shoring up Jewish family life which is beginning to erode under the impact of mobility, intermarriage, and zero population growth; enhancing the role of women in the synagogue and Jewish community life; making Jewish education more relevant to the ethical and value needs of our people; reinvigorating synagogue liturgy and ritual in ways that make connections between the tradition and the real needs of our people today.

During recent years, as I have observed relationships between Catholics and Jews, members of the Jewish community have approached their Catholic friends and neighbors for support of causes on the Jewish "foreign" agenda, and here is where the "out of phase" awareness begins to register. There is a Catholic "foreign" and "domestic" agenda that is frequently not well known by Jews.

My impression is that most Catholics are content to leave "foreign" ques-

tions to the disposition of the Pope, the Holy See, the national Catholic hierarchy, or the impressive Catholic relief and welfare agencies. Except for the vigorous public anti-war activity of Catholic left groups, mainstream Catholics seem to be far more concerned about "domestic" issues involving personal faith and family life. The intensity of passion and conviction that many Jews exercise over the welfare and security of their brothers and sisters in Israel, the Soviet Union, and the Arab countries finds its parallel in similar intensity of Catholic feelings invested in right-to-life issues—abortion, birth control, involuntary sterilization, and euthanasia. The social dimension of parish Catholic concern seems to be located mainly in such issues of public morality as censorship and combating pornography.

An almost weird kind of "parallel play" seems to be developing between Catholics and Jews on the neighborhood level, and I worry about it. Increasingly, I am inclined to believe that it is not good for the "wholeness" of either Catholic or Jewish morality or spirituality for such "out of phaseness" to continue without correction.

Surely it does not advance the cause of seeking to preserve the dignity of the human person created in the image of God for the right-to-life issues to have become publicly identified as solely a "Catholic" issue, allegedly being imposed on the public by "Catholic power." In fact, the right-to-life issues are supremely issues of biblical morality, and it would have far better served our common spiritual purposes had Catholics, Jews, and Protestants found a way very early in the debate to clear a common ground. The Catholic Church and the Catholic people are to be applauded for having raised to public consciousness the centrality of the dignity of human life issue, but their strategy for building a domestic coalition leaves much to be desired. It is not too late to try to win broad support and understanding for these

crucial spiritual and moral issues, and I for one propose to do what I can to bring Jews, Catholics, and others together in alliance for preventing the further erosion of the divine image of God in man.

Similarly, it is not good for the "wholeness" of the Jewish spirit and psyche for Jews to find themselves struggling almost alone for the human rights of Jews in the Soviet Union or for the right of the people and state of Israel to live a peaceful existence with secure, defensible borders. While it is now self-evident that in the pluralism of America, and of the world community, every religious-ethnic community has its own agenda and its own legitimate priorities for which the group itself is expected to be the foremost advocate, for the group to become the sole advocate of the cause invariably casts upon it the cloud of marginality.

I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that had not the Jews of America and elsewhere committed themselves heart and soul to the cause of emigration of Soviet Jews, very few of the 70,000 who were allowed to leave since 1971 would have been liberated. At the same time, the cause of the human rights of Soviet Jews is the identical cause of the human rights of Catholics in Russia, Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, and elsewhere. Jews, Catholics, Baptists and others have very similar problems in Russia and elsewhere in terms of overcoming restrictions that prevent religious education of children, and the conducting of a significant religious life in houses of worship and homes. What great spiritual and political power could be released if Catholics were to join their Jewish neighbors in national and international efforts to compel the Communist countries to conform to the human rights obligations they committed themselves to when they signed the United Nations Charter! It is not enough to leave this to the Holy See, in my judgment. American Catholics, precisely because they are Americans, have an enormous lever-

age to exercise at this moment in history precisely because the Soviet Union is desperate for American wheat, trade, and technology. No one should underestimate the impact that George Meany of the AFL-CIO and Thomas Gleason of the Maritime Union had in prodding the Soviet Union to play a constructive role in helping bring about a ceasefire in the Middle East when they announced that longshoremen simply would refuse to load the wheat bought by the Soviet Union unless the Russians stopped arming and goading Arab nations to war against Israel. Similar actions in support of the human rights of Catholics, Jews, and other deprived communities in the Soviet Union might produce interesting results not otherwise obtained.

The right to life issue on the domestic agenda of Catholics, and the Soviet Jewry and Israel issues on the foreign agenda of Jews, are simply illustrative of the need to find more effective ways for synchronizing the priority issues of both communities and of replacing much unnecessary polarization by mutual understanding and mutual support. Both Jews and Catholics have got to find a constructive way of meeting the educational needs of their children in non-public schools. The quality education of nearly six million children in parochial and all-day schools is first and foremost an American education issue, rather than a religious issue. If we can send Skylabs to the moon, we certainly must have enough ingenuity to find a formula for aiding our school children without violating the Constitution.

Jews and Catholics have a vital stake in seeking to overcome the widespread religious illiteracy in America, and the counterculture of paganism and hedonism which threatens all the religiously-based values of self-restraint, civility, and respect for the rights of others. When a society tolerates the blasphemy and crude anti-Semitism of *Jesus Christ Superstar* on the grounds that it is "entertainment," it is virtually inevitable that

the next step will be encouragement to produce the Danish film on "The Erotic Life of Jesus." Catholics and Jews must stop tilting at windmills, and must together create effective mechanisms to halt the further erosion of religious and ethical disciplines and norms in our society.

And obviously there are other issues which should be calling Catholics and Jews together—America's national priorities of overcoming poverty, providing jobs, housing, education, improved courts of justice, prison reform, health care, aid to the elderly, affirmative action for the disadvantaged, etc. There are also the more elusive but nonetheless significant questions for theologians, scholars, and clergy to engage in together—the moral and ethical challenges of biomedical research which threatens to make man in the image of man rather than in the image of God; the laissez faire model of doing science and technology which is leading to such devastating corruption and pollution of the environment. Catholics

and Jews must begin to play some effective role in the decision-making process in these areas which shape the life of all of us.

How to go about it? I suggest that the time is ripe for Catholics and Jews to begin organizing national, regional, and local "Catholic-Jewish Agenda Meetings" that would enable each group to take inventory in a careful, precise way of all the problems and issues that are of real concern to each community and to place these on a common table for reciprocal consideration.

By replacing vague impressions and stereotyped notions and images about what it is that genuinely concerns our respective communities, and by working out joint and parallel approaches to our common religious and societal problems, we will have gone a long way to implementing the spirit of the Vatican Council *Declaration on Non-Christian Religions* which called for "mutual knowledge and reciprocal respect."