



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 3, Folder 1, Response to *Christian Century* editorial, 5
November 1975.



RESPONSE TO THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY EDITORIAL OF 5 NOVEMBER 1975

At least as offensive as Golda Meir determining who is a Palestinian is a Christian determining what is a Zionist. While I am grateful that The Christian CENTURY believes the "existence of Israel is no longer debatable," I very much reject the idea that the foundation of the Jewish state can be understood only in religious terms. Please let us define ourselves!

To be a Jew is to be part of a civilization, a culture, a people, a common past. A Jew can have, through physical assimilation in the Diaspora, changed his original olive complexion and black hair to every shade from light blonde to coal black; he can have changed his Orthodox faith to Reform, Reconstructionist, Conservative or socialist/humanist/rationalism (or any combination thereof); he can believe that God will send the Meshiach only when all Jews observe all mitzvot or that a messianic age will come when a new form of economic justice, based on Marxism, will assure that man will no longer be wolf to man. The Zionist leadership and heroic figures of the nineteenth and twentieth century, from the religious Ahad Ha'am to the socialist David Ben Gurion, from the Tolstoyan A. D. Gordon to the worldly Max Nordau included all these types. But the link that connected them all, and one that binds Israeli and Diaspora Jewry, is not just the ancient dream, about which we sang as captives by the waters of Babylon, of a rebuilt Temple, but the dream of being free men in a land where no one could tell us to go back where we came from, a land where we

were no longer the eternal wanderer, the stranger forever. For the Jew, whether born in Yemen, in Austria, in Morocco, or in Poland, and sometimes, though it may make some American Jews uneasy to say so, in America, there has always been the dream of "going home" to the place where our people once were sovereign and free.

It is as a life-long Zionist and as a Jewish refugee from Nazism that I can relate to the Palestinian child in a camp in Lebanon whose eyes light up when father tells the story of the return, as my father told it to me in Vienna. It is as the mother of an American-Israeli woman named for a great-grandmother, martyred in the Holocaust, and as the grandmother of a second generation Israeli baby boy, that I wish to reach out to Palestinian mothers and grandmothers and say: Let us have an end to the maiming and killing; let us live side by side in sister states, peace and brotherhood. Ben Gurion often said that if all the Jews in the world came home, the Negev alone would be big enough to absorb them; as Rabin has said more recently, we would be glad to travel to Hebron with a passport (but never again to stand segregated and barred from the place where our Fathers and Mothers rest).

Although it is true, as your editorial states, that "what is going on in the General Assembly is not a debate on Zionism qua racism, but a hostile propagandistic action questioning Israel's right to exist," it is also true that an understanding

of what Zionism is will bring about a climate in which Israel can afford flexibility. It was my Zionist father who taught me that racism in any form is evil, my Zionist teachers and comrades who encouraged me to fight, as a young girl in America, discrimination against blacks and other minorities, and my Zionist faith in the eventual redemption, not only of the Jewish people, but of all mankind, that keeps me from becoming cynical in the face of the worst kind of political prostitution (ah, Fidel!) in recent memory. The United Nations cannot, thank God, murder Israel with anti-Semitic rhetoric, but it will surely commit suicide with resolutions like the one against Zionism.



ILG

5 November 1975