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Box 3, Folder 9, "The 1976 Presidential Election, Evangelism, and the Jews", 24 May 1976.

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THE 1976 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION,
~~CHURCH~~, EVANGELISM, AND THE JEWS

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This background memorandum is not intended in any way as a statement of support or of opposition to any of the ^{Presidential} candidates of the Democratic or Republican parties in the current election campaign. As an intergroup relations agency, the American Jewish Committee has been concerned since its inception with combatting prejudice and bigotry that arise from negative stereotypes and hostile caricatures leveled against any religious, racial, or ethnic group.

Both because Jews have been the victims and scapegoats of religio-ethnic stereotyping which nurtures anti-Semitism, and because of our conviction that hatred and unwarranted suspicions against any group or person contradicts the basic Biblical and democratic values to which we subscribe, we wish to oppose any tendencies in the current campaign that may lead to the defamation or the villification of that group of Americans whose faith commitments and ^{are} ~~is~~ ethos now being most prominently discussed in this election campaign; namely, the 40 to 50 million Evangelical Christians.

An additional reason for this effort at clarification of our views regarding the Evangelical community derives from the fact that the American Jewish Committee began in the mid-1960s a series of academic and theological conferences and meetings with Dr. Billy Graham, Dr. Harold Lindsell, editor of Christianity Today; Dr. Arnold Olson, president of the Evangelical Free Church; the National Association of

Evangelicals; the Evangelical Theological Society; the Southern Baptist Convention; and a National Conference of Evangelicals and Jews held in January 1976 involving representative Evangelical and Jewish scholars and religious leaders from the major Evangelical and Jewish seminaries, colleges, and universities in America. The American Jewish Committee, which pioneered in developing the most extensive network of relationships between Evangelicals and Jews in this country, has had the benefit and good fortune of knowing Evangelical Christians as persons, not as mythic entities. It is something of ^{that} realism and ~~dis~~mythologizing about this important group of American citizens that we ~~wish~~ have learned through first-hand knowledge and experience that we wish to share in this document.

THE ELECTION PROCESS AS A FORGE OF PLURALISM

For the first one hundred years of American history, this country has been characterized by such church historians as Dr. Martin Marty (The Righteous Empire) as an "Evangelical Empire". Nine of the thirteen colonies had established ~~xxxx~~ churches modeled on the Puritan theocracy ("Puritan oligarchy" Dr. Thomas J. Wertenberger preferred to call it) of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In those established church-state arrangements, neither Catholics, ~~xxxx~~ Jews, nor dissenting Protestants were allowed to vote nor hold public office unless they would affirm "an evangelical Christian oath".

During the past 100 years, owing mainly to the efforts of ecumenical moderates, the churches were disestablished de jure. Pluralism and dialogue now became possible, with a growth in understanding that every religious, racial, and ethnic group was to be accepted as an equal.

That conception of pluralism as the mode of co-existence between

diverse groups was more theoretical than actual. The election of 1960 disclosed that reality. Despite the lip service that was widely given to pluralism, John F. Kennedy, had to undertake a special effort to persuade many Americans, especially evangelical Christians in the ~~South~~ and to the Pope in Vatican City South, that his fidelity to the Roman Catholic Church/would not compromise his loyalty to American democracy nor his ability to serve the entire American people as their president.

That election campaign disclosed how extensive was the nativist, anti-Catholic bigotry in our nation. Awkward, embarrassing, and even painful as was that campaign, it would appear on reflection that President Kennedy's election speeches - especially that given to the meeting of Southern Baptist ministers in Houston - became an essential part of the process of confronting America with its hidden hostilities toward the Catholic minority. The election of President Kennedy marked a turning point in the history of pluralism in America. The nation began to ~~xxxx~~ purge itself of its stereotypes and irrational fears about Catholics; The election of Kennedy ratified the entry of American Catholics into first-class citizenship in our democracy.

The election process, it becomes increasingly clear, is a force for burning off our pretensions about pluralism and for enabling each major religio-ethnic group to challenge the willingness of the national society to accept its first-class citizenship ^{as well as} de jure, and ~~not only~~ de facto. In 1960, the Roman Catholic community in America went through that national rite of passage. In 1976, the Evangelical Christian community is engaged in such a rite of passage into national acceptance.

Apart from the principles of equality and justice that are at stake, I contend that Jews, blacks, hispanics, women, asians, and others

have both moral and self-interest obligations in making this election process work with a minimum of defamation against the surfacing group, for the simple reason that in the future unfolding of the democratic process each of these groups will in time present their candidate for the Presidency of the United States whose election will constitute their ratification as first-class citizens. ~~Making~~ Making pluralism a factual reality for each group in the American mosaic requires our collective efforts to combat the false images that rattle around our culture, and thereby enable our citizenry to make wise ~~choices~~ choices on the basis of a candidate's merits and virtues, undistorted by group stereotypes and unreflective prejudices.

— Movement to Anubelt - 806 of Shub^v



When asked to describe "the evangelicals," one contemporary writer, liberal and generally well-informed, wrote these words:

"Evangelicals (or, as they used to be called called, 'Fundamentalists') were long stereotyped by other Americans as rustic Gospel thumpers from the 'backward, bigoted Bible Belt' and this invidious image still lingers. Their aggressive proselytizing, too often single-mindedly directed at Jews, has caused resentment, and their preoccupation with individual salvation, often to the exclusion of social concern, is alien to Jews with their strong social orientation. American Jews usually have sought and found their allies not in these quarters, but in liberal "mainstream" churches - Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Baptist, Methodist, and so on--that were committed to pluralism and were not trying to convert them."

There is little doubt that this characterization of Evangelicals reflects a rather widely-held view not only among Jews in northern urban, industrialized centers but among northern liberal Protestants and Catholics as well. A prominent black liberal Protestant clergyman recently told me that at "475 Riverside Drive" - the headquarters of the National Council of Churches, "they're 99% against Carter." A Jewish leader in Chicago recently told a Carter official in Illinois that he was troubled by the report that Jimmy Carter says that "he prays 25 times a day. I would like to know what he prays for."

~~Are these accurate and fair representations of "Evangelicals"?
an "Evangelicals" be equated without distinction with "Fundamentalists"?~~

Two principal streams of ideology dominated the colonies of North America in the 17th and 18th centuries.¹ The first was Calvinist evangelicism a product of the Puritan experience and the Great Awakening of

1. Religious Liberty in the United States by Elwyn Smith, Fort

-6 -

Are these accurate and fair representations of "Evangelicals?" Should "Evangelicals" be equated without distinction with "Fundamentalists?" Are there images held by the non-Evangelical community of the Evangelical groups which require modification? Are there issues which the Evangelical community should legitimately be required to clarify as a precondition for winning the confidence and support of non-Evangelicals in behalf of political candidates who ~~shakex~~ assert Evangelical loyalties?

Answers to questions such as these require ^{Some} ~~something~~ more than a ~~mere~~ casual acquaintance with the history and doctrine of Evangelicals and Fundamentalists in America:

Calvinist ^{revival between} evangelicalism, product of the Puritan experience and the Great Awakening of ^{1734 and 1750}, was one of the principal streams of ideology that dominated the colonies of North America prior to the birth of the American nation. The Massachusetts Bay Colony, "the Puritan Oligarchy," was a Bible Commonwealth which united ecclesiastical and civil government. Only "the sanctified," those who experienced infant baptism and celebrated communion at the Lord's Table, were entitled to hold public office and vote in civil elections of magistrates. ^{It was}

^{promoted not only because it weakened the authority of secular government; it was also because it threatened their rule but also because} Reaction against the enforced establishment of evangelical

orthodoxy began early. On March 7, 1638, Roger Williams gathered nineteen men, refugees from Massachusetts Bay, to form a new colony at Rhode Island that would not only allow but enforce liberty of conscience. Williams became convinced that there existed no Scriptural authority for baptizing infants and he rebaptized twelve people by "plunging," as it was derisively termed by conventional Calvinists. Thus, was born the first Baptist Church on the

North American continent.

Roger Williams became "a seeker after light," adhering to the principle that "every one should have liberty to worship God according to the light of his own conscience." In his celebrated parable of the ship, Williams elaborated his commitment to "total freedom of conscience" paralleled by his call for complete obligation "to obey the common laws and orders" of the civil sphere:

"There goes many a ship to sea, with many hundred souls in one ship, whose weal and woe is common; and is a true picture of a common-wealth, or anyx human combination, or society. It hath fallen out some times that both Papists and Protestants, Jews and Turks may be embarked into one ship. Upon which supposal, I affirm that all the liberty of conscience that ever I pleaded for, turns upon these two hinges, that none of the Papists Protestants, Jews, or Turks, be forced to come to the ship's prayer or worship nor compelled from their own particular prayers or worship, if they practice any."

Thus, the Baptist tradition of religious liberty and freedom of conscience is deeply rooted in early American history. But there is another side to that tradition which has relevance to our present concerns.

Isaac Backus was the pre-eminent Calvinist theorist of church-state relations in the generation that prepared the way for the American Revolution. Backus shared Roger Williams' commitment to religious liberty as one of the rights dictated by divine and natural law. But to Backus, as Prof. Elwyn Smith writes, "All true liberty, in religion or the public realm depends on the supremacy of Christ."

In the original Calvinist view, God's dealings with men were through a single covenant in two "dispensations": that of an obscured gospel called law, the other of Christ and fully revealed gospel. Backus

Religious Liberty in the United States, by Elwyn A. Smith, Fort Worth

broke sharply with Calvin and developed a theory of two covenants which contrasted "the covenant of law" with "the covenant of grace." The Puritans of Massachusetts remained steadily friendly to the Old Testament and modeled their new commonwealth on its institutions. Backus opted for strong contrast between the two covenants, and declared that there could be no religious fellowship between those whose moral aspirations were derived from "an abrogated covenant," the law of Moses, and those saved by the grace of Christ.

"A by-product of an exaggerated covenant theology," Prof. Smith observes (p.23), "is ^a hardened attitude toward Catholics and Jews, ~~which~~ an issue not sociologically important in the era of the American Revolution but regrettable as the nineteenth century advanced. Catholics found themselves persistently charged by Protestants formed in the tradition of radical Puritanism with being slaves of works-righteousness; a principled rejection of the Old Testament is productive of hostility to Jews."

Beyond that, Backus wrote in The Liberal Support of Gospel Ministers that "All the privileges of the covenant of grace are personal as they were not before the death of Christ," and he set the "nation," i.e., corporate group, sharply against the individual. His theology led him to a fundamental quarrel with the group solidarity of the Old Testament and of Puritan orthodoxy.

Backus was a spiritual theocrat. The perfected ~~max~~ order was for Backus strictly future. While he waited for the eschaton, the entire separation of church and state was necessary to both. But Puritan orthodoxy demanded fulfillment of theocracy in the present.

These ambivalent and contrasting influences in the Baptist tradition have left their traces down to the present.