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Box 4, Folder 24, "Fanaticism and Fundamentalism", 3 November 1984.



EXCERPTS FROM TALK BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM, DIRECTOR OF
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE AT
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"Armageddon theology is rapidly becoming one of the greatest threats to democratic societies and to religious pluralism, which are the keystones of world order and peace.

"At the heart of this apocalyptic theology is a simplistic but deadly fantasy. It proclaims that an inevitable conflict must take place between the children of light (the "saved") and the children of darkness ("the damned"), and that at the end of days a global catastrophe must ensue which is a prelude to the purification of the world. There are Christian, Jewish ~~and~~ Muslim ^{and secular} versions of this Armageddon theology.

"In free societies, no one can contest the right for people to believe what they will, no matter how fantastic. But when this fantasy is joined with military might and political power, it becomes a genuine threat to human survival, especially in a nuclear-missile age.

"These eschatological fantasies ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ took form in the second century ^{BCE} with the Book of Daniel and in the first century CE ^(about 93 A.D.) in the Book of Revelations. The translations of these fantasies into Armageddon politics resulted in ^{the} suicidal ^{conflict} destruction of Jews, ^{with} ~~at the hands~~ of the Romans in the first and second centuries. It resulted in vast destruction of Christian masses beginning with the Montanists in the fourth century in Asia Minor, the Crusades, the Inquisition, and with numerous salvation cults of "saints" down through the Middle Ages.

"After the second century, the Rabbis condemned such apocalyptic fantasies and stressed instead Jewish messianism - social justice in this world. The Catholic Church condemned these Armageddon theologies and salvation cults in the fourth century and afterwards."

"Yet, so powerful were these eschatological fantasies and their emotional grip on depressed masses that they persisted in a subterranean way down into the 20th century. As Prof. Norman Cohn has documented in his monumental study, 'The Pursuit of the Millennium,' Communism and Nazism appropriated these fantasies and developed secular ideologies which proclaimed the vision of inevitable cosmic conflicts. The Communists developed the notion of the "saved" (the proletariat) destroying the monstrous "damned" (the bourgeoisie Capitalists). The Nazis developed their demonic scenario of Aryans (children of light) purifying the world by destroying the ~~xxx~~ impure non-Aryans (the Jews and other untermenschen.)

"Today Islamic fanaticism is the most intense purveyor of those Armageddon fantasies, The suicidal attacks by Shiite Muslims against American marines in Lebanon are but one evidence of that tragic reality. Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological perception of America as "the great Satan" is another statement of that reality. The episodes of contemporary violence ^{against} and hatred ^{of} of the "unsaved" are almost everywhere.

"And now Fundamentalist Christians have resurrected Argmadden politics in the United States. There are few greater threats ^{to} of American democratic society and religious pluralism than that demonological world-view which sees cosmic catastrophe ^{as} inevitable. After the forthcoming election, Americans must confront this ideological force as one of the central issues facing American domestic and foreign policy.

"In Israel, the resurgence of fundamentalist Judaism with its threats of violence and terror against the President of Israel, other Jews and Arabs must engage the concern of American Jewry no less than the threat of fanaticism in America by Christian fundamentalists and by Islamic fundamentalists on the international scene."