



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 4, Folder 26, Rabbinical Assembly session with Marc H. Tanenbaum and Jerry Falwell [tape transcription], 19 March 1985.

Transcription of Tape

Dear Colleagues and Friends of the Rabbinical Assembly, we welcome all of you here today. I want to tell you that we have at this convention broken important and good ground of outreach. We ought to feel happy and gratified about that. We have dealt with some major issues that face the American Jewish community, and especially on its agenda of social concern, and I am particularly gratified to see and to hear about issues such as nuclear disarmament, Jewish poverty, attitudes toward the handicapped, the problem of cults, Ethiopian Jewry and Syrian Jewry, alcoholism. We even had a session on domestic violence. Had I time I would want to tell you as the chairman of the Social Action Committee that the work of our colleagues in Israel in that arena has been of great consequence and of vast importance to us. A few weeks ago I was privileged to join with them in Israel in the Knesset to help defeat the so-called "Mi who Yehudi" amendment to the "Chug Toshvut," to the Law of the Return. And I know that they are doing yeoman work on behalf of our movement. As is the Committee of the Rabbinical Assembly for Soviet Jewry, for I know, having attended the remarkable session that they held yesterday which unfortunately was very sparsely attended. But there will be occasions when we will call upon you, and expect it very soon, to show your support for our brothers and sisters of the Soviet Union, and we certainly hope that you will respond at that time and that you will communicate that, as you have been doing, to the people of our communities and congregations.

Tonight we deal with a crucial concern. The future of Jewish-Christian relations in America. Touching on the issues of Church and State, as it is called. Touching on evangelical missionizing and on the relation to the State of Israel. I think you will want to know that the other evening I heard at the

CCAR, our Reform brethren will also be meeting with Mr. Falwell at a future convocation that they are now planning. In a time when, fortunately and thankfully, we can bring to our podiums our Orthodox brethren and the Reform to meet with us, we do so to know our sameness as well as our separateness. For at this convention we have had dialogue with many segments of the American community. We want to continue to talk with them and indeed to influence them. We have had Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta because the South is a very important part of America. Yesterday we welcomed Roy Innis, the head of CORE, because the North is a very important part of America. And tonight we welcome Jerry Falwell, who speaks for Middle America and in many ways for all Americans who adhere to his views. We will want to clarify central concerns. We have many questions. We seek solid answers. We want to hear what he has to say and what Marc Tanenbaum has to say and we hope to be heard. We are here therefore to explore our commonality, while admitting our disagreements. But we are here to do so in the most agreeable way that we can. For not to discuss the future of Christian-Jewish relations in America would be a disservice to our people and a tragedy for America. For the Jewish and the Christian contributions to the American way of life is an absolutely indispensable one. America needs, and I am sure you believe as I do, both of our traditions working at their best, nourishing and sustaining the fabric and the stream of American life. We have no intention of avoiding the real issues or of making believe that they do not exist. Let us walk together when we can and when we depart from each other let us do so with knowledge and with decency. This is not only the American way, I would submit to you that this is the Jewish way. And this is certainly the way in which we hope to conduct this session this evening.

Our first speaker will be Reverend Jerry Falwell, one of the outstanding of our Evangelical preachers and teachers of America whose thought over these last years has affected millions of people in this country. He is a graduate of the Lynchburg College in Virginia and of Baptist Bible College in Springfield, Missouri, and I read here that he is one of the twenty-five most influential people in American according to U.S. News and World Report, and the second most influential man in the United States, according to Good Housekeeping 1983 Annual Poll. Mr. Falwell has been the recipient of the Jabotinsky Centennial Award in 1980 presented to him by Menachem Begin. He is the founder of the Thomas Rhode Baptist Church in 1956 which then had thirty-five members and which today has a membership, I read here, of 21,000. A founder as well of the Moral Majority in June, 1979, a political organization that is pro-life, pro-family, pro-moral, pro-strong national defense -- its membership today speaks of six and a half million American families.

He will be our first speaker and then we will hear from our dear friend, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who is an honored colleague and a close friend, a graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary and a member of the Rabbinical Assembly. It is a particular pleasure for me to present him to you since at one time he was a member of a congregation that I personally served, and we go back together to college days at Yeshiva University where my respect for his sincerity and knowledge first began. Already at that time, in college days he was deeply concerned with the future of American Jewry, and that respect has subsequently blossomed into admiration for the devoted service that he has brought to the Jewish people in more than 25 years effort with the American Jewish Committee. I must add that when reading recently of Marc's meeting with Pope John Paul the

Second in Rome, I felt a surge of pride that the Jewish position would be presented by such a devoted and informed member of the Rabbinical Assembly. And so after Reverend Falwell, Rabbi Tanenbaum will immediately speak.

One last word about the format. I have asked each of our two speakers to make an opening statement which we hope will not exceed twenty minutes. Then there will be time for comment of each upon the other for five or six minutes and this should leave time for questions.

And so, dear friends, our program will begin. We shall now proceed and I ask you to receive Reverend Jerry Falwell.

Thank you Rabbi. I have been reading about your Assembly and having read about your Assembly (shouting heard here..) we havewho also who misbehave, so don't be embarrassed. (We are going to get rid of him...) That's fine. And we are glad to have him, but you are not. All right. I repeat. I have been reading about your Assembly in the national media, and I was amazed, and as I listen tonight, very much amazed at the kinship of what happens in Baptist meetings, namely the congregational spirit that goes on. (there is a babble of voices here about the heckler here....) I understand...no problem.

Third time. The amazing likeness of this Rabbinical Assembly and an out-of-order Baptist Convention is very obvious and I feel right at home about five minutes into the railroaded motions that went through with no opposition allowed. I want to say that it is a great honor for me to be here. I mean

that, that is not a trite statement, but sincerely from my heart as one who was raised up in Virginia, and if you have had time to read Merrill Simon's book that we asked Merrill to help us, we paid the bill, to send to you for the purpose of your knowing where we came from and where we are and hopefully where we are headed and why. Having grown up in Virginia and having grown up in a very provincial attitude and life style and relationship, to be here speaking before hundreds of rabbis who, in my estimate, are such a vital part of the American fabric. Considering where I come from, and I won't go into that beyond this statement. I am honored, and I want to thank you, each of you for allowing me to come. We may not agree on every issue. I want you to know that I sincerely love you and it's my great honor and privilege to be here in your midst and I hope that tonight I can share a few things, as well Marc, that will help us perhaps to better understand who we are and where we fit, not just into the present but into the future, for both of our communities.

I have just returned, last week, from our fifteen tour of Israel. We carried a group of some 830 pilgrims through the land. We go each year. We stay in Jerusalem for most of the tour except for our visit into the Galilee. We employ Israeli guides, we travel on Israeli busses, we bring members of the Israeli government, if and when they can, to address our group, as happened this last experience. The purpose being to bring pastors, ministers, legislators from our community to the Land of the Bible, to Israel, to meet the people as well as the Land and come back truly committed to the Zionist commitment that is in our breast. That did happen again this year, and we were very delighted to have Mr. Moshe Arons speaking to us, we were very privileged to meet with the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and to have Mr. Sharon speak to our group.

We were delighted to have Harry Horowitz participate in a national live satellite show from Jerusalem that covered the nation on the final Sunday night of our tour there and to discuss what is affecting Israel today.

When Merrill Simon called me three years ago to ask permission to trail me all over the country for two years and, in a question and answer kind of format, to write a book on what Evangelical Christians really are up to, and what they believe, and the relationship that seems to be developing between Conservative Christians and the Jewish community, I admit I was somewhat dubious. Very frankly, I was aware of many of the questions that we would be asked, probing questions that could not be avoided and questions which demanded answers that would be offensive. We agreed to that commitment and in fact for about two years Merrill would fly into this city and that city and meet with us and many, many scores of hours spent on airplanes, in terminals, in motel rooms, wherever, in answering questions that were to go into a book that he wanted to write, in his words to set the record straight, and to determine what is the stance of this Conservative Christian public today, not just towards the State of Israel, but towards Judaism and towards contemporary issues and what are those ulterior motives, if in fact they exist, in the hearts of Christians in this country towards the Jewish people and the settlement of the Jewish people in the land of Israel.

When the book was finished, I was glad it was, it was hard work. But I tried to do several things in answering the questions in the book, and in the event that you didn't get one, we brought some and we would be very happy for you to take one with you, free. We addressed Israel, Judaism, contemporary issues from our

own Biblical and cultural perspective as honestly as I knew how to do it. And I put it on the record permanently. I then again, riding here from Evansville, Indiana, where I spoke this afternoon, in Huntsville, Alabama where I spoke this morning, and Leesberg where I was earlier this morning, I reread the book, reread it carefully and it brought back the memory of those hours with Merrill into which, I think for the first time, I could be wrong but I think for the first time, Marc, and not speaking for all Americans or even all Evangelicals, for no one does that, but speaking for myself and I think a significant group of conservative and Bible-believing Christians, I think I shared the perspective that is ours, I think that for the first time there is a record of reference for perhaps better understanding.

In the past twenty years there has been developing in this country a phenomenon, as I call it, a reversal of roles in the conservative and the liberal church. When I speak of the conservative church I am not speaking of Baptists per se, I am speaking of those millions of American Christians who believe the Bible is the word of God, Old and New Testaments, who believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ and who have professed a new birth experience in relation to God through grace, and his Gospel is death, burial, resurrection. As opposed to the liberal branch of Christendom that would also pledge an allegiance to Christ but who would not for example believe in the fallibility of the authority of the word of God as we do. Or take a stand on Biblical issues as we do in the conservative church. And I would probably say personified mostly by the World Council of Churches and its American counterpart the National Council of Churches.

When I came along as a youngster, I'm 51 now, I was encouraged by a rabbi who received the award, as I am, by Ronald Reagan and a few others who are doing it well, like one of you. That we have in this country for the past twenty years watched the conservative church that at one time was anything but committed to Zionism and to Jewish people, coming towards a commitment to the Abrahamic covenant, coming towards a humanitarian commitment to the State of Israel, an historical commitment. And in some other areas, commitments that are very much American-centered. I watched that happening, while simultaneously I watched liberal Christendom in this country moving more towards the PLO point of view and away from a commitment to the State of Israel and to Jewish people and their interests.

I say a phenomenon because it is rather new. Some ten years ago we began meeting in conservative Christian circles about may we express our commitment to Israel. We have been going for years to the land, taking pilgrimages, but how may we express our commitment. And we began speaking publicly, we began inquiring with various lobbying groups that were interested in the land and in the State of Israel. We began offering our talents, and offering what head count we might have for purposes of political persuasion.

I suppose it was not until the last five years that there has been a dialogue developing between the Jewish community and the Christian that has brought about things like this. If I were to accept all the invitation to speak in synagogues that I receive now I wouldn't have time to speak in the churches. I go as often

as I can. I speak in as many places as I am able, whether Reform, Orthodox or Conservative. This is my first time with you, but I know many of your as individuals.

I believe that any meaningful and continuing relationship must be based on several premises. Number one - total honesty. That is what the book is all about. It was not an attempt to sidestep issues or compromise our positions. What you see in the book "Jerry Falwell and the Jews" is what I preach at Thomas Rhode Church and none of that has been said in a corner, its been said publicly and openly and has been, and is being, and will be said permanently.

Secondly I believe that any continuing relationship, and I believe it is a continuing one, must be based on patience. I do not for one moment believe that the Jewish community is monolithic any more than the Christian one is. Nor do I expect that Jewish people are going to wrap their arms en masse around conservative Christian leaders and conservative Christian lay people. Because we have not come to the point we are suddenly, and I rather suspect that it will be our children who really know the wholesomeness of this relationship more so than we.

I am only here to tell you that, speaking for myself and thousands like myself, we have made a commitment. And no amount of malignity, from inside your camp or ours, is going to break that commitment. It is not based on ulterior motives. It is not based upon the necessity of the Jewish gathering in Israel to set the stage for the second coming of our Messiah. I will just say in one statement that as I interpret Scripture there is no such necessity, there is no such

requirement for Jewish occupation or the building of a temple or any other happening in Israel or anywhere else for we to experience the second advent of our Messiah. My commitment, like the commitment of most of the conservative Christian Church in this country that I dialogue with is based upon number one, a belief in the Abrahamic covenant, that God deals with nations in relation to how those nations deal with the apple of God's eye. We believe in the chosenness of the Jewish people, and we believe that what God told Abraham is as binding and as true today as when he said it 4,000 years. "I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curseth thee."

Beyond that my commitment is based upon a belief in the humaneness and the human needs of not just Jewish people in this country but three and a half million in the State of Israel who, through great hardship, great deprivation, have moved into their land, maligned by their European neighbors, totally misrepresented by the international, looked upon as everything but human beings by many here in our own country, but who have nevertheless survived everything that debased human nature could throw at it, survived as a strong and a permanent fixture on this planet. It is the American way, as well as the Christian way to help those who need help those who need help and those who sincerely deserve help.

Historically, I believe, and history supports this, that the land belongs to the Jewish people and I further believe that Israel is the best, if not the only, true friend America has in that part of the world. And that every dollar we spend, our tax dollars, in Israel, is the best defense dollar we spend anywhere in the world, for any purpose, and I do not look on our grants to Israel, our loans to Israel as charity. I don't look on them as foreign aid. I look on our

monies in Israel as an investment in our well-being, in our interest, economic and political. And I say to those who disagree that if it were not for Israel and what she does not just with her money but her men, if it were not for the Israeli presence, the Soviets would well now own the oilfields of the Middle East and we would not be sitting here in an economy that is strong and flourishing and enjoy all the privileges therefrom this evening. We, as Americans, actually owe a great deal more to Israel than Israel owes to us in dollars and cents. We therefore, I therefore stand here as one who is committed to Israel for those and many other reasons and I can say to you that is where our Christian brothers and sisters stand in the main.

I say that a number of things are needed. Number one, honesty. We need not think we are going to change each other. I haven't come here to convert you and I assure you you are not going to convert me. I have come here to tell you that I am with you. I am for you. Whether you want me to be or not. And that's where I will be when I leave here, whether you want me to be there or not. And I am further here to tell you that I did not come here to receive an offering. I don't think I'm going to get an honorarium, it hasn't been mentioned yet. I came here at my expense because I want to be here.

And I hope that I can say what I am going to say now and say it in a way that it will come across in the spirit in which I intend to say it. I believe that if we are to develop the kind of relationship that needs to be developed, and neither one of us has an overabundance of friends outside the United States. You and I happen to be in this country well insulated with love and resources

and friendship. But when you leave these borders, like it or not you and I are in a very distinct minority and our friendship, our need of loyalty to one another has never been so accentuated as it is right now.

I believe that, as we heard one of the rabbis say this evening regarding the purchase of Israeli bonds requiring faith. I believe down the long haul there must be a willingness to express faith and a willingness to exert patience to determine if in fact this phenomenon is for real and if it is permanent. If it is permanent and if some 70 million conservative Christians in this country can be marshaled together in a strong unswerving bloc of support for Israel and for Jewish people everywhere and against anti-Semitism, it will have been worth everything the Jewish community expended to achieve. If in fact it is for real it will have been worth everything that we in the Christian community expend to achieve because, I repeat, we desperately need each other, regardless of the advantage and disadvantages of our relationships. I want to tell you that what I know about what is happening today is for real. And we are here to extend the right hand of friendship as we have been doing for a number of years, with no expectation of anything in return. Just the willingness to continue the dialogue, continue the efforts.

Recently, this past year as a matter of fact, I was asked by Congressman, is it Lantos, from California, to appear before a subcommittee of the House, the Jerusalem bill was being discussed. I was asked if I would bring an address to that group and I did. I don't usually spend a number of hours preparing anything because I speak twenty-five times a week and I travel 8,000 miles a

week and I don't have time for a script. I get a few thoughts in my head and then far away, that's the way I notice its been done here tonight. Flip Wilson said, "the Devil made me do that."

But I want to read something to you that I did spend a few hours on because it really expresses not just my commitment to the move of the Embassy to Jerusalem, but I believe my heartbeat and the heartbeat of the conservative Christian public in this country, a growing heartbeat, towards Israel. So I would just like to read it to conclude my twenty minutes.

One of the issues we have addressed from the outset of Moral Majority in 1979 and from the beginning of my ministry nearly 28 years ago is support for the nation of Israel. Born in our lifetimes and for the Jewish people everywhere who deserve a homeland where they may be forever free from the scourge that nearly eliminated them from the face of the earth during World War II. The question before this joint hearing today however is not the support of Israel, though it is in a sense. But, rather a sovereign nation has the right to declare its capital where it wishes. And have that capital recognized by other sovereign nations. As all of you are aware the United States recently granted full diplomatic recognition to the Vatican, a religious entity that, despite this recognition, still does not recognize Israel as a nation, much less Jerusalem as its capital. The political identification of the Vatican flows from its religious status. Jerusalem, on the other hand, is revered not by one religion but by three and even by those who hold to a secular faith. It has always been and is the historic capital of Israel. Even in our dispute with the British, the English government did not deny us the right to place our capital

in Philadelphia or New York or Washington or anywhere else we pleased. This has been the historic right of all nations, whatever their political status, religious belief or concept of freedom, to establish its capital where it wishes. The argument might be advanced, as it often is, that Jerusalem is a controversial city and that some accommodation should be made for the dissension that so often surrounds it. What about the land held by the Soviet Union in violation of signed treaties at the end of World War II? Has the Soviet Union's violation of these and other treaties been sufficient for us to tell the Russians we will withdraw diplomatic recognition from them? Of course it has not. Have these treaty violations been enough for any President or our State Department to suggest we should punish the Soviets by moving our embassy to Novoseborsk or Siberia instead of Moscow? We have not. This is a double standard, Mr. Chairman, which no other nation, save Israel, is expected to endure. We treat no other nation the way we treat Israel. President Reagan has just finished a trip to the People's Republic of China, a nation that is officially atheistic and hostile to everything we stand for and believe in. Yet our embassy is in their capital of Peking. Nicaragua recently had a revolution. We are hardly favorable toward the regime that holds power by force and denies the elections they promised, yet our embassy is in Managua. Israel has treated Jerusalem and particularly access to the holy places to the three religions better than any other has or would. As a pastor I am particularly appreciative of how the Israeli Government and particularly the administration of Jerusalem and Mayor Teddy Kollek have meticulously maintained access for Jews, Christians and Moslems. Even Israel's harshest critics cannot criticize her on this issue. Compare Israel's treatment of the holy places to Jordan's when that nation maintained control over East Jerusalem. Jordan razed all Jewish synagogues in

East Jerusalem. Jordan used tombstones from Jewish cemeteries for roads and for latrines in its army camps. Jordan signed an agreement with Israel that it would let any Jew visit the Western Wall. It never lived up to that agreement. Jordan forbade any church to build a steeple higher than the Islamic minaret. Compare this with Israel's record. Not only in Jerusalem but also its open bridges policy over the Jordan River which allows Moslems and anyone else to cross into Israel and visit the holy places in Jerusalem, even if the country from which the person comes is at war with Israel. Israel is not obligated under any international law, Mr. Chairman, to provide access to citizens of countries at war with Israel. But she does it. Even the Vatican recognizes this policy. Listen to what Israel's Declaration of Independence states: "The State of Israel will be based on the principles of liberty, justice and peace as conceived by the prophets of Israel, will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of religion, race or sex, will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education and culture and will safeguard the holy places of all religions." Is there any nation in the Middle East which has made such a pledge. Or has carried it out so faithfully as Israel? I think not. Jerusalem is not only the capital of the nation of Israel, it is also the capital of the three great religions. Jerusalem is holy to Christians because of what Christ did there. Why did Jesus come to Jerusalem? Because he recognized it as the capital of his country. It is the same with Islam. Mohammed lived and worked all his life in Arabia, but Moslems believe that when he went to heaven, he came first to Jerusalem because he recognized Jerusalem as the center of Judaism and Christianity and saw the validity of the claims of their prophets. Of course to the Jews, Jerusalem is the capital because it was declared so thousands of years before Jesus and

Mohammed, by God himself. What then is the main stumbling block keeping the U.S. from doing what is morally correct, religiously justified and politically correct. It seems to be the fear of what might happen given the threats of some who have an interest in keeping Israel destabilized and her borders unfixed. Should we really be fearful of such threats? I think not. President Harry Truman was advised by the State Department in 1948 not to recognize the newly independent nation. He was told that Arab nations would riot, American embassies would be attacked and forced to close and that America would be boycotted by the Arab states. Mr. Truman ignored the advice and did what was right. He recognized Israel and the threats failed to produce the dire consequences that were predicted. I might mention that the U.S. which does not recognize Berlin as the capital of East Germany still maintains its embassy in Berlin. We sometimes treat our adversaries better than our friends. Israel is the only nation on earth which is denied the right to place its capital where it wishes. It is not right, it is not fair. Tel Aviv is no more the capital of Israel than Alexandria is the capital of Egypt. Tel Aviv is a modern creation, Jerusalem is an ancient heritage. Tel Aviv is the brainchild of man, Jerusalem is the heartthrob of God. Moving our embassy from exile in Tel Aviv to its rightful home in Jerusalem would tell the world that our commitment to the single democracy in the Middle East is irrevocable, that regardless of economic or political conditions, we stand behind Israel's right to exist, free from outside predators and no surplus or shortage of oil or any other reason will allow us to sacrifice our friend on the alter of expediency. Do we think that we can promote reasonable behavior among those who are sworn to wipe Israel from the map by allowed threats to determine American policy, even the location of our embassy. From whom should we expect reasonable behavior, from Libya, from

Syria, from Iraq or Iran, the latter which we are told is responsible for the killings of our marines in Lebanon. From the reasonable and rational PLO who massacre innocent women and children and civilians of all types and who certainly aren't going to kill fewer Israelis because we have kept our embassy in Tel Aviv. Israel is not asking for a favor, Mr. Chairman, it is exerting a right, the right to be treated as other nations, the right to have its capital recognized by all nations."

This is the heartbeat we have towards Jerusalem, towards Israel, towards Jewish people and we are pleased to be here tonight to express it to you.

Thank you.

A week ago Friday I had the privilege of being part of a small group of American Jewish leaders, men and women, who had an audience with Pope John Paul the 2nd in the Apostolic Palace. If you are looking for a place to hold a fancy "chasana" or bar-mitzvah, you could even arrange for a kosher caterer, I understand in the new spirit of the times.

I mention that because first of all, in itself, it was a deeply moving and I believe in some ways historic occasion. Once you have a opportunity to read the text of the official declarations that were exchanged between our leadership and the Pope regarding the present relationship between some 800 million Roman Catholics throughout the world who he represents and the Jewish people. The

reason I tell you that story is not to make my Catholic-Jewish speech tonight but to tell you that after that audience was over and there was exchange of gifts, which is the usual protocol, we in fact presented to him a copy of the Book of Esther illuminated by an Israel artist, he kept asking what is this phrase, "V'Mordechai lo ichrav v'lo yeshtachave." To Jerry Falwell that's Baptist for Mrdechai would not kneel or lie down.

But the reason I begin with that story is that after the audience was over and the spirit was genuinely deeply respectful, warm and genuinely loving, the Pope actually in his official text spoke of his love of the Jewish people, a love, he said, so profound it is a love which the New Testament has inherited from the old Testament.

After the audience was over and we came out into the Hall of St. Peter's Basilica and said "Shalom Aleichem" to all the Swiss guards, one of the Bishops on the Vatican staff came over to me and said, "Boy, that was a wonderful audience. What do you do for an encore? And I said, "I'm going to Miami Beach to share a platform with Reverend Jerry Falwell.".....And he turned to me and he said "Oh!"

Reverend Falwell indicated the new life that he has been going through in recent years in terms of the invitations that he has been receiving from synagogues and temples to come and make the kind of magnificent address that he has this evening. I want him to know that he has great commiseration on my part because I am working the other side of the street.

I want to thank him tonight because had he not been invited by the Rabbinical Assembly I would not have a chance to meet so many Jews and rabbis all on one occasion.

I want to respond to Reverend Falwell's address in the spirit with which he has defined the terms for our conversation this evening. Namely, a spirit of integrity and genuine honesty. I believe the greatest compliment that two people who really respect each other can pay to one another is to speak out of their hearts, heart to heart, with all the honesty they are capable of, whatever the pain, as part of the process of purgation of pain and coming to a deeper mutual appreciation.

I began my outreach to Evangelical Christians in 1965 because, as I began traveling through the South, through Dallas and Houston and Arizona and Atlanta, Georgia and Greensboro, I began to realize something that the Reverend Falwell was suggesting here this evening. The ignorance, the illiteracy, the caricatures, the stereotypes that Jews, and not only Jews, but the vast majority of American Christians, Roman Catholic, mainline Protestants and others, had about Evangelical Christians and Christianity literally began to verge on an obscenity. The quality of the people I began to meet, the genuineness of their heart, their desire to know Jews and Israel and Judaism became a very important for me personally as well as professionally.

And so I began in late 1965 to establish a relationship with Dr. Billy Graham, then with the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Jimmy Allen and many others there, Dr. Olsen, the President of the Evangelical Free Church, and I

began to realize that the gap between our perceptions and our realities are staggering and really quite incredible in the 20th Century, in an age of such massive instantaneous communication. We can bounce messages off satellites around the world and we walk across the street from each other and not know who we really are and what we are about.

One of the most heartening aspects of my nearly three decades of service in the area of seeking to overcome misunderstanding and promote mutual appreciation, mutual knowledge between Christians and Jews of all denominational groups has been a recognition that there is in every religious community the potentiality of growth and development, provided there is an intention to want to overcome one's parochialism and isolationism and elevate rather than some kind of idolatry, some kind of chauvinism, it's mine and I'm not going to change. And I think the growth and relationship between millions of Evangelical Christians, perhaps there are so many millions, that is what the Gallup Poll says now, the last kinds of statistics I've seen from the Southern Baptist was something like 40-50 million. Whatever the numbers. Incidentally, 20 million "nicht kein statistikal kleinikeit."

But the fact remains this has been one of the most significant developments in the transformation of the history of the United States since the end of World War II, and I want to say that I personally am grateful, first that the Rabbinical Assembly has the intelligence and the wisdom in its leadership to extend this invitation to Reverend Falwell, especially in the light of the recent events that have taken place during the last election. Presupposed in this invitation is a determination to uphold the fundamental principles of

American democracy, the first of which is freedom of expression, secondly both a Jewish as well as a deeply democratic commitment to seeking knowledge and truth to open discussion and debate. We had something to do with that in the tradition of "kinat sophrim mar bechochmo" competition of the increases wisdom and I think this evening is a helpful move in the development of such a process of unlearning that which needs to be unlearned and learning that which has to do with the real world in which we live today.

Secondly, I want to acknowledge again, as I did once before to Jerry Falwell when he did me the honor of visiting with me in 1980, that the Jewish community, whatever all the differences we may have on other issues that I want to talk about in a moment, the Jewish community does not take for granted the fact that there are millions of Evangelical Christians across the entire spectrum, from Fundamentalists to mainline, even to some of the more liberal elements of the Evangelical community, does not take for granted the stalwart support that they have given us in advocacy of the security and well-being of the State of Israel and our brothers and sisters there. We have had some Jewish leaders on their own speak with..... and venom, sometimes more in anger than in wisdom, "me varft zech nit" with our supporters.

Let me tell you the reality that Reverend Falwell speaks of tonight. I was invited to speak before the World Council of Churches in Vancouver at its Assembly, as the official Jewish representative, and I was there with a Muslim and a Hindu and Africans and Christians of the Western World. Sitting through that Assembly I could not believe what was going on. Apart from the fact that the place was honeycombed with PLO people, it was honeycombed with PKGB agents following the RussianChurch around. And there are some good things

the World Council of Churches does in social justice, refugee, humanitarian issues, they are to be honored. But sitting through that Assembly I could not believe that this was the year of 1984 when that Assembly leapt to adopt resolutions condemning the United States for anything that we did to stand against Communist expansionism and totalitarianism and to uphold democratic countries. It couldn't bring itself to adopt a single resolution critical of the Soviet Union for its invasion of Afghanistan, or the oppression of human rights in Poland, or Cuban Angola. Its not the kind of world we want to see constructed for the future, for ourselves, for this great country, for our children.

And so, on many levels, in terms of the firm, profoundly Biblical grounded support of Israel, of the stands that he and Billy Graham and the others have been taking against anti-Semitism, for the support that they have given us in the advocacy of the human rights of Soviet Jews and other oppressed Jewish communities, we thank God, and we thank God for their stalwart support and solidarity with us.

But that is not why we are here this evening. If that had been the level of relationship and the nature of the issues that have been between us, there would not have been this great concern about somehow wanting to establish, re-establish dialogue with Reverend Falwell and Fundamentalist Christian and Moral Majority people and others. In that spirit of honesty we need to deal with the reality.

During the course of this last election we took polls in the Jewish community every month to know how Jews feel about issues. If you had taken a poll in March and April last year, President Ronald Reagan would have received at least 50 to 55 percent, perhaps even 60 percent of the Jewish vote in the United States during that campaign. The Jewish community, I think all of us would acknowledge this, was absolutely appalled that a candidate for the Presidency of the United States, the most powerful nation in the world, running on the Democratic ticket, could have at his side a Louis Farakhan, preaching the most vicious kind of Nazi-like anti-Semitism and that that could go on without any significant response. And in reaction to that I think the whole mood of the Jewish community was indeed "we know where we are with Ronald Reagan, we know where we are in terms of a strong defense of America, we know where we are in strong support for Israel, strong support for Soviet Jewry and many other causes," and the mood of the Jewish community was in fact preparing to give him the highest proportion of the Jewish vote of any Republican President in history.

And then a number of things began to take place. And this is what we have got to face in candor. To see what our mutual perceptions of these issues are, how we can deal with them. Whether they are issues that are so fundamental and incapable of change and modification, reinterpretation, in which case we have a different set of problems to deal with. Or do we have problems of time lag, cultural lag, or perhaps even linguistic problems that can be dealt with in a constructive spirit and resolve.

I want to mention four of them quickly. To identify them and perhaps we can have discussion about them.

There was a theme which began to emerge early on, even as far back as 1980, which began to take on the concrete form of an ideological formulation, a fundamental conception that began to emerge out of certain quarters of this alliance between Fundamentalist preachers and ultra-conservative politicians, an example of which is the following: A born-again Christian acknowledged born-again Christian who I take it would identify himself with the religious political ideological reading that Reverend Falwell has come to embody for a great many millions of Americans, is an official of the United States Department of Education. He used American governmental funds to mail a speech to public school teachers and superintendents throughout the whole Middle West, declaring in these words, "charges that Godlessness is now controlling every aspect of our society and then asks how can these things be happening in America, this land of freedom, this Christian nation. What has happened to our Christian system of values." This government-funded speech then added, "in the last few years Christians have woken to the desperate need of a truly Christian educational system for their young people. I am excited to see the growth of the Christian textbook on the curriculum ministries."

Now, as a graduate of a Jewish parochial school I see absolutely nothing discontinuous, there is no dissidence for me in a Christian school system, but the notion that the American public school system which has been the meeting ground for the Americanization of generation upon generation of America, which

is the ground of the pluralistic experiment of America, when that is seen as an avenue for that kind of proselytization of an ideology, it means that we have serious problems to contend with.

Now, beyond that the U.S. Department of Education has also proposed regulations to restrict funds for the Magnus Schools assistance program for teaching secular humanism. Similar restriction involving the prohibition of secular humanism has already been passed for the education for the Economic Security Act. Nowhere is the term secular humanism defined. And I tell you that as I read through the literature, Thomas Jefferson by that definition, or absence of definition, could have been defined as certainly as a humanist, if not a secular humanist. Benjamin Franklin even had strong humanistic qualities about it.

The point is there is a basic conception which is emerging in this kind of simplistic black and white formulation, the notion that America is in great moral difficulty. Indeed it is and I want to talk about that in a moment. But that the only way to save America is to make it into what it was in the good old days, namely, these Angelical Empirists, Professor Martin Marty calls it in his book, which won the National Book Award, The History of the Emergence of the Separation of Church and State in this Country. I simply want to say that there is a great need for us to discuss together our differing perceptions of the history of America.

I tell you that my reading of all of the major church historians, never mind a secular historian, Martin Marty, Sydney Alstrom,Hudson,Lee, all of the major Christian historians, from whatever denominational tradition they

come from, will tell you that the only time that America was in any way a Christian nation, was during the period of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, after 1629, which lasted 75 years, it yoked together church and state, you could not run for public office unless you were vouchsafed for by the minister, by the preacher, who had to say you were in good standing and communion.

Yes, there were established churches in nine of the thirteen colonies, but the whole struggle of America over 200 years was to disestablish church from state, to bring about the possibility of religious liberty and freedom of conscience and indeed, for me, the great irony, at this moment, in much of this discussion, is that we owe it to the Southern Baptists, the Evangelicals Baptist preachers, to the circuit riding Methodist preachers, to the dissident Presbyterians who fought a life and death battle in this country, in the State of Virginia, to disestablish the Anglican Church in order to assure freedom of conscience, not only for themselves, for their own preachers, but for everyone living in the State of Virginia. And for them to hear that America is a Christian country, for Roger Williams to be told this is....they would have understood if someone said that America is predominantly a Christian society. A society made up of at least a 145 million people who call themselves Christians. That is a fundamental difference between a Christian society and a Christian State, which must remain neutral and secular. It is the common order. It is the secular within which all of us have our being, our independence on the basis of mutual respect and first class citizenship.

Wait, I got more. I want to make one other point. Two other points, really. I will try to be as brief as I can. I'll finish early because I have to catch an 8:00 o'clock plane in the morning. If the meeting goes well tonight, may Reverend Falwell will invite me on his Lear Jet to go over.

The second concern I have, and I think this has been a concern widespread in the Jewish community, has to do with the notion that America is in very grave moral trouble, and I want to say I think that Reverend Falwell especially, and many people associated with him, have had perfect pitch about the moral decline in much of our society. I have just read the cover story of Newsweek magazine on pornography in America. My wife is a criminologist. We had dinner the other night with Rudy Gulliano, an Italian United States attorney who has just brought the heads of five Mafia families to court. And he just began telling us of the problems, of the corruption, and the exploitation, pornography, prostitution, drugs, the massive amount of drugs that is eating at the soul of the society. We have got real problems to deal with. And raising those problems in a serious, responsible way that can lead to serious, responsible solutions is all of our responsibility, not only the responsibility of Reverend Falwell, and of those around him, and I am sure that he will acknowledge that.

But I have to say that there is something, there is something amiss about the way in which the issue of the moral troubled soul of America and its social conditions are being defined. When you begin saying that we need to restore America to being a Christian nation, not society, a Christian nation state so that we can return to the condition we were at our origins, I have to say to you that that kind of mythologizing is nothing less than the revisionism of American

history. And the more I hear of it, and I see it and read it everywhere, I have to tell you that you we are being victimized, even paralyzed by a very great lie. And we had better face it.

To say a complex thing simply. If you read William Warren Sweet's History of Revivalism, Robert Handy's History of the Churches of United States and Canada, Timothy Smith, a Baptist scholar-historian, a very great one, of what American was like in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it has absolutely no relationship to what some Fundamentalist preachers are saying about the soul of America.

All of them will agree that by the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth century America was virtually an unchurched country. No more than 10% of the population was affiliated with churches, not to speak of synagogues, of which there were virtually none. But beyond that, this country wasreligiously, beyond that the immigrants who came to this country who went to the frontiers to work in those difficult hard, laboring, uncouth conditions, this was virtually an uncivilized society. Do you know what the biggest problem of America was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, pervasive drunkenness. A social anthropologist has written a book called The Alcoholic Republic, this country was sodden in drunkenness. Mills, stills, God knows what, everywhere, including Puritan New England. And that, and that low moral condition, low brutal vices, which provided a condition for lynching and the kind of "high noon" morality, a kind of breakdown of morality.

Why do I raise that fine point without going into great detail. Its because this is a reflection of the tendency to mythologize America, to tell America about a country, the great golden past. We have declined from that past, which is to say we are all moral pygmies. They were all moral giants in the past, we have declined, we have got to confess our sin. And we believe in "tshuva." But the way in which one defines that problem, what happens is a kind of moral paralysis. And I would suggest that we need to study that history together.

And, finally, I want to conclude just with this last concern I have. And that is how does one deal with the problem of language. Apocalyptic language. And I don't want to be judgmental about this. Everyone has a right to their own conceptions, their own ideologies, their own language. But something has happened when a religious rhetoric of an apocalyptic character goes over into the political process. And I think that a great many Americans, and certainly a great many Jews are deeply troubled. There is a cosmology which sees the world is a cosmic struggle between the children of light and the children of darkness. That's a humanistic way of talking about the classic millenium doctrine that ultimately there is a struggle between the forces of Christ and the anti-Christ, and the anti-Christ is Satan. One has a right to believe that. To believe in truth of that. But, when one looks at what that apocalyptic rhetoric meant in terms of its reality literally from the Middle Ages down to contemporary times, it became a political engine in society which said that you not only sought to negotiate differences, but if you saw life as a struggle between the forces of Christ and Satan, you were religiously obligated, not only to defeat Satan, but to destroy Satan. Satan had to be removed from the earth before the millenium could take place. And I have now sat with enough Congressmen and Senators who

were defeated in some of these campaigns, who were described not only in terms of their voting records, and how they may have been deficient in one way or another, but because they are anti-Christian and therefore anti-American. They are in league with Satan and they have to be wiped out politically, and some of them have been. Literally finished as the result of this kind of what for me is a kind of fanatical campaign. And it is a disturbance of the political process.

These are issues that people of good will can discuss, however emotionally charged they may be. That process has begun this evening, and will continue. I would not want to see 1984 repeat itself, where Jews vote because they feel fear on both sides, fear in the sense of political homelessness, nowhere to go. We have not labored in this country, we have not enriched this country, we have not sunk roots in this country, to wind up at the end of the twentieth century feeling marginal to this society. And we need people like Reverend Jerry Falwell and Billy Graham and many others to engage us in this dialogue, not only for our sake, but for the future of the democratic health of this religious pluralist society, which is the greatest bastion of civil and political liberties in the world today.

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