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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series B: Early Activities. 1945-1972

Box 8, Folder 3, Barnes, Roswell, 1958-1960.



Rev. Dr. Roswell P. Barnes
Exec. Secy, W. C. C.
475 Riverside Dr.

Dear Roswell:

Owing to travel out of the city, I have not been able to reply to your letter of October 11th before now. Needless to say, I am chagrined over this matter, as much for its having put you in an embarrassing position with your constituency as for the memorandum itself.

This memorandum was prepared by a staff person while I was in the hospital this summer (recovering from a minor coronary attack.) While I was informed in a general way that ^a ~~an internal memorandum for~~ ^{limited} ~~restricted~~ distribution was being prepared on the major inter-religious issues that are of concern to our people, ^{was being prepared for limited internal distribution} neither I, nor any of our people in administration, nor our ~~staff~~ commission chairman ^e were shown the documents ^{before they were distributed.}

The memorandum was replete with inaccuracies and distortions ^(the Fifth World Order Study Conference took place in Nov. 1958, not Dec., etc.) ^{We have} ~~and it has~~ ^{been} ~~destroyed,~~ ^{it} including the file copies. The saving grace is that it was sent, I understand, to a limited number of our people. I would make an effort to recall it, but that would only focus more attention on it.

~~The document - replete with inaccuracies~~
This was an act of indiscretion on the part of an overzealous person, and as happens from time to time, ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{such} ~~such~~ combinations, this combination of traits gets out of hand. ~~Despite the completely~~ [?] unauthorized character of this memorandum,

we feel we owe you an official apology which we herewith express ^{and sincerely} ~~and~~ ^{hope you will accept.} ~~insofar as it is controllable,~~ I assure you this sort of thing will not recur. [?]

I would be less than candid if I did not tell you, however, that since the Mission Study Program on the Middle East we have been under considerable pressures from national and local Jewish community leaders to explain the positions and programs of various Protestant denominations and inter-denominational bodies on the two stubborn questions on which our respective communities have

(for example, in addition to those mentioned you cited)

still considerable differences; namely, Evangelism and the Israel-Arab situation. ~~These pressures, however,~~ ^{I suspect, apparently} ~~triggered off the memorandum~~. But clearly the way to confront these complex matters is not through propagandistic memoranda, but perhaps through a return to ~~the~~ ^{our} free and frank consultations of the past, that you referred to in your letter.

For our part, ~~we~~ we would welcome the resumption of these talks, and I would be glad to meet with you and the appropriate official at National Council of Churches, at any time, to discuss arrangements.

Again, our deepest regrets and apologies for this unfortunate episode. As far as I am concerned, it is the first and will be the last of its kind.



WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE INTERNATIONAL MISSIONARY COUNCIL

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New York Office - Room 439, 475 Riverside Drive, New York 27, N. Y. - RIverside 9-4887 - Cable Address: WORCIL

October 11, 1960

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum,
Synagogue Council of America,
110 W. 42nd Street,
New York 36, N. Y.

Dear Marc:

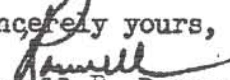
A memorandum dated August 10, 1960 to Officers and Executive Directors, Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, which enclosed a confidential summary of the activities of the Synagogue Council of America, has come to my attention. It is sent by one of our constituents protesting my having yielded to the pressures of the Synagogue Council and raising the question as to why the World Council has such official dealings with an American agency.

I am replying that the paragraph on March-April 1959 is quite inaccurate. To the best of my memory no one from the World Council of Churches was involved in those consultations. The consultation which is said to have taken place in April, at which I made a presentation, took place according to my records on October 24, 1957 while I was still an officer of the National Council of Churches, and did not yet have the title assigned to me. Obviously the paper given by Rabbi Hertzberg, which later resulted in the publication of his book in early 1959, could not have been presented in March and April 1959.

I do not know just what basis there may be for other references to the World Council of Churches, including specifically the reference to the study of religious liberty in the state of Israel, under the paragraph headed September 1959. I shall have to ask the Geneva office about that.

I call the erroneous reference to me to your attention so that in the future you may identify me with the National Council of Churches in connection with the discussions in question. I am quite prepared to defend my participation there, but to involve me as a World Council officer is another matter.

I hope your memorandum will not fall into the hands of many of our constituents, because it would tend to jeopardize the freedom and frankness of consultations.

Sincerely yours,

Roswell P. Barnes
Executive Secretary

RPB nl

DR. ROSWELL P. BARNES
April 1, 1958 - Plaza Hotel, New York City

Rabbi Max D. Davidson, Chairman
Greetings: Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg
Greetings: Mr. Joseph Schlang

Dr. Barnes:

I am grateful to Rabbi Hertzberg, but I would like it made clear that although you have been talking about someone who ought to be Abraham, someone who is not Abraham has been presented to you. I find myself in a quandary as to how to reply to these introductory remarks, because in spite of what you say about my hopes and aspirations which I don't want to discount at all, in regard to achievements I must say that they have been more than slightly exaggerated. I am sure that if you listen to my presentation for a while you will realize how exaggerated they are. I suppose at the close of a busy day you are feeling rather weary and this may be pretty heavy going.

As I thought about this assignment - Jewish Protestant relations - about the substance, not the interpretation, I was interested to find myself, because of the topic which you asked me to speak about, thinking of the usual analysis of the characteristics of Protestants and Jews. I thought of studies of their relationships as groups with different histories, and the analysis of their history, and I am reminded of the great mass of material of psychoanalysis of the Protestants among the Christians, and of the Jews, and of why they are different because of their histories. And then I started to make some notes on religious differences and theological variations, as well as things held in common theologically. And then I began to realize that I can only give a superficial and inadequate review of an approach which has been made very often -- an approach which looks, it seems to me, too directly at relationships between groups.

And then I began to think about the area where my experience might be useful, and it seems to point me to a consideration of the influences of our social environment, our national scene in which we find ourselves living together and the influences those might have on Jewish-Protestant relationships. My experience has been primarily in relationships between different branches or groups of Protestantism and the relationships between Protestant and the Orthodox churches, which are quite different from Protestant churches in faith and practice and yet in close association with us. So that my experience has been broader than that of Protestant to Protestant and Protestant to the Roman Catholic and Jewish community.

So I scratched most of these notes of review of the psychoanalysis of the Jew and the history of Protestantism in relation to capitalism, the reformation and the renaissance and Protestant and the western democracy, and what has happened to the Jew during its long history and I even passed over the elements that we have in common in religious rootage and heritage and the elements in which we differ.

And then I came to a presentation of a personal reflection of my own experience and observation of relationships between religious groups - those in which I have been most involved - and there is some indication, I believe, in what has been happening in intergroup relationships between Protestant and Orthodox and their relationship to the relationship between Jews and Protestants. I believe that the variations or fluctuations from confidence to insecurity in the national temper is probably as important a factor for influencing Protestant-Jewish relationships as any differences between Protestants and Jews in terms of psychoanalysis of the two groups or a review of their history through the centuries.

When we arrive at a period of national insecurity, tempers tend to be short, there is a tendency even to panic sometimes. And when there is panic in the national psychology, differences which otherwise might have been a stimulation in the community become a challenge to presumed community solidarity and an irritation in the community. In a period when there is confidence and a sense of security, there is an entirely different attitude toward differences.

I wonder how many of you have read Prof. Alan Devon's review of a quarter of a century in last Sunday's Times Magazine. I read it with great interest. He is, to my mind, one of our most competent historians. I think the article was a little too optimistic in the way he brushed McCarthyism aside as an episode that had not been very significant, and did not pay much attention to the issue of desegregation during the past couple of years. I believe that we came pretty close to losing our sense of direction and our national perspective for a couple of years during the period when McCarthyism was strong enough to qualify very substantially the desires of a President and his cabinet. I believe it got to the point where there was considerable timidity on the part of a substantial number of Senators and Congressmen - not a man such as Senator Lehman who is interested in high principle - and political expediency made many people cautious and act not according to their principles but according to what they believed to be the demands of national psychology, accommodating themselves to the national temper. I remember an officer of one of the Jewish communities telephoning me about a year and a half ago after two weeks in the south and recounting to me the experience the Jewish community was having in many southern states where they and the national Jewish community were being blamed for the Supreme Court decision on desegregation, that this was all a Jewish plot, and reporting that in numerous southern communities where the Jews had been accepted and respected in community life without suffering in professional, economic or social disabilities for a couple of generations found themselves being pressured by white citizens

councils to support them or suffer economic consequences. It was a case of blaming Jews for something unpopular in the prevailing mores. There was a period of tension, especially in certain states, where relationships between Protestants and Jews were completely upset by the cultural, historic situation and I think that we should give careful consideration to these changes in national mood.

Having said those cautionary words with regard to reminding ourselves of the dangers of a period of tension, I would recall at the same time that I believe that the most extensive collaboration between Protestants and Jews in any community during the past couple of decades that I have been aware of - the most extensive collaboration has been the support and defense of human rights. Some of you were not so much involved in that - in the earlier days of the Synagogue Council - when in relation to the American Jewish community there were more meetings, more conferences, more clearance of information and consultation in regard to strategy over McCarthyism than over any other issue in the last 20 years. There was a consolidation of resources of the community as a whole that I believe had very substantial influence on the national scene. I know that some foreign journals gave our Protestant and Jewish groups in this country considerable credit for having stood up to McCarthy while there was yet time. I know some of us worked on it very hard and, being objective, we should say there was a consolidation of resources, of influence, of strategy, without setting up any unitary organization, that made a very substantial contribution to our national life.

While I am talking about the national temper and the influence upon relationships of shifts in the national temper and fluctuations between confidence and security, I must make some comment on the relationship between

religion and the environing culture and society - because I think both Jews and Protestants are very much concerned that we should ~~not~~ assume that religion dare become a mere aspect or factor of a national culture - one aspect of a national society. Yet there is an influence - there is a mutual influence. I recall a graduate course in Columbia about 30 years ago on the principles of literary criticism, analyzing relationships between art and life. Art is an idealization of life. It lifts life up to its level. And then at times art gets so remote from life that it seems to be irrelevant to life. Then art accomodates itself to life so that it is almost indistinguishable from life, and then it is hardly art any more. I wrote a little paper in which I quoted an epigram which I recall as follows: "Art remains art; and life remains life; they are eternally in conflict; and eternally becoming reconciled."

This eternal tension between the two - art ~~being~~ drawing life toward the idealistic and life drawing the idealistic or the ideal down to the level of fact - I think that there is a suggested analogy there with regard to the relationship between religion and society. Religion remains religion; society - the social order - remains society; they are eternally in conflict, and eternally becoming reconciled. And those of us in the field of religion are concerned about maintaining that tension in creativity so that religion does not become so remote from life as to be irrelevant to life and not have an influence on life and society, and does not accomodate itself so far to society as to be useless to society and indistinguishable from society.

As far as Protestantism is concerned, right at this period the great danger in religion becomes so indistinguishable from prevailing patterns and preoccupations of our society as to lose its tension and its capacity. There is always that danger when it is too ^{popular} and when it is too preoccupied with the standards of judgment and success of the society in which it is set.

So it is within this tension and the fluctuation of the degrees of tension of accommodation or compromise and removal to the point of irrelevance or disattachment, that I speak of the relation of the national temper to the relationships between religious groups. There is an influence of society on religious groups and on their relationships. Let us look at some relevant features of social change within our generation and their influence on religious groups.

First, the mobility of our compilation -- in Protestant churches, any average urban church - 50% of the members of a given church were members ten years ago. In this ~~rapid~~ rapid movement of population - people moving from one community to another - they normally go to the church which is convenient in location to them in the new community, or the church which has a good program for ~~young~~ their young people, or the church where they find a congenial social affiliation, or a preacher they like. And there is a great deal of movement not only from one church to another of the same denomination, but even more from one denomination to another. And with our vast building program, with the budgetary requirements in new building programs and expansion of plant, there is an appeal for members and a presentation of religion in such a way as to make it acceptable to the potential constituency of the church - not merely to the group which would normally look to that church as their home. There is a tendency to slough off or neglect or omit the peculiar characteristics of a denomination in order to bring more people into the church and build up a constituency and support of a budget. That tends to take the traditional edge off the distinctions between denominations. Or, another fact which has been very important - we have had a lot of different denominations in this country established for the purposes of the language convenience for groups coming into this country in migration. So that we have Swedish, Danish, Norwegian

Lutheran churches, all of the same essential Protestant traditions, but setting up their own groups, not because of doctrinal concern, but because of language concern. Each wants to worship in their own language. And with the second and third generations, no longer trained in the same tongue, there is a self-consciousness about using a foreign language. And so we have a whole series of mergers of Lutheran churches and many Lutherans coming into other churches. This is also true in the Orthodox churches, which in their faith and liturgy are more like Roman Catholicism than they are like Protestantism - but the second and third generations of many of these churches - the children - want to be identified with the prevailing culture and mores of the community and are going with their friends to the Protestant churches. So the Orthodox churches are now beginning to use the English language. We have had conferences at which the Orthodox church decided to change at least the language of their services and liturgy to hold their young people.

There are these changes in relationships that are taking place because of the changes in environment and getting cooperation among Protestants and Orthodox, particularly because a result of the factors of history, entirely aside from any desire of the Christian community, in order to make a more impressive witness to the world. Our relationships, especially between Protestants and Orthodox, have presented us in the World Council with problems of proselytism within our own group. So several years ago a Commission was appointed to study the problem of proselytism versus religious liberty within the constituency of the World Council.

We had protests from the Evangelical church of Greece that the Orthodox had prevented them from purchasing property for religious schools and churches. They are both members of the World Council, and one member was making a formal protest against the infringement against religious liberty of the other. They said in a Christian country there should be no missionizing.

I have here a copy of the preliminary report of our commission on proselytism and religious liberty. This is within Christian circles - Protestant and Orthodox - and also between the Baptists and Lutherans of Denmark - and the ~~Methodists~~ ^{Methodists} and Lutherans of Sweden - and here we are all together in one Council of Churches. Some of the basic considerations of this document are "The theological approach to these problems must be based on the premise that every Christian church is not alone permitted, but required, freely and openly to seek to win adherence to Divine Truth as expressed in that church. No church, by virtue of its membership in the World Council, is under obligation to suppress, truncate, or alter its creed, by which it stands and falls. This would not be in the interest of the World Council which, on the contrary, aims to be a council of whole, real and genuine churches. This means that every church must be able to bring its full, truncated witness into the Council and give it full expression without holding anything back. The Toronto declaration also stated that membership does not imply that each church must regard other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word. This means that a church which, in the light of its own confession, must regard certain teachings of other churches as errors and heresies and certainly its practices as abuses, cannot be compelled to withhold its criticism. The more frankly a church states its views in the Council, the less will be the need to state it in an undesirable way. This exchange should proceed to the fullest extent without minimizing the difficulty of the issue. Churches will be most inclined toward proselytism and making charges of proselytism on the other hand when they are restricted or prevented from openly presenting the truth in their relations with each other.

The World Council of Churches is establishing a method of living broad enough even to include in its membership some who do not recognize that other members really are legitimate churches. But so long as they enter into association on the basis of free expression, we are getting a pattern, it seems to me, which is in response particularly to certain changes in society. We have been forced to live together in close community and we have been forced to recognize that our constituency, our people, are demanding fundamental and essential truth rather than emphasis on the secondary differences that exist within Protestantism, and even within branches of the Christian church. Among these changes in the social scene, these factors driving the churches in this direction, where society is tending to rule the churches in their pattern of relationships, is the inevitable trend in mass society to aggregation. In mass society, to make an effective impact requires the use of mass media of communication. For example, it is stultifying and frustrating to have a multiplicity of seemingly conflicting and incongruous views from the same source. The mass media imposes this on us. They will give the Protestant and Orthodox community network time if we will do our own policing and if they don't have to allocate the time and say who is to be the speaker and who will be put on the program. So there is an impact of history on us, not because of any inherent significance in terms of faith, which is driving us to act together, at least in cooperation. At the same time this need to act together provides a certain measure of stability and resistance to panic and rallying around the demagogues. This pattern of cooperation, I think, has enabled us to freeze out McCarthyism to a very substantial degree and to keep the rabid reaction of the segregationists fairly well in control.

Another aspect of social change is the magnifying of the role of the state and nationalism in this modern mass society. We become so security conscious because of wars, because of depression, because of various aspects of national life so interdependent that no matter what we talk about statism, we turn to the state for fundamental security and order in national life and security against alien foes. So that the role of the state has been magnified in recent history. Our faith in our own eyes is more dependent upon the national state than it has during most of our history. This has an advantage, it seems to me, for religion, in almost driving religion into a certain aggregating of its resources. But it has a very great hazard. The stronger the state becomes, the more tendency religion has to accommodate itself to the state. So one of the most difficult problems as an administrator in the National Council of Churches and now in the World Council is how a church can exert its influence to the point of ethics and morals on the policy and action of the national state without being so closely accommodating to the policy of the state as to seem to be an instrument of national policy.

A few days ago we had a question about whether churches should encourage government policy, and I said if the churches in Czechoslovakia were to do this same thing with regard to the present regime there, wouldn't we say they were puppets of the Communist regime. So we backed out and said we must do it in a different way.

Especially is this a point that requires attention - when we realize that the state is a secular power and that one of the things which confront both of us is that secularism is so strong in our society. The churches must stand together if they are going to stand against secularism, especially when it is in the powerful state.

The implications of some of these changes I have indicated for Jewish-Protestant relationships - is this quotation with regard to accomodation that we made in Protestant circles with regard to freedom to bear witness. If this definition of witness and of religious liberty which I read comes to prevail in relations within our own Christian groups, I believe that this is going to greatly color relationships between Protestant and Jewish groups, and Protestant attitudes toward Jewish groups. If the level of discussion of relationships between Jews and Protestants is as a religious community, I think we are coming into a pattern of relationships much more similar in principle to those of cooperation as those I described in "witness and freedom" that I read from our own interrelationships.

I have been very much interested in knowing that there are Jewish groups that are not afraid of being called proselytizers, because they are educating people that want to respond to the basic religious and ethical insights and community discipline of the Jewish faith. There is a witness which, within our framework is a perfectly legitimate one. It is the really necessary witness of a religious group - if it is a religious group and not just a variation of a cultural pattern. So interfaith relationships, I believe, are taking this pattern increasingly and ~~we~~ we can face them as faith - or religious group to religious group.

We are having debates over the ^{Hocking} ~~Toynbee-Hanking~~ wing and the extremely revealed religion wing. The influence of ^{Hocking} ~~Toynbee-Hanking~~ is pointing toward the future syncretism of the world's great religions, and there is going to be a continued tension between these two wings. I believe that the greatest hope for Protestant-Jewish relationships in the period immediately ahead is the magnified interreligious - assuming the continued integrity of the different

groups, at least through our generation, and I think it will be a good deal longer. This assumes that we face each other in frank discussion, in frank confrontation on problems of religion and public education, Zionism and Israel. And incidentally, on that point I have been reflecting a good bit. I don't have an answer yet. I question you as to whether we don't need very much today an education of our American community as to the meaning of Zionism to the Jews and a distinction between the historical movement, religio-ethical, of Zionism, and Israel as a nation, and the policy of the government, policies of action of the government of Israel as a state in the power relationships between states. I know that among many of my associates in Protestantism there is a failure to make distinctions and a confusion and they fear that support or criticisms of a particular economic policy of the state government of Israel is identified as a religious ethical value of Zionism. Now, is there a distinction to be made between a particular governmental regime and the state? I think there is. You can change policies of the state with a change in regime. You don't change the meaning, the purpose and the destiny of the nation thereby. At least not necessarily. We should get to the point where there is a freedom of debate with regard to the policies of government at any given time, responsible for the state of Israel and the destiny of Israel as a nation. I am terribly confused and I wanted to raise this question as to whether in that area we don't have a common job of education. But you need to help us clarify the meaning in religious terms. That might be an illustration of a point where there can be a lot of ~~substantive~~ tension in discussion, but the only thing that I feel basically is getting to the point where we can talk.

I am speaking from experience about long relationships in our own communities. So I am very optimistic about Protestant and Jewish relations, especially when we keep the direct association between the religious community as a religious community and at the same time give our blessing and cooperation to those who are cultural groups.

I appreciate the opportunity of being with you, and I will appreciate it even more if we have any challenges and contributions to the discussion now.



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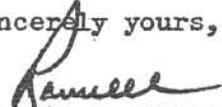
November 14, 1960

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, Executive Secretary
Synagogue Council of America,
110 West 42nd Street,
New York 36, N. Y.

Dear Marc:

Thank you for your letter of November 7th. It is reassuring and I am forwarding your explanation to the man who sent me a first copy of the memorandum. Since I wrote you I have received a copy from a Jew who apologizes for it and says that it does not represent the entire Jewish community. Only two or three other people have spoken to me about it. Apparently it has not been circulated widely among our constituents. For this I am just as grateful as you are.

Sincerely yours,


Roswell P. Barnes
Executive Secretary

RPB nl

November 7, 1960

Rev. Dr. Roswell P. Barnes
Executive Secretary
U.S. Committee for the World Council
of Churches
475 Riverside Drive
New York, New York

Dear Roswell:

Owing to travel out of the city, I have not been able to reply to your letter of October 11th before now. Needless to say, I am chagrined over this matter, as much for its having put you unjustifiably in an embarrassing position with your constituency as for the memorandum itself.

While the Synagogue Council and I, as its senior executive officer, must accept responsibility for whatever is issued over the organization's name, the fact of the matter is that this memorandum was prepared without the knowledge of any responsible Synagogue Council official and it was sent out without authorization.

In checking into this, I found that an overzealous and unknowing staff person prepared this document while I was away from the office this summer (recovering from a minor coronary attack) for about three months. Under normal circumstances, this memorandum would never have happened.

I find it impossible to explain to my own satisfaction how this document was pieced together. It is replete with error and inaccuracies. Nothing in our files provide the basis for the interpretation made throughout the document. Certainly we repudiate this document, and you are at liberty to so inform your constituents.

We would have made an effort to recall the copies that, fortunately, have been sent only to a limited group of people, but that undoubtedly would have called attention to it.

We hope you will accept our genuine apologies for this regrettable episode and our assurance that this sort of thing will not recur.

November 7, 1960

On a personal level, I must tell you that since the 1958 Commission on Missionary Education's year-long study program on the Middle East, the public declarations of the Presbyterians and Lutherans, in particular, about Evangelizing the Jews, and the activity Committee on The Approach to the Jews of the National Council, we have been under considerable and increasingly heavy pressures from local Jewish communities to interpret the Protestant positions and programs on these two questions. This memorandum, I understand, was intended as something of a response to these internal pressures - needless to reassert, a hardly acceptable response even from our point of view.

Perhaps a return to the free and frank consultations between our groups that you refer to in your letter is in order. We would welcome these at any time.

Sincerely,

AMERICAN JEWISH
ARCHIVES

Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
Executive Director

MHT:rp

