



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1952-1992

Box 17, Folder 7, Evangelicals, 1980.

FROM THE DESK OF
ROBERT S. JACOBS

Thane —
From Oberammergau
to Dallas!
The first step is
the hardest!

12-21-80
CJP
The Rev. Bailey Smith, the Baptist leader who believes that God doesn't hear the prayers of Jews, plans to observe the festival of Passover in the home of a prominent Jewish family in Dallas. Smith, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, angered many Jews with his remarks in August about their prayers and fueled the controversy a few weeks later when he said that they had "funny noses." He apologized for the comment about noses, but has reaffirmed his beliefs on the prayers. Smith, who is from Del City, Okla., spoke this week at a meeting in New York of the Anti-Defamation League to "foster understanding." Nathan Perlmutter, national director of the League, said he was satisfied that Smith had "no anti-Semitic intent" when he made the remarks.

STATEMENT BY RABBI MARC H. TANENBAUM,
NATIONAL INTERRELIGIOUS AFFAIRS DIRECTOR
OF THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE
ON "NEW RIGHT EVANGELICALS"

The current emergence of "the New Right Evangelicals" or "the New Christian Right" has elicited widespread interest and concern among millions of American citizens, among them, a great many Jews.

No responsible and fair-minded American questions the right of fellow Americans of Evangelical Christian or any other religious or moral persuasion to participate fully as citizens in the political process nor to advocate the adoption of public policy positions which reflect their ideological bent. Indeed, maximum participation by our fellow Americans in the democratic process can only be encouraged and welcomed.

During the past fifteen months, however, there have been a number of actions and statements by major spokesmen of this newly-forged alliance of several Evangelical Christian leaders and ultra-conservative political organizers which have become deeply troubling to many of us, and which require, we believe, careful analytical scrutiny by both Presidential candidates, both political parties, and by the American people. These concerns center around the following major issues:

- 1) A number of major spokesmen of "the New Christian Right" assert that their primary purpose in this election, and through related political activity on the local levels, is "to Christianize America," and to establish "a Christian republic."

That is a myth and it is an ideologically dangerous myth for American democracy which must not go uncontested. The only period in American history during which anything resembling a so-called "Christian Republic" existed was the establishment of the Massachusetts Bay Colony after 1629. That colony was a Puritan theocracy which yoked together ecclesiastical and civil government. As every major church historian acknowledges, the Puritan oligarchy sought religious toleration for themselves but did not believe in religious toleration for others, and that "Christian republic" collapsed after about 50 years when dissenters such as Roger Williams fled persecution in order to find freedom of conscience in Providence, Rhode Island.

What is historically true is that Baptist farmer-preachers, Methodist circuit-riders, and dissenting Presbyterians became the foremost champions of freedom of conscience, religious liberty, and the principle of the separation of church and state. They suffered persecution, imprisonment, and ruthless harrassment at the hands of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia and elsewhere to uphold those fundamental democratic principles not only for themselves but for all Americans.

It is both ironic and sad that some of the spiritual heirs of those Evangelical Christians in Virginia today and elsewhere have chosen either to forget or to ignore that historic achievement of American democratic pluralism.

2) A number of "New Christian Right" spokesmen regularly speak of the "Golden Era" of "Evangelical Christian America" when our forbears were supposedly deeply religious and highly moral people, and by contrast, we today are convicted of religious and moral inadequacy.

That is also a myth, and its repetition tends to immobilize us in unnecessary guilt and self-doubt, rather than energize us to face the truth about our past and our moral responsibilities in the complex, real world today.

As every major church historian documents, "the great majority of Americans in the eighteenth century were outside any church, and there was an overwhelming indifference to religion." Dr. William Warren Sweet wrote (Revivalism in America) that "taking the colonies as a whole, the ratio of church membership was one to 12." Dr. Robert R. Handy states, "No more than ten percent of Americans in 1800 were members of churches" (A History of the Churches in the United States and Canada).

As a result of the vast labor and the rough, uncouth hardships encountered by the pioneers, frontier communities became coarse and partially wild societies, with little or no social restraints, and filled with low vices and brutal pleasures. The West was described as "the land of sinful liberty" with large sections of the frontier society debauched and whiskey-sodden. The violence and anarchy resulted in a breakdown of respect for emerging civic authority.

The Three Great Awakenings in America -- the first in the 13 colonies from 1725-1770; the second, West of the Alleghenies, 1770-1830; the third, 1865-1899, with the rise of city evangelism -- were all responses to the widespread decline of religion and the degenerated moral conditions of the times. We may well be in the midst of The Fourth Great Awakening today.

The point is that there are more people affiliated with our churches and synagogues today than any time in the past. And while we face real and serious moral issues in contemporary America and in the troubled world, it serves no useful purpose to imply that we are a generation of moral pygmies when contrasted with our forbears who were supposedly moral giants. Precisely because there are more Americans who are religiously committed today than in the past we are in a far better position to mobilize conscience and moral will to cope constructively and realistically with our many problems. That means that religious and civic leadership needs to speak to our better selves rather than evoke paralyzing images of our worst selves.

A vital lesson that should be derived from our past is that when confronted with the massive moral challenges of the frontier societies, evangelical leaders -- to their everlasting credit -- launched a wide range of moral reform movements as voluntary expressions of the churches. Organized benevolence ("The Benevolence Empire" these efforts were called) were created for the poor and downtrodden, anti-slavery groups, temperance societies, aid to youth, and the military. With the exception of the Prohibition legislation calling for total abstinence from alcoholic beverages adopted as the 18th amendment in 1920, the anti-evolution law, and the Puritan Sabbath -- all of which subsequently collapsed and resulted in general disillusionment and loss of morale -- all of the great moral reform movements were effected through internal, voluntary church resources, rather than through legislative means of dominating the government or the nation's political machinery.

3) Several "New Christian Right" spokesmen have asserted or implied that "the Founding Fathers" of our nation perceived America as "a Christian Republic." If you check their writings, you will find that such assertions contradict everything Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and others stood and fought for.

Thus, Thomas Jefferson wrote in his Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom -- which became the basis for the First Amendment -- "Almighty God hath created the mind free, and that all attempts to influence it by tempt or punishments or burns or by civil incapacitations tend only to beget habits of hypocrisy and meanness, and are a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion."

The exercise of religion, Jefferson added, is "a natural right" which has been infringed by "the impious presumption of legislators and rulers" to set up their "own modes of thinking as the only true and infallible," and "to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves," which is "sinful and tyrannical."

In his Notes on Virginia, Jefferson stated, "The rights of conscience we never submitted, we could not submit. We are answerable for them to our God ... Subject opinion to coercion; whom will you make your inquisitors? Fallible men; men governed by bad passions, by private as well as public reasons. And why subject it to coercion? To produce uniformity. But is uniformity of opinion desirable? No more than of face and stature."

I would commend such writings of our Founding Fathers to the Rev. Bailey Smith and others who share his views about uniformity of conscience and religion. Rev. Smith's utterance about "God not hearing the prayer of a Jew" is not only religiously presumptuous and morally offensive; it is dangerous to the future of our democratic pluralistic society. He is saying not only that the Jewish people have been living a religious lie for 4,000 years across 30 civilizations; he is also saying that because they are religiously invalid there is no place for them at Presidential inaugurations or political conventions, and ultimately, no legitimate place for them in American democratic society. Some evangelical pastors spoke such theological obscenities about the Jews in Nazi Germany.

It is encouraging to us that literally hundreds of Baptist pastors, Christian seminary faculties and lay people have issued statements repudiating his narrow views as un-Christian and un-American.

4) The campaign by some members of the "New Christian Right" to elect "born-again Christians" only to public office is anathema to everything American democracy stands for. It violates Article 6 of the United States Constitution which forbids the exercise of "a religious test" for any citizen running for public office. The American people must repudiate that anti-democratic practice. Candidates must continue to be judged on the basis of their competence, their integrity, and their commitment to the common welfare. That is the American way.

5) The most effective critique of "single politics" campaigns and candidates is provided by the leading Evangelical journal, Christianity Today (Sept. 19, 1980):

"Moral Majority and Christian Voice appear to emphasize the first three principles of Evangelicals for Social Action more than the others (that is, the family; every human life is sacred (abortion); religious and political freedom are God-given inalienable rights). The Bible deals with all of them. In fact, probably more space in the Bible is devoted to calls for justice and the care for the poor than to the fact that human life is sacred, though none can deny that both are Biblical mandates. The concerns of the religious lobbies will appeal to a broader range of Christians to the extent that they emphasize these other equally biblical principles of justice, peace, stewardship of our resources, and care for the poor, as well as profamily and prolife issues. It is a case of "these ye ought to do but not to leave the others undone." Too narrow a front in battling for a moral crusade, or for a truly biblical involvement in politics, could be disastrous. It could lead to the election of a moron who holds the right view on abortion."

6) Many of us are concerned about the militant apocalyptic style of some "New Christian Right" spokesmen. This mentality dates back to antiquity when in every century where there was vast social disarray and disorientation, there emerged a widespread yearning among the masses, especially the poor and disinherited, for a Messianic savior joined by an Emperor of the Last Days who would relieve society of its oppression and moral decay and usher in the Millenium "in which the world would be inhabited by a humanity at once perfectly good and perfectly happy" (Norman Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium).

This revolutionary apocalypse was dominated by eschatological phantasies of a new Paradise on earth, a world purged of suffering and sin, a Kingdom of Saints. A prodigious final struggle would take place between the hosts of Christ and the hosts of the Antichrist through which history would attain its fulfillment and justification.

Before the Millenium could dawn, however, misbelief had to be eliminated as a prelude to realizing the ideal of a wholly Christian world. In the eyes of the crusading Messianic hordes (which began to form in the Middle Ages), the smiting of the Moslems and the Jews was to be the first act in that final drama which was to culminate in the smiting of the Prince of Evil (Satan, the Devil).

Much of the present "New Right" public discussion of issues seems to be characterized by that traditional scenario of political conflict between "the children of light" and the "children of darkness." There is too much demonology in the current discussion which appears to consign political candidates to being demolished as "satanic" -- the moral hit lists with "zero ratings," "secular humanists standing at the side of satan." Reasoned, civil debate in an open democracy requires another, higher order of discourse.

One has a sense that some "New Right" advocates perceive America as if it were a vast camp revival meeting whose characteristic method was to plunge into anguish the sinner over the state of his soul, then bring about a confession of faith by oversimplifying the decision as a choice between a clear good and an obvious evil. The Civil War was rendered all the more intransigent and destructive

by each side claiming that God was on their side, and by portraying the other side as "infidel" and "atheist." A mature America deserves a far more balanced and thoughtful method to analyze its problems and to formulate its responses; anything less than that is an insult to the intelligence of the American people.



FOR RABBI TANENBAUM

10/21/80

1:45

David Macpherson
816-781-1130

Liberty Mission

Rapture

1830 - Margaret MacDonald

PR 1,80 - Time

May 7, 80 - Xan Century

Baptist Bible School
Dorridge, Mo.

Rapture rally - tribulation

18th Avenue

Wolverton - Dallas

Author of several books on Evangelicals or rather the right wing in religion; For 30 yrs. has examined inner workings of what is called "the new right" - fundamentalist religion. Knows for years how they get their money. Thru "rapture rallies" etc.

Has written "The Incredible Coverup" his latest book - his publisher is putting 1/2 million dollars into publicity for it.

I guess he wants to put his knowledge to our use. Told him if Rabbi Tanenbaum were - and when - free, would handle the matter.

Box 420
Liberty, Mo. 64068
November 6, 1980

Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum:

It was good chatting with you via phone recently. I decided to send this material after the election, confident that many had underestimated Moral Majority (which, by the way, had received support from all of the top TV ministries). However, pollster Harris did say before the election that about 26 percent of the Republican vote would come from Moral Majority and allied groups and that without that bloc Reagan would lose the election by one percentage point.

For 30 years I've constantly monitored and analyzed the electronic church. I usually have several Christian stations on at the same time and simultaneously tape various broadcasts and telecasts. Lately Jerry Falwell has been mentioning Norman Lear on his broadcasts, on the Phil Donahue show (11/3/80), in TIME (11/3/80) etc. Falwell and others like him can give but not take.

If the origin of the Pre-Trib Rapture could be aired nationally, the electronic church would collapse. Millions of supporters of the TV church still don't know that their supposed 2000-year-old prophetic view really originated in 1830 in Scotland (a place also taken up with castles, witches, the Loch Ness Monster, and "second sight"), that its origin was deliberately covered up many decades, that it got its foothold in the U.S. in the 1860's, that it didn't become controversial until the 1880's, and that it didn't begin to dominate all of Fundamentalism and a portion of Evangelicalism until the early decades of this century.

Mr. Lear should produce a TV documentary on the Rapture. He could even film certain places in Scotland, England, and Ireland (see the photos in my book). If he advertised it widely, millions of Rapture fanatics would be sure to watch it (just as they swarmed to theaters a few years ago to see the film version of Hal Lindsey's first book, which was written to promote the Pre-Trib Rapture), and then the fanatics would discover that they've been deceived by the stars of the top TV ministries.

Hal Lindsey is, without question, the biggest Pre-Trib promoter of all time. More than 18 million copies of his first book The Late Great Planet Earth have been sold in many languages; Falwell and others of the electronic church have often used Lindsey's first book on their programs as a "gift offer" in order to attract donations.

There's been a clear connection between Rapture bumper stickers and Reagan bumper stickers. Lindsey's latest book The 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon was promoted on network TV for several months prior to the election, and Lindsey himself starred in the commercials. The Pre-Trib Rapture was the climax at the end of the book; that's the bait to get the fanatics. But he sneaked in right-wing politics, too. Throughout the book he urged a U.S. military buildup, he supported relations with South Africa (p. 153), he said we should get rid of the SALT agreements (p. 171), and a

(over)

few pages later (p. 175) he wrote: "We need to get active electing officials who will not only reflect the Bible's morality in government but will shape domestic and foreign policies to protect our country and our way of life."

Lindsey believes Pre-Trib because he wanted something he could bank on - and he laughs all the way to it! His book royalties have gone into real estate in Pacific Palisades, a community now famous because Ronald Reagan lives there. Last fall I photographed Lindsey's first residence there (390 Paseo Miramar) and also his current address not far away (1368 Avenida de Cortez).

Pre-Trib is actually anti-Semitic. Before 1830 Christians had always believed that they would be the ones persecuted by the Antichrist - if his cruel reign were to happen during their lifetime. Since 1830 Pre-Trib teachers have insisted that Christians will be raptured off earth before Antichrist's reign and that Antichrist's wrath will focus only upon Jewish persons!

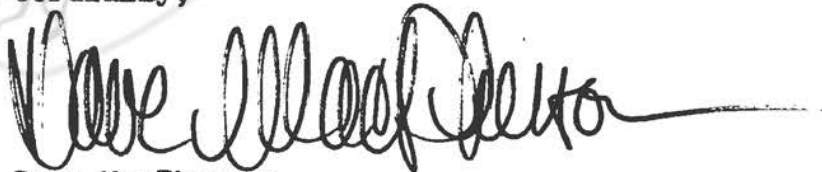
This belief helped to foster the Holocaust. Many influential Christian leaders, assuming that Hitler or Mussolini would soon be revealed as Antichrist, sat idly by while expecting an imminent Rapture - and did nothing to stop the horrors. The recent headline-grabbing comment by Bailey Smith, head of the Southern Baptist Convention, that God doesn't hear the prayers of a Jew certainly fits in well with the only books stocked in the prophecy section of his Oklahoma church's bookstore: Pre-Trib books.

Pre-Trib is believed by no more than 10 percent of all American Christians. But that fanatical, well-financed 10 percent now occupies more than 90 percent of the electronic church!

On May 7th Martin Marty devoted his entire CHRISTIAN CENTURY column to my published evidence about Pre-Trib's roots - and he said in that issue that TIME or NEWSWEEK should do a story on my findings. The national news media can easily destroy Pre-Trib (the treasury of the TV church) by simply exposing its bizarre origin. Until that's done in a big way, TV preachers will be heard and seen everywhere.

And they're already sharpening their swords for the next election!

Cordially,



Dave MacPherson

P.S. - Enclosing a gift copy of my book (Omega recently purchased the rights from Logos and is now advertising its own edition), also a summary on Falwell etc. Rabbi Tanenbaum, John Kohan of TIME's religion department was on the phone yesterday with me; I had sent him this material and my book; he said they're interested in doing a story. Any chance you could phone him and urge him to publish something on this? To my knowledge, this issue has never been aired in any national (secular) publication.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date November 26, 1980

to Milton Ellerin, Seymour Samet, Bookie,
Sam Rabinove, Selma Hirsh, Marc Tanenbaum ✓

from Bert Gold

subject

Terry Dolan's comments are most interesting.
I would appreciate your views as to whether
we should respond and/or use the letter as
an occasion to make direct contact.

Please advise.

BHG:aw:d

Attachment

memorandum



National Conservative Political Action Committee

1500 wilson blvd. suite 513 arlington, va. 22209 (703) 522-2800

November 18, 1980

Mr. Maynard Wishner
President
The American Jewish
Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56 Street
New York, New York
10022

Dear Mr. Wishner:

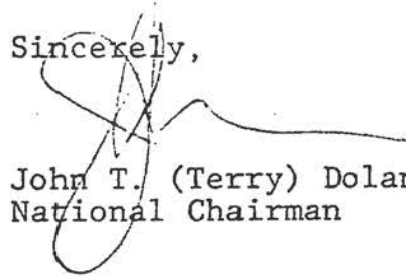
I read with some interest your paper "The New Right, A Background Memorandum", and have some comments about it.

First, the notion that the so-called "new right" threatens Jewish interests in America is perhaps a comment on the misguided view of what Jewish interests are. I am familiar with no Anti-Semite in our movement. One leader of a small conservative group was quickly read out of your activities for this reason.

Second, the belief that Israel has no part in a new right agenda is wrong. I personally favor any settlements the Israeli feel are critical to their security, whatever aid necessary to maintain Israel as a free strong nation, and the basic Camp David Agreement without the obvious pre-Egypt bias displayed by the Carter administration. I favor annexation (or whatever is a better term) of West Jerusalem and the Golan Heights. I oppose arms sales to Arab nations without a commitment to the integrity of Israel. America should treat Saudi Arabia for example, as a weak and reluctant junior ally, not as a country which can dictate American foreign policy.

Papers such as the one you distributed without even talking to the new rights, are most unfortunate, and could result in opportunities lost for both groups.

Sincerely,


John T. (Terry) Dolan
National Chairman

bcc: Richard Strauss
Michael Cole

JTD/cmt