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

Series C: Interreligious Activities. 1960-1991

Box 46, Folder 3, Stendahl, Krister, 1969-1978.

NEWS COMMITTEE

FROM THE

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 165 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022, (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

ANNUAL NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEETING

Oct. 26-29
Hyatt Regency Cambridge
575 Memorial Drive
Cambridge, Mass. 02139
617-492-1234

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CAMBRIDGE, MASS., Oct. 28...Dr. Krister Stendahl, Dean of the Harvard Divinity School, stated today that intensive study of Judaism at a high level not only creates better understanding between Christians and Jews but has value for the study of the humanities generally.

Speaking at Harvard Hall in conjunction with the annual meeting of the American Jewish Committee's National Executive Council at the Hyatt Regency Cambridge, Dean Stendahl said that in the past, historians and theologians had not been sufficiently sensitive to Judaism. As a consequence, he said, many of Judaism's values have been overlooked. It was largely because of this, he said, that the Harvard Divinity School has recently set up a Center for Jewish Studies.

"The components of Jewish studies must be part of our studies," Dean Stendahl said. "I hope that with the establishment of the Center for Jewish Studies, Christian clergymen will be able to acquire the kind of knowledge in depth that is essential in our times."

It was the absence of such knowledge, Dean Stendahl stated, that had been responsible for "polite anti-Semitism" among some otherwise educated individuals in the past. He praised the American Jewish Committee for helping to strengthen the Center.

"The Committee's encouragement, as well as its leadership at the time of Vatican II," Dean Stendahl said, "has been a powerful force for betterment of interreligious understanding. By helping to establish the Center as an area of high scholarship, the Committee has assisted in the creation of an element whose potential is unlimited."

At the same session, Dr. Nathan Glazer, Professor of Education of Education and Sociology at Harvard, called for an end to the argument over legal issues that have arisen following the U.S. Supreme Court in the Bakke medical school admission case, and urged all parties to seek constructive means for implementing affirmative action programs.

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"There is a distinction between the autonomous action of private groups and governmental action," Professor Glazer said. "It is not the job of government to tell schools that they should set numbers. It is a perfectly legitimate objective of institutions to undertake certain actions. They are fully aware that race is a factor in education, in the social structure and in politics."

Dr. Glazer said he felt that Harvard University's policy in respect to admissions -- one that gave proper weight to handicaps resulting from race and color -- was a proper one, and he pointed out that it had been so characterized by the Supreme Court.

Founded in 1906, the American Jewish Committee is this country's pioneer human relations organization. It combats bigotry, protects the civil and religious rights of Jews at home and abroad, and seeks improved human relations for all people everywhere.

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Summary of presentation on
"Biblical and Theological Aspects"
Middle East Seminar, December 29-31, 1969

- 1) To begin with the biblical and theological aspects
are traditional and seem⁴ to express proper respect for
Scripture and Theology. But it should be remembered that
much theology and use of Holy Scripture actually is post-
rationalization of positions taken on other grounds. Such
habits must be unmasked and faced squarely.
- 2) But it is also true that biblical and theological
elements are at the root and at the beginning of the
problems to be considered at this seminar. They supply often
early and subconscious models of thought and experience that
shape us -- for better for worse. That is the reason why
one cannot by-pass these aspects if he wants to find lasting
solutions. Unless we scrutinize and purify the biblical
and theological aspects, we have left untouched some of the
basic forces in men's lives, and they will emerge sooner or
later.
- 3) Religion is a mighty force and it has caused much
blessing and much evil in the history of mankind. It is
shallow and dangerous to overlook that fact by assigning
only positive results to religion, blaming whatever went
wrong on the weakness of men or to the religions we consider
wanting in one respect or another. Religion is like atomic

power, with a lot of "fall out." Sound theology is the deliberate attempt at the "peaceful" use of this atomic energy.

title

4) It is good that our ~~bible~~ distinguishes between "biblical" and "theological," for they are not the same:

a) Biblical material is historical material shaped and expressed in specific times and places. For a Christian it includes material shaped by the experiences during the first generations of the Christian movement. These documents have their "theology," but it is a theology that calls for constant updating in the light of new situations and experiences, philosophical, psychological and religious, as well as institutional, political, economic, etc.. In that sense the theologian is a modernizer, and there is no living bible without such contemporary interpretation.

b) The New Testament material needs such reflection not least in matters relating to the encounter between Judaism and Christianity. For example many of the words of Jesus as given in the gospels, were spoken within the Jewish community. He continued the sharp tradition of the Old Testament prophets speaking within and to his people. Once quoted by Gentiles outside and against that people they take on a meaning that may not have been intended by Jesus. But it is even more important to consider how something went wrong in the relation

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between Judaism and Christianity during those early generations. We can see how the early Christians were disappointed when the majority of the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. And the disappointment grew into bitterness, and the bitterness into name-calling and even hatred. At points the New Testament itself is colored by such all too human attitudes. But I fail to see that such attitudes are according to the will and plan of God. They should rather be unmasked as ugly early signs of anti-semitism -- with ferocious consequences in Christian history.

c) That is why the theologian of today needs to take a fresh look and he must do so in terms of the actual world -- God's world -- in which we find ourselves. And that is a world in which it is necessary to open up a dialogue between Judaism and Christianity -- and in this case a trilog between Jew, Christian and Muslim. In a shrinking world we must find a new theological vision of how these three faiths fit together in God's plan. The world of religious pluralism gives us a new theological task never needed or seen so clearly before.

5) This seminar is not too well suited for that purpose, since it is structured as a Christian conference. It is true that some attempts were made to find a Jewish voice.

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But if we are to make any progress in these areas, we cannot plan on a unilateral Christian basis and expect Jewish (and Muslim) participation. Those two traditions have to be in on the very first stage of planning. (We are slowly learning that the white power structure cannot plan a program with assigned roles for the blacks. The blacks have to be in on the planning. . . . And rightly so.)

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6) There is another flaw in much Christian (both American and ~~Neat~~ Eastern) discussion of the biblical and theological aspects of the present conflict. Some people affirm that they have great respect and veneration for Judaism but that they despise Zionism. They love the Jews and hate the State of Israel. And they often substantiate such a distinction by various arguments to the effect that a "true" understanding of the Old Testament and the message of its prophets gives no support to a Jewish hope for a political return to Zion. Religion, they argue, is a matter of the heart and the spirit, not of land, history and geography.

7) Such a line of thought has two elements.

a) There is an overt Christian interpretation of the Old Testament according to which the messianic promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ and transcended into a new "people," i.e., the church that knows no national or geographical boundaries.

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b) But there is also the unwarranted tendency to lecture the Jews on how they are supposed to read and interpret their Scriptures. Whether we like it or not, we have no right to decide for the Jewish community in these matters. We cannot lecture them on the true Jewish interpretation of the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings. Both as historians and as theologians we must recognize that the vast majority of actual Judaism has retained a hope for the return to Zion. It is their duty and responsibility to interpret and shape their own tradition and obedience. To declare Zionism as anything but an integral part of Judaism as we know it, is an arbitrary game of Christian self-deception. Biblically it is based on a highly selective reading of certain prophetic passages, all actually spoken within the self-evident attachment to the Land and the Messianic prophecies about the restoration of Zion. We must allow Judaism to come to grips with its own tradition on its own terms.

8) Personally I find that the apostle Paul sets an example for us in these matters. In his grandiose speculation on the relation between Jewish Jews and Gentile Christians (Rom. 9-11) his missionary zeal expresses itself in the

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conviction that in God's plan we shall one day all be one in Christ. But at no point does he urge his Gentile followers to carry on a mission to the Jews. To Paul this consummation is and remains a mystery beyond man's interference. Until that time Paul envisages a continuing existence of Judaism and he urges the Gentiles to stand in awe and to remember humbly that they are the latecomers, engrafted on the tree of promise. We know Paul too well to interpret this vision of his as due to lack of Christian zeal and conviction. On the contrary, it is his deep respect for God's will and plan that leads him out of Christian imperialism and ecclesiastical propaganda.

9) Where do these observations lead us and leave us?

Let me summarize and point toward the task ahead.

a) We must recognize that to contemporary Judaism the return to the land is not only a political but also a religious and theological fact.

b) We must trust and respect the right of the Jews to struggle with the implications and implementations of these facts.

c) In a spirit of true dialog -- broadened by a Muslim participation that will create the trilog -- we must face together the theological implications of pluralism and coexistence.

d) In my own mind this means that we must transcend our various traditions and ask together the tough question of how we do coexist in God's plan for the world.

e) That is a meaningful question since all our three traditions have it in common to see God at work in history. Herein lie both the glory and the dangers of our faith and obedience. But it is this dimension that makes our theology a potential power for radical solutions to political problems.

f) To some Judaism is a faith but Zionism an ideology. The fact is that all religious ideas can deteriorate into ideologies. The difference between faith and ideology is that the former stands under the judgment of God while the latter lacks such a court of judgment and appeal. That is why it is so important to recognize and even strengthen the theological aspect of Zionism.

g) The ultimate tribunal is God's will for justice and the humanization of man. True theology aspires to that vision within which all traditions and ideologies are transcended. As human beings in a pluralistic world we can only reach that vision by a joint effort, an effort where we ask together for

our limited place in God's plan for justice and peace. At that level it will appear that truth is one of the words that cannot tolerate adjectives. There is no American truth or Arab truth or Christian truth or Jewish truth or Muslim truth. There is only Truth.

"Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one." When Paul wrote that, he did not speak partisan language but expressed the great and obvious truth, without which religion would be mere folklore or worse.