

MS-603, Box 112, Folder 1 Transcription

Introducing Billy Graham followed by Graham's remarks,
American Jewish Committee, Atlanta, Ga. 28 October 1977.

Marc Tanenbaum:

Dr. Graham, my new friend and colleague Colleague Rabbi Lehrman, and Miles Jaffey, who is such an important mainstay to us and all of our work: I'm always embarrassed when I hear reference made to that Newsweek depiction of me, but I never have been more -- I suppose, embarrassed to have that said in the presence of Dr. Billy Graham. (laughter) My mother used to say to me when somebody used to say that this person was a great scholar, she says, "Yeah, but is he a great scholar about the great scholars?" (laughter) And in the Talmudic tradition, reference is made to two kinds of apostles or prophets. One is spoken of as Navi [Eliyahu din?], as a prophet or an apostle to the Hebrews, and another category is spoken of as Navi [La Goyim?] - - an apostle to the Gentiles or the nations of the earth. And Billy, I've got my hands more than full trying to be a prophet to the Jews, not to get involved in trying to be an apostle to the Gentiles. (laughter) And I must say that, given your own great ministry, you don't need even a Jewish kibitz from me. (laughter)

This is a special moment for me in both my professional and personal life. And if you will allow a personal reflection, for the past 25 years I have tried to develop my life to seeking to uproot the weeds of misunderstanding, prejudice, and bigotry between Christians and Jews of all denominations, and to try to plant seeds that might flower in time into mutual respect, friendship, and even love and caring for one another. And it has not always been an easy nor a smooth course to follow. Much, if not most, of the 1900 years of the Jewish historic experience in the Christian west, I think all of us will acknowledge, have left deep scars in both Christians and Jews -- of mutual suspicions, resentments, hostility, and worse. At times, my colleagues and I at the AJC have felt like Sisyphus pushing the rock up the mountain of understanding, only to find it crashing down from time to time at critical moments of Jewish life.

What has saved us, I think, from cynicism or even despair, and what has helped us to keep our balances, our perspective, and even hope for the future, has been redemptive events -- kairos, turning points -- mediated through redemptive personalities. Vatican Council II was just such a redemptive turning point, and the late blessed Pope John XXIII was surely such a redemptive personality. He was a friend of God and a friend of man. I heard it said in Rome frequently during Vatican Council II, in a

friendly irony: "Pope John was the best pope the Jews ever had."
(laughter) And if we will recall, Christians and Jews together, in honest and in candor, the dominant images and perceptions among many Jews that the Catholic Church has been sensed in popular culture, it had been the enemy of the Jews, especially at the height of its power in medieval days. The progress that we have made in mutual understanding between Catholics and Jews during the last 15 years alone, since the close of Vatican Council II, has been little short of a miracle. Now, the presence here last night of Archbishop Thomas [Denellan?], the spirit of affection and honesty that prevailed, was a lovely cameo illuminating that remarkable and welcome change in these relationships.

We're now beginning to cross the threshold hopefully of a similar journey into a new history of understanding, of mutual respect and reciprocal caring between the 50 million evangelical Christians, who are the fastest-growing church in the United States -- between them and the Jewish people in this country. The problems of mindsets, of stereotypes, of single-dimensional cartoon images that evangelicals and Jews have held about each other, are not dissimilar from those that Catholics and Jews held just some 15 years ago.

On the basis of personal experience since the mid-1960s, I can testify that the growth in mutual appreciation between evangelicals and Jews thus far in many parts of this country and abroad is in very large measure due to the attitudes, the convictions, and the personal influence of the distinguished guest who we honor today, the Reverend Dr. Billy Graham -- certainly the world's most noted evangelist, who has reached more people in more places than probably any other religious personality in our lifetime. It is not generally known, either among Jews or Christians, that Dr. Graham has been present to the Jewish people in virtually every moment of trial, of threat, of testing, as well as, at times, of celebration.

Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, Simcha [Dinitz?], Mayor Teddy [Calik?] of Jerusalem, and now Menachem Begin and, indeed, the American Jewish Committee itself can tell, in moving chapter and verse, how Dr. Graham came time and again to the aid of the embattled people of Israel when his voice and influence in high places made a crucial and at times a decisive difference in mobilizing economic, moral, and other aid for our brothers and sisters of the holy land. And I can tell you what I saw with my own eyes in a Chicago hotel room a few years ago, when Dr. Graham intervened with the White House quite directly in ways that others were not able to that led to the freeing from Soviet

labor camps of Jews who might otherwise have perished. Ruth [Alexandravitch?] is but one Jew who was redeemed from captivity -- [Hebrew?] -- from [Putma?] Prison, and who is now reunited with her family in Israel. She and her family owe their liberation to Billy Graham. His public statements and his films condemning anti-Semitism and Nazism, his repudiation of proselytizing of the Jewish people through deceptive techniques of such movements of Jews for Jesus, are expressions of his friendship and respect for Judaism, for the Jewish people, in addition to his deep love of and support for Israel.

While not overlooking for a moment our authentic theological and other differences as Christians and as Jews, which we have frequently and freely and openly discussed, I do not believe that it is an exaggeration to declare at this historic moment that based on nearly 15 years of our association with Dr. Graham, that next to the late Pope John XXIII and next to Professor Reinhold Niebuhr, the towering genius of American mainline Protestantism, Dr. Billy Graham has been, unknown to most of us, has been and continues to be one of the greatest friends of the Jewish people and of Israel in the entire Christian world in the twentieth century. (applause)

It is for all these reasons that it gives us genuine pleasure to bestow upon him our first National Interreligious Award of the American Jewish Committee. Our gratitude for his continuous, constant friendship and love for our people, which we reciprocate today, is similarly symbolized in an original work of sculpture created by [Ludwig Walpert?], a German Jewish refugee who made this as a work of love for Dr. Graham. Dr. Walpert is a resident sculptor and artist at the Jewish Museum in New York.

Billy, this original sculpture (applause) -- this sculpture of the Ten Commandments, the supreme moral bond between all Christians and Jews everywhere, across two millennia -- indeed, it is the foundation stone of civilization itself -- and our inscription reads, "The American Jewish Committee, in grateful appreciation of his friendship for the Jewish people and for Israel, bestows its first National Interreligious Award on the Reverend Dr. Billy Graham at this National Executive Council. God bless you. (applause)

Billy Graham:

My dear friend, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, Mr. Jaffey, Rabbi Lehrman, members of the American Jewish Committee, Christian friends, I'm almost speechless, and that rarely happens to me. (laughter) I'm

moved and touched and overwhelmed with gratitude to all of you that have made possible this moment. I hope, indeed, it will be a historic moment in the relationships between Jews and Christians in the years to come. I consider this perhaps the high moment of my ministry. Because one of my purposes years ago was to see if I could build some bridges between various groups, whether black or white, and Jew, and bridges throughout the world. And to have these words of expression from Marc Tanenbaum today have moved me beyond -- almost to the point of an emotional situation in my speech today.

You already know that I stand before you as an evangelical Christian who is committed to the belief of the New Testament. You do not expect me to be anything other than what I am. Let us not hide our differences under a basket. Let's follow the council of Martin Buber at this point, when he said, "Don't try to score points or defend your partner in dialogue. Understand him. Respect his uniqueness. Establish a warm friendship."

It is in the spirit of dialogue and understanding that I relate to you my own experience. When I was 17 years of age, I was living on a small farm south of Charlotte, North Carolina. I was reared in a very orthodox Presbyterian church. I rebelled against the hard work on the farm and the strict religious

teachings of the church. But one day something happened to me that is so fresh in my mind that I can recall every detail of it at this moment. It was as if I had met Jesus Christ face to face: a Jew who was born in Bethlehem and reared in Nazareth. I became convinced that in his death on the cross that he died for my sins. I felt my own need of personal repentance. I accepted him as my Lord and Savior, and I have walked with him for 43 years since then. And during the past 40 years, I have proclaimed his message on every continent of the globe.

My central intellectual question about Jesus came from his assertion "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Light. No man cometh to the Father but by me." On the surface, that seems to be the most intolerance of statements. Think of any man on the stage of human history claiming to be the supreme embodiment of all philosophical, scientific, and religious truth. He was either an egomaniac, a liar, or what he claimed to be.

By faith, I accepted him for what he claimed to be -- the Son of the living God. That simple decision changed my life, and I am here today because of that commitment made 43 years ago.

I've grown in understanding since that hour of personal commitment, but it was that decision that has made me intolerant

of the social and personal evils of this generation. As a Southerner, I began to wrestle almost immediately in my conscience with the question of race. As soon as I began to study the Bible in earnest, I discovered the debt that I owed to Israel, to Judaism, and to the Jewish people. I realized that the record of the relations, as Rabbi Tanenbaum has already mentioned, between Christians and Jews makes unpleasant and at times horrifying reading. The institutional Church has sinned through much of its history and has much to answer for at the Judgment, especially for the anti-Semitism practiced against the Jewish people.

I look also with sadness and deep regret that those episodes in history when Christians tried to force the conversion of Jews. To force men to believe is, I'm convinced, against the will of God. [Alquin?] said to Charlemagne, "How can you force a man to believe what he does not believe? Faith is an affair of the will, not of compulsion." [Tartellian?] wrote, "It is a fundamental right, a privilege of nature, that every man should worship according to his own convictions."

Others spoke in the same vein, but their voices were barely heard above the thunder of the terrible intolerance and persecution in the Dark Ages of Christian and Jewish

relationships. A nineteenth-century scholar once said, "I shall not try to write the history of intolerance. That would be to write the history of the world."

However, there is one thing that all Christians and Jews must understand: it is equally as difficult to define a Christian currently or in history as it is to define a Jew. One of the great questions throughout the world for you is -- "Who is a Jew?" Equally, the great question is "Who is a Christian?" Millions who profess Christianity could not possibly be true Christians in the biblical sense. For example, if a professing Christian is not dominated by love for his neighbor, then he cannot possibly be called a Christian. Thus, many of the persecutions of history were caused by false Christians who dragged the name of their master into the mire of bigotry, anti-Semitism, and prejudice.

I am an evangelical Christian who believes that God can be experienced in daily life and that we are known not only by the creed we repeat but by the love we live out in our relations with our fellow men and women of whatever religious persuasion.

Evangelical Christians especially have an affinity for the Jews, because the Bible they love is essentially a Jewish book,

written under the influence of God's spirit. One theologian wrote: "Remove the New Testament books written by the Jews and only two remain, Luke and Acts. Remove every Jewish concept, every Jewish influence from the New Testament, and only a question here and there from a pagan source is left -- scarcely enough for one short paragraph. As for the Old Testament, no Christian can read it consistently without subscribing to our recent pope's statement: "Spiritually, we're all Jews. Semites." It is to the lasting glory of Judaism and Christianity that they have their roots in the Old and New Testament scriptures written so largely by Jews. No greater words have been penned than those of the Mosaic code that was presented to me today on the Sermon on the Mount. As never before, the world needs to accept the ethical principles and follow the moral standards outlined in the law of Moses and the sermons of Jesus. Through their application, social injustice and moral evil can be greatly reduced, if not eliminated. Dr. Abraham [Kaddish?], past president of [Drabsa?] University, and other scholars have demonstrated the close relationship between the Hebrew Scriptures and the foundation of American democracy.

If the Holy Scriptures were proclaimed fearlessly and lived faithfully, our world could be changed for the better.

There are theological differences that we may never agree on, but there are certain things that we can work for now, hand-in-hand, that could make a better America and a better world. What are those things?

First, we can work and pray together for the peace of Jerusalem. Two years ago, I gave my wife for Christmas a gold pendant, on which side of which is inscribed in Hebrew, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem," and the same thing on the other side in English. And she wears it all the time. My oldest son has been to the Middle East and to Israel 27 times. My eldest daughter and her husband went to Hebrew University and lived in Jerusalem. My oldest son-in-law's grandmother is buried in Jerusalem. Thus, we as a family have a great personal interest in that great city, apart from its biblical and political significance.

The Middle East is the most dangerous and the most thrilling spot in the world. The Bible teaches that history began there and will someday end there when the Messiah comes to create a new social order and a new humanity. The capital of the world we believe the prophets teach will then be Jerusalem. Then will the prophecies be fulfilled spoken by Isaiah the prophet in the 19th chapter and the 25th verse, a very important passage: "Whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt, my people,

and Assyria, the work of my hands. And Israel, mine inheritance.'" In that future day, God will recognize and bless Syria and Egypt and Israel. They will live together in permanent peace. (applause) This and other scriptures definitely recognize the right of Israel to exist as a state, just as Syria and Egypt.

Now, I don't pretend to be capable of suggesting an immediate answer to the present situation. We just held a press conference, and I was asked every question that you can imagine about what ought to be done in the Middle East at the present time, and I was one of the most evasive people you've ever seen. (laughter) But I do believe the biblical prophecies that there will be permanent peace in the Middle East someday. Till that glorious day, then we're commanded to work and pray for the peace not only of the world but especially of Jerusalem. And as we work and pray for the peace and well-being of all the people of the Middle East -- Jews, Christians, and Muslims -- it is my conviction that the vast majority of evangelical Christians in this country and abroad support the state of Israel's right to existence.

In biblical history and secular history, Israel has every right to exist as much as Syria or Egypt or Russia or the United States. (applause)

The Palestinians also have a right to exist under legitimate leadership committed to the peace of the Middle East. (applause)

Secondly, Christians and Jews must continue to work together for better race relations in the United States. Black and white, Jew and Gentile, majority and minorities: no nation has attempted so valiantly to solve its racial problems as has the mosaic that is America. We now have the most extensive civil rights laws on our statute books in world history, and I'm glad that we can say that in Atlanta, the home of Martin Luther King. (applause)

We've gone beyond any nation in history. I remember in the 19... I think it was 1964 Civil Rights Law was enacted. I had the privilege of being at the White House that evening and spending the night with President Johnson. By the way, I think I spent 26 nights with him and only three with Mr. Nixon. (laughter) (applause) Mr. Johnson always liked to have a preacher around him, (laughter) and there were times when he needed one.

(laughter) But America -- but that night, I remember Hubert Humphrey came over, and he came straight to me and he said,

"Billy," he said, "we've passed the greatest civil rights legislation in history; now it's up to people like you to see it's implemented." I knew what he meant. The law would not mean very much unless hearts and attitudes would change. America has been courageously tackling her problems. Contrary to the wails of some pessimists, progress has been made in race relations during the '60s. Young black families, according to the latest census, are moving even closer to parity with whites in income level and opportunity.

If all this is happening in America, why do racial tensions continue to mount in some areas? It's because hearts have not been changed. We're hearing a great deal of the expression "born again." It was used by Ezekiel the prophet; it was used by Jesus Christ when he said, "You must be born again if you are to see the kingdom of heaven." There must be a change in attitudes. We must recognize that skin color does not matter to God who looks upon the heart. Love alone will serve to make good laws work. The one weapon no one can resist is a genuine, sincere, unaffected love for people, regardless of race, color, or religion.

Two months ago, I was in Hungary. I had only one condition about my going to Hungary, and that was that I would have the

opportunity to meet the Jewish leadership of that country. And they made no conditions on me whatsoever. I could say anything I wanted to and choose my own interpreter. And I chose a gynecologist from right here in Atlanta who was my interpreter, and you'll see it on television if you watch -- I think it's the first or the second of December; it'll be on at prime evening time.

Even though we were total strangers -- I'm talking about the Jewish community now. Even though we were total strangers, within an hour of discussion, we were expressing affection for each other. And before we left, tears were in all of our eyes as we recalled the terrible events of the last weeks of the Second World War, when it was already lost, and an order went out to exterminate the Jews, and 400,000 Jews were eliminated in Hungary in those last weeks of the war.

We talked together about common faith in God. Those who love God have a moral responsibility to work at the business of racial and religious and racial justice on and off the job and in every waking hour. The American Jewish Committee, the nation's pioneer human rights organization, has a long history in fostering positive inter-group relations, and I know you will continue this noble effort.

And I want to say my tribute to Rabbi Tanenbaum now. No man in this country has helped me to understand the interrelationships that are necessary and the problems that Jewish people face in various parts of the world, or interpret the situation in the Middle East to me as he has. He has become a close personal friend that goes beyond what normal friendships go, because we stand shoulder to shoulder in some of these visions and dreams that we have as far as the Jewish-Christian dialogue and relationships are concerned. And I want to pledge to that, that I will do all in my power to help foster these dialogues and these understandings to a much greater degree in the future than in the past.

Thirdly, we can join in honoring and supporting and undergirding our nation. No country in the world has treated its minorities better than America. Every American Christian and every American Jew should thrill to the Stars and Stripes, bless our Constitution, and thank God that here on these shores we have found the land of liberty and opportunity second to none.
(applause)

Fourthly, we should hammer out together a common agreement for teaching moral law to our young people in the public schools. I

know I'm touching on tender ground, but I believe the Ten Commandments, the Law of Moses, should be read every day in every classroom. Our children need to know there is a moral law. If you don't want to read that, take the eight sayings of Mao Tse Dong, which was taken from that, by the way. But whatever you call it, they need to know there are moral guidelines. I'm alarmed by the zeal of some clergymen, Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish, to secularize America. And I warn you that total secularization will lead to a rising tide of both anti-Semitism and anti-Christianity. Many have been surprised that the new anti-Semitism in America has come from the new radicalism in America. I'm not surprised. Much of the new radicalism is secularistic, atheistic, and even dehumanizing. It is intolerant toward any kind of faith in God or morality. I will stand and fight to the last for separation of church and state, but I must confess that if this separation of church and state is to continue, then this push toward secularization must be halted and reversed: otherwise, democracy and freedom will not survive in this country, as we have seen it fail in other countries that have become totally secular.

Let's face it: in some areas of life, we should be intolerant. By that, I mean we should be intolerant of evil. Moses refused to tolerate idolatry into which Israel had fallen in his absence

when God gave him these Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

[Mechan?] the prophet showed his intolerance when he pointed to King David and told him that he was the man that was guilty of sin. Israel's ancient prophets were intolerant, as they denounced the personal and social sins of both Israel and the pagan nations round about them.

All of this is a far cry from the contemporary [postures?] in which the quest for toleration has sometimes resulted in meaningless broad-mindedness, ethical relativism, and ambiguous sentimentalism. Certainly breadth of understanding and charity are called for; however, our Judeo-Christian heritage is persistent in its demand for biblical intolerance toward moral and social evil.

Too often, tolerance has included compromise of conviction -- a yielding to expediency on primary matters. In moral issues, permissiveness and self-indulgence have often made us morally soft and devoid of conviction. We've become accustomed to unbelievable crime, the drug culture, pornography, obscenity, [ghettoes?], racism, poverty, pollution, and the deep spiritual cry of our young people in the midst of their rebellions. Need I remind you that science is narrow-minded and intolerant of error in its pursuit of truth? There is little room for unchecked

broad-mindedness in the laboratory. Just so, there are some moral, social, and religious convictions all of us hold in common and separately that cannot be compromised. If we undertake and allow for this then we can make common cause in many things as believers in God and citizens of America.

Christians and Jews can join hands at some point on this issue.

Fifthly, we can work together for world peace, freedom, and justice. But it should be the right kind of peace. Is there peace in some countries where many Jews are persecuted and Christians are severely restricted? There is peace and security in a prison. There is peace and security in a concentration camp. There is peace and security in a cemetery. But is this the kind of peace we want? Freedom and justice are equally important, and whether we like to admit it or not, freedom is rapidly disappearing in our world.

Out of the 156 nations in the United Nations, only nineteen now have democracies. Jeremiah the prophet warned long ago that the day would come when people would say "peace, peace, peace" when there is no peace. And certainly peace is not enhanced by a policy of terrorism, whether in the Middle East, Ireland, Africa, America, or anywhere else. The hijacking of planes, the

wanton slaughter of tens of thousands in Central Africa, the kidnappings in Italy, the hijacking of a train in the Netherlands, the killing of children at [Mela?] are just a few of the horrifying examples we've read. Human life, created in the image of God, should never be used as a means to realize any group's ideology or political programs. (applause)

The surest way of winning lasting justice and peace for the state of Israel, as well as the Palestinian people and in fact all peoples of the Middle East and throughout the world, is to help create an atmosphere of mutual respect and reconciliation, and that condition demands an end to the killing -- an end to the shedding of blood.

Sixthly, I think that Jews and Christians ought to work together for a national spiritual and moral awakening in America. As I go from campus to campus and talk to students, I find that our youth are asking spiritual questions and wanting spiritual answers. *Newsweek Magazine* said some time ago that at Harvard University, many young Jews have actually abandoned radical politics to search for some kind of deeper spiritual satisfaction. Dr. Armand Nicolai has been a senior psychiatrist at Harvard for over twelve years, and he was quoted as saying that he, quote, "has been struck by the extraordinary number of

young Jews who complain that their parents didn't transmit spiritual values to them, whereas somehow their grandparents had transmitted such values to their parents." End quote. I could say precisely the same thing about Christians in America.

We need a spiritual awakening that will not only dynamically influence the social and political life of this country but answer the deepest needs of our young people. It is a demonstrated fact that the revivals in ancient Israel and the revivals in the history of the Christian church have contributed much to the well-being of the nations. Time after time, these spiritual awakenings brought about a change in the moral and spiritual climate. Old grudges were wiped out. Wrongs were rectified. Sins were confessed and forgiven. A new concern for one's neighbor ensued, and moral strength was infused into the youth of revived nations.

I've often wondered what would happen in America if the zeal for righteousness that at times characterized ancient Israel could be reflected among some Jewish sons and daughters today and mingled with the revival zeal displayed by early American Christians. I believe that God is calling us for this kind of moral and spiritual awakening.

When Jehoshaphat ascended the throne of Judah in the ninth century before Christ, his country, like ours, had experienced long, costly struggles and was surrounded by threatening foes. Earnestly, young Jehoshaphat sought God's help for his people. There began an era of peace almost unparalleled in the history of Judah and Israel: an era later brought to an end by Jehoshaphat's own mistakes.

As recorded in Second Chronicles 17, nine to ten, these words: "They taught in Judah and had the book of the law of the Lord with them and went about through all the cities of Judah and taught the people, and the fear of the Lord fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat."

World leaders warn about the possibilities of a terrifying Third World War that might begin in the Middle East. But when Jehoshaphat led the nation to the Scriptures and back to faith in God and led the nation in a spiritual awakening, the enemies round about them could make no war on them. God intervened on their behalf.

Suppose the word of Jehovah God were to rule America. Would not the reverence and the fear of God fall upon the other nations of

the world? I believe that a nation steeped in the Judeo-Christian Scriptures offers more national security than the costliest array of armaments.

America, wholly dedicated to God, entirely obedient to His word, could enjoy the same promise of peace and blessing that Judah enjoyed in the days of Jehoshaphat. Spiritual renewal in America will come only if we follow God's admonition through the great king Solomon: "If my people which are called by my name shall humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

This quest for renewal demands from all of us here today the sacrificial commitment of self to God and to righteousness. We cannot stay as we are. We must not slide deeper in the direction we are going morally. We must change. We must move forward.

In the ancient synagogues of Israel, upon the completion of the reading of any of the books of Moses, it was the custom for the congregation to exclaim, "Be strong. Be strong and let us strengthen one another." In like manner, when we ask Christians and Jews -- "See each other under the enemy's attack, let us encourage and strengthen one another. And I would say to both

Christian and Jew today: be strong. Be strong and let us
strengthen one another.

Thank you very much. (applause)

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