

MS-603, Box 112, Folder 6 Transcription

Dictation and collected radio commentaries. December 1983.

Marc Tanenbaum:

-- 83. This is the day of the creation of the world. This is the day on which all creatures of the earth stand under judgment. These are phrases from the *mahzor*, the Hebrew prayer book that is used for the Jewish people in Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year which began at sundown on September 7th. The high holy days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are solemn days that express the universal human need for self-correction, for taking inventory of one's life, and then seeking through fasting and repentance the change for the better. More so perhaps than in other years, Rosh Hashanah and this year of experiencing new outbursts of violence, greed, and bigotry make us highly conscious that the ideas and values of moral judgment, confession for wrongdoing, and determination to change for the better, are more than simple religious pieties. These spiritual disciplines are the very pivot of a just and civil society. The Jewish holy days also underscore how precarious human existence is. Who shall live and who shall die are recurring themes in Jewish prayers, and this year they take on, again, compelling meaning. For human life continues to be expendable through oppression, fanaticism, and tragic conflict in Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Poland, the

unrelenting PLO terrorism, through violence in Lebanon, Ireland, Central America, and the Soviet Union. In the face of such widespread dehumanization and suffering, Rosh Hashanah summons us not to capitulate to despair, but rather to do whatever we can to help redeem and heal an anguished world through acts of moral courage, decency, kindness, and caring for human lives. [Hebrew], a good and sweet and peaceful year to all of our listeners. This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

This script is Yom Kippur 1983. With the chanting of the moving Aramaic prayer of *Kol Nidre* on Friday evening, September the 16th, the Jewish people throughout the world will inaugurate the observance of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the most sacred of the Jewish holy days. Observed as a solemn fast day from sundown to sundown, Yom Kippur is characterized by individual and communal spiritual exercises to renew one's inner life for the coming year. Its perennial message is that it is possible for human beings to improve their character, to strengthen their ethical conscience, and moral responsibility through the rigorous discipline of *Teshuvah*, turning away from error and sin. In the synagogue on *Kol Nidre* evening, every person is called upon to turn to his or her neighbor and to ask forgiveness for any hurts or injustices inflicted during the

past year. And Jewish tradition says that Yom Kippur will be of no avail, unless and until people forgive each other, and start a fresh and mutually respectful relationship. One wonders what blows might be struck against the evils in the world, the corruptions, the prejudices, the violence, the massacres, where the heads of state assemble at the United Nations to practice repentance and forgiveness, and thereby start the world on a new, more civilized course for the coming year. A day of atonement for mankind is worth thinking about. This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

This script is called "Black-Jewish Relations." Black-Jewish relations, unhappily strained in recent years, may yet suffer further deterioration, unless statesmen in both communities move quickly to steer a wise, moderate course. President Reagan's appointment of the new members of the US Civil Rights Commission has been attacked by several prominent black leaders. For most among the new appointees is the distinguished leader and human rights advocate Morris Abram, who will testify in Washington next week. There are legitimate differences among Jews, as well as others, over whether the president's dismissal of commission members compromises the independence of the Civil Rights Commission. But anyone even remotely familiar with Morris Abram's record in fighting over decades for civil and human

rights causes could not but conclude that he is a superb choice for that position. Nevertheless, Mayor Andrew Young of Atlanta and Georgia Senator Julian Bond chose to trivialize Mr. Abram's role in civil rights. Their statements were nothing less than outrageous, especially since they knew better. In this strained atmosphere, I find reassuring the calm, responsible voice of Johnny Jacob, president of the Urban League. In a recent address in Savannah, Mr. Jacob said -- and I quote -- "Black-Jewish relations are not as close as they once were. Just as clearly, they are not as bad as many assume. They are transitory differences, rather than sharp and permanent differences. New alliances between blacks and Jews are needed to help America live up to its promise to minorities and the downtrodden." This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

This is entitled "Jews Against Jews." It was not a good week for the morale of the Jewish community of New York City. In recent weeks, a group of murderous hooligans drove past Yeshiva University, shot and wounded two young rabbinic students, and a high school pupil. Mayor Koch, police commissioner Maguire, and the FBI have ordered intensive investigations of the would-be killers who have now carried out three anti-Semitic attacks within the month. If that were not distressing enough, in mid-June, five masked men kidnapped a 35-year-old Hasidic rabbi,

Mendel Vechter, cut off his beard and broke his ankle. Rabbi Vechter was formerly a member of the ultra-orthodox *Satmar* Hasidic sect who apparently transferred his loyalties to another Hasidic group, the *Lubavitch* group. The masked kidnappers are believed to be associated with the *Satmar*. They were meting out lynch justice for Rabbi Vechter's apparent defection from their ranks. And then in early in June, another Hasidic rabbi was similarly attacked and for the same reason. *Satmar's* spokesman denied that they had anything to do with these abominable actions. It boggles the mind that religious Jews, committed to God's law of justice and love, could tolerate such indecent behavior. At a time when the Jewish community has its hands full, fighting off anti-Semites of both domestic and foreign varieties, such fanaticism is little less than self-destructive. Can the Jewish community and society at large long tolerate anti-Semitism by anyone, especially by Jews against other Jews? This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

This is entitled "World Lutherans and the Jews." In what may well become one of the most significant achievements of the year long observance of Martin Luther's five hundredth birthday, the Lutheran World Federation adopted here recently a declaration repudiating the sins of Luther's anti-Jewish remarks and his violent verbal attacks against the Jews. The world Lutheran

leaders in Stockholm also pledged their undertaking that Luther's writings will never again serve in their churches as a source for the teaching of hatred for Judaism, and the denigration of the Jewish people. The historic declaration climaxed the three day international conference of representatives from the Lutheran World Federation and the International Jewish Committee for inter-religious consultations. The Christian and Jewish leaders examined through scholarly papers and frank discussion the theme "Luther, Lutheranism, and the Jews." In a joint communiqué issued in the Swedish capital of Stockholm, the Lutheran and Jewish spokesmen also declared the far-reaching agreement that we affirm the integrity and dignity of our two-faith communities, and repudiate any organized proselytizing of each other. The Lutheran statement acknowledged with deep regret that Luther has been used to justify anti-Semitism in the Nazi period, and that his writings lent themselves to such abuse. At the same time, the joint communiqué stated that "We are mindful of the compassionate response of Scandinavian Christians to the plight of Jewish victims of Nazi persecution." The Lutheran and Jewish leaders quite rightly characterized their meeting of minds as a new chapter in the relationship between Jews and Lutherans which should find practical expression in teaching, preaching, and worship, as well as in joint activities for social justice and

human rights and the cause of peace. Copies of the text are available by writing to me at the American Jewish Committee, 165 East 56th Street, New York, New York, 10022. This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

This is entitled "The World Council of Churches Assembly in Vancouver." As an official representative of the World Jewish Community, attending the World Council of Churches Assembly recently in Canada, I found the experience enriching, stimulating, and troublesome. The enrichment came from the opportunity it gave me to meet religious leaders literally from every part of the world. I even met a black Anglican Archbishop from Botswana who spoke fluent Yiddish. The stimulation came from the privilege of listening to a series of frequently brilliant papers on the threat to human survival posed by the nuclear arms race, poverty, hunger, world refugees, and rampant fanaticism in many parts of the world. As the first Jewish spokesman ever invited to address a world council plenary of 4,000 delegates and guests, I told the international gathering that the Jewish people share many of these concerns. Given Judaism's emphasis on the sanctity of human life, I [stated the?] world Jewry is prepared to collaborate in the struggle to assure human survival. But what I found troublesome was an approach to Christian unity that seemed to ignore the powerful

reality of religious pluralism in the world. It was also unsettling to see how Arab-Christians were using their Christianity to mount blatant, one-sided anti-Israel campaigns among the world council delegates. Above all, it was unsettling to find that delegates were prepared to consider the United States the focus of all evil in the world while neglecting the role of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Poland, and elsewhere. If the world council of churches is ever to become a reconciling, rather than a polarizing, force, it will have to approach the world conflict with far greater fairness and balance than was evident in these resolutions. This is Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee.

Reverend Wesley (inaudible). A small, dark-skinned man with a warm smile, he is a Christian minister from Sri Lanka who serves on the World Council of Churches in Geneva. About ten days ago (break in audio) --

-- at their meeting, [his?] extremely heartening to my colleagues and myself.

God knows that we have enough fragmentation and alienation in American life without introducing further cleavage of this nature.

Paul, I can hardly begin to find words to tell you how much I appreciate your incisive and ready understanding of the importance of not allowing this meeting to repeat the very bad experience that developed in Atlanta.

I look forward to our future cooperation in many areas of common interest.

With warmest personal good wishes and my prayers for God's richest blessings over you, I am, cordially as ever -- sign my name. Send a carbon copy to Don Feldstein and to Selma Hirsch, Mort Yarmon, and (inaudible), with a note to Mort Yarmon: Mort, this might make a good press release, especially to the Anglo-Jewish press.

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