THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

date February 15, 1977
to Area Directors, JCRCs, Rabbinic Associations
from Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum
subject PROPOSED LOCAL OR REGIONAL CONFERENCE(S) ON COPING WITH RELIGIOUS CULTS

It is evident that there is a substantial concern in many parts of the Jewish community about the impact of various religious cults on the Jewish community, especially on Jewish youth.

In various parts of the country, there is particular concern about the activity of the so-called "Hebrew-Christian" groups and their missionary activity among Jewish young people. Among them are the Jews for Jesus, the American Board of Missions to the Jews, B'nai Jeshua, etc. The national evangelistic campaign called, "Here's Life, America," which is a spin-off of the Campus Crusade for Christ, also has a special emphasis in its literature and program materials on "How to Evangelize Jews."

Recently, the Nassau-Suffolk Board of Rabbis sponsored an excellent local consultation that brought together about 175 Jewish religious and communal leaders to consider together how they might organize effectively to cope with this problem. I enclose a copy of that conference program which you may want to consider as a possible model for replication in your community.

The AJC Interreligious Affairs Department cooperated with the Nassau-Suffolk Board of Rabbis in organizing this impressive and useful meeting, and in providing background materials. We will be happy to cooperate with you in helping to organize such a conference in your community.

One of the positive by-products of this local effort has a significant interreligious dimension. I enclose a sensitive and thoughtful statement prepared by the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island's Commission on Christian-Jewish Relations which repudiates the "Hebrew-Christian" groups. It would be most useful if you would send copies of this statement - which Episcopal Bishop Jonathan C. Sherman has endorsed - to your key Catholic, Protestant, and Evangelical contacts.

If your Christian leaders groups were to agree to sign such a statement and publicize it widely, it would help remove any "sanction" or "halo" effect from these Hebrew-Christian groups as being regarded as part of the normative Christian community.

Please keep me informed of what uses you may make of these materials and send copies of any statements or publicity that may result from your efforts. Thanks very much for your cooperation.

Cordially,

MHT:RPR
Enclosures
CONFERENCE ON "HOW TO COMBAT THE MISSIONARY THRUST IN SUFFOLK"

sponsored by The Suffolk Board of Rabbis

Sunday, February 13th, 1-4:30 PM

at the

Huntington Jewish Center, 510 Park Avenue, Huntington

Chairman - Dr. Tobias Rothenberg

Coffee and cake in the Social Hall - 12:30-1:00 PM

PROGRAM

Welcome
Introductory Remarks
Updating on the Missionary Activities
A Personal Experience - How We Emerged
Introduction of Guest Speaker
Address - "Evangelism & the Jew-Constructive Alternatives"
Introduction to Teaching Demonstration
How We Can Combat in the Classroom the Missionary Effort!
What We Are Doing Already in Suffolk
Introduction of a Guest Speaker
Our Best Response-Better Education More Extensive Outreach

Call To Action

4:30 PM - Shalom!

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Thanks to the Huntington Jewish Center for the use of its facilities and to the Sisterhood for the gracious serving.
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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That a Task Force on "The Jewish Community and Evangelism" comprising members of the Board of Rabbis and interested persons be formed to deal on an ongoing basis with the Missionary programs.

2. That a Series of four County-wide Youth Conclaves be organized to acquaint our teen-agers with each other, and to teach them what to answer when accosted, and to stimulate their Jewish Identity, pride, and self-knowledge.

3. That instruction on Comparative Religion be initiated in the Religious School on the High School level.

4. That suitable curricula be worked out for the Bar/Bat Mitzvah age level to teach our youngsters how to answer the Missionary.

5. That coffee houses for our older teen-agers and college-age young people be set up in various areas by individual synagogues or by several acting in concord.

6. That a Panel of Rabbis who are professionally trained in counseling be formed to work with young people who are involved with the missionary groups.

CALL TO SERVICE!!

We shall need many willing hearts and helping hands! If you are willing to give of your time and ideas, please fill out the following coupon, tear, and leave it at the Desk or mail in.

SUFFOLK BOARD OF RABBIS
2600 New York Avenue
Huntington Station, NY 11746

NAME ___________________________ PHONE ___________________________

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"CHRISTIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS: THE THREAT OF 'JEWISH-CHRISTIANITY'

The Reverend Lawrence McCoombe, Commission Chairman

It is time to make clear to the public how most Christians feel about Judaism and about the "Jewish-Christian" movement.

I am confident that I speak for most Christians in saying that we recognize Judaism to be a valid and positive way of life. The integrity of the religious tenets of Jewish faith is beyond question. This will sound rather patronizing to many Jewish ears. Still it needs to be said: it's all right with most Christians for Jews to be Jewish. Christianity is not a "better" religion. Christian beliefs are not "superior" to Jewish ones. They are, of course, different -- not better, just different.

When Christianity and Judaism parted company in the first and second centuries, there was a lot of name-calling on both sides. It was like a divorce: both parties had to feel justified about the "rightness" of the split. So Christians called Jews blind to Jesus' messiahship; and Jews called Christians infidels.

Historically, the name-calling persisted long after that parting of the ways. Christians, since they were the ruling majority, used the Jews' "rejection" of Jesus' messiahship as good and proper cause for keeping Jews out of positions of power and confining them to a second class citizenship -- unless, of course, they became Christians. The Jewish community in turn became understandably suspicious in all its dealings with the Christian majority, especially in religious matters.

We have come a long way in the recent past toward changing this pattern of prejudice. Although discrimination remains a problem, it
is not now as dangerous to be Jewish as it once was. (This is not
grounds for Christian self-congratulation: we've simply become less
involved in playing a very harmful game which we shouldn't have been
playing in the first place.)

Christians and Jews today have become more willing to discuss their
religious beliefs with each other, to take the first tentative steps
toward mutual understanding, to leave fear and mistrust behind and enter
into a dialogue in which Christians are not out to show Jews where they
"went wrong", and in which Jews are not as afraid that someone is out to
make them into Christians.

We are beginning to be able to acknowledge and respect each other's
religious traditions as representing positive ways of life. Christians
are realizing that Judaism has its own integrity and needs no Christian
correction. Together we are beginning to see that we can behave as
equals, that we do not need to make each other's belief-systems "wrong".
We are siblings, each possessing his own validity, vitality and wholeness
Christians no longer pray for the conversion of the Jews. It is all
right now with most Christians for Jews to be Jews and Christians
Christians.

This climate of growing respect and understanding is now threatened
by the recent growth of something called -- for want of a better name --
"Jewish-Christianity". The zealous proponents of "Jewish-Christianity"
aim their proselytizing activities specifically at Jews. They maintain
that real fulfillment for a Jew consists in accepting Jesus (they call
him Yeshua) as messiah. Their message is grounded in the notion that to
accept Jesus "is the most natural, wonderful and, above all, spiritual
thing that can happen to a Jewish person." Once again the "incomplete-
ness" of Jewish faith is being preached.

The current rise of "Jewish-Christian" missionary activity in
Long Island is distressing to both Jews and Christians. It is upsetting
to Jews because it impugns the integrity of Jewish belief. It is alarming to Christians because it misrepresents Christianity. It is disturbing to both Jews and Christians because it undermines the basis of mutual respect which it has taken so long for us to establish.

Perhaps the greatest danger in this "Jewish-Christian" missionary activity is that the Jewish community may draw back from interfaith dialogue, convinced that the "Jewish-Christian" movement is simply a highly visible manifestation of the otherwise tacit intent of all Christians to convert Jews to Christianity.

We wish, therefore, to make it clear that as Christians we acknowledge and affirm the integrity of Judaism and disavow completely the message and the methods of these "Jewish-Christian" groups.

February 9, 1977
STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Board of Governors of The Long Island Council of Churches recognizes the right and commends the practice of religious groups in this country in their attempts to share their faith and to invite others to join their community.

The Board, however, notes with alarm that certain groups are engaging in subterfuge and dishonesty in representing the claims of their faith groups. The Board points out that there is a confusion which results in mixing religious symbols in ways which distort their essential meaning. The Board also deplores the pressures which result when any faith group call into question the right to continued existence of another faith group.

In this regard the Board of Governors of The Long Island Council of Churches is particularly concerned about the alleged dishonest persuasion tactics employed by such groups as Jews for Jesus, B'nai Yeshua, and the Unification Church.

Rev. Herbert Chamberlain
Rev. Jack H. Alford
Rev. Duncan MacKenzie
Rev. Malcolm Bertram
Rev. John Paul Hankins
Rev. Horace Shoanberger
Rev. Edmund Claypool
Rev. Matthew Thies

Rev. Frank Livingston
Mr. Arnold Feltman
Mr. John Pace
Rev. William Rambo
Mr. Lewis Jackson
Rev. Everitt Sheldon
Rev. George Summers
Rev. Kenneth Nelson
February 9, 1977

Kevin Lahart
NEWSDAY
Stewart Avenue
Garden City, NY 11530

Dear Mr. Lahart:

As a person deeply concerned with interreligious relations, I feel that it was in no way a service to anyone for Newsday to give space in last Sunday's edition to a tract on why Jews ought to become Jewish-Christians ("Some Wait for the Messiah -- For Others He has Come", February 6 Ideas section, p. 5).

Any Jew or Christian is free to believe that his religion is the only correct one. So also anyone is free to understand Jews and Christians as having equally valid religious experiences and beliefs. But whatever stand we choose to take about another's religious position, the Ideas section of Newsday is not the place to proclaim the exclusive rightness of our religious beliefs and to attack the integrity of all other religions. This is, of course, precisely what Stephen Campbell did in his two column article. He then invited your Jewish readership to "see the light" and espouse his beliefs. I am very surprised that Newsday even agreed to print such an inflammatory piece.

Now that you have published Mr. Campbell's article, however, I feel it is important that your readers be clearly informed that the views of this "Jewish-Christian" spokesman are emphatically not those of most Christians.

I urge you, therefore, to publish the enclosed statement to provide your readers with a more balanced view of how Christians feel about Judaism and the "Jewish-Christian" phenomenon.

The statement has the full support of the Right Reverend Jonathan G. Sherman; Bishop of Long Island.

Sincerely,

Chairman
Commission on Christian-Jewish Relations
Diocese of Long Island