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to Marshall
1-24, should
Eckstein be
invited to
Jewish Christian
Dialogue on
Feb. 5?

THE WHITE HOUSE


WASHINGTON

March 13, 1985

Dear Rabbi Eckstein:

Thank you for your recent note. I am sorry that we were unable to meet in late January. Let's try again soon.

Cheers,



J. Douglas Holladay
Associate Director
Office of Public Liaison

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
President
The Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews
36 S. Wabash Street
Suite 626
Chicago, IL 60603



06 MAR 1985

The Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews
36 S. Wabash St. • Suite 626 • Chicago, IL 60603 •
(312) 346-7693

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
President

Dear Mr. Holladay
Sorry I missed seeing you
at the National Prayer Breakfast
& that our appointment together
was cancelled at the last
minute. I thought this might
be of interest. Hope to see
you soon. Are you ever in
Chicago?

Shalom,
Yechiel

sent
note to 1
Dehym 1-29
asking for FW
to meet Rabbi
Eckstein



The Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews
36 South Wabash Street • Suite 626 • Chicago, Illinois 60603 • (312) 346-7693

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
President

January 11, 1985

Mr. Doug Holladay
White House
171 OEOB
Washington, D.C. 20500

14 JAN 1985

Dear Mr. Holladay,

I feel as if I know you already, considering the fact that so many people have spoken of you and suggested that we meet. You may recall that a few months ago I was in Washington where I had lunch with Doug Coe, Milt Richards and others and that you were supposed to attend but had an emergency at the White House. I was sorry we were not able to meet at the time. My friend, Bob Billings, whom I believe you also know, was another one who suggested that we ought to meet and that if possible, you might arrange for me to meet with Faith Ryan Whittlesey as well.

I am writing to you now as per my conversation with Mindy Aldridge, your secretary, to inform you that I will be in Washington from January 30-February 6 where I will be attending the Prayer Breakfast at the invitation of Doug and Milt, and later on will be giving a talk for this year's NRB convention. From what I gather, it may be difficult for us to meet at the Prayer Breakfast itself though I will look for you at the various seminars. Could you please give me a call upon your return so that we might set up a meeting during the course of my stay? Also, could we perhaps meet with Ms. Whittlesey as well?

I have enclosed a small sampling of material to refresh your memory about me and our work in building Christian-Jewish relations. I look forward to speaking with you and meeting you soon. All the best.

Shalom,

Yechiel Eckstein, Rabbi

YE:mcm
enc.

A Special Issue
November 1984
CHRISTIAN LIFE Magazine

THE LAND

An in-depth view of the Holy Land from a Christian and Jewish perspective. You may not agree totally with all these expressions of concern. But we believe you will be challenged by them.

Prepared under the direction of a panel of consulting editors:



Dr. Pat Robertson
Christian Broadcasting Network



Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
Holyland Fellowship of Christians
and Jews



Dr. Jerry Falwell
Moral Majority

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Perspectives

© National Jewish Resource Center, May 1984

UNDERSTANDING EVANGELICALS: A GUIDE FOR THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

BY

RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN

President, Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews

Each of these publications are available at a cost of \$3.00 or as a gift (upon request) with a contribution of \$50 or more.

THE LAND

A Special Issue
November 1984

CHRISTIAN LIFE Magazine



Dr. Pat Robertson



Rabbi Yechiel
Eckstein



Dr. Jerry Falwell

The Distinguished Editorial Panel

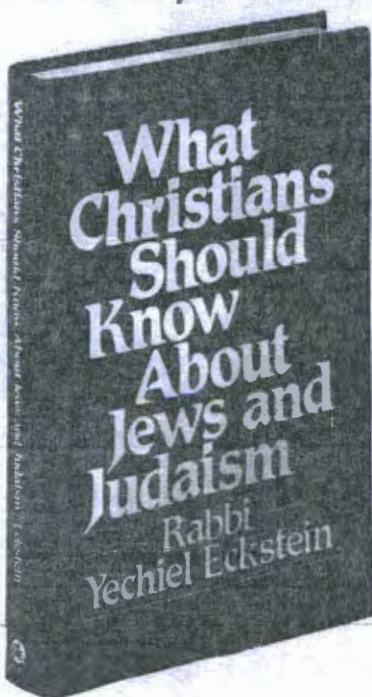
An in-depth view of the Holy Land from a Christian and Jewish perspective. You may not agree totally with all these expressions of concern. But we believe you will be challenged by them.

over

What are some Major Sources of Conflict between Jews and Christians?

● **Lack of awareness.** Christians are often not completely aware of their history of contempt for Jews; Jews are generally aware *only* of that dimension of Christianity.

● **Insensitive language.** "Old Testament" for "Hebrew Scriptures." Some dictionaries define "Jew" as "to cheat," and "Pharisee" as "hypocrite." A pastor at whose church Rabbi Eckstein had spoken to enthusiastic response invited him back to speak at a "Crusade."



from
*What Christians
Should Know About
Jews and Judaism*
by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein
(Word Books)

● **Religious justification for Jewish suffering** as a sign either of Jewish accursedness or special chosenness. Historically, this view has set up systems that led to the administering of such suffering, or to passivity in the face of it, as in the case of the Holocaust.

● **"Christ killer" portrayals of Jews.** Jews regard Jesus as a martyred Jew, killed by the Romans for political insurrection. The N.T. account of Jesus' death, to a Jew, is inaccurate because it conflicts with the manner in which Jewish trials were conducted in Jesus' day and was written decades after the fact, at a time when it was expedient to exonerate Roman rulers.

● **Jewish views of a "Generic Christian?"** Catholics, liberal Protestants, and Evangelicals are alike to most Jews, because they are perceived as sharing a Christian history of persecuting Jews. "The question of whether or not a true ideal Christianity exists apart from the way it has been practiced by its devotees for almost two millennia must be raised."

● **Missionary activity directed at Jews.** Christians may claim their love for Jews motivates their zeal to convert them. "Jews challenge those genuinely seeking to love Jews to express it in a manner Jews themselves desire, by preserving the integrity and survival of the Jewish people." Groups such as "Jews for Jesus" are resented as fronts for evangelical trickery. A weekly TV show, "The Jewish Voice," is actually a Christian missionary program. In Chicago, ads in Russian and Hebrew in Jewish neighborhoods invited Jewish immigrants to "Congregation Adat Hatikvah" for Jewish food and socializing. The sponsor was a proselytizing Christian group.

HOW TODAY'S JEWS FEEL TOWARDS:

Catholics—relations are "vigorous and favorable" since the 1965 Vatican II statement repudiating the deicide charge and strongly condemning anti-Semitism.

Mainline Protestants—though liberal white Protestants are the least anti-Semitic Christians on questions pertaining to Jews, they have also become the leading Christian antagonists of Israel. The long alliance between liberal Protestants and Jews on social justice matters has been threatened by the National Council of Churches' recent anti-Israel statements. The shift among Jews to more conservative positions lately and their primary concern for Israel has increasingly put them more in accord with conservative Christians.

Evangelicals—leave Jews "confused and ambivalent." Jews applaud the Moral Majority's pro-Israel views. Yet they believe that the evangelical right tend to be the most anti-Semitic Christians. Dialog between Jews and evangelicals has just begun in the last decade. Its overriding concern is that their central commissions clash: evangelicals exist to proclaim the Christian gospel to all, including Jews; Jews see as their purpose to survive as Jews. The hope for relations, therefore, is in a sensitive give-and-take. To Jews, this means asking evangelicals to witness "through dialog, decently and courteously, by model, teaching and cooperation and without intentions to convert."

The book is available at local bookstores (\$13.95) or as a gift with a contribution (tax deductible) of \$100 or more.

over

FUNDAMENTALIST JOURNAL

December 1984



by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein

Only when Fundamentalists make the supreme attempt to understand the indigenous Jewish experience and condition—that which has brought Jews joy and pain—can they ever hope to glean insight into the Jewish psyche; only then will they be able to develop a semblance of awareness of Jewish perceptions of them or “love” for them.

There is a Jewish story told of a young student who exclaimed to his Rabbi one day, “Rabbi, I love you dearly!” The Rabbi, who was both touched and amused by this outburst of emotion said, “Tell me, my son, where do I hurt?” The bewildered student replied, “Rabbi, I do not know what ails you but I love you nonetheless.” To this the Rabbi responded, “But how can you say you love me when you do not even know where I hurt; when you are not even aware of that which brings me joy or pain?”

Jews are a people whose ethos has been indelibly imprinted by their collective historical past. Their perceptions of Christian piety and Fundamentalism have, likewise, been shaped in light of their 2,000-year encounter with those forces. In truth, only when Fundamentalists make the supreme attempt to understand the indigenous Jewish experience and condition—that which has brought Jews joy and pain—can they ever hope to glean insight into the Jewish psyche; only then will they be able to develop a semblance of awareness of Jewish perceptions of them or “love” for them.

By and large, American Jews are suspicious of Fundamentalist Christians and leery about cooperating with them. Apart from their overall liberal orientation, which plays a significant role in molding their attitudes toward Fundamentalism of any kind, Jews have a keen memory and sense of history. Many still bear deep-rooted scars from prior Jewish encounters with Christian orthodoxy and Fundamentalism. Their visceral reaction toward Christian Fundamentalists, seeking as they do to convert them from their Jewish faith—frequently through overly aggressive, offensive means—is nurtured in the memory of the long and painful history of Christian triumphalism and of the many such prior attempts over the past 2,000 years. Inquisitions, Crusades, pogroms, blood libels, ghettos, degradation, humiliation, intolerance, death, and martyrdom—these are some of the images conjured up in the minds of Jews, and some of the

anguishing associations they frequently make when they consider those who seek to “win the world over for Jesus Christ.” Even the cross, which for Christians is a symbol of God’s unbounding love for humanity, is for many Jews, a stark reminder of their past suffering under its banner. Sadly, Fundamentalists are often totally unaware of these Jewish associations and sensitivities. Certainly Christian proselytizers (who tend to be Fundamentalists) are viewed as threatening the central Jewish commission today—to survive as a Jewish peoplehood—and as challenging the integrity of Jews and their ancestral faith.

Decades of dialogue and social interaction between Jews and mainline Protestants and Catholics have helped to allay many of these anxieties and to dispel many of these stereotypes and associations. However, Jews essentially still tend to perceive Fundamentalists against such a backdrop. These perceptions are reinforced in the Jewish mindset by Fundamentalists who, wittingly or unwittingly, make insensitive or intolerant remarks about Jews and Judaism or who, by their statements and policies, threaten the foundation of religious pluralism in America and try to erode Jewish civil and religious liberties. Claims such as those made by certain leading Fundamentalists, for example, that Christians should strive toward making America into a “Christian nation,” that God does not hear the prayers of a Jew, that Jews control the media and the city of New York, or that Jews are an ungodly people concerned only with money and power, tend to confirm some of the deepest Jewish fears and suspicions.

Jews generally believe that they can have greater religious freedom, and can thrive better as individuals and as a community, in open secular societies that are rooted in strong moral and religious underpinnings—but that do not dictate or legislate religion—than they can in “religious” ones, which they fear would sooner or later become exclusivist, sectarian, and “Christian” in nature. Jews today are preeminently aware that the forces of universalism, secularism, liberalism,

and enlightenment—and the *breakdown* of “public religion” in Christian-dominated Europe, and the supplanting of religious rule with a secularist model—brought them emancipation and new religious, civic, and socio-economic opportunities in the Western world. However, many Jews feel these very same values are being compromised and threatened by the Fundamentalist community.

Jewish perceptions of Fundamentalists are more complex than these brief comments may suggest. For while much of their religious and political agenda may be anathema to a large segment of Jews, Fundamentalist positions on another issue of critical concern to Jews—Israel—tend to be extremely favorable. This phenomenon leads some Jews to embrace Fundamentalists, some to seek selective cooperation with them on the matter of Israel and on other issues of mutual concern, and still others to reject their offers of help and friendship in the belief that Fundamentalist support for Israel is part of a ploy to convert them and is contingent upon their eventual acceptance of Jesus Christ.

Whether these are, indeed, Fundamentalist motives, and whether Jewish anxieties are, in fact, warranted is, however, only one aspect of the matter. That many, if not most, Jews tend to *perceive* Fundamentalists in this way is of great import. Only by sharing together in dialogue and mutual respect, and learning to understand each other as we truly are, not as we are stereotyped to be, can either community ever hope to develop accurate perceptions of the other and a genuine appreciation for each other's values and religious traditions. Only then can they come to genuinely know and perhaps even *love* each other, and in the midst of such a relationship find the one living God, Creator of *all* humanity.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein is president of the Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews, Chicago, Illinois, which seeks to build better Christian-Jewish relations and a united base of support for Israel. He is the author of the recently published **What Christians Should Know About Jews & Judaism** (Word, Inc.).

Chicagoan a Jewish apostle to Gentiles



Bruce Buursma
Religion writer

RABBI YECHIEL Eckstein is a modern Orthodox Jew who often has occupied Christian pulpits, appeared on major fundamentalist television talk shows and doggedly charted a course over the rugged American interfaith terrain that has left him disappointed at times but never daunted.

At 33, the Chicago-based rabbi has emerged as a major American Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, a relentless proponent of closer cooperation and deeper understanding between the adherents of two of the world's major religious groups.

When Rev. Bailey Smith, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, declared that God does not hear Jewish prayers, Rabbi Eckstein invited Rev. Smith to accompany him on a tour of sacred sites in Israel.

Since then, the rabbi has preached in Rev. Smith's home church in Oklahoma, and the repentant Southern Baptist pastor has signed on as a board member of Rabbi Eckstein's new foundation, the Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews.

THE NATIONAL organization, based in Chicago's Loop, is sponsoring a prayer breakfast and rally Tuesday in the Union League Club here. The invitation-only event is called a "Morning of Christian and Jewish Solidarity with Israel."

The gathering will bring together an improbable mixture, including Msgr. John Egan of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago; Rev. Robert Schmidgall of Naperville's Calvary Assembly of God Temple; Charles H. Goodman, president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago; Israeli Consul General Emanuel Zippori; and, by videotape, Rev. Jerry Falwell, the outspoken political activist and evangelist from Lynchburg, Va.

The keynote speaker will be Robert Billings, a former administrator of the fundamentalist Hyles-Anderson College near Hammond and a founder of Moral Majority Inc. Billings is an appointee of the Reagan administration in the U.S. Department of Education.

"We're trying to bring to a head Christian-Jewish relations in Chicago," said Rabbi Eckstein. "We want to move away from business-as-usual and force people on both sides to ask the hard questions. Do Jews want to engage in dialogue with Christians? Are Christians willing to repudiate anti-Semitism?"

FOR A LONG time, Rabbi Eckstein has been centrally involved in formal and informal Jewish-Christian encounters, working for seven years in Chicago as the national codirector of interreligious affairs for the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

In that time, he was instrumental in establishing Jewish contacts with leaders of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian groups, a conservative segment of American Christianity. The alliances forged from that effort have stirred controversy in both religious communities, but Rabbi Eckstein contends that the possibilities for cooperation outweigh painful past divisions between the two camps.

For example, the rabbi's recently published book, "What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism," was issued by Word Books, a major evangelical communications company in Waco, Tex. And the fundamentalist Christian affection for Israel, growing out of the importance placed on the establishment of the Jewish state in the fundamentalist's interpretation of Biblical prophecy, appears to have increased in recent years, at a time when many mainline Christian figures are speaking out for greater attention to the Palestinian cause in the Middle East.

The security and prosperity of Israel is a critical concern for most American Jews, and despite misgivings over the ultimate theological intentions of fundamentalists, many have embraced these conservative Christians as allies on that issue.

"**BY AND LARGE**, American Jews are still suspicious of fundamentalist Christians and leery about cooperating with them," Rabbi Eckstein acknowledged.

"Many still bear deep-rooted scars from prior Jewish encounters with Christian orthodoxy and fundamentalism. Inquisitions, Crusades, pogroms, blood libels, ghettos, degradation, humiliation, intolerance, death and martyrdom—these are some of the images conjured in the minds of Jews when they consider those who seek to 'win the world for Jesus Christ.'"

But the rabbi said that through frank face-to-face exchanges, a fresh understanding can be accomplished. "Change is possible," he said. "There have been more bridges built between Jews and Chris-

tians in the last 20 years than the previous 2,000 years.

"We don't want to homogenize the faiths. We want Christians to be better Christians and Jews to be better Jews, because if they are, we can perhaps respect and even love each other and in the midst of such a relationship, find the one living God, Creator of all humanity."

over

Chicago's 'unorthodox' rabbi

HE DREAMS OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN JEWS AND CHRISTIANS

"One of my daughters had a friend over for the Sabbath weekend, and somehow we began talking about a person who's not Jewish. The friend said, 'Oh, she's a goya.' My daughter asked, 'What's a goya?' and I said, 'It's like a Christian.' And then the other child asked, 'What's a Christian?' That was such a telling exchange. I am convinced that we pass along our biases generation to generation, sometimes without even realizing it. I'm saying, 'Isn't it time to stop and examine that?'"

Yechiel Eckstein

By Mary Gillespie

Yechiel Eckstein knows he has developed a reputation for being... well... different.

"I think I've become sort of a curiosity, like 'Oh, here comes Eckstein, what's he up to now?'" admits the handsome, 33-year-old Orthodox rabbi. "What I'm doing is unique, and it is controversial."

What he's doing is religious bridge-building. It's a pursuit he hopes will help span the religious and cultural chasm separating Jews from Christians—especially evangelical and fundamentalist Christians.

This month, Eckstein is celebrating the first anniversary of his Holyland Fellowship of Christians and Jews. Essentially a one-man operation housed in a small downtown office, the fellowship represents his lifelong quest to chip away at what he believes are America's outdated and counterproductive religious barriers. It can be a risky business at times, he admits, both financially and socially. He left a stable job with B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League to launch the fellowship, and now is dependent on benefactors to fund it. (They've provided a heartening \$85,000 this year, he reports.)



The lighting of the Sabbath candles is a moment full of anticipation for Yechiel and Bonnie Eckstein's daughters: 6-year-old Talia (from left), 2-month-old Yael and 7-year-old Tamar.

Then there are the sidelong glances from those who just don't understand—or approve—what he's doing. One of those, he admits with a wry smile, is his father-in-law, well-known American Jewish Congress leader Henry Siegman.

"I'm not trying to homogenize religions," stresses the eighth-generation rabbi, the first of his clan to be born in this country, who calls himself the "black sheep" of his Orthodox family. "I'm trying to engender a little understanding and respect between them."

"I started out with a dream (of starting the fellowship) and no money," he recalls. "Even to me, it sometimes seemed preposterous to dream that we could bring Jews and Christians together in understanding. In the case of fundamentalists and evangelicals, it was virgin territory, uncultivated field. I came to realize how large a body of the American population hadn't been exposed to any dialogue with Jews—or, for that matter, to Jews."

Eckstein's recently released book, *What Christians Should Know About Jews and Judaism*, lights the path for such Christians who may wonder, as Eckstein puts it, "what makes Jews tick." It is a practical treatise on Jewish culture, beliefs and traditions that is helpful for all non-Jews—but especially so for fundamentalist and evangelical Christians, who typically have far less contact with Jews than Catholics and main-line Protestants.

"Language, for instance, can be totally different in the context of one or another community," he explains. "Several years ago, after Bailey Smith (then leader of America's Southern Baptist Convention) made his much-publicized remark about God not hearing the prayers of Jews, I convinced him and some of his associates to join us on a tour of Israel."

"At one point, I stopped in the marketplace near Jerusalem, and came out with a present for my kids. One of the Baptists traveling with us asked me how much it cost,



SUN-TIMES/Tony Vaccaro

Each morning, the rabbi spends a few quiet moments with his prayers. The phylacteries are wrapped about the head and arms to symbolize how the scriptures should remain close to the mind and heart.

and I said \$10. He replied, 'Oh, you could have Jewed them down to \$5.'

"There are so many instances like that—quite often innocent misunderstandings based on ignorance or misinformation," Eckstein says with a sigh, then a smile. "That's the struggle."

For Jews' part, he adds, there's plenty to learn about Christians—especially those who believe they've been "born again"—with whom they must coexist.

"Right here in Chicagoland we have what is frequently called 'the Vatican of the evangelical movement.' There are more than 30 major evangelical institutions based in or near Wheaton.

"The image of them as some kind of rednecks is just not based in reality. The current president of the United States is an evangelical Christian; the immediate past president is a Southern Baptist evangelical. I'm not even talking about the administrations with which they surround themselves."

"Jews can no longer afford the luxury of having no contact with or understanding of the estimated 60 million people in this country who call themselves evangelicals," he adds. "It's not enough for a Jew to say, 'A goy is a goy' or for a non-Jew to say that 'Jews are insular; they won't change.' Those who do are living dangerously in the past."

Eckstein has become well-known for his pragmatic approach to Jewish-Christian understanding; he responds to current events swiftly and with action.

After Nation of Islam minister Louis Farrakhan made his recent scathing remarks about Israel and the Jewish religion, for instance, Eckstein flew to Dallas and enlisted the support of leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, the nation's largest Protestant denomination, boasting about 14.6 million members. They issued a statement, which was carried in many newspapers across the country, deploring Farrakhan and urging all Christians to support Israel.

Such savvy in handling the media and swaying politicians to publicly support his cause has enabled Eckstein to put the Holyland Fellowship on the national map within a single year. Where did he acquire such aplomb?

He pauses, pondering the question. Then, he answers simply, "I believe in what I do. That's all. It's like sex, I guess—if you use all the books and make it mechanical, you lose all the passion. Everyone must be passionate about something. What good is work, or life, if there is no passion?"

Despite long workdays and ever-heavier workloads, Eckstein is as passionate about making time for his family—wife Bonnie and

daughters Tamar, 7, Talia, 4, and 2-month-old Yael—as he is about his many other personal and professional pursuits. For the foreseeable future, he says, his work is here. His once-fond dream of moving to Israel will have to wait.

There are other dreams, too, waiting in the wings.

"There was a time when I dreamed about being a senator. Then I realized how many compromises politicians are forced to make. But I'm still young..."

Meanwhile, besides running the fellowship, Eckstein serves as chief rabbi at Michigan Ave.'s Park Synagogue. He is on the faculty of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard and the Chicago Theological Seminary. He serves on the American Refugee Committee, which provides medical aid to displaced Thais and Cambodians. A former cantor, he also is an accomplished guitarist who entertained Israeli troops during the 1973 war. He has recorded four albums of Israeli-Hasidic music.

But it's the fellowship—and the vision behind it—that is his true love.

"I dream, I pray, that a day will come when I can be freed of the mechanical things—the fund-raising, the office work—and just be able to pursue the vision. The best and truest work is in following that vision."