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Confronting Hate:
The Untold Story of the Rabbi
Who Stood Up for Human Rights,
Racial Justice, and Religious Reconciliation

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The long subtitle of this admiring biography may seem excessive to those who have never heard of Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, the renowned interfaith and civil rights activist of the last century who was called “Secretary of State for the Jews” (p. 37) and the “foremost Apostle to the Gentiles” (pp. 174, 331). However, Tanenbaum practically invented what it means to work in the field of interreligious engagement, serving as the director of interreligious affairs for more than 20 years at the American Jewish Committee beginning in 1961. This book was co-written by a husband and wife team who worked with and deeply admired Tanenbaum and who also considered him a friend. It is a fascinating read for students, clergy, and laity interested in what some have called the golden age of Christian-Jewish relations in the United States, the period from the promulgation of the Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra Aetate* in 1965, which broke with centuries of Christian anti-Judaism, through the civil rights coalitions of the 1970s and ‘80s

Relying on contemporary interviews, oral histories, documents at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, and AJC archives, the authors are able to animate momentous events with the hope that the lessons of Tanenbaum’s leadership will “inspire those who want to bring about lasting social and political change” (p. x).

The key chapters focus on Tanenbaum’s work with religious leaders in Jewish-Christian relations and with African-American and other civil rights leaders, as well as his efforts to rescue Jews who wished to leave the former Soviet Union. The book also includes a chapter on Tanenbaum’s complicated relationship with Rev. Billy Graham, the prominent Evangelical Christian minister, and Tanenbaum’s efforts to rescue Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees after the United

States exited the Vietnam War. In the authors' views, "Marc was a strong believer in the separation of Church and State but he was also a strong believer in utilizing the intersection of religion and public policy as fertile ground for interreligious understanding" (p. 41).

The book provides a window on the dynamics that formed his personality, philosophy, and work ethic from his early family life, to his study at Yeshiva University and his ordination at the Jewish Theological Seminary, to his brief stint in public relations, followed by more than six years as head of the Synagogue Council of America and his long career at AJC. About a third of the book is devoted to the last dozen years of his life, with a focus on his courtship and marriage to his second wife, Georgette Bennett. While these chapters are highly personal and subjective, they do provide a window on the challenges faced by those trying to maintain a balance between public and private life.

The book includes photos of Tanenbaum with significant religious leaders and a few family photos. It does not have footnotes but does include a list of people who were originally interviewed for inclusion in the Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Oral History Archive. It also includes a total of thirteen pages of chapter notes (with both sources and recommendations for further study) and an index.

The changing relationship between Catholics and Jews is a major focus of the book. The authors explain how his arrival at AJC, on the cusp of the momentous changes wrought in Catholic teachings at Vatican II, was fortuitous for the young Tanenbaum, for AJC, and for Jewish relations with Christianity in its myriad forms. There is an entire section, some 76 pages, on Vatican II and AJC's efforts, both publicly and behind the scenes, to convince key prelates of the need to reject the traditional deicide charge against the Jews. Much of this material will be familiar to students of Catholic-Jewish relations, but new insights are offered in the close attention given to Tanenbaum's role. The authors show the opposition he faced from diverse Jewish groups during Vatican II. Tanenbaum and the AJC were attacked by prominent Orthodox rabbis who accused them of becoming involved "in areas of theology in which they have no competence." At the same time, the major association of Reform rabbis attacked Tanenbaum and AJC for "obsequious appeals" to the Vatican which were "insulting to the Jewish spirit" (p. 117).

Tanenbaum worked with other Christian groups and leaders. As with Vatican II, he had to overcome skeptics within the Jewish community, for example, in his outreach to prominent Evangelical Rev. Billy Graham, who visited AJC in 1969 at Tanenbaum's invitation. That meeting led to subsequent communication between Graham and Tanenbaum and several frank exchanges as well as to joint meetings to discuss scripture, theology, and history.

Tanenbaum's important work for racial justice is also included. In 1963 he became involved in the National Conference on Religion and Race. At the conclave, Tanenbaum introduced Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Tanenbaum would later serve as president of another civil rights organization, the Interreligious Foundation for Community Organizations (IFCO). However, he resigned from that position in 1969 in response to demands from black students that IFCO support their call for reparations and because of their advocacy

of civil unrest. Continuing his civil rights work, Tanenbaum participated in a forum with Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1987 despite demonstrations by Jewish extremists.

Until his death in 1992, Tanenbaum continued to strike “a crucial balance between public relations and real dialogue, between advocacy and substantive communication, between diplomacy and authenticity” (p. 308). To the end, he showed “Jews how to be in the world” (p. 309). This book does a fine job showcasing his many contributions.