

**Jewish
Community
Relations
Council**
OF NEW YORK, INC.

JACK D. WEILER CENTER FOR INTERGROUP RELATIONS
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Religious Zionists of America
Suffolk Jewish Communal Planning Council
UJA-Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of NY
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism
Westchester Jewish Conference
WIZO-Women's International Zionist Organization
Women's American ORT, NY District
Workmen's Circle
Zionist Organization of America

The JCRC is a beneficiary of the UJA-Federation

November 8, 1999

The Rev. Dr. Paige Patterson
President, Southern Baptist Convention
c/o SEBTS
PO BOX 1889
Wake Forest, NC 27588-1889
VIA FAX (919) 556-8550

Dear Rev. Patterson:

As leaders of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York (JCRC), the central resource and coordinating body for over 60 Jewish organizations, and heads of the four Rabbinical Seminaries representing the major branches of Judaism, we feel compelled to respond to your letter of September 24, 1999 to Dr. Philip Abramowitz, Director of JCRC's Task Force on Missionaries and Cults.

We acknowledge and appreciate the Southern Baptist Convention's (SBC) stand on religious freedom which is on par with the Jewish communal position. We support and defend the right of all Christians to proclaim the tenets of their faith.

Our quarrel with the Southern Baptist Convention is not over its right to proselytize. Rather, the Jewish community is deeply offended that the SBC has formally embraced a strategy that attempts to deceive Jews into believing that one can be both a Jew and Christian.

The deceptive forms of proselytizing endorsed by the SBC are constitutionally protected behavior. However, when symbols and rituals, sacred exclusively to Judaism, are expropriated for use as props for the sake of converting Jews to a distinctly different religion, to us that behavior is deceptive.

Deception is a harsh word, but we have chosen it carefully. Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary defines *deceive* as: "to cause to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid." The evidence clearly shows that the SBC grants license to deception:

- The SBC supports "Messianic" conversion methods, indeed, the Convention's actions and words all point to a wholehearted endorsement of these deceptive tactics.
- You have co-convened with a "Messianic" organization the recent "To the Jew First ..." Conference in New York City.
- You participated in a "Sukkot" festival at Calvary Baptist Church in New York City.
- The statements of Don Kammerdiener, Executive Vice President of SBC's International Missions Board, refer to so-called Messianic synagogues as part of a "... powerful movement ... where they [i.e. Jewish converts] worship Christ the Messiah ..." (Days of Awe Prayer Guide, Sept. 1999).
- The statement made by Mark Kelly, quoted as a Southern Baptist spokesperson who said, "When you become a Christian, you become more of a Jew ... you become more Jewish than ever." (Philadelphia Inquirer, Sept. 10, 1999).

All the movements within Judaism have jointly averred that conversion to Christianity removes one from participation in Jewish communal life and that the Christian belief in, and worship of, Jesus is incompatible with any authentic form of Jewish practice. This position has been fully articulated in the enclosed document, "Meeting the Challenge: Hebrew Christians and the Jewish Community", which received the endorsement of the Rabbinical seminaries of the four major Jewish denominations (i.e. Conservative, Orthodox, Reform and Reconstructionist.)

As stated in the document, there is no disagreement among the Jewish movements that:

Though Hebrew Christianity claims to be a form of Judaism, it is not ... It deceptively uses the sacred symbols of Jewish observance ... as a cover to convert Jews to Christianity, a belief system antithetical to Judaism ... Hebrew Christians are in radical conflict with the communal interests and the destiny of the Jewish people. They have crossed an unbreachable chasm by accepting another religion. Despite this separation, they continue to attempt to convert their former co-religionists.

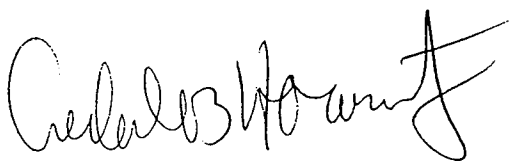
The entire Jewish community is of one accord on the above set of principles. Those who adopt another religion discard any true connection with their Jewish faith and heritage, thus making any claim at Jewish identification devoid of meaning, disingenuous and, ultimately, false. The Jewish community does not seek to define the parameters of Christianity. We ask that Southern Baptists accord the Jewish religion the same courtesy.

Jewish converts to Christianity may pray in so-called synagogues, they may go through the motions of observing Jewish holidays, they may even use Hebrew words and Jewish rituals, but

their religion is Christianity, not Judaism. To claim otherwise is wrong. You say that you do not want to offend. Please understand, the Southern Baptist Convention's support for this mis-use of core Jewish symbols, rituals and terminology is not merely offensive, it is deceptive.

Please understand, too, that this exchange of opinions is consistent with the atmosphere of religious liberty that Jews and Baptists both crave. But we must call on the Southern Baptist Convention to depart from this deceptive and offensive road that has been taken.

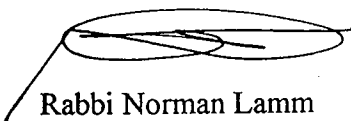
Sincerely,



Gedale B. Horowitz
President,
Jewish Community Relations Council



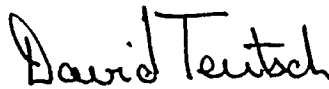
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