

Christian activist tries to mend ties with Jews

ADL chief welcomes 'new beginning'

By Larry Witham
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Ralph Reed, executive director of the Christian Coalition, last night offered an olive branch to Jewish leaders by pledging to educate his constituency about gentile persecution of and insensitivity to Jewry.

He added, however, that accusations of extremism and anti-Semitism should likewise not be hurled lightly at Christian conservatives.

"I have an obligation to teach that history, however painful it may be, to our members and supporters," Mr. Reed said in an address to the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL) in Washington. "I want you to know I intend to do this."

Citing the Holocaust, Easter Sunday pogroms, ghettos and the "Christ-killer" slur, he said, "We

will never forget what you endured as a people."

But he said Christians today face the same stereotyping and bigotry that once burdened Jews.

"In the same century in which the Holocaust occurred, to be accused of anti-Semitism is the most serious and grave charge that can be leveled against a citizen," he said.

He also criticized attacks on Christians by the secular media and people who oppose them for wanting to express their values in democratic politics. "This kind of bigotry . . . is a threat to Jews and Christians alike," Mr. Reed said.

ADL National Director Abraham Foxman told the meeting of 200 Jewish leaders that Mr. Reed's talk was "courageous" and marked a "significant step, in fact a new beginning, between our two

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communities." But he stressed, "We do not condemn or characterize religious conservatives as anti-Semitic."

Mr. Foxman said the main differences still dividing the two groups are church-state issues and the Christian Coalition's use of the term "Christian nation" to de-

scribe their goals for the United States.

"We simply differ on basic points of constitutional law, particularly regarding separation of church and state," Mr. Foxman said.

Last night's session was the latest in a series of steps toward improving ties between conservative Christian and Jewish leaders since last June, when an ADL booklet accused coalition founder

Pat Robertson of fanning intolerance and turning a blind eye to anti-Semitism.

In November, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, founder of International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, brought together leaders from both sides for a successful heart-to-heart talk at a private session here.

Last month the clash resumed when Mr. Foxman asked Mr. Robertson to explain a warning

against "European bankers" in his 1991 book, "The New World Order"

Last night, Mr. Foxman asked Mr. Reed to persuade Mr. Robertson to explain the book and "to purge himself of conspiracy theories."

Mr. Reed emphasized that the Christian Coalition does not seek to create an "officially Christian" nation. "But like our founding fathers, we also believe that we are a

deeply religious nation."

He said the loss of this religious culture would threaten the vitality of both Christian and Jewish faiths and value systems.

"Religious conservatives have at times been insensitive and have lacked a full understanding of the horrors experienced by the Jewish people," for which some segments of Christianity "have a measure of culpability," he said.

He cited slights against Jews

such as the remark of a Southern Baptist leader that "God does not hear the prayer of a Jew," or the tendency of Christians to focus "patronizing philo-Semitism" on Israel but on no other Jewish concerns.

Yet, he said, those who have made conservative evangelicals, traditional Catholics and some Eastern Orthodox "an object of fear and anxiety" are setting the stage for the same discrimination.