



## On Jews For Jesus

There was an effort in San Francisco last week to start an organization called Christians for Moses. But it died aborning, for instructive reasons.

The idea arose, of course, because of the excitement over recent attempts to convert Jews to Christianity. First, there was the news about Pat Boone busily baptizing Jews in his Hollywood pool. Then there was that full page ad in the San Francisco Chronicle showing some ex-Jews smiling happily into the camera. And everyone knows how solemn Jews are in their unconcerned state. Now, there's all the local attention in the newspapers to an organization known as Jews for Jesus.

All of this titillating furor adds up to practically nothing in round numbers. On a hot afternoon, there are more Jews splashing around in the Jewish Community Center pool than there have been cumulatively in Pat Boone's, not counting unconverted movie producers. And Jews for Jesus carries about the same weight and conviction as those letterheads which read Democrats for Goldwater. Or Republicans for Bella Abzug. Of all of the concerns which Jews have about the possible diminution of Judaism, these proselytizing efforts certainly belong at the bottom of the list. Maybe lower.



Roab

**Then why do so many Jews get so disturbed? Probably because of History, which Jews carry around with them like an extra sensory organ. Conversion wasn't always a matter of sweet Suasion. Throughout much of Western History, Jews were faced with the alternatives of conversion or expulsion, conversion or death, conversion or torture. There's that memory.**

But even after things became a little more civilized, there were strenuous evangelizing efforts. The Berlin Society for the Spread of Christianity among the Jews was founded in 1823. The efforts at persuasion have been constant. A society to evangelize Jews has been headquartered on Clement Street in San Francisco for many years.

Some local parents have expressed concern about the susceptibility of their college-age youth to such phenomena as the Jesus Freaks. In the midst of a religious revival there is undoubtedly some of that, although the impression is that more Bay Area Jewish youth are experimenting with Zen Buddhism than with fundamentalist Christianity. The largest mass conversions of Jews- by persuasion- probably occurred when Jews were making the dazzling transition from ghetto to European society. One creditable estimate is that there were about a quarter of a million Jews who converted during that period.

However, the flow is in the other direction, now. We may have the most stable Jewish ranks since the medieval ghettos. And organized efforts to convert Jews aren't changing that.

Perhaps one of the reasons people are nevertheless disturbed by these efforts is the intimation that Judaism is an inferior religion and deserves defection. Indeed, it was only a few years ago that a Pope was able to acknowledge that Judaism was a valid religion in itself. And a recent University of California study found that Jews still present a theological puzzle to many Christian clergymen.

And that connects with the failure of Christians for Moses to get off the ground. The first Christian who was asked to join Christians for Moses, said, with some bewilderment: "I already am." And indeed they are. After all, Christianity is just supposed to represent a higher stage of the Judaism on which it is built. And that's why it's always been so troubling to some Christian evangelizers when the Jews themselves didn't come along. But if it couldn't be done with the sword, it can't be done with newspaper ads and swimming pools.