



Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations
of America

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MEMORANDUM

CONFIDENTIAL

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DATE: Sivan 3, 5722
June 5, 1962

TO: Mr. Max Stern, Chairman, Joint Overseas Commission

FROM: Dr. Samson R. Weiss

SUBJECT: London Meetings

*Copy for Rabbi
Lamm*

In keeping with our discussion of Tuesday, May 15th, I set up a series of meetings in London. Haham Dr. Solomon Gaon checked with Chief Rabbi Brodie as to the best available dates. It was determined that my presence in London at the occasion of the meeting of the Standing Committee of the Chief Rabbis' Conference would be advisable and should be combined with the purpose of my trip. Accordingly, I left for London on Saturday night, May 26th and arrived in time to participate in the afternoon session of the Standing Committee. This committee is in charge of carrying out the resolutions adopted at the Biennial Chief Rabbis' Conferences which Dr. Brodie initiated six years ago. Three of these conferences have taken place. The fourth one is scheduled for May, 1963 in Basel, Switzerland.

Participants in this conference were: Dr. Brodie, Dr. Gaon, Rabbi Grunwald (Hamburg), Dayan Dr. Lew (London), Grand Rabbin Schilli (Paris), Chief Rabbi Schuster (Amsterdam), Oberrabbiner Taubes (Zurich), Chief Rabbi Toaff (Rome), and Rabbi Rose, the Secretary of Chief Rabbi Brodie.

Of interest to us are the following issues, given here in condensed form:

(A) CALENDAR REFORM

In view of a recent statement in the Osservatore Romano that the Pope favors Calendar Reform among other reasons for the purpose of obtaining a fixed day for Easter, there is great danger that such a reform may be introduced through the United Nations. When Calendar Reform proposals came up last in 1954, it was the resistance of the Catholic Church which played a great role in the defeat of these proposals.

The Pope now agrees to a reform which would divide the year in four equal quarters of 91 days each, a total of 364 days. The last day of the year, and in Leap Years the two last days, would be uncounted, unnamed "blank days". Thus, each year would begin with a Sunday as would each quarter. Accordingly, the Shabbos would fall each year on a different day of the official week - a terrible danger to the maintenance of Jewish life.

It was decided to revive the Committee for the Fixity of the Sabbath, which was active in 1954, with headquarters in London to coordinate all defense activities. I informed the Chief Rabbi that Rabbi Immanuel Jakobovits had been asked by Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein to coordinate our activities here. In 1954, while occupying the position of Chief Rabbi of Ireland, Rabbi Jakobovits had played a major part

in establishing successful liaison with the Catholic Church in this matter and specifically with the official Astronomer of the Vatican. As of this writing, Rabbi Jakobovits has already communicated with Chief Rabbi Brodie and has also written to the Vatican Astronomer. The Calendar Reform proposal will be taken up by the Ecumenical Council, convened by the Pope for the Fall of this year. Once this Council has reached an official decision, it will be well nigh impossible to change any position taken. Our efforts, therefore, must be undertaken speedily.

I suggested the following approach: According to official Vatican statements, one of the principal reasons for convening the Ecumenical Council is to join all Biblical faiths in a common defense against the onslaught of Communism and materialism. The introduction of any Calendar Reform involving a blank day would mitigate against this purpose. Firstly, the Christian Seventh Day Adventists (Sabbatist) will never go along with such a scheme. They were very active in 1954 and during prior attempts of Calendar Reform in the defense of the fixity of the Sabbath.

Secondly, the introduction of a blank day would be in direct line with the Communistic-materialistic scheme. It would manifest man's absolute mastery over the universe and deny the existence of a universal order imposed upon this world by its Creator. Russia and India were the countries which actually introduced Calendar Reforms and have been its strong supporters in the U.S. This is a matter of public record.

It was decided to make available to the Vatican our material on Calendar Reform and especially one proposal which substitutes for the blank day a so-called "blank week" every five or six years (based on the Leap Year occurrence) which would maintain the natural order of the days of the week, yet would nevertheless make it possible that the Church dates, such as Easter, be fixed.

In connection with this proposal, I further suggested that we propose the utilization of this blank week as a week of spiritual rededication of humanity, utilizing it for the fostering of religious and spiritual values. A blank day, or two blank days in Leap Years, could not be utilized in this manner. They would become nothing more than prolonged weekends.

There was unanimous consent that the above approach should be taken.

(B) ECUMENICAL COUNCIL

A great deal of discussion evolved on the issue of Jewish participation in the Ecumenical Council. There had been unanimous consent of Jewish religious leaders everywhere that such participation should not be sought and that an invitation to participate should be politely rejected. Since the Ecumenical Council deals with theological issues and is the highest authority of the Catholic Church, our presence is unwarranted and will have only harmful consequences.

Dr. Nahum Goldmann, on behalf of the World Jewish Congress and joined by B'nai B'rith, DAJA (the organization of Argentine Jewry) and the Australian Board of Jewish Deputies, submitted a memorandum to the Vatican, requesting the elimination from the liturgy and the Catechisms of various anti-Jewish statements and phrases. Similarly, the American Jewish Committee submitted a voluminous memorandum, over 100 pages, on the same issues. Dr. Goldmann approached the British Board of Jewish Deputies with the request that this Board become a co-signer of the memorandum. This was opposed by Chief Rabbi Brodie and Nahum Gaon. Dr. Goldmann stated that Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

had told him that he sees not only no objection to such a memorandum if presented by secular groups but on the contrary considers it a duty. Upon inquiry of Naham Gaon, Mr. Feuerstein had checked with Dr. Soloveitchik *by and by* wire and subsequent letter ~~and~~ stated in behalf of Dr. Soloveitchik, that Dr. Goldmann had misquoted him. Still, Dr. Goldmann persisted, at a meeting of the Board of Jewish Deputies and in the presence of Dr. Brodie and Dr. Gaon, that he had not misconstrued Dr. Soloveitchik's remarks. Subsequently, he wrote from America that he had checked once more with Dr. Soloveitchik and that Mr. Feuerstein was incorrect. Thereupon, Dr. Gaon wrote directly to Dr. Soloveitchik asking for immediate clarification.

In the meantime, in spite of their difficult position caused by the statement alleged to Dr. Soloveitchik, the Chief Rabbi and the Naham maintained their opposition. The Standing Committee once more resolved to confirm the position of non-participation.

Chief Rabbi Toaff asked the advice of the committee in his personal situation. He had been approached several times by emissaries of the Cardinals in charge of various phases of the Ecumenical Council. He is hard pressed to indicate his consent to appear as an observer. Non-Catholic Church groups as well as representatives of the Islam have been invited. Why, then, should the Jews not seek participation? When Chief Rabbi Toaff replied that the Jews have no interest in the deliberations of another faith, suddenly the Calendar Reform proposal was quoted to him as a matter of deep concern for the Jews. Upon his reply that an observer can do nothing in this matter anyhow, because word and vote are reserved for the Catholic hierarchy only, it was intimated to him that this might not apply to meetings of the commission of the Ecumenical Council which will deal with the Calendar Reform proposal. Chief Rabbi Toaff now expects to be asked what his attitude would be if an invitation were to be forthcoming, i.e. if he himself would not apply for participation but on the contrary if the Church were to seek his presence. The Vatican is displeased with having been approached by secular groups only. They wish to deal only with religious representatives in connection with the Ecumenical Council. This is why the increasing pressure for rabbinic participation is to be expected. Also the argument has been used that the Chief Rabbi of the city in which the Ecumenical Council will convene does not necessarily represent Jewry in its totality and that his presence, therefore, is innocuous.

The consensus was reached that Chief Rabbi Toaff should indicate to the emissaries that he cannot attend even if invited. He is bound by the decision of the Chief Rabbis' Conference and that as a matter of religious discipline he must decline. It was my feeling that this reply would be the least offensive and the members of the Standing Committee agreed. Dr. Toaff added that in view of the conversion of the previous Chief Rabbi of Rome to Catholicism his participation under any pretext would be most difficult.

There is a possibility, as Chief Rabbi Toaff suspects, that he will be asked to request a "dispensation" from the Chief Rabbis' Conference so that he may be permitted to attend. If this occurs, the matter will be referred to Chief Rabbi Brodie as the presiding officer of the Chief Rabbis' Conference.

Underlying the above decision was the analysis given by Dr. Toaff and agreed upon by the Standing Committee that the Catholic Church will utilise Jewish participation, under whatever pretext or for whatever purpose, for its own ends, publicising it in any way it sees fit. The Catholic Church wants to

emerge from the Ecumenical Council as the leader of all religions and as the defender of faith. It therefore wants the Jews to turn to it as to their patron and protector, thereby acknowledging, forfend, its supremacy.

The prevailing opinion of the Standing Committee was that any changes in liturgy, any stand against anti-Semitism, and any position on Calendar Reform will not be influenced by participation in the Ecumenical Council but be governed solely by the self-interest of the Catholic Church. If our reasons against the Calendar Reform proposal impress them, they will consider them regardless of our presence. If they reject them, our presence would tend to lend their action approval of sorts.

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(C) COJO CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION

The forthcoming COJO World Conference on Education was briefly discussed. The Chief Rabbis share the position taken here that Jewish education is not a proper domain for secular organizations and that, therefore, religious organizations cannot participate. It was noted that the Conservative Movement in the United States has also rejected participation for the same reasons.

Inasmuch as the attempt to organize at this conference separate sessions for Yeshiva education, attended by representatives of the Yeshiva Movement and of religious education, so far did not materialize, it was felt that no change in position is indicated. The organizing of such a parallel convention which would bespeak the autonomy of Torah education, was discussed by Mr. Feuerstein with Dr. Goldmann. The assurances given in this direction, though, have not been carried out as of this writing.

(D) LITERATURE

The dearth of religious literature, especially for youth, was discussed. The need to translate into other languages whatever is available was unanimously agreed upon.

In behalf of the Orthodox Union, I stated that there would be no difficulty in making available our general and youth literature to the European communities and that I would doubtlessly obtain the permission for free reprint and translation of our material, all of which is protected by copyright.

This permission was obtained, in the meantime, by decision of the officers of the Orthodox Union. Accordingly, I sent all our material to the office of Chief Rabbi Brodie and to the office of Haham Gaon, notifying them of this decision. Haham Gaon undertook to have our material translated into Spanish, so that it may be utilized also for Central and South America.

I suggested that the Chief Rabbis' Conference issue an Index or catalogue of all available literature to be circulated among the European rabbis. This Index would include also references as to the granting of free reprint or translation rights, wherever applicable.

- (E) I was requested to name American experts on the Jewish calendar in view of a previous decision of the Standing Committee to investigate the correctness of the commonly accepted date of the Tekufoth, with special reference of the insertion of "Tal U-motor". Doubt as to the correctness of the accepted date (December 4-5) had been expressed by Chacham Pereira of Amsterdam. I named

Dr. Arthur Spier of New York (author of the "Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar") and Professor Hugo Mandelbaum of Detroit, Michigan, who for years has been preparing the calendar for the Detroit Jewish community. Upon my return to New York, I mailed to the Chief Rabbi's office the addresses of these two gentlemen whom I notified of my suggesting them as participants in the study.

(F) NORTH AFRICAN IMMIGRATION TO FRANCE

Grand Rabbin Schilli gave a report on the situation of the North African immigration to France. It is estimated that 50,000 such immigrants are in Marseille and another 50,000 in Paris with similar numbers in adjacent communities. There is a lack of rabbis, teachers, Shochetim and of Jewish schools. The professionals among the immigrants cannot pursue their calling, due to lack of funds to pay them. Therefore, they must seek any kind of work. Rabbi Schilli painted a very dark picture of the situation.

Haham Gaon reported that he had suggested to Otzar Hatorah to establish schools in France, as a logical continuation of its North African work. He expected to meet with Mr. Isaac Shalom, President, and Dr. Hachohen, Executive Director of Otzar Hatorah, the next morning (Tuesday, May 28). Both gentlemen were expected in London on their way to Paris.

It was decided to ask Grand Rabbin Kaplan to make available to the Standing Committee a memorandum describing the needs and making definite proposals how to alleviate them. The Standing Committee went on record expressing its desire to be of all possible help to French Jewry in taking care of the spiritual needs of the immigrants. The consensus was also reached to request of the JDC the allocation of funds for rabbis, teachers and schools.

In this connection I mentioned the statement made by Mr. Feuerstein at our last National Dinner to the effect that the Orthodox Union will request its affiliated congregations to grant Sabbatical leaves to its rabbis for the purpose of dedicating one year's service to communities abroad and that, in fact, one prominent rabbi has already indicated his willingness to go to France under this plan.

(The final session of the Standing Committee took place in the Adler House, with the London Beth Din as the host and the five Dayanim participated in this session. The Sunday and Monday morning sessions took place in Jews' College).

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I omit the enumeration of various other issues discussed because they have no direct bearing on the American Jewish community and on our work. Among them were the problems of unification of conversion procedures, referral of family records, divorces, etc., etc.

I carried away from this meeting the feeling that the presence of an observer representing the Orthodox Union and available to give the participants information on positions and attitudes taken by the American orthodox Jewish community, was welcome and appreciated. In my role as observer, I did not ask for the floor. I gave my opinions and made my suggestions only when requested by the Chairman, Chief Rabbi Brodie. The above report indicates that throughout the meetings, which took place on Sunday and Monday, May 27-28, there were at least six items on the agenda on which the participants were eager to have the American observer state our views.

PRIVATE MEETINGS

While I had occasion Sunday evening and Monday to discuss with Haham Gaon the project of a World Conference of Ashkenazi and Sephardic synagogues, our formal meetings were held on Tuesday and Wednesday forenoon in the office of Chief Rabbi Brodie. In addition to the Chief Rabbi and the Haham, Rabbi Rose was present, acting as Secretary. Dr. Brodie and Dr. Gaon voiced great displeasure with the premature publicity which had emanated from Israel, from the office of Mr. Jaffe. The Chief Rabbi, for instance, did not visit Israel during Pesach to participate in the Conference of Israeli Synagogues but in purely private capacity. Haham Gaon, too, had no intention to, and did not, participate. Yet, press statements announced that Dr. Gaon would come to Jerusalem for this specific purpose. They also felt that the correspondence of Mr. Jaffe with the various Chief Rabbis and communities was unwarranted and harmful. Both are of the opinion that the project must be approached very carefully and that a great deal of preparatory work is to be done. Whether or not Israel should participate in this preparatory work is doubtful.

There was full agreement that a World Conference is necessary. Orthodoxy is being challenged by the deviationist movement, and by the attritions of assimilation. The Communities are drifting away, by the lack of contact and communication with the main centers of Jewish life.

There was furthermore full agreement that there should be no attempt to create a World Union which would immediately present great difficulties to the various national synagogues organizations which would be asked to join such a Union. A conference, on the other hand, imposes no organizational discipline. Every group can participate without giving up any of its autonomies and proper representation is, therefore, more likely.

A World Conference would give us all the benefits we are seeking without any of the liabilities incurred by the creation of a super organization.

In order to execute any resolutions or decisions reached by such a World Conference, a Standing Committee could be formed. This committee would be the link between the communities and be in charge of calling the next World Conference.

In order to convene the first World Conference, there was full agreement that a top leadership meeting of limited attendance must be called. From this meeting would then emanate the call for the World Conference. The Chief Rabbi was willing to issue invitations for such a meeting over his signature, with Haham Gaon as co-signer. Invitations to be directed to Sephardic leaders. The purpose of this leadership conference was determined, upon the insistence of Dr. Brodie to be of ideological character, namely to discuss the ways and means how to show the relevancy of Torah and Halacha to modern man and to modern existence and to dispel the widely spread image of orthodoxy as being backward, reactionary, outdated and "dark". Furthermore, the status of the Jewish communities in the various countries should be discussed at this meeting so that the participants obtain, so to speak, a global picture.

Accordingly, the invitees should be outstanding scholars and men of science whose intellectual position lends weight to their pronouncements and whose call for action will be respected. In addition, a few outstanding lay leaders should participate.

From this meeting shall result a program of action to strengthen Torah life all over the world and, as one of the means of this end, the call for a World Conference.

The meeting shall be unpublicized. The conferees themselves will decide on whatever public statements or calls shall be issued subsequently. Its confidential character must be safeguarded until such statements or calls are issued.

While originally the proposal was made to call such a meeting in conjunction with the Chief Rabbi's Conference in May, 1963, with the World Conference to follow in the Spring of 1964, agreement was reached to call this meeting in December of 1962, with the World Conference to follow in the Fall or Winter of 1963. In view of the retirement of Chief Rabbi Brodie three years hence, announced by himself, I held out for obvious reasons for the earlier date. I also felt that the site of this meeting should be Jews' College in London, in view of the recent controversy. This was accepted by Chief Rabbi Brodie with a great deal of appreciation. As I wrote to him yesterday confirming these tentative arrangements, this would have "a tremendous impact and serve as the best and conclusive evidence of the unchanged or even heightened focal place Jews' College occupies in the intellectual life of Torah-true Jewry". Linn

While no limitation of the number of the prospective invitees was given, the consensus was that it should be a rather small number representing the top level of recognized Jewish scholars and truly outstanding scientists and intellectual leaders of world renown. Dr. Brodie asked that we submit to him on a confidential basis a list of prospective invitees from the United States as soon as possible.

I was also requested to prepare a questionnaire which the Chief Rabbi and the Rahan, respectively, would send out to key men in the various communities to ascertain their status. The results of this questionnaire would be tabulated by the Chief Rabbi's office and made available to the participants prior to the meeting for their study and evaluation.

I repeatedly stressed the need for framing the agenda of the meeting in such a form that practical action and especially the call for a World Conference, will be discussed. Otherwise, this meeting might result in the exchange of opinions, in the delivery of ideological papers, in assignments to publish pamphlets or books on certain issues, etc., etc., but would fail to stir the imagination and evoke the response precisely of those communities which need our help most. I insisted, therefore, on the presence of "practical" men, able to translate into programs of action the postulates of the scholars and scientists convened at this meeting. Dr. Brodie and Dr. Gaon, at our final session, expressed full agreement with these purposes and, accordingly, with the preparatory choice of invitees.

Agreement was reached that the office of the Chief Rabbi and the office of the Orthodox Union should serve, for the time being, as joint secretariats in the pursuance of the above aims.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Samson R. Weiss

cc: Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein, President, UOJCA
Rabbi Charles Weinberg, President, RCA