

February 3, 1967

Rabbi Dr. Bernard D. Bergman
280 Riverside Drive
New York, N. Y. 10025

Dear Dr. Bergman:

Earlier this week I called you over the telephone in order to inform myself of the particulars concerning your charge against the Hebrew University and their invitation to Archbishop Cody of Chicago. I met with the officials of the Hebrew University that same day, this past Monday, and I think it important to relate to you my impressions of that meeting and my opinions, whatever they are worth, on the matter.

First, I think it is exceedingly important to refrain from any exaggerations or extravagances, lest we vitiate the true merit of our argument. Therefore, I would not confuse the proposed "Archbishop Cody Chair In Canon Law" with the teaching about Christianity in general at the Hebrew University. I cannot see any objection to the former and, in fact, the chairman of the department of comparative religion at Hebrew University is a warm, observant Jew who is a "baal teshuvah." Furthermore, I do not believe that the problem is at all one of giving aid and comfort to Christian missions in Israel.

Nevertheless, I was upset by the report of the establishment of this chair, and that is why I called you and attended the meeting with the people from the University.

The information that was given to me, and which I believe to be correct, is that the entire matter was executed by a local public relation's man who had failed to clear the plan with the proper authorities. Once the Archbishop -- who is a most friendly man -- had been visited and the association mentioned, it was obviously impossible to withdraw and administer a slap in the face to him and the entire Catholic community of Chicago.

Moreover, despite the local radio and television announcements, there was no mention in print, or impression given to the Archbishop, that there was to be a chair at the University for Canon Law. Mr. Cherrik

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of Jerusalem specifically told the audience in Chicago that what was planned was a visiting lectureship. This means two or three days a year in which a visiting lecturer will talk about this theme in a series of two or three lectures.

Even more relevant is the question of the nature of the subject to be taught. "Canon Law" is not theology. It is, especially in the context of modern day Israel, the personal status law which governs the Christian community of Israel, even as the Jewish community has its personal status law defined by, "le'havdil," Halakhah, and the Moslem community is governed by Islamic religious law. It is reasonable to assume that a lawyer graduating from the Hebrew University should have some acquaintance with the various legal systems operative in the country.

There can be no doubt that the publicity given to this matter in Chicago was unfortunate, and left some terribly misleading impressions. But it is clear that the matter was not initiated by responsible authorities of the University, or even by the national authorities of the American Friends of the Hebrew University who now find themselves in a serious dilemma.

For these reasons I believe it would be wisest for us to desist from any further comment or involvement in the matter. We, on our side, have all too often found ourselves in embarrassing situations from which it was most difficult to extricate ourselves. We ought, therefore, to be somewhat compassionate when others find themselves equally vexed.

Most important, I believe that from a "K'lal Yisrael" viewpoint, it is best that the matter be allowed to die a quiet death. No one stands to gain from any further exacerbation of this painful issue. The more we involve ourselves in it, the more we appear as the culprits, and the more we allow the notion to prevail in the minds of the American Jewish public that there is, after all, nothing wrong with the teaching of Christianity in a Jewish school.

I have gone to some length because I think the matter is sufficiently important to elaborate upon it. I respectfully submit these comments to you in the hope that you will find them as reasonable as I think they are.

Sincerely yours,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

RNL/fz

cc - Mr. Michael
R. Herschel Schacter
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Chernick
Krasnick
Klavan