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AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992

Box 62, Folder 4, Iraq, 1969.

THE INSTITUTE OF JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN STUDIES

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

SOUTH ORANGE, N. J. 07079

TEL: (201) 762-9000 - EXT. 491

762-8788

January 30, 1969

Dear Rabbi Tanenbaum:

We have just sent the following wire to Secretary General U Thant. Use it as you please.

Outraged by Iraqi summary trials and execution of alleged spies, Muslim, Christian, and Jew, we protest its inhumanity. Identification of those hanged as Jews (see picture, front page, New York Times, January 29) shows anti-Semitic character of trial. Whole affair recalls shame of Hitler's and Stalin's courts. Agree with Times editorial "Peace on the Scaffold." Beg your intervention with Iraqi government not to continue trials and soil Near East with more blood.

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Miss Josephine Casgrain

Miss Jean Rice

Cordially,

Monsignor John Oesterreicher
Monsignor John Oesterreicher

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
American Jewish Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56 Street
New York, New York 10022

JMO:jar

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January 29, 1969

Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum
The American Jewish Committee
Institute of Human Relations
165 East 56th Street
New York, N. Y. 10022

Dear Marc,

With the permission of Humphrey Walz I am enclosing for your information a copy of a special delivery letter on the Iraq situation to Rabbi Balfour Brickner. While other members of the AMEU board are not yet aware of Humphrey's letter on behalf of New York City Presbytery's Near East Committee, I think they would concur. Whether guilty or not, the public display of executions of Jews and others must be emphatically denounced.

Your secretary, Miriam S. Binder has already replied to my letter to you of January 23. I know you are extremely busy and a joint action on the inflammatory Saada leaflet may be difficult at this time. If you will send us a copy or indicate where we can obtain it, we will act unilaterally and consider joint action later, at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Henry Bucher, Jr.
Ecumenical Liaison

HB Jr/AMW

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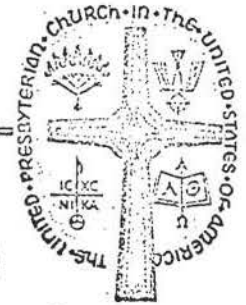
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PRESBYTERY OF NEW YORK CITY

The United Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.

7 WEST 11th STREET, NEW YORK 11, NEW YORK / TELEPHONE WAtkins 4-5620



January 29, 1969

Rabbi Balfour Brickner
Union of American Hebrew Congregations
838 Fifth Avenue
New York, N. Y. 10021

SPECIAL DELIVERY

Dear Rabbi Brickner,

When, last November, you and I chatted together as we strolled away from the Jewish-Christian dialogue arranged by Soule and Klotzle, at the UN Church Center, the inflammatory Mideastern events that have since added to the forebodings of all peace-seeking people were still beyond the horizon.

The most recent developments in Iraq--the spy trials, the manner in which they have been conducted and the nauseous public executions--are particularly disheartening and the sense of depression and frustration they are creating in Christian circles opens the way to remedial interfaith action. In this matter, at least, U Thant speaks for humanity. And the Pope's latest expression of concern makes him the spokesman of all conscientious, knowledgeable churchmen.

If there is anything you can recommend that I might do as New York City Presbytery's Near East Chairman or in any other of my limited capacities to bring immediate compassion and long-range justice to bear upon this situation in a concerted effort of Christian and Jewish Americans (and others, if possible) I shall be most grateful to hear from you.

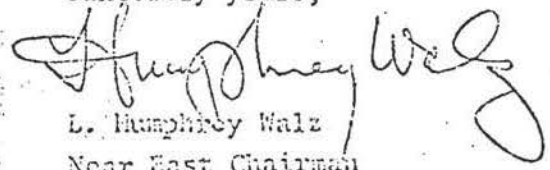
I think that for a first step we could offer haven in our own country for persecuted peoples in the Middle East with specific initial implementation in behalf of those Jews who, fearful of their future, wish to leave Iraq promptly. For the longer view, we could approach some foundation--and/or specifically religious treasuries--to support an investigation of the facts, factors and implications behind the inflammatory spy trials in Iraq.

You may remember that, in connection with my part in your being invited to speak last April at New York Theological Seminary on "A Biblical Basis for the Modern State of Israel?", Benjamin Freedman accused me of "growing fat on the Zionist payroll." I haven't the slightest objection to the risks of being tarred again with the same, or any other defamatory, brush in any endeavors your colleagues and mine may be called into in the spirit of Micah 6:8.

Looking forward to hearing from you soon, I remain

P. S. Carbons go to three others involved in the November dialogue: Bernards, Klotzle and Soule.

Sincerely yours,


L. Humphrey Walz
Near East Chairman

Department of International Affairs

National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.

475 Riverside Drive, New York, N. Y. 10027 Telephone: (212) 870-2724

Arthur S. Flemming, President

R. H. Edwin Espy, General Secretary

Ernest A. Gross
Chairman

Robert S. Bilheimer
Executive Director

January 28, 1969

U Thant, Secretary-General
The United Nations
New York

Dear Mr. Secretary-General:

The staff of the National Council of Churches responsible for all matters related to the Middle East has followed with anguish the mass trials and executions currently under way in Iraq. We want to express to you our deep appreciation of your efforts to press the Iraqi government toward the observance of safeguards of the rights of the accused, and to discourage measures which inflame sentiment and endanger various categories of Iraqi citizens, and which have repercussions that increase tensions in the area.

Our concern is humanitarian. It embraces all who have been, or may be, arrested in connection with the current espionage trials in Iraq, whether they belong to the majority religion or to any of Iraq's minority groups. We look to the United Nations to express the conscience of people throughout the world on this issue, as on issues of human rights elsewhere, and to urge the leaders of Iraq toward the careful observance of due process of law and full respect for the rights of the suspect.

Yours respectfully,


Robert S. Bilheimer

RSB:eb

cc-The Secretary of State of the
United States of America

Kurtis Friedl Naylor, Associate Executive Director • Paul M. Diellenich, Director of Educational Program
J. Murray MacInnes, Director of Southern Africa Affairs • Gerhard A. Elston, Director of Vietnam Affairs
Allan M. Parment, Director of Program in Washington

A Department of the Division of Christian Life and Mission

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R E L I G I O U S N E W S S E R V I C E

FOREIGN SERVICE

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 1969

POPE SAYS RACISM SUSPECTED
IN IRAQ'S EXECUTION OF JEWS

By Religious News Service (1-29-69)

VATICAN CITY (RNS) -- The inclusion of a large percentage of Jews among the persons executed in Iraq for alleged espionage has given rise to suspicions of racism, Pope Paul VI said at his weekly general audience here.

While he disclaimed any intention of judging the merits of the court decision, the Pope said that it may "tragically exacerbate the very difficult situation" in the Middle East.

He noted that he had "respectfully asked for the accused to be dealt with mercifully."

In an address which covered a variety of topics, Pope Paul also referred to fighting in Vietnam and tensions in Africa and Czechoslovakia. But he said that "in the Holy Land the situation is most painful and there peace is troubled by violence and bloodshed." The latter part of his address was devoted to the "alarming crisis of faith" in the Church.

"You know what happened in Iraq," he said, "where numerous executions have taken place, arousing great dismay and great execration in the world."

He noted that, "numbering as they did among the executed no less than nine persons of Jewish extraction," the executions have "given rise to suspicion that a part has been played by racist prejudice -- something we all would wish never to encounter in the already difficult problem of coexistence of civilized people."

"This painful occurrence, in the merits of which we have no intention of interfering, is still for us a source of affliction because, we, too, had respectfully asked for the accused to be dealt with mercifully and because its tragic epilogue can tragically exacerbate the very difficult situation. Let us all pray that God may help them all to solve this very difficult problem."

On the current ferment in the Church, the Pope said that it is more than a case of "growing pains."

"Many say that it is a crisis of growth," he said, "and it is. But is it not also a crisis of faith, a crisis of confidence by some children of the Church in the Church itself?"

The crisis, he said, is accompanied by an impatience for reform which "sometimes reaches the point of imprudence, superficiality, the longing for innovation for innovation's sake..."

"But we know that they are limited phenomena, even if they are real and not unimportant. We know that the Church, on the whole, shows today an extraordinary vitality. There is no doubt that in our Church, which is disputed so much from outside and shaken from within, there is an immense reserve of love."

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

DOMESTIC SERVICE

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 1969

CHURCHMEN CALL ON PRESIDENT
TO CONDEMN IRAQI EXECUTIONS

By Religious News Service (1-29-69)

NEW YORK (RNS) -- Sixteen national Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic leaders here joined in urging President Nixon to condemn the government of Iraq for the mass trial and execution of 14 persons accused of being spies for Israel or of favoring a regime which would make peace with Israel.

The churchmen asked the President to score the action in the United Nations and in contacts with other governments. It was requested that the condemnation be made with "the same vigor with which we have condemned other acts of terrorism and reprisal in the Middle East."

Nine of those killed were Jews. All were citizens of Iraq, an Arab land which is predominantly Muslim. Execution was on Jan. 27.

Signers of the message to Mr. Nixon included Catholic Bishop Joseph L. Bernardin, general secretary of the U.S. Catholic Conference; Archbishop Iakovos, primate of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America, Dr. Ben Mohr Herbster, president of the United Church of Christ, Dr. Edward H. Tuller, general secretary of the American Baptist Convention; Dr. David Hunger, deputy general secretary of the National Council of Churches and four executives of the United Methodist Board of Christian Social Concerns.

The church leaders rejected the Iraqi claim that the executions comprised an internal affair.

"No such trial and execution is ever solely an internal matter," they told the President. "It is, rather, a matter for men of conscience of all creeds and beliefs to decry. By any civilized standard, the nations of the world should take the necessary steps to prevent a repetition of this act..."

"This tragic event has introduced a new element in the Middle Eastern situation that is a perilous threat to human freedom. Americans should speak out firmly against this threat."

Other signers of the appeal were the Rev. Grover C. Babgy, the Rev. J. Elliott Corbett, the Rev. Rodney Shaw and the Rev. Herman Will, Jr., all of the United Methodist social concerns unit; Dr. Alfred Carleton, executive vice-president of the United Church of Christ's Board for World Ministries; Dr. Truman B. Douglass, a vice-president of the National Council, and Father Edward H. Flannery, executive secretary of the Secretariat for Catholic-Jewish Relations of the U.S. Catholic Conference.

Also, Father Bernard Law of the committee for ecumenical and interreligious affairs, National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Dr. Thomas B. Manton, director of international relations, United Church of Christ's Council for Christian Social Action; Dr. Lewis I. Maddocks of the same UCC council, and Dr. Everett C. Parker, UCC director of communications.

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

DOMESTIC SERVICE

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 1969

JEW'S PLEA TO IRAQ:
'LET MY PEOPLE GO'

By Joseph McLellan
Religious News Service Staff Writer

NEW YORK (RNS) -- The man pointed a trembling finger at a newspaper photograph -- a group of prisoners standing in a dock, their heads bowed.

"That's my brother," he said, his voice taut with anguish. "They have hanged my brother, mutilated his body, marched mobs past him as he hanged in a public place. For nothing. For no reason. Because he was a Jew."

The man asked Religious News Service to withhold his name because he still has relatives in Iraq, "more innocent people they could torture and kill."

He spoke to the press because he had a plea for the government of Iraq, a plea as ancient in Jewish history as the names of Moses and Pharaoh: "Let my people go."

"From 1963 to now," the man said, "not a single Jew has been allowed to leave Iraq. If they are enemies of the country as Iraq's government says, if they are a disruptive element, if they are so deeply hated, why doesn't Iraq let them out?"

He said that Iraq is the only country in the world since Nazi Germany which passes laws specifically directed against Jews by name, forbidding Jews to sell their property, to have bank accounts, to leave the country or travel more than two or three miles within it, to attend government schools or colleges.

Iraq has confiscated Jewish property, including synagogues, schools and cemeteries, he said. He charged that the government is keeping the 2,000 Jews who remain in Iraq as hostages, to be threatened with torture or execution if there is "too much" action or protest outside Iraq.

"They cannot threaten me," he said. "They have killed my brother. They cannot hurt me any more than they have."

The systematic persecution of Jews in Iraq has included mockery of their religion, the man said. "On radio and television, whenever they wanted to make people laugh, they would put on someone to mutter a few words from the Bible in Hebrew until their own religious leaders protested -- 'we worship the same God.'

"A Jewish cemetery, more than 200 years old was taken over and leveled by bulldozers. Once there were more than 25 Jewish schools in Baghdad; now there is only one. There were 50 synagogues; all but one have been taken by the government and sold. The Jewish religious community, which once regulated the lives of its members, has been demolished. Jewish charitable organizations have been abolished, Jewish hospitals confiscated."

(more)

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE

DOMESTIC SERVICE

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WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 29, 1969

The speaker was one of the 200,000 Jews who managed to leave Iraq before this became impossible. He has kept in touch with developments there through a number of business acquaintances, non-Jews, who go to Baghdad regularly. During the interview, he showed letters from these friends which gave him details on his family and other Jews. One letter told of a Jew who had sold land to the government and had not been paid. Finally, the letter said, "the government decided that it was simpler to arrest him than to pay its debt."

The interviewee said that the chief objective of the government in the trial and execution was to get rid of one of the convicted "spies," Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzazz, who was the prime minister in 1965 and 66 and who was "an educated and a moderate man but no friend of the Jews."

"They hanged him with Jews to discredit him," the man said. "If they had hanged him alone, there would have been disturbances among the people. So they killed some Jews, too. It's very easy for them. They have 65 more innocent Jews under arrest and they can replenish their supply at will."

He pointed at another face in the news photo: "This man, I knew him personally. He is more than 60 years old, functionally illiterate, unable to drive a car. How can he plot against the government? How can he meet with Abd al-Rahman? Blow up bridges? Communicate with the C.I.A.? Bring germ warfare into Iraq? He was accused of all these things and he confessed. They can make any man confess to anything with torture. Every man has a breaking point. Some can hold out longer than others, but none can hold out indefinitely."

He insisted that under the restrictions imposed on them in 1967, without employment, with their telephones cut off and their right to travel limited, it was impossible for Jews to engage in espionage in Iraq.

Commenting on a radio broadcast of Iraq's chief rabbi, who said that he accepted the court's verdict and who denied that his son had been executed, the man said that the government could force the rabbi to say anything. "How can he say that he doesn't accept the verdict of the court? Then he is a criminal." There had been a case of mistaken identity regarding the rabbi's son, he explained. "The son of another rabbi, Nessim Hakham Yaein, was tortured to death while under arrest five or six months ago. He didn't even get a chance to go to court -- what they call a court."

He pointed to another face in the photo. "I know him, too. He's only a boy -- just out of the Jesuit College; one year out. He is not a spy. But he is dead."

When the government forbade Jews to attend government schools, he explained, the American Jesuits who run Baghdad College began to accept a few Jews. "Now the college has been confiscated and the Americans have been driven out. The Jews have no place to go."

He finished the interview as he had begun it, with a plea that Jews be allowed simply to leave Iraq.

"What law," he asked, "allows any country to confine people to their houses and forbid them to emigrate? What civilized country is able to pick people up at random, hang them when it wants to, torture them to death, mutilate their bodies and use their dead remains to intimidate the population?"

"Why can't they just let them leave?"

All United Methodist property is ultimately held by the General Conference of the Church, with local church units holding it in trust.

In the Episcopal Church, local parishes hold titles to property unless it is a mission directly related to the diocese. There are, however, canon laws against alienation of church property from the denomination.

Responding to questions about the effect of the Supreme Court's decision on the Episcopal Church, a spokesman said the ruling affirms what the denomination's law already states.

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AMERICAN CATHOLIC-PRELATES DEPLORE IRAQI EXECUTIONS

By Religious News Service (1-29-69)

NEW YORK (RNS) -- Two leading members of the American Roman Catholic hierarchy have "deplored" the hangings of 14 men in Iraq, nine of them Jews, on charges that they spied for Israel.

Lawrence Cardinal Shehan of Baltimore and Archbishop Terence J. Cooke of New York both joined their pleas for calm in the Middle East with the appeal made by Pope Paul VI for clemency.

"The haste with which this execution was decided and the apparent brutality with which it was carried out make it a particularly repulsive action," declared Cardinal Shehan.

Such retaliatory measures, the cardinal claimed, "can bring the whole area closer to a prolonged general warfare which is likely to endanger the whole world."

Cardinal Shehan termed the mass killings "repugnant to the conscience of civilized people. The preponderance of Jews among the victims of this tragedy gives the execution an aura of the vendetta."

Like Archbishop Cooke, the Baltimore prelate pleaded for an end to the conflict stressing that "everything is to be gained by peace with justice -- nothing by war."

The New York archbishop, in denouncing the hasty trials and executions, prayed for "an end to all inhuman violence."

"At this critical moment," Archbishop Cooke said, "the safety and well-being not only of the individuals involved but also of millions of people depend so much upon the wisdom of the governments concerned.

"We look to the political and moral leaders of the world to show their sincere desire for peace and to exercise the patience and restraint so essential for its achievement."

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HALFWAY HOUSE TO CONTINUE OPERATIONS AT NEW SITE

By Religious News Service (1-29-69)

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (RNS) -- New Life House which helps former convicts and parolees in their adjustment to life outside prison will continue its work despite a recent court order to move.

The project sponsored by the Arkansas Release Guidance Foundation of the Arkansas Council of Churches has been using two adjoining houses here for its program, but the state's supreme court has upheld an earlier ruling that such use is not in accord with area zoning regulations. The Rev. Eugene Efird, executive director of New Life, said the project will continue its successful work at a new location, yet to be found. New Life House has assisted 48 men since it opened ten months ago. "Only two have been returned to prison," Mr. Efird said, "and four have run off." Twelve men now live at the "halfway house."

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