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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Merger plan.
Friedman memo to Barnett Brickner. 1952-1953.

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American Jewish Archives website.

MEMO TO RABBI BARNETT BRICKNER

SUBJECT: Position of Reform Movement

SUGGESTION: Discussion of this topic to be aired in full at next meeting of CCAR in June, 1953.

Dear Barney:

For some time now, many of us have been bothered by various trends and developments within the Reform Movement. There has been little opportunity to bring these matters to the light of public discussion, and I would like to make a suggestion that you, as Program Chairman for the next meeting of the CCAR, arrange to give at least one day to what is, after all, one of the most important things we can spend time talking about: namely, the state of the Reform Movement.

Let me admit, at the beginning, that this is an enormous topic, and one in which there are many cross currents and areas of confusion. I have set some of my own feelings down on paper, in order that you might be able to see more specifically the type of thing I am driving at. If this happens to conform in any way with any of your thinking, then I suggest that you and I, plus anybody else interested, might arrange to get together for a more elaborate composition of an agenda.

I am sending this to you now, even though I know the Holiday time is the busiest time for all of us, because I presume that you will be presenting a suggested draft of the program for next June to the forthcoming Executive Board meeting in October. At least, I am informed that this has been the procedure in the past. With that in mind, I want to get this idea onto your desk early.

My thinking runs somewhat as follows:

1.- The general title for a discussion at the CCAR could run something like this:

A. WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT?

or

B. WHAT SHOULD BE THE FUTURE OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT?

or

C. WHAT IS THE TREND OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT?

2.- There should be a brief historical description of the swing in the movement from the time of the Pittsburgh platform of 1885 to the Columbus platform of 1937.

3.- The need for some new statement now.

A. The events of the past fifteen years have been epochal.

These years encompassed the destruction of European Jewry and the establishment of Israel.

4.- The Reform Movement during these fifteen years has been propelled into a leading position in America. If this is true, then the Reform Movement should re-evaluate itself. Where is it going? Where should it aim to go? Is it on the right path?

5.- In my judgement we have made our startling successes in recent years by reabsorbing the emotional warmth of ritual and ceremony (as witness the details expounded in Berman's report), by re-identifying with the total Jewish people, by supporting Israel, by retaining our prophetic orientation towards social justice, by continuing our intellectual emancipation from the dead hand of the past. I think these five factors are responsible for the phenomenal growth of the movement.

6.- Do we want to be the mass movement of American Judaism? If so, we continue along the present path. If not, we revert or retreat or withdraw. Many people think that we should remain a small select group

in American Jewry. Is that what most of us want?

7.- Is there an irreconcilable cleavage within the Reform Movement - with one wing wanting it to take on those attitudes of maximal Jewishness which will keep it in touch with the masses and thus the future; and the other wing wanting to revert to the old classical position?

8.- These questions are really not academic, because I have a feeling that there is developing a tendency within certain circles to aim toward withdrawal or retreat or reversion. Now, perhaps, this is only a subjective feeling on my part. Yet, I think there is a certain amount of objective evidence which can be adduced to indicate that there are people who would like to take the Movement backward. I think there are some specific items which somehow should be incorporated in the whole discussion. I suggest the following:

- A. Why has there been opposition to changing the name of the Union? Why was there opposition several years ago, toward moving the Union to New York?
- B. Why is there a reluctance to make a strong impact in New York? This reluctance seems to be manifested in the way in which the JIR is being handled. I would appear, from much evidence, that there is no intention of building the JIR into a very strong springboard for the development of reform in the New York area. Instead the JIR seems to be constantly being whittled down.

As one keen observer put it:

"Maybe it is a secret dispensation of Providence to take away what little sense the reactionary Cincinnati outfit has left, and to leave the immense resources of New York Jewry to the more legitimate and less

moribund bearers of Judaism. I mean in plain English: let the oldtime Reform crowd (who like the Bourbons have learned nothing and forgotten nothing) commit suicide, or sink into an obscure minority - conventicle with headquarters somewhere in the southwestern part of Ohio."

Many representations have been made to Glueck on this subject. The various people who led these deputations could offer their description of the conversations they held. Maybe the fact that Finkelstein makes LIFE and TIME so frequently is significant, and maybe it isn't. (See attached clipping.)

- C. Why has there been no diligent effort to effectuate the fullest terms of the merger between the College and the Institute? As it stands now, the schools are entirely duplicating in their effort. The original notion of the merger contemplated a dovetailing of effort so that the schools would complement each other, not duplicate each other.
- D. What is the meaning behind the incident in the Commission on Education which took place before the last meeting of the CCAR in Buffalo? Is Dr. Marcus's position one which is personal or does it reflect a larger sphere of thinking?
- E. What is the attitude of the Reform Movement, and the administration at Cincinnati, toward the American Council for Judaism? Why should several Council members or sympathizers have been brought back on the Board of Governors? Why should Glueck have sent such hearty and gratuitous greetings to the recent annual meeting of the Council? Why should Lazarus say that the financial future of the Reform Movement

is in the hands of the American Council, for they are the only ones who will support it? What does all of this indicate? Or is it simply a series of unconnected events?

It seems to me that nothing is more important than that we should attempt to iron out this question. I would like to have the CCAR have a full chance to debate the matter and express its mandate. If it is the clear cut and overwhelming wish of the majority of the Conference that we constantly and deliberately proceed to take the Reform Movement along certain lines, then I think we should do so with renewed vigor.

Eisendrath has taken the Union in a pioneering and effective manner toward the consummation of some of the ideals which I consider to be important for the spread of Reform Judaism. He is not hide-bound by any classical reform tradition, nor is he willing on the other hand, to sell out the essence of the reform position for the sake of surface good relationship with other branches. He is completely reform in his thinking and emotions, yet he represents the kind of reform approach which makes it possible for our movement to embrace all of the best in Judaism so that we may legitimately inherit the next generation of American born Jews.

There is a moral aspect to this which disturbs me immensely. If there is a sociological process within our Jewish community wherein people come to the Reform Temples as they increase in wealth and social position, then I think there is a moral obligation upon us to provide the fullest kind of Judaism for the people who are coming to us by choice or by default from Orthodoxy. In other words, if we are to be the inheritor of the future, especially the American-born generations of Jews, then I think it is incumbent upon us to offer a highest-common denominator kind of Judaism rather than a lowest-common-denominator kind. This moral

responsibility on us is a noblesse oblige from which we cannot escape.

Let me have your thinking on this matter. I really feel that it is important. If you are interested, the thing to do is work out an integrated agenda, for a whole day and evening meeting. Let a paper or two be presented - a panel - an open question period - an open floor discussion - culminating in a series of resolutions or a statement of principle (a la 1885 and 1937) to establish the present position and future intentions of the movement.

As ever,

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman

October 10, 1952

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- C. Why has there been no diligent effort to effectuate the fullest terms of the merger between the College and the Institute? As it stands now, the schools are entirely duplicating in their effort. The original notion of the merger contemplated a dovetailing of effort so that the schools would complement each other, not duplicate each other.
- D. Has Glueck a far-sighted program and philosophy for the Reform Movement for the next 25 years?
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HAF/ms

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~~What about further of progress
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~~The question of a continuous
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As ever,

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman

You must omit relationship of Reform & a loss of
If there is no bridge found a possibility
of some type of merger in ^{an attempt of cooperation} ~~consolidation~~ movement (conservative)
So say - If there is ~~perhaps~~ not the
factors that would be helpful in
creating the new Union ~~Union~~ ^{movement}
that we want.

This topic should be discussed - as pointed out
since it is too narrow in scope & the
ranges of are grinding rather than
path-finding

Temple Beth Kodesh

117 GIBBS STREET
Rochester 5, N. Y.

THE RABBI'S STUDY

September 9, 1952

Rabbi Herbert Friedman
2419 East Kenwood Blvd.
Milwaukee 11, Wisconsin

Dear Herb

There really isn't much to add to what I have already said in person. Don't let my reaction keep you from doing what you think ought to be done. Perhaps you ought to make allowances for my own reluctance to get involved in a long drawnout messy fight, and assume perhaps that I may even be rationalizing this reluctance.

Anyway, you ask for my reaction, so here it is. I doubt very much that this approach will accomplish much if anything. In the first place you will be putting the matter in the hands of two men who are definitely not on your side. The one, as you yourself told me is clearly under obligations to those against whom you are directing the attack. The other lacks the guts and the will (unlike the British, he won't forget Balfour) for a real fight. If you succeed in getting this into the program it will probably be handled by them in such a way as not to accomplish what you want, but perhaps the opposite.

The Also, we must not be unrealistic about what these symposia achieve. ~~its~~ results more often than not are nebulous. In this case, it is likely simply to prevent or at best defer positive action.

As However, I have said before, I don't think much can really get accomplished short of a knock down and dragout fight. This will require organization, leadership and definite commitment of support from the man whom you praise in your memorandum. I think the fight is worth making but I personally don't want to spend the next few years doing what leadership in it would involve for me. I am ready to get into it but at this point, not assume responsibility.

The above is just about what I've said to you before. From where you sit certainly feel free to disregard it, and count on my standing by you if you go ahead.

I haven't heard from Fink since Ike's death but assume the Executive Board will meet in New York on the 28th as formally planned. When will you be coming to New York and for how long?

Love to the family and everything good for the New Year.

As ever,
He



Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, *PRESIDENT*

838 FIFTH AVENUE • NEW YORK 21, N.Y. • Regent 7-8200

September 19, 1952

Rabbi Herbert A. Friedman
Temple Emama-El B'ne Jeshurun
Milwaukee 11, Wisc.

Dear Herb:

I have now read very carefully your memorandum to Brickner. I do believe that it contained the essence of what really does require some frank thinking and mutual searching of hearts. In your paragraph "5" on page 2, in listing the gains we have recently made you say "by retaining our prophetic orientation towards social justice." I am beginning to question this particular statement which most of us take for granted, and I would prefer seeing this placed as one of the problems to be raised rather than as one of the gains over which to rejoice.

Several recent experiences have convinced me that we are slipping badly in this particular realm. While I would not go as far as Freehof did, in suggesting that ceremonialism has supplanted social justice, during our conference; nevertheless, I am apprehensive lest we are leaning in this direction. You know me well enough to realize that I do not place ceremonialism and social justice as two mutual opposites. There is no reason why we cannot embrace both, but I do feel that this larger aspect of our movement needs further exploration in addition to the specifics that you have mentioned.

I understand that Nelson has appointed a Committee to go into the matter of the J.I.R., and that there are at least five representatives of the J.I.R. on it. I do hope that this includes yourself; although he has not as yet indicated to me the precise position of the Committee.

I am most eager to learn of Brickner's response. Do keep me informed.

With fondest New Year's greetings to you, Elaine and the children from Rosa and myself, I am as ever,

Most faithfully,

Maurice

Maurice N. Eisendrath

MW

LINE: NW