



*Handwritten signature or initials, possibly 'M. N. S. R.' with a horizontal line underneath.*

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Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, President

November 13, 1963

Mr. Bernard Goodman, President  
Hebrew Union Congregation  
Post Office Box 212  
Greenville, Mississippi

Dear Mr. Goodman:

Thank you very much for your letter of November 7 conveying the results of the meeting of your Board of Directors and the protest about the Biennial Assembly. I have read your letter with great care and am deeply distressed with the anguish that has been caused you. I so regret that the invitation to have Dr. King address our Biennial has created such unhappiness for you.

I want to assure you that every action taken in the various areas of Social Action enlists the most careful consideration, the deep and sensitive concern for the difficult position of our fellow Reform Jews in the exposed areas of the South. The many meetings with our southern congregations have created and continue to create that consciousness.

There is much soul-wrestling at the UAHC, much consultation and widespread probing before any action is taken. Our congregants in the South have made clear their position and the dynamics of the situation in the various states, through which there are great variations between states and communities, and the UAHC administration is exceedingly cautious and ever strives to tread that narrow path between inaction and reckless action. I believe it does so admirably.

There are many requests made of us by kindred organizations, church bodies and synagogue groups, Jewish and Christian civil rights organizations as well, and by many individuals to take part in a host of activities or to initiate them. Many of these suggestions are attractive in that they would serve splendidly to advance the ideals to which we are committed, would help reduce or bring attention to discrimination based on color.

It is because of the careful sifting and cautious weighing that many of these are not undertaken. We are frequently criticized for being too sensitive to the requests of our southern congregations, of lagging behind other religious groups, of failing to fulfil the mandate of the majority of our congregants. There is frequently justice in this accusation.

We know that any positive step we take, though these steps be too infrequent, and only the most modest of gestures made, will be castigated sharply by some in the southern congregations.

Mr. Bernard Goodman

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In candor, I contend we ought to be apologizing to the majority of our congregations who expect more from us than the mere participation in the Washington March, the statement entitled "A Call to Racial Justice" and the invitation extended to Dr. King to address the Biennial banquet. Yet even these pitifully inadequate gestures are the recipients of endless, bitter complaint.

We have done too little. We have heeded too much the complaints of those who disagree with our position on integration and, if the truth be told, we are far behind every other religious organization and far behind what our ideals demand.

Our Conservative counterpart, the United Synagogue, is having its Biennial the same week as ours and are also having Dr. King address them. In addition, they are giving him their Solomon Schechter Award, the highest award their movement can bestow upon distinguished leaders in contemporary American life. We have spoken to them repeatedly to discern if they are receiving protests and threats. To their pride and our shame, they are receiving no such response. Last Sunday, Dr. King received the St. Francis Peace Medal from a national organization of 100,000 Roman Catholic clergymen and laymen.

Dr. King has changed the nature of the Negro revolt. He has given it spirituality and dignity. He has impressed upon his people the necessity for a non-violent approach to their revolution. If it were not for Dr. King, we would today be witnessing savagery and brutality from both sides. Many are convinced that this nation is so deeply in his debt because he has saved us from an experience that is horrible even to contemplate. Not only has he saved us from the degradation of a violent or physical confrontation between fellow Americans, he has made certain that his people and all Americans see the striving toward equality by the American Negro as part of the basic religious precepts to which we all pay homage or at least lip service. If we do not uphold his hand, if we do not support his effort, others will take his place who will bring us to calamity.

Dr. King was invited because of the noble sense of religious idealism he represents, because of the high principles he has brought into play. He stands as a mountain among the foothills and to have invited another would have been to undermine his stature and to have given strength to his foes.

Sincerely yours,



Maurice N. Eisendrath