
An Unpublished Letter from Mordecai Kaplan to Martin Weitz

415 Central Park West
New York 25, N.Y.
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Rabbi Martin W. Weitz
Atlantic City, N. J.

Dear Rabbi Weitz,

I am very glad that I was able to be a visitor at the Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism which took place in London in July 1953. I thus happily learned at first hand something about the "World Union" that is not generally known namely that it has actually lived up to the purpose implied in its full name. Having started out virtually with the limited purpose of combating any Zionist version of Judaism, it has progressed beyond that purpose and is now serving the need of fostering all non-Orthodox versions of Judaism, be they Liberal, Conservative, or Zionist.

As soon as I returned to the United States I communicated with Rabbi Joseph Raush of Louisville, Ky., urging him to see to it that the forthcoming conference of the World Union be held in Jerusalem. I pointed out that it was extremely important that the voice of Progressive Judaism should be heard particularly there. In the first place, the Jews in Israel have to be made to understand that there is a third alternative to orthodoxy and secularism. Secondly, the Jews of the Diaspora have to be made to realize that they cannot afford to be indifferent to what happens to Jewish religion in Israel.

No Jew anywhere in the world can be spiritually secure, should the State of Israel, God forbid, be destroyed as a result of

the bitter religious conflicts that are going on there at present. We have more to fear from the pro-Jewish than from the anti-Jewish fanatics, from the political and religious terrorists fighting for Jews and Judaism than from the bitterest anti-Semites and worst intransigent Arabs. The World Union for Progressive Judaism can have no more urgent and imperative task than to rally all its Liberal, Conservative and Zionist forces to forestall the outbreak of a religious civil war in Israel. Let us not forget that Jerusalem fell to the Romans in the 70, because she had been weakened by the inner civil strife among the Jews themselves.

Unfortunately, the Zionists, in their pre-occupation with the immediate tasks and problems, have failed to take into account what it means to build a modern democratic state with human material that intellectually and religiously belongs to the Dark Ages. None of us is exempt from the consequences of this terrible oversight. All Jews who have in them any wisdom and sense of responsibility must unite in an effort to bring about some *modus vivendi* among the various religious and non-religious elements in Israel. In the interests of enlightened and ethical religion it is essential that the rabbinate be separated from the state and be deprived of the power to impose its authority on all dissidents from orthodoxy.

What more important purpose could the World Union for Progressive Judaism have at present, and what more effective means than convening in Jerusalem to carry out that purpose? The conference scheduled to take place in Paris should, therefore, in my opinion, take action leading to the holding as soon as possible of a conference in Jerusalem.

Sincerely yours,
Mordecai M. Kaplan

Rabbi Martin W. Weitz is associated with Temple Judea, Laguna Hills, California.