

Testimonials - Dr. Walter Zander

Dear Ben,

I just heard about your father and, having benefited from his humor and wisdom for so long, albeit at one remove, I felt as if a father figure of almost mythical proportions had gone for me too. How many of your pupils, audience and friends, to whom you quoted him, will feel something similar.

When someone with a distinctive voice, in the widest sense of voice, dies, they do not disappear. I frequently hear my late grandmother, by conjuring up what I immediately know she would have said about something. There is barely any sense in which she is not there. For your father to have left an impact like that on me, when I never spoke to him in person, tells me something of how present he will always be to those he knew, not to mention you and your brothers and Angelica. I know, once more at second hand, of his achievements, but what can match the attainment of an attitude to life such as his?

Since an attitude to life is also an attitude to death, his death is what puts all of what he said in its perfect and final context. Surely Passover is the time to go.

With love from Anthony & Miranda

To Walter Zander:

For a long time (I don't know at what point in our history the practice began) the British were famous—or notorious—for being reticent and undemonstrative with their friends and even with their families. My father shook hands with me only once in his life and was never so weak as to embrace me.

This Roman tradition (some say cold, some say calmly dignified) is dying: we are now urged to hug and kiss and to end each conversation, however humdrum, with the expression, however gratuitous, of deep and undying affection. I am too set in my ways to follow the new fashion, I can display emotion towards institutions: I can say that I love Oxford, or cricket, or that I would die to save the subjunctive. But people are different.

Exceptio probat regulam; and surely a ninetieth birthday is a time for making exceptions. So I want to record, for 8th June 1988, not only my admiration but also my warm affection. Admiration is an easier thing because it is based on demonstrable qualities: your kindness, your generosity of spirit, your wisdom, your courage, your astonishing serenity after a long acquaintance, in the middle of your life, with daunting turmoil and anxiety. Affection is less rational and more profound. I am sure that you enjoy boundless affection from all who know you. But I should like to add my bucketful to the immense pool.

I wish you, in the old English phrase, many happy returns of the day, and everything, as Macbeth said, of "That which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience and troops of friends."

James Craig

May 12, 1988

Dr. Walter Zander is probably the purest-hearted man I have ever met during my long life. He seems to be moved by a vision of spiritual ideals shared by the major religious faiths and forms of life shaped and dedicated to such ideals, which has always moved me even while, I confess, I cannot share it completely: such a vision has, on the whole, been denied to me; but as expressed in the life and works of Dr. Walter Zander it cannot but inspire the deepest moral respect in anyone who has a sense of the difference between good and evil.

If ever there was an embodiment of integrity and the disinterested pursuit of the good life, these qualities shine through in everything that Dr. Zander has done and been. Since he was born a Jew, it is the religion and the ideals connected with Jewish aspirations, political, social, personal, that have entered his soul most deeply, and to these-and in particular to Jewish learning, and the services to intellectual development performed by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which he places, I think, at the summit of his Zionist convictions - he has devoted his noble and thoroughly useful life.

His work in the cause of Christian/Jewish understanding, his deep interest in the character and conduct of the various churches represented in the Holy Land, his understanding of what moves their followers even when they are in conflict, is part and parcel of his vision of which I spoke my first words of this tribute - I have known Dr. Zander for many years, I have been bound to him by ties of true friendship, and I greatly welcome this opportunity of congratulating him on his 90th birthday - may many years be added to the life of this wholly good man.

Isaiah Berlin