

Perspectives

Jonathan Sacks

In this section of L'Eylah we provide a review of ideas in circulation – religious, ethical and social – which have appeared recently in book or periodical form. We take a look at intellectual developments in the Jewish world in Israel and America, and at those debates in the non-Jewish world from which we have something to learn, or to which we have something to add. In some cases we give briefings on books available on a subject of current concern.

In this issue we look at rabbis in America, a controversy about the ArtScroll publications, compartmentalisation as a Jewish response to modernity, and the recent history of Jewish-Christian relations.

Reluctant Rabbis

Do rabbis share in Ben Zoma's definition of wealth? Do they rejoice in their portion? According to Howard Singer ("Rabbis and Their Discontents", *Commentary*, May 1985) American rabbis do not. Especially if they belong within the Conservative or Reform movements.

One recent study showed rabbis to suffer from abnormally high levels of stress: higher indeed than the stress measured in people living close to Three Mile Island immediately after the accident at the local nuclear reactor. And not just stress. Thirty per cent of rabbis felt that their wives would prefer them to be in another profession.

Not surprisingly, these findings accord with a high drop-out rate from the rabbinate. Forty per cent of American Reform rabbis are no longer in congregational positions. About the same percentage applies to

the Conservative movement. The Orthodox position is harder to gauge. Many of those who take semikhah never intend to enter Jewish communal life as a profession. Only twenty per cent go into education, fifteen per cent into the rabbinate.

Why the sudden crisis atmosphere in American non-orthodoxy? One professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary attributes it to a growth of ambivalent and disrespectful feelings showed by communities to their rabbis. Singer agrees, and traces the phenomenon to a sociological change in the lay leadership of congregations.

Between the 1940s and the 60s, he argues, synagogues were led by the "builders", the generation who set up the suburban congregations in the first place. They had their own motivations; the rabbi had his; but there was an easy relationship between them. The lay leaders were motivated not religiously but socially: they wanted to establish an acceptable Jewish presence in hitherto non-Jewish neighbourhoods. So long as the rabbi got along well with the local non-Jewish ministers and "related" to the synagogue youth, all was well.

The 70s saw lay leadership pass to the next generation, who were less easily satisfied. Singer identifies two character-types who have proved particularly disruptive. One is the secularist – the young professional who dropped out of Judaism in the 60s and returned to the synagogue so that his children could go to its nursery school. He or she brought a hard-edged consumerism into the congregant-rabbi relationship. When the rabbi's contract was due for renewal, he would find his membership being circulated with a

questionnaire. Is the rabbi meeting your needs? How do you rate his pulpit ability, community involvement, his "socio-political involvement"?

The other type was the ex-60s hippy, the searcher for experience, now in his or her thirties but still expecting Judaism to do what drugs had done before: turn them on. So, writes Singer, "if a woman gave birth to a daughter, and it was discovered that the ancient ceremony of the redemption of the firstborn applied only to males, the mother might write her own ceremony for little girls and expect her rabbi to come and participate."

The result? Singer, a Conservative himself, comes to a conclusion which the Orthodox world would strongly endorse: "Once Jewish learning was declared irrelevant to the rabbi's qualifications to serve, and his status as a teacher of the tradition was preceived to confer a merely arbitrary authority, he became nothing more than an employee – one whose job specifications were alarmingly vague and were in addition subject to periodic re-evaluation by his employers."

Singer ends by citing an incident that took place in a New England synagogue and which, for him, says it all. A local television station wanted to show a film of American Jewish youth dancing with *sifrei Torah* outside the synagogue on Simchat Torah, to contrast it with scenes outside the synagogue in Moscow. To be able to show the footage on the day itself, filming had to be done beforehand.

The rabbi objected, and pointed out that the *sifrei Torah* could not be taken from the ark for this secular exercise. Lay pressure was brought to bear on him, and in the end he

was forced to relent. So, on an ordinary weekday, the scrolls were taken out to the synagogue forecourt, the local Jewish youth were assembled, and at the decree of the cameras, there was rejoicing.

Some days later Simchat Torah arrived. The synagogue was empty. The young people were nowhere to be seen. Where were they? At home, watching themselves on television.

The Great ArtScroll Debate

In the 1984-5 issue of *Niv Hamidrashia*, Dr. Alan Unterman re-opens a intriguing controversy that had run through the correspondence pages of *Tradition* three years earlier.

In the later 60s the Jewish publishing phenomenon that epitomised a decade was the Jewish Catalog. A guide to do-it-yourself, experience-it-yourself Judaism, it captured the mood of the moment: ethnic, existential, small-group orientated. It took a taste-and-see approach to mitzvot that was at once refreshingly original and surprisingly traditional.

Few moods have vanished faster than the born-again breeziness of the 60s. Politically, morally, economically and religiously, the late 70s and the 80s turned sharply to the right, to values of austerity, discipline, responsibility and above all the search for clear and simple creeds. Judaism moved with the times. And once again the mood was marked by a publishing phenomenon, this time the library of books published under the name of ArtScroll.

In 1981, in the American journal *Tradition*, Professor Barry Levy of McGill University published a savagely critical review of the ArtScroll Bible commentaries, entitled "Judge not a Book by its Cover". The title alluded to the discrepancy between form and content in the ArtScroll books. Aesthetically and typographically, Levy claimed, they were ultra-modern and brilliantly successful. But in content they were, to list his grievances, not modern or scientific or organised or scholarly: worse, they were full of errors.

Levy accused the compilers of turning their backs on "the roles of critical thinking and scientific discovery, the availability of related, nontraditional materials, and the right of the intelligent, learned reader to make independent

judgements about the meanings of biblical passages". The sources cited in the commentary were not presented chronologically or systematically. They often did not focus on the text itself. The result, said Levy, was to turn "thoughtful exegetical creativity into dogmatic antiquarianism". ArtScroll, he concludes, will be judged by posterity as a key document of antimodernism, or what he terms "the East-Euromerican Orthodoxy of our age".

The article produced violent reaction, some of which was directed at Levy's own highly provocative style. Most writers agreed, however, that ArtScroll with its wide sales and readership was indeed a "phenomenon". It was a sign of a religious and cultural shift. What, asked one writer, does ArtScroll's popularity say about modern American Orthodoxy – implying that the school of thought over which *Tradition* magazine had presided had produced nothing comparably close to the mood of the moment. Others attested to the series' value in making traditional texts accessible to a wide lay community.

One correspondent sided with Levy on three grounds. First, the books made it possible for people to bypass the task of studying the sources in the original Hebrew. Second, their principled disregard for modern scholarship amounts to "Implicitly confessing that all attempts to harmonise and synthesise traditional theology with modern historical analysis are inherently impossible". Third, their combination of modern format and anti-modern content are a symbol and symptom of "the demise of the ideals of *Torah U'Mada* in favour of a compartmentalised Orthodoxy whose members are quite sophisticated in their professional enterprises yet close their minds to modern scholarship when they think Jewishly."

Dr. Unterman, taking up the cudgels on the side of the critics, concentrates on the literalness with which the commentaries treat aggadic material, a procedure which he argues renders them at times bizarre and self-contradictory, and which will produce misunderstanding on the part of the reader. The old debate on the meaning of aggadah (see Dr. S. Leperer, "The Approach to Obscure

Aggadot", *L'Eylah*, Rosh Hashana 5746) has caught fire again.

The controversy has far wider implications than its immediate cause. The books themselves announce their scope explicitly and will mislead no-one. Their enthusiastic readership is evidence of the service they perform, the vacuum they fill. Even their severest critics acknowledge their excellence as artefacts, visually appealing and imaginatively produced. And there was surely no protest when, in 1947, the Soncino Press produced the Chumash with a commentary edited by the late Dr. A. Cohen, which too was an "uncritical" digest of traditional interpretations.

But for ten years beforehand there had been available, alongside the Cohen Chumash, the edition produced by the late Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz. Reading between the lines of the ArtScroll critics one senses a lament for the absence of a Hertz-for-our-times. A commentary that would, as Hertz did fifty years ago, steer us through moral and intellectual perplexities and make us feel proud to be the people of the book in the eyes of the world.

A key ingredient in the Hertz approach was to cite non-Jewish scholars wherever they could be enlisted to this end. There is no more telling reversal of the mood of Orthodoxy than the blunt remark of R. Meir Zlotowitz in his preface to the ArtScroll *Megillat Esther*: "No non-Jewish sources have even been consulted, much less quoted. I consider it offensive that the Torah should need authentication from the secular or so-called scientific sources."

The Torah predicts, promises, that its life and teachings will evoke admiration in the non-Jewish world: "This is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations". In 1936 J. H. Hertz could still seek that admiration, as could Cecil Roth two years later when he wrote "The Jewish Contribution to Civilisation".

Fifty years on the ArtScroll editors have judged that admiration to be neither available nor desirable. Their Torah is firmly of a post-modern, post-holocaust world. "The nations" appear intellectually and morally discredited. "The eyes of the nations" cannot then represent a reference point for approval,

validation, Jewish self-definition.

That from this bleak scenario a project as exuberant, prolific and enhancing as ArtScroll should emerge is a cause for celebration.

Compartmentalisation

The wider phenomenon of which ArtScroll is a symptom has been identified as "compartmentalisation", a response in which Jews participate in modernity while rejecting any synthesis between Judaism and modernity. In the last decade, insights have been provided by two penetrating Jewish sociologists, Professor Samuel Heilman of New York and Professor Charles Leibman of Bar Ilan.

Heilman provided a study of an unnamed Young Israel community in the States, in his *Synagogue Life: A Study in Symbolic Interaction* (University of Chicago Press, 1976). He found a congregation whose members were, in the main, professionals – in medicine, law, the sciences and university teaching. Accordingly they regarded themselves as an integral part of the world outside. But at the same time, "their commitment and strict adherence to the code of Jewish law draw them back". The average member is therefore "cosmopolitan in his desire for modernity and parochial in his commitment to Orthodoxy". And the Jewish commitment takes priority when the two conflict.

Heilman considers the relationship between these orthodox professionals and the neighbouring yeshiva community, whose occupational range is more likely to be represented by Hebrew teachers, Hebrew book-dealers, kosher butchers, scribes – roles which represent a decision to engage with the outside world as little as possible.

The relationship is one of ambivalence. The Young Israel members respect and admire the "more frum", but by and large avoid sending their children to be educated by them. The yeshiva community represents a consistency between teaching and practice. The orthodox professionals admit this as an ideal, but would still not like their children to follow it.

Heilman is a close observer of behaviour; Charles Leibman is a broad analyst of intellectual trends. In

his *Religion and the Chaos of Modernity* (in J. Neusner (ed.), *Take Judaism for Example*, University of Chicago Press 1983), he divides contemporary Orthodox responses into four types. There are the "neotraditionalists" who follow the lead of Hatam Sofer (R. Moses Sofer, 1762-1839) in rejecting modernity. Characterised by strictness in the interpretation of halakhah and intolerance to deviations from it, their constituency is the Yeshiva and Hassidic communities. Then there are the "adaptationists" who hold that the values of modernity are in sympathy with Judaism and who argue generally for a lenient and flexible halakhic approach. There are "expansionists" who follow R. Abraham Isaac HaCohen Kook in reinterpreting modernity through the prism of the Jewish tradition, "seeing through" such phenomena as secularism to their hidden holiness. Lastly there are "compartmentalists" who distinguish between their Jewish identity and their orientation – which has nothing to do with Judaism – to economic, political and even cultural issues.

Leibman notes that "adaptationism" has been declining as an option in recent years, and that "expansionism" today has almost no base of support – Rav Kook's son, R. Zvi Yehudah Kook, took the movement in another direction, ultranationalist politically and neotraditionalist religiously. Neotraditionalism itself is currently showing signs of great vitality. But "the behaviour of most Orthodox Jews is characterised by de facto compartmentalisation – multiple identities through which they relate to different aspects of life".

Compartmentalisation differs from the other three responses in offering no ideological legitimisation. It has no theorist, though there are some who misleadingly attribute it to Samson Raphael Hirsch. It can have no theorist, for it is essentially a de facto rather than de jure reality. It runs counter to whole orientation of Judaism, which resisted the idea that life could be divided into "Jewish" and "secular" components. All this notwithstanding, Leibman claims that most Orthodox Jews "do not search for consistency between their Jewish and non-Jewish life. On the contrary, they make a virtue of their

inconsistency".

Wherein lies its attraction? Liebman makes a crucial point when he says that compartmentalisation is not a philosophy but a *survival strategy*. Nineteenth century emancipation meant surrendering Jewish jurisdiction over large areas of life. To compensate, those areas which remained – family, synagogue, the Jewish component of education – were to be defended with uncompromising vigour. Judaism became privatised, which cohered with Western if not Jewish models of the religious domain. The strategy was successful: Jews were able to achieve professional distinction in the wider society while preserving intact a segment of life which was holy in the basic sense of "set apart". Not was it schizophrenic. There are the Jewish contexts in which one affirms *identity*, and non-Jewish contexts in which one *plays a role*. Role-playing, as Goffman and others have stressed, is central to the modern personality, and compartmentalisation is a valid tactic of identity-preservation in a complex social environment.

One of the unusual results of a situation in which the religious life is lived through de facto adaptations to modernity, is that the sociologist is better poised to enlighten us about contemporary Judaism than the rabbi or the theologian. Heilman and Leibman, in their very different styles, are among the most perceptive commentators on today's Orthodoxy. Heilman's *The People of the Book: Drama, Fellowship and Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 1983) is a brilliant portrayal of *lernen*, of informal Talmudic study-circles. Leibman, along with Eliezer Don-Yehiyah, has produced two recent books on *Civil Religion in Israel* (University of California Press, 1983) and *Religion and Politics in Israel* (Indiana University Press, 1984).

Missionaries

The last six months have not been easy ones for Jewish-Christian relationships. In Britain, renewed attention was paid to the missionary activities of a number of Christian and Jewish-Christian groups. In Israel concern was focused on the Mormon Brigham Young University being built on Mount Scopus. There were widespread protests against the

project on the grounds that it would, immediately or eventually, be used as a base for missionary work directed at Jews.

The discussions which ensued generated more heat than light. But they clearly signalled Jewish anxieties – anxieties which were, implicitly at least, as much directed at the state of Judaism as at the state of Christianity. If Jews were vulnerable (the “if” remained: hard facts to quantify the problem were hard to come by) this was a telling comment on the current fragility of Jewish commitment, identity and education. In pre-modern encounters between the two religions, this at least was not a stake. As Frank Talmage wrote some years ago: “For most medieval Jews . . . no matter what crises they may have had to endure, the identity crisis was not one of them”.

The American Jewish community has been the scene of much activity by “Jewish Christians” in recent years, and several books have been produced – of very varied quality – which confront the problem. *The Jew and the Christian Missionary: A Jewish Response to Missionary Christianity*, by Gerald Sigal (Ktav, 1981) is a large work which concentrates entirely, verse by verse, on the Biblical texts used by missionaries to persuade Jews that Christianity is the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy. In each case Sigal presents the standard

missionary interpretation and provides either arguments for the untenability of the reading or gives the alternative reading which Jewish tradition supplies. This procedure means that doctrinal differences between Judaism and Christianity are dealt with en passant, rather than in any systematic manner: virgin birth under Isaiah 7:14, and so on. The work is a useful sourcebook for anyone affected by or interested in the problem.

Samuel Levine’s book, *You Take Jesus, I’ll Take God: How To Refute Christian Missionaries* (Hamoroh Press 1980), is an almost perfect example of how not to address the issue. Hectoring and aggressive in tone, badly organised and frequently offensive, Levine seems to have no clear idea as to whether he is addressing the potential convert, the missionary, the Jewish anti-missionary, or simply venting his spleen. The book, unusually, contains a section on counter-attack (“Some strong questions that you could present to a Christian missionary”). But the strategy of not merely trying to save Jews for Judaism, but also of attacking the credibility of Christianity on its own terms, is practically and morally unwarranted. Levine does not further his cause by the tastelessness of his presentation.

By contrast, David Berger and Michael Wyschogrod’s *Jews and “Jewish Christianity”* (Ktav, 1978) is a

miracle of tact, lucidity, intelligence and brevity. Addressed directly to those who have been attracted by missionaries, it moves within the brief span of its seventy-odd pages through the major doctrinal and textual issues, never losing its sureness of tone in this most delicate of contexts. The authors respect the intelligence of their reader and the integrity of Christianity and have produced a book that should be compulsory reading for Jewish sixth-formers and university students.

For those with a more detached interest in the Christian-Jewish encounter, Frank Talmage’s *Disputation and Dialogue* (Ktav 1975) is an excellent anthology of readings with useful bibliographic guidance; Hyam Maccoby’s *Judaism on Trial* (The Littman Library – Associated University Presses, 1982) is an elegant translation of and commentary to the Jewish-Christian disputations in the middle ages.

Evangelism and Israel

Meanwhile from Israel comes a sharp warning on the missionary problem in the form of a short book by Rabbi A. H. Rabinowitz, until recently Chief Rabbi of the Israel Airforce (*Israel: The Christian Dilemma*, Gefen Publishing House, 1985).

His assertion is dramatic, perhaps melodramatic: “All levels of Israeli society are being penetrated. Towns,



villages, kibbutzim, the army, the universities. Different methods of approach are advocated for each ethnic background. Christian support for Israel is widespread. It is not altruistic . . . The groundwork for this Christian presence, which is avowedly missionary in intent, is assiduously cultivated at all levels, government, municipal, in general welfare activity, and in the approach to the individual."

There are, he maintains, some 190 missionary organisations active in Israel. Their approach is disorientatingly different from the classic pattern of evangelism. The rebirth and vitality of the State of Israel mark a crisis for traditional Christian thought. The Jew in exile, the Jew as sufferer, could be interpreted as visible proof of the punishment of the people who rejected salvation. The restoration of Israel to its land broke one of the most vicious circles in the history of human thought.

The new response, taken by a variety of Messianic-Jewish and Hebrew-Christian movements, has been to assert that the Jewish state is of messianic significance, part of the process of the Second Coming, and that a Jewish Christianity should be forged, preserving Jewish forms and distinguished only by its recognition of the Christian source of salvation. Jews should no longer be asked to see their conversion as a relinquishing of Jewish identity. Instead the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation calls on "Church leaders to encourage and promote those elements of Jewish life, culture and worship by which a Jew identifies himself."

Such missionarising Rabinowitz regards as doubly dangerous. First, it effectively hides its ulterior aim under the cloak of friendship, dialogue, familiar Jewish forms and the search for the Jewish roots of Christianity. Second, it enters an Israeli society undereducated in its own Jewishness and to a degree alienated from Judaism by its current politicisation.

His proposals? Negatively, he suggests the enactment of a law against missionary activities. This he believes would not be an infringement of liberties: "There is nothing undemocratic in the effort of a people to retain its national character and prevent its erosion and

disfigurement by others". Positively he proposes "the enactment of the basic statutes fundamental to Judaism and their constitutional guarantee; and the dissolving of religious parties" – in other words, the creation of a halakhic state which would allow the religious parties to disband and concentrate on independent grassroots influence.

The debate is likely to intensify over the coming years.

The Vatican and the Jewish People

One sector of the Christian world which has undertaken fundamentally to reconsider its attitudes to Jews and Judaism has been the Roman Catholic church. In October 1965 the Second Vatican Council adopted the Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, in which a new formulation was proposed. This was supplemented in 1975 by a set of "Guidelines" for its implementation, and in 1985 a Pontifical Commission issued further "Notes for Preaching and Teaching" entitled *The Common Bond: Christians and Jews*.

How far have the last twenty years taken us in the direction of reconciliation? This is the question posed to sixteen Jewish and Christian symposiasts in the September issue of *Christian Jewish Relations* (published by the Institute of Jewish Affairs).

All agree that *Nostra Aetate* was a major advance. Pynchas Brener, Chief Rabbi of Venezuela, calls it a "historic, momentous event for a new relationship between Catholicism and the Jewish people". Here and there there may be Jewish reservations, but "we dare not and cannot shy away from a peaceful and friendly hand that is extended to us". Jacob Kaplan, a former Chief Rabbi of France, defines its two key achievements: it testified to "a real desire to tear up the roots of religious antisemitism" and it finally took a stand against what the French historian Jules Isaac termed the 'teaching of contempt', the theological tradition of anti-Jewish teaching in the Church.

But have all the positive expectations been realised? Throughout the symposium cautionary notes are sounded about the time it takes for a new theological directive to filter down to the local level. Patience is urged: it takes more than twenty years to reverse a two-thousand year tradition of hostility. David Novack

outlines some of the reasons for Jewish scepticism about dialogue. There are Jews who believe that antisemitism is a problem for Christianity, which it must solve by itself. There are others who suspect that dialogue is a pretext for missionary activity. Others again feel that Jewish striving for Christian goodwill was a "necessary but humiliating tactic" of an exposed Jewish diaspora. It has no place in a Judaism that knows the self-confidence of its own State.

But it is the failure of the Catholic Church to recognise the State of Israel that figures most prominently in the Jewish responses. Arthur Hertzberg suggests that both partners "will continue to be disappointed in their deepest expectations of the dialogue". Jews are dismayed that the Vatican "will make gestures to Yassir Arafat, or his successors, and it will then cover its flanks with Jews by repeating the Church's condemnations of antisemitism."

The point is put most passionately by Emanuel Rackman, President of Bar Ilan University. The non-recognition of Israel by the Vatican "makes Jews doubt that the Declaration was meant to be anything more than a profession of love with the usual innocuous consequences that flow from such professions as distinguished from legally consequential acts that alter the relationships of the parties . . . The establishment of the State of Israel was a momentary response of conscience to the Holocaust on the part of the two greatest world powers. That the Vatican did not join those powers – whatever the reason – indicates that two secular states, one democratic and the other totalitarian, have a keener conscience than the very power most responsible for the antisemitism that made the Holocaust possible".

The June 1985 document, *The Common Bond*, does make a statement on Israel. The paragraph reads: "The existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law". The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations reacted swiftly with a statement which regretted "the regressive spirit and formulations"

of the document; it found "the absence of a strong statement on the Holocaust" to be "particularly disturbing"; and was distressed that "nothing is said about Israel's right to exist or of the justice of her cause".

Rabbi Dr. Norman Solomon, the new editor of *Christian Jewish Relations*, finds some solace in the fact that the document at least takes the recognition of the State of Israel out of the theological arena. He argues that while Medinat Yisrael must have religious significance for Jews, it would be counterproductive to invite the Church to incorporate it within its own theology. A Christian theological approach to Israel might take two forms, either of them invidious. Either the Jewish rejection of salvation involves forfeiture of the covenantal right to the Land, or (as Rabinowitz, above, documents) the Jewish return to the Land heralds the Second Coming and Israel is therefore to be made a key target for evangelism. Solomon appeals to the Catholic church: "Please get on with the job of establishing diplomatic relations, and don't let it any longer impede the progress of your theological dialogue."

Jewish Views of Dialogue: Eliezer Berkovits

In the light of current questioning, it is useful to recall two powerful statements on the parameters of dialogue made by major Jewish thinkers twenty years ago.

Eliezer Berkovits delivered a scathing negative judgment in an essay entitled *Judaism in the Post-Christian Era* (Judaism, 1966, subsequently reprinted in his *Faith After the Holocaust*, Ktav, 1973). Christianity, he maintained, was reaching out for dialogue only because it needed to. It was no longer a world force. "The age of Christian militancy is over; 'baptism or death' is gone forever". Christian affirmations of the principle of freedom of religious worship and human conscience have come about because, after centuries of persecuting others, Christians now find themselves on the other side of the equation in Communist and non-Christian countries. The new mood is born of practical necessity and should be evaluated as such.

In confronting Christians in a post-

Christian era, Berkovits urges Jewish representatives to "speak with courage, self-assurance and with all the dignity to which sixteen centuries of Jewish martyrdom in Christian lands obligates them." They should speak, not in the narrow context of the present, but with the voice of the entire Jewish historical experience – of those who lived before the birth of Christianity, those who suffered under Christianity, and those who have emerged on the other side into post-Christianity. "I have never sensed so acutely that we are indeed the *am olam* as in these days when we are able to survey the Christian performance from the beginning of the Christian era to its end. We have been there all the time, we alone know what it has meant."

A Jewish-Christian dialogue, for Berkovits, is an impossibility at many levels. Emotionally, "we are not as yet ready to enter into a fraternal dialogue with a church, a religion, that has been responsible for so much suffering, and which is ultimately responsible for the murder of our fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters in the present generation." Though the Holocaust was not perpetrated on the basis of Christian teaching, it could not have been conceived, let alone executed, without the long history of the "teaching of contempt" through which the church had planted antisemitism into the core of European culture. The 1965 Vatican declaration that henceforth "the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God" was, for Berkovits, massively inadequate.

Theologically, dialogue is pointless. Judaism is self-sufficient and does not need to consult Christianity to understand itself. Philosophically, a specific Jewish-Christian conversation has no special significance. Jews are open to ideas from other cultures; each is to be judged on its own merits; but there is no unique relationship between Judaism and Christianity: "the realm of thought is universal". In particular, the concept of a common "Judeo-Christian" heritage has no meaning within Jewish frames of reference. It is a construction of Christianity, and a misleading one, for "when Christians use the term 'Judeo-Christian', 'Judeo' means something fundamentally different from what is Jewish for the Jew".

What motivates Christians to dialogue has no counterpart in Judaism. Christianity standardly sees itself as the repository of universal religious truth. By contrast, "Judaism does not have the ambition to save mankind, because it never maintained that mankind was lost without it. Judaism is the only possible way of life for Jews. Only Jews are lost without it. As to non-Jews, Judaism maintains that 'the righteous of all the peoples has a share in the world to come'." The evangelism of Christianity and the non-evangelism of Judaism mean that any conversation would be conducted on unequal premisses, and hence not be true dialogue.

Finally, dialogue would be frankly unethical. It would imply "a measure of mutuality" in the responsibility for the Jewish-Christian tragedy. There was no mutuality, "there was only unilateral oppression and persecution". Also it would suggest that only if we understand one another's religious beliefs do we have a basis for mutual respect and love, as if religious misunderstanding somehow excuses persecution. Instead "I am duty-bound to respect the dignity of every human being no matter what I may think of his religion. It is not inter-religious understanding that mankind needs but inter-human understanding."

The task ahead lies not in the theological sphere but in ethical and social issues, matters of common concern to those of any faith and those of none – the search for peace, justice and freedom of conscience. The major *religious* issue, the confrontation with secularism, is one where Judaism must go its own way. It must teach its own special relevance to the times. Its distinctive message would be diluted by "the burden of a common religious front".

This devastating critique first appeared in 1966, and events were to provide Berkovits with supporters even among those who were initially disposed to think him wrong. Professor Jacob Neusner wrote a letter to Judaism magazine, which had published Berkovits' essay, arguing that he was too sweeping in his condemnation. Christianity is not a monolith; there were Christians who risked their lives to save Jews from the Nazis; there were others who were prepared to go further in

their change of heart than the Vatican. There were too many contexts and possibilities of dialogue to write off the entire exercise.

A year later came the Six-Day War, and shortly afterwards a second letter from Professor Neusner. He had been wrong, he confessed; Berkovits was right. What had changed his mind? "The silence in most, though not all, leaders of American Christianity in the face of what then seemed impending genocide, but what was most certainly intended and well planned genocide against the people of the State of Israel." Berkovits' pessimism turned out, when Jewish-Christian friendship was put to the test, to be no more than realism. From here on, Neusner agreed, though the two faith communities might co-operate on humanitarian ventures and converse on shared scholarly concerns, "the middle ground of religious and theological conversation has, I think, been closed by the massive indifference and, I think, craven silence of those from whom some of us hoped for better things."

A similar and no less dramatic change of mind was recorded by Emil Fackenheim, prompted by the same cause. In his majestic essay *The People Israel Lives* (in E. Fackenheim, *The Jewish Return into History*, Schocken, 1978; also in Talmage, *Disputation and Dialogue*, supra) he tells of his earlier belief that Christian antisemitism was vanishing through the process of dialogue. "I have now been forced into a more radical view: Anti-Semitism exists wherever it is held (or implied) that 'the Jewish people' is an anachronism which may survive, if at all, only on sufferance . . . Anti-Semitism survives in Christian attitudes – in none so obviously as those vis-a-vis the state of Israel." Why had the Christian press been so silent in 1967? Why had it been so ready to criticise Israel, so uneven in its choice of moral issues? "I have no answer to these questions except a theology of a new Israel to which, consciously or unconsciously, the resurrected old Israel remains an affront."

In a later essay (*Post-Holocaust Anti-Jewishness, Jewish Identity and Israel*) he goes a stage further. The cure of Christian and Muslim anti-Jewishness lies with those religions themselves. Jews can only help by curing themselves of self-hatred in its many

forms; and by removing themselves as far as possible from the reach of anti-Jewish power through the existence and affirmation of the state of Israel. The great dialogue Judaism now faces is with itself.

Soloveitchik on Dialogue

The classic statement on dialogue, though, had been given in an august and overarching formulation by the Rav himself, Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik. The essay, whose leading points were adopted by the Rabbinical Council of America, appeared under the title *Confrontation in Tradition*, 1964.

There were, he said, four basic conditions that must be satisfied. First, Judaism rejected any attempt to characterise it from within the theology of another faith. "We are a totally independent faith community. We do not revolve as a satellite in any orbit. Nor are we related to any other faith community as 'brethren' even though 'separated'." In one sense there is a Judeo-Christian tradition, namely, that both religions together with Hellenism have shared in shaping the *culture* of the West. But in terms of *faith* there is no joint tradition, and Judaism-as-viewed-by-Christianity is a falsification which has no part in authentic Jewish self-understanding.

Second, the meeting or "confrontation" between Jews and Christians should not take place at the theological level at all: "our common interests lie not in the realm of faith, but in that of the secular orders". The stance will, in other words, be side-by-side rather than face-to-face, working together on such causes as social justice, individual freedom and joint civic and scientific enterprises. Even this should not "dull our sense of identity as a faith community", our Jewish singularity.

Third, in such encounters Jews should refrain from suggesting any changes in the texts or rituals of Christianity. If another faith is prompted to undergo change it must be through its own liberal and humanitarian dynamic, without the intrusive advice of outsiders.

Fourth, Judaism is not itself willing, able, or authorised to revise any of its historic stances in the cause of mutuality and reconciliation. This would be a betrayal of the Jewish

past, and a tragic failure of the "sense of dignity, pride and inner joy in being what we are".

Underlying these conditions is a general philosophical statement of the nature of man in his encounter with the world. There is a "double confrontation", on which Soloveitchik was further to elaborate in his *The Lonely Man of Faith*. At one level, man is challenged by nature and overcomes it by knowledge, control, and mastery. At another and higher level, he meets and aspires to communicate with the Other, renouncing any effort at control or domination, but instead discovers his essential loneliness.

In Jewish terms, at the first level we are all part of the common human enterprise of civilisation and technology. At the second, we are members of a unique covenantal community, with its singular ethos, faith, and historical expectations. It is at the first level, then, that joint action between Jews and other groups is natural and productive. At the second, the level aspired to by interfaith dialogue, the very act of meeting will only serve further to enhance our sense of distance.

Soloveitchik's particular genius in this kind of theologising is to anchor his analysis in Biblical texts, creating a distinctive if traditional *midrash*. Accordingly, he sees the meeting between Jews and Christians in terms of the encounter between Jacob and Esau after their years of separation. Jacob sent messengers bearing gifts to his brothers, and instructed them on what they should say: "When my brother Esau meets you, he will ask, 'To whom do you belong? Where are you going? Who owns all this that is with you?' You should reply, 'They are your servant Jacob's. It is a present sent to my lord Esau . . .'" (Genesis 32:18-19).

Dialogue raises these three questions. To whom do you belong – what is your spiritual identity? Where are you going – what is your historical destiny? To these two the answer is uncompromising and produces no common ground. The third – Who owns all this that is with you? – asks, are you willing to contribute your gifts and talents to the general good of society? And to this there is a positive answer: "It is a present sent to my lord Esau". We are duty-bound to enrich society with all the creative gifts we possess.