

# Part I – Jewish Medieval Perspectives on Christianity

## Summary of Medieval Perspectives:

1. **Rambam** – Christianity = Avodah Zara
2. **Rabbi Menachem Hameiri** – The halakhic category of Avodah Zarah refers to uncivilized heathens. Christianity is not Avodah Zara
3. **Rabbeinu Tam** - Jews are prohibited from Shituf (to combine belief in God with something else), but Non-Jews are permitted. There are different standards for Jews and Non-Jews

### רמב"ם, פירוש המשניות ע"ז

אלו החגים הנזכרים היו מפורסמים באותו הזמן אצל הנוצרים והנלוים אליהם. וכן כל חג אצל כל האומות בכל גלילות הארץ, אם היו עובדי עבודה זרה, יהויב בהם מה שזכר. **ודע, שזאת האומה הנוצרית העומדת בטענת המשיח, על חילוף כיתותיה, כולם עובדי עבודה זרה, ואידיהן כולם אסורים, ונוהגים עמהם בכל התורה כמו שנוהגים עם עובדי עבודה זרה, ויום ראשון הוא מכלל אידיהן של גויים, ולפיכך אין מותר לשאת ולתת עם מאמין המשיח ביום ראשון כלל בדבר מן הדברים, אלא נוהגים עמהם ביום ראשון כמו שנוהגים עם עובדי עבודה זרה ביום אידן, וכך ביאר התלמוד**

### משנה עבודה זרה א:ד

עיר שיש בה ע"ז חוצה לה מותר היה חוצה לה ע"ז תוכה מותר מהו לילך לשם בזמן שהדרך מיוחדת לאותו מקום אסור

### רמב"ם, משנה עבודה זרה א:ד

ולפיכך יש לדעת שכל עיר מערי האומה הנוצרית שיש להם בה במה, צנוני לומר בית תפילתם, אשר הוא בית עבודה זרה בלא ספק, הרי זו...  
...העיר אין מותר לעבור בה בכוונה, וכל שכן לדור בה

### בית הבחירה למאירי מסכת עבודה זרה דף כו עמוד א

הרבה ראינו שמתפלאים על שבזמנים אלו אין אדם נוהר מדברים אלו כלל ואנו כבר ביארנו עיקר כונת הספר על איזו אומה היא סובבת כמו שיעידו ימי אידיהן שהזכרנו שהם כלם לאומות הקדומות שלא היו גדורות בדרכי הדתות והן אדוקות ומתמידות בעבודת האיללים והכוכבים והטלזימאש שכל אלו וכיוצא בהן הם עיקרי ע"ז כמו שהתבאר ומ"מ לענין חשש איסור שבת וחשש איסור מאכלות ומשתאות כיון נסך וסתם יינם ושאר איסורין הדומים לאלו הן שנאסרו בהנאה הן שנאסרו באכילה הן מאותם שגזרו עליהם מחשש חתנות כל האומות שוות בו חוץ מאיסור הנאה בסתם יינם לדעת רוב מפרשים כמו שיתבאר במקומו במסכת זו ומעתה יהו דברים אלו מיושרים על לבך ולא נצטרך להשיבם בכל דבר ודבר אלא שתהא אתה בוחן באיזו אתה מפרשם על האמות הקדומות ובאיזו אתה מפרש על כלל הכל ובין ותדע

### תוספות מסכת סנהדרין דף סג עמוד ב

אסור לאדם שיעשה שותפות - אמר ר' שמואל כ"ש שבועה עצמה דאין לקבל הימנו ור"ת אומר מותר לקבל הימנו השבועה קודם שיפסיד כדאמר בפ"ק דמס' ע"ג (דף ו:): דמלוה ע"פ נפרעין ממנו מפני שהוא כמציל מידם ולא חיישינן דילמא אזיל ומודה ואף על גב דהתם ספק והכא ודאי מ"מ בזמן הזה כולן נשבעים בקדשים שלהן ואין תופסין בהם אלהות ואף על פי שמה שמזכירין עמהם ש"ש וכוונתם לדבר אחר מ"מ אין זה שם עבודת כוכבים גם דעתם לעושה שמים ואף על פי שמשתפין שם שמים ודבר אחר לא אשכחן דאסור לגרום לאחרים לשותף ולפני עור ליכא דבני נח לא הוזהרו על כך

## Part II - Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Thought of Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik and Rav Abraham Joshua Heschel

### 1. Theodor Herzl, The Complete Diaries of Theodor Herzl, volume 4, pg 1601 (quoting the Pope)

The Jews have not recognised our Lord, therefore we cannot recognise the Jewish people. It is not pleasant to see the Turks in possession of our Holy Places but we have to put up with it; but we could not possibly support the Jews in the acquisition of the Holy Places. If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptise all of you.<sup>1</sup>

### 2. 1965 - Nostra Aetate, Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions

Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that, according to God's saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ-Abraham's sons according to faith -are included in the same Patriarch's call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people's exodus from the land of bondage. **The Church, therefore, cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament through the people with whom God in His inexpressible mercy concluded the Ancient Covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws sustenance from the root of that well-cultivated olive tree onto which have been grafted the wild shoots, the Gentiles.** Indeed, the Church believes that by His cross Christ, Our Peace, reconciled Jews and Gentiles, making both one in Himself.

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Since the spiritual patrimony common to Christians and Jews is thus so great, **this sacred synod wants to foster and recommend that mutual understanding and respect** which is the fruit, above all, of biblical and theological studies as well as of fraternal dialogues.

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**True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ; still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.** All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

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Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, **displays of anti-Semitism**, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.

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### 3. Rav Moshe Feinstein, Yoreh Deah 3:43

#### שו"ת אגרות משה יורה דעה חלק ג סימן מג

שני תשובות בענין איסור לילך לאסיפה עם נוצרים בענייני התקרבות באמונה והתחברות עמם. א' י"ט אדר ראשון תשכ"ז מע"כ ידידי הנכבד מהר"ר דובער לאנדער שליט"א הנה בדבר שכתר"ה הבטיח לבא למקום שיתאספו בכ"ג אדר א' קאטאליקן ופראטעסטאנטן /קטולים ופרוטסטנטים/ יחד עם בני" מחברי סינאגאג קאנסול וגם חברים רבנים מהסתדרות הרבנים, אף שמה שידבר כתר"ה יהיה במילי דעלמא, פשוט וברור שהוא איסור חמור של אביזרייהו דע"ז אשר פשטה המגפה עתה בהרבה מקומות ע"י יזמת הפויפסט /האפיפיור/ החדש אשר כל כוונתו הוא להעביר את כל היהודים מאמונתם הטהורה והקדושה ושיקבלו את אמונת הנוצרים, שיותר נוח להעביר באופן זה מבאופן השנאה והרציחות שהשתמשו הפויפסטן שלפניו, ולכן כל מגע ומשא עמהם אף בדברים בעלמא ועצם ההתקרבות הוא אסור באיסור החמור דהתקרבות לע"ז, ויש להחשיב זה גם באיסור מסית ומדיח, שאף אם כתר"ה ועוד רבנים שילכו לשם יזהרו בדבריהם וגם לא יחניפו להכומרים ואמונתם כמו שמחניפים הראבייס המסיתים ומדיחים מרעפארמער וקאנסערוואטיוון /מרפורמים וקונסרבטיבים/ ילמדו מזה הרבה אנשים לילך לדרשות המיסיאונערן /המסיונרים/ וכדומה, וכן אין לכת"ר לשלח אף במכתב לשם מה שהיה חושב לדבר כי כל פגישה עמהם הוא סיוע למזימתם הרשעה ביותר.

### 4. Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel, No Religion is an Island

I speak as a person who is convinced that the fate of the Jewish people and the fate of the Hebrew Bible are intertwined. The recognition of our status as Jews, the legitimacy of our survival, is only possible in a world in which the God of Abraham is revered.

Nazism in its very roots was a rebellion against the Bible, against the God of Abraham. Realizing that it was Christianity that implanted attachment to the God of Abraham and involvement with the Hebrew Bible in the hearts of Western man, **Nazism resolved that it must both exterminate the Jews and eliminate Christianity, and bring about instead a revival of Teutonic paganism.**

Nazism has suffered a defeat, but the process of eliminating the Bible from the consciousness of the Western world goes on. It is on the issue of saving the radiance of the Hebrew Bible in the minds of man that Jews and Christians are called upon to work together. None of us can do it alone. Both of us must realize that in our age anti-Semitism is anti-Christianity and that anti-Christianity is anti-Semitism.

The supreme issue is today not the halacha for the Jew or the Church for the Christian-but the premise underlying both religions, namely, whether there is a pathos, a divine reality concerned with the destiny of man which mysteriously impinges upon history; the supreme issue is whether we are alive or dead to the challenge and the expectation of the living God. The crisis engulfs all of us. The misery and fear of alienation from God make Jew and Christian cry together.

Jews must realize that the spokesmen of the Enlightenment who attacked Christianity were no less negative in their attitude toward Judaism. They often blamed Judaism for the misdeeds of the daughter religion. The casualties of the devastation caused by the continuous onslaughts on biblical religion in modern times are to be found among Jews as well as among Christians.

**On the other hand, the Community of Israel must always be mindful of the mystery of aloneness and uniqueness of its own being. "There is a people that dwells apart, not reckoned among the nations" ( Num. 23:9 ), says the Gentile prophet Balaam. Is it not safer for us to remain in isolation and to refrain from sharing perplexities and certainties with Christians ?**

Our era marks the end of complacency, the end of evasion, the end of self-reliance. Jews and Christians share the perils and the fears; we stand on the brink of the abyss together. Interdependence of political and economic conditions all over the world is a basic fact of our situation. Disorder in a small obscure country in any part of the world evokes anxiety in people all over the world.

**Horizons are wider, dangers are greater ... No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Spiritual betrayal on the part of one of us affects the faith of all of us. Views adopted in one community have an impact on other communities.**

Today religious isolationism is a myth. For all the profound differences in perspective and substance, Judaism is sooner or later affected by the intellectual, moral and spiritual events within the Christian society, and vice versa.

We fail to realize that while different exponents of faith in the world of religion continue to be wary of the ecumenical movement, there is another ecumenical movement, worldwide in extent and influence : nihilism. **We must choose between interfaith and inter-nihilism. Cynicism is not parochial. Should religions insist upon the illusion of complete isolation ?** Should we refuse to be on speaking terms with one another and hope for each others failure ? Or should we pray for each other's health, and help one another in preserving one's respective legacy, in preserving a common legacy ?

There are four dimensions of religious existence, four necessary components of man's relationships to God : a ) the teaching, the essentials of which are summarized in the form of a creed, which serve as guiding principles in our thinking about matters temporal or eternal, the dimension of the doctrine; b ) faith, inwardness, the direction of one's heart, the intimacy of religion, the dimension of privacy; c ) the law, or the sacred act to be carried out in the sanctuary, in society, or at home, the dimension of the deed; d ) the context in which creed, faith and ritual come to pass, such as the community or the covenant, history, tradition, the dimension of transcendence.

In the dimension of the deed there are obviously vast areas for cooperation among men of different commitments in terms of intellectual communication, of sharing concern and knowledge in applied religion, particularly as they relate to social action.

In the dimension of faith, the encounter proceeds in terms of personal witness and example, sharing insights, confessing inadequacy. On the level of doctrine we seek to convey the content of what we believe in, on the level of faith we experience in one another the presence of a person radiant with reflections of a greater presence.

**I suggest that the most significant basis for meeting of men of different religious traditions is the level of fear and trembling,**

**of humility and contrition, where our individual moments of faith are mere waves in the endless ocean of mankind's reaching out for God, where all formulations and articulations appear as understatements, where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering God's commandment, while stripped of pretension and conceit we sense the tragic insufficiency of human faith.**

What divides us ? What unites us ? We disagree in law and creed, in commitments which lie at the very heart of our religious existence. We say "No" to one another in some doctrines essential and sacred to us. What unites us ? Our being accountable to God, our being objects of God's concern, precious in His eyes. Our conceptions of what ails us may be different; but the anxiety is the same. The language, the imagination, the concretization of our hopes are different, but the embarrassment is the same, and so is the sign, the sorrow, and the necessity to obey

##### **5. Rav Soloveitchik, Confrontation, Tradition 1964**

We Jews have been burdened with a **twofold task**; we have to cope with the problem of a **double confrontation**. We think of ourselves as human beings, sharing the destiny of Adam in his general encounter with nature, and as members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavorable conditions, confronted by another faith community. We believe we are the bearers of a double charismatic load, that of the dignity of man, and that of the sanctity of the covenantal community. In this difficult role, we are summoned by God, who revealed himself at both the level of universal creation and that of the private covenant, to undertake a double mission - the universal human and the exclusive covenantal confrontation.

Like his forefather, Jacob - whose bitter nocturnal struggle with a mysterious antagonist is so dramatically portrayed in the Bible - the Jew of old was a doubly confronted being. The emancipated modern Jew, however, has been trying, for a long time, to do away with this twofold responsibility which weighs heavily upon him.

**The logos, the word, in which the multifarious religious experience is expressed does not lend itself to standardization or universalization. The word of faith reflects the intimate, the private, the paradoxically inexpressible cravings of the individual for and his linking up with his Maker. It reflects the numinous character and the strangeness of the act of faith of a particular community which is totally incomprehensible to the man of a different faith community. Hence, it is important that the religious or theological logos should not be employed as the medium of communication between two faith communities whose modes of expression are as unique as their apocalyptic experiences.....We must always remember that our singular commitment to God and our hope and indomitable will' for survival are non-negotiable and non-rationalizable and are not subject to debate and argumentation. The great encounter between God and man is a wholly personal private affair incomprehensible to the outsider - even to a brother of the same faith community.**

### **Response to R Tannenbaum, 1962**

“I just received your letter....The letter is extremely apologetic, bordering on servility.... the elimination of inciting and prejudicial sections from Catholic Liturgy, is not our problem but theirs.

### **Letter to Hakham Dr Salomon Gaon, 1962**

“....Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneersohn of Lubavitch has commented that the Ecumenical Council is a strictly Catholic Wedding and it would be undignified if we were to crash the party. Unfortunately, Jewish political leader in America possess neither a sense of dignity nor an awareness of Jewish historical continuity”

### **Letter to the Rabbinical Council of America – “On Interfaith Relationships”, 1964**

The Jewish religious tradition expresses itself in a fusion of Universalism and Singularism. On the one hand, Jews are vitally

concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community charged with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific, and ethical. As such, we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism or esotericism which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society. On the other hand, we are a distinctive faith community with a unique commitment, singular relationship to Gd and a specific way of life. We must never confuse our role as bearers of a particular commitment and destiny with our role as members of the family of man. In the areas of universal concern, we welcome an exchange of ideas and impressions. Communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to all of us.

In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine and ritual, Jews have throughout the ages been a community guided exclusively by distinctive concerns, ideals and commitments. Our love of and dedication to Gd are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship to Gd has been modeled by different historical events and in different terms. Discussions will in no way enhance or hallow these emotions.

...We are, therefore, opposed to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis a vis "similar" aspects of another faith community. We believe in and are committed to our Maker in a specific manner and we will not question, defend, offer apologies, analyze or rationalize our faith in dialogues centered about these "private" topics which express our personal relationship to the God of Israel. We assume that members of other faith communities will feel similarly about their individual religious commitment.

We would deem it improper to enter into dialogues on such topics as:

- 1) Judaic monotheism and the Christian idea of Trinity.
- 2) The Messianic idea in Judaism and Christianity.
- 3) Jewish attitude on Jesus.
- 4) The concept of the Covenant in Judaism and Christianity.



- 5) The Eucharist mass and Jewish prayer service.
- 6) The Holy Ghost and prophetic inspiration.
- 7) Isaiah and Christianity.
- 8) The Priest and The Rabbi.
- 9) Sacrifice and the Eucharist.
- 10) The Church and the Synagogue – their sanctity and metaphysical nature, etc.

There cannot be mutual understanding concerning these topics, for Jews and Christians will employ different categories and move within incommensurate frames of reference and evaluation.

**When however, we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors, communication among the various faith communities is desirable and essential. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as war and peace, poverty, freedom, man's moral values, the threat of secularism, technology and human values, civil rights etc which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology.**

....To repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private individual commitments.”

#### **6. Rav Herschel Reichman, The Cardinals' Visit: Thoughts of a Rosh Yeshiva, February 17, 2004**

In the wake of Vatican II, and its call for religious ecumenism, the Rav z'tzal issued his psak (Tradition, 1964) that has defined Orthodox Jewry's policy towards the Catholic Church for forty years. He decided: "Religious dialogue" between Jews and Christians is prohibited. "Social dialogue" concerning human and social issues, particularly anti-Semitism, is permitted.

The Rav's psak was not issued in a vacuum. He was well versed in Christian theology and knew exactly what Vatican II meant. As a leading halachist of his time, he was also very well aware of the

halachic considerations that promote dialogue like aivah, darchei shalom, and hatzalos nefashos, as well as those halachos that limit dialogue. Yet, he issued his, as yet unchallenged, historic psak. **As far as I know, nothing has fundamentally changed in the last forty years to warrant a reassessment of that psak.**

Thus, the only halachic issue for us to decide today is whether or not any particular event is "religious" or "social." To my mind, priests listening to bachurei yeshivah learning Torah in a Beis Midrash is a "religious" event. I would also say the same if rabbis went into churches to listen in on Christian religious classes.

7. **Dr. Reuven Kimelman, Rabbis Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations, Edah Journal 4:2, 2004**

The essay itself is quite unusual. Perhaps it can best be described via the negative, by stating what it is not. It is not written in Hebrew, the traditional language of Jewish legal discourse. There is no clear behavioral conclusion (*p'sak halakhah*). It makes no reference to the history of Jewish understandings of Christianity. In this regard, it cites neither the Talmud, Judah Halevy, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Menahem ha-Meiri, Jacob Emden, or Israel Lifschutz, not to mention authorities of the last century.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, it hardly cites at all. And when it does cite Maimonides and Nachmanides, the citations have nothing to do with Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Finally, there is no assessment of the relationship between Christianity and *avodah zarah*.<sup>42</sup>

Rather than being formulated as a *p'sak halakhah*, the essay constitutes a meditative ambivalent reflection on the complexity of the issues. Its contradictory quality is intrinsic to its message.<sup>50</sup> What it gives with one hand, it takes away with the other. On the one hand, it is sufficiently prohibitive to buttress those who are apprehensive about, or unwilling to engage in, such a conversation with the requisite religious legitimation to decline to do so. On the other hand, it is sufficiently equivocal to allow those who are well informed theologically, and who psychologically do not grovel before Christianity or modernity, to broach a conversation with Christianity. It thus serves as a prohibition for the many and a permission for the few.<sup>51</sup> Some will claim that the Rav is talking out of both sides of his mouth. Precisely, the fragmented modern Jewish situation prevents a single answer on the burning issues of the soul. The contemporary life of the soul allows for few universals. A Rebbe's answer has to be attuned to the needs, abilities, and situations of his students. By referring to himself more as a Rebbe than a *posek*, R. Soloveitchik allowed himself to give divergent rulings to different students.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, the vagaries of the post-modern world preclude one from being a *posek* without being a Rebbe, for the validity of an objective order so often consists in reflecting a subjective reality.<sup>53</sup>

## 8. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

**I restudied in depth the moralist essay by my teacher Rabbi Soloveitchik, "Confrontation". This is not a halakhic reponsum; it is a philosophical, highly nuanced treatise dealing with the issue of Jewish-Christian confrontation written before the church made its changes...**

Rav Soloveitchik was afraid that this would lead to a theological debate and he was very much against debating issues of religion. I maintain that our center operates perfectly within the guidelines of Confrontation. Conventional wisdom has it that we may only discuss politics, not religion with people of other faiths, but that's not what Confrontation says. If that was Rav Soloveitchik's stance, he could have said it in two sentences, not in twenty-five very heavily footnoted pages of philosophical and theological arguments. Rabbi Soloveitchik is pro-confrontation; otherwise the article would have been called Non-confrontation. He shows in magnificent Biblical exegesis that it's important to confront the world and it's important to confront the "other". He contrasts single-confrontation with double-confrontation. Single-confrontation is what Western man understands – that is that if we are to confront the world, we cannot confront ourselves. You cannot have a double identity; you cannot be a citizen of the world and have a separate unique status as a unique faith community. If we confront the Christians with a single confrontation it will lead to a whittling away of our unique Jewish identities and that is what Rabbi Soloveitchik was very much against.

We are not one big happy family; we are two very separate and unique faith communities. What he was against was dialoguing with Christians whose purpose was to convert Jews, debating religious issues with Christians, or compromising Jewish ideals or practices to be more in consonance with Christianity

Those were the three things that he was against and those are my three red lines. We will never dialogue with Christians even on political issues, if their purpose is to convert Jews. We never debate

religious issues with Christians, we only teach them Jewish theology and thirdly, we never compromise our religious values in order to be more in consonance with Christianity.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was never against expressing Jewish ideas, ideals or practices to Christians or listening or reading about Christian ideas from Christians. At the beginning of *Halakhic Man*, he frequently quotes Kant, Kierkegaard and especially Karl Barth and Uno Vacht ?? Rav Soloveitchik read and was thoroughly aware of the writings of these Christian philosophers. He wasn't against expressing Judaism to the Christians, he wasn't against hearing the Christians speak about issues of faith which could be very revealing, he was against debating Jewish ideas and ideals. Indeed, the first reading that he gave of his "Lonely Man of Faith" prior to its publication took place at an interfaith seminar at St John's Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts.

9. **Dr. Marc Shapiro, Confrontation: A Mixed Legacy**, available at: <http://seforim.traditiononline.org/index.cfm/2009/1/25/Thoughts-on-Confrontation--Sundry-Matters-Part-I-#sdfootnote13anc>

Yet despite the fact that I have lived my life in accordance with the Rav's guidelines, I believe that his position has had certain negative consequences. It might be that these are the sorts of consequences that Orthodox Jews who follow the Rav's prescriptions must live with, but I hope not.

One of these consequences is religious separatism, and when it comes to interfaith relations the Modern Orthodox have adopted the same position as that of the right-wing Orthodox. Thus, in the United States one finds virtually no relationships between Modern Orthodox rabbis and Christian clergymen, or between Modern Orthodox groups and their Christian counterparts, even of the sort that the Rav would encourage. This type of separatism is to be expected when dealing with the *haredim*, but one would have thought that the rabbinic leadership of Modern Orthodoxy would be more open-minded in this area. Yet for many Modern Orthodox rabbinic figures this is not the

case, and when a group of Cardinals recently toured Yeshiva University a number of faculty members and students of the Rav expressed strong criticism of the administration in allowing this visit.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the Rav was often cited as a source for this opposition, as if anything he wrote in "Confrontation" spoke against friendly relations and interchange of ideas in non-theological settings.

In today's Orthodox world, when it comes to Christianity the stress is on the negative, beyond anything the Rav wrote about in "Confrontation." This has brought about a broad refusal on the part of Modern Orthodox rabbis to have even the barest of relationships with their Christian counterparts. I am not blaming this on "Confrontation," since before the essay appeared such relationships were also rare, but the essay reinforced the atmosphere of distance between Orthodox Jews and Christians in all spheres, even though this was not its intent. To put it another way, I would say that, despite its intent, "Confrontation" reaffirmed Orthodox Jews' inclination that, in all but the most negligible circumstances, they should ignore the dominant religion and its adherents. A different essay by the Rav could have put an even greater stress on the positive results of interfaith cooperation in "secular" spheres. Instead, almost nothing was done to remove the fear of Christianity from Orthodoxy, and while in the very shadow of Vatican II this might have been the correct approach, by now I think we have moved beyond this. Yet even in our day it would still be unheard of for a Christian clergyman to address the members of an Orthodox synagogue or group about matters of joint concern. A lay Christian might be welcome, but any relationship with clergy is seen as dangerous, in that it could lead to a compromising of traditional Jewish beliefs...

10. **Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Vatican City, "We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah." March 16, 1998. Available at: [http:// www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=1028](http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?id=1028)**

It was this extreme ideology which became the basis of the measures taken, first to drive the Jews from their homes and then to exterminate them. The Shoah was the work of a thoroughly modern

neo-pagan regime. Its anti-Semitism had its roots outside of Christianity and, in pursuing its aims, it did not hesitate to oppose the Church and persecute her members also.

But it may be asked whether the Nazi persecution of the Jews was not made easier by the anti-Jewish prejudices imbedded in some Christian minds and hearts. Did anti-Jewish sentiment among Christians make them less sensitive, or even indifferent, to the persecutions launched against the Jews by National Socialism when it reached power?

Any response to this question must take into account that we are dealing with the history of people's attitudes and ways of thinking, subject to multiple influences. Moreover, many people were altogether unaware of the "final solution" that was being put into effect against a whole people; others were afraid for themselves and those near to them; some took advantage of the situation; and still others were moved by envy. A response would need to be given case by case. To do this, however, it is necessary to know what precisely motivated people in a particular situation.

The Catholic Church desires to express her deep sorrow for the failures of her sons and daughters in every age. This is an act of repentance (*teshuvah*), since, as members of the Church, we are linked to the sins as well as the merits of all her children. The Church approaches with deep respect and great compassion the experience of extermination, the *Shoah*, suffered by the Jewish people. . . . It is not a matter of mere words, but indeed of binding commitment. "We would risk causing the victims of the most atrocious deaths to die again if we do not have an ardent desire for justice, if we do not commit ourselves to insure that evil does not prevail over good as it did for millions of children of the Jewish people. . . . Humanity cannot permit all that to happen again

**Dr. David Berger, *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations.***

"In sum, we now have an official document of the Catholic Church,

'ratified and confirmed' by the Pope himself [and whose author is now Pope! -GS], declaring that a key purpose of interfaith dialogue is mission, which includes the message that conversion is necessary to attain full communion with God" (p. 383). "Cardinal Ratzinger's [now Pope Benedict's -GS] vision, however, is not confined to the *eschaton*. He appears interested in bringing individual Jews to a recognition of Christian truth even before the end of days, and he sees interfaith dialogue—though that is not its only purpose—as one means of accomplishing this end" (p. 390).