



CONGREGATION  
SHOMREI EMUNAH

**JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS:**  
SHARED VALUES AND THE  
LIMITS OF COOPERATION

**PART III**

*MOTZEI SHABBOS PARSHAS VAYIGASH*  
7 TEVES 5765  
DECEMBER 18, 2004

שני תשובות בענין איסור לילך לאסיפה עם נוצרים בענייני התקרבות באמונה והתחברות עם

ר"ס אדר ראשון תשכ"ו מע"כ ידידי הנכבד מהר"ר דובער לאנדער שליט"א

הנה בדבר שכתרייה הבטיח לבא למקום שיחאסא בכ"ג אדר א' קאסאליקן וטראסטאנטן יחד עם בניו מחברי סיגאניאג קאנסול וגם חברים רבנים מהסתדרות הרבנים, אף שמה שידבר כתרייה יהיה במלי דעלמט, שטוט וברור שהוא איסור חמור של אבויייה דע"ו אשר פסקה המגפה עתה בהרבה מקומות ע"י יומת המופטט החדש אשר כל כונתו הוא להעביר את כל היהודים מאמונתם המסורה והקדושה וסיקבלו את אמונת הנוצרים, שיתרו נוח להעביר באופן זה מאופו השגאה ורציחות שהשתמשו המופטטן שלפניו, ולכן כל מעד ומשא עמהם אף בדברים בעלמא ועצם התקרבות הוא אסור באיסור החמור להתקרבות לע"ו, ויש להחשיב זה גם באיסור מסית ומדיה, שאף אם כתרייה ועד רבנים שילבו לשם יוהרו בדבריהם וגם לא יחניטו להכומרים האמונתם כמו שחזינו וראינו המסיתים ומדיחים מרעאמרער וקאסערואסטיון ילמדו מזה הרבה אנשים לילך לדרשות המיסיאונערן וכדומה, וכן אין לכתרייה לשלח אף במכתב לשם מה שהיה חושב לרבר כי כל מנישה עמהם הוא סיוע לפויפתם הרשעה בח"ב. וכן אסור להשתתף בשום אופן באספות כאלו ששמעתי הרועים לעשות בבאסטאן וברומא וכל המשתתף עמהם יהיו מי שהיו הם נחשבים למסיתים ומדיחים את כלל ישראל, דמה שעמלו המיסיאונערן של הקאסאליקן כל השנים ולא עלה בידם רק מעט דמעט ח"ו ע"י רבנים חסרי דעת כאלו כרוצים להשתתף עמהם אפילו שיחמדו ע"י הרבה יותר, ואין סוענים למסית לומר שלא נתחוב לזה ויתחייבו נפשיהם ח"ו בזה ובכא.

ולכן לא יגניח על מה שלא יקיים הבטחתו לבא לשם ולדבר כי אדרבה אולי ע"י שכתרייה לא ילך מצד האיסור גם אחרים לא ילכו ויהיה בכלל מוכי הרבים. ידיו מוקירו, משה פיינשטיין

In reading the Feinstein responsa, it seems clear that Feinstein viewed the relationship between Jews and Christians as unaltered by modern developments such as Vatican II. From his perspective, only isolation from Christians and their representatives could ensure the survival of the Jews as a minority community. He could perceive no Christian motive for initiating joint religious dialogue other than conversion of the Jews. Furthermore, his responsa - inasmuch as

As a result, Soloveitchik did not respond to Feinstein's overture and refused to condemn Jewish-Christian dialogue in the harsh and overarching terms that Feinstein had. Nor would he reverse the position he expressed on this matter in "Confrontation." There is no indication that Soloveitchik signed the declaration that Feinstein appended to his letter; nor is there any record that Soloveitchik offered an alternative formulation. If he had agreed to do either of these two things, a document condemning dialogue of all types between Jews and Christians would have been issued by the two foremost leaders of late-twentieth-century American Jewish Orthodoxy. Instead, the Feinstein documents (translation below), considered in concert with the position put forth by Soloveitchik and the RCA, reflect the diverse sensibilities and differences in policy that emerged among the two camps of American Orthodoxy on this issue. They also reflect the commitments and principles that informed and guided each of these men. Feinstein did not hesitate to publish these documents as expressions of his views on the matter, nor did Soloveitchik - in view of his own writings on this issue - feel constrained to respond in any way.

בנייה ס' אדר שני תשכ"ו מע"כ ש"ב ידידי וחביבי הגאון הגדול המפורסם מרביץ תורה רבנים מהר"ר סאלאווייציק שליט"א. שלו וברכה כל הימים.

בדבר אשר איוה רבנים המציעים נלכדו בסח של ראש הכומרים בוואטיקאן בשם המועצה האקומנית (עקומנישן ראט), אשר בענמנו הוא לעבד כל היהודים לאמונתם ח"ו והקראדנאלן והבישאפן צוט ממנו לעשות התקרבות בין הכומרים ובין הרבנים בוועדות (באמיטעט) בכל מקום ומקום וגם בהתכנסויות (קאנווענשאנס), והצליח מעשה שסן שנחברו לזה איוה רבנים בהראת היתר שלא ידברו בעניני אמונה אלא בעניני חברה (סאציאלע אנגעלעגענהייטן), אשר לבר שכמעט כל הדברים הם עניני דת שלהכומרים הוא השקפה אחרת, ולבר שכל כוננתם הוא רק לבא ע"י זה לעניני אמונה, הגה שטוט שבעצם ההתחברות עמהם אף לדברים בעלמא הוא דבר אסור בכל עת ועידו, וכ"ש עתה שבא זה מעשה הרשעה של ראש הכומרים שאסור, וכדחוינו שהעוננים מחסארים מזה שכבר הוא כבאו לשיווי אמונה דעות ולהתפלל יחד וכדומה, וכבר שאל אותי אחד מרבנים הצעירים אשר נשלח מהסתדרות הרבנים לדבר בכ"ג אדר א' שהיה כעין התכנסות כגאב ארק מחבור הכומרים להבריל עם רבנים אם מתר לו ללכת לשם באשר שבשיבה הניא לא ידברו מעניני אמונה וכתבתי לו שאסור באיסור החמור דמסית אף שאין כוננתו לזה, וכ"ה ששמע דבריו ועתה בקרוב יהיה התכנסות כזה באופן יותר גדול בבאסטאן, ולכן להפר עצת הרשעים והצלחת מעשה שסן ולהציל כלל ישראל משמד ח"ו יהיה רצוני שגם ה"ג יחתם על הבתב שאני שולח במכתבי זה שאיסור גמור הוא

להתחבר עם הכומרים בשום אופן אף לא לדברים בעלמא ולא להשתתף בהתכנסות שיהיה בבאסטאן ולא בכנס התכנסות עמהם בשום מקום לא במדינה זו ולא ביוראם ולא לסייע בשום דבר לעצת ראש הכומרים בעקומניזם שלו, ומקטו: אני שמס"ד של שנינו ימנע לכל הרבנים מה וחסור עצת הרשעים בעקומניזם שעשו האם הוי"ג רצה לכתוב בכתב עצמו וכתב לי העמדת נוסחו, וידוע לי סדרת הוי"ג בימים אלו ה' ירחם אבל הוא כבוד שמים לעמך כפרץ הגדול הוה שלכן בסוח אני שיבליג על עצרו וסדרתו ותיכף יתחום ע"ו כאסור וישלח לי בתורה, והנני ידיו ש"ב מוקירו מאד נומר בברכה כפולה לרשאה שלימה, משה פיינשטיין

נוסח האיסור

בדבר ענין עקומניזם אשר יצא בעצת ראשי אגות הנוצרים אשר הכונה היא להעביר לשמד ח"ו הצליח מעשה שסן לסמות לזה גם איוה רבנים להתחבר בחבורה אחת עם כומרים בקאמיטעט קבוצים בכל מקום ומקום וגם בקאנווענשאנס במדינה זו וביוראם, הגה אנתנו מדיעים כי הוא איסור גמור וברור שאסור לעשות חבורות יחד רבנים עם כומרים ולא להיות בקאנווענשאנס לא כמה שידויה בבאסטאן ולא בכום מקום לא במדינה זו ולא במדינות אחרות, ואף לא לדברים בעלמא שאינם עניני אמונה דת בלא שום התגללות ותירוצים, וכן אסור לסייע בכום דבר לענין העקומניזם ח"ו בזה בשום איסור מסית אף שלא יתכוננו לזה וע"ו כגון על החתום להדיע דין איסור זה לכל הרבנים כומרי דת ותרנתו הקדושה ועומדים בפרץ כיום תענית אסתר תשכ"ו.

David Ellenson, After Emancipation (chpt. 17)

In practical terms, this meant that Soloveitchik and members of the RCA endorsed Jewish-Christian dialogue on social and political issues of general human concern. At the same time, they were opposed to such dialogue on matters of faith. Each religious community is singular and its theological postures are axiological. They cannot be the subjects of joint discussion. Of course, precisely how this line can be drawn in praxis is unclear. After all, the social concerns and political commitments that religious persons adopt are presumably extensions of the faith affirmations they possess. Nevertheless, this was the policy position Soloveitchik and his followers advanced, and it has informed and guided the stance numerous Orthodox rabbis and Jewish lay people have taken towards Jewish-Christian dialogue for over three decades.<sup>15</sup>

In looking at the Feinstein letter to Soloveitchik on the topic, no element of Jewish-Christian dialogue is endorsed. Feinstein, in contrast to Soloveitchik, expressed the view that ecumenicism and the Jewish-Christian dialogue such ecumenicism fostered were nothing more than a thinly-veiled plot designed by the Catholic Church to convince Jews to abandon their faith and convert to Christianity. Only two types of Jews would participate in such efforts. The first were individuals like Reform and Conservative rabbis, people who advocated positions that could only lead to the assimilation of the Jewish people. The second were well intentioned but naive people, like the young Orthodox rabbi who had approached him earlier on this matter. Their participation in such dialogue could lead to no positive end. Feinstein was particularly concerned that this latter group could inadvertently create an atmosphere that would allow the Church to entice Jews into abandoning their faith. However pure their motives, these Jewish leaders would be responsible for the apostasy of these Jews and Jewish law would therefore hold them culpable. It was this group Feinstein particularly sought to address, and he saw Soloveitchik as his natural confederate in this matter, as together the influential authority the two men could exercise together in the Orthodox world was considerable.

0399

1400

1404

David Berger, America (Sept. 17, 2001)  
"Dominus Jesus and the Jews" p. 11

Finally, if dialogue avoids discussion of core doctrinal issues and focuses on shared moral, social and political concerns, it may well be justified even with people whose conversionary objectives are much sharper than those of Dominus Jesus. Many Jews hold discussions about such issues with evangelical Protestants who conduct overt missions to the Jews, and Rabbi Soloveitchik, who did not believe that such objectives had been abandoned by the Catholic Church, endorsed discussion of these matters with full awareness that theological content would play a significant role.

D. Berger, America p. 9

For Jews to denounce this sort of supersessionism as morally wrong and disqualifying in the context of dialogue is to turn dialogue into a novel form of religious intimidation. As the pre-eminent Orthodox rabbinical authority Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik understood very well, such a position is pragmatically dangerous for Jews, who become vulnerable to reciprocal demands for theological reform of Judaism, and it is even morally wrong. To illustrate the

Jon D. Livensong, Commentary, "How Not to Conduct Jewish-Christian Dialogue" (December 2001), p. 32

How has this change in Christian attitudes been greeted by Jews? As a political and cultural matter, needless to say, it has been warmly welcomed, if with occasional signs of wariness. But what has been slower in coming—and what many Christians, after a painful reevaluation of their own tradition, have been most eager to receive—is a considered historical and theological response. Are the regrets of Christians accepted, or do Jews think that Christianity inherently leads to anti-Semitic persecution? Will Jews acknowledge that the two communities are members of the same larger spiritual grouping, or do they see Christians as an alien group, little closer to them in belief and practice than Hindus or Buddhists?

D. Berger - BC Symposium

It is precisely friendly theological discussion and not religious disputation that generates these dangers, all the more so when the discussion is formalized as a theological encounter not between individuals but between communities. As I noted in a paper on Dabru Emet posted on the Center's website, a prominent participant in the dialogue, with as positive an attitude toward Jews and

STATEMENT ADOPTED BY THE RABBINICAL COUNCIL OF AMERICA AT THE MID-WINTER CONFERENCE, FEBRUARY 3-5, 1964

We are pleased to note that in recent years there has evolved in our country as well as throughout the world a desire to seek better understanding and a mutual respect among the world's major faiths. The current threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values makes even more imperative a harmonious relationship among the faiths. This relationship, however, can only be of value if it will not be in conflict with the uniqueness of each religious community, since each religious community is an individual entity which cannot be merged or equated with a community which is committed to a different faith. Each religious community is en-

David Berger - BC Symposium

Rabbi Soloveitchik worried that theological dialogue would create pressure to "traic favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith to reconcile some differences." He argued against any Jewish interference in the faith of Christians both on grounds of principle and out of concern that this would create the framework for reciprocal expectations. Now, the changes in Catholic attitudes detailed by Dr. Korn are real, welcome, and significant, but they do not undermine these concerns. Quite the contrary: the trajectory of dialogue to our own day has confirmed the validity of Rabbi Soloveitchik's analysis to an almost stunning degree.

"Dabru Emet" The Institute for Christian and Jewish Studies

- Jews and Christians worship the same God.
- Jews and Christians seek authority from the same book—the Bible (what Jews call "Tanakh" and Christians call the "Old Testament").
- Christians can respect the claim of the Jewish people upon the land of Israel.
- Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah.
- Nazism was not a Christian phenomenon.
- The humanly irreconcilable difference between Jews and Christians will not be settled until God redeems the entire world as promised in Scripture.
- A new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice.
- Jews and Christians must work together for justice and peace.

Judaism as one could hope for, congratulated the Jewish theologians who authored that declaration. "The dialogue," he said, "will be stymied if Christians affirm a theological bonding with Jews without an acknowledgement of such bonding from the Jewish side." Several years ago, I criticized the New York Board of Rabbis for inviting its members to participate in an interfaith prayer service in the main sanctuary of St. Patrick's cathedral, asserting in an interview with The Jewish Week that although many Jewish authorities maintained that classical Christian theology is not considered idolatry for Christians, it is for Jews. In light of this, prayer in such a setting raises the most serious of issues to the point where no Orthodox rabbi should even consider participating. An important official in the New York Archdiocese wrote a strong letter of protest to the paper, and in a private letter to me, he complained about my expressing such an assessment of Christianity after all that Catholics had done to reassess their negative image of Judaism. In an article on Dominus Jesus, I have already expressed my regret at using the term idolatry, which is easily misunderstood in this context, but my correspondent was not mollified even after he understood very well that I was not suggesting that Christians attribute divinity to icons. Rabbi Soloveitchik's concern about the trading of favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith could not be more clearly illustrated.

DABRU EMET suffers from one of the great pitfalls of interfaith dialogue as it has come to be practiced over the past several decades. Given the history of religiously inspired contempt and animosity, it is inevitably tempting in such exercises to avoid any candid discussion of fundamental beliefs and to adopt instead the model of conflict resolution or diplomatic negotiation. The goal thus becomes reaching an agreement, in the manner of two countries that submit to arbitration in an effort to end longstanding tensions or of a husband and wife who go to a marriage counselor in hopes of overcoming the points of contention in their relationship. Commonalities are stressed, and differences—the reason, presumably, for entering into dialogue in the first place—are minimized, neglected, or denied altogether. Once this model is adopted, the ultimate objective becomes not just agreement but mutual affirmation; the critical judgments that the religious traditions have historically made upon each other are increasingly presented as merely the tragic fruit of prejudice and misunderstanding.

p34

In recent years, Christians have made these ideas the basis for a positive evaluation of Judaism, and it is understandable that the authors of *Dabru Emet* should feel the need to reciprocate. But the relationship is not symmetrical. For classical Judaism, there is no covenant between God and the Church—no parallel, that is, to Paul's belief in the irrevocable "call" of the Israelite patriarchs. *Dabru Emet's* suggestion that the Church will survive until God finally redeems the world thus seems like a thin imitation of Christian doctrine, contrived for purposes of dialogue but without real foundation in Jewish thought.

*Dabru Emet* moves to only slightly more secure ground when, in another of its eight theses, it asserts that "Jews and Christians accept the moral principles of Torah." But how many Christians ask themselves, "Are my morals in line with Torah?" They are more likely to ask, "What would Jesus do?" (hence "WWJD" on bumper stickers, T-shirts, etc.). In fact, Christianity has usually considered Jesus' moral principles to be superior to those of the Torah, an improvement or radicalization and not just a restatement. Consider these examples

p35

*Dabru Emet* is not wrong to draw attention to common scriptures and "similar lessons." The problem is that it reduces what is not common to mere differences of opinion—as if the two traditions make no truth claims. This easygoing relativism profoundly impedes any sophisticated understanding of the two millennia of Jewish-Christian dialogue and dispute over the meaning of Scripture. A more accurate statement would note that it is precisely the points of commonality that make disputation over the differences inevitable—at least within communities committed to the idea of religious truth and not simply to the rhetorical equivalent of "I'm OK, you're OK."

For the thrust of this statement is to make the two communities look as alike as two peas in a single religious pod. Both, we are told, pray to "the same God," appeal to "the same book" (from which they "take away similar lessons"), and abide by the same "moral principles"—in fact, the "moral principles of Torah." Moreover, both were the targets (if with a difference in chronology) of the Nazis' "murderous rage," and both can now appreciate God's gift of the Land of Israel to the Jews. Although the statement mentions disagreements and asks that they be respected, it is hard to come away from it without feeling that the nearly two thousand years of Jewish-Christian disputation were based on little more than the narcissism of small differences.

Is it mere coincidence that the recent rapprochement between Jews and Christians has been accompanied by soaring rates of intermarriage, and by a striking acceptance of this demographic calamity on the part of many Jewish organizations? If, as we are now told, the commonalities between the two religions really are so basic, and so encompassing, why indeed should intermarriage, or for that matter conversion to Christianity, be resisted as strenuously as their tradition has long enjoined Jews to do?

None of this need deter anyone from "speaking the truth" about the relationship of Jews and Christians as he sees it. But for the authors and signatories of *Dabru Emet* to assert that their version of this truth poses no hazards to Jewish practice and identity is not just wishful thinking; it is whispering in the dark.

Commentary (April 2002)

RABBI CHARLES L. ARLAN:

Jon D. Levenson's strongest criticism of *Dabru Emet* is leveled at its assertion that "a new relationship between Jews and Christians will not weaken Jewish practice." He correctly notes that the era of growing Christian-Jewish understanding has coincided with unprecedented high rates of intermarriage and assimilation. He claims that the breakdown of the "instinctive repugnance" Jews and Christians have felt for each other is what has made intermarriage possible.

But Jews are intermarrying not because they no longer feel a repugnance for Christianity but rather

because they have ceased to believe in and practice Judaism. Many Jews make no religious affirmation beyond the view that "Jesus was not the messiah." Their automatic antipathy toward Christian belief causes them to assume that whatever Christianity affirms, Judaism denies. A religious identity based on nothing more than the negation of "the other" has no staying power.

In a dozen years as both a Hillel director and the rabbi of a Conservative synagogue, my experience has been that—contrary to Mr. Levenson's fears—a positive appraisal of Christianity can strengthen Jewish practice and identity. Jews learn that belief in a personal God who loves and redeems us is not just a "Christian" concept.

Institute for Christian  
& Jewish Studies  
Baltimore, Maryland

JACOB NAUSNER:

Jon D. Levenson's splendid critique of *Dabru Emet* rightly focuses on intellectual issues. But he treats as a minor detail what strikes me as critical: nearly all the signers are Reform and Conservative rabbis, whose congregations are loaded with intermarried couples. It seems to me that the statement's urgency derives from the practical politics of finding something to say on the subjects of Hanukkah/Christmas and Easter/Passover, not to mention the problem of little Moshe O'Reilly.

With more than half the Reform congregations in the country unwilling to hire clergy who do not perform intermarriages, and with Conservative rabbis facing heavy pressure not to preach against intermarriage at all, *Dabru Emet* is more than politically expedient. The statement's utter misrepresentation of Judaism's view of Christianity, which Mr. Levenson puts on display, is a necessary theological cover for the shame of Reform and Conservative Judaism and their rabbis' craven politics. What motivated the handful of Orthodox signers I cannot imagine.

Bard College  
Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

MICHAEL WYSCHOGROD:

Jon D. Levenson's cogent critique of *Dabru Emet* is a service to Jews and Christians who could easily be misled into concluding that there are no really difficult theological differences between their faiths. Two of the most intractable of these are the divinity of Jesus and Christianity's abrogation of Mosaic law—neither of which is mentioned in *Dabru Emet*. Its authors would argue, no doubt, that they wished to focus on what unites us rather than on what divides us. But if the document's aim is to show how Jews evaluate Christianity, omission of the difficulties Mr. Levenson enumerates is fatal.

As an Orthodox Jew who has devoted much energy to Jewish-Christian dialogue, I am saddened that *Dabru Emet* missed the opportunity to produce a document that did not evade the hard questions while contributing to improving Jewish-Christian relations.

University of Houston  
Houston, Texas

DAVID BERGER:

While the motives underlying *Dabru Emet* are understandable and even laudable, Jon D. Levenson's critique properly underscores serious concerns outweighing the benefits that the document strives to achieve. Shortly after the statement was publicized, the Orthodox Union asked me to formulate the following very brief response, which was later adopted as the position of the Rabbinical Council of America:

*Dabru Emet* is in many ways an admirable statement composed by

people for whom I have high regard. I agree with much of it, including the controversial but carefully balanced passage denying that Nazism was a Christian phenomenon. However, I did not agree to sign it for several reasons. First, for all its exquisitely skillful formulation, it implies that Jews should reassess their view of Christianity in light of Christian reassessments of Judaism. This inclination toward theological reciprocity is fraught with danger.

Second, although it is proper to emphasize that Christians "worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth," it is essential to add that worship of Jesus of Nazareth as a manifestation or component of that God constitutes what Jewish law and theology call *avodah zarah*, or foreign worship—at least if done by a Jew. Many Jews died to underscore this point, and the bland assertion that "Christian worship is not a viable religious choice for Jews" is thoroughly inadequate. Finally, the statement discourages either community from "insisting that it has interpreted Scripture more accurately than the other." While intended for the laudable purpose of discouraging missionizing, this assertion conveys an uncomfortably relativistic message.

Brooklyn College  
Brooklyn, New York

R. Meier Solovitchik, *The Forward*,

"How Solovitchik Saw Interreligious Dialogue" (April 25, 2003)

The reluctance of Orthodox rabbis, even those rabbis who have a history of communication with the Christian community, to sign the declaration reflects a strict adherence to the admonitions of the revered Rabbi Joseph Solovitchik, known by his students and followers as "the Rav," who in the 1960s prohibited theological dialogue with the Catholic Church. With the 10th anniversary of the Rav's passing being widely commemorated this Passover, reflection is warranted on the limits that the Rav's prohibition still places on Orthodox Jews today — as well as on opportunities for dialogue yet to come.

The Rav's opposition to communal and organizational interfaith dialogue was partly predicated upon the prediction that in our search for common ground — a shared theological language — Jews and Christians might each sacrifice our insistence on the absolute and exclusive truth of our respective faiths, blurring the deep divide between our respective dogmas. In an essay titled "Confrontation," Rabbi Solovitchik argued that a community's faith is an intimate, and often incommunicable affair. Furthermore, a faith by definition insists that its system of dogmas, doctrines and values is best fitted for the attainment of the ultimate good. In his essay, the Rav warned that sacrificing the exclusive nature of religious truth in the name of dialogue would help neither Jews nor Christians. Any "equalization of dogmatic certitudes and waiving of eschatological claims" spell the end of the vibrant and great faith experiences of any religious community — he wrote.

Interestingly, when one reads the writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the most influential and enthusiastic proponents of interfaith engagement at the time that the Rav first voiced his opposition, we find an example of the equalization of dogma that the Rav so opposed. In his essay "No Religion is an Island," Heschel noted that religions have profound disagreements, and each claim to be true. Yet he argued that truth is not exclusive, that "ultimate truth is not capable of being fully and adequately expressed in concepts and words," and that God speaks to man "in a multiplicity of languages. One truth comes to expression in many ways of understanding."

Orthodoxy rejects this approach. While Jews and Christians both agree on many religious issues, we disagree, and believe each other profoundly wrong, about others. Either Jesus is the son of God or he is not. Religious relativism is not the answer to disagreement between faiths, yet relativism, and a blurring of religious distinctions, all too often result when two deeply believing faith communities engage each other in the public arena on theological issues.

Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times*,  
"The Real War" (Nov. 27, 2001)

If 9/11 was indeed the onset of World War III, we have to understand what this war is about. We're not fighting to eradicate "terrorism." Terrorism is just a tool. We're fighting to defeat an ideology: religious totalitarianism. World War II and the cold war were fought to defeat secular totalitarianism «Ai Nazism and Communism «Ai and World War III is a battle against religious totalitarianism, a view of the world that my faith must reign supreme and can be affirmed and held passionately only if all others are negated. That's bin Ladenism. But unlike Nazism, religious totalitarianism can't be fought by armies alone. It has to be fought in schools, mosques, churches and synagogues, and can be defeated only with the help of imams, rabbis and priests.

The generals we need to fight this war are people like Rabbi David Hartman, from the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. What first attracted me to Rabbi Hartman when I reported from Jerusalem was his contention that unless Jews reinterpret their faith in a way that embraced modernity, without weakening religious passion, and in a way that affirmed that God speaks multiple languages and is not exhausted by just one faith, they would have no future in the land of Israel. And what also impressed me was that he knew where the battlefield was. He set up his own schools in Israel to compete with fundamentalist Jews, Muslims and Christians, who used their schools to preach exclusivist religious visions.

He answered: "All faiths that come out of the biblical tradition « Judaism, Christianity and Islam « have the tendency to believe that they have the exclusive truth. When the Taliban wiped out the Buddhist statues, that's what they were saying. But others have said it too. The opposite of religious totalitarianism is an ideology of pluralism «Ai an ideology that embraces religious diversity and the idea that my faith can be nurtured without claiming exclusive truth. America is the Mecca of that ideology, and that is what bin Laden hates, and that is why America had to be destroyed."

The future of the world may well be decided by how we fight this war. Can Islam, Christianity and Judaism know that God speaks Arabic on Fridays, Hebrew on Saturdays and Latin on Sundays, and that he welcomes different human beings approaching him

Many Jews and Christians have already argued that the answer to that question is yes, and some have gone back to their sacred texts to reinterpret their traditions to embrace modernity and pluralism, and to create space for secularism and alternative faiths. Others Christian and Jewish fundamentalists have rejected this notion, and that is what the battle is about within their faiths.



Jonathan Rosenblum, Jerusalem Post  
"Tom Friedman's Latest Big Idea" (Dec, 2001)

Friedman cites his rebbe David Hartman, to the effect that Judaism, Christianity and Islam all have a tendency to believe that they have the exclusive Truth - a sin he labels "religious totalitarianism"

But he again fails to note the crucial differences between the three biblical faiths. Judaism, for instance, does not seek converts. Nor does Judaism deny that the righteous of the nations have a place in the World to Come.

THE progressive religion advocated by Friedman/Hartman turns out to be high-falutin gibberish. Like good post-modernists, Friedman/Hartman call for a "multilingual view of God" that reduces different religions to nothing more than a series of narratives of human beings approaching God out of their different history, language and cultural perspective.

Religion, in this view, is nothing more than a man-made construct, an expression by men of their sense of the Divine. Revelation by an Infinite God to finite man, who would otherwise be incapable of apprehending God or knowing His will, has no place in such a view.

The Friedman/Hartman redefinition of religion is an assault on the very concept of Truth. Jesus cannot be both divine and not divine, the covenant between God and the Jewish people cannot be simultaneously intact and superseded, Mohammed cannot have been a prophet and not have received prophecy.

For Friedman/Hartman, however, any proposition and its opposite are equally valid. It's all a matter of narrative perspective. Somehow, according to Friedman, man-made narratives need not weaken "religious passion."

Rabbi Caamy (First Things 2005)

More liberal Jews, and I include here many who take the practice of their religion seriously, gladly "dialogue" with secularism even as they decline to acknowledge cultural common ground with their Christian brethren.

Though usually ascribed to the legacy of persecution, indifference to and ignorance of Christianity is part and parcel of the American academy's tendency to marginalize religion and deprecate religion's intellectual resources. To treat religion, and its cognitive demands, with respect, is to confront the very difficulties the Rav addressed in "Confrontation" and elsewhere: The intractable conflict of incommensurable ideals and beliefs that cannot be resolved by invoking neutral, universal secular standards, before which the various religions are judged, engenders discomfort and loneliness. For modern Jews, taking theological distinctiveness seriously is perceived as an obstacle to integration in American life; going along with secularism is not perceived as harmful. The solution is to downplay or oppose the positive contribution of Christianity in American life and, correspondingly, to reduce halakhic Judaism to behavior devoid of

The naked public square and the religiously evacuated academic arena are incompatible with passionate commitment and intellectual self-respect.

There is an element of intellectual Marranism in a policy of passive accommodation to the dominant intellectual culture of liberal secularism. The more thoroughly we recognize the mystery and incommunicability of Jewish distinctiveness, the more evident this becomes. Jews who wish to engage in creative confrontation with the giants of Western thought can do so, with dignity, humility, courage and reticence, within the frame of reference developed for us by the Rav and in his spirit. Doing so may increase the likelihood that, when we find ourselves side by side with similarly oriented members of the "community of the many," we will do one another some good.

R. Meir Soloveitchik

Overlooked in the debate is that in issuing a set of guidelines to Orthodoxy's Rabbinical Council of America, titled "On Interfaith Relationships," the Rav did not ban all Orthodox interfaith engagements. When it came to causes that were not strictly theological in nature, the Rav insisted that there was much that Orthodoxy and Christianity could accomplish together. All human beings, he believed, are charged by the Almighty to enhance the physical and moral welfare of humanity. In seeking the moral betterment of man, specific religious beliefs of Jews and Christians serve to unite rather than divide us.

The Rav stressed that the two faiths can dialogue not only on such topics as "war and peace, poverty, freedom" but also on "the threat of secularism." This interfaith engagement, he stressed, will be based on "our religious outlooks," in which we express our feelings "in a peculiar language which quite often is incomprehensible to the secularist," and in which we define "morality as an act of *Imitatio Dei* — of imitation of the Almighty. While organizational dialogue on dogma was prohibited, the Rav insisted that Jews and Christians can, and should, dialogue on the distinctly religious morality that they share.

We live in an age in which the biblical-moral traditions that have guided us for centuries are increasingly being forgotten. Orthodoxy now shares certain moral commonalities with some Christians that it does not share with other Jewish denominations, such as certain views on abortion and homosexuality. While most Orthodox rabbis rightly refrained from signing "Dabru Emet," we Orthodox ought to issue a statement of our own, one focusing not on theology, but on morality. It would let the Christian community know that we will work with them to preserve and protect, inter alia, the sanctity of life and of marriage in America, and that Orthodoxy is uniquely suited to join them in this endeavor.

While the Rav rightly feared religious relativism, and therefore forbade communal theological engagement, the effort to enhance the welfare of the world, as well as the battle to preserve the biblical-moral tradition in America, provide common cause for traditional Jewish and Christian believers. While our particular faiths divide us, it is also our faith — specifically, our adherence to traditional religious mores — that unites us and provides a foundation for dialogue in the future.

Toward Tradition.org

### MISSION STATEMENT

Toward Tradition is a non-profit (501.c.3), educational organization working to advance our nation toward the traditional Judeo-Christian values that defined America's creation and became the blueprint for her greatness. We believe that only a new alliance of concerned citizens can re-identify and dramatically strengthen the core values necessary for America to maintain that greatness and moral leadership. These values are: faith-based American principles of constitutional and limited government; the rule of law; representative democracy; free markets; a strong military; and, a moral public culture.

Concerned Jews share this objective with many evangelical and conservative Christians. Working together, they focus on our common cultural, moral, and political goals. The corollary benefit of this alliance is that the majority gentile culture sees that American Jews are not monolithically liberal, and that many of the "progressive" forces in this country are advocating positions that are in fact abhorrent to traditional Judaism.

### Strategy:

The intellectual strategy of *Toward Tradition* is to apply ancient solutions to modern problems in the three critical areas of human life: Family, Faith, and Fortune. Toward Tradition offers an integrated philosophical and moral cultural vision - one that is rooted in Torah, American history and in the Judeo-Christian values reflected in that history.

M. Michael Shoham, Jewish Action  
"The Christian Right: Trojan Horse or  
Knight on Shining Armor?"  
(Winter 5765)

verged. Yet today, in an era of almost unprecedented anti-Semitic and anti-Israel hostility, one Jewish ally seems to have emerged out of this volatile union—the evangelical Christian Right.

This development has provoked significant debate within the Jewish community. Some have enthusiastically embraced this new lone champion with few reservations, while others feel it is best to remain at arm's length. Most Jewish leaders have opted to cautiously nurture this emerging relationship. Clearly, any reasonable assess-

Traditional Jews usually find that they share many common values with evangelicals. Their conversion agenda is the one major sticking point. It is vital for us to understand why evangelism is such a priority in their lives.

Many Jews are incredulous when they learn that the same Christian Right that has come out so passionately on behalf of Israel is equally committed to having Jews believe in Jesus. The late *rosh yeshiva* of the Mir Yeshiva in Jerusalem, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, often spoke about the paradoxical idea of "light and darkness operating simultaneously." The reality is that the same groups that are seeking our physical and political well-being are often dangerous to us spiritually.

The strong affinity evangelicals have for the State of Israel is rooted in a complex mixture of spiritual and political factors. The ties are similar to those of traditional Jews, similar but not congruent. It is vital to appreciate

the primacy of the Bible in order to understand evangelical loyalty to Israel. The Torah clearly teaches that God established the land of Israel as the homeland for His Chosen People. As many Christian bumper stickers proclaim, "The Bible says it, I believe it. And that settles it!"

Israel is also the birthplace of Christianity. Thousands of Christian

Remorse over Christianity's long and sad history of persecuting Jews is what motivates some evangelicals to now extend themselves on our behalf. Recalling a world that stood by as six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust,

many feel it is their duty to support Israel during its current crisis. These feelings are often intensified by a sense of gratitude to the Jewish people who gave Christianity both its Bible and Messiah.

For many on the Christian Right, loyalty to the Jewish State is also rooted in political considerations. Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East and is a vital strategic ally in the ongoing war against terror.

With the mounting hostility to Jews across the globe and the Jewish homeland subjected to an ongoing campaign of terror and isolation in the international community, there has been little cause for optimism. The lone port in the storm has been the loving embrace of the evangelical community. However, since Christian affinity to Israel is often part of a larger agenda to convert every Jew to the Christian faith, we must tread very carefully when negotiating this relationship.

What this calls for in practice is a delicate policy of *chabdeihu vechashdeihu*, appreciative engagement and careful scrutiny, when dealing with evangelicals. We need to carefully connect the dots to ensure that we don't unwittingly cooperate with groups whose work puts Jews at spiritual risk.

R. Daniel Lapin, Jewish Action  
"Living as Jews in Christian America" (Winter 5765)

Let me tell you a little about what I came to learn about those people; for in coming to understand the fathers, I came to know the children. And in knowing the children, today's American Christians, I came to see why America has offered our people the safest, most tranquil, most durable and most prosperous home we have enjoyed in the past 2,000 years. You will see that we Jews have enjoyed this unprecedented paradise, not in spite of the Biblical values of its founders but precisely because of them.

Which brings us to our neighbors and friends in America today, the evangelical Right. Do they want to convert us to Christianity? Of course, they would like to do so. However, what a blessed time we live in when Christians want to convert us with words rather than with guns and knives. We live in a time and place where constitutional guarantees assure us that only words will be used, but we should remember that these guarantees were all derived from the Word of God.

It is useful to realize that throughout our history, when we have been given the choice of renouncing our faith or being murdered, we Jews have nearly always chosen death. If forced to choose, we have always preferred a soul without a body to a body without a soul. American Christians do not threaten our bodies, and while it is true that their teachings can threaten our souls, the enemy in this case is not Christianity but Jewish ignorance.

Regardless of how distressing it is to see alienated Jews abandoning our faith, I am convinced that attempting to silence, reprove or condemn Christians in an effort to prevent Jews from converting to Christianity is not a really effective approach. One problem is that it causes resentment without accomplishing very much. You see,

rance of their religion. When Jewish Americans know the name of Jesus' mother but not that of Moses' mother; when they know more of Khalil Gibran than they do of *The Kuzari*, when they cannot understand or even read the Bible in its original Hebrew; when they find more warmth in the Christian community than in the Jewish one, it is a Jewish—not a Christian—problem. Christian leaders, among them Reverend Jerry Falwell, have told me that evangelistic efforts are not effective among observant and Torah-educated Jews.

After World War I, the communists condemned the great twentieth-century Jewish leader Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky to a life-sentence in the Soviet Gulag. High-level diplomatic efforts, conducted in great secrecy by the British government on behalf of Anglo-Jewry, secured his release in 1933. The Russians immediately expelled him to London, where he became a *dayan* of the London Beit Din, which is to say, a justice on the supreme Jewish court of the British Empire.

Much later, I attended a public discussion on the Holocaust at which Rabbi Abramsky refuted the notion that anti-Semitism was somehow endemic to Germans. A member of the audience, agreeing, suggested that the Holocaust could really have happened anywhere. But, he then remembered Rabbi Abramsky's debt of gratitude to the British government, and with sensitivity to the Jewish principle of gratitude, he added, "excepting England, of course." And Rabbi Abramsky looked very sadly at the speaker and said, "No, even in England." Before the stunned London audience could recover, Rabbi Abramsky continued, "But probably not in America."

Years later, when I was learning at Yeshivat Kol Torah in Jerusalem, I often visited with Rabbi Abramsky at his home in that city, to where he had retired. More than once I referred back to the London lecture. And I asked him, "Why not in America?" He would only smile at me and repeat, "No, no, not in America. No, not in America."

I am not saying that things will forever be good. We are in the *Guilt*, even in America. However there is no *mitzvah* to accelerate bad times. I.e.'s not behave in the foolish ways prohibited by our sages that, God forbid, could turn friends into enemies and undo Rabbi Abramsky's optimistic prophecies. (A)