The Views of Rabbi Moses Feinstein, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Interfaith Dialogue

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David Orenstein

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ABSTRACT

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A thesis presented to the Near Eastern and Judaic Studies Department

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Brandeis University
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By David Orenstein

The present thesis will provide an overview of ecumenism as well as important information necessary for its proper historical contextualization; discuss the Second Vatican Council as well as elucidate the official documents associated with it; provide biographical sketches of Rabbis Moses Feinstein, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik; explicate the positions on interfaith dialogue advocated by these rabbinic personalities; delineate where such positions converge and diverge; and assess the contemporary implications of these positions for the future of interfaith dialogue and interactions involving both Jews and Christians.
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Overview: Ecumenism

The English term “ecumenism” derives from the Greek word *oikumene*, denoting “the Church universal,”¹ and refers to the desire to reunite the Christian Church. This desire for reunification arose after centuries in which the Christian Church fragmented into increasingly distinct and independent religious entities. In 1054, after multiple episodes of fragmentation, the Christian Church was split into the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Western Roman Church. In 1517, the Protestant Reformation wrought further divisions within the Church. In the 1800’s, one could observe multiple denominations of Christianity in the United States and elsewhere. What these denominations had in common, ironically, was a shared theological recognition that the fragmentation of the church was a sinful phenomenon. Each of these denominations demanded that the others modify their conceptions of the truth, but none of them exhibited a willingness to compromise on its theological truth claims to achieve unity.

During the 19th century, the missionary movement produced the modern ecumenical movement. It was at this time that, within the United States, cooperation between denominations occurred. This cooperation was partly due to the necessity of “meeting the religious needs of a constantly expanding nation,”² a daunting task for

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¹ Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 194
² Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 194
any one denomination to pursue effectively alone. In order to achieve this objective, such organizations as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Home Missionary Society were established. Many of such organizations, none of which was completely inclusive, eventually collapsed as a result of “doctrinal conflicts,” but the formation of such organizations set the stage for practical collaboration as a basis for interdenominational cooperation. This practical collaboration would address such subjects as “missions, charity, combating infidelity, and moral reform” while eschewing theological differences. In 1893, the World’s Parliament of Religions convened in Chicago in what was “the first attempt to create a global dialogue of faiths.”

In the aftermath of the Civil War, a growing number of organizations devoted to collaboration began to form, specifically among college-age individuals. In 1908, a number of such organizations, representing 33 denominations, united to form the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. In 1919, this collaboration led to the establishment of the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, widely conceived of as “the birth of the worldwide ecumenical movement.” In 1921, as a result of the conference, the International Missionary Council, which sought to “stimulate thinking about the missionary enterprise and to coordinate the activities of the various Christian churches in the mission field so that they, where possible, could engage in cooperative rather than competitive action,” was established. This cooperative spirit

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3 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 194
4 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 194
5 Brill 5
6 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 194
7 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 195
continued in 1925 in Stockholm, Sweden with the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work. At this conference, “over 600 delegates representing 91 denominations and 27 countries met to discuss economic, educational, and international issues.” To carry on this work, a Continuation Committee, later known as the Life and Work Committee, was established, and an additional Life and Work Conference, concerned with such issues as Church, Community and the State, was convened in 1937 in Oxford, “mark[ing] a turning point for the ecumenical movement.” At this conference, “the merging [of] the Life and Work Commission with the Faith and Order Commission was approved, [thereby]…pay[ing] the way” for the eventual establishment of the World Council of Churches after World War II.

In 1910, Protestant Episcopal, the Disciples of Christ, and the Congregational churches within the United States attempted to engage the doctrinal differences of one another. The first conference devoted to this subject, Conference on Faith and Order, was convened in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1927. An additional Faith and Order Conference convened in Edinburgh in 1937 “resulted in a general agreement about the ‘grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,’” but not much else, save a decision to merge with the Life and Work Conference, resulting in the establishment of the World Council of Churches in 1948. Cooperation between liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews was evident when, in response to increased antisemitism in the United States in the 1920’s and due to concern over the rise of Hitler in the 1930’s, they began to promote the idea of the United States as a Judeo-Christian nation, “nurtured by three ennobling spiritual

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8 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 195
9 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 195
10 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 195
11 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 195
tradi\nsions (‘culture groups’): Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism.”\n
The term “Judeo-Christian” was initially used to refer to “connections between Judaism and Christianity in antiquity,”\nmaking its first appearance in 1899 in the *Literary Guide* in the context of a “Judaico-Christian ‘continuity theory.’”\nThis theory “postulated the development of Church ritual out of the practices of the Second Temple.”\nThe term “Judeo-Christian” was later employed in reference “to values or beliefs shared by Jews and Christians, to a common western religious outlook.”\nThe popularization of the term “Judeo-Christian” occurred due, in part, to American opposition to fascists and antisemites, who “had appropriated ‘Christian’ as an identifying mark.”\nThe term “Judeo-Christian,” therefore, began to be associated with “the other side,” as evident, for example, by “the left-liberal *Protestant Digest*’s descri[pt]ion [of] itself (for the first time) as ‘a periodical serving the democratic ideal which is implicit in the Judeo-Christian tradition’…in its handbook, *Protestants Answer Anti-Semitism,*” published in 1941.

The increasing prevalence of Judeo-Christian attitudes in the United States was a result not only of Americans’ political considerations in orienting themselves against America’s foes, but also of theological reconsideration of the Christian faith. Beginning in the late 1930’s, a number of American Protestant thinkers started “to emphasize the

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12 Sarna 266
13 Silk 65
14 Silk 65
15 Silk 65
16 Silk 65-66
17 Silk 66
18 Silk 66
19 Silk 66
ground that Christianity shared with Judaism.’”¹²⁰ For example, Reinhold Niebuhr, “America’s leading Protestant theologian,…was also the foremost Christian ‘Hebraist,’”¹²¹ turning to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible for inspiration regarding “the moral complexity of historical existence.”¹²² Indeed, in explaining his theological efforts, Niebuhr explicitly articulated his desire “to strengthen the Hebraic-prophetic content of the Christian tradition.”¹²³ Also, Paul Tillich, a noted Christian theologian, in asserting the commonalities between Judaism and Christianity, asserted “that the two religions shared faith in an exclusive and righteous G[-]d, an understanding of man’s historical existence, and the need to wrestle with ‘a legalistic and utopian interpretation of righteousness.’”¹²⁴ Influenced by the thought of Niebuhr and Franz Rosenzweig, a prominent German-Jewish philosopher, Will Herberg, Professor of Judaic Studies and Social Philosophy at Drew University, argued: “that the two faiths [Judaism and Christianity] ‘represent one religious reality, Judaism facing inward to the Jews and Christianity facing outward to the gentiles, who, through it, are brought to the G[-]d and under the covenant of Israel, and therefore cease to be gentiles,’”¹²⁵ while stressing the religious differences separating the two faiths from one another. Other Jews, such as Robert Gordis, a prominent Conservative rabbi, and Bernard Heller, a prominent Reform rabbi, expressed their concern that excessive emphasis on a Judeo-Christian tradition threatened to undermine Jewish distinctiveness.

¹²⁰ Silk 70
¹²¹ Silk 71
¹²² Silk 71
¹²³ Silk 71
¹²⁴ Silk 71
¹²⁵ Silk 75
Leaders, Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish, “in an attempt to rout religious prejudice,”26 assembled “in hundreds of local communities”27 to advocate and exemplify “interreligious cooperation.”28 The National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) was founded in 1927 and, “through its Commission on Programs in Army Camps, Naval and Air Bases,…attempted to stimulate mutual understanding.”29 In promoting “goodwill and the American way of tolerance,”30 it organized “roundtables and speaking tours”31 with Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders while acquiring the aid of Protestant, Catholic and Jewish chaplains in speaking to servicemen. In 1934, Brotherhood Day, which was “a focus for these efforts,”32 was celebrated for the first time. In 1947, Brotherhood Day was extended to Brotherhood Week.

Efforts to promote interreligious harmony were undertaken by “the central military command, eager to promote religious harmony in the ranks during wartime.”33 Jewish chaplains participated along with their Protestant and Catholic counterparts in a number of meetings, “addressed servicemen,”34 many of whom had never before witnessed a rabbi speak, during basic training, as alluded to above, and officiated “at funerals for the unknown soldier.”35 In 1943, in what “created an enduring interfaith legend,”36 the four chaplains serving aboard the USS Dorchester, consisting of “two

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26 Sarna 266
27 Sarna 266
28 Sarna 267
29 Moore 38
30 Moore 38
31 Moore 38
32 Sarna 267
33 Sarna 267
34 Sarna 267
35 Sarna 267
36 Sarna 267
Protestants, a Catholic, and a Jew,“37 “George L. Fox[,] Clark V. Poling[,] John P. Washington, and Alexander D. Goode,”38 respectively, helped save seamen evacuating the sinking ship by giving the seamen “their own gloves and life belts.”39 The chaplains then proceeded to pray alongside one another “in three languages—English, Latin, and Hebrew”40 as the ship sunk into the water. This noble act was recorded in heroic terms on a 1948 U.S. postage stamp that read: “interfaith in action.”41 This act of “worshipping together [by]…the four chaplains…exemplified the creation of a ‘Judeo-Christian tradition’ that would come to express American ideals guiding the country’s wartime mission.”42 Indeed, the chaplains’ deaths came to signify “faith confronting adversity, the triumph of fellowship over religious strife, the spirit of self-sacrifice by officers for their men, the power of love over death.”43 After news of the Nazi death camps came to light, “a phrase like ‘our Christian civilization’ seemed ominously exclusive,”44 impelling an expansion of the spiritual underpinnings of American society. By 1951, institutions devoted to achieving Christian unity, relating to deed and creed, were established. In the 1950’s, a direct Catholic-Jewish dialogue, to which “the largest contributions were made by Jewish human-relations agencies,”45 began. Come “1952[,] good Americans were supposed to be, in some sense, committed Judeo-Christians. It was a recent addition to

37 Sarna 267  
38 Moore 120  
39 Sarna 267  
40 Moore 37  
41 Sarna 267  
42 Moore 121  
43 Moore 121-122  
44 Silk 69  
45 Feldman & Berenbaum
According to this Judeo-Christian tradition, “All Americans...believed in the Fatherhood of G[-]d, the Brotherhood of Man, the individual dignity of each human being, and ‘positive ethical standards of right and wrong’ existing apart from ‘the will of any man.’” In the 1960’s, the Roman Catholic Church began to exhibit greater openness to engaging with other Christian bodies, choosing to convene, for example, the Second Vatican Council.

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46 Silk 65
47 Moore 121
The Second Vatican Council/Nostra Aetate

The Second Vatican Council was “probably the most important event in the history of Roman Catholicism since the Reformation” and had its origins in the announcement of Pope John XXIII, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, on January 25, 1959 that he would convene an ecumenical council. The primary purpose of the ecumenical council, as articulated in the Papal Bull, was “to ‘offer an opportunity for all men of goodwill to turn their thoughts and resolutions to peace,’ in a world that is currently ‘lost, confused and anxious under the continual threat of new frightful conflicts.’” Indeed, the council was convened at a time when advances were being made “in science and technology, space exploration and new methods of communication, as well as new political realities, the rise of Communism and the constant fear of nuclear war,” prompting Christians to reconsider “their religious existence in the modern world.”

During the period from 1958 to 1960, the Papacy chose to eliminate several Catholic liturgical expressions that were deemed prejudicial toward Jews. The Pope gave Cardinal Augustin Bea, who was president of the Secretariat for Christian Unity of the Holy See at the time, the responsibility of developing a draft concerning “the

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48 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 696
49 Sklarin 353
50 Sklarin 353
51 Sklarin 353
relationship between the Catholic Church and the Jewish people for the consideration of the Council Fathers.”

One of the organizations that participated in this initiative was the American Jewish Committee (AJC), which appointed an advisory group comprised of Rabbis Elio Toaff of Rome, Jacob Kaplan of France, and Louis Finkelstein, Salo Baron, Joseph Soloveitchik, and Abraham Heschel of the United States. Soloveitchik and Heschel “emerged early on as the major Jewish spokesman.” Their participation will be described in greater detail below. After years of preparation, the council met on October 11, 1962, and finished its work on December 8, 1965. The council consisted of “Catholic cardinals and bishops” tasked, by papal imperative, “to harmonize tradition ‘with the new conditions and needs of the time.’” Among many of the changes effected by the Second Vatican Council was a modification in the way the church conceived of itself. The Roman Catholic Church transformed its understanding of itself as hierarchical, consisting of “bishops, priests, religious, and laity,” extending the conception of the church to “the whole people of G[-]d.”

The Second Vatican Council also wrought modifications in the way in which the Church conceived of its relationship to Protestants and non-Christians. Nostra Aetate (“Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions”) and Dignitatis Humanae (“Declaration on Religious Freedom”) altered the way in which the Church understood itself in relation to other religions, religious liberty, and the separation of church and state. These texts discarded the traditional Roman Catholic view that “no salvation

52 Kimelman 4
53 Kimelman 4
54 Sarna 312
55 Sarna 312
56 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 697
57 Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 697
outside the Roman Catholic Church”\textsuperscript{58} exists, extending the conception of the church to “the whole people of G-d.”\textsuperscript{59} It affirmed the perpetual covenant between G-d and the people of Israel, translating Romans 9:4-5 “in the present tense (‘They \textit{are} Israelites and to them \textit{belong} the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises…’).”\textsuperscript{60} Furthermore, \textit{Nostra Aetate} “explicitly condemned anti-Semitism and implicitly recognized the role of Catholic doctrine in promoting it.”\textsuperscript{61} American bishops played an important role in advocating for the approval of these documents, as they could personally attest to the benefits of democratic government and religious liberty in the United States. Leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States were motivated, in part, to advocate on behalf of doctrinal modification out of sympathy for the Jews in the aftermath of the “Nazi atrocities”\textsuperscript{62} committed against them during the Holocaust.

\textit{Nostra Aetate, No. 4}, officially approved by the Second Vatican Council on October 28, 1965, “coinciding with the same date in 1958 when Roncalli was elected Supreme Pontiff,”\textsuperscript{63} constitutes the first “declaration on the Jews and Judaism”\textsuperscript{64} issued by a Council in Church history. It ultimately “passed by a vote of 2,221 to 88 of the assembled bishops.”\textsuperscript{65} There were “three different generations”\textsuperscript{66} of individuals who developed \textit{Nostra Aetate} in its different stages, bringing their own particular views and experiences to bear on the formulation of the document. The first generation consisted

\textsuperscript{58} Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 697
\textsuperscript{59} Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 697
\textsuperscript{60} Flannery x
\textsuperscript{61} Queen, Prothero, & Shattuck 697
\textsuperscript{62} Feldman & Berenbaum
\textsuperscript{63} Goldstein 10
\textsuperscript{64} Fisher, 
\url{http://www.adl.org/main_Interfaith/nostra_aetate.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_2}
\textsuperscript{65} Goldstein 10
\textsuperscript{66} Lamdan & Melloni 18
of individuals, such as Roncalli and Bea ("the German Jesuit...retired rector of the Biblical Institute of Rome [and] a renowned scholar")⁶⁷, both of whom were adults at the time of World War II and the Holocaust. These individuals “approached the issue with a personal consciousness of how weak the Christian response to Nazi and Fascist racism was”⁶⁸ and cognizant of the etiology of such weakness: namely, “liturgical practices, catechesis, and response to the teaching of deicide”⁶⁹ of the Catholic Church.

The second generation that developed *Nostra Aetate* was born prior to World War I. The third generation that worked on *Nostra Aetate* was born temporally proximate to the Great Depression and consisted of individuals who “were children during the Second World War and were very much oriented to situating anti-Semitism into the larger tragedy of the War.”⁷⁰

The document consists of fifteen lengthy sentences composed in Latin script that encapsulate an abbreviated rendering of the debates that had transpired in the entire Council. The document was initially intended to be longer and issued separately from other documents. Then, it was proposed that the text be appended “to the statement on ecumenism.”⁷¹ However, a compromise was ultimately struck whereby the text of *Nostra Aetate, No. 4* was to be included “in a statement on ‘Non-Christian Religions’ in general.”⁷² It was in this way that the Council addressed the subject “of dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and the native traditions, in a real sense, in order to take a

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⁶⁷ Sanua 127  
⁶⁸ Lamdan & Melloni 18  
⁶⁹ Lamdan & Melloni 18  
⁷⁰ Lamdan & Melloni 18  
⁷¹ Fisher, [http://www.adl.org/main_Interfaith/nostra_aetate.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_2](http://www.adl.org/main_Interfaith/nostra_aetate.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_2)  
⁷² Fisher, [http://www.adl.org/main_Interfaith/nostra_aetate.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_2](http://www.adl.org/main_Interfaith/nostra_aetate.htm?Multi_page_sections=sHeading_2)
positive approach to Judaism.” A “positive contribution of Nostra Aetate has been the
recognition that Christianity did not replace Judaism; Judaism is a legitimate religion in
its own right.”

The final text, however, “did not quite live up to initial hopes.” For example, earlier drafts of the document contained the prohibition: “do not teach anything that could give rise to hatred or contempt of Jews in the heart of Christians,” which was altered in the final version to read: “do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.” Furthermore, an earlier draft of the document stated: “May Christians never present the Jewish people as one rejected, cursed, or guilty of deicide,” but this was later altered to read: “The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by G[-]d, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures.” Moreover, “there are…some serious reservations that a Jew must feel about” the final text. Indeed, its “pronouncements are expository and prescriptive, as though the world’s problem were primarily the lack of an adequate blueprint for a viable world order,” seemingly withholding explicit condemnation of “the degradation of man in various social and political practices condoned or fostered in many societies, such as racial discrimination, or the trampling of human freedom by various

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74 Reedijk 69
75 Sarna 313
76 Sarna 313
77 Sarna 313
78 Sarna 313
79 Sarna 313
80 Bokser 138
81 Bokser 138
authoritarian regimes.” In addition, a Jew might have reservations over the fact that the document appears to place “abortion in the same category as murder and genocide,” as the Jewish ethical tradition would consider the sacrifice of an unborn child for the sake of the life of the mother “the lesser tragedy” and, thus, not necessarily on par with “murder and genocide.”

It should be noted that “the official term” employed at the Second Vatican Council for Nostra Aetate: namely, “Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions” can, itself, be viewed as an indication of the Church’s unwillingness to make as strong an effort toward reconciling with the Jewish people for which some had hoped. This observation can be made in light of the way “dialogue” was understood at the time. Following World War II, “the term ‘dialogue of religions’ attained its modern meaning…and was closely connected with Existentialism, especially the I-Thou philosophy of Martin Buber.” This meaning of “dialogue” was: “approaching the other side as one encounters another person in dialogue—outside of doctrine, institution, or any objective standards.” Liberal Christians would use the term “dialogue” when characterizing the encounter between different religious communities as if to intimate “a humanistic dialogue of equals outside of doctrinal restraint,” but more conservative Christians, such as Catholics, would eschew its employment. This conservative Christian reticence could explain why the Catholic Church sought to employ

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82 Bokser 138  
83 Bokser 138  
84 Bokser 138  
85 Bokser 138  
86 Brill 5  
87 Brill 5  
88 Brill 5  
89 Brill 5
“Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” intimating “that Catholic theology and doctrine confront other religions,”\textsuperscript{90} rather than “dialogue” with its attendant signification. As will become clear, there existed not only a difference of opinion among Christians regarding how to view and encounter other religions, but also a difference of opinion among Jews. Indeed, “a dispute arose within American Jewry over how to best address and deal with the Second Vatican Council,”\textsuperscript{91} with disagreements transpiring between “religious groups…[and] both secular organizations”\textsuperscript{92} as well as religious movements, rabbis within a single movement, “secular organizations,”\textsuperscript{93} and academics. Three rabbis, in particular, will be the focus of the following chapters.

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{90} Brill 5
  \item \textsuperscript{91} Sklarin 357
  \item \textsuperscript{92} Sklarin 357
  \item \textsuperscript{93} Sklarin 357
\end{itemize}
Rabbi Moses Feinstein: Biographical Sketch

Rabbi Moses Feinstein was widely regarded as one of the most, if not the most, prominent poseqim, or legal decisors, among American Jewry and, arguably, global Jewry “in the second half of the twentieth century.”

He was born in Uzdan, in the district of Minsk, Belorussia, where his father served as a rabbi. In 1921, he, himself, became the rabbi of Luban, located in the same district. In 1920, he married Shima Kustanovich, who gave birth to three children in Russia: Faye Gittel, Shifra, and David, as well as one in America: Reuven. In 1937, Feinstein, along with his family, eventually emigrated to the United States, where he taught at the Orthodox Rabbinical Seminary in Cleveland, Ohio “for a few months” before becoming Rosh HaYeshivah of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City. In 1960, he became co-president of the Agudath ha-Rabbanim of America, “an Orthodox rabbinic organization made up predominantly of European- as opposed to American-trained rabbis” and known for its “policy of nonrecognition of and noncooperation with the American Orthodox rabbinate.” In 1962, he became chairman of the American section of the Mo’ezet Gedolei ha-Torah,
Council of Torah Greats, of Agudath Israel, a group comprised of prominent scholars regarded by “the sectarian Orthodox community” as religious policy-makers, and head of *Hinukh Azmai*, “the Agudath Israel-sponsored independent school system in the State of Israel.”

His responses to halakhic questions have been published in a six-volume collection known as *Igros Moshe (The Letters of Moshe)*. In 1986, when he died, 60,000 Jews accompanied his coffin in New York and, once his body was flown to Israel, 150,000 Israelis went to his funeral. His “courageous willingness to answer by letter or on the telephone any and every question posed to him” largely explains his popularity among so many Jews and the deep regard and affection they had for him. He was known for issuing lenient, or liberal, legal rulings in private when possible while, nevertheless, maintaining rather stringent, or illiberal, positions in public. For example, an irreligious Jew who was a *Kohen*, or priest, became Orthodox and sought to marry a woman who was divorced, an action prohibited by the biblical text Leviticus 21:7. The rabbi of the Orthodox congregation to which the Jewish man had belonged related “that nothing could be done” about circumventing this biblical prohibition. However, the rabbi, upon receiving an invitation to the wedding of these two individuals, contacted the Jewish man, discovering that Feinstein permitted him to marry the divorcee on the basis that “the several generations of irreligiosity in the family had invalidated the father’s right to give testimony on religious matters, and so the son could not rely on his father’s word that he

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98 Robinson 242
99 Robinson 242
100 Telushkin 474
101 Telushkin 474
was a Kohen.”\textsuperscript{102} Through employing such reasoning, Feinstein was able to allow these two Jews to marry. He, nevertheless, did not shy away from taking rather illiberal stands in many of his public statements. For example, he considered Reform and Conservative Judaism to be heretical and deemed them to be of no religious value, although his invalidation of Reform and most Conservative religious marriages largely provided a solution to the issue of some of such unions resulting in \textit{mamzerim} (bastards) due to a woman not having received a Jewish divorce upon re-“marrying.”

Feinstein holds that “One is permitted to maintain relations with non-observant Jews on the assumption that their non-observance is non-ideological in nature,”\textsuperscript{103} but this permission does not extend, in his view, to those Jews who deviate from halakha on ideological grounds, which would include Conservative and Reform. Feinstein states:

[The members of] a Conservative synagogue have announced they are a group of people who deny some of the Laws of the Torah and have removed their way far from it...for even those who deny one thing from the Torah are considered “deniers” [\textit{kofrim}] of the Torah...and they are considered heretics [\textit{minim}]...even if they [merely] err like infants who were captured by the heathen because their fathers and their surroundings led them astray and the laws [concerning heretics are not enacted] on them...In any event they are heretics and one must remove himself from them.\textsuperscript{104}

It is, therefore, evident that Feinstein regards Conservative Jews who do not exhibit fidelity to the Orthodox conception of halakha as “deniers” of the Torah. It is on this basis that Feinstein invalidates Conservative synagogue functionaries as ritual slaughterers and does not confer legitimacy on Conservative rabbis officiating at weddings. He speaks of Reform Jews in an even harsher tone, “call[ing] them ‘the

\textsuperscript{102} Telushkin 474-475
\textsuperscript{103} Robinson 246
\textsuperscript{104} Feinstein, IM. OH 4. No. 91/6. Cf. YD2, no. 101
wicked who have denied our holy Torah’ and who in fact have transgressed all the 
commandments of the Torah.”\textsuperscript{105}
Rabbi Moses Feinstein on Interfaith Dialogue

Feinstein also speaks of gentiles in his writings, conceiving of three sources among the gentile world from which threats against Jews emanate: namely, “religion (Christianity), the secular society and gentiles wishing to change their status to that of Jews.”

That Feinstein maintains a rather suspicious attitude toward the gentile world is apparent from “a responsum he issued on interfaith gatherings of Jews and Christians in the wake of Vatican II” in which he states:

> It is plain and clear that it is stringently forbidden [to attend such meetings]...for this plague has spread through the influence of the new Pope whose entire purpose it is to cause all the Jews to abandon their faith…and accept the faith of the Christians, [feeling] that it is easier to cause this abandonment in this way rather than through [means of] hatred and murder which previous Popes had used.

An accurate understanding of Feinstein’s position on interfaith relations between Jews and Christians requires some theological-legal contextualization. The Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin 56a relates the fact that halakha recognizes the universal relationship that exists between G-d and all of humanity. This relationship is signified by the Noahide Covenant according to Jewish tradition and is characterized by seven commandments that Noah and his descendants are legally obligated to observe. One of these seven

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106 Robinson 248
107 Robinson 248
108 Feinstein, IM. YD 3, no. 43/1. Cd. EE I, no. 6
commandments is the prohibition of idolatry. Given this conception of non-Jews’ legal obligations to G-d, rabbinic authorities sought to determine “whether Christian beliefs violated the Noahide stricture against idolatry.”\(^{109}\) If Christian beliefs were deemed to be in conflict with this Noahide prohibition of idolatry, then Jews would have to circumscribe their relations with Christians so as to “distance themselves from such false beliefs, but also because interactions with Christians might lead Christians to swear by an ‘idolatrous deity,’ an act condemned as sinful by the Talmud in Tractate Sanhedrin 63b.”\(^{110}\) In fact, “the Jew would be held culpable for this transgression by Jewish law, for the Jew would be the proximate cause for the Christian having committed this sinful act,”\(^{111}\) adding an even greater level of severity to potential interactions between Jews and Christians.

Christians, themselves, insisted that their beliefs about G-d accorded with monotheism, yet, despite such insistence, rabbinic authorities in the Talmud disagreed, “explicitly condemn[ing] early Christian expressions concerning the doctrines of Trinity and the incarnate man-god, Jesus, as untrue and in opposition to genuine monotheism.”\(^{112}\) Indeed, in responding to these and other theological beliefs, Rabbi Moses Maimonides later explicitly articulated “his denial of Trinity (Guide of the Perplexed I:50) [and] divine impregnation ([Guide of the Perplexed] II:6),”\(^{113}\) ultimately assigning Christians to the Talmudic category of “ovdei kokhavim u-mazalot—worshipers of idols.”\(^{114}\) It was upon such theological-legal foundations that Feinstein relied in developing his own views

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\(^{109}\) Ellenson 401
\(^{110}\) Ellenson 401
\(^{111}\) Ellenson 401
\(^{112}\) Ellenson 401
\(^{113}\) Lasker 33
\(^{114}\) Maimonides, Commentary on the Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 1:3 & Hilkhot Akum 9:4
on Christian-Jewish dialogue, fearing that discussions between Jews and Christians “would lead to apostasy”\textsuperscript{115} while maintaining his understanding of Christianity as idolatrous. He, thus, remained suspicious of Christianity and Catholic intentions, being unable to “conceive [of] the modern Catholic position on ecumenicism that emanated from Vatican II as anything other than a ploy on the part of the church.”\textsuperscript{116} Indeed, “The classical evangelical stance the Church had adopted towards the Jews was the only one Feinstein could imagine the church would ever take.”\textsuperscript{117} It was such a stance, coupled with his fear that “naïve people,”\textsuperscript{118} however well-intentioned, could inadvertently facilitate the creation of conditions conducive for the achievement of what he believed to be the hostile ambitions of the Church by participating in interfaith dialogue, that prompted his issuance of two legal rulings effectively proscribing Jewish engagement in interfaith activity.

Feinstein’s first responsum, issued on March 1, 1967, was addressed to an Orthodox rabbi who had promised to attend a gathering on 23 Adar I, 5727 (March 5, 1967) where Catholics and Protestants will assemble together with Jews who are members of the Synagogue Council of America as well as rabbinical colleagues from the Rabbinical Council of America.\textsuperscript{119} Feinstein urges him not to attend the gathering, despite the fact that that which is to be discussed at the gathering is to be “nontheological in nature,”\textsuperscript{120} the rabbi’s action

\textsuperscript{115} Ellenson 402
\textsuperscript{116} Ellenson 406
\textsuperscript{117} Ellenson 406
\textsuperscript{118} Ellenson 118
\textsuperscript{119} Ellenson 122
\textsuperscript{120} Ellenson 122
“constitut[ing] a violation of the prohibition against appurtenances to idolatry.”\footnote{Ellenson 122} That the rabbi’s action would constitute such a violation is, in Feinstein’s view, “clear and simple.”\footnote{Ellenson 122} Feinstein is thoroughly convinced, as was previously mentioned, that “the new pope[’s]…only intent is to cause all the Jews to abandon their pure and holy faith so that they will accept Christianity.”\footnote{Ellenson 122} Feinstein, thus, proscribes “all contact and discussion with them [Christians],”\footnote{Ellenson 122} as efforts should not be made to bring oneself near to idolatry, of which, apparently, Feinstein believes Christians to be practitioners. Feinstein proceeds to assign Conservative and Reform “rabbis,” in a manner consistent with his remarks above concerning “deniers” and “heretics,” to “the category of ‘those who entice and lead astray.’”\footnote{Ellenson 122} He even encourages the Orthodox rabbi to whom his responsum is addressed to “not…send a letter expressing what you might be prepared to discuss,”\footnote{Ellenson 122} as such activity would aid the Christians in their evil scheme. Feinstein also makes clear that any individual who chooses to “participate with them, whoever they may be,”\footnote{Ellenson 122} would be subsumed under the category of “those who entice and lead the community of Israel (\textit{klal yisrael}) astray.”\footnote{Ellenson 122} Feinstein reassures the Orthodox rabbi to whom the former’s responsum is addressed that the latter’s refusal to fulfill his commitment to attend due to his attendance being prohibited could actually serve as a model worthy of emulation by others considering participating in interfaith activity.

Feinstein’s second responsum, issued on March 21, 1967, was addressed to Rabbi
Joseph B. Soloveitchik, whose own position on interfaith dialogue will be discussed shortly. In the responsum, Feinstein relates that “it is obvious” that not only are discussions between Christians and Jews of a theological nature prohibited, but also discussions between Christians and Jews “on ostensibly social-political matters, at all times, during every era.” This view accords with Feinstein’s aforementioned, and now repeated, understanding of the Church’s malevolent intentions toward Jews. Feinstein views the fact that some rabbis are engaging in interfaith activity as evidence of the success of “this deed of Satan,” believing the deceptive lure of the Church’s seemingly ecumenical efforts to be of cosmically dire import to the community of Israel. The text of this responsum also relates the decision of the aforementioned Orthodox rabbi to whom the first responsum was addressed to comply with Feinstein’s instructions. Feinstein requests that Soloveitchik “sign the document I have included in this letter” to endorse the “absolute prohibition (issur gamur) against associating with priests in any way” or to author his own document recording his own formulation of the prohibition.

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129 Ellenson 123
130 Ellenson 123
131 Ellenson 123
132 Ellenson 124
133 Ellenson 124
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik & Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: Biographical Sketches

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel were widely regarded as “the two most consequential religious thinkers on the American Jewish scene” during, at least, the years ranging from “the forties through the seventies of the twentieth century.” It has been said that whereas “Joseph Baer Soloveitchik [was] a masterful teacher, [but] an occasional and awkward writer[,] Abraham Joshua Heschel was a masterful writer, [but] an occasional and awkward teacher.” Such pedagogical and authorial differences notwithstanding, Soloveitchik and Heschel had much in common with one another. Although both rabbis taught at separate institutions affiliated with different Jewish movements, the former at Yeshiva University affiliated with Modern (or Integrationist) Orthodoxy and the latter at The Jewish Theological Seminary of America affiliated with Conservatism, they were “probably the only theologians read by students of both institutions.” In fact, both rabbis had followers around the world. Soloveitchik and Heschel had prestigious rabbinic lineages, as well. The former

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134 Kimelman 2
135 Kimelman 2
136 Goldberg 115
137 Kimelman 2
descended from the Beis Halevi (the great-grandson of “R[abbi] Chaim of Volozhin,”138 the most prominent disciple of Rabbi Elijah of Vilna, a leading “oppo[nent]”139 of the Chassidic movement, as well as “the founder of Volozhin Yeshivah and the spiritual father of the modern yeshivah movement”140) and was related to a prominent Lithuanian rabbinic family known for its unique approach to Talmudic scholarship. The latter descended from the Apter Rav, “the rebbe of Apt (in Polish, Opatow)…venerated for his diplomatic as well as spiritual skills,”141 having “mediated disputes among Hasidic leaders during a period of extreme factionalism,”142 later “bec[oming] a spokesman for the third [C]has[s]idic generation”143 following the death of the Baal Shem Tov (founder of the Chassidic movement). Furthermore, Soloveitchik and Heschel sought a general education beginning in Warsaw and continuing their studies at the University of Berlin, where each of them received doctorates in philosophy. Moreover, both men might have met one another in the context of “gather[ing] around the brilliant Talmudic scholar Rabbi Haim Heller”144 and did meet one another in the context of discussion regarding interfaith dialogue. Both rabbinic personalities grappled with the writings of a variety of philosophers, including Kant and Kierkegaard, while employing ideas from a variety of theological writings, including those of Reinhold Niebuhr, in developing their descriptions of Judaism. Despite sharing a knowledge of such writings, both rabbis are

138 Meller 8
139 Satlow 282
140 Wein 111
141 Kaplan & Dresner 5
142 Kaplan & Dresner 5
143 Kaplan & Dresner 5
144 Kaplan & Dresner 106
widely regarded as having become proponents of diametrically opposed positions regarding Jewish-Christian dialogue.
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on Interfaith Dialogue

On November 26, 1961, Soloveitchik declared his opposition to “the presence of Jews as observers or with any formal status at the Ecumenical Council”\textsuperscript{145} to rabbis of different denominations convened by the World Jewish Congress. In February 1964, Soloveitchik, speaking at the Conference of the Rabbinical Council of America, “criticized the proposed decree as ‘evangelical propaganda,’”\textsuperscript{146} regarding Jews solely as converts \textit{in potentia}. That same year, Soloveitchik gave a talk, entitled “Confrontation,” in which he delineated four preconditions for Jewish-Christian engagement:

1. Acknowledgement that the Jewish people are an “independent faith community endowed with intrinsic worth to be viewed against its own meta-historical backdrop without relating to the framework of another (i.e. Catholic) community.”\textsuperscript{147}

2. Recognition that the Jewish “singular commitment to G[-]d and....hope for survival are non-negotiable and not subject to debate or argumentation.”\textsuperscript{148}

\textsuperscript{145} Kimelman 4
\textsuperscript{146} Kimelman 6-7
\textsuperscript{147} Kimelman 7
\textsuperscript{148} Kimelman 7
3. Jews ought to refrain from recommending modifications of Christian doctrine, given that such recommendations would necessarily result in Christians reciprocating in recommending modifications of Jewish belief. “Change must emerge autonomously from within, for ‘non-interference is a *sine qua non* for good will and mutual respect.’”\(^{149}\)

4. “Each community must articulate its position that the other community ‘has the right to live, create, and worship G[–]d in its own way, in freedom and dignity.’”\(^{150}\)

Soloveitchik also explicitly delineated the signification of his decision to reject “any negotiation of differences,”\(^{151}\) stating:

> Any intimation, overt or covert, on the part of the community of the many that it is expected of the community of the few to shed its uniqueness and cease existing because it has fulfilled its mission by paving the way for the community of the many must be rejected as undemocratic and contravening the very idea of religious freedom…We must always remember that our singular commitment to G[–]d and our hope and indomitable will for survival are non-negotiable and non-rationalizable and are not subject to debate and argumentation.\(^{152}\)

Although Soloveitchik was adamantly opposed to negotiations between Jews and Christians regarding the theological truth claims of their respective communities, he, nevertheless, contended that discussions between Christians and Jews could, nay should, take place as long as they were restricted to “non-religious subjects,”\(^{153}\) with the Council asked merely to condemn antisemitism rather than assert religious fraternity between the groups. Indeed, he believed that Jews and Christians could benefit from exchanges on  

\(^{149}\) Kimelman 7  
\(^{150}\) Kimelman 7  
\(^{151}\) Kimelman 7  
\(^{152}\) Kimelman 7  
\(^{153}\) Kimelman 7
certain non-religious matters, sharing, with all humans, a divine imperative “to enhance the physical and moral welfare of humanity.”\textsuperscript{154} It was such a position that Soloveitchik articulated in his “On Interfaith Relationships,” a set of guidelines he issued to Orthodoxy’s Rabbinical Council of America to be implemented as the official policy of the rabbinic body. Some of the topics Soloveitchik considers appropriate for Jews and Christians to cooperatively address consist of “war and peace, poverty, freedom...[as well as] the threat of secularism.”\textsuperscript{155} In sum, “The Rav, with his delicate balance between universalism and singularism, never opposed interfaith dialogue. He always, however, approved of interfaith dialogue about matters of general ethical and social concern.”\textsuperscript{156}

Soloveitchik’s “Confrontation” was later reworked in written form. The textual version of “Confrontation” is divided into two sections. The first section consists of twelve pages in which Soloveitchik provides a philosophical analysis of human existence, dividing it into three levels, based on the biblical account of the creation of the first human being in the Book of Genesis. The first level is the “natural man,”\textsuperscript{157} who is “non-confronted”\textsuperscript{158} and “sees himself as indistinct from the natural order, the ‘is,’ and knows no moral norms, the ‘ought.’”\textsuperscript{159} This refers in modern times to “the hedonistic, power-driven aesthete.”\textsuperscript{160} The second level is the “contemplative”\textsuperscript{161} man, “who feels confronted by an objective order standing in opposition to himself...and thus discovers

\textsuperscript{154} Soloveitchik, \url{http://www.forward.com/articles/8692/}
\textsuperscript{155} Soloveitchik, \url{http://www.forward.com/articles/8692/}
\textsuperscript{156} Kaplan 299
\textsuperscript{157} Soloveitchik 6
\textsuperscript{158} Soloveitchik 7
\textsuperscript{159} Korn 307
\textsuperscript{160} Korn 307
\textsuperscript{161} Soloveitchik 9
his...identity as a singular ‘I.’"162 He relates to others as objects, rather than subjects. The third level is redemptive man, who “forgoes his...impulse to dominate and thereby achieves human relationships with others as equals.”163 The second section consists of thirteen pages in which Soloveitchik delineates the responsibilities of Jews to humankind and outlines the way in which pious Jews should relate to members of other religious communities. The philosophical argument he puts forth concerns “the nature and limits of human communication.”164 Indeed, Soloveitchik basically asserts, as alluded to earlier, “that each faith community is unique and therefore any attempt to equate them is ‘absurdity.’”165

There are a number of features of “Confrontation,” however, that are somewhat conspicuous for their use in the writing of a prominent rabbinic authority. It is not composed in Hebrew, which is “the traditional language of Jewish legal discourse,”166 does not relate a clear legal ruling, and it does not provide citations from the writings of, among others, “Maimonides [or] Menahem ha-Meiri”167 regarding Christianity, despite the fact that such rabbinic personalities “had much to say regarding Christianity.”168 Furthermore, Soloveitchik’s conception of Adam I and Adam II appears to closely parallel references in “Paul’s Epistles”169 as well as the “modern Christian theology”170 of, for example, Karl Barth, a prominent Protestant theologian. This conception of Adam

162 Korn 307-308  
163 Korn 308  
164 Korn 293  
165 Korn 294  
166 Kimelman 8  
167 Kimelman 8  
168 Korn 292  
169 Kimelman 8  
170 Kimelman 8
I and Adam II is also found in Soloveitchik’s “Lonely Man of Faith,” which was, interestingly, delivered before an interfaith crowd at St. John’s Catholic Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts and in which Adam I and Adam II are portrayed as “embodying…two conflicting types of people,” 171 paralleling the different portrayals of Adam in the two creation stories in the Book of Genesis. Adam I is characterized by “superficial[ity] [and] pragmati[sm]” 172 while being “a man of the world, conqueror of diseases…builder of bridges…[and] ‘majestic,’” 173 while Adam II is characterized by “profund[ity] [and] purposive[ness]” 174 while being “a man of the spirit, nurturer of prayer…builder of true community…[and] ‘covenantal.’” 175 Soloveitchik also employs Jacob-Esau imagery in analyzing Jewish-Christian relations, in consonance with a strong textual tradition “from the Talmud through medieval literature” 176 asserting that “Esau and Edom represent the Gentiles, either Greeks or Romans, and other Christians.” 177 Soloveitchik’s conception of an “assertive Jacob,” 178 however, is diametrically opposed to the traditional midrashic rendering “of an obsequious Jacob before Esau,” 179 all the more ironic given the traditional Catholic theological identification of Jews as Esau and Catholics as Jacob. Such features have led some to conclude that one of the intended audiences of the “philosophic excursus” 180 of “Confrontation” was, in fact, the Christian community. If the Christian community was, in fact, the intended audience, Soloveitchik

171 Goldberg 101
172 Goldberg 101
173 Goldberg 101
174 Goldberg 101
175 Goldberg 101
176 Roth 214
177 Roth 214
178 Kimelman 8
179 Kimelman 8
180 Korn 308
could be interpreted as urging Christians to leave the second level of existence, having historically often treated Jews as contemptible objects rather than respectable subjects, and “ascend to the third level of existence”\textsuperscript{181} by treating Jews with more dignity.

\textsuperscript{181} Korn 308
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel on Interfaith Dialogue

On January 9, 1962, Cardinal Bea sent a personal letter in German to Heschel requesting a memorandum from Heschel. Before submitting his memorandum to Cardinal Bea, Heschel sent him three books he authored: *God In Search of Man*, *Man Is Not Alone*, and *The Sabbath*. Cardinal Bea received these texts as proof of the “strong common spiritual bond between us,”182 the language of “spiritual bondedness”183 eventually being utilized in the Church document and becoming an integral part of “papal teaching on the Jews.”184 Heschel responded to Cardinal Bea’s request by submitting to him a memorandum entitled “On Improving Catholic-Jewish Relations,” in which he related:

Both Judaism and Christianity share the prophet’s belief that God chooses agents through whom His will is made known and His work done throughout history. Both Judaism and Christianity live in the certainty that mankind is in need of ultimate redemption, that God is involved in human history, that in relations between man and man God is at stake; that the humiliation of man is a disgrace of God.185

He then proceeded to delineate four recommendations for “improv[ing] mutually fruitful relations between the Church and the Jewish community.”186:

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182 Kimelman 5
183 Kimelman 5
184 Kimelman 5
185 Kimelman 5
186 Kimelman 5
1. The Council should “brand antisemitism as a sin and condemn all false teachings,”\(^{187}\) including the charge of deicide and its extension to every Jew, which, thereby, regards each one as being accountable for the death of Jesus.

2. The Council should recognize Jews as Jews as well as “the integrity and the continuing value of Jews and Judaism.”\(^{188}\)

3. Christians should become “familiar with Judaism and Jews.”\(^{189}\)

4. A high-level commission should be established at the Vatican and given the responsibility of eliminating anti-Jewish prejudice as well as continually monitoring Christian-Jewish relations.

Heschel further articulates his position in his article “From Mission to Dialogue,” which appeared in *Conservative Judaism* 21 (Spring 1967) and had been adapted from Heschel’s address to the 1966 Rabbinical Assembly convention while incorporating elements from the Inaugural Address he delivered at Union Theological Seminary in 1965 published as “No Religion is an Island.” Heschel “stat[ed] that the primary aim of the article is to find a religious basis for cooperation on matters of moral and spiritual concern in spite of disagreements,”\(^{190}\) proceeding to describe “the difference between our contemporary situation and the pre-modern one,”\(^{191}\) asserting:

> A good many people in our midst still think in terms of an age during which Judaism wrapped itself in spiritual isolation, an age which I sought to relive in a book called “The Earth is the L[...-]rd’s.” Nowadays...involvement has replaced isolation. The emancipation...has

\(^{187}\) Kimelman 5  
\(^{188}\) Kimelman 5  
\(^{189}\) Kimelman 5  
\(^{190}\) Kimelman 9  
\(^{191}\) Kimelman 10
not only given us rights, it has also imposed obligations...we are deeply conscious of the vital interrelationship of religious sensitivity and the human situation.\textsuperscript{192}

Heschel, thus, views spiritual isolationism, like physical isolationism, as an option that is no longer viable. He, instead, sought to form a coalition of Christians and Jews willing to fight against what he deemed to be threats to both Christian and Jewish communities: namely, “the movement of modern nihilism, the desanctification of the Bible, and the removal of the Bible from public discourse,”\textsuperscript{193} all of which threaten to turn the “life of faith”\textsuperscript{194} into “an anomaly.”\textsuperscript{195} Indeed, Christians and Jews, in Heschel’s view, could dialogue with one another on “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 G[-]d...where our souls are swept away by the awareness of the urgency of answering G[-]d’s commandment.”\textsuperscript{196} Indeed, despite disagreements between Christians and Jews regarding how to achieve such fear and trembling and doctrinal views, Christians and Jews are united, according to Heschel, by “Our being accountable to G[-]d, our being objects of G[-]d’s concern.”\textsuperscript{197}

\begin{footnotesize}
\linebreak
\textsuperscript{192} Kimelman 10
\textsuperscript{193} Kimelman 10
\textsuperscript{194} Kimelman 10
\textsuperscript{195} Kimelman 10
\textsuperscript{196} Kimelman 11
\textsuperscript{197} Kimelman 11
\end{footnotesize}
Convergences and Divergences

There are a number of matters on which Feinstein, Soloveitchik and Heschel agree and a number of matters on which they disagree. A rudimentary framework situating the approaches toward interfaith dialogue advocated by these rabbinic personalities on a spectrum of liberal (left) to conservative (right) would probably feature Heschel advocating a liberal position, Feinstein advocating a conservative position, and Soloveitchik advocating a moderate (more accurately, center-right) position. All three have a conception of honor or self-respect they wish to preserve and are, therefore, unwilling to countenance certain events. Thus, Feinstein, wishing to proscribe interfaith dialogue, addresses himself to Soloveitchik, stating: “But it is for the honor of G[-]d to stand in this great breach”\textsuperscript{198} and prohibit interfaith activity. Soloveitchik limited interfaith dialogue to nontheological matters, and even this, he believes, must be done “carefully and with tact”\textsuperscript{199} not only to preserve Jewish moral values, but also Jews’ “self-respect.”\textsuperscript{200} Heschel, upset over an early draft of \textit{Nostra Aetate} in which the Church’s belief in its mission to the Jew seemed present, chose to call the draft “spiritual

\textsuperscript{198} Ellenson 124
\textsuperscript{199} Sklarin 371
\textsuperscript{200} Sklarin 371
fratricide,” asserting that, were he forced to choose between “the choice of conversion or death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he would choose Auschwitz.” He personally succeeded in convincing the Pope to change the wording of the document, later speaking of the “precious[ness] of Judaism.” Heschel and Soloveitchik “share an understanding that excludes the core of faith from the field of dialogue,” motivated by a desire “to safeguard dialogue from slipping into proselytism [and] their respective understandings of the nature of faith and its attendant experience.”

The rabbis differ when one considers the manner in which they tend to characterize the Church in interfaith dialogue. Feinstein describes the Church as “idolatrous,” calling Christians supposedly wishing to engage in interfaith dialogue “evil ones” who are guilty of performing the “deeds of Satan,” reflecting a cosmically negative perspective. Soloveitchik identifies the Church as the “community of the many,” acknowledging that the Church lacks the “brute power” that it once yielded while simultaneously intimating his recognition of the church as constituting “a faith community with its own integrity.” Heschel, in Maimonidean fashion, explicitly acknowledges “a divine plan in the role of Christianity,” regarding Christianity “as part

201 Kimelman 6  
202 Kimelman 6  
203 Kimelman 6  
204 Krajewski & Lipszyc 165  
205 Krajewski & Lipszyc 165  
206 Ellenson 122  
207 Ellenson 124  
208 Ellenson 124  
209 Kimelman 9  
210 Kimelman 9  
211 Kimelman 9  
212 Heschel 19
of G[-]d’s design,” while contending that any religion has the capacity to “become idolatrous when regarded as an end in itself.”

They also diverge on the tenability of the Jews isolating themselves from the Christian world. Feinstein believes isolation is highly tenable, as evidenced by his assertion: “all contact and discussion with them, even on worldly matters, is forbidden.” Indeed, he believes that “only isolation from Christians and their representatives could ensure the survival of Jews as a minority community.” Heschel, however, believes that isolation is no longer tenable, as evidenced by his statement: “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.” Heschel proceeds to point out that even during

the Middle Ages, when most Jews lived in relative isolation, such [non-Jewish] impact [on Jews] was acknowledged. To quote, “The usage of the Jews is in accordance with that of the non-Jews. If the non-Jews of a certain town are moral, the Jews born there will be so as well.” Rabbi Joseph Yaabez, a victim of the Spanish Inquisition, in the midst of the Inquisition was able to say that “the Christians believe in Creation, the excellence of the Patriarchs, revelation, retribution and resurrection. Blessed is the L[-]rd, G[-]d of Israel, who left this remnant after the destruction of the second Temple. But for these Christian nations we might ourselves become infirm in our faith.”

Heschel, thus, contends that the notion that Jews could even maintain complete isolation from non-Jewish influence not only fails to accord with the historical record, but

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213 Heschel 19
214 Heschel 13
215 Ellenson 122
216 Ellenson 118
217 Heschel 6
218 Heschel 6
also is not even an aspiration worth pursuing. Indeed, Jews can potentially profitably learn from the moral lifestyle of pious Christians as well as have their own theological beliefs reinforced by those of religious Christians.

Soloveitchik believes that

Our approach to and relationship with the outside world has always been of an ambivalent character, intrinsically antithetic, bordering at times on the paradoxical. We relate ourselves to and at the same time withdraw from, we come close to and simultaneously retreat from the world of Esau. When the process of coming nearer and nearer is almost consummated, we immediately begin to retreat quickly into seclusion. We cooperate with the members of other faith communities in all fields of constructive human endeavor, but, simultaneously with our integration into the general social framework, we engage in a movement of recoil and retrace our steps.\textsuperscript{219}

Soloveitchik, thus, disagrees with Feinstein that all contact and discussion between Jews and Christians should be prohibited, but, in contrast to Heschel, emphasizes that the achievement of some form of isolation is not only tenable, but also necessary. However, Soloveitchik does acknowledge that just as “Judaism as a culture has influenced, indeed, molded the ethico-philosophical Christian world,”\textsuperscript{220} elements of which were coupled with Judaic elements and then “absorbed [by]…our Western civilization.”\textsuperscript{221} Heschel, too, speaks of Judaic elements influencing the development of Western civilization through Christianity, asserting that “it was Christianity that implanted attachment to the G[-]d of Abraham and involvement with the Hebrew Bible in the hearts of Western man.”\textsuperscript{222} Both Heschel and Soloveitchik, thus, seem to believe in the existence of some type of Judeo-Christian tradition.

\textsuperscript{219} Soloveitchik 26  
\textsuperscript{220} Soloveitchik 22  
\textsuperscript{221} Soloveitchik 22  
\textsuperscript{222} Heschel 4
Contemporary Implications

The approaches toward interfaith dialogue advocated by Feinstein, Soloveitchik and Heschel provide a useful framework for grappling with Christian-Jewish relations in modern times. It can be somewhat difficult to accept a one-size-fits-all approach for determining how Jews should relate to the Christian world. In September 2000, a number of Jewish academics, philosophers, and theologians living in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Israel signed a document known as Dabru Emet (Speak the Truth), “A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity.” A number of interpretations of the positions of the rabbis mentioned in the present thesis have been offered, programs facilitating Christian-Jewish learning have been established, and a variety of books on the subject of interfaith dialogue have been written. There are even texts that have been, or are in the process of being, written that offer compilations of biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern approaches from which Jews in our day can construct, individually and collectively, systematic theological conceptions of other religions if they so choose.

I agree and disagree with certain aspects of the positions toward interfaith dialogue discussed in the present thesis. I believe that Feinstein’s position is somewhat extreme in terms of the terminology employed to describe those Christians and Jews who seem to be genuinely interested in religious reconciliation, especially given the existence of alternative rabbinic interpretations regarded as equally authoritative as, but less hostile
theologically than, the tradition on which Feinstein’s position is based. I also regard the extent to which he proscribes encounters with Christians as somewhat excessive. I admire Heschel’s often poetic style and his recognition that, in today’s world, isolation of religions is no longer an option, but I think that he seems overly concerned about Christian belief. Indeed, I agree with Soloveitchik’s concern that Jewish lobbying efforts urging the Church to modify its beliefs could, in fact, result in reciprocal Christian efforts toward Jews to modify their religious beliefs.

There are, however, a number of points worth considering in assessing the way in which Jews in our time should relate to Christians. For example, the role of Israel in contemporary geopolitical calculations has changed since the time of the Second Vatican Council and, with it, the stance of Christians toward the Zionist enterprise. When Herzl visited Rome on January 23, 1904 to request Pope Pius X’s support for Zionism, the Pope declined, stating: “We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem—but we could never sanction it,” and, according to Herzl, also stating:

It is not pleasant to see the Turks in possession of the Holy Places but we have to put up with it; but we could not possibly support the Jews in the acquisition of the Holy Place. If you come to Palestine and settle with your people there, we shall have churches and priests ready to baptize all of you.

These papal sentiments reportedly expressed to Herzl, though probably not “actually read” by Feinstein, coupled with the historically confrontational and disrespectful stance assumed by many Christians toward Jews, only serve to underscore the legitimate skepticism harbored by Feinstein and Soloveitchik “concerning Catholic

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223 Prior 101
224 Prior 101
225 Ellenson 128
motives for Christian dialogue with Jews.” Soloveitchik, himself, regarded the establishment of the State of Israel as a “refut[ation] [of] the claim that Jews are a people rejected by G[-]d,” this new political reality of Jewish self-determination appearing to disconfirm a supposedly axiomatic Christian theological conception of the Jews. In fact, Soloveitchik seems to have “relished the reversal of fortunes, with “Judaism through the State of Israel…at the apex of its temporal power…[and] the Church…at its nadir.”

During the period of the Second Vatican Council, the Church seemed to be developing “two conflicting tendencies...: a greater respect for the Jews, and a growing sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians.” However, with Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War in 1967, “Contacts between Jews and Catholics increased.” On December 22, 1975, the Pope, speaking to Israeli Jews, “acknowledged the rights and legitimate aspirations of the Jews to a sovereign and independent state of its own.” In 1983, “Monsignor W. Murphy, Under-Secretary of the Pontifical Commission for Justice and Peace, acknowledged that the Holy See recognized the factual existence of Israel, its right to exist within secure borders, and other rights that a sovereign nation possesses.”

Among the Protestant community, “Many Evangelical churches have attained an understanding of the importance of Israel for Jews.” This fact is particularly important

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226 Ellenson 127
227 Millen 155
228 Kimelman 20
229 Kimelman 9
230 Prior 102
231 Prior 102
232 Prior 102
233 Prior 103
234 Brill 236
for Jews given that this religious demographic constitutes “a strong plurality”\textsuperscript{235} of the United States. Many “Evangelicals understand the role of nationalism and peoplehood within [the Jewish] religion,”\textsuperscript{236} and, therefore, sympathize with many Jews, sharing a concern for Israel’s security and the wellbeing of the Jewish people. Evangelicals even “support and fund Jews from American suburbs to move to Israel,”\textsuperscript{237} although many are apparently awaiting “Armageddon in Israel and the eventual conversion of all the Jews who make Aliyah.”\textsuperscript{238} I, personally, do not believe that Jews should seek to modify such Christian beliefs. Indeed, Soloveitchik, himself, stated: “I do not deny the right of the community of the many to address itself to the community of the few in its own eschatological terms”\textsuperscript{239} and characterized Jews as “praying for and expecting confidently the fulfillment of our eschatological vision when our faith will rise from particularity to universality.”\textsuperscript{240}

I believe it would be mutually beneficial for Jews and Christians committed to promoting the adoption of policies relating to the security of the United States and Israel, such as ensuring Israel’s qualitative military edge and promoting the advancement of stronger sanctions against Iran, on which many Jews and Christians can agree, to continue cooperating. Perhaps such cooperation could extend its reach to other sectors of Protestantism that are somewhat hostile to the State of Israel in an attempt to persuade such sectors to modify their attitudes toward the Jewish State. I am of the view that, today, the growing threat of Islamism to the national security of the West and Israel

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offers an opportunity for renewed encounter between the Jewish and Christian communities. In order to work effectively alongside Christians, “Jews need to work to overcome their fear and distrust”\textsuperscript{241} of Christianity. Much has changed in Christians’ conceptions of the Jews and Judaism. Although significant theological and political differences divide the Christian and Jewish communities, such differences need not prevent collaborative efforts aimed at achieving shared objectives.

\textsuperscript{241} Brill 236
Bibliography


