

Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground"—this came from the earth—"and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"—this is the spirit from the Holy One, blessed be he. This, then, is the meaning of "in our image, after our likeness" [Gen. 1:26]: dust in your image after your likeness, and spirit in my image after my likeness. This too is the meaning of the verse, "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it were you taken" [Gen. 3:19], and of Solomon's words, "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" [Eccles. 12:7].

"Let us make man." The heretics say that "Let us make" implies two, and they are the father and son. You can put off such a heretic by answering: Indeed, the matter is as you say. The father told the son, "My son, help me, and let you and I make man." However, the son rebelled and did not wish to help his father, and so the father made man alone without the son's help, as it is written, "And God created man," with a singular rather than a plural verb. Consequently, the father became angry with his son and said, "If the time should come when you need my assistance, I shall not help you just as you have not helped me." So when the day came for the son to be stoned and hanged, he cried out in a bitter voice, "My Lord, my Lord, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me . . .?" and he begged for his help [Matt. 27:46]. Then the father told him, "When I asked you to help me make man, you rebelled against me and did not come to the aid of the Lord, and so my own power availed me and I made him without you. Now you too help yourself, for I shall not come to your aid."

[6]

Moreover, if he [i.e., the son] is God, why did he cover himself with flesh and why did he not appear publicly to renew his Torah and give it openly so that the people of that generation would not err and the people of the world not be misled? He should, on the contrary, have done his deeds openly and in a clearly recognizable fashion so that all would believe in him. Indeed, the loss that resulted from this disguise outweighed the salvation; people refrained from believing in him, since the disguise involved separation from holiness and purity

The Church keeps ever in mind the words of the Apostle about his kinsmen: "theirs is the sonship and the glory and the covenants and the law and the worship and the promises; theirs are the fathers and from them is the Christ according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:4-5), the Son of the Virgin Mary. She also recalls that the Apostles, the Church's main-stay and pillars, as well as most of the early disciples who proclaimed Christ's Gospel to the world, sprang from the Jewish people.

As Holy Scripture testifies, Jerusalem did not recognize the time of her visitation,(9) nor did the Jews in large number, accept the Gospel; indeed not a few opposed its spreading.(10) Nevertheless, God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues—such is the witness of the Apostle.(11) In company with the Prophets and the same Apostle, the Church awaits that day, known to God alone, on which all peoples will address the Lord in a single voice and "serve him shoulder to shoulder" (Soph. 3:9) (12)

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

True, the Jewish authorities and those who followed their lead pressed for the death of Christ;(13) still, what happened in His passion cannot be charged against all the Jews, without distinction, then alive, nor against the Jews of today. Although the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ.

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

Besides, as the Church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of men and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows.

5. We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man's relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned.

The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against

David Novak

Speaking of history, let me tell you at what point in history I came to be interested in Jewish-Catholic relations. History is best appreciated and gains ethical significance when one's own personal story is connected with the larger story of the community and communities in which he or she lives and works.

I came to Jewish-Catholic relations at a pivotal time in my own life history and at a much more pivotal time in the relationship between the Jewish people and the Catholic Church. In my own case, I feel privileged that this was during my youth, when I was unformed enough to be able to give Jewish-Christian relations a prominent place in my life's work as a Jewish scholar and thinker. In the early 1960's, 1963 to be exact, while studying for the rabbinate at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, I became the student – indeed, the close disciple – of a man who to the mind of many was the most important Jewish theologian to work in America, my late revered teacher, Abraham Joshua Heschel. At that time, Professor Heschel was engaged in serious discussions with the leadership of the Catholic Church at the highest levels, especially with the late Cardinal Augustin Bea, in preparation for Vatican Council II, which in 1965 issued a landmark statement *Nostra Aetate* ("In Our Time") about its view of Judaism and the Jewish people, a document that is undoubtedly the most significant statement of the Church regarding the Jews in modern times, perhaps ever.² I remember how hopeful my teacher was for this new attitude that was emerging in the Church then, and the tremendous chance he was taking in becoming the chief Jewish advisor to the Church in this whole enterprise. And not only was he taking a chance, but Cardinal Bea and Pope Paul VI were also taking a chance, and for similar reasons. Professor Heschel was taking a chance because of the harsh criticism to which he was subjected by some other prominent Jewish scholars, quite unfairly I think, for assuming that a new relationship was even possible with the Catholic Church.³ That criticism sometimes took the form of verbal abuse, both private and public. And the leaders of the Church took a chance because there were elements in the Church, powerful elements, who argued that since the Jewish people had rejected Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ, what kind of positive relationship could there be with such a people? Yet there was enough momentum on both sides of this great divide to take the chance on developing a new relationship as something important, something good, and perhaps even something holy in the world, especially in a secular age.

We are all the beneficiaries of those chances taken over thirty years ago. In the wake of what happened "in our

Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles. The author would like to express profound appreciation to Professors Lawrence Kaplan of McGill University and Eugene Korn of Seton Hall University, who read earlier drafts of this introduction and translation and offered numerous valuable suggestions that improved the final version of this article.

Moshe Feinstein, Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh

Deah 3

Number 43

Two Responsa Concerning the Prohibition Against Attendance at a Meeting with Christians on Matters of Rapprochement in Faith and Association with Them

I (19 Adar I, 5727 – March 1, 1967)

In regard to the matter wherein you 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. Even though what you will discuss there will be nontheological in nature,²³ it is clear and simple that such participation constitutes a grave violation of the prohibition against appurtenances to idolatry. For a plague has now broken out in many locales on account of the initiative of the new pope, whose only intent is to cause all the Jews to abandon their pure and holy faith so that they will accept Christianity. Indeed, it is much more convenient to convert them in this manner than to employ the methods of hatred and murder that popes prior to him utilized.²⁴ Consequently, all contact and discussion with them, even on worldly matters, is forbidden, for the act of "drawing near" is in and of itself forbidden, as it falls under the category of the grave prohibition against "rapprochement with idolatry—*hitkarvut 'im 'avodah zarah*."

And one should also consider this [drawing near] as falling under the category of prohibition against the "the one who entices (*Ha-meisit*) and the one who leads astray (*Ha-madiah*)."²⁵ For even though you and the other Orthodox rabbis (*rabbanim*)²⁶ who will go there will surely be cautious about what you say, and will also not behave obsequiously toward the priests and their faith, as is the wont of the Reform and Conservative rabbis (*rabbis*)²⁷ who by definition fall under the category of "those who entice and lead astray," nevertheless, many

people will learn from your example and they will attend the sermons of missionaries and the like. Similarly, you should not even send a letter there expressing what you might be prepared to discuss, for all contact with them assists them in their most evil plot.

Similarly, it is forbidden to participate in any way in meetings like the ones I heard that they propose to hold in Boston and Rome. Anyone who participates with them, whoever they may be, will be considered among "those who entice and lead the community of Israel (*khal yisrael*) astray." Catholic missionaries have labored for years to convert the Jews. Nevertheless, they succeeded only in rare instances. God forbid that it would be possible that many more Jews would convert to Christianity on account of such joint ventures and because of rabbis like these, rabbis who lack good sense and who desire to engage in such joint meetings with them. And one cannot put forward a claim on behalf of the "one who entices" that this was not his intent, for their souls will be culpable, God forbid, in this world and in the world to come.

You should pay no attention to the fact that you will not have fulfilled your promise to go there and speak. On the contrary, perhaps through your decision not to attend on account of the prohibition, others too will not go. In this way, you will be among those who gain merit for the public.

II (Addressed to R. Joseph Soloveitchik on 9 Adar II, 5727 – March 21, 1967)

I am writing because of my concern over those young rabbis who are trapped in the snare laid by the Head of the Priests in the Vatican in the name of the Ecumenical Council, whose intent is to cause all the Jews to convert to their faith, God forbid. The cardinals and the bishops are commanded by him to establish connections between priests and rabbis through committees and conventions in every locale. This deed of Satan has succeeded, as a number of rabbis have engaged in such associations on the basis of a *heter* (permission) that allows for interreligious dialogue on social-political, albeit not religious matters. For, aside from the fact that nearly every matter is one of religion, as the priests have another way of viewing such matters, and aside from the fact their only intention is to exploit these meetings to arrive at matters of faith, it is obvious that there is an *issur* (prohibition) against any connections with them, even on ostensibly social-political matters, at all times during every era. It is all the more so now as regards this evil design that emanates from the Head of the

53. On RCA Participation in an Interreligious Conference

Letter to Rabbi Pesah Levovitz, president of the RCA at the time.

Wednesday, April 12, 1967

Dear Rabbi Levovitz:

We reconfirm our previous guidelines that any dialogue, debate or symposium on dogmatic and theological subjects is not only futile, but damaging as well to the best interests of the religious communities involved in such a debate. It would only result in an attempt, conscious or unconscious, of one community to impose its theology upon the other. Therefore, we appeal to all segments of the Jewish community, regardless of their diverse philosophies, to refrain from discussing theological problems which will only cause embarrassment to and inflict untold harm upon the good relationship prevailing between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

We reassert that, as loyal citizens of our great country, we are all, Jew and non-Jew alike, interested in the welfare of our people and in their material as well as their spiritual and moral advancement. Therefore, it is desirable that full cooperation and coordination of efforts in the fields of social legislation and ideology be furthered and promoted. Since joint action must be preceded by mutual understanding, discussion of social and moral problems in terms of universal humanitarian and religious categories is essential and will help promote goodwill and mutual understanding among the various communities in our land. However, even

the dialogue on social and civil problems must not be construed as an act of acquiescence on our part in the absurd idea that the Jewish community is involved and participates in the ecumenical movement initiated by the Second Vatican Council. Ecumenism as such is rooted in Christian theology and tradition, and we as Jews, as a non-Christian community cannot and will not join this movement which is alien to us. Our concept of the brotherhood of man, solidarity of individuals, love and understanding of each other is rooted exclusively in our Judaic tradition which is basically a universal one.

In light of the above I request the Executive Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America to refrain from participating in, sponsoring or endorsing the interreligious conference on conscience to be held in Boston during May. My objection to participation in this conference is not so much based on the list of topics which are to be discussed, since the vast majority of those belong within the sphere of social morality, but on the unfortunate manner in which this conference has been arranged and publicized. The impression has been conveyed that Orthodoxy has revised its attitude to ecumenism and plunged into the mainstream of dialoguing and debating the most delicate and intimate theological ideas, which will neither contribute to mutual understanding of the Jew and non-Jew nor toward the promotion and strengthening of the religious cause in general.

We members of the RCA, were, after all, the first who, over six years ago, pointed out the vicissitudes and dangers implied in undisciplined and completely unintelligent and vulgar dialoguing about ideas which are irreconcilable. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to be cautious and careful, even as regards problems of social morality, not to become unintentionally involved in the type of dialogue which is presently in vogue.

vi. Tor
and I

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik on Interreligious Dialogue: Forty Years Later

Dr. David Berger

November 23, 2003

Let me begin by conceding that Rabbi Soloveitchik was not entirely unconcerned by the residual problem of outright polemic. Dr. Korn correctly notes that he uses the term debate at one point, and I agree that the term is revealing. It is also clear that Rabbi Soloveitchik assumed that he was dealing, even on the eve of *Nostra Aetate*, with a thoroughly supersessionist Catholicism whose adherents were interested in converting Jews. But I cannot agree that the full intent of “Confrontation” is exhausted by depicting it as a warning against engaging in old-fashioned disputation. First of all, Jews did not need such a warning. Second, it was perfectly clear even in 1963 and 1964 that the call for dialogue was not framed in disputational terms. Indeed, that is precisely why Rabbi Soloveitchik had to caution against it. Thus, the preliminary text “On the Attitude of Catholics toward Non-Christians and especially toward Jews” distributed at the second session of the Council on November 8, 1963 declared that “since the Church has so much of a common patrimony with the synagogue, this Holy Synod intends in every way to promote and further mutual knowledge and esteem obtained by theological studies and fraternal discussions” (Arthur Gilbert, *The Vatican Council and the Jews*, p. 262). Third, Rabbi Soloveitchik provided guidance to the interfaith representatives of the Rabbinical Council of America for many years after *Nostra Aetate*. By then it was perfectly evident that interfaith dialogue was not Barcelona-style disputation, that the parties were not engaging in medieval polemics about Isaiah 53 or the rationality of the incarnation. And yet Rabbi Soloveitchik, on the whole, held to his guidelines. The entire thrust of “Confrontation”’s inspirational rhetoric about the private character of the religious experience is incommensurate with an interpretation that sees it as a straightforward injunction against trying to “prove” your faith; the issue is explicitly communicating an experience, not demonstrating the truth of a position. In other words, though the existential character of R. Soloveitchik’s stance correctly noted by Dr. Korn is indeed inimical to the notion that religious positions can be definitively proven, the larger argument is that the personal experience of faith cannot even be communicated. What *can* be communicated is intellectual apprehension of faith. The problem is that such communication is pitifully inadequate.

This, I think, is the real thrust of R. Soloveitchik’s position. Of course many elements of religious *doctrine*, of the *content* of religious belief, can be conveyed. The assertion that the great encounter between God and man cannot be communicated, applied in the same breath even to individuals of the same faith, cannot mean that no theological discourse is possible. It means that the deepest levels of the faith experience are inaccessible to outsiders, and Rabbi Soloveitchik applies this to a collective of believers as well as to individuals. Thus, as much as theological propositions can be conveyed, as much as even religious emotions can be partially expressed, that which ultimately commits a person to God or a faith community to its particular relationship with God remains essentially private, leaving not only a lonely man of faith but a lonely people of faith—a nation that dwells alone.