WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK – VIRTUAL ISSUE

The first week of February is *World Interfaith Harmony Week*, which aims to promote harmony between all people regardless of their religious faith.
In honor of *World Interfaith Harmony Week* we are delighted to offer free access to the following articles from *European Judaism* that deal with many aspects and opinions of interfaith dialogue and relations.

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 2

Soloveitchik's 'No' to Interfaith Dialogue
Angela West

VOLUME 46, NUMBER 1

Reflections on the Promise and Limitations of Interfaith Dialogue
Paul R. Mendes-Flohr

Social Media and the Movement of Ideas
Edward Kessler

Power and Authority in Religious Traditions in Islam: Reflections about issues of power and authority in the traditions and the present situation of Muslims in Europe
Hüseyin Inam

Growing Up Religiously in a Changing World
Julia Gardos

VOLUME 45, NUMBER 1

The Integrity of John Rayner and Inter-faith Relations
Richard Harries

Rabbi Hugo Gryn as Preacher
Marc Saperstein

VOLUME 39, NUMBER 2

Forty Years of European Judaism – Thirty Eight Years of Dialogue
Michael Hilton

VOLUME 37, NUMBER 1

Dialogue? Thank You, No! Ten Commandments for Interfaith Dialogue
Claus Leggewie

SOLOVEITCHIK'S 'NO' TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

*Angela West**

Abstract

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, one of the outstanding figures of modern Orthodox Judaism in the twentieth century, was opposed to interfaith dialogue and more particularly, to theological dialogue with the Catholic Church. In guidelines laid down in his paper 'Confrontation' in 1964 he proposed that Jews and Christians should discuss social and ethical problems together, but not matters theological. Since he was personally well acquainted with non-Jewish secular learning and had a philosophically sophisticated understanding of the role of halakhah, there has been much speculation as to why he sought to restrict dialogue in this way. Fifty years after 'Confrontation' was issued, it may be useful to re-examine his reasons and motivation in this matter and consider what relevance it has for contemporary interfaith relations.

Interfaith dialogue, in the Jewish and Christian circles that I am most familiar with, is generally considered a Good Thing, even by those who are not particularly active in it. But is there another view of the matter? And if so, might it be instructive to investigate its reasons?

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who was one of the outstanding figures of modern Orthodox Judaism in the twentieth century, was opposed to interfaith dialogue and more particularly, to theological dialogue with the Catholic Church. His lifetime spanned one of the most fateful periods of Jewish history (1903–1993), including both the Shoah in Europe and the birth of the state of Israel in 1948, and his biography reflects and touches these developments in significant ways. Born into one of the most famous rabbinic families of nineteenth-century Lithuanian Jewry, he made a pioneering break with family tradition by going to study at the University of Berlin at the age of twenty-two, where he gained a doctorate in philosophy. In the 1930s, he emigrated to the USA, where his father had already settled, and here he was later to become the head of the Talmud faculty at New York's Yeshiva University. In 1935 he was a candidate for the position of Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, but preferred

***Angela West** completed a dissertation on Soloveitchik as part of an MA course at the Centre for the Study of Jewish Christian Relations in Cambridge (now the Woolf Institute).

European Judaism Volume 47, Number 2, Autumn 2014: 95–106
Doi:10.3167/ej.2014.47.02.12 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

to remain as a teacher of Talmud in Boston and New York for the rest of his working life.

In the USA, he found himself part of a large and increasingly sophisticated Jewish community for whom America, rather than Israel, had become the land of promise. Here Jews enjoyed the protection of law and a measure of civil equality, thus making it possible, as Neusner says, for argument to go forward once more between people equal at both a political and an intellectual level (Neusner 1991: 92). So why then did Soloveitchik feel it necessary to argue against interfaith dialogue?

In 1964, as Chairman of the Orthodox Halakhah Commission he addressed the rabbinical council on this topic. The essay which he produced on this occasion, 'Confrontation', was not a halakhic ruling in a formal sense, but was treated as an authoritative response to the specific religious question at issue. Its closing paragraph was subsequently adopted by the Rabbinical Council of America, thus obligating the Orthodox community to follow the guidelines concerning Jewish–Christian dialogue that Soloveitchik had laid down. These guidelines allow that Jews and Christians can discuss social and ethical problems together, but apparently state that they should not discuss matters theological. Yet given his own involvement with non-Jewish secular learning in his education, it seems rather strange that he would seek to restrict dialogue in this way.

Soloveitchik introduces his theme with reference to the Biblical account of the creation of man, where the human being is portrayed at three different levels. First, there is 'natural man', who exists in a state of immediacy in relation to his environment and is unaware of any existential otherness but seeks only to gratify his needs and pleasure. At the second level, the 'man' is forced to confront an objective order which limits the exercise of his power and leads to the discovery of a self that is trapped in an unfree existence between the potentiality and the actuality of his life. It is here that he becomes aware for the first time of the divine norm for conduct, and confronts the choice either to become an active subject-knower, or else sink into despair at the absurdity of existence. At this point a third level opens up, where an individual becomes aware of their loneliness and isolation from the entire creation and here Soloveitchik refers to the Biblical account in which God creates a helpmeet for Adam. He is now 'confronted' again, this time not by an objective order beneath him but by someone who is an equal subject like himself, with a craving for companionship (Soloveitchik 1964: 8–9) and these two form the first community. However, their communication is paradoxical for it expresses not only agreement and cooperative effort but also inherent separateness. In both marriage and in the covenant community, the individual may experience a fearful apprehension of a loneliness, which dogs their hopes for fulfilment (Soloveitchik 1964: 10). The modern person,

Soloveitchik argues, has forgotten 'the difficult dialectical art of being one with and, at the same time, different from, his human confronter, of living in community and simultaneously in solitude' and so is tempted to react to his Other or others in the domination mode, reducing the relationship to that of subject–object and abandoning the attempt to communicate (Soloveitchik 1964: 11).

But how does all this relate to the question of interfaith dialogue? According to Soloveitchik, Jews are 'doubly confronted' in relation to another faith community in that they share with them the destiny of Adam in the general encounter with nature, but they are also members of a covenantal community which has preserved its identity under most unfavourable conditions (Soloveitchik 1964: 11–12). As he sees it, one faith community cannot be equated to the ritual and ethos of the other, so it is therefore futile to try to find common denominators between them. Each has its own 'normative gesture reflecting the numinous nature of the act of faith' – for Judaism this is halakhah – the application of the teachings of the Torah. He concludes that 'doubly confronted' Jews must stand with civilized society over and against the objective order, but at the same time they must confront this society with Jewish 'otherness' as a metaphysical covenantal community. In a democratic society, he says, both parties must enjoy full religious freedom, and Judaism must not be treated as a satellite of 'the majority community' nor evaluated in terms of the service it has rendered to Christianity. He fears that interfaith dialogue would pose a risk to the minority community – of finding itself obliged to express its faith in the theological language of the other. As he says:

> The logos … the word of faith reflects the intimate, the private, the paradoxically inexpressible cravings of the individual … and his linking up with his Maker. It reflects the numinous character and the strangeness of the act of faith of a particular community which is totally incomprehensible to the man of a different faith community. Hence, it is important that the religious or theological logos should not be employed as the medium of communication between two faith communities whose modes of expression are as unique as their apocalyptic experiences. The confrontation should occur not at a theological but at a mundane level. There, all of us speak the universal language of modern man. (Soloveitchik 1964: 18)

To many Jews nowadays, Solveitchik's response must seem unduly fearful, but it is necessary perhaps to look more carefully at its specific historical context. In the early 1960s, the Vatican was preparing for the Second Vatican Council and, in a hitherto uncharacteristic move, had decided to seek dialogue with Jewish leaders with a view to reconsidering its relations with other faiths. Soloveitchik, however, declined the invitation. It has been suggested that he

believed his necessary precondition for dialogue – that Judaism be treated as a totally independent faith community – was unfulfillable in relation to the official organs of the Catholic Church at that time. This may have been why he opposed the presence of Jews as observers or with any formal status at the Second Vatican Council.

Another Jewish philosopher, however, Abraham Heschel, whose background and concerns were in many ways parallel to those of Soloveitchik, took a different and opposite approach. In New York, in 1963, he agreed to chair a delegation of Jewish leaders who met privately with Cardinal Bea and here he spoke of the necessity for interreligious dialogue in view of the common threat of evil facing humanity. Like Soloveitchik, he also insisted on the integrity of Judaism as an independent faith community but unlike him, he was prepared to recommend changes in Christian doctrine, in particular the notion that Jews are 'deicides' cursed by God.

For a while, it was unclear whether or not the Church would repudiate this charge. The text of the Vatican Council's declaration, to be called *Nostra Aetate*, from the second session in 1964, omitted specific reference to the term 'deicide' (though condemning the notion of collective guilt quite strongly) and added a statement of eschatological hope for the union of Israel and the Church, which many Jews saw as a reaffirmation of the Christian mission to the Jews. Heschel labelled the draft 'spiritual fratricide' and declared that, faced with the choice of conversion or death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, he would choose Auschwitz (Kimelman 2004: 4). This was no doubt the sort of outcome that Soloveitchik had wished to avoid by his refusal from the outset to participate in any such exchange. On the other hand, it was Heschel's intervention that helped to make possible those major doctrinal changes in the Church's supersessionary theology that appeared in *Nostra Aetate.* Only eleven months previously another key document of Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, gave a wholly supersessionist account of Judaism, where Israel's relation to God was seen as entirely in the past.

Soloveitchik, however, continued to maintain that Jews should avoid suggesting changes in Christian ritual or doctrine, seeing this as a 'private' sphere which should be respected by dialogue partners. If Christians are minded to redress a historic wrong to Jews, he argued, they should do so at the human ethical level. Mindful of the martyrdom for their faith of millions of the ancestors, he asserted that Jews of today are not authorized to 'trade favours'; i.e., make changes in their faith for the sake of 'reconciliation' (Soloveitchik 1964: 19).

Yet even within his own tradition of modern Orthodoxy, Soloveitchik's theological reasoning on this matter did not go without challenge. If, as some have suggested, he was at heart a traditional East European rabbi, indifferent to the world outside the 'four cubits' of the Talmud study hall, with only

incidental recourse to Western philosophy, then several aspects of his thought are rather strange to Judaism – as David Rosen points out:

> The very idea of 'theology' as something set apart is debatable from a Jewish perspective. Precisely because Judaism sees everything in relation to the divine, even a discussion of the weather between believers is a theological discussion! (Rosen 2003)

Soloveitchik undoubtedly valued his distinguished family tradition of Lithuanian piety and scholarship (of the Mitnaged variety in contrast to the Hasidic legacy of Heschel and Buber) but it seems unlikely that his position was motivated only by a defence of past pieties. In fact, another Orthodox scholar, Daniel Rynhold (2003), argues that Soloveitchik's entire approach to interfaith dialogue was based on a rather modern set of philosophical foundations that he first laid out as early as 1944 in his essay *The Halakhic Mind*, which, however, was not published till 1986. This approach, he says, owed a lot to the philosophy of science, in particular to the Marburg school of Neo-Kantianism which Soloveitchik had encountered in Berlin, and for whom the physical sciences and mathematics represented the highest form of objective knowledge. This led him in his early works to emphasize the importance of establishing a religious philosophy on a sound scientific or empirical basis, and to argue that religion should ally itself with the forces of clear, logical cognition, as uniquely exemplified in the scientific method – even if at times the two might clash with one another.

But despite his commitment to 'objective data' that bespeaks the language of empiricism, Soloveitchik was a witness to the great paradigm shift in the twentieth century, away from the Newtonian world of classical physics, to the much stranger and uncertain universe of quantum physics. As he says: 'The claim of the natural sciences to absolute objectivity must undergo a thorough revision' (Soloveitchik 1983: 25). If scientific methodology is a 'paradigm' that operates like a theological or artistic tradition, it follows, as Rynhold says, that science itself can no longer be granted the exclusive right to call itself rational at the expense of all other approaches to cognition (Rynhold 2003: 8). The quantum physicists have discovered that one's theoretical framework determines to some extent the nature of the object being studied and the consequence of this has been that cognitive pluralism has succeeded the once interconnecting universe of the Newtonian world.

Soloveitchik in his book *The Halakhic Mind* (1986 [1944]) was aware of and deeply shaped by these currents in modern philosophy. As Jonathan Sacks (1990) says, he encountered and mastered the western intellectual tradition, and thus experienced the profound estrangement of the religious individual in western culture. In 1966, two years after 'Confrontation', he published *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Soloveitchik 1992 [1966]) in which he

attempted to examine philosophically the problem of 'the person of faith in the modern world' and the searing existential loneliness that this can involve. It is interesting, in view of his 'no theological dialogue' position, that an early version of *The Lonely Man of Faith* was presented to a Christian audience. In 1941 in *Halakhic Man* (Soloveitchik 1983 [1941]) he had written that 'any religion that confines itself to some remote corner or society, to an elite sect or faction, will give rise to destructive consequences that far outweigh any putative gains' and in 1983 he states: 'A religious ideology that fixes boundaries and sets up dividing lines between people borders on heresy' (Soloveitchik 1983 [1941]). His words thus 'signal' themselves to an audience that extends beyond Judaism, like the one who listened to his address when *The Lonely Man of Faith* was first delivered at St John's Catholic Seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts in 1964.

Clearly he recognized that those of another faith could also experience the sense of being strangers and outsiders, since all are affected by the breakdown of the optimistic friendship between reason and revelation of which medieval philosophers, both Jewish and Christian, dreamed. However, in the post-Kantian age, it seemed to him impossible to communicate at the level of faith, and he appears to have assumed this ultimate isolation of the faith experience, even to some extent among members of the same faith community (Soloveitchik 1964: 19). This radical thesis is only rarely implied in his other writings, and it certainly appears strange in the light of his own religious phenomenology. It has links to the religious existentialism of Kierkegaard which had an important influence on him, and to the work of several other thinkers in Protestant tradition, such as Barth, Otto and Kant.

As Sacks (1990) sees it, his writings are a kind of philosophical autobiography which bears testimony to his deep sense of the privacy of faith. For how can faith be persuasively expressed to another if 'there are no cognitive categories – no universal "faith data" – in which the total commitment of the person of faith could be spelled out'? Sacks observes the increasingly pessimistic turn of Soloveitchik's thought as he confronted the existential dilemma of modernity, but is clear that it was not these developments in science per se that disturbed him. Indeed, he welcomed the secular enterprise – whether scientific method, technological mastery or aesthetic creativity, and he had no nostalgia for a pre-technological age, nor was he interested in the alleged conflict between religion and science. But whereas Marx, Hegel and Nietzsche saw religion as a 'slave morality' and Freud saw it as a neurotic craving for authority, Soloveitchik advanced the belief that it is an entirely legitimate human pursuit of 'majesty' which is, however, checked by the dialectic of reality in 'man', who is also 'dust' and utterly dependent.

His thought here has some interesting parallels with that of Peter Berger, who has argued that the creed of ancient Israel, which was based on the

revelation of Sinai, was a triumph of rationality in a juridical sense, and its victory over paganism opened the way towards the 'disenchantment' of the world – whereas Catholic Christianity in some sense reenchanted it (Berger 1967/1990: 118–21). Soloveitchik had no patience with religion as contempt for the world. Torah for him was law – for the human situation, not for the angels – and he held that there is nothing so physically and spiritually destructive as diverting one's attention from this world. He argued that Jewish piety does not fit familiar models of Western religiosity and 'halakhic man' has distinctive attitudes to observance (Soloveitchik 1983 [1941]). For him, the authentic figure of Jewish spirituality is more like 'the man of science' than the traditional *homo religiosus* (the person of faith). We begin to get a sense of why he was reluctant to enter into dialogue with the Church, much of whose spirituality was based on rather more otherworldly premises.

This trend in his thinking has become clearer in some of his work that has been published posthumously. In *The Halakhic Mind* (1986 [1944]) he had spoken about his concept of human nature and how to approach scripture in the light of modern science, concluding: 'Out of the sources of halakhah a new world view awaits formulation.' However, during his lifetime, he did not appear to fulfil this promise and there has been considerable speculation as to what exactly he meant by it. But the recently published posthumous work entitled *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (Soloveitchik 2005) brings us closer to knowing what he believed had the potential to supersede Neo-Kantianism, pragmatism, Heidegger-type existentialism, and even the approach of modern science. It seems he considered contemporary Jewish thought to be based on medieval philosophy, and as such premised on Greek and Arabic thought – sources he considered alien to Judaism. For him, the 'new world view' would have to emerge from what he saw as fully Jewish roots, the Hebrew Bible and classic rabbinic texts, and, in particular, narrative parts of the Bible, especially Genesis and Exodus. It is interesting, incidentally, to see how this ties up with the typology he advances in the 'Confrontation' paper. He proposes here a concept of the human being as a part of the natural world whose moral and religious capacities do not require a departure from the order of nature (Hazony 2012). This contrasts with the understanding of the Church fathers and also the Jewish medieval philosophers who were seeking a way for human nature to escape or transcend the natural.

In view of this, it is evident once again why Soloveitchik may have felt that these differences of perception were so profound as to be virtually unbridgeable in ordinary interfaith dialogue. Did he perhaps think that engaging in this might risk betraying his own understanding of them? The drama in the Hebrew Bible, as Soloveitchik sees it, is the conflict between the natural life of 'man', subject to the laws of biology and physics, and the

ethical life, where humans, by their ethical choices and halakhic obedience, have the opportunity to redirect indifferent nature towards a world constituted according to God's will. This is the idea behind the *tselem elohim* – the image of God in the human, and it is radically different from the Christian view of transcendence, which he felt was similar to that held by many modern Jews.

Yet Soloveitchik did not in fact set about constructing and publishing this 'new world view' during his lifetime. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, a gradually more pessimistic tone afflicted his utterances. According to Sacks, this mood was not a reaction to the secular knowledge he had encountered in the University of Berlin, but rather to the secular person encountered in suburban Jewish America. It was not secular triumphalism per se that disturbed him but the fact that the secular has entered into the religious domain and distorted its institutions and teachings. The covenant has become mercantile, he said, and the attraction of religion for the secular person is its therapeutic, cultural and aesthetic aspects. This kind of religious nostalgia he saw as only the 'corruption' of religion in the search for peace of mind and 'meaningful' halakhah against the chaos of the secular world. He had rejected the idea that one faith can be translated into the language of another – and that there is therefore no need for the agonizing act of choice, commitment and submission that he conceived of as faith. As Sacks says: 'His modernity consists in this: that his hero – so often reminiscent of Kierkegaard – lives in a world in which faith is uncommon: an act of choice made against the stream of his culture' (Sacks 1990: 279).

Sacks thinks that this realization by Soloveitchik that 'majestic man' has appropriated religion, taking only that part of the message that moderns can comprehend, is what precipitated the ordeal of withdrawal for him, and led to the tragic position of the 'Lonely Man of Faith' (Sacks 1990: 48). However, he does not fully endorse his account of this alienation. Loneliness, Sacks contends, is rather the condition of sin, and the result of opposing one's will to the will of God, and thus experiencing others as obstacles to our self-realization, unable to concede the separate reality of other selves. He suggests that Soloveitchik's increasing pessimism may also be due to the fact that his philosophical position rests on a certain contradiction. He stated at one point that 'one must choose one's philosophy from a subjective, normative point of view' (Soloveitchik 1986: 52) and as has been described here, he adhered to a belief in the autonomy and incommensurability of each faith community. Yet at the same time, his own faith commitment meant that he was committed to the objective truth of the halakhic system and its supremacy over the others. According to Sacks (1990), there is a straight road from his conclusions in *The Halakhic Mind* to the argument in 'Confrontation' – that there is no ultimate dialogue between religions. Soloveitchik had perceived that the methodological pluralism of the 'hard' sciences allowed Judaism to

be understood on its own terms in a way that had never been possible in the shadow of Christendom in earlier times. But the subsequent proliferation of plural life worlds that this now entailed had given rise to the permanent identity crisis and homelessness of the modern individual, the world of Lonely Man/Woman. Was there then a price to be paid by Soloveitchik in his own soul for his confident embrace of the modern era of epistemological pluralism? Is it possible that 'the universal language of modern man' was not, after all, such a 'safe' arena for Jews' interaction with the world?

Yet Sacks also proposes another way of seeing Soloveitchik's work that is not directly beholden to modernity. The first draft of his work *The Halakhic Mind* was written in 1944: and just at the moment he was setting forth the halakhic universe, a cosmological understanding of Jewish tradition which could be dethroned neither by science nor romantic subjectivism, the old world of halakhic community in Europe was experiencing a literal meltdown. The world of the Lithuanian yeshivot of his ancestors was being reduced to ashes. Was it then a kind of tribute, a mourner's Kaddish to a shattered universe? His comprehension of the halakhah in this moment of crisis takes on the role of consolation – the letters of fire that cannot be destroyed by fire, and the Torah is untouched by the Holocaust.

Thus, Sacks suggests that Soloveitchik was in some sense a contemporary Yohanan ben Zakkai concentrating on the quiet task of reconstruction, rejecting both apocalyptic and gnostic responses, which are evident elsewhere. In this respect, he shared the perspective of his grandfather, Chayyim of Brisk, who held that the role of the rabbi is to 'redress the grievances of those who are abandoned and alone, to protect the dignity of the poor and to save the oppressed from the hands of the oppressor' (Sacks 1990: 273).

How does Soloveitchik's position – that of no theological dialogue between Judaism and other faiths – now appear to contemporaries? In 2003, a conference entitled 'Confrontation 40 Years On' was held in Boston to discuss whether or not it was still binding or relevant for the Jewish (Orthodox) community. Joseph Ehrenkranz, who presented a paper, made the following remark:

> Whether or not Christianity can be accurately described in terms of *avodah zorah*, the ethical and social efforts of Christians themselves are aimed at discerning the will of the God of Israel for the world. This entails theology[.] (Ehrenkranz 2003)

As I reflected on this phrase *avodah zorah*, and its meaning in Hebrew of 'alien worship', it suddenly seemed to provide a key to the picture of Soloveitchik that was beginning to emerge. For amid the extensive scope of what he had to say that is on record, there was, it seems, something that he did not, or could not, for good reasons, bring himself to say. Did he, as Ehrenkranz implies, consider

the worship and theology of Christianity a species of *avodah zorah* – and even, at times, perceive an 'alien spirit' at work in his own faith community? One can immediately see that embarking on theological discussion when one suspects that the faith of one's dialogue partner is idolatrous is probably not the most auspicious basis for interfaith dialogue! And if one fears that the alien spirit might even have crept into one's own faith community in certain respects, then the matter becomes even more complicated. No wonder Soloveitchik would hesitate to raise it in such terms! Indeed, it becomes obvious that it would be dangerous to do so. In past times, Jews who won the disputation in theological argument with Christians were often liable to pay with their lives. And with the Shoah still very much in living memory, such memories, though rarely expressed, make sense of Soloveitchik's concern that dialogue between the faith communities should not lead to a 'reconciliation' between them that would fundamentally betray the 'martyrdom of the millions of the ancestors in faith' (Soloveitchik 1964: 19).

But coming as I do from a Christian background, and living in a later era than Soloveitchik, perhaps it is possible for me to say some things that he could not have said. The Hebrew Bible commands in no uncertain terms that Israel should have no dealings with those that engage in idolatrous practices – like human sacrifice and the burning of children. Practices is the operative word here, for the Torah also makes it clear that a Gentile is to be judged not merely on the fact that he or she is an 'alien' (non-Israelite) with an alien form of worship but rather on whether or not they are obedient to the declared will of Israel's God. The latter is known, to Christians as well as to Jews, by means of the commandments. How then shall we judge the age-old theological slander of 'deicide' maintained by the Church for centuries, as anything other than a transgression of the commandment not to bear false witness? Moreover, Christians are commanded to love their neighbour, and love their brother/sister as a precondition for loving God. Yet Christians, both at popular and institutional level and across many different European nations, were massively engaged both by complicity and active perpetration in mass slaughter of their Jewish neighbours. By refusing to consider them as their kin, they effectively condoned their murder. When to kill even one person is forbidden, how shall we regard the slaughter of millions if not as the result of 'idolatrous practices'?

Despite the Church's promulgation of *Nostra Aetate,* many clergy are still unaware of any doctrinal changes, and quite a few of those who know of them are either indifferent or resistant to them. There has been little in the way of radical change at the popular or institutional level, and meanwhile new secular forms of the ancient slander have arisen. Though individual scholars and theologians, church leaders and other groups of Christians in Europe and the US have undertaken a far-reaching 'examination of conscience' with regard to

the events of the Holocaust, Catholic populations as a whole, especially those most implicated, have not done so. At the Boston conference, the question of Christian teshuvah for the sins of the Holocaust featured significantly and the single Christian participant, Fr Philip Cunningham, referring to the gospel statement 'by their fruits you shall know them' (Mt 7:16, 20) spoke of 'the sinful collective behavior of my own faith community toward the Jewish people over the past millennium' (Cunningham 2003).

In conclusion, it would appear that, by his 'no' to theological dialogue, Soloveitchik was employing an assertive but essentially defensive strategy. His priority is to protect the community to which he owes primary allegiance, and in his own sophisticated way, and adapted to his US American context, he is respecting the traditional wisdom of the Jewish diaspora communities – that they should not give Gentiles any unnecessary cause to intensify their oppression. Thus, for Jews, to be in a situation where they might risk telling Christians that their fundamental beliefs are contrary to the covenant is clearly something which according to this principle must be avoided at all costs.

However, in the light of the dialogue as it has developed in the fifty years since 'Confrontation', it seems that a new necessary precondition for interfaith dialogue has arisen almost implicitly among those most seriously engaged on both sides – that of Christian teshuvah. It seems possible that Soloveitchik, were he writing now, might well be prepared to accept that dialogue at the depth required cannot even begin unless Christians are willing to accept the necessity of teshuvah in its fullest sense, the metamorphosis of one's self-identity, as he himself had defined and explicated it for Jews. For, as Rosen says, the sanctification of the Divine name amongst the nations is a preeminent religious responsibility, fundamental to Israel's purpose and destiny. Jews should no longer ignore tactfully, as part of a defensive strategy, the desecration that has been perpetrated in the past in the name of Christianity, because this would ignore the fact that:

> the image of our own testimony and purpose has been perverted as well! By correcting this distortion, by restoring and promoting the image and glory of our Torah through dialogue and joint co-operation, we rectify the desecration of God's Name (*Chilul HaShem*) and sanctify it instead. (Rosen 2003)

Works Cited

Berger, Peter L., *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, Anchor Books, New York 1990 [1967].

Cunningham, Philip A., 'Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik – 40 Years Later: One Catholic's Reflections'. Paper presented at conference: 'Revisiting "Confrontation" After Forty

Years', Boston, November 2003. www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/ (accessed May 2014).
Ehrenkranz, Joseph H., '"Confrontation", Religious Freedom, and Theological Dialogue'. Paper presented at conference: 'Revisiting "Confrontation" After Forty Years', Boston, November 2003. http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/sol_ehrenkranz.htm (accessed May 2014).
Hazony, Yoram, 'A Bombshell from the Rav', *Jerusalem Letters 11*, 2 April, 2012. http://jerusalemletters.com/a-bombshell-from-the-rav/ (accessed May 2014).
Kimelman, Reuven, 'Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish Christian Relations', *The Edah Journal* 4, no. 2, 2004. www.edah.org/backend/JournalArticle/4_2_Kimelman.pdf (accessed May 2014).
Neusner, Jacob, *Jews & Christians: The Myth of a Common Tradition,* SCM Press, London & Philadelphia 1991.
Rosen, David, 'Orthodox Judaism and Jewish–Christian Dialogue', Paper presented at conference: 'Revisiting "Confrontation" After Forty Years', Boston, November 2003. http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/center/conferences/soloveitchik/sol_rosen.htm (accessed 12 July 2005).
Rynhold, Daniel, 'The Philosophical Foundations of Soloveitchik's Critique of Interfaith Dialogue', *Harvard Theological Review* 96, no. 1, 2003, 101–20.
Sacks, Jonathan, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age*, Valentine Mitchell, London 1990.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B., 'Confrontation', *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 6, no. 2, 1964, 5–29.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B., *Halakhic Man*, The Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia 1983 [1941].
Soloveitchik, Joseph B., *The Halakhic Mind: An Essay on Jewish Tradition and Modern Thought*, Seth Press/MacMillan, New York 1986 [1944].
Soloveitchik, Joseph B., *The Lonely Man of Faith*, Doubleday, London and New Jersey 1992.

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROMISE AND LIMITATIONS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

*Paul R. Mendes-Flohr**

Abstract:

This article challenges the view that religious tolerance is promoted by affirming what the respective faith communities have in common. Rather, it proposes that genuine interfaith dialogue acknowledges difference and celebrates our distinctive paths to the life of the spirit as refracting our shared humanity.

To tolerate is to insult. Tolerance must only be preparatory to open the way to mutual acceptance... True liberalism is acknowledgment and understanding. Wolfgang Goethe[1]

I

In what might be regarded as a commentary on Goethe's sapient maxim, cited as the epigraph to this essay, the Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig exclaimed, 'the main thing is that we still must prove ourselves – the test is still before us: The overcoming of mere thoughts of tolerance, above all the overcoming of [mutual] indifference'.[2] In the best of liberal circles, marching under the banner of tolerance, 'the Christian ignored the Jew in order to tolerate him, and the Jew ignored he Christian in order to allow himself to be tolerated'.[3] This strategy of studious indifference attained its most pristine expression in the German poet and philosopher Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's didactic play, *Nathan the Wise*. A parable of tolerance, this play, first performed in 1779, projects the difference between the bearers of the three monotheistic faiths to be irrelevant, of no consequence because they are – despite their religious particularities – first and foremost human beings. As Nathan, Lessing's wise Jew, rhetorically asks, 'Are Christian and Jew sooner Christian and Jew than men?'[4] Indeed, as Rosenzweig observed, Nathan is abstracted from his Judaism, as is Lessing's Muslim from Islam, and as his Christian is from Christianity. They meet solely as fellow human beings. Their religious patrimony, grounded in the witness they bear to their respective faith

***Paul R. Mendes-Flohr**, Professor Emeritus of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is currently the Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor of Modern Jewish History and Thought in the Divinity School of the University of Chicago.

European Judaism Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2013: 4–14
Doi:10.3167/ej.2013.46.01.02 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

communities, is accordingly treated as an encumbrance, or an ultimately trivial accident of birth. Hence, as Rosenzweig laconically observes, Lessing's Jew, Christian and Muslim 'have no children'.[5] As pure human beings, they have no progeny, certainly no Jewish, Christian or Muslim descendents.

Surely, though, believing Jews – as with believing Christians, Muslims and for that matter Buddhists, Hindus or Navajo Snake Dancers – would protest that their humanity is refracted through the particularity of their community of faith. Yet one must acknowledge that religious faith, especially of biblical or theistic inspiration, may engender intolerance.[6] The claim to privileged knowledge often instills hubris, and contempt for other faiths. Indeed, historically the liberal ethic of tolerance was born of a resolve to contain the fury and wrath aroused by conflicting religious claims. If tolerance courts indifference, let it be. For surely it is preferable to the scourge of religious intolerance.

Hence, the liberal creed of tolerance poses an irrefragable challenge to men and women of faith: Can an abiding fidelity to the theological positions and values of one's religious community allow one to acknowledge the cognitive and spiritual integrity of other faith commitments? The challenge is perhaps more poignant when formulated from the perspective of religious educators: How is one to instruct youth in the religious beliefs and values of their community, while encouraging them to be tolerant of beliefs and values deemed to be incompatible with their own? How is one to educate youth to have firm moral and faith convictions, while encouraging them to honour opposing positions? Surely, this challenge would be banal were tolerance interpreted merely as a code of 'live and let live', or construed as a demand to dismiss differences between religions, to cite once again Nathan the Wise, as but a question of 'color, dress, and shape'.[7] The differences are not always so superficial, however. There are often some very real and far-reaching theological and axiological differences that divide various faith communities. It is from this perspective that T.S. Eliot exclaimed, 'The Christian does not wish to be tolerated'.[8] If one takes one's own faith seriously, one must perforce demand that others take one's faith seriously, even if but to protest. Thus, Franz Rosenzweig voiced his preference for the medieval disputations – in which Jewish savants were obliged to defend rabbinic teachings before an inquisitorial forum of Catholic clerics – to the tepid ethic of interfaith tolerance. Taking his own faith seriously, Rosenzweig unflinchingly insisted that the differences between Judaism and Christianity are not merely matters of folklore and contrasting cultural inflections. In a memorable essay on 'the phenomenology and dialectic of tolerance', the Catholic existentialist Gabriel Marcel posed the issue with particular acuity when he mused, '(i)nsofar as I consider the object of my faith sacred, does not this prevent me from taking any action which would confirm the disbeliever in his disbelief?'[9]

For a person of true religious faith who has internalised the liberal ethos the challenge of interfaith reconciliation would then have be conceived in the spirit of Goethe's maxim: 'To tolerate is to insult – *Dulden heißt beleidigen*.' To underscore his contention, Goethe alternately interchanges the term *Toleranz* with the German term for 'sufferance', *dulden*, to suffer the Other although one may find the Other's beliefs and values abhorrent, or at the least contrary to one's own. True liberalism, Goethe insisted, must go beyond mere sufferance. As addressed to individuals of an authentic faith commitment, the liberal challenge is thus to be understood as to how one may extend tolerance beyond the pragmatic bounds of tactical indifference towards other religious and axiological traditions, and to forge a path to mutual 'acknowledgment and understanding' – and to do so without compromising or vitiating one's own commitments.

II

The lexicological history of the term tolerance highlights the issue. Prior to the eighteenth century and the dawn of liberal politics, the word 'tolerance' had, in French, a pejorative connotation, namely, a permissive or complacent attitude towards evil. As late as 1691, in his famous admonition to Protestants, Jacques F. Bossuet unabashedly extolled Catholicism as the least tolerant of all religions. As a 'careless indulgence', tolerance was deemed a heresy. It is only with the emergence of the modern state as a fundamentally secular institution, concerned preeminently with public tranquility as a condition necessary for collective prosperity, that tolerance lost its pejorative sting and became a civic and moral virtue. Whether it can also be a theological virtue is of course yet another issue.

Philosophically, tolerance is an elusive concept, fraught with logical paradoxes, if not downright antinomies.[10] Are we to tolerate the intolerable? Liberal law, crafted to ensure the maximal freedom and thus diversity of opinion and practice recurrently has difficulty in drawing the lines between toleration and legal censure. The civic duty to tolerate and the moral injunction to oppose what is objectionable are often in conflict, if not seemingly irreconcilable. Tolerance has accordingly been defined as a deliberate restraint – albeit conditional – to objectionable beliefs and conduct. However, again returning to Goethe's instructive maxim, one must regard this form of tolerance – when addressed to intercommunal and interfaith encounter – as at best preparatory to 'mutual acceptance' and reciprocal 'acknowledgment and understanding'. From the perspective of the state, such tolerance is supererogatory, that is, it is above and beyond the purview of the law; it cannot be legislated. A solicitous, dialogical tolerance – through which one actively seeks to acknowledge and

understand the Other – must take its lead from a source other than a concern for civic harmony. As a positive virtue, dialogical tolerance derives its energy from a compelling desire to know and honour the Other, and perhaps at a deeper level a conviction that the Other, despite his or her difference – and perhaps even because of this difference (and this will be our point) – shares some basic humanity with oneself.

The issue of tolerance, of course, is considerably alleviated if one adopts a moral and cultural relativism. This was Lessing's recommendation. In his parable of tolerance, neither the Jew nor the Christian nor the Muslim are certain whether he is God's elect, that he possesses the pristine covenant. Bereft of such knowledge, Lessing's Jew, Christian and Muslim are enjoined to humility, and thus to disregard the doctrinal and historical differences that divide them. In effect, to overcome that divide Lessing sought to remove the differences by urging a self-critical agnosticism and an ethic of cultural relativism. If all is relative, religious and attendant cultural differences are not worth a fight. This attitude leads to what has been aptly called a skeptical pluralism, and an 'easy acceptance of a heterogeneity of values and ways of life'. [11] This may also be characterised as a laissez-faire conception of tolerance. With the elimination – often by dint of a sheer decision for the sake of tolerance – of a clear ground of morality and religious conviction, one ethical system and set of beliefs are to be regarded as good as the next.

As in the case of the well-meaning Lessing, this form of relativism is prompted not merely by pragmatic objectives of civic and inter-communal tranquility, but also by a genuine humanism. The humanist holds that at the core of every culture and faith is a common humanity and even shared spiritual sensibilities. Focusing on the essential humanity of the Other enables one to dismiss that which is particular as unessential. Indeed, extending tolerance to the Jew in the person of Nathan the Wise, Lessing 'abstracted' him from his Judaism. He became what later Isaac Deutscher would call a 'non-Jewish Jew'.[12] To a lesser degree, Lessing also did this with the Christian and Muslim protagonists of his play. What is tolerated is the human being hidden beneath the façade of a particular faith community. A species of this type of tolerance is what might be called '*ad hominem* tolerance', in which a pious individual – be he or she a devout Jew, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or what have you – is portrayed as being fundamentally a decent person, for he or she is perceived to possess such engaging human qualities as sincerity, integrity and honorability. Intrinsic value is attributed to these transcultural qualities and implicitly granted priority to the distinctive beliefs and practices that define the particular Jew, Christian or Muslim. The danger of this approach is also illustrated by Lessing. In his earlier play, 'The Jews', he presents a Jew of manifest integrity, social grace and a humane disposition, and then has one of the protagonists parenthetically but tellingly sigh, if only all the Jews

were like him.[13] Unwittingly, he casts his Jews – as he does the Muslim and Christian in *Nathan the Wise* – to be exceptional, and, in fact, praiseworthy for transcending the constraining limits of their respective faith communities. Seeing the individual Christian, Jew or Muslim as an autonomous and thus a transcultural subject, Lessing, the preeminent humanist, in effect ignores or at least downplays their faith commitments.

In some contemporary interfaith circles, there is a beguiling twist to the humanistic leveling of differences, namely to regard the particularities of faith and value as essentially the same. Hence, there are those who choose to present the Christian holiday of Christmas and the Jewish feast of Hanukkah as two variations of a similar theme, but the two religious events are, of course, not the same at all. Their calendric proximity, and the fact that both occasion an exchange of gifts, and that both holidays are marked by illuminated candles does not render them spiritually and theologically homologous. Likewise, Passover is not 'essentially' identical with Easter. There are, to be sure, more nuanced and sophisticated variations of this approach to interfaith understanding. These are especially represented among certain trends in the academic study of religion, stemming from the *Religionsgeschichte-Schule* of the early twentieth century, which holds that all faiths, including so-called pagan faiths, enjoy a relationship to the Absolute. This is not a theological but a phenomenological argument, based on heuristic presuppositions of a universally apprehended Absolute or divine reality, and some core religious personality to which particular religious beliefs and actions are ultimately peripheral.[14]

To be sure, these strategies promoting inter-religious tolerance generally reflect more than a mere pragmatic accommodation or sufferance of the Other. They express humanistic affirmations and a moral commitment to the ideal of genuine tolerance. Without gainsaying the overarching significance of this attitude, I wish to highlight conceptual problems inherent to such an attitude.

III

Humanistic and phenomenological approaches to interfaith tolerance induce two distinctive forms of pluralism: A weak pluralism, which contends that all religions have some intrinsic value; and a strong pluralism, according to which each religion has not only intrinsic value, but each is of equal moral and spiritual value. In either case, the ethic of tolerance is advanced by endorsing a form of cultural and religious relativism. However, if tolerance is to be more than merely a by-word for relativism, then it must, indeed as Goethe suggested, entail a determined resolve to honour the divergent beliefs and practices of the Other, not as incidental but as a central aspect of the religious experience and identity of the Other. In other words, the religious

beliefs and theological commitments of the Other must be taken seriously, even should they clash with one's own. In contrast to the humanistic and phenomenological appreciation of other faiths, this approach to interfaith understanding does not ignore, or treat as incidental, the content of belief and objective character of given religious practices of the Other. It does not flinch from engaging the Other theologically, and in order to tolerate members of other faith communities it does not suffice with focusing on the subjective reality of the Other, bracketing or even dismissing as irrelevant their beliefs and actions.

One may even question whether the humanistic and phenomenological approach to interfaith understanding is actually capable of achieving its objective. For by focusing on the interior experience and human qualities of members of other faiths – the subjects or agents of other faiths – this approach in effect detaches the subjects from the objective content and theological claims of their beliefs and actions. According to the subjective approach – be it in the form of some humanistic essentialism or universal phenomenology of religious experience – only human beings are strictly tolerated, not their beliefs and practices. One does not tolerate the beliefs and practices of the Other, but only the subjects holding these beliefs and the protagonists of these practices. Put differently, tolerance of the subjective reality of the Other and the assumed humanity of the Other, while perhaps confirming the humanity of the Other, does not entail an understanding of the Other's beliefs and deepest religious commitments.[15]

IV

The problem of tolerance as a theological virtue is probably most acute for monotheistic religions. Founded upon historical revelation, these religions hold themselves to be graced by a privileged knowledge of God and the divine will. Revelation thus constitutes a system of propositional claims, that is, truth claims that are affirmed through faith, and as such are constitutive of a specific theistic religion's guiding principles and practices. The privileged status of revelation lends the religion upon which it is founded a preeminent position, which perforce denies the truth claims of competing religions. There is but one true religion, others are utterly false or, at best, impaired by incomplete knowledge of divine truths. Hence, it is argued that 'a religion based on constitutive ... revealed truths cannot ascribe value to a religion that contradicts these truths'.[16] Monotheistic religions are thus said to be inherently intolerant. Since the Enlightenment, theologians have implicitly acknowledged that the propositional character of revelation has obstructed monotheistic religions' integration into the liberal order. In late-eighteenth-

century Jewish circles, Moses Mendelssohn argued that Judaism is not constituted by a divine dispensation of 'eternal truths' – which should in principle be available to all rational individuals – but rather a divine legislation of ritual or ceremonial laws. Twist and turn as he did, the German-Jewish philosopher could not, however, deny that Judaism had a privileged status, for, as he argued, the ceremonial laws had the symbolic role of keeping the Jews ever alert to the eternal truths, of which ordinary mortals, that is, non-Jews often tend to lose sight. Despite his passionate endorsement of the then new, indeed, revolutionary ethic of religious tolerance, Mendelssohn could not explain away Judaism's privileged status as a revealed religion.

Liberal Christian theologians fared no better in their efforts to adjust revealed faith to the demands of tolerance. In the twentieth century, a radical new strategy crystallised with the rejection of propositional conceptions of revelation. Revelation, according to this view, is not a disclosure of divine truths, but is rather the experience of divine presence, especially as manifest in given historical events. Founded on such events, religion is thus said to be an encounter with the living God, and not principally a dispensation of privileged knowledge. Such encounters cannot be properly formulated in propositional statements to be affirmed or denied; the witnesses to these events are meant to inspire among believers a posture of faith allowing for similar encounters in their lives. In this sense, revelation is instructive, not constitutive. A non-propositional conception of revelation, propounded especially by Protestant liberal thinkers, is by definition less exclusive and thus in principle capable of accommodating other faith experiences. However, even if one should grant that the non-propositional conception of revelation paves the way for religious tolerance and pluralism, it is actually irrelevant to the larger question whether religious tolerance can be regarded as a theological virtue. Moreover, it is probably a historically irrelevant position. For the fact remains that the votaries of a non-propositional view of revelation are a small minority of theologians, who address a rather circumscribed circle of readers. The vast majority of believers still – at least formally – regard their respective theistic faith communities to be based on a privileged access to divine truths.

There is yet another more basic flaw in the non-propositional view of revelation. Eager to free monotheistic faith from what they regard the bane of exclusivity, the proponents of a non-propositional view of revelation implicitly deny the faith reality of those for whom revealed truths are an intrinsic, indeed, perhaps the constitutive aspect of that reality. Should interfaith understanding not be limited to post-traditional, perhaps secularised theologians representing various monotheistic faiths, it must also be forged between individuals for whom propositional revelation is deeply part of their faith experience. To be historically significant, interfaith understanding cannot

demand a theological shift to non-propositional conceptions of revelation. The reality is that there are those, perhaps the majority of believers, who are beholden to propositional conceptions of belief. One cannot demand of Christians to forfeit their conceptions of dogma as revealed truths mediating salvation, and *ergo* to claim that 'outside the Church there is no salvation' (Saint Cyprian). Nor can one demand of Muslims to yield certain notions of Islam, such as expressed in Quran, Sura 3:18: 'The only true faith in Allah is Islam'. Nor could one require of Jews to deny that the Torah, oral and written, was given at Sinai and that God thereby established a special relationship with the Children of Israel. We, therefore, return to our original question, slightly reformulated in the light of the preceding discussion: Are monotheistic faiths, grounded as they are in historical revelation embodying propositional truths, inherently incapable of genuine tolerance? Are monotheistic faiths constitutionally antagonistic to religious pluralism?

A journal founded in Germany of the late 1920s adumbrated a strategy for interfaith dialogue that might not only provide an answer to our question but also point to the possibility of regarding religious tolerance as a theological virtue. Appearing between 1926 and 1930, the journal, entitled *Die Kreatur*, was jointly edited by a Jew, a Protestant and a Catholic.[17] The journal sought to provide a forum for representatives of monotheistic religions to engage in a respectful dialogue that did not require the yielding of traditional faith positions. The name of the journal was chosen with great care: *Die Kreatur* – translated as 'creature', – but the German has wider connotation, embracing 'all living created beings'. Under the sign of Divine Creation, men and women of theistic faith are to be cognisant of themselves as created beings and thus co-responsible for the care of the created order, which includes at its centre one's fellow human beings.

Conceived by the theologian Florens Christian Rang, this interfaith journal was initially to be called 'Greetings from the Lands of Exile' – each of the monotheistic faiths are locked in doctrinal and devotional exile from one another, an exile which will be overcome only with the eschaton, at the end of time. Until that blessed hour, however, they could only greet one another. As the inaugural editorial noted, '… what is permissible,and at this point in history mandatory, is dialogue: the greeting called in both directions, the opening or emerging of one's self out of the severity and clarity of one's self-enclosedness, a dialogue (*Gespräch*) prompted by a common concern for created being'.[18]

Although the journal did not encourage direct theological exchange – it preferred to focus on issues of shared concern – it provided a forum for various theological voices from the traditions represented. Without proclaiming it as its position as such, the journal thereby implicitly took seriously the constitutive

beliefs of each religious community, thus acknowledging them as intrinsic to the faith commitment and identity of the Other. There was no apology, no defensive posturing. The distinctive voices were simply resounded and heard, resonating a humble sense of a shared creatureliness.

The Jewish editor of *Die Kreatur*, Martin Buber, explained that in such a dialogue one encounters the Other as a Thou (*ein Du*) – as an irreducibly unique presence. The Thou, he further pointed out, is not to be construed as some hidden essence of the Other, some quintessential core distilled from the Other. Rather the Thou is the whole – the *Gestalt*, if one wills – of the Other. The Thou is beholden in the Presence of the Other, through which the Presence of the Divine is also manifest. Dialogue thus differs from a humanism that seeks to isolate and celebrate the common 'human' essence of each of us. In contrast, dialogical tolerance discerns one's humanity – or creatureliness – in the particularity, as Emmanuel Levinàs would put it, of the distinctive Face of each human being.

Hence, within the sphere of theistic faith, dialogical tolerance finds in the concept of creatureliness a theological ground analogous to the humanistic notion of our universal humanity. Creatureliness, though, is not to be construed as a mere synonym or metaphor for the humanistic notion of a common humanity. By virtue of a consciousness of one's creatureliness, one assumes a bond with one's fellow human beings – or divinely graced creatures. One is thus bonded to the Others not only by dint of common anthropological features but also because of a sense of shared origins, destiny and responsibility before the transcendent source of life.

As dialogical tolerance secures the integrity of each participant in the ensuing dialogue, it need not, as is often feared by orthodox custodians of the various monotheistic faith communities, threaten the certainty of one's beliefs, or commitment to the values of one's religious tradition. Open-mindedness and tolerance need not necessarily lead to a loosening of communal bonds, and a weakening of cognitive attachments. Indeed, dialogical tolerance may be hailed as a theological virtue.

Notes

1. *Goethe Werke,* ed. Emil Straiger (Frankfurt a.M.: Insel Verlag, 1966), vol. 6 (Sprüche): 507.
2. Franz Rosenzweig to Martin Bube, letter dated 9 March 1924, *Rosenzweig, Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften*, Part 1, vol. 2: *Briefe und Tagebücher* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979), 948.
3. Ibid., 947.
4. Cf. 'Nathan:… Sind Christ und Jude eher Christ und Jude, als Mensch? Ah! Wenn ich einen mehr in Euch gefunden hätte, dem es genügt, ein Mensch zu heißen'. Lessing,

Nathan der Weise, II, 6, lines 523–526. *Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Werke* (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutsche Klassiker Verlag, 1993), vol. 9:533.

5. Rosenzweig, 'Lessings Nathan', in Rosenzweig. *Der Mensch und sein Werk. Gesammelte Schriften.* Part 3*: Zweistromland. Kleinere Schriften zu Glauben und Denken* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1984), 452.
6. This argument has been most recently raised by Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, trans., Robert Savage (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).
7. For a philosophical analysis of the principle of religious tolerance as represented by Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, see Avishai Margalit, 'The Ring: On Religious Pluralism', in David Heyd, ed. *Toleration. An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 147– 157. Margalit argues that *Nathan the Wise* is actually an 'antipluralist story'. He points out that the parable of the three 'identical' rings is given to the following logical, mutually exclusive possibilities: *Nathan the Wise* as "the story of one real ring [*Nathan the Wise]* is an antipluralist story. One is that the ring is made [of genuine gold]. The analogy to this is that the belief is true. The second possibility is that the ring if it is effective, if faith in it leads to desirable actions; the analogy here is to religious practice; a religion is genuine if it leads to the proper worship of God. The third possibility is that the ring is real if it truly determines who the father's legitimate heir or representative is. Here the analogy is to the question of who truly constitutes the source of religious authority – more precisely, who the true prophet is, from the three claimants for legislative revelation. Of course, there is yet another important version of the parable. A ring made of impure gold… is replaced by a ring of purer, 'moral real' gold. This is a possible Christian or Muslim interpretation of the story, and the analogy is clear." Ibid., pp. 148–9. Margalit's logical analysis of the parable, as trenchant as it might be, is of course not in accord with Lessing's intended message of the parable.
8. T.S. Eliot, 'The Idea of a Christian Society', in Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York, 1949).
9. Gabriel Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, trans. Robert Rosthal (New York: Fordam University Press, 2002), p. 217.
10. David Heyd, 'Introduction', *Toleration. An Elusive Virtue* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 3.
11. Ibid., p. 4.
12. Isaac Deutcher, *The Non-Jewish Jew, and other Essays,* ed. Tamara Deutcher (London/ New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).
13. Lessing, 'The Jews', translated in P. Mendes-Flohr and J. Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World. A Documentary History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 67.
14. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
15. In this respect, dialogical tolerance would go beyond what David Heyd characterises as a 'perceptual conception' of tolerance. 'We do not tolerate', he argues, 'opinions and beliefs, or even actions and practices, only the subjects holding dislike beliefs and the agents of detested actions. … [Tolerance] consists exactly in the shift from the perspective of judging beliefs and actions impersonally to focusing on persons. Only human beings can be the object of restraint based on respect, which is required by the idea of tolerance'. Heyd offers this perspective to avoid the problem of relativism. 'Toleration of the practices and beliefs of other peoples and cultures involves

recognizing the intrinsic value of the human beings who are committed to certain cognitive systems or who autonomously choose and follow certain systems of rules and values'. *Nota bene*: Heyd speaks of 'the intrinsic value of the human beings' who abide by particular beliefs and practices one might find objectionable or at least alien; in order to affirm the humanity of their agent, these beliefs and practices are to be ignored or bracketed. The conclusion that Heyd draws from this conception of tolerance is in accord with the presupposition of dialogical tolerance. A perceptual conception of tolerance, he insists, 'does not require any weakening of certainty, confidence, or commitment to our own beliefs and values'. Heyd, 'Introduction', pp. 14, 15.

16. Margalit, 'The Ring', p. 151.
17. *Die Kreatur. Eine Zeitschrift. Viermal im Jahr erscheinend.* Herausgegeben von Martin Buber, Joseph Witte und Viktor von Weizsächer (Berlin by Verlag Lambert Schneider, 1926-1930); reprint: (Nendeln, Lichtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1969), three volumes.
18. *Die Kreatur*, vol. 1: 1.

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE MOVEMENT OF IDEAS

*Edward Kessler**

Abstract:

The Social Media has become an important part of our (online) lives, in an incredibly short period of time. This paper will explore to what extent it contributes to fostering interfaith dialogue. Its impact depends on the people who use it - and how they use it. The Social Media challenges traditional hierarchies (including religious hierarchies) because control moves from website owners to users which means that "everyone is a publisher and everyone is a critic."

Although the less personal nature of online communication makes it easier for information to be distorted, there are examples of good practice to promote interfaith dialogue. The Social Media can also overcome ignorant stereotypes and combat prejudice, (although it is also (ab)used to promote prejudice).

In interfaith dialogue, the Social Media needs to provide a safe space for users, to facilitate trust and to help users feel a sense of connection with the 'other'. Although this can be more easily achieved in a face-to-face encounter because the 'virtual world' will only ever be virtual, the Social Media should be integrated into interfaith dialogue so that it not only contributes to positive political change but also to furthering inter-religious understanding.

The 'Facebook' Generation

The term 'social media' refers to the use of 'web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue'. This definition is provided by a well-known example of modern technology – Wikipedia – established in 2001. Only a decade later, Wikipedia provided users with 19 million articles from 91,000 contributors in over 200 languages.

Google, famous for its web search engine, is also worth mentioning. In 2010, only 12 years after incorporation, unique visitors of Google surpassed one billion for the first time, up from 931 million unique visitors a year earlier. In 2011 there was an average of two million Google searches per minute and

***Dr Edward Kessler MBE** is a leading thinker in interfaith relations, primarily Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim Relations. He is Founder Director of the Woolf Institute and Fellow of St Edmund's College, Cambridge.

European Judaism Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2013: 26–36
Doi:10.3167/ej.2013.46.01.04 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

when I searched 'interfaith dialogue' in September 2011, I could have chosen any one of 1,940,000 Google results.

These two examples may help you understand the seismic and generational shift which has taken place since 1990, less than one generation ago, when Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist, invented the World Wide Web and helped it become operational. Although Wikipedia and Google are part of the second phase in the evolution of the internet, see below, they are not the most recent. There have so far been three phases:

1. 1980s – **One-to-One** connections: e.g., e-mail (in 2010, 107 trillion emails were sent, an average of 294 billion per day; 89% spam)
2. 1990s – **One-to-Many** connections: e.g., webpages (such as Wikipedia and Google available to countless 'websurfers' at the same time)
3. 2000s – **Many-to-Many** connections, also known as 'social media': e.g., Facebook (established 2004), YouTube (established 2005) and Twitter (established 2006).

This third and most recent phase in the evolution of the internet, the initiation of social media is still therefore just over 5 years old. Still an infant, but we can be sure that the landscape will be different in another 5 years and even more important.

This paper will focus on the third phase, the 'many to many connections', which has generated global attention, especially from the traditional media, for its contribution to societal upheavals, including the Arab Spring. The UK witnessed the role played by the social media during a tumultuous period in August 2011, when we experienced 4 days of riots. At the time, the Prime Minister, David Cameron, raised the possibility (11th August 2011) of seeking to ban the use of Twitter, Facebook and Blackberry Messenger, all of which were used by rioters. He sensibly decided against taking this course of action, probably because it would have ended in failure, as did the attempts by certain former Middle Eastern rulers to block the internet and control all forms of media (for example, Egypt blocked the internet on 27th January but re-opened it on 2nd February 2011).

Social media sites have grown exponentially in the last 5 years and control has moved from website owners (dominant in the 1990s) to website users (dominant today). This means the social media is not just a communication tool; it is also a connection tool. It enables affiliation, interest group formation and solidarity in new ways; ways that do not conform to existing social groups or geographic locations.

This means that 'everyone is a publisher and everyone is a critic'. In other words, we are witnessing a massive and revolutionary democratisation of information. Sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, have no editors and users

are expected to edit inappropriate or inaccurate content. This collaborative process demonstrates the challenge to traditional hierarchies: individuals communicate their own interpretations (of events and texts), rather than rely on the accounts of their leaders, religious or political.

A 2011 report from the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University[1] indicated that the proliferation of information also shapes religious identity. For example, Peter Mandaville, of the Center for Global Studies at George Mason University, has observed that many young Muslims find information from a multitude of sources with varying perspectives on their faith[2]. Indeed, religious activists and intellectuals from all faiths (and none) are establishing their own websites and Facebook pages in order to communicate their own interpretation of their faith (and/or ideology).

This transformative development has massive implications for religious authority. Let us take Christianity as an example. Just a couple of generations ago, among communities in the West at least, the priest was not only the moral and spiritual authority — the representative of the 'true religion' and its 'true scriptures' — but also probably the most educated. He (almost certainly it was a he) spoke with authority on a wide variety of issues that were important to the society of his day.

Contrast that with today's situation. Rarely are priests approached as figures of authority, except perhaps within their own congregation. The internet and social media are primary authorities for information, with the traditional media (radio, television newspapers, and the cinema) a distant second. For many American Christians, www.Beliefnet.com ('Your Trusted Source for Free Daily Inspiration & Faith') is a bigger authority on matters of Christian belief and practice than a priest. According to Philip Clayton writing in the Princeton Theological Review (2011)[3], whilst 40 years ago people were influenced in their judgements about religious matters by their priest and editorials in the religion section of their local newspaper; today online blogs which congregants choose to follow are a far greater influence. Blogs offer an opportunity to express personal spiritual beliefs and practices and reinforce the move to a democratisation of religious expression and demonstrate social media's challenge to traditional authority.

Opinions of the social media also tend to align with their generation and area of expertise. For example, more experienced and older faith leaders believe that the 'impersonal' nature of online communication significantly limits the potential for substantive dialogue, stressing the importance of being able to physically see and hear the Other in an offline context. Younger and less experienced interfaith leaders tend to view new social media more positively, as a tool for initiating, building and maintaining positive dialogue.

Unfortunately, democratisation of information and the increase in user-generated content also make it easier for misinformation and negative content to proliferate online. In addition, access to a huge array of media makes it easy for local issues to attract global attention and, for example, a controversy in one region of Pakistan or India can have a significant impact on the streets of Bradford or London just a few hours later. In the Woolf Institute's training of Metropolitan Police Officers, the speed of the continental transfer of tension has become a topic of increasing interest.

Although, as I will outline below, the social media has the potential to foster interfaith dialogue and to spread individual freedom, it has an equal capacity to reinforce pack identities and mob rule. Negative consequences are equally part of the potential of the social media exemplified by a coarsening of debate and increasing polarisation that have grown directly from a fashionable political incorrectness on websites where anonymity is guaranteed. Indeed, there is even a temptation among mainstream websites to cut moderate posts in favour of the extremes, for the sake of generating controversy and greater publicity. Is it a coincidence that the tone of public debate in the US over the last 10 years has become increasingly adversarial and 'loud'? The 'one-way conversation' is becoming the norm and examples of genuine public dialogue have diminished significantly.

It is my view that anonymity is a key part of a process of debilitation which harms society. Psychologists have applied the Jungian term, 'Individuation', which refers to the concealment of identities when social norms are withdrawn. Individuation occurs when we sit behind the wheel of a car and abuse the driver in front/behind of us; it is what motivates football supporters to shout abuse or hatred at the opposition team and its fans, and/or the referee. And it is why under the cover of an alias – surrounded by 'virtual strangers' – conventionally restrained individuals act in a different manner than in the real world.

Another relevant and related term is 'disinhibition', which enables people to post comments that they would not normally in the real 'face-to-face' world. Disinhibition is also demonstrated by all too common examples of harsh criticism, anger, hatred and threat. It is easy to visit the dark underworld of the internet (such as websites devoted to pornography and violence), which might not be visited in the 'real world' (Cf. John Suler, http://users.rider.edu-suler/psycyber/disinihibt.html). The ubiquity of anonymity, as well as the language of the mob, leads to increasing individuation and disinhibition and in this respect, social media could be described as a wilful contributor.

Consequently, the ordinary rules of behaviour are suspended, especially when people believe they are anonymous and no longer take responsibility for their words. Their actions are fostered by anonymity as well as asynchronicity

and the lack of face-to-face encounter. The suspension of the normal rules of behaviour is a particular topic of concern in the UK, illustrated by the 2011-12 Leveson enquiry into the media following the controversies about media intrusion into peoples' personal lives and the furore surrounding the closure of the *News of the World*.

Jimmy Wales, founder of Wikipedia (which he suggested was the most hopeful experiment in human collective knowledge) has argued that the internet would benefit from a voluntary restraining authority. It was the case of the blogger Kathy Sierra that caused Wales and others to propose in 2007 an unofficial Code of Conduct (especially on blog sites), which would outlaw anonymity. Kathy Sierra was randomly targeted by an anonymous mob that posted images of her as a sexually mutilated corpse in various websites and was issued death threats. She wrote on her own blog, 'I'm at home with my doors locked, terrified. I am afraid to leave my yard. I will never feel the same. I will never be the same.'[4]

One simple antidote rests in the old-fashioned idea of standing by your own name. Adopt a pseudonym and you are not putting much of yourself on the line. Put your name to something and your words carry responsibility. As Schopenhauer said 'anonymity is the refuge for all literary and journalistic rascality. It is a practice that must be stopped. Every article, every newspaper should be accompanied by the name of its author; and the editor should be made strictly responsible for the accuracy of the signature. The freedom of the press should be thus far restricted… the result of such a measure would be to put to an end two-thirds of newspaper lies, and to restrain the audacity of many a poisonous tongue.'[5]

The internet amplifies Schopenhauer's concern many times over. There are repressive regimes when anonymity is a pre-requisite of freedom, and occasions in democracies when anonymity must be preserved; it is generally clear when these reservations might apply. A Code of Conduct should commend genuine authorship of postings and those who fail to do so should be viewed with more suspicion than those who put their name to their words.

The anonymous trend in the social media, as well as the less personal nature of online communication, makes it easier for information to be distorted or misinterpreted. It also impacts on interfaith dialogue in many ways, not least because it adds to the confusion of the meaning of the word 'dialogue' and the nature of dialogue activity. A casual conversation (face-to-face or online) between Jews, Christians and Muslims that may add up to no more than a loose restatement of entrenched theological positions is sometimes claimed to be dialogue. It is not!

Equally, any communication between persons of differing religious points of view is sometimes also described as dialogue. It is not – dialogue is not simply synonymous with communication. For dialogue to take place, there

must be a genuine hearing of the Other. This is not always a concern amongst users of the social media and once a message is posted online, control is lost and one has to accept that someone else may interpret what you are trying to achieve something else.

Ironically, a consequence of the huge array of online communities and the ease of finding those with specific interests is a tendency to self-select into like-minded groups, lessening the opportunity to encounter and learn from those with different perspectives and opinions, and be exposed to other voices. Online communication and social media allow niche communities to exist with little or no interference from society and sectarian factions reproduce themselves easily.

Yet, these new technologies have propelled an already interconnected world to connect to an even greater diversity and number of people, places and ideas. For example, mobile phones were introduced into Egypt in 1998. By 2002, there were 3 million subscribers, by 2006 it had reached 16 million and by 2009, 42 million. According to the Egyptian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, the number of mobile phone subscribers had reached 71.5 million in January 2011, resulting in a penetration rate of 91.5%.

Mobile phones are of course personal, with continuous access, interactive and capture the social context of the media where the user and sender are not fixed. Thus, they help ensure that new social media is not only a versatile and important part of our online lives but also demonstrate that websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube enable users to communicate, engage, and create content and information at an unprecedented level of speed and accessibility.

There are more than 800 million active Facebook users, of whom more than 50% log onto Facebook every day. There are more than 70 languages available on Facebook and more than 75% of users are outside the United States. Many synagogues, churches, mosques and other faith communities use Facebook to build a sense of community within the parish, providing updates on the community and a forum where members can reach out to one another for support. 'MyChurch' is Facebook's leading religious application. These increasingly include podcasts of sermons (called 'Godcasts'), easily downloaded by congregants and listened to during periods of leisure. Facebook provides a network for users to join or create groups and is ideal for holding discussions within a trusted circle of friends. However, these closed networks do not make it an effective tool for engaging the wider public.

YouTube reached over 700 billion playbacks in 2010 when more than 13 million hours of video were uploaded. In 2011, an average of 48 hours of video was uploaded every minute, resulting in nearly 8 years of content daily. Synagogues regularly use YouTube to upload songs and liturgies so

that congregants can learn the necessary tunes and words before Shabbat or special services. Although YouTube may successfully engage and share content in a public space, its public commenting format makes it a less than ideal tool for dialogue.

As for the youngest of the three, Twitter, by the end of 2011 there were 200 million accounts, and an average of 140 million tweets sent per day and the number of twitter users increases by 300 000 every day. Considering the fact that the first tweet was sent on 21 March 2006, (by Jack Dorsey [@jack]), this represents astonishing growth. However, of all the social media, Twitter is probably most limiting in terms of fostering interfaith dialogue because of its 140 character per post limit and its one-way communication channel.

At the very least, the examples from Facebook, YouTube and Twitter demonstrate that the social media, this new medium, provides new ways of discussion. As we have seen, some social media call for very brief content – perhaps a few dozen words – some call for longer content, for videos and pictures for analysis.

It is clear that what used to be called 'the mainstream media' is struggling to adapt to the new social media realities. It is not just the economic challenge of competing with free content online (similar challenges are faced by traditional publishers of books). Just a few years ago a newspaper journalist wrote one story, finished it, turned it in and it appeared in print the next day. Today, she is simultaneously writing a long story and posting very small parts of it on social media throughout the day. The journalist then reacts to comments from readers and news sources and continues to adapt and repost the story. She may be posting words, sound, picture and video. Consequently, previous distinctions between print, TV, radio and wire service are increasingly meaningless.

We see the same challenges for religious communities in their use of the social media. Some tools are used for very brief reminders, updates and calls for action. Some are more spiritual – religious communities offering prayer services via Facebook, calling for followers to help the unfortunate via Twitter, posting religious ceremonies on YouTube – and linking them all together, and to their websites, blogs and mobile phones.

This demands a new kind of literacy: a capacity to be fluent in many forms of communication. The medium calls for new ways to be in discussion and religious communities need to develop a capacity to be in those discussions.

Although these changes are astonishing and even revolutionary, social media do not create physical revolutions. People create revolutions, not the technology they use. The internet has no other purpose than to dispense data, to spread information. It has no ethics, no values. It does not espouse moral principles or any principle for that matter. The web is neutral. It is nothing more than a machine, a tool that can be used for positive or negative purposes.

Thus, social media in themselves have no inherent positive or negative influence on interfaith dialogue. Their impact depends solely on the people who use them —and how they use them. In other words, it is not the medium itself but the motives of its users that is important. For example, a tractor is a tool. As a tool it can be used to tend fields and haul fruit and vegetables from the field, yet it can also be used to destroy fields and demolish all means to bring food to the hungry.

What is different, and observed with some trepidation by all political leaders (especially more despotic leaders) as well as excitement among their citizens, is that the social media can easily be used as a tool to organise and promote meetings, demonstrations, create channels to bypass traditional state control of the media (as well as religious hierarchies) so others in their countries (as well as their co-religionists), and the outside world can see what is going on. Social media has enabled people to break state censorship and intrinsically has the infrastructure to disseminate far, fast and wide. Social media has no respect for borders or doctrines. What happens in Morocco, Egypt and Libya is heard in real time and emulated, in Syria for example. Social media enables ordinary people to tell their story to others in their country, among the faithful; and to the world.

Although the outcome of such use for political purposes appears to be relatively new, the seeds of activism have been consistently sown for the past two decades with rising access to the internet, the end of government control over the mainstream media, and the growing availability of new levels of individual freedom of expression. Perhaps the greatest sense of empowerment has come through the ability to use cyberspace as a location for doing what might not otherwise be done in reality: assemble to discuss ideas, concerns and complaints, and to share frustrations, while also providing the social networking opportunity to unite, strategise and plan for change. In cyberspace, the social restrictions that exist in reality in some places—such as gender segregation—disappear, providing groups of people who might otherwise never meet and converse with the opportunity to connect and recognise what they share in common. It is noticeable, for example, how many women were involved in the overthrow of President Hosni Mubarek in Egypt.[6]

There are many lessons to be discerned from the successful use of social media in garnering change. The first is that information technology today is used by such a wide variety of people that no one has a monopoly over how it is used or for what purpose. This is expected to have a permanent impact on how countries are perceived. In the past, governments were able to maintain relative levels of control over the image of their countries, often focusing on artistic or scientific achievement. Today's reality of a variety of voices shaping that image—most of which lie outside of the government—carries the potential for a less cohesive or positive picture.

As for the implications for interfaith relations, the social media can make a valuable contribution. For example, in the United States, many Muslim websites have been established to confront harmful anti-Muslim stereotypes that have emerged since 9/11. American Muslims are using social media to help others understand their faith and to promote a positive image of Islam. For example, the website www.AltMuslim.com was established in 2001 to promote awareness amongst Muslims and non-Muslims about issues regarding the Muslim world. It now has a readership of 2 million and is at the forefront of an emerging independent Muslim media in the West.

The social media can demonstrate that Jews, Christians and Muslims share many of the same reasons (both positive and negative) as to why it is important to engage in dialogue. Some may start for defensive reasons; to respond to the ignorant and negative stereotypes. A lack of knowledge provides a seedbed for prejudice, demonstrated by increasing antisemitism anti-Christian prejudice and Islamophobia, both outside and inside our communities. For example, the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at the University of Southern California has developed a text Compendium (http://cmje.org) and provides an information service about Islam and Judaism.

The fact that social media will continue to evolve and extend its reach, its influence will expand. It will be a fundamental failure if we fail to grasp its potential – but we do need to understand both its opportunities and limitations and to be familiar with its forms.

Although online communication is of a less personal nature and a virtual world will only ever be 'virtual', social media should be integrated into interfaith dialogue and I have shown examples of good practice promoting dialogue and inter-religious understanding. Social media can connect users with those with whom they cannot physically communicate. I cannot call the Archbishop of Canterbury every day and ask him for his views on a certain event and theological conundrum, but I can follow him on Twitter (http://twitter.com/#!/lambethpalace); or Lord Sacks, (http://twitter.com/#!/chiefrabbi); or Professor Tariq Ramadan (http://twitter.com/#!/tariqramadan1).

However, although the social media provides an excellent learning opportunity from those who have a different perspective than you, in reality does it happen very often? When virtual communities are formed, how often do we include those who we disagree with? How often do Israelis and Palestinians follow each other on Twitter or friend each other on Facebook?

Studies indicate that a majority of people tend to join social networks of like-minded individuals. The overall trend is that people talk to people with whom they agree. There is not much interaction between the Salafis, the Sufis, the Shi'as. The technology may exist but you still need someone with the will, curiosity and empathy.

This leads me to the conclusion that it is not the medium itself but the motives of users that are most important. Successful interfaith dialogue depends less on the medium and more on the substance of the conversation. The three phases of the internet evolution have no inherent positive or negative power. Online tools themselves do not make people more or less tolerant. Their impact depends on the people who use them—and how they use them.

Further Reading

Princeton Theological Review on faith and social networking
http://www.princetontheologicalreview.org/issues_pdf/current.pdf

Bridging Babel: New Social Media and Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding
http://repository.berkleycenter.georgetown.edu//UGFNewSocialMedia.pdf

Technology and the public sphere: the power of social media
www.gpia.info/files/u1392/Shirky_Political_Poewr_of_Social_Media.pdf

Notes

1. Bridging Babel: New Social Media and Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding, available at: http://repository.berkleycenter.georgetown.edu//UGFNewSocialMedia.pdf
2. Ibid.
3. Princeton Theological Review on faith and social networking, available at: http://www.princetontheologicalreview.org/issues_pdf/current.pdf
4. See debate at: http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9642178
5. *The Art of Controversy: and other posthumous papers*, Arthur Schopenhauer. (trans. T. Bailey Saunders), London, New York: S. Sonnenschein & Co., p 39.
6. See, for example, Nadine Sika and Yasmin Khodary, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? Egyptian Women within the Confines of Authoritarianism.' *Journal of International Women's Studies* 13 (5), 91–100.

POWER AND AUTHORITY IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN ISLAM

Reflections about issues of power and authority in the traditions and the present situation of Muslims in Europe

*Hüseyin Inam**

Abstract

The article begins with an example of the significant impact of antireligious restrictions in the twentieth century, which led to an intellectual retreat of Muslim authorities and a change of traditional authority structures. It makes clear the negative role that was played, and continues to be played, by the dominant European perspective on Islam. The article tries to describe the systematic misunderstandings about the role of the Islam in the Muslim communities. How can Muslims or non-Muslims give an authoritative response to several questions posed to Islam? It then clarifies how early the caliphate lost its significance so that the schools of religious jurisprudence took on the decisive role for the religious life of Muslims.

Theological conceptions and their historic backgrounds show us that Islam contains a lot of positive potential for interpretation, which can be used by Muslim communities to rebuild new, democratic authority structures. How relevant are the new western-christian influences, and what are the essential bases for a Muslim argumentation? In the German context the article deals with the importance of the mosque as a centre for the religious life for the individuals and the community. Finally it discusses the important question, how could a new formation of Muslim authorities within the communities be constructed, and what role might the interfaith experience play in this.

The text is based on the article: Inam, Hüseyin: Autoritätsstrukturen aus sunnitischer Sicht, in: MUREST, Multireligiöse Studiengruppe (Hrsg.): Handbuch interreligiöser Dialog. Aus katholischer, evangelischer, sunnitischer und alevitischer Perspektive, Gaimersheim 2006, S. 85–91.

***Hüseyin Inam** is an Islamic scholar, born in 1969 in Turkey. Since the end of the 80s he has taken an active part in interfaith dialogue. In 1997 he was appointed to lead this kind of dialogue in the organization "Muslim Theologians in Europe".

European Judaism Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2013: 66–74
Doi:10.3167/ej.2013.46.01.09 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

I come from the western region at the Black Sea in Turkey. My parents grew up in the countryside there. In their childhood, in the 1940s and 1950s, they experienced how the laicist Turkish system made it difficult for the coming generations to get an Islamic education easily. Many from their generation went through the experience that the Koran could only be recited in a low voice at home and had to be hidden away when the gendarmes came. Frequently a few people had to be guards in order to prevent detection. For the regime wanted the Turkish population to grow up in a European areligious way, instead of Islamic. The European spirit was the standard. Since this spirit, from the most radical left to the most radical right, was greatly biased against Islam and therefore despised it, this attitude was absorbed by the ruling Positivists as an objective judgement. People who did not appreciate Islam were bent to 'reform' it, in so far as everything that appeared to be at variance with Europe was to be adapted by law. The Muezzin was to call in Turkish, women were supposed to completely follow European dress standards, religion was to be accused of any backwardness, etc. As a result of this political attitude, people in the tradition-oriented countryside were reluctant to send their children to school, if they did it at all. Thus, religious resistance was silent and inconspicuous but also increasingly ready for compromise with the system, while temporarily making religious people losers in the field of education. The resulting deficit affected the coming generations.

The Situation Today

If the question is asked today what Islam says about a particular matter, then this immediately implies the question who is going to answer and how far can the one who answers it speak for Islam. Obviously there is no organised structure today that would be able to present a doctrine that is binding for all Muslims. Nor are there any authorities who have been mandated by the Muslims for religious affairs. This condition is to be taken seriously but does not change the fact that Muslims – based on a certain consensus on minimum essential principles (the so-called *āmantu,* that is Credo) – understand themselves as a comprehensive community (*Umma*) even if they belong to different denominations or differ or even sometimes disassociate themselves from each other because of their national, cultural or historical conditioning. Whoever expresses the "testimony of faith" in public, that there is no god but the One God and that Muhammad is His servant and messenger, becomes a member of the community of the Muslims.

Considering the unqualified and phrase-like voices that, nevertheless, often claim to represent the truth and frequently make themselves heard in this country, the outsider or unknowing observer may get any impression

between a religion built on strict dogmatism that does not tolerate a diversity of opinions, and a religion that is unable to find answers for controversial questions that would be binding on all believers because sufficient authority structures are missing. This basically gives a civil, but at the same time, problematic character to the Muslim community: it therefore appears to be loaded with risks, easy to manipulate, and difficult to control. For example, on the political level there is therefore often a tendency to accept minority views that run contrary to the concerns of religious Muslims (e.g., in questions like the headscarf or ritual slaughtering) as representing Muslims in general. Likewise, there is a tendency to generalise problematic statements by radical individuals, holding all Muslims responsible for it.

It is usually assumed that the religious views of most Muslims are determined by the Koran and the Tradition of the Prophet. However, the religious conditioning of the majority of Muslims today is rather based on ancient religious teachings and cultural traditions that can hardly be directly traced back to the Koran or the Prophet. At this point, religious education is hardly offered in schools, and Koran schools are usually only treated as problematic – not reformed; therefore most pupils do not even learn the basics of their religion. Usually Muslims in Germany come to know their religion first – most of them exclusively – in a lay framework within their families. A considerable part of them increase their knowledge in the mosque communities or in conversations with more or less religiously trained individuals. Most of them – not all of them – are men who mainly address men, therefore the average religious education of women lags behind that of the men. More committed Muslims augment their basic knowledge with the help of religious books, for example the Muslim catechisms, or by unsystematically reading individual books or magazines that very often refer to classical teachings. Only a few Muslims widen their horizons beyond that basic knowledge or are able to deepen their religious development or to use analytical methods in their education. Religiously motivated people who study traditional teachings critically often have a tendency to go very specific ways or to sympathise with immature or sectarian views. Many imams, who are well trained in matters of theology, are strangers to the culture, mentality and language of the country and lack sufficient backing in the communities (*ǧamā'a*) to take efficient steps against persistent traditional concepts. Whatever is taught about Islam in the religious or secular colleges remains with a tiny elite and has no influence worth mentioning on the education of Muslim society in general. In contrast, unusual, problematic or seemingly modern opinions are emphasised by the media, mainly for marketing or political purposes.

Most non-Muslims very often get an impression of Islam as presented to them by the media and by public opinion. This image is necessarily political and, more often than not, negative. Because the emphasis on the differences of

traditions and external expressions of this image and the results are exclusively against the others. Personal contacts are rare. People who want to know more about Islam mainly resort to books and writings by non-Muslims or critics who have a certain inner distance to Islam. The multilayered subjective motives or differences that result from different beliefs are often underestimated with regard to their influence on the contents and the assessment. If we then look at literature produced by Muslim authors in German language, we realise that, on one hand, there are translations circulating that are incompatible with the modern European reality, and on the other hand there is a lack of authors and books in the vernacular that are widely accepted among both Muslims and non-Muslims; or that there are far from enough books that could inform an intellectually stimulating discussion.

Theological Concepts and their Historical Backgrounds

The question of Islamic structures of authority always implies a question of social or political structures of authority. Obviously, an attempt to avoid this does not make any difference. The most well-known commandment with regard to Muslim self-organisation is that, whenever at least three Muslims are travelling together, they are supposed to elect one of them as an amīr (commander). This commandment – that actually refers to social matters – is based on the fact that, in the time of the Prophet, travelling was dangerous and in many places there was hostility against Muslims. However, scholars have derived far-reaching conclusions for the Muslim community from this. Accordingly, Muslims should never be without an amīr among themselves (Surah 4:59, 83). If the question is asked whether a specific system of authority or society is suggested in the Koran, then the answer would basically be: "If so, then it is Prophecy." The relevant content of the Koran completely focuses on the presence of the Prophet and hardly refers directly to the time after his death. It just points out that the faithful then are not supposed to simply turn away (Surah 3:144). On the whole, system-related thought is something that emerged only in modernity. The concept of the abstract institution of the "state" as the subject of communal action was alien to the first generation of Muslims. In the course of the centuries, institutional thought in this direction did emerge in outline, but the modern understanding of an "Islamic state" could only emerge under the influence of ideas of a nation state.

According to Sunni doctrine, the office that would have the task of taking the place of the Prophet in keeping the community (*Umma*) of Muslims together would be the caliphate. Responsible for coordinating their affairs; solving religious, political and social problems according to the demands of each time and age; promoting the dignity of religion worldwide' and to care

for the wellbeing of the world,. Originally, the caliph – in Sunni tradition considered the highest religious imam – was understood to be someone who "followed" the Prophet in his office. He was elected from among the community of believers to be their leading amīr, mandated by a communal oath (*bay´a*). This oath was overseen by a council (*ahlu l-hall wa l-´aqd*) that also had far-reaching authority in other matters.

After the office of the caliph had lost its probity and thereby its authoritative meaning for the community after the death of Imam Ali (661 in Kufa) and, besides, ended up being controlled by the dynastic system, Muslims had to develop alternative structures for the cohesion and wellbeing of the community. This task could not be left to the authoritarian dynasties. It is characteristic for the Muslim faith community that their central religious authority were primarily jurists. Historically, they represented their faith community even more than charismatic, dogmatic or political personalities. This is probably due to the fact that the faith community was best able to protect itself from the power of the rulers with the help of the legal system. For in Islam, law is above any office. The independence of the legal system from the power of the rulers is a basic principle of the Islamic social order. Therefore rulers learn to respect the power of the jurists and most often made an effort to come to terms with them.

Jurisprudence (i.e., the so-called *Fiqh* from which *šarī'a* is developed) relates to all spheres of the life of a believer, including, among other things, ritual, ethical and social aspects of faith and practice and still has a central role today. It is represented by the schools of law (*madhhab*). The classical approach in questions of religious practice is not to ask what Islam says on a particular matter, but rather what the position of the school that is relevant for the Muslims concerned takes on it.

For many centuries, the schools of law were so decisive that today voices that move outside their range find little appreciation among the majority of the believers. Schools of law can very well develop according to regional or social differences. Before personality-related schools of law came to be accepted, schools of law were rather regional. It would therefore make more sense to rethink the meaning of regional schools of law than to demand an ominous "Euro-Islam" or "German Islam".

With the emergence of nation states in the nineteenth century, Islamic clergy (*Ulamā*) were widely deprived of their power by the political rulers concerning both their function and their institutions and resources. In place of a law based on Islam, the rulers now decided on legal codes that had simply been imported from the Occident. Since the religious, cultural and moral traditions, values and taboos hidden behind those new legal codes were different from their own ones, most Muslim scholars kept a distance from

them, thereby increasingly becoming socially marginalised. They left the field to a new class of intellectuals conditioned by Western concepts. They were no longer involved in public processes, being only allowed to deal with purely religious functions and being left to reflect privately on political and social changes. Therefore religious scholars today give an impression of being problematic and sometimes simply antithetic while they are inevitably confronted with many social, psychological, legal and political questions.

After various nation states were established, many Muslim countries made an effort to build up national structures for the administration of religious affairs. Ever since, the established religious organisations are more or less influenced by national interests. Moreover, it is the case in the European diaspora that traditional structures were nonexistent and, on the other hand, could not simply be extended. There were attempts to create better conditions than those that had been experienced in the countries of origin that are often politically more restrictive. Starting from backyard mosques, structures were built up over the decades with the help of Muslims who made efforts to deal with their challenges.

Today, the influence of Muslim scholars is rather based on personal reputation or on their office in a pre-eminent Islamic university like the al-Azhar University in Cairo. Even official titles, like that of a mufti who leads the imams and other religious functionaries in a region, have only a limited effect on the believers. Both religious study centres and other religious institutions are controlled by the government of the respective country. As the result of their negative influence, the community is unable to gain the confidence necessary make a decisive impact as authorities of integrity in contrast to other competitive voices in the opinion of the believers. Even influential Muslim movements who are organised in associations in Germany are unable to find a common binding line because of their internal competitive behaviour. As the situation is today, it is always possible for very individual and problematic interpretations of the Koran and the Hadith to find followers without a politically pure authority being able to efficiently oppose them.

Binding Foundations of Theological Arguments

For the human spirit, the most binding element in any matter is God's sign (*āya*). Thus, verses of revelation are (or contain) signs of God, and so do natural processes and miracles. Basically nobody has the right to intentionally deny any of God's signs even if one has not yet been understood as such. The highest verbal authority (*nass*) is revelation as God's speech (*kalāmullah*), for Muslims manifested in the Koran – as authentic tradition. Next after that there are the instructions and traditions (*Sunnah*) of the Prophet, because they

are either based on non-textual revelation (*wahy ġayri matluw*) (much of it can be found in the Bible expressed in similar ways), or they are considered as authorised by God and understood as an implementation of the Koran. As the next highest authority, the consensus of the faithful as represented by their scholars (*iğma'*) was accepted that had initially been guaranteed by the caliph and that, later on, was temporarily reconstructed by the jurists in retrospect. Since the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet can be misinterpreted, or earlier interpretations may not have included essential social changes, this authority, in a way, works as a necessary corrective. Besides, conclusions by analogy (*qiyās*) or the more comprehensive development of law (*iğtihād*) by extraordinary jurists (*muğtahid*) claim to be binding for the believers. Thus, considering the possibilities for interpretation of the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet, as well as the new demands of time and age, further methods and criteria developed in Islamic jurisprudence (*usūl al-fiqh*) were developed in order to prevent harm to the community through wrong decisions and too conflicting opinions. In contrast, reason (*'aql*) is no legal argument in Sunni thought but that divine gift without which no healthy judgment is possible.

The Mosque and its Structures of Authority

A mosque is a place that has been founded and made available by the faithful for the worship of the One God. It is not essentially sacred but must be kept pure because of the conditions for prayer. It also constitutes the public space for interaction between the believers and their religious leadership that is open to all believers without discrimination. According to general understanding, the faithful have an obligation to regularly take part in Friday – or holy day services; the sermons on these occasions are supposed to contribute to collective information, education, enlightenment and motivation for the community. The term mosque does not include an organised structure or congregation, nor is it a term for the Muslim community as it is the case with the term church for Christians. No formal membership and no ceremony is necessary in order to belong to a mosque community or to attend prayers there. Typically a mosque with all its facilities is open to every Muslim.

In Germany, most mosque communities are organised as associations. In the course of the years, this came to be accepted as the easiest form of self-organisation. For that reason there are now members and boards in mosques as well as other functionaries depending on the constitution of the respective association. The imam, whose task consists in leading prayers and giving sermons and the like, is often not a member of the mosque association and hardly ever its president. Because of this arrangement, he is independent of internal disputes within the association while, on the other hand, he is dependent

on the goodwill of the mosque association and can easily be relegated to the position of a nonlocal employee. This seemingly secular microstructure of the mosque communities is not useful at all and may weaken the important status of the imams in the long run, with the result that they may end up having to respect the taboos prevalent in the community, the association or the people's country of origin, and are unable to speak up against persistent traditions among the members of the community (for example forced marriages or sentiments of honour that glorify violence), against sociopolitical mistakes of their associations, or against restrictive actions in their state of origin.

In order to lead prayers as an imam, a Muslim does not need any specific training. The fact that he is able to perform the prayers himself is basically sufficient. The situation with other religious functions is similar. A self-taught individual with sufficient experience and knowledge could well take over various religious tasks. Here you can very well see the civil character of Islam. For a strict differentiation of the believers as *laypeople* and *clergy* is not possible. It is rather a question of professionality or competence. The master of a household or the holder of an office has a certain priority but nevertheless there is the recommendation to choose the most competent person in the community. Imam and preachers of mosques are trained in order to protect the communities against possible abuse and sectarianism and in order to guarantee order and some minimum quality, not because other believers as such would not have a right.

Concluding and Interreligious Views

The structures of religious authority in the Muslim world are in a problematic situation. The suspicion that they are confronted with by modern people conditioned by Western thought is not limited to the framework of beliefs, but also results in politically shaped and increases the grievance. As long as Muslim scholars are unable to become mentally independent and, at the same time, do not undergo an intensive critical inner process in order to reach an authentic faith of their own and more self-confidence, they will hardly be able to build up healthy structures because of their insecurity. They must not be pushed into an attitude of rivalry, nor should they be presented with an authoritarian choice of either accepting positions that are alien to them or to reject them uncritically. The improvement of a community needs the improvement of its intelligentsia. This also needs safe spaces for intellectual activities. Going along with the people's mood – that may well be burdened with prejudices against minorities – or with the political interests of the powerful may indicate an intellectual deficit; so does political carelessness. Exchanging experiences with other religions, cultures and worldviews can be

very enriching, widening horizons. The encounter with religious authorities from other religions may provide many differences but also of many things that are familiar.

GROWING UP RELIGIOUSLY IN A CHANGING WORLD

*Julia Gardos**

Abstract:

This paper was written for the JCM interfaith conference in 2012. The theme of the conference was youth and religion, and the three keynote speakers of the three respective faiths were all young members of their communities, asked to talk about their personal experiences and views on growing up religiously in a changing world. Being the Jewish representative, I wrote about my own religious identity and the challenges that young Jews face in Hungary, comparing it to a Jewish upbringing in England.

I set out to explore why atheism and antireligious views are so prevalent among young adults today and why established religions are judged so harshly. I then presented my own expectations towards my faith, and talked about how Jewish tradition can be reconciled with the values and lifestyles of young people in today's Western world. Finally, I looked at the importance of interfaith dialogue and open mindedness towards other cultures, and the essential role that these must play if religion is to prevail in future generations.

I would like to start by saying what a privilege it is for me to be here. It is a great honour to be asked to contribute to JCM and such a joy to have the chance to participate in this conference.

On being asked to speak I first asked myself: why did they choose me? Why am I the one for this task? But then, as the old Jewish joke goes...

A man asks the rabbi, why do Jews always answer questions with another question? The rabbi replies, how should they answer?

I have always been more interested in asking questions then giving answers. I am probably better at it, too. According to the wisdom of the Rabbinic tradition, the only thing in the world that can be perfect is a question. So, if you were expecting to get answers today, you may instead be left with new questions.

***Julia Gardos** was born in 1984 in Hungary. She studied English Language and Literature and obtained an MA from the University of York. She is currently working as a teacher in England.

European Judaism Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2013: 97–102
Doi:10.3167/ej.2013.46.01.13 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

However, you are probably – and very rightly – interested in what brought me here and why I was chosen to speak today. I suppose I do fit the theme of this conference, as I am young and religious, and I have grown up religiously in a changing world. What exactly does this mean?

My story is an unusual one, both in Western and Eastern European terms. I was born in a Jewish family in Hungary in 1984, on the eve of socialism. By Jewish family I mean that both my parents were of Jewish descent, but neither of them knew much about their tradition (apart from the fact that their families had been victims of the Holocaust), and they had not been brought up with religion. This, in itself, was not unusual in Hungary. My story became unique when I started visiting London regularly at a very young age, and in the company of my parents I encountered Reform Judaism. My mother and father started discovering their Jewish roots and their religion as I was growing up, and for three years I attended a Progressive Jewish primary school in England. In the meantime, my mother was attending Rabbinical College and went on to become the first and (to this day) only female rabbi in Hungary. Of course, I was seen as unusual in England, in the sense that I had come from an Eastern European, assimilated background; but upon my return to Hungary I was considered equally odd to have a fairly healthy and positive Jewish identity, which my peers did not have the good fortune to have acquired. In my secondary school in Hungary, being Jewish consisted of making fun of Christianity. I was not interested in the slightest in joining this community. I have always felt I had more in common with my religious Christian friends than my atheist Jewish classmates, even if this came as shocking news to some of my parents' generation, who talked about 'a cultural Jewish identity'. In common terms, this cultural identity means we don't go to synagogue and don't pray but we like Woody Allen. I can understand where this attitude stems from, and don't get me wrong, I love Woody Allen. But I was always more interested in the spiritual side of religion, even if it was hard to find anyone my age who felt the same. As a result of the duality of my Hungarian and British childhood, I've felt like a stranger, an outsider most of my life, and have become quite accustomed to this state of affairs now – it is a cliché to say I'm the perfect example of the wandering Jew, but a true one. You might ask me if I now live in Hungary or Britain... the answer is the Czech Republic. And I have no idea where I will end up settling down.

What meaning does my faith have for me? I was young enough when I started believing in God not to question the Almighty's existence. I cannot say *why* I believe in God because I feel this question is beyond the realm of reasoning or logic, but I can say I consider myself lucky to have this faith, made stronger by the fact that it originates from childhood, as I think the world would look a lot bleaker without faith.

One of my favourite Jewish traditions serves as a good example of unrelenting faith in a better future. It has been introduced to our community from Eastern Europe via America. On the Seder night, the festival to celebrate liberation from slavery, we pour a glass of wine for Elijah the prophet, to show we are awaiting the coming of the Messiah. At the end of the night, seeing that the wine has not been drunk, we pour the wine from Elijah's cup back into the bottle while we sing these lines from Psalm 118: "You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you" to a haunting, beautiful tune. I find so much sadness and yet such a strong sense of hope and faith in this gesture, as it incorporates the acceptance of the fact that the Messiah has not come yet, and the belief that we will not give up waiting, we still trust that there will be a brighter future.

This trust does not have any rational foundation; however, I regard it quite inappropriate to search for logic in religion. It has become fashionable in the circle of contemporary intellectuals to criticise religion for its illogical nature, in books such as *The Age of Absurdity* by Michael Foley, along these lines: "It is ironic that Christianity, the religion of the rational West, is, in fact, completely *irr*ational, inconsistent and even absurd, whereas Buddhism, the religion of the mystical East, is completely rational, consistent and even practical – not a creed requiring a leap of faith into absurdity, but a method that can be shown to work." (Foley, p. 25)

I find arguments like his rather irritating, as looking for consistency or rationality in religion is, in itself, absurd. The very beauty of religion is its irrationality, and any attempt at rationalising it would be taking away its essence. I was also intrigued, yet deeply puzzled at the news of Alain de Botton's proposal to build an Atheist temple in London. On this matter I tend to agree with Richard Dawkins for once, who claimed the money was being misspent and that a temple of atheism was a contradiction in terms. But this is something that I'd be interested to hear your opinions on later.

Unlike many of you, I have a lot of personal experience with confirmed atheists, having lived most of my life surrounded by non-religious people, as Judaism has never been my main field of study or work. I feel one rabbi in the family is enough. In the past few years, in particular, some of those closest to me have been people who hated religion with a fervent passion. They all had good reasons for doing so, such as having been brought up in a fundamentalist sect, or being from a country where religion serves as the basis of war and hatred to this very day. So I'm quite used to a wide array of reactions from my generation when revealing my Jewish identity, ranging from forgiving smiles and bewilderment mixed with mild disgust (she's a bit odd), to outrage (religion is to be blamed for all evils of the world) or covert anti-Semitism (I once knew a Jew who was nice...). I suppose I have become immune to these

reactions, and do not have the desire to convince anyone that they should turn to religion; I think it is a private matter. However, I do consider it my mission to try and make people see that NOT all religion is evil, fundamentalist and narrow-minded. Sadly, religion has very bad "PR" these days, so many people only hear about it in the context of war and terrorism. In fact, my fantastic experiences at the last two JCM conferences have served as my most powerful argument to convince people about the opposite. But there is always something comforting about finding a fellow outsider, another believer like myself, as if we had inadvertently become members of a secret club. When I was studying English Literature at the University of York, I noticed that one of my course mates never drank alcohol. I didn't want to ask him about it, but after several months I somehow mentioned to him that my mother was a rabbi, and he was greatly relieved to confess that he, in fact, was a Mormon. Neither of us would have felt comfortable talking about our religions with the other people on our course – not because they would have condemned us, but because it would have sounded totally alien to them, something that our secularised generation would not be able to relate to. Interestingly enough, the other person I ended up befriending there turned out to be from a devout Quaker background.

One of my favourite contemporary writers, a British woman named Jeanette Winterson, belongs to the above-mentioned group who have a well-founded personal reason for disliking religion. Yet in her recent autobiography *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, she offers some valuable insights into the vacant nature of our secular existence. "A meaningless life for a human being has none of the dignity of animal unselfconsciousness; we cannot simply eat, sleep, hunt and reproduce – we are meaning-seeking creatures. The Western world has done away with religion but not with our religious impulses; we seem to need some higher purpose, some point to our lives – money and leisure, social progress, are just not enough. We shall have to find new ways of finding meaning – it is not yet clear how this will happen." (Winterson, p. 68)

In a nutshell, I do not think religious people are in any way better than non-religious people, in fact I have a great respect and love for many friends holding anti-religious views. I do, however, think that I may consider myself lucky in some sense to have the blessing of faith. I think all religions that I know of are beautiful and intriguing, as well as being potentially dangerous and even deadly at the same time.

This diversity is the most important thing to realise if someone is approaching a religion as an outsider: no tradition is homogenous and there are several strands, approaches and interpretations inside each one. This is especially true of Judaism in today's world. To say "I don't like Judaism" would be

as absurd as saying "I don't like food" – how can somebody have an equal dislike for spaghetti Bolognese, chocolate cake, chicken soup and apples? Such pluralism seemed to be a basic characteristic of Jewish communities in every city and country I have seen so far. Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Liberal Judaism disagree with each other on many basic matters, not to speak of the Chabad Lubavitch, Reconstructionist Jews and others. On the one hand this is sad, because it leads to many conflicts between people who essentially share the same faith. Looking on the bright side, though, it means that young people like myself have the chance to choose a variation of their tradition that they find compatible with the values and lifestyle of our time. I am not trying to say that my choice of Reform and Liberal Judaism is the right one for everybody, but I think it is important to emphasise that many choices exist, as opposed to the binary opposition of anachronistic fundamentalism and enlightened atheism.

What are my expectations towards my religious tradition as a young person? It is essential in my opinion for any religion to be accepting and welcoming towards other people. Being open to dialogue with other faiths, and having a liberal attitude to moral issues in contemporary life is something that I personally could never give up. A lot of Biblical and Rabbinical laws do not and cannot make sense in our world today; accepting them literally, without any thought or interpretation could hold many dangers. I personally feel that Judaism can be egalitarian (giving equal rights to men and women), liberal and inclusive. Many young people would agree with me; however I cannot say that the Progressive approaches are the only strands of religion to attract my generation. I have heard of many young people being increasingly drawn to the orthodox way of life, and I respect their choice as long as it does not harm others or result in extremism. For me, however, it is very important in our secular and intercultural society to be able to live together with non-Jews, and I think this requires some flexibility and open-mindedness. Tradition is important but being tolerant and non-judgmental towards others are equally essential.

And in what way, you might ask, is religion relevant for young people if I find so many aspects of it problematic? There are a lot of things that I dislike about modern day society and I often find myself genuinely worried about the youth of today, even if this makes me sound inappropriately grandmother-like. In an era of obsession with smart phones, Facebook, computer games, gadgets and brands, an age of consumerism ruled by advertising and TV programmes, an age of impatience and boredom in the face of the increasing multitude of stimuli, I think we need God more than ever. My teenage students recently told me they do not write emails because "to wait for a whole day for someone's reply" is preposterously long. Instead, they only use instant chat. In my time, we wrote letters... I am only 10 years older than them, but feel

that there is an unbridgeable abyss dividing us. I also sympathise deeply with the aforementioned Michael Foley's outrage at a piece of news characterising modern attitudes to encountering difficulty: "It is shocking and profoundly regrettable, but, apparently, the sales of oranges are falling steadily because people can no longer be bothered to peel them." (Foley, p. 112)

If one needs to wait for something, or to work for it, they will appreciate it more when they get it – but our society is used to demanding instant satisfaction. I think the Western world desperately needs values, as we need spirituality – we need something to aspire to that is more than a new pair of trainers, the latest tablet PC, a better car, a better house, a better body. These are things that money can buy; at the same time, however, money has become an end in itself as opposed to being a means to an end. We need to remember how lucky we are to be alive and that we can be thankful for the sunshine and the snow, the clouds in the sky, our friends, our family – the things that we take for granted. In fact the original word for Jew, "Yehudi", means one who is grateful. Too many people have forgotten it, and sometimes I'm inclined to make this mistake too, but for this very reason it is more important than ever to remind ourselves constantly.

Every Friday night I go to the Liberal Jewish community in Prague to take part in their Shabbat service and I feel truly at home there (one more thing to be grateful for!) Something struck me recently as we read their progressive, interpretive translation of Aleynu, the main closing prayer:

> "Therefore, Almighty God, we put our hope in You. Soon let us witness the glory of Your power; when the worship of material things shall pass away from the earth, and prejudice and superstition shall at last be cut off; when the world will be set right by the rule of God, and all humanity shall speak out in your name."

The phrase "when the worship of material things shall pass away" (in Hebrew, ' the worship of idols"), seems particularly relevant to me today as well as "prejudice" being cut off. I do not think this prayer means that we are hoping everyone will become Jewish – for me it certainly does not carry this meaning. However, to pray for spiritualism to overcome the idolatry of materialism and for understanding to triumph over prejudice is something that we can all do.

References

Foley, Michael, *The Age of Absurdity.* London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2010.

Winterson, Jeanette, *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* London: Jonathan Cape, 2011.

Aleynu translation from: *Hegyon Lev*, Czech and Slovak Progressive prayer book. Prague: Bejt Simcha, 2008. Ed. Jan David Reitshlager, Tomas Kucera.

THE INTEGRITY OF JOHN RAYNER AND INTER-FAITH RELATIONS

*Richard Harries**

Abstract

John Rayner had warm memories of the Christians he met when he first came to England and had a positive attitude to Christianity. Nevertheless, he believed that the Christian dispensation in Europe had broken down for good, that there were elements in Christianity unbelievable to modern people and that liberal Judaism could play a key role in building a new moral and spiritual foundation. Dialogue with Christians was an important part of his ministry. This was characterised by his unfailing courtesy and integrity. This integrity enabled him to transcend all personal considerations to focus on the issue in hand and to speak plain truths as he saw them, both to Christians and his fellow Jews.

The word that immediately comes to mind when I think of John Rayner is integrity. This was particularly evident in his long battle to obtain recognition of non-orthodox Jewish leaders as co-presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews (CCJ) alongside the Chief Rabbi. This was an issue about which John felt very deeply, and he pursued it with great persistence and exemplary politeness over many years. I was Chairman of CCJ at that time, and it was then that a first step was taken to make a non-Orthodox leader a vice president. This did not, of course, satisfy John, but the fact that CCJ now includes amongst its presidents four Jewish leaders in addition to the Chief Rabbi, representing Reform, Liberal, Masorti and Spanish and Portuguese forms of Judaism is a tribute to John's long fought principled stand on the issue.[1]

John's parents were secular Jews, but in Germany he was exposed both to Zionism and Orthodox Judaism and indeed became quite observant at the time. Even then, however, he was critical of many aspects of it, singling out the breakneck speed at which prayers were recited and the impossibility of giving

---

***Richard Harries** was Bishop of Oxford from 1987 to 2006. On his retirement he was made a life peer (Lord Harries of Pentregarth). He is currently Gresham Professor of Divinity. He was Chairman of the Council of Christians and Jews from 1992 to 2001 and is the author of *After the Evil: Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the Holocaust*. Together with Tim Winter and Norman Solomon he edited *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation*.

European Judaism Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 2012: 20–27
Doi:10.3167/ej.2012.45.01.04 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

due attention to their meaning. Coming to England in 1939, he lived first with a Church of England vicar and his wife, Mr and Mrs Stannard in Newcastle, who also managed to get John's sister out of Germany. On his first night Mrs Stannard kissed him goodnight with the words, 'You must be very proud to be Jewish'. 'Uncle Will' and 'Aunt Muriel' who 'were invariably kind to me' arranged for him to go to Durham School, where the headmaster, another Church of England priest, also helped him greatly, and where John voluntarily attended school chapel because of what he described as its spiritual value. For various reasons, in 1941 he went to live with another clergyman and his wife, Mr and Mrs Wilkinson at Chester-le-Street, who again were very kind to him. In short, as he put it: 'The Stannards, as well as the Wilkinsons, were Christians of the most sincere and saintly kind. From them I learn much about religion at its best, but'(and this is a point I will refer to later) 'was never persuaded by Christian doctrine, and remained loyal to Judaism inwardly and, when opportunity occurred, outwardly' (Rayner).

It was at Durham School that, 'I wished there was a liberal version of Judaism that had all the virtues of liberal Christianity without the Christianity, and began to formulate such a Judaism in my mind, without knowing that it already existed'.[2] Before moving on to the substance of what John taught about Judaism and Christianity, I want to say something about his style.

In the personal memoir which he wrote for his family about his early life there are a number of points where a lesser man would have emphasised how intensely he was feeling at the time. John totally eschewed that approach. He did indeed feel deeply, very deeply, but what he wrote and said was always focused on the matter in hand, not on his own emotions. In the memoir, for example, when he was met at King's Cross after the journey from Germany, whilst all the other children were met by aunts and uncles, he was left alone until a strange lady found him. In his new home there was total uncertainty about what had happened to his parents. For a short period he was classed as an enemy alien and transferred to another school until he could be reclassified. Then there was the moment when he had to leave the Stannards to go to the Wilkinsons. All he wrote was, 'I tried to accept the decision gratefully, but it felt a little like losing my parents all over again'. The feeling at these and other points is below the surface, not drawing attention to himself. I mention this now, because this characterises all his sermons and other writings. I was reminded of some words by C. S. Lewis in a forward to a book of sermons by a great Anglican priest and thinker, Austin Farrer. Lewis, wondering why there were so few books like it, wrote:

> Perhaps, after all, it is not so difficult to explain why books like this are rare. For one thing, the work involved is very severe, not the work on this or that essay but the life-long work without which they could not even have begun. For another, they demand something like a total conquest of

> those egoisms which — however we try to mince the matter — plays so large a part in most impulses to authorship. To talk to us thus Dr Farrer makes himself almost nothing, almost a nobody. To be sure, in the event, his personality stands out from the pages as clearly as that of any author; but this is one of heaven's jokes — nothing makes a man so noticeable as vanishing.

I would echo every line of that in relation to John, which is one of the reasons why his sermons and other writings are still so worth reading. As Georges-Louis Leclerk Buffon put it 'Style is the man himself'.

John was first of all, a very modern man, prizing rationality and sharing the desire for hard evidence that has characterised Europe since the Enlightenment. This went with another characteristic. It was said once that theologians in recent years have let themselves off giving a plain answer. John was prepared to give a very clear, plain answer. Take what he said in one sermon:

> Is there any good reason to believe that angels exist? None whatsoever. Even Dr Louis Jacobs takes that view, though he hedges his bets just a little by quoting the famous lines from Francis Thompson's poem:
>
> The angels keep their ancient places,
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
> 'tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
> that miss the many splendoured thing.
>
> And then commenting: 'Fine poetry or halting expression of a reality? Most of us would opt solidly for the former. Yet perhaps, a very faint perhaps, a question mark is still there' (Rayner 2006: 17).

As someone who loves that poem, and who temperamentally is of the 'perhaps' type, I recognise the unequivocal 'None whatsoever' of John's answer. Never, or rarely, as we will see, did he let himself off a plain answer.

As a modern man he was also unqualified in his acceptance of Enlightenment values, though he believed, rightly, that they had their basis in the best kind of Judaism. So, all his sermons are in dialogue with conservative religion, on the one hand, which for him mostly took the form of Orthodox Judaism, of course, and the modern world. They were also often in dialogue with Christianity, as well as were a number of lectures which he gave.

In 1974, John clearly felt that the world was in a terrible state and he preached a sermon comparing our time to the breakup of the Roman Empire. When that broke up, Christianity provided the unifying force for a new civilisation which lasted 1,500 years but, John believed, it was no longer capable of doing so. First, because of its record of intolerance, and secondly, because so many people now found its central beliefs about the incarnation and God untenable. He thought that this was a great new opportunity for Judaism if it could stop

being preoccupied with its own life, and renew itself as a covenant people with its vocation to be 'a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach to the ends of the earth' (Isaiah 49:6). He did not think Judaism could do this on its own but he thought it could 'make a contribution to the emergence of "Hebraic" or "Abrahamic" consensus comprising the common ground of Judaism, Christianity and Islam' (Rayner 1998: 173).

So John was passionate about the missionary role of Judaism not so much in terms of individual converts, but along the lines of Isaiah 58:12: 'You will be called the repairer of the breach' — the breach being the break-up of the moral and religious consensus previously provided by Christian civilisation. He would not have denied that a renewed Christianity also had a key role to play towards this consensus, but his point was the positive one, that Judaism had a key role to play if it grasped the opportunity. What John wrote in 1974 seems even clearer today.

In 1956 John was invited to give a series of lectures to the clergy of the York diocese. These were subsequently published as a little book *Towards Mutual Understanding between Jews and Christians* (1960). This book still shines with the three qualities that characterised John in all he did and said, not least his struggle over the CCJ presidency: clarity, intellectual toughness and courtesy.

The first part of the book is concerned to set out what Judaism really is, in contrast to the stereotypes which Christians had of it then and, sadly, still too often do today. It is clear and it is firm without being in the least offensive or deliberately polemical. It is also noteworthy for the use of the word 'understand'. Examining an approach taken by the New Testament which he cannot share, John nevertheless stresses that he understands why they wrote as they did. This section of the book could even today be read by any Christian with great profit.

The second part of the book looks at the differences between Christianity and Judaism. Here the debate has perhaps moved on since that time. For whilst the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation have indeed been regarded in the past as totally incompatible with Judaism, it is now recognised that there are greater resonances than was once thought, as, for example, we get in the essays in *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (2000). Within Christianity too, there have been developments with much richer understandings of the Trinity, reflecting the fact that mind itself is a social reality, and life is essentially life in communion. In this section, John sets out his own understanding of Jesus as a sublime prophet with ethical and religious insights, in some respects, in advance of the Judaism of his age. He is also quite honest in admitting that we all approach the scriptures wanting to find material that reinforces our own point of view, and he himself is no exception. The only surprising feature of

this section is that there is no mention of the Christian belief that Christ was raised from the dead, a conviction which of course shapes every line in the New Testament.

The final section of the book is again one which could be given to anyone today, showing how Christian-Jewish relations have moved from hostility though coexistence to better understanding and mutual respect. He argues that there should now be respect leading to the possibility of mutual enrichment and cooperation, without in any way diluting the fundamentals of one's own religion.

John was no relativist. Truth mattered for him, and, interestingly, he had no problem with forms of Christian mission, provided they rejected coercion and inducement, and he did not think this was incompatible with Jewish Christian dialogue, based on mutual respect.

In sermons and lectures all his life John related to various tension points between Christianity and Judaism. He put right the misunderstanding of the Pharisees, which still, sadly, you hear from too many pulpits. He put forward a Jewish interpretation of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, in distinction from the Christian one. He continued to express his admiration for Jesus as a great Jewish figure, and his rejection of Paul's understanding of himself as someone steeped in Judaism. He set out the Jewish understanding of human nature as fundamentally good, with an evil inclination as well as a good one, yes, but not fundamentally flawed, as he took the Christian view to be. And during his life, which involved a fair amount of inter-faith dialogue, he came to a more open view of what might be learnt from other religions.

He said that many years before a very able rabbinical student had written to him to say 'I have come to the conclusion that Judaism is infinitely superior to Christianity'. John said that, at the time, although he would not have made such a view public, it was in fact what he believed privately, but by 1995 he no longer even believed such a statement. First, because his long experience of interfaith dialogue had given him a respect for other religions, and an awareness that for even the best informed person our personal knowledge of another religion must be very limited. As stressed earlier, he was no relativist. He was quite prepared to say, and did say, that he thought certain aspects of Judaism were true and comparable aspects of another religion less than the full truth, but he was not prepared to say that about another religion as a whole. He did not want to give up the language of covenant, or the idea of Judaism having a special vocation, but he believed that this was an existential matter for each individual Jew, a matter of personal commitment. 'Do we feel that Jewish history is a pilgrimage in which we are personally engaged and that its continuation may tip the balance between the success and failure of God's plan? Do we feel that being Jewish matters in some ultimate sense?' (Rayner 1998: 196).

Passionate himself about a positive answer to those questions, he encouraged his hearers to put away any sense of moral superiority.

For example, he was absolutely clear about Christian responsibility for the Holocaust. 'Jews … can no longer condone Christian indifference to the role played by the teaching of contempt in the causal chain that led to the Holocaust'. But he went on to say, in his teaching about non-Jews, that there are skeletons in the Jewish cupboard as well, which we would prefer not to be there.

> So our relationship is not, or should not be, an asymmetrical one of offender and offended. Both of our communities have treasures in our respective traditions, and both have blemishes which, by repudiating uncritical, self-righteous, fundamentalist attitudes, we must strive to rise above. Both of us have need to say, in the words of Jeremiah: 'Heal me O God, and I shall be healed: save me, and I shall be saved'. (Jeremiah 17:14). (Rayner 1998: 188)

I think that in John's inter-faith encounters he was not just concerned to bring about greater mutual understanding. What he was very much concerned with was finding a new spiritual and moral order which could help a broken world. He used the word Hebraism to denote those fundamental beliefs and principles that he believed were the foundation of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In a lecture entitled 'Hebraism: our common heritage and hope' (Rayner 2006: 109) he points to monotheism, the transcendence and immanence of God, the ethical emphasis in the Bible, the biblical understanding of human nature, universalism and messianism as that common heritage and hope. He is not, of course, thinking of these as often traditionally understood, but what at heart they are about. Understood thus, the three great religions which spring from the Hebrew bible can make a 'positive contribution to the cultivation of *global spirituality and a global ethic*' (Ibid.: 125).

Reading John's sermons and lectures I very much felt his presence and often wished he were physically present to enter into conversation with me. In particular, I wanted to talk to him about what remains *the* great stumbling block to a belief in a wise and loving Creator.

He did not, so far as I have been able to discover, write or speak on Holocaust theology, but he made clear his hostility to certain kinds of view. For example a remark of a former Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel he described as 'one of the most stupid and offensive remarks ever made'. No less, he rejected Jonathan Sacks' view of it as a 'mystery', commenting:

> The implication being that in some mysterious way, completely beyond our understanding, it was God's will that it should happen. I find that utterly unacceptable. To me it seems plain that when murder, let alone mass murder, is committed, what happens is not in any sense whatsoever attributable to God's will but a ghastly violation of it. To me the Holocaust

> is proof positive that God does not intervene in human history. It is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the traditional belief in an interventionist God (Ibid.: 99-101).

I entirely agree with John in the bluntness of this statement, as I do in what he went on to say: '…although God does not *intervene* in human history, God is nevertheless *active* in human history. To that extent the traditionalists are right. But God's activity in human history is that of a Teacher, not a Dictator. God guides, persuades, cajoles us, exerts a constant pressure on us to do what is right, but never compels us' (Ibid.: 99-101).

This still, of course, raises the question of whether everything will come right in the end, what form that rightness might take and, not least, Ivan Karamozov's testing question, even if it did come right in God's terms, was he justified in creating a world in the first place in which such suffering occurs. John did not write extensively on this issue, so far as I know. However, what he wrote in the section on theodicy in the prayer book of Liberal Judaism, makes it clear that he rejected all easy answers.

> Perhaps the sufferings of the righteous are 'chastisements of love', which God visits on them for their own good? Perhaps the righteous will be rewarded, and the wicked punished, in the 'world to come'? Perhaps the pain we inflict on one another is the price we have to pay for being free to choose? Perhaps God looks on in sorrow as we misuse our freedom, yet cannot, or will not, revoke it.
>
> And yet we cannot be silent. Our minds demand to know, our hearts refuse to be still. We have seen too much triumphant evil, too much innocent suffering. Abraham's question [Gen 18:23 and 25] remains unanswered; God remains on trial.
>
> We do not know, but we can pray! We can love those who are turned to anger, denial and despair. And we can hope to be among those who come through suffering with faith intact, and learn to say, as Job did: 'I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye beholds You.
>
> We confess our ignorance. We do not understand God's ways. But nothing in the world can alter this: that good is right, and evil wrong, and that to seek good, and to struggle against evil, is to advance God's purpose, and to give meaning to our lives.

John rejected the idea of a coming Jewish Messiah, as he did the idea of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. He did, however, hold to a radically demythologised belief in a messianic age. He thought it was important to hold on to this vision and imperative as a continual spur to human activity to make the world a better place. Yet beyond this he did say that there is a universal hope, rooted in Hebraism, that, 'ultimately God will be vindicated and humanity redeemed' (Rayner 2006: 125).

What I would have liked to have talked about with John was what form that vindication will take, and in what sense humanity will be redeemed. Perhaps wisely, he did not speak or write about this. What mattered to him was the hope itself and the striving to which it gave expression.

References

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel and Michael A. Signer, eds., 2000. *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press).

Harries, Richard, 2003. *After the Evil: Christianity and Judaism in the Shadow of the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Harries, Richard, Tim Winter and Norman Solomon, eds., 2005. *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation* (London: T&T Clark).

Lewis, C.S., 1960. 'Preface to Austin Farrer', in *A Faith of Our Own* (Cleveland, Ohio: Word Publishing), p.10.

Siddur Lev Chadash., 1995. Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues, p.175–6.

Rayner, John D., 1960. *Towards Mutual Understanding between Jews and Christians* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co.).

Rayner, John D., 1998. *A Jewish Understanding of the World* (Oxford: Berghahn Books).

Rayner, John D., 2006. *Signposts to the Messianic Age* (Middlesex: Vallentine Mitchell & Co Ltd).

Rayner, John D., *Before I Forget: An Illustrated Chronicle of a Twentieth-Century Life* (unpublished).

Notes

1. It is not surprising that the moral quality he prized most was integrity and that this was what he looked for in Liberal Judaism. See John D. Rayner (2006: 41).
2. The information and unattributed quotations in the previous and subsequent paragraphs comes from John's *Before I Forget: An Illustrated Chronicle of a Twentieth-Century Life* privately printed and shared with me by Rabbi Alexandra Wright with the permission of the family.

RABBI HUGO GRYN AS PREACHER

*Marc Saperstein**

Abstract

Rabbi Hugo Gryn was both the leading rabbinic figure of British Reform Judaism for several decades and one of the best-known and highly admired rabbis in British society. The sermons he delivered regularly throughout the entire period of his leadership as Rabbi of the West London Synagogue show that preaching was a significant component of his rabbinic role. Most of the extant texts of Gryn's sermons are not fully written, but rather detailed outlines on cards. They suggest a communication that reached its final formulation only as the preacher faced his listeners, depending on the delivery for much of its power. Almost all are rooted in the weekly Torah reading, exploring a biblical passage in its own context before applying it to an issue of contemporary significance. Many draw not only from his wide reading but also from his own personal experience, as Holocaust survivor, young rabbi in India, community leader deeply involved in interfaith dialogue. The present article uses the extant texts to recapture something of the impact of the sermons, and concludes with one fully written text given at a public tribute to the memory of Gryn's teacher, Rabbi Leo Baeck.

As Rabbi Albert Friedlander noted in his entry for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Hugo Gryn was both the leading rabbinic figure of British Reform Judaism for several decades and one of the best-known and highly admired rabbis in British society.[1] Since a significant component of his work as a rabbi were the sermons he regularly delivered at the West London, and since the texts of these sermons were not only preserved but were organised in readily accessible files, it seemed obvious that a study of his sermons deserved to be published.

Several considerations informed my decision to accept the invitation from the family to study and write about the unpublished sermon texts (see description below). Most of the research and publication I have done over

***Marc Saperstein** is Professor of Jewish History and Homiletics at Leo Baeck College, following his five-year term as Principal. He has written four major books on Jewish preaching, most recently *Jewish Preaching in Times of War 1800-2001* (Litmann Library 2008).

European Judaism Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 2012: 58–77
Doi:10.3167/ej.2012.45.01.09 ISSN 0014–3006 (Print), ISSN 1752–2323 (Online)

an academic career of more than three decades has been connected with the history of Jewish preaching and the sermon as a source for Jewish history, literature and thought. Although trained as a medievalist and working primarily on material through the eighteenth century, I began a serious study of modern Jewish preaching with the book that I edited of sermons by my father, Rabbi Harold I. Saperstein, *Witness from the Pulpit: Topical Sermons 1933–1980* (Lexington Books 2000). That project eventually led to my most recent book, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800–2001* (Littman Library 2008). A study of Hugo Gryn as preacher seemed a natural continuation of that task of presenting significant sermons from the recent past to an audience beyond those who heard them delivered, as a source for understanding the challenges presented to Jewish leaders mediating and communicating their tradition in difficult times.

A personal connection with Hugo Gryn began with my being invited to their family *seder* when I was a student at Pembroke College, Cambridge in the spring of 1967. It continued when Gryn asked my father to serve as his associate rabbi at West London Synagogue twice in the early 1980s, following my father's retirement from his own congregation, first while Gryn went on sabbatical leave and second when Associate Rabbi Jackie Tabick went on maternity leave. My relocation to London in June 2006 to serve as Principal of Leo Baeck College, an institution that was almost as close to Gryn's heart as was the West London Synagogue, and to which he made an invaluable sustained contribution as a member of the administrative and teaching staffs, made it possible for me to work on the material in an environment still suffused with his memory.

What follows is a general characterisation of Hugo Gryn as preacher based on the unpublished sermon texts, together with one annotated address that has already been published and is in the public domain.

The Texts

For the proposed study, Rabbi Hugo Gryn's family made available to me four large boxes of files containing the texts of sermons he delivered over a period of more than fifty years. Two of the boxes contained file folders organised by the weekly Torah lesson, from *Bereshit*, the first lesson in Genesis, to *Ve-Zot ha-Berakhah*, the last in Deuteronomy. The overwhelming majority of these texts were delivered at the West London Synagogue. In a third box, the files are organised topically, with labels ranging from 'Anglo-Jewry' and 'Rabbi Leo Baeck' through 'Interfaith' (perhaps the thickest of the folders) to 'Shoah' and 'Soviet Jewry', 'W[est]L[ondon]S[ynagogue]', 'Yitzhak Rabin' and 'Zionism'. In addition to the texts of sermons for regular synagogue services,

these files also contained lectures or addresses for special occasions, many of them presented at various organisations in which Gryn played an active role. In the fourth box, the files are organised by the holidays of the Jewish calendar. The major lacuna in this box is the absence of folders containing sermons for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, with only a handful of texts for Rosh Hashanah. Since these are the most important preaching occasions of the year and rabbis invest in these sermons considerable time for preparation, there can be little question that many such texts existed, but efforts to locate them have been unavailing.[2]

Within the file folders, a small number of texts (from earlier years in his career) are written by hand, but typed texts are the norm. Most of these are on large index cards, 175mm x 200 mm. The reason for preferring index cards to A4 paper would be obvious to professional speakers who do not want to attract attention to the text they are using. Because of their smaller size, the index cards can easily be concealed inside a book while walking to the speaker's lectern, and then unobtrusively placed on the reading stand, with each card pushed to one side once the end of its text is reached.

The first card of each sermon text is headed in the top left corner by the place of delivery (mostly West London Synagogue or WLS), the date and, in many cases, the name of the boy or girl whose Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah was being celebrated at the synagogue on that date. At the top right corner we find the name of the weekly Torah lesson, under which is recorded the specific verses read from the Pentateuch (Torah) and from the Prophets (Haftarah) that preceded the sermon at the service when it was delivered. As in most Progressive Jewish congregations, the practice was to read from the Torah not the full weekly lesson but a meaningful selection from it. Thus, for example:

> BERESHIT
>
> Genesis 2:4–25
>
> Isaiah 42:5–21

Verses from one or both of these passages will almost invariably be cited in the course of the sermon. Also at the top margin of many first cards one finds written by hand one or more years subsequent to the date of initial delivery when the same sermon, suitably adapted, was delivered again (on this common practice, see below).

The most obvious characteristic of the text on the cards is the highlighting of specific words and phrases with a transparent colour. The main purpose of this highlighting would have been to enable the speaker to see, by a quick glance downward, the key words or ideas of each sentence he intended to say. This technique would be important for a speaker who intended not to read the text, while glancing up occasionally at the listeners, but rather to

communicate directly to the listeners, occasionally glancing down at the text for cues and reminders. The highlighting would also have indicated points of emphasis in the delivery.

The text on the cards quickly reveals that it is not a conventional style of writing. Em dashes (—) abound, often several in each long sentence, breaking up the material into phrases that are visually apparent. (Some of these dashes are supplemented by a coloured forward slash [/], obviously added at the same time as the highlighting of words.) These mark the places where the preacher would pause, and perhaps glance down to the written material, while delivering the sermon. Another punctuation mark that is visible in abundance, the exclamation point, appears far more frequently than would be acceptable in standard print, and was undoubtedly intended as a cue for the speaker to communicate the emphasis with his voice. A third characteristic of the texts is the abundance of Hebrew words written by hand, where Gryn was citing a biblical or rabbinic passage in the original language before rendering it in translation. Often these are just a few words long, but sometimes they are an entire verse or a full sentence or more from the Talmud or Midrash.

Most of the Shabbat morning sermons end with a passage addressed directly to the Bar Mitzvah boy or Bat Mitzvah girl. While it often refers back to a theme in the sermon, much of it entails personal remarks about the family of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah, while also referring to the interests and talents of the individual who would be standing before the preacher. This might well have been the highlight of the sermon for the principals involved (the Bar or Bat Mitzvah and family), but other listeners unconnected with the family might have perceived it as anticlimactic.

It is clear that, with the exception of an address to the Leo Baeck Lodge (published below), the texts in these folders were not written with the idea of publication in mind. They were written as an aid for a speaker. They do not reflect a significant effort to elevate or polish the literary style of the discourse. While in reviewing what he had written in preparation for the delivery, Gryn occasionally made corrections by hand, these are not the kind of stylistic improvements that would have been made in preparing an article for print. These texts on cards in the folders will not impress the reader as great literature, for that is not what they were intended to be. They were the means to a different end.

It is never superfluous to remind readers of this genre of literature that the written text of a sermon is not the sermon itself. The sermon is an oral communication between preacher and a group of listeners. Three major components of the sermon are absent from the printed page. First is everything entailed by the word ‘delivery’, which includes the manner of the preacher: the enunciation of the words, the pace, the emphasis and the pauses, the

loudness or softness of voice, the level of animation and excitement, gestures of arms and hands and expressions of the face. The printed words in relation to the sermon as delivered may therefore be considered as analogous to the relationship between the printed words of a Shakespearean soliloquy and the performance of an actor speaking the words in the middle of a play. Or the relationship between the notations on a musical score and the sound of a Beethoven sonata as performed in a concert hall. In the absence of video tapes or tape recordings, the text may be our best evidence for the sermon, but it is only partial evidence, not the real thing. Readers who actually heard Gryn preach may be able, as they encounter the printed words of the Leo Baeck Lodge address below, to hear his voice and picture him standing and speaking with powerful conviction at the pulpit. Others will need to imagine the words as spoken.

The second component missing from the written text — and inaccessible even with a videotape — is the relationship between the preacher and the listeners. This is especially true for a rabbi who has an ongoing relationship with a community of listeners as Gryn had with the West London Synagogue community. A rabbi who serves in one congregation for more than thirty years develops deep connections with families. Life cycle events the rabbi has performed might include a wedding for a young couple, Brit Milah and Bar Mitzvah for their son, funerals for the parents of the groom, then a wedding for the son. Sharing such occasions of joy and grief over many years establishes a significant bond. And there are many dimensions of relationship between Rabbi and congregant beyond that of life cycle events: working together on standing or ad hoc committees, study sessions, cooperation in fundraising for significant causes, personal friendship. In the case of Gryn, as Albert Friedlander noted in his *Dictionary of National Biography* article, 'In a congregation of close to 3,000 families, most of them felt a special relationship with this rabbi, and his pastoral work was phenomenal. It seemed that he had time for everyone'.[3]

The dynamic of that relationship, between the preacher and individuals listening in the congregation and with the membership as a whole, is another integral component of the sermon. Those sitting in the audience during the sermon are not listening to a stranger but, in many cases, to someone they have come to trust, respect, admire, sometimes even love. When the preacher takes a controversial position in his sermon, when he resorts to the rhetoric of criticism and rebuke for failings in his community, when he provides comfort and reassurance in critical times of anxiety and confusion, the words carry a weight beyond what they would ordinarily bear, because of the personality of the preacher. That too is part of the fullness of the sermon that cannot be conveyed by a written text.

Another dimension of this relationship is the personal biography of the preacher. Gryn spoke about the Holocaust on relatively few occasions, but when he did so, he brought the authority of one who had himself experienced and survived the harrowing events he described, whose youth was informed by a world most of us can barely imagine, whose beloved father, who had provided strength and guidance during the wartime period, was one of its victims, as was his brother. The authority of the witness to this experience informs not only the words describing cruelty and horror, but also the words of hope, the summons to brotherhood, the faith that God has not totally abandoned this world and that human beings are not beyond the possibility of redemption. Seeing and listening to the survivor recalling a moment from his past and drawing a lesson for present and future is an experience that can barely be communicated by mere written words.

The third component of the sermon absent from the printed text is the unique moment when the sermon was delivered. The same words that have dramatic resonance and power when they respond to deep anxieties and fears among the listeners may seem flat and uninspiring when read without awareness of the circumstances or the concerns. Consider a sermon delivered on Saturday 3 June 1967. Arab armies were amassed along the borders of Israel, Arab radios spoke of driving the Jews into the sea. The most optimistic scenarios in Israel assumed the real possibility of many thousands of deaths within both military forces and the civilian population. Memories of the Holocaust, which had ended just twenty-two years earlier, were still fresh in many minds.

We all know now that two days later, when the war broke out, Israel would go on to achieve one of the most stunning military victories in history. But no one could have known that on this Shabbat morning when the sermon was delivered. People came to their synagogues anxious, afraid, dejected, confused, feeling the need to hear from their rabbis some message that would recognise the seriousness of the situation without giving in to panic or despair. The printed words of that sermon may show that it was not a great work of literature, but the spoken words may have had a powerful impact on the listeners, an impact irretrievable once that moment has become only a distant memory.

The same is true for a sermon responding to an unforeseen disaster. Many of those who remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy, which occurred on a Friday in the late afternoon Greenwich Mean Time, in the middle of the day in the American time zones, will recall going to the synagogue on Friday evening or Saturday morning expecting and needing to hear a response from the pulpit. For the rabbi who had to prepare something appropriate and worthy under pressures of time and considerable emotional stress, this was a significant challenge. The first preaching occasion following the terrorist

attacks of 11 September 2001 or 7 July 2005 presented a similar challenge: preachers had to decide not only what they wanted to say, but what in their judgment the people in their congregations needed to hear. Gryn's sermon responding to the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin should be read with such memories of similar contemporary emotions in mind.

Selection

Selecting material for discussion from an abundance of extant texts necessarily entails a degree of subjectivity. This is true even if the preacher himself is choosing from among the files of his own sermons for publication in an anthology. One fundamental decision is whether to favour the 'timeless' or the 'topical' sermon. Whether or not a date is given, the timeless sermon characteristically does not refer or allude to current events or issues of specifically contemporary concern. Focusing on the enduring topics of the Jewish tradition — passages from the Bible (the Binding of Isaac, the career of Moses, the story of Jonah), themes of the holidays (repentance and atonement, the meaning of the *sukkah*, slavery and freedom), doctrines of Jewish belief (creation, revelation, the messiah, resurrection of the dead) — the same sermon might have been delivered twenty or fifty years earlier, and could be delivered twenty or fifty years later.

Such sermons typically go beyond the theoretical discussion of exegetical problems or conceptual ambiguities that would be appropriate for an academic lecture, moving from the text to make a homiletical application to the lives of the listeners. But since there is nothing that anchors such a sermon in a specific historical setting, and therefore nothing that makes it obviously dated, the preacher himself may repeat the same sermon a decade later. If published, it may be used with little change by another preacher (more on both points below).

By contrast, the topical sermon responds to a unique event: the outcome of a political election, the sudden death of a leading political figure, the outbreak of war for one's own country or for Israel, an unexpectedly uplifting occurrence (Egyptian President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the destruction of the Berlin Wall) or an unexpectedly shocking tragedy (the attacks of 11 September 2001 or 7 July 2005). There may indeed be a link with biblical or rabbinic material in such sermons, but the central focus is clearly on the present. Consequently, these are one-off sermons that would never be repeated in the same form.

Most published collections of sermons are of the 'timeless' sort, for an obvious reason. When a rabbi or an editor sits down to review sermons delivered over an entire career, the topical sermons, by their very nature, will

seem to be the most dated. Much of what was of compelling concern at the time of delivery twenty, thirty, forty years earlier may seem to be of little more than antiquarian interest with the passage of time. There is now an entire generation with no first-hand memory of the Six-Day War — how many of that generation would be interested in reading what was said from the pulpit in the days immediately before, during or after that event? If the answer to that is a pessimistic one, and that is true of an epoch-making event such as the Six-Day War, how much the more for less dramatic political issues or religious controversies that may have once seemed so important to address. Often the issues themselves are not explained in detail in the sermon, and memory about them has blurred with time. While the topical sermon requires considerable annotation in order to make the references to contemporary issues and events intelligible to a new generation of readers, the 'timeless' sermon is generally self-explanatory, with only the sources requiring identification. It remains as intelligible to readers from a similar background a generation or two after delivery as it was to the listeners who first heard it.

Despite this preference for the 'timeless' sermon in published collections, the topical sermon is by no means undeserving of careful analysis. Indeed, in many ways, it has greater significance than the purely homiletical text. As I hope to have demonstrated in publications over the past twenty years, this type of sermon is a valuable contemporary source for the understanding of historical events as perceived by those who lived through them. Like other sources affixed to a specific date — the newspaper, the diary, the letter — the topical sermon bring us back to a moment in the past when the future was as opaque and obscure as it is to us today. The record of such preaching enables us to identify with the uncertainties of people as the events were unfolding, rather than viewing them with the knowledge of how they would turn out, often projected back through the prism of value judgements to the effect that the people then should have known better. Such sermons also reveal how religious leaders applied familiar Jewish sources to specific challenges that their people were facing.

Gryn's sermons are an interesting blending of the two categories. A few of them are exclusively topical in nature. Examples would be:

- the sermons delivered immediately before the outbreak of the Six-Day War and immediately after its conclusion (1967);
- his response to Israel's High Court decision on Jewish identity (1970);
- the centenary celebration of the West London Synagogue building (1970);
- the sermons following the assassinations of Senator Robert Kennedy (1968) and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (1995).

Far more common are the sermons that give weight to both the textual, homiletical material and topical issues. Examples would include:

- 'Proclaim Liberty' — North Africa (1962);
- appeal during Yom Kippur War (1973);
- Soviet Jewry (December 1973, December 1974; more weight is given in these sermons to the contemporary issues);
- the Oslo Accords (1993). In this sermon considerably more weight is given to the biblical material, specifically the story of Abraham in Genesis and the Quranic tradition, but this is presented in the special context of what at the time appeared to be a dramatic breakthrough in the progress toward peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

In these sermons it is clear that the textual discussion is intended to provide a basis for the issue of current concern: persecution of Jews (North Africa, Soviet Jewry), war and peace.

Gryn's default practice, at least for the Shabbat sermons, was to begin with a passage from the weekly Torah lesson or prophetic reading. He discusses this passage in its original ancient context, often drawing rabbinic comments, medieval exegesis and modern scholarship of the ancient world. Usually he will identify and explore a religious or ethical theme derived from that reading, often with reference to religious literature and later Jewish thinkers. At some point in the discussion, perhaps two-thirds or three-quarters of the way to the end, Gryn will make an application to events of the present: 'Indeed, what recent events have underscored ….' (19 September 1970); 'Reflecting on these insights of the Torah, the events of the past week crowd into the mind' (22 August 1987); 'This past week alone has been filled with events and developments that could give "perspective" a whole new meaning' (14 December 1991); 'We had taken it into our heads and hearts that a host of recent conflicts has yielded a solution' (20 July 1996).

For many British readers, this form or structure of Gryn's sermons may be compared with 'Thought for the Day', a religious-based message included in Radio 4's morning news programme, 'Today'. Speakers representing various religious traditions are given three minutes for their message. Their instructions are apparently that they should begin with an event of current interest, recently in the news, discuss it in a somewhat original manner, and then, at some point in the second half of their message, relate it to a theme or text in the classical religious tradition, thereby revealing its relevance to the present.

Gryn's sermons are structured in an antithetical manner. His progression is in the opposite direction from 'Thought for the Day': he moves from the

past to the present. In both cases, however, the beginning of the discourse comes out of its immediate context. The radio message, heard in the middle of a news programme, starts with the present and moves back to the past, which is shown to be relevant to the present. The sermon, following a reading of biblical material, starts from the past and moves to the present, which is illuminated by the ancient texts.

This connection drawn between the embedded wisdom of ancient text and contemporary reality would have been the high point of the sermon for many of the listeners. Yet rarely does Gryn indulge in a deep analysis of the current issues in his sermon. It is the placing of these issues in the context of the traditional material that appears to have been his purpose, illuminating the present in a way that newspaper columnists or radio talk show experts would not have done.

Repetition

Most clergy who preach each week in the same congregation over a period of many years repeat sermons after a respectable period of time. This despite a general expectation — rarely articulated, generally unexplained and blatantly unrealistic — that each sermon should be a new creation. Passages from the liturgy are repeated three times a day, or (if distinct to the evening service) once a day, or (if used only on the eve of Shabbat) once a week, or (if unique to Yom Kippur) once a year. No one imagines that the words will change, or even that the melody will be different each time the prayer is used. The Scriptural readings from Pentateuch and Prophets recur in regular cycles. The sermon is the one component of the worship service for which the expectation of originality seems to be integral to the exercise.

Yet how many preachers, faced with all of the other obligations of religious leadership in a congregation of worshippers, can find something novel to say, week after week, for decades? To be sure, there are a few who set this goal for themselves as the norm. The London Baptist preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon published fifty-five volumes of *The Metropolitan Pulpit* delivered between the years 1854 and 1891; a typical volume would contain between fifty and sixty different sermons averaging more than ten pages of small type each. In total, he is said to have delivered more than 3,500 different sermons. To take a Jewish example, Saul Levi Morteira of Amsterdam set a unique discipline for himself by choosing the first significant verse of each Scriptural lesson as the basis for his sermon during his first year of regular preaching, and then moving progressively verse by verse through the lesson in subsequent years. By the time he had been doing this for twenty-five years, his disciples reported there were texts of some 1,400 different sermons in his

files.[4] Turning closer to home, Gryn's Liberal colleague John Rayner, rabbi of the Liberal Jewish Synagogue for more than forty years from the mid-1950s, kept a ledger of his sermons beginning with number 1, dated 21 June 1953 and ending with number 1,137, dated 5 October 2003; while he would occasionally repeat a sermon given at LJS when invited to preach elsewhere, he apparently did not re-use the same sermon where it was originally delivered.

Yet there are reasons why even the best and most original preachers will repeat sermons within the same congregation. Some of the reasons apply to the preacher. Unexpected pressures may make it impossible to prepare something new on a deadline. In the case of many individuals, the capacity for original creativity wanes with age, and the ever-increasing number of sermons delivered in the past makes it more difficult to come up with new ideas. Other reasons apply to the listeners. Each year some of the congregants die or move away, and new congregants join the community. If there is a turnover of 7 to 8 percent per year, in seven years more then half the congregation will be newcomers who had not heard a sermon delivered eight years earlier. Of those who remain, many will have forgotten the sermon not long after they heard it, and even the most stimulating and inspiring sermon will not remain fresh in the minds of the listeners. Finally, there are some who would appreciate hearing a reprise of a sermon they liked, as they would eagerly listen to a great pianist play the Waldstein Sonata a second time, or a celebrated tenor sing the same operatic role, or watch a great actor perform once again as Hamlet after a decade has elapsed. Certainly topical sermons, responding to timely events, cannot be repeated, but many other sermons, rooted in ancient texts and timeless messages, intended to inform and inspire, can be with profit.

All this is to explain that Gryn did indeed repeat some of the sermons he delivered, and noted such repetitions by adding a new year at the top of the first index card of his text, several years after the original date of delivery. Obviously they were delivered on the Shabbat when the same Torah lesson occurred in the year listed. In some cases several different years are listed as occasions for repetition. We should not assume, however, that the sermon when delivered a second or third time was identical with the original delivery. Some of the typed texts have hand-written emendations, usually of a stylistic nature, apparently made when Gryn reviewed his text for re-use. In addition, as noted above, most of the Saturday morning services conclude with a page or so addressed to the child celebrating Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah that week. The personal material in this conclusion obviously needed replacement when a different child was before him. Perhaps most interesting is a third category of revision, pertaining to the contemporary relevance of the homiletical point derived from the classical texts.

To provide one example, on 11 December 1971, near the beginning of his career, Gryn gave a sermon on the lesson *Va-Yeshev*, which recounts the

beginning of the Joseph story. Here we see the transition from a theme that emerges from that narrative — the responsible use of high birth and power — to the events of the recent past, including an open war between India and Pakistan. Joseph's struggle, he says is the struggle of all people in positions of influence: how to use power appropriately. He then applies this issue to India, with its tradition of non-violence, engaged in the use of missiles and aircraft, to Christians in Belfast turning from love of enemies to terrorism, to Soviets proclaiming egalitarian principles prosecuting Jews in the Leningrad show-trial. When the sermon was repeated twelve years later in 1983, the same theme was illustrated by allusion to different contemporary examples of the perversions of power: Muslims killing each other in Libya and on the border between Iran and Iraq, the breakdown of disarmament talks between Western and Communist leaders and the 'Darkley killings' of Pentecostal Christians in their church by members of a 'Catholic Reaction Force'. The timeless message remains the same; the new application to contemporary events brings it up to date.

Annotation

The passages cited above raise the need for annotation if they are to be published years after they were delivered. There are several functions of annotation to the texts of published sermons. The first, and most obvious, is to identify the source of exact quotations, in accordance with commonly accepted practices of documentation. A Jewish preacher citing a 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' will usually identify its source, not content with a general phrase like, 'As the Bible says', and not specifying 'Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18', but with some formulation like, 'as we read in Leviticus chapter 19' or 'in *parashat Kedoshim*'. For rabbinic citations, there is a range of practices, varying from attribution to 'the Rabbis', 'the Talmud' or 'the Midrash' in Progressive Jewish circles, to precise citation from tractate and page by many Orthodox preachers. In print, however, precision is required: if the source is not provided by the preacher — and Gryn often did provide the reference in his written text — it must be added by the editor.[5]

The same, of course, applies to citations from authors of the medieval or modern period. Referring to a comment by Rashi or another of the standard Jewish commentators on the biblical verse that is being discussed usually does not require further annotation. But a citation from Maimonides without specification of the work may leave the reader curious as to where exactly the statement may be found. Even if the book is specified, for example, 'Bachya ibn Pakuda in his *Duties of the Heart*', a precise identification of the place in this large work, and the translation used by the preacher, is desirable. Similarly

with quotations from modern thinkers: Rav Kook, Abraham Joshua Heschel, Martin Buber. The listeners may not have needed specificity; the reader may indeed desire it.

This task has become substantially easier for an editor with the availability and easy accessibility of Google and especially Google Book Search. In some cases of quotation from texts written in Hebrew, the Google Book Search reveals not the original Hebrew source, but the place where Gryn found it. A citation from a relatively unknown work by an unfamiliar Hasidic Rebbe — R. Mordecai, the Lechivitzer Rebbe (from *Or Yesharim*) — was taken from Louis I. Newman's collection and translation of Hasidic wisdom, *A Hasidic Anthology*. Other pithy citations were apparently taken from Joseph L. Baron's *A Treasury of Jewish Quotations*. Such 'preaching aids' — collections of quotations frequently organised by topic — go back for Christians to the Middle Ages, and for Jews at least to the seventeenth century. Information about the resources available to help preachers accomplish their task more efficiently reveals something about the way a rabbi in a large congregation may work to prepare his weekly sermons, by uncovering what the preacher read, how he used his material, and thereby something of his intellectual world and his creative process.[6]

One specific category of source material that deserves identification is the use of collections of sermons published by other preachers. From the very first collections of Jewish sermons in the thirteenth century, it is clear that a primary purpose of the authors was to provide models for later practitioners of the art to emulate and to use. Indeed, some medieval manuscripts actually include guidance for subsequent preachers to employ the material in their own preaching.[7] An entire genre of books or periodicals of *homer le-derush* — 'homiletical material' — is explicitly intended to facilitate and enhance the work of other preachers. No public speaker begins with a *tabula rasa*; it is doubtful that a single preacher who speaks regularly has not used ideas encountered in the work of others.

Several collections of published sermons were obvious favourites of Gryn, and he mentioned these colleagues from a previous generation with deep respect. One was Joel Blau, a predecessor as rabbi at the West London Synagogue, whom Gryn described as 'the most brilliant preacher of his time, tragically cut down at the outset of his ministry here'; Blau's collection of brief sermons, *The Wonder of Life*, an enormously appealing work, was not infrequently consulted and used by Gryn. Two American Conservative rabbis, also with distinguished reputations for their homiletical talents, whose books of sermons Gryn used with acknowledgment were Morris Adler of Chicago and Milton Steinberg of New York. The use of such material for a similar or even slightly different purpose reveals a living homiletical tradition;

appropriate annotation — enabling the interested reader to compare the source and evaluate its relevance to the discussion at hand — is another task for the editor.

Perhaps the most important need for annotation applies to the preacher's references and sometimes allusions to contemporary events. This need results from the distinctiveness of the sermon as communication between a speaker and an audience he knows at a discrete moment in time. Unlike an author who is aware that potential readers may live far away and be reading the text years in the future, the preacher knows what may be assumed about the listeners' knowledge, because of information on the front pages of newspapers and featured in programmes of television and radio news. To give an example from May and June of 2009 when these words were first written, a London preacher could refer in passing to 'the expenses scandal' confident that everyone in the audience would know exactly to what he was referring. Forty years from now, the phrase would be an enigma, probably even to historians. If the preacher had said, 'the scandal of second-house expenses claimed by MPs', the future reader would have a clearer sense of what the issue was, but even the word 'scandal' would give that future reader little clue to the power of the emotions generated by that issue at the time the sermon was being delivered. Only by going back to contemporary newspapers, or history books about the era, would the resonance of those few words be recoverable. This kind of annotation is what is required for topical references in a sermon to come to life years after its words were spoken.

An example comes from a sermon Gryn delivered on 20 July 1996, a month before his death. This was the Sabbath preceding Tish'a be-Av; the *parashah* was *Devarim,* the first in Deuteronomy, but Gryn was more interested in the prophetic reading, from the first chapter of Isaiah. 'This Shabbat I feel very close to Isaiah, and I'd love you to share that feeling': a personal sense of connection, that comes across without the slightest hint of arrogance, then reaching out to his listeners to include them and invite them into the preacher's mental and emotional world. Isaiah was not just a figure of the distant past. 'He can help us, still, to understand events taking place all around us.'

Isaiah, he points out, was unique among the prophets in that he had access to the centres of influence in the Judean kingdom. He was no stranger to power politics and international conflict and intrigue. Yet his message, conveyed in stirring verses of condemnation cited by Gryn from Isaiah Chapter 1, is that the realms of the royal court and of the sacrificial cult in the Temple are barren without the inner transformation expressed in social justice. This is a new idea that the prophet articulates. Armies, alliances, policies, strategies are important, but it is the character of the people, their moral strength, that is ultimately decisive.

At this point, a quick transition takes us from the past to the present. We believed, the preacher says, that many significant conflicts — the Middle East, the Cold War, Bosnia, Ulster — were all in the process of resolution, stability was increasing, 'peace process' had become a favourite phrase. 'And a short angry walk of twenty-three minutes left it in tatters!'

This is a beautiful example of allusion to an event that everyone in the congregation would immediately have recognised, but that would leave most readers bewildered today, except for those fully conversant with the conflicts over the Orange Order parade of loyalist Protestants through a largely nationalist Catholic neighbourhood in Belfast. A simple explanation brings back the power of the reference to challenge simplistic assumptions about how progress is made.

Gryn continued with another dramatic event that occurred three days before the sermon was delivered: 'A large group of tourists and travellers get on a TWA flight to Paris — and half an hour later, they are dead.' Here the reference is self-explanatory, though a few additional details are helpful in fleshing it out. Written by hand in square brackets after the reference to the TWA flight — and undoubtedly said when the sermon was delivered — is the simple phrase, '[As if we needed a reminder of the fragility of life!]'. The full poignancy of this addition would not be obvious to a reader unaware that Gryn had been diagnosed with terminal brain cancer several weeks before, and that his own death would occur a month after these words were spoken.

As his newspaper eulogiser Albert Friedlander wrote, Gryn was not an orator.[8] Apparently he was not even a naturally eloquent speaker. The texts of his sermons would not be esteemed as great literature, nor were they intended as such. They are not sources for original Jewish religious thought; they contain few examples of sustained, in-depth analyses of contemporary problems. But there is little question that the power of Hugo Gryn's personality, the passion of his commitment to enduring Jewish values, his credibility as a witness to some of the most harrowing events of the century, and his personification of the human capacity to survive and transcend the direct encounter with ultimate evil by going on to play a unique role of leadership both within a major congregation and in the broader society — all of this makes the texts of his sermons a source of insight and potential inspiration for readers today.

The following text is not of a sermon, but of an address delivered at a commemorative event. It is presented to provide some sense of his power as a preacher.

Notes

1. Albert Friedlander, 'Gryn, Hugo Gabriel (1930–1996)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
2. Perhaps some reader of this article who knew Rabbi Gryn might be aware of what has happened to these precious texts.
3. Friedlander, op. cit.
4. See on Morteira Marc Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam: Saul Levi Morteira's Sermons to a Congregation of 'New Jews'* (Cincinnati: HUC Press, 2005), Chapter 2: 'The Manuscript/s'.
5. A recent edition in which this basic editorial work is totally absent is *One Voice: The Selected Sermons of W. Gunther Plaut*, ed. Jonathan V. Plaut (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2007). Even biblical verses and rabbinic passages are not identified by the editor, let alone references to later authors. In one paragraph, we read, 'taken by Elie Wiesel when he says "Everything in the world causes me to reject God ..." A famous Midrash he is fond of quoting pictures the Jew ... That is what Yosel Rakover said just before he died in the ruins of Warsaw: "You have done everything to make me renounce You. ... but I die exactly as I lived, a believer!"' (p. 49). None of the quotations are identified, nor is there any hint that Yosel Rakover was a literary character, not an actual person. A twenty-five-line poem is cited, followed by a ten-line prose passage, without identification (pp. 57–58), as is an eight-paragraph vignette attributed to Isaac Mayer Wise with no indication of its actual source (pp. 114–15).
6. Occasionally, I was unable to identify the source of the quotations despite significant searching and consultation with others. In his September 1970 sermon on the centenary of the West London Synagogue building, Gryn cited an English version of a poem attributed to 'the Hebrew poet'; even consultation with experts in modern Hebrew poetry has not led to an identification of its author. Discussing in a late sermon from January 1995 the commandment to love the stranger, (Lev. 19:34 and elsewhere), Gryn refers to comments by two rabbis of Prague: the Maharal (Rabbi Leib ben Bezalel), whom he identifies as 'my own ancestor', and Sabbatai Bass. But the statements attributed to them, 'No reason need be given for loving the stranger', and '"Love itself is commanded", meaning that the final reason for human love is God' continue to elude me.
7. Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching 1200–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 16 and n. 27.
8. Albert Friedlander, 'Obituary: Rabbi Hugo Gryn', *The Independent*, 20 August 1996.

FORTY YEARS OF EUROPEAN JUDAISM – THIRTY EIGHT YEARS OF DIALOGUE

*Michael Hilton**

The beginnings

Writing on the tenth anniversary of this journal in 1976, David Goldberg criticised the magazine's relationship with 'alienated intellectuals' – a remark which provoked a number of protests published in the following issue. In its early years, *European Judaism* published a good deal of abstruse intellectual writing, in accordance with Ignaz Maybaum's original aim of including 'cross-currents of influence, intellectual, cultural and spiritual'. But interfaith was different. From the start, inter-religious debate within these pages was grounded in the practical realities of dialogue. This has largely been because of the relationship of the journal with the Jewish-Christian Bible week and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim (JCM) conferences held for so many years at Bendorf in Germany. Regular reports have been among the mainstays of *European Judaism* and continue to play an important part in the life of this journal.

The very first mention of interfaith dialogue in the journal is one likely to be missed by those unaware of the reference. It was a poem by Jonathan Magonet in Vol. 5, No. 1 (1970–71) entitled 'Yesterday Today Tomorrow'.

In Bendorf on the Rhine
a good woman planted
a little rock
which whispers
Peace
Paix
Friede
Shalom

The reference is to Anneliese Debray (1911–85), director of Hedwig Dransfeld Haus Bendorf for the first thirty years of its existence (1950–81). The first Jewish-Christian Bible week was held there in 1968, and the first JCM week in 1972.

* Rabbi Dr Michael Hilton is minister of Kol Chai Hatch End Jewish Community and is the author of *The Christian Effect on Jewish Life* (SCM Press, London, 1994).

The Prophet

In the 1970s, Lionel Blue was the principal Bendorf correspondent. In 1973, he wrote about early contact with Muslims: 'Despite Israel/Palestine we have much in common. Our religious are embedded in a culture and expressed through law.' At a time when Jews knew very little about Islam, it was important to publish the basics. 'The new entry into Europe,' wrote Lionel Blue, 'is Islam. Trialogue gives Jews a function as the religious middle man. The structure of Judaism is similar to that of Islam, but we have learnt to speak the theological language of Western Christianity' (Vol. 9, No. 1 1974/5). Lionel went on to say it was difficult for Jews and Muslims to meet without the Christian *shadchan* to bring them together. Lionel returned to the theme in 1976 (Vol. 10, No. 2) 'Jews in Europe will have to live with Marxists and Muslims if they are going to live at all. *European Judaism* has taken this seriously. Most European Jewish leaders have not.'

In the early 1980s, we find a number of interfaith colloquia – verbatim reports of debates staged at Bendorf. In the first of these, Jews and Muslims were quite open about the difficulty of approaching the other side. This first debate was remarkable for Lionel Blue's prophetic words, which seem to predict the growth of a militant Islam (Vol. 14, No. 1, 1980): 'One of the fears of the Jews is that whereas the Christian Church is beginning to use a form of exegesis which stops this anti-Jewish bomb inside from detonating, just defusing, we are frightened that another type of teaching is going to come in which the whole problem can flare up again.'

I found this so striking that I contacted Lionel and enquired how he had managed to make such an accurate prediction. He told me 'Everyone said at that time Islam was not important, but I begged to differ. I had noticed in my journeys the rise of Islam in Europe. I met Muslims in my train travels, and realised that Europe was no longer a Christian-Jewish world. It was no use having wars in which Israel was victorious but made another war more likely. Every time the opportunity for peace is missed, the price of peace goes even higher. I realised we needed a rabbinate who knew Muslims. The Christians had to be there. The Muslims wanted to talk to the Christians, the ones in power in Europe, the Christians wanted to talk to the Jews and the Jews to the Muslims. That's how the whole thing worked.'

The personal

A special issue in 1982 (Vol. 16, No. 1), 'Dialogue and Identity', printed extracts from lectures of the first ten years of the Bendorf JCM. Speakers

were generally optimistic about the opportunities for dialogue, but pessimistic about world events. Thus Jonathan Magonet could preach: 'If we feel ourselves outsiders, then we are pioneers of an experience that all in our culture are also facing, and by recognising that hurt within us. We might help a generation survive within its own destructiveness.' Howard Cooper argued in the same issue that intermarriage in the Jewish community had suddenly increased as awareness of the Holocaust had grown. In 1983, the Bendorf Colloquium focused on the personal stories of a few of those involved in the dialogue, including Jonathan Magonet, Barbara Borts, Daniel Smith and Bert Breiner. The colloquia capture a unique blend of personal stories, academic debate and world politics. The stories of participants in the dialogue reflect the boundaries of dialogue at that time. Thus Gordian Marshall could say (1983): 'In a fairly detailed study of St Matthew's Gospel which I was doing, I felt more and more convinced that I couldn't understand it without understanding something of the Jewish background from which it was written. So I must confess that I went looking for a museum in which I could find Judaism and I found it alive and kicking.'

Throughout the past 30 years, a number of more academic articles on interfaith maters have been published. In Vol. 10, No. 1 (1975/76), Albert Friedlander wrote of 'Kafka's Ape: A meditation in Religious Dialogue'. The reference is to Kafka's story of an ape who became a man, a story teaching that man's animal nature can be overcome. This, wrote Albert, is relevant to reconciliation after the Holocaust. In 1979 (Vol. 13, No. 1), the Christian theologian James Parkes explained how his discovery of the post-Christian growth of Judaism had led him to realise that Judaism was not a fossil but dynamic and adaptable. 'Judaism is missionary,' he added, 'in the sense that Jews are everywhere involved in and concerned for social betterment and reform.' In the same issue, Peter Schneider (pages 37–38) called for Churches to be more positive about the State of Israel. It was a theme returned to in 1992 (Vol. 25, No. 1) with a special issue on Israel and Jewish-Christian Dialogue. Neocon Christian Zionism had not yet reached public awareness, and Alice Eckhard explained that Christians were more ready to ponder on the meaning of the Holocaust than on the State of Israel. Many Christians still held the view that 'Jews were exiled from their land by God to serve as a negative witness to the truth of the Christian gospel.'

Women in dialogue

Vol. 21, No. 1 (1987), edited by Dorothea Magonet, was devoted to papers from the JCM Bendorf annual women's conference. Jewish participants

had strongly objected to a paper by a Christian theologian, unnamed in the magazine, who had argued that Judaism had a strongly anti-feminist history, with women as second-class beings who sat in the gallery. Rachel Montagu, in her response, called this last statement 'a grotesque error'. Gisela Hommel, writing of 'Anti-semitic tendencies in Christian Feminist Theology in Germany', gave other examples of what she called 'old theology', which she said was alive and well in Germany. The God of the Old Testament was seen as both tribal and male, and Eve was an inferior being who had to submit to the yoke of male power. 'Everything evil in the Old Testament is conceived of as Jewish, whereas everything that is good is said to be post-Jewish, a Christian anticipation.' Arguments between Jewish and Muslim women seemed tame by comparison, though papers by Muslims reflect opposing views as to whether it is necessary for women to be veiled in public, a dispute which has come much more into the open in recent years. The women's conference was again highlighted in Vol. 28, No. 2 (1995) 'Women question their tradition.'

Much of Vol. 22, No. 1 (1988/9) is also devoted to dialogue. Albert Friedlander pointed out how we return again and again to the problems of communicating between Judaism and Christianity. In the US, he pointed out with a touch of envy, there seems to be more confidence about the dialogue, but in Europe we feel the problems more deeply. Jack Cohen argued that the great danger in and for religion today is that is has become a tool in the hands of political extremists. But if our religions are really based on divine absolutes, how can we easily avoid claiming exclusive possession of the truth?

World events change the dialogue

Since the mid-1980s, interfaith issues have been arguably the major theme of *European Judaism.* Public events reflected in these pages have been commented on from an interfaith perspective. President Ronald Reagan's visit to German war graves in 1985 provoked a bitter Jewish-Christian argument about forgiveness after the Holocaust. The humanitarian crisis in Bosnia in 1993, the massacre in Hebron in 1994, Rabin's assassination in 1996, the millennium and the 9/11 terrorist attacks all provoked much comment. The back issues of this journal must be regarded as a major resource for the modern history of dialogue between Jews, Christians and Muslims. Few of the articles were written specially; nearly all are conference papers, recorded speeches or reprinted from other publications. In spite of that, the editors have managed to capture all the

big events and issues. The argument between Jews and Christians about forgiveness, reprinted from the *Times* and the *Jewish Chronicle,* must be regarded as one of the historical highlights of *European Judaism*, a debate frequently referred to in histories of dialogue. The debate was printed in Vol. 19, No. 2 (1985), and it was the chaplain of St John's College, Oxford, Dr ACJ Phillips, who introduced a bitter element into the discussion with his article 'Why the Jews should Forgive'. He went beyond the bounds of ordinary debate with an angry closing sentence: 'In remembering the Holocaust, Jews hope to prevent its recurrence; by declining to forgive, I fear they unwittingly invite it.' The Jewish responses politely argued that Jews have no power to forgive on behalf of the dead and missing. None of them, not even the normally polemical Hyam Maccoby, took up directly Phillips's inference that Jews are vengeful people who harbour grudges. It was a debate which left an unpleasant taste. It was revisited by Anthony Bayfield in Vol. 21, No. 2 (1988), who described how the debate had been a 'personal disaster' for Phillips, who had given up his job for a teaching post and left the interfaith scene.

The Bosnian War of 1992–95 is all but forgotten, but at the time it seemed to herald a new era in Jewish-Muslim relations. When the besieged citizens of Sarajevo pleaded for aid, Jewish communities around the world and in Israel rushed to respond. I remember my own synagogue full from floor to ceiling with blankets. At one point, Jewish relief organisations seemed for some reason to be the only people able to get aid into the city. Vol. 27, No. 1 printed a document from the World Union for Progressive Judaism on relations with Islam, together with a detailed action guide on how communities might help. A 'Sarajevo Charter' was published in 1995 (Vol. 28, No. 2), and a history of 'Religious Pluralism in Bosnia: Five centuries of *Convivencia*, Five Years of Conflict' in 1999 (Vol. 31, No. 1, by Ahmed Zilic).

The dialogue deepens

By this time, it was normal in the magazine to read Christians and Muslims writing about their own faith, discussing really deep internal debates which went far beyond the superficial exchanges often associated with dialogue. A good example is Maulana Farid Esack, whose article about Muslims in South Africa was published in Vol. 26, No. 1 in 1993. An exception to the general rule that writers and lecturers should criticise only their own faith was the redoubtable Hyam Maccoby, who insisted on criticising Christian theology and history. Several noteworthy articles by

him have appeared in these pages. His article 'The Jewishness of Jesus' (Vol. 28, No. 1, 1995) is one of several which expresses his disquiet: 'There has been a strong tendency to discount as inauthentic those elements in Jesus's teaching which have been discovered beyond doubt to derive from Jewish teachings of his day.'

In 1996, the journal highlighted the new and specific dialogue taking place between Jews and Catholics. Cardinal Edward Cassidy wrote on the thirtieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate*,* paying tribute to those who wrote the official documents and covering the subsequent thirty years of dialogue.

In 1998 (Vol. 31, No. 1), the journal celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the JCM by reprinting speeches by the Prince of Wales and Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan. By this time the conference felt mature enough to discuss the issue of warfare. Jeffrey Newman argued that war could never be justified: 'War is always failure. It wastes lives and leave bitterness and broken bodies. It is hard to believe that war (or violence) ever solves anything.' Karen Armstrong similarly argued that, 'It is clearly very dangerous for Christians – or for anybody else – to say "God wants us to make war."' AN Elias pointed out that very word 'Islam' contains within it the root which means peace. Mohammed Gulbar spoke emotionally of the 'wave of islamophobia sweeping the west', of how so many views were based on ignorance and prejudice. Annegret Möllers spoke of the need for a German national memory. Saad Eddin Ibrahim drew on traditional Muslim sources to argue that Muslims can and should work towards communal pluralism within their communities. All these papers revealed the speakers honestly and sincerely confronting issues in their own traditions. The issue also contains a list of the topics for the entire twenty-five years of the JCM, a statement of shared moral commitment to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the founding statement for the new London based Three Faiths Forum.

9/11 and after

It is not possible even to mention here all the excellent debates reprinted in *European Judaism* in the past decade, but one issue must be mentioned. The atrocities of September 11 2001 fell a week before Rosh Hashanah, and led to much rewriting of sermons. Jonathan Magonet collected and anthologised extracts from twenty-five High Holyday sermons from 2001, and managed to find room for another eight complete ones as well (Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002). The variety of sources and perspectives is fascinating,

and many were worried about the damage the attacks would do to relations with Muslims. Tony Bayfield said that 'religion is coming dangerously close to discrediting itself utterly and completely' and my own words at the time are here recorded: 'True dialogue is the terrorist's enemy.' Helen Freeman said: 'The fundamentalist versions of religion are always based on an embattled form of spirituality, and so they neglect the compassion and tolerance at the heart of the great religions.' The same issue included a statement by Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan, under the heading 'A Muslim Calls for Sanity.'

Almost the whole of Vol. 37, No. 1 (2004) was devoted to interfaith relations. It is an astonishing survey, running to 140 pages (until 1994, issues of the magazine were often only 50 pages in total). Personal memoirs of thirty years of JCM mingled with personal histories of those now engaged in the dialogue. Laura Janner-Klausner spoke openly of the place of anger in dealing with the other, while Halima Krausen drew attention to verses in the Qur'an which promote good dialogue. Humera Khan pointed out that the 1976 Race Relations Act categorised people into racial classifications and ignored completely their faith identity. This led to a melting pot culture, and 'thus the seeds of Muslim alienation were sown'. An important paper by Marten Marquardt, 'Interreligious Dialogue in Conflict Situations', explored how crisis situations can stimulate genuine dialogue, and revealed how Martin Buber and Karl Ludwig Schmidt had debated publicly in Stuttgart a few days before Hitler came to power. He went on to point out that dialogue between faiths is bound to lead to arguments within faiths, and that we must be ready for that kind of internal conflict. Claus Leggewie gave us his 'Ten Commandments for Interfaith Dialogue' and Mark Winer wrote of the need for repairing the world *(tikkun olam)* as a product of dialogue: 'The Jewish Messiah comes every day, in the restoration of hope and in the prayer of the heart.'

Will the future of *European Judaism* bring more of the same? No doubt the old topics will continue to be debated, but new ones will come along as well. A time will come when our dialogue needs to move beyond the three faiths to include others. There will be those for whom dialogue is the centre of their faith. Britain is now training 'interfaith ministers' to care for the needs of mixed-faith families, but none of them so far has written for this magazine. No doubt they will. At the same time, we live in a world of increasing danger and confrontation. The task of building peace is ever more urgent. Dialogue is not just a leisure activity, but has a real part to play. Interfaith groups could even achieve a measure of political power, safeguarding holy places in Jerusalem and perhaps elsewhere. My own words on the future of dialogue were published in Vol. 33, No. 2 (2000):

'We have only just begun to respond to a newer warmer relationship with Christianity and Islam. We have not yet developed new theologies in Judaism to respond to these warmer relationships. We must learn, too, new responses to cope with secularity and fundamentalism. To cope with different kinds of family life requires new rituals and a new openness. These are urgent tasks. They do not require us to look at the next thousand years. They can begin now.'

DIALOGUE? THANK YOU, NO! TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

*Claus Leggewie**

'Dialogue' is a spoken exchange between two persons who exchange their viewpoints. In the dictionary of the 'good person' this concept has the highest rank which one can basically only confirm. Fundamentally, it must be better to talk with one another instead of immersing oneself in evil silence or in turning to aggressive attacks. Why, then, did the organizer of this forum present me with the title 'Dialogue: Thank You, No!' How can one be against dialogue? It is rooted in an honourable philosophic tradition which has been primarily established by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas within the centre of modern thought. Since then, the waters of diplomacy have washed over it and softened it, and overuse has killed it. Therefore, I only feel it necessary to establish a critical revision precisely where the 'dialogue' establishes an institutional identity in the area of the oecumene. Here, I am helped by one of the hosts of the Berlin Ecumenical Kirchentag: Bishop Wolfgang Huber properly warned us about this 'interreligious cheating'. That is the opening that I would strongly pursue at this point, and try to act as the *advocatus diaboli*.

The opening is a warning example taken from the political field. Twenty years ago, the Polish union Solidarity arose and demanded fundamental reforms. You may recall that the Warsaw government defined this as a declaration of war. The West immediately demanded that the government enter into a dialogue. Otherwise, as in previous revolts of the people, force would be the only language; and tanks would roll. Such a dialogue was also suggested to Solidarity, among others by those who had found it easy to have a dialogue with the Polish government, but did not want to talk to the Catholic workers' movement. Addressing oneself to what was the false address did not delay the selfemancipation of Poland and of Eastern Central Europe, but the example shows that not every invitation to enter into dialogue per se will succeed.

I do not have an easy task here. The Ecumenical Kirchentag is a place in which one dialogues without pause and in great numbers. And I am supposed,

---

* Claus Leggewie is Professor of Political Science at Justus Liebig University, Giessen, co-editor of the journals *Transit* (Vienna) and *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik* (Bonn). He is the author of the pamphlet 'The emergence of Euro-Islam? Mosques and Muslims in the Federal Republic of Germany'. This lecture was given at the 2003 Ecumenical Kirchentag in Berlin and has been translated from the German by Albert H. Friedlander.

as a neutral, religious and not particularly musical observer to set critical questions. Thus, I accept the role of devil's advocate and I find it helpful. I am open to interreligious dialogue and have also participated with works dealing with Euro-Islam. Most recently, I published a small study on the mosque conflicts, i.e., local disputations concerning the building and the maintaining of Islamic cult establishments in Germany. We call this 'religious–political science': a comparative study of the different ways and means by which political structures, in particular Western democracies, deal with conflicts arising out of religious motivations or those disguised as such. These attempts try to subdue these conflicts and seek to preserve peace. They stand at the beginning of many political theories since the beginning of modernity and continue to be actual. With this, I finally come to a critical examination of the nature of dialogue in this country. Since, by the grace of God, I am permitted to be the devil's advocate, I am now permitted to express this through my own Ten Commandments. The first commandment seeks to set the boundaries of possible dialogues.

I. Thou Must Never Force Anyone to Enter a Dialogue

One cannot hold the same dialogue with everyone. One must insist upon the complete willingness of a dialogue partner, and no one who is unwilling may be judged negatively for having good reasons not to open themselves. This would seem to be selfevident, but the ruling 'dialogism', which has lifted dialogue into an ideology, practises a really not very soft pressure, demanding public communication where this is not all a religious imperative. Dialogue then becomes a burdensome exercise of duty.

Other exceptions exist. One does not want to enter into dialogue with hopelessly stubborn antisemites, nor with fundamentalists of any persuasion who deny homosexuals any human dignity or the right to existence. One can discuss opinions, but antisemitism and homophobia are not opinions but mere acts of violence disguised by rhetoric. We keep hearing this out of the mouths of religious dignitaries, and the coming to terms with political Islamism suffers through the fact that ignorance or cowardice keeps one ideologizing.

II. Thou Shalt Not Make Thyself Any Illusions

The example of Solidarity has taught us that the conceptualized symmetry within society is not a reality. Those with power have many possibilities to

direct both the preconceptions and the results of such dialogues. Power can preserve an iron silence or can talk its opponents to death, and the powerless can 'dialogize' continually without gaining anything. In such a situation, the 'round table' is just a trap. The same warning can be applied to those pseudo-dialogues which appear on television until they stick in our throats. There, up to the very end, the scripted and manipulated rounds suggest an equality among those apparently communicating, which in truth does not exist. That leads to the third commandment:

III. Thou Shalt Not Accept a Lazy Peace

Many friendly dialogues prevent necessary disputations and are therefore only the evidence of a shyness to enter into conflicts. In contrast to a broadly accepted rhetoric of dialogue which claims that conflicts in social life are avoidable, they are not only unavoidable, but basically desirable. They advance cultural innovations and social change. It is precisely multicultural societies that need the cleansing function of conflicts that are spoken softly but demand hard actions. In other words, it is good to fight as long as this dispute stays within peaceful boundaries.

Permit me a short excursus into the changes of definition which the multicultural society has experienced in the last two decades. Here in the hall one can surely proceed with the assumption that multiculturalism evokes positive associations. However, the wind has changed in the public mind. Dangerous multicultural fantasies are evoked and cultural pluralism is viewed as dynamite. It is seen as creating the famous 'clash of civilizations' proclaimed by the American political scientist Samuel Huntington. This oversimplified thesis has found unbelievable distribution within the mass media and serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. There, modern societies are actually seen in more of their gradations and may be more surveyable. In the areas of science and law, economy and mass culture, as covered by many examples, a continuing assimilation and adjustment to others takes place and global standards become established. However, divergences in the field of religious or aesthetic values are encouraged to emerge within a value system that creates conflicts within style and the scene itself. However, these generally do not escalate into militant confrontations. Viewed by sociology, it is not typical that multicultural groups remain socially distanced and enter into a political antagonism. Rather, they are structured into an interlocking pattern of changing participation in which they are bound together as members. Moreover, the pressure of these relationships often has a more calming influence then any enforced 'dialogue of cultures'.

IV. To Understand Does Not Mean to Excuse

An old rule of thumb, supposedly going back to Germaine de Stael, states 'tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner' [to understand all is to forgive all]. This misunderstanding of tolerance frequently underlies religious dialogues. In this, the alienation between cultural streams is allowed to endure. Serious attempts to understand the other do not exhaust themselves in mere laissez-faire. Those who are tolerant permit that with which they cannot actually agree and against which they also preserve a moral distance. It would be a mistake to assume that the practice of tolerance would end differences of opinions. Or, that it would actually lead to a relativization of one's own position. Tolerance exists where one permits the validity of another conviction, previously not deemed acceptable, without surrendering the validity of one's own conviction. And if one respects a differing opinion, this does not mean one will not attempt to have the holder of that opinion abandon it or cease acting in ways which one, for good reasons, judges to be inappropriate. A truly tolerant person decides how to deal with positions taken within a 'foreign culture' that one considers to be wrong, by subsuming them under the same measurement of what one might expect or view as reasonable as one had experienced it through decades of cultural and religious conflicts with those who are part of one's 'own culture'. That does not include discriminatory or criminal practices such as anti-semitism. Yet it must be noted that such items are not the responsibility of dialogue organisers and religious experts; rather they are the task of judges, mediators, or, if necessary, the state attorneys.

V. Thou Shalt Not Hold Thine Own Belief In Low Esteem

Religious faith and religious convictions are by their very nature not negotiable. Therefore, with all the interest and openness in today's religious supermarket, there can be no serious religious encounter without some estrangement and worry taking place. Whoever wants to draw close must first of all be pushed back. (Whoever wants to be a friend must first discover in himself the stranger.) It is my impression that religious persons seldom seek the dialogue, but rather the confirmation of their own, frail faith. They might be better off if they conduct the intrareligious dialogue with a pastor, friend, or someone unknown to them, rather than the interreligious exchange in front of a large audience. Certainly, in front of two thousand people or more one can search for common convictions which unite all religions – the 'World Ethos' is a well known formula – but dialogue ultimately revolves around the incompatible, frightening, uncomfortable within other religions. That remains stubborn and cannot be broken into small

bits, cannot be made soft and amenable. When Pope John Paul II gave a clear rejection to a shared Mass in his Eucharist Encyclical it caused great anger. I cannot claim to make theological judgements, but in my opinion 'oecumene' implies a working together of religions, which remain distant from one another and do not melt together into one identity. The sociologist Niklas Luhmann assigned religion into the actual category of those who define themselves and are able to give themselves a form. This means that religion truly defines itself and excludes everything that is incompatible with it. But what happens, for example, when the issue concerns other religions, or heathens, or evil, or the *civitas terrena* (the present world)? Selfdefinition is only possible if one includes that which is excluded, if one uses a negative correlate. The system is only autonomous if it has a share in controlling what it is not.

VI. Thou Shalt Not Do Too Much Good!

Often, dialogue builds upon the premise that one cannot have enough of it, and that one must meet again as soon as possible. In general, most times the same dialogue partners meet and at the end of the conference take out their diaries and exchange their cards. In my experience, this leads to a bureaucratizing of dialogue; i.e., the task is delegated to those already known for their inclination to fulfil the plans on hand. The key word then is not 'more of the same' but 'achieve a result'. Yet it is only when dialogues again become rare that they remain fruitful and attractive.

VII. Thou Shalt Not Only Talk About God!

It makes sense to begin religious dialogues with theological questions, as long as one does not limit oneself to the transmission of the generalities and nonobligatory contents within the science of religion. Perhaps, instead of speaking for the fifteenth time about the Five Pillars of Islam, it should be possible to talk with Muslims and others about basic issues themselves. For example, the questions of life and death as they express themselves today through euthanasia, abortion, and prenatal diagnoses, with all of their urgency and with all their drama. Or, there is the architectonic structuring of the cult places within public places which has, until now, not become a general theme. Nor would one want to hear these principal and pragmatic questions always discussed by the religious virtuosos. One wants to turn to totally normal, unassigned Jewish doctors, Muslim nurses, Buddhist midwives, Christian judges, etc. One should not claim all this within the competence of religion where the

core of the matter is elsewhere, within the questions of social inequality and injustice. For many years, problems of migration have been pushed into the religious domain where something else is clearly dominant in the agenda. On the other hand, one should not act as though religion has nothing to contribute at all within multicultural societies or is only added to the agenda when there is actually the need to discuss religious differences.

VIII. Thou Shalt Enter Into the Turmoil of the Actual World

Interreligious dialogues appear often similar to summit meetings of heads of state or elitist circles like the Forum for World Trade in Davos. Actually, the bureaucratic type of dialogue has already crawled into those nests. Behind closed doors, one verbalizes a World Ethos; meanwhile, in the suburbs, indifference, prejudice on both sides, and not infrequently open hatred towards those of a different faith, grow apace. In addition, the limitation of the dialogue (or, here, trialogue of the Abrahamic religions) is to be questioned. This approach creates an official religious cartel and introduces a hierarchy which lifts the churches per se above the sects. In this way, it sets itself against a worldwide trend in which the 'cultic milieu' grows, which probably represents current religious needs better than the churches of the past. In any case, the religious–political dialogue cannot ignore the turmoil of the real world. One must have a critical confrontation with the quasipolitical functions which religion has achieved in public – I view this in this Kirchentag with a certain uneasiness, even with some envy. It is so easy for the churches present here to assemble hundreds of thousands to para- and quasipolitical discussions. And how difficult it is for political parties or nongovernmental organizations to mobilise a few hundred to collect advice for development and ecological problems! Here, I can follow commentaries which recommend to religious communities and churches that they return to their basic tasks. At this time, I find nothing more suspicious than the form of interreligious alliances which occupy themselves with religious rights in the U.S.A. The neoconservatives and fundamentalists from all camps are assembled into an unholy alliance and exercise an enormous pressure upon the American democracy. This leads us to the penultimate commandment:

IX. Thou Shalt Not Be Politically Correct in Thy Speech

A religious exchange of opinions often has explicit political goals; i.e., it is ersatz politics, where one at times talks about religion where a political dis-

cussion would be more appropriate. In this fashion, religious quarrels are politicized and dramatized, precisely in terms of Hartington's famous 'clash of civilizations'. However, religious dialogues are not suited to act as lightning rods for neglect and failures within the political sphere. An example of this is Muslim religious education in Germany. It does not break down due to a lack of religious understanding but, above all, because of judgements that one takes over uncritically out of the area of the protection of the constitution. Finally:

X. Thou Must Constantly Examine and Reexamine Thine Own Actions

Dialogues are so deeply desired that they are considered sacrosanct. Only rarely are they examined on the basis of their achievements. So often no other criterion is needed than 'it was good that we have finally talked about it'. In this way, dialogues only feed a discourse machine, which is satisfied by its mere existence. Just like well meant political programmes, like the fight against right wing radicalism, so religious dialogues must also undergo a critical evaluation: expenditure and gain have to stand in a proper and reasonable relationship. Which events are meaningful; which departments and appointees have to be created for this; how much money is available?

Conclusion

We have forced, asymmetrical, lazy, pseudotolerant, superficial, redundant, elitist, politically correct and unevaluated dialogues – what happened to anything positive? The function of the dialogue is rather the establishing of difference instead of locating the superficial similarities. One can take a further step. Dialogues should really evoke missionary ambitions and one should convince those of other beliefs to recognize the advantages of our own faith. Naturally, this does not mean conversion with fire and sword, but a quiet and engaged selfexamination by looking into the mirror of the other. Nor does this necessarily imply all others. Therefore, the place of dialogue is not so much the podium illuminated with spotlights, nor the exaggerated and artificially warmed up polarization through roleplay structures; instead, above all, it is the intimate discussion with another, the little circle of believers, in the form of a religious openness, which differs from political arenas and does so intentionally.

Within the political public sphere we try to establish the game rules of a pluralistic democracy. That is the place where the relationship to the Muslims in Europe and within Islamic societies comes primarily into view. That the

relationship to political Islam in the battle against terrorism needs to be handled with particular sensitivity is clear. Within the actual situation, sensitivity does not necessarily require that one censor oneself in a moment when phenomena and positions are revealed that demand a clear opposition and rejection on our part. Even after 11 September 2001, a certain naivety, ignorance or sheer relativism still exercise their rule. A position is established that proclaims itself as dialogue, but in reality serves to move the conflict towards an indefinite postponement. Such tactics of avoidance are the fear that one could fall back into a type of colonialism and are strengthened by one's colossal uncertainty about one's own standpoint, including one's religious position. This limitation of political openness and honesty is, sadly, supported by the organizations fighting for civil rights. In the past, they properly engaged in combating the denunciations of antireligious or atheistic positions that were accused of blasphemy. They fought against the church organizations that claimed a monopoly in their commentaries on Christianity. Now, however, they often collapse when dealing with supposed insults towards non-European religions.

The prime example of such a case is still the opportunist reaction of Western as well as Arabic intellectuals and organizations as they dealt with the unholy fatwa against Salman Rushdie's novel *The Satanic Verses*. One formed a protecting wall around a religion claimed to be helpless against attacks. Actually, out of false consideration for the religious community, one gave no protection against intolerance and indoctrination to those individuals striving for autonomy within that community. However, whoever declares silence to be the active foundation of dialogues would be best advised not to begin to speak.

I hope I have not stepped on anyone's toes. If so, let me try to reconcile you through an interreligious dialogue of a humorous nature. It concerns itself with everyday life and with the ultimate questions. A Christian priest, an ayatollah, and a rabbi participate in discussing the question, When does life begin? The priest's answer is: 'at conception'. The ayatollah says: 'with the birth of the child'. 'When does life begin?' ponders the rabbi. He answers himself: 'when the children leave home, and the dog dies'.