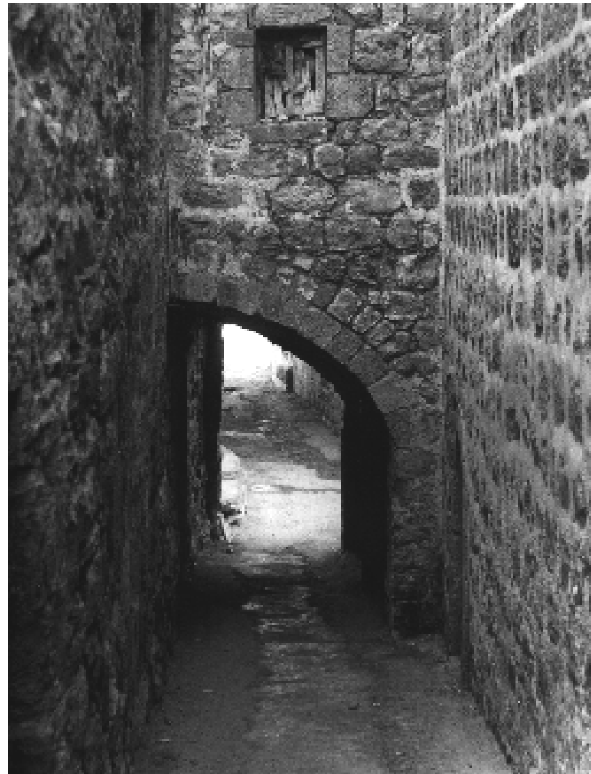
The Elijah Interfaith Institute &
The University of Scranton

Scranton Meeting Paper Summaries

Towards a Jewish Theology of World Religions

An Inaugural Conference



Paper Summaries

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Project Overview

- Alon Goshen-Gottstein

Interreligious relations are often a deep challenge for religious traditions. Most, if not all, religious traditions have historically been in tension, competition and even war with other religious traditions. The present era of interreligious relations assumes new paradigms must reign. Religions must collaborate, accept and respect each other. We have come to realize that world peace is to a large extent dependent on the mutual acceptance and collaboration between world religions. In the context of interreligious relations, religions often try to bring out the best in their tradition and to show a public face that meets the challenge and circumstance of dialogue. However, without addressing in a deep and systematic way the core attitudes that each religion espouses towards the other, such engagement in interfaith relations risks being superficial at best and double-talk at worst. If interreligious relations are to be genuine they must ultimately go beyond the formal show of good will and engage religious traditions in their theological core. Only through the study of the historical riches and attitudes of traditions, the history of their relationship to other religious traditions and the challenges and opportunities that past models present to today's traditions can genuine interreligious understanding advance.

This year the Catholic Church celebrates 40 years to the composition of *Nostra Aetate*, one of the major documents of the Second Vatican council. This document is a theological reassessment of the Catholic Church's position to world religions in general, with special reference to a complete reconsideration of its historical attitude to Judaism. In honor of this anniversary, several symposia and conferences will be held worldwide, including in Rome and in Jerusalem. *Nostra Aetate* provides a model of the type of theological questioning and assessment that is a necessary correlate of the advance of interreligious relations.

To date, no other religion has invested as much thought into the theological significance for a religion's own self understanding of the engagement in interfaith dialogue as the Christian Church, as witnessed not only in *Nostra Aetate*, but also in the works of many other theologians, representing other strands of Christianity. Such

reflective work must be undertaken by all religious traditions if serious advance is to be made in interreligious relations. If not, the unexamined portions of traditions may continue to nourish streams of thought that will undermine efforts at understanding, growth and peace, through dialogue between world religions.

As an institution devoted to interreligious reflection, study and dialogue, the Elijah Interfaith Institute is committed to advancing such introspective reflection among all religions with which it works. Some important steps in this direction have been taken in relation to both Judaism and Islam, and plans are underway to engage other religious traditions in such systematic examination as well.

Recently the ground was laid for launching a multi-year conversation, which we hope will capture the attention of large audiences within Jewish religious, intellectual and educational leadership. The ground was laid at a conference hosted by the Chair of Jewish Studies at the University of Scranton in June 2005. Thanks go to Prof. Marc Shapiro for his invaluable partnership in this initial stage of launching the program. Twenty five thinkers from the United States, Israel and Europe attended the Scranton conference. A still wider circle of thinkers, scholars and religious leaders who are deeply interested in the project, but were unable to attend this meeting, are involved in the project. The goal of the Scranton conference was to raise the initial issues that Judaism faces in an attempt to begin a process of historical study and theological self-examination, necessary as an accompaniment to genuine involvement in interreligious relations. Scholars hailing from the disciplines of Jewish history, philosophy, halacha, kabbalah and education collectively set an agenda for ongoing conversation within the Jewish people regarding the significance and method of involvement in interreligious work and in Judaism's view of other world religions. Beyond setting the agenda, one may recognize in the participants of the Scranton meeting a core group that is committed to pursuing further the agenda of developing a contemporary Jewish theology of world religions, or perhaps more appropriately: Jewish theologies, thereby acknowledging the inevitable diversity of opinion that must characterize such an endeavor. Participants represented the various streams and denominations of Judaism, thereby pointing both to a shared sense of urgency, felt by members of all streams, and

to the possibility of common conversations, even if not always common conclusions, between members of different streams of Judaism on this vital issue.

It is fair to summarize the urgency of the subject matter, as expressed by participants in the conference, as nothing short of its relevance to the significance of the continued existence of the Jewish people. Our ability to state our relationship to the religious other is also our ability to state our own sense of uniqueness and the purpose for the continuity of the Jewish people and religion. Thus, the theological work necessary for better understanding of the other is, in reality, nothing short of a consideration of the continued purpose of Judaism, as seen in the broader framework of its relations with and attitudes to other world religions. Thus, what may seem as a purely theological or philosophical exercise was deemed by participants to be of great urgency for the agendas of Jewish survival, continuity, education and leadership. All these are necessarily affected in major ways by the question of Judaism's relations to other religions and that question is in the present day and age, as in many other periods, a pressing issue, and not a tangential consideration.

The most important decision to have come out of the Scranton conference is that the themes and concerns raised at that conference must be shared with broad audiences within the Jewish community. While there is a plan for extensive research and reflection, to be carried out over the coming years, on a variety of core issues relating to Judaism's attitudes to world religions, the Scranton conference already provides a basis for engaging a variety of learning communities with the agenda developed at Scranton. We hope in the coming weeks to begin sustained conversations with such learning communities around the Scranton conference papers. As a preliminary step in such a process, the abstracts of the Scranton conference are here offered. An overview of these abstracts suggests some of the core issues and concerns of the project. While the discussions at the conference were often the highlight of the meeting, we begin our sharing with the broader public by sharing these abstracts of the Scranton meeting. Discussions will shortly be available in audio form and full papers, providing the basis for people-wide conversations, will also follow. This modest collection of abstracts is thus a fore-taste of the fuller versions of these papers, as well as of new materials we hope to develop in coming years around these crucial issues. In all phases of this

project, we seek to cultivate awareness of issues, genuine discussion and open reflection, irrespective of the attitude taken by the individual thinker. Our purpose is to set the issue of a contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions on the broader intellectual agenda of the Jewish people. We trust that in launching this project, the appropriate forms of response to the issues posed by this process will emerge.

"Towards A Contemporary Theology of the Religious Other: What are the Core Issues?"

- Alon Goshen-Gottstein

There are various factors on account of which the articulation of a contemporary Jewish Theology of World Religions is a need of the times, and a matter of great urgency. These include the following:

A. The de facto involvement of large segments of the Jewish people in relations with other religions and their practitioners, without appropriate guidance from religious and intellectual leadership.
B. The de facto involvement of Jewish religious and intellectual leadership in interreligious collaboration and dialogue, without adequate reflection on the meaning of such activity, upon its challenge to our own tradition or upon the resources that are used in such frameworks.
C. Judaism's own self understanding and mission are at a point of crisis. Jewish uniqueness and identity are threatened not only through various existential and demographic considerations, but also through the loss of ultimate significance of the meaning of purpose of Jewish uniqueness. The ability to address the meaning of Judaism's existence in relation to other religions can make a significant contribution to these concerns.

A reexamination of Judaism's historical attitudes to other religions is made necessary in view of the following considerations:

1. The lack of any systematic statement of Judaism's positions to world religions.
2. The significant changes in historical circumstances from the times at which some of the major historical articulations of Judaism's relations to other religions were initially articulated. Such changes include both change in historical circumstance, philosophical understanding and the changing understanding of Judaism and its purpose by other religions.

3. There is no broad overview of Judaism's attitude to all world religions, and the only religions about whom much is said are the so-called Abrahamic religions.
4. The changing views of humanity and the increasing sense of the global-village demand a fresh statement of Judaism's role in the global village.
5. The establishment of the state of Israel places a unique responsibility for assessing Judaism's perspective on other religions from a context significantly different from that which shaped Jewish attitudes for millennia. This may be understood both as historical fact and as a statement of theological significance.

The most significant challenge for a contemporary Jewish theology is to articulate the meaning of Jewish particularity. Theologically, two doctrines combine to create this sense of particularity - election and revelation. Both are seminal and both need to be taken account of in the context of a contemporary Jewish theology of world religions. Both notions must be safeguarded, while interpreted and understood in ways that enable the development of attitudes to world religions that respond adequately to contemporary challenges.

There are four major areas that are relevant for future discussion, and all four in some way reflect the central concerns of Jewish particularity as spelled out above.

A. *Avoda Zara*, roughly translated as idolatry. This is probably the most charged notion that has governed large parts of Jewish discourse towards other religions over the millennia. A careful assessment of the term is necessary. There is room for concern that technical aspects of the issue have overshadowed its ultimate spiritual purpose. Furthermore, a variety of options exist historically within tradition for dealing with this matter, yet many of those options are relegated to the margins, without serious discussion of their merits. Conflicting attitudes reign and there is no careful study of other traditions on their own terms in light of the concerns of *Avoda Zara*, nor of the suitability of models developed in relation to Christianity to other world religions. Ultimately, the concerns of *Avoda*

Zara must be situated between the concern for proper theology and our concern for maintaining clear identity markers, one of which becomes *Avoda Zara*.

B. Revelation and Truth. Careful thought must be given to the question of whether truth is the appropriate way of addressing religions in general and to the nature of religious truth. Is revelation to be understood in terms of truth and must the consequence of such an understanding be that only one religion can be true? There are a number of ways of understanding both truth and revelation so that they do not foreclose the possibility of other religious systems maintaining their own validity.

C. The legitimacy of other religious systems. Several statements in the Talmud and in later authorities, suggest that the very legitimacy of other religious systems, for their own believers, cannot be taken for granted. An examination of the historical and theological basis for such understandings must be undertaken, along with a careful study of the message that Judaism currently offers to the non-Jew. In particular, it should be noted that the seven noachide commandments provide only a basic moral frame, but not a basic religious worldview. Does Judaism have a religious vision for humanity short of its present or ultimate conversion to Judaism? This discussion involves us with a consideration of the role of ethnicity in the Jewish religion and the possibility that the teaching of Judaism is meant to advance the spiritual life of a people, rather than to provide an exclusive teaching for all of humanity.

D. The threat to Jewish identity and continuity. Such threat is twofold. On the one hand, the fear that recognition of the other might undermine our own sense of identity and purpose. Secondly, the felt need for setting up strong boundaries between ourselves and others as a means of establishing our own sense of separateness and identity. The challenge is to establish identity not upon the difference with others, but upon the uniqueness of our relationship with God.

Throughout the various sections, it is argued that a relational understanding, highlighting the particular relationship that Israel has with God, should serve as the alternative to the more philosophical and hence exclusivist position that is commonly considered as a Jewish view. A relational view is closer to the biblical roots of the covenant and permits multiple relationships, without detracting from the ultimate purpose and import of the unique Jewish relationship with God.

"Conceptions of the Other: Gender, Philosophy, and Theology"

- Hava Tirosh-Samuelson

This paper argues that to articulate a Jewish theology of world religion the project must gain clarity about different conceptions of the Other in twentieth-century philosophy. There are three main approaches to otherness. The first approach takes the term 'other' pejoratively to connote dissimilarity, alienation, marginalization, and oppression. This negative usage is developed most systematically by Jean Paul Sartre on the basis of Hegel's philosophy. In Sartre's philosophy the Other is viewed negatively as the enemy of the Self who threatens to annihilate the Self. As Sartre put it "hell is other people." The second approach uses the term 'other' positively as the source of ethics and the locus of care, compassion, concern, and above all, responsibility. In this positive sense, the Other is not only the recipient of nurturing, love, and care, but also the trace of the divine, the Face that can only be encountered, but never thematized. Emannuel Levinas is the main contributor to the positive understanding of the Other and his views were deliberately developed as a critique of the totalizing tendencies of western philosophy. Finally, according to the third approach, the Self is always relational but the Other can be either treated as an object, a means to another end (I-It relations), or as a partner in a genuine dialogue (I-Thou relations). Buber developed the dialogical paradigm in his analysis of relations between persons and Hans-Georg Gadamer extended it further to texts, works of arts and traditions. This paper considers Sartre, Levinas, and Gadamer on the meaning of otherness and the feminist engagement with them.

The various conceptions of the Other play important role in feminist philosophy, since women have been treated as the perennial Other. Feminist theorists have engaged each of these approaches but without reaching consensus, because feminists speak in many voices and differ deeply in their diagnosis of the problem of women and the prescribed solutions. Nonetheless, feminists generally agree that in traditional patriarchal society women have been treated as object rather than subject and that they were viewed as that which the (male) Self is not. Some feminists have charged that even the positive construal of the Other in the philosophy of Levinas and his use of "the

feminine" as the trope of the Absolute Other is no bonus to women; it is only a continuation of the same tendency characteristic of male-centered philosophy. The Self is always defined by men who speak from their located perspective but universalize it as the norm of humanity. The paper analyzes the feminist engagements with Sartre (mainly Simone de Beauvoir), Levinas (mainly Luce Irigaray), and Gadamer (mainly Georgia Warnke) in order to shed light on feminist reflections on otherness and difference.

How relevant is the philosophical discourse on the Other, including the feminist engagements with male philosophers, to the project of constructing a Jewish theology of world religions? The answer lies first in the claim that attention to the category of gender and familiarity with the feminist discourse on difference and otherness can help us clarify how we understand the meaning of being Jewish. The feminist wrestling with the difference between men and women parallels Jewish internal debates about the place of biology (call it "birth," or "blood" or "kinship") in Jewish collective identity in relationship to religion and culture. This issue is especially pertinent to situation in Israel today, where the internal political debate about the attitudes toward the Palestinians involve national/ethnic difference as well as to religious/cultural difference.

Second, the encounter with feminist philosophy compels us to think about the body as a source of difference and otherness. In all human societies the male body has been taken to be the norm of the human. The woman is understood as a deviation from the norm or as a deformed, underdeveloped version of the norm. The similarity between how women were perceived and how Jewish circumcised males were viewed by non-Jews, especially in the Christian West, cannot escape us. The Jewish circumcised male was viewed as less than normal, as a feminized aberration of nature. The tendency to feminize the Jewish male in order to denigrate the Jews as a collective should lead to ponder: why is it that denigration of a group is done by portraying the group in feminine categories? Do we have a similar situation in Jewish sources? Do they treat non-Jews in feminine terms? If so, which terms are used, and if not, why not? In short, we can learn a lot about the conception of the non-Jewish other by looking at the treatment of the Jewish woman, the other within.

Women in patriarchal Judaism fulfilled the same function toward men that Jews fulfill toward non-Jews, especially, the Christian, in Western culture. By that I do not only mean that Christians regarded Jews as socially inferior, as women are to men, but also that the very continued existence of the Jews rebuffed or challenged Christian self-understanding. As much as the Jewish female reminds the Jewish male not to generalize about being Jewish on the basis of male norms and not to identify the ideal Jew with the Jewish male, so does the Jew reminds the Christian not to generalize about humanity and mankind on the basis of Christian norms, identifying the ideal human being with the ideal Christian.

Third, the encounter with feminist thought is a particular angle from which to view the challenge of religious pluralism to contemporary Judaism. I understand this challenge to mean a **resistance to sameness** and a commitment to preserve difference and distinction without submitting the one who is different to marginalization, exclusion, and oppression? Even though feminist philosophy resists generalization, I believe that all feminists agree on one point: feminists want women to be **both equal and different at the same time**. Against this feminist vision, one could say that even if this goal is logically coherent, why should we take equality to be a Jewish value? The value of equality found neither in nature, nor in the sacred texts of Judaism. So where does it come from? There is no logical necessity to the claim that all human beings are equal. And yet, this is precisely what the modern condition as framed by the French Revolution and the American Revolution is all about. As modern Jews we cannot but accept that value if we wish to see ourselves as part of the modern world. Over the past few decades Jewish feminists have demanded equality within Judaism and all strands of modern Judaism have found that demand to be morally compelling (at least to some extent), even though the tradition does not speak about men and women as equal and clearly assigns distinctive roles to each of the sexes.

The feminist wrestling with the value of equality and the challenge that this value poses to the Jewish tradition can help us construct a Jewish theology of world religions. As Jews we have tenaciously insisted on our otherness, and we resisted repeated attempts to eliminate our distinctiveness, be it through conversion, neglectful

assimilation, or physical annihilation. But if preservation of difference is a Jewish value, are we ready to defend the otherness of other religions with the same tenacity, even when such otherness includes a mission to convert us? Is it a Jewish value to allow the Christian to be a Christian, and as such to evangelize Jews? Furthermore, are we ready to see the non-Jew as a religious equal? I will be very surprised if this group answers the question in the affirmative.

The engagement with Sartre, Levinas, and Gadamer brings to the fore three main lessons. First, from Sartre and de Beauvoir the main message is the danger of objectification of the Other that we commit knowingly and unknowingly. The Jewish tradition abounds with hierarchical anthropologies in which the Jew is not only ontologically different from the non-Jew, the Jew is also ontologically superior to non-Jews. This is the view of Judah Halevi, Kabbalah, and Hasidism which I frankly find most disturbing in part because this hierarchical thinking is also applied to the "Other within," namely, to the Jewish woman. The Jewish woman too is viewed as inherently inferior to the Jewish male (for example, by Maimonides and the entire Jewish Aristotelian tradition), because it is the male who defines the norm and standards of what it means to be an ideal Jew, and by extension, an ideal human being. The feminist demand for equality and justice, to which de Beauvoir contributed more than any other woman in the 20th century, is a salient reminder about the genuine (but hopefully not insurmountable) difficulty that contemporary Judaism faces as it attempts to take equality seriously in contrast to the tradition that enshrines hierarchy.

The encounter with Levinas and his feminist critics is relevant to us because he reminds us not to reduce, capture, or flatten out the specificity of the Other. As Jews we have insisted on our particularity and otherness refusing to be assimilated into the same, namely, the Christian West, through conversion. For this refusal we suffered sustained persecution which gave us the moral power to speak truth to power and to challenge the totalizing agenda of majority culture, as Levinas has challenged Heidegger and his interpretation of philosophy. The insistence on our uniqueness, particularism, and otherness has enabled us to survive, but it has not removed the ethical challenge that faces us today. If Levinas' philosophy of the Other is true, we too must respect and preserve the otherness of other religions; we should not expect them to be like us, nor

give up their uniqueness and difference. The same respect to the difference of the Other within should be accorded to the Other without. How to do so in practice is a huge challenge, given the evangelical and missionizing self-understanding of Christianity.

Finally, the hermeneutical model articulated by Gadamer seems to me the most adequate response to the challenge, both in terms of acknowledging difference of women within Judaism and in terms of dialoging with the Other without. The Gadamerian model of hermeneutical understanding offers a way to enter a genuine dialogue with the past which is based on openness and generosity of spirit. The genuine dialogue with the Other as Gadamer understood it involves an attempt to respond to what is said by trying to go deeper into the very issue that provides the basis for the conversation itself. This is what it means to interpret, namely, to critically and creatively engage the past rather than viewing it as a repository to be arbitrarily drawn on. A genuine dialogue with the past means that we acknowledge that we share some concerns with that past, but without forgetting that there are also significant differences to reckon with. The past continues to speak to us and has its effect on us in the present, even when the present is different in significant ways form the past. Such dialogue involves the prospect of both limited continuity and limited novelty. This is the model that enables us to deal with the status of women in Judaism as well as with attitudes toward the religious Other.

A genuine dialogue with Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism requires the same kind of openness and awareness of difference as the dialogue with our own Jewish past. If we adopt the hermeneutical model for our interaction with religious others, we will need to have a deep understanding of their horizons, in ways which may not be comfortable to all Jews or Judaica scholars. I trust that the conversations ahead will enable us to begin the understanding of conceptions of the Other in Judaism, be it the Jewish female or the non-Jew and I pray that we have the courage proceed with the project for the following five years.

"The Violence of Neutrality in Interfaith Relations"

- Meir Sendor

Contemporary efforts at interfaith relations often adopt a neutral vantage point conditioned by historical relativism as a framework for discussion, and proceed by attempting to find commonalities of theology and practice between estranged religious groups, to smooth the way to mutual conciliation. Such an approach, falling prey to the distortions of cultural relativism and religious syncretism, may actually shortcircuit and ultimately doom the possibility of real interfaith relationship from the start. Applying the studies of Levinas, Derrida and Ricouer on alterity, especially regarding the deception of the neutral viewpoint, this paper attempts to develop a more authentic and effective model and methodology for interfaith relationships.

Levinas' critique of the neutral stance is one of the momentous contributions of his seminal work *Totality and Infinity.* He identifies the reductive tendency in Hellenistic thought as a process of imperialist domination: to explain and thereby subsume all that is other, all difference, under a totality that represents a tyranny of sameness. This process designates neutrality as a privileged position from which to view all beings, a reductive region in which all differences are presumed to be resolved, in which the general and collective overpowers the individual existent. History, too, is conscripted into the service of this ultimately materialist agenda: when every person and every action is explained, accounted for, put in place by a linear, dialectic and reductive causality, the effect is to dissolve the individual into the neutral sameness of the whole. The impact of this pervasive, neutralizing habit of Western thought is not limited to the Academy. Derrida considers the totalizing oppression of this Hellenistic mindset at the ontological level as the origin of all political oppression and totalitarianism. It is also at the root of what Taylor calls the "naturalistic fallacy" that gives rise to contemporary Western liberal thought and its moral and cultural relativism: the notion of the self as an anonymous individual, an isolated, faceless point in neutral nature, degrading our sense of justice to the merely distributive and egalitarian.

This neutralism, when adopted in interfaith discussions, endangers any chance for honest encounter by obscuring the irreducible otherness of the other person, tempting

us to conceptualize and thematize the other in terms that render him or her more familiar, overlooking differences. It leads to misrepresentations of one's own faith and the faith of the other. Examples can be drawn from recent Jewish writings on Christianity, from works such as *Christianity in Jewish Terms*. In one article, the Eucharist is analyzed in essentially Jewish categories, ignoring the principle of transubstantiation which lies at its heart and which is inconveniently alien to Judaism, drawn largely from pagan mystery religions of the Roman Empire. In another article the distinction between incarnation in Christianity and immanence in Judaism is collapsed, based perhaps on a misapplication of the terminology of Irigeray, obscuring the uniquely nuanced, delicate and complex ways in which Jews try to navigate the challenge of the apperception of the reality of divine presence in the context of divine transcendence.

The antidote to these distortions is a more deconstructive historical method that highlights details and provides context and sharpens our sense of the differences as well as similarities between religious groups, providing a fuller sense of Jewish tradition, with its principles of exclusion as well as inclusion, and a correspondingly fuller sense of other religions. If we release ourselves from the neutral vantage point and the imposition of a forced theological and cultural sameness employing truncated views of one's own religion and the religion of the other, the possibility of a real awareness and authentic relationship with the other as other opens up.

Derrida proposes that the more appropriate paradigm for interfaith relations is hospitality. This is not just a model among models. Hospitality is the authentic translation of the exteriority of consciousness into the realm of relationship. At the heart of hospitality lies a paradox: hospitality is not achieved if it is extended only to the familiar, or even to one welcomed as though they were family. Real hospitality is a welcome that respects the other as him or her self, not because they can be rendered like oneself. In true hospitality the other is welcomed transcendently, not on the basis of some cultural commonality, but because I recognize in him his infinite otherness, his humanity. Derrida probes more deeply into the inner relationship of hospitality, in which host and guest are hostage to each other in responsibility for each other. He suggests that there is a unique Abrahamic hospitality characterized by "substitution," an acceptance and welcome of the other as other, as not oneself, and a giving of oneself in

taking full responsibility for this stranger, not to convert him into oneself but just as he is. The place of Judaism in interfaith hospitality is pivotal: it is the destiny of the Jewish people to be the stranger for others and to find all others strange. In this sense, interfaith relations is a worthy field in which to discover true hospitality, in which accomodations of theology are not only unnecessary but encumber and endanger the possibility of a sincere offer of home hospitality to the really other in their pure humanity.

Ricouer emphasizes the reciprocal impact of alterity, and argues for a respectful responsibility for the other which enriches, even constructs, one's own conscience and self awareness. The model that emerges from these interrelated studies is of an interfaith relationship based on hospitality we offer from the fullness of our home, in which we take responsibility for each other, calling each other to our ownmost selves and challenging each other to find, within the best of our selves and the best of our religious communities, the true consciousness of our mutually transcendent humanity.

"Can the Other be Anything but a Person?"

- Stanislaw Krajewski

The 'Otherness' as distinct from the 'otherness' is a philosophical notion it has a theological flavor. Experience with philosophical concepts of the philosophers of dialogue like Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, Emmanuel Lévinas, and also of those in the phenomenological, hermeneutical, existentialist traditions, suggests that it is reasonable to *assume* that one can apply them to the meeting of another religion.

Thesis I. Beyond the Naïve View

Let us assume it is possible to go beyond the naïve view of what another religion can mean for me.

We shall attempt various ways to acknowledge the otherness of another religion, but we should constantly come back to one basic point, the one we started with. We never encounter religions. We come into relations with descriptions of religions, which clearly are far cry from the real thing, and sometimes with more genuine manifestations of religion, like texts, buildings, rituals; all of them are important but above all we encounter individual human beings who profess a religion.

There is one specifically Jewish approach that I find of interest: we are the *mamlechet kohanim*, the priests. The priests never exist just for themselves. The fact that Christians, and, perhaps, to some extent Muslims, subscribe to Jewish understanding of the priestly role of Israel, is important. However, we can say that from the perspective of Judaism that role is not dependent on anyone else's approval. Whatever they do, we can always ask the question: How should a priest behave vis-à-vis the rest of society, the non-priests? Well, he can either turn back to them or to face them. Literally, and also metaphorically.

According to Levinas, the other presents a new issue, neglected by traditional epistemology and ontology. "The realm of intelligibility … deprives the Other of his alterity by reducing it to the same."

Thesis II. No Common Denominator

There is no common denominator for religions.

How can the acceptable religions be defined? My proposal is as follows: a religion will be considered *acceptable* (for the purpose of deep interfaith dialogue) if it can boast at least 7 generations of life, or the continuous transmission from generation to generation. This requirement I would take as necessary, but there is little reason it can be also a sufficient condition. What is more, I guess that no formal condition would be enough. After all, we would be hesitant to accept as a partner religion a cult that currently requires human sacrifices. So let us add: a religion will be considered *fully acceptable* if, in addition, it functions with socially acceptable consequences. To avoid the necessarily unsatisfactory business of definitions, a simpler solution to the problem of singling out the religions acceptable for dialogue, or at least for the dialogue with Judaism, is possible, namely, to make simply a list of acceptable religions. Then we would have as expected Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and also Jainism, Sikhism, and so on up to Shintoism, Mormonism and Bahaism.

I strongly feel that Judaism is distinct from the other items on the list in such a fundamental way that putting it together in one list is misleading. Despite all the common elements, aspects, patterns, Judaism, or should I rather say Jewishness, is sui generis. Others say the same, so let us try to be generous:

Thesis III. The Universal Uniqueness

Accept the possibility of every religion's uniqueness.

On the one hand, we often repeat that Judaism is independent of other religions currently alive, notably of the "daughter" religions. On the other hand, it is a historical fact or at least the way the past came to be understood very early in the history of Judaism that from the beginning the main objective of Judaism was to distinguish itself from the other religions by rejecting idol worship. We still do the same. Looking at other religions we ask, Are they idol-worshippers or not? Do they worship false gods? And now we can add: Do they worship false gods or do they turn to the true God in their own way? If so, then even if this is the way different from ours, unacceptable to us, it may still be of value for us, even of ultimate value. This last possibility did not exist

when Judaism came into being. Confrontation was unavoidable. The question about idolatry may be today the same as millennia ago but the context is vastly different. For a long time, in much of the world the problem of idolatry is understood along the Jewish lines. There are differences but the new general understanding of the problem necessitates new understanding of the meaning of idolatry for contemporary Jews.

One can make an idol of one's own religion, even of the religion that so strongly rejects idolatry as does Judaism. A. J. Heschel was teaching that as well as F. Rosenzweig. The positive religiousness, based on faith and faithfulness, doesn't need the rejection of the value of other religions. We can respect them, without compromising our principles. The respectful approach to others can be Judaism's way of showing self-respect.

Thesis IV. Interdependence

My religion's self-understanding depends on my view of other religions.

Group identity can be either negative, created by being against the others, or positive, created by the appreciation of some aspects of the group, its mission and its history. The enemies, too often real, reinforced the feeling of common fate, and the negatively defined Jewishness. However, now as always, the core of Jewish identity has been positive. The philosophical counterpart of the view of the other assumed in the negative identity is that the 'other' is a stranger, he/she cannot understand me, and I cannot communicate with him/her. To Levinas, "the Other is not primarily a threat or even a rival. … Levinas reinvests with value precisely those elements of the existential world-view which seem to Sartre most negative."

The act of knowing as seen from the dialogical philosophy perspective is something sinister. To know is to comprehend, englobe, to assimilate to my world, thus to myself; knowledge has an imperialist character, totalizing, even a totalitarian one.

Thesis V. Beyond Knowledge

Knowledge of another religion is not the (only) aim.

The approach that assumes the ignoring of knowledge is perhaps particularly easy for Judaism. Judaism's tradition of turning inside is very strong. In fact FR made it a

defining characteristic of the Jewish way of being. The lack of missionary attitude coupled with the feeling that other religions are out there, makes it easier to relate to them in a way respecting their integrity than is the case with missionary religions like Christianity. I must note that this quality is present at a price. Namely, from the Jewish perspective it is easy to completely turn back at other religions, and what is more, at other people. This tendency has been present among Jews. It is disrespectful.

The I-Thou relation opens the view to the formerly ignored sphere of existence, the interval, the between, Zwischen. The between is not neutral, but is accessible only to the two participants in the encounter.

(Hypo)Thesis VI. The Inter-religious Dimension

To acknowledge the presence of the specific inter-religious dimension, the Between?

One of the main theses of EL is the claim that the ethical comes from the asymmetrical character of the I-Thou relation, of the inter-human space. It is the vision of "*my* responsibility for the other person, without concern for reciprocity, in my call to help him gratuitously, in the asymmetry of the relation of *one* to the *other*…" To transfer it to the realm of religions seems highly dubious but for the sake of exercise we can formulate

(Tentative Hypo)Thesis VII. The Other's Highness

The Other religion is in some sense higher than mine.

We would show disrespect if we treated others as human in general, mere instances of our abstract relationship between priests and the rest of the society. Each of them has qualities that are dear to him or her. Presumably, religion is one of those. Therefore we should treat them as *our* crowd, the people who complement us in our capacity as priests, not despite their religion but together with it, if only the religion is fully acceptable (in the sense mentioned above). Even more is possible: to respect the others not despite their religion, just because we should perceive them as inseparable from their religion, but due to their religion, because we should see the value of their religiosity. To see the other religion so positively we need a highly untraditional

approach, allowing for the possibility of other covenants. This has been initiated by A. J. Heschel (who taught that no religion is an island), though there had been precursors, like Al Fayumi. The most developed attempt has been propsed by Yitz Greenberg. I guess that the Jewish way, and certainly a Jewish way, of dealing with the problem of otherness is precisely to pass from the considerations on the other religion to pondering the (possibility of the) other covenant.

"The Testimony of Jewish Life in the Shadow of Christianity"

- David Berger

Jewish attitudes toward Christianity in medieval and early modern times were molded both by foundational elements of Jewish theology and law and by the interaction of Jews and Christians in the real world.

To Jews, Christianity had usurped the name, Scripture and status of Israel and affirmed belief in a false Messiah. But the issue most critical to its theoretical standing in Jewish eyes was that of *avodah zarah*, which can roughly be defined (allowing for one major exception delineated by Maimonides) as the worship or formal recognition as God of an entity that is in fact not God. By this definition, it is very difficult to exclude Christianity—and hardly any medieval Jews did. Maimonides, crusade chroniclers, liturgical poets, and polemicists all expressed this conviction. *Sefer Hasidim* justifies the use of pejorative terms for Christian *sancta* by invoking the verse affirming that worshippers of idols should be dealt with like the idols themselves, and the Rabbis have taught that idols should be described in hostile language. Thus, such terms, widely used in Northern Europe, are inseparable from the issue of *avodah zarah*. Jews in medieval Christian Europe were surrounded by icons, which they saw as unequivocal idols. We must surely withstand the temptation to deduce from these rhetorical excesses that the assertions that Christianity is *avodah zarah* should not be taken literally. People do not martyr themselves and even kill their children over rhetorical flourishes.

The key issue both emotionally and theologically was not the abstraction called the trinity, but the worship of Jesus of Nazareth as God Incarnate. It is true that many Ashkenazic Jews no doubt saw trinitarianism as tritheism, but sophisticated Jews realized that semi-kosher and perhaps even fully kosher interpretations of the trinity were possible. The irreducible objectionability of the trinity was demonstrated precisely by its intersection with the incarnation: if only one person of the Godhead became flesh, the rhetoric of divine unity was exposed as a sham. But even without trinitarianism, Jews were repelled by incarnationism in and of itself. Meir of Narbonne affirmed that asserting the divinity of a human being is grounds for damnation, as did Yosef HaMeqanne in a discussion of the golden calf, and even when R. Yehiel of Paris

indicated under pressure that Christians can be saved, it is clear that his heart was not in it. R. Shimon b. Tzemah Duran and Abarbanel predict the collective destruction of Christians at the end of days for the sin of *avodah zarah*, though the motif of punishment for persecuting Israel is by no means ignored. At the same time, interactions in medieval society also produced cordial and sometimes friendly contacts. *Sefer Hasidim* speaks of defending a gentile against a Jewish attacker. Yosef HaMeqanne records religious debates in an often friendly atmosphere. A Jewish moneylender described in Joseph Shatzmiller's *Shylock Reconsidered* succeeded in producing several Christian character witnesses. Ivan Marcus and to some degree Israel Yuval have pointed to the impact of Christian practice on Jewish ritual. Hostility -- even revulsion -- and attraction can coexist .

Ashkenazic talmudic/ halakhic material is well known but not always properly understood. Economic pressure led Jews to reconsider Talmudic regulations restricting business dealings with idolaters, but with all the efforts to seek out a lenient position, the abiding assumption remained that Christianity is *avodah zarah* even for non-Jews. It is important to note that the affirmation that Christianity is *avodah zarah* can coexist with a positive evaluation of its function, as in the famous Maimonidean view that it is a sort of *praeparatio messianica*. Apparently, God intentionally brought about a particular kind of *avodah zarah* for a higher purpose . A famous *tosafot* in *San*. 63b affirms that even though Jesus is "another god," Christians have in mind the true Creator when they say the word "God." A few lines later, the tosafists assert that non-Jews are not prohibited to "associate," and though this comment probably applies only to the taking of an oath, many modern authorities understood it to affirm that even worship of the true God along with something else" is permissible for non-Jews.

Finally we come to R. Menahem ha-Meiri, who apparently excluded Christianity from the category of *avodah zarah* entirely and connected belief in a cosmic deity with the sort of ethical society that deserves full protection against discriminatory laws. If he really denied that Christianity is *avodah zaraz* at all, this is a unique position among rabbinic decisors, and it is very difficult to defend. Nonetheless, a variant of the argument from civilized behavior combined with the sense that Christians worship the true Creator was highly influential among some authorities, most famously R. Moses

Rivkes, author of *Be'er ha-Golah*. Modern figures more or less endorsing ha-Meiri's position on discrimination (whether or not they refer to him explicitly) include Rabbis Jacob Emden, Samson Raphael Hirsch, David Zvi Hoffmann, Abraham Isaac Kook, IsaacHerzog, Hayyim David Halevi, Yehiel Weinberg, Eliezer Waldenberg, Yosef Eliyyahu Henkin and Ahron Soloveichik.

"The Testimony of Jewish Life in the Shadow of Islam"

- Reuven Firestone

Jews had a legal standing in Islamic society, which the Jews of Christendom eventually lost. Jews had rights in Islamic courts. Jews could, at least theoretically, if male, serve as a witness (though Jews didn't count as fully as a Muslim male would). And Jews were not the only religious minority in the Islamic world as they were in most of the Christian world. There were also Christians, Zoroastrians, and of course, Muslims who were considered heretics, all of which tended to take the heat off the Jews.

In Qur'anic language, there are 5 categories of non-Muslims, roughly in the following order of preference. From the bottom:

- *Murtadd – irtidad* – apostate.
- *Mushrik – shirk* - idolater (association – שיתוף)
- *Kafir – kufr* – denier (etymologically is same as כופרים, but who deny the truth of Islam and the Prophet while not actual idolaters).
- *Ahl al-Kitab* – people of the book.
- *Munaafiq* – follower of Muhammad who are not loyal (usually translated as hypocrites, but I usually transl. as "opponents")
- *Mu'min* (*imaan*) – believer.

In the Qur'an, *Ahl al-Kitab* are usually a distinct category, but they are sometimes grouped with *kafir* or *munafiq*. But not with *mushrik* or *murtadd*, and of course not with *mu'min*.

But in later interpretive tradition, it is common for them to be associated with *mushrikun* – idolaters. The distinction between *kafir* and *mushrik* was often lost. That, of course, was not good for the Jews.

Contrary to our use of Abraham as a unifying symbol between the the "Abrahamic" faith systems, he was not a unifying symbol in the medieval period, but a symbol and tool for polemic. Paul said (ROMANS 4:13) "It was not through law that Abraham or his posterity was given the promise that the world should be his inheritance, but through the righteousness that came from faith...."

Qur'an 3 (Al-`Imran) [65]O People of Scripture! Why do you argue about Abraham, when the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until after him? Have you no sense? [66]Do you not argue about things of which you have knowledge? Why, then, argue about things of which you have no knowledge! God knows, but you know not! [67]Abraham was not a Jew nor a Christian, but was an early monotheist (*úan¥f muslim*), a Muslim [one who submits to God's will], not an idolater.

Maimonides, the Guide:

> "Because [Abraham] bore [great trials] for the sake of God, may He be exalted,[1] and preferred truth to his reputation, he was told (Gen.12:3) *I will bless those who bless you and curse him that curses you,* וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה...., *and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.* And in point of fact his activity has resulted, as we see today, in the consensus of the greater part of the population of the earth in glorifying him and considering themselves as blessed through his memory, so that even those who do not belong to his progeny pretend to descend from him." (Pines transl. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:29).

On the other hand, Maimonides sees the Abrahamic circumcision as a kind of unifier of the truly monotheistic religions of Judaism and Islam, to the exclusion of Christianity.

Guide (3:49):

> According to me, circumcision has another very important meaning, namely, that all people professing this opinion – that is, those who believe in the unity of God – should have a bodily sign uniting them, so that one who does not belong to them should not be able to claim that he was one of them, while being a stranger…It is also well known what degree of mutual love and mutual help exists between people who all bear the same sign…circumcision is a covenant made by Abraham our Father with a view to the belief in the unity of God. Thus everyone who is circumcised joins Abraham's covenant…

But (ibid) "The perfection and perpetuation of this Law (*al-shari`a*) can only be achieved if circumcision is performed in childhood…"

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[1] A Judaizing of the Islamic custom of saying *ta`ala* ("the most high") after the name of God, became in Hebrew יתברך.

Because Muslims postponed circumcision from the best time for doing it, they sometimes cancel it entirely. There is thus a hierarchy in circumcisions – symbolic of the level of unity in each's monotheism Nevertheless, Rambam claims that circumcision creates a social bond between monotheists.[2]

In Guide 2:40, he alludes to Muhammad as a false prophet who surrendered to his sexual desires, and as is well-known, in *iggeret teyman,* he refers to Muhammad as משוגע.

In Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim 1:3, Rambam refers to *beit avraham* as a kind of religious community of believers in the unity of God, though they are not Jews.

> Abraham would go and call and bring together the people from city to city and kingdom to kingdom until he arrived in the Land of Canaan. He proselytized,[3] as it is said (Gen.21:33): "and he called there in the name of the Lord, *El `olam*. When the people all gathered to him and asked him about his words, he would announce to every single one according to his understanding until he brought him (lit. returned him) to the path of truth, until thousands and tens of thousands gathered to him. These are the people of the "house of Abraham" and he instilled in their heart this great *`iqar*.

Abraham's creating a community of pre-Jewish, pre-Israelite monotheists. This notion is exactly in parallel with the polemical statement of Qur'an 3:65.

From the perspective of the History of Religion, Abraham became symbolic of authenticity and authority in monotheism. He was established as a monotheistic paradigm by the Hebrew Bible. When new monotheisms emerged in history, the smart ones engaged this authoritative symbolic paradigm for legitimization. And best of them also engaged Abraham to delegitimize the establishment religions with which they were in competition. Thus the Christian Abraham is the Abraham of faith – not law or obedience. In the Islamic Abraham you see that he is the quintessential monotheist who is the original "submitter" (read small-"m" Muslim) to God. Abraham could not have been a Jew or Christian because he existed before Judaism (Torah) and Christianity (New Test.)

[2] Perhaps he was thinking of in public baths in the Muslim world, where Christians were the odd-man out (literally).
[3] קרא (called), like Arabic *da`ah – da`wa*.

Note the same phenomenon in relation to other central religious symbols of monotheism in biblical religion: covenant, Moses, Temple, etc. There is polemic and competition over who owns the "true" (as opposed to real) item.

Observations. There is significant ambivalence toward Islam in Maimonides as well as other Jewish thinkers of the medieval Muslim world. In their and our thinking about the religious other, we are much more profoundly influenced by context than we might like to think. We have much more in common theologically and phenomenologically with Islam than with Christianity. But we have much more trouble engaging with Muslims today than we do Christians.

The Qur'anic historiography of monotheism, expanded by commentators: God revealed himself to all human civilization, each in its own particular language and cultural bias. It is the same God and same basic message. But the narrative continues. Those who accepted divine revelation prospered. Others were destroyed. The people called the `Ad and the Thamud rejected their prophets and were destroyed. Jews and Christians were ambivalent, so they were punished but not destroyed. The 7th century subtext is that the Arabs have their chance to become the chosen people. They succeed, for a time. But today the Muslims have lost that status. Therefore the salafi movements to reclaim it by going back to roots and establishing a primitive (that's good), pristine form of militant "haredi" Islam.

Conclusion. Islam is ambivalent about Judaism as a legitimate religion, but not so ambivalent about Jewish monotheism (with some exceptions such as Q. 9:30[4]). There is much in Islamic scripture and tradition that, under the right historical contextual situation, could be cited as authority for acceptance of Judaism as fellow monotheists on the path to realizing God. Jews are less ambivalent about the monotheistic nature of Islam, probably because of the obvious problems associated with Christianity. But Jews had a problem with the imperial status of Islamic religion, which "othered" Jews.

[4] "The Jews say: Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say: the messiah is the son of God. This is what they say from their mouths, resembling the speech of unbelievers of old. God fight them, for they lie."

"Towards a Contemporary Theology of the Religious Other: Halakhic Perspectives"

- David Novak

1. As one of the four authors of *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, which appeared in September 2000 (and which has since been translated into at least six languages, including Hebrew), I knew that the first proposition of that statement would be controversial among Jews, viz., "Jews and Christians worship the same God." I didn't know, however, it would be the most controversial of the nine propositions of *Dabru Emet*, receiving some especially sharp criticism from an Orthodox rabbinical organization, the Rabbinical Council of America, through its spokesman, Rabbi Professor David Berger, a prominent historian of Jewish-Christian relations.

2. This assertion of the legitimacy of both Jewish and Christian worship of the same God is itself a theological proposition, but it has obvious practical/halakhic ramifications. There has been considerable theological debate over this question just as there has been considerable halakhic debate over the question of whether Christianity is a form of proscribed "strange worship" (*avodah zarah*), minimally for any Jew; maximally for any human being. I use this term rather than the usual translation of it as "idolatry" or "polytheism" because it is more than that alone. *Avodah zarah* includes idolatry: the worship of an image as representing either the One true God, (hence monotheistic) *and* the worship of an image representing any false god (hence polytheistic). According to Noahide law, *avodah zarah* that is either idolatry (*avodat pesilim*) or polytheism (*avodat elilim*) is proscribed to any human being. It is thus "strange" or "alien" or "taboo" for any human being created in the image of the One and imageless God. Mosaic law reiterates (and strengthens) that proscription for all Jews (see Sanhedrin 59a for the principle that "nothing proscribed to the gentiles can be permitted to Jews"). But *avodah zarah* can also be legitimate worship of the One true God, which is only "strange," i.e., proscribed, for one group of monotheists, yet not for all monotheists. So, e.g., as a non-kohen, the priestly function of offering sacrifices in the Temple or of uttering the priestly blessing with the kohanim in the synagogue (*duchan*) is *for me* an act of proscribed *avodah zarah* (see Leviticus 10:1; Numbers 17:5), even though it is prescribed to the kohanim (Numbers 6:22-27).

3. I suggest, largely following Meiri, that Christianity is only *avodah zarah* for Jews, but not for those gentiles who accept the revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth, not so much as Messiah (since that would make claims on Jews we cannot accept, like the similar messianic claims made by Lubavitch messianists that we also cannot accept), but as the second person of what they call the "Triune God." That is further bolstered by the fact that Christian revelation, as recorded in the New Testament and the Church Fathers does not deny the truth of any of Jewish revelation in the Written and Oral Torah. It simply adds to it (something we Jews can accept) for gentiles who are not within God's covenant with the Jewish people, but only within God's covenant with the descendants of Noah qua humankind. Hence we can respect their worship of our God being legitimate *for them* even though not *for us*. The only Christianity we cannot have the same respect for is the type of Christian supersessionism that asserts that God has terminated what, for us, is the perpetual, covenant between Himself and the Jewish people. We have the same problem with all of Islam, which asserts that much of Jewish revelation consists of lies invented by the Jews themselves rather than being God's true word.

4. This view of Christianity requires a careful Jewish examination of Christian theology and Christian practice. As for Christian theology, what about the Incarnation and what about the Trinity? As for the Incarnation, i.e., that God was present in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, Christians (with the exception of Monophysites) do not claim the body of Jesus was itself divine. (Thus, for Maimonides, Jews who believe God *has* a body would be worse anti-monotheists than Christians who only believe God was *present* in the body of Jesus.) As such, one could say that the assertion of incarnation is no different in principle from rabbinic assertions of the presence of the *Shekhinah* among the Jewish people themselves (a point made by Michael Wyschogrod in his book, *The Body of Faith*). As for the Trinity, how is the Christian assertion of God as three-in-one different in principle from rabbinic and mediaeval assertions of the attributes of God, or from kabbalistic assertions of the ten *Sefirot* as manifestations or *persona* of the One Infinite *(Ayn Sof)* God (a point actually made by Jewish anti-kabbalists)?

5. As for Christian practice, what about the use of three-dimensional statutes (Western, Catholic Church) or two-dimensional icons (Eastern, Orthodox Church)? But

some Christian theologians (with the exception of many Protestants, especially Calvinists and Anabaptists, who reject their use altogether) have argued that these images are not objects of worship. Rather, they simply remind the worshipers of the presence of the dead saints they depict (cf. Sanhedrin 63, Tos., s.v. "asur"). One Catholic theologian told me that he sees the images to be no more idolatrous than the *cherubim* in the Temple, which also had human likeness (see Yoma 77a). This is unlike Hinduism, e.g., where the icons are literal incarnations of the gods they depict. As for the Christian practice of the *Eucharist*, Christians who practice this rite literally (either as transubstantiation by Catholics or as consubstantiation by Lutherans) do not believe a divine body has been resurrected but, rather, the human body and blood of Jesus has been resurrected in the consecrated bread and wine.

6. In approaching any non-Jewish religion, we need to determine whether their first Noahide commandment pertains to the proscription of idolatry or the prescription of justice (see Sanhedrin 56b). If the former, then we would probably follow Maimonides, whose negative view of Christian theology is the basis of his negative view of Christian practice. But, if we make justice our main concern with any non-Jewish religion, then we can be impressed with Christian adoption of biblical morality (as did Maimonides in a late responsum), and explain the excesses of Christian theology to be more customary than dogmatic (see Hullin 13b). Thus, e.g., the wide ranging legal principle "the law of the kingdom is law" (*dina de-malkhuta dina*), which essentially enables us to have dealings in good faith with gentile societies and cultures that uphold elementary just norms (Baba Batra 54b and parallels), was made with a Babylonian society/culture that was, at least officially, idolatrous. Nevertheless, this does not mean we should have only secular dealings with Christians, both of us ignoring the theological roots of our respective moral foundations (seemingly, the influential approach of the late Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik), foundations that come out of our common acceptance of the universal aspects of biblical revelation. Such dealings would play right into the hands of those militant secularists in our society, who regard any religious commitment to be an impediment to implementing true justice in the world. Not only are such secularists the common enemy of both Jews and Christians theologically, what

they take to be justice (e.g., in such matters as abortion, euthanasia, and homosexuality) is contrary to the common, biblically based practice of both Jews and Christians.

"Rabbinic Views of Hinduism and Buddhism"

- Nathan Katz

Judaic perceptions of Hinduism are much less nuanced than those of either Christianity or Islam. This is because, relatively speaking, there has been less contact between Israel and India than between Israel and either Europe or the Middle East.

But this is only part of the reason. Another factor is a lack of curiosity and interest. For the most part and with a very few significant exceptions, the rabbis simply assumed Hinduism to be *Avodah Zara* without either defining the term or considering Hinduism's self-understanding.

Some of the rabbinic literature known as *teshuvot*, responses to specific halachic or ethical questions, engages Hindu beliefs and practices in an indirect yet practical way. How ought Jews in India relate to their countrymen? To what extent, if any, may they participate in the social, cultural and business life on the Subcontinent? How is merchandise from India to be treated?

As background for the teshuvot, one must view biblical, Hellenistic, talmudic, kabalistic and disputational literature up through the Middle Ages.

The only direct biblical reference to India is in the Book of Esther (1:1). Linguistic evidence from the Bible of commerce between India and Israel have been examined by Rabin.

Chakaravarti has argued that the mysterious biblical port of Tarshish is in western India. He has also explored trade routes between India and the West and found a surprisingly large Jewish involvement, dating from the Second Temple Period.

The biblical verse about the sons of Avraham and Keturah bringing gifts to the East (Gen. 26:5), as glossed in the Zohar, has been a fertile source for Judaic appropriations of Hinduism and Hindu mysticisms.

Hellenized sources, especially historian Josephus and philosopher Philo, evidence a very open and admiring attitude toward India and Hinduism. Philo takes a Hindu sage, Calamus, as a paragon of fidelity and faith in the face of Greek assimilationism. In his telling of the Matsada story, Josephus has Eleazar citing Hindu bravery in the face of

death as the deciding argument for the mass martyrdom. What is surprising that such a positive evaluation of India should turn into disinterest and/or scorn.

Medieval authorities seem to have had little direct contact with or knowledge of India. The tenth century Karaite, al-Qirisani, compared Hindu with Judaic practices, translated the Sanskrit deva with the Hebrew melakhim, and says that the brahmins upheld reason but denied prophecy. His contemporary, Saadia Gaon agreed with a;-Qirisani's last point, adding that the brahmins upheld Adam as a prophet, but denied all subsequent prophecy. He also describes such Hindu ascetic practices as fire-walking. Yehuda Halevi, 11th-12th century, seemed impressed with Hinduism's antiquity, but held that in his time Hindus all practice sorcery. At the same time, he traces Indian sciences – held in high regard during medieval times – back to the Torah. Abraham ibn Ezra, a 12th century rabbi who is said to have visited India (according to some sources, he was imprisoned and even died there), praised Indian sciences such as astronomy, arithmetic and astrology, and he traced Aesop's Fables to the Buddhist Jataka literature. Maimonides in the 12th century also admired Hindu astronomy. He claimed that Hindus worshipped stars as intermediaries, and they eventually came to take these intermediaries for G-d Himself, and this view became the standard rabbinic gloss. He connected Hindus with Sabeans, and wrote that the animals sacrificed at the Temple were precisely those revered in other countries, explicitly oxen and cows in India. He also left the first known reference to Indian Jews in one of his letters, due no doubt to the fact of his brother's livelihood in the India trade. Ibn Gabirol also held that in his time idolaters were not really idolaters in the way the Canaanites were, because they were merely following ancestral custom and the real intention between their use of idols was the G-d of Israel. Nachmanides in the 13th century wrote that Gan Eden as located in India, a tradition Muslims and Christians to this day place in neighboring Sri Lanka.

Throughout the ages, the quest for lost tribes has been a filter through which India has been viewed. From the 19th century, emissaries from Israel's four holy cities visited India's port cities, seeking support for their shrines and yeshivot. As did the 19th century Rabbi David de Beth Hillel and the 20th century Louis Rabinowitz, they left a significant literature pertaining to Indian cultures and religions. From the 19th century, a number of

rabbis visited the controversial Bene Israel community of western India, including I. J Benjamin and Moses Gaster.

In the Kabbalah, we find numerous analogies to Hindu thought, according to Moshe Idel. Saadia's commentary on the Sepher Yetzirah mentions its indebtedness to Indian mathematics, Abraham Abulafia adapted such Hindu symbols as the mandala to Judaic practice, and Moses de Leon explicitly rejected the Hindu metaphysic of Maya.

Since the 16th century, Sephardic rabbis have written teshuvot pertaining to life in India. The oldest one we know dates from 1520 when ibn Zimra responded to a question about caste like divisions within the Jewish community of South India. His disciple de Castro opined similarly about 20 years later. During the 19th century, the Ben Ish Hai wrote to a Jewish merchant of Mumbai about the ethics of doing business in the pepper marts of Malabar. Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim, rishon le-tziyon during the mid-20th century, wrote an extensive opinion affirming the Jewish status of the Bene Israel. In this monumental work, the rabbi evidenced close familiarity with Hindu marriage and divorce practices. During our new 21st century, two major rabbinic issues pertaining to India have arisen: the use of wigs made from human hair which may have been offered at the Tirupati Temple in Andhra Pradesh, and Rabbi Amar's issued a controversial opinion affirming the Jewish status of the B'nai Menashe of the Indo-Burmese border areas.

Finally, indigenous Jewish writing ought to be taken into account. One example would be David Rahabi's 18th century work written in Kochi comparing the Hindu, Jewish and Muslim calendars. Another would be the early 20th century writing of Asher ben Asher of Darjeeling, who freely employs Tibetan terms for Kabalistic ideas.

"Jewish Liturgical Memory of the Non-Jew: Past Realities and Future Possibilities"

- Ruth Langer

One of the tasks of ritual and liturgy is to form and transmit communal memory. In the context of telling its stories, Jewish liturgical memory also almost necessarily speaks of non-Jews. A survey of the ways that non-Jews appear in traditional statutory Jewish liturgies yields the shocking result that over and over, non-Jews are presented only as the negative other, as persecutors and enemies, as sinful, as theologically errant and as legitimate objects of divine vengeance. This appears not only in direct negative portrayals, but also in positive statements about the special relation that Jews have with God. The horizon of the praying community is the Jewish people, and even where prayers might be universalized, as in prayers for peace or for healing, they generally are not. With the exception of the Reconstructionist Movement in North America and the British Liberal Movement, no non-traditional have consistently addressed this issue in their official published liturgies.

This situation derives in no small part because the focal point of Jewish liturgical memory is the covenantal relationship between God and Israel. Rabbinic liturgy, developed in the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple and designed primarily to compensate for the absence of Temple sacrifices, has as its central narrative the disruption of covenant, caused by non-Jews. Particularly where Jews continued to live under the heirs of Rome, in Christendom, those who caused this disruption continue(d) to be very present in Jewish consciousness. After Muslims built their own holy places on the Temple mount, they too became religious supersessionists vis a vis Jews, bringing themselves de facto into this narrative.

In the classic Jewish narrative, this conquest by non-Jews and the consequent exile is punishment for Israel's sins. Therefore, the conquerors are doing God's work. However, as the liturgy works itself out, Jews seem to have moved beyond this element. While on the one hand, the *musaf amidah* reads *mipnei hata-einu galinu me-artzeinu*, on the other hand, the Passover seder tells us *eleh shebekhol dor vador omdim aleinu lekhaloteinu.* Amalek/Haman rises again and again in new incarnations of absolute evil. Medieval prayers, particularly, take this another step in their reiterated calls for divine vengeance

against Israel's persecutors. Many of these themes become concentrated in the liturgy for the 9th of Av, particularly in the *Qinot*. Here we find very specific references to historical events and historical enemies voiced with immense grief and pain. Where the descendents of these enemies still exist, it is very difficult to identify with our communal grief fully while simultaneously disassociating the perpetrators from their descendents.

These issues come to a head today in a few contexts. Traditional Jews do not change statutory prayers. Most elimination of piyyut happened in the 19th century, and the movement today is towards retrieval, not to further elimination. Liberal Jews who have not confronted these issues have the resources to do so, but this requires serious theological rethinking of the purpose of liturgy. But where all Jews confront these issues is in the construction of new rituals to memorialize the events of recent generations, most importantly the Shoah and the establishment of the State of Israel. In the stories that will form the memories of both events, non-Jews play a significant and a negative role. It is easier to construct a narrative for Yom Ha-Atzmaut that avoids stigmatizing non-Jews because it is more appropriate to focus on rejoicing in the positive parts of the story. However, the Shoah is a story of persecution by non-Jews with a few elements of Jewish heroism that can be thrown in. The tendency has been to name the perpetrators very explicitly, in language that expresses anger as well as grief and pain. This preserves Germans and German collaborators as unrehabilitated and the national epitomes of persecutors without hope of change. Perhaps a lesson can be learned from the *qinot* responding to the First Crusades and other medieval persecutions where the focus was on the martyrdom of the Jews and not on the identity and story of the persecutors.

"The Heritage of Jewish Philosophy and the Challenges of a New Theology of the Religious Other"

- Norbert Samuelson

The lecture was an outline of major views in the history of Jewish philosophy of the conception of "the other" and of "other religions." The focus was on paradigm examples in major historical periods rather than on a general sociological survey of what everyone had to say on the two related but not identical subjects. In general, the paradigm presented was a visual image drawn by the philosopher whose goal was to express what for the author was a central conception that in itself transcends what is expressible through any linear string of words.

The periods of Jewish philosophy considered were the biblical, the pre-modern, the modern, and the post-modern. (Due to time limits, the modern example was excluded from the verbal presentation, but would not be excluded from a written presentation.) For the biblical period the focus text was *Genesis* chapter 1. Here we are presented with a three dimensional, geometric diagram that undergoes change from an initial origin into a final vision of the cosmos. The movers of this change are divine commandments directed to creatures God generates to occupy and govern the cosmos. In general what the author of this narrative considers to be good is separation. In our text what are separated are day from night (day 1), the earth globe of animals from the celestial ring of stars (day 2-3), the rulers of each region (sun and moon on day 4 and the human on day 6) from their subjects, and finally the seventh Sabbath day from the six working days of creation (day 7). As the narrative continues beyond our paradigm, God makes more separations, all of which from the perspective of the author are inherently good –humans from other animals, the descendents of Abraham from other humans, the Jewish people from other descendents of Abraham, the members of the family of Levi from other Jewish people, and the priests (Cohanim) from other Levites. Similarly regions of space on the earth surface are rendered good through separation by divine fiat – the land of Israel from other lands, the mount of Zion from other parts of Israel, the space of the Temple from other space on the mount, and the Holy of Holies within the Temple.

For the pre-modern period the focus text is Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Part III, chapter 54, where Maimonides draws a verbal picture of a city, that contains a palace, whose antechamber contains an inner court, in the center of which is a throne room. Within this space Maimonides differentiates seven kinds of human beings: (1) those outside of the city who hold no doctrinal beliefs at all, who are almost sub-human. (2) Those wandering within the city away from the palace's surrounding wall, who do speculation but hold false beliefs. (3) Those wandering within the city around the wall of the palace, who are ignorant people who nonetheless follow the laws of the Torah. (4) Those within the city, by the wall, who have found the gate into the palace and are looking for a way the open it, who Maimonides identifies as knowers of the laws of the Torah (whom he calls "jurists") who also know logic and mathematics. (5) Those within the antechamber of the palace who are looking for the entrance to the inner court, who are individuals who know natural science. (6) Those within the inner court who are searching for the throne room, who are scientist-philosopher-sages who know metaphysics and theology. Finally, (7) those who are facing the throne of the king who are scientist-philosopher-sage-prophets who govern their people. In general, Maimonides distinguishes humanity in terms of two criteria – those who do or do not observe the action laws of the Torah, and those who do or do not know the correct beliefs about the divinely created universe. Each set of criteria is subject to further distinction based on the level of action and knowledge. Knowers range from the ignorant, to logicians and mathematicians, to natural scientists, to metaphysical theologians. Note that it may be assumed that following the Torah defines who are Jews, and that mastering the way of the Torah is a necessary training for understanding true science/philosophy. However, these assumptions are not explicitly stated. It may be the case that not all followers of the Torah and not all of the wise are Jews.

For the modern period the focus text is Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, which, in contrast to the other texts considered, presents an algebraic rather than a geometric model to map his understanding of the joint role of religion and politics (which are inseparable) in the (implied) context of the scientific-philosophical understanding of the universe that Spinoza spells out in his *Ethics.* (By "modern thinkers" I mean all those scientists-philosophers from the 16th century on to the present

who created a mechanistic/mathematical account of reality that provided the dominant worldview for the French Revolution and continues to provide the conceptual foundation for all post-Revolution republican systems of government.) Spinoza makes a radical separation between scientists and philosophers on one hand and clergymen and politicians on the other. The talents of the latter pair are in the use of the imagination to govern people in community through the manipulation of stories. The talents of the former pair are to guide intelligent individuals to their own determination of what is and is not true. Furthermore, it is this knowledge that is the primary criterion by which humans may be differentiated into moral categories. Persons are free to the extent that they control their own fate, and that control is directly proportionate to the degree that they can judge the truth of their situatedness in the universe. The more you know the more you control your own fate; the more you control your own fate the more free you are. Finally, human beings are good to the extent that they are free. Within this structure there are good and bad religions. That judgment rests on the usefulness of their fanciful stories for creating a society that will maximize the opportunity of the citizens of the religious state to become wise. In general, Moses and Jesus were both good prophets who authored morally useful books. However, those who followed them, who became the governing clergymen in their name of the Jewish people and the Christian people, did not share in the goodness of their founders. Hence, Spinoza could affirm the moral value of the religions of both Moses and Jesus, but that virtue did not extend to either rabbinic Judaism or priestly Christianity.

For the post-modern period (whose primary examples are thinkers, post World War I, who rejected modernist paradigms described above in association with the French Revolution) my focus text is Franz Rosenzweig's analysis of Christian chronology in *The Star of Redemption,* Part III, Chapter Two, in the subsection entitled "The Christian Chronology" within a larger unit entitled "The Way Through Time: Christian History." Rosenzweig introduces a metaphor for the relation between the peoples of the world with respect to temporal events. On the metaphor there are people on a bridge looking down on train tracks set along side of a river. On his metaphor the river is the flow of every-day time through space. The bridge is Jewish law, and those on the bridge are the Jewish people, while the train tracks are Christian chronology, the

train is the church, and those riding it are the Christians. Although he does not say so explicitly, the logical extension of the image is that pagans are people floating endlessly down the river of secular time from the source of the river in creation towards its end in redemption. Muslims are pagans pretending to be Jews, while Buddhists and Hindus are pagans fighting to swim upstream, maintaining that there is no river.

During my presentation I made a number of observations on these models. Two of them are the following: (1) The tradition of Jewish thinking, from its biblical origins on, is strongly committed not only to the reality of otherness but also to its moral desirability as a way of relating to the world. That Jews are fundamentally different from other human beings and that human beings are fundamentally different from other creatures is as deep within Jewish intellectual history as is any other proclaimed core belief. However, the assertion of otherness, usually in the form of an affirmation of chosenness, need not entail any negation of the moral value of the other. (2) Rosenzweig was a modernist, secular Jew in transition to becoming what we would today call a "modern orthodox" Jew. There are problems with what Rosenzweig says (particularly about people who are neither Jewish nor Christian), but it makes more sense to "reconstruct" Rosenzweig's thought than it does to "reinvent the wheel" (so to speak) to develop out of the sources of rabbinic Jewish texts a contemporary philosophical theology that is adequate to comprehend a world of cultural and religious pluralism.

"New Theologies and New Encounters: Educational Challenges, Risks and Opportunities"

- Michael Rosenak

I shall present here, not my prepared notes, written before our Scranton meetings, but to three of the issues that arose in our conversations, all of which present themselves for educational consideration. Part of my contribution to this discussion dovetails with my prepared notes, but the discussion itself will be the focus of my remarks.

The issues that arose here include: (1) the distinction between normative and deliberative discourse, in itself an educational issue par excellence (b) the distinction to be made (if possible) between an openness to the faiths of others that is relativistic in nature and one that is pluralistic; (3) and, the academic approach to knowledge and experience as against the personal knowledge of endearment that is socially transmitted or immediately "seen" and "grasped." How may educators relate to these categories and experiences? For without a pedagogy that is appropriate to openness, but that yet does no damage to the conscience of believers, all discussion of openness to the "other" will remain in the realm of the fanciful, or become a playing field for rarified intellectuals.

In this draft, I do not note sources and refrain from footnoting. I shall leave footnotes for the time we present comprehensive papers.

The Normative and the Deliberative

The normative and the deliberative are two distinct types of educational discussion. In the normative world, "the good," the valuable and the worthy are known, and are taught by Scriptures, or by "great books", transmitted by revelation or Reason or shaped by them The educational problem is merely to devise theories and modes of practice that help the educator initiate the young into the treasured culture. In terms of what we are doing here, it might be said that the open approaches being championed in our sessions which constitute a common set of assumptions may be presented as normative and "authentic" views of our tradition(s). Those who go this route will pose

the question: how may we combat the ("pathological") tendencies in religious communities, Jewish and otherwise, that sabotage the pristine religious truth (of openness toward the other) and prevent its general acceptance? Proceeding from this normative vantage point, it becomes the educator's task, in conjunctions with theologians and Jewish scholars (as well as sociologists and psychologists) to review and revise educational practice so that "the truth" can become known and "curricularized."

In contradistinction to the normative approach is the naturalistic deliberative one. This approach is based on the assumption that human existence, as the world in which we live, is replete with problems to be correctly identified so that we may work towards their solution. This pattern, of problem discovering and solving, calls on those in new situations to have both the courage and the intelligence to re-examine previous solutions to (previous) problems, even when these (no longer relevant) solutions have been sanctified by tradition as perennial and sacred. In terms of our discussion, we enter the deliberative mode whenever we sense and think that what was once acceptable no longer is so: that the context in which we live must dictate some examination and self-examination with a view to change. This orientation, despite its (seeming>) secular bent, is often used by sincerely religious or otherwise normative people, to examine how to save or enhance the normative tradition itself by way of discovering what aspects of it seem not to be functioning well. They wish to know how these aspects may be returned to satisfactory meaning and implementation.

All three "moves", the normative, the deliberative and the normative-deliberative, were made in our conversations and each suggests different educational orientations and procedures with regard to "the other". I hope to examine them at a later stage of our discussions.

Relativism and Pluralism

The distinction I suggest we make in the world of our values, that may lead us to a more open view of non-Jewish faiths, is one that urges us to differentiate between ground values and operational values. The former are largely understood by reference to their existential opposites (e.g., good versus evil, service of God versus idolatry, love of peace as against joyful aggressiveness). The operational values, on the other hand, are

those that we understand through the prism of their valuative opposites. In the latter case, the choice presented is not between good and bad but between what is good "in itself" yet inappropriate in given situations and circumstances and what is perceived as more appropriate and therefore, currently better. Here we come upon contradistinctions such as "truth and peace,' the dignity of humans versus the sacredness of their being (especially prominent in medical ethics) and justice and mercy, freedom and discipline. If the discussants in such valuative deliberation share a common ground of existential opposites (i.e., they have a common language about the evil of Nazism and they share a commitment to human dignity) the discourse between them may be termed pluralistic. Those engaged in the pluralistic conversation have accepted certain absolute values as normative though the specific content and form of their "translation" into real situations may differ. However, where there is openness to the other without any common commitment to ground values and there is no shared repugnance of their existential opposites, there we may say that relativism prevails. Our conversations have seen us struggling to determine what may count as common ground values: the lengthy treatment of idolatry (in the Christian world) is a primary example of this discussion at our meetings.

Academic and Committed Views of "the other"

An underlying fear in many of our discussions was that the treatment of the problem (or desired norm) of openness to the other would remain particular to a small group of academics. The academic was defined as detached, given to over-views of things, alienated from communities of faith, even from his (ostensibly) own one. The academician was one who left communities of commitment behind him. The upshot was that our discussions, conducted by academicians, and bespeaking partially anticipated outcomes would inevitably seem irrelevant to most and even threatening to many. The question confronting us was: Can a common language be created between "communities of commitment" and those who think in a language of inquiry and objectivity? It was clear from our discussions that the solution to this problem is crucial lest the Elijah Institute merely initiate a few more hugim of the like-minded, hugim that are unlikely to change the world.

The beginning of an educational ″take″ on this issue was proposed around Rokeach's categories of "the open and the closed mind." Rokeach argues that "open minds" are cultivated where the world is presented (and perceived) as friendly; an unfriendly world, he maintains, makes for "closed minds. Each of these categories is moved by Rokeach through numerous models of action, thinking and feeling. One of them he calls "differentiation". This model distinguishes between the person who thinks that everything of value and worth knowing is situated where he or she is and the other, categorically, knows nothing of value and may be dehumanized or at best ignored. Hence, there are Jews and "goyim." The reason: since everything is perfect where we stand and in what we believe and do, there is not only no need to know the others but it is dangerous to know about them. This is because we may acquire the habit of differentiation, i.e., the ability to learn from the other, to get to admire features of the other and, in the process, acquire the ability to criticize what we ourselves are and do.

The primary educational issues that present themselves are: how shall we educate towards seeing the "world" as friendly when it patently is not? What aspects of our tradition can help us shape the child's view of the world in a way that makes for a measure of trust without recourse to falsehood? Does differentiation foster relativism, or pluralism? What are the subject matters of a believing yet differentiating Judaism? Who is the teacher who can enhance differentiation without a loss of identity and commitment among his pupils?

I hope that subsequent discussions will expand, yet also focus our discussions, and expose to view the various educational issues that arise on the basis of normative or deliberative decisions. Here too, the questions that arise for educators include: How are perennial norms to be conveyed in the contemporary world without falling prey to indoctrination? What are legitimate "initiations" into a culture? How may deliberation be saved from the absolute indifference that leaves us with nothing but a clean slate for re-examinations of culture that bespeaks an educational ideal of thoroughgoing secularism, where nothing is holy?

John Dewey once said that all philosophy is educational theory. This means, at the very least, that we must take educational questions into account when we talk about

halakhic, theological, social and other issues to be confronted when seeking an appropriate relationship to the "other".