

Addendum to the Original Edition of "Confrontation"

The following addendum was written by Rabbi Soloveitchik, and published in the version of "Confrontation" included in A Treasury of Tradition, Hebrew Publishing Company, 1967, pp. 78-80.

ON INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS

The Jewish religious tradition expresses itself in a fusion of universalism and singularism. On the one hand, Jews are vitally concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community charged with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific, and ethical. As such, we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism or esoterism which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society.

On the other hand, we are a distinctive faith community with a unique commitment, singular relationship to God and a specific way of life. We must never confuse our role as the bearers of a particular commitment and destiny with our role as members of the family of man.

In the areas of universal concern, we welcome an exchange of ideas and impressions. Communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to all of us.

In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine, and ritual, Jews have throughout the ages been a community guided exclusively by distinctive concerns, ideals, and commitments. Our love of and dedication to God are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship to God has been moulded by different historical events and in different terms. *Discussion will in no way enhance or hallow these emotions.*

We are, therefore, opposed to any public debate, dialogue or symposium concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis à vis "similar" aspects of another faith community. We believe in and are committed to our Maker in a specific manner and we will not question, defend, offer apologies, analyze or rationalize our faith in dialogues centered about these "private" topics which express our personal relationship to the God of Israel. We assume that members of other faith communities will feel similarly about their individual religious commitment.

We would deem it improper to enter into dialogues on such topics as:

Judaic monotheism and the Christian idea of Trinity; The Messianic idea in Judaism and Christianity; The Jewish attitude on Jesus; The concept of the Covenant in Judaism and Christianity; The Eucharist mass and Jewish prayer service; The Holy Ghost and prophetic inspiration; Isaiah and Christianity; The Priest and the Rabbi; Sacrifice and the Eucharist; The Church and the Synagogue—their sanctity and metaphysical nature, etc.

There cannot be mutual understanding concerning these topics, *for Jew and Christian will employ different categories and move within incommensurate frames of reference and evaluation.*

When, however, we move from the private world of faith to the public world of humanitarian and cultural endeavors, communication among the various faith communities is desirable and even essential. We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, Man's Moral Values, The Threat of Secularism, Technology and Human Values, Civil Rights, etc., which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminology.

Jewish rabbis and Christian clergymen cannot discuss socio-cultural and moral problems as sociologists, historians or cultural ethicists in agnostic or secularist categories. As men of God, our thoughts, feelings, perceptions and terminology bear the imprint of a religious world outlook. We define ideas in religious categories and we express our feelings in a peculiar language which quite often is incomprehensible to the secularist. In discussions we apply

the religious yardstick and the religious idiom. We evaluate man as the bearer of God's Likeness. We define morality as an act of *Imitatio Dei*, etc. In a word, even our dialogue at a socio-humanitarian level must inevitably be grounded in universal religious categories and values. However, these categories and values, even though religious in nature and biblical in origin, represent the universal and public—not the individual and private—in religion.

To repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private individual commitment.