

- 8 John Navone, "Christian Vision," *Cross and Crown* 29 (Dec. 1977), pp. 346-56.
- 9 Hugo Meynell, "The Holy Trinity and the Corrupted Consciousness," *Theology* LXX (May, 1976), p. 148. This is not inconsistent, according to Meynell, with God's giving the gift of his love in and through other religious traditions. He notes Bernard Lonergan in *A Second Collection*, pp174f, to affirm: "But if the Spirit who is God's love is the Spirit of the Son, and the Son is made man, those who receive the Spirit explicitly through the Son do have a special privilege," p. 148.
- 10 See Andrew Greeley, *What a Modern Catholic Believes about God* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1971), pp. 18-21.
- 11 Hugh Jones, "The Concept of Story and Theological Discourse," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976) 6, p. 427.
- 12 Daniel W. Hardy, "Man the Creature," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977), 2, p. 123.

Judaism and the Universe of Faiths

Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok

Recently there has been considerable discussion in Christian circles about the relationship between Christianity and the world religions. Traditionally Christians have insisted that anyone outside the Church cannot be saved. To quote a classic instance of this view, the Council of Florence in 1483-45 declared that: 'no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not just pagans but also Jews or heretics or schismatics, can become partakers of eternal life: but they will go to everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. Unless before the end of life they are joined to the Church'.¹

Increasingly, however, for many this view has seemed highly improbable in the light of contact with other faiths. An important document issued by the Catholic Church in 1965 (*Nostra Aetate*) for example declared that the truth which enlightens every man is reflected also in non-Christian religions.² Nevertheless while recognising the value of other religions, this declaration maintains that the Christian is at the same time under the obligation to preach that Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.³

Similar attitudes have also been adopted by various Christian theologians. Karl Rahner, for example, argues that salvation is open to adherents of other faiths since the devout Muslim, Hindu, Sikh or Jew can be regarded as an anonymous Christian—a status granted to people who have not expressed any desire for it.⁴ Again, according to Hans Kung, the way is open to all men to attain eternal life in the world's religions. As Kung remarks, 'A man is to be saved within the religion that is made available to him in his historical situation.' In this manner the world's religions are 'the way of salvation, in universal salvation history; the general way of salvation, we can say, for the ordinary people of the world's religions, the more common, the "ordinary" way of salvation, as against which the way of salvation in the Church occurs as something very special and extraordinary.'⁵

Other Christian theologians have taken this view further by declaring that Christians must recognize the experience of God in Christ to be but one of many different encounters with what has been given to different historical and cultural segments of mankind. In this light Christianity should lay no claim to superiority. In the words of Professor John Hick, the most important advocate of this view, 'In His infinite fullness and richness of being He exceeds all our human attempts to grasp Him in thought... the devout in the various great world religions are in fact worshipping the one God, but through different, overlapping concepts or mental icons of Him.'⁶

In the modern Jewish world, however, scant attention has been paid to this issue of interfaith religions. Though there is an interest in the development of Jewish-Christian dialogue as well as isolated instances of Jewish-Christian-Muslim encounter, contemporary Jewish thinkers have not seriously considered the place of Judaism in the context of man's religious experience. This is regrettable since from the very earliest period Jews gave considerable thought to this crucial question.

In the Biblical period there was friction between Israel and other religions. Pagan deities were described in the Bible in the most negative way; they are 'elilim'—non-entities, loathsome and abominable. The worship of God is the way of faith; other religions are false. Yet despite such condemnation of pagan worship, the prophets did not plea for other nations to give up their gods. According to Deuteronomy, God permits the nations to serve their own deities: 'these the Lord your God allotted to other peoples everywhere under heaven.'⁷ Indeed it is even

suggested that when non-Jews worship their gods, they are actually worshipping the God of Israel. According to Malachi, whose words can be interpreted in this way, 'from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name is great among the nations; and in every place offerings are presented unto my name, even pure oblations, for my name is great among the nations.'⁸

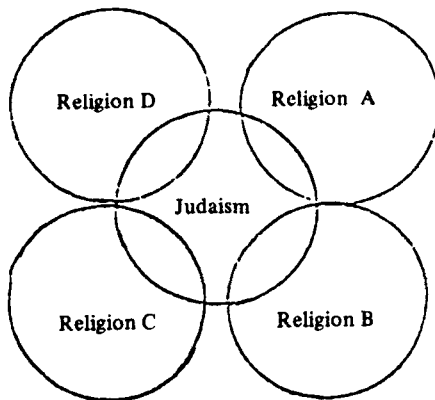
The rabbis continued the struggle against idolatry. The tractate *Avodah Zarah* in the Babylonian talmud is devoted to the laws regarding the worship of other gods in the Greek and Roman religion as well as Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Gnostic dualism. Nevertheless, rabbinic Judaism maintained that salvation is open to non-Jews as well as Jews as long as they observe the seven precepts of the sons of Noah. These are classified as follows: (1) Not to worship idols; (2) Not to commit murder; (3) Not to commit adultery and incest; (4) Not to eat a limb torn from a living animal; (5) Not to blaspheme; (6) Not to steal; (7) To have an adequate system of law and justice.⁹

In the Medieval period the two rival faiths to Judaism were Christianity and Islam. The general view of Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages was that Islam was not to be classified as idolatry, but there was considerable debate regarding Christianity.¹⁰ But despite this uncertainty about the status of the Christian faith, it was not unusual to find some Jewish writers who regarded the teachings of Christians and Muslims as contributing to the spiritual life. Bahya Ibn Pakudah, for example, relied on Sufi teachers and defended his right to use them as teachers of religion.¹¹ Nevertheless, as religious faiths, Islam and Christianity were unanimously regarded as false, and there is simply no mention of Far Eastern religions in rabbinic sources.

By the time of the Enlightenment it was widely held among the Jews that Christians and Muslims were in no way to be included in the harsh condemnation of heathens in classical sources. The general view was that these denunciations applied only to the ancient pagans and to contemporary idolators. Thus Phineas Elijah Hurwitz writes that Jeremiah's injunction: 'Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations that know Thee not' (Jer. 10.25) refers to nations that do not know God, 'like the men of India and Japan who worship fire and water and who are called "heathen"'.¹² The legal authorities of this period all view Far Eastern religions in this way. This is the position, for example, of Rabbi Ezekkel Landau concerning a priest who married a Hindu

woman according to the Hindu rite, but later divorced her and repented of his actions. Jewish law rules that a priest who had once worshipped idols is not permitted to bless the people even after his repentance. But in this case Rabbi Landau permitted him to bless the people because his participation in a marriage service did not in and of itself constitute idolatrous worship. The clear assumption lying behind this decision is that the Hindu faith should be understood as idolatrous.¹³

From this brief survey we can see that from the earliest times the Jewish community had a moderately tolerant attitude to other religions. Jews did not attempt to convert non-Jews even though they regarded their own faith as the touchstone of truth. Nonetheless they viewed all other religions as false except insofar as they agree with Judaism. No doubt this was the reason why rabbinic authorities did not view Islam as idolatry whereas they maintained that polytheistic religions such as Zoroastrianism, and Gnosticism and Hinduism are idolatrous. From this vantage point, then, Judaism is at the centre of the universe of faiths, whereas all other belief systems encircle it intersecting only at those points where there is no common ground. Such a view can be presented diagrammatically:



According to this traditional model, Judaism is at the centre because it is absolutely true. Its source is God; at Mt. Sinai God revealed to Moses His holy Torah. It is this bedrock of certainty which is the mainstay of the Jewish faith. Sinaitic revelation is seen as a unique divine act which provides a secure foundation for the religious traditions of Israel. It is from the Pentateuchal

account that we learn of God's true nature, His dealings with the chosen people, and the promise of the world to come. In this fashion the Written Torah as well as the rabbinic interpretation of Scripture serves as the yardstick for evaluating the truth claims of other religions.

The significant feature of this model is that it excludes the possibility of God revealing Himself to other peoples. In other words, this model assumes that throughout the history of the world, men have mistakenly believed that they have had an encounter with the divine, but in fact God only made Himself known only to the Jewish people. This accounts for the wide diversity and contradictory character of religious beliefs among the religions of the world. As to those religions which have ideas similar to what is found in Judaism, this concurrence is not due to God's intervention. Rather the adherents of these religions would have arrived—possibly through the aid of human reason—at religious conceptions which happen to be true and therefore conform to what is found in the Jewish faith. Thus, for example the Muslim belief in one God who is eternal, omniscient, omnipotent and all-good is true, not because God revealed himself to Mohammed, but simply because it coincidentally corresponds with Judaism's understanding. Similarly, Christians would be viewed as coincidentally correct in their adherence to monotheism, but misguided in terms of their conception of the Trinity. On the other hand polytheistic religions, such as the religious systems of The Ancient Near East and the Greek and Roman religions, are utterly fallacious. In all these cases the criterion of true belief is the content of the Jewish religion as revealed to the people of Israel.

Though such a model is consonant with the attitude of many Jews in the past, it suffers from a very serious theological defect. If God is the providential Lord of history. It is difficult indeed to understand why He would have hidden His presence and withheld His revelation from mankind—except for the Jews. To allow mankind from the beginning of human history to wallow in darkness and ignorance, weighed down by false notions of divine reality, is hardly what we would expect from a loving, compassionate and caring God. While it is true that traditional Judaism maintains that in the Hereafter all the nations of the earth will come to know God's true nature, this does not at all explain why God would have refrained from disclosing Himself to the mass of humanity in this life on earth.

Arguably what is much more likely is that in the past God revealed Himself not only to Jews but to others as well. On this view subscribed to by some modern Jewish thinkers,¹⁴ Judaism would still be at the centre of the universe of faiths, encircled by other religions. But the significant difference between this second model and the previous ones concerns the role of revelation. Here, non-Jewish religions would be regarded as true, not simply because adherents happened to have similar ideas to what is found in Judaism, but because of a real encounter with the divine. Judaism would on this view be regarded as ultimately true; its doctrines would serve as the basis for testing the validity of all alleged revelations.

Thus it would be a mistake on this view to think that because a particular religion, such as Theravada Buddhism, has doctrines that directly contradict Jewish theology, God did not reveal Himself to the peoples of the Indian continent. On the contrary, it is likely He did but because of social, cultural and historical circumstances this encounter was misunderstood or filtered through human interpretation in such a way that it became confused and distorted. On this account God would have manifested His general concern for mankind throughout history as well as his particular love for His chosen people.

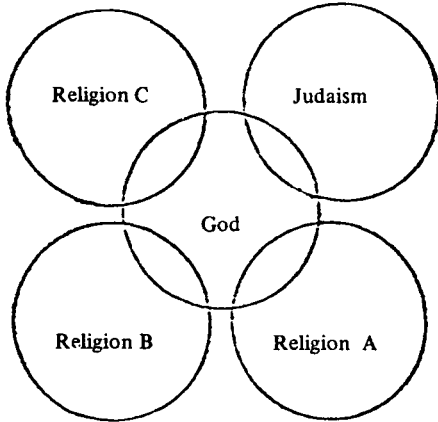
The advantage of this second model is that it not only takes seriously God's love for humanity but it also comes to terms with man's spiritual quest. This is particularly important in the light of our increasing knowledge of religious cultures. Unlike the Biblical writers or the ancient rabbis, we know a great deal about Christianity, Islam and the religions of the East; the comparative study of religions has made us more aware of the great riches of the religious faiths of the past. It is short-sighted in the extreme to dismiss these traditions as having no religious integrity. What is much more plausible is that in each stream of religious life there have been great mystics, teachers and theologians who have in various ways experienced God's disclosure and presence.

This second model preserves the centrality of the Jewish faith while giving credence to the claims of other religions that have experienced the divine. Nonetheless, it is questionable whether this picture of the universe of faiths goes far enough. Arguably even this modern approach to the religions of the world does not do full justice to God's nature as a loving father who truly cares for all his children. According to this second model, it is the Jewish people who really matter. They are the ones who have received

the full and ultimate disclosure of His revelation; other faiths have only a partial and incomplete view and are pale reflections by comparison. What is missing from even this more tolerant account is an adequate recognition of God's providential love and concern for all men.

What is far more likely is that in each and every generation and to all peoples of the world, God has disclosed Himself in numerous ways. Thus, neither in Judaism, nor for that matter in any other religion, has God revealed Himself absolutely and completely. Instead, God's revelation was made manifest to different peoples in varied forms. In each case, the revelations and traditions to which they gave rise were conditioned by such factors as history, climate, language and culture. For these reasons the form of revelation has been characteristically different in every case.

Such a conception of God's activity serves as the basis for an arguably more accurate model of Judaism and the universe of faiths. In this third model, God, rather than the Jewish tradition, is at the centre. Judaism, like other faiths, encircles Him, intersecting only at those points where the nature of divine reality is truly reflected.



The advantage of this vision of Judaism in the context of the world religions is that it is theologically more coherent, but it also paves the way for inter-faith encounter at the deepest levels. Already Jews work together with members of other faiths on common projects of fellowship and charity. Yet, if Jews could free themselves from an absolutist Judeocentric position, the way would be open for inter-faith dialogue at the most profound level. With the divine at the centre of the universe of faiths, Jewish

dialogue with other religious traditions would assume an altogether different and beneficial character. From its Biblical origins Judaism adopted a generally tolerant attitude to other religious traditions. What is possible today is for this spirit of tolerance to deepen and serve as a foundation for a common quest with like-minded adherents of other faiths for spiritual insight and religious truth.

- 1 Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, 29th Ed., Freiburg, 1952, no. 714.
- 2 C. Hallencreutz, *Dialogue and Community*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977, 37.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 38.
- 4 *Theological Investigation*, Vol 14, 1976, Ch. 17; Vol. 16, 1979, Ch. 13.
- 5 *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, ed. J. Neuner, Burns and Oates, 1967, 52-53.
- 6 *God Has Many Names*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1980, 48-49.
- 7 Deut. 4:19
- 8 Mal. 1:11
- 9 See *Encyclopaedia Talmudit*, Vol. III, 348-362.
- 10 See J. Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1961.
- 11 See L. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, New York, Behrman House, Inc., 1973, 286.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 287.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 See L. Jacobs, *A Jewish Theology*, 289-291

Liberation Ethics and Idealism

Gerard Fourez SJ

Liberation theologies provide a framework for serious reflection about systemic issues. But some liberation theologians, while urging social change, foster a guilt-inducing process which actually prevents both personal and social change. The tendency to moralize individual life is thus simply transposed into moralizing and collective issues. Absolute search for justice can even sometimes become offensive. The content of normative ethics is changed but the same guilt-inducing attitudes remain.

This article is concerned with the construction of a "liberation ethics" which goes beyond the mere transposition of idealistic moral philosophy to a new set of issues. It deals with the meaning of ethical principles and of sin, while constructing an ethics based on historical accounts of liberation. Interestingly, this approach is