

DOCUMENT

A Jewish Legal Authority Addresses Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Two Responsa of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

Translated and Annotated by David Ellenson

October 28, 1965, will stand as a milestone moment in the history of Catholic-Jewish relations. On that date the Second Vatican Council, in response to a call first put forth by Pope John XXIII in 1960, issued a statement on the Jews, *Nostra Aetate*. This document provided a positive assessment of the role played by the Jewish people throughout history and sought to repudiate anti-Semitism. In many Jewish circles *Nostra Aetate* was received with enthusiastic, albeit cautious, optimism. After all, the spirit of openness found in its pages contained a promise of hope. Its proponents heralded it as marking the advent of a new era in which almost two millennia of an often-tragic history between Jews and Christians might be coming to an end. The document chartered new directions for Catholic-Jewish relations throughout the world, and the spirit of religious ecumenicism and tolerance contained in its pages opened the floodgates for Jewish-Catholic dialogue and debate.

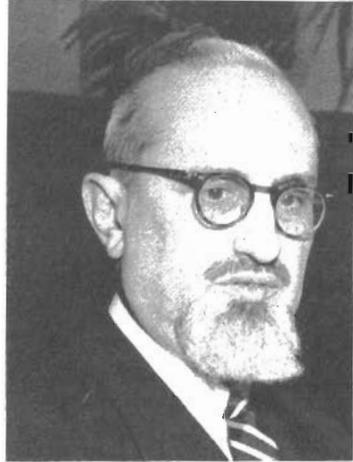
The Orthodox Jewish world was not impervious to these developments. Indeed, foremost among those who paid careful attention to these trends was Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895–1986). Born to a prominent rabbinical family in Uzda, Belorussia, Rabbi Feinstein arrived at the United States in 1937. He served from 1937 until his death as head of *Metivta Tiferet* Jerusalem in New York, and his multivolumed collection of responsa, published under the title *Iggerot Moshe*, gained him worldwide recognition as a decisor (*posek*) and interpreter of Jewish law.¹ In the United States no Orthodox *posek* was more authoritative than Rabbi Feinstein was during his lifetime.² A leader of what is commonly labeled “sectarian” or “traditionalist” Orthodox Judaism,³ his was a brand of Orthodox Judaism that has been described as “committed to resistance... to the surrounding

culture."⁴ Feinstein served as president of the Agudat HaRabonim (Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada), an organization first established in 1902 by sixty Yiddish-speaking Orthodox rabbis. This group, in the words of Jeffrey Gurock, was from the outset "strident" in its "nonrecognition of the Americanized Orthodox rabbinate."⁵ Rabbi Feinstein also came to occupy the post of chairman of the American branch of Mo'etzet Gedolei ha-Torah (Council of Torah Sages) of the sectarian Orthodox Agudat Israel, a European-born organization that was initially planted in the United States in 1938. This group, to cite Gurock once more, was critical of what it regarded as "the old-time American rabbis' non-adherence to uncompromising principles."⁶ Rabbi Feinstein gave expression to these principles in 1956 when he, with a number of other authorities in the world of the American *yeshivot*, issued a joint *herem* (ban). This ban stated that Orthodox rabbis were "forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah" to be members of organizations such as the Synagogue Council of America or local boards of rabbis where these Orthodox men would cooperate "with their Reform and Conservative counterparts."⁷ In view of all this, it is hardly surprising that the ecumenical developments surrounding Vatican II concerned him. Indeed, his concern was such that he issued two responsa in 1967 on the issue of interreligious Jewish-Christian dialogue that mirrored the attitude he had adopted a decade earlier regarding intrareligious discussions. They are presented here in English translation and reflect a consistent sectarian stance on his part.

The first responsum, dated 19 Adar I, 5727 (March 1, 1967), was addressed to Rabbi Bernard Lander, then a young Orthodox rabbi, today president of Touro College, who was scheduled to attend a Protestant-Catholic-Jewish dialogue four days later. The rabbi had apparently promised to attend this meeting and expressed concern over his obligation to attend in light of this promise. He wanted to know from Rabbi Feinstein whether such attendance was permissible from the standpoint of Jewish law. The alarm Rabbi Feinstein felt over such matters is palpable in this document and his refusal to sanction Jewish attendance at such meetings was absolute.

Clearly agitated by the issue, Rabbi Feinstein wrote less than three weeks later to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik (1903–1993), expressing his uncompromising determination to prohibit such dialogue. In writing

to R. Soloveitchik on 9 Adar II, 5727 (March 21, 1967), R. Feinstein was not only addressing a man who was his relative,⁸ he was communicating with the man who was the foremost leader of modern Orthodox Judaism in America.⁹ R. Soloveitchik himself stemmed from the same sectarian Orthodox Jewish world that had spawned R. Feinstein. Indeed, his family was famed in his native Lithuania for its genius in the study of Talmud, and R. Soloveitchik brought that tradition with him to America. In 1941 he became *Rosh Yeshiva* at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) of Yeshiva University, succeeding his father, Moses, in that post. His presence linked RIETS to the realm of the Lithuanian yeshiva, and his ascribed and earned status in the Orthodox world can hardly be exaggerated. However, despite his ties to the world of sectarian Orthodoxy, R. Soloveitchik also affirmed the worth of secular culture. He received a Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Berlin for a dissertation on the work of Hermann Cohen, and he championed the universe of "modern" Orthodox Judaism. This universe, in contrast to the realm of sectarian Orthodox Judaism, "explicitly advocates accommodation to the surrounding culture."¹⁰



Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik
(American Jewish Archives)

Rabbi Soloveitchik had already publicly expressed his views on the issue of ecumenical dialogue with Christians three years before R. Feinstein approached him on this matter. As Aaron Rakkefet-Rothkoff explains:

With the advent of the ecumenical thrust of the Catholic Church in the 1960s, the Rav was consulted regarding Orthodox participation in the dialogue initiated by the Vatican with Jewish leaders. Rabbi Soloveitchik opposed many aspects of this dialogue. He held that there could be no discussion concerning the uniqueness of the respective religious communities. Each, he held, was an individual entity which could not be merged or equated with the other, since

each was committed to a different faith. The Rav presented a paper entitled "Confrontation" on this topic at the 1964 midwinter conference of the Rabbinical Council.¹¹

Rabbi Soloveitchik published this paper in expanded form later that year in *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought*, under the same title as his address, "Confrontation."¹² While Rakkefet-Rothkoff is certainly correct in asserting that R. Soloveitchik opposed dimensions of the dialogue, an examination of the Soloveitchik essay indicates that there were also elements in the Jewish-Christian dialogue that R. Soloveitchik strongly endorsed. At the outset, the rabbi maintained that there was value in there being formal relations between Jews and non-Jews. In addition, he viewed Christianity as more than a source of hatred toward Jews, and he recognized that the modern world had witnessed significant transformations in the attitudes Gentiles adopted toward Jews. This meant that there were areas in which Jewish-Christian cooperation was surely desirable. His open yet cautionary attitude is best captured in the following statement:

We cooperate with the members of other faith communities in all fields of constructive human endeavor, but, simultaneously with our integration into the general social framework, we engage in a movement of recoil and retrace our steps. In a word, we belong to the human society and, at the same time, we feel as strangers and outsiders.¹³

As spiritual head of the modern Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), R. Soloveitchik's stance led the RCA to adopt a policy statement on ecumenicism and interreligious dialogue at its 1964 convention. As a policy statement of the rabbi's opinion on the subject, the resolution is worth citing in full precisely because its tone, as well as parts of its nuanced content, stand in such sharp contrast to the position put forth by R. Feinstein, a position contained in the translation below. The statement reads:

We are pleased to note that in recent years there has evolved in our country as well as throughout the world a desire to seek better understanding and a mutual respect among the world's

major faiths. The current threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values makes even more imperative a harmonious relationship among the faiths. This relationship, however, can only be of value if it will not be in conflict with the uniqueness of each religious community, since each religious community is an individual entity which cannot be merged or equated with a community which is committed to a different faith. Each religious community is endowed with intrinsic dignity and metaphysical worth. Its historical experience, its present dynamics, its hopes and aspirations for the future can only be interpreted in terms of full spiritual independence of and freedom from any relatedness to another faith community. Any suggestion that the historical and meta-historical worth of a faith community be viewed against the backdrop of another faith, and the mere hint that a revision of basic historic attitudes is anticipated, are incongruous with the fundamentals of religious liberty and freedom of conscience and can only breed discord and suspicion. Such an approach is unacceptable to any self-respecting faith community that is proud of its past, vibrant and active in the present and determined to live on in the future and serve God in its own individual way. Only full appreciation on the part of all of the singular role, inherent worth, and basic prerogatives of each community will help promote the spirit of cooperation among the faiths.¹⁴

In practical terms, this meant that R. Soloveitchik and members of the RCA endorsed Jewish-Christian dialogue on social and political issues of general human concern. At the same time, they were opposed to such dialogue on matters of faith. Each religious community is singular and its theological postures are axiological. They cannot be the subjects of joint discussion. Of course, precisely how this line can be drawn in *praxis* is unclear. After all, the social concerns and political commitments that religious persons adopt are presumably extensions of the faith affirmations they possess. Nevertheless, this was the policy position R. Soloveitchik and his followers advanced and it has informed and guided the stance which numerous Orthodox rabbis and Jewish laypeople have taken toward

Jewish-Christian dialogue for over three decades.¹⁵

In looking at the Feinstein letter to R. Soloveitchik on the topic, no element of Jewish-Christian dialogue is endorsed. R. Feinstein, in contrast to R. Soloveitchik, expressed the view that ecumenicism and the Jewish-Christian dialogue such ecumenicism fostered were nothing more than a thinly veiled plot designed by the Catholic church to convince Jews to abandon their faith and convert to Christianity. Only two types of Jews would participate in such efforts. The first were individuals like Reform and Conservative rabbis, people who advocated positions that could only lead to the assimilation of the Jewish people. The second were well-intentioned yet naive people like the young Orthodox rabbi who had approached him earlier on this matter. Their participation in such dialogue could lead to no positive end. Rabbi Feinstein was particularly concerned that this latter group could inadvertently create an atmosphere that would allow the church to entice Jews into abandoning their faith. However pure their motives, these Jewish leaders would be responsible for the apostasy of these Jews and Jewish law would therefore hold them culpable. It was this group he particularly sought to address, and R. Feinstein saw R. Soloveitchik as his natural confederate in this matter, as the influential authority the two men could exercise together in the Orthodox world was considerable.

In reading the Feinstein responsa, it seems clear that Rabbi Feinstein viewed the relationship between Jews and Christians as unaltered by modern developments such as Vatican II. From his perspective, only isolation from Christians and their representatives could ensure the survival of Jews as a minority community. He could perceive no motive for joint religious dialogue other than conversion. Furthermore, his responsa—inasmuch as they advanced a completely negative position regarding such dialogue—implicitly reveal that he had theological-legal grounds for rejecting such discussions, for R. Feinstein clearly maintained a classical Jewish posture that negatively viewed Christianity as a form of idolatry.

According to Jewish law as recorded in Sanhedrin 56a, God enjoys a universal relationship with all humanity. This relationship, known in Jewish tradition as the Noahide Covenant, caused the rabbis to assert that God issued seven commandments through Noah to all humankind. Among these seven commandments is one that prohibits idolatry.

The relevance of this for understanding the positions of Rabbi Feinstein and Rabbi Soloveitchik on the question of Jewish-Christian dialogue is vital. This passage led rabbinic authorities to ask whether Christian belief in God violated the Noahide stricture against idolatry. If so, then relations with Christians had to be circumscribed not only because Jews should distance themselves from such false beliefs, but also because interactions with Christians might lead Christians to swear by an "idolatrous deity," an act condemned as sinful by the Talmud in Sanhedrin 63b. Indeed, in such instances the Jew would be held culpable for this transgression by Jewish law, for the Jew would be the proximate cause for the Christian having committed this sinful act.

Of course, Christians insisted that their doctrines regarding God adhered to monotheistic standards. However, a number of Talmudic sages disagreed, and they explicitly condemned early Christian expressions concerning the doctrines of Trinity and the incarnate man-God, Jesus, as untrue and in opposition to genuine monotheism.¹⁶ Most importantly, these attitudes caused no less an authority than Moses Maimonides to affirm that these doctrinal differences were of such import that Christians could be assigned to the Talmudic category of "*ovdei kochavim u'mazalot*—worshippers of idols."¹⁷ These legal sources reflect the doctrinal emphases that have classically distinguished Jewish from Christian faith and possess normative implications that limit Jewish-Christian interactions on religious grounds. Rabbi Feinstein obviously stood upon these legal sources in issuing his views. He not only feared that such discussions would lead to Jewish apostasy, he also never modified his definition of Christianity here as idolatry.

However, other voices in Jewish tradition took a different stance on these matters. They would not consign Christianity to the category of idolatry, nor, by extension, would they accept a definition of Christians as idol worshippers. In a comment on Sanhedrin 63b, Rabbi Isaac of late—twelfth-century France, the nephew of Rabbenu Tam,¹⁸ spoke of Christians and Christianity in the following terms:

. . . Although they [Christians] mention the name of Heaven, meaning thereby Jesus of Nazareth, they do not at all events mention a strange deity, and moreover, they mean thereby the Maker of Heaven and Earth too; and despite the fact that they

associate the name of Heaven with an alien deity, we do not find that it is forbidden to cause Gentiles to make such an association,... since such an association (*Shituf*) is not forbidden to the sons of Noah.¹⁹

In taking this stance, Rabbi Isaac offered a distinction that was unknown in Talmudic Judaism: that while Trinitarianism constituted idolatry for Jews, it did not for Christians. Indeed, the historian Jacob Katz has characterized its significance in the following way. Katz writes, "The assertion that the Gentiles are not bound to uphold the strict unity of the Godhead opens up the possibility of condoning Christian adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity so far as the Gentiles, though not the Jews, are concerned."²⁰ Katz further notes that this view was taken up and expanded upon by Rabbi Menachem Ha-Me'iri of Provence who, writing in the early 1300s, stated that Christians "recognize the Godhead" and "believe in God's existence, His unity and power, although they misconceive some points according to our belief." In fact, Ha-Me'iri explicitly refused to place contemporaneous Christians in the Talmudic category of "idol-worshippers," declaring, "Now idolatry has disappeared from most places."²¹ Katz, commenting upon these writings of Ha-Me'iri, noted "that the exclusion of Christians... from the category of the idolatrous—an exclusion that had been suggested purely casuistically by earlier halakhists—was to be acknowledged as a firm and comprehensive principle."²²

The trajectory that marked these rulings came to dominate among later generations of Jewish legal writers. The eighteenth-century Rabbi Yehuda Ashkenazi, writing on the *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah*, 151:2, in his authoritative *Ba'er Heitev*, echoed both Rabbi Isaac and Ha-Me'iri and granted their position normative Jewish legal status. His commentary there on Christians and their faith states, "In our era, ... when the gentiles in whose midst we dwell ... [speak of God], their intention is directed towards the One Who made Heaven and Earth, albeit that they associate another personality with God. However, this does not constitute a violation of Leviticus 19:14, 'You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind,' for non-Jews are not warned against such association (*Shituf*)."

R. Soloveitchik obviously stood upon this latter position in Jewish law. Had he not, he would simply have been compelled, as would

have R. Feinstein, to consign contemporary Christians to the Talmudic category of “*ovdei avodah zarah*—idol-worshippers,” in which case all dialogue with them would have been forbidden. The fact that R. Soloveitchik did not prohibit but, in fact, allowed for Jewish-Christian dialogue on matters of common human concern indicates that he felt that Christian faith was an acceptable form of monotheism for Gentiles. It also reflects his conviction that Christians, not just Jews, were capable of performing beneficent acts on account of their religious beliefs that would contribute to the repair of the world and that their sole motive for such dialogue was not conversion.

As a result, R. Soloveitchik did not respond to this overture that R. Feinstein made to him. He would not condemn Jewish-Christian dialogue in the harsh and overarching terms that R. Feinstein did. Nor would he reverse the position he expressed on this matter in “Confrontation.” There is no indication that R. Soloveitchik signed the declaration that R. Feinstein appended to this letter, nor is there any record that R. Soloveitchik offered an alternative formulation. Had he agreed to do either of these two things, then a document condemning dialogue of all types between Jews and Christians would have been issued by the two foremost leaders of late—twentieth-century American Jewish Orthodoxy. The Feinstein documents, considered in concert with the position put forth by R. Soloveitchik and the RCA, reflect the diverse sensibilities and differences in policy that emerged among the two camps of American Orthodoxy on this issue at that time. They reflect the commitments and principles that informed and guided each of these men. R. Feinstein did not hesitate to publish these documents as expressions of his views on the matter, nor did R. Soloveitchik—in view of his own writings on this issue—feel constrained to respond in any way.

These responsa are therefore significant sources for understanding the diversity that then marked Orthodox Judaism in the United States and for illuminating the ethos that then separated the ethos of sectarian Orthodox Judaism from the greater openness which characterized the more modernist camp. Those differences remain current. These documents thus not only shed historical light on Orthodox Judaism in America, they remain important sources for comprehending the diverse precincts in American Orthodoxy today.

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

Moshe Feinstein, Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh

Deah 3

Number 43

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

I (19 Adar I, 5727 – March 1, 1967)

In regard to the matter wherein you promised to attend a gathering on 23 Adar I, 5727 (March 5, 1967) where Catholics and Protestants will assemble together with Jews who are members of the Synagogue Council of America as well as rabbinical colleagues from the Rabbinical Council of America. Even though what you will discuss there will be nontheological in nature,²³ it is clear and simple that such participation constitutes a grave violation of the prohibition against appurtenances to idolatry. For a plague has now broken out in many locales on account of the initiative of the new pope, whose only intent is to cause all the Jews to abandon their pure and holy faith so that they will accept Christianity. Indeed, it is much more convenient to convert them in this manner than to employ the methods of hatred and murder that popes prior to him utilized.²⁴ Consequently, all contact and discussion with them, even on worldly matters, is forbidden, for the act of "drawing near" is in and of itself forbidden, as it falls under the category of the grave prohibition against "rapprochement with idolatry—*hitkarout 'im 'avodah zarah.*"

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

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

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

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

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

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

Priests. For we have seen that the newspapers take pride in the fact that this has already led to a leveling among faith and opinions, to joint worship and the like. I was recently asked by one of the young rabbis being sent by the RCA to speak at some type of joint meeting in New York on 23 Adar I between priests and *l'havdil*,²⁸ rabbis if it was permissible (*mutar*) to go there, since they will not discuss matters of faith.²⁹ I told him it was forbidden, as the grave prohibited category (*issur hamur*) of "meisit—one who entices" applies, even if this was not his intent. Thank God, he listened to me.

And now there will soon be another larger convention like this one in Boston. Therefore, to overturn the conspiracy of the evil ones and the success of the deeds of Satan, as well as to rescue the Jewish people from apostasy (*sh'mad*), God forbid, it is my desire that Your Excellency sign the document I have included in this letter. It declares that there is an absolute prohibition (*issur gamur*) against associating with priests in any way. One can neither speak with them on social-political matters (*devarim b'alma*), nor attend the convention that will be held in Boston. This applies to any such convention with them in any place, neither in this country, nor in Europe. One cannot in any way aid the conspiracy that the Head of the Priests has concocted through his ecumenicism. And I hope that the legal ruling issued by both of us will prevent any rabbi from joining in this, and the conspiracy that the wicked ones have hatched with the ecumenical policy they pursue will thus be thwarted.

Or perhaps Your Excellency wants to write a document himself. If so, please send me a copy of your formulation. And I know of the trouble Your Excellency is experiencing during these days, May God have mercy.³⁰ But it is for the honor of God to stand in this great breach. Therefore, I am certain you will repress your distress and sorrow and immediately sign the document, stating that it is prohibited to attend such gatherings, and send it back to me.

Formula of the Prohibition

Concerning the matter of ecumenicism that has been spread through the conspiracy concocted by the leaders of the Christian faith, whose only intent is to cause Jews to apostasize, God forbid. This act of Satan has succeeded in enticing a number of rabbis to join with priests in joint fellowship on permanent committees established in every locale, as well as in conventions held here in this country and in Europe. Behold, we declare that there is an absolute and clear

prohibition against joint meetings of rabbis and priests. One should not participate in the convention to be held in Boston, nor anywhere, either in this country or any countries. Just as it is forbidden to dialogue on matters of faith and religion, so there should be no joint discussion on matters of social-political concern and there should be no excuses or rationalizations offered [by any rabbis for participating]. Indeed, it is prohibited to aid the project of ecumenicism in any manner, as the participants in such conversation fall under the *issur* (prohibited category) of “one who entices—*meisit*,” even though those who participate in such joint Jewish-Christian endeavors have no intention at all of engaging in this. On account of this, we have come to sign this document so as to proclaim the *issur* (prohibition) against this to all rabbis who preserve the religion of our holy Torah, and we stand up against the breach on this day of the Fast of Esther, 5727.

NOTES:

1. For a brief biography of Rabbi Feinstein, see Rod Glogower, “Feinstein, Moshe,” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*.

2. Numerous articles exist on the role Rabbi Feinstein played as the leading Orthodox decisor of his era. Several of the most significant English-language publications that give insight into his legal corpus include Emanuel Rackman, “Halakhic Progress: Rabbi Moshe Feinstein’s *Igrot Moshe on Even Ha-Ezer*,” *Judaism* 13 (1964): 365–73; Aaron Kirschenbaum, “Rabbi Moshe Feinstein’s Responsa: A Major Halakhic Event,” *Judaism* 15 (1966): 364–73; Ira Robinson, “Because of Our Many Sins,” *Judaism* 35 (1986): 35–46; and Norma Baumel Joseph, “The Traditional Denial of Change: Women’s Place in the World of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein,” *Journal of Religion and Culture* 2 (1987): 190–201; *idem*, “*Mehitzah*: Halakhic Decisions and Political Consequences,” in Susan Grossman and Rivka Haut, *Daughters of the King: Women and the Synagogue* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992), 117–34; and Norma Baumel Joseph, “Jewish Education for Women: Rabbi Moshe Feinstein’s Map of America,” *American Jewish History* (1995): 205–22.

3. For the use of these terms, see, among others, Lynn Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World: Women Turn to Orthodox Judaism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), 37ff.; Jeffrey Gurock, “Resisters and Accommodators: Varieties of Orthodox Rabbis in America, 1886–1983,” *American Jewish Archives* (1983): 100–187; Samuel Heilman, “Inner and Outer Identities: Sociological Ambivalence Among Orthodox Jews,” *Jewish Social Studies* 39 (1977): 227–40; and Charles Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life,” *American Jewish Year Book* (1965): 21–97.

4. Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

5. This description of Agudat HaRabonim is taken from Jeffrey S. Gurock, *American Jewish Orthodoxy in Historical Perspective* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1996), 7.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 56.

8. Rabbi Feinstein’s grandfather, Rabbi Yehiel Yitzhak Davidovich of Karelitz, was

the great-grandfather of Rabbi Soloveitchik. R. Davidovich's daughter Faya Gitel was the mother of R. Feinstein, while her sister Guta Chisa was the mother of Rabbi Soloveitchik's mother, Pesia. Pesia, the first cousin of R. Feinstein, married R. Moses Soloveitchik, and that union produced Joseph Baer. For the family tree, see Aaron Rakkefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Vol. 1 (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav, 1999), 41.

9. For a fine description and analysis of the preeminent role Rabbi Soloveitchik played in Orthodox communal life at this time, see Charles Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," in Marshall Sklare, ed., *The Jewish Community in America* (New York: Behrman House, 1974), 144ff.

10. Davidman, *Tradition in a Rootless World*, 38.

11. Rakkefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 1:49.

12. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," *Tradition* 6 (1964): 5–28.

13. *Ibid.*, 26.

14. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

15. Lawrence Kaplan, "Revisionism and the Rav: The Struggle for the Soul of Modern Jewish Orthodoxy," *Judaism* 48 (1999): 299, summarizes the Soloveitchik position well when Kaplan writes, "The Rav, with his delicate balance between universalism and singularism, never opposed interfaith dialogue. What he opposed, as he states in 'Confrontation,' was interfaith *theological* dialogue. He always, however, approved of interfaith dialogue about matters of general ethical and social concern." Kaplan also points out that R. Soloveitchik issued a second statement on this matter two years later that reconfirmed the policy position R. Soloveitchik had advanced earlier in "Confrontation." This statement is published as an appendix to "Confrontation" in N. Lamm and Walter Wurzburger, eds., *A Treasury of Tradition* (New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1967), 78–80.

16. For example, see *Exodus Rabbah* 29:5. On this passage, see Samuel Tobias Lachs, "Rabbi Abbahu and the Minim," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 60, no. 3 (January 1970): 200; and Lieve Tugels, "The Background of the Anti-Christian Polemics in Aggadat Bereshit," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30, no. 2 (1999): 196.

17. For example, see his *Commentary on the Mishna, Avodah Zarah* 1:3, and *Hilchot Akum* 9:4. Of course, in fairness to the Rambam, his stance on this issue is complex. For instance, in his legal rulings of Responsum #364, Maimonides writes that "it is permissible to teach the commandments to Christians—*mutar l'lamed ha-mitzvot l'notzrim*." This indicates that dialogue with them is permitted in certain instances and implies that Christians do not fall under the category of "*ovdei avodah zarah*—idol-worshippers." I, therefore, want to be clear that I am not offering a complete exposition of Maimonides's perceptions concerning the legal status Christianity enjoys in Jewish law. That would be far beyond the limits of this paper. Rather, it should be noted that his stance on Christianity is not simple and cannot be summarized in only a few sentences. At the same time there are sources that serve as warrants for the contention that Christianity can be assigned to the category of "idol worship" in Maimonidean jurisprudence, and the trajectory that marks these sources appears to have informed R. Feinstein's views regarding Christianity. Indeed, I would unhappily note that this is probably the majority position in *halakhic* jurisprudence.

18. This commentary is often wrongly attributed to Rabbenu Tam, Rabbi Jacob

Ben Meir Tam (1100–1171), a grandson of Rashi and a leading French *tosafist* (medieval rabbinic commentator on the Talmud) and twelfth-century scholar. However, in Shalom Albeck's, "The Relationship of Rabbenu Tam to the Problems of His Era" (Hebrew), *Tziyon* 18 (1954): 109, he convincingly demonstrates that Rashi's nephew, Rabbi Isaac, another *tosafist*, was the author of this commentary upon Sanhedrin 63b.

19. The translation here is taken from Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 35. The underlining is mine.

20. *Ibid.*, 36.

21. *Ibid.*, 121 and 136.

22. *Ibid.*, 115. The underlining is mine. For an extensive recent discussion of Ha-Me'iri and medieval and modern scholarship on his position, see Israel Ta-Shema, *Exegetical Literature on the Talmud in Europe and North Africa* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2000), 167–70.

23. The precise Hebrew here is "*divrei b'alma*," literally, "mere words." In employing this phrase, Rabbi Feinstein is referring to a position undoubtedly put forth by his interlocutor. This position, commonly advanced in modern Orthodox circles, holds that interreligious dialogue between Jews and adherents of other faiths on nontheological matters is permissible. Hence, discussion on matters of common social and human import between Jews and Christians can be held, as such discussions reflect a common task advanced by both religions and do not touch upon the unique religious posture that informs and characterizes each community. The foremost advocate of this stance in the Orthodox world, as explained in the introduction to these translations, was Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. For this reason, I have here elected to translate this phrase as "nontheological in nature." Elsewhere, I have translated these words as "social-political matters." Such translations capture the sense, if not the literal meaning, of these words.

24. Throughout history there have been Christian proponents of outreach to the Jews who felt that a kind missionary approach marked by love might well lead significant numbers of Jews to abandon Judaism and convert to Christianity. Perhaps the most prominent among them was Martin Luther who, in his 1523 pamphlet, "That Jesus Christ Was Born A Jew," states, "I hope that if the Jews are treated friendly and are instructed kindly through the Bible, many of them will become real Christians..." Of course, when virtually no Jews responded to this approach, Luther's fury against the Jews knew no bounds. In 1543 Luther, in his "Concerning The Jews And Their Lies," queries, "What then shall we do with this damned, rejected race of Jews?" These documents are found in Jacob R. Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World* (New York: Atheneum, 1938), 165–69. Professor Marcus, in commenting upon these passages on page 165 of his introduction to these sources, observes, "In a work written as early as 1523... Luther was very sympathetic to the Jews because he hoped that he might induce them to Protestantism... Later in life Luther turned bitter against the Jews... the Jews did not flock to his new Christianity..."

In light of the suspicions R. Feinstein expressed concerning Catholic motives for Christian dialogue with Jews, it is fascinating to note an entry recorded by Theodor Herzl, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzl* (New York: Dial Press, 1956), 420–31, concerning audiences he held with Pope Pius X and Cardinal Merry del Val, the Vatican secretary of state, in January 1904. In these pages, Herzl states that he asked the Holy See for

assistance in creating a Jewish State. The Cardinal, according to Herzl, turned down the request. He also said, "So long as the Jews deny the divinity of Christ, we certainly cannot side with them... A Jew who accepts baptism out of conviction is for me the ideal person... In order that we should come out for the Jewish people in the way that you desire, they would first have to accept conversion." To this, Pope Pius X added, "If you come to Palestine and settle your people there, we will be ready with priests and churches to baptize all of you."

While there is no reason to believe that R. Feinstein had actually read either these statements or those of Martin Luther, the attitudes expressed by all these men are surely emblematic of positions long held by many Christian leaders regarding the Jews, and R. Feinstein clearly knew that. He also obviously regarded such postures as reflecting the true position the church adopted toward Jews on these matters. He disregarded the pronouncements of Vatican II that ran contrary to this position. Obviously, he could not conceive the modern Catholic position on ecumenicism that emanated from Vatican II as anything other than a ploy on the part of the church. The classical evangelical stance the church had adopted toward Jews was the only one R. Feinstein could imagine the church would ever take.

25. These Jewish legal categories stem from Deuteronomy 13. Verse 7 reads, "If your brother, your own mother's son or you, your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your closest friend, entices you (*y'si'tekha*) in secret, saying, 'Come, let us worship other gods...' "This is followed in verse 11 by the admonition, "You shall stone him so that he dies, for he sought to lead you away (*l'hadihakha*) from the Lord your God..." One should also consult verse 14 in the same chapter, where the warning concerning those who "have led the inhabitants of their city astray" is repeated. Hence, the terms "*meisit*," the one who entices, and "*madiah*," the one who leads astray, are the noun forms of the Hebrew that appears in verbal formulation in the biblical text. As the penalty of stoning that the biblical text prescribes for such people suggests, the Jews to whom these categories apply are guilty of a most severe infraction of Jewish law. R. Feinstein's application of these categories in his response indicates the gravity he attached to this issue.

26. Here, as in other legal writings of R. Feinstein, Orthodox rabbis are referred to by the Hebrew term "*rabbanim*," while, when speaking of Reform and Conservative rabbis, R. Feinstein simply transliterates the English term "rabbis" into Hebrew letters.

27. *Ibid.*

28. "*L'havdil*" is an idiom that can perhaps best be rendered as, "not to be mentioned in the same breath."

29. See the first responsum translated in this article.

30. R. Soloveitchik's wife, Dr. Tonya Lewitt Soloveitchik, was sick at this time and in fact died on the Fast of Esther, 5727 (1967), the date mentioned at the conclusion of the document R. Feinstein appended to the letter. For the date that Mrs. Soloveitchik died, see Rakkefet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, 2:8. R. Feinstein was likely referring here to the anguish her illness undoubtedly caused R. Soloveitchik.