

Bases and Boundaries of Jewish, Christian, and Moslem Dialogue

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I am deeply aware that the unprecedented dialogue a-trois in this conference is fraught with new problems which increase the complexity of our meeting. There are places where Christians and Jews will be able to ally themselves against Moslems, and Moslems and Christians against Jews. There are positions of three-way mutual agreement as well as situations of mutual disagreement. I cannot take for granted that the Moslem and I will share what the Christian and I do, and so on, round and round. What is tacit in one relationship is necessarily explicit in another. When I make explicit what is tacit, I may create problems.

Moreover, I am convinced of the need to conduct our dialogue with other members also, not physically present, who are committed to other ways, Bibles, and dogmas which express emphases concerning God and the Cosmos that are different from ours. All of this makes our dialogue exceedingly delicate. We cannot retreat from the challenge, though the dynamics are very complex, and we will need to keep all of this in mind while we are trying to evolve the right manners for this new phase of dialogue. May God grant that we stay conscious of this.

Our Dialogue Takes Place in Exile

How does one live with exile? Exile is one of the ways in which traditional Jews experience life differently than do their Moslem and Christian counterparts. We are in *Galuth*. We participate in dialogue against the background of exile. With the exception of a few exalted souls, Christians lost the sense of exile in the year 321 when Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity. The religion of oppressed ghetto dwellers now sat in the drivers' seat of the *saeculum* and controlled political events. From that time on, salvation for Christians became a private matter between the soul and its God. The messianism of Christians no longer needed this world to come into its own. Triumphalism claimed its fulfillment here on earth under the rule of the triple-crowned vicar of Christ. All that now mattered was the spread of the Holy Roman Empire. Only oppressed nations after the resurgence of nationalisms had messianic dreams of temporal significance. If a Christian felt alienated and marginal it was interpreted as his or her personal problem. Until Vatican II the church did not see itself as the *ecclesia* in waiting for the end of the exile, but as the church arrived.

In Islam, to my knowledge, although there too an expected Mahdi is part of the eschatology, there is no sense of exile. Once the Jahaliyin and idolators were removed from Mecca, a new world order began.

Except on the Sabbath when we Jews share a few moments of exilelessness, we stay aware of exile. I ask my partners in this dialogue to remain aware of exile, which I believe we all share, as the basic condition of an unredeemed world.

Dialogue Is Not Arbitration or Disputation

There is a myth, begotten by marketplace and parliament, that the individuals involved in dialogue will have power given to them to change the thinking of the faithful of their own community. The Jewish community has given me no such power. If I go too far out, I will be repudiated by my own community. The dialoguer who goes too far afield is discredited and with this the effectiveness of dialogue as a changer of consciousness is undermined. Dialogue is not even part of seminary

curricula. With the notable exception of the Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati, there are no chairs in Christianity and Islam in Jewish seminaries. I suspect that the same is true of Christian and Moslem seminaries vis-a-vis other religions. In the past we have studiously ignored one another, and still there is tension between us. But in conferences such as this one we become the instrument of the Power that wants us to connect, the Power which I believe is at the core of the urge for dialogue.

Thank God we are not in a disputation. We may look to a discussion in which all partners are equal, open to each other and caring for the truth, each responding from the position of a loyal adherent to his or her own religion, standing in the presence of the God who witnesses the sharing. As Malachi 3:16 has it, "then did those who respect God speak, each to his fellow, and the Lord heard and listened and wrote it all into his book entitled 'The dialogues of those who fear the Lord and honor his Name.'"

Our Poor Acts of Faith

To us Jews, and in some measure to Christians and Moslems, the revelation of Sinai is crucial. But what if we could construct a working time machine which could take us to participate in the receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai? As we teach this event in the tradition of Scripture and Midrash, there were present the souls of the born and yet unborn receiving the Law in seventy languages. All the earth trembled when the entire Torah, up to the last insight yet to occur to a diligent student, was given to Moses and the vast multitudes, of whom the 600,000 men from twenty to sixty years old were only the nucleus, surrounded by elders, women, children, slaves, and the mixed multitudes. Echoes of that event are still in the air and can be heard by those with holy ears.

Would this, in fact, be what we would find at the other end of a trip in time? When I am in a mood for historic facts, in touch with what I know of the nature of Hebrew-with the documents of covenants of the ancient Near East-I think there were fewer people there. All the eisegetics of the Midrash that came in subsequent times managed to help people accept the momentousness of the revelation, but were they warranted by the factic reality, or were they a pious strategy intended to exhort the faithful?

The Midrash, even if unfactual, was not untrue. I am in need of the Midrash where I am a viscerotonic celebrator of the holy feasts and mysteries, a devotee. On that level and in only that universe of discourse do I accept the Midrash as reality. The Midrash is true in the same way that God is love, or Brahman is Atman, and the Lord is King. (The word "is" is a convenience for the English ear. In Hebrew it is lacking, as in "Adonai Melekh.") Rabbi Yishmael stated that "the Torah speaks in the language of men." I understand this to mean that the symbolic language of the Torah motivates our hearts and behavior more powerfully than would a factual record of events.

I do not base my values and my life as much on facts as on faith. So, despite the facts, I make an act of faith which places me at the foot of Sinai, and I accept the Law and the revelation. If this is so with regard to the Sinai revelation, how much is it true of an event less public and in the view of only the one person who reports it? Were not all the revelations of the prophets like that reported in Daniel? "And I Daniel alone saw the vision and the people with me did not see, though a great quaking fell upon them and they fled" (Dan. 10:7). Had we been present, all that we could have reported would have been that this holy man claimed to have experienced a vision. But what about the truth in that vision? This I allege by an act of faith, distinguishing it from a common hallucination. I base my life on such acts of faith, and I will try to persuade my children to make similar acts of faith. I will do so in emulation of Father Abraham of whom the Bible states, "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord" (Gen. 18:19), but this is an act of faith and love. I have been talking about my own faith and the problems associated with it. If my own faith is on such shaky ground, then what about the claims of other religions, especially the ones with which I am in dialogue today?

Granted even the most generous reading of their positions, what facts do I have? A carpenter's son from Galilee spouts holy sayings culled from the popular piety of his day, heals some folks in the same way as did Elijah and Elisha, makes grandiose claims, and dies without fulfilling them. Then I have the testimony of his bereaved disciples, which is about on the same level of credibility as that of the disciples of Rabbi Judah the Prince who, it is claimed, came back after his demise to recite the sabbath sanctification and, when this became part of local gossip, ceased to come (Kethuboth 103). I also have the testimony of a zealot persecutor of Jesus' followers, who on the road to Damascus fell victim to a seizure and reported afterward that he saw an apparition reproving him, "Why dost thou persecute me?"

What of the claim that an unlettered man rode a miracle horse to heaven to get the true and latest version of the revelation which any form critic can see as a bowdlerized version of Jewish Midrash served up in new ethnic clothes and at the service of the children of Ishmael instead of those of Isaac?

Deflating Inflated Faith Claims

I am aware that I am treading on pious toes. But please watch; I also stepped on my own. What I am saying is not that the world faiths to which we belong have no factual basis at all. What I *am* saying is that we are *all* on shaky ground, and that we need to deal not so much with the external facts but with our own *acts of faith*. These we need to take seriously because we stake our lives on them and invest them with supreme value. These acts of faith are not the result of facts. On the contrary, facts in this world are more often the result of acts of faith on which we base our actions. Our acts of faith create realities for us and others. So that we do not become arrogant in the process of inflating our truth claims which are based on our own acts of faith and put down those of others, I must make these statements so that in a sober and humble fashion we may talk about our traditions without undue triumphalism.

The major impediment to communication among our three religions is the dogmatic stance which we assume for the sake of the propagation of faith. We quote authorities who knew no more truly than we know but whose energetic assertions "snow" us. Their energy is the result of worldviews so dominated by their inner scene that they did not permit any of the doubts that are brought on by reality maps that did not match their dogma. Against the refrain, "it ain't necessarily so," we bluff others who are not of our faith, and we bluff our own people—not deliberately as con artists, but out of desperation at the lack of hard evidence, and we bluff ourselves as a strategy against our own fickleness, our "crooked heart" as Jer. 5:23 calls it. Then again, acts of faith are not made on an empty heart. We have within it our soul, the most reliable teacher. As we watch the process in which the soul becomes thought or speech, we notice that many a time we ease ourselves into convenient clichés that have little of the new insight in them. Once more we are trapped by habits which are the dunghill upon which the creeds feed. It takes vigilance and humble courage to make acts of faith. After all, where faith is weak, there is an abundance of beliefs. With this in mind we may be more humble about our tradition and our sureness, yet also a bit more proud of the holy process in our inner being which keeps teaching and guiding us.

The Aquarian Challenge

Besides the challenge of past history we also face the challenge of the present New Age. The Aquarian age is empirical, experiential, humanistic, multioptional, fluid, mystical; it is existential, integrative, ecumenical, aware of non-verbal dimensions, with a view of God that is radically immanent, while at the same time utterly transcendental, non-anthropomorphic, and apopathic. Instead of being particularistic in regard to salvation and the conditions that make for it, it is universalistic and non-institutional, heuristic and empirical. This view takes most seriously "by their fruits ye shall know them," and the fruits are manifest in the realm of better human living and interaction. It demands to see the fruits in better and more harmonious relationships, and to see a consciousness that is higher, more integrated and with the physical, multi-dimensional, centered,

and ecologically aware. The new humanism wedded to transpersonal psychology has challenged all of us by presenting a viable and deeply religious option to the Bible religions.

Here, too, we make some acts of faith. I believe that there is something in Judaism that is in some sense closer to the divine intent than even the best that Aquarian psychology can produce. At the same time I maintain that Judaism without holistic Aquarian psychology will be farther from the divine intent than Aquarian psychology alone. We three can meet the challenge of Aquarian psychology most significantly in the field of spiritual direction, Tarika, Maussar, and Kabbalah. About these things we must talk with one another from real live experience, not only from books.

The Dialogue of Devoutness

Once we realize the shakiness of the factual fundaments of our acts of faith and come to a tentative agreement that the Biblical and Qur'anic notions of holiness are not too far apart, then we realize that the holier we become, the stronger the impression our acts of faith make on the universe. But where do we learn how to fulfill the command, "holy ye shall be for holy am I the Lord your God"? We search the sources of our traditions and find an entire literature devoted to spiritual direction. We read about holy souls and the paths they took on their way to holiness, the anecdotes in which their lives and conversations taught more than what one can learn in the academy, the counsels they gave to seekers, and their day-to-day, breath-by-breath witness.

There are few conversations in this universe as deeply satisfying to the heart as the dialogue of the devout. Unfortunately, such dialogue took place mostly among the people of each religion separately. If this profound sharing were to take place between zaddik, saint, and dervish, monk, murid, and hasid, we would have a model of what one of the highest forms of conversation could be. One of the prime topics of that discourse would be counsel that would help the spirit gain the service of the flesh for the sake of the divine. The dialogue is a sharing of how best to surrender and conform to the divine will, how to receive divine wisdom for our guidance, how to read Scripture for the sake of the spirit, how to emulate-imitate-divine attributes. The counsel gained in such dialogue helps the worshipper to worship, the mediator to mediate, the adorer to adore, and the virtuous one who wished to become a devotee to become a virtuoso of devoutness, a saint.

Neighbors on the Shelf of the Head Bookshop

In the past such exchanges were rare occurrences. Most of the instances found in the literature were motivated by a competitive spirit that might be expressed as follows: "If this goy-kaffir-pagan serves God with such zeal and devotion, how much more need I who have the true religion serve God with zeal and devotion?" Nowadays these exchanges are becoming the more common. The conversation is motivated by the consideration that one's own tradition may lack a certain way, approach, attitude, or advice that another tradition has deeply fostered. The popularity of bookshops specializing in how-to-become-enlightened literature is an index of New Age spirituality. Their shelves are packed with Yoga, Vedanta, Zen, Tibetan and Teravada Buddhism, Tantra, Sufism, Kabbalah, Hassidism, Tarot, I-Ching, and Christianity in its mystical form.

In the literature, in retreats and workshops, and by attendance at worship with others, Christians and Jews can learn about Zikr; Moslems and Jews can learn from the stately rising and abating rhythm of the Mass; and both Christians and Moslems can learn much from shabbat and davvenen for their own holy resting and praying.

Shankara, AlGhazzali, Luria, and Eckhart meet in the mind and discuss how the infinite becomes finite. Reb Nahman, Ramakrishna, Shams al Tabriz, and St. Francis prod one to adoration among the trees. Rob Moshe Kobriner, St. Jean-Vianney, Junaid, and Hakuin keep urging us to the simple, humble essentials of steady, everyday holiness. This dialogue of devoutness produces such hybrids as Christian Yoga and Catholic Zen, and it once produced a Raimond Lully, a Kabir, a Bahya ibn Paquda, and an Abraham, the son of Maimondes.

The dialogue of devoutness is the dialogue of devotional empiricism. It does not seek to improve on what is divine in the spiritual life, but on what our human response is to the divine challenge. What used to be secret teaching from master to initiate has now come out of the closet.

The Eso/Exo-teric Switch

Andre Guenon and Friedtjoff Schuon found in Houston Smith their American spokesperson. His point is that the greatest sharing between religions takes place in the realm of the esoteric, not the exoteric. Behind all religions there stands the *philosophia perennis*. This view accounts for the difference between religions as mere accidents of time and clime, space and race. Though I find this view not quite convincing, for reasons I hope to detail elsewhere, it is nevertheless pervasive in our culture. There is much agreement today that what all religions share is more important than are the their differences.

The hallmark of the Aquarian Age is that the esoteric has taken the place of the exoteric, and there is more agreement concerning the esoteric teachings and their empirical value than concerning the exoteric aspects. Many of the exoteric observances are being discarded, often out of ignorance and carelessness, or lack of proper instruction in doing them so that they work in one's life. Pragmatic rationalists among members of the hierarchies give their consent to this because the practices seem to divert a person from the essentials, toward minutiae that in superstitious minds have taken on a magic heaven-coercing quality. Thus the Catholic Church is discarding Latin, novenas, holy water, incense, and the concern for extreme unction; "tantric" means formerly at the disposal of the faithful. This is on the official level, while such practices as exorcism, use of incense, and anointing have moved to the counterculture.

Among Jews there is less observance of the midnight lament, the ablutions of the miqveh, the kapparot with live rooster or hen, and the holy days of Succoth and the New Moon. As I hear it from Moslems, Ramadan has for some become less a period for fasting during the day than for feasting at night. This switch is akin to the one that occurred in the use of our sacred and vernacular languages, Hebrew, once referred to as the holy tongue and reserved for prayer and sabbath conversation, has become the language of the marketplace and the election campaign, while Yiddish, the once secular vernacular, is now used for the study of Torah and colloquy with God.

The esoteric aspect has become the public face of religions. As mentioned before, bead bookshops are stocked well with St. John of the Cross and St. Theresa of Avila, but one will be hard pressed to find a catechism or a Kyriale. The Kabbalah is much better represented than volumes dealing with home life and daily prayer. On the Moslem side, one will find only rarely a book of Hadiths or Salaat, but Sufism is overflowing the shelves.

All this causes the guardians of religion great anxiety and concern. Does it mean that what once was considered essential is no longer valid? Was the synagogue/church/mosque wrong in maintaining our differences all along? Is the effort to get us to dialogue together nothing but another ploy to homogenize all cop out from real commitment? These anxieties cannot be averted by reverting to a strict fundamentalist position. Whenever tradition is challenged to renew itself, it must meet these crises. Whenever a religion refuses to renew itself, it finds itself without adherents. How do we steer the course between removing all the surface tensions between religions, thus losing what is special in each, and the building of concrete walls between us? Perhaps we need to explore this again and, after exploring, reformulate our teachings on the differences of our religions. Let us each look at the teachings concerning the status of the adherents of our sisterfaiths.

The Theology of Goy

In the age preceding this Aquarian era, known as the Piscean Age, we worked with words rather than with functions. Words were very powerful. "Abra Kadabra" (Aramaic for "it is created as it is

spoken”) and “Hocus Pocus” (a vulgarization for “Hoc est enim Corpus meum”) were words for religious magic. The proper formulae for prayer were vital requirements for receiving an answer. Theology has to be in precise legalese and a clause such as “filioque” could split a church. The difference between one synagogue and another was in the use of “w’yatzmah purqaney,” and Sunna and Shia split similarly over such either/ors.

It is easier to teach in flat blacks and whites than in shades of gray. The higher the contrast between right and wrong, saved and damned, the easier it is to run the magisterium. and the institutions. For us Jews it was simply the choice between Jew and Goy. Even Jews who were not well educated or did not abide by the expected norms were called “Goy”. Originally the word did not have pejorative connotations. We are called “Goy” too. “Amkha’ Yisrael Goy Ehad Ba’aretz” (“Thy people Israel one nation on Earth”; from the Sabbath afternoon liturgy). I am sure the word became laden with pejorative meaning by all the pain inflicted upon us by Centurion, Crusader, and Cossack, to the point that when one referred to a *Nazi* by that word it had lost all human connotation and became synonymous with inhuman villain.

Today I am in dialogue with “Goyim.” Who are you to me in that category? Jews are agitated by the question “Mihu Yehudi?” (who is a Jew?), and the agitation extends to “Mihu Goy?” which is the other end of this polarity.

In many aspects of Jewish thought and Law I have discovered, instead of a binary yes-versus-no relationship, one that is graduated in the middle range and this is what I wish to share at this time. In Halakhah there is a descending order of persons. The highest rank is occupied by the High Priest. He is the only one to enter the most holy sanctuary, and this only on Yom Kippur. Below him is the average priest. Below the Kohen Hediote stands the Levite, and below him the first born in the family. All other Israelites come next, and they are followed by the Gerey Zedeq, the righteous proselytes who have embraced Judaism as their own religion. Below them stand the ones forbidden to marry Israelites, the Mamzer, child of adultery and incest, and Goyim. But even among Goyim there is a scale in which the Hasidey Umoth Ha’olam (the devout of all nations) rate highest; they are followed by the Ger Toshav, the sojourner (to whom we will return), and any other son of Noah (that is to say, any non-Jew of general ancestry). Below him is one who worships stars and constellations (idolators); below these are the seven nations of Canaan, and below them the Amalekites.

There are occasional aggadic statements to the effect that a learned Mamzer is higher than an unlettered High Priest or that regardless of one’s status each person is rewarded according to one’s deeds. There are also distinctions regarding freemen, bondsmen, and slaves.

We are concerned here with the categories of Son of Noah and Ger Toshav. According to rabbinic tradition, based on the covenant made with Noah and his children, God prohibited to them idolatry, bloodshed, sexual depravity, theft, and the living limb (to eat part of an animal that is still alive), and ordained that they establish courts of Law. Anyone who accepts these commandments and lives by them is to be accorded all the courtesy with which the Torah charges us concerning the stranger in our midst. Such a person is to have the same rights before the Law and is invited to worship with Jews, though still forbidden to intermarry with them.

Whenever I have talked with Christians about this I found that the category of Ger Toshav, although satisfying to some,¹ is not satisfying to others, and it does not satisfy me. Under this category an Advaitin Vedantist, a Jnani Yogin, and a Zen Buddhist would enjoy the same status as a Christian and a Moslem. Somehow I feel that the Islamic model of the “peoples of the book” challenges our present thought on this matter. We must clearly separate two issues here. What happens if a Jew becomes a Christian or a Moslem? The Law holds that even if Jews renounce their religion, they still remain Jews; nevertheless, they incur severe ostracism in the community for embracing Christianity or Islam. The other issue deals with non-Jews who by their act of choice become Christians and Moslems. They are better than Henotheists (an option open for the children of Noah). They hold beliefs which Albo in his *Iqqarim* claims are essential, i.e., there is a

supreme God whose will is revealed to humankind, and who rewards those who keep to this revealed way and punishes transgressors. Here Christians and Moslems definitely are closer to us than are Zen Buddhists.

Alas, we Jews do not have a forum such as a Sanhedrin in session these days, and opinions are private until someone publishes a responsum and this responsum is accepted by the majority. I know of no such work concerning the status of Christians and Moslems today. It is clear that the Ger Toshav category is inadequate to deal with members of the other Bible religions, who in my opinion deserve a special status ranking above Ger Toshav and below Ger Zedeq. This category will allow us hopefully not only to tolerate one another but also to learn from one another.

The Dialogue of Good News

I am deeply intrigued to hear the good news others proclaim. It is in the nature of each religion to emphasize one or another aspect. Our daily prayer in the grace after meals asks God to send to us soon Elijah-Al Khidr with the good news of redemption and consolation. Elijah wears many garbs and disguises. When a Christian proclaims what he knows as good news, I want to hear it. I cannot hear it though if it addresses itself only to those who belong to the visible church. None of us here reject the truth stubbornly out of truculent recalcitrance to God; hence we can in some sense connect with salvation in what is called. the invisible church. We Jews dealt with the category of the children of Noah. The Moslems accept non-Moslems who believe in One God as Mumin. So what is our message? All three of us share the good news of turning to God. Tshuvah, Metanoia, Tawba. All three of us share the good news of the ultimate kingdom of God right here in this planet. Can we not share in the dissemination of that message? We all believe in the consequentiality of human life. We all share the sense of "in illo tempore" time which allows us to keep in touch with the seasons of hope and revelation, and the advent of redemption. We all share in the belief that some of God's blessed will and wisdom are manifested to humankind. We all share in the belief and hope in the ultimate transcendence of the limitations of the flesh and society.

In the areas where we do not share, we still need to be able to hear what good news the other proclaims, without getting "up tight." Each one of us has some aspects that are well developed in the faith and others that are either over-developed so that they have become top-heavy or underdeveloped because we have heard only through a wall and seen through a veil. We need each other as mirrors. How do I look to you? I must tell you how you look to me so that we have accurate reflections of whether we manifest what we proclaim.

The Dialogue of Indebtedness

James Parkes once gave a sermon which has often been reprinted under the title "Christianity's Debt to Judaism." I think that there are some issues on which we all need to declare our debt to each other. Islam has given us the first thrust in the direction of scholasticism. Maimonides and Aquinas came on the heels of Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd. It was Islamic thought and scholarship that made us enter into dialogue with philosophy. It was so fruitful in its own day that I cannot believe that there is at present hardly any of this dialogue going on.

It is clear to me that Mohammed, in his hadiths and in the formulations of the Qur'an which depended on his vocabulary and the state of his awareness, did what he conceived as bringing the shariya of Judaism and Christianity into line with the condition of his day and age. Even during Mohammed's life, Islamic law changed to fit the changing conditions. There must have been developments in the shariya to deal with the industrial revolution. I would like to learn more about this. I would like us to be able to enter into a dialogue on ecology, holy places, medical ethics, food technology, etc. We all owe Islam a debt for keeping an untarnished Tawhid-unity of God-before our eyes in the past. We now need to dialogue on Tawhid in cosmic terms.

The issue of abrogation also needs detailed and caring exposition so that we know clearly what Islam teaches on the abrogation of the other Bible faiths and prophecies. It will be delicate and difficult, but necessary to do, since there were many developments in Judaism and Christianity after the Qur'an. It is a situation similar to that of Vatican II when it dealt with rabbinic Judaism after Christianity.

Judaism, in its concern for the practical and the mystical, owes much to Christianity for systematic theology. The current rabbinate as a clerical and pastoral, instead of a judicial, vocation came to us as a result of the influence of Christianity. One cannot listen to synagogue music without sensing the influence of sacred music from the church. Modern seminary education is clearly modeled after the Christian paradigm.

At times I wish that the dialogue had developed before we copied from Christians and Christians from us. We might have voiced our caveats to the total vernacularization of the Christian liturgy. Our experience with Reform Judaism might have helped the church. Conversely, we needed to learn some of the caveats for candidacy to seminaries without a sense of vocation. Heinrich Heine said, "Wie es Christelt sich, so Juedelts sich." I only wish that would have been the result of critical scrutiny, not merely external emulation.

The Dialogue of Hermeneutics

In this dialogue we need to share information. How does a Jew read the Bible? What are the canons of legitimate interpretation? How does the Christian come to an interpretation of the text? In recent years teams of scholars have worked together in new and very helpful translations of the Hebrew Bible. Some Jews have made fine contributions to the understanding of the New Testament, bringing to bear parallel sources from the Talmud and the Midrashim. Other Jews have worked on the Qur'an and made worthy contributions quoted by Moslem scholars.

For all that books can offer us, the vital contact comes from studying texts together, with getting to see with the eyes of the other. In this way I have come to a fair understanding of Roman Catholic and Neo-Orthodox Protestant hermeneutics. I have met a number of Christian Old Testament scholars who knew our hermeneutic of Tanakh, though I have yet to meet a Christian scholar of Talmud Rabbis.

Unfortunately I have no sense of Moslem hermeneutics of the Kitab al Muqqadas, the Bible. It seems to me that the way in which the Qur'an views the Bible is more a reworking of oral midrashic material than of the texts themselves. I am not even aware of an Arabic translation of the Bible which is authorized for Moslems. I do know that Sufis have a four-level hermeneutic close to that of our Kabbalists, but I have as yet no sense of hermeneutical dialogue with Islam.

We Agree to Disagree

What is it that we will not be able to agree on? What is it that we will have to learn to live with in each other?

It seems to me that a Jew will have to learn to live with the following aspects of Christianity. The person of Jesus of Nazareth is bound to stay central and in the position of the Christ, the Messiah of the first coming, Both Jew and Christian will have to wait for the Shalom order to be instituted by the one who will complete history and fulfill the Messianic expectations dealing with turning swords into plowshares and having lions living with lambs. The teachings of Paul concerning the Law will remain a shibboleth between us until the day comes when we all no longer see by looking through the glass darkly, and the Tree of Knowledge will have been supplanted by the Tree of Life.

With Moslems we will have to negotiate matters of the shariya and the issue of abrogation. On the matter of the Razuhip of Mohammed, we may find accommodation. I pray that we learn to

agree first on matters dealing with more practical issues and find a way for the children of Isaac and Ishmael to live in peace.

I am convinced that learning Torah together is an important prelude to the kind of dialogue we will hold with each other when our eschatological expectations will have been fulfilled. I trust we each will find that we were right, though not quite in the way we thought we would be. Only by holding on to our shape and color do we form the mosaic in which we are God's tiles.