



## Healing Rifts Between Religions

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*In his keynote address to the July 8-11, 2007 International Conference of the International Council of Christians and Jews held in Sydney, Australia, Rabbi Raymond Apple, former Chief Rabbi of the Great Synagogue, Sydney, surveys various views of interreligious relations and offers his own prescription for 'healing rifts between religions.'*

### Healing Rifts Between Religions

#### Keynote Address by Rabbi Raymond Apple AO RFD

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What a colourful occasion – what impressive auspices! The symbolism of religions meeting together will not be lost on the general public, who tend to blame religion for all the ills of the contemporary world. Bearing in mind that in Australia the ordinary person is John Citizen, and that in Judaism there is a saying, “Go out and see what the people do” (Berachot 45a), let us, at least notionally, go out and see what John Citizen has to say about interfaith gatherings. I suspect that every John (and Jane) Citizen will make the same comment: “Why do religions fight when they have so much in common? Wouldn’t the world calm down if the religions could unite and live at peace?”

John and Jane Citizen have a point, but it is not so easy. Religious commonalities have decided limitations. Consider the so-called “Judeo-Christian Tradition” or its other name, “The Judeo-Christian Ethic”, neither of which actually matches the reality. If there were really a Judeo-Christian tradition, we would basically be the same – almost clones of each other – with only cultural baggage to differentiate us. But that is not how it works.

Judaism and Christianity have a common origin in the Hebrew Scriptures, but they read the texts quite differently. They believe in God, but they view Him and His nature through different lenses. They have a story, but it is two stories: a concept of man, but it is two concepts. They are ethical religions, but their ethics, as Ahad HaAm pointed out, are widely apart in emphasis. Their ideas about man’s nature, salvation and destiny are far apart. For Christianity, Jesus is crucial (in every sense of the word): in Judaism, though a Jew, he does not figure. Christianity, as Leo Baeck argues, prefers “the finished statement” of dogma: Judaism, “the unending process of thought”. Judaism and Christianity both lay claim to the truth, but there are rival versions of the truth. And we haven’t even started looking beyond Judaism and Christianity. The question must be asked again in relation to Islam. If we turn to the non-theistic, non-monotheistic faiths it becomes ever more complex. There are many commonalities, but so many differences.

Arthur A. Cohen argues in "The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition" that there is not only no tradition of religious brotherhood but a tradition of theological enmity. The so-called Judeo-Christian tradition is, he contends, a myth produced by Christian guilt and Jewish neurasthenia to obscure the basic fact that Christians and Jews, to the extent that they are seriously Christians and seriously Jews, are theological enemies.

Possibly his pessimism is not the last word, now that we live in the same street as friends and neighbours who sometimes shout but are on speaking terms more than ever before.

But is this what Cohen calls "the reconciliation of contradiction, the dissolution of paradox"? Is it not mere politeness, propriety and political correctness (not that these are necessarily to be deplored? Having become partners in dialogue, have we ceased to be enemies? Or are we, to continue Cohen's words, "inundated institutions making common cause before a world that regards them as hopelessly irrelevant, and meaningless"?

Joseph B. Soloveitchik does not talk much of enemies but of strangers. His essay entitled "Confrontations" argues that our differences arise out of existential tensions within the human condition. As man and woman love each other dearly but in some ways will always be strangers, so it is with Jew and Christian. Even when on friendly terms they will never completely understand what goes on in each other's head. Martin Buber, addressing the nature of the two faiths, sees a gulf as dividing what the Jew thinks is the impossibly daring Christian who believes what is inconceivable, and what the Christian views as the incredibly obdurate Jew who cannot see the truth. Soloveitchik reminds us that all faiths have a mutual interest and can be brothers in addressing social and ethical problems, but on the theological level we are strangers rather than brothers: "The great encounter between God and man is a wholly personal affair incomprehensible to the outsider." God bursts into the Jew's life one way – in Christianity, a different way. If this is because of history, that history is now so inexorably defining, so inescapably distinctive, that it is totally impossible to take off one theological coat and put on another. The difference is not the coat but the heart, soul and personality. And the difference lies not merely between two individuals qua humans, but between two human types, the Jewish type and the Christian type.

Leo Baeck acknowledges that each religion faces analogous questions, but neither the questions nor the attempts at answering them are analogous. Each religion, he insists, has grown its own characteristics. It is not just religious individuals who are different, but their religions. He posits a dichotomy between "classical" and "romantic" religion. "Romantic" religion lives in a world of feelings: "its world is the realm in which all rules are suspended". "Classical" religion focusses on "reality with its commandment, and... the profound seriousness of the tasks of our life". Baeck may be unfair to both Christianity, the "romantic" religion, and Judaism, the "classical", but his general view is valid, that each religion is *sui generis*.

Soloveitchik's analysis is of two types of religious personality, "homo religiosus" and "halakhic man". The result is that the rifts are not simply between the Jewish idea and the Christian idea but between two distinct types of religious approach. Buber's distinction is between, on the one hand, a religion that restricts or "freezes" God in one position, and, on the other, one where God is a God of the moment, a Presence that can only be addressed, not expressed: apprehended, not comprehended. Which one is right, or more right? The judgment is God's. Our task is not to deprecate, demonise, delegitimise or diminish the other, not damn the other or the unbeliever as a heretic or rogue but to recognise their right to be themselves. "In

a genuine dialogue," says Buber, "each of the partners, even when standing in opposition to the other, heeds, affirms and confirms the opponent as an existing other".

The issue is not where each will go when they die but what they will do for the world whilst they are alive. Abraham Joshua Heschel said that when asked, "But what about the salvation of your soul?" he did not understand the question. For him the real issue was not his soul or his afterlife, but his task: "What mitzvah can I do next?" We who are Jews have all faced those accusatory moments when someone has said, "You'll end up in hell!" My own answer never varied. I always said, "Hell? We Jews have been to hell – on earth – and we have come back. We place our stress on life in this world: the next world is God's department."

This may give to John Citizen, but maybe not. Impatient with the lot of us, he may prefer to know why we don't throw all our theology on the scrap heap and get on with making the world whole. His question may be not merely, "Why do you need your own particular religion?" but "Why religion at all?"

In the last two centuries religion had a hard time. There is a Jewish tale about the class that had to write an essay entitled "The Elephant and the Jewish Question". Like all Jewish humour, the story is both serious and comical. Comical: for what connection can there be between earthy elephants and an august people? Serious: for don't Jews and Judaism impinge on every aspect of human civilisation? I did actually once try to formulate an academic analysis of The-Elephant-and-the-Jewish-Question (someone I know developed a line of reasoning on Garlic and the Jewish Question). The results of either exercise are hardly relevant, but what is important is the significance of the conjunctive "and". A number of modern thinkers (Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber and others) emphasise that speaking of "God", "Man", "World" as distinct, independent entities is not as productive as examining the connections – "God and Man", "Man and the World", "I and Thou". The rabbinic sages noted a similar thing when, long before, they saw that the middle letter in the Five Books of Moses (Lev. 11:42) is vav, which means "and", joining the two halves of the Torah text.

Recent centuries have constantly utilised the "and" in relation to religion. In measuring religion against a sheaf of other disciplines (religion and humanism, religion and secularism, materialism, modernity, science, history, nationalism, politics, economics, communism, sport, and especially religion and no-religion). Religion was constantly tried in the balance and found wanting. One could show how in each case the challenge to religion was unsustainable. Allow me, however, to limit myself, for reasons of time, to the supposed science/religion conflict.

Probably the first scientific discovery in history followed the Biblical promise, "As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). When early man saw that these words invited empirical assessment, this was the first recorded instance of scientific analysis and study. It enabled man to discern patterns in time, patterns in space and patterns in everything, and became the foundation of all scientific development.

This being so, it is surprising, to say the least, that for 400 years there has been talk of conflict between religion and science, because without religion, science would be unthinkable. Only because religion posits and guarantees the existence of design, order and pattern, can science hope or dare to formulate hypotheses and examine them.

Maimonides, scientist as well as rabbi, stated that because God is one, the universe is one; because the universe is one, God is One. No wonder the poet Edward Young said in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "An undevout astronomer is mad". Acknowledge it or not, the scientist must inevitably be a religious person in the deepest sense; Alfred North Whitehead said that the confidence of science in the intelligibility of the world comes from the religious insistence on

the rationality of God. When science is prepared to be fair, it is full of awe and reverence for the Creation; when it is realistic, it also admits its tentativeness – hypotheses are never the last word, and only in religion has man ever found that last word as well as the first.

Those who toppled religion and worshipped science – with its temples of its own, its saints, its priests, its mysteries and rituals, even its sacred language – are more inclined these days to see it as a god that failed when it became too sure of itself. How strange that John Citizen is so behind the times and still holds views that those in the know have already discarded. The Harvard professor Theodore William Dwight sadly wrote nearly a century ago that just when scientific experts had rejected a theory, “the ignorant, half-educated masses have acquired the idea that it is accepted as a fundamental fact”.

Similar analyses would be possible, if time permitted, in relation to the many other challenges to the veracity and credibility of religion. Whatever the challenge the message seems to have been, “God, You don’t exist but I can still manage without You”, or, as reported of Nietzsche, “If there is to be a God, I couldn’t bear that it shouldn’t be me...”

Religion was shunted aside as finished, effete, extinct, over and out. There was nothing so passé and irrelevant. Then came the Holocaust. As Martin Buber put it, it was an event that affected the whole nature of being. Man without God brought civilisation to its knees. The Austrian poet Franz Grillparzer had said, “Man moved from humanism to nationalism, from nationalism to barbarism”. Man no longer had sufficient faith in God to overcome the forces of evil. Those who did retain a residue of faith rang the sanctuary bells in the interests of self-preservation: it might keep the fiends from shattering the church windows as they had done to the synagogues. It was also theological antisemitism: the victims were largely Jews, and the Jews deserved their punishment. Who thought that the Jesus in whose name they claimed to act was himself a Jew, and in allowing the destruction of his people they were destroying their own Christianity? Could religion of a higher and nobler kind have saved the situation? Who knows? But it might at least have saved its own soul.

Two full generations later religion is back on the stage, but not yet that higher and nobler kind of religion. It is not that kind of religion which the essayist and poet Arthur Christopher Benson calls “the power, whatever it be, which makes a man choose what is hard rather than what is easy, what is lofty and noble rather than what is mean and selfish; that puts courage into tender hearts and gladness into clouded spirits; that consoles men in grief, misfortune and disappointment; that makes them joyfully accept a heavy burden; that in a word, lifts men out of the dominion of material things, and sets their feet in a purer and simpler region”.

The type of religion that is on today’s agenda is fierce and fanatic, facing you down if you mildly beg to differ. It is aggressive, triumphant, bent on world domination. No, you will tell me: that is not the only religion, but that is certainly the bully on the block. It is not Christianity, but Christianity has entered a post-Christian phase which lacks a creative, dynamic response to the complicated challenges of the age. Nor is it Judaism, but the strength of Judaism these days tends to look inward and is rarely brought to bear on global problems. Christianity half-heartedly mounts its missions to the Jews and to third world countries, but recognises that its efforts will not meet with much success. Judaism is suspicious of Christians after the centuries of persecution and is often uncomfortable conversing with Christianity in the market-place of ideas. Both faiths are ill at ease in conversation with Islam, and Islam reciprocates: all three feel under siege.

In the West in particular there is a paradox: less formal adherence to religious institutions, but more genuine personal piety and spirituality. There are many religious people, but they have little time for the clutter of religious pomp and ceremony. They are more interested in hearts and minds and less in bells and smells. They are also more concerned with piety than politics,

because it taints religion to be embroiled in the public domain.

Brave organisations such as the Councils of Christians and Jews in many parts of the world acknowledge many of these problems and try to encourage a combination of credible religiosity and engagement with the world, but they are, at least so far, too limited in scope, too lacking in spiritual muscle, too polite and too genteel to make a real difference. They have chats and cups of tea together but the pleasant moments have little impact on the world. They pass resolutions but they achieve little influence anywhere. So what does John Citizen see? Not very much to impress him. Religion is in the news, but neither sweet nor loving, not the still small voice. It is an unacceptable face of religion, religion commanding the waves to go back, religions trying to outshout each other. The spiritual people are neither visible nor audible; many prefer to remain so, knowing that instead of fighting the impossible fight they have enough to do working on their own souls. John Citizen sees telling episodes like my arrival at Belfast Airport many years ago wearing my hat. Asked to remove the hat, I have a kippah underneath. "What's the Frisbee for?" I get asked. "It's a religious skullcap," I reply; "I'm a Jew!" "A Jew? What sort of Jew – a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew?"

I meant this as an illustration of religion as a source of violence and friction, but it also suggests another interpretation to which I will return. But let me ask the question, how is it that religions are rivals? They agree that there is such a thing as truth, but they regard themselves as its exclusive possessors. "Truth" claims are monopolistic and mutually exclusive; if each religion is right about having the truth, then none can give way and the rivalry will and must continue. Jonathan Sacks found himself in trouble a few years ago with a book called "The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilisations". (The phrase, "the clash of civilisations", is the political scientist Samuel P. Huntington's in arguing that cultural and religious identities are increasingly our main source of conflict). Sacks' thesis that there is truth in other religions and not just in Judaism led to other rabbis accusing him of blatant heresy. How can a Jew not see, demanded the critics, that it is Judaism which is truth? That is the gist of the accusations that Sacks faced. A new edition of the book calmed things down when he softened his language and spoke of wisdom in other religions. This is one way of reducing the problem, but it does not make the moot point go away. Either my religion is true or there is no reason for me to adhere to it. If my truth is not consonant with your truth, we have theological deadlock. The moment that we argue, at least hypothetically, that all religions are equally true, then we find ourselves speaking in illogicalities. If black is blue and blue is black, then colour ceases to make sense. If apples are oranges and oranges are apples, then fruit needs to be redefined. If I were to resorting again to Jewish humour, I would tell you that there are countless "rabbi" jokes. But there are "clergy" jokes in other religions. Does that mean that all clergy are the same and a story about a rabbi could just as well be told about a priest? Only if the two are interchangeable, but each title has such distinctive connotations that you cannot tell "rabbi" stories about communion tables or "priest" jokes about milk-and-meat knives.

Our topic is "Healing Rifts Between Religions". The inevitable conclusion is that because it is the nature of religions to claim they have the truth, the rifts cannot be healed. A scandal? Probably, but a fact. The effect on Judaism and Christianity, the two monotheistic faiths with the longest continuous encounter – call it, if you prefer, a confrontation or head-on clash – led Hans Urs von Balthasar to say, "The Church and the synagogue are mysteriously but indissolubly linked throughout the history of civilisation... They may have turned their backs on each other... but they are tied back to back... for the people of God, old and new together, is a single, indivisible scandal." Leave to one side for a moment the phrase "old and new together" with its insulting pre-Vatican II implications – and let us ask how, if at all, the scandal could be averted or removed. A historic Christian dream is that the Jews will see Christianity as the completion of Judaism, but Jews could never contemplate such a total undermining and abandonment of their age-old identity. The Jewish philosopher Franz Rosenzweig advocated a

parallelism of opposites when he posited what is tantamount to Judaism as the completion of Christianity (Jews, he averred, are already with God: Christians will arrive eventually), but Christians are unlikely to consider this too seriously. So we are back again: two truth claims neither of which will resile. Hence if we are to be honest and logical in our thinking, we have no choice but to say that the rifts will remain until the end of historic time, that therefore there are theoretical limits to the possibility of inter-religious dialogue.

Some thinkers indeed warn against even trying to enter into dialogue at all. There are practical reasons: we have to feel ready; we have to be able to trust the dialogue partner; we cannot restrict the dialogue to two or even three religions and indeed to religion as a whole when so many other philosophies clamour for market share or domination; we have urgent internal agendas that make dialogue a luxury (the Lubavitcher Rebbe, for instance, urged Jews to focus on inner faith, not inter-faith). We have obligations to our past which, from the Jewish point of view, Rabbi Soloveitchik expressed in these words: "We certainly have not been authorised by our history, sanctified by the martyrdom of millions... to trade favours pertaining to fundamental matters of faith". The appropriate policy, he added, was "unconditional commitment to our God, a sense of dignity, pride and inner joy in being what we are, believing with great passion in the ultimate truthfulness of our views". Yes, there is an ideological roadblock: no serious, significant giving way is possible between the immovable forces of unique, distinctive faith identities that sometimes use the same words but speak different languages. Travers Herford, the great Unitarian scholar of both Judaism and Christianity, wrote, "Judaism and Christianity can never blend without the surrender by one or the other of its fundamental principles."

Yet is this the meaning of "healing"? Does it really entail blending, full commonality, one doctrine, merging, getting married and living happily ever after? Life doesn't work that way, especially when what separates us is deep, intimate, private conscience. If that's what healing means, it will not happen this side of the messianic redemption. But a different kind of healing is both possible and necessary. Summed up in the benediction, Barukh Attah, Meshanneh Hab'ri'ot – "Blessed are You, O Lord, who makes His creatures diverse", it is a healing that takes the form of celebrating each other as we are, created by the Divine will with all our varied doctrines, ideas and commitments.

Very nice, very noble, but how can this be squared with the rigorous demands of truth? An answer is suggested by the Anglo-Jewish scholar Claude G. Montefiore in the first essay in a work published a century ago but still highly stimulating, "Truth in Religion". Quoting the Apocryphal Book of Esdras (4:41), "Great is truth, and strong above all things", he addresses the nature of truth. Not like the "'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate" of Francis Bacon's "On Truth"; "jesting Pilate...would not stay for an answer". Montefiore is not jesting, nor does he prefer to escape from the problem. "Truth", he says, "stands at the meeting point of the moral and the intellectual world, and partakes of the character of both". If the truth we are talking about when we see no way of healing the rifts is intellectual truth, it is the deadlock of irresistible force meeting immovable object. If it is moral truth, there can be room for compromise as we shall argue in a moment. But how can both be valid - intellectual truth which cannot resile, and moral truth which allows for pragmatism? Which truth is more true? Answer: both of them. How can they both be true, you ask? That's also true. But remember that religion has a series of what might be termed necessary paradoxes: at one and the same time an immanent and a transcendent God; a doctrine of the greatness of man and of his littleness; a belief in free will and a belief in determinism; and so on. Polarities which conflict – yet somehow they manage to live together. This is the healing: the rift remains but the rancour diminishes.

Intellectual truth, once revealed or arrived at, is firm and unmoving, not bound to time or place. It is an architectural construction. Moral truth is not rarefied or theoretical; it deals with

situations. Positions and situations are not identical. Moral truth is a task, not a stand: not static but dynamic. Intellectual truth is a logically necessary underpinning: moral truth is a pragmatic challenge. Intellectual truth tends to be, in Leo Baeck's words, "finished statements"; though moral truth is eternal principles such as peace, justice and compassion, it applies them in changing times and situations. We have varying emphases in terms of moral truth – but also a range of responses that do or do not intersect. It is here that healing comes into its own. It says, "Let's celebrate our spectrum of insights and make them an offering in the service of our society and civilisation." Which insights? Not theological constructs or abstracts but concerns and priorities. As our leader Professor John T. Pawlikowski puts it: "A concern with major world social issues such as hunger, energy and warfare... coming to grips with the current social crisis... work(ing) together to shape the public and private values of this new society that is being born in our midst".

Will we have enough water, enough resources, money, health, education and opportunity to keep mankind alive? Will we be able to contain explosive issues? (I use the word "explosive" quite deliberately!) What will we do about racism, refugees and radicalism? Will we value and speak up for every human being, man, woman or child, whatever their colour, creed, politics or preferences – sexual or otherwise? Surely immovable differences in theology recede into academic issues when we have an urgent human task to share, a task to exhilarate and engage us. Our answers will not be identical, but in joining the debate we will be united in motivation – the shared belief that global man is capable enough and worthy enough to improve his condition, that the world is capable of redemption, that religion can embrace the task given by God, however envisaged, however understood, to "Build a house for My Name" (II Chron. 6:8).

For this to succeed we need what might be called an ethic of difference. 45 years ago Robert Gordis' book, "The Root and the Branch: Judaism and the Free Society", attempted this in a series of what he called "ground rules". I borrowed and adapted his material for a paper published by British CCJ under the title "The Opportunities and Limitations of the Dialogue". Much has remained the same since then: but so much has altered. Hence let me offer the following revised ethic of difference which owes its methodology to Gordis but is more directly relevant to our own time. I call it applied pragmatism in five sections: personal, collaborative, academic, theological, attitudinal.

**Personal:** we will never completely understand and share the inner essence and depth of the other's intellectual truth and spiritual personality, but we can become good friends, good neighbours, part of each other's lives and families. My family and I have had this privilege over and over again, and it has enriched our lives.

**Collaborative:** we will rarely be able, because of our varying faith commitments, to pray together, but we can worship together in a different sense by working with one another, bringing moral truth to the service of our society and civilisation, standing at all times and in all circumstances for human dignity and the supremacy of justice, peace and compassion. As a long-term participant in this type of effort, I rejoice in my lot, but how much further we have to go!

**Academic:** we will find ourselves fascinated by each other's source materials and interpretations. The founder of the discipline of comparative religion, the German orientalist Max Muller, may well have been right in his contention that he who understands only his own religion really understands none. Nonetheless we can and will never overcome our lack of internal grounding in the other faith or faiths, but we can study and converse together, learn to be fair to the texts, correct long-standing errors, delete the dogmatism that comes from ignorance and fear, and endorse the rabbinic word that "the ignorant person cannot be pious". To be personal again, I constantly find the academic aspect of our dialogue an

immense stimulus.

Theological: we will respect the dignity of each other's faith and the legitimacy of each other's conscience, but heart and mind will know that there are private realms which we must hold back from entering. Bertrand Russell broke through the barrier with Joseph Conrad, "an experience," he wrote, "unlike any other I have known. We looked into each other's eyes, half appalled and half intoxicated to find ourselves together in such a region..." Rabbi Soloveitchik, however, warns against entering such realms (he would have emphasised the Talmudic story about the danger of "entering the garden"); faith experiences, he reminds us, cannot be shared but are ultimately deep, characteristic, private, and inaccessible to outsiders. This principle has moulded much of the rabbinic approach to dialogue thinking.

Attitudinal: we solemnly aver that we will not attempt any form of coercive proselytising, denigrating, demonising, victimising or targeting of each other, but live in mutual respect – despite, and indeed by reason of, our differences. We will remain true to our respective identities, commitments and conscience, echoing the Hassidic teacher who said, "I am I because you are you. If I am not I, then you are not you; if you are not you, then I am not I". The culture of courtesy is the surest test of our touch of healing. It will lessen the pain of division. It may certainly assist us to diminish the danger of religion-inspired terrorism, where believers appoint themselves as God's policemen and target members of other faiths with the bite of the bullet and the blast of the bomb.

But even this is not the end of our story. What Samuel Huntington called the clash of civilisations happens between civilisation, but also within civilisations. The rifts are not only external, between one religion and another. They are internal too. We all seem to have many extremes and little middle ground. Where once our communities looked like cigars with little at each end and the bulk in the middle, now our shape resembles dumbbells, thin in the centre and bulky at the extremes.

We have problems as to the legitimacy of members of other groups within our own faith communities. My experience at Belfast Airport comes back into the conversation at this point. There cannot be a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew, but there can be a Protestant Christian and a Catholic Christian. Which is the real Christian – the Catholic Christian, the Protestant Christian, or someone different from either? Which is the real Jew – the orthodox Jew (and of which shade of orthodoxy?), the progressive Jew (and how progressive?), the secular Jew (even though the believer thinks secular Judaism an oxymoron)? Which is the real Muslim – the Sunni, the Shi'ite or some alternative expression of Islam?

Even more important, which of the range of internal attitudes found in each group should and can become the norm in a modernist world – the one that embraces modernity, the one that rejects it, the one that attempts a synthesis? Every religion has its fault fractures, its modernists and archaists: the one group seeking an accommodation with the contemporary world, the other preferring to recreate the past. This is not identical with the division between what in Judaism tends to be called orthodoxy and reform, since not every orthodoxy is uncomfortable with modernity and not every reform endorses every modernist whim. Then there are debates about the pomp and paraphernalia of religion. Some groups enjoy their rich architecture, ornate ritual, splendid vestments and colourful processions; others prefer simplicity unaided by what they regard as baubles and saturnalia. In their ethical and pastoral programs, religions seem to have another dichotomy. Ethically the conflict is between earth and heaven: are the rules the result of human pragmatism and expediency, or given from above (Louis Jacobs asks whether the rules are good because they are Divine, or Divine because they are good)? Pastorally the division is between that which will win friends and influence people and that which risks alienating them whilst insisting that this is what the traditional ways require.



The intra-faith debate sometimes becomes quite fierce, with accusations and counter-accusations being hurled from side to side and some groups wishing that putting heretics in the stocks or burning them at the stake were still available. Our question about healing rifts applies, then, not only between religion and other philosophies, between one religion and another, but within religions too. Here the view that the rift is incapable of healing is less likely to be the only conclusion that can be drawn. Despite the differences that divide one internal group from another, they probably all share sufficient allegiance to an overall norm that they might well find that their conversations will allow some giving way and a reasonable *modus vivendi*. May I quote myself? At times when there were differences between segments of the orthodox Jewish community in this country, I used to remind all sides that they all stood for the same Shulchan Aruch, the same Torah-based code of conduct.

Here too we need an ethic of difference. This time also I propose a five-point ethic: again a series of headlines and then a brief working out of each – Identity, Honesty, Study, Courtesy and Credibility. Once more it is a plan for applied pragmatism.

**Identity:** we may not always agree, but we are part of each other and we honour a shared heritage which has a range of interpretations.

**Honesty:** we each respect the other's point of view and accept that we all have a conscience and commitment to our heritage.

**Study:** we will sit together to study our heritage and discover its nuances and how it handled differences in the past.

**Courtesy:** we will keep the conversation, discourse and debate on a civilised, courteous level and never indulge in name-calling or mutual denigration.

**Credibility:** we will agree where we can, but disagree if the credibility of our heritage requires it, in which case we will agree on how to acknowledge and articulate the range of views we espouse.

The internal rifts may not entirely disappear. Indeed having a range of views is a sign of life and vitality. But the occasional internal ferocity will have been softened and healed by the application of mutual love and respect.

In the long run the God we affirm, each in our own distinctive way, as the ground and guarantor of ultimate truth, will reveal the answers. As the prophet Isaiah assures us, "He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in His paths" (Isa. 2:3). If we have handled His charge erroneously He will chide us and guide us. If we have loved each other too much He will smile: if we have loved each other too little He will understand. Voltaire said, though not in these precise words, "God will forgive – that's what He's there for". Faith requires that we wait for the Divine answers. Does this mean that all must be left to God? Solomon Schechter used to say, "Leave a little to God". Leave everything to God, and that's abdication. Leave nothing to God, and that's self-pride and arrogance. Schechter's advice was, "Leave a little to God". Our question must be how much. Can we do at least some of God's work for Him? As His partners? As His instruments? As His agents?

It is not because we have a multicultural world that these questions need urgent attention. It is because so many threats face our civilisation that this could be the last human generation unless small groups somewhere begin to mobilise for human survival. The Jerusalem Talmud declared centuries ago, "A generation in which the Temple is not built is as if the Temple were destroyed in it" (Yoma 1:1); Hillel said, "If not now, then when?" (Avot 1:14). Religion, notorious for its love of the familiar, may well be tempted to say it's all too hard and to retreat into its

shell, but there is danger – if you will permit a mixed metaphor - of our shell becoming a death knell.

Moses pleaded with God, “Send someone else!” (Ex. 4:13); in the end he accepted, as all of us must in our own circumstances, that there was no-one else. When there is healing to be done, the healing cannot be left to the doctors; we are the doctors. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish critics of university studies remarked, “When the rabbis became doctors, Judaism became sick”. Today’s situation does not allow us to resort to mere bon mots. Unlike the Song of Songs (2:5 etc.) which spoke of being love-sick, our civilisation is hate-sick, and though John Citizen might accuse religion of making it so, we religious people have to be the doctors and exert ourselves to bring a touch of healing.

We began with a reference to Australia. We will conclude with one. When the city of Melbourne looked for a motto, they chose the following from Virgil’s Aeneid (IV: 175): “Vires acquirunt eundo - We gather strength as we grow”. It applies to all of us. If we are not dynamic, we decay, we take up space, we become irrelevant, we eventually die. If we can help humanity to heal the rifts where that is possible, and exercise the good will to soften them when it is not, we will at last enjoy, in the words beloved of the Biblical prophets, “hope for our latter end”.