Rabbi Riskin Confronts Rav Soloveitchik in Makor Rishon: Jewish Israel Responds

In May 2012 the Israeli newspaper *Makor Rishon* ran a seven-page feature article, penned by Chief Rabbi of Efrat Shlomo Riskin, in their "Shabbat HaGadol" supplement. The subject matter was whether or not Jewish-Christian theological dialogue is permissible. Rabbi Riskin, a maverick on interfaith issues, has on more than one occasion ventured out onto an extreme theological limb. This time around, Rabbi Riskin appears to have inverted the inherent intent of Rabbi Joseph Dov Ber Soloveitchik’s (J.B. Soloveitchik, "the Rav") major essay on the subject, "Confrontation".

The treatise, which was formulated in 1964, is widely interpreted within Orthodox circles to be a *halachic psak proscribing interfaith theological encounters*. However Rabbi Riskin contends, in the *Makor Rishon* article, that the intention of the Rav’s essay was to permit, rather than prohibit, such theological dialogue. Concurrently, Riskin opens his personal "postscript" to Soloveitchik’s "Confrontation" by inferring that the timing and the history of the document limits its application, as it was written one and a half years before the ratification of *Nostra Aetate*, and in response to the Catholic-Jewish dialogue taking place at the time.

Rabbi Riskin’s premise is puzzling, because it is well documented in Rav Soloveitchik’s personal letters, as well as noted in contemporary academic papers, that the Rav had already formulated his firm position on interfaith concerns as early as 1950 - many years before the Vatican II initiative. In addition, “Confrontation” continued to guide the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) on interfaith developments well into the 1980's, long after *Nostra Aetate*.

Rabbi Riskin also challenges the widely accepted status of "Confrontation", claiming it does not fall into the category of a "halachic responsum". But, again, the Rav was known to frame his responses in non-halachic terminology when he was presenting positions which he knew would be *read by non-Jews*.

It is one thing to challenge a *halachic ruling from a Gadol Hador*, arguing that it's no longer of relevance, but quite another to declare it was never intended as *halacha*. Rabbi Riskin goes even further in his article by amending what's been commonly accepted as the original intended meaning and premise of the treatise, despite the fact that the RCA reaffirmed the Rav's guidelines on interfaith dialogue as recently as 2006, in response to suggestions that the Rav's directives prohibiting topics of theology no longer applied.
[Note: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin is a member of the RCA, although his interfaith endeavors are not, as of this writing, mentioned in his profile].

In January 2009 there was a previous attempt to challenge the Rav's directives. The resolution, "Diaspora Jewry's First Amendment In Praise of Evangelicals", was scheduled for approval at the Orthodox Union (OU) Conference in Jerusalem (the RCA is the rabbinic authority of the OU). The document, which was forwarded to this writer in November 2009, rendered brief lip service to the Rav while giving very short shrift to the Rav's position on interfaith matters. To add insult to injury, the resolution, which was to be passed in Jerusalem, seemed to disregard the troubling facts on the ground of wide-spread evangelical missionary infiltration into the public and private sectors of the Jewish state. The proposed resolution was withdrawn for reassessment after Jewish Israel engaged in several private meetings with key figures from the OU and presented them with evidence and documentation.

In the summer of 2010, before penning our series, "Now there arose new rabbis in Israel who knew not the Rav", Jewish Israel met with noted scholar Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rosh Yeshiva of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary at Yeshiva University (YU). Rav Schachter, who served as the personal assistant to the Rav, reaffirmed to Jewish Israel our understanding of the Rav's position proscribing interfaith discussions, dialogue, debate and worship.

Five years ago (June 2007), this writer called Rabbi Dr. Aaron Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion and a renowned disciple of the Rav, as well as the Rav's son-in-law, to review my understanding of "Confrontation" before I penned a Jerusalem Post op-ed, "Right of reply: Beware theological red lines".

Why has Rabbi Riskin gone to such extraordinary lengths to bury what one highly respected student of the Rav described to Jewish Israel as an "iron-clad psak"? Perhaps the sweeping brilliance, foresight and endurance of Rav Soloveitchik's position stands in the way of Rabbi Riskin who, when it comes to interfaith matters, doesn't hesitate to leap "where angels fear to tread".

Jewish Israel is once again in contact with many who were very close to the Rav and who best understood his stance on interfaith relations. We will keep our readership posted as we receive opinions and clarifications. In the interim, our Rabbinic Director, Rabbi Dr. Sholom Gold, has responded in a published letter to the editor of Makor Rishon. The below letter, which can also be read here in Hebrew, is followed by Jewish Israel's view of what we feel are major problems with Rabbi Riskin's position. In this report Jewish Israel will also be covering the missionary agenda of the church personalities Rabbi Riskin deems as partners and friends.
Sir;

Over a week ago, Makor Rishon carried a large feature article penned by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, in which he asserts that Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, z”l was an advocate of theological dialogue with Christians, albeit with guidelines. Rabbi Riskin’s views are a radical departure from what has long-been understood, and in recent years reaffirmed, by the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), as Rav Soloveitchik’s halachic position opposing interfaith theological discussion, dialogue and debate on matters of personal faith, doctrine and ritual.

Rav Soloveitchik's halachic treatise, “Confrontation”, on interfaith confrontation is a timeless masterpiece which holds special relevance today as the Jewish people attempt to navigate the fine line of engaging a supportive Christian community without forming theological bonds, which would break down the respected boundaries between different faiths and ultimately compromise Jewish principles and foundations.

"Confrontation" was written with the intention of preserving the uniqueness of the Jewish faith in a time of change, re-evaluation and reflection in the Christian world. The directives and guidelines laid down by Rav Soloveitchik are so inclusive and far-reaching as to have profound relevance regardless as to whether the ever-shifting world trend is philo-Semitic, anti-Semitic or in flux.

It is clear that Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, a former student of Rav Soloveitchik, has chosen to pursue a theologically-based path which seeks commonality, a covenantal relationship, and "religious equality" with evangelical Christians. It is therefore misleading and somewhat disingenuous for Rabbi Riskin to manipulate the Rav’s words and to speculate on their meaning in order to fit his current agenda – especially when it is quite evident from Rav Soloveitchik's published addendum to "Confrontation" that he was opposed to dialogue and discussions on some of the very matters Rabbi Riskin presents at his Christian-Jewish center for theological dialogue.

It should be remembered that regardless of the positive changes taking place in the Christian world, Evangelical Christianity remains committed to missionary endeavors, and seeks to erode the barriers between faith communities, culminating in ultimate spiritual assimilation in the form of "one new man" under christ. This danger of religious integration was especially concerning to Rav Soloveitchik, and is a consistent theme throughout "Confrontation". There is ample proof that the very people whom Rabbi Riskin praises in his Makor Rishon article are actively engaged in such a mission to the Jews.
Rav Soloveitchik taught the Jewish world to walk with dignity and to uphold the integrity of our Torah and tradition, while encouraging active participation in the larger world community.

We regret that Rabbi Shlomo Riskin has chosen not only to disregard Rav Soloveitchik’s directives, but to misinterpret them as well. He has ravaged the lines that “the Rav” so painstakingly drew in order to ensure Jewish spiritual continuity for us and our children.

Rabbi Dr. Sholom Gold
Rabbinic Director
JewishIsrael.com

Riskin’s long and winding road to circumvent the Rav: an overview

Jewish Israel was able to obtain the original English version of Rabbi Riskin’s article (which later appeared in Hebrew in Makor Rishon) titled, “Is Christian-Jewish Theological Dialogue Permitted? A Post Script to Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s ‘Confrontation’ article”. This article will be working from the English version of Riskin’s article in our upcoming reports, in order to accurately critique Rabbi Riskin’s message and intent as originally written.

The first 11 pages of Rabbi Riskin’s 27 page English document are replete with stories of Rabbi Riskin’s own very personal journey which culminated in the establishment of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (CICUC) in Efrat. Like most Jews living in a post-Holocaust era, Rabbi Riskin recounts a number of positive (and some negative) experiences with warm, concerned and devout Christians who have committed themselves to trying to understand the Jewish people and to changing the historic approach of the church towards Judaism.

The next segment of the article addresses the question, "Are we permitted-or perhaps even mandated to teach Torah to Christians?" Rabbi Riskin writes that he had to face this "fundamental question" when large numbers of Christians who were coming to his interfaith center were "less interested in discussing politics or even in Israel's right to a Jewish State... ” and "...more interested in learning Torah: the Written Law, chiefly the Pentateuch (five books
of Moses) in accordance with traditional Jewish commentaries, and the Oral Law, the Talmudic Pharisaic Tradition which had been studied by Jesus.”

For several years now Rabbi Riskin has been regularly drawing upon Christian theology, in articles and videos, to illustrate that the evangelical Christian community “has grafted itself” upon the Jewish covenant.

In his Makor Rishon article, Rabbi Riskin uses a number of sources, primarily Maimonides, to convey what he believes to be a Jewish imperative to teach Torah to Gentiles. Riskin places a special focus on “the eschaton” when, according to Rav Moshe Ben Maimon (Maimonides), “everyone will return to the true religion” (“dat ha’emet” - Kings 12,1). According to Rabbi Riskin, that means all gentiles will at that time convert to Judaism. Indeed, Rabbi Riskin responded to this writer in December 2008 with the following:

"Christians believe that theirs is the perfect revelation to which ultimately everyone will convert. We, as Jews, also believe that Judaism is the perfect revelation to which ultimately everyone will convert."

Rabbi Riskin continues this theme in Makor Rishon, where he claims that both Maimonides and Rav Soloveitchik express the view that "ultimately, in the eschaton, everyone will turn to the Jewish faith."

Jewish Israel consulted with our Rabbinic Director Rav Sholom Gold who told us that the wide consensus found in traditional rabbinic commentary on (Maimonides) is that there will be both Jews and Gentiles as separate entities in the messianic era.

Rabbi Riskin derives his interpretation of what he sees as the Rav’s view on a universal conversion to Judaism by citing a portion in "Confrontation" in which the Rav offers the following majestic approach:

"Only a candid, frank and unequivocal policy reflecting 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, praying fervently for and expecting confidently the fulfillment of our eschatological vision when our faith will rise from particularity to universality, will impress the peers of the other faith community among whom we have both adversaries and friends."

Rabbi Riskin has chosen to take the Rav’s profound and poetic expressions, regarding the dignified journey of a Jew committed to his God, to justify his interfaith program of teaching Torah to Christians under conditions the Rav would have clearly objected to.

Although the Rav, like most devout Jews, surely believed in the ultimate truth of Judaism, it is not hard to find his very grounded opinion on the Jewish vision for the future, when compared to that of Christianity.
"The Jewish religion has never monopolized the media of salvation...it never maintained that our faith is destined to become universal in order to save mankind from damnation. Our prophets and scholars have taught that all men who live in accordance with Divine moral standards will share in the transcendental *summum bonum* which was promised to God-fearing and God-loving people –*hasidei umot ha-olam yesh lahem helek le-olam ha-ba." (see page 21, "Community, Covenant and Commitment")

Rabbi Riskin comes to the conclusion that:

"Hence it is indubitably clear that we may teach Torah to the Gentiles - the seven Noahide Laws as compulsory and as much of the rest of it that they would wish to learn- and that is precisely what our Center for Jewish Christian Understanding and Cooperation does: we teach the Hebraic roots of Christianity, the basic lessons of our Written and Oral Torah studied and practiced by Jesus. (In 2010-2011, 6650 Christians entered our portals to study these teachings)."

We at *Jewish Israel* are not academics, nor do we possess prophetic abilities to clearly envision "the eschaton". We are admittedly unqualified to enter the speculative and contemporary debates on what Maimonides really meant with regards to the status of non-Jews in messianic times. Yet even though ivory towers are beyond *Jewish Israel’s* reach, we have been regularly monitoring the facts on the ground and we have published numerous reports and have posted and linked to videos illustrating the costs and absurdity that comes with the territory of *teaching Torah to adherents of Christian sects*.

We know that any Judaic references about merging into one true religion naturally excites and inspires devout evangelicals, who actively aspire to a new testament vision where Jew and Gentile become "One New Man" under Jesus (see *Ephesians 2:14*, *Ephesians 3:6*, *Galatians 3:28*). In a sense, "Replacement Theology" is alive and well among both philo-Semites and anti-Semites. We don't need to explicate on traditional orthodox church doctrine where Israel is superseded, but evangelical philo-Semitic doctrine is perhaps more problematic as it erases the lines between Judaism and Christianity and calls for a complete fusion of faiths under their lord. Either way, for us as Jews, it is a form of usurping/replacing our identity.

What we believe has been overlooked by Rabbi Riskin and a number of other Torah observant scholars who regularly wrestle with eschatology or teach Torah to Christians, is that in the here and now, the evangelical drive to bring Jesus to the Jews and to blur the lines between faiths has resulted in the formation of a large and formidable missionary movement of Christian evangelicals who have learned extensive Torah and Hebrew, and now dress like Jewish scholars in order to dupe the Jews into receiving the "Hebrew gospels". It is clear that adherents of the evangelical Hebraic roots movement and their "messianic Jewish" affiliates adorn their christ-centered faith with Jewish rituals to enhance their belief in Jesus and to reaffirm his "Jewish roots". Abandoning their lord and savior in favor of pure monotheism is simply not a part of their current or end-days vision and goal.
Jewish Israel does not feel too alone in its opinion, as the Rav’s wisdom and foresight are forever present to back us up. Professor Gerald J. Blidstein, renowned as “one of the Rav’s illustrious students”, accurately describes the Rav’s foremost concerns:

“As many have already noted, the Rav’s reservations about inter-religious dialogue were grounded in two different arguments. First, he was concerned about the missionary impulse that, he believed, remained characteristic of the Church. Acknowledging that the impulse was legitimate from the perspective of Christian theology, the Rav did not call for its abolition or raise any complaints against it. He simply objected to Jews cooperating with it or willingly submitting to it. Perceiving a sociological environment in which the majority community had an advantage over the minority community, he believed it necessary to avoid a dialogue that would lead to a comparison between the religions—a comparison that, at the end of the day, would blur and even breach the boundaries between them.” ("Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Letters on Public Affairs", June 7, 2010)

Reinstating the Rav

Despite Rabbi Riskin’s denial, the evangelical figures he works with and lauds in the Makor Rishon article are indeed involved in missionary endeavors directed at the Jewish people and Israel, as we shall clearly see in the later pages of this report. In spite of the exuberant pro-Israel stance currently being taken by a significant number of church leaders and congregations, evangelism and christ-centeredness remain the identifying attributes of the evangelical movement. Bringing Jews and Judaism closer to a relationship with Jesus, via breaking down the boundaries between faiths, has always been and remains a key objective of that movement.

This blurring of lines between faith communities was of primary concern to Rav Soloveitchik as reflected in "Confrontation", as well as in numerous letters written by the Rav on a variety on interfaith matters. With deceptive proselytizing tactics and "messianic Jewish" escapades and masquerades still very much a part of evangelical Christianity's approach, it would seem that times are far from being ripe for intimate and honest theological encounters.
Rabbi Riskin understands pro-Israel evangelical enthusiasm and love as being indicative of a "sea change", that, "a whole new era of Jewish-Christian relations and understanding has dawned upon the world."

For Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l, the enthusiastic overtures directed at the Jewish community from both the Catholic Church and Protestant factions were hardly revolutionary. Nor did he find it earth-shaking that the Catholic Church had embarked on a more Protestant evangelical approach of bringing the Jewish people "near through love and praise" as "such approaches by the Church have been made many times in our history" (see pages 247 and 265, "Community, Covenant and Commitment"). In his numerous letters which are critical of the Jewish response to interfaith overtures emanating from the Vatican, Soloveitchik cites the change in approach by the Catholic Church towards a more "evangelical appeal", and "evangelical theme".

The Rav was disturbed by the "naïve and equivocal" statements coming from Jewish leadership in their reckless attempts at dialogue and by "rushing in where angels fear to tread" (see pages 263 - 265, "Community, Covenant and Commitment"). He reproached Jewish leaders in the strongest of language for having...

"...transcended the bounds of historical responsibility and decency by asking for a theological document on the Jews as 'brethren' in faith instead of urging the Church to issue a strong declaration in sociological-human terms affirming the inalienable rights of the Jew as a human being."

This was certainly not the exclusive position of the Rav, nor was it revolutionary. In 1960, four years prior to the publication of "Confrontation", Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm penned remarkably similar views in his Dvar Torah on Parashat Vayishlach. Lamm, a student of the Rav and currently Chancellor of Yeshiva University, continues to stand firm and uphold Rav Soloveitchik on interfaith matters as one can see from this Jerusalem Post 2009 interview.

In letters concerning other interfaith matters unrelated to the Vatican, Rav Soloveitchik warns about erasing the boundary line between church and synagogue and expresses concern about the strong appeal interfaith worship would have for American Jews "with their almost neurotic fear of anti-Semitism." In addition to opposing any "Christianization of the synagogue", he called it "a privilege and duty of a good Christian to object to the Judaization of the church" (see page 10, "Community, Covenant and Commitment").

Whereas Rabbi Riskin is on record for saying that the Rav was opposed to theological debate and not to dialogue, Professor Gerald Blidstein makes it clear that the Rav was indeed opposed to inter-religious dialogue. Blidstein defines the Rav's perception of the type of dialogue he opposed as follows:

"The term “dialogue,” for example, signifies not an academic seminar but a personal-educational-therapeutic encounter in which each side is expected to learn from the other and even to be transformed through internalization of the values imparted by the other."
Based on the description of the CJCUC program, it seems that Rabbi Riskin's center engages in the sort of encounter that would have certainly disturbed Rav Soloveitchik:

"Our [CJCUC’s] biblical sessions are based upon a unique, interactive approach – that includes Christian hermeneutics and allows not only for the Christian participant to be part of the process but provides the spiritual group leader with a meaningful theological role in the learning session."

Blidstein does address "the complexity of the Rav’s approach to religious dialogue as a universal phenomenon":

"...he [the Rav] argues that if Second Temple Judaism had been able to formulate its ethical principles in philosophical terms comprehensible to Jews and Gentiles alike, Christianity would have been unable to claim that it had uncovered new religious horizons. It is noteworthy that the Rav here calls for religious discourse addressed to Gentiles as well and laments its absence in the past."

That the Rav expressed a deep, personal yearning for Jewish religious values to be disseminated and discussed on a universal level (including to Christian clergy) should not be a source of confusion or seen as a sanctioning of interfaith theological discussions on personal faith, doctrine, religious law and ritual. The Rav’s views were certainly profound and refined but they were hardly ambiguous. Any attempt to use his introspective spiritual yearnings and poetic language to justify Jewish-Christian theological encounters would be exploitative, because as a "halachic man" he left very clear, grounded, and uncomplicated directives, including a list of what he deemed inappropriate for discussion.

Rabbi Norman Lamm put it simply and succinctly for the Jerusalem Post:

"Based on principles that he says he learned from Soleveitchik, interfaith dialogue aimed at improving life and advancing peace is important, "as long as there is not an exchange of dogmas"."

Yet the Rav went a step further, because even when the subject matter and topics of an interfaith conference fell within the appropriate "sphere of social morality", he would object if the promotion and publicity of the event gave...

"...the impression... that Orthodoxy had revised its attitude to ecumenism and plunged into the mainstream of dialoguing and debating the most delicate and intimate theological ideas..." (letter from 1967, page 268, "Community, Covenant and Commitment").

The Esau-Ya'akov Time Warp
Rabbi Riskin glosses over the fact that the lengthy and concluding section of "Confrontation" addresses the epic reunion between Esau and Jacob and that the directives issued by Jacob to his servants, upon meeting Esau, and the subsequent separation, serve as the foundation and inspiration for Rav J.B. Soloveitchik's position. After all, it is a Torah principle, based on Nachmanides' (Ramban's) commentary, that everything that happened to the patriarchs and matriarchs is an indication of what will happen to their descendants.

Based on the notes taken by Dr. Israel Rivkin at the Rav's various lectures on Parashat Vayishlach, Jacob foresaw a conflict with Esau down through the ages. And Jacob was afraid, because G-d could not reassure him about such a protracted struggle that would take the form of anti-Semitism, assimilation and attempts at "salvation":

"Chazal interpret the displacement of the thigh of Yaakov as the loss of Jews to the Jewish nation in the time of shmad [spiritual destruction]. Can Yaakov be reassured not to fear Esav in such a protracted struggle? Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi and Antoninus were the closest of friends, yet when Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi went to see this 'friend' he first consulted the parasha of Vayishlach. The struggle is too long and the gap between Yaakov and Esav is too wide and unbridgeable. This is why Yaakov was afraid, yet G-D could not reassure him."

It appears Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik shared with his great-grandfather and namesake, Rav Yosef Dov Ber Soloveitchik (the Beis HaLevi), a primary concern over the camaraderie and friendly exchange between Jew and Christian which could lead to spiritual integration and the compromising of our faith and commitments.

The Beis HaLevi's commentary on Jacob's prayer, "Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav" in the Torah portion Vayeshlach suggests that Esau the friendly and supportive "brother" poses a more dangerous threat than Esau the mortal enemy, because of the consequences of assimilation. With great foresight the Beis HaLevi proposed that, in the Galut of Edom, the brotherly Esau may even take on certain Jewish traditions in order to draw the Jews away from their unique and distinct identity and to try to underplay differences.
Along these same lines, Rav Moshe Feinstein, z"l's commentary in Sefer Darash Moshe (on verse 32:25 in Parshat Vayishlach) cites a Gemara in Chulin 91a in which there is a disagreement as to what the angel of Esau looked like. One opinion is that he appeared to Yaakov as a gentile and the other opinion is that he took on the appearance of a Torah scholar. Perhaps it was both, because this Gemara literally comes to life today as Christian missionaries, well-versed in Jewish scriptures, effectively mimic Torah scholars.

The deception may fool Jacob all the way to messianic times. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 3:8) relays the following:

"Rabbi Acha says in the name of Rabbi Huna: In the future, the evil Esau will don his tallit and go sit among the righteous in Gan Eden, and G-d will drag him out of there."

But beyond wrestling with angels and precarious reunions, Parshat Vayeshalch may provide a startling lesson for us Jews with regards to our own behavior with Gentiles. After all, a number of Torah sages feel that, upon meeting up with Jacob, Esau's kisses and tears and his desire for reconciliation were very sincere. We are not denying that a good number of evangelical Christians are certainly expressing a heartfelt desire to be a part of Israel and have a role in Jewish destiny.

After the reunion and separation episode with Esau, Jacob's daughter is kidnapped and raped by Shechem. Then, under impossible circumstances, "negotiations" ensue for a
marriage. The commentaries in the ArtScroll Chumash Stone Edition make it clear that discussions with Shechem and Hamor were handled "cleverly". Jacob's family would never acquiesce to an intermarriage and they had no intention of accepting the proposal of Hamor and Shechem. The Radak comments that Jacob remained silent throughout the deceptive diplomacy because the brothers' response was not truthful and Jacob is the embodiment of truth. According to the Ramban:

"The original intent of the brothers was that the Shechemites would release Dinah because they would never agree to be circumcised. Even if they were to agree, the brothers would be able to seize Dinah and escape while the Shechemite men were ill and weakened."

Ramban's commentary on the verse "... and we will dwell with you and become one people"(34:16) - a proposal made by Jacob's sons - is as follows:

"This statement was the source of Jacob's anger when his sons took the lives of the Shechemites. Though Shechem and his people were evil and deserved retribution, Jacob could not countenance a broken word. His sons had no right to break their word. They should have clothed their deception in terms that would not constitute a promise." (Ramban to v.13).

For Jewish rabbis and leaders to encourage a theological bond with impassioned evangelicals, who aspire to fuse Jews and Christians into a single entity, is simply deceptive on our part because we can't deliver on something which would ultimately destroy Judaism.

And yet today's Jewish religious, political and community leaders frequently and publicly address evangelical Christians about a "covenantal bond" and "our destiny, our glorious past, our present and the promise of our future," and that "we have the same Book and we have the same G-d...this brotherhood is for eternity". Mixed Jewish-Christian audiences give standing ovations to mega-church leaders who declare such things as "we are one, united and bound together by the Torah in a covenantal relationship. " This is simply not true.

And Jacob's anxiety is palpable. The Parasha comes to life in this recent exchange between Rabbi Riskin's good friend, missionary Robert Stearns, and Israel's Consul General to New England Shai Bazak.

Stearns speaks about the wonderful meeting of Jews and Christians coming together and uniting. He makes a few points about the increasing Christian population in Israel. Bazak
declares, "We love the Christians. They are our brothers. We want to be together." Things get very friendly and a *shidduch* is then proposed between Bazak's twin girls and Stearns' twin boys (all in jest?). Stearns requests that Bazak give a closing word to our Christian friends around the world. Bazak complies by including the now *de rigueur*, "We share the same values. We share the same history. We share the same future...."

"This is the legacy of 'gid haNashe' -- to know that Esav can try to kill us and extinguish us and burn us, but we can survive. We must be afraid, however, of the 'hand of my brother,' the 'and the sun rose upon him,' the Esav that would have our sons marry his daughters and his daughters our sons, and who would offer his "salvation through love." That is the Esav that leaves the lasting effect of "he limped upon his thigh."--- (Rabbi Yissocher Frand citing Rav Shlomo Breuer, Parashat Vayishlach)

**Evangelical Missionaries as friends: too close for comfort**

"We will never dialogue with Christians if they represent missionary movements, if their avowed or surreptitious purpose is to convert Jews." ---Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Makor Rishon

Almost without exception, The Christian friends and partners cited in Rabbi Riskin's article are not only partnering with and supporting the Christian messianic movement and missionaries who operate in Israel, but they are all actively engaged in advancing a theological unification of the Judaic and the Christian. We will now explore the activities and aspirations of some of the major personalities mentioned in Rabbi Riskin's article.

**Robert Stearns**

"I had become particularly friendly with the charismatic Pastor Robert Stearns, who brought groups of Evangelicals of all ages – including Collegiates - who wanted to
hear our Tanachic interpretations, who wanted to study Talmud, who wanted to know about the Sabbath and the Festivals. I understood that their intention was not conversion to Judaism; they merely wanted to live their lives more and more the way Jesus had lived his life!” ---Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Makor Rishon

Over the years Jewish Israel has reported extensively on the activities of Pastor Robert Stearns, a missionary with a vision of Jewish-Christian reconciliation in the form of one new man under Jesus. Stearns is Founder and Executive Director of Eagles Wings’ Ministries and the former North Eastern US Regional Director of Christians United for Israel (CUFI).

Rabbi Riskin has for years been a regularly featured speaker at Robert Stearns Day of Prayer for the Peace of Jerusalem, an event co-sponsored by renowned missionary Jack Hayford. A number of Israeli dignitaries attend these events which include performances of Christian worship. The only other high-profile rabbi who regularly attends Stearns’ event as well as other Christian prayer happenings in Israel is Rabbi Benny Elon.

Roberts Stearns has facilitated in raising funds for Rabbi Riskin’s endeavors at CUFI’s Night to Honor Israel events, in which Ohr Torah Stone charities has been the beneficiary.

In May 2010, Robert Stearns of Eagles’ Wings and Day of Prayer fame was the main attraction along with notorious messianic missionaries Daniel Juster and Eitan Shishkoff at the Israel Mandate 2010 IHOP conference. The video promo for the event was startling in its unabashed prayer for the conversion of the Jewish people. Of course, IHOP’s Israel Mandate is all about “partnering with Messianic Jews for the salvation of the Jewish people”. In the
summer of 2011, IHOP organized and emceed Texas Governor Rick Perry's prayer rally in Houston, which included a highly disturbing prayer segment calling for the conversion of Jews.

At the Israel Mandate Conference, Stearns preached passionately and implored Christians to unite around the cross of Jesus Christ, because "Jesus the son of David" - "moshiach ben david" - "a Jewish man is returning" and "gentiles get to be a part of it". He declared that, a "battle" has begun about "whose name gets to be lifted up over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem". Stearns is a "lover" of Israel and is not referring to a physical battle, but a battle of worship and sound in the name of his lord. He then relays a prophetic experience he had and urges Christians to align themselves with the lunar (Jewish) calendar in order to advance the process of Jews and Gentiles becoming "one new man united in messiah".

In May 2012 Stearns sounded a battle cry in New York City where Christians and Jews gathered for the 8th annual Jerusalem Banquet:

"We gather this evening lifting one voice, one sound, one shout, declaring loudly and clearly and strongly that we will not be silent, that Jerusalem is our home!"

Former Baptist pastor and Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee was the keynote speaker at Stearns' event. Huckabee spoke about what he instilled in his daughter in Israel and what he hopes to teach his granddaughter:

"Our people are their [the Jews'] people, and their people are our people. What happens to them happens to us, and what happens to us happens to them."

[Note: Jewish Israel has previously reported that Huckabee was the keynote speaker at 9th annual banquet of the Messianic Jewish Bible Institute (MJBI). MJBI is a deceptive and aggressive Christian missionary organization which exists for the sole purpose of converting Jews.]

More recently, Robert Stearns was featured on the cover of Stephen Strang's publication Ministry Today, for which Stearns served as a guest editor in the past. The theme was "The New Zionism". With all of Robert Stearns' love and support, the main inspiration for the
"New Zionist" comes through loud and clear as Stearns writes, "Jesus is returning to a people. He is returning to a place. He is returning to Jerusalem".

What's makes Stearns' "end days" dream especially disturbing is that he is taking steps to actualize that vision, with Jewish religious and political leaders such as Rabbi Riskin, Rabbi Benny Elon, and Counsel General Shai Bazak encouraging and fanning the flames of those efforts.

In 2011, Stearns came out with book, No, We Can't: Radical Islam, Militant Secularism and the Myth of Coexistence (Chosen Books). The book divides the world into three houses and although Israel is at center stage, the Jewish home and Judaism becomes a victim of spiritual domination:

"A war for world domination is raging--between radical Islam, fundamentalist secularism, and Judeo-Christianity."

Stearns' addition of a little "ity" to the "Judeo-Christian" word swallows and replaces Judaism. Stearns speaks in terms of the "absolutist houses", "absolutist systems", and "... that "the absolutist house of Judeo-Christianity is the only viable choice..." (pg. 186-187).

Israeli and Diaspora Jews may not fully comprehend the spiritual zeal that comes as part of any Judeo-Christian alliance. The term "Judeo-Christian" is commonly used in reference to Western civilization and values. But Evangelicals and Messianic Jews infuse the concept with an added spiritual dimension that amounts to a theological fusing of Christianity with Judaism. And it's this blurring of lines, in combination with unchecked missionary activity which currently threatens the nature of the Jewish state.

Popular Evangelical leader and radio show host Janet Parshall, upon resigning her position as co-chair of a Knesset Christian Allies Caucus event, threw a spot light on the matter for us:

"Judeo-Christian values have no meaning apart from Scripture... the proclamation of the Good News [the gospel of jesus christ] is the ultimate Judeo-Christian value”.

With profound foresight, the Rav emphasized in "Confrontation" that, in order for us as Jews to "safeguard our individuality and freedom of action", we must make it very clear that the Jewish Nation is not related to any other faith community as "brethren" even though "separated." The Rav goes on to express that:
“... people confuse two concepts when they speak of a common tradition uniting two faith communities such as the Christian and the Judaic.”

Rabbi Aryeh Klapper refers to the phrase “Judeo-Christian tradition” as having been a concept especially dreaded by the Rav:

“He [the Rav] is of course opposed to debate, but he is also opposed to dialogue that blurs distinctiveness, that seeks to build theological community and blur distinct identity. His bête noire in this regard is the phrase ‘Judeo-Christian tradition’.”

Pastor John Hagee – We are one

“Pastor Hagee is a most impressive man, with a clear, deep, articulate voice, and a warm and embracing manner. He looked at me intently and said, ‘Rabbi, I love the Jewish people; Rabbi, I love you, Rabbi.’” ---Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Makor Rishon

Pastor John Hagee is frequently the subject of Jewish Israel's reports and articles. If any contemporary church figure encapsulates the imbroglio we Jews face when forging interfaith alliances, it would have to be John Hagee, founder and director of Christians United for Israel (CUFI). His love for Israel knows no bounds and has no boundaries - and that includes supporting missionary endeavors in the Jewish State.

In addition to tirelessly lobbying in Washington and throughout the United States on behalf of Israel, the commanding mega-church pastor has lavished mega-millions of dollars upon the Jewish state for a staggering array of charitable causes and institutions. Jewish Israel notes that Rabbi Riskin’s yeshiva in Efrat, Ohr Torah Stone, has been a recipient of that generosity. Rabbi Riskin has reciprocated by taking gratitude and adoration to a whole new
level, going as far as to bestow priestly status upon the mega church leader, whom Riskin referred to as a "kohen pastor", in comparison to Melchizedek, of Genesis 14:18-20.

Saying "no" to the pastor, or at least deliberating over his theologically fueled generosity in order to weigh the costs involved, is no easy matter. But the failure to do so has resulted in Jewish leadership's support of an effective and relentless bulldozing of the halachic fences between faith communities. When Hagee speaks, mixed Jewish-Christian crowds can't help but respond with thunderous applause and ovations to his Judeo-Christian siren song:

- "If a line has to be drawn, draw the line around both Christians and Jews. We are one. We are united. We are indivisible." - John Hagee, November 30, 2011 Houston Chronicle
- "It is wonderful to see Christians and Jews coming together to stand together and be together forever" - John Hagee, October 17, 2007 Jerusalem Post
- "Christians and Jews listen to me very closely. Our future is bound together by a covenant relationship." - John Hagee, Night to Honor Israel, Jerusalem August 2010

In the span of a few minutes, Hagee can quote from the new testament and thank the Jewish people for giving Christianity their icons Mary, Joseph, Jesus, the apostles and Paul, while using the Book of Ruth to substantiate his claim that, "we [Christians and Jews] are bound together by the Torah ... Christians United for Israel is a Gentile organization in a covenant relationship with the Jewish people and the State of Israel."

We may, at this particular time in history, have common concerns and interests with numerous gentile supporters, but we have no covenantal relationship with them. There is nothing in our Torah that would indicate that Jews and Christians are or will be theologically bound together.

Needless to say, whereas Rav Soloveitchik would have welcomed non-theologically bound moral, political, and humanitarian support for Israel from concerned Gentile parties, Pastor Hagee seeks a covenantal consummation of the interfaith relationship and couches the partnership in terms which are disturbing and untenable for the Jew.

Drawing upon the Eisav-Yaacov model, the Rav suggests, in the conclusion of "Confrontation", that the Jew should know how to "recoil", "disengage" and "retrace his steps" when things get too close for comfort:

"When the process of coming nearer and nearer is almost consummated, we immediately begin to retreat quickly into seclusion. 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."

Rabbi Riskin has justified Israel's alliance with evangelical Christians in these terms:

“This present World War, in which the Israeli-Palestinian clashes are only small change, is primarily a religious war, in which Allah- turned-Satan by Wahhabi Islam is
poised to overtake the God of love, compassion, morality and peace of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. Since we are less than 13 million Jews world-wide our forging an alliance with almost two billion Christians is not only politically clever, but becomes a crucial, planet-saving necessity."

[Note: the above quote is from the original English draft of Rabbi Riskin's article. The term "Judeo-Christian tradition" is replaced by "our tradition" in the published Makor Rishon article.]

Again, the Rav had an issue with the phrase "Judeo-Christian tradition" when used in a way which seeks to build theological commonality between faith communities:

"People confuse two concepts when they speak of a common tradition uniting two faith communities such as the Christian and the Judaic." (see "Confrontation")

However, the Rav gave credence to the term in a cultural and historical context:

"This term may have relevance if one looks upon a faith community under an historicocultural aspect and interprets its relationship to another faith community in sociological, human categories describing the unfolding of the creative consciousness of man... we could readily speak of a Judeo-Hellenistic-Christian tradition within the framework of our Western civilization."

To ask Israel to assimilate and accept the concept of a Judeo-Christian heritage or tradition as the answer to a threatening and oppressive Islamo-fascism is, for the Jew, a spiritually stifling and simplistic solution. It would, in essence, annul our belief that Judaic values are universal values, which have been and can continue to be adapted to any culture or religion without infringing upon the belief systems of those independent faiths or communities, whether Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. The moral and ethical contribution of Judaism is available to any community that strives to be creative, productive and wants to contribute to the greater good of mankind. The solutions that the Jewish people aspire to transcend those that are found in either fundamentalist Biblical Christian theologies or in a secularized globalized world-view.

Jewish Israel remains unclear as to Rabbi Riskin's use of the phrase "Allah turned Satan" and will refrain from comment at this time. However we suggest that Jewish leadership be very careful and clear when referring to the concept of "satan" so that it not be confused with the Christian understanding of a satan or a devil which is expressed by such leaders as Pastor Hagee and evangelist Pat Robertson.

Rabbi Riskin's demographic fears may also ring a bit alien to Jewish ears. Relying on a spontaneous swelling of our ranks, via an influx of another faith or nation, has never been the preferred strategy for the Jew. Our successful legacy and survival has never been tied to demographic strength and superiority.
Indeed, Pastor Hagee has successfully marketed the brand, "Israel, you are not alone". But knowing that "seventy million evangelical Christians in America stand by Israel in their day of trouble" in an "indivisible", "covenantal" embrace with the Jewish people, would have likely caused some discomfort for the Rav - and it would have had little to do with historic church anti-Semitism. The Rav as "the lonely man of faith" knew that the Jew and the Jewish nation, in times of trouble, find redemptive solutions and G-d in a state of existential loneliness. "Yaakov remained alone." (Bereshit 32:35)

If faced with today's fervent support from devout evangelicals, we imagine the Rav would have shown an appropriate and dignified level of appreciation to our many devoted gentile friends, but he would have been intellectually honest and principled enough to firmly insist that pro-Israel Christians respect our spiritual space. And in order to preserve, protect and ensure our religious sovereignty, he would have formulated a resolute policy to guide us – which is why "Confrontation" retains its relevance today.

The Rav was a realist and valued America as an ally. In interviews published in the Israeli newspaper Maariv in 1975 and 1977, the Rav referred to America as being "the only friend of the State of Israel – and she is a great friend". He also expressed an appreciation for those gentiles who understood the spiritual and redemptive hopes that the Jews attach to the Land of Israel. At the same time, he relayed to the reporter that the status of being alone "is part of the covenant God established with the Jewish people". "...The aloneness of the Jewish people is one of the clear signs of the nation which exists as a chosen nation...A lonely individual is creative. A lonely nation is also a creative one." (see Community, Covenant and Commitment, pages 233-243)

The Rav's eminent student Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein expounds on this concept of loneliness which is an innate part of being Jewish:

"The Jew feels himself unique among the peoples. He might find himself immersed among them; however, he always feels separate from them...Its [the Jewish nation's] uniqueness pertains both to the present as well as to the eschatological future, both on the socio-historic, as well as the meta-historic level. "Hen am levadad yishkon u-vagoyim lo yitchashav!" ---Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein on Parashat Balak

Every Jew retains the privilege to cherish and develop an intimate relationship with G-d within the bounds of Torah - without outside forces infringing on, influencing, and disturbing that relationship. And that should be okay, as respect for privacy, for boundaries, and for differences, should potentially form the foundations of healthy alliances between all people, communities and nations. However, impassioned Christian evangelicals are drawing closer
to the Jews and to Israel with a theological mandate in hand that calls for the breaking down and erasing of the sacred lines between faith communities.

- “For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.” (Ephesians 2:14)

- “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 3:6)

- “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

John Hagee – the missionary

As indicated earlier in our report, Professor Gerald Blidstein noted that Rav Soloveitchik was very wary of the “missionary impulse” of the church, but he did not demand its abolition. “He simply objected to Jews cooperating with it or willingly submitting to it”. But that was in relation to American Public Affairs.

With regards to missionaries in Eretz Yisrael, the Rav took a very different stand. Between 1963 and 1964 records of the Rav indicate that he delivered fiery speeches on the issue of Christian missionary activity in Israel at both the annual Mizrahi convention and to the entire body of Yeshiva University. He held high level meetings on the issue which had become a matter of great concern in Israel and was in correspondence with then Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. The Rav was a signatory on this no-nonsense letter signed by top American Rabbaim and addressed to then Prime Minister Eshkol. A year later Israel did adopt some counter-missionary legislation with regards to the conversion of minors. (see Community, Covenant and Commitment, pages 207-208)

Pastor John Hagee is first and foremost a missionary in the classical sense of the word, whose stated mission is, “to aggressively fulfill the commission that Jesus Christ gave to His followers to go into the world and make disciples of all people.”

Pastor Hagee gave his enthusiastic blessing, endorsement and monetary contribution for missionary Daystar television to spread the gospel 24/7 in Israel. Daystar which now owns a studio on Mt. Zion is not a benign channel. Promoting "Christians and Jews together in a
single faith”. Daystar runs “messianic Jewish” programming, offers instructions on how to convert Jews to Jesus and features “pro-Israel” figures who specialize in the desecration of Torah scrolls. Daystar has been a major contributor and promoter of Pastor Hagee’s organization, CUFI. Watch this video of Pastor Hagee delivering a blank check to UJC Dallas. It’s blank because Hagee is awaiting a generous donation from Daystar. Be sure to look closely at the podium which is adorned with a cross within the Star of David.

Pastor Hagee*, as well as members of CUFI’s past and present executive board and regional directors, stand with notorious messianic missionaries in their endorsement and support of the Israeli messianic organization MaozIsrael/IstandwithIsrael. The organization aggressively targets Jews for conversion and is closely affiliated with Christ for the Nations in Dallas Texas. MaozIsrael/IstandwithIsrael encourages overt missionaries like Zev Porat, who can be seen actively proselytizing Jews at the Kotel and in Bnei Brak. But the organization engages in much larger projects and sets their sights on young “messianic” Israelis, Ethiopian Jews and, relentlessly campaigning against Orthodox Judaism — including sponsorship of demonstrations for interfaith and civil marriage in Israel. One could look at MaozIsrael’s material and understand that Christian replacement theology is very much alive and well in Israel.

*[Note: Pastor John Hagee has recently removed his name and that of his wife from the MaozIsrael/IStandWithIsrael endorsement list. This occurred after Jewish Israel passed information on to a number of CUFI’s Jewish supporters about MaozIsrael and Hagee’s connection to it. This is not the first time that Pastor Hagee's name had been removed as an endorser, only to return again at a later time.]

In 2008 this writer met at Rav Simcha HaCohen Kook’s home in Israel with Rabbi Arye Scheinberg, of Congregation Rodfei Sholom, from San Antonio, Texas. Rabbi Scheinberg was then and remains now Pastor Hagee’s good friend and confidant. During that meeting, documentation was presented tying certain CUFI executives and directors to Maoz Israel and other missionary endeavors. At the time, Rabbi Scheinberg was honest enough to acknowledge the wealth of evidence indicating support for missionary endeavors in Israel among CUFI’s top brass. I was told that Pastor Hagee was aware of the problems and that long-time CUFI regional director Stephen Strang would step down. That move never transpired.

Hagee is so emboldened and comfortable in Jerusalem that he recently took religious freedom to an entirely different level when he chose the roof top at Aish HaTorah’s World Center (Aish HaTorah is one of the most respected Torah institutions in the world) to proclaim that Jesus is lord and king and to assert that “every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess” that belief.

John Hagee – the lover

“Rabbi Soloveitchik worried that theological dialogue would create pressure to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, to reconcile ‘some’
differences.” He argued against any Jewish interference in the faith of Christians both on grounds of principle and out of concern that this would create the framework for reciprocal expectations...The trajectory of dialogue to our own day has confirmed the validity of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s analysis to an almost stunning degree.--- Dr. David Berger, Revisiting “Confrontation” After Forty Years: A Response to Rabbi Eugene Korn

Indeed, as expressed in "Confrontation" and in his letters on interfaith matters, it was clear the Rav considered it "a betrayal of our faith and heritage" to "even hint to another faith community that we are mentally ready to revise historical attitudes, to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, and to reconcile 'some' differences". The Rav warned against "displaying a servile attitude".

But in the face of dialogue and dollars, it seems servility trumps dignity. Netanya Academic College is one of Pastor Hagee's favorite charities in Israel. Hagee has established the Jewish Heritage Center at the college, was instrumental in establishing the synagogue on campus, supported the recruitment of the campus rabbi, and promotes activities to bring Jews and Christians closer.

This video produced by CUFI for a Night to Honor Israel in Jerusalem captures Netanya Academic College in a state of adulation. Hagee is hailed as an "icon" and the college voice over "reciprocates his love without reservations - with boundless love and gratitude".

When Christian pastors start building our synagogues, our Judaic studies departments, and recruiting our rabbis, then it appears that Judaism is in for a theological realignment. For how can we possibly delineate the fundamental differences between faiths or broach sensitive religious topics – lest we offend our good friends and benefactors? This situation is certainly not Pastor Hagee’s fault, but it is the fault of Jewish leadership for not being able to draw appropriate lines in a theologically loaded relationship.

A very tired Jewish leadership has graciously stepped aside and asked Pastor Hagee to fight our battles for us. In June 2012 a well-known Jewish activist, radio personality and journalist asked Jewish Israel for an opinion on his published letter to Pastor Hagee. With regards to the issue of an undivided Jerusalem, the letter stated:

“Pastor Hagee, I once heard you say at a fundraiser in Jerusalem: “Don’t tell me you love me, show me you love me.” Now I say that very phrase back to you – Don’t tell me you love me, show me you love me by harnessing the power of CUFI and Christian Zionists to defend Jerusalem from bad US policy... In short, this is your fight.”

Jewish Israel responded by cautioning the writer about turning the Israel-evangelical relationship into a "love affair". We suggested that he not make the political battle over Jerusalem Hagee's fight, because if Hagee wins, then it will be his Jerusalem – jesus and all.

Christianity, whether politically left or right, remains christ-centered, exclusive and triumphalist. Despite his outstanding support and rhetoric, Pastor Hagee should not be serving as chief spokesperson for the Jewish people concerning the Land of Israel.
Pastor Hagee asked AIPAC leaders back in 2007 to “…think of our potential future together. Fifty million evangelicals joining in common cause with 5 million Jewish people in America on behalf of Israel is a match made in heaven.” At that time Jewish leadership should have thought long and hard about the costs involved in being "unconditionally" loved to death. With some foresight and restraint, a dignified, responsible, and limited partnership -with conditions - could have been forged with those gentiles taking a moral stand with the Jewish people and the State of Israel – a relationship in which Jews across the political and religious spectrum would have been comfortable with.

“We have had Inquisitions and pogroms and Holocausts. Unfortunately, we have lost many. But a lasting effect on Yaakov is not visible, because we can cope with that Esav. That battle we can withstand. However, when "the sun rises," [the sun connotes the new bright day]... when Esav shines his face upon Yaakov shows him the kiss, shows him the shake of the hand -- that is when it is obvious that "he is limping on his thigh."... When Yaakov meets Esav at night, and succeeds, he calls it Peni’el. This is the Face of G-d. But when the dawn arrives and we get the 'brotherly love' of Esav, then it is PenUel. Meaning 'penu E-l' -- G-d clears away, He leaves. When one is fighting and must struggle with Esav, one can be assured of Peni’el -- the Face of G-d is present. One knows that “I'm a Jew and he's Esav.” It may be tough, it may be difficult, but one knows he is a Jew and he knows this is the Face of G-d. However, when the “sun comes up” and Esav tries to ‘love you to death,’ then it becomes 'PenUel' -- G-d, so to speak, turns away. Then, the real impact is evident -- "and he limps on his thigh.”“ - Rabbi Y. Frand, Parashat Vayishlach

Collaboration with Vaughn, Bachman and Garr

“Two cherished couples of outstanding Christian leaders, who are also our good friends – Pastors Lasalle and Portia Vaughn from the New Life Christian Center in San Antonio, Texas, and Gary and Connie Bachman from Gates of Zion in Oklahoma City – own apartments in Jerusalem, and when they are with their congregants and organizations, they observe the Sabbath and the Festivals with them. Dedication such as this to the family holidays and customs mentioned in the 24 books of Scriptures (“Mikrah”), which were strictly adhered to by the founder of Christianity himself, is spreading and advancing among evangelicals, who are [nevertheless] not [as a result of these observances] ceasing to retain their loyalty as well to the unique characteristics of their Christian belief. I even met one representative of a large Evangelical women’s group from Oklahoma City who gather every evening between Pesach and Shavuot in order to recite together chapters from Psalms, to count the Omer and to review together daily improvements of personal character, as well as to
Rabbi Riskin’s friends, the Vaughns and the Bachmans, draw their inspiration from and host programming with notorious leaders in the messianic world who dedicate their resources towards targeting the Jewish people for conversion. Before expounding on the specific personalities and their activities, JewishIsrael offers a review of some of the attitudes and approaches that are the latest rage in the evangelical world. The tactics may differ, but the evangelical mission is always geared towards breaking down the theological barriers between Christian and Jew.

A number of Torah observant Jewish leaders, including Rabbi Riskin, attribute the intense "love for Zion" among evangelical Christians and their fascination with the "Jewishness of Jesus" and Jewish traditions as a harbinger of end times. With great anticipation, both Jews and Christians turn to the prophets and cite such passages as Zechariah 8:23, a time when "ten men of all the languages of the nations shall take hold of the hem of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you'."

While it is important to acknowledge the existence of significant numbers of sincere truth seekers and supporters of Israel, many of these gentiles are caught-up in a wealth of Hebraic roots and messianic sects whose leaders remain diehard adherents to the gospel message and its sanctioned methods of deception:

"To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law." (1 Corinthians 9:20)

Christian missionaries have traditionally spun Biblical scripture and prophetic writings as a calculated part of strategic "outreach" intended to bring Jesus to the Jews. While the Holocaust and the rebirth of the State of Israel caused the church to rethink the conventional approach to Replacement theology, it did not prompt Christian leaders to abandon the fundamental belief that the church is Israel – on the contrary. Today’s messianic Christian "make-room-for-the-Jews" approach has birthed some very creative theology, allowing Christians to fit themselves into Israel’s destiny. This can take the form of grafting the church into the commonwealth of Israel, by claiming to be literal "Israel" as part of "the lost Jewish tribes", or by claiming to be "a co-heir and equal member of the chosen people of the God of Israel through the Blood of Jesus."
In Rav Soloveitchik’s treatise "Confrontation", as well as in numerous letters, the Rav made it clear that it is not our role as Jews to pressure the church to change their historical interpretation of Jewish history before they are ready to do so. What Rabbi Riskin interprets as "a sea change" or "theological earthquake" in the Christian world is actually a confusing period fraught with pitfalls for the Jews.

"Non-interference with and non-involvement in something which is totally alien to us is a conditio sine qua non for the furtherance of good will and mutual respect."
--- Rav Soloveitchik, "Confrontation"

Playing the role of theo-therapist or unreservedly embracing every seemingly sweeping gesture towards reconciliation is a risky venture. Some Hebraic Roots sects, such as the Ephramites, are downplaying and even disavowing overt proselytizing in their quest to become a part of the commonwealth of Israel.

Not only is the "messianic Jewish" deception damaging and deeply offensive to the Jewish people, but myriads of Christian congregants who are sincerely seeking the truth and spiritual fulfillment are being cruelly deceived. A quest to recapture what is perceived as first century Christianity will not make them Jewish, closer to Judaism or part of the commonwealth of Israel.

Former evangelical church leaders, who have managed to leave Christianity and convert to Judaism, openly confirm the evangelizing agenda, which is part and parcel of Christian Zionism. Despite the warning, numbers of rabbinic leaders and Jewish community activists attribute increased spiritual confusion and the emergence of mishapen Judeo-Christian or Hebraic roots cults to messianic birth pangs, as understood by Judaism. They perceive the Christian "messianic Jewish" movement as a transitional step towards authentic Judaism. In some instances, the movement has been just that. However it has served overwhelmingly as a trap for a staggering number of Jews.

JewishIsrael has spoken with some Jewish leaders and activists who have taken their cue from evangelical cult leaders and have reasoned that a return to first century "Hebraic Roots" Christianity, adorned with Jewish rituals, would be a positive move as it would purge the christ-centered religion of certain anti-Semitic and paganistic tendencies attributed to Rome, opening the way for Jews and "Jewish" believers in Jesus to become "brethren". The problematic blurring of lines, assimilation, confrontation, and progressive replacement theology, which threatens Jewish spiritual sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael, has yet to be considered by those Jews advocating and encouraging evangelical leaders in their efforts towards a revival of early Christianity.

Evangelizing messianic Christians (so called "messianic Jews") are reveling in the turmoil. They see new testament prophecy being fulfilled in the formation of one new man as described in the new testament (Ephesians 2:14, Ephesians 3:6, Galatians 3:28, Romans 11). For the evangelical, the current era of Christian-Jewish reconciliation is indicative that a Christian restoration is in full swing in Israel and evidence that Christian evangelism (proselytizing, witnessing and other missionary outreach efforts) is effective and all is going according to their "God’s plan for the Jewish people". Evangelical missionaries are spread throughout the globe convincing numerous peoples and tribes that they are the real "lost tribes".
Rabbi Riskin is clearly enamored with new testament theology and the persona of Jesus. He frequently references Christianity's concept of having been grafted into the Jewish covenant. But according to former evangelical Bible teachers, Rabbi Riskin misreads the concept of grafting in Romans 11 which he readily quotes in articles and videos.

Two years ago JewishIsrael ran a report examining Rabbi Riskin's opinions about the "messianic Jewish" movement. At that time Penina Taylor and a number of other counter-missionary professionals experts expressed concern and disappointment over what they considered to be Rabbi Riskin's "misinformed", "irresponsible" and "at the very least, naive" views and conclusions.

Igniting a Revolution

Pastor Dr. La Salle Vaughn of New Life Christian Center in San Antonio enjoys a close relationship with Rabbi Riskin. Vaughn brings his church group members to Israel "to dialogue" at Riskin's Ohr Torah Stone Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (CJCUC). Rabbi Riskin and CJCUC's executive director, David Nekrtuman, are featured speakers at Pastor Vaughn's church.

Dr. Vaughn has written the book, "The Next Great Move of God". Rabbi Riskin and Mr. Nekrtuman can now find their interviews prominently featured in Vaughn's online book promotion alongside notorious evangelical messianic personalities such as Jonathan Bernis of Jewish Voice Ministries and Joseph Shulam of Netivyah, who deceptively pose as "rabbis".

The mix of authentic Jewish rabbis and teachers with Christian "rabbis" on Vaughn's book site only adds legitimacy to Vaughn's own One New Man aspirations and to the breaching of sacred lines between faith communities. Make no mistake, Pastor Vaughn's message and intention is clearly missionary in nature:

"The one new man is a total representation of both the Jewish and non Jewish believers in Christ. God is bringing the whole house of Israel back together again. The house of Israel includes the church of the Lord Jesus Christ because it involves the multitude of nations. Scattered all over the world, we began to get involved in pagan worship; however, we did embrace Jesus as Lord. Now, God is drawing the church back to our Hebraic roots. The house of Judah represents the Jewish people. The house of Judah has held fast to its Hebraic roots. God is causing the Jews to embrace
Yeshua as their Messiah, and the church to embrace their Hebraic roots. When this happens, God will take the house of Israel and the house of Judah and form one new man according to Paul in the book of Ephesians...

Vaughn and his New Life Christian church sponsors major conferences featuring leading messianic missionary figures such as Jonathan Bernis and Marty Goetz who target Jews for conversion. Coach Bill McCartney and Dr. Raleigh Washington of Promise Keepers and their Israel outreach partner Evan Levine of the Hatikva Project promote and financially support the messianic community and missionary activity in Israel. Dr. Rick Kurnow, a Jewish convert to Christianity, markets Israeli messianic products such as the New Covenant Messianic Prayer Shawl. Christian Hebraic roots leader Bill Cloud teaches that the christ-believing church is literally Israel via a grafting process found in Romans 11 and subsequently the land of Israel is part of their inheritance.

Wherever you find a Pastor LaSalle Vaughn sponsored event poster you'll also find Rabbi Riskin's friends, Gary and Connie Bachman of the Zion's Gate International, pictured alongside an exclusive messianic and missionary entourage. Rabbi Riskin's theological center, CJCUC, enjoys a collaborative relationship with the Bachman's ministry.

Same old same old new age
John Garr of The Hebraic Heritage Christian Center is another figure who is ever-present in Vaughn’s New Life Christian Center conference promotions. Garr also enjoys a much-touted ground-breaking relationship with Rabbi Riskin’s CICUC. After working with and collaborating with CICUC, The Hebraic Heritage Christian Center released a statement called Covenant and Witness: Reflections of Evangelical Christians in Conversation with Orthodox Jews. It reads in part as follows:

"As a result of continuing dialogue with scholars associated with the Israel-based Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation (CICUC), the Hebraic Heritage Christian Center (HHCC), headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, has developed an Evangelical Christian statement on “Covenant and Witness” to encourage a new era of Christian-Jewish relations based on mutual respect and support”.

"...We fully appreciate the fact that the salvation which we as Christians cherish is “from the Jews,” in the words of Jesus, our Lord. We also acknowledge that our understanding of salvation as God’s plan of redemption and restoration of the universe comes to us from the Jewish people..."

"...We rejoice in that we share with the Jewish people in God’s covenant with Abraham by virtue of Jesus’ faithfulness unto death on our behalf and our faith in and acceptance of him as Messiah and Lord...

"...Though we understand that own self-definition as Evangelicals rests on our response to and engagement in the call to bear witness both to Israel’s God and to Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and though we honor the divine imperative to make disciples of all nations, we engage the Jewish people in conversation not as heathens or unbelievers but as fellow believers in the God of Scripture; therefore, we share our understanding and our beliefs with the Jewish people as dialogue within a monotheistic Abrahamic family and as communication with fellow citizens in the commonwealth of God’s community of faith..."

Although the statement is couched in seemingly conciliatory terms, there is an obvious attempt to attach and link Jesus and Christian belief to the Jewish people. There is little to indicate that we have entered a new era in Christian-Jewish relations. Rather the christ-centered document remains consistent with Christian dogma. It’s clear that Jews and Christians remain theologically light years apart. There is, however, a paragraph that claims, "We, therefore, denounce all efforts at singling out individual Jewish people as specific
targets for proselytization through the use of deceptive, devious, and coercive methodologies."

But those words come across as lame, to say the least, when one sees John Garr sitting with the king of messianic deception, "Rabbi" Jonathan Bernis on his "Jewish Voice" show. Bernis sells Garr's books in order to raise funds for his convert-the-Jew ministry.

While sitting with Jonathan Bernis, John Garr, a representative of Rabbi Riskin's "new era" in Jewish-Christian relations, gave us a hefty dose of the "same old same old".

When discussing the blank page which stands in the way of the old testament and the new testament of his "lord and savior jesus christ", Garr says, "The bible is a continuum. It's one book."

Forty-eight years ago the Rav declared the impossibility of that "continuum" in "Confrontation":

"...the whole idea of a tradition of faiths and the continuum of revealed doctrines which are by their very nature incommensurate and related to different frames of reference is utterly absurd, unless one is ready to acquiesce in the Christian theological claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism."

The obscenity of it all
Nine months ago, those blindly racing along and proclaiming a new dawn of theological partnership slammed into a concrete partition wall when evangelical missionary and snake oil salesman Ralph Messer, masquerading as a rabbi, very publicly defiled a Torah scroll.

Such a resounding cry of "the emperor is naked" came forth from the Jewish, Christian and secular press, that even the most hardcore messianic leaders went running for cover and scrambling for fig leaves. There was messianic "al chet" and an almost unanimous cry from "Hebraic roots" leaders of "we don't know the guy." Meanwhile Messer's numerous outrages began to surface with well-know Christian Zionist leaders actively participating in the travesties.

It was only after JewishIsrael ran an extensive report and posted a number of videos which exposed Messer, that Pastor LaSalle Vaughn erased references to Messer’s name from his website.

Vaughn and his congregants had been greatly influenced for numerous years by "Rabbi" Ralph Messer. Messer was the keynote speaker at Pastor Vaughn's Days of Elijah Conference in 2003 ("Rabbi" Jonathan Bernis filled the bogus rabbi slot in Vaughn's 2011 conference). In the 2011 "Yeshiva" section of New Life Christian Center’s website, it's made clear that "Rabbi Messer’s message entitled ‘A Look at the Torah’ inspired Dr. LaSalle R. Vaughn (founder and pastor of New Life Christian Center) to start a Yeshiva school".

The Riskin Challenge

Rabbi Sholom Gold is the Rabbinic Director of JewishIsrael. In a letter published in Makor Rishon on July 13, 2012 in reaction to Rabbi Gold's response to Rabbi Riskin's original feature article, Rabbi Riskin challenged Rabbi Gold with the following:

"If Rabbi Gold knows of other people who work with me who are cooperative with missionary activity, I would appreciate it if he would inform me, and if the claim is correct I will cut my ties with them immediately."

JewishIsrael is confident that our research and reporting should provide Rabbi Riskin with more than sufficient information to cause him to stop, think, take the appropriate action, and hopefully change course.

The Rav's Legacy
As a Jew living in the Diaspora, Rav Soloveitchik was acutely aware of the dilemma that comes with being a member of a small faith community living among "the community of the many". He brilliantly crafted "Confrontation" with such awareness and sensitivity for "the other," that the document never uses the terms "missionary", "idolatry", or "conversion". But this was hardly a case of political correctness. It was because the Rav was a man of truth. In his dignified, thoughtful and penetrating approach he didn't abandon our forefather Jacob in his timeless struggle with Esau. Rather, the Rav threw such an intense and profound spotlight on the epic and timeless biblical struggle that, to this day, Jewish academics and Christian theologians continue to wrestle with the Rav's words – words that maintain their relevance and brilliance over forty eight years later. The directives as outlined in "Confrontation" ensure that Ya'acov will continue to live and prevail.

The Rav was a "halachic man" as well as the "lonely man of faith". But perhaps it was the Rav as the "integrated man", a combination of being the existential thinker anchored in halacha, which gave the Rav the ability to fly higher and see farther than most:

"Even in Halakhah, where he was our generation's undisputed master, he still was a stranger in a foreign land. Other great scholars were also gifted thinkers capable of incisive insights, but he alone in addition to his cognitive supremacy, his dazzling halakhic definitions, and his brilliant formulations - had a broader scope by virtue of his wider knowledge and his exposure to other modes of reasoning, which helped him in his halakhic creativity, so that he was singular amongst the giants of Halakhah of our time." ---Rabbi Norman Lamm's Eulogy for the Rav

The Rav had the foresight to establish the red lines and establish the guidelines which would be of particular relevance in an enlightened age where borders between faith communities are being regularly challenged and breached. The blurring of the lines between faiths was of primary concern to the Rav.

A number of today's rabbinic leaders, such as Rabbi Riskin, have thrown caution to the wind on interfaith matters because they detect change in the air. Living as part of a Jewish majority in Eretz Yisrael has given many a false sense of spiritual security while allowing the focus to be directed solely on the existential physical threats emanating from our external borders. However, ambiguous theological interpretations and reckless attempts at improvisational halacha to match the perceived spirit of the times will likely leave a number of Jews grooping in the dark, with Christian "friends" more than happy to "catch" those who stumble.
"Riskin takes Risks"

We didn't create this slogan. David Nekrutman, the executive director of CJCUC, did. In a recent interview (August 27, 2012) with John Sandager, Nekrutman was asked how Rabbi Riskin and his organization, CJCUC, were received in Israel and among Orthodox Jews. Nekrutman replied as follows:

"...I guess his name Riskin, R-I-S-K, is part of his mission in the world, to take risks and to go to the boundaries and to see how much we can do to bridge different faith communities and to talk to one another..."

The validity of Rabbi Riskin's approach can be debated, but traversing interfaith theological boundaries was surely not sanctioned by the Rav, regardless of Rabbi Riskin's claims in Makor Rishon.

If the Rav were alive today it's likely he would censure Rabbi Riskin like he reproached Jewish leaders back in 1966:

"They should say... 'hatanu'- for rushing where angels fear to tread."

Revisionist history

"...One can only learn from someone or something one is sure about...if one entertains any doubt about his rabbi, then this person ceases to be his rabbi and he can no longer learn from him.\" ---Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, Strive for Truth, Parashat Hukkat, "Get yourself a teacher"

Rabbi Riskin has chosen a very different path from that of his "revered mentor", Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. It is nothing short of a travesty for Rabbi Riskin to try and reinvent, reinterpret and deny the Rav's firm stand and to drag the Rav down a road he would have refused to travel.
There is little question that the Rav would have shunned a former student and a rabbi who publicly entertains the concept of the Trinity as a unity, explores the acceptance of Jesus as "a true Jewish religious thinker and teacher", and who maintains a policy of inviting Christian guests of his theological institution to synagogue and telling them to "pray in Jesus' name – don't leave Jesus at the door".

"...as the chairman of its halakha commission, the Rav was the unchallenged halakhic authority of the Rabbinical Council of America."--- Rabbi Walter S. Wurzburger, "Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik as Posek of Post-modern Orthodoxy"

The Rav passed away in 1993. Yet to this day the RCA continues to uphold the Rav's position on interfaith matters. Apart from Rabbi Riskin, nobody, including those Orthodox rabbis who actively and enthusiastically engage and cooperate with the Christian community, such as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks and Rabbi Meir Soloveitchik, has dared to reinvent or alter the Rav's words on theological dialogue.

Even those who did not know the Rav were very aware of his position on interfaith matters. Obituaries appearing in the Hareidi, international and secular press may have been brief or reportedly short-changed the Rav on a number of accounts. However none of those publications failed to recall the Rav's unshakable stance on the matter of interfaith theological dialogue:

"He approved of co-operation between religious communities on a practical level, but strongly disapproved of any attempts at mutual theological examination. He considered each religion's revelational experience to be unique and impenetrable by those of a different faith."---Hyam Maccoby, the UK Independent, April 15, 1993


"Nevertheless, he was unequivocal on several issues, such as rejection of theological dialogue with Christian groups."--- R. Nissan Wolpin, the Jewish Observer, May 1993.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm foresaw the kind of revisionism and distortion that would plague the Rav's legacy. In his eulogy for the Rav, Rabbi Dr. Lamm minced no words. He made it obligatory that those who misinterpret the Rav's ideas and work be confronted at once:

"We must guard, therefore, against any revisionism, any attempts to misinterpret the Rav's work in both worlds, akin to the distortion that has been perpetrated on the ideas of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. The Rav was not a lamdan who happened to have and use a smattering of general culture, and he was certainly not a philosopher who happened to be a talmid hakham, a Torah scholar. He was who he was, and he was not a simple man. We must accept him on his terms, as a highly complicated, profound, and broad-minded personality, and we must be thankful for him. Certain burgeoning revisionisms may well attempt to disguise and distort the Rav's
uniqueness by trivializing one or the other aspect of his rich personality and work, but they must be confronted at once. When the late R. Yehezkel Abramski eulogized R. Hayyim Brisker, he quoted the Talmudic eulogy, "If a fire has blazed up among the cedars, what shall the hyssop do," and interpreted that as: after the giants have been taken from us, who knows what the dwarfs who follow them will do to their teachings...."

In 2007, under the guidance of Rav Sholom Gold and based on Rav Soloveitchik’s directives, JewishIsrael drafted the following recommended guidelines for the Orthodox approach to Interfaith dialogue. Then and now we urge rabbinic leaders in Israel and in the Diaspora to review this document and use it as a guide for drafting a policy which will help direct the Jewish people at this time and avert a swiftly approaching crisis.

"The righteous even in their death, are called living." (Brachot 18b)
A JOINT CALL FOR REAFFIRMATION AND CLARIFICATION WITH REGARDS TO THE
ORTHODOX APPROACH TO INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS

Recent alliances between Israel and a variety of Christian evangelical groups require that the Orthodox world clarify policy and establish guidelines that will prevent any blurring of halachic
lines, and to ensure the spiritual integrity of the Jewish people both in Israel and the Diaspora.

We urge all those involved in all aspects of the burgeoning relationship with evangelical Christians
to consider that the very nature of the evangelical movement is to evangelize (spread the Christian
gospel via missions). Therefore, the following should be acknowledged and understood:

1. Judaism does not recognize any heritage described as Judo-Christian in nature. Any
   reference or dialogue pertaining to Judaism’s alleged sharing of common theology,
   prophecies, messianic aspirations or familial roots with Christianity is to be avoided.
   (Source: Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik)

   Judaic values are universal and a gift to mankind. As such, these values have been, and
   continue to be, shared and adapted by various faith communities. The Jewish people,
   however, have no need to add to, subtract from, or transform what has kept us in good
   stead for thousands of years.

2. The Jewish world asserts its necessity to preserve and protect its sovereign status, rights,
   and religious character as an independent community via distinctive political and religious
   legislation, and measures designed to ensure the unique status and continuity of the Jewish
   people in the Land of Israel.

3. Missionary activity, whether overt or covert, is to be shunned. (See attached letter from
   Gedolei Ha’Torah regarding missionary activity, from Kotel 526)

   This would include:
   • Discussions, literature, and programs designed to invite the Jewish people to
     observe or participate in the blessing of the nation of Israel on behalf of alien duties,
     scriptures, or ideas forbidden to the Jewish people.
   • Endeavors designed to convince Jews to adopt their faith by accepting another deity,
     or by grafting the beliefs of other faith communities into Judaism’s roots.

4. The issues of Redemption and the arrival of the Mashiach are sacred principles of the
   Jewish faith (Source: Rambam’s 13 Principles). To openly encourage various groups - who
   hold opposing end-of-days scenarios – is ethically questionable, and spiritually untenable.

5. Those choosing to embark on cultural, political, or humanitarian ventures with various
   members and institutions of other faith communities are obligated to be fully aware of, and
   take into account, the character, intentions and ambitions of the particular participants, as
   well as the wider network and associations connected with any participants from those
   other faith communities.

Fundraising and monetary activities in this regard require meticulous ethical accountability and
consideration. A qualified halachic authority should be consulted before initiating any interfaith
charitable or business endeavors.

It is incumbent upon all Jewish leaders involved with consulting and advising the Jewish people
in interfaith matters to be sensitized and aware of the real motives of pro-Zionist Christian
organizations and their activities throughout the State of Israel. It is also imperative that all Jewish
leaders become attuned to the spiritual connotations behind the various keywords, phrases and
concepts currently being utilized and disseminated by a variety of Christian churches and
movements with theological agendas vis-à-vis Israel and the Jewish people.

We at JewsFromIsrael hope that this assembly of members of the Orthodox rabbinic leadership will
study and investigate these matters in depth and will continue to strengthen the commitment to
protect our Jewish heritage from negative influences and to spiritually strengthen Am Yisrael
during these challenging times.
Jewish Israel's notes on Rabbi Riskin's interpretation of "Confrontation".

Below are the in-house notes exchanged among the Jewish Israel staff after reading the portion of Rabbi Riskin's article which offers his interpretation of "Confrontation". Based on the below comments we decided to write an extensive report in response. The full text of Rav Soloveitchik's essay "Confrontation" can be found at this link.

C. Rav Soloveitchik's "Confrontation"

1. Background and overview

My revered teacher and mentor, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik published a ground-breaking essay on Christian-Jewish dialogue in the journal, Tradition, a publication of the Rabbinical Council of America, in the Spring-Summer edition of 1964, one and one half years before the Second Vatican Council ratified Nostra Aetate in October 1965 (The essay was penned at least two years before). *

JI comments: the timing of the essay may be irrelevant, as evidenced by the Rav's letters which indicate that he formulated his position on interfaith dialogue in the 1950's (long before Vatican II, and the Rav continued to monitor the RCA on Vatican matters well into the 1980's – years after Nostea Aetate. There is nothing to indicate that the Rav's position ever changed on interfaith matters with Christian entities (whether Catholic of Protestant). See additional comment on this below.

This was at a time when the Catholic Church was rethinking its relationship to the Jews (in the wake of the holocaust as well as the unexpected and unprecedented rebirth, phoenix-like, of the Jewish State of Israel) and was beginning to cultivate Catholic-Jewish inter-religious dialogue within this context of "aggiornamento" - updating of doctrine. Rav Soloveitchik was legitimately concerned lest such dialogue at this early and delicate stage* lead to Jewish recapitulation on fundamental Jewish truths, which would obviously be disastrous. It was to this end that the internationally renowned halakhic and theological leader of "Yeshiva University" style orthodox Jewry - the Lubavitcher Rebbe called him "lamdan ha'dor" the greatest Talmudic scholar of the generation - penned his far-reaching and penetrating essay, "Confrontation".

JI comments: This appears to be conjecture on Riskin's part. There are many reasons cited as to why Rav Soloveitchik opposed this interfaith encounter at "this early and delicate stage" (see his letters in "Community, Covenant and Commitment"). But as already mentioned above, the Rav continued to supervise the RCA on Vatican matters well into the 1980's – years after Nostea Aetate, and his position apparently remained unchanged. [see Dr. David Berger's comments on "Confrontation".]

The essay begins and ends with biblical exegeses, opening with a masterful commentary on the Biblical chapters on creation and their ramifications for understanding the human existential mission and predicament, and concluding with the confrontation between Jacob and Esau after the patriarch leaves Laban and is returning to his ancestral home; obviously, Jacob represents Israel and Esau is the Midrashic symbol for Rome and the Vatican.* The major piece of this theological tour de force is dedicated to Israel's relationship towards or confrontation with the world - and the concomitant obligations this engenders - as well as Israel's confrontation with its religious faith counterpart, Christianity, and to what extent dialogue in that setting is desirable or even possible.
JI comments: Isn't Esau also the Midrashic symbol for Christianity in general, and certain aspects of Western civilization? Why should we assume that the Rav was limiting his reference to Esau to the Vatican?

Contrary to what many Orthodox rabbis have maintained, "Confrontation" is not to be seen as a cut and dried halakhic responsum, which permits Jewish-Christian dialogue on "universal problems," which are "economic, social, scientific and ethical," but that categorically forbids dialogue in areas of "faith, religious law, doctrine and ritual." (Rabbinical Council of America, Mid-Winter Conference, February, 1966). Were that the case, Rabbi Soloveitchik would have written just such a precise halakhic responsum setting down these guidelines replete with Talmudic citations and halakhic precedents, rather than the highly nuanced, theologically rich, and dialectically infused "Confrontation." Moreover, the very RCA statement of 1966* forbidding discussions of "faith and religious law" concludes, "to repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private, individual faith commitment."

JI comments: The addendum to "Confrontation" is not an RCA statement, rather it was penned by Rav Soloveitchik himself and published in the version of "Confrontation" included in A Treasury of Tradition 1967 pp.78-80 (see attached document)

Apparently how to define "religious" issues is neither simple nor clear-cut.* In fact, Rav Soloveitchik defined his philosophical "school of thought" is that of an "halakhic existentialist" - committed to the proposition that halakhah deals with the most fundamental existential problems of humanity! Rav Soloveitchik himself often cited in his writings Christian theologians such as Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth and Rudolf Otto (See, for example, the beginnings of Halakhic Man) and the first reading that he gave of his "Lonely Man of Faith" essay prior to its publication took place at an inter-faith seminar (sic) at St. John's Seminary in Brighton, Mass. (See Korn, The Man of Faith and Religious Dialogue, note 8).

JI comments: Riskin is being deliberately confounding here, as Soloveitchik had a religious world outlook as opposed to a secular one. So naturally he would draw from religious existential thinkers, but this has little to do with exploring, dialoguing, comparing and mixing Christian theological dogma and doctrine with Judaism.

Perhaps what the RCA in its 1966 Statement was really saying was that "we resist any attempt to debate our private faith commitment," whereas "discussion (or dialogue) of universal religious problems" is perfectly permissible. Perhaps much more in line with the Rav's thought is the statement adopted by the RCA [and probably written by R. Soloveitchik himself] * at its Mid-Winter Conference in Feb '64, which is appended to the "Confrontation" article in Tradition '64 which calls for a "harmonious relationship among all faiths" in order to combat the "threat of secularism and materialism and the modern atheistic negation of religion and religious values." At the very least, combating the negation of religion requires basic theological discourse defining "religious" values ..

JI comments: That is an RCA statement added to the bottom the "Confrontation" (see attached document) and apparently not a statement by Soloveitchik. Riskin seems to have mistakenly switched statements (see related comments above)

Indeed, I believe that a careful reading of "Confrontation" will more than justify the salutary benefits of religious dialogue today, albeit in accordance with the very specific guidelines and limitations expressed by the Rav and to which we at CICUC carefully adhere*. Let us explore together the Rav's Confrontation, utilizing as much as possible his own words, to attempt to fully understand his position.
**JI comments:** "carefully adhere"?? One need only read the list of topics the Rav deemed "improper" for dialogue in his addendum to Confrontation to see that CJCUC has breached those limitations

### 2 Adam in the Garden of Eden - Non-Confronted vs. Confronted Man

Rav Soloveitchik typologically explains the initial Biblical description of man as "natural man," man who sees himself as part and parcel of the natural world around him, non-confronted by it and bearing no responsibility towards it. "And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden eastwards, and he put there the man whom He had formed" - in the midst of all of the alluring and seducing vegetation roundabout (2:8,9). Natural man is egocentric and hedonistic, driven only by instinctive pleasures, devoid of individuation and self awareness. In short, nonconfronted man.

Six verses later we see the emergence of a different man, a confronting and confronted man, who looks at the world, understands his power over and his responsibilities towards it, and accepts a commanding God who sets limits as to his conquest of it: "And the Lord God took the man and He placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to preserve it ... and the Lord God commanded the man, saying ... :"(2: 15, 16). Man has a kerygma, a mission, to perfect and preserve the world, to attempt to subdue the other and lesser creatures roundabout, and to agree to submit to - and be subdued by - the Creator of the Universe. He says - and lives - "I am responsible, therefore I am." Confronted and Confronting man has emerged.

Confronting and confronted man is filled with self-awareness, recognizes his unique (because he can control and conquer world) and tragic (because he, too, will be subject to conquest by evil and by death) position in the universe, and is beset by profound and debilitating loneliness ("It is not good for the human to be alone," Gen.2:18). And so, in addition to the universe, he confronts Eve, his life's partner, with whom he can establish a community by means of verbal communication, or dialogue (ibid 2:23), a counterpart with whom to confront world.

Words, however, are a double edged sword; they express "what is common in two existences," the similarities between two individuals joining their lives and destinies, but also the "singularity and uniqueness of each existence," what is separate and distinct for each one respectively. And of course the wages of sin are felt when the one attempts to control and subdue the other (ibid 3:16 "He shall rule over her").

From this paradigm, it is clear that confrontation is positive, salutary, even redemptive. And so Rav Soloveitchik goes on to write that Jews engage in a double confrontation, with the Universe as human beings as well as with God, through our Covenant as Jews. And while "westernized" Jews may think that it is impossible to engage in both of these confrontations, the universal and the covenantal- that they are mutually exclusive, that concern for world obviates and even drowns out the concern for a unique and separate covenantal identity, - the very opposite is the truth.

Indeed, it is the covenantal confrontation which defines and directs our national kerygma (mission) towards the universal and the universe: "through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth," was G-d's charge to Abraham, and "but only in this (not in wisdom or strength or wealth) shall be praised the one who is to be praised: be intelligent, and come to know (understand) Me, that I am the Lord who does (acts) of loving-kindness, moral justice and compassionate righteousness on earth (the whole of the earth), for in these do I delight, says Gd," was Jeremiah's message to the Israelites as well as the citation with which Maimonides concludes his final magnum opus, "The Guide of the Perplexed."

Moreover, continues the Rav as he goes on to deal with Jewish-Christian confrontation and
Dialogue*: "Involvement with the rest of mankind in the cosmic confrontation does not rule out the second personal confrontation of two faith communities, each aware of both what it shares with the other and what is singularly its own. In the same manner as Adam and Eve ... encountered each other as two separate individuals, cognizant of their incommensurability and uniqueness, so also two faith communities - which coordinate their efforts when confronted by the same cosmic order - may face each other in the full knowledge of their distinctness and individuality. We reject the theory of a single confrontation and instead insist upon the indispensability of the double confrontation" (Tradition, vol 6, no.2, Spring Summer 1964)

JI comments: Interesting that the Rav never uses the term "Jewish-Christian" or "dialogue" in the essay "Confrontation". But he does refer to an "encounter" with the emphasis on the terms "separate", "incommensurability", "uniqueness", "distinctness" and "individuality" (terms all used in one sentence). The Rav's addendum to "Confrontation" does clearly outline his opposition to "dialogue"... concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis a vis 'similar' aspects of another faith community.

The only reason* why the Rav questions a confrontational dialogue with the "other faith community" which would be as salutary as Adam's confrontation with Eve - is because the Church historically treated us as inferior beings; in the Rav's own words, "unfortunately, however, non-Jewish society has confronted us throughout the ages in a mood of defiance, as if we were part of the subhuman objective order separated by an abyss from the human" (ibid, P.19,20).

JI comments: There is nothing to indicate that this is "the only reason" the Rav questions a confrontational dialogue (again the term "dialogue" is not in the text) with the non-Jewish world. But the Rav does write that the mood of defiance made it "impossible for us to participate to the fullest extent in the great universal creative confrontation ..."

"A confrontation of two faith communities is possible only if it is accompanied by a clear assurance that both parties will enjoy equal rights and full religious freedom ... A democratic confrontation certainly does not demand that we submit to an attitude of self-righteousness taken by the community of the many which, while debating whether or not to "absolve" the community of the few of some mythical guilt (i.e. deicide!--SR), completely ignores its own historical responsibility for the suffering and martyrdom (it has inflicted) upon the few, the weak and the persecuted ... there should be insistence upon one's inalienable rights as a human being created by God ... we do not intend to play the part of the object encountered by dominating man" the Christian. (ibid P.21)

In other words, Rav Soloveitchik is not against religious dialogue with Christians; that is why this essay is entitled Confrontation and not "Non-Confrontation." The only thing he insists upon, however, is that the confrontation be in the spirit of religious equality*, of mutual respect for the individual faith commitments of each which are not subject to logical debate or traded compromises in matters of our unique covenantal faith values and rituals.

JI comments: the term "religious equality" is never mentioned in "Confrontation" and, again, "dialogue" is never used. And "dialogue" is not synonymous with the term "confrontation".

3. Red Lines and Pre-Conditions
These are the three things that Rav Soloveitchik was against and these are likewise my red lines for dialogue with Christians:
1) We will never dialogue with Christians if they represent missionary movements, if their
avowed or surreptitious purpose is to convert Jews.*

**JI comments:** a) The Rav does not specifically refer to missionary movements or the conversion of Jews in the directives in "Confrontation". b) Riskin and his center are clearly involved with missionaries – including the very people he mentions in his Makor Rishon article.

2) We will never debate unique Jewish ritual or faith issues with Christians. We will attempt to share with them unique Jewish points of theology and ritual practice* if they wish to better understand them, but we and they must realize that each faith community has its religious expressions which transcend rational logical discourse, and which are not subject to debate.

**JI comments:** Again, The Rav's addendum to "Confrontation" clearly outlines his opposition to "dialogue"... concerning the doctrinal, dogmatic or ritual aspects of our faith vis a vis 'similar' aspects of another faith community." He goes on to enumerate the subject deemed "improper" for discussion. Among them, Judaic monotheism and the Christian idea of Trinity; The Messianic idea in Judaism and Christianity; The Jewish attitude on Jesus; The concept of the Covenant in Judaism and Christianity – all topics which Riskin and his theological center regularly address.

3) We will never enter into dialogue with Christians in which we are expected to compromise our religious values or doctrines in order to be more in consonance with Christianity.

**JI comments:** A quick look at Jewish Israel's video library on Rabbi Riskin would seem to indicate otherwise

Here are Rav Soloveitchik's words, published in his landmark article "Confrontation" in which he set down his pre-conditions for Jewish -Christian dialogues, which are my pre-conditions as well:

"In light of this analysis, it would be reasonable to state that in any confrontation we must insist upon four basic conditions in order to safeguard our individuality and freedom of action.

1) "First, we must state, in unequivocal terms, the following. We are a totally independent faith community. We do not revolve as a satellite in any orbit. (p.21)."

He was afraid that since Christianity claimed that it had superseded Judaism, this is what they would attempt to foist on us in any debate, and since they were the many and we were the few, we would be forced into a difficult position. Hence, our independence in faith has to be accepted and respected.*

**JI comments:** It seems Riskin gives the Rav's explication of condition number one short shrift, as the Rav is clearly speaking about the incommensurability of faiths and the absurdity of engaging in discussions on such matters. He mentions supersession in the following context: "the whole idea of a tradition of faiths and the continuum of revealed doctrines which are by their very nature incommensurate and related to different frames of reference is utterly absurd, unless one is ready to acquiesce in the Christian theological claim that Christianity has superseded Judaism.

2) "Second, the logos, the word, in which the multifarious religious experience is
expressed, does not lend itself to standardization or universalization. (p.23)

Here, he emphasized that we are not one religious faith community with Christianity. He went on to write, "We must always remember that our singular commitment to God, and our hope and indomitable will for survival are non-negotiable and non-rationalizable and are not subject to debate and argumentation." (p.24)

JI comments: The Rav's second condition is clearly concerned with the personal, private, and intimate matters of faith, which is not subject to discussion or debate. Riskin seems to totally miss the point. In fact Riskin deliberately skips over this concept the Rav expressed in condition #2: "the religious or theological logos should not be employed as the medium of communication between two faith communities whose modes of expression are as unique as their apocalyptic experiences."

3) "Third, we members of the community of the few should always act with tact and understanding and refrain from suggesting to the community of the many, which is both proud and prudent, changes in ritual or emendations of its texts. (pp. 24-5)

We do not want Christians to ask us to change our religious texts and so we ought not expect of them to change their religious texts. I would submit that we can and must, however, share with them the pain in our hearts and injuries to our bodies that we have experienced as a result of certain of their sacred texts, as in the statements in the Gospel which refer to the historic Jewish collective guilt for "deicide" and the references in their writ and liturgy to convert the Jews now. Rav Soloveitchik continues:

JI comments: the Rav is simply speaking about propriety and acting in a wise and dignified manner. There seems to be a difference of opinion here as Riskin feels Jews are obligated to challenge Christians on certain problematic texts, whereas the Rav feels that if Gentiles are genuinely concerned, "they will act in accordance with their convictions without any prompting on our part. It is not within our purview to advise or solicit."

4) "Fourth, we certainly have not been authorized by our history, sanctified by the martyrdom of millions ..., to revise historical (Jewish) attitudes, to trade favors pertaining to fundamental matters of faith, and to reconcile "some" differences .... We cannot command the respect of our confronters by displaying a servile attitude. Only a candid, frank and unequivocal policy reflecting 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, praying fervently for and expecting confidently the fulfillment of our eschatological vision when our faith will rise from particularity to universality, will impress the peers of the other faith community among whom we have both adversaries and friends."

Here Rav Soloveitchik is expressing the view of Maimonides that ultimately, in the eschaton, everyone will turn to the Jewish faith*. In the meantime, however, in our confrontation with the other faith community, we must express passionate commitment towards our unique religion without holding back the intensity of our intellectual and emotion fervor; only then will our peers in the other faith community truly respect us.

JI comments: Where does Rambam unequivocally state that everyone will turn to the Jewish faith? Isn't there a wide consensus found in traditional rabbinic commentary on Maimonides that there will be both Jews and Gentiles as separate entities in the messianic era?

It should be obvious that the four pre-conditions stipulated by the Rav for Jewish-Christian
dialogue have largely been accepted by the Catholic and Evangelical Churches*, as well as by many Protestant Church authorities*. Nearly all churches today have rejected the collective deicide charge against the Jews, deplore anti-Semitism, asked for forgiveness for Christian persecution of Jews, and no longer maintain that Christianity has superseded the Jewish People's covenant with God.

**JI comments:** Rabbi Riskin seems to have missed the entire point. The overriding concern of the Rav's, which is stressed over and over again throughout "Confrontation" is to avoid a situation where the lines of faith become blurred and lose their distinctiveness. He found the concept of commensurability to be absurd. The Rav never stipulated conditions for "Jewish-Christian dialogue" in those terms nor did he lay down conditions that Christians ask for forgiveness, deplore anti-Semitism and reject deicide charges – although there is no question that those things do stand in the way of healthy interfaith relations.

In fact, we do enter Jewish-Christian dialogue very much as equals – and even as "equals plus"*.

*JI comments: The Rav refers to "full religious freedom" and "equal rights", but not to putting Christianity and Judaism on par with each other as equals - quite the contrary.

Our very existence in history ~ despite destruction, exile and global persecution=affirms God's covenant with us as well as His existence on earth ("you are My witnesses says God ... " Isaiah43:10), and our return to our homeland, Israel after close to 2000 years of exile confirms the divine biblical prophecies m Deut 30:1-10 and Isaiah 11:11. And if many of our Christian brothers and sisters believe that in the eschaton everyone will become Christian, we see that Maimonides believes that in the eschaton, everyone will become Jewish!* As long as the group with whom we dialogue respects us as we are now in the fullness of our differences, we can very well agree that the eventual Messiah will tell us who is converting to whom (if indeed a conversion will be necessary at that time).

**JI comments:** Again, isn't there a wide consensus found in traditional rabbinic commentary on Maimonides that there will be both Jews and Gentiles as separate entities in the messianic era?

3. Understand the differences from generation to generation

As for those Jews to whom the Christian involvement in Jewish persecution culminating in the Holocaust makes it emotionally impossible to participate in any kind of Jewish-Christian discourse – and for whom the "Jewish Jesus" cannot escape their lips or enter their hearts* since so many atrocities were perpetrated against innocent Jews in the name of the founder of Christianity ~ I can only urge that they re-visit the biblical commandment, "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations; ask thy father, and he will declare unto thee, thine elders, and they will tell thee" (Deut. 32:7). Rabbenu Sa'adiah Gaon lists this verse as one of the 613 commandments, as exhortation to study history.

**JI comments:** The Holocaust has little to do with why "Jewish Jesus" doesn't enter our hearts. Perhaps it has more do with our instinctive aversion to avodah zarah and our commitment to our G-d.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch* goes one step further, interpreting the Hebrew "shnot" not as "years" (from the Hebrew shanah), but rather as differences (from the Hebrew shinui). Be sensitive to the changes in history and respond accordingly: be sensitive to the evil empire of radical Islam threatening to destroy Israel and the entire free world in a "religious" war of the
civilizations; be sensitive to the fundamental doctrinal changes within contemporary Christianity; be sensitive to the outstretched hands of so many in the Christian world offering friendship and support. Have we the moral and religious right to reject their overtures in the present climate of widespread Israel hatred and delegitimization?

JI comments: Rav Hirsch goes into great length over the "tragedy of our days" being that the terms "religion" and "theology" have been applied to Judaism and Torah, which has incorrectly put Judaism on par with Christianity (see Sivan 1 Collected Writings), so it's a little irreverent for Riskin to pull Rav Hirsh out of a hat to defend his position on theological/religious dialogue.

We don't think Rav Hirsch advocated being sensitive to Doctrinal changes within contemporary Christianity. He rejected shituf outright:

Source: http://jewishisrael.ning.com/page/the-missionary-masks-and-the

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch offers a related Torah insight which deepens our understanding of how the above commandment refutes this Christian doctrine. In his commentary on the words, “You shall not have other gods before Me,” Rabbi Hirsch writes that “before Me” means “before My Presence.” Rabbi Hirsch then adds the following Torah teachings:

“God’s Presence encompasses the world and its fullness, the vast expanses and further development of the universe, in every season and at every moment; His Presence also pervades our inner lives and all our emotions. Besides Him, there is no other god, and we should not give credence to even the slightest possibility of another god’s existence. This negates the doctrine of shituf (a deified partner with God), whose proponents think, that without denying God’s existence, another deity can be placed at God’s side, sharing His Divinity. They forget that, by placing another deity at God’s side, they completely nullify the concept of God.”

[ note: Rabbi Hirsch referred to Sefer Ha-Mitzvos Gadol, Prohibition 1]

4. Confrontation Desired
What emerges most decisively from Rav Soloveitchik's "Confrontation" is how the Rav always emphasizes the importance of confrontation-dialogue with the other faith community:

JI comments: Aren’t Confrontation and Dialogue somewhat antonymous? Again the Rav avoids the use of the word "dialogue" in "Confrontation"

"We insist upon the indispensability of the double confrontation .... As a charismatic faith community, we have to meet the challenge of confronting the general, non-Jewish faith community. We are called upon to tell this community not only the story it already knows—that we are human beings committed to the general welfare and progress of humanity, that we are interested in combating disease, in alleviating human suffering, in protecting man's rights, in helping the needy, etc. - but also what is still unknown to it, namely our otherness as a metaphysical covenantal community (pp 20,21).
Rav Soloveitchik wants us to communicate - in addition to the universal social human concerns - what we believe in the secret chambers of our hearts, the differences in our religious commitments.

He opposes a debate on these unique issues with the other faith community, BUT NOT OUR TEACHING THESE ISSUES TO THE OTHER FAITH COMMUNITY. As the Rabbinical Council of America expressed it: "To repeat, we are ready to discuss (dialogue) universal organization.* Such commitment to the holy days and family rituals ordained by the Twenty Four Books of the Bible -and followed zealously by the founder of Christianity his lifetimeare becoming more and more popular among the Evangelicals while they remain completely faithful to the unique features of their Christian faith. I even met a representative of a large group of Evangelical women from Oklahoma City who meet every evening between Passover and Pentecost to recite Psalms, count the Orner of the day and speak about a daily character improvement to prepare themselves for the Festival of the Revelation at Sinai, Pentecost.**

JI comments: Did the Rav sanction teaching gentiles Torah?
Riskin appears to take the Rav's words out of context (refer to addendum to "Confrontation"). the RCA did not write it, but the Rav did write, "To repeat, we are ready to discuss universal religious problems. We will resist any attempt to debate our private individual commitment."

Jews for Jesus and every other evangelizing messianic group which targets and dupes Jews teaches their missionaries to keep Shabbat, observe Passover, recite psalms and learn Hebrew

We have initiated an Institute for Theological Inquiry in partnership with the Witherspoon Institute of Princeton, NJ to provide a forum for theological discussion amongst recognized Christian and Jewish theologians. The result of our dialogues will soon appear in a book entitled, "Covenant and Hope in the Human Future", which emphasizes our united mission to bring a God of Compassion, Morality, Freedom and Peace into a world caught between the twin dangers of radical Jihadist terrorism on the one hand and rampant secular materialism on the other. Our next project will be dialogue on "Religion, War and Violence" as well as "The Significance of the Jewish Return to Zion”. Additionally, we effectuated the first Jewish-Evangelical Colloquium ever at Emory University, which resulted in the emergence of a paper by the Evangelical theologians stating unequivocally that the Christian mission to bear witness is for the Gentiles; there is no necessity to convert Jews. All of our dialogues are clearly within the four official constraints parameters* established by Rav J.B. Soloveitchik in "Confrontation."

JI comments: This appears to be an absolute insult to "Confrontation" and everything the Rav intended in that essay. This warrants a full report in response.

It is to be hoped that our Efрат Center, and the Jewish-Christian dialogue it engenders will be a fitting addition to the "beginning of the sprouting of our redemption" in the era of our return to homeland, responsibility and history. May it hasten the time when God will "turn to His nations with a clear language to call out to all of them in the name of the Lord to serve Him shoulder to shoulder". (Zephaniah 3:9), and bring about "the perfection of the world in the Kingship of the Almighty," when nation will not lift sword against nation and humankind will not learn war anymore.” (Isaiah2, Micah 4)