

Jewish Dialectics and Dialectic Theology in J.B. Soloveitchik's Writings: On the Crisis of the Modern Jewish Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

It is arguably held that modern enlightened values engendered a crisis for the modern homoreligious. The modern conception of rational faith induced a quandary for 20th century Jewish and Christian leaders alike. This paper examines the relations between the proponents of Dialectic Theology, Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, and their influence on Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik. In his attempt to reconcile the opinions of Jewish thinkers who embraced enlightened values with traditional Jewish conceptions of faith, Soloveitchik employed Christian-philosophical language to revalorize the traditional Jewish understanding of the homo religious.

This paper proposes a reading of Soloveitchik's writings in light of the Dialectic Theology movement. It draws philosophical distinctions between shared usages of dialectics in Judaism and Christianity to solve religious dissent. Second, to reach an insight concerning boundaries between the two traditions. How does Judaism, represented here by the neo-orthodox leader Soloveitchik, manage religious-philosophical dissent differently from the dialectical theological thinkers, and share their propositions? Examining concepts employed by the Dialectic Theology movement, this paper considers the philosophical boundaries between Judaism and Christianity. One aspect of dealing with religious dissent resulting from modernity can be understood when examined through the lenses of one who, like Soloveitchik, is versed in philosophy and rabbinic teachings alike.

Keywords: Dialectic Theology, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Neo-orthodoxy, Modern Jewish Thought, Philosophy of Religions.

INTRODUCTION

Jewish thought was revived as a modern phenomenon once Jews attempted to integrate into the German Protestant society following the emancipation across Europe. Part of that revival required that Jewish thought adapts to the current mode of thought. Consequently, and due to a wide range of cultural and political reasons, traditional Judaism was alienated in the process. Jewish neo-orthodoxy found a different path into the intellectual and political discourse of modernity. The emergence of *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, the scientific study of Judaism, stimulated various Jewish responses to the contemporary philosophical thought. Jews were forced to think and reevaluate their tradition, given their newly gained and continuously shifting social status. Philosophical thought, external to the Jewish tradition, asserted many things that Jews could now respond to philosophically. These responses vary from one another in the way they are obliged by tradition

and philosophical capacity. For example, some responses discussed the role of Jewish revelation or Halakha's status, the Jewish law, in the face of modernity and social integration or as direct responses to individual continental thinkers such as Kant and Hegel (Greenberg Gershon, 2011: 19-24). Other responses worked from within the tradition and aimed to resolve historical and Jewish textual issues.

One interesting example of a Jewish response to western philosophy is Joseph B. Soloveitchik. His writings are a mixture of philosophy and Jewish thought. It is interesting to see how western philosophy is integrated into Judaism so that it might be impossible to distinguish the two, which is often not the case with earlier Jewish responses.¹ Soloveitchik is categorized

¹ Earlier responses often referred explicitly to a philosophical issue that has implications on Judaism (but it is not always the case, for example, Nahum Krochmal discusses Jewish dialectics might be a

as working from within the Jewish tradition and fully obliged to Halakha and traditional Jewish thought and a philosophical dialectic thinker. His writings influenced the contemporary discourse on modern Jewish theology and religious ethics, especially within modern Jewish neo-orthodoxy of the twentieth century. (Greenberg, 2011: 482-484). His dialectic methodology highlights crucial issues in the relations of philosophy and theology. Nevertheless, a closer reading of some of his writings reveals an interesting relation and resemblance to critical notions in protestant theology. At the same time, Soloveitchik is familiar and often refers to others in the same milieu (such as Kierkegaard, this is true especially concerning the dialectic theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, which is the topic of this paper.

The primacy of dialectics in the dialectic theology movement and the resemblance to certain aspects in Soloveitchik's thought raises some questions regarding the role and place of dialectics in Judaism and the boundaries between philosophy and Judaism for someone who seems to work explicitly from within the Jewish tradition.

This paper presents a close reading of Soloveitchik's writings with particular attention to similar themes in Barth and Brunner.² It

possible response to Hegel, but it is not explicit. However, it is clear he discusses philosophy) in those cases it is clear to distinguish between the Jewish premises of such a thinker and his philosophical premises. In Soloveitchik's case, it is not always clear what is "Jewish" in his writings and what is philosophy. This raises questions as to the role of philosophical inquires in Soloveitchik's writings, especially if we are to accept his categorization as working from within the tradition, is philosophy and Jewish thought interchangeable? What are the relations between philosophy and (Jewish) theology? I cannot claim to answer those questions in this paper, but I attempt to set some of the boundaries for such a discussion.

²Although the dialectical theology is presented in many writings of the scholars of this movement, in this paper I chose to focus mostly on Barth's 'Church Dogmatics' (Barth Karl, Church Dogmatics, New York, 1936-1988.) and Brunner's 'The divine imperative' and 'Dogmatics; (Brunner Emil, The Divine Imperative, 1947; Dogmatics Vol. iii The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, 1979). I will not present Soloveitchik's intellectual development and the changes in the use of dialectics throughout his writings. It is beyond the scope of this

focuses on the different stages of Soloveitchik's dialectical thought in an attempt to understand what is Jewish in the use of dialectics, why does Soloveitchik use dialectics and the limits of this method for Soloveitchik and perhaps for Jewish studies, as well. I conclude that Soloveitchik uses dialectics primarily in the ethical context, as it aims to give a phenomenological account of human-religious experiences. However, his thought has a theological dimension that does not involve dialectics, as this dimension does not discuss human experiences. That is to say, for Soloveitchik, humans cannot partake in things beyond the dialectical tension mode. Furthermore, though a more detailed analysis is required in order to provide a more thorough account of Soloveitchik's particular mode of dialectics, it is enough to determine the main difference between him and the dialectic theology movement. That is, while the latter sought to resolve the conflict of faith in modernity with the third stage of dialectics, reconciliation, Judaism, according to Soloveitchik, cannot do this. Dialectics, according to Soloveitchik, is limited to the first two stages, and reconciliation is an epistemological impossibility in Judaism. Judaism uses dialectics primarily to describe the mode of human existence and his conflicted nature without the final stage. There is no reconciliation, according to Judaism. Thus, we could distinguish between dialectic theology and Soloveitchik's use of dialectics – dialectic ethics.

DIALECTIC THEOLOGY: GOALS AND DEFINITIONS

The dialectic theology movement of the 1920s, intellectually led by Brunner and Barth, protested against the view that Christianity is identified as part of the ethical and social domain. The movement identified a tension between faith and modernity. In their view, the person of faith lives in dialectic relation to the world. The movement described the dialectic relation in ethical, theological, and social-phenomenological terms. Scholars of this movement vary in how they describe the dialectic tension, but in a general outline, they all sought to defend faith from the forces of modernity. To achieve such a goal, they must place faith outside of society. Creating a

paper because this topic calls for a separate discussion. This paper focuses on the possible implications and limits of using dialectics on Judaism.

dichotomy between faith, as a private domain, and the liberal public culture (Robinson, James. M., 1968: 9-25). The disenchantment of the modern world, alongside trends of secularization, emphasized the gap between the divinity and the world is emphasized through the theological revolt of dialectical theology against liberalism. This tension is illustrated through how they portrayed the world in opposition to the fallen world and divine transcendence. The outlines of this thought are known as "dialectical theology" or "theology of crisis."

Next will be presented key themes in dialectic theology, which are central for Soloveitchik as well. The outline of dialectic theology regarding creation in both Barth and Brunner describes the natural man as concerned mostly with aesthetics and knowledge.³ This person stands in contrast to his creation in God's image, and receiving responsibility, and then attaining dignity.⁴ They are redeemed only through creating a covenantal community, which has faith. Faith, in turn, is received through the transforming force of revelation in which man acknowledges his created-in- God's-image status. God's image is responsible for social order, and thus the covenant's people stand in a dialectical relation with the natural people. Redemption is the final stage of this dialectical move that is enabled through one's acknowledgment of his divine image and thus being able to create a true covenantal community. Thus, the dialectical tension between faith and modernity is resolved. As illustrated below, Soloveitchik shares many views with this movement but does not enable

the final stage of the dialectical mode of existence, reconciliation.

Brunner focuses on showing how revelation is greater than any personal experience of the *homo religiosus*. He presents the natural person as one who, while seeking meaning in the despair of an unredeemed existence,⁵ changes their perspective into accepting revelation where only God grants order and meaning to the world. Barth, on the other hand, framed his thought in opposition to the forces of society. He presents the gap between God and man as so great that only revelation can provide religious knowledge. For him, the natural person requires a redemptive act of faith based on personal humility and submission (Robinson, 1968: 14).⁶

Brunner's social philosophy describes a social world setting where man must live in a dialectical relation to the world by attaining dignity (i.e., by living, creating and ruling the world) and religious humility, which balances one's existence (Robinson, 1968: 17-25).⁷ The primary mode of existence of an individual is loneliness. In order to go beyond loneliness, and being able to express their inner state, one must be married. Through marriage as a social and religious activity, the individual constitutes a relation to the world, which is reconciled with a covenantal society.

Barth discusses one's commitment to the covenantal community to attain revelation and holds similar views to Brunner's on marriage and loneliness. Barth rejects Brunner's view on society. He argues that the distance between

³The differences between Barth and Brunner, which are relevant to this paper, are illustrated below.

⁴This paper focuses on the doctrine of creation because it sets the grounds for a discussion about human nature, its dialectical-conflicted nature. However, it is possible to discuss other aspects of human life in relation to dialectic theology in Soloveitchik's work (such as relations of Halakhah and ethics). This is true, especially with regard to Brunner, who emphasized work and duty as the peak of Christian ethics. I argue that, in Soloveitchik's case, Halakhah is mainly an ethical category, which poses an answer to the conflicted man, not to resolve it, but rather to assist in living through it. For Brunner, there are also major theological implications (Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 191, 320-329. There he discusses the relation to God and its implications on Christian humanism, individuality, and relation with others).

⁵This view was common in the religious-existential thought of the time and not unique to Brunner.

⁶While other scholars could have influenced Soloveitchik, Reinhold Niebuhr sought to change the secular-liberal society, and make it acknowledge humility and revelation due to humanity's limits. Given his prominence in U.S.'s religiosity and advocacy for the dialectic theology movement, it is possible that he had some influence on Soloveitchik. Barth drew the distinction between majestic man and the covenantal from Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, § 41, 194-195). Soloveitchik's doctoral dissertation's topic was Hermann Cohen's work, and he was familiar with the works of Cohen's student, Barth, and at times cites him

⁷Soloveitchik will call this 'self-defeat' a term he often uses in regard to the inability of man to achieve full victory, and hence reconciliation. The only possible resolution available to man is to acknowledge his limits and contract his ambitions.

God and man is so great that only revelation and the way of faith can help individuals escape from their despair and vanity. The articulation of many of these ideas influenced Soloveitchik's dialectical thought. The intention here is to presents some of Barth's and Brunner's ideas in Soloveitchik's 'The Lonely Man of Faith' (1950') in an attempt to understand Soloveitchik's use of dialectics and its implications on Judaism.

SOLOVEITCHIK AS A DIALECTIC THEOLOGIAN?

In his 'The Lonely Man of Faith, ' Soloveitchik analyses the first two chapters of Genesis to empathize the conflicted nature of humanity. He aims in part to describe the human-religious experience in modernity. He identifies two human types: the first Adam, the 'majestic man,' who employs his creative faculties to master his environment, and the second Adam, the 'covenantal man, who surrenders himself in submission to his lord. Soloveitchik describes how the man of faith integrates both forces. The first chapter of Genesis describes the first Adam as created alongside Eve, and they are given the mandate to subdue nature and transform the world into a domain for their power and sovereignty. The first Adam is a majestic man who approaches the world and relationships, even with the divine, in functional and pragmatic terms. The first Adam, created in God's image, fulfills this seemingly 'secular' mandate by conquering the universe and employing knowledge, technology, and cultural institutions. The human community described Genesis I is utilitarian, where man and woman join together, like the male and female of other animals, to further the telos of their species (Soloveitchik Joseph B.,1965, 1992 ed.: 12-20).

In the second chapter of Genesis, the second Adam represents the lonely man of faith, bringing a redemptive interpretation to the meaning of existence. The second Adam does not subdue the garden, but rather tills it and preserves it. The words introduce this type of human being, "It is not good for man to be alone," Through his sacrifice, he gains companionship and relief of his existential loneliness—this covenantal community requires the participation of the Divine (Soloveitchik 1992: 21-24).

While Soloveitchik draws much of his conceptions from Jewish sources, the dialectic theology scholars, concerned with faith in the

face of modernity, inspired his thought framework. It seems that Soloveitchik's basic view that God alone, through one's relation to him, grants meaning to a confused world,⁸ and the different creative capabilities of humanity,⁹ comes from Brunner, and the tension between modern society and the covenantal community to Barth, as Soloveitchik states in 'The Lonely Man of Faith' (Soloveitchik 1992: 43):

...community of interests, forged by the indomitable desire for success and triumph and ... the "I" and the "thou" who collaborate in order to further their interests. A newcomer, upon joining the community, ceases to be the anonymous "he" and turns into a knowable, communicative "thou." The second is a community of commitments born in distress and defeat and comprises three participants: "I, thou, and He," the He in whom all being is rooted and in whom everything finds its rehabilitation and, consequently, redemption.

Above Soloveitchik describes the advantage of the community of faith, who, unlike the first Adam, receive order and meaning through their relation to God. Brunner presents a similar view: through a relation to God, one is granted with order and meaning. The opposite is no more than an interested relationship with God, and using one's God-given abilities to his ends hoping to achieve autonomy of reason without God (from the English translation of "Das Gebot und die Ordnungen" 1932 = The commandment and orders, translated as the "Divine imperative") (Brunner, 486):

But it is the creator who has given us reason...it is not the absolute, but the relation with the absolute...man has been created by God in a way that he is never complete in himself, he is only complete through his relation to God... when man refuses to respond through faith, the relative self-end and autonomy of the reason... man desires to be as God.

Barth, in section § 41 of 'Church Dogmatics,' on creation and covenant, presents a detailed analysis of the two accounts of the creation of man in Genesis I-II (Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 2:7-8,15-17), (Barth, § 41: 223-239). Barth's analysis discusses the differences

⁸The same idea is expressed in Brunner's 'The Divine Imperative,' 486-488.

⁹The idea of human creativity is similarly expressed in Brunner's 'Dogmatics Vol. iii The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption', 56-57.

between the two Adams in a way that resembles Soloveitchik's. However, Barth takes the discussion to possible implications on man's relation to God, while focusing on the different names of God mentioned in the biblical source in each account. Brunner has a complimentary discussion regarding the different creative forces man has (Dogmatik II: Die christliche Lehre von Schöpfung und Erlösung. 1950, English translation 1952 = *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*).¹⁰

Soloveitchik appears to draw from Barth the general outline of a dual account on human creation and from Brunner the implications on human existence and typology. This analysis is oriented towards an understanding of the nature of humanity. The main difference is the creation of man out of the dust versus creating man in God's image. Soloveitchik and Barth note the distinction between the triumphed and majestic man and the covenantal man (Barth, 237). Although early rabbinic sources are aware of the two accounts of creation, the Babylonian Talmud's focus is mostly on the relation between man and women and not the implications for human nature.¹¹ This speaks to the relation between Soloveitchik and Barth on this matter. In contrast, rabbinic sources discuss the implications of the two accounts of creation on the relations between man and woman, Soloveitchik, like Barth, understands these accounts to say something about human nature and how a person acts in the world. According to them, these accounts discuss two conflicting forces that man must deal with and the role of faith and acknowledging God plays in it. These issues will be further elaborated below.

The notion of 'God's image' (*Imago Dei* in Brunner)¹² has a significant meaning in the dialectic theology movement and in

¹⁰Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 30, 56-57. In this paper, I quote several passages from these sources, but the creative force of humanity as deriving from God and its implications is the main theme in "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption."

¹¹Tractate Berachot, 61.a, and tractate ketubot 8.a.

¹²Although Brunner uses Latin for 'image of God' *Imago Dei*, implying certain notions of Christian theology, he discusses the different uses of the biblical terms and the implications to each account of creation, namely 'tzelem Elohim' (אלהים צלם) = image and 'demut' (דמות) = form.

Soloveitchik's work, which has a similar implication of 'God's image' (Soloveitchik, 1992: 14):

... to be 'man,' to be himself...to discover his identity which is bound up with his humanity... For thou made him a little lower than angels and has crowned him with glory and honor.¹³ Man is an honorable being.

That is, the self-acceptation of man's creative abilities derives from God, who enables one to attain dignity.

And as Brunner notes (Brunner, 56-57):

The free self, capable of self-determination, belongs to the original constitution of man as created by God...God wills my freedom... because he wills to glorify Himself...and give Himself to His creatures...man has only limited freedom because he is responsible, but he has freedom only so can he be responsible. Thus... man's nature...' made in the image of God'...

Similarly, Soloveitchik and Brunner have a similar view of dignity derived from the image of God (Brunner, 30):

The capability of man to know is one aspect of...' being made in the image of God' which constitutes the nature of man...gives him the consciousness of possessing particular dignity and special destiny. For this reason alone, science could be in the service of God...' replenish the earth and subdue it'... God gave this permission...man's responsibility...He gave the capacity to make use of it.

Soloveitchik's view of God's image implies man's creative force, which is a manifestation of God, as well as the mandate to use knowledge. The same notions appear in Brunner's work, as illustrated above. According to Soloveitchik and Brunner, the man created in God's image has the creative power derived directly from God, which the right use of it grants dignity. (Soloveitchik, 1992: 17-20):

¹³In my opinion, this translation of the psalmist verse fails to show the significance of man's limitation in comparison to God. The Hebrew verse shows a better resemblance to Brunner's view- "ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים וכבוד והדר תעטרהו" (Psalms 8, 6.), "man is limited and a little lower than God," this language is very apparent in Brunner who shows the contrast to God, rather than to angels.

Only the man who...discovers therapeutic techniques and saves lives is blessed with dignity...Adam the first is trying to carry out the mandate entrusted to him by his Maker, who, at dawn of the sixth mysterious day of creation, addressed Himself to man and summoned him to 'fill the earth and subdue it'...Thus, in sum, we have obtained the following triple equation: humanity = dignity = responsibility = majesty.

While the notion of dignity and its implications on human nature are inspired by Brunner, the tension between the salvation of the majestic person, and the helplessness of the natural person, comes from Barth.¹⁴ According to Soloveitchik, the natural community is founded on the individual's helplessness; this is similar to Brunner's notion, in which individuals need to live in a community to succeed. Brunner uses Robinson Crusoe as a negative example for life, arguing that humanity must live in a community of faith, alongside non-believers, to form ethical and valid social values (Brunner, 294-295):

...the relation between the individual and the community is not a philosophical, but a theological problem...' individual' and the 'community' – appear to be...two kinds of sin...in the Christian faith, the individual is so defined that he cannot be imagined apart from the community, and the community that it cannot be imagined without the individual...I do not mean the...reflection that Robinson Crusoe...is an abstraction which would not occur in real life...what I do mean is this: that the individual as such [i.e., Robinson Crusoe] does not and cannot exist at all...the very conception of the individual implies and includes that of the community.

A similar notion of the wholeness of the individual appears in Soloveitchik's work. While Brunner further implies that the notion of the individual includes the community,

¹⁴Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, § 60 *The Pride and Fall of Man*, 376, 465-467. There, Barth discusses the balance needed between personal humility and the ability to achieve salvation. Essentially, one must be aware of himself (as God is) and respect that—only then he would be worthy of salvation. In other words, a conflicted aspect of existence is in God as well as in man. The helpless natural man is majestic because he lives according to the Lutheran decree to be in need of salvation, thus maintaining the natural order in which humanity needs God to be saved. Brunner and Soloveitchik both need a community to succeed (or in Protestant terms, to achieve salvation).

Soloveitchik's individual is completed in his own terms, and his full fulfillment is in the community (Soloveitchik, 1992: 30-31):

To the thinkers of the Age of Reason, man posed no problem. He was for them an understandable, simple affair...They saw man in his glory but failed to see him in his tragic plight. They considered the individual ontologically perfect and existentially adequate. They admitted only that he was functionally handicapped even though he could, like Robinson Crusoe, surmount this difficulty, too. If the individual is ontologically complete, even perfect, then the experience of loneliness must be alien to him, since loneliness is nothing but the act of questioning one's own ontological legitimacy, worth, and reasonableness.

This similarity provides additional support for Brunner's social anthropology's influence on Soloveitchik's work (Brunner, 294-295). If so, it appears that the dialectical theology movement, especially as put forward by Brunner and Barth, influenced Soloveitchik's views.¹⁵ Barth and Soloveitchik's opening postulates are similar. Humanity without God lives in a constant struggle in a conflicted dialectical relation to the self and the world. Barth's solution is to place God outside one's ontological existence and find reconciliation in faith through marriage. Similarly, Brunner reconciles individuality and community with faith in marriage.

To Soloveitchik, Halakhic actions do not resolve the dialectic nature of the religious experience. Moreover, he argues that even in a religious community, one cannot lose his dialectic consciousness (Soloveitchik, 1992: 56). Barth and Brunner take the dialectical nature of humanity to the next level, namely Christian theology;¹⁶ Soloveitchik has his reservations for

¹⁵ There are more passages that require a more thorough comparison with Soloveitchik's writings and Protestant theology. This paper presents some examples of the key terms of dialectic theology. However, for Soloveitchik, the comparison ends at the description of human nature and is meant to show that the use of dialectics is primarily for emphasizing the human condition and mode of existence in the world.

¹⁶ Brunner understands that this human feature implies the Christian doctrine of the First Sin. This derives from one's overlooking his responsibility in acknowledging his human limits on the one hand, and his freedom on the other. Brunner seems to place the capability of sin with the first Adam, the natural

further uses of dialectics in Judaism. In Judaism, dialectics do not ascend to the third stage, reconciliation. Soloveitchik employs dialectics when the topic is the human experience and the ethical implications of it. When he discusses themes that relate directly to God, he uses connotations of harmony, contrary to dialectics.¹⁷ This is because it goes beyond the roiling ontological existence of humanity. Hence, Soloveitchik's distinction between Halakha, which is meant to assist man in dealing with his conflicted-dialectic nature, and divine related topics are not discussed in dialectic terms.¹⁸

RECONCILIATION AND THE LIMITATIONS OF JEWISH DIALECTICS

As discussed earlier, Jewish dialectics are limited to human experience; however, their uses, roles, and limits in Judaism have not been clearly articulated. Turning to Soloveitchik's 1978 'Majesty and Humility' shed some light on this matter. On the limitation of dialectics Soloveitchik notes (Soloveitchik, 1978: 25):

Judaic dialectic, unlike the Hegelian, is irreconcilable and hence interminable. Judaism accepted a dialectic move, consisting only of thesis and antithesis. The third Hegelian stage that of reconciliation is missing. The conflict is final, almost absolute. Only God knows how to reconcile; we do not. Complete reconciliation is an eschatological vision. To Hegel, man and his history were just abstract ideas; in the world of

man, while the second Adam acknowledges his limited God-given freedom (Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption*, 91-93).

¹⁷By 'harmonized,' I mean that, while dialectic issues are described in a conflicted manner, here, there is no other option. There is an ultimate ability to describe reality in unified terms. This is often the case when Soloveitchik discusses topics that relate to God, such as prayer.

¹⁸I do not use the term 'theology' because that could take different meanings in Soloveitchik's writings. However, it is often the case, but not always, that when Soloveitchik discusses a topic that relates to God or man's relation to God, such as prayer or his Halakhic response to suffering, the dialectic tension disappears. Note that the dialectic tension does not, however, resolve itself but is simply not there. I will not present an example of such an analysis because it is not the topic of this paper, a more detailed typology of Soloveitchik's dialectics is required for this. This paper seeks to draw the limits of Jewish dialectics, not to describe its full scope.

abstractions, synthesis is conceivable. To Judaism, man has always been and still is a living reality, or may I say a tragic living reality. In the world of realities, the harmony of opposites is an impossibility.

While Soloveitchik accepts dialectics when they describe the human religious experience, he argues that there is no third stage to Jewish dialectics. Here he sharply differs from the scholars of the dialectic theology movement, who go beyond human experience and ethical implications towards theological assertions. Man, according to Soloveitchik, is bound to his limitations, and cannot reconcile his conflicted nature to find true harmony, which Soloveitchik employs to divine issues. Reconciliation does not apply to a Jewish system of thought per Soloveitchik (Soloveitchik, 1978: 26):

Man, confused, kneels in prayer, petitioning God, who has burdened him with this dialectic, to guide him and to enlighten him. The Halakha is concerned with this dilemma and tries to help the Jewish person of faith in such critical moments. The Halakha, of course, did not discover the synthesis, since the latter does not exist. It did, however, find a way to enable man to respond to both calls.

The ability to reconcile is beyond Halakha; the ethical commands man is obliged by God to perform. While man must deal with the day-to-day dilemmas through and with Halakha, the experience cannot go beyond the conflicted dialectic mode embedded in existence. Halakha poses a solution to immediate problems, and while it might be of a divine origin, it is for humanity.¹⁹ To achieve full victory, and implicitly the ability to reconcile is to become like God, because reconciliation, as a victory, means to partake in creation. (Soloveitchik, 1978: 34):

Underlying the ethics of victory is the mystical doctrine that creation is incomplete. God purposely left one aspect of creation unfinished in order to involve man in a creative gesture and to give him the opportunity to become both co-

¹⁹In this sense, it is possible to understand the Midrash about the Oven of Akhnai, and Rabbi Eliezer's response: "It (the Torah) is not in the sky" in another way: Halakha, as a God-given construct is for man and situated in the day-to-day human dealings in the world. It cannot go beyond the human world because if it were, it would no longer be Halakha.

creator and king. The individual who is not engaged in the creative gesture can never be king; only a creator may lay claim to kingship and sovereignty. The creative gesture aims at the control and domination of a hostile environment. Under victory, we understand the subjection of nature to the needs of man and the establishment of a true and just society and equitable economic order.

From the outline of Halakha's limitations and the meaning of reconciliation, Soloveitchik turns to a description of what it means to be truly obliged to Halakha and why one cannot reconcile. To Soloveitchik, reconciliation is the ultimate victory. The need for victory frustrates humanity because man will never achieve real victory due to his finite nature. The notion of *tzimtzum*, the doctrine of God's contraction (a development of the medieval problem of unity vs. multiplicity, how to get from the ultimate-infinite one to the many individuals, etc.) has a significant meaning in Soloveitchik's dialectics because it establishes the foundations of *Imitatio Dei*, which is a crucial concept to understanding the limits of Jewish dialectics. Man's ultimate goal is to acknowledge his defeat and seek to imitate God's contraction in bringing the finite world into existence by practicing self-defeat. (Soloveitchik, 1978: 35-36):

Let me ask the following question: Is this Lurianic doctrine of *tzimtzum* just a Kabbalistic mystery, without any moral relevance for us, or is it the very foundation of our morality? If God withdrew, and creation is a result of His withdrawal, then, guided by the principle of *Imitatio Dei*, we are called upon to do the same. Jewish ethics, then, requires man, in certain situations, to withdraw. Man must not always be the victor. From time to time, triumph should turn into defeat. Man, in Judaism, was created for both victory and defeat - he is both king and saint. He must know how to fight for victory and also how to suffer defeat. The modern man is frustrated and perplexed because he cannot take defeat. He is utterly incapable of retreating humbly. Modern man boasts quite often that he has never lost a war. He forgets that defeat is built into the very structure of victory, that there is, in fact, no total victory; man is finite, so is his victory. Whatever is finite, is imperfect; so is man's triumph.

The notion of *tzimtzum* calls for self-defeat; it forces humanity to acknowledge its limitations.

It is the guiding principle of *Imitatio Dei* that prevents Judaism from ascending to the third stage of dialectics. Reconciliation is beyond impossibility, it is immoral, and it would miss the point of Halakha, the Jewish law. As seen above, Soloveitchik's understanding of Halakha is as follows: it is a tool that assists man in his day-to-day conflicts and crises in the world. As such, it is the foundations of Jewish ethics because they are part of the ontological existence. If one goes beyond his conflicted-human nature, he attempts to go beyond his ontological existence and hence loses the need in Halakha, and hence, revealed morality.

In the final footnote of 'Majesty and Humility,' Soloveitchik mentions that Abraham found victory in defeat—his son Isaac was returned to him, and Moses did not (he was denied entry to the land of Canaan), although he followed the same formula of obedience to God and self-defeat (Soloveitchik, 1978: 37, footnote 21). Soloveitchik concludes that God's ways are not intelligible to men. However, if the goal of self-defeat is *Imitatio Dei*, we can understand at least one thing: one aspect of God that man should, or rather must follow, is self-defeat as deriving from *tzimtzum*. That is to say, that there are ways of God that are intelligible to humanity, at least for readers of the Hebrew Bible. Abraham's victory is not a reward for his goodwill or obedience to God because God needed Isaac (this echoes Kierkegaard's 'Knight of Faith'). Furthermore, for God's unintelligible-to-humanity reasons, he did not need Moses to enter the Promised Land.²⁰

Soloveitchik's mentioning of Moses sheds light on another notion – dignity, or *Kavod* (כבוד), which is related to another aspect of reconciliation, or being like God. Moses asks of God, "Now show me your glory," and God responds to him, "you cannot see my face, for no man may see me and live." (Exodus 33:18-20).²¹ Moses requests to see God's dignity and is

²⁰The ethical way to live according to Soloveitchik's formula is self-defeat and Halakhic obedience. In this example, Moses did exactly what God required from him, but, unlike Abraham, he was not rewarded. To Soloveitchik, the goal of Judaism is not victory; it is the ethical-obedience and submission to God's will. The only way one can fulfill the *Imitatio Dei* ideal is by retreating. Self-defeat is what God teaches man through his own contraction.

²¹The Hebrew text uses the term *Kavod* “הָרִאִי נֹא אֵת” כְּבוֹדָךְ” which Soloveitchik refers to when articulating the notion of dignity in his 'The Lonely Man of Faith.

refused because this aspect is not accessible to humanity; the penalty for such an act is death. However, if we understand Soloveitchik correctly, "death" is not merely a penalty inflicted by God. It is a change in one's ontological status. Following Soloveitchik, I argue that if Moses were able to reconcile, he would become God-like. One finds dignity not only in acknowledging his abilities and using them in the world but also in knowing one's limits and practicing self-defeat. According to the principle of *Imitatio Dei*, Moses can follow solely what is known and accessible to him. Therefore, if Moses had seen God's dignity,²² according to *Imitatio Dei* and the aforementioned primacy of human dignity, Moses would die like *a man* because he no longer has *his* dignity, but God's.²³ Hence, man must retain his form of dignity, along with the recognition in his limitations and self-defeat, as the foundation of Jewish religious experience. This argument illustrates another gap between the Protestant theologians and Soloveitchik. If, according to Soloveitchik, reconciliation is to become like God, then it, in his view, it might imply the Christian doctrine of the incarnation. That is to say; the ability to reconcile is not possible in Judaism because Judaism is part of the mere ontological existence and manifested through Halakha. To reconcile, one must go beyond the boundaries of ontology, which is impossible in Judaism. At this point, Soloveitchik and the dialectic theologians separate, in transgressing between man and God.

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS:

So what is Jewish about dialectics, and what is the dialectical nature of Judaism? As long as we deal with the first two stages, thesis and antithesis, dialectics describe humanity's religious experience in the face of modernity and the role of Halakha. Nevertheless, when we

²² By 'seeing,' I mean understanding and acknowledging this form of dignity. Because as seen above, attaining dignity is through acknowledging and acting in accordance to the origins of this form of living. Understanding and acting according to God's dignity might have the transforming force, according to Soloveitchik, if we accept this interpretation to the dangers of victory and reconciliation.

²³ This is because man's dignity is based on the accessible to humanity aspect in the doctrine of *tzimtzum*, which calls for self-defeat.

reach the final third stage, there is nothing Jewish in the full scale of a dialectic move—the third stage is beyond mere hubris to attempt achieving, it is merely impossible. Moreover, to reconcile is to become like God, but this aspect is not accessible to humanity, and hence it is beyond humanity.

If Soloveitchik does not accept the final dialectical stage, why does he use the first two stages presented in comparison to Barth and Brunner? I argue that the first two stages describe the condition of humanity and provide an understanding of Halakha's role. The final reconciliatory stage simply goes against the logic and system of Halakha. It misses the point of Judaism, the eternally conflicted human existential nature, and the asymptotic ideal concept of *Imitatio Dei*. Reconciliation is problematic from a phenomenological and behavioral perspective because while one falsely attempts to reconcile, he presumably ceases to act like a human, but like God. This requires a different objective of acting in the world and acquiring knowledge. Moreover, for Soloveitchik, the third stage is not possible from an ontological perspective. The analysis of Moses' encounter with God and asking to know God's dignity, in Soloveitchik-ian terms, demonstrates that reconciliation is not accessible to humanity, who cannot achieve final victory. The self-defeat is not only a moral act, or merely obeying God, but also a metaphysical realization that humanity cannot go beyond it. As such, reconciliation is an ontological impossibility.

However, understanding the limitation of dialectics in Judaism enables us to distinguish between two types of dialectics. The scholars of the dialectical theology movement can use dialectics to its full scale, with particular applications to Christian theology, which reconciles human experience in the world. Soloveitchik, on the other hand, accepts dialectics as long as they describe the human religious *experience*. This leads him to the understanding of the role of dialectics in Halakha and ethics. I argue that there is a difference between 'dialectic theology,' which includes the final stage of dialectics, as in Brunner and Barth, and 'dialectical ethics,' as Soloveitchik finds dialectical in Judaism.

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