

...them, he not them that believe; in my name  
...ed: he is risen; with new tongues; they shall  
...the place where; 18 They shall take up serp  
...his disciples and if they drink any deadly t  
...h before you it shall not hurt them; they  
...l ye see him, lay hands on the sick, and they  
...recover.  
19 ¶ So then after the Lord  
quickly, and spoken unto them, he was rece  
; for they up into heaven, and sat on the  
ed: neither hand of God.  
y man; for 20 And they went forth,  
was risen preached every where, the  
week, he working with them, and confi  
the word with signs following. A-

### SPEL ACCORDING TO LINT LUKE

certainty of those things, w  
thou hast been instructed.  
taken 5 ¶ THERE was in the d  
der a Her'od, the king of J  
which a certain priest named Zäch-  
us, of the course of A-bi'á: and h  
unto was of the daughters of Aár'  
were her name was Ê-lis'a-béth.  
the 6 And they were both ri  
before God, walking in all th  
av- mandments and ordinances  
all Lord blameless.  
ite 7 And they had no child,  
at that Ê-lis'a-béth was barren, a  
both were now well stricken i  
e 8 And it came to pass, thi



# THE FREE CHURCH AND ISRAEL'S COVENANT

Peter Ochs

THE FREE CHURCH  
AND ISRAEL'S COVENANT



The 2009  
J. J. Thiessen  
Lectures

THE FREE CHURCH  
AND ISRAEL'S COVENANT

Peter Ochs

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The 2009 J. J. Thiessen Lectures were  
presented at Canadian Mennonite  
University on October 21-22, 2009.

## FOREWORD

What do a Jewish theologian from Virginia and a Mennonite theologian from Indiana have in common? It turns out a lot. While Peter Ochs has never met John Howard Yoder in person, he is nevertheless intrigued enough with his thought to read him carefully and engage him critically. And this may well be because Yoder took seriously the Jewishness of both Jesus and the Christian community called church. On this basis Yoder argued that “it did not have to be” as it was regarding the Jewish-Christian schism.

The Jewish philosopher and historian Gershom Scholem has described the Christian notion of redemption as taking place within the individual and as such it is best understood as a private spiritual activity. While one may well forgive this reading of our story, since it is not uncommon within Christianity, it is not one that is accepted by John Howard Yoder. For Yoder, Jesus is a political messiah in whom redemption is visible, public, and social; and as such represents a contrast to a private spirituality. It is Yoder’s “political theology” that Ochs teases out in his lectures.

Ochs also does not accept the sharp disjunction named by Scholem. In this he is in agreement with Yoder. And yet this does not mean that he follows Yoder all the way; for in effect he argues that Yoder’s Jesus is not Jewish enough. Perhaps better said, the community of followers (especially the free church) could learn more from the biblical portrayal of faithful Judaism. Ochs suggests that Yoder tends to over-emphasize



the model of exilic Judaism at the neglect of the blessed life in a state of landedness. In other words, Ochs is concerned about what he calls Yoder's tendency towards "binarism" and sees the life of faithfulness as more dialectic, more both/and, and "precarious" than Yoder seems to. Ochs is skeptical of all quests for "total perspectives" and worries that, despite Yoder's statements to the contrary, he seems to be reaching for more "closure" than some of Yoder's younger interpreters attribute to him.

Yet Ochs' passion for peace goes much deeper than sorting out theological niceties with Yoder and other Mennonite authors; it extends to a deep desire for serious Jewish-Christian dialogue generally and the peace of Israel-Palestine in particular. And here he holds out a sincere hope; not one based on a "solution" to the divides, but a hope rooted in a process deeply respectful of the others' traditions and sacred texts. He commends a process called Scriptural Reasoning. It entails the meeting of representatives from each of Christians, Jews, and Muslims and together reading and studying each other's scriptures. The assumption is that peace names not a relationship at the periphery but one at the core of our confession. Engaging in this process is impossible without a basic prerequisite for peace—hospitality of the stranger. He suggests that this approach might complement current Mennonite peace initiatives, locally and internationally.

The lectures in this booklet are a wonderful model of how a scholar engages those outside of his religious tradition. Never is there an effort to minimize difference in order to claim commonality; always there is a deep commitment to understanding, respect, and genuine truth-seeking.

Harry J. Huebner  
Canadian Mennonite University  
September 2010

## ONE

### JOHN HOWARD YODER'S REPAIR AND NOT REPAIR OF THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SCHISM<sup>1</sup>

*Shalom Uvrachot . . . Peace and Blessings to you.*

*Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.*

*Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.*

*Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.*

*Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out (Deut. 28:3-6).*

ברוך אתה בעיר וברוך אתה בשדה

ברוך פרי בטןך ופרי אדמתך ופרי בהמתך שגר אלפיך ועשתרות צאנך

ברוך טנאך ומשארתיך

ברוך אתה בבאך וברוך אתה בצאתך

I never met him in the flesh, but John Howard Yoder became a close friend of mine. I knew of him, to be sure, from the words of my living friend, the Christian theologian Stanley Hauerwas, and I also knew how much Mennonite faith was one of Hauerwas' ideals. But John Yoder became a close friend only after two things happened.

The first was that the Yoder scholar, Michael Cartwright, asked Stanley Hauerwas and me if we would publish Yoder's *The Jewish Christian Schism Revisited*<sup>2</sup> in the book series we

were editing. We said yes, and Cartwright and I decided the book would fit this series better if we appended to it our own Jewish-and-Christian commentaries on Yoder's understanding of the Jews.<sup>3</sup> So all of a sudden I was reading Yoder's work in-depth and I began to make his acquaintance in a more intimate way. I listened to his arguments. I received some of them happily and others made me want to argue back. I felt that Yoder and I began to spar together, like two wrestlers. If any of you have experienced sports, you know that sparring is a mixture of love and aggression. In the process I began to become his friend.

I became Yoder's close friend only after another event. Some scholars at Eastern Mennonite University, Harrisonburg, Virginia—only an hour from my home in Charlottesville, Virginia—invited me to come speak about the Jewish-Christian schism. I came, I spoke, I was engaged in deep conversation, and then I came again a few times. My relation to Yoder's words was still spicy: some of his words I loved, and some of his words made me want to argue with him, wrestle. But through the process, in agreement and in disagreement, my heart was warmed to the Mennonite company I was keeping. I spoke my mind and I listened; over a little time, a year, three years, I noticed some of my opinions changed—not drastically, but I had come a little closer to Yoder in the areas of our disagreement. For their part, members of the Eastern Mennonite University faculty and seminary students grew closer to one of my own projects: what we call inter-Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning. It is a method for drawing Muslims, Jews, and Christians into fellowships of sacred text study. In sum, I was drawn into fellowship with members of the Mennonite seminary community, and members of the community were drawn into fellowship with my Abrahamic community.

And that is why I have come to deliver these J. J. Thiessen

Lectures. I would have come to give one academic talk just because of my academic interest in Mennonite theology—and the importance of Chris Huebner's contribution to it. But four public lectures! That is a great commitment and, even with the great honour of it, I accepted the invitation only because there is a chance it may deepen this friendship with Yoder and with members of his religious community.

That leaves one more introductory point I would like to make. Why should I care to deepen this friendship? I trust that many of you offer yourselves in service: service to community, to family, to God, to peace, to caring for those in need. Whatever service you offer, you may share my experience that the single greatest challenge to service is energy. Every act of relationship, of thought, of caring absorbs some of the limited energy our mortal bodies have stored in them. Even if in God's grace our prayers open to us new foundations of strength, we remain earthbound creatures, and the work and love we pour into life with this group here limits what we may pour into life over there. . . . So we find we have to make choices: which good thing shall I choose? These great mortal limits are the only reason I say that inter-personal or inter-religious friendship and dialogue is good for its own sake, but it is not good enough to merit our deep energies unless we believe it is not only good but also urgent at this moment. And this is the only reason, I would argue, that inter-religious dialogue is not an important goal to hold in general. None of us has time to make deep friends with everybody, and shallow friendship is shallow. An inter-religious dialogue merits our deep energies only if a given, specific one is deeply important here and now.

I have come to deliver these lectures because Jewish-Mennonite and Mennonite-Abrahamic dialogue is deeply important to me right now. The first reason is beyond my comprehension: I did not will myself into this dialogue, but

some spirit seems to have drawn me into it, and this kind of drawing is rare enough that I have learned to take it seriously. The second reason is easier to comprehend, because it is partly disclosed through Yoder's book, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. It is that something at the centre of the ancient Jewish-Christian schism is of central significance to Christianity today and to Judaism today. That is important to members of both congregations. But it is also important to human life on this globe today, because it concerns the relation of what we understand to be God's will and word to the modern Western projects of nationalism, of global capitalism, and of the kind of secular or instrumental reasoning that serves them both.

I believe that Yoder's Free Church vision has an urgent message to offer contemporary Jewish thinkers and, if you will indulge this, that rabbinic Judaism may also have an urgent message for Free Church thinkers. I believe, furthermore, that, beyond its significance for these two religious groups, the global import of a Mennonite-Jewish dialogue may lie in the fruit of sustained dialogue between these two messages. It will—at best!—take four lectures for me to clarify the two messages and then to explain what I mean by the fruit of a dialogue between them. For now, I hope you won't mind listening to me on two levels at once.

On one level, I have four claims to make. In Lecture One, I claim that, in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, Yoder repairs this schism when he frees each tradition from the conceptual constructs that human interpreters have imposed on them, but that at times he imposes some conceptual constructs of his own. In Lecture Two, I offer a portrait of early Judaism that I hope would extend Yoder's repair, but without erasing the distinction between Judaism and Christianity that I believe serves rather than impedes the repair.

In Lecture Three, I introduce the work of Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning as one example of how we might conduct intimate theological dialogue without losing our different identities. After describing Abrahamic dialogues we have shared at Eastern Mennonite University, I pose two direct questions to peers in Canadian Mennonite University and in Mennonite Central Committee: Would Canadian Mennonite University consider hosting a fellowship of Jewish-Christian-Muslim theological dialogue as a way of extending the work that Yoder initiated? And would Mennonite Central Committee entertain an even bolder project: an Abrahamic witness as part of its international peace witness, that is, modest Abrahamic fellowships residing and working alongside centres of peace work throughout the world? In Lecture Four, I pose what may be a defining—if not an end-time—goal for Abrahamic dialogue and for Jewish-Mennonite dialogue: peace for Israel and Palestine.

By way of these four claims, I also want to speak, indirectly, to a second level of dialogue: not a literal conversation between two or more communities of theologians and peace workers, but a metaphorical encounter between two kinds of religious practice, two ways of serving God's work in the world. These two ways are defined differently in different contexts, and the very goal of dialogue is to introduce a context—you might call it loving dialogue or simply love—in which they are mutually defining. "Mutually defining" means that these two are bound to a third—the relationship itself—in the presence of which the two appear as different yet complementary, each one in need of the other to achieve its full identity as a source of goodness in the world. To start somewhere, we might say that, in the context of a Jewish-Christian schism, the two appear as any of a series of contrast pairs: Jew versus Christian, exile versus landedness, end-time versus this world, sacred space

versus profane, or, in most general terms, one versus the other, the bare form of a binary separation or schism. In the context of Yoder's book, they appear, instead, as two paths of peace, of exile, of mission, all one in relation to God. My modest complaint is that Yoder may anticipate too much of an end-time by identifying these two as one, or by suggesting that the schism is overcome only through identity rather than through complementary difference and dialogue. In these terms, my dialogue with Yoder would appear as another form of this relation, and what this relation becomes depends on the future of Mennonite-Jewish dialogue more broadly. But there may be more to this dialogue than Mennonites and Jews or even than rabbinic Judaism and Christianity. According to my side of the dialogue, the dialogue is between two or more ways in which the divine Word lives in this world: not two or more religions, but two or more actual lives of the Word through which the creaturely differences among God's creatures are not overcome but are made into a chorus of different voices, a network of love relationships across and through difference. The identity of each member of the chorus is displayed through its relations to the others and to the past and future of this chorus as well. I am speaking now in vague terms because these are not things we know clearly apart from the actual relations we have in this chorus, of all creatures in some time and some space.

But now to the specific business of Lecture One, which is to open the dialogue at a given point: a point of mild difference (and not schism) between my words and Yoder's as I examine his book, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. I shall begin by imagining that I am in dialogue with John Yoder, that his Mennonite half of the dialogue is the *Jewish-Christian Schism*, and that these four lectures represent my Jewish half. But I do not mean only John Yoder in a literal sense. I have learned to substitute my living encounter with members of

the Eastern Mennonite community for my literary encounter with John Yoder. And I am eager to hear your own words so that this encounter may have its place at Canadian Mennonite University as well.

*"It did not have to be": A new reading  
of the historical plain sense*

"It did not have to be": that is the title of the first chapter of Yoder's book. It is a remarkable chapter, introducing an unprecedented thesis: that the Jewish-Christian schism did not have to be, because of at least these four things.

We cannot, Yoder writes, "forget the Jewishness of Christianity," as if they somehow began as two different streams of history. No, there was only one stream of history, which later patristic, medieval, and modern Christians—as well as rabbinic and modern Jews—interpreted as if it had been separated since the beginning. This interpretation, Yoder continues, belongs to a story constructed over centuries to justify keeping the two apart. The story rests on the following claims, which are not historical but ideologically driven re-readings of history

First, there was a single normative Judaism, born in Ancient Israel and articulated by the rabbinic sages of the first few centuries CE (this Yoder claims was the rabbis' own construction). Second, Jesus rejected this normative Judaism and was in turn rejected by it. Third, the apostle Paul once again rejected it and was rejected by it. Finally, Christianity is defined by these doubly mutual rejections, which means that, whatever Jews and Christians shared in the 1st century, it was far overshadowed by their differences.

In reply, Yoder poses the following, alternative reading of history which, he argues, reflects the actual history. There was



no single normative Judaism emerging out of the first century. Instead, the latter decades of Roman occupation—before and after the destruction of the Second Temple—was a time of radical upheaval with many movements vying for ascendancy among the Jews. By the end of the first century, the most significant of these were the messianic or Christian Jews and the rabbinic Jews.

Second, neither Jesus nor Paul rejected normative Judaism: first because there was no such norm; second because Jesus affirmed the historical stream of Judaism. I'll quote Yoder at this point:

What Jesus himself proposed to his listeners was nothing other than what he claimed as the normative vision for a restored and clarified Judaism, namely the proper interpretation of the Jewish Scriptures and tradition for this present, in the light of the new age which he heralded. . . . There is in the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus nowhere a rejection of Judaism as a stream of history or a group of people. With regard specifically to the law [Torah], Jesus' attitudes are all affirmative. He said he had come not to destroy the law—or even relax it—but rather to *fulfil* it. He claimed to defend its intent against interpretations that would destroy its meaning or dull its edge. . . . He placed himself completely within that history.<sup>4</sup>

Third, Yoder continues:

The Apostle Saul/Paul never rejected his claim that a true child of Abraham must share the faith in the son of the promise made to Abraham. Those Israelites who had not seen Jesus the Promised One were not thereby for Paul main-line Jews or authentic Jews, but rather Jews not yet accepting the fulfillment of the promises made to their father. . . . Paul debated head-on against certain ways of applying the Jewish heritage to the diaspora situation. . . . That was a debate which had been going on already generations earlier. . . . It was in no way an

un-Jewish or anti-Jewish position. Paul was the great Judaizer of the Gentiles.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Yoder concludes:

*The Jews did not reject Christianity. . . .* Judaism as a system of beliefs and practices did not reject Christianity as a belief system. Nor did Jewry as a body of people, or most of their institutions, reject believers in Jesus as a people. The Temple at Jerusalem was open to believers in Jesus until its destruction. The experiences of clash reported in Acts are [*sic*] not typical, few of them are official, and they did not interrupt the continuing participations of believers in Jesus. . . . [Furthermore, outside of Jerusalem] until the end of the first century, (at the very earliest hypothesis) there was no general expulsion of Christians from synagogues.<sup>6</sup> . . . The real division had to come much later because it *could* only come in the diaspora situation, only after Bar Kochba and only after further developments within rabbinic thought and social forms.<sup>7</sup>

In sum, he concludes, “the standard account . . . *is wrong on all counts.*”<sup>8</sup>

***“It did not have to be”: A new reading  
of the historical implications***

Yoder adds a second level of historical interpretation that begins to show why his new reading of history is so important to him. He claims that the main stream of classical Judaism was exilic (or “diasporic”), pacifist, anti-nationalist, and eschatological: in other words, that Judaism anticipated his Free Church. Before looking at his church, let us glance at the evidence he offers for this reading of ancient Judaism.

*Classical Judaism was exilic and messianic:* In Yoder’s words, “Diaspora [was] Normal Jewish Existence.” He is referring primarily to the fact that, after Rome destroyed the Second Temple, the Jews were sent off into exile from

Zion, but Judaism did not die. Instead, in Yoder's reading, the rabbinic sages re-interpreted Israel's service to God in this world as service performed in exile (*galut*, גלות) until the coming of Israel's Messiah in the end of days. Yoder believes that this exilic heart of Judaism was already revealed 500 years earlier to the prophet Jeremiah as he was in Babylonian exile with the intellectual elite of his people. Yoder reads one chapter of Jeremiah's call to the exiles in Babylon as defining all genuine Jewish existence thereafter: "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare" (Jer. 29:7). Yoder reads the history of all Jewish returns to Zion after that as undertaken either in error and sin *or* under the banner of exile, that is, only under some other nation's rule in the land.

*Classical Judaism was pacifist:* Yoder constructs this claim out of a highly original synthesis of the following observations: (a) "Blood is sacred." For ancient Israel, "blood is the life and belongs to God." The blood of animals can be shed only in a ritual context—even there, it must be consumed. Human blood must not be shed.<sup>9</sup> (b) "The Messiah has not yet come." Only the Messiah could "restore the patterns of divine vengeance, or of national policing, which alone could justify the shedding of blood."<sup>10</sup> (c) "Jewish thought" seeks to learn the lessons of its experience with Zealotry and never again turn that way. (d) In their interpretations of the Bible, the rabbinic sages sought continually to downplay violence and delegitimize it in their own legal rulings. (e) Since God does not reveal to us (in Israel) how God deals with the other nations, it is not for us to choose to act as instruments of his wrath toward them. (f) "There is a place for suffering in the divine economy. That the faithful must suffer under the benevolence of a sovereign God is a mystery not yet clarified in the Jewish understanding of history. . . . [But] some suffering at the hands of the *goyim*

[nations] has always been expected, and is to be accepted as 'Sanctifying the Name' of God."<sup>11</sup> (g) "The survival of Israel is promised by God. . . . [which implies] that Israel . . . is not to take its survival into its own hands."<sup>12</sup>

*Classical Judaism was anti-nationalist:* We have already presented Yoder's evidence for this claim, since Jewish anti-nationalism would be a corollary of Jewish pacifism, exilic life, and messianism: Israel would renounce self-rule until the end of days. This would correspond, moreover, to the theopolitics of Moses and Joshua, for whom God alone is King.

*Classical Judaism was missionizing:* It only abandoned this activity later, to distinguish itself from a world-missionizing Christianity. Thus Yoder writes, "Paul is . . . not the pioneer of mission to the Gentiles. Mission to Gentiles had been going on for generations. It was so routine that the different schools of rabbis compared their different rules about how to do it."<sup>13</sup> His most ambitious conclusion is that "the Judaism of Jeremiah, of Hillel, of Jesus and of Jochanan ben Zakkai was a missionary faith. It then represented an adaptation to Christianity, when the rabbis by the time of the *Mishna* abandoned their missionary openness, leaving that function to the messianic Jews (i.e., the Christians)."<sup>14</sup>

*Classical Judaism was anti-clerical and decentralized, a priesthood of all believers:* These are my own terms for Yoder's claim that early rabbinic Judaism lacked a ritual priesthood and decentralized its centres of worship into local synagogues: "Jewish identity was (and still is) rendered flexible by the ability to live without central administration;"<sup>15</sup> "[among] the culturally unique traits which define 'Judaism' and thereby Christianity in turn: . . . the phenomenon of the synagogue: a decentralized, self-sustaining, non-sacerdotal community life form capable of operating on its own wherever there are ten households; the phenomenon of Torah: a text around the

reading and exposition of which the community is defined. This text is at once narrative and legal; the phenomenon of the rabbinate: a non-sacerdotal, non-hierarchical, non-violent leadership elite whose power is not civil but intellectual, validated by their identification with the Torah.”

***“It did not have to be”: Why Yoder desires  
for it not to have been***

Yoder’s thesis presents a powerful challenge to our very old habits of deeply separating classical Judaism and Christianity. And I wish it were fully true. If it were fully true, after all, its practical consequences would parallel a number of causes that are central to my work: intimate religious dialogue among the Children of Abraham, absorption into the will and work of God rather than into the innumerable activities of boundary-building that take so much of our time and exhaust so much of our spirit. If it were fully true, moreover, there would be many more friends to call on to share in causes like this. So my arguments with Yoder are not against his spirit of dialogue and shared passion for the God of Creation and of Sinai. My central argument is that, perhaps in the enthusiasm of a pioneer, he has over-stated his case—so much so that he may unintentionally have pushed through the middle to the other side: replacing the ancient rabbis’ normative Judaism with the new normative Judaism of Yoder’s Free Church vision—removing separation by removing the identities that most Jews have claimed for themselves since the first or second centuries. But I assume he had a reason.

If John Yoder pushed such a strong reading, he must have believed he was serving a cause that called for it. Before I turn in detail to my own concerns, I would therefore like to ask, first, what this cause may have been. What animated Yoder’s search for a unified Christianity and Judaism? I do not need to

invent an answer, since Yoder concludes his first chapter with a section entitled "The Contemporary Value of This Review of the Ancient Schism" (61) and much of the subsequent chapters extend his account. I will therefore simply summarize what I take to be the four central features of Yoder's answer.

*Correcting historical misconceptions:* Yoder argues that the myth of a Jewish-Christian schism is so ingrained that many of its features reappear even in the work of "post-Holocaust" Christian scholars seeking to make amends for Christian anti-Semitism. The myth also defines much Jewish writing, before and after the Holocaust. The first goal Yoder identifies is simply to correct this errant myth.

*The Jewishness of the Free Church vision:* In Chapter 4, Yoder suggests that many features of the Free Church were features of classical Judaism as he interprets it: messianism, pacifism, a decentralized congregationalism, "the rejection of national-governmental control of the churches" (or synagogues),<sup>17</sup> and a view of "God as active in correlation with historical change and criticism more than with sanctifying the present,"<sup>18</sup> "nonconformity to the world,"<sup>19</sup> readiness to "derive its ongoing social identity from the presence in its midst of a book" rather than from a clergy and clerical ritual, a burning moral commitment (for Jews, a commitment to the teachings and laws of Torah, greater than reliance on divine grace and immersions in mystery), at home and yet also foreign in every foreign land, a community at once of descent (heritage) and dissent (radical social criticisms). In sum: a second goal of Yoder's new vision is to discover in classical Judaism a model of what George Lindbeck terms the church as Israel<sup>20</sup>—as knowingly challenging to regnant Judaism as it is to regnant Christianity. These are features that also distinguish this Judaism from the Judaism of the rabbinic sages after the first century and distinguish the Free Church from most

conceptions of Christianity after Constantine and before the Radical Reformation.

*The Jewishness of Christianity's primordial vision:* As we have seen, Yoder's primary argument is that, by demonstrating the Jewishness of the Free Church, he has demonstrated how well the Free Church captures the vision of primordial Christianity.

*An urgent calling today to renew Christianity's primordial vision:* Composing this book in the 1970s, Yoder spoke to an emergent movement of Christian theologians and religious leaders who decried what they took to be Christianity's historical complicity in three sins: anti-Judaism, rationalism (by which I mean the reduction of Christianity to a system of thought rather than obedience and witness to the Word incarnate), and Constantinianism (or seeking to adopt Caesar—or the nation-state—as this world's instrument of obedience and witness). This emergent movement sought both to renew and reform Reformation Christianity as its means of seeking redemption from these sins: rededicating themselves to the apostles' primordial obedience and witness to Jesus Christ, serving Christ only by way of Christ within the body of Christ, and refinding his body in the primordial church as Israel. By recovering Israel as, in most or all ways, the Free Church, Yoder provides what he may believe this movement is seeking: the body of Christ as the body of Israel. In his words, "It was the Jewishness of Jesus, the rootage of his message in the particular heritage of Abraham, Moses, and Jesus which as we have seen made it good news for the whole world."<sup>21</sup>

To describe this culminating goal of Yoder's book, I rely both on his own words and on the thesis of my book, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews*.<sup>22</sup> For now, I will introduce just one element of my thesis. I adopt George Lindbeck's use of the term "postliberal" to refer to a Christian

movement that seeks to renew the vision of the Reformers by renewing obedience to Christ alone in the church, rather than to modern or classical concepts about him or to the authority of priesthood, tradition, and spiritual devotion when adopted as anti-modern agents of him. Postliberal Christians renew the practice of *sola scriptura* as a means of correcting these modern and anti-modern tendencies in the church: as a means, in other words, of *semper reformanda*. In the process of recovering Scripture's witness to Christ, postliberals rediscover the Jewishness of Jesus Christ, and—of greatest significance for these lectures—they discover that his Jewishness means something about how Christians must read the gospel witness to him. The gospel gives witness to Jesus as the Christ only when each of its chapters and verses are read *as* readings of specific chapters and verses of the Old Testament. Furthermore, these are not once-and-for-all readings. To read gospel as witness to Christ is to read it each time anew, in the context of each of life's daily struggles, as a new reading of the life of the people Israel. But this means that the life of Israel continues as eternally as the life of Christ and that the life of Israel is renewed in each reading of the gospel's witness. If so, then Christian supersessionism is false; that is, it is not true that ancient Israel's covenant was superseded by the coming of Christ, for the meaning of Christ's life is also the meaning of Israel's life. In this rediscovery of the Old Testament, the post-liberals therefore recognize that they are reforming as well as renewing the doctrine of *sola scriptura*. They recognize that the doctrine of *sola scriptura* requires, as well, a doctrine of non-supersessionism. Life in Christ does not supersede, but continues and extends, life in Israel. This claim is not made on behalf of the Jews or in response to anti-Judaism; it is made as a discovery about the gospel truth.

In these terms, readers may see why I read Yoder's book as



contributing to the postliberal movement. His vision of classical Judaism enables contemporary Christians to comprehend the Jewishness of Jesus as strengthening rather than weakening their devotion to Jesus as the Christ. Yoder's claims about Judaism's closeness to the Free Church imply, furthermore, that the Free Church is as close to Jesus as his Jewishness. However much members of the Free Church may value their minority status, Yoder has thereby offered a strong argument for promoting the Radical Reformation as answering this epoch's call for renewing the church by renewing Christian obedience and witness to Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

*If "it did not have to be," then why should I object at all?*

I am not only a Jewish reader of Yoder but also a postliberal Jewish reader. This means that I belong to a movement of contemporary Jews who, like the postliberal Christians, seek to renew their scripturally and rabbinically based faith and practice in place of what they consider the twin errors of modern Jewish rationalism and an anti-modern effort to replace reason with the authority of individual schools of rabbinic text interpretation.<sup>24</sup> Postliberal Jews do not return to Hebrew Scriptures, alone, however. *And this is a very important point. They return to the practice of scriptural interpretation and perennial re-interpretation that has roots in the biblical canon but whose prototype is articulated only in the rabbinic literatures of Mishnah, Midrash, and Talmud, composed and redacted from the first through the sixth centuries of the common era.* In my second lecture, I will offer a broader introduction to the rabbinic literatures. To conclude this first lecture, I need to teach only one point about these literatures—but it is a very important point with three sub points, so the conclusion will take a few pages!

Nearly all forms of contemporary Judaism as practiced by

those who call themselves Jews—from the most liberal to the most orthodox—are based in these rabbinic literatures. What many of us consider the primordial genius of these literatures appears in the first century before and after the destruction of the Second Temple; but it took several hundred years to appear as a full prototype—and the last centuries were among the most important.

*My first sub-point is that postliberal Jews tend to seek renewal by recovering the genius of this entire literature, not just a few of its words.* That means recovering the genius that links Hebrew Scripture to the three rabbinic literatures. Postliberal Jews are drawn to close dialogue with postliberal Christians because the two groups respond to modern Western civilization in overlapping ways, because their projects of recovery employ several similar methods of reading and iteration, and because they tend to reaffirm each other's commitments and to care for one another. For most postliberal Christians, reaffirming Judaism means reaffirming the whole trajectory of rabbinic literature—not just the Jewishness of Jesus in his own day but also the Jewishness of those Jews who did not follow him but followed the rabbinic sages. While postliberal Christians do not identify the truth of Jesus with the truth of the later rabbis, they still learn from the rabbis—and their contemporary interpreters—what it means to belong to the living people Israel, who live alongside the church as Israel. Of particular significance for the themes of these lectures, postliberal Jews and Christians tend to share a parallel hermeneutical lesson. For postliberal Christians, the gospel is hermeneutically thick: it does not speak just by itself, but by the way it rereads the Old Testament. It thereby draws its reader into a complex relationship to two texts and to the God whose incarnate life is in between them. For postliberal Jews, Hebrew Scriptures are hermeneutically thick in the other direction; they do not speak by themselves,

but by the way they are read through the rabbinic literature that displays their full character. It thereby draws the reader into a complex relation between two literatures and the God whose life in Israel is in-between. This last point is the source of my concerns about Yoder's vision of classical Judaism: and they comprise my final sub-points.

*Yoder's (modest) tendency to historical over-reading:* Yoder presents his case as a way of saving history from its Christian and Jewish ideological misreadings. Yes, I would agree that the two classical and early medieval traditions sought to strengthen their internal order by over-defining their mutual borders doctrinally and demographically. But, after having reopened the early sources to an array of fresh readings, Yoder has tended to close the sources down again by drawing them to a single conclusion: that late and post-Second Temple Judaism was a type of the Free Church. I will mention his most unhistorical claims, adding scholarly details in endnotes.

The first claim is a defining one: that Jeremiah preached perennial exile. I must assume that Yoder was purposeful in the way he extended only one of Jeremiah's letters (and one of his chapters out of 52) into a type of a much later diasporic Judaism. I think it is powerful typological and figural reading. My objection is that he promoted typology in the name of a kind of historical science.<sup>25</sup>

A second example is that, on the one hand, he claims that "we cannot recuperate the narratives of communities which died out;"<sup>26</sup> on the other hand, he is nevertheless prepared to identify the early rabbinic sages' acceptance of Diaspora as defining their Judaism per se while dismissing the bulk of their Mishnaic literature as composed only in reaction to emergent Christian hegemony. My objections should be obvious: the Mishnaic literatures are the founding literatures of post-Second Temple rabbinic Judaism, redacted early in the Diaspora as an

anthology of two centuries of rabbinic rereadings of biblical law and custom. Yoder's claims about diasporic rabbinic Judaism are based largely on the same Mishnaic literatures that he otherwise tends to delegitimize as a mere complement to proto-Constantinian Christianity. He has offered an intriguing typological argument on behalf of Free Church Christianity, but not yet a clear reading of history.<sup>27</sup>

A third example concerns Yoder's claim that the Jews did not expel Christians from synagogue worship. I may wish it were true, but the dates of apparent exclusion are earlier than Yoder claims.<sup>28</sup>

A fourth example concerns his claim that rabbinic Judaism is pacifist. I am indeed encouraged that the textual evidence is of a strong tendency throughout rabbinic literature to interpret away the community's capacity to impose death; to avoid violence. To save a life, furthermore, one may transgress other divine commands: one may feed and heal on the Sabbath (or even travel) if it is to save a life or health; one may bear false oaths if it is in private to save one's life or another's.<sup>29</sup> There are only three contexts when one cannot transgress despite death to self or other: one must die rather than agree to rape another or to kill another or to blaspheme in public.<sup>30</sup> But there is no single "ism" here, no single concept to predefine what this will mean. Peace, *shalom*, is wholeness, *shlemut*. In this world, however, and outside the fullness of single moments, peace remains finite before the fullness of God's presence, and we cannot predict how its finitude will be displayed for each sage community in each context of life.<sup>31</sup> I say this only about rabbinic self-understanding, without presuming what other communities should do or what the most saintly already do.

A fifth example concerns Jewish missionizing. In recent writings, the rabbinic scholar Daniel Boyarin responds that yes, the *amoraim*, or Talmudic sages, often predefined Jewish

orthodoxy in response to Christian orthodoxy and its claims and critique. But there was, he argues, already a tendency after the Maccabees to limit missionizing practice and, certainly, to envision the plurality of God's relations to the languages and peoples of the world. In gentle debates with Yoder scholars, I have often been asked to provide historical evidence that counters Yoder's claims on this and other matters. While there are indeed historical documents to cite,<sup>32</sup> I add that part of the problem is Yoder's tendency to read his theological interpretations into the documentary evidence, closing down the capacities of textual and historical sources to warrant readings that compete with his. While he acknowledges the difference between evidence and interpretation, he tends to presume that, with sufficient effort, scholars can identify the one interpretation that is clearly most consistent with the evidence. I believe this is a category error, since evidence and interpretation belong to different genres of inquiry, with different implications for performance and for testing.

A sixth example illustrates the difference. There is strong historical evidence for Yoder's claims that rabbinic Judaism was decentralized and "anti-nationalist." But how he understands these claims is not a matter of evidence alone. He treats these characteristics as if, strictly following the law of excluded middle, each were atomic (or elemental) and could only be affirmed or denied. He thereby excludes the possibility that each characteristic names a broad range of possible meanings and thus of different historical phenomena. In this case, he treats the rabbis' decentralized practices as if they were—on formal, albeit not linguistic, grounds—identical to those of the Free Church. All my criticisms of Yoder can be reduced to this syllogism: a) Both rabbinic Judaism and the Free Church resist being defined by the set of choices that includes strict landedness, non-pacifism, centralization, anti-missionizing,

and so on. b) Yoder assumes that this resistance is equivalent to logical negation within a binary system (one defined by the law of excluded middle): so that we can infer from "a" that both rabbinic Judaism and the Free Church affirm the set of choices that includes strict non-landedness, pacifism, de-centralization, missionizing, and so on. c) But Yoder's assumption is not warranted. "a" is consistent with the inference ("b") that rabbinic Judaism and the Free Church resist these initial choices in different ways. The rabbinic way, alone, assigns three values to each of the choices: affirmed, denied, *or* denied only in a strict sense, but affirmed in an indeterminate sense. Thus, Yoder has not shown that rabbinic Judaism denies the following set of choices: dual states of living on the land and not on the land, avoiding violence and accommodating violence, resisting national politics and accommodating it, accepting proselytizing and conversion but resisting both global mission and the pursuit of a single religion of humanity. We have moved, indeed, from the challenges of some of Yoder's historical claims to the challenges of some of his hermeneutical practice.

*Yoder's (modest) tendency to conceptualism or non-Scriptural hermeneutics:* I have first addressed Yoder's readings of history only because he appeals to historiography as a foundation of his effort to repair the Jewish-Christian schism. My critique has been that, at times, he over-reads history by reading into it the conceptual framework of his Free Church vision and, moreover, by applying that framework in what I call "binary" or either/or terms: as if the evidence of history supports either the affirmation or denial of his conceptual framework and nothing else. I consider this a hermeneutical rather than a historical problem, because it concerns how the evidences of history are interpreted, not how they are collected. I am triply concerned about this problematic tendency in Yoder's work:

first, because it may generate some inaccurate claims; second, and most significantly, because it may militate directly against his efforts to enlist Scripture and scriptural hermeneutics as a resource for repairing modern conceptualism. If it does, then it challenges what is most hopeful in Yoder's work.

If I may explain. I trust in Yoder's work because I trust his effort to help repair Western secular rationalism and nationalism by appeal to the divine word disclosed in Scripture. I trust in his appeal to Jesus' Judaism not first because I need Yoder—and you—to be a friend to my people or my religion, but because the scriptural word that redeems us from secular rationalism is not just a banner or emblem or a set of good propositions but a dynamic life into which we may enter; and one irreducible element of this life is the reading and performative rereading of God's spoken word into our immediate context of life. I believe that, like other postliberal Christians, Yoder rediscovers the Jews only because he rediscovers the inseparability of gospel from the Old Testament narrative of the people Israel. Postliberal Christians read and performatively reread the gospel *as* itself a continual reading and performative rereading of this narrative of Israel. God's word is present to us only by way of such reading and rereading. That reading and rereading *is* Scripture's reparative hermeneutic which means that, for postliberal Christians, *it is* the source for repairing modern conceptualism. It is the pattern of this reading and rereading that rabbinic Jews and Mennonites may share. But I fear that Yoder may at times interrupt the pattern when—for reasons I must ask you to explain to me—he appears to freeze the hermeneutical relation into a clear-and-distinct, once-and-for-all construction, articulable in clear sentences and emblems such as “Jeremic Judaism,” “pacifist Judaism,” and many others. I do not at all fear the contents of these emblems. I fear only the conceptual finality of their form, for I fear that this is

precisely the form of secular Western rationalism rather than of the redemptive pattern of God's word among us. It is not the new wine I fear, but the absence of old skins. These conceptual forms are not the skins of Jacob, but of the secularized uses of Enlightenment thinking that bred nationalism along with a reduced hermeneutic of reason. I do not trust such skins.

*But I trust in Yoder!* As I will say again in my second lecture, I trust that, through humbly corrective readings of his work by Chris Huebner and others of your community, Yoder's words may indeed help restore the skins we wore as God created us and that we will wear as God recreates us ever anew.



## TWO

### BIBLICAL ISRAEL, RABBINIC JUDAISM, AND SOLA SCRIPTURA

*O God of Many Names, hear Our prayer.*

*I believe you may have divided us by your Will. For if not, why did you give us these many names and give us languages to receive them differently and live them differently? As you did with us at Babel, you may have done in Jerusalem as well. You sent us forth as more than one people in service to your name, but you also left with each of us signs of the unity of your identity: for this reason the Jews pray, in the end of days may your name be one. Without imposing this prayer on my hosts, O Lord, I pray that you vivify these signs in our midst. If you are not ready to receive us as one, then draw us one step closer to one as we shall You.*

**A**t the end of my first lecture, I asked if you would join me in Jewish-Christian dialogue and, more specifically, dialogue between the Free Church and its Jewish conversation partner. In this lecture, I want to explore the conditions of such a dialogue more precisely.<sup>1</sup> If you agree with Yoder that Christian-Jewish theological conversation is urgent, who is it that you are engaging in conversation? What do you share with us so that you can build on it for deeper dialogue? What are the differences that render your dialogue a truly dynamic dialogue? In this lecture, I want to place another portrait of rabbinic Judaism alongside the two portraits Yoder

offers: as noted in Lecture One, one was the portrait Yoder rejected (the “standard” view of rabbinic Judaism as anti-Christian); the other was the portrait of “what could have been” (early Judaism as highly plural, with a strong tendency toward something like the Free Church). The portrait I shall offer is of a classic rabbinic Judaism that serves as theological dialogue partner to those forms of Christianity that are, like the Free Church I observe, neither very similar to this Judaism nor opposed to it. I believe that all the Jewish denominations today derive from classical rabbinic Judaism: one indication that the literary sources and inherited practices of this Judaism are polyvalent—that is, they have the capacity to generate, and in that sense warrant, several streams of beliefs and practices. I believe that the portrait I offer is warranted by the sources but that there are other warranted portraits as well. I recommend this portrait to you as the warranted portrait that, I believe, best responds to the failings of secular rationalism in the West and in forms of Judaism that have sought to join the secular West. This form of rabbinic Judaism is therefore an appropriate dialogue partner to postliberal Christianity, which, as I suggested in Lecture One, responds in analogous ways to the failings of modern secular rationalism.

I have suggested that virtually all of today’s Jewish denominations inherit the rabbinic Judaism that was not yet fully articulated in the first century but achieved its full voice through the compositions of a vast literature over four to five centuries. The notion of full articulation over time already challenges one of Yoder’s assumptions: he assumed that “getting back” to the original voice of Judaism means getting back to a singular religious vision, clear and distinct to the individual human mind, that he called the Jeremiad vision of exilic Judaism. But I know of no Judaism, prophetic, first century or rabbinic that lent the individual human mind such clarity of individual

vision. The great contemporary Talmudist, David Halivni, calls even Moses' revelation on Sinai a continuing revelation that was not completed until the work of Ezekiel in Exile and of Ezra after he returned to Jerusalem in the fifth century BCE. Metaphorically, we might say that God's voice is so broad it may take 500 years for a human community to hear each word God utters—or maybe it takes much longer.

I am not saying that the individual mind has no role to play in receiving God's word, but only that, for classical Judaism, the human mind is not what the modern, Enlightenment West says it is. In the oft-cited image penned by René Descartes in the early seventeenth century, this is the *ego cogito*, the individual mind as a self-contained substance whose existence is defined by its thoughts alone, freed from attachments to body and from relations to others except as objects of vision and examination. Such a mind thinks necessarily in either-or terms: the truths it sees are strictly separated from what is false, and each characteristic of truth is sharply distinguished from every other. For classical Judaism, however, the mind—called *lev* (לב) or *heart*—is the heart-mind, not just cognition but an activity of lightness that comes to lightness only after passing through all the body and the emotions as well as our memories and thoughts—and not just our *own* isolated body/mind but also the parts of us that live in relation to others around us today, and in the past, and in the future. We read, for example, in Deut. 6:5, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,” (*veyahavta et adoshem elohekha b'khol levav'kha*) and this is achieved when combined with “all your soul and strength” (*u'vekhol nafshekha u'vekhol me'odekha*).

Here the heart is the seat of belief, judgment and caring; in Ex. 31:6, it is also the seat of wise skills: “I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have commanded you”: “craftsmen” here is *chakham lev*, “the wise of heart, or

skillful.” The rabbinic sages maintained these senses of heart/mind, as in this humorous observation in TB *Baba Batra* 12b<sup>2</sup>: “Rabbah said: before a person eats and is satisfied he has two hearts (meaning he is of two minds); after he eats he has one.<sup>3</sup> Finally, my favorite medieval pietist, ibn Paquda, titled his most famous book, *chovot ha levavot*, “Duties of the Heart,” meaning ways to serve God through the heart/mind in addition and in relation to service performed through the limbs or body, *ibarim* (איברים).<sup>4</sup>

For the rabbinic sages, to think is thus to do something both within one’s individuality *and* at the same time in deep relation to God and to other humans. It is also something that usually succeeds only when undertaken in community with others—through back and forth dialogues among persons and among ideas. My mentor Max Kadushin, of blessed memory, thus referred to “The Rabbinic Mind” as a place, at once, of interpersonal relations, of Godly values, and of the concrete and context-specific judgments of individual human beings.<sup>5</sup>

What, then, does the individual heart/mind *do* in relation to others? Many things of course, but our focus today is on the activity of receiving, interpreting, and applying God’s word—for that is the activity Yoder revisits in undoing the Jewish-Christian schism. Both complementing and, at times, hoping to complete Yoder’s account, I will examine *six* key features of classical Rabbinic Judaism as God’s continuing revelation to and through the people Israel.

### ***The feature of plain sense and interpreted meaning***

I begin with a biblical text that Yoder does not seem to like (and there is already one challenge to note: Yoder practices highly selective reading; my classical Judaism does not promote selective reading but, rather, highly interpretive reading). The text addresses the history of Israel’s return from the First

Exile in Babylonia—a return that Yoder objects to, against his Jeremiac call for perpetual exile. The prophet/scribe and Persian appointee, Ezra, begins to re-teach the Mosaic Torah to a generation of Jerusalemites who had forgotten much of it and who now spoke the Aramaic of Babylonia (and later of the Talmud) rather than the Hebrew of Scripture:

Ezra opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above the people; as he opened it, the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with hands upraised. Then they bowed their heads. . . . Jeshua, Bani. . . and the Levites explained the Teaching to the people, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense, so they understood the reading. (Neh. 8:4-8. See Appendix 2b)

The Talmudist David Weiss Halivni argues that classical Judaism lent Ezra a status near, or in ways equal to, that of Moses (Yoder objects to this, since Ezra is tied in his view to an Israelite nation).<sup>6</sup> There is a Talmudic tradition, for example, that the Torah texts transmitted by the priestly scribes to Ezra were imperfect; that Ezra instituted a process of restoring those texts, and that the dots that appear over ten verses in the Torah (*eser nekudot*) mark places where Ezra did not yet carry out the revision.<sup>7</sup> According to this tradition, Ezra's corrections were transmitted as "oral Torah": "for Ezra had dedicated himself to seek [interpret, *l'drosh* לדרש] the Torah of the Lord so as to observe it, and to teach laws and rules to Israel" (Ez. 7:10). In Halivni's reading, this text about Ezra illustrates an early form of the later rabbinic distinction between plain sense and interpreted meaning.

In the *Jerusalem Talmud*, but especially in the *Babylonian Talmud*, plain sense meant the place of any text within the flow of the Biblical passage or book as a whole: the Hebrew for plain

sense, *peshat*, means literally spread out—and this connotes both a surface meaning (like oil on the surface of water) and broad contextual meaning. Ezra provides a name for the interpreted sense: the verb is *l'daresh*—literally, perhaps, to dig up and, in this sense, to draw up the meaning that lies underneath. Note that, in our text, the Levites helped Ezra teach Torah by spreading out among the people and not only translating (*l'targem*) but also “giving the sense” (*l'drosh*). The work of the biblical scholar, Michael Fishbane, suggests that this sense is more than plain sense.

Fishbane devoted his lengthiest book to studying how the Bible interprets itself: for example, how Deut. 4:16b-19 (“be careful . . . not to make for yourselves a sculptured image. . . : the form of a man or a woman, the form of any beast on earth . . .”) reapplies the creation imagery of Gen. 1:20-27: “and God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.” Fishbane suggests that we can imagine how one such passage interprets another one. In this case, “the Deuteronomist . . . establishes a distinct rhetorical nexus between the themes of creation and idolatry . . . , [reinforcing] the . . . [theological claim] that idolatry is a sin against the creator and his transcendence.”<sup>8</sup> Fishbane suggests that almost every passage of written Torah can be re-read as interpreting another.<sup>9</sup> As the example from Deuteronomy shows, such interpretation is not plain sense: in this case, since Deuteronomy’s reference to idolatry is not there in the plain sense of Genesis but reflects concerns that later readings brought to and read out of the earlier text. In this way, the teachings of Torah appear first as interpretive judgments about other teachings rather than as judgments about the world-itself

beyond the text. In light of Fishbane's study, the rabbis' notion of an interpreted sense appears to continue rather than intrude on the Bible's own tendency to display meaning by way of re-interpretation. To return to Halivni, this means that Torah is received only through Israel's interpretive practices of God's word, as they are exemplified in the interpretive practices of the rabbinic sages and completed only when we enact them, as well, within our own communities of interpretation and practice. God's teaching thus appears to us in the relationship that binds the plain sense of Torah to its interpreted sense.

This brings us to the second and third elements of God's continuing revelation to Israel: b) the dynamic relation between everyday Scripture study and studying Scripture as revelation; c) deep anguish as the context for studying Scripture as revelation.

I want first to introduce you to a notion that I have not seen in Yoder's work but that seems fully compatible with it. For classical Judaism, receiving the words of Scripture *as* revelation is not the same as Bible study. Revelatory reading is a rare, rather than daily occurrence, conditioned not by the joy of seeking God's word each happy morning but by the terrible affliction of fearing that what we took to be the meaning of that word is now lost. To search for the light of God's word in the midst of some crisis or affliction: that is to search for revelation. To catch any glimpse of that light in that darkness: that is to begin to share once again in the ongoing revelation of God's word, and to share in it is not merely to return somewhere else— either in the people Israel's past or some pace in an unchanging heaven or future—but to share in the renewal of God's word here and now in a way that affirms God's word as it has always been but that also shows its face in a way that has never before been seen. The prophets sing of this renewal: "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure

before me,” declares YHVH, “so will your name and descendants endure” (Is. 66:22). And the rabbinic sages gather around *this renewal* as the generative source of their own Judaism, which is not the Judaism of any past but the Judaism that is there, in their day, reborn out of the ashes of the affliction and destruction they faced and from which they are now redeemed through the light of this renewal alone.

The best text I know to illustrate this comes from a very brief but haunting midrash in the *Mishnah* (*Sanhedrin* 10:1)—the first canon of rabbinic interpretation after the destruction of the Second Temple (see Appendix 3b). The midrash begins with the text of Is. 60:21: “Your people shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land forever; they are a shoot of My planting, the work of My hands in whom I shall be glorified.” Let us assume, with both biblical scholars and rabbinic interpreters, that until very late—in the book of Daniel—Hebrew Scriptures makes no reference to any world other than this. If so, the plain sense of this text would appear to promise that the people Israel will forever inhabit the land of Israel, enjoying there the glory of God. Imagine, then, that you are one of the rabbinic sages reading this text after the Destruction of the Second Temple and, most likely, after the expulsion from Jerusalem and much of Israel after 135 CE. How do you feel when you read it? Yes, I assume you would find the text distressing and that you face something like these two choices: either to mistrust the veracity of the Bible, God forbid, or to believe that it is true but means something other than it appears to. The latter choice would represent an interpreted meaning, or midrash. I do not believe that the rabbinic sages thought of midrash as readerly collusion in the postmodern sense—that is, as exegesis in service to the reader’s needs. Following Halivni, I believe instead that it was readerly collusion in the rabbinic sense. This means, first, that the plain sense of God’s word was



not legislative: it did not by itself command the belief and practice that would offer paths of *imitatio dei*. It means, second, that the legislative force of God's word is displayed only when occasions arise for a community of readers both to seek and be shown the force of that word for them—at that time and place. When received, as the sages say, *b'et ratson*—at a time pleasing to God—this is a display of Scripture's interpreted meaning. Inspired by Halivni, and also Franz Rosenzweig and others, I am calling this the revealed meaning of Scripture, as distinguished from the plain sense of every day study.<sup>10</sup>

The midrash appears to read Is. 60:21 in just such a way. The midrash is displayed in a single phrase: "All Israel have a portion in the world-to-come, as it is written, 'Your people shall all . . .'" The Mishnah reads Isaiah, in other words, as referring not to this world of tribulation and exile but to the future, messianic world to come. In short, this reading departs from the plain sense and provides a meaning that preserves the truth of the Bible after Israel's exile by re-assigning "the land" from this world to the next. This is, furthermore, just the kind of reading that Yoder receives as the Jeremiac truth of classical Judaism: namely, the transformation of Israel's landedness from theopolitics to eschatology. Since Yoder has the Mishnah on his side on this matter, it may surprise you to hear me—in a few minutes—challenge Yoder. I will do this not because I challenge the Mishnah, but because of something I said just a minute ago but that you may not have noticed: I said that the legislative force of God's word is displayed only when occasions arise for a community of readers both to seek and be shown the force of that word for them—at that time and place. This means that a midrash reveals God's will for a specific time and place, not for all time. At another time, for example after the Shoah, God's will may appear differently. Defining Judaism as strictly exilic appears to freeze God's will

by seeking to define classical Judaism once and for all.

Another text illustrates how unfrozen the rabbis were: a second text from the Mishnah that registers the full impact of our first text. This excerpt from *Mishnah Pirke Avot*—popularly called “Ethics of the Fathers” (see Appendix 3b) was later included in the rabbinic daily prayer book, since it is traditionally read afternoons between Passover and the Feast of Weeks. I mention all that because the prayer book introduces the text of Ethics of Fathers with that haunting midrash we just studied. So, imagine once again, you are among those rabbinic sages just after exile. The midrash has revealed to you the setting of your new Judaism: no longer in the land of Israel, but where? The answer of *Pirke Avot* is that this is no longer a question of place but of relations among the people Israel and between the people and God’s revealed world. The new Judaism redefines the relation of Jews to the canon of Scripture, whose commandments belong no longer to the plain sense but will be revealed only in the interpreted sense, and that also means they will be continually revealed and revealed anew in each setting of interpretation. Here is the text:

Moses received the Torah on Mt. Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, the Prophets to the members of the Great Assembly. . . . The pairs, the rabbis. (*Mishnah Pirke Avot* 1:1)

Like Acts 7-9, but much more briefly, it appears to be a genealogy of the reception of God’s word. Do you notice anything odd about the genealogy? It begins on Mt Sinai, so we know it is talking about God’s words to Moses, the Torah and commandments. But look at the line of transmission: yes, Moses transmitted this Torah to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and yes, the prophets have a significant place. But where are the Priests and Scribes? We know that the physical scrolls of the Torah

were maintained by the scribal priests and stored in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. But there is no reference to this part of the transmission, which moves right from elders to prophets to the legislators of the Sanhedrin or assembly in Second Temple days and thence to the line that generates the rabbinic sages who composed this Mishnah.

What is going on? The dominant scholarly reading of this passage is that it introduces a distinction of plain and interpreted Torah right into the genealogy of the reception of God's word. The plain sense is identified with what the rabbis call the *torah she b'khtav*, the written torah—and that is what the priests and scribes maintained. But this genealogy is not about that, but about what they called the torah *she b'al peh*, the oral Torah, the torah of midrash, and this cannot be maintained in a physical text because it is unpredictable. It is known only after it is revealed and it is revealed anew in each stage of transmission. This is why I agree but also disagree with Yoder on the midrash of Israel's leaving the land of Israel. Yes, our midrash reveals a change in the land. But there is more than that: our Mishnah reveals that there is also a change in the book. Revelation is no longer sealed in the written Torah but continues beyond the plain sense of what is written, breaking through the face of Torah on every occasion of anguish, when the people Israel face loss or destruction and call on the name of the Lord to ask "why?" and "what now?" and Torah is renewed whenever they are answered in that time and place with a new word, new heaven, and new earth that says to them then and there. *This* is the meaning of my written word for you here and now. So Judaism of the first and second century did not only leave the land of Israel; it also left the landed fixity of the written Torah – and those two departures mean that we cannot predict what the next meaning of the written Torah will be in any here and now. So my challenge to Yoder is not that Israel's life is more fixed than he says, but that it is even less fixed. And if classical Judaism is also the Free Church then I say to you the

Free Church would also be less fixed, even less. And if it is less fixed, it cannot be captured in the conceptual formulations of mere humans, even if they are the greatest human theologians we have. Every destruction of our present lives may also signal a transformation of our religion, again and again. That for me is one lesson of the fact that the plain sense speaks revelation through the interpreted sense and that the interpreted sense is interpreted in times of great affliction and loss.

The words I just offered remind me of words by Chris Huebner in *A Precarious Peace*.<sup>11</sup> So, before turning to the next element of continuing revelation, I want to read a few of his words to see if indeed his reading of Yoder may suggest the dialogue we have in response to my concerns about Yoder.

I will offer two illustrations. The second part of his book is named "Dislocating Identity." On one level, the title signals Yoder's exilic vision: no permanent land for God's people, no permanent identity. On another level, I believe Huebner takes Yoder's vision further than it appears within the plain sense of the *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. You have already read my complaint that Yoder made a permanent identity out of dislocation itself, freezing exile into a permanent place. I hear Huebner's words as answers to me. Consider first his critique of the contemporary philosopher Charles Taylor. Huebner applauds Taylor's own critique of the vision-centered and thus concept-centered focus of modern philosophy and theology, as opposed to the relation and practice-centered focus of Christianity. But then Huebner chides Taylor for not taking his critique far enough. He shares Taylor's concern "to shift our central metaphors from representation to participation,"<sup>12</sup> but he chides Taylor for clinging, nonetheless, to a classical modern concern to preserve the integrity and stability of the individuated self, which is a self formalized through too much theory.<sup>13</sup> Against this modern theory-laden model of the sovereign self, Huebner praises the "multi-focused self" as it is portrayed in

films by Atom Egoyan, such as *Exotica* (1994).<sup>14</sup> For Huebner, Egoyan's films illustrate how, ironically, the self is destabilized by its own efforts to capture its identity. The antidote is exile, diaspora in the world, which means, as I read it, to allow one's self the identities life brings to it, without seeking to limit, redefine, collect or totalize them.<sup>15</sup> As displayed in the chapters that follow, the prototype for such a self is the martyr's self, whose identity is revealed through the release of self to the other: the identity, in other words, of Christ on the cross.<sup>16</sup>

My question to both Huebner and Yoder is this: can the martyr's self become a frozen identity as well, or does it also signify a kenotic giving up of pre-determined identities, including that of the one who literally dies for the word? Huebner offers several very encouraging responses. Responding to the Radical Orthodox theologian John Milbank, he argues that Mennonite epistemology, or theory of knowledge, "resists closure, refusing the lie of the total perspective and the search for a purified form of speech."<sup>17</sup> He says that Yoder's peace epistemology, for example, "assumes that the truth about God is not something that can be possessed or secured through some . . . theory of justification. It can only be witnessed."<sup>18</sup> For Yoder, furthermore, we cannot seek to "ensure that history comes out right"; we cannot theorize or seek to master the flow of things by imposing "theoretical dualisms" or "abstract principles."<sup>19</sup> Following the Jeremiad model of Judaism, we cannot "reify and privilege the world's terms" in any effort to take charge of the world." We must, instead, be patient, responding to different things in the different ways that are called for then and there, rather than "speeding things up" through a quick conceptual account of the whole: the lay of the whole land all at once.<sup>20</sup>

I am moved by each one of these statements by Huebner, and I also find support for each one in the classical Jewish

understanding of continuing revelation. Continuing revelation means that we cannot even trust our understanding of the written word of Scripture—even of the Ten Commandments—for their commanded meaning is not disclosed other than in the place we inhabit in response to our ills and afflictions.<sup>21</sup>

So, we are agreed on these principles. My only challenge to Yoder—and now to Huebner as well—is whether the *Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* is obedient to these principles, or if, as I fear, Yoder was too speedy at times in his reading of classical Judaism, too ambitious to draw together a foundational and total vision of the original Jewish Christianity and too tempted therefore—even he—to construct a conceptual answer to his questions about Christian origins. How, then, do even the greatest theologians resist the human temptation to concept building?

Within this lecture, we are in fact the middle of reviewing a rabbinic response, which is that we must rely on God's word. But how do we receive it? It has been given in the gift called Scripture. But how do we receive Scripture? By studying its plain sense and then waiting until the time God chooses, when our anguish begins to open up the locally revealed meaning of God's word. But how do we study the plain sense and how and where do we wait on the interested sense? This brings us to the next two features of continuing revelation: e) the presence of the interpretive community *within* the process of revelation; f) the presence of finite, individual interpreters and judgments within this community.

The significant amount of literature we have already examined may suffice to illustrate these two features, and I am confident that both of these are also fully affirmed by Yoder and by Huebner. In fact, I will begin the rabbinic account with Huebner's account of Yoder. First:

Although Yoder often emphasizes that his conception of the

church is grounded in Scripture, he nevertheless denies that the biblical text is an autonomous entity that somehow stands alone.<sup>22</sup> . . . Rather, he claims that the Bible is ecclesiological, mediated, such that it can be said to have meaning, let alone exist in the first place, within the context of the church . . . [For Yoder,] the church exists as a “hermeneutical community” in which the Bible is read and appropriated by the gathered community.<sup>23</sup>

Huebner then cites a Yoder passage he finds “reminiscent of the reader-response criticism associated with Stanley Fish: “To speak of the Bible apart from people reading it and apart from the specific questions those people reading need to answer is to do violence to the very purposes for which we have been given the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>24</sup>

Amen: a rabbinic Amen, for the words of Fish, Huebner and Yoder speak directly to the classical rabbinic manner of continually receiving God’s revelation. I have placed a few more rabbinic proof texts in the Appendix, but I do not need to review them since there is no issue here that we need to debate. In the brief words of Hillel from *Pirke Avot 2:5: al tifrosh min ha tsibbur*, “do not separate yourself from the community.” We might say that the one who interprets Scripture is the local community of rabbinic readers.

I believe we also have nothing to debate with regard to the next feature of continuing revelation: the irreducible place of individual readers and individual judgments within the community of readers. Here is one case where we should be allowed to stereotype the Jews. It is true what they say: that any group of three Jews has three leaders, ten Jews ten leaders. Here again, Yoder’s Free Church vision of classical Judaism is the same as mine. Judaism, he writes is decentralized:

First, there is no central Temple: Jews gather wherever they are, in synagogues and houses of study; second, there is no

priesthood: as the rabbinic sages put it, “every man a priest”—and more recently, every woman tends to be one as well. In fact, in many ways, the central Jewish place of worship is not the synagogue but the home, of which the altar is the dining room table; third, suffering matters.<sup>25</sup> I mention this under the theme of individuality because it is the individual, *per se*, who suffers, and whose suffering becomes a center of concern for the local community.

Now, I will add a few more features that Yoder does not mention but should support his reading. First, suffering, as we have already seen, conditions the reception of revelation. In my own reading, a condition of peace leaves the plain sense mostly unchanged, but conditions of unpeace—of anguish and loss—open the interpreted sense. Once again, the individual’s cries define what we mean by anguish, and the individual reader is the one who first speaks the midrash, or new possibility of meaning, that the community may come to recognize as revelation. “The Israelites groaned in their bondage. . . . And God heard their cries and took notice” (Ex. 2): that is the prototype of all Jewish suffering and response. “I have come down to rescue them. . . . I will send you” (Ex. 3): the consequence of God’s call to Moses is one of Israel’s defining transformations, this time from a family who worshiped God to a people who enter history bound in covenant to God.

Second, in rabbinic Judaism, I believe smaller anguishes offer openings, in God’s grace, to smaller adjustments in the meaning of Jewish religion, but major anguishes open major changes. Without anguish—I am afraid and I wish it were not true—there has been no revelation to Israel; and the context of every anguish has been embodiment, landedness somewhere, and a deep relation to the land of Israel in particular. The only alternative for Jews appears to have been spiritualism and otherworldliness, not a prototypically Jewish route to take.



Appendix I to this lecture provides a series of “texts of destruction and of redemption,” scriptural and early rabbinic records of ancient Israel’s events of “major anguish.” I shall refer to only a few of them, but I hope readers will look through the list before reading the rest of the lecture. Even though this degree of anguish may mark, say, only one percent of what history has shown the Jews, this one percent appears to have shaped some dominant trends in Jewish belief. Among these are the following beliefs about the anguish that accompanies revelation:

*The anguish is embodied:* No redemption, each one of which is revelation, has come to a quiet scholar in a place of quiet meditation, unless the scholar has participated in and now draws into mind the anguish of Jewish life.

*The divine word is known in embodiment,* and this embodiment brings thinking, reading, and writing into an anguished relation to flesh and pain and sociality and politics and the physical world.

*The anguish is embodied in relation to landedness:* Midrash and thus revelation takes place only in the finite places in which the community lives; in that sense, revelation is “landed,” or delivered to someone (and received by someone, including some community) in some place. Midrash and thus revelation is displayed through the concrete details of life lived in that place. One cannot have it both ways: if revelation is continual, then it refers to the specific places in which it is embodied, which means that there is no way to speak of revelation in general, independently of where and when, or to identify the words of revelation with clear-and-distinct concepts or principles that apply to all places at all times. Clarity is a local and landed and temporal thing. The alternative is to claim the power to read revelation as a direct source of articulable, universal claims—but, then, to refer to revelation only as a

once-and-for-always event whose character is not disclosed locally and, in that sense, not embodied or landed. As I understand them, both Second Temple and rabbinic Judaism take the route less clear: revelation is landed, but landedness is not a clear concept or principle that we can understand in general, apart from the particulars of life in some place and time.

*Land of Israel:* For these classical Judaism, landedness someplace is measured in relation to the land of Israel. One solution—which is Yoder's and Neture Karta's—is to insert a strict dichotomy between Jewish life in this world, in exile, and the world to come in the distant future, back in the land. But such a dichotomy appears only when rabbinic writings are re-stated in conceptual terms and, thus, in strictly human terms. In the actual practice of Jewish life and of Jewish readings of Scripture and re-readings of midrash, the world to come is not only in the future but very much here in the present. For the rabbinic sages, the twenty-five hours of Sabbath is of the character of the world to come now; so are the holy days; so is each moment in prayer, each moment in studying Torah for its own sake, and each moment of practicing true loving-kindness, true care for others, true fulfillment of each commandment, true love, true relation: *all* of these are not only anticipations of what will always be in the world to come, but they are also within themselves the fullness of the world to come *now*, not as mere hope, not as anticipation but as embodied reality. If so, may Yoder not say that each moment of that kind *is* itself life in the land of Israel—but lived in Brooklyn, or Antwerp or Babylonia? Yes, in one sense it is, but that sense stands by itself only if you make a concept out of it. If it is understood in its direct relation to God's presence in the community of Israel, that sense has no sense without a literal understanding of how this land where I stand today relates to conditions in the land of Israel right now. My obligation as a

member of the covenant of Israel is to care for that land. And when I do not, I fail that commandment and in that moment fail to live in the end time, which means I am not truly landed here *or* there. And how do I care for that land? Yoder may say I care for it by staying out of it, since its material presence is not for me in this world – and if it is for anybody, it is for Palestinians to make a nation on it. If Yoder says that, I must say, oh dear, that is a very human claim to make. Even more human if you presume that, when I disagree with you, I am somehow making the opposite human claim. No, I do not claim the opposite. I claim neither. I read Scripture, and Jewish Scripture refers to Israel's responsibility for life in the land, as does classical rabbinic literature. That responsibility is not fulfilled *per se* by acquiring political hegemony in the land. Nor is it fulfilled in the opposite way, simply by waiting in exile for the messiah. It is fulfilled through whatever ways the God of Israel indicates through God's continual revelation to us. To understand those ways is to engage in a practice of study that is as perennial, continual, as is revelation, renewed in each new place and time. Therefore, "Ben Bag-Bag used to say of the Torah: Turn it and turn it again, for everything is in it. Pour over it, and wax gray and old over it" Stir not from it for you can have no better rule than it. (*Pirke Avot* 5:25). We cannot know before each study what the study will yield. We do not know once and for all what landedness in the land of Israel means for each time and place.

Will Yoder's Free Church peers and students join me and my Jewish peers in such study – examining testimonies and sources of this continuing disclosure? Will you join us and, without predetermined answers, wait on these sources and testimonies, turn them over and over, engage in dialogue about them, and see what we shall learn?

I pray you will. And I pray that our dialogue remains in

anguish so that the word we both hear will not be the plain sense alone—any plain sense—but an interpreted sense, and ultimately the interpreted sense that begins to reveal God's presence.

## THREE

### ABRAHAMIC SCRIPTURAL REASONING AND/IN THE MENNONITE WORLD MISSION

*Hinei mah tov umah nayim shevet achim gam yachad.*

#### *Psalm 133*

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

How good and pleasant it is  
when brethren dwell in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,

running down on the collar of his robes!

It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,  
life forevermore.

#### *Ephesians 4*

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.*

*Unity in difference*

Shall brethren dwell together in unity? If so, is this possible only if, in the time between the times, they fully share one body and one Spirit? In different words, does unity require identity, or in this world—*ha-olam hazeh* (העולם הזה)—can we hope first for unity in difference?

In the first two lectures, I introduced words of Jewish-Mennonite dialogue as one illustration of unity in difference. In the next two lectures, I seek to challenge Jews and Mennonites, especially those seeking Jewish-Mennonite dialogue, to entertain what may be both the greatest threat and the great hope for this dialogue: the case of disunity in difference in Israel-and-Palestine. In the fourth lecture, I will raise the question, literally, in the context of a proposal for Muslim-Jewish-Christian, theo-political dialogue. In this third lecture, I raise the question symbolically as a way of identifying the eschatological character of both Jewish-Mennonite and intra-Abrahamic dialogue. In these ways, we shall arrive at what has, all along, been my central concern in these lectures: to celebrate Yoder's call to repair the Jewish-Christian schism if and when it is a call for unity in difference, but to wave some warning flags if and when this tends toward a call for unity in non-difference. This is the final measure I will offer of the strengths and challenges in Yoder's approach to dialogue. I challenge his approach when, on occasion, it appears to consider only two alternatives: what I will call "difference in difference" vs. "unity in non-difference." I celebrate his approach when it celebrates Jewish-Mennonite dialogue as a "unity in difference." This is the kind of unity of which I hear the psalmist sing (in Ps. 133). Of which kind of unity does Paul preach in Ephesians 4? And which kind of unity would you pursue if you joined me in Jewish-Mennonite dialogue? In dialogue about Israel-and-Palestine?

In this lecture, I shall examine three contexts for addressing these questions: 1) Chris Huebner's model of patience, re-introduced here as a source of guidelines for the pursuit of unity in difference; 2) Sabbath observance as a source of Jewish wisdom about unity in difference; 3) Inter-Abrahamic scriptural study as a setting for conducting inter-religious dialogue on the model of unity in difference.

*How impatience forces the either/or choices  
of human finitude*

In Lectures One and Two, I wrote of my affection for the theology of John Howard Yoder and of my appreciation for his deep opening to Judaism. Trusting that dynamic and intimate dialogue not only joins but also maintains differences, I also spoke of my concern that his cure for the Jewish-Christian schism may on occasion rush prematurely toward the literal unity that I believe is appropriate only for the world to come, the final end-time, rather than for this time between the times. I sought to isolate specific characteristics of this rush to the end, so that we could debate them and, unless you persuade me otherwise, so that we could remove them from any plans for Jewish-Mennonite engagement.

I want to restate three of these characteristics now because I believe they may help us identify what would in fact impede our efforts in this present world to help brethren dwell together in unity. *One characteristic is haste*: rushing to resolve disputes and differences as quickly as possible, all at once. One public illustration is the Clinton Administration's effort, at the very end of President Clinton's term in office, to rush a solution to Israel-Palestine. Such a rush may have been largely well-intentioned, but the haste may also have been a sign that the resolution would serve the Administration's own interests as well as those of peace—in this case, its desire to go out with

a political triumph. As may be expected, the Administration's effort failed.

*A second characteristic is conceptualism:* As we learned yesterday from Chris Huebner's study, the tissue of broken relations—like the tissue of our fleshly wounds—either heals one cell at a time or it does not heal. Healing in this sense always moves at the pace of our material, creaturely being. That being has reason and a measure—*ratio*—but it is the measure given only by the Creator, not by individuated reason, which remains creaturely and thus fleshly, made of protoplasmic cells and not angelic ether. In the words of Job, “To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his” (Job 12:13). Not that God hides God's wisdom from us:

“Come, let us reason together,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” (Is. 1:18)

But the grammar of God's reasoning is the grammar of creation and of revelation—the logic of Scripture; and Scripture speaks at its own pace. In Chris Huebner's teaching, this is the pace of waiting and humility. To insist on a quicker pace is to insist that life—in this case, healing—go as we desire rather than as it is given to us. This is to direct our attention to the world as we would conceive it, rather than as it is created: in other words, to seek the world of our creaturely conceptions, rather than this one (*olam hazeh*). A philosophic name for this choice is “conceptualism,” or choosing to measure the world and others by way of our concepts rather than of God's word. In Martin Buber's famous account, the language of divine speech is the language of intimate relations, I and Thou (*Ich und Du*); the language of merely human speech is the language of objects, I and It: each other seen as the object only of our own desires, intentions and cognitions: our own creaturely concepts (*Begriffen*)—our own grasping, *greifen*.<sup>1</sup>



*A third characteristic is clarity:* As individuals, we call our own concepts clear because we see the world through them; they seem to be windows, displaying the world before our own eyes as it really is. It is very difficult indeed to divest ourselves of the habit of confusing what-is-clear-to-us with what would be clear to all creatures at the end of time when the Creator transforms all our eyes into windows to God's word and will. In the words of 1 Cor. 13:12, "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." In this world now, we see only what fits the creaturely measure God has granted us. To demand that others speak and reason with us *clearly* is to demand that they speak in terms of *our* own finite measure – whether the "we" here means each of us individually or, as in the Enlightenment notion of clarity, it means we of our class or nation or civilization or species.

I believe that it is sinful to demand clarity of this kind, because it suggests our own clarity is that of the Creator, and to confuse creaturely self and Creator is to approach the sin of idolatry. For this reason, I also associate hastiness with a *fourth and most disturbing characteristic: violence*. Peace offered through the language of individual concepts is peace spoken through individual desires and grasping. This cannot be peace, however much it may express our desire for it. It cannot be peace, because peace, *shalom*, refers to *sh'lemut*, "wholeness," or the oneness that comes with completion and fullness: "oneness" in the sense of fullness, the character of that which is no longer divided into parts or separated, one part from the whole. To seek what we individually desire, however, is to seek what cannot be whole, since it is the object of some individual, creaturely conception and thus represents one object and not another. If our desire is *for* "universal peace" this names, nonetheless, the object of some individual conception,

whose individuality, alone, testifies to its incompleteness. Its existence entails separation and thus disunity: the separation between a concept and its object, between the present-tense of the activity of desire and the future-tense of its object, between this world and the one we would replace it with, and between this singular conception and another possible one.

Because the fact of this desire (for peace) is itself not-peace, I must recognize that this desire shares something with the desire to rule-over or oppress others. The two very different desires share the capacity to separate. Because separation—of, for example, a concept from its object, or one self from other—is a pre-condition of violence, the desire for peace bears within itself a pre-condition for violence. To be sure, I am not suggesting that this desire is violent: only that it, innocently and unintentionally but tragically, carries in its formal structure instruments that could be employed for the sake of violence as well as for peace.

I believe the lesson is that our individual desires and reasonings are not sources of peace. As features of creaturely life, they may indeed serve as instruments for peace, but in service to something other than our desires, conceptions and imaginings—we, that is, “whose imaginings are corrupt from birth” (*Noah*).<sup>2,3</sup> Applying Huebner’s model of patience, I would conclude that “peace sought in haste” corresponds to “peace sought by way of merely human desires,” and thus “peace sought through concepts,” and thus “peace sought in ways that generate separations (binary distinctions between concept and object, true and false, this world and the next. . .).” In the terms of this lecture, I conclude that peace sought in haste is peace that we—in our limited and corrupted imaginings—conceive to be “peace in unity” as opposed to “non-peace in non-unity.” Finite consciousness cannot imagine the “unity-in-difference” that, I assume, is the alternative mark of peace. We do not

initially recognize this as peace, because it appears outside the limits of our faculties of recognition (individual consciousness or imagination). We would therefore be introduced to this mark only by way of a desire other than our own, from which we could learn to desire and eventually recognize this, even though we could never “see” it within the scope of individual consciousness.

These are not surprising conclusions, of course, since the reason and condition for our Jewish-Mennonite dialogue is our overlapping passion for the divine word. We already recognize that peace is not by our word but God’s, our desire but God’s, our means but God’s, however much we may at times forget that we do not know and perceive God’s word as we know and perceive our world. One Jewish narrative of peace may go like this: The Torah, God’s word, was present at creation—displayed in the laws of the cosmos—but we humans proved ourselves incapable of comprehending enough of the cosmic law to comprehend how to live in peace in this cosmos and with one another. The Word had to enter directly into our lives. Rabbinic Judaism calls this entry *mattan torah*, the giving and the gift of God’s word and Instruction (*torah*), and, as discussed in Lecture Two, this Torah means both the plain sense of Holy Scripture but also the interpreted sense that guides day to day life and that therefore guides our work of worldly repair. The interpreted sense comes, however, by way of human interaction with the divine. It is therefore fallible: a means to peace in this world but not a perfect means, for which the sages await the end of days. I would not therefore conclude that the direct pathway to “the peace of unity in difference” is through the *halakhah* alone, since the human hand in religious law brings “separations” with it. Rabbinic law is a necessary but not sufficient condition for peace. Perfect peace—for all humanity and all creation—remains strictly an end-time

promise. But, say the sages, we do not wait until the end-time to learn directly what this means: to taste it and learn its ways. The “completion” of the law comes to us in God’s indwelling presence or *shekhinah* (שכינה), which may come to us directly without delay or mediation—although only within the limits of worldly time. Moments of indwelling come typically in prayer (any prayer), in acts of loving kindness and charity, in love; but the prototypical occasion is the weekly *shabbat*, or twenty-hours of Sabbath.

### *The unity of Sabbath*

Two favorite songs of mine—granted to greet *shabbat*—may help display the rabbis’ sense of God’s presence on this day:

#### *Shalom Aleikhem*

שלום עליכם מלאכי השׁרת מלאכי עליון  
ממלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא

*shalom aleikhem malakhei ha-sharet malakhei elyon mi-melekh  
malkhei ha-m'lakhim ha-kadosh baruch hu*

Peace upon you, O ministering angels, angels of the Exalted One—from the King who reigns over kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.

בוֹאֲכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מְלָאכֵי הַשְׁרָת מְלָאכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן  
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

*bo-achem l'shalom malakhei ha-shalom malachei elyon  
mi-melekh malkhei ha-m'lakhim ha-kadosh baruch hu*

May your coming be for peace, O angels of peace, angels of the Exalted One—from the King Who reigns over kings, the Holy One, Blessed is He.

בְּרִכּוֹנֵי לְשָׁלוֹם מְלָאכֵי הַשְׁרָת מְלָאכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן  
מִמֶּלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

*bar'khuni l'shalom malakhei ha-shalom malakhei elyon  
mi-melekh malchei ha-m'lakhim ha-kadosh baruch hu*  
Bless me for peace, O angels of peace, angels of the Exalted  
One—from the King Who reigns over kings, the Holy One,  
Blessed is He.

צִאֲתֶכֶם לְשָׁלוֹם מְלֹאֲכֵי הַשָּׁרֵת מְלֹאֲכֵי עֲלִיּוֹן  
מִמֶּלֶךְ מְלֹאֲכֵי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא

*tseit'khem l'shalom malakhei ha-shalom malakhei elyon  
mi melekh malekhei ham'lakhim ha-kadosh baruch hu*  
May your departure be to peace, O angels of peace, angels of  
the Exalted One—from the King Who reigns over kings, the  
Holy One, Blessed is He.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Yedid Nefesh*

Beloved of the soul, Compassionate Father  
*yedid nefesh av harachaman*, ידיד נפש אב הרחמן  
Draw Your servant to Your Will  
*meshokh avdekha el retsonekha*, משוך עבדך אל רצונך  
Then Your servant will hurry like a hart  
*ya'arutz avdeckah kemo ayal*, ירוץ עבדך כמו איל  
To bow before Your majesty;  
*yishtachave el mul hadarekha*, ישתחוה אל מול הדרך  
To him Your friendship will be sweeter  
*ye-erav lo yedidotekha*, יערב לו ידידותיך  
Than the dripping of the honeycomb and any taste.  
*minofet tsuf v'khol ta-am*.<sup>5</sup> מנפת צוף וכל טעם

The twenty five hours of *shabbat* (sundown to an hour after sundown, when stars appear) may serve as a prototype of God's peace.<sup>6</sup> This is, for one, the cosmic Sabbath: Sabbath that was there at the beginning of creation as the end of creation—Sabbath that is always there at the beginning, since the creation is renewed each day (*u'vetuvo mechadesh bekhoh yom tamid maaseh bereshit*: “for out of His goodness each day He renews

the order of creation”).<sup>7</sup> The cosmic Sabbath is in this sense a daily Sabbath, as part of that dimension of the day that, each day, reiterates the end as well as the beginning of creation. Sabbath is the time of cosmic ending and rest: the *whole* of creation that is always there in each part, the *completion and lying down* that is always there in the *beginning and setting out*. This is, for two, the cosmic-not-cosmic Sabbath: Sabbath that introduces the order of a seventh day into the cycles of days that mark the movements of stars, planets, and moons. This is Sabbath through which the universe declares that it is of the universe and not of the universe, a place of not one but many cycles and dimensions of time, a creation that always recalls its creator, a creature that is also always the breath and word of God. This is, for three, Sabbath as unity-in-difference, since it is a moment of end-time within time: neither the unity of end-time, alone, nor the multiplicity of created life, alone. This is, for four, the ritual Sabbath through which the people Israel enacts and thereby comes to embody the cycle of Sabbath-time and thus the cosmic-not-cosmic being that accompanies it: being of creation and of the divine breath and divine word, being in the beginning yet in the end, in one time yet another. This is being in the rest of the seventh day but also in the Sabbath that belongs to every day. This is, I suggest, another name for what we call “being in peace” as also being in “wholeness and completion” (*sh’lemut*). In this sense, to be at peace is to enjoy the completeness of one’s creaturehood, to live as one is in relation to the end of creation and thus within a living network of completed creatures. The Sabbath day offers this peace as a cosmic possibility for each one who receives it: *lish’mor v’zakhor*, “to observe and remember.”<sup>8</sup> And acts of daily prayer and blessing, acts of loving kindness, Torah study for its own sake, love: all these offer the peace of Sabbath, in moments throughout each day, for those who would receive

them. Through each moment and day of *shabbat*, the divine presence is there, present, for each who would come and receive and, through receiving, share in *yidiah*, “intimate knowing” of the divine presence.<sup>9</sup>

As *dibbur*, God’s spoken-word or command, the *shabbat* includes words and relational actions like cleaning the household before Sabbath, lighting candles to mark its beginning, blessing the children as Sabbath begins, chanting the Song of Songs—read by the rabbinic sages as a song of love between God and Israel, chanting the Sabbath prayers, enjoying sleep and rest, enjoying the matrimonial bed, enjoying the presence and words and love of family and community, celebrating study and peace: the fullness of created life as it is received now, without seeking to change it or fashion it into any other sanctuary than it already represents. All the more so, without seeking to change, let alone in any way disturbing or hurting other creatures, all the more so human creatures. These are activities of peace, and wholeness, because they are activities in which the end of all creation is present in the moment, and there is nothing else to be made or done. Speaking cosmically and eschatologically—not metaphorically—the rabbinic sages referred to the Sabbath day as *m’ein ha-olam ha-ba*—as of a piece of the world to come—the end time. Any moment one lives in the Sabbath of each week and each day, one lives in that moment of the end of days. The eschatological meaning of Sabbath is therefore not something hidden but something so present that it is as palpable as the Sabbath feast and the Sabbath quiet toward other creatures. This Sabbath that is already here is therefore the immediate agency of the one who brings us to the eternal Sabbath of all days: we can enter the body of that agency and thereby join ourselves to the end time now. Until the end of ends of days, this joining is of the moment, but that moment may serve as agent of another and, so, another. Some

call this movement from one to another “peace work,” others may call it *kevod hashem*, “the glory of God,” or sharing God’s word.

***Being a witness to Sabbath among Jews and Mennonites  
and among the children of Abraham***

How then shall “brethren dwell together” in a unity that maintains creaturely difference and a worldly multiplicity that shares in unity? Perhaps we may agree that such a unity-in-time is made available only by the divine presence? For rabbinic Judaism, the prototype is the time or moment of *shabbat*, the time that is peace within each worldly day. How will you name this time or place in the Mennonite community? Dwelling in the peace of Christ? . . . If so, what unity may we share that bears such different names—and divine names rather than human constructs? The very question suggests one part of the answer: that, if there is a unity to share, we shall name the unity differently, so that the mode of sharing is itself a unity-in-difference. In other words, what we share is known only through the way we share. “I will be with you, says YHWH,” (Ex. 3); “that is, ‘I shall be known by My acts,’” (from the biblical commentary by the medieval Jewish sage R. Moses Nachmanides). Applying the lessons drawn earlier from Huebner’s study, I would conclude that, if “brethren dwell together in unity,” it would not be within visions of unity constructed by the human imagination, framed in concepts, or gathered in haste—even out of an urgent desire for peace. One of our lessons was that conceptual constructs separate and divide as much as they appear to unify. Brethren dwell together in peace only in the unity-in-difference hosted by the divine presence in our midst.

There would be no conscious peace work to do—and no more to say—if this hosting were strictly a mystery to us. I



would not doubt that “the spirit moves where it wills”—works righteousness is to be avoided on the Jewish side as well. But we do remember: as in the Sabbath commandment, where “observance” (*l'shmor*) follows “remembrance” (*l'zkhor*).<sup>10</sup> The reference, in Deut. 5:15, is to remembering God's saving hand at the Sea, and, without presuming when and where and if grace is received, we have remembered when and where and how to honour the possibility of receiving grace again: the many meanings of *shabbat*. We remember, for example, to utter blessings, to pray, to engage in works of loving kindness, to share love, to study God's word, to prepare for *shabbat*. In each case, we have learned to pray—here, in the words of the *Tanya* (the Hasidic book of kabbalistic meditations)—that “a little movement here below may be met by a great movement from there in heaven”: with grace, our human actions may be met with divine response. Our defining question is, then, what “tickle” shall we offer on behalf of a Jewish-Mennonite dialogue so that it may display unity-in-difference? According to our present discussion, the dialogue would be one in which Jewish and Mennonite participants would most likely offer different names for the divine presence and different names for the dialogue itself and its unity. How then would dialogue be possible? I would respond by *remembering* occasions on which I have observed dialogue succeed<sup>11</sup> in precisely this way. These are occasions of the kind of scriptural study some of us call Scriptural Reasoning. Based on what I have “remembered and observed,” I suggest that Scriptural Reasoning represents one appropriate way for Jews and Mennonites to share in the divine word without removing the difference that shows itself even in the ways we speak of that word, as Sabbath or as Christ.

Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, “All the words which the LORD has spoken

we will do!” In Hebrew, they said, *naaseh v'nishmah*. (Ex. 24:7)

In a famous rabbinic midrash (BT *Shabbat* 88a), the phrase *naaseh v'nishmah* is identified with the words of angels who say to their Lord, “Whatever you say, we will do and only then seek to comprehend.” In this sense, Israel declared at Sinai: “When you command us, we do not first ask you what you mean. We act first, recognizing that only after doing will we be prepared to comprehend the reason for what we do.” Muslim, Jewish and Christian participants in Scriptural Reasoning (hereafter, “SR”) understand their practice in a comparable way. As human creatures who speak different languages of faith, they do not understand how it is possible to study God’s word together in peace and yet comprehend that word differently. Before the act of study, this project seems impossible. They do it anyway and, during the process, they lose their perplexity . . . The perplexity gradually returns when they return to their various denominations but, in the meantime, they appear to have participated in some unseen dimension of God’s word and presence. I understand this dimension to belong to the peace of God and to represent the source of unity-in-difference in their inter-Abrahamic study.

Here, in brief detail, is an overview of this practice of SR. Scriptural Reasoners seek to bring the three scriptural literatures into conversation through the following rather simple practice. They set up tables and chairs to accommodate study circles of about six to eight persons each. They set out brief excerpts from each of the three scriptural canons on the tables. They invite small groups of Muslims, Jews, and Christians who love or enjoy their own scriptural traditions to sit for long periods of time around these tables, reading each of the scriptural excerpts out loud, discussing the plain sense of the texts with each other, and then discussing deeper and deeper questions and readings and interpretations of each and

all of the texts. At first, they may ask experienced readers from each tradition to introduce the texts in the original languages. But, after that, they offer each other hospitality to read “their” scriptural sources as if it were their own. If they are in North America or the UK, they read the texts in English. They do not allow any individual or group to act as authority on the texts’ meaning: the text is its own authority, they are all mere readers. They read and discuss for hours. Some of the groups meet for several days at a time, a couple of times a year; some meet monthly for a few hours each time. And that is the practice. They see it as a means of, in a sense, inviting the three scriptural canons themselves to converse one with the other. And they believe this conversation has the power to generate deep relations among traditional practitioners of three faiths without compromising the defining beliefs of each tradition. If peace, shalom, is *sh’lemut*—wholeness, the fullness of being—then this is to generate peace among these practitioners.

SR did not begin as a practice of inter-religious peace. It began peacefully and inter-religiously, but all for the sake of an intellectual and religious quest. Starting about fifteen years ago, a small group—of Christian and Jewish and then Muslim scholars of Scripture and of philosophy—shared one with the other their deep concerns about the way Scripture and scriptural traditions or Abrahamic religions were studied both in their denominations and in the academy. Sometimes scriptural study was wonderful in both places. But more often they saw their religious communities study Scripture as if it were a denomination-defined set of doctrines. And more often they saw their academic disciplines study Scripture as if it were another subject to which one might apply a discipline’s standard tools of either historical or literary or conceptual study (where conceptual meant philosophic or ethical or structural or other kinds of abstractive work). They desired a practice that

examined Scripture in all its manifold and complex ways: the wonder and discipline of God's speech to us, a living process of covenantal life, a many-leveled collection of narrative, poetry and law; a challenge to our reasonings and an invitation to surprisingly new ways of reasoning. Each of them had previously studied Scripture in fellowship but only within their particular traditions or denominations. They sought to uncover a new epistemology for conducting the kind of study-across-traditions that is often precluded in the denominations; it is pursued in the academy, but by way of conceptual constructions that restrict meaningful inquiry to the terms of either "unity in non-difference" or "non-unity in difference." Their method was to sit and study ("to do first") and then discover afterward what kinds of study might tend to nurture the third alternative of "unity-in-difference." They sat for long hours, studying selections from two or three canons of Scripture at a time. They would probe and plumb everything, read, argue, interpret, sing and pray, while always asking: "Are we reading true to our traditions of piety? Are we reading true to our highest intellectual disciplines? Are we hearing each text and each other?" This mode of inquiry went on for months, then a few years, first with three members,<sup>12</sup> then eight, twenty, forty.<sup>13</sup> Through this period, the group's focus remained egg-headish, focusing on issues of text, hermeneutics, epistemology, not thinking self-consciously about matters of world peace. In the middle of those first years something unexpected began to emerge. The group began to notice that, after maybe eight hours of study, or, when they had the time, into the second day, their sessions of study often generated certain streams of reading-and-reasoning: complex, but somehow focused directions of inquiry, always accompanied by a joyous energy, albeit also critical in manner and sober in subject. On reflection, participants noticed that the stream displayed certain patterns of

movement that they associated with their various religious and intellectual traditions of interpretation but that also belonged to no one of them, nor to any obvious amalgam of them. Soon, they found that almost every long day of study generated such a stream, each one unique to its day and to itself: a vector and style of reasoning that emerged out of the Jewish-Muslim-Christian-Western texts and minds but that belonged to no one of them. They named this stream Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning and devoted their work to discovering the place of and for such reasoning in their denominations and in our academic disciplines.

Some time in 2000, after these inquirers had formed about three or four different fellowships of SR study, some friends and colleagues tapped them on the shoulder once in a while and asked, "Do you realize that your fellowships are comprised, for the most part, of traditionally religious Muslims, Christians, and Jews, a number of them shepherds of traditional congregations who might not be comfortable with, let alone understand what you are doing? And yet you all get along and are, in fact, dear friends? You are studying each other's religiously intimate texts and yet you preserve your religious differences quite strictly. Do you realize that this is odd? Do you realize that you are demonstrating a possibility for peace in places almost none of us would expect to find it?"

In this way, the SR scholars learned that their innerly-focused work might bear something of interest to a broader public and that it might have theo-political applications. The scholars began to reflect more self-consciously on what they were doing on an inter-personal and inter-religious dimension. They began to nurture Abrahamic fellowships of study for non-academics: clerical groups, students, congregations, local communities. At the University of Virginia, some participants developed undergraduate and graduate courses and

clubs in SR, several electronic journals, then a PhD program in Abrahamic studies.<sup>14</sup> At Cambridge University, the Faculty of Divinity launched the Cambridge Interfaith Program, receiving substantial governmental and private funding both for its academic offerings and to nurture a wide range of civic organizations related to the practice of inter-Abrahamic study, including SR training for police, for prison use, and for high schools.<sup>15</sup> About the same time, some participants launched an Abrahamic study group in Capetown South Africa, peopled by orthodox Muslim, Jewish, and Christian leaders whose communities were not at all friendly one to the other.<sup>16</sup> A series of other ventures followed in the UK, in North America, and in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the original quest for ways of studying Scripture for its own sake and by its own reasons, SR scholars now turn their academic gaze, as well, to SR as a practice of peace. When they do, they observe that the practice of SR has generated forms of relationship—interpersonal and inter-textual—that they would not have imagined or anticipated before observing them. Depending on their languages of faith, some SR participants might label these “relations of Sabbath peace,” some may speak of “sharing in the Holy Spirit,” or “witnessing the peace of Christ,” some that “we have come together to recognize *tawhid*, God’s utter unity.” The lived unity has appeared, not in how participants speak about what we do, but in the doing: reading and interpreting one another’s Scriptures.

***Would Abrahamic SR be appropriate  
in any Mennonite setting?***

Does SR introduce any model for Jewish-Mennonite dialogue? I will conclude this third lecture by reporting on how SR was received at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) and

Seminary. Then I shall ask how it might be received at CMU. Your responses would shape Lecture Four's concluding discussion of if and how Jewish-Mennonite dialogue might be conducted as a practice of unity-in-difference and as a practice that sought the peace of God's presence. Such a discussion would, perhaps, represent our shared reflection on my encounter with John Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*.

After working with Michael Cartwright on *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, I found myself in the middle of a flurry of Mennonite responses to the commentary that we attached to our publication. I believe my first energetic exchange was with Alain Epp Weaver, who politely expressed his strong objection to my critique of Yoder and to my tolerating anything other than an exilic Israel. Later, I had several opportunities to speak and share dialogues at Alain's home institution at EMU. I recall one wonderful conference there that provided a day of gentle, albeit intense, interaction with Ray Gingerich, Mark Nation, Alain, and many other insightful participants. One effect of the day was to open my mind to a more complex reading of Yoder and, thereby, to moderate as well as complexify the critique you have heard from me. The critique remains, but I believe my EMU discussions helped it become gentle and discerning—a preparation for what I am now learning from Chris Huebner and many others of you here at CMU.

At the same time, a group of EMU Seminary faculty and students met with a comparable group from our University of Virginia (UVA) program in Abrahamic studies. The meeting generated a new Scriptural Reasoning fellowship, completed by participants from the Muslim and Jewish communities in Harrisonburg and Charlottesville. Meeting monthly for about three hours each visit, the group studied passages from the

three Scriptures about the earth and our place on it and on its soil. After about fourteen months of very fine study, some challenges arose. Some participants wanted to spend more time learning about the other religions rather than spending hours studying brief excerpts of the scriptural texts: as if, they suggested, “floating in an ungrounded space.” Some were uncomfortable about the unequal numbers of participants from Judaism and especially from Islam. The group decided to rest for a while. Soon however, a new group formed—this past year, 2009—with leadership from nearby James Madison University, including Jewish and Muslim faculty as well as nearby community members. In just the past few months, a cohort from EMU as well as UVA has joined them. They have re-started with high energy.

A bit of that energy comes from a new project at EMU you may have heard about: The Abrahamic Center. I have had the pleasure of serving as a visiting member of the Center’s founding board and have enjoyed several wonderful sessions of study and planning. I will close by reading an excerpt from the Center’s vision statement: leaving you, after this, with a set of questions about how the Center may relate to your interests and goals at CMU.

“EMU envisions that such a Center would help to shape the university’s thought and action in a post-Cold War, post-9/11 world in which religion and politics may either serve our quest for reconciliation or detract from it,” Dr. Swartzendruber said. “The Center would provide a setting where practitioners and scholars belonging to the three Abrahamic faith traditions—Judaism, Islam and Christianity—could collaborate in research, training, learning and relations that further peace, just development, security, and wholeness in North America and in the rest of the world.” “I believe that Anabaptists bring a precious gift to the table in the meeting of Christians, Muslims and Jews,”



said David W. Shenk, global consultant with Eastern Mennonite Missions, Salunga, Pa. "My hope is that the Abrahamic Studies Center EMU is considering can nurture that gift and equip many for faithfully learning and sharing around that table."

What direction will the Abrahamic Studies Center take? I know it will be guided by a spirit of peace with deep compassion for members of all religious traditions. But will its spirit emerge from a dialogue among witnesses to God's word in Scripture? Or from humanly constructed concepts of unity? What relations will the Center have to each Abrahamic tradition of Scripture study and lived interpretation? What relation to the World mission of the Mennonite church and worldwide witness to peace in areas of conflict? And if it engages this witness, will the Center, we may ask once again, be served by witness to God's word of peace or by witness to a humanly framed vision of human unity? I trust that, by now, my thesis is clear. Out of my "textual reasoning" community of Jewish inquiry, I am drawn to Yoder's call when I trust that it is served by witness to God's word, but not when it is served by witness to creaturely desire and humanly constructed visions. I am drawn to Jewish-Mennonite dialogue on the model of unity-in-difference, but not on the model of "unity in non-difference." I am thus drawn to join with you in peace, when it is the peace of Sabbath, this moment of the end-time *in* this world. Are you, too, drawn to meet then and there?

## FOUR

### THE FREE CHURCH, ISRAEL, AND ISLAM TODAY

If there is a mutually beneficial Mennonite-Jewish theological dialogue, is this also an opening to Mennonite-Jewish-Muslim theological dialogue? If so, what is the place of Jewish-Muslim and Palestinian-Israeli relations within an inter-Abrahamic dialogue? And what is the place of Abrahamic studies within the world vision of the Mennonite Central Committee?

Rabbi Tarfon would say: The day is short, the work is much, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the Master is pressing. He would also say: It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it. If you have learned much Torah, you will be greatly rewarded, and your employer is trustworthy to pay you the reward of your labors. And know that the reward of the righteous is in the World to Come. (*Pirke Avot*, 2:15-16)

Just as, on the side of hope, the Sabbath is both the eschaton and the direct engine of God's peace in the everyday world, so too, on the side of despair, Israel-and-Palestine is the image both of the absence of peace and that whose repair would perhaps mark the eschaton of Abrahamic relations. The places where Abraham journeyed as well as the stones of Jerusalem

are the mother source of all Abrahamic faith. The blood on those stones and the walls of hate in those places mark a schism in the divine word God sent forth with Abraham, and that word will not be one until that blood is redeemed, those walls are melted, and the stones of Jerusalem are mother again to all Abraham's children.

This song I seem to be singing of lament and of prayer is not sung of a merely heavenly Jerusalem. The blood is of this world and the hope is for a world to come that is no more and no less than this world in peace. As we discussed in Lecture Three, this world in peace, *shalom* (שלום), is a world of *sh'lemut* (שלמות), living in the fullness of its creation, the world in *shabbat*. To pray for such a world is—at least for this Jew—to pray for fulfilled time but not for timelessness. The theme of Lecture Two was that time cannot be fulfilled by mere human will and work; human haste will not bring the end more swiftly; hope cannot even be articulated through merely human desires, concepts, and intentions. Nevertheless, there is still work to be done—“It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it; The reward is great, and the Master is pressing”—because we have been offered a share and a responsibility in *avodat ha-shem* (עבודת השם), the work of the revealer and redeemer. Our boss is the divine word, our assignments are posted in Scripture, and we will know we have reached our objective only when we have entered *shabbat* (שבת), the peace and wholeness of time on *this* earth.

But what is the peace of Israel-and-Palestine that we might seek? What does it mean to envision Sabbath in that land? (And what work toward that end is served by mere Scriptural Reasoning?)

It is the face of this Sabbath peace that stands as witness against the groaning of Israel-and-Palestine: this groaning

against the completeness of God Creation, against the commands of God's words *din v'chesed*, "justice and mercy" (דין וחסד) and against the fulfillment of our history and our days. The peace of Israel-and-Palestine is an eschatological image, but this does not mean it is a utopian image. If the model of eschatology is the Sabbath, then the eschatological peace of Israel-and-Palestine must already be present somewhere within the fabric of the created cosmos. It must already be present in the Torah that instructs us in daily life and in that presence we may somewhere locate here and now the body and the agency of that peace. This does not mean we alone become the agents—that is, we humans alone. It means we *may quietly join it and seek for others to join it*.

It is in this sense of quietly joining the peace of Israel-and-Palestine that the image of peace becomes not only a goal but also the prototype of SR. But let me be cautious. I am applying a theological and eschatological vocabulary to the topic of a painfully material and immediate political disaster. I must explain to you carefully how I am using the term "the peace of Israel-and-Palestine" lest you, or I for that matter, mistake my words for an oddly spiritualized or merely conceptual way of addressing urgent theo-political realities.

1. My premise has been that the particular schism and conflict named by the word "Israel-and-Palestine" will not be healed and made whole through the agency of human design and effort alone. "The peace of Israel-and-Palestine" is an eschatological image. But, just as the Sabbath of the seventh day is the agent of Sabbath peace within the hours of every day, so too the end time "peace of Israel-and-Palestine" is the agent of worldly peace in the land in this time between the times.
2. As agent of worldly peace, "the peace of Israel-and-Palestine" refers to an often hidden but actual dimension of our cosmic and political world. It is possible for us to participate in this

dimension. But by what capacity do we observe and share in what is hidden in this way?

3. This question is not different than the question of how we know God's will. As suggested in Lecture Two, I am satisfied with the answer Chris Huebner offers in his reading of Yoder: that Mennonite epistemology "resists closure, refusing the lie of the total perspective and the search for a purified form of speech."<sup>1</sup> He writes that Yoder's peace epistemology "assumes that the truth about God is not something that can be possessed or secured through some . . . theory of justification. It can only be witnessed,"<sup>2</sup> and, furthermore, that we cannot seek to "ensure that history comes out right"; we cannot theorize or seek to master the flow of things by imposing "theoretical dualisms" or "abstract principles."<sup>3</sup> We must, instead, be patient, responding to different things in the different ways that are called for then and there, rather than "speeding things up" to force an outcome. This is humble knowing. And the prototype of humble knowing comes from studying Scripture as a source of learning how to live: Yoder's "obedient action."
4. In the terms of my Lecture Two, Huebner's lesson may be learned, again, from the classic rabbinic sages, particularly in their distinction between the plain sense of Scripture and its interpreted sense. The plain sense is true and eternal but does not yet display its meaning for this present day and time of action. This, the completed instruction of God's word, is displayed only by way of the learned community's study, prayer, and at times agonizing over the meaning of Scripture in the face of all the details we observe in the socio-political earthly moment. This display is not some clear and distinct revelation out of the sky, like a direct perception of this book or table or chair. It comes, instead, by way of human reading and study and examination of the context of life, and argument, and final decision. It is thus fallible: fallible,

but nonetheless the final passage of God's word into lived meaning at each moment of the day.

5. To comprehend "the peace of Israel-Palestine" is to study Muslim and Christian Scripture and Palestinian tradition and history in the face of Palestinian aspiration, loss and suffering and to study Jewish Scripture and history and tradition in the face of Jewish aspiration, loss and suffering and Israeli statehood and government policy. The method of this study is close to the method I attributed to rabbinic midrash: the study of God's word and command in the context of our worldly reality. But this is also unlike rabbinic midrash, since this must be the study of three Scriptures at once, and three traditions and three histories—or, of course, more.
6. But study by whom and in what manner? I assume there will be a number of possible ways to study. But the only adequate example I have come across so far is Scriptural Reasoning. SR, in other words, names the humble and patient knowing and the obedient action through which the hidden peace of Israel-and-Palestine may be brought, albeit fallibly and ever incompletely, to our ken.
7. According to the account of SR we considered in Lecture Three, SR is the study of these three Scriptures and traditions and realities only by way of interactive dialogue among members of all three scriptural communities. It is a study fellowship among potentially warring parties, unified by the divine word alone, which is the only word that unifies without loss of creaturely difference and identity. By Lecture Two's definition of peace as *sh'lemut* or wholeness and fulfillment, only such a study could participate directly in and manifest the peace of Israel-and-Palestine, for that peace would mean the co-present wholeness of each party in relation to each other and in witness to the divine word. In this peace, the divine word is named differently by members of each tradition, but the hidden unity of that name is displayed in the unity-amidst-difference of the activity of study.

8. What then of the worldly suffering and turmoil in front of us? How presumptuous to suggest that a classroom-like activity would offer any aid! Indeed! But I would not suggest practicing SR in any setting where the urgent need of the moment is for medics and food and protective shelter and schools and farmable land and economic resources. At the same time, such goods remain goods only of this moment, even if the moment is months or years long. And to speak of a momentary or creaturely good is not only to speak of the limits of time and space; it is also to speak of the limits of instrumental knowledge. If these are to be instruments of peace, then we must identify the peace as well as the food and shelter that serve it. This, I have argued, is the peace of *shabbat* and of the scriptural word shared in its differences among the three different and dislocated traditions. One may deliver medics, food, and shelter in a spirit of this peace or of a peace envisioned and willed only by the human creature. The instrumental work will serve one end or the other; my argument is that one may choose before the fact to serve the spirit of *shabbat* rather than of human will. This spirit may also affect how agents of medicine, food, and shelter deliver and share their goods.
9. But where then is the agency that brings these combatants to this sharing and enlists such instruments in the service of this sharing? The answer I offer you is that this agency is no different than the agency that brings God's word to our scriptures and into our flesh. SR is nothing other than a particular practice of our traditional faiths. Its distinctness is the way the faiths are gathered – not by humanly constructed concepts of unity, or by any single tradition of scriptural study and performance, but by small fellowships of dialogue in response to the three different canons of Scripture. The peace of these fellowships, moreover, does not necessarily generate any manifesto or documents of agreement about what should be done to repair any specific conflict. Their fruit is more similar

to the fruit of traditional practices of prayer. How weak and paltry my answer may sound to you all! So lofty and perhaps “bookish” in the face of such suffering. But I hope I offer it without presumption and also without naïveté. After decades of humanly-devised efforts to frame the conditions of Middle East peace, it should not seem unreasonable to consider other sources.

10. The one very worldly goal I trust in is sheer quantity. The peace of SR is served, in part, by the quantity of fellowships, which means by the number of Abrahamic persons whose lives are on occasion swept together through the spirit and network of intimate, inter-Abrahamic study. Another face of quantity is the variety of institutions whose members share in such study and the peace of whose members may therefore find more places to hide within those instructions: How many teachers share in this peace? How many preachers, congregants, labourers, nurses, physicians, politicians, and fighters?
11. But, finally, how can such a seemingly interminable and geographically particular conflict remain the focus of this movement of peace? I should explain: the peace of Israel-and-Palestine is not the dominant focus of this movement. It is the prototype, but often a hidden one, a measure of the depth of each Abrahamic conflict, an emblem of the end time of all inter-Abrahamic conflict and hope. But most fellowships of SR consider other conflicts and many consider no particular political conflict per se, but occupy themselves with the activity of studying God’s word for its own sake, trusting that the peace that may show itself will provide instructions about where it might best be shared and how.

In that spirit, I turn to the concluding question of my four lectures: *Is there reason to link the work of SR in any way to the local or world peace mission of the Mennonite Church?*

In his book, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*, Marc Gopin



suggests that: "There have always been exclusive religious visions of a peaceful world. Never before in history, however, have so many leaders and adherents been inspired to work for a truly inclusive vision that is multicultural and multi-religious."<sup>4</sup> Do you think something historically new is happening in the area of inter-religious dialogue today?

I can't speak about what is going on outside of inter-Abrahamic dialogue, but as far as interrelations among Muslims, Jews, and/or Christians, I do not think we have seen an effort like this before. As far as inter-religious dialogue, it is a new epoch. Call it the third one.

The first epoch was one of separate Muslim, Jewish, and Christian self-definition and exclusive identity formation. The second epoch was the modern one. The architects of modern dialogue were seeking an alternative to what they considered the oppressive and violent consequences of religious exclusivism. They assumed that the trouble lay in difference, that the difference lay in the most intimate details of each tradition's understanding of God and holiness, and that these details are the subject of Scripture and scriptural doctrine. So, seeking to avoid all discussion of Scripture, doctrine, and theology, they based dialogue on the non-intimate issues of public ethics and social relations. Models for hosting such dialogue were introduced, for the most part, by well-meaning liberal Christians, by which I mean Christians who identified God, at least in part, as the author of Enlightenment reason and universal ethics. Liberal Jews followed suit.

The success of the second epoch was to have introduced conditions of hospitality, where one religious group could, in the name of universal ethics and justice, invite others into dialogue. In many cases, the dialogue led to shared work for civil rights and equal rights, for overcoming discrimination against members of minority traditions, and for crafting a

common (if naked) public square. But the major shortcoming of this epoch was a kind of reverse discrimination against particularity and local identity, which were misinterpreted to be the source of failures in the first epoch, rather than elements of the human condition itself. Attempting, on the whole, to elide these elements, rather than respect-but-redeem them, second-epoch dialogue was ultimately utopic—unconstrained, that is, by a realistic sense of human limits and unwarmed by affection for communal traditions and folkways.

Marc Gopin's work belongs, I believe, to the third epoch of inter-Abrahamic dialogue: one that is just now emerging out of the second. For Gopin and other early participants in this third epoch, the second epoch was noble in aspiration but also somewhat tragic, since it tended to overlook or undermine what might have been its most powerful resource: the love of God that animates the folk practices of many local communities and particular traditions. According to religious leaders in the first epoch, the One God "appears" only through the divine Word as it is embodied in lives shaped by specific scriptural traditions. Leaders of the second epoch sought to identify the meaning and ethical force of this One God through a single, universal discourse. Members of this third epoch are moved by a third vision: that the One God appears only through non-universal traditions of practice; that no individual human mind can construct universal images or principles that would unify these traditions; but that the God who speaks locally could also animate communities of dialogue among members of the three Abrahamic faiths.

I have so far met no community that seems to offer a better prototype for such dialogue than the Mennonite community. At CMU in particular there appears to be a strong community of scriptural study, academic and theological, reasoned and communal. And of course there is also the Mennonite Central

Committee and an international mission of witness to God and work for peace. What connection is there in your minds between these two? In addition to your “insiders” perceptions of the work of MCC, my outsider’s eyes also perceive a potential for how to engage scriptural witness—and study—in the work of inter-Abrahamic peace and how to bring that witness to every place of mission that the MCC guides in Abrahamic lands.

But is there place for Scripture study at least on the fringe of those missions? And Abrahamic scriptural study? This is my concluding question to you: *is there a place at least on the margins of the MCC for an Abrahamic witness to peace alongside the Mennonite witness?* This last question provides a practical conclusion to my four lectures on John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Revisited*. May I review the primary steps of my argument?

*I accept the primary arguments of what some call the “post-liberal Christian theologians:”*<sup>5</sup> (a) That secular thinking in the modern West tends toward “conceptualism,” or the presumption that whatever is knowable in the world is knowable by way (and only by way) of the kinds of ideas or “concepts” that can be framed and intuited by individual human beings; (b) That this conceptualism tends, unintentionally, to foster divided or “binary” patterns of thought and belief. These patterns encourage individuals to believe that to know something is to know it clearly and distinctly (that is, through a series of clear-and-distinct concepts). One conspicuous property of clear-and-distinct concepts is *identity*: if a concept *a* is knowable, then, “*a* is *a*” or *a* has a character that can be clearly recognized so that the knower recognizes what “is *a*” and what “is not *a*.” A related property is “*the law of excluded middle*,” that, as defined here, either *a* is true or not-*a* is true ( $a \vee \neg a$ ). When applied to everyday knowledge, this property encourages individuals to

assume that if they believe, for example, in a given philosophy or religion or method of inquiry, then either their peers should share the same belief or else either one or the other must be wrong. (c) That many churches in the modern period tend to be influenced by Western conceptualism. This means that these churches will tend to conceive of their beliefs in conceptual terms and according to binary divisions: between, for example, a now conceptually framed conservative or neo-orthodox religiosity and a liberal or humanistic religiosity. (d) That the remedy is for churches to renew the vision of the Reformers by renewing obedience to Christ alone in the Church, rather than to modern or classical concepts about him or to the authority of priesthood, tradition, and spiritual devotion when adopted as anti-modern agents of him. Postliberals renew the practice of *sola scriptura* as a means of correcting these modern and anti-modern tendencies. In the process, they rediscover that the Jewishness of Jesus Christ means something about how Christians must read the Gospel witness to him. The Gospel gives witness to Jesus as the Christ only when its verses are read *as* readings of specific verses of the Old Testament. Moreover, to read Gospel as witness to Christ is to read it each time anew, in the context of each day's struggles, as a new reading of the life of the people Israel. This means that ancient Israel's covenant was not superseded by the coming of Christ, for the meaning of Christ's life is also the meaning of Israel's life. In this way, the postliberals therefore recognize that they are reforming as well as renewing the doctrine of *sola scriptura*, adding to it a doctrine of non-supersessionism. This claim is not made on behalf of the Jews or in response to anti-Judaism; it is made as a discovery about the Gospel truth. (e) This renewal of Reformation offers a response to the secular West more broadly, as well as to the modern churches. It identifies the divisive tendencies that modern conceptualism introduces not

only into modern academic inquiry but also into modern politics, economics, and a great variety of social institutions. While the reparative work of Christian postliberalism applies directly only to the churches, the general patterns of postliberal repair serve as resources for reformers outside the church as well. I have described the work of Jewish textual reasoning as one example,<sup>6</sup> which represents another “return to Scripture”—in this case, the rabbinic study of torah—as a means of repairing divisive tendencies in the modern West. There are additional parallels in Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning, in its cognates in Qur’anic reasoning,<sup>7</sup> and more distant parallels in a series of what we might call “after-modern” disciplines.<sup>8</sup> All of these reforms seek alternatives to concept-based systems of belief and practice and to anti-conceptual (or anti-rational) substitutes as well. Chris Huebner’s critique of “hasty” thought and practice has illustrated for us the kinds of postliberal wisdom that apply both within and outside the church.<sup>9</sup>

*I address John Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* within the overall frame of my study of Christian postliberalism:* This means that I address his work not only in its own terms, but also as a contribution to four areas of what I consider urgent postliberal work: (a) A critique of divisive and schismatic tendencies in the modern secular and religious west; (b) Parallel models of repair for Christianity in the West, Judaism in the West, and for secular academics and politics in the West. For each of the Abrahamic traditions, these are various models of scripturally grounded reparative reasoning; (c) Accompanying both of these areas is a critique of supersessionism and, with it, a model for renewed Jewish-Mennonite dialogue and, thus, Jewish-Christian dialogue; (d) “Peace work” is common to all these models of postliberal repair: efforts, in other words, to identify pathways for peaceful relations among religions, denominations, communities, nations, individual persons.

*Guided by the non-binary models of repair I observe in other postliberal Christian theologians, I praise what I judged to be comparable models in Yoder's The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited, and I challenge what I judge to be Yoder's own occasional tendencies to binarism: I argue that these modest tendencies are inconsistent with Yoder's primary achievements and with his overall goals: of, for example, seeking to repair the Jewish-Christian schism, to teach a model and a method of peace, and to counter divisive tendencies in the modern West. My four lectures offer four levels of this praise-and-challenge, hopefully for the sake of engaging my CMU hosts in four areas of, I hope, on-going dialogue.*

## EPILOGUE

*Lecture One:* My goal was simply to introduce my model of Christian postliberalism and to apply it to my praise-and-challenge of Yoder's study of the Jewish-Christian schism.

*Lecture Two:* My goal was to recommend a somewhat different model of rabbinic Judaism than Yoder offers, at the center of which is a characteristic practice of reading Scripture, at once, in its plain and interpreted senses. Consistent with what I consider rabbinic interpretive tendencies, I suggested that the model of inter-religious (or inter-denominational) dialogue is not "unity as non-difference," but "unity-in-difference." I suggested that the latter model is missing in patterns of thought and practice framed by modern conceptualism, and I argued that the model needs to be strengthened in Yoder's efforts to repair schism.

*Lecture Three:* I "sang" of the Sabbath as a cosmic and ritual embodiment of unity-in-difference as it appears directly in our midst on earth. Out of rabbinic sources, I identified *shabbat*, at once, with the indwelling presence of God, with *sh'lemut* or "wholeness, completion" and, thereby, with *shalom* or "peace as wholeness, completion"—which latter would entail wholeness with all creatures and relations as with self. I suggested, out of rabbinic sources, that by way of days—and also daily moments—of *shabbat*, we may, in grace, directly encounter the divine presence in the company of whom we may inhabit and share unity-in-difference and, joined with others, inhabit

and share relations of unity-in-difference. I suggested, in other words, that relations of peace may be identified with relations of unity-in-difference. I reported on practices of Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning (SR) as illustrating how individuals from different scriptural traditions may share in such relations. Describing my experiences of SR at Eastern Mennonite University, I asked if, indeed, the best way to move past the Jewish-Christian schism may be to engage in Jewish-Mennonite SR or in comparable ways of sharing unity-in-difference. I asked if my hosts at CMU would entertain such a dialogue. In closing, I asked if, furthermore, members of the Mennonite Central Committee would consider hosting modest fellowships of Abrahamic SR in some of their peace missions worldwide. I stand ready to share in such work as an embodied witness to Yoder's effort to repair the Jewish-Christian schism.

*Lecture Four:* I suggested that "Israel-and-Palestine" is an icon, at once, of failed modern models for pursuing peace and, at the same time, of the eschatological goal of peace work conducted as the pursuit of unity-in-difference. This is an end-time goal, but it is also an end-time that can be lived in this world, just as *shabbat* is both life in the fullness of time and creation and life lived here and now in the presence of God. I suggested that there is no peace for "Israel-and-Palestine" if the peace is crafted through the visions and instruments of human desire and imagination alone, for the human imagination at every step serves the ends of both peace and division, divinity, and corruption. For the Middle East and also for the modern West more generally, the goal of unity-in-difference can be realized only with the grace of divine presence. Hopefully without presumption, I suggested that rabbinic Jews and Free Church Christians may remember occasions in which the work of seeking unity-in-difference was met by such grace—or so our forebears have told us, on the witness of the peace



they have witnessed. Among such occasions, they say, were occasions of love, of prayer, of works of lovingkindness.

In this spirit, I concluded by returning to the primary theses of Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism* to ask how the theses might be reframed if Yoder chose the single model of unity-in-difference rather than, at times, preferring the model of unity-as-non-difference. I then asked how the remaining theses might be applied to the question of "Israel and Palestine."

*Yoder's theses about Judaism:* Classical Judaism was exilic, messianic, pacifist, anti-nationalist, missionizing, anti-clerical and decentralized. Classical Judaism was non-non-Christian, very similar in most ways to the Free Church.

*How the theses might look if framed in terms of unity-in-difference:* Overall, the historical evidence would not be pressed into either/or categories but allowed to display the broad areas of ambiguity that—as I argued in Lecture Two—is more consistent with the evidence. Thus, classical Judaism would be portrayed as: landed-and-unlanded; seeking the end-time in this world and living it in moments of *shabbat*; seeking the peace of *shabbat* but not as a pre-defined concept in this world and not necessarily at the cost of one's own life—thus, peace-seeking but within the unpredictable contexts of creaturely life; dis-establishing "religion" and nation but recognizing Judaism as both peoplehood and not-only peoplehood—thus, not presuming before the fact what politics will accompany the people's creaturely life; open to proselytizing but not defined by it, more passively so than active; non-priestly but bearing ritual memories of priestly practice; democratic but non-homogeneous in religious practice; multiply centered and non-centralized.

*One great, additional difference would be this: the living faith of the people Israel would not be identified, statically, with a "Classical Judaism" of the past but with an historically*

*mobile Judaism in continuity with its revealed sources and ancient rabbinic readings but ever-responsive to changing worldly settings.* This is a Judaism living in the spirit as well as the word, Judaism not defined by itself alone but in dynamic relations and inter-relations with a varying and expanding network of peoples and creatures of this world.

*A major corollary would be this: the living faith of Israel would display a plurality of faces, each reflecting the consequences of different encounters, dialogues, and relations; at the same time, all forms of Judaism should reflect inter-Jewish dialogues as well—Judaism's non-overt community. One of these faces would, we hope, reflect the consequences of Jewish-Mennonite dialogue.* A pursuit of Jewish-Mennonite and Jewish-Christian identity would, in fact, inhibit the practice of dialogue, since a pursuit of identity reinforces the model of "unity in non-difference" and inhibits the dialogic model of "unity-in-difference." Identity is, moreover, defined conceptually, while dialogue is fulfilled only through the grace of divine presence.

*To nurture Jewish-Mennonite dialogue is to nurture occasions that would, according to the witness of memory, more likely invite the grace of divine presence. Within these lectures, I have addressed one such occasion: shared scriptural study.* One way to continue Yoder's work in *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* is to foster fellowships of Jewish-Mennonite scriptural study. Another way would be to foster Mennonite participation in the kinds of inter-Abrahamic study that EMU has initiated. Will CMU seek to host or share in either or both of these settings for study and dialogue?

*As for the iconic subject of Israel-and-Palestine:* If this names one defining goal of Jewish-Mennonite dialogue, then, on the model of unity-in-difference, one occasion for pursuing this goal is inter-Abrahamic scriptural study. This is study

among Muslims, Jews, and Christians—including Palestinians and Israelis—and practiced in hopeful anticipation of the peace of *shabbat*. Participants would bring many concerns and yearnings to the study, but the study should not be shaped, formally, by pre-defined concepts, but only by the words of Scripture and the spirit of intense study and dialogue and of patience. Should the study continue and relations deepen, then we might expect it to draw in the worldly concerns—and concepts—that participants bring to the study. If pursued patiently and if met by grace, the study may re-fashion and re-frame those concerns and concepts in ways that participants could not expect, fashioning kinds of relations they could not foresee. But we do not know beforehand, nor should we presume that all participants will relish the outcome. If there is peace to be shared, we have reason to expect that it will not appear in any of *our* terms.

## NOTES

### *Lecture One* *John Howard Yoder's Repair and Not Repair* *of the Jewish-Christian Schism*

<sup>1</sup> My work on these lectures was enriched, corrected, and refined by several circles of interlocutors. My initial guides in this work have been Stanley Hauerwas and Michael Cartwright, followed by colleagues associated with Mark Thiessen Nation, Peter Dula, Gerald Shenk, Ray Gingerich, and many other discussants at several Eastern Mennonite University conferences. In the summer of 2009, Jacob Goodson (University of Virginia and William & Mary) and Timothy McConnell (Center for Christian Study, Charlottesville) gathered a circle of graduate student and faculty peers to respond, over two days, to chapters of my manuscript, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011). Responding to the chapter on John Howard Yoder, Tommy Givens (Duke Divinity) made a significant contribution to my thinking about Yoder's work, which was enriched, as well, by further discussions with Goodson and McConnell, Daniel Weiss (University of Virginia and Cambridge University), Andrew Black (University of Dayton), Peter Kang (University of Virginia), Rebekah Eklund (Duke), Jason Byassee (Duke), and several others (W. Christian Hackett, Wesley Zell, Dawg Strong, William Elkins, Barry Harvey, Jennifer Howell, Lindsay Cleveland, David Dault, Scott Yakimow, Benjamin

Maton, and—in another context—Emily Wilson-Hauger). My faculty hosts at Canadian Mennonite University (several of whom are cited on these pages) have become my most recent guides in this work. My study of Yoder's work has brought with it the counsel and friendship of this profound company of Yoder's readers and fellow travellers; I am very grateful.

<sup>2</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* eds. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003 (hereafter *JCSR*)).

<sup>3</sup> I recognize that our commentaries seem intrusive to many readers who simply want to enjoy Yoder's book. And I believe the book merits a "clean" edition, but in another series. We were asked to publish the book in a series, *Radical Traditions*, that has its own mission:

Charged with a rejuvenated confidence, spawned in part by the rediscovery of reason as inescapably tradition constituted, a new generation of theologians and religious scholars is returning to scriptural traditions with the hope of retrieving resources long ignored, depreciated, and in many cases ideologically suppressed by modern habits of thought. . . . [Books in the *Radical Traditions* series] are able to speak unapologetically out of scriptural traditions manifest in the practices of believing communities (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim); to articulate those practices through disciplines of philosophic, textual, and cultural criticism; and engage intellectual, social, and political practices that for too long have been insulated from theological evaluation.

The series' goal is thus to provide an academic venue where theologies of the traditions may be articulated without submitting them first to the measure of certain canons of modern inquiry. We chose to add commentaries for the same reason that I offer my mild critique of Yoder: there are times when, I trust unintentionally, he appears to submit the literatures of early Judaism to such canons.

- <sup>4</sup> *JCSR*, "It Did Not Have to Be," 49.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 49-50.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, "Jesus, the Jewish Pacifist," 82.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-83.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 83-84.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.
- <sup>13</sup> *JCSR*, "Paul the Judaizer," 95.
- <sup>14</sup> *JCSR*, "The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision," 105-106.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>16</sup> *JCSR*, "On Not Being in Charge," 171.
- <sup>17</sup> *JCSR*, "The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision," 108.
- <sup>18</sup> And as in this sense "more interested in history than in [sacerdotal] religion." *Ibid.*, 108.
- <sup>19</sup> Understood here as a willingness to persist as a minority against the grain of society, unashamed particularism or separatism. *JCSR*, "The Forms of a Possible Obedience," 127.
- <sup>20</sup> See George Lindbeck on "the Church as Israel." Here are some excerpts:

But if we apply Paul's argument to the church, then the covenant between God and the church as Israel is also unconditional, and the logic of supersessionism—and of a wide range of other triumphalisms to which Christendom has been vulnerable—falters. (George Lindbeck, "Postmodern Hermeneutics and Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Case Study," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, eds. Tikva Frymer-Kensky et al. [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000], 111 [108-113]).

First, if the church is Israel, then the whole Old Testament is as essential as the New for Christian communal self-understanding. Thus the church cannot be thought of in modern fashion as a

religious instance of a limited liability corporation formed by individuals freely contracting together for the furtherance of their personal projects. On the contrary, the church is a people that God has gathered out of many nations to bear corporate witness along with Israel to the promise made to Abraham and Sarah that their seed would bless all humankind. Second, such an Old Testament understanding of the church challenges the Christian tendency to polarize collectivism and individualism, this-worldliness and other-worldliness, extramural concern for humanity as a whole and intramural attention to the elect community. Finally, and most decisively, the Old Testament emphasis on Israel's unconditional corporate election is vital in the struggle against Christian claims that Israel's election was merely conditional, was abrogated, and was replaced by the church's own election. Such are the general benefits of understanding the church as Israel. (George Lindbeck, "What of the Future? A Christian Response," in *Christianity in Jewish Terms*, 362-363 [357-366].)

See also George Lindbeck, "Performing the Faith: An Interview with George Lindbeck," *The Christian Century*, vol. 123, no. 4, 28 November 2006.

<sup>21</sup> *JCSR*, "Jesus the Jewish Pacifist," 75.

<sup>22</sup> Forthcoming, Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010).

<sup>23</sup> In Appendix 1, I reprint a previous claim of mine that "The Central Argument of *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* is for and about the Church, not the Jews."

<sup>24</sup> My interest in postliberal Christianity emerges out of work over 15 years in the Society for Textual Reasoning. This community of Jewish text scholars and philosophers is dedicated to postmodern/postliberal theological issues that parallel many of the concerns of postliberal Christianity. Postliberal Christianity therefore interests us, first, as a source of insight

and encouragement to support our own Jewish correctives to modernity. Jewish Textual Reasoning remains the specific community of inquiry out of which I offer my theological judgements and interpretations. See Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene, eds., *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002). See also the on-line journal, *Journal of Textual Reasoning*: <http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/tr/>.

<sup>25</sup> As I suggest in the last section of this lecture, Yoder reopens Scripture as a source for repairing modern secular rationalism but then tends at times to close the sources down again by drawing them to a single conclusion. I argue that, to read Scripture as yielding only one conclusion, articulable in our natural language, is to reduce Scripture to our discourses. In this case, Jeremiah 29 offers Jeremiah's counsel to the exiles at a particular time for particular purposes. The preponderant message of Jeremiah is that "days are coming, declares YHVH, when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah . . . and I will bring them back to the land" (Jer. 30); "they shall return from the enemy's land" (Jer. 31); "thus shall Babylon sink" (Jer. 51), and so on. There is no reason to identify one set of texts as eschatological rather than another.

<sup>26</sup> *JCSR*, "It Did Not Have to Be," 57.

<sup>27</sup> Yoder has warrant, indeed, to refer to the exilic character of rabbinic Judaism and, moreover, to rabbinic Judaism's tendency to postpone Israel's *theo-political* return to the land until messianic times. My objection is to the un-rabbinic way in which he hypostatizes "exile" into a conceptually pre-defined doctrine. He thereby precludes any alternatives to the binary pair "strictly exilic/strictly landed," such as: "exilic and landed," "a return to the land without political hegemony," "landed without the kind of political hegemony anticipated for the end-time." Of greater concern to me, Yoder also bypasses



the hermeneutical practices with respect to which the rabbinic sages offer their interpretations of exile. Rabbinic literature does not catalogue the kind of clear-and-distinct, once-and-for-all claims that may characterize either an end-time theology or modern conceptualism. Instead, the literature anthologizes series of individual claims, by individual sages, of how a rabbinic or scriptural verse or text ought to be applied to a certain issue at a certain time and place. Individual anthologies may indeed display a dominant tendency, but anthologies tend to collect different versions of any dominant tendency, with different emphases or definitions, and they usually include competing or minority views as well. In short, rabbinic claims are offered within the flow of history and with the expectation—or possibly—of future change. They are finite, temporal claims offered in relation to the infinite and eternal, but not as a substitute for it.

By way of illustration, readers may want to examine such rabbinic statements about exile as these:

- *Exile is a form of punishment and atonement for Israel's sins*: specifically, “false witnesses are punished with exile” (which is the punishment they would have caused others to suffer) (Babylonian Talmud [TB] *Makkot* 2b).
- *God regrets having created exile*: “Four things does the Almighty regret having made: Exile, the Chaldeans, the Ishmaelite and the Evil Inclination” (TB *Sukkot* 52b).
- *God goes into exile with Israel*: “For when Israel is in exile, God is also in exile as it were; as it says: ‘In their affliction, He is also afflicted’ (Isa. 63:9). And when Israel will be redeemed, God will also be redeemed as it is said: ‘My salvation will come soon’ (Isa. 56:1)” (TB *Megillah* 29b).
- *Exile is ended when the Messiah comes, and Israel's deeds can hasten his coming*: Rabbi Johanan said, “The son of

David will come only in a generation that is altogether innocent or altogether guilty" (TB *Sanhedrin* 98a).

These statements all support Yoder's claim that the rabbinic sages tended to anticipate an end to exile only in messianic times. But did this preclude return to the land of Israel? The historical evidence is that, when the political situation in the land permitted, rabbinic leaders did not discourage Jews from settling the land. There were, for example, significant Karaite settlements in the land in the tenth century. Throughout the late medieval and modern periods, Jewish settlement increased in response to pogroms and to expulsions of the Jews from various European nations. Throughout the modern period, Kabbalistic leaders promoted Jewish settlement, not only in Safed, but also in cities like Jerusalem and Hebron. I believe the strongest reading of such evidence is that, while rabbinic leaders tended to associate the messianic days with a return to political hegemony, exile did not, in the meantime, preclude settlement in the land. Settlement was encouraged for the sake of pilgrimage and for "saving a (Jewish) life"—that is, to save Jews from pogroms or other upheavals. In other words, the rabbis' traditional daily prayer for a return to Israel spoke to a third alternative, between the two strict alternatives that Yoder considered. Beyond the issue of exile, there is a more general lesson to be learned here: the practice of rabbinic Judaism cannot be defined "top down" simply by reading Talmudic and other texts and presuming that statements gleaned from them define "the faith of Israel." Rabbinic statements tend to follow evolving communal practice rather than lead them. To understand the faith of Israel, one has to follow the people Israel's movements—both of demography and of belief.

For evidence of the "in-between" character of rabbinic beliefs about exile, one may want to consult sources cited in recent texts like these:

*For an overview of the frequency of Jewish settlement, readers may consult any standard history of the Jews, for example, Salo Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) (e.g., vol. XVIII); Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, eds., *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Howard M. Sachar, *A History of the Jews in the Modern World* (New York: Vintage, 2006).*

*For specifics on Jewish settlement efforts during the Ottoman period, see, e.g., Martin Sicker, "Lovers of Zion," in *Reshaping Palestine: From Muhammad Ali to the British Mandate, 1831-1922* (Westport, CT; London: Praeger, 1999), 37-62.*

*For specifics on Jewish settlement efforts in the early modern period, see, e.g., Ruth Lamdan, *A Separate People: Jewish Women in Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).*

*For specifics on Jewish interest in settlement in the eighteenth century, see, e.g., Jacob Barnai and Naomi Goldblum, *The Jews in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: Under the Patronage of the Istanbul Committee of Officials for Palestine* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1992). See, Salo Baron, *The Jewish Community* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1942). And see, Salo Baron, "Towards a history of the Jewish settlement in Tiberias in 1742-1744," in *Jubilee Volume for Alexander Marx* (New York, 1943), 79-88 (Heb.).*

*For illustrations of medieval rabbinic expectations of immanent redemption and return, see, e.g., Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, chap. 3 ("Biblical Prophecy: Redemption of the Jews") (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 198-204.*

*For illustrations of Jewish settlement through the medieval and modern periods, see, e.g., Abraham Yaari, ed., *Iggerot Eretz Israel* [Letters from the Land of Israel] (Tel Aviv: Gazit,*

1943) (Heb.).

*For illustrations of how medieval rabbinic leaders valued settlement in the land of Israel, see, e.g., Franz Kobler, A Treasury of Jewish Letters: Letters from the Famous and the Humble, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society Of America, 1953). The following excerpts may help readers appreciate the complex character of rabbinic attitudes to exile and land:*

And thus I came to the Holy Land, to Safed, may it be rebuilt, in Upper Galilee, on the intermediate day of the Feast of Tabernacles 5363 [1603] in peace. I found here a holy community, even a big city before God, a city full of salvation, with nearly three hundred great Rabbis, all pious and active men, with eighteen Yeshivot [religious schools], twenty-two houses of prayer and one big Beth ha-Midrash [center for study and prayer], where about four hundred children and young men are taught by twenty teachers without payment. For there are rich people in Constantinople who provide the salaries of the teachers and have garments made for them every year. . . . Whoever, therefore, is given grace by the Lord to settle in the Land of Israel is able to find his living here even with little money. Such a man has chosen a happy lot, for he can acquire an eternal life, by joining the great saints and men of action, by having delight in God and refreshing his soul, while, at the same time, he enjoys the wonderful fruits of the land. ("Letter of the religious mystic Shlomoh Shlomieli, son of Hayim, to an unknown addressee," Safed, 19 July 1607, 393 ff.)

May it be the will of the Lord that all of you be granted to come to Jerusalem in order to live there in peace, and also the whole house of Israel. ("Rabbi Isaiah Hurwitz to his sons and daughters," Safed, November 1621. The editors add, "Rabbi Isaiah, son of Abraham ha-Levi Hurwitz, born in Prague about 1555 and Rabbi of this community from 1614, was one of the most popular figures in the Jewry of his time" [480].)

Finally, a prestigious rabbinic leader's recommendations concerning settlement may be found in Moses Bloch, ed., *Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg's Response on Emigration to the Land of Israel: Teshubot MaHaRaHaM* (1891): Nos. LXXVIII, LXXIX (Heb.).

<sup>28</sup> There is evidence (unfortunately) of mutual distancing almost a century earlier, apparently related to political suspicions aroused, on either side, by the wars with Rome. See, for example: James D. G. Dunn, ed., *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways, A.D. 70 to 135* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

In his concluding remarks, Dunn summarizes the arguments eight scholars shared in a conference and then in this book (363-368). All of them treat the "parting of the ways" as less sharply defined than the "standard view" criticized by Yoder but also earlier than Yoder argues. By way of illustration: *Martin Goodman* argues that, indeed, rabbinic Judaism was slow in achieving hegemony, but he cites evidence of a parting of the ways in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries (e.g., "the implication of the  *Fiscus Judaicus*, as providing a means of distinguishing Jew from non-Jew: it may have enabled a Jewish Christian to continue affirming his Jewishness [by paying the tax], and was perhaps therefore a factor in the evolution of the  *birkat-ha-minim* as a means of categorizing Jewish Christianity as unacceptable; the definition of a Jew by Romans primarily in religious terms after 96 ties in with the fact that a clear distinction between Jew and Christian appears regularly in Roman texts after about the same date" (96). *Martin Henkel* interprets Christian uses of the Septuagint among the evidence for the early 2nd century as a parting of the ways. *Graham Stanton* cites rabbinic criticisms of christology as evidence for an early parting. *Neville Birdsall* argues for a later parting among Christians in Syria. Dunn concludes that:

(1) "The parting of the ways," properly speaking, was very "bitty," long drawn out and influenced by a range of social, geographical, and political as well as theological factors. On the one hand, we must beware of thinking of a clear or single "trajectory" for either Christianity or Judaism; and we should also avoid using imagery which necessarily implies an ever widening gap between Christianity and Judaism. On the other hand, "Christianity" did emerge from a Jewish matrix, and "Christianity" and "Judaism" did become separate and distinct, so that the basic image, "the parting of the ways," is appropriate. (2) The period under review, 70-135, does seem to have been one of particular importance for "the parting of the ways." This is indicated by the growing political and social distinctiveness of the two movements during this period, climaxing in the 135 revolt; but always with a broad Jewish-Christian middle ground, whose dimensions we can no longer chart with any certainty, but which certainly retained vitality long beyond this period (368).

Stephen G. Wilson, *Related Strangers: Jews and Christians, 70-170 CE* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006). Refining Dunn's argument, Wilson argues that a single time period cannot be pin-pointed for Jewish-Christian separation; the parting is gradual and varies with place. Nonetheless, he agrees that a mutual parting of the ways is fairly complete soon after the Bar Kochba rebellion (c. 135). He argues that some significant separation begins with the Wars of 70, since it forced Christian writers to judge Jewish error as having been punished more swiftly than they may have anticipated. By the turn of the century, separation was advanced by Christian fears that Jews would seek to rebuild the Temple (see his summary, 286-287).

<sup>29</sup> The rabbinic sages required each person's protecting his or her own body as well as that of the neighbour, since each body

is God's creature and "the other's blood is no redder than one's own." One may therefore defend one's own life even through the use of force, but it is impossible to predict beforehand what this should mean in each individual case. (TB *Bava Metzia* 62a illustrates a rabbinic view of what we call "lifeboat ethics.")

<sup>30</sup> TB *Sanhedrin* 74a.

<sup>31</sup> The rabbinic sages sought to "undo" capital punishment—or minimize it—by vastly increasing the conditions that would have to be filled in order to judge anyone guilty of biblically-based capital crimes (increasing, for example, the number of witnesses or requiring that the offender had been explicitly warned just prior to the offense). Capital crimes were tried, furthermore, on the authority of the Sanhedrin. With its dissolution after the Roman Wars, that authority was, technically, no longer available. At the same time, rabbinic authorities were capable of re-introducing the practical equivalent of capital punishment when, in their judgement, conditions required it. The clearest examples are medieval rabbinic rulings that informants (*malshinim*) who endangered the safety of Jewish communities and the lives of community members could be executed. Thus, Rabbi Michael J. Broyde writes:

Even though Jewish law expects people to observe the law of the land, and even imposes that obligation as a religious duty, the Talmud recounts—in a number of places—that it is prohibited to inform on Jews to the secular government, even when their conduct is a violation of secular law and even when their conduct is a violation of Jewish law. While there are a number of exceptions to this prohibition (which are explained further in this section), the essential *halakha* was that Jewish law prohibits such informing absent specific circumstances. Even if secular government were to incorporate substantive Jewish law into secular law and punish violations of what is, in effect, Jewish law, Jews would still be prohibited from cooperating with such a system. Indeed, classical Jewish law treats a person who

repeatedly informs on others as a pursuer (a *rodef*) who may be killed to prevent him from informing, even without a formal court ruling. . . . The reason for the rabbinic decree positing that an informer (*moser*) is a life-threatening pursuer (*rodef*) is simply stated by Rabbenu Asher: "One who runs to inform so that Jewish money is given to a bandit (*anas*) is analogized by the rabbis to one who is running after a person to kill him. This is seen from the verse (Isaiah 51:20): "your children lie in a swoon at the corner of every street, like an antelope caught in a net." Just like when an antelope is caught in a net, the hunter has no mercy towards it, so too the money of a Jew, once it falls into the hands of bandits, the bandits have no mercy on the Jew. They take some money today, and tomorrow all of it, and in the end, they capture and kill him, since perhaps he has more money. Thus, an informer is like a pursuer to kill someone, and the victim may be saved at the cost of the life of the pursued."

(Rabbi Michael J. Broyde "Informing on Others for Violating American Law: A Jewish Law View," in Jewish Law [[www.jlaw.com/Articles/mesiralaw2.html#b1](http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/mesiralaw2.html#b1)]).

David Novak comments:

According to Rabbenu Asher, what makes informing worse than any other act which improperly damages another Jew is that informing puts a person in danger of life and limb—even when the initial act of informing is over a small money matter. Once one is enmeshed with these types of people, one never can tell what will happen and even death can result. Thus one who informs is like a pursuer who might kill. . . . Indeed, in Jewish law, one who poses a threat to the life of others must be prevented from accomplishing the intended harm; force—even deadly force—may be used in such a case without the need for a court hearing. This threat need not be limited to the possibility that the criminal will actually harm another, but includes such factors as the possibility that in response to a Jew being apprehended for committing a crime, other Jews will be injured or



anti-Semitism will be promoted. (See *Rema* commenting on *Shulchan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat* 388:12 [discussing one who counterfeits coins], 425:1. For a complete analysis of the various permutations of this rule, see R. Yaakov Blau, *Pithei Hoshen* 5: ch. 4) . . . Finally, R. Joseph Karo, in his commentary on the Tur, notes the following opinion of R. Solomon ibn Adret [the noted, late thirteenth-century jurist, known by his acronym, "Rashba"]: "Rashba wrote in a response, 'it seems to me . . . that this is for the preservation of society (*mequyyam ha'olam*), because it bases everything on the laws collected in the Torah, and only does what the Torah prescribes as punishment in these and similar offenses, then society will be destroyed, for we require witnesses. It is *hatra'ah* as the rabbis said that Jerusalem was destroyed only because they based their judgment on the law of the Torah.'"

(David Novak, *The Image of the Non-Jew in Judaism: An Historical and Constructive Study of the Noahide Laws* [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983].

<sup>32</sup> On the issue of Jewish proselytizing, once again, the historical evidence points to the "in-between" character of rabbinic beliefs and practice: neither to the view Yoder rejects (strict anti-missionizing) nor to the one he advances (missionizing in the manner of Christianity). Yes, the religion of Israel was open to proselytes, and in varying ways, in different times sought converts. This was not, however, in the same manner that Yoder portrays, which is close to that of early or later Christianity. One significant difference was that late Second Temple and rabbinic conversion remained within the pattern of a fictive kinship group, marrying its faith in the one God to the covenantal life of a single people among other peoples. Another significant difference was that Jewish educators tended, strongly, to draw the lessons of Torah *hermeneutically*, through context-directed interpretations of texts, rather than *ontologically*, through scripturally grounded proclamations

of universal truths. These two manners of teaching foster two different forms of proselytizing.

- On the variety of Jewish practices of mission, see Michael F. Bird, *Crossing over Sea and Land: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010).
- James Walters, “Romans, Jews, and Christians: The Impact of the Romans on Jewish/Christian Relations in First-Century Rome,” in *Judaism and Christianity in First-century Rome*, eds. Karl P. Donfried and Peter Richardson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 175-195. Walters writes: “Martin Goodman has argued that Judaism in the first century was not a proselytizing religion and that the desirability of embarking on a proselytizing mission occurred to third-century rabbis only because of the successes of the Christians. Although I believe Goodman draws the distinction between Jews and Christians too sharply, he is correct in stressing that Jews did not operate with the same mandate for missions that was assumed by the Christians” (182). Walters suggests that Jewish mission was often a passive process, while it was an aggressive goal for Christians.
- Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Jewish People* (*Matai ve'ekh humtza h'am hayehudi?*) trans. Yael Lotan (London and New York: Verso, 2009). While uneven in quality, the text is useful for its collection of sources. Sand notes the variety and ebbs and flows of Jewish proselytizing from the early years into the early modern period. The overall lesson reinforces my “in-between” portrait: yes, the sages were open to conversion when it was possible, but, no, it was not a universal mission of the kind pursued by Christians.

*Lecture Two*  
***Biblical Israel, Rabbinic Judaism and Sola Scriptura***

<sup>1</sup> In my first lecture, I explained my interest in John Howard Yoder as a Christian thinker whose critique of both the rationalist-humanist modern church and the anti-modern traditionalist church parallels my concerns about modern rationalist and traditionalist Judaisms. With Yoder, I also believe our concerns are of urgent significance for the life of both the church and the synagogue—and, moreover, of the modern world we share in. These concerns are important because the alternative is the modern temptation to substitute humanly constructed ideas for the divine word and human leadership for God's direct leadership. In classic theological terms, this may be called idolatry; in contemporary and more reasoned terms, it is to mistake what might be for what ultimately is and what is merely finite for the infinite. In more graphic terms, this is to believe that whatever seems clear or agreeable to my mind—to our group's mind—must therefore be true or good. Which means that whatever seems unclear or disagreeable is wrong or bad. In this way, the modern temptation is toward narcissism and either/or or binary thinking: either clear to me and us or unworthy. In Stanley Hauerwas' Yoderian phrase, this is to live against the grain of the universe; ultimately, therefore, to live toward death. For those persons and nations powerful enough to carry on longer than seems just, this is, before death, to impose my clarity on you and our clarity on others: it is to oppress, in other words, to colonize, to rob, to violate.

If I am attracted to Yoder's openings to Judaism, it is not, therefore, because I seek to belong to a bigger team. I don't think the issue is ultimately about Christianity or Judaism, but about life and death, life according to the will and wisdom of the Creator-revealer, and death according to the will and folly

of a self-made humanity, of human narcissism. When I am attracted to Yoder's account of Judaism, it is because I read the details of that account as a corrective to overly humanistic practices of Judaism or Christianity—or, for that matter, Islam.

In the first lecture, I also admitted that I am not attracted to a minor part of Yoder's account of Judaism. And now you know why. It is because I worry when Yoder seems, for a brief moment, to import a touch of the modern temptation into his account and, thereby, to weaken his corrective to modern narcissism and thus to the modern obsession with individual clarity. In these moments, he may misrepresent various aspects of classical Judaism; but my concern is not with the misrepresentation in itself. In the spirit of conversation that Yoder offers (*JCRS*, 115), I asked for a Free Church-Jewish dialogue about this concern and this element of Yoder's work. I added that, in fact, Chris Huebner's recent book may introduce the best terms for such a dialogue.

<sup>2</sup> "TB" refers to Babylonian Talmud, or *Talmud Bavli*. The version of Talmud composed in the land of Israel is called the Palestinian Talmud or *Talmud Yerushalmi*.

<sup>3</sup> As it is written in Job 11:12, *ish navuv yelavev*, or "an empty man is ravished," which the rabbis re-read "is many-hearted."

<sup>4</sup> In sum, the individual heart-mind is not frightened and shy. It has a role in God's plan and his revelation. It is simply not what the secular modern West thinks it is.

<sup>5</sup> See Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1972; Repr. Binghamton: Global Pub., 2001).

<sup>6</sup> David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). See also David Halivni, *Revelation Restored: Divine Writ and Critical Responses* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> “Some give another reason why the dots are inserted. Ezra reasoned thus: If Elijah comes and asks ‘Why have you written these words?’ [why have you included these suspect passages?], I shall answer, ‘That is why I dotted these passages.’ And if he says to me, ‘You have done well in having written them,’ I shall erase the dots over them” (*Bamidbar Rabbah* III.13).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 322.

<sup>9</sup> In similar fashion, Tikvah Frymer-Kensky examines ways in which verses of the Five Books of Moses reinterpret other verses, for example in which Moses himself restates God’s words. She suggests that the written Torah problematizes any notion that individual verses have the status of revealed text independently of their relation to the whole of the written Torah. See, for example, Tikvah Frymer-Kensky, “Revelation Revealed, The Doubt of Torah,” in *Textual Reasonings, Jewish Philosophy and Text Study at the end of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Peter Ochs and Nancy Levene (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 68-75.

<sup>10</sup> The distinction between reading Scripture every day and reading in anguish contributes significantly to my portrait of rabbinic Judaism. I therefore think it may be worthwhile to offer additional comments for any readers who find my portrait still murky. Perhaps you will find the following description makes the distinction clearer.

My primary model is that Scripture as read in daily Bible study and in most daily prayer is not the same as Scripture received through what we have termed “continual revelation” (not the same as revelation received as Scripture). I associate continual revelation with the reception of God’s word in the face of extraordinary suffering and loss or, God forbid, destruction, up to what seems to be a destruction of the entire people as they know themselves. According to this model, Bible study

corresponds instead to the socializing aspect of liturgy. In addition to opening a channel for interactive relation to God, traditional liturgies also provide a way for individuals to rehearse the formational narratives of their religion, to embody—and thus be socialized in—traditional beliefs and doctrines.

In this model, a continuing revelation is at the center of Judaism. To share in that center is not to think for oneself alone, but, rather, in the company of one's community, to draw one's heart-and-mind to the place of anguish and loss that sets the context for this particular moment in the history of Israel. To enter into the heart of rabbinic Judaism is to consider, at once, at least three contexts, whose inter-relations will define the path of Jewish belief and practice at any given time. One is the context of God's revelation to Moses at Sinai, which is Israel's wandering out of enslavement in Egypt toward a promised land one does not yet see. The second is the context of the formation of classical rabbinic Judaism, which is the Destruction of the Second Temple. The third is the present day context of affliction that prompts a rabbinic reader to seek God's word anew and, thus, to share in the unfolding revelation that links Sinai to the rabbis to the present day of the reader. I suggest "at least three contexts," because comprehending revelation means deep study of each prior destruction and each manner of Judaism that rose up after destruction: from Egypt to the Destruction of the First Temple, then the Second, and so on again and again throughout the history of the Diaspora, through the Holocaust, to this day. This is why I have provided, in Appendix I, a series of texts of "destruction and redemption."

<sup>11</sup> Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 182. Atom Egoyan is a contemporary Armenian-Canadian film maker.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>16</sup> What we might consider a gracious intrusion of otherness into a world of the same. See Ibid., 197ff.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>20</sup> See Lecture Four, note 9, 114-116, for parallel comments on the virtue of patience, from Stanley Hauerwas, Harry Huebner, and Yoder himself.

<sup>21</sup> We learn many things from yesterday's meanings, since they were near us in time and place, but at least some bit of meaning is different today and, sometimes, just about everything is different, even in a day. We cannot trust our lives and the future of humanity to any conceptual schemes we or any other humans have built in order to *respond* to our immediate fears more quickly than God can.

<sup>22</sup> Citing John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 117. Cited in Huebner, 61.

<sup>23</sup> Citing John Howard Yoder, "The Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," *Essays on Biblical Interpretation: Anabaptist-Mennonite Perspectives Vol. 1*, William Swartley (ed.) (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1984), 11-28). Cited in Huebner, 61.

<sup>24</sup> John Howard Yoder, "Binding and Loosing," in John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright, (Waterloo, ON and Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2004), 353. Cited in Huebner, 61.

<sup>25</sup> Huebner, 85.

*Lecture Three*  
*Abrahamic Scriptural Reasoning and/in*  
*the Mennonite World Mission*

<sup>1</sup> Martin Buber, *Ich und Du* (1923) (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1999). Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1970). See Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> You may ask, "but what of we who are saved from this corruption?" Answering only as a Jewish philosopher, I would reply, "I must anticipate that one who is saved from corruption would thereby desire only what He wills, and not desire the objects of individual human desire."

<sup>3</sup> Defining and relating to the other according to my own terms—perceptions, concepts, and grammars of relation—alone. If this "I" refers not only to this one person but also to my community or nation, then this means generating institutions of social, political, and economic relations that comprehend and engage other communities or nations in our terms alone. If our will and bodily strength is no greater than the other's, then we are portraying what Thomas Hobbes perceived: a state of nature as a state of mutual threat, to which the human response may be a social contract or a *pax romana*. If we imagine disequilibrium of will and strength, then we are portraying the conditions of oppression and victimhood. Either way, we have portrayed the institutionalization of violence. I hope my dialogues with Hauerwas and then with the work of Yoder and then with members of the Mennonite Church have taught me to perceive these conditions of violence as precisely what the God of Abraham commands us not only to shun but also to repair and heal.

<sup>4</sup> "*Shalom Aleikhem*" is typically chanted on Friday nights at



the beginning of the *shabbat* meal. The hymn was composed by seventeenth century Kabbalists, drawing on this Talmudic passage:

It was taught, R. Jose son of R. Judah said: Two ministering angels accompany a person on the eve of the Sabbath from the synagogue to his home, one a good [angel] and one an evil [one]. And when he arrives home and finds the lamp burning, the table laid and the couch [bed] covered with a spread, the good angel exclaims, "May it be even thus on another Sabbath [too]," and the evil angel unwillingly responds "amen." But if not, the evil angel exclaims, "May it be even thus on another Sabbath too," and the good angel unwillingly responds, "amen" (TB *Shabbat* 119b).

<sup>5</sup> *Hadur na-e ziv ha-ōlom*, Majestic, Beautiful, Radiance of the universe,

*nafshi cholat ahavatecha*, my soul pines [lit: is sick for] for your love.

*ana el na r'fa na lah*, Please, O G-d, heal her now

*b'harot lah noam zivecha*, by showing her the pleasantness of Your radiance;

*az teet-chazeik v'titrapei*, then she will be strengthened and healed,

*v'hayta lah simchat olam* and eternal gladness will be hers.

*Vatik yehemu na rachamecha*, Enduring One, may Your mercy be aroused

*v'chuso na al bein ahuvecha*, and please take pity on the son of Your beloved,

*ki ze kama nichsof nichsafti*, because it is so very long that I have yearned intensely

*lir'ot m'heiro b'tiferet uzecha*, to see speedily to splendour of Your strength;

*eile chamdah libi*, only these my heart desired,

*v'chuso na v'al tit-alom.* so please take pity and do not conceal Yourself

*Higalei na ufros chavivi alai,* Please my Beloved reveal Yourself and spread on me

*et sukat shlomecha,* the shelter of Your peace;

*ta-ir eretz mich'vodecha,* illuminate the Earth with Your glory,

*nagila v'nism'cha bach.* that we may rejoice and be glad with You;

*Maheir ehov ki va mo-ed,* hasten, show love, for the time has come,

*v'chaneinu kimei olom.* and show us grace as in days of old.

<sup>6</sup> For the most cited spiritual teaching about *shabbat* see Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2005). Heschel writes, for example, “The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world.”

<sup>7</sup> From *shacharit*, the traditional morning prayer service.

<sup>8</sup> The words “Remember the Sabbath” (Ex. 20:8) and “Observe the Shabbat” (Deut. 5:12) were proclaimed as a single utterance, something the human mouth cannot utter and the human ear cannot hear” (TB *Shavuoth* 20b).

ומאי דבר אתה תן דביבור

זכור ושמור בדיבור אתה נאמרו כדתניא

אחד נאמרו מה שאין יכול תפת לדבר

ומה שאין האוזן יכול לשמוע

<sup>9</sup> The *shabbat* hymn introduced earlier—*yedid nefesh*—displays the spiritual and epistemological character of this

Sabbath intimacy with the divine. In the words of the final verse (note 5 above): “Please my Beloved reveal Yourself and spread on me the shelter of Your peace.” The biblical term for “intimate knowledge,” *yidiah* (ידיעה), applies to both sexual intimacy (“Adam knew Eve”) and relational knowledge—of any subject of knowing (“Do you know how to go there?”).

<sup>10</sup> See Note 8.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, one may challenge any notion of “success.” Here I refer to occasions in which participants who sought inter-religious dialogue *as* unity-in-difference report, with surprise and gratitude, that they experienced what they sought, always in unexpected ways.

<sup>12</sup> The Anglican scholars Daniel Hardy, of blessed memory, David Ford, and the Jewish scholar Peter Ochs.

<sup>13</sup> The first expanded group added Ben Quash, Steven Kepnes, Robert Gibbs, Laurie Zoloth, Basit Koshul; the second added Oliver Davies, Muhammad Suheyl Umar, Rachel Muers, Susanah Ticciati, Nicholas Adams, Umeyye Isra Yazicioglu, Chad Pecknold, Jim Fodor, Mike Higton; the third added Jeff Bailey, Lejla Demiri, Annabel Keeler, Ben Fulford, William Young, Gavin Flood, Tim Winters, Sarah Snyder, Tom Greggs, Jason Fout, Rume Ahmed, Ayesha Chaudhry, Yamine Mermer, Catriona Laing, Martin Kavka, Randi Rashkover, Faraz Masood Sheikh, Redha Ameer, Aryeh Cohen, Aref Nayed; the fourth added Valerie Cooper, Maria Dakake, Shari Goldberg, Matthias Muller, Jason Byassee, Fyodr Kozyrev, Esther Reed, Ejaz Akram, Daniel Weiss, Ari Ackerman, and so on, and so on—the group expanded to twenty more, then up to twenty more groups have been formed in the UK, North America, and elsewhere.

<sup>14</sup> Called “Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice,” the graduate program offers studies in the three Abrahamic traditions of scriptural study and practice (as well as in other traditions).

See <http://artsandsciences.virginia.edu/religiousstudies/graduate/areas/sip/>.

<sup>15</sup> On the Cambridge Interfaith Programme, see <http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/about>.

<sup>16</sup> For descriptions, see [http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/abraham/i\\_news.html](http://etext.virginia.edu/journals/abraham/i_news.html) and see <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/journals/jsrforum/participating.html>.

<sup>17</sup> For related coverage and interviews on the PBS program “Religion & Ethics Weekly,” see <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/by-topic/worshipliturgy/cover-scriptural-reasoning/1026/> and <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/october-12-2007/scriptural-reasoning/3118/>. See also The Christian Century: “Sacred book club: Reading Scripture across interfaith lines” by Jeffrey W. Bailey, September 5, 2006”: [www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=2332](http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=2332).

#### **Lecture Four** ***The Free Church, Israel and Islam Today***

<sup>1</sup> Chris K. Huebner, *A Precarious Peace: Yoderian Explorations on Theology, Knowledge, and Identity* (Waterloo, ON and Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2006), 45.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>4</sup> Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Such as Stanley Hauerwas, George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson and so on. See Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> See Lecture One, note 22, 86.

<sup>7</sup> See “Islam and Scriptural Reasoning,” *The Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (April 2005), <http://etext>.

lib.virginia.edu/journals/ssr/issues/volume5/number1. See Tim Winter, "Qur'anic Reasoning as an Academic Practice," in David F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold, eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 105-120 ([www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/resources/papers/qur-anic-reasoning-as-an-academic-practice](http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/en/resources/papers/qur-anic-reasoning-as-an-academic-practice)).

<sup>8</sup> In several essays, I have adopted the term "after-modern" for inquiries that seek to repair modern conceptualism and binary thinking without, however, endorsing any one of the so-called "postmodern" ideologies. Among these essays are P. Ochs, "Max Kadushin as Rabbinic Pragmatist," in Peter Ochs, ed., *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind*, (Atlanta: Scholars Press for South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism, 1990): 165-196; and P. Ochs, "A Rabbinic Pragmatism," in Bruce Marshall, ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> There are many sources to support this approach, for example: see Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005). With regard, for example, to the challenge of negotiating religious commitments ecumenically, Nation learns from Yoder that "we simply continue, in ecumenical patience, to impress upon others (as upon ourselves), the call to be faithful to our Lord whom we all as Christians seek to serve" (108).

See also John Yoder, "'Patience' As Method In Moral Reasoning: Is an Ethic Of Discipleship 'Absolute'?" reprinted in Stanley M. Hauerwas, Mark Thiessen Nation, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner, eds., *The Wisdom of the Cross: Essays in Honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999). Yoder offers a remarkable list of nineteen kinds of patience, of which I will cite a few: Pedagogical

“patience”: recognizing that learning takes places in stages. “Pastoral patience takes account of other dynamic dimensions, likewise located within the person learning, which may hinder or facilitate the appropriation of normative truth. Ecumenical patience is the result of our accepting willingly and not just grudgingly the fact that we are conversing with people who have been educated otherwise than ourselves, in ways that we think theologically wrong, yet which are for them for the present the framework of their integrity and accountability” (27). “David Neville has reminded me that such ‘patience’ is at work as well in my suspicion of the drive of many for a single master method and of the ‘foundationalist’ claim to a privileged point of departure” (28). This is a fine case of Yoder’s speaking to the concerns I have raised about his tendencies to “binarism.” He sees the issue clearly; I retain my concerns with regard to his occasional practice, not to his intention. “There is a (psycho) therapeutic patience which goes even farther in yielding (for a time, for a reason) to the other” (29). Yoder refers, for example, to patience with those who have suffered authoritarian rule. “There is the patience of the ‘subject,’ which the New Testament calls ‘subordination,’ as it applies to the state or to any other super-ordinate power. We accept it as a fact, without accepting it as the best, that we live in a society ruled by the sword. . . . There is a special kind of ‘corporate’ patience dictated by respect for the roles of others” (29). “There is the “apocalyptic” patience of waiting in hope (Rev. 6:10)” (33).

See also Stanley Hauerwas, with Charles Pinches, “Practicing Patience: How Christians Should be Sick,” in Stanley Hauerwas, *The Hauerwas Reader* John Berkman and Michael G. Cartwright, eds., (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 348-370. “If the virtues in general have been ignored in modern Christian ethics, the virtue of patience has

especially been ignored. Happily, however, patience played a prominent role in much earlier accounts of the moral life" (356). Among other earlier sources, Hauerwas cites Cyprian (for whom, "nowhere is God's patience more exemplified than in the life of Christ," 356), Tertullian, and Augustine (for whom, significantly for this study, "those are patient who would rather bear evils than inflicting them. . . . Such patience cannot come from the strength of the human will, but rather must come from the Holy Spirit," 358).

See also Harry Huebner, "How to do Things with Confessions," in *Directions* Vol. 27 No. 1 (Spring 1998): 41-52. "If the cross and resurrection are signs of God's redemption, then we are called to give up our own attempts to determine outcome by using any means necessary. Then our task is to develop structures of patience that invite us to actively open ourselves to one another and to God" (51). See Harry Huebner, "The Christian Life as Gift and Patience: Why Yoder Has Trouble with Method," in Ben C. Ollenburger and Gayle Gerber Koontz (eds.), *A Mind Patient and Untamed: Assessing John Howard Yoder's Contributions to Theology, Ethics, and Peacemaking*. (Telford, PA: Cascadia, 2004), 23-38. Huebner's reading of Yoder illustrates one of my hopes: Yoder as guide to confronting reality with intelligence, but not reduced to conceptual theory: grounding without modern foundationalism!

## APPENDIX I

### *The Central Argument of JCSR is for and about the Church, not the Jews<sup>1</sup>*

Yoder argues for the truth of the radical Anabaptist witness to Christ as a means of correcting errors in most Reformation as well as Catholic theologies.<sup>2</sup> For Yoder, Nicaea is itself problematic, since it already replaces Jesus' scriptural voice with the conceptual doctrines of a religious orthodoxy. and since its gathering of bishops already legitimates a form of the Constantinianism that Yoder believes undermines the politics of Jesus. *JCSR* contributes to Yoder's corrective search for pre-Orthodox and pre-Constantinian witnesses to the politics of Jesus Christ. In this sense, like George Lindbeck, Robert Jenson, and Stanley Hauerwas, Yoder re-encounters the Jesus of history and Scripture and, by way of this, re-encounters Jesus' Jewish flesh. In the gospel of Jesus and the hermeneutic of Paul, he rediscovers what he believes was clear to the very early church: that Jesus' words always re-read Israel's Torah, which means that they *continually* read those words as well as reading them through their fulfillment in Christ. The hermeneutical lesson is that "fulfillment" does not mean supersession, as if the "solution" to each verse of the Old Testament is simply "Jesus Christ!" The lesson is that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection re-reads in ever-renewable and surprising detail all the details of ancient Israel's narrative.

So, why is this discovery not primarily *about the Jews*?



Because it is the end-point of Yoder's search for the witness behind Nicaea, and the lesson is not all that far from Jenson's claim that the Trinity means no more than that the God who redeemed Israel from bondage in Egypt also resurrected Jesus from the grave. In Yoder's terms, "What Saul or 'Paul' did was not to found another religion but to define one more stream within Judaism [and within 'Pharisaic Jewry']."<sup>3</sup> "Neither Jesus nor Paul nor the apostolic communities rejected normative Judaism."<sup>4</sup> Whether grafted in, or in the flesh, this people Israel is therefore the one whom God redeemed and ever will redeem from bondage and whose messiah is Jesus Christ.

For Yoder, there is one covenant, continuous from Old to New Testament, and it is not superseded by Nicaea or any subsequent council or dogma. In these terms, repairing the Jewish-Christian schism is, first and foremost, not about repairing relations between Jews and Christians, but about reuniting the divided body of Christ. Yoder's central concern is to argue that the Free Church vision is appropriate to the Church as a whole. His goal is therefore to argue, against the Reformation and what he considers Catholic Orthodoxy and Nicaea, that the purpose of Christianity is displayed normatively and most clearly in the practices of the first generations of messianic Jews or Nazarenes. These were Torah-observant Jews of the first and into the second centuries who recognized the resurrected Jesus Christ as the messiah of the Jews. With the Jeremiah of 29:7, these were Jews of perennial exile who abandoned claim to any land and sought to live their lives among the nations as lights to the nation, claiming the light of Torah incarnate in the flesh and word of Jesus of Nazareth. This, for Yoder, is the radical Anabaptist vision, and it displays the authority of the revealed Torah of Sinai, of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and of the apocalyptic theo-politics of the apostle Paul. For Yoder, this is primordial Christianity,

and it is challenged only by something added onto Christianity: the theological orthodoxy of Christian bishops who gathered for the sake of an ecclesial political unity that lacks warrant in the words of Gospel and in Pauline proclamation. This means that if Yoder writes primarily about the “Messianic Jews” of the first centuries, this need not directly imply supersessionism because it need not be about the Jews per se. It is about the Church and its self-understanding. It may of course have implications for how the church regards the Jews who are not messianic, but this is a second and separate question that need not be mixed with Yoder’s first purpose.

## APPENDIX II

### *Readings on Destruction and Rebirth in Ancient Israel’s Salvation History*

#### 1a. Mitsrayim: Bondage in Egypt

The Israelites groaned in their bondage and cried out and their cry for help because of their bondage went up to God. (Ex 2)

#### 1b. Mitsrayim: Rebirth After Exodus

The Lord continued, “I have marked well the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters.” . . . “I have come down to rescue them. . . . I will send you.” Moses said, “Who am I that I should go?” . . . He said, “*ehyeh imach*, I will be with you.” . . . “Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘*ehyeh* sent me to you.’” (Ex 3)

#### 2a. Chorban: First Destruction

I reared up children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against me. . . . The Lord’s anger burns against his people. (Is. 1)

How solitary sits the city, once so full of people.

Bitterly she weeps at night, tears are upon her cheeks . . .  
 Jerusalem has become unclean. (Lam.1)

### 2b. Chorban: Rebirth after First Destruction

*But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, Seed of Abraham my friend - You whom I drew from the ends of the earth. . . . To whom I said: You are My servant. . . . Fear not, for I am with you. . . .*

This is My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen one, in whom I delight. I have put My spirit in Him, He shall teach the true way to the nations. . . . who formed you, O Israel: Fear not, for I will redeem you. . . . You are Mine. (Is. 41-43)

Ezra opened the scroll in the sight of all the people, for he was above the people; as he opened it, the people stood up. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with hands upraised. Then they bowed their heads. . . . Jeshua, Bani. . . and the Levites explained the Teaching to the people, while the people stood in their places. They read from the scroll of the Teaching of God, translating it and giving the sense; so they understood the reading. (Neh. 8:4-8)

### 3a. Chorban: Second Destruction

An image dominates even more than a text: the Burnt Temple (70-71ce); Jerusalem razed and salted (135ce). But texts abound:

When Rabbi Joshua looked at the Temple in ruins one day, he burst into tears. "Alas for us! The place which atoned for the sins of all the people Israel lies in ruins!" (from *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 11a).

### 3b Chorban: Rebirth after Second Destruction

All Israel has a place in the world to come, as it is written, "Your people shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land

forever; they are a shoot of My planting, the work of My hands in whom I shall be glorified” (Is. 60).

Moses received Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, the elders to the prophets, the prophets to the members of the Great Assembly. . . . Simeon the Just was one of the last members of the Great Assembly. He used to teach: The world rests on three things: on Torah, on service to God, and on acts of loving-kindness. (*Pirke Avot 1*)

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> To paraphrase Mark Thiessen Nation from an oral presentation at an Eastern Mennonite University conference on John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (March 16, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> *JCSR*, “What Needs to Change,” 32.

<sup>4</sup> *JCSR*, “It Did not Have to Be,” 49.

## THE J. J. THIESSEN LECTURES

The J. J. Thiessen Lectures were first held in 1978 at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and, since 2000, have been held at Canadian Mennonite University.

1978 Marlin Miller, Professor of Theology at Goshen (Indiana) Biblical Seminary. *Mennonites and Contemporary Theology*.

1979 *Lectures cancelled.*

1980 J. Gerald Janzen, Professor of Old Testament at Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, Indiana. *The Terrors of History and the Fear of the Lord*.

1981 Frank H. Epp, Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo Ontario. *Mennonites with the Millennium on Their Mind*.

1982 Jürgen Moltmann, Professor of Systematic Theology at the University of Tübingen, Germany. *Responsibility for the World and Christian Discipleship*.

1983 Cornelius J. Dyck, Professor of Anabaptist and Sixteenth Century Studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Indiana. *Rethinking the Anabaptist Vision*.

1984 Kenneth Bailey, Professor of New Testament at the Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon. *Jesus Interprets His Own Cross: A Middle Eastern Cultural Approach*.

- 1985 Orlando Costas, Professor of Missiology at Andover Newton Theological School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. *The Crisis of Mission in the West and the Challenge of World Missions.*
- 1986 Susan Muto, Director of the Institute of Formative Spirituality at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. *Christian Spirituality and Everyday Living: A Practical Approach to Faith Formation.*
- 1987 Walter Klaassen, Research Professor of Religious Studies and History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. *The Emancipated Laity: Anabaptism in Its Time*
- 1988 W. Sibley Towner, Professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. *The Bible and Our Human Nature.*
- 1989 Stanley Hauerwas, Professor of Theology and Ethics at the Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina. *Resident Aliens: The Church and Its Ministry.*
- 1990 Werner O. Packull, Professor of History at Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. *Rereading Anabaptist Beginnings.*
- 1991 Howard I. Marshall, Professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. *The Theological Message of the Letter to the Philippians.*
- 1992 George Lindbeck, Professor at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut. *The Church as Hermeneutical Community: Jews, Christians and the Bible.*
- 1993 Phyllis A. Bird, Associate Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Garret Evangelical Theological Seminary, Chicago, Illinois. *Feminism and the Bible.*
- 1994 David Augsburg, Professor of Pastoral Counselling at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. *Shepherding, Reconciling, Healing: The Church and Christian Counselling.*

- 1995 George Rawlyk, Professor in the Department of History, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. *Is Jesus Your Personal Saviour? In Search of Canadian Evangelicalism in the 1990s.*
- 1996 Nancey Murphy, Associate Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. *Christian Faith in a Scientific Age.*
- 1997 Richard B. Hays, Professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina. *New Testament Ethics: The Story Retold.*
- 1998 Eugene H. Peterson, James M. Houston Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places.*
- 1999 T.D. Regehr, Professor Emeritus of History, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. *Peace, Order and Good Government: Mennonites and Politics in Canada.*
- 2000 William P. Brown, Professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Virginia. *God and the Imagination: A Primer to Reading the Psalms in an Age of Pluralism.*
- 2001 Letty M. Russell, Professor of Theology, Yale Divinity School, New Haven, Connecticut. *Practicing God's Hospitality in a World of Difference.*
- 2002 Sean Freyne, Professor of Theology and Director of the Centre for Mediterranean and Near Eastern Studies, Trinity College, Dublin. *Jesus, Jews, and Galilee.*
- 2003 Paul G. Hiebert, Professor of Mission and Anthropology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. *Doing Missional Theology.*
- 2004 Peter C. Erb, Professor of Religion and Culture at Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. *Late Medieval Spirituality and the Sources for Peace and Reconciliation.*

- 2005 Paul J. Griffiths, Schmitt Professor of Catholic Studies, University of Illinois at Chicago, Illinois. *The Vice of Curiosity: An Essay on Intellectual Appetite.*
- 2006 Joel J. Shuman, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Theology, and Director for the Center for Ethics and Public Life at King's College in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. *To Live Is to Worship: Bioethics and the Body of Christ.*
- 2007 Ellen Davis, Professor of Bible and Practical Theology, Duke Divinity School, Durham, North Carolina. *Live Long on the Land: Food and Farming from a Biblical Perspective.*
- 2008 Mark Noll, Professor of History at the University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana. *A Yankee Looks North: Toward an Appreciation and Assessment of The History Of Christianity In Canada.*
- 2009 Peter Ochs, Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia. *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant.*





These four lectures offer groundwork for a Mennonite-Jewish theological dialogue. One context for the dialogue is a sphere of overlapping interest among Jews and Mennonites who have returned to consider the power of Scripture at a time when both secularism and radical anti-secularism have lost their lustre. Another context is the publication of John Howard Yoder's *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*. Yet another context is an emerging effort among Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars to meet together in peace and through conversations about Scripture. A final context is the on-going loss of life, justice, and hope in Israel-Palestine. *The Free Church and Israel's Covenant* introduces Mennonite-Jewish theological dialogue as a contribution to the work of inter-Abrahamic peace and scriptural

Peter Ochs is Edgar Bronfman Professor of Modern Judaic Studies at the University of Virginia, and co-director of the Society for Scriptural Reasoning and of the Children of Abraham Institute. He has authored or co-authored, or co-edited a number of books including *Another Reformation: Post-Liberal Christianity and the Jews*; *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*; *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*; *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Theology*; *Christianity in Jewish Terms*; *Reasoning after Revelation: Dialogues in Postmodern Jewish Philosophy*; *The Return of Scripture in Judaism and Christianity*; *Understanding the Rabbinical Mind*; and *Reviewing the Covenant*. With Stanley Hauerwas, he co-edits the book series *Radical Traditions: (Jewish, Christian, and Muslim) Theology in a Post-critical Light*. Professor Ochs serves on the editorial boards of *Modern Theology*, *The Journal of Culture and Religion*, and *Crosscurrents*.

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